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The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

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Inside Hollywood

Robert Altman had his problems with the major film studios and what is usually thought of as the “film industry.” His unwillingness to change his creative ideas to make his films more commercial was well known. Yet, he lived in that culture for many years and the quality of his work made him well respected in wide Hollywood circles.

The preservation of films was a cause Altman was happy to support, and he joined with many other prominent Hollywood directors to do so through Martin Scorsese’s Film Foundation. After Steven Spielberg viewed a damaged copy of *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and asked Warner Brothers to check on the condition of their films in storage, Altman stated his support for preserving any filmmaker’s work.

Sandcastle 5 Productions, Inc.

August 24, 1998

Mr. Martin Scorsese
Cappa Productions
445 Park Avenue, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10022

Via Fax: (212) 906-8891

Dear Marty,

I received your letter, thank you. I am honored to join you and the other board members in the battle for film preservation. It is a very important issue to me. Both personally in regards to my own body of work and for the films of our colleagues past and present.

I will do whatever I can to spread the word for this cause. Just to let you know, I will be out of the country shooting for September and October.

I look forward to our working together on behalf of The Film Foundation.

Best regards,

Bob Altman

Bob Altman

502 Park Avenue New York, NY 10022 212-826-6641
Telefax (212) 758-4182

Robert Altman, typed letter to Martin Scorsese, August 24, 1998.

STEVEN SPIELBERG

November 16, 1998

Dear Terry,

This is just a note to bring to your attention the fact that your studio print of *McCABE & MRS. MILLER*, which we enjoyed looking at Saturday night in 35mm at home, has lost all of its primary colors and is sadly faded to a state of washed out “red and white.” *McCABE* was released in 1971 and I fear that print is representative of other Warner Bros. 35mm library prints that may have deteriorated to such a degree that one could almost say, “Remains not viewable.”

McCABE is one of the greatest movies of Robert Altman’s career and I also believe one of the greatest films in Warner Bros. library, and perhaps there is someone in the library you could call to check on the status of many of your 20-year-old movies. I’d be very happy to speak to and work with anyone you choose to throw my way to do a thorough check of the Warner Bros. film archive.

All my best,

Steven Spielberg

SS/sr

100 UNIVERSAL PLAZA, BUNGALOW 477 • UNIVERSAL CITY, CA 91608 • 818.733.9300

Steven Spielberg, typed letter to Terry [Semel], CEO of Warner Brothers, November 16, 1998.

Sandcastle 5 Productions, Inc.

November 17, 1998

Steven Spielberg
100 Universal Plaza
Bungalow 477
Universal City, CA 91608

Dear Steven,

Thank you so much for your note about the condition of *McCABE AND MRS. MILLER*. Unfortunately, as you know, there are thousands of films in this regrettable condition.

As you also probably know, I’ve recently joined you on the board of Marty Scorsese’s Film Foundation. It seems bizarre (but what else is new) that groups like ourselves have to raise money to restore films that actually belong to THEM. Even then, while the results are slow in coming, we must keep up the fight.

When someone like yourself draws attention to the state of a film -- as your letter to Terry Semel does -- it surely strengthens the cause. Thank you very much. And please know that for anything that will help rescue ANY filmmaker’s work, I am here and ready to do battle.

Again, accept my appreciation for your concern.

Best,

Robert Altman

Robert Altman

P.S. PRIVATE RYAN was awesome -- best I’ve seen.

502 Park Avenue New York, NY 10022 212-826-6641
Telefax (212) 758-4182

Robert Altman, typed letter to Steven Spielberg, November 17, 1998.

Altman’s highly acclaimed film *The Player* (1992) is a biting satirical glimpse inside the often unscrupulous dealings that occur in Hollywood. It was a world Altman knew well, and his onscreen depiction of it was much appreciated by others, “on the inside.”

MEL BROOKS
c/o Brookfilms
P.O. Box 900
Beverly Hills, CA 90213
(310) 203-1375

22 May 1992

Dear Bob,

My wife and I just saw *The Player*, and we loved it! It proves once again just how special you are...

Warmest regards,

Mel

Mel and Anne Bancroft Brooks

We liked it so much we didn't even notice our son's hit was cut.

Great!
Love, Bancroft

Mel Brooks & Anne Bancroft, typed and handwritten note to Robert Altman, May 22, 1992.

TOM BROKAW

Bob,

THE PLAYER is a jewel, the best film in years. It so perfectly captures that wierd world of your industry and the surrounding environs and yet it also engages and touches audiences who wouldn't know a trailer from a double wide. Thank you. I hope you get to do lots more of what you want.

Tom

Tom Brokaw, handwritten note to Robert Altman, not dated. Bob, *THE PLAYER* is a jewel, the best film in years. It so perfectly captures that wierd (sic) world of your industry and the surrounding environs and yet it also engages and touches audiences who wouldn't know a trailer from a double wide. Thank you. I hope you get to do lots more of what you want. Tom

COSMOPOLITAN
Helen Gurley Brown, Editor • 524 West 57th Street, New York, New York, 10019, (212) 649-3555
November 18, 1991

Dear Bob,

Sometimes I write better than I talk and maybe I can write you how wonderful *THE PLAYER* is. I couldn't quit thinking about it all night long and I can't wait to see it again. David tells me that is the reaction of a lot of people...there is just too much *shame* to do all of it justice in one first viewing. Bob, my raves have nothing to do with David's being connected with this movie. I am *maternal!* I have assured him *THE GIRL FROM PETROVKA* was one of the five worst movies ever made and *THE ISLAND* was in the top - or bottom - ten! Bob, I am raving about this picture because it is good - it works - it's a little masterpiece. These are the things I like best:

Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan*, typed Letter to Robert Altman, November 18, 1991.

15 MAY '92 11:05 FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL FILM #8854 P.1/1
14 MAY '92 19:57 AUDITORIUM JOHNVILLE P.1

Paris, 14 May 92

ROMAN POLANSKI

Dear Bob,
Just a note to thank you for a great time I had last night seeing your picture. It's great! It made me feel like going to the movies again.
I wish you the best, best luck.
As we say here: merde!

Warmest regards,
Roman

Roman Polanski, handwritten Note faxed to Robert Altman, May 14, 1992. Dear Bob, Just a note to thank you for a great time I had last night seeing your picture. It's great! It made me feel like going to the movies again. I wish you the best, best luck. As we say here: merde! Warmest regards, Roman