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The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

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Filmmaking as a Business

Robert Altman's wide experience in the entertainment industry before he began to make feature films prepared him for the work of creating his own production companies and overseeing both the business and the creative sides of filmmaking. Besides following the somewhat typical route from actor and writer to director, he also made a valuable sojourn into the world of "industrial film" early in his career. Though he was involved in commercial television within a few years, his broad knowledge of the production and business sides of film gave him the expertise needed to set up his own film companies when Hollywood was not willing to gamble on him. From the 1970s on Robert Altman often controlled his own work as a creative and daring director by wearing the hat of an owner of various production companies that produced his films. His companies also produced the work of other directors.

Calvin Company in Kansas City

When the young Robert Altman retreated from Hollywood around 1950 to his hometown of Kansas City, Missouri, he went to work for the Calvin Company, which at the time was the largest and most successful producer of educational and industrial film in the U.S. The archive contains a notebook from a workshop put on by the Calvin Company in 1955 that was attended by 350 people making films in various educational, government, and business settings. At the time, Altman served the company as Director of the Production Division.

After his return to California, Altman found work as a writer and director for television and also participated in professional groups such as the Actors Film Lab, giving him access to broad areas of the film industry.

FLASH! NELLY DON TV FILM IN THE MAKING...

... believed to be first 15-minute editorial fashion show on film

... photo'd in New York ... New York cover-girl models

... background sets are impressionistic sketches

Style 773 - rayon gaborino

Getting ready for the next take - just before the director called "roll 1st".

Here, Suzie Parker waits on last-minute lighting adjustments for the travel sequence.

Style 826 - rayon and wool Helaine Hanson

Moré's real-life doll - Mona Morley - taking the pose of her 24-inch miniature for an on-camera rehearsal of the office scene.

Below right, it's anyone's guess what the cameraman said to Mona to catch this startled expression.

Left, Style 770 - Oriane Nicomac' clone
Right, Style 696 - rayon autumn outfit

Stop the game girls! Cameraman Sid Zukor takes a light reading before filming Ricky Van Dusen and Marie Mahar.

Bob Altman, our director, gives Carolyn Cross some heavy instruction on how to look "homely" in front of the cameras while the crew stands-by.

Style 621 (OSB) - sweater-top washed jersey

NOTE:
THIS SHOW FILMED IN COLOR - and has been submitted to CBS for experimental work in color television transmission. Also, will be sent to leading journalism schools across the country with a running commentary by the director on how the film was produced.

YOURS FOR THE ASKING! WRITE NELLY DON STORE SERVICE, BOX 60,
KANAS CITY, MO., FOR DETAILS AND ROUTINGS FOR FILM IN YOUR CITY.

Style 924 (OSB) - rayon gaborino

Poster, "Flash! Nelly Don TV Film in the Making," Calvin Company, mid-1950s. "Bob Altman, our director" is pictured in the lower right of this announcement from Calvin.

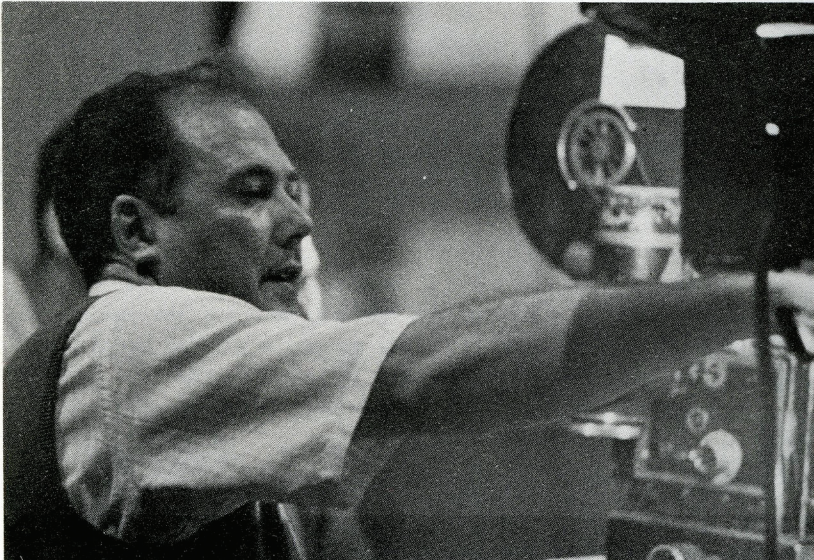
The FILM INDUSTRY WORKSHOPS
is made up of four groups:

the SCENE CLASS Monday,
the FILM SCENE LAB Wednesday,
the FILM ACTORS LAB Tuesday-Thursday,
the FILM DIRECTORS LAB Tuesday-Thursday.

Meetings are from 6:30 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.
Membership is on a month to month basis.

The fee for membership in each of the groups
is \$30.00 per month plus \$5.00 registration.


Membership in the groups is limited, giving
members maximum opportunity for experience.



ROBERT ALTMAN, a Guest Director with the
Film Actors Lab, points out "marks" for the
actors, during a camera rehearsal.

The SCENE CLASS Monday

deals with learning to act as a basic requisite before learning to "act for the camera". While it has more of a classroom atmosphere, it is geared to advancing the member to more practical work in front of the camera. The Director of the Scene Class critiques the scenes, and works with the actors on improving and polishing their crafts.



TOM CARR motion picture veteran, returns
to camera after last minute additions to
scene in professional Film Actors Lab.

Brochure for the Film Industry Workshop at Columbia Studios
(also known as the Film Actors Lab), ca. 1960.

Notebook from "The Ninth Annual 16 MM Motion Picture Production Workshop." 1955. Calvin Company, Kansas City, Missouri.