

Great Directors: Cassavetes

A Woman Under the Influence 1974

Friday, February 27 - Thursday, March 5, 2009



Film Information

Directed by

John Cassavetes

Language

English

Running Time

155 minutes

Film Notes

Go ahead and flip this sheet over right now, because anything that can possibly be said about John Cassavetes' *A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE* has already been said better by the director himself. To many observers, this represents his greatest masterpiece, and if the poignancy with which Cassavetes speaks of it is any indication, at least part of him agreed.

A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE is perhaps the most personal film of Cassavetes' career, and considering the intimacy and emotional honesty at the very heart of his works, that's saying quite a bit. "The film was born out of my despair and questioning of the meaning of my life," he once told biographer Ray Carney. "As I thought this, and, later, during the filming, I became very conscious of certain problems that were unknown and foreign to me. I'll use anything I can to straighten out a problem—even write a movie about it. When I finally saw the finished film, I was shocked by the reality of these problems."

In his drive and determination to make the picture, Cassavetes overcame some more pedestrian problems, as well. According to one story, the production was so strapped for money that they couldn't afford film. When approximately two-hours worth of film mysteriously appeared on the first day of shooting, it led to a rumor that actor Seymour Cassel had snuck off to the San Fernando Valley and procured the short-ends—left over portions of otherwise used up film stock—from an adult film company. The story was never quite verified, but, as Carney writes, "It didn't really matter where it came from. It would be enough to begin."

—Casey



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More Information

Screenplay by

John Cassavetes

Featuring

Peter Falk
Gena Rowlands
Fred Draper
Lady Rowlands
Katherine Cassavetes
Matthew Labordeaux
Matthew Cassel

Cinematography by

Mitch Breit
Al Ruban

Film Editing by

David Armstrong
Sheila Visel tear

Original Music by

Bo Harwood

Country of Origin

USA

Also Recommended by Cassavetes

Shadows 1959
Faces 1968
Minnie and Moskowitz 1971
Opening Night 1977
Love Streams 1984

From "Cassavetes on Cassavetes" (ed. Ray Carney):

"Gena and I were speaking about the pictures we were going to make, how the roles are so thin and everything is made so a narrative can work. We were talking about how difficult love was and how tough it could be to make a love story about two people who were totally different culturally, coming from two different family groups that were diametrically opposed and yet still regarded each other very highly. I kept thinking about that. Gena and I are absolutely dissimilar in everything we think, do and feel. Beyond that, men and women are totally different. When I started writing scripts, I kept these things in mind and didn't want the love story easy. I made a lot of discoveries about my own life."

"I don't think audiences are satisfied any longer with just touching the surface of people's lives; I think they really want to get into a subject... We've learned to gossip about life instead of living it. A woman is either a married housewife who is happy or a married housewife who is unhappy. It's not that simple. It is possible to be married and in love and unhappy too. And love fluctuates. Marriage, like any partnership, is a rather difficult thing. It has been taken rather lightly in the movies.... Films today show only a dream world and have lost touch with the way people really are. For me the Longhetti family is the first real family I've ever seen on screen. Idealized screen families generally don't interest me because they have nothing to say to me about my own life."

"When I first start writing, there's a sense of discovery. In some way, it's not work, it's finding some romance in the lives of people. You get fascinated with their lives. If they stay with you, then you want to do something—make it into a movie, put it on in some way. It was that which propelled us to keep on working at A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE. The words kind of spell out the story in a mysterious way. I deal with the characters as any writer would deal with a character. There are certain characters you like, that you have a feeling for, and other characters stand still. So you work until you have all the people in some kind of motion."