



ROBERT ALTMAN: AMERICAN OUTSIDER

O.C. and Stiggs

How is it possible that a film whose entire narrative is framed as a prolonged crank call to Gabon's then-president Omar Bongo is not a mainstay of the retro/cult screening circuit? Altman's pungent, unloved satire – about two aberrant hipster high-schoolers and the summer they spend terrorising the right-wing, nouveau-riche suburbanite Schwab family – not only repays repeated viewing but almost demands it with its ultra-scathing humour and typical 'controlled chaos' structure. Leisurewear'd patriarch Randall Schwab (Paul Dooley), head of Arizona's Schwab Insurance, makes a hell of a hate figure, citing 'drinking' and 'the continent of Africa' as personal bugbears on his hilariously shonky, western-inspired television infomercial. Though one might view the film as a more sophisticated, less winsome retooling of John Hughes's *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), it's more in the anarchic spirit of *Nashville* or *Brewster McCloud*, and Altman clearly has no time for learning, trusting, bonding, growing or symbolically taking a boot to daddy's Ferrari: *O.C. and Stiggs* celebrates teenagers as wild, impulsive, obstructive, obnoxious and politically astute, thereby making a complete mockery of the so-called teen movie.

David Jenkins, *Sight & Sound*, June 2011

A contemporary review

O.C. and Stiggs is a film haunted by ghosts. The ghost, first of all, of its own non-appearance: filmed in 1983, under the title *The Ugly, Monstrous, Mind-Rouosting Summer of O.C. and Stiggs*, it was shelved by MGM and has only had a limited video-test run yet to make its theatrical appearance in the U.S. It is haunted most wickedly by Altman's reputation as a satirist, since it stands in the dwindling line of those frescoes, from *Nashville* through *A Wedding* to *Health*, which attempt to take America in a large metaphorical embrace. Here the satire was authored by two *National Lampoon* Magazine writers, Tod Carroll and Ted Mann, and is a peculiar mixture of juvenile pranks (mostly directed against the Schwab ménage, epitome of all that is gross, materialistic, racist and stupid) and pious self-pity on the part of its eponymous heroes. When one of the most incidental and barely established characters, Melvin Van Peebles' Wino Bob, is found dead in a back alley, Stiggs waxes righteous, 'I don't suppose the Phoenix Liquor Association has a policy for burying dead winos.' O.C.'s summer is meanwhile blighted by the imminent removal of his grandfather to an old folks' home, and his being sent to live in Arkansas with an uncle 'who has seven wrecked automobiles on his lawn'.

Altman has described this pair as rebels who have decided 'that they shouldn't listen to anything their parents or teachers tell them, because they might grow up to be like them'. But if Randall Schwab Snr is, admittedly, a deliciously realised caricature of reactionary bluster, with a particular phobia about miscegenation ('I don't like coloured ice-cream'), the unpleasant mockery of O.C. and Stiggs, directed against all and sundry (their triumph is winking two gay teachers out of the closet), hardly seems morally superior. Their contempt for the Schwabs is only equalled by their enthusiasm for the music of King Sunny Adé and his African Beats, but there is a patronising edge here too, perhaps because, in either its positive or negative moods, the

film is never far from comic-strip exaggeration. Salvation for O.C. and his grandfather finally arrives with a cheque for \$42 000 from dress manufacturer Paul Coletti, who has turned his Phoenix backyard into a Tahitian idyll (‘I wonder what the poor people are doing tonight?’, he muses, meaning his own sweatshop workers), and who is given a bright idea by the boys for marketing his line of clothes for fat women. In this context, the only possible satirical point would seem to be that O.C. and Stiggs must inevitably grow up to be Schwab and Coletti. But the film operates by giving them a (thoroughly undeserved) moral *carte blanche* while glibly trashing everything around them. That said, the final ghost engaged with here is the shade of those other fantasies which Altman has set in the desert – *3 Women*, *Come Back to the 5 & Dime Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean*, *Quintet* (a desert in negative). In this clime, Altman is able to imagine an America that is both a dream and an essential caricature of what exists everywhere else. When Stiggs’ mother, who spends the movie rehearsing for a production of *Cactus Flower*, asks if there are cacti in Arkansas, O.C.’s future home, her husband retorts, proudly, ‘Arkansas is one of the United States. All America is the same’. This, for Altman, seems to be the most maddening thing about his country, and in the desert sameness blooms with the similarly maddening repetitions of a dream, (or the pointless extravagance of terminal forms of life). There’s evidently a cultural critique here, but it’s not satire in the usual sense, and the juvenile high-jinks of *O.C. and Stiggs* are best ignored for its richer sense of the local flora and fauna. The former would include the cacti that sprout everywhere, even in the food, in Stiggs’ home, because his mother is ‘living’ her part in *Cactus Flower*. And the latter is at its wittiest with Dennis Hopper playing *Carry on Apocalypse Now*, bringing the war back home to the firework fight the boys are engaged in with Schwab, and remarking pleasantly, when they protest that the grenade he has tossed them is real, ‘Everything gets to be sooner or later, man’.

Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1988

O.C. AND STIGGS

Director: Robert Altman
©/Production Companies: MGM/UA Entertainment, Sand River Productions
Executive Producer: Lewis Allen
Producers: Robert Altman, Peter Newman
Associate Producer: Scott Bushnell
Production Manager: Allan Nicholls
Office Co-ordinator: Georgia Hamlin
Production Co-ordinator: Doug Cole
Location Manager: Jack Kney
Post-production Co-ordinator: Matthew Seig
1st Assistant Directors: Stephen P. Dunn, Paula Mazur, Ned Dowd
Script Supervisor: Luca Kouimelis
Screenplay: Donald Cantrell, Ted Mann
Story by: Tod Carroll, Ted Mann
Director of Photography: Pierre Mignot
Theatrical Lighting: Paul Gallo
Camera Operators: Jean Lépine, Michael Levine
Chief Lighting Technician: Jonathan Lumley
Key Grips: Emmanuel Lepine, Tom Grunke
Special Effects: Alan Hall, Movie Mechanics
Editors: Elizabeth Kling, Dennis M. Hill
Assistant Editors: Geraldine Peroni, Juliet Weber, Mickey Kaczorowski
Production Designer: Scott Bushnell
Artistic Consultant: Stephen Altman
Art Director: David Gropman
Set Decorator: John Hay
Wardrobe Supervisor: Kristine Flones-Czeski
Make-up: David Craig Forrest
Hairdresser: Victor Denicola Jr
Titles/Opticals: MGM Title
Colour Timer: Stephen Sheridan

Cast

Daniel H. Jenkins (*Oliver Cromwell* ‘O.C.’ *Ogilvy*)
Neill Barry (*Mark Stiggs*)
Jane Curtin (*Elinore Schwab*)
Paul Dooley (*Randall Schwab*)
Jon Cryer (*Randall Schwab Jr*)
Laura Urstein (*Lenore Schwab*)
Victor Ho (*Frankie Tang*)
Ray Walston (*Gramps*)
Donald May (*Jack Stiggs*)
Carla Borelli (*Stella Stiggs*)
Stephanie Elfrink (*Missie Stiggs*)
Amanda Hull (*Debbie Stiggs*)
James Gilsenan (*Barney Beaugereaux*)
Tina Louise (*Florence Beaugereaux*)
Cynthia Nixon (*Michelle*)
Greg Wangler (*Jefferson Washington*)
Dennis Hopper (*Sponson*)
Alan Autry (*goon*)
Louis Nye (*Garin Sloan*)
Dan Ziskie (*Rusty Galloway*)
Martin Mull (*Paul Coletti*)
Melvin Van Peebles (*Wino Bob*)
Tiffany Helm (*Charlotte*)
Dana Andersen (*Robin*)
Bob Uecker (*Bob Uecker*)
Margery Bond (*Mrs Bunny*)
Jeannine Ann Cole (*Nancy Pearson*)
Nina Van Pallandt (*Clare Dejavue*)
Thomas Hal Phillips (*Hal Phillip Walker*)
Danny Darst (*Schwab commercial singer*)
Caroline Aaron (*Janine*)
Tom Flagg (*policeman*)

Special music composed and performed by:
King Sunny Adé and His African Beats
Musical Arrangements: Ralph Schuckett
Music Supervisor: Allan Nicholls
Music Editor: Greg Sheldon
Music Recording: Stephan Galfas
Sound Mixer: John Pritchett
Re-recording Mixers: Lee Dichter, Mel Zelniker
Supervising Sound Editor: Bernard Hajdenberg
Dialogue Editors: Magdaline Volaitis, Al Nahmias, Ray Karpicki
Sound Effects Recording: Andy Aaron
Sound Effects Editors: Cari Comart, Skip Lievsay, Jess Soraci
Foley Editor: Ron Bochar
Stunts: Randy 'Fife'
Technical Co-ordinator: Michael Altman

Maurice Orozco (*bandito*)
Louis Enriques (*promoter*)
Frank Sprague (*actor in play*)
Robert Fortier (*Wino Jim*)
Allan Berne, Roger Carter, Roy Gunsberg, Robert Ledford, Lobo,
Bob Reilly, Richard Thompson, Wayne Wallace, D.C. Warren,
Florence White (*winos*)
Fred Newman (*Bongo voice*)

USA 1985©
105 mins

ROBERT ALTMAN: AMERICAN OUTSIDER

OC & Stiggs
Wed 9 Jun 20:40; Tue 22 Jun 18:00
M*A*S*H
Thu 10 Jun 18:00; Tue 22 Jun 14:30; Mon 28 Jun 20:40
3 Women
Thu 10 Jun 20:30; Sat 19 Jun 15:00
A Wedding
Fri 11 Jun 20:30; Wed 23 Jun 14:30; Sun 27 Jun 18:10
Images
Sat 12 Jun 15:30; Fri 25 Jun 18:00
Quintet
Sat 12 Jun 18:10; Wed 30 Jun 20:45
Fool for Love
Sat 12 Jun 20:40
Popeye
Sun 13 Jun 12:50; Tue 29 Jun 17:50
Brewster McCloud
Sun 13 Jun 16:00; Fri 18 Jun 17:50
A Perfect Couple
Mon 14 Jun 17:50; Wed 16 Jun 20:45
Health
Tue 15 Jun 20:45; Sun 27 Jun 12:15
Secret Honor
Wed 16 Jun 18:00; Sun 27 Jun 15:50
Women in the Films of Robert Altman: An Online Panel Discussion
Thu 17 Jun 19:00

Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean
Sat 19 Jun 12:30
The Long Goodbye
Sat 19 Jun 17:30
California Split
Sun 20 Jun 15:40; Thu 24 Jun 14:30
Thieves like Us
Mon 21 Jun 17:50
Streamers
Mon 21 Jun 20:40
McCabe & Mrs Miller
Sun 20 Jun 18:30
Beyond Therapy
Thu 24 Jun 17:50; Tue 29 Jun 20:45
Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull’s History Lesson
Sat 26 Jun 15:10

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