



ROBERT ALTMAN: AMERICAN OUTSIDER

The Company

Whether in Warner Bros Depression-era spectacles like *42nd Street* (1933), flamboyant offerings such as Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948) or even Carlos Saura's *Tango* (1998), it's a convention of backstage musicals that the lead-up to a new production will always be fraught: the nervous tension will build, the relief come only with performance. With typical iconoclasm, Robert Altman eschews this approach in *The Company*. Master of the freewheeling ensemble piece, he is more interested in how a ballet troupe functions day to day than in delivering melodramatic flourishes or final reel catharsis.

In particular, Altman strives to contrast the formal perfection the dancers seek in performance with the unruliness and banality of their off-stage existences, characterised by Altman in the press notes as 'the same messy stew that we all experience'. Pitched somewhere between drama and documentary (and shot on high-definition video), *The Company* is a 'messy stew' itself. Barbara Turner's sprawling screenplay introduces various characters whose stories seem set up for deeper exploration: the young company member reduced to sleeping on a friend's floor; the veteran ballerina fiercely resistant to change; the choreographer with off-the-wall ideas for a new ballet; the young dancer dropped for not picking up a routine quickly enough. But the narrative style is deliberately elliptical and impressionistic: rather than set out to resolve such dilemmas, Altman uses them as illustrative of the complexities of lived lives. Most of the performers are real members of Chicago's Joffrey Ballet but Altman is equally oblique in his treatment of the three leads, drawn from outside the profession: rather than dwell on the personal lives of newcomer and would-be principal dancer Ry (played by co-producer Neve Campbell), her sous-chef romantic interest or troupe leader Antonelli, Altman repeatedly cuts away from what are apparently key dramatic sequences to return to the rehearsal room.

The crucial performance sequences are handled admirably: often shooting long, Altman has clearly listened to Fred Astaire's old dictum that 'either the camera dances or I do' and largely resists elaborate montage sequences or editing tricks. We are treated to some extraordinarily expressive routines: Campbell and Domingo Rubio performing a delicate *pas de deux* on an open-air stage during a thunderstorm, a mesmerising solo dance featuring one of the company members curling herself into wreaths with a rope, the colourful (if kitsch) 'Blue Snake' ballet which rounds off the movie.

The stresses and inadvertent comedy of company life are well captured, without romantic illusion. In one telling scene, a ballerina straight out of a Degas suddenly snaps a tendon and, helped off stage, is promptly and unemotionally replaced. Malcolm McDowell’s Antonelli comes across as a camp latter-day Diaghilev, bedecked in a series of yellow and orange scarves, but for all his mannerisms and brusqueness he is presented as a heroic and even visionary figure battling to ensure the company’s welfare and the quality of its members’ performances.

Geoffrey Macnab, *Sight and Sound*, May 2004

Robert Altman on ‘The Company’

Dancers do the impossible. And yet we all want to be them. They are that beautiful, that vulnerable, and that expressive. They are the essence of what we mean by ethereal. Their lives, of course, are the same messy stew that we all experience, complete with the complications of families, lovers, friendships, and work. I want *The Company* to show this world with all of its contradictions. Here are world-class artists who, for the most part, are poorly paid and live hand to mouth, often in very unglamorous conditions. They take immaculate care of their bodies while smoking countless cigarettes, downing endless cups of coffee and working punishing hours. Their daily reality includes bloody feet, bludgeoned ambitions, and the work itself – in all of its demanding beauty.

What thrilled me most about making this film was simply being allowed into this particular tribe of artists, dreamers and human beings. On a daily basis, and in the most impossible and dramatic terms, dancers face what we all face: biological clocks and the force of gravity telling us ‘no’. Yet for some part of their working lives dancers literally prevail over those forces. The fact that they (like the rest of us) will all ultimately be trumped by time doesn’t diminish or compromise their efforts. It only enriches them... and us. I am privileged to have been allowed into the world of the dancers of the Joffrey Ballet and privileged to have the opportunity of sharing it in this film.

Production notes

ROBERT ALTMAN: AMERICAN OUTSIDER

The Company
Tue 13 Jul 17:50; Sat 31 Jul 11:50
The Long Goodbye
Tue 13 Jul 18:00
Vincent and Theo
Tue 13 Jul 20:30
Kansas City
Thu 15 Jul 17:40
The Gingerbread Man
Sat 17 Jul 17:50
Short Cuts
Sat 17 Jul 19:30

Gosford Park
Sun 18 Jul 18:20; Fri 23 Jul 14:30
Prêt-à-porter
Mon 19 Jul 17:40
A Prairie Home Companion
Sun 25 Jul 12:00; Sat 31 Jul 17:50
Dr T & The Women
Mon 26 Jul 20:30
Cookie’s Fortune
Tue 27 Jul 17:40
The Player
Wed 28 Jul 20:30

THE COMPANY

Director: Robert Altman
©: The Company Productions AG & Co. KG
Production Company: Killer Films
In association with: First Snow Productions, Sandcastle 5 Productions
Presented by: Capitol Films
Presented in association with: CP Medien, Capitol Films
Executive Producers: Jane Barclay, Sharon Harel, Hannah Leader, John Wells, Roland Pellegrino, Dieter Meyer, S.R.O. Entertainment AG, Stefan Jonas, Jonas McCord
Producers: David Levy, Joshua Astrachan, Neve Campbell, Robert Altman, Christine Vachon, Pamela Koffler
Line Producer: Karyn McCarthy
Associate Producers: Jocelyn Hayes, Lowell Dubrinsky
Unit Production Manager: Karyn McCarthy
Production Accountant: Christi Tidman
Location Manager: Noel Olken
Post-production Supervisor: Sarah Connors
1st Assistant Director: James Giovannetti Jr
Script Supervisor: Drucilla Carlson
Casting: Pam Dixon Mickelson
Screenplay: Barbara Turner
Story by: Neve Campbell, Barbara Turner
Director of Photography: Andrew Dunn
Camera Operators: Robert Reed Altman, Pete Biagi
Visual Effects: Big Film Design
Editor: Geraldine Peroni
Additional Editor: Affonso Gonçalves
Production Design: Gary Baugh
Art Director: Craig Jackson
Set Decorator: Karen Bruck
Props Master: William Dambra
Costumes: Susan Kaufmann
Key Make-up Artist: Jamie Weiss
Key Hairstylist: Agnes Gibicar
Title Design: Big Film Design
Digital Intermediate: EFilm
Colour Grader: Mike Stanwick
Original Score Composed by: Van Dyke Parks
Musicians: The Kronos Quartet: *Violins*: David Harrington, John Sherba; *Viola*: Hank Dutt; *Cello*: Jennifer Culp
Musician (Bass): Michael Barr
Solo Piano Reductions Performed by: Paul Lewis
Production Sound Mixer: Peter Glossop
Boom Operator: Shaun Mills
Re-recording Mixer: Michael Barry
Supervising Sound Editor: Eliza Paley
Sound Editors: William Sweeney, Tony Martinez, Dan Korintus
Supervising Dialogue Editor: Jac Rubenstein
Dolby Sound Consultant: Steve F.B. Smith
The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago:
Artistic Director: Gerald Arpino
Executive Director: Jon H. Teeuwissen
Artistic Manager: Harriet Ross
Company Manager: Jan Watson
Production Manager: Keith Prisco
Lighting Director: Kevin Dreyer
Properties Master: Jeff Kolack
Wardrobe Supervisor: Rebecca Shouse
Sound Engineer: Nicholas Gibson

Cast

The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago:
Neve Campbell (*Ry*)
Malcolm McDowell (*Alberto Antonelli*)
James Franco (*Josh*)
The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago (*the company*)
Barbara Robertson (*Harriet*)
William Dick (*Edouard*)
Susie Cusack (*Susie*)
Marilyn Dodds Frank (*Ry’s mother*)
John Lordan (*Ry’s father*)
Mariann Mayberry (*stepmother*)
Roderick Peeples (*stepfather*)
Yasen Peyankov (*Justin’s mentor*)

The Joffrey Dancers:
Davis Robertson (*Alec*)
Deborah Dawn (*Deborah*)
John Gluckman (*John*)
David Gombert (*Justin*)
Suzanne L. Prisco (*Suzanne*)
Domingo Rubio (*Domingo Rubio*)
Emily Patterson (*Noel*)
Maia Wilkins (*Maia*)
Sam Franke (*Frankie*)
Trinity Hamilton (*Trinity*)
Julianne Kepley (*Julianne*)
Valerie Robin (*Veronica*)
Deanne Brown (*Dana*)
Michael Smith (*Michael*)
Michael Roy Prescott (*Colton*)
Lar Lubovitch, Robert Desrosiers(*the choreographers*)
Charthel Arthur, Cameron Basden (*the ballet mistresses*)
Mark Goldweber, Peter Lockett, Adam Sklute (*the ballet masters*)
Heather Aagard, Michael Anderson, Erica Lynette Edwards, Jennifer Goodman, Stacy Joy Keller, Calvin Kitten, Peter Kozak, Britt Lazenga, Michael Levine, Brian McSween, Elizabeth Mertz, Masayoshi Onuki, Samuel Pergande, Will Shives, Erin Smith, Kathleen Thielhelm, Mauro Villanueva, Yukari Yasui (*the company*)
Tristan Alberda, Bobby Briscoe, Orlando Julius Canova, Angelina Sansone, Jacqueline Sherwood, Jessica Wyatt (*the apprentices*)
Michael Andrew Currey, Katherine Selig (*stage managers*)
Paul Lewis (*company pianist*)
Julie O’Connell (*physical therapist*)
George Darveris (*production manager*)
Marc Grapey (*toast master*)
Keith Prisco (*bridegroom*)
Emma Harrison (*Neo waitress*)
Dwayne Whitmore (*Neo bouncer*)
Danny McCarthy (*bartender*)
Robert Breuler (*barfly*)
Larry Glazer (*Grant Park cellist*)
Mark Hummel (*Grant Park pianist*)

USA/UK/Germany 2003
112 mins

Promotional partners



A deliciously irreverent brewing company



https://planetradio.co.uk/scala-radio

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.
We’re also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.