



Woman with a Movie Camera

Grace of My Heart

+ intro by Grace Barber-Plentie, BFI Festivals Film Programmer

Grace of My Heart

Director: Allison Anders
©: Universal City Studios
a Cappa production
Presented by: Gramercy Pictures
Executive Producer: Martin Scorsese
Producers: Ruth Charny, Daniel Hassid
Line Producer: Elliot Rosenblatt
Unit Production Manager: Elliot Lewis Rosenblatt
Production Supervisor: Erica L. Hiller
Production Co-ordinator: Barbara Duncan
Location Manager: Martha Pilcher
LA Post-production Supervisor: Clark Henderson
1st Assistant Director: Artist Robinson
2nd Assistant Director: Christian P. Della Penna
Script Supervisor: Barbara Tuss
Casting: Russell Gray
Screenplay: Allison Anders
Director of Photography: Jean Yves Escoffier
Special Effects: John Hartigan
Supervising Editor: Thelma Schoonmaker
Editors: James Kwei, Harvey Rosenstock
Production Designer: François Séguin
Art Director: Mayne Berke
Set Decorator: Sara Andrews
Costume Designer: Susan Bertram
Costume Supervisor: Julia Bartholomew
Supervising Make-up/Hair: GiGi Williams
Key Make-up Artist: Christine M. Steele
Hairstylist: Linda Vallejo
Titles/Opticals: The Effects House
Music: Larry Klein
Musicians: Alex Acuña, Dale Balenseifen, Chuck Berghofer, Robert Brunner, David Carey, Jim Cox, Randy Crenshaw, Donna Davidson, Lawrence Feldman, Michael Fischer, Steve Foreman, Tommy Funderburk, Domenic Genova, Ed Greene, Claudia Groom, John Guerin, Jim Haas, Dan Higgins, Leslie Johnson, Plas Johnson, Raven Kane, Larry Klein, Greg Kurstin, Michael Landau, Greg Leisz, Steve Lindsey, Rick Logan, Rob Mounsey, Sal Marquez, Michael Melvoin, Bobbi Page, Chris Parker, Dean Parks, Herb Pedersen, Lynette Rennells, Chad Smith, Lewis Soloff, Dave Spinozza, Lloyd Stripling, T-Bone Wolk, Freddie Washington, Doug Webb, Victoria Williams, FLEA
Orchestrations/Arrangers: David Campbell, Jim Cox, Jimmie Haskell, Eddie Karam, Gene Page
Music Supervisor: Karyn Rachtman
Associate Music Supervisor: Mary Ramos
Music Co-ordinator: Rhonda Baron
Production Music Editor: Carlton Kaller
Music Editors: Bobby Mackston, Suzana Peric
Mix Engineer – Music: Steven Krause
Recording Engineer – Music: Dan Marnien, Tony Phillips
Recording Engineer – Music: Larry Hirsch, Charlie Paakkari, Leslie Jones, Julie Last
Music Consultants: Chris Douridas, Tiffany Anders
Choreography: Keith Young
Sound Mixer: Stephen Halbert
2nd Unit Sound Mixer: Lawrence Loewinger
Re-recording Mixer: Tom Fleischman
Supervising Sound Editor: Philip Stockton
Dialogue Editor: Fred Rosenberg
Effects Editor: Lewis Goldstein
UK ADR Supervisor: Christopher Barnes
US ADR Supervisor: Becky Sullivan, Lee Lamont
ADR Mixer: David Boulton
UK ADR Engineer: Ernie Marsch
ADR Editors: Marissa Littlefield, Kenton Jakub
Foley Supervisor: Bruce Pross
Foley Artist: Marko Costanzo

Playing Edna Buxton/Denise Waverly, a songwriter whose career is closely based on that of Carole King, Illeana Douglas brings such a winningly tipsy verve to her character's pursuits – from her singing (although dubbed), to the Brill Building hackwork she marks time with – that we can't help loving them too.

For King, the true-life payoff was her 1971 solo LP *Tapestry*, which became the best-selling record of the mid-70s. Actually, the girl-groups that King started out writing for have far more hip cachet today than the introspective West Coast singer-songwriter genre, a boom started by King's massive success. Yet not only is the film titled after Waverly's equivalent to *Tapestry*, her LP *Grace of My Heart*, but this record's implied artistic triumph gives the movie its closure. That this ending convinces and pleases us is a testament not just to Douglas' resplendent smile, but to the calm, uncynical breadth of Allison Anders' generosity towards every warring style within the music industry. For even those inclined to prefer early 60s three-minute symphonies-for-kids (where King began) to the well-heeled mid-70s adult self-regard of a Carly Simon (which King unleashed) are allowed to retain their sense that an artist's achievement of total control will entail loss as much as gain.

Wim Wenders may once have been Anders' guru, but now it's Scorsese, so intelligent about compromise with the Hollywood machine. Better yet, classic Hollywood 'women's picture' melodrama has become Anders' lode-star in a way not evident in *Gas Food Lodging* and *Mi vida loca*. As an examination of the value of creative compromise – and of power, freedom, priorities, support and other feminist concerns – only the director's own story betters King's.

Anders has never been the most adept storyteller: characters often stand around spouting back story, and Edna's need for an unsatisfactory love to be on the rebound from – between Caszatt and Phillips – is dabbled into the plot very awkwardly. Nor has she the slightest interest in giving her male characters more than one dimension. Though great fun while on-screen, John Turturro's Millner – ostensibly the film's moral hero, for his understated supportiveness – is little more than a wig, a beard and an accent; Matt Dillon's Phillips, as an unstable childlike genius, a doomed Brian Wilson figure, seem misconceived from the outset – wised up 90s moviegoers will be willing Edna to stay away from him. But then Anders' women are all so characterful, smart, and self-sufficient (even Brit-poppet Patsy Kensit acquires a certain depth) that it's a mystery why they don't simply make do with one another.

However, the real triumph is how the music is dealt with. When Edna and Cheryl realise that squeaky-clean girl idol Kelly Porter (Bridget Fonda) is not the brainless deb her publicity makes out, but a tormented secret lesbian we're able to watch her recording 'My Secret Love': this is a stunning portrait in subjective emotion – she sings it direct to her lover, who sits out in the mixing booth beside the unwitting (male) producer, who simply ('objectively') hears the song as another brilliant but trivial hit aimed at silly teens.

Stunt Co-ordinator: Michael T. Brady

Cast:

Illeana Douglas (*Denise Waverly/Edna Buxton*)

Matt Dillon (*Jay Phillips*)

Eric Stoltz (*Howard Caszatt*)

Bruce Davison (*John Murray*)

Patsy Kensit (*Cheryl Steed*)

Jennifer Leigh Warren (*Doris Shelley*)

John Turturro (*Joel Millner*)

Sissy Boyd (*dress saleswoman*)

Christina Pickles (*Mrs Buxton*)

Jill Sobule (*talent show contestant*)

Tegan West (*M.C. at talent show*)

Richard Schiff (*audition record producer*)

Natalie Venetia Belcon (*Betty*)

Kathy Barbour (*Sha Sha*)

Diane Robin (*waitress in diner*)

Portrait, Eric Jerome Kirkland,

Irving Eugene Washington III, Kurt Jackson,

Michael Saulsberry (*The Stylettes*)

Brena De Niro (*1st receptionist*)

Jade Gordon (*girl in coffee shop*)

Tracy Vilar (*Annie*)

Amanda De Cadenet (*2nd receptionist*)

Martin Valinsky (*Brill Building songwriter*)

Lita Stevens (*radio station receptionist*)

For Real (*Brill Building hallway singers*)

Larry Klein (*record producer*)

Chris Isaak (*Matthew Lewis*)

The Williams Brothers (*Click Brothers*)

Bridget Fonda (*Kelly Porter*)

Lucinda Jenney (*Marion*)

Deidre Lewis (*girl in Howard's bed*)

Buster (*Baby Luma*)

John Nacco (*cab driver*)

Lynne Adams (*kindly nurse*)

Brittany English Stevens (*Luma*)

Johnny Thomas III (*Annie's son*)

Hary Victor (*journalist*)

Redd Kross, Jeffrey McDonald,

Steven McDonald, Brian Reitzell (*The Riptides*)

Christina Ehrlich, Melanie A. Gage

(*Riptides dancing girls*)

Albert Macklin (*TV interviewer*)

J Mascis (*Riptides engineer*)

Eric A. Stromer (*Doris' LA boyfriend*)

Robert Brunner (*theremin player*)

Chris Shearer (*security expert*)

China Kantner, Paige Dylan, Alicia Jaffee,

Alice Cohen, Lita Hernandez, Delia Gonzalez

(*singers in tree*)

David Clennon (*Dr Jones 'Jonesy'*)

Precious Chong (*crying woman at funeral*)

Peter Fonda (*voice of Guru Dave*)

Shawn Colvin (*commune guitarist*)

Kristen Vigard (*singing voice of Illeana Douglas*) *

USA 1996

115 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

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

Sight and Sound

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info:

sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk/subscribe

**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

This sets *us* up for our appropriate double response to Edna's own performance of her composition 'God Give Me Strength'. Singing to an audience of one – she's auditioning for future producer-husband Phillips – with a song that opens up on the miseries of her own recent life ('I'm only human, I want him, I want him to hurt'), she hunches over in total concentration, rocking clumsily from foot to foot: she has to convince him (and us) professionally, as well as being true to the contradictory feelings she has about events – her unrequited love for the married Murray – that only we have witnessed.

The music, in other words, has to carry a remarkable double burden. Firstly, it's the soundtrack-to-a-life inner-voice commentary on the events that unfold: this device was first heard when the massive stomp of The Ronettes' 'Be My Baby' kicked Scorsese's *Mean Streets* into life. But it also arises out of the experiences and observations of these various bed-sharing songwriter teams: 'Be My Baby' was by Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, another model for Howard and Denise (the first being Gerry Goffin with King, the *third* Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil). To reflect this, we have to be in on the apparent *creation* of songs: existing ones won't do, with their freight of potentially inappropriate resonance. Which lays a great responsibility on the behind-the-scenes pasticheurs providing these songs – including Goffin, Burt Bacharach, Elvis Costello and even Leslie Gore (on whom Kelly Porter may be based).

That these backroom workers don't disappoint is perhaps the main reason why *Grace of My Heart* succeeds where many 'modern' musicals (from *New York, New York* to *Absolute Beginners*) have failed: the different levels of delivery of meaning interact, supporting, extending and critiquing one another. But it's also down to Anders, who comes up with what she's best at: scene after scene of lively, funny, unexpected woman-to-woman moments.

Mark Sinker, *Sight and Sound*, March 1997