

Document Citation

Title	Husbands
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Husbands, Cassavetes, John, 1970

Husbands (COLOR)

San Francisco, Oct. 25.

Columbia Pictures release of Al Ruban & Sam Shaw production. Directed and written by John Cassavetes. Camera (DeLuxe Color), Victor Kemper; film editor, Peter Tanner; asst. director, Alan Hopkins. (No MPAA Rating) Running Time: 154 MINS.

Harry Ben Gazzara
Archie Peter Falk
Gus John Cassavetes
Mary Tynan Jenny Runacres
Pearl Billingham Jenny Lee Wright
Julie Noelle Kao
Leola Leola Harlow
Annie Meta Shaw
Red John Kullers
The Countess Dolores Delmar
With: Peggy Lashbrook, Eleanor Zee, Claire Malis, Lorraine McMartin, Edgar Franken, Sarah Felcher Antoinette Kray, Gwen van Dam, John Armstrong Eleanor Gould, Carinthia West, Rhonda Parker, Joseph Boley, Judith Lowry, Joseph Hardy, K.C. Townsend, Anne O'Donnell, Gene Wheeler.

Appalled and horrified by the death of their best friend, three middleclass, not-quite-middleaged family men explode and ricochet off on a marathon New York-to-London binge. Director-writer-actor John Cassavetes and Ben Gazzara and Peter Falk are the "Husbands," who, in the face of death, revert to drunken, giggling, horse-playing adolescence, and, with a stunningly-talented supporting cast, create and improvise a memorably touching, human and very funny film. Columbia unreeled a 154-minute version at a special midnight sneak at the San Francisco Film Festival, which drew a full house. It was obviously in a transitory state of editing with no end credits. It is, in its present shape, self-indulgent to the point of boredom and too long by at least a half-hour, but editing down to sharpen the dramatic impact, and cutting out scenes and the drawn-out dialog of the improvising actors should produce a major work of cinematic and dramatic art whose box-office appeal should be considerably broader than Cassavetes' previous "Faces."

Unlike "Faces," "Husbands" is a work of love, compassion, and humor. But Cassavetes is working the same turf. The middle-class, middle-aged, materially-successful American man-boy, fenced in by home, wife, kids and careers, which he sincerely loves in two out of three cases. Yet each man's adolescent dreams of being his own man, an ungraspable illusion of freedom, is vented in drinking, picking up girls, and the trite alcohol-inspired songs with meaningless lyrics, sung by people who can't express in words what they feel, let alone communicate to others.

On the evidence of "Faces" and "Husbands", Cassavetes cannot be classed with other American directors, even those who write or develop their own original screenplays. He is more like a novelist, creating, or recreating, his own slice of the world with typewriter, camera, and formidable dramatic talent.

However, he is not his own best editor. The scenes that should be cut, that must be cut, are all ones in which Cassavetes is a principal. There is a prolonged ending with him talking with his kids in the driveway, when the psychological moment to end is with a freeze-frame of him and Falk staring at one another on the sidewalk outside their homes.

"I don't like your silly, snickering school-boy friends," Jenny Runacre tells Cassavetes in his London hotel bedroom. That said, there is no need for the childish wrestling match that follows.

After prolonged bout of beer drinking and singing with some New York barflies, he and Falk throw up, with Falk's horrendous retches resounding off the toilet wall like the battle roar of a brontosaurus. The scene is excessive, and its interminable, self-indulgent length eventually evoked a strong chorus of hisses from the festival audience. Fleeing from the beer foam and grime of a lower New York bar in a sudden panicked flight to London, Cassavetes, Falk and Gazzara are three of the uncoolest married men to ever go on the make. Falk, stumbling about a chic London gambling casino, propositioning every skirt in sight and quite joltingly getting accepted is the film's comic highlight. His bedroom scene with a totally silent Chinese girl its most touching, and a final bit of improvisation outside their homes as he wildly makes sure that he and Cassavete have the right number of stuffed animals, sailors' hats and toy pets for their kids is the film's culminating flash of inspiration.

But if Falk is the confused clown, then Gazzara is its mixed-up heavy, the one in whom the binge triggers a final brutal confrontation with his wife. From the beginning he is established the loner of the three in ways as subtle as keeping on his dress suit during the post-drunk basketball game while the other two change into sweat suits to work off their hangovers. It is he who remains in London while the others slink back to Port Washington, Long Island.

now having lost not one, but two close friends.

In a superb cast, Miss Runacre, a tall lovely blonde English girl making her first film, gives a complex, touching performance as Cassavetes' high-strung, neurotic pick-up.

Victor Kemper's lighting and camera work is an inspired improvisation of its own. It moves in and out and around the action, isolating it, focusing it, involving the viewer as subjectively as if he were the fourth husband. In the midst of a London downpour, the audience feels as sopping wet as the crew and actors must have been.

But supervising editor Peter Tanner still has a great deal of work cut out for him. Rick.