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Pret-a-Porter (Ready to Wear)

USA 1994

Director: Robert Altman

Certificate

15
Distributor
Buena Vista
Production Company
Miramax Film International
Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Ian Jessel
Moscow:
Angelo Pastore
Producer
Robert Altman
Co-producers
Scott Bushnell
Jon Kilik
Associate Producer
Brian D. Leitch
Production Co-ordinator
Agnes Bermejo
Production Manager
Daniel W. Hermann
Location Manager
Eric Muller
2nd Unit Film/TV Director
Allan Nicholls
TV Associate
Dylan Tichnor
Assistant Directors
Jerome Enrico
Philippe Landoulsi
Olivier Greco
Emmanuel Hamon
Jean-Marc Joly
Casting
France:
Guylene Pean
Screenplay
Robert Altman
Barbara Shulgasser
Script Supervisor
Carmen Soriano
Directors of Photography
Pierre Mignot
Jean Lépine
Editor
Geraldine Peroni
Film:
Suzy Elmiger
Production Designer
Stephen Altman
Creative Consultant
Nathalie Rykiel
Art Director
William Amello
Set Design
Jean Canovas
Set Decorator
Françoise Dupertuis
Set Dresser
David Ronan
Costume Design
Catherine Leterrier
Simone Lo's Collection:
Cerruti 1881
Cy Bianco's Collection:
Xuly Bet
Cort Romney's
Collection:
Vivienne Westwood
Lamameraux Boots:
Larry Mahan
Western Boots
Featured Collections
Jean-Paul Gaultier
Issey Miyake
Christian Lacroix
Sonia Rykiel
Gianfranco Ferré for
Christian Dior
Wardrobe Supervisor
Olivier Beriot
Fashion Co-ordinator
Christine Jolimoy
Key Make-up
Judith Gayo
Jacques Clemente
Key Hairstylist
Paul de Fisser
Title Design
Balsmeyer & Everett
Computer Graphics:
Syzgy Digital Cinema

Music/Music Conductor

Michel Legrand
Music Supervisor
Allan Nicholls
Music Editor
Suzana Peric
Music Consultant
Happy Walters
Songs/Music Extracts
"Here Comes the Hotstepper" by Ini Kamoze, Salaam Gibbs, Chris Kenner, performed by Salt 'N' Pepa; "70's Love Groove" by Janet Jackson, James Harris III, Terry Lewis, performed by Janet Jackson; "These Boots Are Made for Walking" by Lee Hazelwood, performed by Sam Phillips; "Martha" by and performed by Eric Mouquet, Michel Sanchez; "Keep Givin' Me Your Love" by Steven Nikolas, Kenneth Karlin, Soul, Shock & Cutfather, performed by Cece Peniston; "Supermodel Sandwich" by and performed by Terence Trent D'Arby; "Style is Coming Back in Style" by Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller, performed by John Pizzarelli; "I'm Too Sexy" by Fred Fairbrass, Richard Fairbrass, Rob Manzoli, performed by Right Said Fred; "My Girl Josephine" by Antoine 'Fats' Domino, Dave Bartholomew, performed by Supercat; "Natural Thing" by Paul Heard, Mike Pickering, performed by M People; "Jump on Top of Me" by Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, performed by The Rolling Stones; "Pretty" by Dolores O'Riordan, Noel Hogan, performed by The Cranberries; "Close to You" by N'Dea Davenport, Jan Kincaid, Simon Bartholomew, Andrew Levy, performed by The Brand New Heavies; "Get Wild" by The New Power Generation, performed by NPG; "Lemon" by Paul Hewson, Dave Evans, Larry Mullen, Adam Clayton, performed by U2; "I Like Your Style" by Emilio Castillo, Stephen Kupka, Nick Milo, performed by Tower of Power; "I Got the Bull by the Horns" by Amos Boyd, Billie Jean Horton, performed by k.d. lang; "Dopest Ethiopian" by Wil Townsend, Warren Robinson, Andre Zachary, Pharaoh Davis, Tony Perez, Kevin

Perez, performed by Asante; "Ruby Baby" by Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller, performed by Björk Guðmundsdóttir & The Guðmundur Ingólfsson Trio; "Be Thankful for What You Got" by and performed by William DeVaughn; "Addicted to Love" by and performed by Robert Palmer; "Unchained Melody" by Hy Zaret, Alex North, performed by the Righteous Brothers; "Blackjack" by Donaldson Byrd, performed by Donald Byrd; "As" by John Custer, Brian Dennis, performed by Dag; "Abat-jour" by Robert Stolz, performed by Henry Wright; "Twiggy, Twiggy" by Lalo Schiffrin, Mort Stevens, Burt Bacharach, Hal David, Nanako Sato, performed by Pizzicato 5; "Raga" by John Wardle, Najma Akhtar, Jacki Leibzeit, performed by Jah Wobble; "How Long Dub" by Beresford Romeo, Philip Harvey, performed by Soul II Soul; "Reste sur Moi" by M. Lavione, P. Grillet, F. Aboulker, performed by Patricia Kaas; "Third Time Lucky" by Basia Trzetrzelewska, Danny White, performed by Basia; "Same Brown Earth" by David Hidalgo, Louis Perez, performed by Latin Players; "Violent and Funky" by Mike Muir, Adam Siegel, Robert Trujillo, Dean Pleasants, performed by Infectious Grooves; "Swamp Thing" by Richard Norris, David James Ball, performed by The Grid; "L'Accordéoniste" by Michel Emer, "La Coulante du pauvre Jean" by Marguerite Monnot, Rene Rouzard, performed by Edith Piaf; "Transit Ride" by Keith Elam, performed by Guru; "Here We Go" by Stakka Bo, Jonas von der Burg, performed by Stakka Bo; "La Vie en rose" by Louiguy, Edith Piaf, Mack David, performed by Grace Jones; "Concerto for Trumpet and Strings" by Giuseppe Torelli; "Duet, Act 2 Bacarolle" by Jacques Offenbach, performed by Amy Albani; "The Pirates of Penzance" by Gilbert & Sullivan, performed by The D'Oyle Carte Opera Company
Supervising Sound Editor
Skip Lievsay
Dialogue Supervisor
Philip Stockton
Dialogue Editors
Eliza Paley
Fred Rosenberg
Foley Supervisor
Bruce Pross
Foley Editors
Frank Kern
Steve Visscher
Production Sound Mixer
Alain Curvelier
Sound Re-recording Mixer
Lee Dichter
Sound Effects Editor
Eugene Gearty
Foley Artists
Marko Costanza
Cast
Banny Aiello

Major Hamilton
Anouk Aimée
Simone Lowenthal
Lauren Bacall
Slim Chryslor
Kim Basinger
Kitty Potter
Michel Blanc
Inspector Forget
Anne Canovas
Violetta Romney
Jean-Pierre Cassel
Olivier de la Fontaine
François Cluzet
Jean-Pierre
Rossy de Palma
Pilar
Rupert Everett
Jack Lowenthal
Kasia Figura
Vivienne
Teri Garr
Louise Hamilton
Richard E. Grant
Cort Romney
Linda Hunt
Regina Krumm
Sally Kellerman
Sissy Wanamaker
Ute Lemper
Albertine
Tara Léon
Kiki Simpson
Sophia Loren
Isabella de la Fontaine
Lyle Lovett
Clint Lammeraux
Chiara Mastroianni
Sophie Choiset
Marcello Mastroianni
Sergei (Sergio)
Tom Novembre
Reggie
Stephen Rea
Milo O'Brannigan
Sam Robards
Craig
Tim Robbins
Joe Flynn
Georgianna Robertson
Dane Simpson
Julia Roberts
Anne Eisenhower
Jean Rochefort
Inspector Tantpis
Lili Taylor
Fiona Ulrich
Tracey Ullman
Nina Scant
Tapa Sudana
Kerut
Forest Whitaker
Cy Bianco
Laura Benson
Laurent Lederer
Constant Anée
Milo's Entourage
Yann Collette
Coroner
Alexandra Vandernoot
Sky TV Reporter
Jocelyne Saint Denis
Hotel Manager
André Penvern
Hotel Clerk
Maurice Lamy
Bell Boy
Pascal Mourier
Fad TV Cameraman
Adrien Stahly
Denis Lepeut
Fad TV Sound Engineers
Harry Belafonte
Paolo Bulgari
Anello Capuano & Friends
Cher
Helena Christensen
Gamiliana
Elsa Klensch
Serge Molitor
Claude Montana
Thierry Mugler
Tatjana Patitz
Sonia Rykiel
Eve Salvail
Nicola Trussardi
Themselves

12,009 feet
133 minutes

Dolby stereo
In colour
Technicolor
Anamorphic
US Title
Ready to Wear

In Moscow, Sergei purchases two identical Dior neck ties. In Paris, the week of the *prêt à porter* fashion shows, Olivier de la Fontaine, head of the French Fashion Council, receives one tie with a letter. After a bitter exchange with his wife Isabella, he puts on the tie, and leaves. He visits his lover, fashion designer Simone Lowenthal, also being visited by pregnant supermodel Albertine. At the airport, Kitty Potter, reporter for American fashion channel FRD, is interviewing celebrities, including Regina Krumm of *Elle*, Sissy Wanamaker of *Harper's Bazaar*, and Nina Scant of *British Vogue*. Fashion buyer Major Hamilton angles for an interview but is rejected. Louise Hamilton encounters a *Houston Chronicle* fashion reporter, Abbe Eisenhower, who has left her bags back in the US. De la Fontaine notes Sergei, just arrived, wearing the same tie. In the ride back to Paris, Olivier dies choking on a ham sandwich. Sergei panics and runs, jumping off the Pont Alexandre. Police Inspector Tantpis and newly widowed Isabella, participating in a dog show, are informed of the death (assumed to be murder) at the same time.

At the Grand Hotel, Eisenhower has to share a room with *Washington Post* sportswriter Joe Flynn, forced to stay in town and cover the 'murder'. Neither has any clothes but what they're wearing - Sergei having stolen Joe's suitcase - and their animosity turns into a hot sexual affair. English designer Cort Romney with his wife Violetta and 'street' designer Cy Bianco with his assistant/lover Reggie prepare for their shows, the House of Dior, Sonia Rykiel, Christian LaCroix, Issey Miyake, and Jean-Paul Gaultier have theirs; all and sundry are interviewed by Kitty Potter. The three fashion editors pursue the services of sardonic, calculating fashion photographer Milo O'Brannigan.

O'Brannigan - who tricks the women into posing for pictures in humiliating positions - is also working for Jack, Simone Lowenthal's son. Married to model Dane, Jack is having an affair with her sister Kiki. Isabella faints when she encounters Sergei at a fashion show, then keeps her cool when he turns up again at a Bulgari jewellery show; they had been married 42 years earlier in Italy. The Romney and Bianco shows are big successes, but each designer is cheating with the other's partner. The three editors have their revenge on O'Brannigan when Wanamaker steals his negatives. Tantpis learns from an autopsy that Olivier's death was an accident and the case is closed. Simone upsets the whole hypocritical appletart, staging her climactic show entirely with nude models, including Albertine.

For all the fuss it makes about going backstage at Parisian fashion shows, Robert Altman's *Pret-a-Porter* has remarkably little to show. Nowhere do we see anyone design anything, or figure out how to drape the models to best effect. A show is deemed a success solely on the buzz it sparks among the audience and the media; at no point do we see anyone buy or sell the fanciful togs on display, which would seem to be the point of the whole thing.

Despite Altman piling his trademark contempt onto television fashion reporter Kitty Potter (played with real comic charm by Kim Basinger), his whole approach merely mimics the shooting style of fashion shows on MTV and CNN: lots of handheld stuff, first closing up on the media lovelies in the audience, then watching the models strut their stuff with low-angle, idolatrous pans that self-consciously include the popping flashes of the photographers. From there it is backstage for ►



A passion for fashion: Julia Roberts, Tim Robbins

◀ the shoulder-to-shoulder post-show jam, a silkier version of the locker room interview. Altman had his cast mingle with the real life personages but all they do is duplicate the posturing of the media-savvy fashion crowd.

There are half-hearted attempts to comment on the whole idea of fashion or fads, but they don't amount to much. Julia Roberts and Tim Robbins play a pair of US journalists, forced to share a hotel room they cannot leave because each has lost baggage. Their forced intimacy soon contributes to some hot and heavy couplings, yet they cannot make any instant judgements on each other's amorous suitability because they're not wearing their usual sartorial signals. Amusing enough, except that even this simple encounter is blighted by Roberts' character becoming some sort of dipso/nympho, unable to resist sex after drinking. It is as if the director can't resist reducing the most innocent characterisation into a mechanism for contempt.

This sourness reaches its nadir with the three fashion editors pursuing fashion photographer Milo O'Brannigan. Although Linda Hunt tries to run a cool and collected variation on the career woman persona, Tracey Ullman and Sally Kellerman dive into stereotypical waters. O'Brannigan, played with condescension by Stephen Rea, tricks the women into humiliating intimacies and photographs them, thus cruelly turning the tables on these merchants of female imagery. Yet the point is utterly subsumed by the gusto with which Altman films their self-abasements; he even has Kellerman repeat her breast-flashing embarrassment from *MASH*. Whatever connivance the women may have in their own plight is swamped by the ferocity of the film's delight in it.

Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni enact a travesty of some of their lesser vehicles, cooing and shouting at one another as they recall a past romance of comically impossible twists. As she is Olivier's widow and he a lowly communist tailor, one supposes there is a point being scored, but whatever it is dies aborning. Forest Whitaker and Richard E. Grant play over-the-top gay designers; the latter in particular confuses swish with character. Neither comes close to the kind of "what-of-it?" campness Kenneth Williams could toss off. Which is another way of saying the movie doesn't even live up to being *Carry On Couturier*.

What makes the movie reprehensible rather than merely miserable is how it marks the degeneration of the film technique associated with Jean Renoir's great middle period. In his hands, the unanchored camera could pick up and follow any character or story passing by. It joined peasant and noble, sinner and saint, in a narrative democracy that was ultimately one of the century's most sublime expressions of secular faith and hope. But in Altman's hands, the camera becomes an instrument for turning away, creating instead a democracy of contempt.

Henry Sheehan