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# Reviewed At Montreal Fest

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**Health**  
(U.S.-COLOR)

**Altman goes to a Florida health foods convention. Amusing but overdrawn.**

**Montreal, Aug. 23.**

Twentieth Century-Fox release of a Lion's Gate Films production. Stars Carol Burnett, Glenda Jackson, James Garner, Lauren Bacall. Directed by Robert Altman. Screenplay, Frank Barhydt, Paul Dooley and Altman. Camera (color), Edmond Koons; sound, Bob Gravenor; editor, Dennis M. Hill. No other credits provided. Reviewed at Cinema Parisien, Montreal, Aug. 23, 1980. Running time: 102 MINS.

Cast: Glenda Jackson, Carol Burnett, James Garner, Lauren Bacall, Dick Cavett, Paul Dooley, Henry Gibson.

Since producer-director Robert Altman completed production early last year of this arch look at a Florida health foods bash, the pic has gradually been stigmatized in the trade as the best known unreleased, major company film in some time. It's a bad rap; "Health" is overdrawn and thin in too many spots, but the pic is a genuinely humorous effort that affords its good cast often-seized opportunities for incisively funny performances.

Twentieth should take the pic off the shelf and, election year or not, test the exhibition waters. Careful playoff plus a canny campaign could yield modest, if not substantial wicket results. What's left of Altman's faithful following should be cheered since this is his most satisfactory outing since "A Wedding."

Like that pic, and "Nashville," the rambling format of "Health" puts a contingent of dotty characters against a frenzied social backdrop. Altman's clever handling of that backdrop — he is best at lending credibility to even the oddest of circumstances; what's seen here really looks like a convention, any large convention — permits the cast to develop broad characterizations that most often work.

In his apparent desperation to get the pic into release, Altman has made much of the all-too-facile connection of "Health's" plot to the recent major-party political conventions. The value of the pic isn't its political moralizing, even as subtly presented here, but the cast's (and Altman's) funny way of poking fun at the character types presented.

The convention is set in a garishly statuesque southern Florida hotel, and Altman (considering his satirical intent) somehow got some 100 health food companies to provide their wares in the pic's highly detailed and immensely clever sets. Lauren Bacall plays a well-preserved 83-year-old health authority who claims she's stayed so remarkably fit (Bacall resembles herself off-screen; there's no attempt to age her) by maintaining her virginity.

Bacall regularly lapses into catatonia, a condition signalled by the raising of her right arm which remains stiffly upraised. She's running for the presidency of the health foods org. that runs the convention, against a vaguely masculine, cigar puffer (Glenda Jackson) with a fondness for Adlai Stevenson and taping her own conversations.

Carol Burnett is the film's real surprise. She's firstrate as a sexually frustrated White House health emissary sent to the convention to gladhand the Presidential candidates. Burnett splendidly combines the sexiness (she's rarely looked better onscreen), temerity and political idealism of her char-

acter without forgetting that she's supposed to be funny.

Dick Cavett plays himself in a supporting part, covering the convention for his tv gab show. Altman cleverly puts him in a hotel room on two occasions, lying in underwear and wistfully watching Johnnie Carson. James Garner is appropriately droll as Burnett's ex-husband, a political p.r. type hustling Bacall's candidacy. Paul Dooley overdoes it a bit as a disgruntled, third-party candidate, but Henry Gibson puts in a very funny bit as a political dirty trickster who resorts to eavesdropping in elevators in drag.

Altman shifts back and forth between this brood. Nothing much is resolved and no big political statements are made. Altman has always been known as a director who gives much leeway to actors. That's a dangerous practice (John Cassavetes' films are a case in point), but with "Health," it works.

Altman's keen satirical eye gives the film shape and the quality of the cast takes it from there. "Health" is in competition at Montreal's World Film Festival. Perhaps it will emerge with the attention it deserves and the release date Altman has had to wait for. Given the soggy series of this summer releases, 20th could do a lot worse.

—Sege.