

## Document Citation

Title	<b>The women</b>
Author(s)	Steve Warren
Source	<i>San Francisco Bay Guardian</i>
Date	1988 Dec 21
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios (Women on the verge of a nervous breakdown), Almodóvar, Pedro, 1988



# MOVIES



**On the verge: Carmen Maura and Rossy de Palma in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*.**

Pepa the truth, he leaves a feeble lie on her answering machine. She tries to reach him but gets only his machine, and grows more frantic with each attempt.

Meanwhile her friend Candela (María Barranco) arrives seeking shelter, afraid some Shiite terrorists she had housed will give her away to the police. She couldn't face her folks if that happened, she says: "It's bad enough I became a model." Pepa, not wanting to stay there with her memories, has listed the apartment with a realtor. The first person to come to look at it is Carlos (Antonio Banderas), Ivan's grown son (not that the plot is heavy on coincidence or anything).

Not far behind is Carlos's mother, Lucia (Julieta Serrano), a once and future mental patient who was Ivan's lover 20 years ago. She thinks Pepa stands in the way of her reunion with Ivan.

The bed burns, things fly out the (closed) window, people fly off the balcony as well as the handle, two cops and a telephone repairman join the party and drugged gazpacho flows freely as the film builds to its hysterical climax.

Were it any more serious, *Women on the Verge* could join *The Good Mother* and countless other films in the genre I call "MASS productions," MASS being the acronym for Men Are Such Shits. But Almodovar is using his finger to tickle, not to point. He's giving us a slightly exaggerated picture of how things are in Spain: men are dumpers and women are dumpees, all of them doin' what comes naturally.

Having made several of the most outrageous — and outrageously funny — films of this decade, Almodovar has toned it down a bit and scored his greatest international critical and popular success. That should help you learn to pronounce his name — the accent is on the *do*(ugh). I think I still prefer his fresher and funkier *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, but I wouldn't discourage you from putting *Women* . . . on a pedestal . . . atop your must-see list. ■

## THE WOMEN

*Spain's enormous breakthrough in film*

**WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN.** Directed by Pedro Almodovar. At the Bridge, SF.

By Steve Warren

IT TOOK a full two weeks after I first saw Pedro Almodovar's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* for the thing that had been gnawing like Pac-man at my brain to burst into my consciousness. I was looking at still photos from the film and noticing that the star, Carmen Maura, had the same glazed expression in each of them. Suddenly Dody Goodman's voice cried in my head, "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman!"; and it all fell into place.

Not since Norman Lear's classic series has a soap opera been so absurdly tragicomic as this Spanish panic that milks human misery for all the laughs it can get.

Maura is Pepa, an actress best-known for playing the mother of a serial killer on TV (and capitalizing on it by doing a detergent commercial where she shows how she gets the bloodstains out of her son's clothes). She also dubs voices for everything from a condom commercial to a Spanish print of *Johnny Guitar*.

What brings Pepa to the brink is learning that she's pregnant on the day her lover Ivan (Fernando Guillen) decides to leave town with another woman. Lacking the *huevos* to tell