

Document Citation

Title	'Family plot'--an amiable film
Author(s)	John L. Wasserman
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	1976 Apr 10
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Family plot, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1976

'Family Plot'— An Amiable Film

By John L. Wasserman

If you attend Alfred Hitchcock's much-anticipated new film, "Family Plot," expecting — hoping — to be terrified out of your mind, the film is bound to be a disappointment.

But if you can go with the equivalent of an open mind, throwing yourself on the mercy of the court instead of demanding satisfaction, the film is a delightful diversion and features one of the great performances of the year.

Whatever your state of mind, there is no question that the old master is slowing down a little. "Vertigo," "North By Northwest" and "Psycho" were all made released in a three year period, 1958-60. But, since the 1969 release of "Topaz," only "Frenzy" precedes "Family Plot." Still, most of us will be lucky to be breathing when we're 77, as Hitchcock will be in August.

Written by Ernest Lehman ("North By Northwest"), the, uh, plot involves two couples, one sinister kidnappers-for-ransom (Karen Black and William Devane), the other a bumbling cab driver (Bruce Dern) and his moll, a fake fortune-teller (Barbara Harris).

Miss Harris has been retained by an aged crone (Cathleen Nesbitt) to find her long-missing nephew. As she and Dern set out on this quest, they keep inadvertently running into the Black-Devane duo, who find the interference anything but humorous. Eventually, it turns out

that their aims overlap and there is, not surprisingly, some ill-feeling expressed.

But one may say no more, for if "Family Plot" is not really suspenseful, much less terrorizing, it is consistently intriguing as Lehman's two-pronged story moves inexorably from parallel lines to perpendicular collision. It is, if you will, an *amiable* mystery.

But, beyond this, the film is worth seeing solely to watch Barbara Harris in action. Devane is properly suave and menacing, Miss Black is cool and efficient and Dern is a magnificent clutz, vainly seeking to establish a dignity which he is convinced he has, but has somehow misplaced.

But Miss Harris — aah, this is a performance to savor and relive. Whether going through the most marvelous twitches of eye and mouth as she conducts her spurious seances (complete with a demon named Harry, who sounds suspiciously like Linda Blair in "The Exorcist"), demanding sexual satisfaction from Dern in clipped, no-nonsense tones or dispatching hamburgers as if they contained the secret of life, her performance is a comic triumph untouched by any actress this year, save for Madeline Kahn in "Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother."



BARBARA HARRIS
A Comic Triumph

Which brings us to something else about "Family Plot." It's a *funny* movie. Not a burlesque, and never without discipline, but very funny. I don't know if Lehman had that in mind when he wrote the picture, but then I don't know if he knew he'd have Dern and Harris on the lines.

Lucky man.