

# LIFE

A NEW CHARGE  
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'Husbands' on the Run

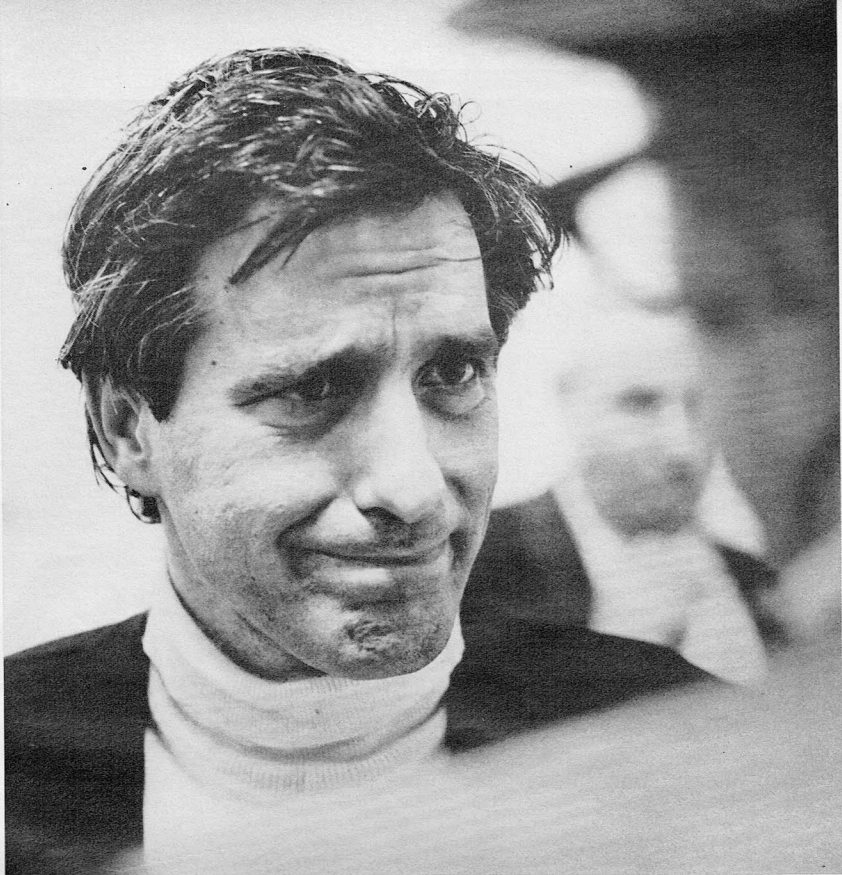
Peter Falk, Ben Gazzara  
and John Cassavetes  
make a movie



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# After 'Faces'

In *Faces* John Cassavetes documented the disintegration of a marriage with such relentless insight that every nuance of sound and image touched someone's personal truth. Now, he has turned his incisive eye and ear on three husbands—not their search for meaning in marriage, but each one's search, through camaraderie with other men, for himself. In *Husbands* the writer-director-actor—he co-stars with Peter Falk and Ben Gazzara—tells the story of three men fast approaching 40. They attend the funeral of a friend, become suddenly afraid and take off on a week of jokes, games, songs and, finally, flight to London. "There are phases in everyone's life that are extreme, when emotions are naturally heightened," says Cassavetes. "This one week changes everything about them—their thoughts, feelings, their relationships to each other." Falk describes *Husbands* as a picture about "three guys who are trying to keep the boy in the man alive; it's a sad thing when that kid dies." Cassavetes explains, "When our son Nicky was born, my wife said, 'It's a man-child.' No matter how old you get, if you can keep the desire to be creative, you're keeping the man-child alive."



At an early planning session, the cast of *Husbands*—Actor-Director John Cassavetes (left), Ben Gazzara (center) and Peter Falk—set a light tone of youthful clowning

**A**  
**film**

**'to keep the man-child alive'**



"At one point, we make a game out of singing in a barroom," says Cassavetes. "Now it's an extremely unusual moment when three men can get a bunch of middle-class people together in a bar in New York City and make them sing from their souls. It's

something everybody wants to do, but never gets around to because of sophistication or not having the right circumstances or other excuses mature people give themselves. But we can do it because we're trying so hard not to be mature. Men have a different

relationship with men than they have with women—a different kind of honesty," says Cassavetes—at right, at home with his wife, Actress Gena Rowlands, and their two children—Nicky (10) and Zan (3). "Men look for friends with whom they don't have to put up a

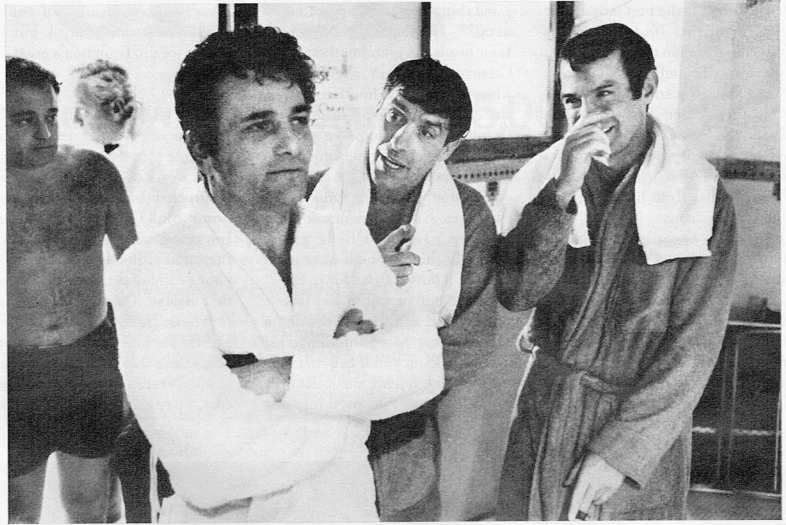
**“Getting old doesn’t bother us—it’s still  
being young and not having done anything”**



front. A man with whom you can be comfortable becomes your friend. You're not married to him, so you don't have to prove anything or carry the responsibility for that friendship outside of just being there. In marriage, the partnership is deeper and much more difficult."



After the funeral the three husbands go off to a gym to play basketball and swim. "Getting old doesn't bother us," says Cassavetes. "It's still being young and not having done anything. We have to make a game out of everything. We enjoy the games as a part of our lives which has always given us comfort when we needed it. And then, after the games are over, we're tired and the thoughts and fears come back again."



# Dead-on dialogue as their cash runs out

by ANN GUERIN

"You know, I think I'm crazy," says John Cassavetes. He throws up his arms and slides off the sofa onto the rug. "What's worse, I get other people involved in my craziness and then I'm obligated to do something about it." He has been talking about *Husbands*. He believes *Faces* "is the best movie ever made," but that *Husbands* will be better. Better than the best? "Well, I have terrific ambition," he says. "My ambition is so pompous. . . ."

He is filming *Husbands* with much the same improvisational techniques that made *Faces* such a masterpiece—with dead-on dialogue gleaned from hours of free-wheeling exchanges. Now, he, Falk and Gazzara begin improvising in the Windsor Room of New York's Hotel Piccadilly, their rehearsal headquarters. The long banquet table in the center of the room is piled high with script pages, bulging ashtrays, platters of half-eaten Danish pastry and discarded bread from sandwiches. Cassavetes looks up.

"What we don't have is an opener. You're all right, Ben—you're pacing up and down outside the bar waiting for us, but Peter and I—we're nowhere." He rattles script pages. "It's here, but it's terrible." He jumps to his feet. He rocks back and forth on his toes and keens, "Terrible, terrible. . . . Terr—ific. I've got it—it's perfect, fantastic, perfect! What's the most cumbersome thing you could bring to a funeral?" Falk and Gazzara shake their heads. "A grandmother," says Cassavetes. "That's what, a little white-haired grandmother. Peter, the camera will come in on us in Grandmother's room. We've been asked by the family to bring her to the funeral. Don't ask me why—I don't know why—I'll think about that later. Grandma will ask us to sit down. Then she'll do grandmotherly things. She'll have a cat and she'll put out food for it. She'll go to the mirror and fix her face—you know, a little dab of powder, a pat-pat at her hair—the things old ladies do. Then you'll help her button her coat, tell her she looks fine, just fine. I won't do anything, just

sit. You see I don't like her, I don't like her at all because I know she's looking at me and she's thinking why is it Stewart is dead and not you?" Falk warms: "It's good, John, very good." Gazzara asks, "What about the bar, John? Do you bring Grandmother into the bar or do I just jump into the cab when you drive up?" For an instant Cassavetes is stumped. "We'll bring her in," he says. "Grandma is a sport. We'll drive up, you'll open the door and make to jump in, but she'll see that you're cold and she'll say, 'I'd like a drink.' Of course, she doesn't want a drink but she knows we do. Grandma's great!"

The telephone rings. Gazzara answers it. Cassavetes stiffens. Shooting already has been delayed three weeks because the man who contracted to finance the film—Count Bino Cicogna, head of Euro International—has not produced the money. For Cassavetes, every phone call holds the menace of further delays. Gazzara comes back, frowning. He says, "John, that was Jay. He's at a meeting with the Euro people and there seems to be some misunderstanding." "Get your coat, we're going," says Cassavetes.

"And there'll be no misunderstanding—our money or we sue. Don't worry, Peter," says Cassavetes as he and Gazzara run out the door.

Falk isn't worried. He's learned about Cassavetes' tenacity. About two years earlier, during a casual lunch, Cassavetes had told Falk that what he really wanted to do was make a movie with him and Ben Gazzara. "I've heard that bull for so many years," Falk is saying now. "You know, you see a couple of guys you like and you say, 'Yeah, we should make a movie. Sure, we're going to make a picture.' Then in Belgrade, last June, I get a message to call John Cassavetes in Rome. He asks if I got his offer. Offer, what offer? Now I'm convinced he's crazy. I don't know what he's talking about. He says, 'You know, the picture we're making together—you, me and Benny.' It takes me a second even to recall and then I said, 'No.' He had a fit, yelled and cursed, said, 'I'll get back to you,' and hung up. Two days later I got a telegram and this telegram was about my offer to make a picture called *Husbands* with Gazzara and Cassavetes with a salary and the whole bit. I didn't know what was going on, I didn't even know what the picture was about. I knew it was Cassavetes, me and Gazzara and it was about three guys who take off—well, that's pretty good."

The next morning, at rehearsal, Gazzara starts to tell Falk about the meeting. "There are all those big-wigs sitting there saying, 'John, we're so glad you got here.'" Cassavetes breaks in, "I said, 'Everyone in this room who represents us, out. This meeting is over and I'm going to sue you if that money isn't up in two weeks.' Business, the word exhausts me. Let's forget it and get to work."

They are about to work on a scene involving the mother-in-law of one of the three men. Women move through the movie but, Cassavetes has said, "This is absolutely a man's story. I think that the interest a woman could have in a picture like this would only be in seeing the relationship between men done on a real level. There are jobs to be done—for a woman or for a man—that have nothing to do with their relationship with each other. The job that has to be done here is for three men to investigate themselves—honestly, without suppression. The minute you settle down and say, that's it, I'm closing shop, I know what I am, then you're a man, no longer a man-child. Is it really better to be a man-child

CONTINUED



Cassavetes coaches Judith Lowry, who plays Grandma, before shooting key scene

**Business—the word exhausts me.**

**Let's forget it and get to work.**

## ‘All they can think of is profits. It kills me’

or to be a man? I don't know.”

Cassavetes turns to Gazzara. “Ben, you'll go into the bathroom and start to shave. Your mother-in-law comes in. I don't know what I'll do with her, maybe I'll have her sit on the edge of the tub and watch you. There are three things you have to keep in mind—one, she's a mother, that's what she is first of all; two, you like her and she likes you—she's an intelligent woman and she knows that what's wrong with the marriage is that you try too hard; three, she's the enemy and don't you forget it—because if this marriage breaks up, she's not going with you.” “Right,” says Gazzara. “Oh are you ever right.” “You see, Ben,” says Cassavetes, “we have to lay in your character because you're important in this section. Peter has no character—until London.” “Yeah,” says Falk, “I'm just the Greek chorus in New York.” “Peter, Peter, didn't we go over the development of your part last night—didn't we talk it through?” says Cassavetes. “Sure, sure,” says Falk. “Now I've less to say than before.” “I don't know, Peter,” says Cassavetes. “You're my friend, you're fun, but I'm be-

ginning to wonder why I want to go to London with you.” “I don't blame you,” says Falk. “Who wants to travel with a deaf-mute?” They laugh until the phone rings.

Cassavetes snaps out a series of sharp No's and hangs up. “It kills me that all they can think of is their profits, it kills me.” He has always had problems with the businessmen of the movie business. In 1961, after *Shadows*, the first picture he directed, won the Venice Film Festival award, he directed one picture for Paramount and another for Stanley Kramer, both of them artistic failures, marked by, and probably caused by, his frustrating fights with the businessmen in control. For two years after that, he could get no work. Finally, he got some work as an actor. Meanwhile he began writing the script for *Faces*. When the script was completed he acted in two TV shows for \$20,000 and spent the money in one day buying equipment with which to make his movie. With his own money, without studio facilities, using mainly his own home and that of his mother-in-law, he made *Faces*. “We didn't go out,” he says. “We didn't do anything but

work, I even gave up cigarettes.” He acted in five movies to finance the editing and cutting of his film, and its eventual success restored his reputation as a director.

“I call the box office every night and see how *Faces* is doing,” he says. “I love the profits. I mean, I go crazy. But the thrill I get, I don't care about the money—it's that those people are going to see it.” He is standing defiantly in the rehearsal room, like Charlie Brown on the mound. “One thing I know is that we're going to make this movie if we have to do it ourselves.”

Now, eight weeks later, the New York work is completed. Cassavetes, Falk and Gazzara have been all over the city and the suburbs for the cameras, have even been robbed on the New York subway. (When subway officials, fearful of image, called Mayor John Lindsay, he said: “I saw *Faces* last night and Cassavetes has my permission to shoot where he pleases.”)

They are ready to leave for London. Their tickets have been bought, but they don't know if they will be able to work when they get

there. Count Cicogna has put up the \$1 million promised in the contract—with the understanding that he will be repaid when they sell the distribution rights to the picture—but they have spent almost all of it. Cassavetes is on the transatlantic phone, talking to Cicogna about the possibility of his putting up more money and handling distribution himself. The film is an independent production, belonging to Cassavetes, Falk and Gazzara, and they have been unable to make any distribution deals elsewhere because they refuse to give up any artistic control. It seems incredible that after *Faces*, Cassavetes should be having this problem.

Cassavetes hangs up and says that Cicogna wants them to come to London; they'll work out something there. “My big problem,” Cassavetes says, “is I'm willing to take chances and people in the professional bank business are not. I know that somehow it is an honor to have people sit down for two hours to watch and listen and I'll be damned if I'm going to make films that do not reflect something more generous of me than just giving them their money's worth.” ◀

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