

## Hitchcock

In the new, fictionalized bio-pic "Hitchcock," Anthony Hopkins provides a dose of bravura acting, and he is matched in guile and smarts by Helen Mirren, terrific as Hitchcock's wife and helpmate Alma Reville.

The narrative starts in 1959 when Alfred Hitchcock, now 60 and seeking a new project, comes upon a novel, "Psycho," which recounts a murderer with a mother fixation, a story which paralleled the real story of Ed Gein, a true nut-job who killed his dominating mother. The story is deemed too dark by his current studio, Paramount, which wants another sleek suspense tale, like his recent "North By Northwest." Thus, Hitchcock must finance the project himself, an enterprise that could cost the couple their home. Through struggling with shooting difficulties, clashes with censors, and financial turmoil, the director is able to get the picture made, and even though the studio is still cold on it, Hitchcock finds ways to hype the film (such as not letting anyone in the theater after it has started so as not to reveal its surprises). He then sees it triumph at the box office, and it turns out to be the most successful film of his career.

Hopkins' Hitchcock is, by turns, droll and strange, childlike and perverse, and the actor makes most of these contradictory turns. In appearance, Hopkins is much larger than the diminutive director and his face lacks Hitch's hound-dog visage. In scenes where he muses on an imagined relationship with Ed Gein (the weakest element of the script by John J. McLaughlin) his stolid bulk reminded me of nothing so much as Peter Boyle playing the Monster in "Young Frankenstein!" What overrides these caveats, however, is how Hopkins, a wonderful mimic, mostly nails the distinctive, insinuating Hitchcock voice, that conspiratorial combination whisper and wheeze which is often delivered with coiled lips pursed in irony.

Much of that irony is directed at Mirren as Reville. The actress, smart and seductive as ever, looks nothing like the real Alma but easily carries off the role of a woman who is Hitchcock's match in their creative endeavors—even making script changes and directorial touches that enhance the final product (such as insisting on music in the shower scene). The role could be compared to that Mirren played as the wife in the shadow of the Great Man Leo Tolstoy in "The Last Station," and in this instance she performs just as effectively. She even makes do with a rather pointless sub-plot involving a possible amorous relationship she has with screenwriter Whitfield Cook (Danny Houston), an element that could have been completely cut.

The film provides, too, the chance to do some amusing casting comparisons with the original "Psycho," with Scarlett Johansson as Janet Leigh, Jessica Biel playing Vera Miles, and James D'Arcy as Anthony Perkins. All acquit themselves reasonably well, with Johansson being a most convincing charmer, but who is shown getting a dose of real terror during the shower scene filming. Other featured players, such as Toni Collette as Hitchcock's secretary and Michael Stuhlbarg as his agent Lew Wasserman, turn in good work also.

The film abjures, rightly, any real clips from the original "Psycho." The director, Sacha Gervasi (making his debut as a director of narrative films), sensibly concluded that any actual material from the original would contrast too drastically with the re-

creations he has staged. Thus, the scenes where Hitchcock is shown directing the film or, later, screening it, show only the director or the audience reacting (along with Bernard Herrmann's memorable score) which is enough to let today's moviegoers fill in the experience from their own celluloid memories. It also allows for Gervasi to show the aghast audience's reaction to the film's horror, and, for comic relief, Hitchcock himself sawing away in imitation of those shrieking strings in the shower scene. (*The film runs a brisk 93 min. and is rated "PG-13"*).