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'September Issue' unveils Vogue

Film humanizes editor-in-chief Anna Wintour

By LIZ SMITH

WELL, I wasn't going to say more about the R. J. Cutler documentary "The September Issue," but I have to go back on my word to myself. I saw this documentary and think it's a work of modern art. The film about the inner workings of Vogue magazine is beautiful and dazzling, just as high fashion is.

This is what I learned watching this dynamic film. Anna Wintour does not come off as an ogre, at least not in my view. But the film sometimes stuns one as it shows Anna's comprehension of herself as -- not the Devil who wears Prada -- but an engaged, mystifying, uncertain woman who acts all too certain in her job. She smiles, she laughs and she is much more charming and engaging than her usual public appearances. She is especially interesting discussing how her very bright, well connected siblings view her job. The camera catches Anna with wrinkles, lines and sags, but she remains quite appealing here. She is more real than when encountered in real life.

And so the real hero of "The September Issue" is Grace Coddington, a fashion veteran with flaming and irrepressible red hair who speaks her mind, tells the truth, and urges the viewer to join in her intellectual and cultural rebellion. She emerges as "the" personality of the film; and of Vogue. There are others -- Andre Leon Talley, a huge endearing presence, trying to play tennis and lose weight by Anna Wintour's direction. Anna's daughter, Bee Schaffer, is beautiful, frank, outspoken without being outlandish and shows remarkable common sense in a somewhat nonsensical world.

I was sorry when "The September Issue" came to an end. I watched it like a snake watches a bird. It's simply irresistible. Mr. R. J. Cutler has made his documentary high water mark!



R.J. Cutler's doc 'The September Issue' gets up close and personal with Vogue editor Anna Wintour.