

reel reviews

★ *Ishtar*

Center and Royal Park

It's a little ahead of schedule, but *Ishtar* seems certain to be this year's *Howard The Duck*. If it had been made by a couple of amateurs on a low budget, it would be an unforgettable piece of junk. The fact that it stars Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman and cost \$42 million makes this fiasco seem almost obscene.

Those two actors certainly shoulder much of the blame. Without their support this lame update of the Bob Hope- Bing Crosby "Road To . . ." movies would never have been made.

But even the best of actors are helpless in the face of empty scripts and poor direction. So, the artistic blame rests squarely on Elaine May, the writer and director.

She is the one who wrote this script about a pair of struggling singer/songwriters who travel to the Middle East and become embroiled unwittingly in the political intrigue of the mythical country of *Ishtar*. She is the one who laboriously directed the film on location. She is the one who delayed the release of *Ishtar*, sending its already bloated budget over the \$40 million mark.

And it is probably not an exag-



Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty pray for someone to come see their new movie, *Ishtar*.

geration to say that she is the one who has now set back the advances of women directors by 10 years.

Besides its many faults, *Ishtar* has one tragic flaw. Its main characters are hopelessly pathetic singer/songwriters who couldn't even lift a tune, much less carry one. That would be fine, but the script insists on sending them to nightclubs to sing . . . again and again and again.

So, we're treated to the painful spectacle of Beatty and Hoffman croaking their way through clever originals like "Hello *Ishtar*" and old classics. If your idea of heaven is Dustin Hoffman singing "Bridge Over Troubled Water," then this is the movie for you.

Needless to say, the other half of *Ishtar* isn't quite as bad, but it tries awfully hard and comes very, very close.

By Michael Giltz