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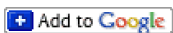
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Review by [Kurt Dahlke](#) | posted January 25, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

Gold: Before Woodstock. Beyond Reality:

As I try watching *Gold* through the eyes of a hippie or a square in 1969 - as opposed to the jaded 21st Century aesthete that I am - I still can't help wondering what kind of thing I'd need to be on to not only truly enjoy it, but to tolerate it at all. Uppers, downers, speed, coke, bennies, reds, 'ludes, 'shrooms, pot, acid, mary jane, sugar cubes, banana peels, grass, weed, cross-tops, hooch, dope, LSD, smack ...

Without such a life-ending pharmacopoeia coursing through my veins, I'm left to taxing my appreciation of unintentional camp to make it through. It's a living, right? However, I'm pretty sure no amount of intoxicants can enliven or justify this ride. No offense, but *Gold's* "let's make a movie!" film-school excesses surely didn't play well then, and 40-plus years in the future, only nostalgia and curiosity can ease the painful fact that there was clearly a reason that this became a 'lost' film.

At any rate, despite filmmaker Bob Levis' comedic aspirations, it's clear he has an agenda. It's probably the top-loaded inclusion of pictures of naked, dead Vietnamese babies during the otherwise lilting credits sequence that tips us off to this fact. Fight the man, right? Down with Imperialist oppression! Yet by movie's end, the only talking point I'm finding is the inevitable conclusion that wallowing naked in the mud with a bunch of hairy hippie chicks is a good, God-given right.

Levis goes about cementing his treatise with an ostensibly time-shifting tale of a group of Wild West longhairs starting their own little town dedicated to the pursuit of free, naked love in the mud, preferably with as many people as possible. The group is assisted by a '60s go-go girl, plagued by a '40s-style G-Man intent on enforcing the law, and shadowed by a mysterious comic-relief/revolutionary character who apparently took acting lessons from Hunter Thompson. There's really not much more to it than that, and this lack of real plot is hindered further by frequent chaotic interludes accompanied by excruciating acid rock. Because of these numerous deficiencies, I'll refer to my opening paragraph to reiterate that I highly doubt *Gold* was tolerable when it was first released, even when screened to its target audience (which was probably naked and fornicating in a nearby mud puddle anyway).

You'd think I'm a 70-year-old arch conservative, but I'm not. Free love is great, and prohibition just creates other problems, in my opinion. Yes, I prefer the things the Diggers did over those who just wanted to get whacked out and mess with the man, but I guess I'm more of a humanist than anything. At any rate, Levis kind-of tips his pallid hand as his nominal hero asserts, "the law sucks" while stripping naked. Long before this, the movie has degenerated into a series of vignettes featuring the G-Man lurking in the bushes watching various naked hippies cavort, or scenarios wherein the audience is forced to ogle the spectacularly unappealing nude dancing of the go-go girl while acid rock plays, music I'd posit no-one ever liked, due to its oppressive atonality and horrifically aggressive unlistenability - yet nobody ever protested because they were all too fucked up to say anything. Come to think of it, the musicians were probably too fucked up to know what they were doing, so I guess it's a wash.

The point is, if you're going to bring it, bring an agenda that makes sense, and

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back it up. While you're at it, make an entertaining movie. While films such as [Easy Rider](#) and [Joe](#) sport sadly nihilistic attitudes, at least they have the good grace to possess linear plots and clear thinking. Yes, *Gold* is oddly entertaining in a nominal, disturbing and unpleasant way, but it brings little more than forceful aggravation and confusion to the table. Grab your extras-laden DVD, give it an obligatory spin, and then lock it up in the vault for another 40 years, at least.

The DVD

Video:

Gold is more or less sterling in appearance, looking pretty darn good in its fullframe presentation. Some print damage and film grain is apparent, but not of concern. I noted one flare during an edit, due to a lack of professionalism more than anything else. On that point, it's amazing they were able to get this film in the can at all. Colors are pretty natural and rich, and there aren't compression artifacts to complain about.

Sound:

Dolby Digital 2.0 English Audio also sounds decent for its age, but for deficiencies in the original recording process. Some ADR audio doesn't quite match up in tone or synching, and other instances of dialog are a bit muffled. The bad part is in those extremely loud passages of music, with previously unreleased tracks by the MC5! David McWilliams! Ramblin' Jack Elliot! Beastly Times and Barry St. John! This music at times completely obscures dialog, which may very well have been intentional.

Extras:

Gold garners some vital 'Freaked-Out Bonus Features.' A **Commentary Track** with director Bob Levis and star Garry Goodrow is a fun, digression-laden listen, and will undoubtedly make you understand what was going on - doped-up improv, mostly. Doesn't make the movie itself any better, but at least you know they were having fun. A **Second Commentary Track** features Matt Walsh and Ian Roberts, close friends of actor Del Close (the revolutionary character in the movie) and founding members of the Upright Citizen's Brigade. The pair expounds on Close's role in the film and his life in general - heavy fans will enjoy it. A 2008 **Interview with Bob Levis** trudges on through an hour of serious political discussion. Not a lot of fun, but it proves that Levis still has that spirit. A recent ten-minute **Interview with Garry Goodrow** shows the man is still full of vinegar too, and is lots of fun. **Trailers** and racy **Lobby Cards** (in video form) round out the package.

Final Thoughts:

With all due respect to lost classics and counter-culture filmmaking of the '60s, *Gold* is just pretty lame. Misguided attempts at humor and 'natural sexiness' cloud what is already a cloudy message. Opening snaps of atrocities from Kent State and Vietnam would seem to lead to a serious treatise on the military-industrial complex or whatever, but director Bob Levis seems content to make his point that "the law sucks" and that sex in a pigsty while truly awful acid rock blares in the background is the apex of everything '60s radicals fought for. It isn't, and *Gold* isn't much more than a failed curiosity good for hippie completists only. If not for a hefty dose of extras, this movie would miss out on **Rent It** status.

- Kurt Dahlke

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