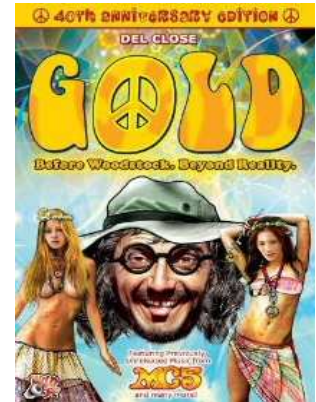


GOLD

(A.k.a. GOLD: BEFORE WOODSTOCK, BEYOND REALITY)

The film opens with an American man holding a billboard encouraging others to exercise their self-esteem (it reads "you are important" and other such mantra), then lunges into a quietly unsettling montage of sepia-tainted stills of dead children, stock war photography, protests from around the globe and the subsequent heavy-handed police approach to them, and stills of assassinated presidents.

Then the tone shifts completely when a couple of key characters address the screen and appeal to us to side with them. Suddenly, it appears to be a comedy ...



Harold (Garry Goodrow) is a local lawman who is disturbed by a hippy commune that has set up in his area. He's determined to uphold moral decency, despite their despicable free loving ways. Hawk (Del Close) is the commune leader, who is equally intent on protecting his community from any intrusions by "the man".

The reason for Harold's steely commitment against the youngsters soon becomes apparent. One, his small town - like something out of an old Western - is a deeply religious sect. Two, and most pertinently, gold has just been located nearby.

Naturally, the locals are in a rush to dig up the precious rock - and don't relish the prospect of having to share it with their new, unwashed neighbours.

Plot-wise, that is essentially all that GOLD has to offer. The rest of the film truly is a mixture of overblown drama with characters occasionally worthy of a Troma production, docu-style clips of hippies grouped together to listen to people singing folk songs on acoustic guitars, and some very welcome nudity.

Surprisingly well-shot and not as inaccessible as it may sound, GOLD is a fast-paced and endlessly imaginative affair (the sex scenes are tame but erotic; the occasional use of negative images and coloured video are inspired for their time). An infrequent split-screen effect even evokes comparisons to Andy Warhol's early output at times.

But rather than wallowing in pretentious tedium, the film keeps cracking along and is endlessly watchable. Part of the allure is the well-chosen placement of some excellent songs on the soundtrack, including contributions from The MC5, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, David McWilliams and more.

You do have to admire co-directors Bob Levis and Bill Desloge for pulling this scattershot, messy event together (they credited themselves as "organisers" rather than directors). It's nuttier than the insides of a well-fed squirrel's stomach, and how the fuck they sold it - let alone pitched it to potential financiers or participants - is beyond me.

But that's part of its appeal: GOLD comes from an era where films like this were possible. In that respect, it's similar (but totally different) to Dusan Makavejev's awesome SWEET MOVIE

(1974): another film that seems to free-flow on a stream of consciousness that only its makers are privy to.

Give it a go though: the pace, the photography, the nudity and the music make it worth the trip.

The film is presented in its original full-frame aspect ratio of 1.33:1, and looks very good considering it's over 40 years old and spent so many years in the wilderness. Colours are bold without bleeding, images are bright and a presence of minor grain throughout preserves that look of natural film. There are surprisingly few specks, making this an extremely well preserved print. Even upscaled it looks great, especially for a "lost" film from 1968.

The English mono soundtrack is generally clean and consistent-sounding, although the occasional muffled dialogue - probably due to the way the film was originally shot - drags the viewer out of the fun.

An animated main menu provides access to a static scene-selection menu proffering 18 chapters.

The "freaked out" extras on Wild Eye Releasing's region-free disc begin with two audio commentary tracks.

The first comes courtesy of Levis and Goodrow, and proves to be an affable if ultimately less than illuminating affair. Still, for fans of the film it must surely be considered a major coup on Wild Eye's part, and the fact that the director and star of such an obscure film are willing to sit and discuss it four decades later is great in itself.

The second commentary, a garbled but occasionally fun offering, is provided by Matt Walsh and Ian Roberts, the two founding members of the Upright Citizens Brigade.

That's already more than I expected to find on the disc, but next up is an interview with Levis. Recorded in 2008 and conducted by prolific cable TV presenter Harold Hudson Channer, this is a whopping 57 minutes in length. Levis looks well in a yellow T-shirt sporting the "Gold" logo, and provides a humorous interview for the intelligently coaxing host. For engagement and information, this feature is better than Levis' commentary.

"Garry Goodrow Roast excerpts" is 10 minutes worth of handheld footage from an onstage tribute to the veteran actor. He seems in good humour and it's a nice enough clip, although the event itself appears to have been woefully ill attended.

A gallery of lobby cards for GOLD follow. Bearing the tagline "Before Woodstock, the revolution had already begun!", these are nice colourful affairs that play on the free love aspect of the film. There are 6 in total, and they play out in silence over the course of 1 minute.

A 2010 trailer for the DVD release of GOLD is 92 seconds long, offering a fast-paced montage of gyrating, tits and psychedelia.

Finally, we get a few trailers for other Wild Eye DVD releases: NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD RE-ANIMATED, THE ELECTRIC CHAIR (not the J G Patterson Jr one that came as an extra feature on Something Weird's region 1 disc of AXE; this is the 1985 one, starring the always excellent Victor Argo), THE BLOODY APE, GOTHKILL and BLITZKRIEG.

All in all, Wild Eye (a subdivision of MVD Visual) have produced an excellent disc for GOLD. The film is a curious mix of drama and documentary, successfully entertaining while capturing a perfect snapshot of an era that many - including myself - will continue to gawp upon with a mixture of bemusement and envy. I recommend it for anyone with a penchant for counter culture mayhem - or indeed, sex drugs and rock'n'roll in general.

Review by Stu Willis

Released by Wild Eye Releasing

Region 1 - NTSC

Not Rated

Extras :

see main review

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