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GOLD (1972)

Organizers: Bob Levis and Bill Desloge
Wild Eye Releasing

Del Close may not be as well known as many of his former students but his influence stretches from Studio 8H in Rockefeller Center all the way across the country to the hills of Hollywood. Think of any comedic actor or actress in the last several decades and chances are, if they're funny, they studied under Del. Bill Murray, Harold Ramis, Stephen Colbert and Amy Poehler have all benefited from Del's improvisational teachings, as have such improv institutions as Second City and the Upright Citizens Brigade. Only recently has Del's unique and passionate way of

approaching comedy been fully recognized publicly and now thanks to Wild Eye Releasing, one his earliest theatrical outings is now readily available to both examine and enjoy.

Looking for gold, a small rural community populated by hippies dressed up like civil war reenactors, boards a train in search of fortune and freedom only to find harassment and persecution upon their arrival. With the majority of the town fully invested in living life in the moment, the idea of mining for gold is quickly scrapped in favor of getting naked and rolling around in the mud. This doesn't sit too kindly with Captain Harold Jinks (Garry Goodrow), who after a failed attempt to manipulate the masses by electing a pocketed mayor, arrests the whole of the community and locks them up in a chicken fenced concentration camp. In Captain Jinks' opinion, public nudity is as horrendous a crime as murder, perhaps even more so, and as the state's local law man it falls upon his shoulder to prevent such moral corruption from getting out of hand. With all the hippies and other townsfolk corralled and confined in the Captain's makeshift camp, the fate of the wooded community comes down to one man, a vagabond played by Del Close, to rise to the occasion and take down the corrupt Captain and strike a blow for dirty hippies everywhere.



Falling somewhere between Bob Rafelson's HEAD and Dusan Makavejev's SWEET MOVIE in terms of sheer randomness, GOLD is a difficult film to describe. Part western, part porno, part comedy, part nudist film; GOLD doesn't defy genre classification so much as it jumps from one to the other with hysterical whimsy. It would appear that those involved had every intention of making a picture that would speak to the counter culture youth of their generation, but then the acid kicked in and Caroline decided to take her clothes off and well, things

got off track. Filmed over the span of a month in 1968, most of GOLD was played out "Johnny on the spot", with the actors let loose in front of the camera to pontificate and fornicate as they saw artistically fit. In one instance, Del was quite literally let loose as there's a scene toward the film's conclusion in which you can see a camera man jumping out of the way of Del who is careening down a hill in a dilapidated old rust bucket. Whatever its proper cinematic classification or intent, one thing is for certain, GOLD is an aural and visual feast that stays with you. It is after all hard to forget a picture that has a scene in which three naked hippy chicks play leap frog in the mud. Yeah, it's that kind of picture.

Rife with naked, well endowed hippies, GOLD at times plays like a nudie cutie with roughie aspirations. Sex scenes are for the most part playful and on occasion downright ridiculous but the camera work, most of which is handheld, is so active and playful that you could in passing mistake these scenes as ones portraying an attack. The use of solarization effects in one scene of copulation is particularly perplexing, as the actors run through a *Mad Magazine* interpretation of the Kama Sutra while Carl Orff's O Fortuna plays in the background, giving the scene the ambiance of an action/adventure coming attraction. Clearly the cast had no qualms about full frontal nudity as anyone willing to get naked for the production seems to have done so 100%. Men and women display their bodies, hairy and natural, the way God intended, throughout the picture's hour and thirty minutes and while it's actually rather refreshing to see so many curvy women o' naturale "down there", the whole Gene Shalit in a headlock look is personally a real turn off.



GOLD's greatest asset, even more so than its abundance of nudity (strange I know, but it's true) is a solid soundtrack featuring tracks, some unreleased, by MC5, Ramblin' Jack Elliot and Barry St. John to name a few. I can't for the life of me see GOLD playing one tenth as well as it does with this particular soundtrack in place. There are a few laughs and the wealth of naked ladies certainly helps keep one's attention on the screen but shown on its own, without the benefit of MC5 and their tunes, I would imagine the film's improv novelty would

wear out its welcome rather quickly. As it stands however the picture is an experience that almost begs to be partaken in an alternated state of mind and a boss set of speakers.

Presented full screen (1.33:1), Wild Eye's transfer of GOLD is rather remarkable considering how old and obscure the film is. Grain is present but not distracting and while there is the occasional blemish and combing, colors are clean and fleshtones appear accurate be they morning fresh or covered in mud. Save for the occasional garbled line of dialogue, the English speaking mono track is more than adequate.



"Freaked-Out" bonus features include two commentary tracks, the first featuring actor Gary Goodrow and "organizer" Bob Levis with the second featuring Matt Walsh and Ian Roberts, both students of Del and founding members of the Upright Citizens Brigade. Both tracks are guided by Keith Crocker, director of THE BLOODY APE, who does a tremendous job of keeping things interesting and on track. The track with Ian and Matt was particularly enjoyable as I am big fan of the old UCB television show, of which Del lent his voice as narrator. Both men

rift with the best of them while watching the flick, persistently dropping fascinating anecdotes about Del and many of his now famous former students. It was also interesting to here Ian's recollections of growing up in New York and visiting 42nd street as a kid, breaking into porno theaters and being awestruck by large marquees touting such titles as SHOCKING ASIA. Extras continue with a 60 minute public access interview with Bob Levis, a 10 minute home video excerpt from a tribute/roast of Garry Goodrow, a collection of "retro" GOLD lobby cards and a trailer which Wild Eye appears to have commissioned for this release. Trailers for GOTHKILL, NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD: REANIMATED, THE ELECTRIC CHAIR, BLITZKRIEG and THE BLOODY APE round out this release's groovy supplements. *(Jason McElreath)*

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