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Writings on film and other things by Ray Young. Text is copyright © 2010 by the author.

Above: Anouk Aimée on the set of *Lola*, photographed by Raymond Cauchetier

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Old Gold

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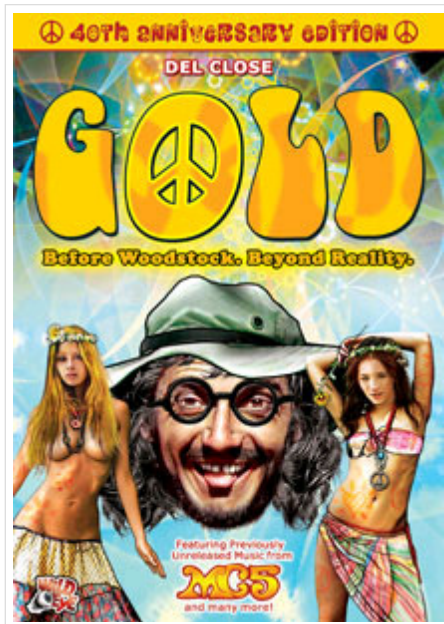
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Gold: Before Woodstock. Beyond Reality.

A film by Bob Levis and Bill Desloge. With Del Close, Garry Goodrow, Caroline Parr, Sam Ridge, Orville Schell, Dorothy Schmidt. 89 minutes. Filmed in 1968, released in 1972.

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DVD review by Albert Schweitzer

- As a “film,” Bob Levis’s *Gold* comes off like a Cheech & Chong movie directed by *Pierot le Fou*-era Jean-Luc Godard. That is, if Godard had taken acid, stopped thinking and been more interested in hippies than Situationist politics. If that isn’t enough to scare you away, then there actually are some pleasures to be found in *Gold*, if only in the way it captures the late-60s San Francisco creative scene (despite none of it being shot in San Francisco), as well as appearances by Del Close and Garry Goodrow, both alums of the legendary 1960s improv team The Committee.

Made in 1968, *Gold* was mostly forgotten for the better part of forty years, and barely seen at all. It was not released until 1972 and then only in England. Its U.S. “premiere” wasn’t until 1996. Now in 2010 it’s available on DVD, the only feature film credited to director Bob Levis.

Del Close in particular has become something of a legend. Prior to his death in 1999 he had established himself as the chief influence and mentor of Chicago-based improvisational comedy, including most of the original *Saturday Night Live* cast as well as subsequent members of *SNL*. Essentially all American improv leads back to Del Close and his name is uttered reverentially by its best known

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practitioners. Despite his reputation, Close's filmography is a curiosity. It's not terribly long and is filled with small, forgettable roles. But the bit parts are in high profile pictures like Lucas's *American Graffiti*, Michael Mann's *Thief*, Paul Schrader's *Light of Day*, De Palma's *The Untouchables*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and several off-beat B movies like Larry Hagman's *Beware! The Blob!* He also appeared in Philip Kaufman's first film, the 1965 *Goldstein*. It's a meager filmography with nearly all appearances in films by major directors. *Gold* is, it seems, the only film in which he has more than a bit part. A lifelong drug and alcohol problem seems to have been the limiting factor in his career, though he spent the early 1980s employed as "acting coach" at *Saturday Night Live*.

Goodrow is less known but has been far more visible, with a filmography that runs from the 1960s (*The Connection*, *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*) through the '70s (*Slither*, *Stay Hungry*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*), '80s (*Eating Raoul* and tons of TV) and mondo beyondo (he played Adolf von Luftwaffer in *Linda Lovelace for President*). He was one of the leading lights of the Committee, a counter-culture improv group that appeared on the *Smothers Brothers Show*, *The Dick Cavett Show* and other more adventurous TV programs of the late '60s and early '70s.

Taken on its own 1968 terms, *Gold* is fairly tough sledding because so much of it meanders like someone on acid. But Close and, especially, Goodrow are pros who manage an occasional moment of inspiration. It helps to watch while listening to the bonus track, with Levis and Goodrow reminiscing — though Levis seems intent on claiming all kinds of innovation in the film, from nude hippies immersing themselves in mud ("Mud people!" exclaims Levis, "a year and a half before Woodstock!") to solarized images ("We did it first!" followed by Goodrow's wet blanket, "Well, no, Man Ray did it back in the '20s.")

The film contains relatively graphic nudity and sex for the period (tamer than HBO is today) and Levis mentions that he tried to sell the film to a nudie distributor. He was turned down because he was told it was the "wrong genre." In fact, the film would fit no genre until *Easy Rider* popularized the Hippie movie — a genre which lasted only about three years. But it was long enough for *Gold's* British co-producer to finally get it a limited release in the UK.

Much is made of the fact that some of the songs are by the MC5. And Ramblin' Jack Elliot makes an appearance (as does a silent Dan Hicks as an extra). But the rest of the soundtrack includes mostly forgotten names like David McWilliams, Barry St. John and a group named Beastly Times. The film also shows many attractive young women that the filmmakers say they wish they could find now. With so many forgotten faces and names, the lasting legacy of *Gold* is that it unintentionally captured a world that seemed eternal at the time

but which is now as lost and far away as the world in Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*.



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