

GOLD

BEFORE WOODSTOCK. BEYOND REALITY

IN 1968 A FILM MAKER LEAD A BUNCH OF HIPPIES INTO THE WOODS. THEY DIDN'T RETURN. UNTIL A MONTH LATER.

BY ANDREW KIM

What do you get when you cross a western, a musical, and a hippie freakout documentary? You get *Gold*, that's what. A film about the struggle between an independent people and a corrupt government. Most of the movie was filmed over the course of a month in the woods, where director Bob Levis was living with a bunch of hippies. The film, which cost about \$10,000, was made in 1968 and stars Garry Goodrow and Del Close. It played in a few theaters around the country but was never released as a home movie until now.

The DVD features commentary with Goodrow and Levis, and their stories about the making of the film are far more entertaining than the movie itself. This is an art film, and much of the cast are non-acting hippies. There is a lot of symbolism, some subtle, some not so subtle. The photography is wild and artistic. It is almost like a fast moving, stream-of-consciousness movie. You have to remind yourself this is a movie about would-be town settlers amid a gold rush. Watching this movie is a lot like reading Norman Mailer's classic novel, *Armies of the Night*. The narrative moves extremely quickly, and you can't think too long about what you're seeing; you have to process it quickly and move on to whatever is coming at you next.

The movie is often goofy, but it does have its moments of profundity. After the police official breaks up



a sex party, he explains that "If you give it away for free, the whorehouse doesn't make any money."

Goodrow steals the show in his role as a ruthless, dictatorial, yet comedic state police official looking to seize control of the town and the population. With his vicious demeanor and gangster's sneer, Goodrow plays the role to the hilt. It is wild juxtaposition against those cast members who not only weren't actual actors, but often didn't know they were being filmed.

Del Close is perfect in his role, whatever that role is. His character is a ragged hippie with a broken ankle who shows up periodically to rage against the corrupt government man, and once to ask a copulating couple for a cigarette.

There is a lot of nudity and sex in the film, but it's not porn. The nude bodies you see are like your own, unfortunately. There is no makeup and they are quite flabby.

And the film is worth seeing just for the music. The MC5 contributed five songs to the movie's soundtrack that have never been released. The rest of the soundtrack is standard hippie fare. A lot of folk music and lyrics repeated over and over. But the MC5 tunes just wail.

Gold is more of a little piece of history than a movie, although as mentioned, it is definitely a piece of art. And that's *Gold*, baby. *Gold!*