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Gold: Before Woodstock. Beyond Reality

Hippies get a bad rap these days, but there's certainly something to be said about participating in such activities as skinning-dipping in a clear mountain lake with people too stoned to care if they fit the physical standards set by media obsessed with actors, athletes and models. If I recall, one could even buy a pair of Levis jeans without using your VW bus as collateral on a loan. And, where would America be right now without easy access to crunchy granola, flavored yogurt and Grateful Deal decals for our "green" automobiles?

As ragged as *Gold* looks, 40-plus years after its creation, it still delivers a jolt of nostalgic recognition ... especially the skinny-dipping and group gropes. Although it attempted to deliver a then-popular Us-vs.-Them message -- a bunch of idealistic hippies and old mountain folks are being harassed by a politically opportunistic sheriff -- the Old West conceit employed by **Bill Desloge** and **Bob Levis** was too goofy to take seriously. But, of course, the same could be said about director **Roger Corman** and writer **Jack Nicholson's** *The Trip* and director **Richard Rush** and star **Jack Nicholson's** *Psyche Out*, films that tried to fit into the emerging counterculture but were laughably out to lunch.

Even so, **Gold: Before Woodstock. Beyond Reality** wasn't released into theaters, albeit in London, until 1972, and 24 years later in the U.S. I was drawn to the DVD release primarily by the presence of **Del Close**, one of the true pioneers of improvisational comedy and a Chicago icon. (In his will, Close donated his skull to the Goodman Theater for future productions of *Hamlet*.) Beyond the movie itself, though, is a soundtrack that contains several songs by the decidedly non-hippie MC5, and a generous bonus package with audio commentaries, interviews, trailers and looks back at the key players.

– Gary Dretzka