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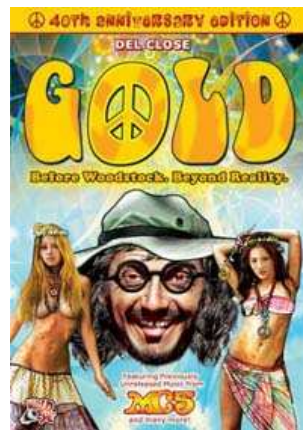
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STRANGE THINGS ARE HAPPENING

GOLD

Wild Eye Releasing DVD. Region 0.



Gold is one of the great 'lost' films of the counter-culture - that it, if you is disregard the 1972 UK theatrical run and the mid-90's US release, neither of which seemed to make much impact. Like a whole bunch of unfinished, unreleased and incoherent efforts of the time, this 1968 production is less a movie and more a document of the period.

There's a vague plot, with a bunch of hippies heading out into the middle of nowhere to form a town, start a goldrush and generally be free, only to come up against corrupt cop Harold Jinks (Gary Goodrow), who dresses like a 1940's gangster and represents the corruption and uptightness of 'straight' society - he fixes the election of mayor, beats up opponents and women, jerks off after shooting someone and rails against free love and nudity before locking the hippies up in a concentration camp. Only Hawk (Del Close), a revolutionary outsider, can save the day.

Don't expect this story to be as coherent as the description though - rather, this is a plot that leaks out during a series of individual scenes that have little connection to anything else. It's much like a sexed-up, cut-price and less cynical version of The Monkees' **Head** - a free-wheeling, episodic, stoned trip that is more about the experience than the story. So random images crop up, with copious amounts of drug-fuelled sex, hysteria and pseudo-philosophy.

There's plenty of nudity too - certainly more male frontal nudity than you'd generally find outside porn, and some surprisingly graphic moments (two on-screen pissing scenes for instance) in amongst the wholesome frolicking. There are also scenes that leave you wondering how the participants survived - watching people running for their lives, no acting involved, you can't help but think that car crashes and explosions would be best handled by filmmakers who were less out of it!

Ironically, the most impressive elements of **Gold** were added to the film after completion, by executive producer and Radio Caroline founder Ronan O'Rahilly, who created the impressive opening titles that use then-current war, revolution and political imagery (the opening image is genuinely shocking) to tie the film into its period and perhaps nail down the film's message that The Man is at war with The Freaks. O'Rahilly was also responsible for much of the excellent soundtrack, which includes MC5, David McWilliams and others - a soundtrack re-release would be a welcome thing.

Gold is sloppily made (camera focus is hit and miss), messy and indulgent - but never dull. Improv experts Goodrow and Close just about hold it together (there's no screenplay credit) and as a relic of a long-lost period, it's fascinating stuff, with enough going on to counter any complaints that it makes no sense.

Wild Eye's DVD pulls out all the stops too - an entertaining and informative commentary track from director Bob Levis and a reluctant Goodrow, another less worthy commentary by colleagues of Close, a badly made but interesting cable TV interview with Levis and other snippets help flesh out the ideas behind the film and its production - even if you felt the film to be an unwatchable mess, the extras go a long way to explaining *why* that is!







DAVID FLINT

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