movies...

Low-cost film is high-calibre fun

by Richard C. Art

'Hallelujah the Hills' at the West End Theatre is one of the best comedies to be released on either side of the Atlantic in many years. American author-director Adolfas Mekas combines the methods of Mack Sennett, W. C. Fields, the Marx brothers, W. D. Griffiths, and the French New Wave in an excellent parody of film makers and film from Eisenstein to Antonioni.

The plot, such as it is, centers around the camping trip that Jack (Peter H. Beard) and Leo (Marty Cronkrite) take to forget Vera, the girl they have both pursued interminably for eight years, only to lose to 'evil Gideon' whom they see as a modern cross between Simon Legree and Attila the Hun.

The underlying spirit of 'Hallelujah' is one of unadulterated levity and youthful adventure. It is impossible to look for deep significance or imagery without finding yourself in contention with a many set of discontinuous items that include a periodically appearing birthday cake, replicas with burning candles, a tree laden with twenty twisting girls, an elephant tank that just shows up and an indestructible jeep that goes through a stone wall.

'Hallelujah' is filled with many movie 'in' jokes that are funny with or without interpretation. The action includes many flashback to the courtship days of the previous years with 'last year' in Vermont and a hillside fire scene that smacks of 'Ugetsu' that is made hilarious by fading-in Japanese subtitles.

This is Mekas' first solo effort at full length film making, but he shows amazing control of all of the resources of movie technique to heights and colors this eighty-two minute satirical riot. Although the acting is basically done by amateurs it is in no way amateurish, they bring the film off well. Ed Emswiller's photography is excellent especially considering that the total budget of 'Hallelujah' from concept to can was roughly the cost of one of Lis Taylor's dresses for 'Clown'.

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Silent film fans will have a field day as many of the funniest bits from other films come from pictures made long before our time.

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