

Lights, Camera, Action!

Sterile Cuckoo isn't overwhelming, just honest

By LLOYD CHESLEY

Some movies bore, some movies overwhelm. *Sterile Cuckoo* is a gentle little film that does neither; it kind of grows on you.

The producer-director, Alan J. Pakula, worked as producer for years with director Robert Mulligan on such films as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Up the Down Staircase* and *The Stalking Moon*. But Pakula had the itch.

He found the novel some three years ago, but was too tied up to go ahead. Meanwhile Liza Minnelli found the book and fell in love with the character of Pookie Adams. She found out that Pakula had the rights and visited him to get the part. Pakula, in town on promotion last week, told me that there was no question in his mind: Liza was perfect.

They found her lover-to-be, Wendell Burton, playing Charlie Brown in San Francisco. It was first love all around, first directing, first starring roles.

As the author describes the book, he was writing about an experience he had in college and using it to describe the two opposite sides of his character — Pookie the loner, the imaginative, the unpredictable, and Jerry Payne, the hard-working, the thoughtful, the naive.

The two opposite forces are, of course, attracted and with soft paths and fun and humor, the film shows how their love develops and how they help and hurt each other.

The performances are flawless. Liza has the more flamboyant part, and so she stands out, but Burton is just as strong. Both are totally aware of their characters and of the pictures their characters have of each other. They complement each other well, never striking a false note.

Pakula's directing experience is from the stage and he controls his

actors beautifully and gives them nice bits, both of comedy and tragedy, to help their characterizations.

What I don't like in this film is the use of camera. Certain clichés now exist about camera work. Vaseline is used too often on the camera lens, there is too much green in the countryside, too much zoom and too much pan, and... too much lack of originality.

Admittedly, it suits the action well, but we are too aware of what is going on for it to affect us emotionally.

I found the folk-rock background music on the same level as the photography, but the color was nice and the mood of the picture is pure.

Something that will trouble a lot of kids, especially those from York, is the kids who go to the colleges used as settings for the film.

There is no long hair, no funny hats, no bell-bottoms, none of the signs we are used to. This is frequently disturbing.

Pakula explained this in two ways. First, he wanted to give a timeless mood to the film. He thought long hair, funny hats and bell-bottoms would have made the film too contemporary. As he saw it, the film took place in the past. Anyway, he said, he let the kids dress however they wanted, and that was how they came.

As I said, some movies overwhelm you and some bore you. *Sterile Cuckoo* does neither. It just reaches you being honest, complete and nice. It is a full experience and a good one.

The Sterile Cuckoo. Directed by Alan J. Pakula. Screenplay by Alvin Sargent. From the novel by John Nichols. With Liza Minnelli, Wendell Burton and Tim McIntyre. At the Towne Cinema, Bloor and Yonge.



Liza Minnelli in *The Sterile Cuckoo*

Allen's 'Take the Money' is lotsa popcorn movie

By DAN MERKUR

There has been a lot of analysis of movies according to genre — drama, musical, western, gangster, etc. — but very little work has been done in audience terms — total involvement, coke and chocolate bar, lotsa popcorn, and 20-minute walkouts. For the more specialized audiences of loges, you might consider one cigarette, a few cigarettes, a big cigar, and two joints, respectively.

Woody Allen's *Take the Money and Run* is a lotsa popcorn movie, for reasons best explained by example. In *A Night at the Opera*, Groucho Marx, as Otis P. Driftwood, has since seven o'clock, the time of his dinner date with Margaret Dumont (Mrs. Claypool), sat with his back to her, calmly eating dinner with a pretty blonde. The wealthy dowager finally realizes Groucho is behind her, and calls him on the carpet.

Groucho answers: "That woman? Do you know why I sat with her? Because she reminded me of you. That's why I'm sitting here with you. Because you remind me of you. Your eyes, your throat, your lips, everything about you reminds me of you, except you. How do you account for that?"

But not content with merely building laugh upon laugh, Groucho calmly proceeds to top the topper by turning to the camera and solemnly pronouncing, "And if she figures that one out, she's a better man than I am, Gunga Din!" Woody Allen is not a halcyon comic: building laugh upon laugh is work enough for him.

James Agee defined screen comedy in terms of laughter, which he categorized as the titter, the yowl, the belly laugh, and the boffo. The true comic takes each joke through the entire ladder of laughs and begins the next titter just as the last boffo is dying.

Allen is essentially a quiet comedian. His lines have to be heard fully in order to be appreciated, so the jokes come every 20 seconds, like clockwork. But if the last joke wasn't particularly funny, you've just spent 15 quiet seconds. Woody Allen needs a live audience, or else he has to time his one-liners like Bob Hope, too many laughs to catch them all.

It has been said that screen comedy has been on a steady decline since the golden age of Keaton, Chaplin, Langdon and Lloyd. With the single, notable, exception of the Marx Brothers, I would agree.

Keaton and Chaplin seldom let a boffo die neglected. W. C. Fields gave us a constant supply of belly laughs, when he was on screen (which was never often enough). Groucho, Chico and Harpo fared better — incessant belly laughs with frequent boffos. Lou and Bud, and the early Martin and Lewis can boast jowls with frequent belly laughs.

With Woody Allen, the level has sunk to titters and yowls, with just a handful of belly laughs in the entire film. To put it rather simply, Woody Allen is not one of the greats. His comedy is verbal, which is rather sad, because the half dozen best gags in *Take the Money and Run* are the ones that had visual punctuation. After all, the basis of film is visual. Allen is vastly amusing, but he isn't hilarious. Superlatives are not in place in discussing his work.

However, there is one major element that speaks well of Woody Allen and *Take the Money and Run*. Madcap comedy is outé; the only surviving example being the rather futile attempts of Bob Hope and Jerry Lewis. Comedy has taken a different direction, the lampoon.

In the last decade perhaps a dozen really funny films have been made, and all of them are burlesques of film genres. The adventure film took a beating with *The Great Race* and *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines*. A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum cast a new light on the spectacle of DeMille. *The Russians are Coming*, *A Shot in the Dark*, *Cat Ballou*, *Dr. Strangelove* — these are the comedies of the sixties.

Take the Money and Run is a good parody of the crime film, from *The Public Enemy* to *Cool Hand Luke*. It's not quite as good as *Mad, Mad World*, but unless there is a revival of Fields or the Marx Brothers in town, it's an easy bet that Woody Allen is the funniest man around, which is a very sad statement on the industry, and a rather backhanded complement for *Take the Money and Run*.

(Final note: The funniest single line in the entire film, sadly enough, is a line swiped straight out of *Monkey Business* that Groucho used even better than Woody does.)

Take the Money and Run. Palomar, 1969. Directed by Woody Allen. Screenplay by Woody Allen and Mickey Ross. With Woody Allen and Janet Margolin. At the Cinema, in the T-D Centre.



Take the Money and Run: titters, yowls and just a handful of belly laughs.

Cutting Room

	Direction	Script	Photography	Music
Easy Rider (New Yorker)	***	***	***	***
Midnight Cowboy (Hyland)	***	***	***	***
Alice's Restaurant (University)	**	***	***	***
The Sterile Cuckoo (Towne Cinema)	***	**	**	***
Oh What a Lovely War! (Hollywood)	***	**	***	***
The Battle of Britain (Carlton)	**	**	***	**
Take the Money and Run (The Cinema)	**	**	**	**
Medium Cool (Downtown)	*	*	*	*
Dracula (1931) (The Silent Cinema)	***	*	*	*
The Raven (1935) (Cinemathèque)	***	***	***	**

*** Worth an evening ** Unremarkable * Detrimental