

Allen's 'Zelig' extraordinary

By WILLIAM CLAIRE
Brunswickan Staff

Zelig, Woody Allen's latest film, is extraordinary.

Allen writes, directs, and stars in Zelig, the story of a psychological misfit from New York who, in an effort to conform with his fellow Americans, learns to transform his physical features to match those of his companions of the moment.

Zelig is a human chameleon.

Allen has written a sad story. Leonard Zelig is everyman to the extent that all men must conform to some degree in order to function in society. More importantly, Zelig is North America's Everyman and, in being so, becomes a symbol for all that is good and bad in the American way of life.

Zelig combines the best of Allen's exploration of the American psyche with his typical neurotic-sexual humour. This combination makes Zelig a black comedy, more black than comedy, but chuckle-belly funny in many places for fans of Allen's off-beat comic sensibilities.

One example: Zelig, thinking he is a psychiatrist, tries to excuse himself from a therapy session by saying he has to teach a class of

advanced masturbation. "If I'm not on time," he explains, "they'll start without me."

But are you supposed to laugh or cry? The humans peopling Zelig are an unenviable lot. They're blatantly sexist, discriminatory, racist, fickle and thrill-hungry. Their America caters to and thrives on these downside needs.

Previously, Allen experimented with cinematic forms ranging from slapstick comedy to Berneque intellectualism. In Zelig, the best of these two film techniques is astutely combined with the documentary style, a form Allen toyed with in *What's Up Tiger Lily*, where he grafted an American plot onto a Japanese film; and *Take The Money And Run*, an early comedy recalling the exploits of a fumbling, would-be bank robber.

Zelig is a masterpiece of documentary imitation. The story of the human chameleon takes place in the '20's. The use of period costume, settings, music and sound is brilliant in its research, design and execution.

What makes Zelig an exceptional effort is Allen's decision to blend reality with his fiction. by doctor-

ing film stock, still photographs, recordings, and newsreel and library footage of the jazz age, Fanny Brice and Al Jolson sings songs with reference to Leonard Zelig; Zelig's name appears on a Broadway marquee just above that of Eddie Cantor; Zelig is seen posing with Jack Dempsey and Eugene O'Neill, sitting at a Nazi rally in the company of Adolf Hitler.

Zelig also borrows a technique from Warren Beatty's *Reds* -- the interview with the acknowledged present-day "experts": Bruno Bettelheim, Susan Sontag, Saul Bellow. He blends these interviews with ones of fictional characters -- some "man on the street" sessions, others with aged versions of people who knew Zelig.

"Who am I," Zelig intones during psychotherapy. He is

so wrapped up in the personalities of others, he has no personality of his own. Reality and illusion are blended, becoming impossible to separate. The film manages to project this montage of truth and illusion.

Allen portrays Zelig. Allen's humour, previous films and personal life reveal psychological struggles with identity.

Mia Farrow plays Dr. Eudora Fletcher, the psychiatrist who works with Zelig to cure his psychosis. (The doctor and patient of tomorrow, one political character notes.)

Mia Farrow is Allen's latest real-life romance. The relationship between Farrow and Allen is fact; Zelig and Fletcher's is not. Or is it?

The fluid tones of the documentary's narrator, Empire-accented Patrick

Hogan, say it was the love of one woman who changed Zelig's life. Allen is known to write, in part, as a type of therapy. How much of a connection here?

Mia Farrow's real-life sister plays Eudora Fletcher's fictive sister, while the remainder of Zelig's acquaintances is a fictional-factual mix. The movie's format is a fictional form of a film style originated to present the facts.

Zelig has an identity problem. Welcome to America, Allen says. "I wanna be liked," Zelig repeats time and again.

The film asks whether, with society's conformity-bound restrictions on behavior, today's North Americans can achieve a balance between individual expression and social acceptance.

Allen's answer is not a happy one.

'1984' Showing

The motion picture 1984 will be shown Sunday at 7 and 9 p.m. in the Tilley Hall Auditorium. Admission is \$2.50 and proceeds will go to Amnesty International.

Based on George Orwell's grim forecast of the way things could go in a totalitarian country in the future, 1984 is set in "Oceania", Mr. Orwell's imaginary commonwealth, where the people have been reduced to puppets, and lead their lives according to the dictates of Big Brother---this new-day land's remote and mysterious head man.

Among the wretches under Big Brother's control are a man who has begun to doubt the infallibility of the government and a woman who has fallen in love with the doubter. Their pitiable efforts to buck the system and achieve some sort of independence make up the burden of the film.

Capably portrayed by Edmund O'Brien and Jan Sterling, the doomed lovers have their moments of old-fashioned high romance, but in the end they dissolve into the colorless herd, so thoroughly brainwashed that they are incapable of expressing anything but fervent acceptance of Big Brother's doctrines. The ter-

rible uniformity of a population for whom any individuality is taboo, is represented by having the citizenry dress in drab gray and wear numbers, like criminals.

To demonstrate the brainwashing techniques of Oceania, we have Michael Redgrave, as a government inquisitor, working over Mr. O'Brien in the best secret-

police tradition. Mr. Redgrave employs every device from shock treatments to confronting Mr. O'Brien with a cageful of ravenous rats, and all his techniques are frightening. But the most unsettling aspect of 1984 is the prospect of what can happen when a whole people is compelled to think alike. (New Yorker, Oct. 6, 1956)

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This week at the Woodshed

Friday and Saturday evening at the Woodshed enjoy the sweet "harmony" of Constantines.

Ed and Walker Constantine, both 2nd year students at UNB, have appeared in various local talent competitions and variety shows. The Constantines perform a varied selection and contemporary pop songs of such artists as Simon and Garfunkel, Jim Croce and Neill Young. Noted for their instrumentals and harmonies, the Constantines display versatility as they accompany themselves on guitar, banjo and mandolin.

An entertainment feature you won't want to miss!

Doors open at 8 p.m. Open until 1 a.m. on weekends.

NOTE:

Special - Tuesday, Oct. 25
THE MAGIC OF PHYSICS
a special presentation
by Prof. Ron Lees