

Film review

'Celebration' is as title implies

R.E. MAXSON

Celebration at Big Sur, now playing citywide, is the warmest and most intimate folk-rock film ever made. It is also by far the most honest.

Done in cinema verite style, *Celebration at Big Sur* was made at the Big Sur Folk Festival of 1969 and should not be confused with the A&M record album *Celebration*, which was put together from performances at the 1970 Big Sur Folk Festival. Never before has a film captured the modern musician's essence of humanity the way *Big Sur* does at the 1969 event. It shows the performers relating to each other and with the audience in a way never possible on the club and concert trail.

The 1969 festival was staged at Esalen Institute in Big Sur. The performers appeared without fee, as is traditional at the annual event. Whenever there are any profits left after the bills have been paid they are divided equally among all the entertainers. These were also the terms under which the film was made and distributed.

Celebration was produced by rotund Carl Gottlieb, the cherubic former member of The Committee who also served as MC a year later at the 1970 festival, and directed by the husband-wife team of Baird Bryant-Johanna Demetrakas. Many talented people were involved, including former Lovin' Spoonful member Zalman Yanovsky, who did some sound re-recording, and film maker Pat O'Neill (*7362, Runs Good*). In co-operation with Bryant, O'Neill has added some breathtaking special effects to *Celebration*. Of course, the primary special effects were provided by such performers as Joan Baez, Crosby-Stills-Nash & Young, Joni Mitchell, Dorothy Morrison and John Sebastian, who all gave of themselves in a way which makes the film a memorable experience.

"There was so much energy at Big Sur it looked like it was going to burst ... with the mountains on one side and the ocean on the other, there was no place for the energy to go. The people who performed came just to get together in the sun after a summer of hard work ... The audience became the performers and the performers became the audience, as rock and folk merged into a community of people celebrating," says Gottlieb.

The performers come to the festival every year because of its relaxed and refreshing atmosphere of friendship and love. It resembles a large jam session because it is the only festival wherein the performers play together as opposed to each individual or group doing her, his or their own thing.

Among the film's highlights are Joan Baez performing "David's Song" (for husband David Harris), Joan and Dorothy Morrison dueting on "Oh Happy Day!" (it was Dorothy's lead voice as former member of the Edwin Hawkins Singers which so distinguished that hit single), all of the performers converting "Get Together" into a joyous audience sing-along, Steve Stills and John Sebastian joining together for "Mobile Line," Crosby-Stills-Nash & Young doing "Down By the River," Dorothy and The Combs Sisters singing "All God's Children Got Soul," Joni Mitchell introducing "Woodstock," Carol Ann Cisneros singing a compelling version of "Malaguena Salerosa," and Joan Baez performing "Sweet Sir Galahad," while her sister, Mimi Farina, dances with husband Milan Melvin.

Gottlieb explains how this remarkable film originated:

"In the spring of 1969 we thought Big Sur would make a good TV special. We tried to interest a backer. It couldn't be done. But five days before the festival began we were saved when festival planners advanced the necessary money to film the weekend. We started assembling the crew, gear and equipment at once, struggling to obtain the cameras, recorders, film stock and accessories needed. It was chaotic, nerveracking and a sure drain on the emotional reserves. At midnight, when we took our camera down to the hot mineral baths and filmed a dozen musicians and friends in the buff (including by now exhausted producer Carl Gottlieb), the atmosphere of giddy relaxation was no act. We were all 'stoned' on fatigue, music and the excitement of the first day. The baths footage, like everything else that happened, was part of the total festival experience. When Stephen Stills lost his temper and got into an offstage hassle with a heckler, we filmed it. When they scuffled, we filmed it. And later, when Stephen apologized to the

crowd and sang a moving solo of "Four Twenty" we filmed it. We tried to film it all, the performers, the audience, the performances, and the place that held it all together. Every possible element combined in a very happy union: the performers sang for themselves, for and with each other, and for and with the audience."

Celebration perfectly captures the mood of the event, and therefore itself becomes a powerful evocation of warmth and humanity as it does so.

Perhaps inevitable are the comparisons which will be made between *Celebration* and *Woodstock*, although *Celebration* is an altogether different sort of film than Wadleigh's work. Wadleigh knew he was going to shoot at *Woodstock* well enough in advance of the event to prepare for the kind of film he wanted to make. Twenty-five cameramen filmed *Woodstock* and the result was a surfeit of footage and camera angles from which Wadleigh could construct his finished product. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the finished work features numerous quick cuts and multiple images.

Bryant, of course, did not have that kind of advance notice, and was subsequently caught with only one Aeroflex and two Eclairs with which to shoot. Obviously, then, he was not going to have the kind of choices that Wadleigh did when it came to editing the film. It is thus easy to understand why Bryant's film is only 82 minutes long, while *Woodstock* runs 190 minutes, and consists mostly of long single takes. What is remarkable is that, given such limitations, *Celebration* works so well.

Although it didn't seem so before, after viewing *Celebration*, *Woodstock* in retrospect seemed fragmented when compared to Bryant's movie. *Celebration* is more likable on a human level, mostly because it is warmer and more intimate than Wadleigh's spectacular epic.

Celebration at Big Sur is not only a "celebration," but a cause for celebration. See it.



"Valiant is the word for the Venice Free Theatre."
— John C. Mahoney, L. A. Times

"The enthusiasm and vigor of this company can't be kept down. Ars Gratia Artis."
— Kip Gibson, Hollywood Reporter

VENICE FREE THEATRE
Elmer Rice's presents
"The Adding Machine"

Friday, April 30th - 8PM
Saturday, May 1st - 8PM
VENICE PAVILION (Ocean Front Walk at Windward)

◆ PLUS ◆

Every Saturday at 11 AM
VENICE FREE CHILDREN'S PLAY GROUP
IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE
Coming: Original Rock Musical
"VENICE IS"
and an original three-act comedy
"FISH ON THURSDAY"

VENICE PAVILION (Ocean Front Walk at Windward)
For information call 396-6864 (Mardee) or 392-7619 (Sherri)

FREE! **FREE!**

EMILY

Father was a preacher—brother was a dope-addict. Her sisters became famous, and so did she. She was a rebel, a man-hater and a loner. Today she'd be called a hippie or

A FREAK

or whatever we call people we don't understand. Emily died over one hundred years ago, at 30. She left one of the finest love stories ever written—'Wuthering Heights.'

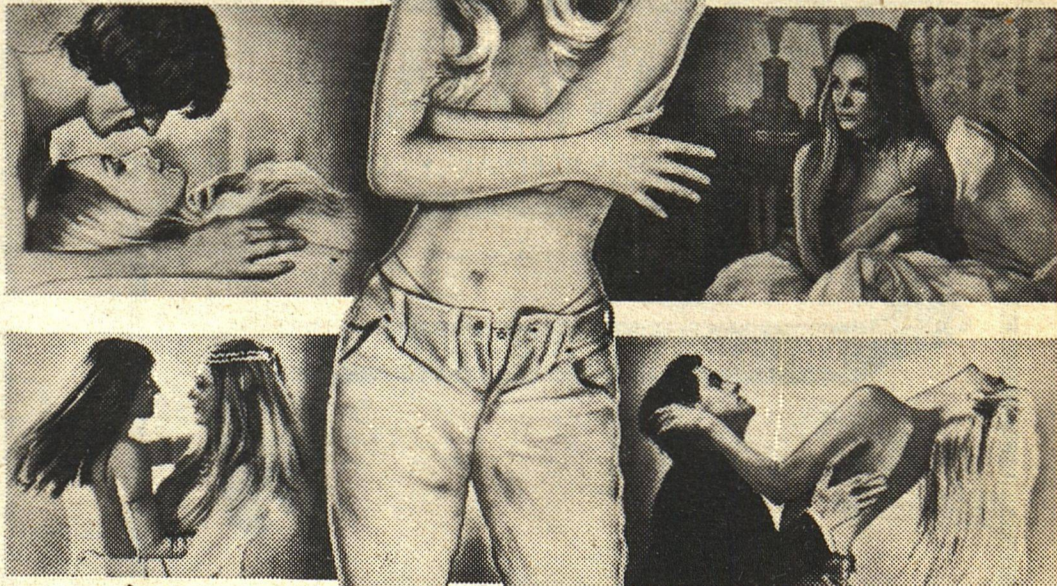
LOVERS

compare the new 'Wuthering Heights' to Zefferelli's fine 'Romeo And Juliet.' (Old folks are still hung up on the '39 version of Emily's story.) Timothy Dalton is Heathcliff. Anna Calder-Marshall is Cathy. Soundtrack is by Academy Award Winner, Michele LeGrand. Rating is 'G'—photography is sensational!

SEE

Emily Bronte's immortal love story. Meet her rebellious young lovers in the all new 'Wuthering Heights' at a Theatre or Drive-In near you.

From the director of "Fanny Hill" and "I A Woman" and the star of "Therese & Isabelle"



NANA

The modern making of Emile Zola's master piece.

ANNA GAEL as "NANA" with KEVE HJELM · HANS ERNBAC · WILLY PETERS · GILLIAN HILLS LARS LUNOE · GERARD BERNER · Directed by MAC AHLBERG · Produced by TORE SJOBERG Music by GEORGE RIEDEL · A MINERVA FILM PROD. · A DISTINCTION FILMS, INC. RELEASE · COLOR
NO ONE UNDER 18 ADMITTED **X**

NOW SHOWING!

LOEW'S
ON HOLLYWOOD BLVD. near HIGHLAND
463-3263

DAILY 12:40 · 2:40 · 4:30 · 6:30 · 8:30 · 10:30 P.M.
Midnight Show Fri. & Sat. at 12:00

ORANGE COUNTY
Loew's CENTURY 21
410 N. TUCULO AVE.
ANAHEIM · 772-8902

Continuous Daily from 12:45 P.M.

HOT PANTS CONTEST · In Front of LOEW'S on Hollywood Blvd. · FRIDAY 11 A.M. · Featuring Girls from Chuck Landis' LARGO