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Woody Allen

Through a Glass Lightly

BY CHARLES CHAMPLIN

● Marriages and other relationships often end not with a bang but a withering away of whatever it was that made the relationship work. And in the time beyond the end there is neither hatred nor despair but a shared affection that is strong enough to do almost anything except make the relationship work again.

"Annie Hall," Woody Allen's newest and most personal film, is more than anything else a love poem in the form of a heartfelt comic Valentine to a romance that was, and, being over, can now be seen with a calm, considered admiration and gratitude. Not without pangs and a taste of bittersweet and now and again a twinge of what if . . .

But the past tense of *que sera sera* is what used to be used to be, and growing up is getting to know it, accepting that lives move on.

"Annie Hall" is not only Allen's newest film, it is also his best. It seems the most directly and obviously autobiographical. His character is called Alvy Singer but he would not be startled to see Woody Allen in the mirror. He is a stand-up comedian working the college circuit most profitably and making the jokes mostly on himself as a postgraduate neurotic signaling to all the girls around in the coffeehouse code words of psychiatry, comp. lit and Ma Jong.

But the jokes, which are several and marvelous, are more transparent than ever as a cover for the character's real angers and concerns—his needs to escape and succeed, to be secure, to tell the sharp-toothed truth about everything he finds preposterous and pretentious around him. There are jokes about Singer's paranoia over the anti-Semitism that he detects in the society, but it is impossible not to feel the rage and the fear beneath the jokes. You sense, not as a message but as a reflection of deep feelings, that Singer may become less insecure, but never entirely secure.

● It is a movie in the form of a personal statement. And after swift silent titles, austere white letters on black, Allen in a waist shot addresses the camera for a monologue that tries to find the truths of a life in old jokes.

(Groucho wouldn't join a club, he said, that would accept him as a member. Singer/Allen wonders if he is incapable of relationships with girls who would have him.)

● The autobiographical impact of "Annie

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Woody—Our Funny Valentine

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Hall" is doubled (approximately) because Annie Hall is the vibrant and splendid actress Diane Keaton, who is, of course, not only Allen's most frequent costar but also formerly a romance and presently the object of the affection revealed herein.

Whether, as could well be, not one of the delicious detailings of the script (which Allen wrote with Marshall Brickman) has a basis in historical fact, you have to believe that the fever chart of the friendship cannot have read greatly different, and that in the making of the movie there must have been odd echoings for them both.

The coordinates are imagined, that is, but the sweep of the graph is true. It is also quite universal in this day, which is why "Annie Hall" becomes more than a succession of sharp scenes and fine lines; becomes a love story of high emotional power—a comedy with tears, or close to them—that many among us can identify with.

Allen uses all the devices of the movie form—the direct address to the camera; having children speak as the adults they would become (the children being his

least favorite grade school contemporaries); standing in the scenes as he and Keaton act out memories or dramatize fantasies.

With all the trickeries, "Annie Hall" takes only a fleeting hour and a half, but carries us from a childhood home (a quaking shambles built beneath the roller coaster at Coney Island) to a 1973 now, two marriages and several relationships later.

The movie belongs primarily to Allen and the wonderfully adept comedienne that Diane Keaton is. But there are also microscopically accurate portrayals in support, one of them by Tony Roberts as an actor pal who goes Hollywood and is last seen wearing an asbestos bee bonnet to keep off alpha rays that age a person.

The other women include Janet Margolin as an early wife—an ambitious literateuse who finds joy in the New York Review of Books and only there. Carol Kane is another wife, discovered at an Adlai rally and reduced to a cultural stereotype, Barnard, dissertation and all, by Allen in a funny expressing of love at first sight.

Shelley Duvall is a contributor to Rolling Stone who is into everything except reality. Singer-composer Paul Simon plays a record producer who catalyzes the end of a relationship but who also lets Allen unload his acid asides on the Southern California life-style, on which he is perhaps the most devastating commentator since an earlier Allen, Fred, famously remarked that it was a swell place to live if you were an orange. Allen, Woody, asks what we are to make of a culture whose prime

Keaton park after their first ride and says, "It's OK, we can walk to the curb from here." But more than in any previous Allen film, it is the feeling that stays in mind.

Allen has enlarged his command of the movie form every time out, from the gags of the early work to the elaborated exercises in style of "What You Always Wanted to Know About Sex" to the ambitious undertakings in time fore and aft of "Sleeper" and "Love and Death." "Play It Again, Sam" got closer to the soul, in its guarded way, of any of the films until "Annie Hall."

It shows a control, confidence and maturity, an ability to let the guard down and reveal the man beneath the clown mask, and it is a great pleasure to watch.

Charles H. Joffe produced. The excellent photography is by Gordon Willis, the tight editing by Ralph Rosenblum and Mel Bourne was the wide-ranging art director.

"Annie Hall" opens Wednesday at the Regent in Westwood.

'ANNIE HALL'

A United Artists Picture. A Jack Rollins-Charles H. Joffe production. Producer Joffe. Executive producer Robert Greenhut. Director Woody Allen. Script Allen, Marshall Brickman. Photography Gordon Willis. Editor Ralph Rosenblum. Art direction Mel Bourne. Costumes Ruth Morley. Sound James Sabat. Featuring Woody Allen, Diane Keaton, Tony Roberts, Carol Kane, Paul Simon, Colleen Dewhurst, Shelley Duvall, Janet Margolin, Christopher Walken, Donald Symington, Helen Ludlam, Mordecai Lawner, Joan Newman, Jonathan Munk, Marshall McLuhan, Johnny Haymer.

Running time: 1 hr. 33 min.

MPAA-rate: PG (some parental guidance advised).

achievement is letting you turn right on red.

Another of the supporting players is Marshall McLuhan, who helps Allen enact one of his fantasies, stepping out of a theater queue (they're all waiting to see "The Sorrow and the Pity") to berate another customer whose opinions (about McLuhan) have been driving Allen batty. McLuhan as McLuhan is perfect, an unbeatable twinning of medium and message.

In the movie's most biting sequence, Allen visits Keaton's prototypically WASPish family in the Midwest, an exercise in culture shock unmatched since "The Heartbreak Kid." Colleen Dewhurst and Donald Symington are the parents, Helen Ludlam a bigoted old grandmother whom Allen sees seeing him as a Sephardic Jew, flat hat, beard and ringlets, long black coat and all. Christopher Walken plays Keaton's uptight brother.

Jonathan Munk plays the young Allen, sharp-tongued from an early age, and Johnny Haymer helps Allen have his delayed say about the Borscht circuit comics, loud and awful, for whom Allen wrote jokes before he realized he could do it better himself. Haymer is them all, wrapped in one.

There are lovely lines to remember. Allen watches