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Annie Hall (COLOR)

Woody Allen and Diane Keaton in terrific romantic comedy. Fine commercial outlook.

Hollywood, March 28.

United Artists release of a Jack Rollins-Charles H. Joffe Production, produced by Joffe; exec producer, Robert Greenhut. Features entire cast. Directed by Allen. Screenplay, Allen, Marshall Brickman; camera (DeLuxe Color), Gordon Willis; editor, Ralph Rosenblum; songs, "Seems Like Old Times," by Carmen Lombardo and John Jacob Loeb, and "It Had To Be You," by Isham Jones and Gus Kahn; art direction, Mel Bourne; set decoration, Robert Drumheller, Justin Scoppa Jr., Barbara Kreiger; costumes/wardrobe, Ruth Morley, George Newman, Marilyn Putnam, Ralph Lauren, Nancy McArdle; sound, Jack Higgins, James Sabat, James Pilcher; assistant director, Fred T. Gallo. Reviewed at Plitt Century Plaza Theatre, West L.A., March 27, 1977. (MPAA Rating: PG) Running time: 93 MINS.

Alvy Singer	Woody Allen
Annie Hall	Diane Keaton
Rob	Tony Roberts
Allison	Carol Kane
Tony Lacey	Paul Simon
Mom Hall	Colleen Dewhurst
Robin	Janet Margolin
Pam	Shelley Duvall
Duane Hall	Christopher Walken
Dad Hall	Donald Symington
Alvy's Family	Mordecai Lawner, Joan Newman, Jonathan Munk, Ruth Volner, Martin Rosenblatt
Themselves	Marshall McLuhan, Dick Cavett

In a decade largely devoted to male buddy-buddy films, brutal rape fantasies, and impersonal special effects extravaganzas, Woody Allen has almost single-handedly kept alive the idea of heterosexual romance in American films.

His four romantic comedies with Diane Keaton strike a chord of believability that makes them nearly the only contemporary equivalent of the Tracy-Hepburn films. The latest, United Artists' "Annie Hall," is by far the best, a touching and hilarious love story that is Allen's most three-dimensional film to date. Commercial prospects are excellent in the reliable Allen market, though the title may cause some confusion about the nature of the film. "Alvy & Annie" might have been a more effective handle, incorporating both characters' names.

All through production and right up to the moment of the world preem unveiling at Los Angeles Film Exposition, the content of "Annie Hall" was kept secret, though rumor correctly had it that it is Allen's most overtly autobiographical film. The lack of publicity overkill is a shrewd stroke that gives the film a fresh and unexpected quality and is sure to engender beneficial word-of-mouth once it opens regular runs. It's heartening, for once, to see a film without knowing the entire plot in advance and without having the director explain what it means ad nauseum.

As Allen requires more finesse as a director, more command of emotion and a smoother visual style, his films have gradually become something deeper than mere laugh machines, though still hysterically funny. The gags fly by in almost non-stop profusion, but there is an undercurrent of sadness and pain now, reflecting a maturation of style. Allen tells Keaton in the film that he has "a very pessimistic view of life," and it's true.

The script by Allen and Marshall Brickman is loosely structured, virtually a two-character running conversation between Allen and Keaton as they meet, fall in love, quarrel, and break up. Meanwhile, he continues his career as a moderately successful tv-nightclub comic and she develops a budding career as a singer. The unhappy ending, in this case, is an unusually satisfying conclusion,

for though the audience comes to love both people, it also comes to respect both of them enough to want them to seek happiness individually.

In his idiosyncratic, comic terms, what Allen is attempting here is not so much different from what his favorite director, Ingmar Bergman, did in "Scenes From A Marriage." This film could be called "Scenes From A Relationship." Allen and Keaton go through just about all the emotional changes one could expect from an intelligent contemporary couple, only in this case the anguish is masked by the surface bravery of Allen's wisecracking and Keaton's deft retorts.

Allen adapts a number of visual devices from Bergman films, such as "Wild Strawberries"-like scenes from his childhood in which he is also present as a grown man, and an opening monolog delivered directly to the camera like those in "Winter Light" or "Hour Of The Wolf." He also makes liberal use of flashbacks, split screens, and other devices not typical to comedies.

Supporting cast is expertly directed but mainly confined to brief vignettes along the way. Tony Roberts basically repeats his hipster best friend role from "Play It Again, Sam," Paul Simon is a sharp caricature of a Hollywood swinger, and Allen's other women are nicely played by Carol Kane, Janet Margolin, and Shelley Duvall. Christopher Walken has a terrific bit as Keaton's strange brother, and Jonathan Munk is droll as the nine-year-old Allen. Marshall McLuhan and Dick Cavett appear fleetingly as themselves.

All technical credits, particularly Willis' lensing, are tops. Ralph Rosenblum's editing deserves high commendation for keeping the complex pattern of fragmented scenes moving briskly for 93 minutes. Allen and Rosenblum know exactly how long to sustain emotional moments without letting them kill the comic tone.

The handsome Jack Rollins-Charles H. Joffe production was produced by Joffe and exec-produced by Robert Greenhut.

—Mack.