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REVIVALS IN FOCUS

A CRITICAL GUIDE BY ANDREW SAR

THURSDAY

Woody Allen's **ZELIG** (1983), from his screenplay, with Allen, Mia Farrow, Susan Sontag, and Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, is a *Citizen Kane* of screen spoofs in the form of a marvelously witty probe of our cultural memories of the years between the great wars. Thanks to the magical editing of doctored photos and the blending of simulated films, Allen is able to create and play a mock celebrity of the '30s, a human chameleon capable of assuming the shape, appearance, and color of whatever person or group he encounters. (Irving Howe, as one of the *Reds*-like talking heads, speaks of the Lower East Side Jewish experience and of Leonard Zelig, who "assimilates like hell.") Allen tells an ingenious rise-and-fall-and-rise tale, but his unifying thread as one of our most gifted filmmakers is his abiding affection and scrupulous respect for all film forms, especially the newsreel and home movie, and their gravely ridiculous and touchingly hammy rendition of the past. Allen as the patient and Farrow as his doctor create a sensitive love story, but he is

also capable of submerging himself into an almost unobtrusive detail in a majestic mise-en-scène. The very elongation of the premise creates a comedy more about art than about life, but Allen's curiously vicarious tapestry of illusionist nostalgia nonetheless bubbles with merriment. Hurrah for elitism! (Cofeature: Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo*, another control-freak masterwork in the tradition of Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.*)

Thalia: 3:40, 7, 10:20