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# Woody Allen's *'Stardust Memories'*

By JOY GOULD BOYUM

Woody Allen's movies have always been, among other things, a movie buff's paradise. That's because Allen is so clearly a buff himself. Think of the Eisenstein-derived images in "Sleeper" and "Love and Death" (the baby carriage on the steps; the close-up of the broken eyeglasses in the midst of battle). Or the Antonioni parody in "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex," where elegant lovers in dark glasses have a taciturn encounter. "Interiors" had a Bergman-like design. Think, too, of all those Allen alter-ego types who are either transported by the likes of "Casablanca," as in "Play It Again, Sam," or who line up, as in "Annie Hall," for still another six-hour run-through of "The Sorrow and the Pity."

It's no surprise, then, that Allen's current film, "Stardust Memories," also makes reference to another movie, Feder-

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## On Film

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ico Fellini's serio-comic masterpiece, "8½." What is more of a surprise is just how extensive the reference is. This time out, Allen hasn't merely reconstructed a shot or two or indulged in a bit of parody; he's borrowed theme, style, motif, tone—the whole kit and caboodle.

Like "8½," "Stardust Memories" focuses on a filmmaker, played by Allen, who though at the height of his success is a man in crisis—a man overburdened by fame, torn between making one kind of film or another and incapable of working out his relationships with the women in his life. The wife, mistress and fantasy-muse of "8½" find their "Stardust Memories" counterparts in Marie-Christine Barrault's motherly lover, Charlotte Rampling's neurotic actress and Jessica Harper's sexy musician.

As in "8½," the director's conflicts are dramatized through abrupt shifts from present to past, from reality to fantasy, from the humorous to the touching, all captured for us in stylized and frequently surreal black and white cinematography. Moreover, most of the scenes that take place in present reality are, as in "8½," set in a seaside resort where the director is spending a few days, surrounded by a host of fawning admirers who want something from him. Most of them are envisioned as grotesques, and as in Fellini, many serve to ward off criticism by voicing the remarks about the director that we ourselves might be tempted to make. For this is a moviemaker who started out making commercial comedies, to his audience's delight, and is now attempting to make esoteric tragedies, to their puzzlement and displeasure. "I love your movies, especially the early funny ones," they keep repeating.

What is Allen up to here? If he is at-

tempting to paint his own portrait as an artist, why should he do so using another artist's structure and style? Is it that Allen wishes to draw some parallel between Fellini and himself? If so, just what is it—that all creative artists suffer creative agonies, that all filmmakers are caught in a bind between art and commerce? Hardly perceptions requiring such wholesale imitation. Or is it that Allen, more than merely trying to tell us about himself, is also trying to tell us about Fellini? But why bother? Surely the outspoken maestro—master not only of cinematic art but of self-revelation—has himself told us all we might need or want to know about him. Quite simply, Fellini has made his own "8½." And when you come right down to it, so has Woody Allen.

What else is "Annie Hall" than Allen's "confession," Allen's "testament" (to borrow the words Fellini used in describing "8½")? It was in that film that Allen first took his biography as his explicit subject, called up his boyhood memories, summoned his fantasies and dramatized his conflicted love life and his artistic problems. "Stardust Memories" tells us little about its creator that we haven't been told before, with one or two exceptions.

We do discover that Allen feels oppressed by his gift for comedy. He sees it as interfering with what he truly wants to do as an artist, namely awaken us to all the misery that he (and he alone, as he would have it) constantly perceives. "Am I the only one," the director cries out in "Stardust Memories," "who saw the item in today's Times that the world is disintegrating?" Though we can sympathize with Allen and we certainly don't want to identify with the shallow, pleasure-loving audience depicted in "Stardust Memories," we can't help but share its preference for the director's comedies. As this film makes clear, Allen, like his alter ego, is at his best when he is being funny (there are some marvelously amusing moments here) and at his worst when he tries to dramatize angst or be profound.

What we also discover is that the creative cul de sac Allen finds himself in isn't only a matter of the very particular conflict between his comic genius and his serious intentions, but a matter of a much more general problem that seems to plague so many of his colleagues as well. Like Brian de Palma, who is hung up on Hitchcock, Paul Mazursky, who has just remade Truffaut and Peter Bogdanovich, who has mimicked almost everyone, Woody Allen seems to be spending too much time at the movies. For his pains he may have become the greater film buff, but he has also somehow become the lesser artist—an homage-maker celebrating the style of others, rather than a filmmaker with a style of his own. What a pity, and what a waste for Woody Allen, of all people.