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One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest

(COLOR)

Topnotch acting, direction overcome dated ideology.

Hollywood, Nov. 10.

United Artists release of a Fantasy Films production. Produced by Saul Zaentz, Michael Douglas. Stars Jack Nicholson. Directed by Milos Forman. Screenplay, Lawrence Hauben, Bo Goldman, from novel by Ken Kesey, dramatized for the stage by Dale Wasserman; camera (DeLuxe Color), Haskell Wexler, Bill Butler, William Fraker; editors, Richard Chew, Lynzee Klingman, Sheldon Kahn; music, Jack Nitzsche; production design, Paul Sylbert; art direction, Edwin O'Donovan; sound, Lawrence Jost, Mark Berger; asst. director, Irby Smith. Reviewed at MGM Studios, Culver City, Nov. 7, '75. (MPAA Rating: R.) Running time, 133 MINS.

Randel P. McMurphy	Jack Nicholson
Nurse Ratched	Louise Fletcher
Harding	William Redfield
Dr. Spivey	Dean Brooks
Orderly Turkle	Scatman Crothers
Martini	Danny De Vito
Sefelt	William Duell
Billy Bibbit	Brad Dourif
Cheswick	Sidney Lassick
Taber	Christopher Lloyd
Chief Bromden	Will Sampson
Frederickson	Vincent Schiavelli
Seaton	Delos V. Smith Jr.
Candy	Marya Small
Rose	Louisa Moritz
Nurse Pilbow	Mimi Sarkisian
Attendant Washington	Nathan George

Despite its seeming more like a fabulous remake of a dated story rather than the first film version of a noted book and play, "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" is brilliant cinema theatre. Jack Nicholson stars in an outstanding characterization of Ken Kesey's asylum anti-hero, McMurphy, and Milos Forman's direction of a superbly-cast film is equally meritorious. Louise Fletcher is excellent as the arch-nemesis ward nurse of the piece, handsomely produced by Saul Zaentz (of Fantasy Records) and Michael Douglas. The R-rated comedy-melodrama is one of United Artists' more impressive releases this year.

The past 15 years have covered what seems to be a century of enlightenment. Kesey, a major intellectual catalyst of the Beatnik era, is virtually an elder statesman of the avant-garde; he and others were stirring up the mind when less aware kids were doing their "American Graffiti" numbers. What used to be theatre-of-the-absurd has become, via and after JFK, The Beatles, Vietnam, youthful rebellion, Watergate, etc., almost conventional, cliché storytelling.

Thus, this long-delayed film emerges with a dual impact. To those under the age of, say, 25, it will be a theatrically powerful, but not especially challenging ensemble showpiece, which poses the now-familiar question, who is insane — the keepers or the kept? To those over that age barrier, it is intellectual nostalgia (a revisitation of the days when causes didn't choke from mace attacks), Lawrence Welk consciousness-raising, or a first-class Maugham, Galsworthy, Maxwell Anderson or Arthur Miller revival.

Sadly, the ideas herein are today as earth-shattering as The Pill, as revolutionary as pot, as relevant as the Cold War. Gladly, however, their transfer to the screen is potent, contemporary, compelling. And so, the young in head like the young in age can be drawn equally to this film as they are to Bette Midler and Manhattan Transfer.

It was Nov. 13, 1963 that Kirk Douglas returned to Broadway in a David Merrick-Edward Lewis-Seven Arts-Eric Productions presentation of Dale Wasserman's legit adaptation of Kesey's book, directed by Alex Segal. "Hello, Dolly!" was in its Detroit tryout that week, and John F. Kennedy

had two weeks or so left to live. Eleven weeks later, "Cuckoo's" had closed, a financial flop. But Douglas for years tried to get a film version off the ground, finally yielding to son Michael who pulled it off with Zaentz; meanwhile, both from its ideas and its versatility as a performers' showcase, local legit productions abounded. (However, play had a very long run, starting March 24, '71, off-Broadway with William Devane in McMurphy role -Ed.)

The film, made independently for over \$3,000,000 before UA bought into it, traces the havoc wrecked in Nurse Fletcher's zombie-run mental ward when Nicholson (either an illness faker or a free spirit) displays a kind of leadership which neither Fletcher nor the system can handle. The story is a dramatic staple: "Stalag 17," "Mr. Roberts," etc. "Us" against "Them-in-authority." The latter win, but not without a fight.

Lawrence Hauben and Bo Goldman are credited with the adaptation of the book (Wasserman's legit version is given separate passing credit). Despite the pointed directions of empathy and revulsion in the original material, the screenplay draws no sharp lines: Fletcher is all the more chilling in her bland autocracy for being apparently sincere in her vocation; Nicholson's real motives (for the offbeat behavior in a work camp that has sent him to the asylum for observations) are never clarified. All hands appear equally propelled by a perverse destiny.

The lengthy (133-minute) film first stresses broad vulgarity, as if to get all that out of the way, before moving into an ambivalence where one knows not whether to laugh or cry, or both. The cumulative impact is compellingly downbeat (nobody wins, everyone loses) and at the same time confusingly ambiguous (as befits the shallow liberalism of the time it so well depicts).

One must therefore forget the whole and concentrate solely on the excellent theatrics of the parts. Nicholson, Fletcher, Forman, cinematographers Haskell Wexler, Bill Butler and William Fraker; production designer Paul Sylbert; composer Jack Nitzsche (providing some haunting musical excerpts both in complementary and counterpoint effect); supervising editor Richard Chew, among others.

In addition, the major supporting players (with their 1963 Broadway production counterparts noted parenthetically) emerge with authority: Brad Dourif (Gene Wilder), the acne-marked stutterer whose immature sexual fantasies are clarified on the night of Nicholson's aborted escape; Sidney Lassick (Gerald S. O'Loughlin), a petulant auntie; Will Sampson (Ed Ames), the not-so-dumb Indian with whom Nicholson effects a strong rapport; William Redfield (William Daniels), the over-intelligent inmate.

Also, Sherman (Scatman) Crothers (Milton J. Williams), the night ward attendant whose hankering for liquor and girls precipitates Nicholson's wild party; Dean R. Brooks (Rex Robbins), in real life a hospital superintendent who makes a superb acting debut as a skeptical chief doctor, plus being the film's technical advisor; Delos V. Smith (Malcolm Atterbury), William Duell (Charles Tyner), Danny De Vito (Al Nesor), Vincent Schiavelli (Wesley Gale), among other ward-mates; Nathan George (Lincoln Kilpatrick), a male nurse. Joan Tetzl did the head nurse part Fletcher handles so well here. Christopher Lloyd rounds out the crew, while Marya Small and Louisa Moritz are very chipper chippies.

The film's pacing is relieved by a group escape and fishing boat heist, right out of Mack Sennett, and some stabs at basketball in which Nicholson stations the tall Indian for telling effect. This in turn makes the shock therapy sequences and Dourif's suicide scene awesomely potent. The film picks one up in a theatrical centrifuge for over two hours; the trip is more than enough to make one forget the mossbound Sixties' thrust — until it's all over.

—Murf.