

Taking Woodstock

Written by Dave Howard



When making movies about the Sixties, storytellers, in general, fall into a glamorizing pitfall which makes the film seem unauthentic. These films often focus on the times, music and fashion completely forgetting to tell a good story. The result ends up being a 120 minutes of

young actors playing Halloween in hippie clothes to a Jefferson Starship soundtrack. Instead of telling a personal story, they opt for the legend. "Taking Woodstock" tells one small story against the very large backdrop of the Woodstock Music Festival.

Elliot Teichberg (Dimitri Martin) has been aching to leave behind his family and hometown of White Neck, NY. His parents have been running their motel into the ground with a penny-wise pound foolish mentality. Elliott has been running his own art company in the city where he also frequents the underground gay night club scene. A latter day George Bailey, he always returns to upstate to run the Chamber of Commerce and fend off the bankers. To drum up some business he produces a yearly music and art festival. He also lets an experimental theater troupe live in his barn.

He reads that nearby town of Woodstock has refused let a promoter hold the now legendary concert. With his own festival permit in hand, he sells them on White Neck. His parents motel becomes ground zero for the planning and ticket sales. Soon he, along with the promoters, are

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in way over their heads as tens of millions of college kids "invade" his home town. Elliot allows himself to come out into his own, all the while balancing his responsibilities to the motel.

"Taking Woodstock" dispels a lot of forgotten facts about the festival. First and foremost it was all about making money. Helicopter chauffeured hippies align with limo suits to find a common ground. When Elliot runs into laundry list of health code violations, he goes back to the groovers to be told "Don't worry, we have a lot of lawyers." Woodstock was the first step in cashing in on the counter-culture and youth market. The locals even get in on it charging outrageous prices for food, sometimes as much as a DOLLAR for a bottle of water. Elliot adds service charges into the ticket prices. Woodstock was the Godfather (albeit less organized) of the over-inflated concerts we have today.

At times even Ang Lee can't escape printing the legend and stereotypes abound. Elliot's childhood friend (Emile Hirsch) is just back from Vietnam and having way over the top flashbacks. The squares and hippies face off at an staged nude reading of "The Cherry Orchard." Oh, no! My parents ate the brownies! Hippie hating cop gets his groove on! One thing that seemed to bother me was that most of the characters seemed very scrubbed for folks who were spending their days mudsliding and bathing in a swamp.

Not to say there aren't inspired moments. Liev Schrieber makes a very fun cameo as an Ex-Marine Tranny who befriends Eliot and his folks while providing security. Paul Dano and Kelli Garner make cameos as VW Nomads with a whole lot of acid. These roles could have easily gone boilerplate but these actors really remembered that these folks were people first and characters second.

"Taking Woodstock" is a fun watch that celebrates youth under crazy circumstances. If going in with those expectations, you will not be disappointed. After all, Woodstock was just a concert that millions of suburban kids went to during Summer Break.