

THE SOUND FROM THE ISLAND

One Loud Zonk for *Woodstock*

By Robert Lane

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Woodstock is the movie that will out gross *The Graduate*. It is just as big a put-on as a Disney animal story; complete with beautiful nature scenes and cuddly, warm, lovable animals to be sentimental about.

Les Wedman began his recent review with this modest claim: "*Woodstock* is the movie, that entirely on its own, can bridge the generation gap ..." Oh, come on Mr. Wedman, what kind of bridge do you have in mind? Dollar bills?

The movie is entirely contrived, selective to the point of leaving out any hint of violence, and attempts to suggest that all is pastoral, pure, and sylvan and that a love-in similar to *Woodstock* is the way to solve all the real problems in the world today.

Okay, Mr. Wedman, so the film can bridge the generation gap. Well, truth is beauty and beauty is truth too, I guess, but what does that mean? About the same thing as "bridge the generation gap" I would guess. Nothing specific, nothing practical or subject to rules of reason, but just a group of words which appeal to the emotions and somehow give us the impression that something of importance has been said. Slightly puzzled we look up from the paper meditatively and think, "Oh, what a good idea!"

If *Woodstock* will bridge the generation gap then perhaps we better not show it. What a bore if the gap is bridged. Where will the creative force of society come from if we are all on the same side of the gap? Isn't it the conflict between the value systems of the old and the young that has always brought change and true progress by the very fact that they were in conflict? Can you imagine any art form, civilization itself, without conflict? The image of the cross, which is older than Christianity, is certainly a symbol always of a crossing over from one way of life to another.

So it seems that bridging the generation gap, if it means anything, may not really be the way to solve social problems at all. The healthy conflict between ideas has never been destructive so long as the conflict remained rational and honest. Even a square like John Milton recognized that truth. One of the biggest problems at the root of North American social upheavals, particularly in the United States, is that we have all turned away from the legitimacy of language. We say things we do not mean. We use words to enrage, to move, to direct, to sell, but rarely do we use them to communicate.

When President Nixon calls the students who use force to win their point "bums" while at the same time explaining the invasion of Cambodia as necessary force to win points at a bargaining

table, an immense gap is evident, not between the students and the president, but between words and acts.

The words are phoney. The movie is phoney. It is a hugely promoted, slick, pretentious, point-of-view bit of didacticism in documentary clothing. As Penelope Gilliat points out in her *New Yorker* review all the freak-outs, ill humour, tawdriness, and business opportunism are cut out of the footage. This leaves a kind of mixed-media banana freak-out of a flick aimed at the largest possible audience and selling celluloid happiness to all those who can feel their way through life without ever bothering to think. The poet who suggested that “thinking divides, feeling unites” was only partly right. Shakespeare comes closer when he has King Lear say that we must lean to “think feelingly.”

Behind *Woodstock* is a spirit not of bridging gaps but of making money. And the kids. They are all unpaid actors. The singing stars and artists have contracts for TV rights, movie rights and recording rights long before the festival began, but then that’s all part of *Woodstock* – big business, and if the kids had started killing each other that footage could have been lopped off by the editor. If the really important thing is money then I suppose *Woodstock* will bridge the gap, for I’m sure Warner Brothers knows where it’s happening, man.