



Woody Allen is Zelig, a chameleon-like character who takes on the guise of people with whom he comes in contact.



the movies  
**Louise  
Snider**

## Woody Allen's back with comedy gem, starring in 'Zelig'

After some fitful meanderings these last few years, Woody Allen is back on track with a winner. "Zelig" (PG) is as original and innovative a comedy as any moviegoer could hope to see. Allen's last couple of films did arouse suspicion that he may have lost his touch, but that dreadful thought can be laid to rest. It appears that touch was only off course, not lost. "Zelig" is the proof. It integrates the zany energy of his early comedies, like "Sleeper," with the sweet-and-humor of his later, more personal movies, like "Stardust Memories." The combination has produced an exciting mutation, more daring and inventive than anything he's done before. Just the technical accomplishments of this film could provide ample material for serious dissertations. These special effects are startling. More than that, they constitute an important and integral part of the movie's content and format.

"ZELIG" IS ABOUT A fictional character, Leonard Zelig (Allen), but it is presented in the factual style of a documentary. There are vintage black-and-white film clips, a narrator and interviews with real people who are supposed to have known Zelig or taken an interest in his peculiar case.

These interviews are a witty broadside reference to Warren Beatty's "witnesses" in "Reds." Allen adopts the technique for comic purposes. He uses real people, including such intellectual and literary heavyweights as Susan Sontag, Irving Howe and Bruno Bettelheim, to talk about an invented character and his strange malady.

Zelig's problem is an overwhelming identity crisis. The identity crisis suffered by the protagonists of other Allen movies were nothing compared with this — the ultimate identity crisis. Zelig is a man so lacking in self that he takes on the characteristics, physical and mental, of whomever he is with. Among Chinese people, he looks Chinese. With a black jazz band, he becomes a black trumpeter. Interviewed by psychiatrists, he becomes a psychiatrist himself as he explains his differences with Freudian theories.

Known as the "Human Chameleon," he becomes the sensation of the Roaring '20s as newspapers utilize the public with his continuing metamorphoses. He might pop up anywhere, with anyone, from Lou Gehrig to Adolf Hitler. To spot him requires that the audience pay attention and participate. Find the Zelig among the real-life historical figures.

ALLEN'S CINEMATOGRAPHER, Gordon Willis, has done a remarkable job of matching old and new film footage and doing some very tricky things in the process. Zelig turns up at every newsworthy event of the era.

The impact of the technique is mind-boggling, equally so the content. The movie runs the gamut of humor from slapstick to metaphysical. All the while Allen takes pot shots at psychoanalysis, art, journalism, dance fads, and even himself.

The cynicism, however, is tempered by a healthy affirmation on the power of love and understanding. Zelig, after all, is saved by a woman's love, determination and courage. Mia Farrow, as Dr. Fletcher, is the woman who becomes Zelig's defender, therapist and lover.

If Leonard Zelig is the most extreme case in Allen's gallery of neurotics, he also proves to be the most salvageable. And "Zelig" the film proves to be another triumph for Woody Allen, America's comic genius of filmmaking.



Mia Farrow is Dr. Fletcher, the therapist who becomes Zelig's lover.

## upcoming things to do

### REMEMBERING PIAF

Marcel Blistene from Paris, who wrote and produced two films for Edith Piaf, will discuss his personal remembrances, in French, at 8 p.m. Wednesday at the Bloomfield University School, 3003 W. Maple, just west of Lehigh in Birmingham. There is no admission charge for the event, which is presented by the Alliance Française. A wine reception afterward will include dancing to the recorded music of Piaf.

### REPERTORY COMPANY

The Hilbert Theatre's new repertory company will begin the 1983-84 season with two productions opening on two successive nights on the Wayne State University campus in Detroit. "A Voyage Round My Father" by John Mortimer opens Wednesday, Oct. 19, following previews Friday-Saturday, Oct. 14-15. "Our Town" opens Thursday, Oct. 20, following Friday-Saturday, Oct. 7-8.

previews. Performances are at 8 p.m. The repertory company consists of 14 new members and 20 returning members. For ticket information call the box office at 577-2972.

### AT FOLK TOWN

FolkTown continues its fall series of folk and traditional music with Just Friends in concert at 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 8, at the Southfield Civic Center at Civic Center Drive, just east of Evergreen. The four women of Just Friends play a variety of instruments including the rarely heard hammered dulcimer. Admission is \$4.50.

### DETROIT TIMES

The Detroit Times Theatre Co. will open a new comedy revue Thursday-Fridays beginning Oct. 6-7 as part of the 10th anniversary celebration for the Peking House, 215 S. Washington near 11 Mile Road in Royal Oak. The theater company is patterned after the Second City comedy theater in Chicago. Reservations

for a dinner show package or any of several scheduled show times may be made by calling the Peking House at 545-2700, or the theater company's box office hotline, 545-6485, from 1-9 p.m. seven days a week.

### VEGAS PARTY

The Community House in Birmingham will host a Vegas Nite from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. Friday, Oct. 7, at 305 Bates, two blocks south of Maple and two blocks east of Southfield. Blackjack, craps and roulette are included for the \$2 admission. All proceeds go to the National Institute for Burn Medicine and the Orchid Society.

### DETROIT REP

The Detroit Repertory Theatre has completed its new \$50,000 parking lot in time for the opening of its 1983-84 season, which begins Nov. 3 with "Valeria a Nightmare" by Jerry Tymlick. The theater is 15103 Woodrow

Wilson, Detroit. The repertory will feature "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All to You" and "An Actor's Nightmare" by Christopher Durang, Jan. 12 through Feb. 19. "Master Harold... and the Boys" by Athol Fugard (rights pending) will run March 1 through April 22. The season will conclude with "A Day Out of Time" by Alan Foster Friedman, May 3 through June 24. For further information call 858-1347.

### COMEDY CASTLE

Shirley Hemphill from TV's "What's Happening" will perform Wednesday-Sunday, Oct. 5-9, at the Comedy Castle, at John Laffrey's, 4818 N. Woodward, Royal Oak. Other comedy stars during October will be Gary Kern, Oct. 12-16; Robert Wahl, from the movies "Flashdance" and "Hollywood Knights," Oct. 19-23; and Bob Saget, from TV's "Boomer Buddies," Oct. 26-30. For more information call 545-2333.

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