

Zelig Film Review

Variety Staff

Dec 31, 1982

Lamponing documentary tradition by structuring the entire film as a meticulously crafted bogus docu, Woody Allen tackles some serious stuff en route (namely the two-edged sword of public and media celebrityhood) but manages to avoid the self-oriented seriousness that's alienated many of his onetime loyalist. More positively, Zelig is consistently funny, though more academic than boulevardier.

Allen plays the eponymous Leonard Zelig, subject of the 'documentary' that traces this onetime legend of the 1920s-30s whose weak personality and neurotic need to be liked caused him to become the ultimate conformist.

Through the use of doctored photos and staged black and white footage cannily – and usually undetectably – matched with authentic newsreels and stock footage of the period, Allen is seen intermingling with everyone from the Hearst crowd at San Simeon, Eugene O'Neill and Fanny Brice to the likes of Pope Pius XI and even Adolf Hitler.

The narrative that does emerge limns the efforts of a committed psychiatrist (played with tact and loveliness by Mia Farrow) to give Zelig a single self, a relationship that blossoms, predictably, to love by fadeout.

1983: Nomination: Best Cinematography, Costume Design

Zelig

- Production: Rollins-Joffe/Orion. Director Woody Allen; Producer Robert Greenhut; Screenplay Woody Allen; Camera Gordon Willis; Editor Susan E. Morse; Music Dick Hyman; Art Director Mel Bourne
- Crew: (B&W) Available on VHS, DVD. Extract of a review from 1983. Running time: 84 MIN.
- With: Woody Allen Mia Farrow Garreth Brown Stephanie Farrow Will Holt Sol Lomita

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