

Gimme Shelter

Film review

Len Schafer

1971

Directed by: David Maysles, Albert Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin. Starring: The Rolling Stones, Hells Angels and a cast of thousands.

"Ooo, the storm is threatening my very life today... But it's all right, man, in fact, it's a gas. It's all right, I'm...an under-assistant, West Coast Promo Man..."

The scene is Altamont. Mick and the Stones are on stage, guarded by a line of drunken members of the California Hell's Angels. The Rolling Stones are doing a sloppy-nervous version of "Sympathy for the Devil."

Suddenly, several of the Stones-employed Angels begin to move into ten or twenty first-row fans. 100,000 Woodstock "nationals" and the Rolling Stones watch in horror as the movie cameras move away from the Stones to flash on the indiscriminate beatings distributed by the Angels.

The Angels, obviously aware of the cameras, the people, and the Rolling Stones, steal the "show."

As the hermaphroditic charisma of Jagger begins to fade away in the shadow of the Hell's Angels' "act," Mick frantically turns around to face the rest of the Stones and orders them to stop playing.

Jagger, unable to comprehend the fruits of his labor, grabs the microphone with a shaking hand and screams-pleads with the Angels to cease and desist. Mick is ignored.

Moments later, a black man is murdered.

"Gimme Shelter" is a down. It's the same kind of down as Balduck Park, the Cincinnati Pop Festival, or even Goose Lake. It's the kind of down you experience when the exploitation of youth culture, by the record industry, the promo-men, and the pop-stars, becomes crystal clear as you watch your sisters' and brothers' (or your own) head get smashed in by industry-employed "protectors of liberty."

"Gimme Shelter" tries to scapegoat the violence at Altamont. It portrays the Angels as violence-loving drunken "bad guys," while the let's-put-on-a-free-concert-and-think-of-the-promotional-value Rolling Stones are the helpless "good guys."

The Rolling Stones' movie-documentary of their latest tour of the United States is only half honest at the most. Although it details the pseudo-high energy of the pre-Altamont concerts, the money-minded media promo-men, and the pitiful character of the Hells Angels, "Gimme Shelter" fails to concretely tie these events together to show that it is the pop-star industry who is responsible for the tragedy at Altamont.

This documentary of the death of Woodstock "Nation" is a promo-hype worth seeing, but keep in mind who's getting your \$2.50 admission charge.

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