

Blowin' down this old technicolor road

By Mark Brothers

Bound for Glory. Directed by Hal Ashby; based on the Woody Guthrie autobiography. With David Carradine, Ronny Cox, Melinda Dillon, Gail Strickland and Randy Quaid. A United Artists release.

Woody Guthrie carved into his guitar the vow, "this guitar kills fascists." And from the mid-1930's until he was struck by Huntington's Disease in 1954, Woody

wrote hundreds of songs that decried oppression and joyously affirmed human solidarity: "This Land Is Your Land", "Pastures of Plenty", "Deportee", "Blowin' Down This Old Dusty Road", "Pretty Boy Floyd", "So Long, It's Been Good To Know Yuh", "This Train Is Bound For Glory."

Because Woody was both a performer and a participant in a social movement, the producers of his film biography **Bound For Glory** had the choice of making either **The Jolson Story** or **The Life of Emile Zola**. In

stead of choosing between, or effectively synthesizing, the performer biography and the historical biography film genres, they wound up straddling both and the result was superficial politics and the separation of Woody from his music. Abandoning the performer biography style of using film as a vehicle for an artist's music, Woody's songs are cut abruptly after one or two verses.

The most striking aspect of the film is the lush cinematography. Haskell Wexler, fresh from shooting Weatherpeople's backsides for the film **Underground**, obviously relished the opportunity to film a few frontal shots. Each frame looks like a portrait of 1930's America, as descriptive as a Marcote drawing or a Woody Guthrie song. The film scans the faces of poor people sprawled over a work camp; it shows people packed in boxcars after being driven from their land; and one can feel the power of songs like "This Land Is Your Land" after watching migrants barred from entering California unless they had \$50.

From Rebel to Radical

At first, casting the somber, rational David Carradine as the impulsive, exuberant Woody, seemed to make about as much sense as starring Gary Cooper in the Leo Gorcey Story. But Dylan wanted complete artistic control before he would take the role, Phil Ochs committed suicide, Country Joe was into disco, and they're saving Arlo Guthrie for **The John Carradine Story**. So Carradine got the role and discarded his Kung Fu stoicism to give a fine characterization.

Woody is depicted as an exceptional individual who "goes to the people," leaving social justice in his wake. His radicalization takes place in a historical vacuum. Divorced from the 1930's social

movement, nowhere is there an indication of the influence the movement had on Woody or the impact of his songs on the movement. His growth process in **Bound For Glory** is one of the common character

and becomes a radical. He goes from rebel to radical; from James Dean to John Garfield.

The most effective political scenes are the work camp shots and the shots of a

made up my mind I'm gonna speak up. I'm gonna let them know what I want... Keep up the music cause everybody's listening."

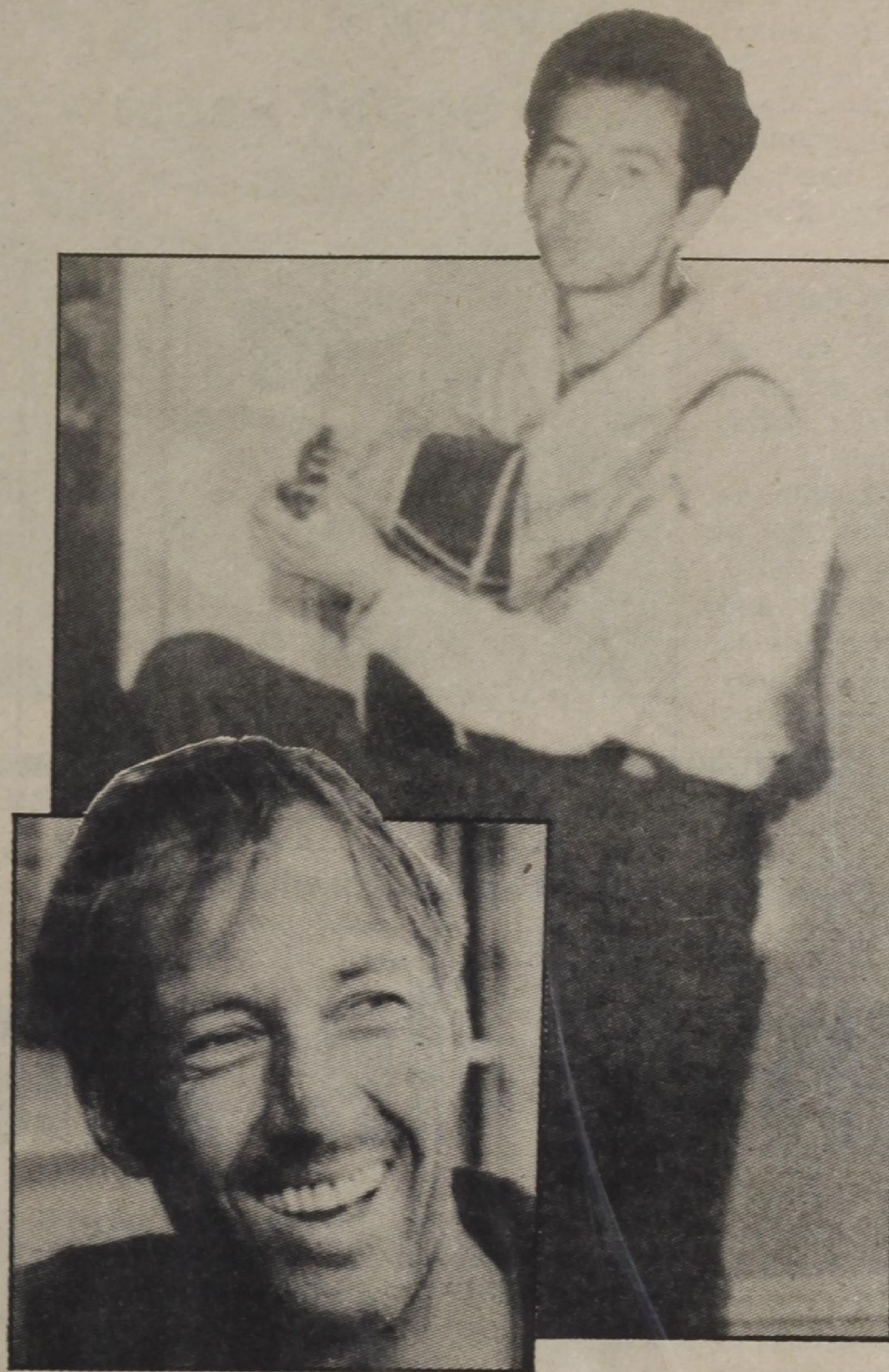
One aspect of the film left dangling is the relationship between Woody and his first wife Mary. They keep leaving each other and, for unexplained reasons, never talk to each other about it. Instead, they exchange 'run away from home' notes such as, "Gone to California. Will send for you all. Love Woody." Woody seems to find it a lot easier to show love for "the people" than to express love to any one person. Mary's feelings for Woody are finally overwhelmed by frustration with his rambling lifestyle and she leaves him.

Unlike his earlier travels to evade responsibility, when Woody hits the road for New York at the close of the film his departure is part of a conscious decision to de-emphasize his "career" and take his music to poor, struggling people. He had rejected professional opportunities, telling a radio producer who, to please sponsors, had tried to censor Woody: "I like my singing too much to take orders from some fat little squirt who doesn't know his own mind."

We Ain't Down Yet

The American film has sanitized the left. Mere mention of the word socialism is taboo. There is no tradition of American leftist feature films. The closest thing to such a tradition has been the smattering of non-ideological, radical movies about "social justice" and "freedom" (they reflect the uniquely American tradition of non-ideological radicalism—from Thoreau through to SDS)—films like **Our Daily Bread**, **Grapes of Wrath**, the John Garfield films and, more recently, **Billy Jack**.

Despite its weaknesses, **Bound For Glory** is part of this tradition. Like Woody's songs, it is art for ordinary people, the people Woody was talking about when he said: "You know, we've been held down, nailed down, beat down, shot down, shut down, set down, drove down, shoved down, pushed down, talked down, chained down. We've been blowed down and showed down, chopped down, howed down, plowed under, held under, ducked under, dusted under, tracted under. We've been shot at and missed. We've been spit at and hit. Been called for and couldn't come. Called to war and wouldn't go. Called to work and couldn't eat. And called to fight for something we ain't got. We've been bulldozed and lied to. Knocked up, held up, hijacked, raped, skint, lint, broke, bent, pistol whipped, gassed, bombed, machine gunned, struck, log chained, lied about and gossiped on, cussed out, seduced, screwed up, misled, stripped naked, left ragged, hungry, broke, disgusted, busted and not to be trusted. But in spite of all of this and many many more things, we ain't down yet. No, we ain't down yet!"



David Carradine (left) and Woody Guthrie

developments in American films—the loner innocent goes through a revealing experience/adventure and awakens a new man. During the first half of the film Woody isn't a professional performer. He's a sign painting rail hopper who hasn't sought the transient life but has stumbled into it because of circumstances. His innocence collides with the injustice he encounters until he picks up his guitar for pay

meeting at which workers are arguing whether to strike. Randy Quaid, a Michael Pollard type who drooled after Cybil Shepherd in **The Last Picture Show** and drooled all over Jack Nicholson in **The Last Detail**, plays Luther Johnson, a migrant worker reincarnate of **The Grapes of Wrath**'s Tom Joad, who gushes to Woody, "I started thinking about thousands of people never getting nothing...I

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man?"

Anita, who lives with America, their son born in of the dominant, decadent culture."

Through the letters, Abbie and Anita reinforce each other's strengths and grow together personally and politically. Abbie says he hasn't met any feminists since going under and asks, "Do you think you are sitting on a New York City phenomenon?" Anita answers, "To me it's (feminism) more a state of mind than a set of well-articulated principles. It's the realization that you're not a piece of shit, that you are indeed, first-rate; it's falling in love with yourself and being the hero of your own adventures; it's knowing you're not the moon's pale reflection but the sun, burning. It's being aware that you can change your life, and doing it. It's believing women can change the world. Understand, 1971, writes about the hassles

of being a single mother and about her attempts to organize welfare mothers. "I'm dreaming of building a women's movement that could mobilize masses of poor women," she writes, "we'll see how much lazy hedonistic me actually does."

They go through personal heaviness. Anita greets his marriage to "Angel," a woman he met since going under, with, "I have only good feelings...Mazel tov!" She writes that Abbie makes "too many demands," and her decision to not visit him sparks a terse "Thanks for the words, and goodbye." But Abbie comes back, asking "Can we just talk?" He reacts to Anita's hesitation to engage in the heaviness by asking, "How can you even ask, 'Is it wrong to share fears?' What do you want to share—Wonderbread sandwiches for lunch?"

The letters discuss his case, her growing strength through independence, friends and enemies, and the sheer drudgery of underground

(and aboveground!) life. "I haven't a thing to write about," Abbie writes.

A continuing theme throughout the book is Abbie and Anita's love for America. Abbie writes, "I ain't around much and naturally it's fucking with his head. But if he can grasp the point that it was interrupted by our enemies and has nothing to do with all our feelings toward each other he'll be O.K.... Generally in a separation kids just hate their fathers like crazy. So let him hate the cops and the government. He'll be O.K."

He is O.K. Anita describes a leftist meeting that was droning on until, "All of a sudden I hear the kid's voice, 'I miss my daddy. I want my daddy.' I was very surprised because I've never before heard him refer to you in the presence of strangers. Everybody looked at the kid and was silent, then somebody said, 'We'll bring your daddy back after a socialist revolution.' We all cheered, some of us with tears in our eyes. The kid's a real showstopper! Incredible timing, huh?" YIPPIE!

politics of housework.

Quixote Magazine, 153 East Gilman, Madison, Wisc. 53703. A special issue of the magazine with a version of the **Communist Manifesto** in comic book form. The drawings were done by the Mexican artist Rius.

Poland: 1970-71 Capitalism and Class Struggle, Informations Correspondance Ouvrieres, Black and Red, P.O. Box 9546, Detroit, Mich. 48202. A report on the Polish workers movement and specifically the strike wave against the Polish State in the early Seventies.

Crises of Nature: How Humanity Saved the Biosphere, Capitalist Crises Studies, P.O. Box 754, Berkeley, Calif. 94703. This pamphlet is a critique of the "ecology movement" from the perspective of the Marxian theory of social evolution. The CCS have various publications analyzing the present nature of the global economy and the development of socialism. Write for more details.

Max Stirner's Egoism, John P. Clark, Freedom Press, 84B Whitechapel High St., London E1, England, \$3. The essay develops an understanding of Max Stirner's philosophical thoughts on egoism and is especially concerned with the social and political implications of egoism.

The Dodo Bird, Emanuel Fried, Labour Arts Books, 1064 Amherst St., Buffalo, N.Y. \$1.50. This play, set in a pub across the street from a foundry, explores the relationships between workers within the workplace and the effect such work has on their human development.

Student And Youth Organizing, Youth Liberation Press, 2007 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, Mich. 48104. How to form a student union, how to combat dress codes and racism, how to raise money and do power structure research. \$1.50.

Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, Jose Peirats, Solidarity Books, P.O. Box 546, Station Z, Toronto, Ontario. As the title suggests it is a history of the Spanish Revolution focusing on the role of the anarchists. Peirats was involved in the War and later became Secretary-General of the CNT-in-exile.

The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude, Etienne de la Boetie, Black Rose Books, 3934 St. Urbain, Montreal 131, Quebec; and Free Life Editions, 41 Union Sq., New York, N.Y. 10003, (\$2.95 in Canada). A sixteenth century essay on the political/psychological basis of dictatorship—the acquiescence of the people in their own servitude. Murray N. Rothbard writes an introduction to this early libertarian writing.

The Kronstadt Uprising of 1921, Lynne Thorndycraft, Left Bank Books Pamphlet, 92 Pike St., Seattle, Wash. 98101, 50¢. Sums up the development of rebellion by the soldiers and sailors of Kronstadt Naval Base against the newly emerged Soviet State. Revised edition of **Anti-Authoritarian Revolutionary Movement** statement also available from Left Bank Books, 30¢.

Prisoners Call Out Freedom, Prisoners Solidarity Committee, 58 West 25th St. New York, N.Y. 10010, \$1. A pamphlet depicting the struggle and repression in New York State's Auburn "Correctional" Facility. The pamphlet is an attempt to organize support for the prisoners involved in the fight.

Marxism & A Free Society, Marcus Graham, Simian Publications, Over-the-Water, Sanday, Orkney Islands, Scotland. An anarchist reply to Isaac Deutscher's address on **Socialist Man** with particular reference to the minutes of the First International and the sabotaging of the Hague conference.

Houseworker's Handbook, Betsy Warrior and Lisa Leghorn, Woman's Centre, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge, Mass. 02139. A compilation of articles outlining the