



FILM: **HAROLD AND MAUDE**

FDG RATING: 4.1 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Colin Higgins: *writer*  
Hal Ashby: *director*  
Bud Cort: *actor, Harold*  
Ruth Gordon: *actress, Maude*

DATE: June 14, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **HAROLD AND MAUDE**

Harold and Maude is a 1971 American coming-of-age dark comedy cult classic that has endured the test of time. Watching it again in 2020, it still is immensely entertaining. Several film discussion participants noted the idiosyncratic originality of the story; there has not been another film with a similar story line: A young man, Harold, from a very wealthy family, is obsessed with death ever since his narcissistic self absorbed mother finally paid him momentary attention when he almost blew himself up at school during a science experiment. He spends his days driving his hearse to funerals where he happens to meet Maude, a free spirited bohemian octogenarian who also frequents funerals but for a very different reason. The unlikely pair form a very close bond; Maude takes Harold under her wing to teach him how to enjoy life and Harold goes along for the wild ride having never before experienced the attention and companionship Maude gives him. Most of our film discussion participants loved the Cat Stevens soundtrack, (bringing back our own memories of the 70s) and practically singing along to “if you want to sing out, sing out, And if you want to be free, be free” although one participant thought it was a bit overpowering.

Harold annoys his mother by staging a staggering variety of theatrical suicide attempts: immolation, hanging, whacking off his arm with a meat cleaver, driving his car over a cliff, drowning, but his mother is merely annoyed. She takes a morning dip in the swimming pool, for example, and when she comes upon Harold's body floating face down, she merely swims another lap. Harold's mother decides that what Harold needs is a little female companionship so she signs him up with a computer dating service, but the girls make quick exits when, for example, he sets himself afire on their date.

Maude is a live wire, spontaneous, full of life and unpredictable, such as when a traffic cop stops her, (Harold is sitting in the passenger seat next to her), for being in possession of a stolen truck, a stolen car, and a stolen shovel. She apologizes and then drives away. When he catches up with her again, she steals his motorcycle.

Some of our favorite scenes were the two dancing in her cabin on her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, the third blind date set up by his mother where he pretends to commit hari kari and rather than being shocked, the girl is herself an actress and plays along, and the brilliant opening scene where only feet are visible stepping onto a riser and then dangling. The scenes with his military uncle were especially comical as the sleeve of uncle's amputated arm swings in the breeze while he spouts his patriotism trying to recruit Harold who stages a scene in which Maude poses as a pacifist protester and Harold seemingly murders her out of militaristic fanaticism so his uncle will see him as an uncontrollable fanatic and thus will stop his recruitment efforts. And the satisfying final scene as we see Harold has learned to love and be loved, to embrace the new (playing the banjo) and to end his fascination with death—finally driving his hearse over the cliff, destroying it.

Only three scenes bothered a few discussion participants: one was when Maude was driving like a maniac, screeching tires, another when we see her concentration camp number on her arm which one person thought was too heavy handed, and when Maude decides that turning 80 is time to let go. It was completely out of character for someone with such zest for life. It just seemed wrong.

With the Bay Area as the film's location, many reminisced about the places they saw on screen and loved revisiting the 70s with its clothes, anti-war message, and Maude hugging a tree. One resident reviewer noted that the acting and cinematography was not exceptional but the story was irresistible. It is ranked number 45 on the American Film Institute's list of 100 Funniest Movies of all Time.

Quirky, sweet, sentimental but not maudlin, thoroughly entertaining, Harold and Maude garnered a vivacious score of 4.1 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, [adedic@pacbell.net](mailto:adedic@pacbell.net)

[www.filmdiscussiongroup.com](http://www.filmdiscussiongroup.com)