

Take the Money & Run (1969) Woody Allen

P Michell, Nov 2016

A surrealist take on documentaries AND the gangster realism cinema of the 1960s.

Synopsis:

This film is presented as a documentary on the life of an incompetent, petty criminal called Virgil Starkwell. It describes the early childhood and youth of Virgil, his failure at a musical career, and his obsession with bank robberies. The film uses a voice over narrative and interviews with his family, friends and acquaintances.

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Cost (mere) US\$1.5 million.

Allen's second film after 'What's Up Tiger Lily' (1966, co-directed) – but first as on-going triple crown – writing, directing and acting.

Heywood "**Woody**" Allen (born Allan Stewart Konigsberg, December 1, 1935) is an American actor, comedian, filmmaker, playwright, and musician, whose career spans more than six decades.

He worked as a comedy writer in the 1950s, writing jokes and scripts for television and publishing several books of short humor pieces. In the early 1960s, Allen began performing as a stand-up comedian, emphasizing **monologues** rather than traditional jokes. As a comedian, he developed the persona of an insecure, intellectual, fretful **nebbish**, which he maintains is quite different from his real-life personality.^[3] In 2004, **Comedy Central**^[4] ranked Allen in fourth place on a list of the 100 greatest stand-up comedians, while a UK survey ranked Allen as the third greatest comedian.^[5]

By the mid-1960s Allen was writing and directing films, first specializing in **slapstick** comedies before moving into dramatic material influenced by **European art cinema** during the 1970s, and alternating between comedies and dramas to the present. He is often identified as part of the **New Hollywood** wave of filmmakers of the mid-1960s to late 1970s.^[6] Allen often stars in his films, typically in the persona he developed as a standup. Some best-known of **his over 40 films** are *Annie Hall* (1977), *Manhattan* (1979), and *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986). In 2007 he said *Stardust Memories* (1980), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), and *Match Point* (2005) were his best films.^[7] Critic **Roger Ebert** described Allen as "a treasure of the cinema."^[8]

Excellent Link:

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/allen/>

“As the early films of a comedy writer, *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Bananas* (1971) and *Sleeper* (1973) were largely platforms for slapstick and the development of signature dialogue, as well as the evolution of the *schlemiel*, a Yiddish comic figure characterised by timidity, failure and perseverance.”

Mickey Rose (1935-2013) co-scriptwriter

Went to school with Woody. Close friends, playing jazz and baseball together. Both matriculated from New York University – Rose Bachelor in Film, Allen dropped out. Wrote scripts for first 3 Allen movies – Tiger Lilly, Bananas.

He wrote for “Lamb Chop’ a popular TV sock puppet. (The latter sent up mercilessly in an episode of ‘The Nanny’.)

Trivia – Beware Lots and Lots ...

The first widely released "mockumentary".

[Woody Allen](#)'s decision to become his own director was partially spurred on by the chaotic and uncontrolled filming of [Casino Royale](#) (1967), in which he had appeared two years previously.

The contract [Woody Allen](#) had with Palomar Pictures gave him carte blanche to do what he wanted with this film, including final cut, setting the precedent for how he works to this day. "They never bothered me," he said. "It was a very pleasant experience. And from that day on I never had any problems in the cinema from the point of view of interference in any way."

[Woody Allen](#) shot countless takes and printed most of them because in his inexperience he assumed a good director must do many takes and protect himself with coverage from all angles. He continued the practice on his first few movies but then gained the confidence to do what felt more right to him - long takes, with little or no coverage and very few retakes.

One hundred San Quentin prisoners were paid a small fee to work on the film during the prison sequences. The regular cast and crew were stamped each day with a special ink that glowed under ultra-violet light so the guards could tell who was allowed to leave the prison grounds at the end of the day.

Many of the cast members were non-professionals and were chosen because they would seem more authentic and real than character actors in the "documentary" approach [Woody Allen](#) had in mind.

[Woody Allen](#) encouraged his cast to improvise, often shooting as many as three impromptu gags for each scene.

Virgil Starkwell was born on December 1, 1935. This is [Woody Allen](#)'s actual date of birth.

The "Spring Street Settlement House Marching Band," with which [Woody Allen](#) attempts to play cello in an early scene, was really the marching band of Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, California, just north of San Francisco. The band had received an invitation to perform at Disneyland in a festival of high-school bands and the fee they received from the film helped to pay for their trip.

Virgil's inept attempt to escape prison by carving a gun out of soap and turning it black with shoe polish is loosely based on real life bank robber John Dillinger's famous escape from the Crown Point, Indiana jail using a wooden gun blackened with shoe polish. In an interesting parallel, in the film [Dillinger](#) (1973) directed by [John Milius](#) and starring [Warren Oates](#) as John Dillinger, he is shown using a bar of soap instead of a piece of wood.

This was the first movie that [Woody Allen](#) directed. His initial lack of either confidence or track record prompted him to initially ask [Jerry Lewis](#) to direct the movie, but Lewis was busy with his own work.

Filmed for 10 weeks in the San Francisco area. [Woody Allen](#) joked that it was a better place to spend the summer than Cleveland but, in reality, he knew that the city was compact enough to allow him and his crew to complete 87 moves in 50 days. His film crew knew that such a daunting schedule was more suited to the TV industry, where working till 10 or 11 at night was commonplace. But Allen completed the film without once working late, and several times he wrapped for the day at 4 o'clock.

The film *Virgil* shows his gang ("Trout Fishing in Quebec") is listed as being a Rollings and Joffe production, the real-life producers of [Woody Allen](#).

Cinema Connections:

Marcel Hilliare plays a former film director named Fritz, who is obviously a caricature of Fritz Lang, right down to his characteristic Teutonic accent, black boots and riding crop.

On their first date, Virgil takes Louise to dinner at Ernie's, the restaurant made famous by "Vertigo." (Though set in New Jersey, the movie was filmed in San Francisco.)

The psychiatrist's name is Dr. Julius Epstein. This is most likely an homage to screenwriter [Julius J. Epstein](#), who is best known for winning an Oscar for his screenplay to [Casablanca](#) (1942).

[Woody Allen](#) showed his crew some movies that would make more concrete his abstract thoughts about what he wanted: [Blow-Up](#) (1966) for the use of colour,

[Elvira Madigan](#) (1967) for its lyrical romanticism, [I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang](#) (1932) for its sympathetic prisoner-on-the-run theme, and [The Eleanor Roosevelt Story](#) (1965) for its documentary approach to a subject.

Quotes:

Louise: He is always very depressed. I think that if he'd been a successful criminal, he would have felt better. You know, he never made the 'ten most wanted' list. It's very unfair voting; it's who you know.

Louise: He'd have the gang over for a meeting and I'd put out a little tray of pretzels and bullets... I had to. He's my husband.

Bank Teller #1: Does this look like "gub" or "gun"?

Bank Teller #2: Gun. See? But what does "abt" mean?

Virgil: It's "act". A-C-T. Act natural. Please put fifty thousand dollars into this bag and act natural.

Bank Teller #1: Oh, I see. This is a holdup?

Reviews:

Off and running....

[Robert J. Maxwell \(rmax304823@yahoo.com\)](mailto:rmax304823@yahoo.com)

12 February 2003

This is Woody's first "real" movie and it's pretty good. Surprisingly so, in fact, when you consider the he began as a stand-up comic dealing out yoks that were by necessity strictly verbal. Some of the yoks here work -- "He told me was a gynecologist but he didn't speak no foreign languages" -- and some don't -- "The prisoners were served one hot meal a day, a bowl of steam." But the visual gags and Allen's physical performance more than make up for the jokes that flop. In fact the first joke in the movie is visual, and imaginative: Allen plays a cello in a marching band. Still, it's a first feature, and it shows. The camera is shakey and the photography not always first rate. He was to improve with practice. Here he has a scene in which he is having a private argument with his wife in the bedroom, but he's shackled to half a dozen escaped prisoners, who laugh at his entreaties and make wisecracks during the conversation. A similar scene in "Love and Death," with a promiscuous Diane Keaton holding the hand of her husband on his deathbed. The husband says something like, "I know you're pure and you've been faithful to me." The attending priests and doctors begin puffing and humming while trying to stifle their laughter. It isn't that the later scene is necessarily funnier, it simply takes it for granted that the audience can get in on the joke without being prompted.

There are several discernible sources for the story. The most obvious is "I Was a

Fugitive From a Chain Gang." Some of the scenes -- the breaking of ankle shackles with a heavy sledge hammer -- are repeated and played for laughs. I can't be sure that "Cool Hand Luke," which was released the year before, is an influence but it certainly seems so. There may be something of "Bonnie and Clyde" in it too. [Paul - particularly when known there was a deleted ending of a bullet ridden shootout.]

Woody hasn't got the great all-star cast that he was to assemble for his post-"Annie Hall" efforts, but what he has is pretty neat. The snarling James Anderson stands out as the Chain Gang Warden, in the Strother Martin role. What a face! Howard Storm as the hold-up victim/arresting officer is a familiar face and a welcome voice. Marcel Hilaire may not actually BE Fritz Lang but he ought to be! But aside from Allen, the most important role is that of Janet Margolin as his wife, Louise. Her talent as an actress was modest, although she could sometimes outdo herself, as, for instance, the sympathetic closet Jew in "Morituri," a dramatic part. Here she's no more than adequate, but she is so attractive that it hardly matters, and the role hardly calls for thespian fireworks. She was 26 when this was released. She was always pleasant, a strange, wistful combination of vulnerability and sex appeal, and some suggestion emanated from her performances that suggested she was that way offscreen as well. Her career and her life ended with a bad death at a relatively early age. Marvin Hamlisch's score is apt and easy to listen to.

It's an amusing debut for Woody. You'll laugh out loud at it, unless you're a real sourpuss.

New York Times – Vincent Canby

... wrote the film is "the cinematic equivalent to one of Allen's best nightclub monologues, a kind of cowardly epic peopled with shy FBI agents, cons who are wanted for dancing with mailmen, over-analyzing parents and one lady blackmailer who has the soul of a Jewish mother - she likes to feed her victim good, hot meals."