

# Mae West

AT THE MYRA PREMIERE

by Arthur Irving

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Mae West, Mae West, Mae West, Mae West, Mae West. "If you've come to see Raquel Welch, go home," yelled a drag queen resplendent in blonde wig, holding her Mae Power sign high and proud.

The occasion was the world premiere of "Myra Breckinridge" at the Criterion Theater. That particular drag queen was noticeable in a festive, often violent atmosphere, that looked more like a Columbia sit-in, what with cops, pickets, police barricades, press, television cameras, pushing, showing-off, camaraderie, hurt feelings, and heroes.

And, of course, the queen of drag herself was there, and no one can measure up to Mae West when it comes to razzle dazzle. Mae has about sixty years over her fans in sheer age power pazazz, originality, and finesse. The night of the "Myra" premiere, the crowd was there to do her proud, to honor the myth as well as the woman. They jammed behind the barricades, thousands of them, to see the stars and to snap their baby Kodaks at the likes of Kay Thompson and Mart Crowley and Jerry Lewis and Penelope Tree and the nobody extroverts with leopard-skin skirts slit up to here and see-through dresses and fuck me shoes. When Raquel Welch entered in a multi-colored Indian thingee, the crowd made a lunge for her and Raquel panicked. Frightened and faint but looking beautiful through tears of consternation, Raquel heaved those million dollar boobies at the crowd, but it was Mae they wanted. When Mae arrived, all hell broke loose. The crowd lunged through four barricades. They broke the Criterion's marquee windows. They screeched, screamed, applauded, they told Mae they loved her, worshipped her, adored her. Mae, with the help of a burly



gentleman, looked straight ahead. She edged slowly into the lobby of the theater, her face in a permanent half smile. She seemed stoned or oblivious, obviously used to the furor. She proceeded onward, Jesus Christ among the multitudes. She was white from head to toe. Her hands were covered with diamonds. Her hair the same as in the days of "She Done Him Wrong."

But up close, and I was up close, the face was that of an ancient child — Margo in "Lost Horizons." To touch that face was to touch an illusion. To look at that face was to look at a mask that had been repaired a thousand times over with the finest glue and spit and now only the glue was overshadowing the mask. Was there ever a real Mae West? How much more glue could the new Mae West take?

As Mae entered the theater, the audiences gave her a standing ovation. They left their seats and jammed the aisles as the flacks slowly led Mae to Row J and surrounded her with key personnel. Mae at her movie. The clamor subsided, and "Myra Breckinridge" began.

"Myra" is a brilliant collage of old movies and new movie tricks. The screenplay follows Gore Vidal's novel, but the choice part of Myra isn't the story, but the interjection of dozens of old movie flashes — a homage to the Fox films of yesteryear. We see John Huston entertaining four old bitches beside a swimming pool and we're treated to a quick shot of Marilyn Monroe legging it out of a swimming pool — a fleeting moment from her last uncompleted film, and our attention (fortunately) is diverted from Huston. Mae's scenes, too, have the feeling of collage insertion. She has more to do than her film clip cronies, but there she is, along with Alice Faye and Shirley Temple and Laurel and Hardy and Marlene and Peter Lorre and Loretta Young and Claudette Colbert and Ronald Colman — and, sort of who the hell needs Raquel Welch and Rex Reed. Mae, incidentally, has been funnier in her older flicks. Wiser, too. But it's nice to have her back. I have a feeling she'll outlast Margo. She'll surely outlast "Myra Breckinridge."