



WHO'S CRAZY?

A film by Thomas White

1966 / Belgium / 73 min. / In English

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Synopsis:

Accompanied by a frenetic original soundtrack by the great **Ornette Coleman**, insane asylum inmates escape their confinement and hole up in a deserted Belgian farmhouse, where they cook large quantities of eggs and condemn one of their own in an impromptu court. The actors don't have much need for words when they can dance around, light things on fire, and drip hot wax on each other instead. Ornette Coleman and the other members of his trio – David Izenzon and Charles Moffett – recorded their score for *Who's Crazy?* in one go while the film was projected for them, and the result feels like a bizarre silent film with the greatest possible accompaniment. The soundtrack also features a young Marianne Faithfull singing what are probably her most experimental riffs – written for her especially by Ornette – as she asks, “Is God man? Is man God?” in an original track titled “Sadness.”

Who's Crazy? was long thought to be lost by jazz-on-film scholars and the Library of Congress. In early 2015, the only surviving copy of the film, a 35mm print struck for the film's debut at Cannes in 1966, was salvaged from director Thomas White's garage after sitting on a shelf there for decades. Ornette's soundtrack exists as a hard-to-find LP, but audiences have never before had the opportunity to see what Ornette saw when he composed it. The cast consists of actors from New York's experimental theater troupe, the Living Theatre, who also performed in Shirley Clarke's *The Connection*; and speaking of connections, Clarke would later direct the fantastic *Ornette: Made in America*. The 35mm print of *Who's Crazy?* was repaired by John Klacsmann, archivist at Anthology Film Archives.

Background on WHO'S CRAZY?:

Who's Crazy? is a joyful lark that brings together two great sets of improvisers: the incomparable Ornette Coleman with his trio and actors from The Living Theatre, the free-wheeling pioneers of improvisational avant-garde theater. The film has not been seen in over 50 years since it debuted at Cannes in 1966 and screened at the Cinémathèque Française (Henri Langlois was a fan.)

The Living Theatre crossed paths with White in Paris during a period of exile in which the theater's founders and directors, Julian Beck and Judith Malina, were in prison in the US owing to a scuffle with the IRS. Leaderless for the moment, the company was on its way to a free place to crash in a Belgium farmhouse. White and his original codirector Allan Zion (a partnership that did not last) went along, bringing their crew and a 30-page script which outlined a loose scenario: insane asylum inmates escape their confinement and occupy a Belgian farmhouse. From that simple premise, the actors proceed to dance, try on clothes, fry eggs, feed each other spaghetti, do weird breathing exercises and light things on fire. Their particular actions, obsessions and rituals gradually cohere to form an internal logic of glee and collectivity which invites us to ponder the question posed in the film's title.

Ornette Coleman came into the picture slightly later, after an early version of the film screened to mixed reviews at Locarno (one critic suggested that the film should be thrown into the nearest lake) and the co-directors had parted ways. Coleman, together with David Izenzon (bass) and Charles Moffett (drums), recorded their soundtrack over a couple of days while the film was projected for them, and the finished film uses this recording almost entirely throughout. The result, which prioritizes physical action, slapstick and visual gags over dialogue, feels like a beat-era silent film with prodigious free jazz accompaniment, or maybe vice-versa. *Who's Crazy?* was screened for Salvador Dalí in 1966 and his reaction was duly noted: "It's almost Dalí."

The film quickly fell into total obscurity. A London screening was cancelled because it "casts doubt upon the sanity of the police." A 1967 letter from Louis Brigante at the Filmmaker's Cooperative, an archive and distributor of avant-garde films in New York, suggests that the film would "do well in the college market" and considers pairing it with Shirley Clarke's *The Connection* as a double feature. It never happened, though, and the film disappeared.

Since then, White has shuttled a large cardboard box containing the only existing 35mm print of the film between apartments and houses; it most recently settled in for a long wait in his Connecticut garage. The film was considered lost by the United States Library of Congress and the few jazz-on-film experts who'd heard of it.

Last October, after Ornette Coleman's death, I tracked down the director and, with Anthology archivist John Klacsmann, retrieved the battered 35mm print, complete with burned-in French subtitles from its Cannes debut. The print had been used for

projection and as a result had areas of significant damage: scratches, tears, splices, and broken perforations. The print was repaired, cleaned and scanned with a liquid gate at 2K resolution. Laboratory work was completed at Colorlab in Rockville, Maryland in 2015.

- Vanessa McDonnell, Grand Motel Films

Press Quotes

“An anarchic rave with a wacky new-wave flavor.”

- J. Hoberman, *The New York Times*

“A cinematic thrill that deserves an honored place in the history books.”

- Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*

"It's almost Dali."

- Salvador Dali

Further reading:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/24/movies/whos-crazy-an-obscure-avant-garde-film-project-is-reborn.html>

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/a-lost-masterwork-is-found-thomas-whites-whos-crazy>

<http://www.newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town/movies/whos-crazy>

<http://www.grandmotelfilms.com/WhosCrazy.html>

CREDITS

Directed by THOMAS WHITE
Produced by THOMAS WHITE and ALLAN ZION

Starring actors from The Living Theatre Company:

Wimme Andre
Melvin Clay
Tom Edmonston
Carl Einhorn
Peter Glaze
Gene Gordon
Diane Gregory
Leroy House
Nona Howard
Steven Ben Israel
Gene Lipton
Michèle Mareck
Dorothy Shari
William Shari
Barry Shuck
Esther Silber
Marvin Silber
Luke Theodore
Steve Thompson
James Tiroff
Lester Waldman

Original soundtrack composed by Ornette Coleman and performed by The Ornette Coleman Trio with David Izenzon (bass) and Charles Moffett (drums).

“Sadness” written by Ornette Coleman, sung by Marianne Faithfull.

Additional singing by Nona Howard.

Additional music by Nino Ferrer.

Spanish guitar by Ramon Ybarra.

Director of Photography: Bernard Daillencourt

Camera operator: Michel Humeau

Editor: Denise de Casabianca

Sound Department: Jean-Pierre Mirouze, Jean-Pierre Turella and Jean-Pierre Goldenberg.

Assistant Director: Pierre Cottrell

Assistant Editor: Anne Dubot

Restoration Producers: Vanessa McDonnell & Aaron Schimberg, Grand Motel Films

Restoration Supervisor: John Klacsmann

Lab Services: Colorlab