

# Screen: A Castro Junket

## The Program

FIDEL, directed, written and produced by Saul Landau; photographed by Irving Sharaf; music by Cuban groups (including Carlos Puebla, las Estrellas Cubanas, and Josecito Fernandez); for release by New Yorker Films. At the Fifth Avenue Cinema at 12th Street. Running time: 96 minutes. (Not submitted at this time to the Motion Picture Association of America's Production Code and Rating Administration for rating as to audience suitability.)

## 'Fidel,' Shown on TV, at 5th Ave. Cinema

By VINCENT CANBY

Saul Landau's "Fidel," which opened yesterday at the Fifth Avenue Cinema, is the 96-minute version of the one-hour documentary that was originally presented here on Channel 13 in June, 1969. Having missed the television presentation, I can only report that the theatrical "Fidel" is all of that—theatrical—as well as funny and moving and very persuasive.

Here is Fidel Castro as he likes to see himself, junketing by jeep through Oriente Province, listening to farmers' direct and sometimes bitter complaints about lack of hospitals, transportation and roads, and then commenting afterwards: "When they have all those things, they want a cinema. . . ."

Mr. Landau made his film during a four-month stay in Cuba in late 1968, when he accompanied the revolutionary leader on a five-day trip through Oriente, which serves as a frame for the film that also manages to recap the history of the revolution, to visit political prisoners and to interview disenchanted Cubans en route to Miami.

None of these latter sequences seriously flaws the image of Mr. Castro, which, according to "Fidel," is that of a stern father figure, that of a kindly big brother figure, and that of a kid who's having one whale of a time in his immense and still mysterious backyard.

He talks about revolution and its impossibility without the support of the vast majority of the people, about history ("a by-product of deeds," although some men quite consciously "write" history), about underdevelopment as a psychological problem, as well as an eco-

nomical and technical problem, and about his own need for the kinds of contacts with the people the movie records.

As the film progresses through sequences in which Fidel participates in an impromptu baseball game (and gets struck out), talks to a pretty little revolutionary in hair curlers and reminisces about "the merciless world" in which he grew up, there emerges the suspicion that the strengths of the man may also be his weaknesses.

He spends at least 90 per cent of his time talking to the people, he tells the filmmakers, keeping in touch with their problems and having his

# FIDEL

is the first — and only — personal film profile of Cuba's leader. Director Saul Landau, the highly esteemed filmmaker, and his crew spent weeks travelling with Fidel throughout the Cuban countryside and living in intimate association with him.

What has emerged is a major document of our times, an extraordinary in-depth report on Fidel and the continuing revolution. Beautifully photographed in color, it shows Fidel among his people, listening, arguing, philosophizing, laughing, cajoling, reminiscing. Funny, tragic, always surprising, the film will amaze you with its breadth and candor.

FIDEL includes never-before-seen footage of the Bay of Pigs invasion and of Fidel and Che in the mountains during the revolution. There are frank interviews with political prisoners and a very moving section on Che, called "The Ballad of Che Guevara."

"A REAL REVOLUTIONARY who is still running a real revolution. The great quality of this remarkable film is that it is educational in the best possible sense. It gives you a feeling for what revolution — any revolution — is actually about, what it means in all its implications and how it affects the lives of the people. The task in making this film seems in retrospect to have been enormous and it is a tribute to the makers that they produced such an exciting and illuminating work. I found it completely absorbing from start to finish. A tapestry for history."

—Ralph J. Gleason, ROLLING STONE

# FIDEL

A STARTLING NEW FILM ON FIDEL AND CUBA TODAY

Directed by Saul Landau

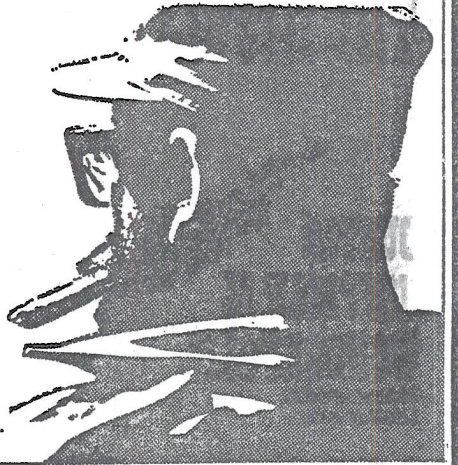
A New Yorker Films Release

plus

"Nixon's Checkers Speech"

A New Yorker Films Release

An historic document now available to the public. Nixon defends himself on TV against a newspaper story accusing him of unethically using special campaign funds.



## New York Premiere Today

5th AVENUE CINEMA

2:10, 4:20, 6:30, 8:40, 10:50

at 12th Street • WA 4-8339

aides take down notes that may be as specific as the need for a local midwife, or a new bus. All of which can't leave him much time for top-level administration, but top-level administration is never as much fun, and as ego-pleasing, as a real-life ball game.

"Fidel" is, in all technical aspects, first-rate, and though it was made three years ago, it is a remarkable document

of contemporary history. Also a remarkable document is "Nixon's Checkers Speech," a kinescope replay of the famous 1952 campaign speech, which accompanies "Fidel" on the Fifth Avenue Cinema program.

The quality of the kinescope recording is not always great, but time has worked one small, positive transformation: what once looked and sounded like low camp is now high, historical comedy.