

‘The Source Family’ Reveals a Communal Past

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 16, 2013 - 11:49pm

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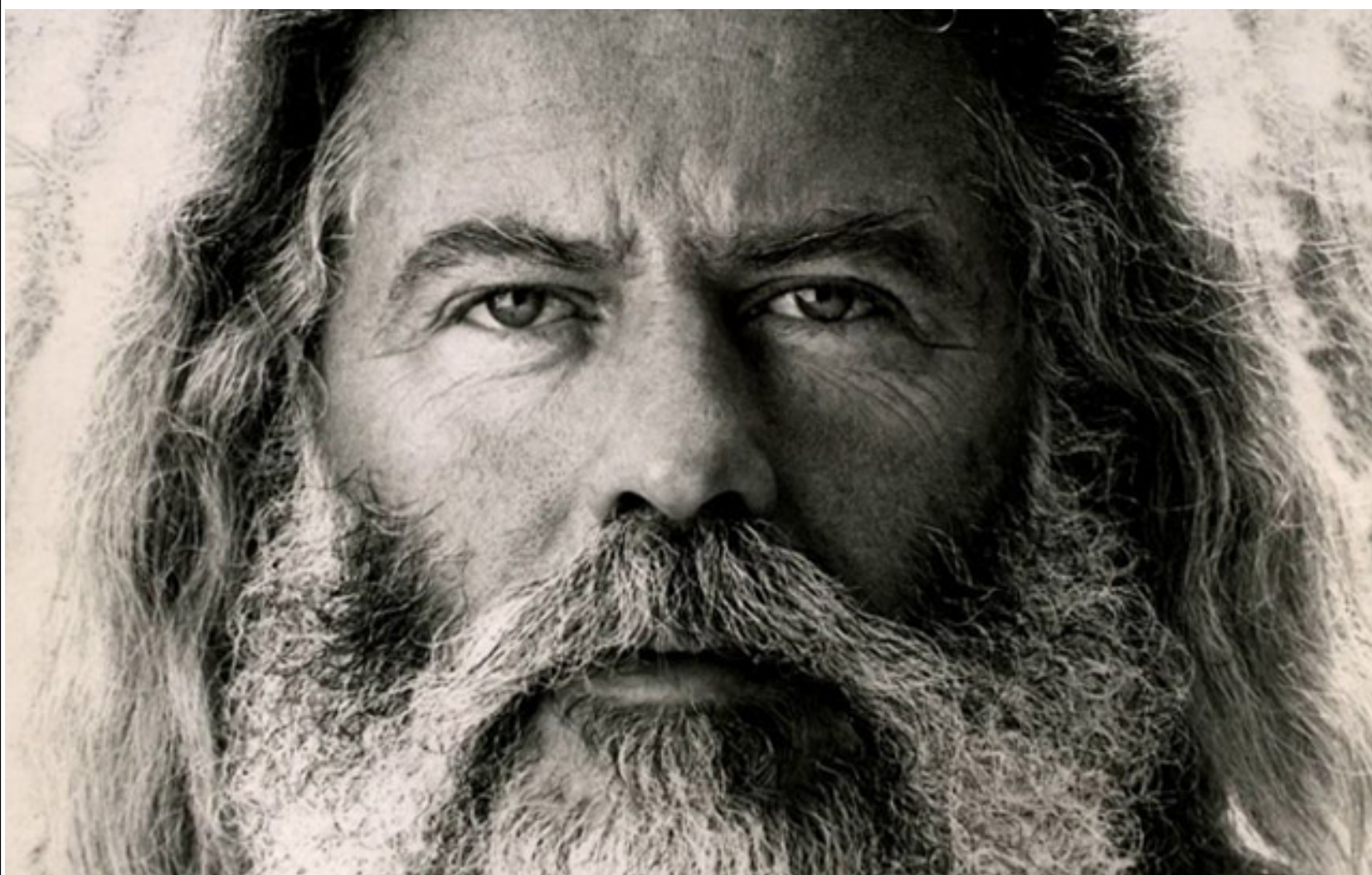


Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – What did you do during the 1970s, Daddy? After this Father’s Day, many adult kids might be asking that question after seeing “The Source Family.” This documentary is about a commune that began in California (naturally) in the 1970s, even after the infamous Manson Family.

The documentary, produced by Isis Aquarian – a former member of the “family,” – explores chronologically the development of the commune, which includes its charismatic leader Father Yod (AKA Jim Baker). It’s fascinating because it is so separated from our post techno society. People were searching for a different way of life post the revolution of the 1960s, and a wealthy restaurateur with a strange past was able to convince a large number of men and women to come into his realm. As in many situations, it’s ‘coveting thy neighbor’s wife’ that exposes the flaw in the utopia, but it does conclude in a fairly astounding way. Although fairly standard as a non-fiction narrative, it will interest anyone wanting to know more about those psychedelic days.

In the mid-1960s, Jim Baker emerges from a middle aged cocoon as a wealthy restaurant owner to tune in, turn on and drop out. He meets a 19 year-old flower child, and eschews his capitalist life to indulge in the Swingin’ 1960s. This leads to one of the first natural health food eateries in California, called “The Source,” which becomes a centerpiece for a new commune that is developing from the workers at the restaurant.



The Eyes of Yod: Jim Baker AKA Father Yod in ‘The Source Family’
Photo credit: Drag City

In 1970, Jim Baker renames himself Father Yod, and combines yoga, eastern mysticism and a hippie ethos in forming a new extended family. The live in a closed and communal society, and there are written commandments that supposedly will create a utopia. A move to Hawaii and the dissolution of monogamy – Father Yod at one point collects 13 wives – creates a rift in the collective and forces an ultimate changing of the guard.

What is intensely interesting, if not ever having heard of this crew, is that it was able to develop after the murder spree of the Charles Manson family. Los Angeles was on high alert after that 1969 crime, and although there is a bit of police harassment implied, the commune was presented as somewhat blissfully unaware of their influence or surroundings. The film record of the group (and record recording history) was comprehensive, and here well preserved.

Baker was an odd character. As a child in the 1930s, he was given the title “Strongest Kid in the Country” and was a judo expert in a pre-martial arts era. His mixed bag of careers included World War 2 soldier, bank robber, alleged murderer and restaurant owner. He had a family that he eventually abandoned, and dropped out of society at an age when most men were using sports cars for male menopause. His conversion to god-on-earth was accompanied by his physical strength, charisma, drug use, money and carnal appetites, which describes quite a number of false idols, but they’re usually movie stars.

Baker’s former followers are interviewed, and quite surprisingly most of them have positive things to say about the experience. The exceptions are the jilted lover and a couple who are regretful of their hippie past – but even they cannot imagine their lives without the experience, despite the assertion that they wouldn’t go through it again. The summation at the end (“where are they now?”) provides a mixed bag portrait of software millionaires and Hawaiian land owners, so they obviously learned a bit about Father Yod’s capitalist side.



Groovy: Communal Ritual Portrayed in 'The Source Family'
Photo credit: Drag City

The end of Zod...er Yod,...is quite spectacular in its execution, especially in the context of the overall history of the commune. Admittedly, he was a committed character to his belief in fulfilling the god role, but when he began to doubt it, he just took another step toward it. And in congress with this tale of the bad vibrations after the 1960s, it did evolve to an almost inevitable culmination.

In the time crunched, frenetic modern day, it’s easy to sit back and imagine a communal existence, with free love and surrendering of responsibilities. But as this documentary reminds us, the moon eventually escapes from the seventh house.

“The Source Family” continued its limited release in Chicago on June 14th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Written and directed by Maria Demopoulos and Jodie Willie. Not Rated.



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