



'California Suite' episodes range from funny to flop

"California Suite" (PG), written by the nimble Neil Simon and directed by Herbert Ross, is only semi-sweet. Taken from Simon's play, the movie consists of four episodes involving various couples staying at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

The first two episodes or playlets are excellent; they display some of Simon's sharpest writing and wittiest dialogue. The last two, dreadful attempts at farce and slapstick are flat, tacky and cheap.

Taking it from the top, we have Alan Alda and Jane Fonda as a divorced couple discussing the fate of their 17-year-old daughter who has run away from her mother in New York to be with her father in Los Angeles.

Fonda, in her third fine performance this year, is a bright, bitchy Newswatch editor. In contrast, Alda, her ex-husband and ex-New Yorker, is into jogging, casual clothes and laid-back living. She is trying to save her daughter from exposure to this Southern California Ziegfeld which she describes as "like Para Diso with a lobotomy."

ALDA IS A DEFT foil for Fonda's quick-witted, sharp-tongued character. Her facade is almost too stony hard for us to sympathize with, yet Fonda manages to reveal some of the beauty in that hardness by showing a concern for people and values. It's not an easy character to write or play, but the dialogue is Simon's most sparkling and perceptive. Certainly, it's a plea sent surprise to find him using his one-liners to make a multi-dimensional character.

The second episode deals with the professional and personal traumas of an English actress, Maggie Smith, and her bisexual, antique-dealer husband, Michael Caine.

They've come to L.A. because Smith has been nominated for an Academy Award. She's nervous, worried, concerned about her appearance. He looks after her and enjoys his minor-celebrity status. Their repartee is as crisp and witty as Alda and Fonda's but less searing. It's less critical of a lifestyle and more reflective view of their own particular accommodation.

Again, the casting is excellent. Smith and Caine team up marvelously and display a splendid rapport.

Walter Matthau and Elaine May have the misfortune of appearing in the tacky third episode wherein a wife discovers her husband bedded down with a hooker. Matthau waddles around, over acting and overwadding. May tags along.

IN THE FINAL episode (saving the worst for last), Richard Pryor, Gloria Gifford, Bill Cosby and Sheila Frazier are two quarreling couples who insist on vacationing together. Their vacation consists of a slapstick sequence of accidents to people and property. None of it is very funny.

Least funny of all is the presence of so many talented actors participating in a series of pratfalls that fall flat.



Walter Matthau finds himself in a surprising situation with Denise Galk in the modern bedroom farce "California Suite."

Glimpses

NEW RELEASES

BRASS TARGET (PG). Accident that killed General Patton was no accident, according to suspense film with George Kennedy and Sophia Loren.

CALIFORNIA SUITE (PG). Neil Simon's comedy of four episodes about guests at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Starry cast includes Jane Fonda and Walter Matthau.

FORCE 10 FROM NAVARONE (PG). High-powered thriller with Edward Fox and the late Robert Shaw on a team whose target is a vital bridge.

KING OF THE GYPSIES (R). Three generations of gypsy life in America are chronicled in film of best-selling novel. Sterling Hayden is the patriarch and Shelley Winters the queen.

LORD OF THE RINGS (PG). Hobbits and the creatures of Middle Earth are energetically recreated in Ralph Bakshi's animated version of J. R. Tolkien's classic fantasy.

MOMENT BY MOMENT (R). Contemporary love story of young man (John Travolta) and older woman (Lily Tomlin).

OLIVER'S STORY (PG). Spongy sequel to "Love Story" with Ryan O'Neal and some new playmates, Candice Bergen and Nicola Pignatelli.

SUPERMAN (PG). Christopher Reeve plays Big S, Marlon Brando his father and Gene Hackman the villain in this humorous fantasy.

WATERSHIP DOWN (PG). Animated adventures of a group of rabbits who leave their doomed warren to seek a safe home. Multi-leveled story of interest to adults and children.

THE WIZ (G). Lavish but lumbering version of the Broadway musical, presenting Diana Ross in an updated black "The Wizard of Oz."

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted
- PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
- R Restricted. Adults must accompany person under 18.
- X No one under 18 admitted.

Actors make play seaworthy

By HELEN ZUCKER

The Meadow Brook Theatre production of Herman Wouk's drama "The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial" is superb. Though Wouk's play founders in the wake of its own confusion, a very able crew of actors does more than keep it afloat. The cast, directed by Charles Nolte, does more than the script calls for: brilliant ensemble playing plugs up the holes in the script.

The actors lend the play a tautness and a clarity it lacks. Wouk's drama about a brilliant lawyer who saves his man by goading an aging commander into a courtroom breakdown and then sobs that he (the lawyer) "really respects all authority" does not hold water at bottom.

WORLD WAR II was the most monstrous war ever fought. It still boggles the mind, and books, plays and articles will continue to be written about it.

Nonetheless "The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial" with its pat answers to highly complex questions, its demands by the lawyer-hero (who has just "killed" Captain Queeg in a devastating courtroom performance) that we must reverse the Queegs of this world, that we should blindly obey madmen if they are out there saving us, making the viewer blind.

Peter Galman turns in a sharp, quietly stunning performance as Lt. Barney Greenwald, the skillful, probing lawyer who proves beyond a doubt that Queeg is a "paranoid personality," a commander who is easily riled, prone to petty passions, contradictory.

Step by step, Galman strips Queeg of his outwardly calm appearance. In Galman's hands, the commander of the Caine is reduced to a man impossible to live with, a man who is not to be trusted in a shipboard emergency. He effectively destroys Queeg and then goes off to drown his sorrows.

The shallow novelist, Lt. Thomas Keefe, jauntily played by Peter McRobbie, seems the worst villain of all by the time the play ends. Novelists (ideally) should write responsible books—not use everything as wisecrack material.

Michel Cullen as Lt. Stephen Maryk, who takes matters into his own hands and then stands accused of mutiny, turns in a lively performance.

He is the real hero of the play: a simple man who knows about boats, weather, and what to do with a ship in a typhoon, and who has the ability to take over in a crisis.

CULLEN CREATES a Lt. Maryk who does not deserve 15 years in the brig; he's no mutineer; he's a true-blue sailor, doing his job well. Greenwald's contempt for Maryk and the strange trial he finds himself involved in is unjustified. Maryk deserves saving.

Booth Colman turns in an engaging performance as Lt. Comdr. Phillip Francis Queeg. He comes on as an affable, old sea dog. Colman gives us a Queeg who is very different from the frazzled, weary, jumpy Queeg that Humphrey Bogart gave us in the movie version.

Colman comes on as downright lovable, a comfortable, aging, sweetie-pie of an officer as he first strolls onstage.



Richard Jamieson (from left), Peter Galman and Booth Colman have important roles in Meadow Brook Theatre's "The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial."

Review

GRADUALLY, as Greenwald works him over, the petty tyrant, the unstable officer who has made the Navy his life, and who has been on too many missions, emerges. Goaded into the rage that destroys him, Colman turns red in the face and screams: "I did not make a single mistake in 25 months aboard the Caine!"

We have heard much evidence to prove otherwise and know that Queeg has sunk himself with this remark. It's the high point of the play. Colman makes little use of the silver balls Bogart played with continually.

He turns in a novel performance. Somehow we wish him well while waiting to be as far from his ship as possible.

Curtis J. Armstrong is very good as the 19-year-old Signalman Third Class Junius Urban. His nervous "Sir?" at each question brought a welcome breath of laughter.

Richard Jamieson is very Scottish, very competent as Lt. Com. John Callaghan. He's Mr. Protocol with brains—and something more. He has the wit to appreciate his Jewish classmate, Lt. Greenwald, and to give him a chance to win in court.

FOR A NAVY MAN in 1945, this took guts as well as brains. Charles Nolte is imposing as Capt. Randolph Southard. His authoritative (if languid) testimony re ships and weather would have convinced anyone less sharp than Greenwald.

J. L. Dahlmann is fine as Dr. Forrest

Lundeen, the navy shrink who gives Queeg a clean bill of health, and who placidly believes that his opinions are the commandments of God.

Daniel Buchen is wonderful as Dr. Bird, a psychiatrist with an outrageous ego. He gets himself embroiled with the members of the court, who can't wait to get rid of him.

Wade Kelley is a competent, if silent, stenographer. Robert Herrie is a bored orderly. And Jack Prokop, Ronald S. Merkin, Donald W. Dailey and Robert

La Pratt are fine as members of the court.

The set design by Douglas Wright was excellent. And lighting by Rich Henson was especially good. Charles Nolte directed with intelligence, taste and skill. I have only one complaint: The pacing could be a bit quicker.

"The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial" runs through Jan. 28. For tickets call 377-3300. Meadow Brook Theatre is located in Wilson Hall on the campus of Oakland University near Rochester.

Herbie Mann plays Earle

Herbie Mann will return to Ann Arbor's The Earle on Monday, Jan. 15. There will be two performances, at 7:30 and 10:30 p.m.

Flutist, composer and band leader, Mann has done it all. A jazz musician for more than 20 years, Mann began his career as a saxophonist, but quickly moved over to the flute, causing its ascent from miscellaneous instrument to lead status as a soloing instrument in the jazz world.

In 1959 he led his first band, a Latin influenced Afro-Cuban sextet, and has since incorporated Brazilian, Middle Eastern and, most recently, reggae and salsa elements into his work.

His newest venture, The Family of Mann, has toured not only this continent but Europe and Africa, as well, gathering an international following in the wake.

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