

the arts

Halifax enters the breach with Seige

by Ronald Foley Macdonald

Most people are probably not aware that there are at least two independent film makers in Halifax. One of them, **Salter Street Productions** has completed two features, "South Pacific 1942" and "Seige". The former is available on the "Star Channel" and the latter recently premiered at the **Paramount Theatre** for a special limited run. Both films await Canadian distribution deals, and "Seige" will likely hit the screens in 1984.

"Seige" has been attracting attention, most just for its existence. Recently both Halifax and Toronto dailies reported that the film has broken even (a miracle in itself for the trash-prone tax incentive program that plagues, or peopels, if you prefer, the Canadian feature film industry), but there were few comments on the actual film.

Some of this reticence can be attributed to the desire not to ruffle feathers. After all, whether Salter Street turns out gems or junk, they mean work for the locals. And highly skilled work it is too, as these are no Hollywood carpetbaggers come to shoot "Johnny Belinda." These guys are not working for tourists.

So is their widget any better than the regular brand? You bet it is. "Seige" is a taut, intelligent thriller (the kind the Americans used to turn out in better days before they discovered technol-

ogy) with a steely, Hemingwayesque struggle suggested by supple cinematography. The tension builds and ebbs like those wonderful old 'B' classics turned out in the fifties. Mind you, the dialogue is sometimes a bit lacking, but who listens to words any more (as all my musical friends say nowadays).

"Seige" is an action film, and makes no pretensions about

being anything else. And action is what you get, skillfully edited and beautifully shot (kudos to Les Krizan, director of photography).

There is some convincing violence, though used sparingly. The surprising thing is how well the script and scenario hold together, not like David Cronenberg's explosion at the jellygoop factory productions with big stars like Deborah Harry to blame

when the premise falls apart.

The actors are all eminently believable, even the ones you see hanging around the street-corner. Furthermore, director Michael Donovan has achieved a kind of distancing with the characters; you don't really like or dislike any of them, therefore you don't identify with them and, thus keep an objective position as an observer.

No wonder the film has done well in Europe (how do you think they justify all those Godard and Antonioni movies?). Sure, the good guys are identifiable from the bad guys, but there's no overriding morality, except that of survival (which, of course, could be taken as a metaphor for the feature film business in the Maritimes).

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The Hot l Baltimore: Life in the rubble

by Chris Morash

THE HOT L BALTIMORE is a play in shatters. About decay. A play in pieces. Even its title is missing a letter. And yet it oozes with an undeniable sense of reality. It is slightly unnerving.

Playwright Lanford Wilson paints an eclectically shifting group portrait of cynical hookers, pensioners, health-food junkies and bitter desk clerks against the rot-ridden background of the fading Hotel Baltimore. His characters argue, fight, steal, and laugh as they squander their lives in the lobby of the once elegant hotel. Yet, none of their cares and passions ever distill into any sort of unified plot. Instead, we are left with an impressionistic image of chaos and decay.

Unfortunately, director Rob Vandekieft has allowed this confused profusion of characters to

over-run the current production of *THE HOT L BALTIMORE* being staged by the Theatre Arts Guild. Vandekieft seems to have overlooked the importance of the character of Paul Granger III, played by an uninspired Darrell Burke. Paul Granger finds himself, somewhat like Alice in Wonderland, in the insanity of the Hotel Baltimore, looking for a trace of his lost grandfather. In his symbolic search for his past he is initially met with indifference and hostility; then, when he finally finds some sympathy from one of the hotel prostitutes, he decides to give up his quest.

However, under Vandekieft's direction, the character of Granger simply sinks into the morass of madness that should have served to highlight his attempt to reconcile past and present. Instead of the visitor, he

becomes a part of the zoo. Consequently, the true struggle at the centre of the play—that of trying to regain the vitality of a glorious past in a stagnant present—is lost, and we are left with lots of anger, but no true conflict.

This lack of focus in the play has an unfortunate effect on the rest of the actors. Despite some fine character work, most notably from Angela Jellet as April Green, Sarah MacVicar's Jackie and Hugh Corston as Jamie, many of the performers succumb to histrionics at the expense of good acting. On more than one occasion, angry outbursts erupt from nowhere, with no discernable rhyme or reason. Because he has lost sight of the play's intent, Vandekieft plays every little moment for all it is worth, leaving the audience to sort through

this mass of random emotional outpourings, and the play suffers as a consequence.

David Parsons' set does not help matters, either. It is sad to see an unimaginative box set in a play such as *THE HOT L BALTIMORE*, which simply cries out for a creative, interpretive design. Instead of speaking to us of faded glories, Parsons' set just sits there and looks faded. Ho-hum.

Ultimately, however, we are left with a despairing slice of life; we meet characters struggling in a frustrating present, caught between a lost golden age and a dismal future. In all fairness, director Vandekieft deserves a "C" for Courage for making a worthwhile attempt at a challenging script. Should you wish to check in at *THE HOT L BALTIMORE*, it runs at the Pond Playhouse on Oct. 6, 7, 8, 13 and 15.

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