

Salesman is honest and should be seller

By LLOYD CHESLEY

In their new documentary Salesman, the Maysles brothers force on us no "great themes" and this brings the film to a level of real life making it one of the most successful of documentaries.

The British seemed to be the only ones to like documentaries. In the States only Robert Flaherty had any real success, and even he had to eventually go to England for support. But in the last couple of years documentary has become not only popular, but a cornerstone of the industry. Non-documentaries are using a documentary technique, as Z does.

Hollywood did this in the forties to some success, but only today, when the documentary is becoming well understood, has this integration of the style been really successful.

The really great break-through for documentary came with the work of Canada's Allan King — first Warrendale and then this year A Married Couple. But Salesman is far more successful than even King's latter triumph.

The Maysles brothers are partners in film-making, together

sharing the tasks of direction and technical production. For Salesman they were aided in the editing by Charlotte Zwerin, and God knows that in documentary, where you have to shoot off an incredible amount of film compared to what will be in the finished product, it is the editing that is the bastard job of the project.

In the film the brothers follow four Bible salesmen on their rounds about different cities in the country. We get to know these four men and we get to know the people they try to sell to. This is a simple statement of a considerable achievement, for the subjects are not actors but human beings, and unlike Billy and Antoinette Edwards of A Married Couple, they are not able to put on for the camera.

They are nervous because of the presence of the camera and they hide things. But as we go along they get used to the camera. The brothers become their friends and they speak to them, and indirectly the camera, like friends.

There is no heavy hammering in this film. Audiences are sure to

enter expecting a real-life Willy Loman, but that play was totally symbolic, as this film proves.

Loman's great desires were to get the success of finance and power, and to be well-liked. These salesmen are not lonely men. They are married (and happily so: they don't cheat while away) and they are four good friends who try to help and console each other. They aren't out to beat J. Paul Getty.

Success is a dream, not an obsession. They are not unhappy in their lives. The point of the film seems to be that in a race of individuals, what seems like horror to some (as selling seemed to be to Arthur Miller) may be good to others, as it is to these men.

The one exception in the group of four is the one called The Badger. He has lost his touch. It becomes a tragedy not of a man with the wrong dream, but of a man close to achieving his dream who suddenly loses his practical ability to do so.

This is the basic statement of the movie. Along with it comes a look at the United States that is

terrifying and sad.

These men sell Bibles. It is an old trick of door to door book companies to hit the poorest areas of a city, because they know that the poor crave success and can be convinced that their product is the key to it easier than the rich.

These people, ashamed because they can't afford the book, but broke if they buy it, are the real America, beyond the middle class, beyond the intellectual. The total poverty of their situation is beautifully delineated.

At one point the Badger tries to sell a book to a man he finds out is a door to door salesman for vacuum cleaners. Unable to make the sale, The Badger complains about a dud vacuum cleaner his wife once bought. Two salesmen ensnared in their own web.

The camera is not a hidden instrument. It shows up in mirrors and reflections to let us know that it is there: that this is a situation of a camera intruding into the real truth, not pretending that "it is hidden, when it could not possibly

be, as King did in A Married Couple. The Maysles let their exposures fall off and let the camera jiggle about so that we are not made fools of.

The film is two-levelled. On the one hand a very humanist statement, not entirely either positive or negative, but a compromise of these extremes, just as life is. On another level it is a sad look at a tragic, self-destructive society, with The Badger the centre of all our negative thoughts.

You feel very uneasy leaving this film. The honesty of presentation lets you right in on the lives of strangers to a point where you take from them without giving back.

Perhaps the last shot, with The Badger staring hopelessly lost out of the door of his hotel room is the opportunity the film is giving for the audience to give something back to these men. Of course we cannot do anything personally for them, but we can do something for the society they are trapped in, by returning to it the type of honesty expressed in Salesman.

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friday: shadow of a doubt
north by northwest

saturday: foreign correspondent
to catch a thief

sunday: psycho
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BURTON AUDITORIUM 8:30

Front Page is really fun — too bad it's at the O'Keefe

The O'Keefe Centre is playing host to a U.S. classic with its usual inability to do anything but damage to a play.

As we all probably know by now, The Front Page was written by newspaperman Ben Hecht and his partner Charles MacArthur, husband of Helen Hayes. It hit Broadway in 1928 and was a smash, both as a comedy and as a melodrama which is to its credit in combining the two elements. The movies took it fast, and 10 years later ace U.S. director Howard Hawks re-adapted it into one of his all-time best comedies.

As far as the original script goes, Hawks was wrong when he called it the finest modern dialogue ever written. Today, tempered by Kaufman and Hart, Niel Simon, et

al, we are used to more punch lines per capita and even the fast pace of the production cannot hide this failing.

The play concerns one ace reporter, Hildy Johnson, who decides to quit his paper right at the point when a corrupt administration is about to execute an insane man so it can win an upcoming election.

Out to stop Hildy is Walter Burns, his editor and a sour mixture of Richard III and Mephistopholes. As things predictably turn out, Burns wrecks the administration and gets his boy back, not for goodness and mercy, of course, but for a scoop.

The fun these newsboys have is well-communicated in the script, as it should be having been written by an ex-newsman, and the cast picks it up. They show the proper amount of disinterest in the circumstances of the facts of their articles and the proper amount of excitement in the gaining and exposing of these facts. They are all basically rotten, says the play, but if you're rotten enough you can be a beloved rogue like Hildy or Walter.

Things get sufficiently nutty to keep up interest, as when Walter sends a guy out to get some help to carry a desk and the guy brings back two Boy Scouts, but it stands as being just too slow.

In directing, Harold J. Kennedy has tried to keep things moving, but the basis just isn't there. The period up to Burns' entrance in the middle of the second act is particularly slow, but he helps to carry the play to its close.

No small portion of this fact is due to the presence of Ray Milland as Burns.

Milland is a charmer in films and always has been. He brings this charm to the evil of Burns, adds a touch of real stage professionalism, and does a fine job. The rest of the cast ranges from adequate, which is where I would rate the supporting

newsmen and the Sheriff, to poor like the mayor, Hildy's girl and unfortunately Hildy himself.

DeVeren Bookwalter has a style that is as dated as the play ought to be (one of the good points in the play is that it is still contemporary, right down to its portrait of Chicago as a corrupt, gun-toting town). Big gestures and a brassy voice put him in the era of Burbage, and not in the style of naturalism that Milland carries so well.

Of note in the supporting cast are good performances by Peter Adams as Bensinger, an effeminate reporter for the Tribune who would be happier writing poetry, and Elizabeth Kerr as Hildy's future mother-in-law, an actress you're sure to recognize with delight.

But the real failure of The Front Page is the theatre it has to play in. The O'Keefe Centre is about the most idiotic construction ever perpetrated on the theatre-going public.

It is so huge that the actors are lost on stage. Worse than this, the high ceilings and sprawled crowd destroy the intimacy that is the cornerstone and final advantage of the theatre.

Laughter and a warmth of feeling for the characters dissipate almost as soon as they leave a person so there can be no communication amongst the audience and the actors have to force themselves to try to communicate. But they have to fail for no one's strength could every be up to the fantastic distances they must conquer.

The theatre is an evil influence on the play, destroying the intimacy it needs to succeed. And it is a nice little play, well-intended and somewhat more than perfunctorily executed. It is a nice opportunity to see a major work of the U.S. theatre, and a nice chance to act as hosts to Ray Milland, an actor we must always enjoy. — L.C.

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