

Without malice

"Absence of Malice"
Sally Fields, Paul Newman
Valley River Twin Cinema

The fatherly city editor leans over the female reporter. "I know how to print the truth," he says, "and I know how not to hurt people. I just don't know how to do both at the same time."

That's what "Absence of Malice" is all about. Sally Fields is Megan Carter, the spunky reporter. Paul Newman is Michael Gallagher, an innocent liquor wholesaler. Carter, acting on information leaked by the FBI, writes the truth — that Gallagher is under investigation in the mysterious disappearance of a local union leader. Gallagher is the one hurt, of course, and he spends the rest of the film getting even with everyone involved.

The central idea is that a newspaper can legally print almost anything it wants, true or not, as long as it can prove that it did so without malice. Writer Kurt Luedtke uses this legal point to look at the damage publicity can do to an individual, and the individual's right to privacy versus the public's right to know.

While not a new concept ("Five-Star Final" did the same thing in 1931), the story is well-written, although it gets a little syrupy with all the "heartless reporter who doesn't consider her

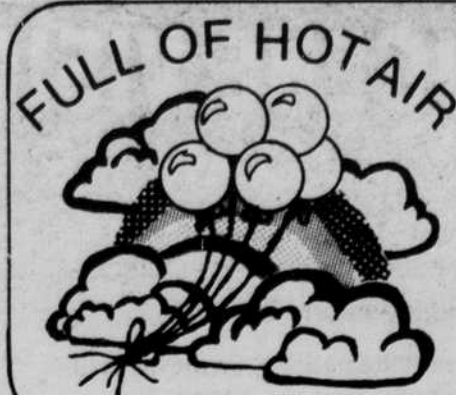
story's consequences" stuff. Director Sydney Pollack ("Electric Horseman," "The Way We Were") puts the story onto celluloid nicely, and the result is a well-made, enjoyable film that almost hits the bull's eye.

Newman and Fields are good. Sure, Fields looks a little sweet to be a hard-nosed reporter, and Newman looks a little hard-nosed to be a sweetie, but they try. The best acting of the film, however, is seen in the minor roles. Bob Balaban (one of the government good guys of "Close Encounters") is impressively convincing as Elliott Rosen, an overzealous FBI honcho who's out to get his man no matter how many laws he breaks in the process. Wilford Brimley is superb as the countrified government investigator who finally gets to the bottom of the mess, with lots of hysterical down-to-earth witticisms and threats of grand jury "subpoenas."

The film does have its share of problems, however. It gets bogged down with a lot of searching questions about "truth versus accuracy," when what they're really talking about is printing truth versus printing what's right.

But aside from that and a few other minor grievances, "Absence of Malice" is a good film. While not a brilliant exposition on First Amendment law, it is a nice little story set in the world of newspapers, and is worth seeing if only for Brimley's performance.

by matt meyer



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Calendar

Christmas Break

MOVIES

Bijou Theatre:
"I Sent A Letter To My Love" Dec. 14 — 16, at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. \$2.50.
"Dark Star" Dec. 16 — 20 at midnight, and 1 p.m. Sunday. Prices vary.
"Beauty and the Beast" and "Orpheus" Dec. 17 — 21 at 5:30, 7:15, and 9 p.m. Sunday matinee at 3:30 p.m. \$2.50.
"The Magic Flute" Dec. 22 — 30 at 6:30 and 9 p.m. (No shows on Christmas or Christmas eve.) \$2.50.
"The Wizard of Oz" Dec. 22 — 30 at 1 and 3 p.m. \$2.50.
"The Wizard of Oz" and "The Magic Flute" (double feature) Dec. 31 — Jan. 6 at 7 and 9 p.m.
"The Rocky Horror Picture Show" Dec. 31 — Jan. 2 at midnight. Prices vary.
"I Love You, Alice B. Toklas" Jan. 6 at midnight. 96 cents.
Cinema 7:
"Heart to Heart" and "Best Boy" Dec. 14 — 16 at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. \$3.

"Limelight" and "A Star Is Born" Dec. 17 — 23 at 7:30 and 9:50 p.m. Sunday matinee at 2 and 4:20 p.m. \$3.

THEATRE

"You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown" ORT Dec. 14 — 28 at 8 p.m. Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. \$3.50 — \$7.
"Oliver" North Eugene High School Dec. 17 — 19. Students \$1.75, adults \$2.50, children \$1.25.
"An Evening With Thomas Condon" Springfield Historical Museum Dec. 20 at 3 p.m. Free.
"Wind Sail Saga" WOW Hall Dec. 19 at 2 p.m.

MUSIC

WOW Hall:
The Cyclones Dec. 18 at 9 p.m. \$2.50.
Winter Solstice Celebration with Just Friends and Crystal Flame Dec. 19 at 8 p.m. Cover charge.
ORT:

"An Evening of Rodgers and Hart" Dec. 15 at 8 p.m. \$6.
Arzina Richardson Quartet Dec. 18 at midnight. \$3.50.
Larry Natwick Trio with Kathy Mezzer Dec. 19 at midnight. \$3.50.

DANCE

"A Solo Evening of Dance with Richard Haisma" Jan. 2 at 8 p.m. at Dance Works. \$3.

MISCELLANEOUS

Lightscares, a collection of holograms Dec. 14 — Jan. 3 in the Centre Court Bldg on the Eugene Mall. \$2.
Old Oregon Christmas Fair Dec. 14 — 24 at the Lane County Fairgrounds. Free.
Saturday Market open daily Dec. 19 — 23.
"Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico" planetary show at WISTEC, weekends at 3 p.m. and Dec. 17 at 8 p.m. Free with regular WISTEC admission.

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5. Pineapple Sweet and Sour Chicken • \$3.00
6. Three Shreds with Bean Sprouts • \$2.65
Shredded Pork, Bamboo, Black Wood Ear and Bean Sprouts
7. Fried Mushrooms • \$2.10
8. Sweet and Sour Fish • \$2.50
9. Curry Beef • \$2.80
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