

CINEMA

A small-scope look at a 'Bountiful' time



Screenwriter Horton Foote is the Midwestern legacy to the American cinema. After his Oscar-winning script "Tender Mercies," Foote embarked on a campaign to resurrect nostalgia with two films he wrote and co-produced — "1918" and the current "The Trip To Bountiful," currently showing at the Bijou Theatre.

"Bountiful" is most known for Geraldine Page's Oscar-winning performance, a character study of a country woman living in the city with her son Ludie (John Heard) and daughter-in-law Jessie Mae (Calvin Glyn). The key conflict in the film is between Page's Mother Watts and daughter Jessie Mae, a character reminiscent in some ways of Carol Burnett's TV character Eunice. Mae dislikes Mother singing hymns as she does the housework, and suspects Mother of hiding her pension checks so she can try to run away again.

Mother Watts, however, needs to leave the stifling city and get back to Bountiful, her hometown. Thus she tries it again, but this time she actually gets away from Ludie and Jessie and makes it to the bus station, where she meets Thelma (Rebecca De Mornay), a young woman who takes to Miss Watts and spends the hours riding the bus listening to her reminisce.

"The Trip To Bountiful" is a small film. It's scope is small,

it's cast centered on four characters and the conflicts surmountable. More than anything else it is a pleasant, easygoing character study with a tone and a pace harkening back to an easier time.

Set in the crux period between the move from the country to the city, Mother Watts yearns for the country while Jessie Mae loves town life. And poor Ludie is caught in the middle, forced into the city by economics, trying to hold the family together through the bickering, understanding both Mother and Jessie Mae and not knowing how to reconcile their differences.

As we might expect, the film is hopeful and positive, finding the value of the country while understanding the necessity and potential of the city. Masterson and Foote prove the goodness of every character and ultimately find America the land of promise and the family a source of inspiration.

This is Americana, well done, beautifully shot, marvelously acted. If the conflicts never seem earth-shattering, well, why should they? Foote never claimed to save the world with this film.

"The Trip To Bountiful" is pleasurable, a leisurely-paced bit of nostalgia that should please those looking for America circa 1940. Foote has captured the most romantic look at middle-class heartland seen in quite a time.

By Sean Axmaker

Remember them?



Photo courtesy Regal Productions

The Smothers Brothers comedy team will be appearing at the Hult Center this weekend, and Tom Smothers is concerned that the present college generation doesn't know who they are. Gone are the days of the late 1960s when a majority of the families in America would gather around the tube to catch Tommy strumming his guitar and Dickie plucking his stand-up bass on their weekly CBS-TV show, bantering good-naturedly in between folk songs.

"The seventies lost us," Tom said in a telephone interview. "The twenty to twenty-two-year-olds don't know who we are. Back in the sixties, we were the Robin Williams of today—I guess we should have done more Sesame Street... or something."

The Smothers Brothers began working as musicians and stand-up comedians in 1959. They were on television in different formats from 1965 until the early 1970s, and were most widely known for "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour."

The "Comedy Hour" produced political satire which led to increasing headaches for the management of CBS, which found itself in constant censorship battles with the brothers.

CBS abruptly canceled the show in 1969. The Smothers Brothers sued and eventually won a \$916,000 settlement, but never again attained the limelight they once had enjoyed, even though ABC and NBC each gave the pair brief flings in succeeding years.

The brothers' act split up in 1976, but got back together in 1980. Television offers come about every five years, Tom said and presently, the brothers are considering an offer from Universal Studios for a TV sit-com. But they're waiting for the right offer.

"There comes a point in life where if you don't do it right, you aren't invited back to the dance. We're hoping a good ship and crew will come together," Tom said.

The Smothers are hoping a good road tour and a hit record will lead to another television variety show. But first, Tom said, the team has to be rediscovered again.

When the Hult Center audience discovers the Smothers Brothers this weekend, the political satire that used to throw the 1960s college crowd rolling in the aisles will have evolved. Their time spent separately matured them, Tom said, and politicians and politics are not the base for their humor anymore.

"If we satirize anything, it will be economics and fundamental religions," Tom said. "We

don't do much political satire anymore — not because of pressure, but because of choice. Politicians are all clowns and it's hard to ridicule them."

What the audience will see is the emotional relationship between the two brothers comically at odds, amiably arguing amidst "the best of all kinds of music"—folk (Gilbert and Sullivan, 14th-century madrigal and spiritual." Tom said. "Our show is 30 percent music and 70 percent comedy. We rarely finish a song."

One of the difficulties the Smothers Brothers have encountered with the revival of their brand of humor is the change in music styles in the last ten years from folk songs to more emphasis on rock 'n' roll. Their act doesn't fit into the rock 'n' roll scene because, Tom said, he couldn't imagine stopping in the middle of a rock song to proclaim, "Mom liked you best," one of the team's most famous lines.

Tom typified the Smothers Brothers as an older, unique form of comedy based in music, differing from the traditional stand-up comedians like the currently popular Jay Leno. "He's a funny guy because he says funny things. Dickie and I say things funny," Tom said. "We're one of the last breed."

Tom has also added a yo-yo song, complete with yo-yo tricks, as a centerpiece to the act. After talking with the comedian, it was obvious that the yo-yo is not just another gimmick adopted to add variety to the show. — Tom Smothers is serious about the sport. Along with the acquisition of custom-built yo-yos, Tom has been taught tricks by yo-yo expert Tom Kuhn.

But more impressive are the philosophies built on yo-yo experience, that reflect a sometimes rough 27 years in the entertainment business.

"Yo-yos are a lot like life — you don't always make every trick. And if you try to get too tricky, you'll get hung up and get into trouble," Tom said.

The Smothers Brothers will appear with their longtime associate, guitarist and Oakridge resident Mason Williams in the Hult Center's Silva Concert Hall at 7 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$12 and \$14 and are available at the EMU Main Desk, the Hult Center box office and all Hult Center ticket outlets.

By Linda Hahn

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