



left, Fern Bedaux, Charles E. Bedaux, the Duchess and Duke of Windsor in *THE CHAMPAGNE SAFARI*: the rise and fall of Charles Bedaux, industrial messiah, amateur explorer and arguably one of the most controversial figures of the twentieth century; right, Daniel MacIvor in *HOUSE*: a journey through the mind of a mentally unstable person

painfully cut off by Emile's confused reaction. Here the characters come vividly, spontaneously to life.

Throughout *L'enfant d'eau*, Marie-France Monette has a firm grip on her character, the type of prematurely bitter young girl who has regularly appeared in Quebec films from *Les bons débarras* to *Le sexe*

des étoiles. As the child-like Emile, David La Haye has touching moments, but his precious body language and obvious reddish-blond dye job tend to make him seem like an eco-tourist who got addled by yoga and ganja in Negril. Gilbert Sicotte's performance as the guilt-ridden and anxious Thomas gives the movie an emotional

anchor.

Filmed by Michel Caron, *L'enfant d'eau* is postcard pretty. However, Ménard and Wojas have turned out a movie that is sanitized and sentimental. Every scene has more or less the same emphasis. The film quickly flattens out as the plot points click on and off with systematic regularity.

by Karen
Tisch

THE CHAMPAGNE SAFARI

directed and produced by George Ungar; written by Steve Lucas, John Kramer and Harold Crooks; production company: Field Seven Films; distributed by the National Film Board of Canada In June of 1934, a fabulously wealthy Frenchman attempts to cross the uncharted Rocky Mountains with a team of 53 hired Canadian cowboys, seven Citroën half tracks, a film crew led by prominent Hollywood cinematographer Floyd Crosby, and 130 pack horses loaded with such "essential" items as crystal glasses, sterling silverware, caviar and pâté. By September, the failing Citroëns have been tossed over a cliff, the horses have succumbed to hoof rot, and the project is abandoned. Forty years later, Montreal-based animator George Ungar, flipping through a 1956 issue of

Maclean's, happens upon a small item describing the exhibition, coined "the champagne safari." His first instinct is to produce an animated satire featuring a Mr. Magoo-like character traipsing across the mountains in silk pyjamas. On further exploration, Ungar realizes that he has unearthed a tale of epic proportions.

The Champagne Safari documents the rise and fall of Charles E. Bedaux, industrial messiah, amateur explorer and arguably one of the most colourful and controversial figures in the 20th Century. *Time* magazine once wrote: "if a movie was ever made of Bedaux's life, they would have to tone down the facts to keep it within the realm of believability." Wading through the innumerable theories and controversies that surround Bedaux's enigmatic existence, Ungar spent over a decade distilling a cohesive and compelling story and bringing that story to the screen.

The Champagne Safari is a brilliantly researched and masterfully constructed film. At its core it is a film within a film, containing original safari footage salvaged from a basement of a country home on the outskirts of

Paris. Using the expedition as a cinematic thread, Ungar blends contemporary and archival film, interviews, still photography, voice-over and sound to weave a tale of intense victory and searing defeat. Bloating with self-importance, Bedaux fills the screen and his story (in the hands of an expert writing and editorial team) unfolds like a good thriller.

Born in France, Bedaux immigrated to the United States at the age of 19, where he quickly rose to international fame by selling efficiency or "scientific management" systems. The Bedaux System offered industrialists a shop floor "utopia" not unlike "the vast industrial prison" depicted in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Protested by workers, Bedaux's prescriptions gained rapid favour among multi-national corporations such as G.E., Kodak and Dupont. By the early 1930s, he had sold his methods to 600 clients in 18 countries. He had also positioned himself at the centre of Western economic and social life, attracting aristocrats, statesmen and high-powered businessmen to his "playground for the rich," a refurbished château in the Loire Valley, France.

With the rise of fascism in the 1930s, Bedaux was faced with what Ungar describes as "a conflict between morality and ambition." After media attacks of his sponsorship of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's tour of Nazi Germany, he was forced to resign from his American company. Soon he forged dubious alliances with fascist regimes in Europe, most notably with the military dictatorship in Greece who magnanimously agreed to adopt his new economic world order—"equivalism." With the onset of WWII, Bedaux refocused his energies on convincing the Nazi and Vichy governments to support an outrageous scheme to build a trans-Sahara pipeline, designed to pump peanut oil from Africa to France. At the same time, he reaffirmed his ties to the U.S., offering the American government the use of his castle as a temporary embassy. In a witty voice over, Ungar exploits the ironies of Bedaux's conflicting relations to full effect.

Bedaux was a gambler and an "internationalist" who refused to be daunted by changing political regimes. With the 1941 entrance of the Americans into WWII, Bedaux took a final entrepreneurial risk, he rejected America's offer of repatriation in favour of pursuing his pipeline venture in Algiers. When the Americans invaded North Africa, Bedaux impetuously refused to abandon his enterprise. Distancing himself from his Nazi sponsors, he once again approached the Americans for their patronage. He was arrested on charges of treason and died of an overdose of sleeping pills while awaiting trial.

Like *Schindler's List* and *The Wonderfull, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, *The Champagne Safari* fuels a contemporary fascination with revisiting the lives of individuals who operated within "a moral grey area," those who worked under the auspices of, if not in direct collusion with, the fascists. Like *Remains of the Day*, it questions the political responsibilities of the common man. Ungar himself refuses to take sides. Risking accusations of political irresponsibility, he presents the facts and contradictions, allowing viewers to formulate their own opinions.

The success of *The Champagne Safari* lies in its subtext. Moving beyond an examination of individual "crimes," the film forces us to take a hard look at prevailing ideological systems that place the desires of a small, economic elite over social justice and collective needs. More than a conventional biography film, *The Champagne Safari* poses an intellectual and ethical challenge, reminding viewers of the ever-shifting lines between good and evil.

by Paul
Eichhorn

HOUSE

directed by Laurie Lynd; written by Laurie Lynd and Daniel MacIvor, based on the play *House* by Daniel MacIvor; produced by Karen Lee Hall; with Daniel MacIvor, Patricia Collins, Stephen Ouimette, Ben Cardinal; production company: The Feature Film Project; distributed by Alliance Releasing

Adapting a play to screen is never easy. When it's done right, the results can offer a whole new perspective on a theatrical work. When it's done wrong, a film can end up looking like a videotaped play. Laurie Lynd, with his first feature *House*, has taken on the ultimate challenge—adapting a one-person play. He does his best, but *House* proves that a good play doesn't always make a good film.

House is built around Daniel MacIvor's award-winning play of the same name. Lynd and MacIvor, who collaborated on the screenplay, previously worked together on Lynd's Genie Award-winning short, *The Fairy Who Didn't Want to Be a Fairy Anymore*. MacIvor recreates his stage role as Victor, a thirty-something man fresh out of group therapy. He's compelled to tell his strange and sordid life story to strangers. The film begins with Victor posting flyers about the play he's staging in a town called Hope Springs. Ten apparently unrelated people from different walks of life come to hear his rant in an abandoned church. It turns out that it's a rant that reflects something about their lives as well.

Bringing material to the screen that focuses on a journey through the mind of a mentally unstable person isn't easy. It's even harder when the film's structure is straight-jacketed by the original theatrical work. Throughout *House*, it appears that Lynd is constantly struggling with or being overwhelmed by MacIvor's play. The theatrical elements, not the cinematic ones, take centre stage. A prime example of this is MacIvor's performance as Victor.

MacIvor's portrayal is brilliant. He makes the manic, dysfunctional character come to life. It's riveting, funny and mind-blowing to watch as Victor pours his heart out about the odd people and situations in his life. His monologue is almost poetic, resembling a preacher or an auctioneer gone mad. But all of this is just the ingredients of an excellent one-person play. There's no room for director Lynd to leave his mark during MacIvor's

tour de force performance.

The way the theatrical elements upstage the cinematic elements is even apparent when Lynd shows off some of his artistry. Since he's limited to a church setting, he does make good use of the lights. The lighting not only embellishes Victor's character but it also highlights dramatic moments or story changes, jolting the audience to attention. Lynd does make the best out of a bad situation by often cutting away from Victor to the audience members watching his manic performance. This works because their expressions mimic how we feel—uncomfortable with the material and wanting to escape this insane monologue. During these scenes, he's also able to introduce an element that theatre can never offer—the close-up. MacIvor's inner pain and anger are clearly revealed in tight shots. And since most of the audience members never utter a word, their close-ups must convey everything. This is particularly true when one audience member (Patricia Collins) tears up and suddenly flees the church. You can see her anguish. Words are unnecessary.

It appears that budget considerations also compromised how and where scenes were staged. Not that this film should have been a four-continent James Bond-like odyssey, but it could have been done much more creatively. For instance, most of the film's on-location footage is used during the opening titles. It sets the film up well as Victor walks around a distressed looking Hope Springs, but most of the story re-creations take place indoors, in the form of stories from Victor, or on Friendly Giant-like model sets where the actors dwarf the buildings and the grass is AstroTurf. By using more on-location footage, Lynd could have reduced the film's claustrophobic feel and taken it further from its theatrical origins.

Lynd does have better luck showing his flair as a filmmaker through sound and editing. The numerous sound effect flourishes are strong counterpoints to MacIvor's ranting. They nicely punctuate the material. On the editing side, Lynd does introduce a clever device throughout the monologue by interjecting a shot of Victor's "house." It's an effective cinematic touch. There should have been more of this.

House does contain some redeeming qualities considering it is mostly a filmed monologue. The film effectively conveys the message about the dysfunctional nature of people and tackles some difficult subjects. Making a film out of *House* was a nice experiment, but it doesn't let Lynd go anywhere. Maybe this is just one play that can't be transferred to the screen ●