Seger's latest bites the bullet

By Joel West

This album attempts to be the California of 1978. The "California" effort of 1977 was a celebration of the vitality brought to the mainstream by the Los Angeles Comets. Argue With a Sick Mind: It's a detailed, albeit somewhat unrealistic, picture of life in Southern California. But Stranger in Town has none of the cohesive mesh that made Hotel California such a winner. For one thing, Seger borrows two songs from other songwriters, and they ("Old Time Rock & Roll" and " Ain't No Money") stick out like a sore thumb. The rest of the tracks were obviously written individually and placed in a haphazard order. In short, Seger has learned little from his friend Glen Frey, whom he acknowledges warmly in the credits.

As lead vocalist for the entire album, much of the burden of success rests on his vocal cords, not an overly stable foundation in this case. Seger's voice can be magnetic, but his tendencies are toward some of his slower numbers, such as, "The Famous Final Scene." On the other hand, exceptions to this are present in the opening cut, " Hollywood Roll," which effectively conveys the mood of the song. Although the melancholy of "Tonight" and " Final Scene" are Seger's most affecting efforts, "Tell It Loud!" is a decent upbeat number. The instrumental mix is on target, and a guitar solo by Frampton Comes Alive, Boston or Caribou (combined).

Singer: Simon's comedy sours

California Suite starring Michael Caine. Walter Matthau, Maggie Smith, Elaine May, June Fonda, Alan Alda, Bill Cosby, and Richard Pryor; directed by Herbert Ross; produced by Roy Stark; playing at the Sack Cheri.

By Margie Beale

In an early scene from Neil Simon's latest comedy, California Suite Alan Alda remarks to ex-wife June Fonda that over the seven years since he saw her last, her life's hit has turned to ridicule. He says that "Once you lose your fast ball, you use curves and sliders." Ironical-
ly, Simon has made Fonda's character for him a bit too honestly for comfort. While his humor has not grown better, this latest screen effort is evidence that the playwright has lit
to leave to offer his audience but over- sized comic routines only occasionally brightened by clever quips.

California Suite is slick and stylish, yet beneath its urbane exterior lie only common
grooves about the difference between California and New York, embarrassingly foolish slapstick sequences, and a number of endlessly trite comedy situations, all of whose denouements are far too familiar already. The film is burdened by the notion that it has that air of worn sophistication and strained wit so characteristic of Simon's scripts.

The film treats the varied experiences of four groups of people visiting California. From the very good, a Vavoom editor, and Alda, as a Hollywood screenwriter, are a divorced couple who are reunited for the first time in seven years when their seventeen-year-old daughter flies New York, hoping to live with her father in California. Fonda's performance is superbly controlled, for she is convincing both as the sharp, toughnewswoman and the concerned parent. Alda, by contrast, is rather bland as the casual Southern California practitioner of the good life. Humor in this segment is perhaps more fre-

quently successful than in other portions of the film, yet there are many instances where the dialogue drags.

Maggie Smith and Michael Caine are well suited as Shakespearean actress and antique dealer who come to California when Smith is nominated for an Oscar for her performance in a second-rate comedy. Smith is elegantly and canny funny as one of Hollywood's losing leading ladies, while Caine complements her with style. The two deliver an engaging performance which overcomes, for the most part, slow spots in the script.

Walter Matthau is amusing, unnecess-
ary awkward in his role as a faithful Jewish husband who is compartmentalized inad
derently. His troubles begin when he returns to his hotel room to find a call for his brother, has hired, and reaches an entertaining climax when his wife, Elaine May, arrives before he can stop her from the room. May is alternately non-please, infuriated, and makes a deliciously humiliating appearance as somewhat venal as she resolves the marital problem to her satisfaction. The in-
cident is probably the film's highlight, although it, too, suffers from plodding dialogue.

Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor are entire-
ly disappointing as the Drs. Panama and Gump who travel from Chicago with their wives. Cosby and Pryor work well together, but while their performance has its moments, these are rare, and overall, the two are here to be noted chiefly for the in-
different, careless work. These thoughtless 
characterizations are not enhanced by a repetitive story line which emphasizes furrious slapstick, muttered dialogues, and sequences that are meant to be funny but somehow aren't quite.

California Suite is lavishly produced, and tastefully backed with a light-hearted, classy scoring by French jazz pianist Claude Boll-

ing. With its cast and its light contem-
porary, it is designed for mass pop-
ular appeal, but it falls short of suc-
cess, for Simon's trendy wit has lost much of its charm.

The Tech's movie rating scale:

excellent very good good fair poor

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