

The visual absence of the painter prevents his valorization. How many films about art have been honest enough to focus on an unknown artist rather than a personality? Yet Tougas obviously has great respect for O'Farrell. The film suggests that commitment is primary for the creator, who must enter into a relationship which often seems painful and interminable. (This film was begun in 1979 and completed in 1986).

To top it off, **Return to Departure** effortlessly functions as a documentary about the techniques and history of egg tempera painting. So a paradox emerges: **Return to Departure** demystifies the process of painting, but uncovers a deeper mystery in the process. This is mirrored by the eponymous painting, which depicts an event seen only in shadow, like the artist's reflection that we see in the windows. The film, with its paradoxical title, is, in fact, about paradox – the paradox of the realist image. O'Farrell says that when he paints he "leaves off with the real and ends up with an expression that represents the real...knowing that it's an illusion." Tougas describes the audience's activity as "the Realism of Watching Pigment Dry" (to paraphrase his title), but at the film's end we zoom in to the painted canvas. The optical effect enlarges the film's grain, reminding us of another realism, the realism of film itself, another "illusion that represents the real." Many documentaries about art-making aspire to being artistically descriptive. **Return to Departure** has the courage to speak to us **within** an aesthetic experience, offering discovery rather than descriptions. In comparison, it makes most films about art-making seem timid and superficial.

Amnon Buchbinder •

RETURN TO DEPARTURE images and soundscape Kirk Tougas sd. mix. Paul Sharpe. Barry Jones col., 16mm running time: 83 mins. dist. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West (604) 684-3014 lp. Chi O'Farrell.

Dan Petrie's
Half A Lifetime

First Choice*Superchannel aired Stephen Metcalfe's play **Half A Lifetime**, which he adapted to a TV-hour format, in August. Essentially a one-set set-piece, its theatrical origin proves to be an asset in transference to the small screen.

While the four male characters are each identified on leaving work, their

meeting place – the basement recreation room – effectively contains, highlights and permits a close scrutiny of the quartet gathered together for a regular session of poker. The buddies since high school days meet at Toby's place – he's a quiet, thoughtful teacher, who provides a comfortable hang-out with beer, nuts, and a promise of home-made chili later. Sam the insurance salesman, though talkative and lively, is somewhat edgy and inclined to ulcers. Bart, the overweight, loud and rough cut-up, looks back at his football triumphs, and dreams of living in the backwoods of Vermont. J.J. is a police officer whose work and personal life has left him despondent and doubting, and it is his proposed solution to this problem that forces the group to take a long, hard

look at their lives and aspirations.

There's a lot of shooting the breeze, reminiscences, pipe-dreams for the future, physical horseplay and, what the Ontario Film Review Board dearly loves to call "coarse language." Three members of the group spend some time waiting for J.J. to make up the foursome, and it's then that the hidden regrets and dreams begin to surface. There's a lot of noise, pummelling, chasing and a little ping-pong thrown in, and an air of juvenile naivety tends to prevail and become a mite tedious. J.J.'s arrival, and his proposed illegal solution to all their individual woes, precipitates a period of sober thought.

In this atmosphere of male-bonding, women don't come off too well – in fact, attitudes seem to be positively old-hat. The overwhelming feeling is that the men are only let out with the "permission" of their wives, who feel safe in knowing where they are. The wives tell each other everything about the marriages, and the husbands can have no secrets. And the solution to J.J.'s crisis is a big group hug...

The performances are well-meshed, regardless of whether you care about any of the characters portrayed. Gary Busey, the blue-collar worker trapped in his ordinary life, who waits for the football season to come around, is first-rate. Saul Rubinek follows him closely with his nervy grasp of Sam's character. Nick Mancuso as Toby and Keith Carradine as J.J. have their lesser moments.

Dan Petrie directs in his usual workmanlike manner, but there's not too much room to manoeuvre in this obvious adaptation from a stage play. Michel Brault's camerawork is, as always, a joy to savour.

Pat Thompson •



• **Half A Lifetime:** Nick Mancuso as Toby, Saul Rubinek as Sam

HALF A LIFETIME d. Dan Petrie exec. p. Lou Stroller p. Stewart Harding sc. Stephen Metcalfe d.o.p. Michel Brault sd. Patrick Rousseau a.d. Charles Dunlop mus. John Mills-Cockell lp. Nick Mancuso, Saul Rubinek, Gary Busey, Keith Carradine running time: 50 mins. (approx.).

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