

Movie review

"Soul Soldier", go home!

By JAMES P. MURRAY

It's a shame that "Soul Soldier" had to open on the same day as that other Black western which stars Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte. There is no comparison. The former — a fanfare Corporation release — qualifies as a cinematic disaster in every way imaginable and, at the same time, manages to come across as a major insult to all Black people and any Indians who happen to be in town.

It appears that 1972 is the year of rediscovery for Black westerns — all of four books have come out recently on the subject. Rediscovery, because a very distinguished film by John Ford, called "Sergeant Rutledge", pioneered in this genre 12 years ago. It starred Woody Strode in the role of the first sergeant of an all-Black cavalry unit and deftly handled the delicate theme of Strode's court-martial for allegedly raping a white woman.

"Soul Soldier" also purports to deal with the Black, post-Civil War cavalry units which operated with military distinction during the Indian wars. But what we see, in this case, should not be what we get. It is a failure from the word go.

Marlene Week, who allowed her name to be credited with this screenplay, has written a story with absolutely no depth, no logic, no sense, no relevance, no entertainment value and questionable historical accuracy.

For example. The movie opens with a scoundrel, clad in his underwear, being chased in a hail of buckshot out of the bedroom of a married woman, as she screams insanely and her husband spouts idiot invective. This scene is repeated three times!

The scalawag, played by Robert DoQui, joins the cavalry under pressure — and with that background, the film's cliché-ridden, grotesque attempts at humor push on.

Director John Cardos follows the inane script as it wanders through the themes of infidelity, Indian warfare, medieval punishment techniques and a friendship be-

SOUL SOLDIER, directed by John Cardos; screenplay by Marlene Weed; photography by Lew J. Guinn; music by Tom McIntosh; produced by James M. Northern and Stuart Z. Hirschman; released by the Fanfare Corporation. At the Forum Theater, Broadway and 47th Street. Running Time: 84 minutes. Rated: PG.

Private Armstrong Rafer Johnson
Trooper Eli Brown Robert DoQui
Sergeant Hatch Lincoln Kilpatrick
First Sergeant Robertson Isaac Fields
Julie Janee Michelle
Colonel Grierson Cesar Romero

tween an Indian and a Black soldier. If it all sounds confusing, that it is. Cardos' clumsy attempt to construct a film from a faulty blueprint causes his final product to teeter-totter on the brink of thundering mediocrity until finally, at some point during those painful 84 minutes, it crashes down on the audience, splattering everyone with smashed images of cardboard caricatures and meaningless dialogue.

And those regular moviegoers who are used to seeing so-called Black movies with musical scores by the likes of Quincy Jones, Isaac Hayes and Booker T., will not believe their ears. In "Soul Soldier," Tom McIntosh gets down with original material that is best described as a cross between classic hillbilly and vintage honkeytonk.

Which brings us to the Black people involved in this production. Admittedly,
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'Soul Soldier'

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they were working with a crippling script, so their shallow and embarrassing performances across the board are shall we say, in context. There is Lincoln Kilpatrick, who plays a cigar-chomping, marriage-breaking Romeo and junior sergeant with all the conviction of a weekend actor passing by the set on the day of filming. This, interestingly, is Kilpatrick's third recent film of dubious merit. ("Honkey" and "Cool Breeze" being the other two).

A very attractive Janee Michelle is introduced as a frontier seamstress and unfaithful wife. Her uncertainty with her craft showed throughout, particularly in the comic strip love scenes.

Then, there is former Olympic star Rafer Johnson, whose role consists of his John Henryesque ability to straighten an iron horseshoe and then bend it back into shape. In the "emotionally-charged", closing scene, Johnson is shown crying over the death of his Indian friend. I could have cried too — but not for the same reason. It's heartbreaking to see that, after having made movies so long that they can still make them so bad. "Soul Soldier."