

Arts and Entertainment

POPCORN™

The General's Daughter: Or Is It Daddy Dearest?

By Michael S. Goldberg

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

There's the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way. That's the sort of moral conundrum that's banded about like sacred lore in *The General's Daughter*, a second rate, pseudo-psychological thriller dressed-up in Army fatigues.

Heart-thumping background music sweeps the rather untidy tale of rape and murder before us, ominously warning that this here is Fort McCallum, Georgia, boy.....and we civilians better know that way down yonder justice marches to its very own beat.

Military jargon and mood populate the script wholesale. Unfortunately, all this mental bayonet clashing proves no substitute for a solidly constructed mystery.

But then this movie directed by Simon West has a likable movie star like John Travolta to ameliorate its obvious shortcomings. And he almost does.

Tossed into a snake pit of ethical dilemmas when General Campbell's Army captain daughter is brutally killed under the most nefarious of circumstances, Mr. Travolta as warrant officer Paul Brenner is assigned to investigate the case.

That he is the only ray of sunshine in these murky surroundings is hardly coincidental. Natch, he's the take-charge type. And this seems to have some folks worried. The consternation showing on his face, Clarence Williams, 3rd as Colonel Fowler, General Campbell's supremely loyal right-hand man, clearly implies a threat when he asks the military gumbush if he's going to be a soldier or a policeman. What the colonel doesn't know is that he's wrong on both counts. Charming in his rogue appeal, Travolta's Paul Brenner is going to be a Boy Scout.

That's it, you figure. The general did it. It's a cover-up. Think about it. They're touting him for Vice President, and he was probably doing some horribly unpaternal thing (this movie loves hinting at the unthinkable). But wait, on second blush, nah.....too obvious. Maybe that's just what the director wants us to think.

While James Cromwell is completely credible as the esprit de corps-espousing general, he's way too guilty looking — a sure sign of his innocence, no? Which leads us to speculate — maybe Williams's rendition of Gunga Din did it. He's crazy with nerves. It looks as if his stressed-out mug is going to twist into a New York City pretzel any second.

Nope.....can't be. Too expendable. What do we care if this ghoulish gets the firing squad?

One is fairly sure how Travolta's character will react if he finds that the culprit(s) are high up on the mess hall chain. Unless of course you're swayed by this one little contrivance: Campbell was Brenner's commanding officer in Vietnam, and the younger man is still in complete awe of the old soldier. We all know Rambo would never turn in Richard Crenna.

But hey.....maybe the panoply of sinister sorts is meant to throw us off. Especially the always game James Woods as Elizabeth Campbell's adoring C.O., amusingly affecting shades of Clifton Webb's societal mentor in *Laura* (1944).

Can we really be certain our golden boy isn't the killer? Geez, what a dramatic cop-out it would be if he were. You'd definitely want your money back then. Come to think of it, though, Travolta did show us an evil side in *Face/Off*. And then again, that would leave the film with absolutely no good guys. What kind of moviemaking would that be? Not very good. But that would be the right answer regardless of whether he did it or not.

As glib as he is heroic, when warrant officer Brenner is asked his whereabouts when the title character was being murdered, he laughingly informs that he was busy killing someone else. He really

was. And when an understandably defensive suspect counters his interrogator by asking how he felt about his father, Travolta's sleuth elaborates, "He was a drunk, a gambler, and a womanizer.....(a well-timed pause).....I adored him."

Hard to resist, Travolta practically charms over the viperous sensationalism that tries to pass as a plot. But he can't mask how *The General's Daughter* sullies itself in a repetition of prurient incursions, is ingenuously rationalizing its highly questionable intent in the name of women's lib.

At its smartest, momentarily reminding of *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), *The General's Daughter* hints that it's going to tackle some tough subjects, and hopefully with some intelligence and dignity. But all too quickly it loses its grip, ultimately turning into an irresponsibly tawdry mishmash of the usual exploitation.

And hardly any of the usual suspects, while painted in perfunctorily different shades of khaki, manages to pique the imagination. Failing to structure his unimaginative whodunit with the wonder of an artistically peeled onion, director West offers no tasty clues to whet the appetite, no Hansel and Gretel trail of informative morsels to lead us to the killer. He merely parades the motley cast of possible perpetrators before us, adjusts the military setting to atmospheric overload, and invites us to pick door number one, two or three.

In the female lead, Madeleine Stowe as Sarah Sunhill is an uncomfortable mistake. A rape counselor who just so happens to be Brenner's former love interest, she is coincidentally assigned to work this case with her old beau.

Referring to a past interlude, Brenner sighs, "At least we'll always have Brussels," but the romantic sparks just don't fly, and worse, there's absolutely no opportunity for the actress to strut the sort of quietly exciting stuff she exhibited in *Blink* (1994).

Lacking the intellectual firepower for the big issues it aspires to, pretentiously dabbling in the possibilities of conspiracy and the gray area between loyalty and justice, this military spook house ride has all the curiosity appeal of a highway accident.

Sure, you may want to know what happened, but you're not terribly proud of it. Possessing too much spit and not enough polish, *The General's Daughter* won't be winning any medals.

The *General's Daughter*, rated R, is a Paramount Pictures release directed by Simon West and stars John Travolta, Madeleine Stowe and James Cromwell. Running time: 118 minutes.

Lydia Brunelli Kass Receives Award

For Excellence in Art

WESTFIELD — Lydia Brunelli Kass received an Award of Merit from the Millburn-Short Hills Arts Center for her work in an exhibition at the Atrium Gallery in the Morris County Administration and Records Building in Morristown.

The art work was judged by Dennis Masback of New York City. He is an Adjunct Art Professor at Pratt Institute and a member of the faculty at Parsons School of Design. The exhibit will remain open to the public through Friday, July 23. Gallery hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mondays to Fridays. The exhibit is located on the third and fourth floor of the building.

For more information, please call the gallery director at (973) 691-0345.



Everlounge Plans Concert At Crossroads in Garwood

CRANFORD — Everlounge, a band which originated from Westfield, will celebrate the release of its new CD at the Crossroads in Garwood on Saturday, July 10.

The band features Bill Siegel, keys and horns; Mark Norwine, guitar; Bob Ardrey, guitar and banjo; Don

Dazzo, vocals; Ed Fleischman, bass and Nelson Popp, drums and percussion.

Songs from their most recent CD's will be performed that evening.

For showtimes or more information, please call (908) 232-5666.



HONORED FOR CREATIVITY... Westfield High School students were recently rewarded for their talents in fine arts. Pictured, left to right, are: Robert Chemela, Wendy Lin, Beth Satkin, Lauren Todaro, Alex Szwarczer-Muth, Yair Ghitza and David Roberts as they receive certificates honoring their accomplishments.

Westfield Seniors Receive Fine Arts Recognition

WESTFIELD — Westfield High School's (WHS) Fine Arts Department held its second annual Fine Arts Senior Recognition on June 7.

The following scholarships and awards were presented:

• **Westfield Coalition Scholarships:** Music — Natalie Warren, Beth Rachel Satkin and Yair Ghitza; Art — Anna Tracy and Megan Pollock; Drama — Allison Feldman; and Multi-Disciplined — Laura Lynn Krasnor and Lisa Villalobos.

• **Bristol Scholarships:** Instrumental Music — Beth Rachel Satkin; Vocal Music — Natalie Warren; and Art — Megan Pollock.

• **WHS Marching Band Scholarships and Plaques:** Wendy Lin, Alexis Jemal, Monique Valcarcel and Rob Chemela.

• **John Philip Sousa Awards:** Wendy Lin and Alexis Jemal.

• **Keith Hertell Scholarship:** Lisa Villalobos.

• **Westfield Womens' Club Award for Music:** Gordon Kaslusk.

• **Teacher Grants:** Kristine Smith-Morasso.

• **Charles Addams Art Award:** Elizabeth Kinahan.

• **Westfield Womens' Club Award:** Daisy Um and Megan Pollock.

• **Director's Award for Orchestra:** Deidre Lynn.

• **National School Orchestra Award:** Beth Rachel Satkin.

• **Patrick S. Gillmore Award:** Wendy Lin.

• **Concert Choir Award:** Amanda Kelly.

• **Drama/Music Achievement Scholarship:** Jeremy Chilnick, Katie Cuca,

Greg Jackson, Lisa Villalobos and Alice Feldman.

• **Marian Glass Award:** Julia Pomann.

• **Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) Fine Arts Award:** Zack Korn.

• **PTO Vocal Award:** Bobby Stroud.

• **Director's Award for Band:** Yair Ghitza.

• **Woody Herman Award:** David Roberts.

• **PTO Crafts Award:** Shin Choi.

• **PTO Instrumental Award:** David Roberts.

• **WHS Purchase Awards:** Daisy Um, Scott Berzofsky, Sayaka Matsuda and Megan Pollock.

• **Art Club Service Awards:** Shara Fischer, Adriana Guerra and Vanessa Kober.

• **Westfield Art Association Awards:** Shara Fischer, Laura Gornowski, Sara Haldeman, Daisy Um, Marie Isolda, Jocelyn Pashko, Megan Pollock, Amy Seligman, Jennifer Starrett, Anna Tracy and Elizabeth Winberry.

• **Westfield Education Association Award:** Daisy Um.

STATE OF THE ART

Music

Motley Crue and **The Scorpions** will perform at the PNC Bank Arts Center on Friday, July 2. **J. Geils Band** will take the stage on Thursday, July 8. For concert information, please call (732) 335-0400.

Union County Blues Festival will be held on Sunday, July 4, at Cedar Brook Park in Plainfield. For more information, please call (908) 558-2550.

Gary Puckett and Joe Bonanno will offer soul music on Wednesday, July 7, at 7:30 p.m. at Echo Lake Park. **Bandit with Patti Davis** will perform country music on July 7 at 7:30 p.m. at Memorial Park in Berkeley Heights. **The Hanover Wind Symphony** will hold a concert on July 7 at 7:30 p.m. at Arthur L. Johnson High School in Clark and on Thursday, July 8, at the Municipal grounds in Scotch Plains. **A musical concert** will be held on Tuesday, July 6, at 7:15 p.m. at George N. Milkosky Park in Linden. **Captain Hawker & The All-Stars** will present oldies music on Thursday, July 1, at 7:30 p.m. at the Municipal grounds in Scotch Plains. **David Post** will perform 50s music on July 1 and **Joe Briskick** will offer popular music on July 8 at Friberger Park in Union.

River City Brass Band will perform on Saturday, July 3, at 7 p.m. at Waterloo Village. **Independence Day Weekend** will be celebrated at Waterloo from Sunday, July 4, to Monday, July 5, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. with historic and

musical events. For more information, please call (973) 347-0900.

Literature

Barnes & Noble in Clark will host contemporary folk singer/songwriter, William Smith, on Friday, July 9, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. For more information, please call (732) 574-1818.

Barnes & Noble in Springfield will host a discussion, "Writing Your Life Stories" on Wednesday, July 7, at 10:30 a.m. with writer and educator, Zella Geltman and a seminar, "Books By And About Women" on July 7 at 7:30 p.m. A Preschool Storytime is slated for Tuesday, July 6, at 10 a.m. and Early Reader Adventures will be held today, Thursday, July 1, at 7 p.m. For more information, please call (973) 376-8544.

Art

A Children's Mini Art Camp will be held on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, July 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, and 15 from 10 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. at the Watchung Arts Center. The workshops will feature drawing, painting, ceramics, sculpture, watercolor, pastels, multimedia art, and indoor and outdoor activities.

Mixed Bag

The Meadowlands Fair will be held through Sunday, July 11, in the parking lot outside of Giants Stadium in East Rutherford. For ticket information, please call (201) 933-0199.

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- ♫ **NJ WORKSHOP FOR THE ARTS** - ELM & E. BROAD AT FIRST UNION BANK
- ♫ **TOM COHEN TRIO** - E. BROAD ST. NEAR THE LEADER STORE
- ♫ **TOM BUTTS QUARTET** - E. BROAD ST. NEAR GAP KIDS

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