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FLORIDA GOES TO CANNES

By Claudia Jannone

One can do many things in the South of France. Tanning one's breasts is only a beginning. One of the most exciting, however, is attending the International Festival du Film held each May in Cannes. Even Mardi Gras pales by comparison to this fever-pitched romp amidst movie stars in chic bars, starlets and harlots, shakers and takers, and wheelers and dealers, who number close to 35,000. Their activities, as well as hundreds of films from around the world, will be closely scrutinized by the press — the bulb-popping, fanny-pinching Italians, the Leica-wearing Germans, the haughty French cinema buffs who still find Jerry Lewis the king of comedy, the staid London *Times* critic and his lower-end counterparts with the Fleet Street scandal sheets. Since everyone from Japan sleeps in no fewer than two Nikons, it's hard to distinguish the press from the tourists.

Every year Edie Williams, of Russ Meyer Z-flick fame, removes her clothes on the Carlton Hotel terrace with a whip in her hand. She creates scant attention, for all along the Cote d'Azur parades a wondrous array of tanned mammary appointments. Last year Edie did a breakaway-dress routine in the local casino, which did cause some clamor. But in Cannes, clamor rhymes with glamor — *c'est la vie* — so everything proceeds as expected. This year, however, something unexpected has occurred: a Florida-produced and financed feature is being previewed in the marketplace of the new Palais, alongside some of the hottest films competing for this year's money, and this year's distribution contracts.

The Enchanted, described as "An American Folk Mystery," arrives in Cannes after an arduous shooting schedule of fourteen weeks in the central Florida backwoods and over a year's work in post-production, which included a trip to London to obtain sound work by the crew that produced

The French Screening Of A Florida Grown Film

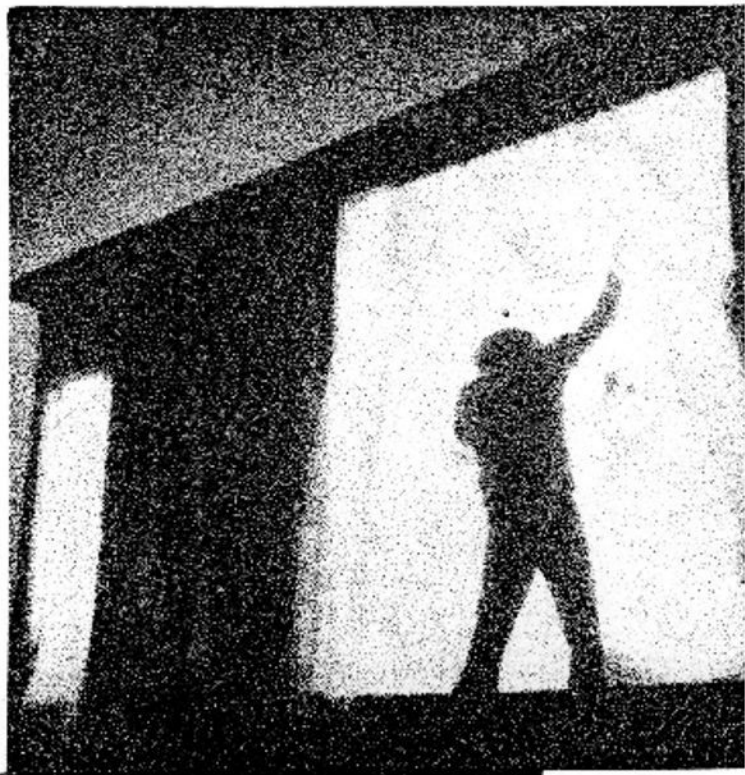
the sound track for *Chariots of Fire*. Outside of that, the rest of *The Enchanted* is pure Florida, a synthesis of gator-wild forests, gray-on-gray stacked summer cumulus, baroquely sensual tropical topography, and a cast and crew made up mostly of Floridians who were magnetically drawn into the project by director Carter Lord and screenwriter Charné Porter. Casey Blanton, the film's female lead, even dumped teaching college English for a shot at stardom, although the reality of that event's possibility makes her knees weak. In addition, most of the film's financial backing came from Florida residents.

It is fitting that Lord should take *The Enchanted* to Cannes. The film is redolent with Americana; however, its nationalism is of the folk myth variety, peculiar to the South and especially the wilds of central Florida, yet universal in many of its basic elements. One of the film's main ingredients, aside from its lush locale, is a superstitious and magical old black man who has lived in the woods all his life. "Superstitious" is only one of the adjectives evoked, followed by supernatural and surreal.

A story must be seen as dealing with the supernatural if its plot conveys the

tale of a quail that turns into a woman. Casey Blanton has summed up her role thusly, yet other levels exist. Surreal describes the threshold that is broached in *The Enchanted*. The film illustrates two worlds existing within one, and the story is possessed of two equally vibrant realities: on the one hand, everyday reality (including a warm love story and gripping chase scenes); on the other hand, a surreality in which all creatures are beings who have souls no less sacred than man's own.

But it's a long way from Florida's intrinsic backwoods magic to the hype of film promotion at Cannes. Waiting for the screening of *The Enchanted*, I calmed my nerves with a slow, reverently-sipped cognac as I wondered and worried about how the international film distributors would judge Lord's upstart production. Sitting in the semi-darkness of the small Palais theater, I watched as the press and distribution agents piled in. A wonder so many had found it, I thought, recalling my own problems during the opening days of the festival. While the Palais itself is confusing, the level where the cinema



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market is located makes the minotaur's maze look simple. It is laid out like a gigantic fan crisscrossed with streets that are either numbered or named after film greats. Somewhere near Avenue Martin Scorsese and Number Three, I found Arista, the New York-based firm that is trying to sell *The Enchanted*. The office was closed. It took days to find the representative available to discuss screening times. Yet, on this almost-last day of the festival, there were potential buyers aplenty.

Still, I was glad I'd had the cognac. One thing which characterizes this festival is honesty. People boo and hiss. They laugh at the wrong times. John Sayles' *Lianna*, a film which was critically well-received in the U.S., was almost hooted off the screen during a prolonged lesbian love scene.

No such fate awaited *The Enchanted*. It didn't come away with any prizes, but attention was respectful and interested — not a bad reception for a low-budget, independently-produced film made by a first-time director, written by a first-time screenwriter, and acted by a cast made up largely of first-time actors. This homegrown Florida film had gone up against some of the classiest competition and the harshest critics in the world and survived.

Besides being a personal triumph for those who sweated, literally and figuratively, through the film's production, *The Enchanted* is another mark of success for Florida's growing film industry. Some of cinema's greats are taking advantage of the cheap production costs of a right-to-work state and the generally cooperative climate. Louis Malle is shooting *Moon Over Miami* in that city; parts of Brian de Palma's *Scarface* and John Sayles' *Baby It's You* were shot there; Paul Newman is directing *Harry and Son* in Florida; Michelangelo Antonioni set parts of *The Crew* in south Florida; and Martin Ritt chose a lake in an orange grove in northwest Florida as the most authentic site for his film of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' autobiographical *Cross Creek*, starring Mary Steenburgen.

The pace at Cannes is slowing down, as am I, for I have done what I set out to accomplish. Tired, drained of my physical and mental resources, I still look forward to next year, next May, the 37th International Festival du Films. Now it's time to have coffee with Australian director Peter Weir. I love living dangerously. **M**