

Local artists onscreen in *A Flash of Green*

By MICHAEL GILTZ

A Flash Of Green is a story of honor, betrayal, redemption and a very lonely man. It was shown at Cannes and other major film festivals and has received enthusiastic reviews from Siskel and Ebert of *At The Movies*, and Vincent Canby of *The New York Times*, among others.

It is a film notable both for its quality and for the fact that it was the only major independent film shot entirely in Florida in 1983. *A Flash of Green* (see review) is yet another example of Florida's thriving film industry and of how filmmakers can utilize local talent. (Much of the cast and crew were recruited from the Hippodrome Theatre.)

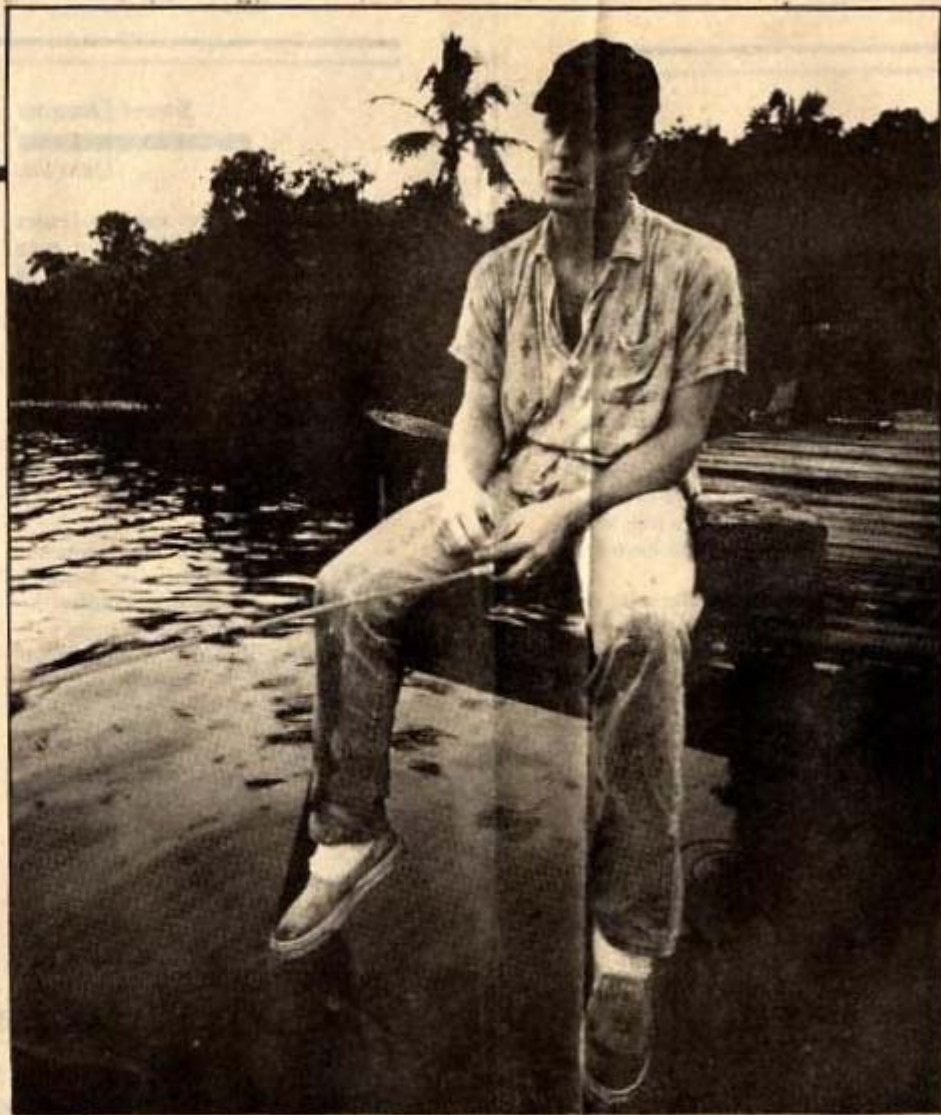
How and why this film was made is just as interesting as the story it tells. At the center of any discussion of the film is Victor Nunez, the director, whose credits include *Gal Young 'Un*, another independent film shot in Florida. He was casting about, looking for a project to develop in Florida, when the wife of close friend Sam Gowan recommended he read *A Flash of Green*, by John D. MacDonald.

Nunez read the book and was immediately attracted to it. "I liked the story very much," he said. "What intrigued me was the fact that it took several traditional genres and stood them on their head." He

was also fascinated by the fact that the hero, Jimmy Wing, starts off by doing something that is clearly wrong.

One of their first and easiest decisions was to tap the talent of the Hippodrome, which had helped Nunez during his last movie. "I always planned to do something with them again," Nunez said. Except for the lead roles, all the major and minor characters were portrayed by Hippodrome actors. They were also extensively involved in the technical production of the film.

One of the most significant contributions came from Gregory Hausch, the artistic director of the Hippodrome. He was intimately involved in *A Flash of Green* from the beginning. For months before



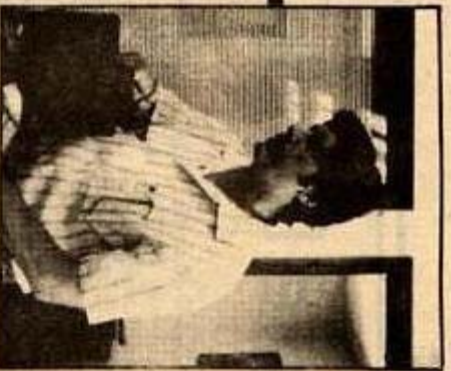
▲ Ed Harris
◀ Blair Brown

the actual shooting began, Hausch scouted around Florida for locations and began to deal with a myriad of logistical problems that arise when making a movie.

"You wouldn't believe all the details," Hausch said. "I hired

everybody, paid everybody. I scouted all the locations, made the political connections, rented boats and airplanes, arranged to use people's houses . . ."

As Hausch laid the groundwork, Nunez went to New York to search



▲ Director Victor Nunez

for actors to cast in the lead roles. He never had any intention of trying to attract major stars.

But a friend of his, who was also a friend of Ed Harris, read the script and knew Harris would be interested. Harris' interest created momentum, and Nunez soon found himself working with such high-caliber and high-profile actors as Blair Brown and Richard Jordan, not to mention Harris himself.

He has a simple explanation for why Harris committed to the low-budget, independent film. People are typecast quickly in Hollywood, Nunez explained. Harris was probably eager to do a role that was a departure from what he had been doing.

"Also, Jimmy is a very difficult character to pin down," he said. "Almost immediately, there was a sense that it was a different kind of part. (Harris is) an actor with a love for creating a character, and he was intrigued by Jimmy."

Eventually, when all the roles had been cast and pre-production was completed, they began filming. To the participants from the Hip-podrome, it was a stark contrast to

what they were used to.

Hausch noted, "In the theater, you might work 12 hours in one day, but the end result is a two-hour play that evening. In the movies, you might work 12 hours in one day for 30 seconds of film. It's a very frustrating experience."

Michael Beistle, who played a minor role in the movie, commented on how a stage actor must change his style when working in the film medium. "If you used the same expressions that you used on stage," he said, "it would look ludicrous. In film, you must be much more intimate, much smaller and very naturalistic."

The final cost of *A Flash Of Green* was \$800,000, and with such a small amount of money (by studio standards), the set was aptly described by Gowan as, "... very small and very tense. A lot of people did 10 or 15 different jobs. Everyone did everything."

Gowan also said "Everybody considers Victor a genius in directing and editing."

Though Nunez has yet to select a new project, there is a good possibility that it, like his last two films, will be set in Florida.

"My model is what Southern writers like Faulkner did," Nunez said. He toys with the idea of doing the film equivalent — basing all his movies in Florida. But, he said, it is much easier to put a blank piece of paper into a typewriter and say, "I'm going to write about such and such a place," than it is to drag 100 people on location to the same spot.

Yet Nunez is philosophical about the logistical and financial difficulties inherent in making a film. Discussing *A Flash Of Green* and movies in general, he said, "Film is always a combination of business and artistic expression. You just have to choose what sort of balance you want." □