

The Perfect

SCRIPT

By C.S. White

THE ORLANDO REGION OFFERS THE FILM & TV PRODUCTION MARKET A UNIQUELY DIVERSE RANGE OF LOCATIONS & TALENT.



Monster. From the Earth to the Moon. Their Eyes Were Watching God. Dr. G: Medical Examiner. The Way Back Home. Waterboy. All have one thing in common: they are examples of successful films and TV productions that were shot in the Metro Orlando region.



Their success is no surprise. As the third busiest film production market in the country, Orlando has grown in the past 15 years from a \$2.5 million to a \$586 million film and television production market. And, for good reasons, including a talented and diverse crew base, and a cast of independent filmmakers and TV producers who call Orlando home. All reasons why *MovieMaker* has ranked Orlando among its 2004 and 2005 "Top 10 Cities for Moviemakers".

IN FOCUS

In the case of Oprah Winfrey's ABC made-for-TV movie adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, although much of the movie was produced on back lots in California, authenticity of certain scenes required they be shot on location in Florida, where the novel is based. Like the symbolic scenes where the main character Janie Crawford (Halle

PHOTO COURTESY OF UCF FILM DEPARTMENT, FIVE STORIES

Berry) jumps into a crystal clear spring and floats on her back while staring at the sky.

"The locations here made it impossible to shoot [certain scenes] anywhere else," says Suzy Allen, managing director of the Metro Orlando Film & Entertainment Commission, a division of the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission. "The film hired about 150 local technicians for a total of three weeks of prep and four days of shooting. Because it was such a high-profile project — with Berry just off an Oscar, and Oprah — the exposure for our region was invaluable, showcasing our diverse locations and workforce."

"[There are] wonderful locations in Orlando—historical architecture, jungles, ranches, farms, beautiful oaks with Spanish moss—not to mention wonderful people to work with," says Frawley Becker, the location manager for the movie.

Filming on location is intrinsic to the Discovery Health Channel's current forensic hit series, *Dr. G: Medical Examiner*. The show features the cases of its star, Orange-Osceola County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Jan Garavaglia, or "Dr. G".

And, the hit *Monster*, a true-life story about Aileen Wuornos (Charlize Theron), a prostitute executed in Florida after being convicted of murdering six men, was mostly filmed in Central Florida and drew heavily on the local talent.

"I frankly was blown away when we came down to Orlando to shoot," says Patty Jenkins, writer and director of *Monster*. "I would take this Orlando-based cast and crew anywhere."

BEHIND THE SCENES

The area's several film schools and existing related infrastructure play a starring role in its film/TV success, as well. Case in point: the **University of Central Florida's Film Department** turned out the five film school grad students who created the wildly popular *The Blair Witch Project* (TBWP).

"The UCF film program gave us a solid background," says Greg Hale, a

MOVIEMAKER HAS RANKED ORLANDO AMONG ITS 2004 & 2005 "TOP 10 CITIES FOR MOVIEMAKERS", CITING ITS SOPHISTICATED CREW BASE AND AS ONE OF THE TOP 10 PLACES TO BE AN INDIE MOVIEMAKER.

TBWP co-producer. "But it was the relationships the school has with the local film industry that really made a big difference. We had access to locations and professional crews. When we worked at Universal, the people there treated us like professionals, so you had to step up your level of professionalism."

The film's success found the school, bringing the acclaimed Sterling Van Wagenen to direct its film program.

"*Blair Witch* upped the profile of the school," says UCF film professor Rich Grula. "Because of its success, the University decided to invest in the program by hiring Sterling, co-founder of the Sundance Film Festival and founding executive director of Sundance Institute."

Grula credits Van Wagenen with moving the program forward to where it is today.

"The program has become much more about story films. We're starting to build a process that is more educational and that gives students opportunities to create real films."

The recently produced *Five Stories* is a prime example of that.

The compilation DVD of five student short films produced and marketed by the UCF Film Department has been submitted to more than 100 film festivals across the country. All the films have been selected for exhibition in one or more events.

"The rapid emergence of UCF as a film school of tremendous quality and creativity is remarkable and exciting for the film world," says Hunter Todd, chairman and founding director of the 38th Annual WorldFest-Houston, a prestigious event that chose two of the *Five Stories* films for screening.

"Two out of five is remarkable," says Todd.

"The DVD showcases our region for content and story creation," explains Allen, whose Metro Orlando Film & Entertainment Commission funded the DVD in part through a grant. "Whereas *Eyes Were Watching God* highlights our location, *Five Stories* shows we

have homegrown talent, from storytellers to filmmakers and crew."

"There's something about contextualizing an art form. *Five Stories* is our calling card about UCF and Orlando," says Grula.

Five Stories couldn't have happened without the help of local vendors who provide gear and equipment for filming and editing, like Panavision, Kodak and Digitech, to name a few. The role of partnerships with local vendors cannot be underplayed in the success of students, says Grula.

"Often schools don't have the budget to offer their students some of the high-end filmmaking gear. When you have a community like ours that wants to help the program out, we can prove Orlando is the base for filmmaking in terms of talent and resources. Because of this, you get a synergy at this level that you can't get elsewhere."

In addition to UCF's four-year program, Central Florida is home to **Valencia Community College's** two-year associate program in Film Production Technology. The school, in partnership with Back Home Productions, recently completed its latest film project, *The Way Back Home*. This \$1-million production, featuring theatrical and film legends Julie Harris and Ruby Dee, provided Valencia students with invaluable experience to take into the real world.

"The biggest benefit to students is getting to work with a large contingency of industry professionals," says Ralph Clemente, director of Valencia's Film Production Technology program. "These people essentially become free faculty. There's a tremendous learning opportunity there that money just can't buy."

In the final cut, with its unique talent base of professional crew and indie filmmakers, and cutting-edge film education programs, the Orlando region continues to be a premier film and TV production market.

Grula sums it up aptly.

"We are determined to be the best possible Orlando can be." 