
Lagniappe* / North Caroliniana

*Lagniappe (lah-yap', lah' yap') n. An extra or unexpected gift or benefit. [Louisiana French]

compiled by Plummer Alston Jones, Jr.

Reel North Carolina: Movies Filmed in the Old North State

The movie industry has come to North Carolina, an exciting proposition not only for the movie producers, who like our climate and local scenery, but also for the citizens of Wilmington, Asheville, Charlotte, Graham County, and other locales who need the job opportunities it brings. Drama majors throughout North Carolina show up for the crowd scenes — a chance to be a star, make a cameo appearance, or at least gain some experience in front of the camera. And, of course, the union-scale wages don't hurt either.

The following reviews of movies filmed in North Carolina demonstrate quite clearly the quality of films produced in our own backyard. Enjoy these reviews submitted by your colleagues, who are avid movie buffs and competent critics.

Most of the reviews this time are of movies for adults. One movie with a PG-13 rating is suitable for young adults. None of the movies reviewed is suitable for children. With your help in discovering them, this glaring omission will be corrected in future columns.

Movie reviews are solicited for any movie filmed or set in North Carolina, or for any movie that features a prominent North Carolina actor or screenwriter. Your review should make clear that special North Carolina connection. Mail or e-mail your review to: Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., Catawba College Library, 2300 W. Innes St., Salisbury, NC 28144; PAJONES@catawba.edu

The Journey of August King, in typical Miramax film fashion, is filled with lush vistas and beautiful natural scenery. It takes me back to childhood days of playing in the woods and family trips to the North Carolina Appalachian mountains. I could smell the damp earth and feel the coolness of the running water. The motion picture was filmed, and takes place in, North Carolina. While the North Carolina accents are not perfect, they do not grate on the ears as some attempts do.

The Journey of August King

(1995). 92 minutes; VHS; Color;

Rating: PG-13; \$14.67 (re-release).

Available from: Ingram Library Services

(1-800-937-5300, ext. 2).

Jason Patric plays the lead role of August King, a farmer who helps a runaway slave named Annalees Williamsburg escape to freedom in the North. Thandie Newton (also in *Jefferson in Paris*) plays Annalees. Those who know Larry Drake as Benny Stulwicz in *LA Law* from 1987 to 1994, will be pleasantly surprised with his performance as Olaf Singleterry, the slave owner.

What makes this film special is that it does not rely solely upon the drama of the ever-present possibility of being caught. The tension of the moral dilemma found in one man's struggle between the desire to obey the laws of man and the need to obey the law of humanity is compelling. August makes difficult decisions with full knowledge of hard penalties. This journey is as metaphysical as it is physical, creating an affinity between the characters and drawing in the audience.

Directed by John Guigan, *The Journey of August King* is based on the book by John Ehle, a resident of Winston-Salem. The book is available in paperback from Hyperion, New York (ISBN 0-7868-8031-7). For more information on this movie, take a look at the Internet Movie Database, Ltd.: <http://us.imdb.com/cache/title-exact/51402>

— Lauren Corbett, Queens College

If you expect the videotape of *The Last of the Mohicans* to be a faithful adaptation of the James Fenimore Cooper novel, you will be disappointed. What it is, however, is an entertaining trip to colonial America in all its natural beauty and, sometimes, in all its unnatural brutality.

The Last of the Mohicans

(1993). 114 minutes; VHS; Color;

Rating: R; \$14.98. Available from:

Facets Video (1-800-331-6197).

The lush scenery of the Appalachian mountains of western North Carolina is used as a backdrop to present the northern New York State territory of the mid-1700s. The setting reminds us of a time before the land was stripped and spoiled — a time when nature was revered and held in high regard. This is evident in the opening scene when the hunters take the time to thank the spirit of the deer, which they have just killed, for providing sustenance.

Director Michael Mann, who directed the fast-paced cop show *Miami Vice*, co-produced the film with Hunt Lowry, and co-wrote the screenplay with Christopher Crowe. Daniel Day-Lewis, Best Actor Acad-

emy Award winner for his role in *My Left Foot*, is Hawkeye, also called Nathaniel, the adopted white son of Chingachgook, the Mohican of the title. Hawkeye spends most of his time rescuing the Munro sisters and, in the process, falls in love with the older one, Cora, portrayed by Madeleine Stowe. The Native American activist Russell Means takes on the role of Chingachgook. While the film did not win any Oscars for its actors, it did win the award for Best Sound.

The screenplay is based loosely on the novel and a 1936 Randolph Scott movie. When Cora, her sister Alice, and their escort, Major Duncan Heyward, are introduced, they are traveling to Fort William Henry to join their father, a British officer defending the fort from attack by the French. Soon they are led into an ambush by their guide, the Huron brave, Magua. This is the point at which Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Chingachgook's natural son, Uncas, come to the rescue. The adventure is only beginning, as there is another ambush to come, along with a raid on the fort — where constant bombardments light up the night sky — an escape and chase down a river and through the woods, a cave hidden behind a waterfall, and a woman flinging herself over a cliff to escape the "fate worse than death."

Filmed on location at Chimney Rock, North Carolina, and at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, the panoramic scans of the scenery are not lost to the videotape audience because of the letterbox format, with the black bands at top and bottom. Therefore, while the grandeur of the big screen cannot be totally captured, it is not compromised by cutting the film to fit the television screen.

Best of all is the beautiful North Carolina scenery, which is readily available to anyone who would care to hike Chimney Rock or visit Biltmore Estate. So enjoy the views on the video and, then, enjoy them in person.

— Rodney Lippard, Catawba College

The mountains of Graham County, North Carolina, star in *Nell*, a 1995 film directed by Michel Apted, the British filmmaker famous for his *7 Up* series. Also in the picture are Jody Foster, Liam Neeson, and Natasha Richardson.

Foster, in an Academy Award-nominated role, plays Nell, a wild child reared by her hermit mother in a far-off cabin in the North Carolina wilderness. With only a stroke-impaired parent to teach her, Nell grows up to speak a language all her own. When a grocery delivery boy discovers the body of Nell's dead mother, Neeson enters the picture. He is the sensitive, Irish-born country doctor who leaves his practice for three months to ease the barefoot innocent — at least slightly — into the twentieth century and a more understandable version of standardized English. He does this so that Nell can continue living in her cabin by the creek.

Richardson (Neeson's wife in real life) is the country doctor's scientific competitor from the big city of Charlotte. She initially wants to cart Nell from the woods to a psychiatric hospital, but, as often happens in film, she and the sensitive country doctor reach a level of higher understanding by being exposed to Nell's childlike wonder and naked interpretive dance.

This movie was designed to be a star vehicle for Jody Foster. She co-produced the film along with her partner, Renee Missel, who fell in love with the character of Nell after watching a Los Angeles production of *Indiglossia*, the play upon which the film was based. Reviewers called *Nell* fatuous, self-serving, useless, simplistic, and sentimental. But what do they know? It's a good date movie, as long as the date isn't too bothered by contrived plots. (Nell gives a climactic courtroom speech that would make even Raymond Burr proud.) The date had better be accepting of Hollywood's version of psychology, too. (Nell's afraid of men? Then show her the good doctor's penis. A few giggles later, and that phobia is conquered.)

Although reviewers applied a wide variety of adjectives to the film, they had one word for the North Carolina setting. Gorgeous. Yep, ya' gotta agree.

— Kevin Cherry, Rowan Public Library

Ruth Anne (nicknamed Bone), born out of wedlock to Anney Boatwright in 1950s' South Carolina, knows a life of poverty, but is nourished by a strong bond with her mother. Anney's marriage to "Daddy Glenn" Waddell changes Bone's life forever, as she is subjected to beatings and escalating sexual molestation. Although Anney knows at some level that Bone is being abused, she is conflicted by her need for Glenn's love despite her close bond with Bone. When Anney's family realizes that Glenn is beating Bone, the men beat him. Bone leaves to live with relatives, and Anney leaves Glenn — but the dynamics of Glenn's jealousy and obsession, as well as Anney's dependence on Glenn, result in a shattering conclusion.

An emotionally searing film with flawless performances, *Bastard* is also an outstanding directorial debut by Angelica Huston. Although quite controversial

because of the strong subject matter, it is presented in context and not sensationalized. That said, this is not a film suitable for children or some adults. It is a serious film, a portrait of an extreme family situation, and a character study, revealing the depths of the likable as well as the despicable.

Essentially, the story is that of a child who loves, and is loved by, her mother, but is caught between the rages, weakness, and jealousy of her stepfather and the inability of her mother totally to

Nell (1995). 113 minutes; VHS; Color; Rating: R; \$19.98. Available from: Baker and Taylor (1-800-775-2600, ext. 2026), Facets Video (1-800-331-6197), or CBS/Fox Video (1-800-457-0686).

Bastard Out of Carolina (1996). 180 minutes; VHS; Color; Rating: R; \$97.99. Available from: BMG Video, 1540 Broadway, 26th FL., New York, NY 10036-4021; (1-800-678-1552).

abandon that man's love despite her bond with her child.

Libraries with collections of serious films intended for an adult audience should consider *Bastard*, with the reservations about audience suitability noted above.

— Melody Moxley, Rowan Public Library

Blue Velvet (1986). 120 minutes;
VHS; Color; Rating: R. Available from:
out-of-print (look for re-release or try
out-of-print vendors).

I knew Wilmington had hit the big time in movie-making when, in the summer of 1987, I walked into a friend's home in Laurel, Montana, and saw my alma mater, New Hanover High School, filling the television screen as a setting for David Lynch's 1986 film, *Blue Velvet*. As a lifetime fan of film, it was a thrilling moment to see that familiar site, along with many other local spots so far out of context, over a thousand miles away in a movie that some say is as classic as Hitchcock's *Psycho* or Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*.

Could the director who came up with the freakish *Eraserhead* and earned an Oscar nomination for the highly acclaimed *The Elephant Man* actually choose Wilmington as a place to form his craft? Evidently he could, and today Wilmington boasts a thriving

community of filmmakers and has become a second home to such film people as *Velvet's* co-star, Dennis Hopper. Wilmington's success has helped to make North Carolina a leader in film production.

For anyone unfamiliar with Lynch's unique and eerie style from his television program, *Twin Peaks*, or his latest narratively challenged movie, *Lost Highway*, *Blue Velvet* is a good introduction to the director's darkly strange mix of everyday life and the bizarre. This is apparent from the opening scenes of the movie where we get a tour of the squeaky clean town of Lumberton, the name given to Wilmington in the film. Everything looks as normal as Mayberry until the camera peeks a little closer. A severed and decaying human ear covered by ants is discovered in a field by the straight-as-an-arrow hero of the film played by Kyle MacLachlan. When a visit to the police produces few results in solving the mystery of the ear, the young man begins his own investigation with the help of a detective's daughter played by Laura Dern.

Their snooping soon involves Isabella Rossellini's character, whose child and husband have been kidnapped by a sadistic Dennis Hopper. The innocence of the young would-be sleuths is contrasted with the seedy underworld they discover. As MacLachlan attempts to help the seductive, but troubled Rossellini, his character is eventually tested and pushed to violent means.

After an explosive confrontation between good and evil, the film concludes by returning to a Disneyesque vision of a small Southern town where a mother hugs her child in the park and young lovers admire a bird from a kitchen window. Such charming images of American life no longer enchant us now that Lynch has taken us below the surface.

Wilmington and North Carolina can be proud to be part of such artistic and insightful filmmaking.

— William H. King, Division of State Library

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