

'Poet of the Swingin' Blade'

A FILM REVIEW

BY CHRISTOPHER BYTHEWOOD

"Poet Of The Swingin' Blade" will bring every viewer back to a time of injustice, ignorance and inequality. It shows us that through it all, African Americans survived on inherent intelligence, courage, music

and laughter.

Director/ Producer/ Writer/ Actor James E. Hurd Jr. beautifully captures the story of the Turpentiners, workers of the Pine Forests in the Florida Pan Handle, in his short film "Poet Of The Swingin' Blade".

The title itself is brilliant and poetic as many slaves were in fact poets and the "swingin' blade" refers to the tool they used to work the fields. The screenplay, written by James E. Hurd Jr. and Dr. Linda Bannister, is authentic and allows viewers to become lost in a world unknown to most of them.

The Directing by Hurd Jr. was stylized more as a play rather than as a film however, it is refreshing to see a Director willing to take chances and break the Hollywood mold. Hurd Jr. not only presents himself as a viable Writer/ Director, but also a talented actor.

In the film, he surrounds himself with other outstanding actors such as Julius Nofin, Carlin Smith, DeSean Terry and Derek Shaun, to name a few, who deliver spot on performances. The music is so rich and lively that it itself becomes an uncredited character. The lyrics are creative



Director James E. Hurd, Jr. (left) seen with Director John Singleton (right)

and will at times become extremely somber, while at other moments put a smile on your face. Enough cannot be said about the entire production team. From the behind the scenes crew to the actors in front of the camera we the viewers can feel the cohesiveness of all involved in this project.

Hurd Jr.'s inspiration for "Poet Of The Swingin' Blade" comes from a person close to his heart, his grandfather Jake Hurd.

The main character Jake (played by Hurd Jr.), is based on the life experiences of Hurd Jr.'s grandfather and the men he worked with in southern Florida. Hurd Jr. has also written a play titled "Turpentine Jake" which expands upon his grandfather's life as a Turpentine.

Hurd Jr. is planning to reach past the theater and short film community by bringing his grandfather's story to the big screen.

When asked about a feature film possibility he responded with "Yes. That's the penultimate goal - to spin a full-length tale from this short that will bring the spirit of the turpentiners to life for generations of people who never knew they existed. One dream is that it will premiere at a major film festival, here and abroad. The primary goal is to teach and delight: to teach people about the courage and soul of the forgotten Blacks on whose backs the turpentine industry flourished; and to delight audiences with their stories and songs and magic, those things that kept them alive".