



Walter Hill: A mountain of talent

Fest Traveler: Rome Film Festival 2012

Posted: Sat., Nov. 3, 2012, 4:00am PT

By NICK VIVARELLI

Action auteur, scribe and producer Walter Hill, who is being feted with the Rome Film Fest's Maverick Director Award, is unquestionably among the most versatile, and underrated, figures in American cinema these days.

With a range that spans from classic Westerns to thrillers, noirs, sci-fiers and buddy comedies, often centered around archetypal male characters, Hill encapsulates the many permutations of genre filmmaking and the connection with a wide audience "that this festival is about," says Marco Mueller.

The event topper praises the Long Beach native for "moving effortlessly from classic cinema to its modern variations, trying his hand at all genres" and "consistently standing out from the crowd."

Hill's more than 20 director credits include "The Warriors," "48 Hours," "The Long Riders," "Southern Comfort" and, more recently, the pilot for HBO's groundbreaking neo-Western series "Deadwood" and AMC's "Broken Trail," for which he won an Emmy.

He was also instrumental in making "Alien," as both a scribe and producer.

"It was essential" to have "Bullet to the Head," Hill's "powerful new noir with an amazing Sly Stallone," world preem in the Eternal City, Mueller enthuses.

Hill seems to be revelling in his Roman accolades, saying, "Quite often good work that is in the commercial mainstream gets overlooked, and I think Marco is trying to address that." He adds, "My joke with my wife is, the farther I go from home, the more people like me."

As a kid Hill, who endured an asthma-ridden youth, read a lot. Books, but also lots of comicbooks, especially "the tough guy stuff, rather than guys wearing capes," he recounts.

Critics often praise Hill for his stylized visuals and pulpy sensibility, which will certainly be on display in "Bullet," as it is based on a French graphic novel. "It is very much a homage to the kind of simpler action films I did in the 1980s," he says, referring to "Extreme Prejudice" and "Red Heat."

Hill took the pic, because "Sly called me and asked me, for those reasons, to come over, help out and direct the thing," he says. "Even though it's a modern film, it was kind of like going back to an old friend whom I hadn't seen in years."

Stallone plays New Orleans hitman Jimmy Bobo, who forms an alliance with a Washington, D.C., detective to bring down the killer of their respective partners. "It's a little genre film, but I think Sly is very good in it," he says.

The filmmaker is also excited about his next project, a redo of the 1962 Robert Aldrich classic "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?," which starred Bette Davis as the former child star Baby Jane Hudson and

Joan Crawford as her crippled sister, Blanche. The Aldrich estate asked him if he would be interested in doing a reimagining of "Baby Jane" and initially he said no. Then he went back and read the novel and thought there was another version to the story that could be brought to the screen.

"You are not going to be able to remake this movie with Bette and Joan. So now, once you kind of scrub that off the chalk board, you are dealing with a whole different animal," he says. The script is completed and casting will soon start, with Lakeshore financing.

"Somebody said to me, 'What the hell are you doing? You don't do women's movies,' and I said, 'No, but I do movies about violent confrontations.' " Hill chuckles. "This is primal stuff."