

American Film Market

Riding the JFK phenomenon

Stone success paves way for companies to fill niche with new product

By Kevin Phinney

Now that Oliver Stone's "JFK" has demonstrated significant box-office clout abroad, several film companies at the American Film Market are vying to fill the niche created by renewed interest in John F. Kennedy's 1963 slaying.

In addition to a Rhino Home Video documentary called "Best Evidence" being marketed internationally by Troma Inc., Manifesto Film Sales is pushing its recent-

ly completed thriller, "Ruby," while Blue Ridge Filmtrust is completing its new documentary, "The JFK Assassination: The Jim Garrison Tapes" in time for an AFM screening at 6 p.m. today at the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel in Santa Monica.

Also, International Creative Exchange has three recent acquisitions dealing with the events of Nov. 22, 1963. One is a reissue, from the 1970s, called "The Life

and Times of John F. Kennedy," another is "The Many Faces of Lee Harvey Oswald," while the third is "Who Didn't Kill JFK?"

"Obviously, the awareness created by 'JFK' doesn't hurt," said John Durie of Manifesto. "But we want people to know that we were not jumping on any kind of bandwagon with this film; 'Ruby' has been on our line-up of films for the last year and a half."

Unlike "JFK," the Manifesto re-

lease contains a disclaimer avowing that fact and fiction are blended freely to provide a compelling narrative. The film stars Danny Aiello as Jack Ruby, the convicted murderer of Lee Harvey Oswald, who had been accused of killing President Kennedy.

In contrast, Blue Ridge Filmtrust is bringing to light the only in-depth interview conducted with Jim Garrison, the former New Orleans district attorney who brought the only criminal charges ever filed in the assassination to court. Garrison theorized that New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw had acted in concert with the Central Intelligence Agency and others to murder Kennedy.

In the interview, Garrison details his hypothesis and the difficulties he encountered while trying to build a case against Shaw. Garrison believes the federal government purposefully obstructed his investigation and refused access to im-

portant evidence. In part, "JFK" was based on Garrison's book, "On the Trail of the Assassins."

"But 'JFK' is not what this movie is about," said Lamar Card, chairman of Blue Ridge. "And it's not about Jim's book, either. It is about this specific interview which Jim conducted with director John Barbour, fleshed out with a number of interviews with people who were actually there."

Card said although Garrison gave his interview to Barbour in the mid-'80s, "The Garrison Tapes" are only reaching the marketplace now because "the marketplace is ready to respond to it. It should have been out long ago, but because of ('JFK'), people's interest has been piqued."

Both company execs mentioned the current glut of Kennedy assassination video paraphernalia on the shelves — much of it made in the

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'60s and '70s. But each said his project is unique. A 12-minute trailer for "Ruby" delineates a sinister connection between the U.S. government and the Mob, while "The Garrison Tapes" concentrates on tantalizing tidbits of information seldom seen elsewhere.

Blue Ridge is talking to distributors, Card said, but wants to refrain from signing away territories until after today's screening. Durie said that distributors from around the world have shown consistent interest in "Ruby" since the market's opening Thursday.

A PolyGram Propaganda production, "Ruby" opens domestically March 27, according to Uptown marketing consultant Bruce Feldman, who is overseeing the marketing of the project in America. Originally intended as a platform release, the success of "JFK" has prompted the film's U.S. distributors, Columbia Tri-Star, to open the film with 800 prints nationally.

"We're spending \$7½ million on P&A, and we've already seen great market appeal on this picture," Feldman said. "All our research shows that people really have a high level of awareness and there is a continuing interest in the subject matter." □