In 1977, the acclaimed American film magazine Cinefantastique devoted the majority of its volume 6, number 3 issue to The Wicker Man. This coincided with the American release of the film. A great deal of what is known about the film comes from this extensive article.

Seeing as this often quoted issue has been out of print for some thirty years, here is the article in its entirety. We would like to credit the now defunct Edward Woodward WWW pages for transcribing the article.

The piece was written by David Bartholomew.

I: THE FILM

"The whole thing was about apples -- that should have been the logo. There's nothing more innocent than an apple." --Paul Giovanni

The colors are deep-hued, resplendent, somewhat fevered. We are gliding too low and fast over islands which seem suddenly to emerge from the sea, as if for the first time. The islands are green and brown and richly foliaged, with gray, rough rocky coasts. The light is as just before a summer thunderstorm. The combination of all of these elements puts an uncomfortable edge on the first images of THE WICKER MAN. That something is going to happen is confirmed by the stolid appearance of palm trees, outlined against a dark sky, a species which has no rightful, natural place here.

Robin Hardy's film, written by playwright Anthony Shaffer, wastes no time. We have come to Summerisle, an isolated island off the harsh Scottish coast, in a sea plane piloted by Sgt. Howie (Edward Woodward) of the West Highland police, who has been summoned by an anonymous letter to investigate the disappearance of a little girl.

TWM Genre films seldom use the theme of the clash of religions (or systems of belief) to any great purpose beyond surface scares, enabling voodooists, cavemen, witches, Golems, demons, mummys and vampires to run amok among the civilized moderns, quickly reduced to numb terror. I can think of only a few meritorious exceptions to the truly massive number of these vapid films: I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE, NIGHT OF THE HUNTER, BURN WITCH BURN, CURSE OF THE DEMON, GANJA AND HESS, and LORD SHANGO. But in none of these is the clash as fully and intelligently articulated as in THE WICKER MAN. Summerisle is a pagan island, a culture separated from the rest of the world, almost from time, symbolized and led by a patrician lord (Christopher Lee). Howie, the policeman, is a Christian, an Anglican, and in a deft, sometimes overwhelming way, he is meant to represent a good bit more. The clash in the larger sense, of ideas and

beliefs, is embodied by these two men on a personal level.

Howie comes to the island as an outsider -- he even arrives in a plane, which remains, offering the security of escape if things get too rough, bobbing in the choppy waters of the harbor -- and he remains an outsider throughout his stay. Needing a boat to get ashore, Howie must shout through his bullhorn and gesture to make himself understood to the group of villagers gathered on the wharf a few hundred feet away. This first attempt at communication sets the pattern for his mission, for even when the physical distance is erased, Howie is still unable to break through to the people in any sense whatsoever. In using the plane, Howie has, in effect, literally dropped from the sky, lending him a (Christian) god-like status, avoiding contact with the earth and water. Standing on his plane, Howie is photographed in isolating one-shots, which are cut against the multi-shot community of villagers, who are right from their initial appearance associated with the land, which plays an important part in their religion. (Later the camera will pan continuously over their faces, cutting Howie out of the frame, as they glance at the photograph and decline knowledge of the missing girl.)

Once onshore, Howie immediately establishes himself in a series of roles which while alien to the villagers are comforting to him, since they represent and translate the routinized stability of his life on mainland Scotland to the unfamiliar surroundings. Howie is a detective, applying logical investigatory methods, seeking only facts. By his uniform, which he wears throughout the film, he affirms himself not so much as a single man but as an agent of the government, of the police, a superior authority. His distaste and impatience with his quest on the island is evident almost at once. Before very long, we are made aware of his straight laced, nearly Calvinist beliefs and that he is properly affianced, quite chastely, to a proper girl, one whom he may not necessarily love -- we learn later that he is terrified of passion, perhaps because it is so uncertain -- but one with whom he feels very sure he will secure the "good" life he has been taught by his entire upbringing to seek. Hardy shrewdly implies Howie's entire background and character by closely studying his behavior and takes excellent advantage of Woodward's slightly wooden presence and stiff posture to characterize his beliefs and expectations perfectly.

Crucially, we share Howie's viewpoint throughout the film, a stranger experiencing ever more strange things. A boisterous pub assaults him with a bawdy song, sung for the innkeeper's daughter (Britt Ekland) but almost entirely at Howie's expense. He flees only to discover a bacchanal in the nearby green and graveyard, the nude lovers flung among the headstones. On the second night of his stay, in his room, his composure cracking, Ekland nearly seduces him, her sexuality slicing through the very walls of his room, with a strangely erotic, slapping dance and murmured song and music filtering from the pub below.

TWM Howie bravely commutes his discomfort to professionalism: the gathering of clues, although he is soon frustrated there as well, compounded by the more he observes of the island's paganistic culture. Everyone easily declines knowledge of the missing girl, except the young daughter of the postmistress, who says she has seen her and that she has drawn a picture of her, where upon she proudly points to a watercolor that Howie has been helping

her to paint (and staining his hands in the process)...of a hare in the fields. He locates the girl's name, which is Rowan, in the ledgers of the schoolteacher (Diane Cilento), but he is so shocked at the pagan "filth being taught here" to the class of young girls that he must leave ("They're all raving mad.") Hardy cleverly uses the school setting, blackboard notes, and dialogue to further explain the beliefs of the island -- it is as if we are among the schoolchildren learning lessons -- which is basically an ancient pantheistic religion, the sort rediscovered and lionized by the British Romantic poets -- principally Wadsworth -- of the early 19th Century, utilizing the old gods of the earth, sun and the elements, and the violent, transcending primacy of nature.

However, it is only when Howie arranges to meet the Lord of Summerisle (Christopher Lee), a titular leader with whom Howie, a man who respects organization and order, is obviously used to dealing, does he attempt to conquer his growing fears and repugnance and muster an intellectual stance, which quickly becomes, through the rest of the film, a (self) defense. It is also at this point that THE WICKER MAN turns most interestingly into a personified clash of faiths and precepts, coldly ritualized into dogma in the case of Howie's religion, but very actively evolving activities, in the May Day ceremonies and beyond, in the villagers'. The clash occurs through an ultimate test of personal wills -- Howie's and Summerisle's. No longer is it a question of a missing girl, but a battle for a life and a soul, the girl's, to Howie's view, but in reality his own.

Shaffer, a notorious lover of puzzles and games (e.g. SLEUTH, play and film), has fashioned the screenplay as a conundrum, which astutely maintains a non-Manichaean stance. Both sides -- Christianity and paganism -- seem to win; however, the former is represented by a man slowly falling into confusion. Theoretically one of the most understanding and tolerant of religions, Christianity proves in Howie's practice to be hypocritical, closed, a bit cruel. Howie is ultimately trapped by his own stolidity, his sealed-off mind, his stuffy superiority. Summerisle even turns his Christianity against him. At the end, as Howie discovers that his entire "mission" has been pre-arranged and carefully plotted, with the end point that he is to die by fire in the wicker man as a sacrifice to the fertility of the coming season's crops and harvest, Summerisle offers him martyrdom, a chance to "sit with the saints," the highest Christian death. And Howie still rejects the notion and his fate as "murder." His very use of the word at this late point indicates that Howie is still uncomprehendingly tied to his now totally irrelevant concepts and roles. That he has failed miserably in one of them (detective) is also now marginal: he is a man trapped in a MacGuffin (which reminds us of Shaffer's association with FRENZY), tearing around in dizzying circles trying to "solve" it, never able even to guess at the true plot beyond it although the evidence of it lies all around him.

TWM Oddly enough, the mid-section of the film is the slackest, when Summerisle is introduced in his castle and recites the past history of the island to Howie, but the pacing soon picks up. It is almost as if being inside the ornate rooms, cut off from the land and vegetation so central to the film, is responsible. Unfortunately, we also simply distrust Summerisle. It is unavoidable; we must blame it on Christopher Lee's entire screen persona as villain, established in too many cheap, awful pictures that put depthless characters through their paces -- the projector reduced to meat grinder. We wonder if Summerisle, as

Howie suspects, is not using these people as pawns -- as his grandfather did, to a certain extent, in reintroducing "the old gods" to the island to allow him to continue his botanical studies -- for more conventionally criminal purposes, like a pot of gold in the basement, or for personal selfishness. The feeling flares into the open when Howie, being prepared for sacrifice, warns Summerisle that if the crops fail next year, they'll come for him, and there's a cut to Lee, in closeup, looking briefly furtive.

During the May Day procession (which Hardy does not quite bring off successfully), Lee/Summerisle appears ludicrous, wearing a frumpy housewifely frock, sneakers, and a wig that looks like the '60s Cher. It's a lapse marring the tightly knit mood in a film that for maximum effect should not have any.

For the greater part, Hardy adroitly piles detail onto detail, from the carefully woven hare imagery (the child's drawing, the figure on the wine goblet, the chocolate figures in the sweet shop, the dead hare in the buried coffin) to the overtly phallicized May Day celebrations (the stone circle, May Pole, etc.) to Howie's ironic exchanging of his uniform for the costume and mask of the Fool character to join the procession in order to discover where the "missing" girl is being held for the sacrifice. Earlier, Howie's plight and fate are perfectly imaged in the school room sequence, when he discovers the "missing" girl's vacant desk. In it is a beetle attached to a pin by a length of string; the insect can only travel in an ever tighter circle, round and round the pin, until it is caught up tight to it. Of course, there is the wicker man itself, a mock Christ in a religion that prefigured Him, a giant concoction with separate compartments for different animals. With the largest in the center for Howie.

Even apparent mis-steps work (again we think of Shaffer's game-playing), if unintentionally, as part of the overall design. When Howie finally discovers the "missing" girl in the cave, her cry to him ("Hurry, please, I don't like it here!") rings false. Later we discover she is only playing a part, like the others, to entrap him further. The moment of their "escape" is underlined with a burst of electronic rock music, as if signalling a "happy" ending in a conventional genre movie way; here, it's only a false tease. The passage is also completely alien to the rest of the music in the film, intriguingly derived by Paul Giovanni from traditional songs and poetry.

THE WICKER MAN benefits from an unerring production design and settings by Seamus Flannery, remarkably photographed by Harry Waxman from the eerie initial aerial shots onward. Summerisle is cleverly culled from a number of different villages and locations, while the Lord's manor house, inside and out, is also a composite. Even the blooming foliage is courtesy of Flannery and Hardy, in a painstaking task of dressing the existing plants since this film about Springtime was shot during the dying winter months. The vegetation is real enough; that part of the film's plot is quite true in that the gardens and greenery, including the ominous palm trees that look so out of place, result from a quirk of nature in which the coral and volcanic-derived soil and nearby warm Gulf Stream have made the area, in Western Scotland, into a botanist's potential fantasy.

TWM That a film as well-made as THE WICKER MAN, both as a consistently intelligent

work of art and an effective genre-staple horror (or terror) film, thus merging a wide audience spectrum, could be shovelled from hand to hand only to gather dust on various shelves, without a theatrical release or sale to TV, says much that is significant about the movie business as a world-wide industry.

The story of THE WICKER MAN in America (and in England) would make an excellent if brutally pessimistic film in itself, although it, too, might never see the light of a projector.

That story's too far-fetched; people wouldn't believe it.

II: GENESIS

"About ten years ago we were filming in the Cornwall area, and one evening we went into Padstow for dinner. Now that is a village where these festivals are still held, and quite by accident we stumbled right on to it. We saw the Hobby-horse chasing the girls, everything. But they had seemed to put up a wall of evasion about it. And it was very unpleasant being a stranger in that town on that day." --Robin Hardy

All films start the same way, with an idea.

"It really began in a quite curious way," remembers Anthony Shaffer, the British playwright and screenwriter and winner of two Edgars from the Mystery Writers of America (for "Sleuth" and FRENZY). "I met a fellow called Peter Snell, who was then managing director of British Lion. And another fellow called Christopher Lee, whom we all know of, and we said, 'Why can't we do a picture together?'"

A book was found and purchased, the name and writer of which no one now remembers. Paul Giovanni, an American who came into the project much later to compose the music, recalls that "the novel was bad, a 5th-rate piece of work, a bare, unrealized sketch of an idea that only hinted at the things that would later become THE WICKER MAN."

But it was enough to intrigue Shaffer, who is a devout horror film fan. He was unable to work it up into a screenplay (the process of adapting another work is, to him, "a mug's game"), and things came to a standstill, which is the normal rate of speed for anything in the movie industry.

For many years through the '60s, Shaffer and writer/director Robin Hardy had worked together as H & S Associates in England, packaging and producing films, plays, and documentaries for British and French television and occasionally commercials.

Early in 1972, the two partners spent a long weekend together and according to Hardy "began discussing the evolution of the horror film away from the old standbys, terribly overused, like things based on the Devil as the antithesis of Christianity. We thought finally about doing a film with an original story that in effect has the cast of a superior horror film but which goes right back to people who believed in real magic, sympathetic magic, people who believed that the elements had real power. But we didn't want them all romping around in Early English period costumes or whatever and thought about doing it in a contemporary setting.

"During that weekend, we literally worked out the entire plot: that we wanted an island setting, to bring in microcosmic aspects; that there would be a character who would be the subject of that island's plot, with the endpoint a sacrifice. And that there would be a lure to get him to come there."

Hardy had had a heart attack some time earlier and thus was severely restricted in his physical movements, so the pair agreed that if Hardy would do all the research needed in order to flesh out the details of the culture they would portray, then Shaffer would write the screenplay. The time that Hardy required dovetailed perfectly with Shaffer's pending commitments in the U.S.

After several drafts, the screenplay was finally completed. It then became a question of securing a production deal, the crucial first step that many, many scripts never manage. Shaffer proposed it to Peter Snell, to replace his stalled adaptation. At the same time, he showed it to Christopher Lee, who had been anxious to play the part of a Jesuit priest in an earlier Shaffer screenplay called ABSOLUTION (which Shaffer terms "a nasty little goodie") that never found a producer. Lee read it and also urged Snell to take it on. "Snell was so impressed with the story that he presented it to the Board of British Lion who were also enthusiastic and said, 'All right, we'll do it, provided that the budget be kept low.' And that was it," recalls Lee.

TWM Shaffer polished up the screenplay. Hardy was signed on as director. He had never done a theatrical feature film before.

As Shaffer puts it, "It didn't seem to me to be any good reason why we shouldn't make it."

III: RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND

"Let's face it; there are strange communities in this world." --Christopher Lee

"I had always been interested in comparative religions. One of the first TV jobs I had was

producing religious affairs programmes, so I learned a great deal about Christianity, the differences in theology between the whole spectrum of Roman Catholics to Baptists and Unitarians. I was later told I was hired for the series because I was an Agnostic, which was, and is, quite true."

A sharply intelligent man, Robin Hardy began his career with the National Film Board of Canada where he did "rafts of documentary films, literally hundreds, over the years." In the late '50s he moved to New York and worked exclusively in television, largely for the "Esso World Theatre" series, where in 1964 he directed "Haunted Passage," a study of the Indian theatre that included a play by Satyajit Ray, and a documentary/survey of Japanese theatre called "The Frozen Moment," which incidentally dealt with ritual and ancient dances and dramas. Work on this anthology series took him all over the world, to Sweden, India, Japan, and France, filming stage productions for broadcast. Later, back in England, Hardy directed, Shaffer produced, and both of them wrote projects under their H&S Associates banner.

Now he was a researcher and spent four months in England studying paganism. "To begin with, we thought of a Hebridean island that could have been made fruitful by an agronomist. It had to have the Gulf Stream phenomenon to fit the story, simply because paganism was closely effected with the crops and sun worship. And I discovered that such island paradises existed. For instance, the Scilly Isles have a strong romantic tradition of the sort we ascribed to Summerisle and are fairly well-known in England. As late as 1920, Lord Leverham, who founded Lever Brothers, bought an island and turned it into a model farm -- it's still there. He did it not just to grow palm trees for the sake of growing them, but more like Lord Summerisle's grandfather; he was an experimental agronomist and tried to develop new strains and succeeded. Those palm trees that we used in the film, for instance, are real.

"As to the pagan culture, everything you see in the film is absolutely authentic. The whole series of ceremonies and details that we show have happened at different times and places in Britain and Western Europe. What we did was to bring them all together in one particular place and time.

"Summerisle is a real island, although we did not film there. The island lies far north of where we filmed, roughly 12-15 miles off the Scottish coast. We discovered only after the shooting was done that Summerisle did indeed grow and was known for its apples, although today it is nearly barren. In fact, it is the only island in the area to do so. The apple trees there are wild, and there are stories of fishermen returning to their mainland homes stopping off on Summerisle to pick the apples.

TWM "The wicker man itself is quite real. The Druids used the structure to burn their sacrificial victims. Historically, the first mention of it is in Julius Caesar's Diaries, in 55 BC, when he noted that Roman prisoners of war were taken by the British tribes and burned as sacrifices. As far as that practice goes, sacrifice is common to every pagan religion in Europe. The Celts were by no means different from the Romans or the Greeks, or the Celtic British, now the Welsh. It was a completely universal practice.

"Take the scene where the woman puts the frog in the child's throat. Well, that's a classic piece of sympathetic magic. Listen to the poor thing croak, taking all the pain into itself. Even the beetle on the string is not hokey -- Salem witches were burned for things like that, using an animal as a surrogate for a person in a spell. The beetle stands in for the person you want to trap.

"Burning the fingers of a dead man's hand -- that's called 'the Hand of Glory,' and only one of many ways to spell a person to sleep. Another was to take earth from a grave and put it one floor directly above the person you want to sleep. Again, sympathetic magic.

TWM "All this sort of transference of ideas is common, like the pregnant women touching the buds of the apple trees to make the apples plentiful -- that connects with the 'make the baby king' myth. And the girls jumping over the fires to make themselves fruitful, which is actually a Beltane myth. One has to remember that pagan people all over the world saw no connection between the sexual act and pregnancy. And all these things, as we illustrated in the schoolroom scenes, were part and parcel of normal pagan education.

"Take the use of the hare all the way through the film. It is an excellent image for the belief in the transmutated soul. I suppose it was because of their speed and freedom. All hares run wild; rabbits live in warrens. The Easter Bunny is actually the Easter Hare. And that's tremendously celebrated all over the world without really knowing why. Take the phrase, 'mad as a March hare,' well that refers to the new season coming in, the activity of Spring.

"There are so many Christian holidays that are celebrated where there was previously a pagan feast. Easter is one of them, originally it was a hare feast. Christmas has been put where the Beltane feast was. At Christmas, you set up a Christmas tree because that was what the goddess Hera worshipped. Mistletoe is purely Druidic -- it relates to the Golden Bough. My God, when you decorate your home for Christmas you are using nearly every pagan symbol there is!

"The Christian harvest celebration, or Thanksgiving, is a continuation of a far older feast, similar to the Inca or Egyptian feasts, also done in Europe, like the 'skinning of the goddess.' Haven't you ever wondered why all priests, and not only Roman Catholic ones, wear women's clothes?

"The film's sexuality is completely natural. It is May Day night. The May Pole is an obvious phallic symbol, and we show a boy climb to the top and crown it. In the evening the Summerisle character brings the same boy to the innkeeper's daughter for sexual initiation. On the green, the women are sitting on top of the men; the one girl sobbing on the grave, mourning a lover, is in the same position as the other women who are celebrating a bit more actively with the men.

"The Green Man, which is our pub name, is one of the oldest pagan images: the tree come to life, the tree turning itself into a man. It is the most common pub sign all over England today.

"What we hoped would fascinate people is not that they would think these things are still going on in Europe, but that they would recognize an awful lot of these things as sort of little echoes from either out of childhood stories and nursery rhymes or things they do at various times of the year.

"But they're not dead. The thing about these beliefs is that people do these things today and not know why they do them. We call them 'superstitions.' There are millions of people who know nothing about the Golden Bough who will...'touch wood.' Or won't walk under ladders. They all have profoundly important and real origins in pagan belief.

"The procession and ceremonies at the stone circle are based on the Morosco dance-drama, the oldest in English history, that's the whole thing with the Fool, the Betsy or Hobby Horse and the Teaser. A derivation of it, is the Morris dance, the part done by the swordsmen; it's still performed today. The basque people in Spain have elements of it in their culture, so it's widespread.

"Estimates vary, but I understand that there are probably in excess of two or three thousand of these kinds of festivals held every year in Western Europe, all over Britain, from the Caucasus northward. And they're celebrated genuinely. The most important one in Britain is in Padstow, which is the one we stumbled into, which experience is really where the idea for the film came from. In that one, the girls still jump through the fire. Of course, they're not naked.

"The point is that it is not for nothing that active paganism is for the most part gone. For one thing, it keeps people in the thrall of superstition. Maybe it's not too big a connection to make between the final scene of THE WICKER MAN and the Nuremberg Rallies in Germany. It was no accident that Hitler brought back all those pagan feasts in his rise to power. It's a great, German thing, really, Wagner after all was always going into the Niebelungen and Ring cycles, glorifying all the old German gods. The idea that it is necessary to sacrifice people for the good of other people is never too far from the human consciousness at any one time. You can't simply say that it was something those people did all those years ago and has nothing to do with us today."

TWM That interest runs high in these subjects is not surprising, especially in Britain, where up until not too long ago films about witchcraft were banned outright. As Tony Shaffer commented, "Once you get some leads, you can trace anything through the London libraries. But you can also put an ad query in the paper, and the lunatics come howling out of the woodwork at you!"

But not quite everything in the film is authentic. Despite the opening title expressing thanks to Lord Summerisle for his cooperation in making the film, the gentleman, in fact, does not exist. Both Hardy and Shaffer only grudgingly admitted it after point-blank questions. The latter began laughing. "Well, it's a trick. I think Peter Snell first thought of it, to lend some outward 'reality' to this implausible tale. It's a bit glib -- I had two minds about using it -- but the intention was to say to people who perhaps are not putting too much attention on the

film, 'Look, this really happened...' And it did the trick."

IV: THE SCREENPLAY

"I have always believed that the truth can be shown upside down..." --Anthony Shaffer

"I doubt if anyone will ever write a more remarkable script for a film." --Christopher Lee

"It seemed to me to be a subject -- the Celtic beliefs and how they're represented in this country -- that I have never really seen treated properly, with the Hobby Horse, the Teaser, the Punch or Fool figure, the Hanged Man, the Green Man, the Golden Bough or Sacred Oak myths, the force that intervenes in life, sometimes it demands a sacrifice, sometimes it doesn't. All of it. I thought there was so much there in Celtic mythology that no one has ever laid a glove on, and I thought it was about time someone did."

Anthony Shaffer came out of Cambridge with a law degree in 1950. He practiced in London for three years, then went into journalism, writing ads for Pearl and Dean, the largest of the movie theatre circuits. He also wrote documentaries and a series of Gothic novels in collaboration with his twin brother, Peter. He spent several years in television, part of the time incorporated with Hardy, but also wrote plays and a number of unproduced screen plays, including FORBUSH AND THE PENGUINS and PLAY WITH A GYPSEY, later known (and mentioned above) as ABSOLUTION. In 1970, his first major play "Sleuth" was produced in London and won a Tony award in its New York production late in the same year. He also adapted his play for the Joe Mankiewicz film, adapted his brother's 1967 play "Black Comedy" for the screen, wrote FRENZY for Hitchcock from an Arthur La Bern novel and has had another play, "Murderer," produced in London in 1975, although it did not match his earlier success and was not brought to Broadway.

Shaffer's interests are inseparable from his work. As Robin Hardy mentions, "Both Tony and Peter have an absolute fascination with games, with people devising elaborate games at somebody else's expense. They also adore fantasy and horror films and will invariably travel all the way across town to a little flea pit showing something or other."

TWM That obsession is infectious -- their mutual friendship with fellow gamester Stephen Sondheim partly inspired Sondheim and Anthony Perkins to write THE LAST OF SHEILA. And the brothers, with each other's connivance, are notorious for pulling pranks on others, because they are identical twins.

Hardy seemed best able to define Shaffer's characteristic style of writing: "Tony has a theory that comes into all his work. He really doesn't care what other people want -- he

wants to turn on the audience with surprises, funny delights, intellectual goodies, all sorts of things. It's a Chinese box theory of entertainment: a box inside a box inside a box and so on, with each box slightly different and more surprising than the last." Producer Snell adds, "He's a highly intelligent individual and the kind of writer who cannot write an exchange of dialogue between two characters without attempting to get something across of his own point of view or observation. You come away from certain things in his work, especially in THE WICKER MAN, remembering and thinking very hard about them, as distinct from writing something off as some sort of simple entertainment experience."

Shaffer comments, "I usually take about four months to do a script, but this one came much quicker, especially once the idea was there, about 10½ weeks, I believe. It's this whole business about truth, about perceiving it, even upside down, although that's sometimes done in plays and films just to confuse or mislead, to make a 'mystery.' I always believe the thriller form is grossly under used. It's stuck in the whodunit thing, or violence and police cars running about the streets or endless parrying.

"I think it really means what it says: a mystery is a mystery, and in order to reveal a mystery, you've got to tell it like one. Otherwise you'd never be able to see what you've said. Years ago I read a play on the Eichmann business called "The Savage Parade." And I wrote a play about a man being captured in Argentina, and during his trial, it turned out that he wasn't the sought-after criminal at all, that it was the man who had captured and brought him in. Then I kept fastening onto each of the rest of the characters in the play as the culprit, until we wound up with one of the judges, who was then hanged. Then, a report comes in that Eichmann or whoever had been captured somewhere else, with the idea that the whole thing would start over. Well, what do we make of that? It is a 'savage parade,' and it continues.

"What we're saying about Summerisle is that in a given society, where our 'normal' mores have been reversed, i.e. it's a good thing to burn books or inform on your parents, under these circumstances, then everyone could have been Eichmann. Everybody could have done it. In a sense, everyone did do it.

TWM "It's a pompous way of putting it, but you can actually bring a reasonable amount of lecturing and moral philosophy into a dramatic form that is getting too little of it. If the form is acceptable, if the surface level or story is jolly good, well, underneath it you can say what you really want to say without being boring about it.

"THE WICKER MAN is a horror film, if only because of its horrific ending. There are terms in this world that are grossly misused: 'detective story,' 'thriller,' and a third is 'horror film.' What is a horror film? It's Christopher Lee with those silly teeth in, rushing around through papier-mache corridors chasing nubile ladies. What you see now playing around are the same old boring legends, Frankenstein and Dracula in various forms. Of course they're not horrific, because once you've seen the monster, with each succeeding occasion it appears it loses its effectiveness and becomes familiar. In most cases the monster is also impotent -- all he can do is gibble about and occasionally bite someone. This quickly runs out of any form of horror whatsoever. And then another person comes in wearing the teeth,

but it's no great surprise. And all those weedy science fiction pictures! You find a few, like NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, but most of them have no imagination at all.

"Plainly there has to be more to the genre than that. I've always found that the great ones have to be about something. Take, for example, REPULSION. Now that is a great horror film. This woman shouldn't be in her apartment -- she should be under medical care. The fact that she is left alone to join up, to cohere, to collide with her fantasies is horror. And in this kind of horror film, you've got to have real human beings.

"But there's a second type of horror film, where that's not always possible, perhaps because the proposition is too far advanced to fully believe. These films are about the imagination, about the quality of imagination. A good example are the Edgar Allan Poe stories which have characters who as humans are a bit difficult to take but which are terrifying pieces of work. It's here that I think we should put THE WICKER MAN.

"I really think we should be finding new names for these things, because 'horror' implies second-rate bits of crap. Disaster movies are really horror movies that have found themselves a new name. There is a lot of the Gothic in it. And I think they should be set just slightly out of their own time, now not that you should use a castle or set it in the 17th or 18th century in some sort of ancient torture chamber. One of the things that works so well in THE WICKER MAN is that we took reasonable trouble to make it perfectly contemporary; the people could wear suits and didn't run around in old cowls or something, which I often find takes away from the horror of the situation. We've all been there, haven't we? But you can find just as much horror on High Street with supermarkets and chemist shops, in the sunlight, if you have a really good story.

"I didn't write THE WICKER MAN as an atheistic picture. If you look at it in one way, it is Christianity that is the new boy -- it's only been going for 2,000 years. The stuff in our film has been going on for thousands and thousands of years. What they worship in the picture is obviously the manifestation of a deity. It doesn't matter what you call it. There's no such thing as atheism -- it's a ridiculous word. You can see whatever you call it, the force or power higher than one's self, in everything. In a leaf. In wood. In the light of someone's eye. Now you can explain the chemical composition of that leaf and why it's green, or the reflection process by which you get that light in your eye, but that by no means, not in the least, can really make you believe there isn't that higher force.

"You cannot believe without faith -- that's the message of every religion. It should be an 'aware' faith -- that's the aim of the sufis for example, to have an open-eyed faith rather than a blind one. Obviously, when people use blood sacrifice in order to appease whatever gods they believe in, for us today it is a meaningless gesture, partly because we kill so many people anyway. The price of human life is almost irrelevant. If we've learned anything at all, we realize that what effects us is precisely what we ourselves are prepared to do and not what a third force will do for us. We must become aware ourselves that nothing is going to come from that. You can sacrifice an ox, a human being, a pelican, any damn thing you want -- nothing's going to happen.

"The further point is this: if by sacrifice you come to believe that as a result of it you have to do something, whether it's dig the soil or whatever to make the crops grow, then it could fill a certain function. We still sort of sacrifice people; look at sports -- ¾ of the sportsmen of the world go onto the football field or whatever wearing some sort of emblem or carrying a rabbit's foot. You can't eradicate a belief. That you are born with it, or inherit it, to some extent you can rationalize it. And it could have a value, so that two and two will not always make four.

"Of course, we have tended to give up human sacrifice, although maybe those of us who think this government should go, should actually start now and go down to Trafalgar Square and get a few fellows and burn 'em up. Real sacrifice is still here; it's that you sacrifice yourself, change the pattern of your life, give up something that means something to you. That's what sacrifice is about, not something that's merely trying to bring in a force that can have no conceivable way of helping you with your problems.

"As to the end of THE WICKER MAN, the question of belief is based on martyrdom. Why do you think this Zeffirelli Christ thing was such a big success? It took a naive and somewhat childish view of the matter. Now I don't mean to put Howie in the same league with Jesus. But this man with his eyes open had to be a martyr. The thing had to be set up for him, and it was via Judas. Judas himself is the sacrifice. When Jesus says, 'Greater love hath no man than to give up his life for another,' who is He talking about? Not Himself, but Judas! Have you ever looked at it that way?

"We don't know if Summerisle's sacrifice fails -- the apples could come tumbling out of the trees that year, but if they don't, the people will have to have another go next year. And they must go back to the community for the victim, and who's the top banana there? The Summerisle character. That's why I shoved that line in there when Howie warns him.

TWM "But if the apples do return, whether it was because of the sacrifice or by a natural process -- it's not unknown for crops to fail and grow the next year -- who knows? It's not, after all, the continuing story of Summerisle. You have to be left with a certain doubt. This time we leave the people in a very happy state; they've burned this man and they go home as if they've been to a football match. The kids might get their schoolbooks out, everything, as if they've seen nothing. Now that's real horror. However, for them, it's not horrible because they believe in it.

"So our intent was to do an unusual picture in the horror vein, one that hopefully works on the accumulation of details. To a certain extent, you are meant to put it together for yourself. I feel you must leave something for your audience to do, you have to.

"However, the problems are apparent. The film business, or what there is left of it in England -- it scarcely exists -- is run by people who like to play safe. If you've gone on the stage with something that's made a fortune for all involved, they say, 'Oh, yes let's do the film. We love it.' Same with a book on the best-seller list. It takes no great talent or act of courage to select a property. But you submit an original, and they'll regard it as, you know... one of those, and put it well down on the list for production, below one that has guaranteed

a success by succeeding in an other medium. Originals are difficult to get done, and I think it is the fault of the people who sell the films and advertise them."

V: PRODUCTION

"The script was brilliant and unproducible, except with a budget of like $7 million." --Paul Giovanni

"The film was made for $750,000." --Robin Hardy

By May of 1972, a businessman named John Bentley had wrested control of British Lion, and he promptly brought in Peter Snell, an independent producer (his credits include, in the genre, GOODBYE GEMINI, in 1970), who had come over to London from Canada, to run the company as managing director and head of production. At the time, Shepperton was the studio arm of British Lion, and Bentley tried to sever the two and began to enlist buyers for the studio acreage, which was considerable. However, this was a highly unpopular move with the British film industry, already in a depressed state, and the unions began to exert tremendous pressure. Partly to appease them, to convince them that he wasn't out to asset-strip the company, Bentley decided he wanted to get something -- any thing -- into production. He conferred with Snell, and by the Summer of 1972, the Shaffer property appeared the most promising; that is, it was the script that had the most appeal that could also be kept within a low budget figure. Snell claims that Bentley "insisted" that his "friend" Robin Hardy direct (although Hardy, who barely knew Bentley, discounts this conjecture), possibly because of the fact that it was Hardy's initial feature and therefore, he would not cost so much. And besides, Snell liked the screenplay.

Suddenly the film was on. Snell, Shaffer and Hardy decided Paul Giovanni was the man to handle the music, which right from the start was to be an important part of the film's concept. He was contacted and hired and immediately set to work composing, since all the music tracks were to be pre-recorded.

There was never any question, especially in Hardy's mind, that the film would be done entirely on location, strangely enough, leaving Shepperton empty the entire time. Hardy immediately took off and spent six weeks scouting locations through Scotland, while Snell completed signing the technical crew, mostly chosen from Shepperton personnel, and actors.

From his trip, knowing his actual production time would be limited, Hardy designed a "shooting journey" in order to best utilize the crew's time and keep logistical expenses low. Newton Stewart, on the Cree River in southwest Scotland, was agreed on as production

base. Snell's final budget allowed for a 7-week shooting schedule, although an additional two days were eventually required.

Certainly in the sense of time and money, THE WICKER MAN was a small picture. And oddly enough, as with a surprising number of small movies, production, while complicated, went very smoothly. The sole problem was this, and it was the only thing everyone complained about: the cold weather. As Tony Shaffer observed, "Such was the great wisdom of the British film industry" that a film crucially set in March was photographed in October and November with the temperature constantly dropping and the onset of winds and rain more and more probable. During production, it got to the point that more than just Hardy the neophyte were working under the gun.

Both Hardy and Shaffer were satisfied with the casting, although the latter was more critical, particularly as regards the strange mixture of accents supposedly native to the film's Scottish island. "Britt Ekland was chosen by Peter Snell who believed she had a following in the U.S. She's a quite limited actress, and there's that lovely Scandinavian face and accent. However, the point is that she was pretty enough for it. Christopher has qualities and defects, although the latter mainly stream from over-exposure in the Dracula canon. He's obviously been trying to get away from all that. He's absolutely super to work with. He's got presence and brings it out well. He's got an amazing voice -- he's an opera singer -- however, the trouble with him is that he just loves the sound of it! He delivers what we pay him for, and that is very rare. Diane Cilento was chosen because I thought she is a very good actress who needs to do more work. Robin chose Lindsay Kemp [as the innkeeper], one of the strangest choices, ever. Of course, you need to cast against type, especially the stereotype innkeeper, usually stout and jolly, with a Scottish accent, grunting about in an apron. Lindsay gives the part a strangest -- he's one of the freakiest people in the industry. I'm not sure he was the right choice, but he's not the wrong one either. Woodward, of course, has a big following by his long-running CALLAN television series, and he was excellent."

Ingrid Pitt, in a small role as the librarian, was the only performer imposed on the production, and that was for reasons of better securing booking through Rank cinemas (British Lion, as a production and, under Snell, distribution company, controls no theatres). However, that plan misfired via an incident, quite funny but. . .delicate, that happened on location during a late evening birthday party, that no one interviewed would give permission to reveal. However, her chief ineffectiveness to the film lies mostly in the incongruity of her strong German accent.

TWM Voices, apart from dubbing, will out, but the endless fascination of film is its potential for trickery. The film's tiny island of Summerisle is actually a series of 25 different locations, most of them on the Scottish mainland, spanning a distance, north to south, of nearly 190 miles. The difference in terrain, and of course, weather conditions made the task of cinematographer Harry Waxman to match shots quite arduous.

A prime, nearly perfect example of this sort of fakery was Summerisle's castle, which was "composed" of two different castles, about 40 miles apart. Culzean, near Ayr, on the

western coast of Scotland, was used for exteriors; however, the interior was Adam period, or 18th Century, which was contrary to the film's storyline which had Summerisle's grandfather, a classic Huxley-esque, Darwin-esque figure, coming to the island in the 1800's. The needed Victorian interior was located in Lord Stair's castle, near Wigtown. This castle was so massive, with huge rooms, that the crew used only the foyer as Summerisle's drawing room, the real room was much too large.

The odd landscaping outside the Stair castle was put to good use by Hardy. Lord Stair himself occupied the land for 50 years under the Hanoverian crown. He retired there complete with his two regiments of cavalry and designed the grounds surrounding the castle with mounds and small pockets to be used for manoeuvres to keep the men occupied. The present Lady Stair still lives in the castle and occasionally would drop in to watch the shooting, each time startling the crew because she bears a marked resemblance to Queen Elizabeth. Her most uncomfortable visit, remembers Hardy, "giving everyone a fright," came during the filming of the fire-jumping dance by the young girls, skimpily dressed in nude body stockings, at the stone circle. (The circle itself was another "cheat:" modelled on Stonehenge, the stones were made of styrofoam.)

The film was shot almost completely out of sequence and on real locations, partly due to Hardy's previous documentary experience, partly to the financial "nonsense" of trying to achieve authenticity in a studio. Hardy says, "For reasons of taste and economy, I never really like using studios if I can possibly avoid it. In some cases we would alter the existing location, put in a false door or something. But basically, it's all real. What art director could put in all the detail that we were able to find and make it all believable. And absolutely no one could have produced that extraordinary texture of architecture which is all over the place." Among the most changed locations were those in Kirkcudbright, southeast of Newton Stewart, where they shot the sequences in the ruined church and the sweet shop, where a false staircase was built for the scenes with Howie, the postmistress (Irene Sunters) and her little girl.

The Logan Gardens, in Scottish Galloway, were used for Summerisle's "tour" of his land with Howie. Maintained by the Scottish Botanical Gardens, Logan is only one of a string of four or five similar gardens along the western coast. They are not very large, only ten to fifteen acres each, but the variety of plants and foliage, and those palm trees, are exactly as they appear in the film.

However, because of the time of year, while the plants were still green, they had no flowers and buds, which led to art director Seamus Flannery's biggest headache: dressing each individual plant with blossoms. In some of the long shots, this amounted to a hundred or more plants, especially in the scenes showing the apple trees. This was largely accomplished by carrying around a truck full of trees and plants wired with blossoms which could be attached to existing trees and plants.

The aerial shots near the beginning of the film were shot over islands on the way to Skye, a large island which with Lewis abut the far northwestern Scottish mainland. Some of these islands do benefit from the attributes of the film's Summerisle, the warm water and soil

conditions, although most are not inhabited. Many are completely barren because the sheep, which people have grazed there for generation after generation, have destroyed every single tree and shrub. Indeed, as Hardy notes, "The grazing has been so destructive to the land that it was necessary after World War II for the government to implement a huge re-foresting program all over Scotland to save the land."

TWM The real Summerisle, which is not on most maps, although viewers of the film might have scurried to their atlas to try and find it, lies even further north. But, as Snell cracked, "The real Summerisle is probably today inhabited by two men and a goat."

The scenes showing Howie's seaplane arriving in the harbor were shot at Plockton, a small village (also not on most maps) that lies at the mouth of the Carran River.

This village illustrates why Hardy had to use so many different locations. "In Plockton, once you go around the main street, which we show in the film, along the water, there are simply not enough buildings behind it to flesh out a town of large enough size. And in all the towns and villages where we shot, while all the buildings you see are real, frequently if you turned the camera around, down the road might be some dreadfully modern little house which would spoil the whole effort. Matching up locations, tacking together a homogeneous town out of disparate buildings and even pieces of buildings, all sympathetic architecturally, is tricky but something I find quite fun to do. And you really have to, these days, anywhere in Europe, especially if you're making a period piece or sustaining a mood, because otherwise you find yourself accidentally staring at a telegraph pole or television aerial."

The most extensive shooting was done near Newton Stewart, including the school house and inn sequences. Other locations used included Stranraer, north of Logan, the departure point for a ferry to Northern Ireland. The final scenes were shot on a peninsula called the Machars, which is surrounded by beaches, cliffs and sea-swept rocky coasts. The scenes of Howie attempting to escape through the caves were shot at yet another spot, an historical property called St. Ninian's Cave, near the site where Ninian established the first Christian chapel in 397 (a fact somewhat ironic to the film).

The production company had no trouble gaining permission to shoot in all these areas, including the National Trust Properties. Quite to the contrary, laughs Hardy; despite the film's themes "the authorities were delighted. And I think we did a great job, really, for Scottish tourism."

One of the most striking passages in the film, which illustrates the extraordinary thematic wedding of music and image in THE WICKER MAN, occurs during Sgt. Howie's second night at the inn: Britt Ekland's nude seductive dance. At that point, the screenplay only vaguely describes the movements, and Hardy brought in Stewart Hopps, a choreographer who was formerly director of the Scottish National Ballet. He also helped out on the May Day procession and the May Pole dance, in which the boys move around like stiff, little wicker men. He and Hardy and Giovanni, who was on location all the while to supervise the music, worked together laying out Ekland's movements and blocking for the camera.

Hardy claims it was not difficult, despite the time spent rehearsing. Ekland had had no prior dance experience and was three months pregnant at the time, which gave a fullness to her figure. Her lack of dance training actually worked to her benefit, since Hardy wanted everything as naturalistic as possible. "I didn't want 'balletic' movements. These people were to be local people, doing things that ordinary people would visualize. Ekland's dance was probably the most carefully worked out sequence, because we filled the room with all sorts of symbolic things and pagan objects, like the phallic corn dollies hanging on the walls, that I wanted to be sure and work into the images. I would have liked to have shot her full-length more than I did, not for prurient reasons, but I think we could have made it more beautiful and erotic."

Giovanni, who is perhaps more critical of the finished film than anyone else interviewed, recalls that it was tremendously difficult working with Ekland. "She's very nice, and cooperative, but lazy. We must have spent 45 hours with her, teaching her that song. Hopps eventually became so frightened of her that he asked me to be there whenever he was choreographing her. She's a very, very tough woman, but has a very limited idea of what work is, especially screen work." Tony Shaffer recalls, "She was lonely. She wasn't with her lover and bitched all the time. However, one has to do with these things."

Hardy sketched what he wanted for the wicker man figure, and Flannery constructed it from those drawings. Three actual figures were made -- two full-sized, standing about 60 feet tall, one of which was burned for the film, and a larger-sized trunk which was used for close-ups and inserts. For the burning closeups, Woodward's double was literally hauled in and out on a wire, the apparatus rigged by the special effects man brought up from Shepperton.

The heat from the burning might not all have been unwelcome, for the weather had caught up with the crew by the time they got to shoot it. Everyone was chilled to the bone, standing out on the cliffs, pretending it was Springtime, and in the scene showing the swaying villagers celebrating the sacrifice, a few look to be gritting their teeth. Giovanni described the order of the day as "'Get on with it!'" Shaffer remembers that it was during the second week in November and that Woodward, who had been stripped down to a light shirt, "was freezing to death and he looks like he is."

Hardy also sketched his ideas for the costumes, including the procession figures, and costume designer Sue Yeldon fleshed them out and coordinated all the costumes, including the villagers' and the animal masks. The kilt that Lee occasionally wore was a dress Morrison tartan, actually belonging to the clan of Hardy's grandmother, who was born in Lewis.

TWM Another striking sequence occurred during Howie's first night, involving Christopher Lee, a pair of snails and a lovely song by Giovanni. It was all invented on the spot by Hardy and Shaffer with the crew's second unit. In context, the sequence presents the pagan philosophy in poetic terms, just as, in Howie's church scenes, the quoted passages from the Bible do for Christianity. The text was a paraphrase of a Walt Whitman poem which to this day neither Hardy nor Shaffer can locate in any anthologies. Shaffer

describes what happened: "Well, we had those snails copulating, a strange thing, they sort of lined up and shot pellets at each other. And Lee was to examine this and recite the Whitman poem, which was about the lack of shame in animals, how they avoid this fearful mishmash of psychological problems and possessiveness that humans do, because in animals, sex is done and that's it, that's how life is for them. We were about to shoot it, and the sun was just about to go, and we said, 'We've lost this one, we'll do it tomorrow. And Lee came over and said, 'Why? Let's do it now,' and I said, 'But you haven't even seen the poem yet.' So he says, 'Well you go set up the shot and let me take a look at it.' You know, he has this photographic memory, which is just extraordinary. And he came back a few minutes later and just did it straight off, perfectly, spoke the poem, and then just walked out of the garden to get ready for dinner."

Despite the union requirement, no extras were taken on location, although many of the young girls in the schoolroom and circle dance sequences were pupils Hopps brought down from his ballet school. Wherever needed, people were recruited from the villages for the crowd scenes, which is exactly the authenticity Hardy strove for throughout the film. These included the procession marchers as well as the boys dancing at the May Pole --all of them were locals.

And they loved the filming for the most part, except that the huge crowd gathered for the wicker man scenes became upset because they thought the crew were actually going to burn the animals. Hardy composed a little speech explaining that there was no question of doing that, that they would be taken down in time the same way as they were put up, with a cherry picker. "They regarded the film as a fantasy, but occasionally they would get very involved, because many of these things were part of their folklore, especially the songs."

The film's ending was lengthened considerably from the screenplay. As Giovanni relates it, "Woodward had some ideas of his own -- he wanted to sing a hymn while he was being burned, and they let him do it. And also Tony put in all that language from the Bible that Woodward yells as a warning to Summerisle and the people. It's the hardest thing in the world to deal with something as huge as the Bible in a little film like this. He should have been burned as quickly as possible, maybe gagged on his way to the top!"

TWM Snell, who all during the filming came under no pressure from his Board of Directors in London, believes the production had incredibly good luck, usually gaining the sun when they needed it the most. The crew worked admirably, considering they were probably asked to do a bit more than normal by the fact that it was Hardy's first feature. By the same token, Hardy cites Snell as an "ideal" producer, who trusted everyone completely, was quite supportive and strictly non-interfering on the creative side of the filming.

Scotland has no labs, so the dailies were flown to Glasgow and down to London for processing then back for viewing. Doing almost as much traveling, Snell, who was needed constantly back in London to run British Lion, spent 2/3 of the time on location. Others of the crew might remember the bitter cold and lively winds. What Snell remembers most vividly about the picture was "spending many, many weeks riding the bloody sleeper up and down from London."

VI: LORD SUMMERISLE

"It's the best part I've ever had. Unquestionably. --Christopher Lee

"Christopher is a much more talented actor than he's ever allowed to be." --Anthony Shaffer

Almost from the beginning, before the screenplay was fully written, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Christopher Lee should play Lord Summerisle.

"A benevolent tyrant, I think, would describe Lord Summerisle, if only in surface terms. He's the leader of a community, a total autocrat, but a good one, until he is crossed. Then he becomes very dangerous, as do his people. He has a tremendous hold on these people. But the only way he will maintain that hold is if the crops burgeon every year. If they do not...well, he says to Howie, 'I have learned to love Nature and to appease it, if necessary.' It's a line I rather threw away on purpose. If something goes wrong they look for sacrifices. This is primitive earth worship; it's been going on for thousands of years in countries all over the world. Summerisle is a simple pagan -- if you can call that simple. He is both king and priest in one. But very dangerous. He's a man, too, of impeccable charm and manners and good taste, an authority, articulate, in many ways a very delightful person. And you can find a bit of that in everyone.

"The character appealed to me because it was so well written. And I know that Tony had me in mind when he wrote it. He knows me and my career. You can say that Summerisle is an amalgam of many roles I have played on-screen. Figures of power, of mystery, of authority, of presence. There is quite a lot of my natural delivery in the way Summerisle's dialogue was written. My delivery of the lines in the film is exactly how I speak. In fact, the three of us -- Tony, Robin and I - are apt to talk in similar ways. So there's probably a bit of all three of us in there. I have been called upon to play acceptably straight characters -- agreeable, courteous, amusing -- add to that the suggestion that the character is not quite what he seems, and I have played them many times. Also in the changes of mood. The fact that Summerisle is dangerous when crossed perfectly applies to me: Christopher Lee does not forget a wrong done to him, so I'm dangerous when crossed, too. That's not a very Christian attitude, perhaps, but it's a very human one.

"Summerisle believes in the forces of nature, which I do too, to a certain extent. So Summerisle was modelled externally on me in many ways, but all the rest of it they gave to the professional actor as a fictitious character to play. It's a complex role.

"While being genuine, the character had to carry the sense that something was not quite right in that village, and you can't quite put your finger on it. Something is going to happen, but it was so cleverly written, that everyone was charming and...normal, even Summerisle, although he's really quite bizarre. It's the abnormal that lurks behind the normal which makes a film like this work so successfully. It's what you don't see rather than what you do, what is suggested rather than shown in detail.

"The power of the unseen...there are communities today that are not what they seem. Look at Freemasonry, although I'm neither condemning it nor comparing it to a pagan religion, but it's a secret society, in a benevolent sense, with a highly organized set of beliefs and practices, and it has considerable power, at least to its members. THE WICKER MAN is not an attack on contemporary religion but a comment on it, its strengths as well as its weaknesses, its fallibility, that it can be puritanical and won't always come out on top. Even the Christian religion is based on the execution and sacrifice of one man. In that respect, there's no difference at all. Christ was sacrificed to appease the organized Establishment and was condemned as a criminal, which is not the case with Howie. If anything, it was the Establishment that Shaffer attacked in his script. Summerisle embodies the pagan beliefs -- he is responsible, the third generation of the founding of it, for its being on the island. Part of the mysterious effect of the film is bound up with this fact and in the various scenes and descriptions of pagan ritual that actually take place in the film."

TWM Hardy conceived the role as a romantic figure and felt that Lee's fans would expect all sorts of things to happen and be surprised when they didn't. They attempted a kind of ambivalence as to the actual content of villainy in Summerisle. Lee's familiar screen persona bursts through more than once during the course of the film. How villainous was he supposed to be?

Hardy begs the question. "A similar question might be asked, was Hitler really anti-Semitic or did he simply use it?" But the analogy seems wildly out of place. The character, whether he's playing a game with the people (and if so, why?) or is genuine, as the screenplay implies, is simply what each viewer will make of it. And if so, will it depend, like a Kuleshovian experiment, on the degree of each viewer's familiarity with Lee's screen career?

While it seems a remarkably practical move on the part of this pagan soul ("...but not an unenlightened one, I hope," as he tells Howie), no one interviewed professed to know just why Christopher Lee chose to wear his favorite sneakers for the May Day procession...

VII: THE MUSIC

"It's haunting, and an unorthodox way to do it, but the music is probably alien to anything you have ever heard on film before." --Peter Snell

The sense of the songs, and how they should be used in the film, came in part from Hardy's original research, basically from the work of a man named Sharpe, who was, as Hardy notes, again "very much like the character described as Summerisle's grandfather -- one of those eager-beaver Victorians." During the mid-19th century, he attempted to research and codify all of the songs in England. His work was original because the songs were part of a vast oral tradition going back hundreds and thousands of years and were never written down. Many of the songs used in the film were more indigenous to England than to Scotland, although their transposition does not really betray their nearly common heritage.

TWM While writing the screenplay, Shaffer indicated in which scenes songs were to be used and in some cases jotted down verses from various anthologies of lyrics appropriate to the Spring pagan festivals to serve as samples of what was needed. No one, however, quite realized how important the music was to become to the film or how large a part it would play in it.

The composer who was chosen was Paul Giovanni, whom Tony Shaffer met through his brother Peter. Tony had seen a production of "12th Night" in Washington, D.C. that Giovanni had worked on and performed in, which used an experimental folk-rock score. Giovanni was sounded out then, shown the script, which he liked, and promised that if the film ever came to production, he'd be the man to write the music.

Giovanni is multi-talented; he's a playwright, actor, director, singer and musician. He was born in Atlantic City, which in some cases could be a detriment, but he began to work acting and directing in regional and summer stock theatre and came to New York to join the cast of "The Fantasticks" in 1962. He left for an offer from Joe Chaikin and his Open Theatre and performed in that group's most prominent political theatre piece "Viet Rock." When the collective began to fall apart, Giovanni began singing and composing and formed a folk-rock group called Sideshow, which toured and recorded for Atlantic. It lasted four years. ("Just as we began to get interesting, the group fell apart. Too many drugs and hysterics, plus the discipline of rehearsing every night and doing concerts. It was my final lesson in democracy: it doesn't work.")

Giovanni then went back to the theatre, alternating acting and directing, of which he prefers the latter.

"It was one of those things where British Lion fiddled with the screenplay for a time, couldn't make up their minds, then -- bang! -- they're ready to go in two weeks -- typical movie scene. Suddenly, I had about six weeks to research, prepare, compose and record the soundtrack, which all had to be done before the first day's shooting."

Throughout his career, Giovanni has always loved folk music and was fully aware that the roots of American folk music, as sung by no-frills people like Pete Seeger, lay in English and Scottish music, with basically the same songs re-appearing in different centuries and

countries with a different set of images to reflect the differing cultures and locales.

Because most of the music is in the oral tradition, scholars have found songs in isolated Appalachian Mountain regions, in the eastern U.S., that are more original than versions that appeared in England a few centuries before. By the same token, linguistic experts have found in the same areas surviving speech patterns that date to Elizabethan England.

Hardy cites an example of how deep the heritage runs in the song "Oranges and Lemons (Say The Bells of St. Clemons)" and what is now the nursery rhyme "Ring a-ring a Posey," both of which date from the plague times in London, "where all the church bells rang against the bubonic plague. Of course, the first symptom of it is that you get a strong smell of roses -- I don't know why. And you also get a horrible round scar on your body, i.e. rings. Now the tunes of those come from old pagan songs several centuries before those times."

"In my research," says Giovanni, "I discovered that as far back as the 10th century, people in England were importing things from all over the world. And not just from the Holy Roman Empire. There's very little written about that. They had drums and instruments from Africa, some of which we used in the film. They were probably brought in by a few progressive people who weren't afraid to sail in every direction. You think that trade began with the Renaissance, but when you go back to Celtic times you find engravings, metal work, jewellery -- it's all in their own style but the tools used had to have come from other countries. Now, take a song like 'Silver Dagger,' which Joan Baez recorded in Appalachia, very American, but you'll find the same thing in England in 1650, with a different set of images. So whoever settled in those mountains took the song, which they remembered, but changed it over the years until it conveyed a completely American idea. The roots of those songs in England come from Celtic lyrics which you can trace through the Oxford Anthology of English Poetry back to the 11th or 12th centuries and some all the way back to the 7th.

"England has a much stronger folk popularity than we do. They have superb modern groups like Fairport Convention and Pentangle that sing straight folk songs. On an average weekend, folk groups like the Corry Brothers, who are very popular, all over England and more so in Scotland -- and Scotland still does not have a real rock sound -- gather to sing straight folk music, songs about the Battle of Culloden, things like that."

TWM Once hired in July, 1972, Giovanni took a long look at the final screenplay and decided to throw out most of Shaffer's "sample" lyrics, because he felt they were impossible to "set" effectively. He knew that if Shaffer's ideas were not treated seriously, or if the music was "wrong," the whole film would become ludicrous. He also realized what they all feared collectively, that if they put in too much singing and dancing, despite carrying through the fact that a pagan society was full of music, the film would turn into a musical. "I felt right from the beginning that what I was doing was not stylistically in keeping with the screenplay. But everyone seemed to like it so much that I stuck to it and decided to develop the songs more fully than the four or five lines accorded to each in the screen play. You can't develop a song or an atmosphere in that short a time."

Apart from the time element, Giovanni had another problem: he hadn't the slightest idea how to go about scoring a film. "I couldn't get anyone to tell me how. I called around and talked to a couple of people and finally arranged a session with Marc Wilkinson, who I sort of knew. He worked at the National Theatre and has scored a number of films, a few of them horror, you may remember Pier Haggard's BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW. And he told me to work it all out the way I wanted in a studio, just to make sure it would fit in with the shooting script, because everything would be pre-recorded and nothing should be changed after that. Then during shooting we would play the tracks on a Wollensack, and the actors would learn to lip-sync what was there."

In the songs and lyrics, whenever possible and if not too obscure, Giovanni used original phrasings and wrote the music as pieces that, so it would not be unnatural, a small village band could have orchestrated via tradition for themselves and accordingly, be able to play. There was an attempt not to write traditional mood music, that the music would not create artificial tension apart from the images or telegraph upcoming action, as most film scores do.

"With a conducting student from the Royal Academy, I auditioned about five or six musicians. I picked only people who were very musical, who could sing as well as play instruments. I didn't want anyone to sound 'trained,' although most of them were music students from the London Conservatory. We also picked the instrumentation to be as authentic as possible. There are a lot of old instruments in there, like a Celtic harp which I found in a museum which lent it to us. But basically it was a sound that a town band could come up with.

"We initially recorded, of course, at Shepperton, but the studio seemed to be dying, and they weren't too interested. I don't think the studio people liked us too much -- we were all young and punky looking, and I was an American -- and they thought we didn't know what we were doing. They were used to Richard Rodney Bennett and all those kind of people.

"I arranged for the brass section of the London Symphony to come in and record the May Day procession and the burning music -- all brass pieces. When they showed up, the studio people didn't know what to think... But the sound was so bad -- technically -- that we eventually had to re-record some of it at DeLane Lea. Actually, the bad recording process worked to our favor, because that music sounded too good for the band that was supposed to be playing it onscreen. I'm not a classical musician, but the conducting student helped me bone up on scoring for brass -- what instruments could hit what range. We especially wanted to get piercing kind of sounds and spent a lot of time on it.

"We were, by agreement, committed to a non-electronic score, everything acoustic. But we wound up with one piece of straight rock, used over the chase through the caves. I think it was a mistake; it sounds bad and is not in keeping with the rest of it. I'd like to take it out. There's a little bit of an electric guitar in the sequence where the villagers all play tricks on Howie, and the hide-and-seek with the Hobby Horse, but we play a lot of Scottish jigs against it, and it works a lot better."

The opening musical sounds, before the first song "Cornrigs and Barleyrigs," is a piece of Gaelic mouth music, very similar to scat singing. "Cornrigs," sung by Giovanni over the credits, sounds the closest to a conventional popular song. "The entire lyric is by Robert Burns, one of his 'Songs,' and the sound was deliberate in that I was trying to make a sound to show that the community was contemporary, in the 1970's, apart from their religious practices. I've set a lot of Shakespeare to music, and I always try to set it just the way it was written. A lot of the old poets are wonderful in that respect; their work has hooks in them and repeats, almost a real rock layout."

"The Landlord's Daughter" is the most manufactured song in the film. It introduces most explicitly the kind of sexual imagery that is at the root of all the music in the film and corresponds to the fertility rites and beliefs of the island's religion. It is a pub song that reveals all the attributes and illusions of the girl who served as the community's initiator, who in Roman times was called the 'Public Harlot.' I wrote that based on an 18th century song which was a bit weirder. Our song is a little bit more incisive in its specific kind of filth ...."

Here is where the fact that Giovanni had chosen performing musicians/singers paid off, for they were all carried on location to perform in the actual filming, so that if the camera passed over them, it would look as if they were really playing and singing. In this case they were, and the number as heard on the soundtrack was recorded live in the pub.

TWM "Gently Johnny" is the best song in the film and along with the female vocal and music used under Ekland's nude dance, best represents the function of the songs with the images and themes -- a complete fusion -- that in these two cases, works to a strange, masterfully hypnotic effect. "'Gently Johnny' uses three old lyrics combined into one and slightly edited. There are about seven old ballads that use the idea of a gigolo, or 'jingolo' as it was called then. The idea for the other song was completely original with me -- there is no indication of what it was to be in the script except a couple lines of absolute filth. The main thing is in the rhythm, and we used all of the old twangy instruments in there. That is not Britt singing but a little English girl I found in London who deliberately tried to intone it and accent it to sound like Britt."

The procession march is wholly original. "What I did was to take a very old song -- in this case it was 'Willy of Winsbury,' 14th century -- take the melody and form it into a piece for a brass band. I wanted a waltz, in three, so that it could be slower and stranger and that the whole procession could sort of sway. Just after that, the 'burning' music, also used over the anointing scenes, prominently uses the Celtic harp -- the guy standing on a rock is playing it. It looks like a lyre, a flat wood triangle, and it only has about seven notes, but it's a most extraordinary sound. We re-recorded that at DeLane Lea -- we could never have duplicated that sound at Shepperton."

The May Pole song, which is a cycle of life rhyme, is also very old. "Actually, we recorded that in the studio with girls although onscreen we have the boys 'singing' it. I hadn't wanted to bring in a bunch of boy sopranos for an afternoon, it's too expensive, so the girls that we had for the other work over-dubbed a couple of tracks, and it worked."

The only song in Shaffer's screenplay that was retained was "The Ram of Derby" which Cilento and Lee actually sing. "The song was much longer and was to be three verses, with the whole scene to be built around it, but it was towards the end of shooting, and when it came to do it, we thought it was too long. And whole chunks were thrown out at beginning and end. It doesn't make too much sense in the film -- it's too elaborate and unsubtle a gag, all sexual imagery. And to make it work would have required more time. If I had known it would work out that way, I would have written something smaller."

The final song almost everyone relates to Chaucer, but it is not. "It comes way before him. It's the oldest song in the English language, probably goes back to the 9th or 10th century. The thing is so sacred -- it goes right back to the worship of the sun. Peter Shaffer wrote an adaptation of it, the original is Old English, translated from the Oxford Anthology -- it's the first thing in it. To give the film a bizarre ending, that they should be singing a happy song while Howie is dying, we worked the May Day procession tune in brass and fit it in harmonically with the 'summer ich iccumin in' lyric so that the instruments and voices blend on the two different pieces. It worked very well, and it's too bad that we couldn't work on that high a calibre all the way through."

THE WICKER MAN was Giovanni's first, and although he has not actively pursued others, only film.

VIII: AFTERMATH

"An unfinished film is in a transitional state, and during it, everybody who worked on it wants to control it. And you see the most idiotic power plays, on a small scale, that you've ever seen. And nobody seemed to stand up and [take charge]." --Paul Giovanni

The shooting was completed, and the actors and crew dismissed, and the project moved back to Shepperton for editing. Present, for a time at least, were Hardy, Snell, Peter Shaffer, sitting in for his brother who left to attend to another commitment, editor Eric Boyd Perkins, and Giovanni, who was asked to stay on because of the complicated nature of the music. However, the office politics at British Lion had begun to get hot. According to Giovanni, "When the film was finished, I was supposed to be done, with my fee about $2000 for what turned out to be 8 or 9 months' work. Then they asked me to stay on for the editing and mixing of the sound, which was an additional three months. An unfinished film is in a transitional state, and during it, everybody who worked on it wants to control it. And you see the most idiotic power plays, on a small scale, that you've ever seen. And nobody seemed to stand up and say, 'No, it's going to be like this.' I think the editor really undermined it a lot, even at this stage. He seemed to keep losing things, saying they hadn't

been shot, but we knew that they damn well had. There were things in there that Perkins hated -- I mean, he used to get red in the face and say, 'That's disgusting!' This, in 1973! He was a real David Lean-type, mooning over DR. ZHIVAGO. That's the kind of movie he wanted to make. THE WICKER MAN was an original and he never understood what it was about or how it should work, as an accumulation of details. He was a real jerk-off, a very dull man."

Somehow, a version of the film was completed with a running time of 102 minutes. Both Hardy and Snell were satisfied, although Christopher Lee was not and complained that even at this length, much of what had been shot was not there. "I thought that so much magnificent dialogue and meaningful story elements had been removed. I think probably 20 to 25 minutes had gone even at that point. We had shot the entire screenplay, word for word, scene for scene, and that should have been the film, apart from the inevitable minor editing, the tightening, that happens to all pictures, that went out to the theatres. I may not be realistic about it, as an artist performing in it, but that was not anywhere near the film that should have been shown. It actually changed the potential of it, the intelligibility of it."

TWM But much worse would happen, for in the Spring of 1973, in a move that caught everyone by surprise, British Lion was once again sold, and Hardy, Snell, everyone connected with the film's production, were locked out from the studio. And the film.

To better understand what happened, and what would happen next, it is useful to glance at the past, always financially shaky history of British Lion.

The company was founded in 1927 at nearly the same time as the giant Gaumont British. The key man involved and first head was Edgar Wallace, the mystery writer, who set it up largely as a British distribution entity, for a while specializing in Republic product. In the '40s it came under the aegis of Alexander Korda and his London Films. In 1954, it was liquidated but immediately reorganized with funds from the National Film Finance Corporation. But by the early '60s the studio was again in trouble, and in 1964 the NFFC auctioned it off, with the highest bid, in the neighborhood of $4.8 million, put forward by a group of independents that included Walter Reade, the Boulting Brothers, Michael Balcon, Tony Richardson, John Osborne, Joseph Janni, and John Schlesinger, with the Boultings, Sidney Gilliatt and Frank Launder taking the principal Board seats. In November, 1971, Star Associated, a conglomerate that owned some theatres, bingo halls and discos, acquired it, with the new owners Derek and Rodney Eckart retaining John Boulting as managing director.

This led into one of the worst periods in the British industry. As Hardy put it, "It was a time literally of robber land barons, men involved principally in real estate, who came into the studios and asset-stripped them for the property." Through the financial power of Jim Slater, who has since been extradited to Singapore for fraud, John Bentley, nicknamed "Pretty Boy," who had made a fortune in Australia and had retired at age 22, took over British Lion in April, 1972, via his outfit, Barclay Securities, a holding company that included between 150 and 200 companies with a total annual turnover in 1972 of $84 million. The purchase price was $13 million on a two-for-seven stock swap. Bentley

brought in Peter Snell to run the studio.

Now in the Spring of 1973, with THE WICKER MAN a finished film of 102 minutes, Bentley and Lord Goodman, the Chairman of the Board of British Lion, were bought out by a fringe banker by the name of Vavasseur, who threw in with another large stockholder, Michael Deeley, and the studio changed hands again. (It is estimated that Bentley made close to $6 million on the deal.) Snell was pushed out, and Deeley and a businessman named Barry Spikings came in as managing directors.

Deeley, at least, had been involved in the film industry. His mother was a cutter, and he trained as one, too, before becoming an independent producer in 1958. Since then, in addition to doing low budget films, he has joined with Peter Yates at Woodfall (ROBBERY) and with Stanley Baker at Oakhurst (THE ITALIAN JOB, among others). He also presided over the financial disaster of MURPHY'S WAR, one of the biggest in British film history.

Somewhere along the line since their taking over British Lion, a deal must have been made with Nat Cohen, of EMI, who since 1975 had been slowly fazing out operation of their studio Elstree (in February, they cut the resident staff from 261 to 48) and converting it to a for-rent, or four-wall, situation, like Shepperton. (One of the last in-house productions filmed there was TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER.) Since July of 1976, EMI acquired and ran British Lion as a $1.2 million tax loss, and as of July of 1977, EMI totally absorbed it, with Deeley and Spikings retained as managing directors (with Deeley operating out of Los Angeles) of the new EMI Films. In effect, from that date, British Lion has ceased to exist.

In the Spring of 1973, for a while both Snell and Deeley/Spikings were together at British Lion; Snell, whose contract ran until June or July, on his way out, but with properties to protect, and Deeley/Spikings on their way in. The dating of the events that followed is fuzzy. Everyone interviewed came up with slightly different versions, and there is simply no authoritative source to check. Unfortunately, the man who could have helped, Michael Deeley, who comes out of this tale as a villain, skirted our attempts to talk with him, whether because he was too busy -- he is overseeing three EMI films now shooting in the U.S. (THE DRIVER, CONVOY, THE DEER HUNTER) -- or unwilling to go on record about THE WICKER MAN, is unknown.

What is known is that Deeley thoroughly hated the film, probably did not understand it, thought it had no market value whatsoever, and refused to release it, even in England.

While Snell lingered on at the studio, he attempted to promote THE WICKER MAN as much as possible, to try and get Deeley interested in it. He submitted the film to the British selection board for the Cannes Film Festival, but when it was not chosen to represent Britain in official competition, he took it into the market section and came up with a classic stunt. On a flatbed truck, they logged down the one remaining wicker man from the filming, and according to Hardy, "set it up right in front of the Carlton Hotel. And everyone saw it, you could not help but see it, from anywhere in Cannes, since it was almost as tall as the hotel. It was a terrific promotion." From its screenings at Cannes, the film was sold to a

number of foreign territories. However, at this point, it was not the same film that Hardy and Snell had completed.

TWM From Deeley's point of view, it was a matter of commercial realities. In his view, the question was, says Snell, "Was this a picture that should have been made by virtue of its appeal to the American market, and that answer was no." What he did was to send a copy of the film in its original 102-minute form to Roger Corman in Hollywood for his opinion as to what should or could be done to make it play for American audiences, which was a shrewd move, since if Corman liked it, and worked on it, he would likely pick up American/Canadian rights.

Following Corman's subsequent report and catalogue of cuts, Deeley cut and remixed the film to a length of about 87 minutes. Eliminated were all of the Scottish mainland scenes establishing Howie as a "card-carrying" Christian. Most harmful of all, "Gently Johnny" was dropped, along with Lee's poetic monologue over the snail footage, and by cutting some minor scenes and shortening others, Howie's two-night stay on the island was converted into one.

As Hardy would later put it, "There was no consultation with any of us. This was the way the film was going to be, and -- tough titty! -- that was it."

During production and initial editing, the film makers had never specifically tailored the film for the widest possible commercial appeal. The thought probably did not even occur to them, especially since the screenplay had been approved as written by British Lion. Both Hardy and Shaffer always believed that there would be no problem with British audiences taking to the film, that they would believe, or suspend disbelieving, the premise. Most would know of the existence of Scottish gardens like Logan and that it was possible to grow such things in that area. However, the idea of a completely fertile island might seem extraordinary, since it would require a great act of will on somebody's part to make it work.

Shaffer felt that perhaps Woodward was too old to be believed a virgin. "Well, if you get some titters in the audience about that, maybe if you don't imagine the world is in a very bad state, then I do. The people who moan about the quality of life now compared to how it used to be have only themselves to blame. If you tear down a nice old building and put up some shitty supermarket, you cannot then complain that shopping is no longer any fun and that your town now looks worse than it did. It's the same with sex. I'm not advocating that everyone go around married, but there is too much sex about. Why do so many people have hang-ups about it. Well, precisely this: once it had its own mystery, but now it's opened up, like a barnyard, so that within a generation or so, the act has become meaningless. And people wonder what happened to virility. .. Woodward is a popular TV star, and he's a very up-form fellow. What would the film have been like if we'd flown in some American star to trudge about? If Woodward had been, say, 25, it would have been better, but remember, he also has to embody authority.

"The funny thing about Deeley not thinking it would do business is the terrible salesmen who came to see it [at Cannes]. I didn't see anyone under the age of 60 there. They hated it,

because obviously the cavalry didn't come at the end. They had little idea what it was about. But at the end of it, one of them turned to me and said, 'You never know with these things. I don't understand a word of it, but I hope it goes. Touch wood!' You see, that's one of the superstitions that we're talking about in the film. That's what it's about!"

The idea of not releasing it was absurd to Lee. "You make a film just as you write a book or paint a picture, anything where the act of it is creative and commercial. How could any company explain to its stockholders that it spent their money to make the film but have decided not to show it? Therefore it has no chance to make back one red cent. It's like building an apartment block then deciding not to rent it and keep it empty. The film needs careful promotion, granted, to prepare people for what they're going to see. I think a majority of people who see it will find it fascinating. Particularly the young, who are always interested in the unknown, the strange, the bizarre. The film could take place anywhere; it happens to take place in Scotland. But it's an international story. The fact that it can be talked about, argued about, thought about, well, that's good! A bit of controversy. There's nothing worse, or more boring, than 100% agreement on anything."

The entire area of acceptability to American audiences as the be-all and end-all of film production is problematical. The film was also completed well before THE EXORCIST smash, and the rash of Anti Christ movies which have ridden in on its coattails, all mostly successfully, from which angle THE WICKER MAN could have been exploited (if crassly). Indeed, to his benefit, Deeley took on the production of THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH, which film must appear even more strange to American eyes (despite its being filmed here), and indeed, the picture had many problems being sold to a U.S. distributor.

One film that Deeley did get behind was DON'T LOOK NOW (also a Nick Roeg film), a British/Italian joint effort produced by Peter Katz, which Snell had bought for British release through the domestic distribution system he had set up at British Lion. It became, on its British run, begun late in October, 1973, the company's biggest hit, perhaps its only financial success. Later, Deeley would claim that he had arranged the film's purchase for British Lion, taking all the credit from Snell.

Then, unexpectedly, late in December, 1973, THE WICKER MAN appeared on the lower half of a double bill with DON'T LOOK NOW, on the latter's sub-runs. There was no announcement, no publicity, no screenings for the critics.

The reaction was immediate on the part of the film makers, all of whom suddenly saw the shortened version of the film for the first time.

TWM Christopher Lee: "Well, the film was just butchered, it was just outrageous. It was in a form that some of it didn't make sense. The continuity of it was lost; scenes that were in sequence in the story were moved around so that it became difficult to understand, particularly for audiences coming into it cold, who were still enthralled. If you consider the script A to Z, in this version the letters M-N-O suddenly popped in before D-E-F, and so on. I'm sure the public was confused by it, because the story of a film like this, that works on so

many levels, must be simple so that you can follow what's going on.

"I did one thing that I've never done before in my entire life and will never presume to do again: I rang up all the film critics whom I knew and asked them if they would go and see this film, as a favor to me. I told them that if necessary I will pay for their seats, but please go. Even if they did not like it, they could say so, but at least see it. The published opinion of 85-90% of them was that it was the most original and remarkable British film to have been made in years. And it was an immediate success."

Paul Giovanni: "It was treated like a jerk-off. Whatever you think of the long version, the short one is laughable, very nearly silly. It was treated like a vaudeville show in the changing around of sequences. It is especially ludicrous, grotesque, even, to have Ekland's dance come in so soon -- it makes no sense. Maybe because I worked on the original mix, the sound levels were now way off."

Tony Shaffer especially was shocked. He, too, called a "a few mates" to go and see it. "There's a difference between trying to cut for plot and trying to make a journey worthwhile. We're not allowed at any time to look out of the window and see what the society is all about. If you design a film, as we did, so that the benefits and joys of a pagan society are explained, while its particular rites may not be too pleasant, you've got to take time. You need to make people believe in it; you can't just bound through it as if it were a 60-minute television play. You simply don't get the flavor of it; you no longer use your imagination. When you take out all these things, you don't merely make a slimmer picture but a less interesting one. British Lion approached it by saying, 'Oh, goodie, it's about human sacrifice.' And they suddenly shoved it out on the circuits."

Shaffer also relates it to the current state of the British industry and its peculiarities. "I realize that when managing directors change seats, the incoming one is not wholly devoted to the product of his predecessor. You find yourself with a total change of policy. Whether it was inspired by jealousy or because they wanted to do something else, I don't know. Sometimes it is easier to lose money rather than make it. It is disappointing especially in light of how little is produced in this country. Especially when you show it to people and it gets good notices and they still want to bury it. Hell, I don't understand that. Especially when you see some of the crap getting first-run releases here. If you live, like the poor fellows at British Lion, on a steady diet of things like THERE'S A GIRL IN MY SOUP or ON THE BUSSES or CARRY ON FARTING or whatever those things are called, inevitably, you cannot see further than that after a time. It's a vicious circle."

Possibly the film had only been released to qualify as a British quota film and thus become eligible for Eady subsidy money. But the press sought the film out; a few ventured in print to wonder why it had been given such treatment, and it eventually collected positive or mixed notices in Monthly Film Bulletin (1/74), Time Out, London Times (12/16/73), London Evening News (2/28/74), The Financial Times (12/15/73), and CinemaTV Today, a trade periodical (12/15/73). And even from Scotland, the Edinburgh Evening News (1/9/74). The film played a long while in London, on double bills, and was successful wherever it was shown, and eventually moved into a single billing at the Odeon Haymarket,

in London's West End. But despite all this, Deeley remained unimpressed, and the film did not get out of London and into the provinces.

In April, 1974 -- no one is quite sure how and who -- the film was entered in the Third Festival of Fantastic Films in Paris, where it won the Grand Prize on April 30th. British Lion was not pleased; to the contrary, Hardy claims, since he was called "with a bitter complaint" demanding of him if he had "smuggled the film into France." Probably British Lion was upset because it was during this time that they were attempting to peddle the U.S. rights, with David Blake, their representative based here, showing the film to American distributors.

"I screened it for all the major distributors," said Blake. "We tried to interest them first, naturally, because they are more cash-happy than the minors. We screened it very quickly; they seemed impressed with it and were complimentary to it in conversation, but we got no offers.

TWM "You should remember that only a very few indie films ever make sense to major distributors, unless they have the chance to go through the roof. They have had no hand in their production, and they're just not interested in anything with less potential; they don't need that risk. And THE WICKER MAN just did not have that spark.

"Remember, too, that at that time we were after a large cash guarantee, of at least $1 million. We had had success in the past with selling British Lion product for advances that large.

"We then showed it to the minors, even though we knew that they could not offer much money up front. I sat with Roger Corman while he watched it, but he felt it was too long and would only take it if he could fool around with it."

Corman eventually offered a bid of $50,000, and probably would have gotten behind it solidly in terms of promotion time and money, but British Lion was out to recover as much money up front against the film's cost as they could.

"Finally," continues Blake, "we made a deal with Charles Boasberg at National General. At the time they had been handling THE GETAWAY with great success. But just about then, when CBS decided to shut down Cinema Center Films, the National General product source dried up. Also, National General was owned by American Financial, and they didn't really want to be in the film business at all, so that was that. We had had a good deal with National General -- I won't tell you for publication the actual figure but it was over $200,000 plus an additional amount for prints and advertising. They also then involved a tax shelter group to the tune of $150,000.

"Four days after the deal was signed, National General went bankrupt. I believe Charlie [Boasberg] let the deal go through because he sincerely wanted to get films in to try and keep National General going. After all, they had Norman Levy as head of distribution and were turning a healthy profit at the time.

"Anyway, Leo Greenfield and Ted Ashley at Warner Bros took over their entire catalogue mainly because they very badly wanted First Artists. They looked at the rest of the films and said, 'Do what you can with them' -- so it didn't surprise me when they later chose not to distribute it. Then they got caught in breach of performance rights and the film reverted to the tax shelter people [Larry Gordon and his Beachhead Properties]. You know, Warners could really care less what happened to it."

Such was the fate of a number of other genre films that Warner Bros had acquired, by one means or another. Warner Bros took one look at THE WICKER MAN, test-marketed it in a few areas, reportedly several drive-ins, with no advance publicity except what Hardy described as "an unbelievable poster."

On May 15, Variety published a highly favorable review (although their listed running time of 97 minutes is erroneous). Thus far, it is the only review to appear in this country.

Unencouraged, near the end of 1974, Warner Bros then played off THE WICKER MAN in a few additional areas, including San Diego and Atlanta, to satisfy the tax shelter requirements (that the film must play commercially somewhere in the U.S. apart from sneak previews within the year of the tax deduction), then promptly shelved it and took the tax loss.

That was the last anyone heard of THE WICKER MAN for several years. The film makers involved chalked it up to experience and moved on to other projects. The principals, such was their faith in the project, had never been paid for their work. Snell, Lee and Shaffer had worked for nothing, taking deferred salaries and gross points. Giovanni had been paid a small sum, but about a year later, in 1975, he attempted to check into royalties due him for the music. "Snell was convinced that he was going to make a fortune from the music, from a soundtrack album, and he also thought that 'Gently Johnny' could if exploited become a popular hit. I told him 'Look, I've spent four years in the business, and that's just not a hit song, even 'Corn rigs' is far from it.' But he was excited. Anyway, when you write a score in Europe, you sell it outright, and you are supposed to get a fee -- something like a nickel -- each time the thing goes through the projector.

"Now I never received one royalty check, even when the movie was selling out in London and Japan. So I got a lawyer to contact the Performing Rights Society, but he got nowhere with them. And it wasn't big enough financially -- a matter of a few thousand dollars -- to get the lawyer really hyped up and go over and search it out. And to sue, I would have had to pay the expenses. So that was that. I was screwed. I had been promised a soundtrack album, but of course, you usually don't expect all those kinds of promises to be kept."

Hardy had been paid a fee ($14,000) for directing, but it meant a lot more to him. THE WICKER MAN had been his first time out directing a feature, so to a certain extent, his future film career was on the line.

In the Fall of 1976, Hardy came to New York to work on a pair of screenplays and decided

to try and locate the film. Through his lawyer, Bob Lasky, who specializes in the film business, he began to dig around and traced its path from British Lion to National General to Warner Bros and finally learned that it had reverted to the tax shelter group, which Lasky began to badger. They came to terms, getting all the parties to agree, which was no small task. "I assume," says Hardy, "because of the tax shelter law changes, they might have been questioned on their tax write-off by the IRS, that there hadn't been a proper effort to release it. [When queried, no one at Larry Gordon's Beachhead Properties office returned my call.] Anyway, they held an auction, and out of three or four distributors who were interested, including A. Stirling Gold, a group called Abraxas put in the highest bid."

TWM Stirling Smith, the man who principally runs Abraxas, is more of a film buff than the usual businessmen one now finds in film distribution. He has produced and hosted a weeknightly film program seen in six Southern states, originating from New Orleans. Abraxas has been in operation about 2½ years, up to now, mainly as an investor conduit for the acquisition of domestic rights to films that are unable to secure a U.S. distributor or films that have been shelved by the majors. Some of the films Smith has attempted to raise funds for are F FOR FAKE, SOLARIS, THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE, and Herzog's AGUIRRE, all of which eventually found other distributors and commercial release. Smith has had two set-backs, first in co-producing Noel Black's MARIANNE, now tied up in litigation and resting in a lab, and second, in the unsuccessful resurrection of a Christopher Lee vehicle NOTHING BUT THE NIGHT, through International Films. Smith wants to specialize in fantasy, horror, and off-beat films and is prepared, through Abraxas, to give careful attention to the films he handles, aware that while the potential of each is limited, there is potential there. The purchase price that Abraxas paid to Beachhead Properties for THE WICKER MAN was in the form of a $20,000 cash guarantee.

Heartened by this turn in his long, frustrating struggle (now five years after the film was made), Hardy decided to take it a step further, and in cooperation with Smith, attempted to locate the footage -- amounting to about fifteen minutes -- that Deeley had removed, so that Abraxas could have the full 102-minute version. In doing so, he uncovered perhaps the strangest story of the entire saga.

They assumed, logically, that British Lion held the missing negative footage. So Hardy began making calls. British Lion told him that they could not locate the footage. Hardy notified Snell and Shaffer in London, who also made inquiries and were turned away.

The story is picked up by Snell. "What was happening was that they couldn't find it. And not being able to deliver the negative trims was embarrassing. British Lion twice asked the film editor to go down into the vaults and look, and he called me each time saying, 'Either these guys have moved it someplace else, or we're only going through the motions.' British Lion kept being ambiguous as hell about it, so I made a trip down there and what I found was this: the picture was cut down to 87+ minutes. That negative was fixed and sent up to the vaults at Humphries, the laboratory. And that was it. That was THE WICKER MAN! To all extents and purposes, I don't think there was ever any question in Deeley's mind that it would ever be re-lengthened. So all those negative trims were pushed back into Shepperton's vaults.

"I spent a lot of time there, looking around. I finally looked at the records and found that the trims, along with a lot of positives, had been destroyed. The person who was managing the vaults at the time was told to clear out a certain number of them, and he did, inadvertently destroying the negatives of three pictures -- not the originals, which were also at Humphries -- and the trims of THE WICKER MAN, thinking they were destroying positives only. It came to a matter of 386 cans of film. They wanted to get rid of it as closely as possible, so it went into the foundations of a motorway that was being built right next to the studio.

"Now that was interpreted by Robin and others as a conspiracy, but I don't think so. It was, frankly, British Lion just looking the other way, although they finally admitted it had been destroyed. People don't destroy negative trims, but it happened. I can't believe it's a conspiracy; it's too petty and mean."

But perhaps Snell is just being reticent since he's still working on projects with Deeley. So is Shaffer, who would not speculate on the matter, who is currently writing the new Christie picture, MURDER ON THE NILE, for EMI. (A recent EMI ad in Variety described him as "the celebrated Anthony Shaffer.")

But others felt differently. Lee said, "I've never heard of that in all my years in the film industry. Every studio keeps the negatives and trims of every film it makes, good, bad, indifferent, old and new. Outside of cases like the natural disintegration of nitrate stock, how do you destroy 386 cans of film quote by mistake unquote. That's in the realm of fantasy. Something very strange is going on here."

Hardy agrees. "After a month of cables, a trip to Britain, letters, unanswered telephone calls, the word was that British Lion had received all the negative, including the 87-minute version, back from Humphries, and that a British Lion employee had signed for it. And since then they say it has disappeared. A friend of mine in L.A. said that Deeley had told him that he didn't believe it had been destroyed."

As if to confirm that view, they had also originally said that all the publicity materials, including color negatives and transparencies, had been destroyed as well, but later they were "found" and shipped to Abraxas.

However, the truth will probably never emerge. And Abraxas was left with only the 25 (short) prints, struck originally by National General, to work with. Luckily, Hardy remembered that a full-length print of the film had been sent to the U.S. So he got on the phone again. "I rang Corman's office and asked him if he had a copy, because it seemed a logical place where it might be, Deeley having sought his advice. And they looked around and called back and said, 'No, we don't have it.' But I knew there had to be a print over here unless it, too, had been destroyed.

TWM "So I went back to Britain and asked some friends of mine at lower levels of British Lion if they thought there was one in London. They said, 'Look, it's more than our lives are

worth to tell you, but there isn't one here. There is one some where in the States, but we don't know where.

"I then called up Ron Weinberg, a vice president of Abraxas. I told him that if we did find it, he'd have to spend some money, but we could print up some new sections from the positive print, and he said, 'We're prepared to do that to get the complete version.' So he called all over the place. Finally I said, 'You call London, they won't do anything for me.' He rang up British Lion, told them he had, in fact, just acquired the picture, could he see a full-length print of it, and they told him, 'There's none here; it had been destroyed along with the negative trims.'

"Finally, on my hunch, he called Corman and said, 'There's a rumor that you have a print. Look, the negative's been destroyed, we're desperate to see this material, can you help us?. And Corman said, 'Under those circumstances, I will let you have the print, because I do have it here.' It had been there all the time.

Corman has nothing to gain from the film's eventual release, but, in fact, before the deal with Abraxas was signed, it was not his to lend. Needless to say, Abraxas is guarding the print with their lives. They are attempting now to make a third generation negative from the Corman print, which was nearly virgin having been run only a few times, and re-cut the missing sections back into the film. The only worry now is what kind of visual quality will result.

The only national exposure THE WICKER MAN has received thus far is a small bit in the National Enquirer in the April 5, 1977, edition reporting how Rod Stewart offered a six-figure sum to buy the "nudie movie" and destroy it, keeping girlfriend Britt Ekland's nude scenes from reaching American audiences. This is either a canny move or a dumb one on Stewart's part. Giovanni dismisses it as "rock star glamour" but "tremendous publicity for the film. I can't believe he's serious. I mean, her tits have been in nearly all her movies since THE NIGHT THEY RAIDED MINSKY'S!"

If we're lucky, American audiences will soon be able to judge the film for themselves. This incredible story is only about one, single film. I dread to think how many other "unseen" films might have similar tales, if less absurd and lengthy. (Beachhead Properties, for instance, is rumored to control the domestic rights to nearly 200 films!) The story is still evolving. In April, 1977, Abraxas screened the film for the New York theatre owners. Of them, Walter Reade offered a site for late May, but due to 1) the extraordinary expense of opening a film properly in New York; 2) the necessary lab work is not yet completed; and 3) the exact final form of the film had yet to be ironed out by Hardy (i.e. perhaps not all of the cut footage will go back in), it was agreed not to go with the Reade house at that time.

In mid-July, Robin Hardy was contacted through his agent by the New York City Police who asked about the film and wanted to see a copy of the script. At the time, the police were in the throes of the "Son of Sam" murders and were clutching at straws for clues to the murderer's identity. Now, one of the nicknames the killer used in his second letter to columnist Jimmy Breslin was "The Wicked King Wicker." Oddly enough, the police did

not ask to see the film, but Hardy says, when he was asked to describe the plot, that "they cooled a bit when I told them that at the end of it a cop was burned to death." Once David Berkowitz, the alleged killer, was captured, it was discovered that a street adjacent to the apartment building where he lived was named Wicker Street.

TWM Abraxas has now set their official U.S. premiere of THE WICKER MAN for October 28, at the Sena Mall theatre in New Orleans. The two-week, Halloween booking at the flagship house of the southeastern Gulf States theatre chain will be kicked off with a special personal appearance by Christopher Lee, who is taking time out from his busy schedule filming CARAVANS in Iran to come in for the film's opening. At this point, the version to be screened is still the 87-minute "cut version, but plans are still being considered to restore the film's missing footage, if only for its eventual sale to American television, where a 100-minute running time is usually desirable to accommodate a two-hour time slot.

David Blake, the man who sold THE WICKER MAN to National General Pictures for American distribution, noted: "Looking back on the whole thing, to see the films that have been successful since, and quite successful, THE WICKER MAN was marginally well ahead of its time."