

NEW YORK CITY'S BUSTLING STREETS

BECOME STAGE FOR "THE WARRIORS"

Director Walter Hill's first trip to New York City was in conjunction with interviews for the opening publicity of "Hard Times." The visit was brief, and his recollection of the city centered around his hotel suite. His second trip was to film "The Warriors" and he spent an entire summer on locations in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens--seeing things even native New Yorkers usually don't.

Making a movie is never dull, especially when you're making it in the electric environment of New York City. The Big Apple is full of big surprises.

Coney Island was the first location site for "The Warriors." The weather was beautiful, and the sunshine on the boardwalk was relaxing. But despite the serenity of the scene, a jungle world existed beyond the boardwalk. That part of Coney Island is the turf of the Homicides and although the gang didn't seem to mind having a movie crew around, they didn't want anyone walking around their turf wearing the "colors" (uniforms) of another gang, even if it was a fictional one. The police were certain that if any of the cast members wore their costumes while taking a stroll up the block, they would be in trouble. A wardrobe man was constantly making certain that no one wandered off the set's limits wearing a Warrior jacket.

A cemetery in Brooklyn was another location site, but a large fence surrounding it made it safe. A few blocks away, however, with no fenced in protection, tremendous crowds began to gather, causing so much noise and commotion that filming had to be suspended for that evening. Quieter sites were found.

While crowd control was eventually handled without major problems, minor skirmishes flared up. Every community has its weirdos and rowdies, and New York is no exception to the rule. Strange types would often wander over to the set and could not be dealt with logically, so often the only solution was to forcibly carry them out of range.

In Harlem producer Larry Gordon, director Walter Hill (who also wrote the screenplay with David Shaber from Sol Yurick's novel) and executive producer Frank Marshall had to have a constant police escort due to threats made on their lives because they had not hired local gang members to appear in the film. Some gangs who visited the set were easily assuaged while others took to throwing things from a distance. One group of rowdies tore through the set during a lunch break, wrecking thousands of dollars worth of equipment.

Larry Gordon's biggest problem was the one he hoped he would never have to face. Other films that had street gang life as a theme had run into trouble with real gangs and the possibility was always there that "The Warriors" could run afoul of a mean and violent street gang.

"We had some really exciting scenes in 'The Warriors,' but we had to keep their existence quiet so that the gangs wouldn't come around. We had over a thousand extras dressed in some really wild costumes for the conclave scene, but the only cameras there were ours. We had some run-ins with gangs during the summer, but the fact that nothing really serious happened was, I think due to the fact that we laid low."

The filming of "The Warriors" left quite a few marks on

the city. In one part of Brooklyn the fictional A.C. Turnbulls gang, with shaved heads and penciled-in tattoos, walked en masse into a local hamburger joint. The regular crowd, thinking it was a real gang, cleared out in a couple of seconds, and even after it had been explained that these were only actors, they were reluctant to come back inside. And although fear wasn't the usual reaction of a neighborhood, no locale could ignore the invasion of lights, cameras and other equipment that accompanies a movie crew.

Much detailed preparation was done for each new location, but some snafus were to be expected. One example of this occurred under the subway tracks. All the lights were set up for a shot, but the illumination from the movie lights triggered the light sensitive switches on the street lights, turning them off. However, for the scene, they had to be on, and though there was a solution, taping paper over each light cell, it required tremendous extra work for the lighting technicians.

Even with the problems--crowds, rain, noise from passing trains and airplanes--everyone knew there was no way to duplicate the excitement of the streets on a movie set. Director Hill was anxious to capture the tension of the gang neighborhoods, even if reality would intrude upon the scene. One shot between the Warriors and a gang called the Orphans was interrupted by a real siren-screaming chase as the police closed in on a robbery car.

But, for most, the toughest part of the filming was the demanding schedule--60 straight days of night shooting. The crew had to adjust to beginning the work day at 8 p.m. and lunching together at midnight.

Throughout shooting, the City of New York lent a helping hand. The police and the Transit Authority were particularly helpful. They provided stations, trains and personnel which were absolutely essential to the film. As one of the cast remarked, "I've lived in New York all of my life, and I'd never been on a subway as much as I was for this movie." It also seemed to be a treat for the real passengers on the regularly scheduled trains to look out their windows and realize they were part of a movie being made.

By the end of filming, "The Warriors" cast and crew felt as though they had actually shared a kind of gang experience, living and working together on the streets of New York. The movie captures their excitement, exhilaration and fears and makes audiences feel very much a part of the Warriors' tension-filled night on the run.

New York City once again proves to be one of the most eclectic real-life stages in the world.

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