

'The List' - A good Southern story

by Sandra Chambers

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When the movie, "The List," premiered in Charlotte on Aug. 2, complete with red-carpet ceremony and black-tie reception, producers of the independent film never predicted its huge success. More than 3,000 moviegoers showed up that first weekend and were met with sold-out screenings. After breaking several single-screen box office records in Charlotte, "The List" is scheduled to open at Mayfaire Theaters in Wilmington on Sept. 28. Based on a best-selling novel by Charlotte attorney Robert Whitlow, "The List" follows the journey of a young lawyer, Renny Jacobson (Chuck Carrington of the TV series, "JAG"), who is stunned by the sudden death of his wealthy father and by the fact that his only inheritance is the contents of a safety deposit box and interest in a company no one has heard of — the Covenant List of South Carolina Ltd.

When Renny encounters lovely Jo Johnston (Hilarie Burton of "One Tree Hill" fame), also an heir of "The List," he begins a spiritual journey which will bring him face to face with supernatural powers — powers of the Covenant List that seek to destroy him and Jo, and the supernatural power of prayer, which is the one miracle that will save them both from the deadly grip of the 140-year-old Covenant List.

Filmed at Orton Plantation, Wrightsville Beach and Charleston, S.C., the movie captures the beauty of the Wilmington area as few other movies have. "It is one of the most beautiful movies I've seen," said Nicholas Pryor, a Hampstead resident and former TV soap actor, who played the part of one of the members of the Covenant List. "The photography is just stunning!" (Tom Priestly was the director of photography.)

"The beauty of 'The List,' in terms of the acting, is that it is an ensemble cast," insisted Carrington. "I got to listen to a lot of great actors give great

dialogue, and everyone sans Malcolm McDowell is from somewhere in the South."



Staff photo by Sandra Chambers
Mark Fincannon, from left, Richard Fullerton, Tim Ware, Steve Ayers, Bonnie Johnson, Chuck Carrington, Gary Wheeler, Afemo Omilami, Hilarie Burton, Elizabeth Omilami and Keith Harris attend the premiere of "The List" in Charlotte.



Supplied photo courtesy of "The List"
Crews took to the beach during filming.

Carrington, who frequently visits his parents' vacation home on Figure Eight Island, said he was fortunate to come by the leading role. "I walked into Starbucks in Wilmington one morning and saw two guys discussing a script over coffee," Carrington remembered. "I walked over and asked if they had a part for me!" After reading the novel and movie script, Carrington said he knew he had to play the part. "For one thing, it's a Southern story, and I am a Southerner. And I've always wanted to do a character that was adapted from a book."

Carrington's co-lead, Hilarie Burton, had a similar story about how she came to the role of Jo. "I really didn't need the job at the time," Burton said. "I was very busy with 'One Tree Hill,' but after reading the script, I knew this was something I really wanted for myself.

"I'd been playing a very flawed character on 'One Tree Hill' — a girl that dabbled in drugs and sex — a girl very far from what I've been in my life," Burton stressed. "I grew up in the church and was involved in youth group, so to find a character that was much more similar to who I really am was a challenge and also a blessing."

Burton said working on "The List" was a new experience for her. "It's rare that you talk about faith in the workplace," Burton explained, "but we prayed every morning, and it was the most flawless production I've ever worked on. For every obstacle we were put up against, the resolution came so easily and gracefully — it really set a very high bar as to what a film should be."

Although the movie has a definite Christian theme, director/producer Gary Wheeler says it is basically a good Southern story. "'The List' is a good movie that happens to deal with elements of faith," Wheeler said. "Audiences want to see truth, and if a character acts believable and truthfully, they will buy it."

Wheeler plans to make a second movie based on "The Sacrifice," another novel by Robert Whitlow. "It's up to filmmakers to hone our craft and make better movies," Wheeler insisted. "Film is such a powerful media, and there are a lot of great stories of faith to tell."

In addition to Chuck Carrington and Hilarie Burton, the movie stars several award-winning actors, including Malcolm McDowell ("Halloween," "Heroes"), Will Patton ("Remember the Titans"), Pat Hingle ("Batman"), Nicholas Pryor ("Edge of Night," "All My Children"), Tim Ware ("In the Heat of the Night"), Mary Beth Peil (opera singer and Broadway actress) and Elisabaeth Omilami (stage actress).