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The Hawaiians



Imperialism, leprosy, mental illness, slave labor, greed, family tradition, and achievement against all odds are just a few of the strains that run through **The Hawaiians** (1970), an epic telling of the island's struggles at the end of the nineteenth century. The second installment in the film adaptation of James Michener's massive story, *Hawaii* (1966), **The Hawaiians** (1970) relates the last third of the book, following the island's growth into the 20th century and the influx of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, initially as cheap labor.

Charlton Heston stars as Whipple "Whip" Hoxworth, the disenfranchised grandson of one of Hawaii's leading white settlers (played by Richard Harris in *Hawaii*), who left him nothing and inspired Whip to create his own fortune in pineapples. Geraldine Chaplin is his highborn Hawaiian wife, who has a mental breakdown after giving birth and goes native. But the real star of the picture is Tina Chen, a young medical technician who had almost no acting experience. She plays as Nyuk Tsin, who comes to Hawaii aboard one of Whip's slave-labor hauls and ends up becoming a matriarch of the island, respected by the locals and her own large family.

The film's cinematography, by Lucien Ballard (*The Wild Bunch*, 1969) and Philip Lathrop (*The Pink Panther*, 1964), delivers the appropriate epic look to the story, beginning with the film's opening aboard Whip's ship. Such grand scale photography had its problems, though. Heston recalls in his autobiography *In the Arena*: "From shooting on a ship we moved to shooting from a

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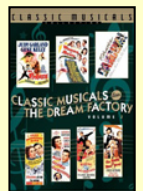
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chopper, which also has its problems. It can give you wonderfully acrobatic shots, not possible before the quantum leap in a helicopter design provided by the Vietnam War, but it's almost as tricky as filming on the water. What looked like a fairly simple shot-throwing a dead leper from a cliff into the sea off the leper island of Molokai-was vastly complicated by the chopper's problems. We spent half a day on it."

The Hawaiians is directed by Tom Gries (father of *The Pretender's* Jon Gries), who had collaborated with Heston on what many believe is the actor's finest film, *Will Penny* (1968). Gries and Heston had just finished another film prior to work on **The Hawaiians** - *Number One* (1969) - about a pro quarterback pushing forty. In his autobiography, Heston remembers his ambivalence towards his role in **The Hawaiians**: "I tried my best to dismiss my anxieties about Whip Hoxsworth's structural function on the film. Maybe this blunted the swordblade edge an actor should bring to any role. If that's so, I have no excuse for it." Heston expressed concern about not being more involved in his part throughout his journal entries for the production. He says he told producer Walter Mirisch (*Hawaii*) from the beginning that the real story revolved around Tina Chen's character and not his own. "You also need to fall in love with the guy you're playing, to marry his story....I'd certainly done it with Tommy Gries on *Will Penny* and *Number One*, but we somehow fell short on **The Hawaiians**."

Despite Heston's admitted disengagement from his character, **The Hawaiians** manages to create a compelling picture of a turbulent time that is still not well understood. The film was nominated for the Oscar® for Best Costume Design and Tina Chen was nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Golden Globe.

Producer: Walter Mirisch, Robert Stambler

Director: Tom Gries

Screenplay: James Michener (novel), James R. Webb

Cinematography: Lucien Ballard, Philip H. Lathrop

Film Editing: Byron 'Buzz' Brandt, Ralph E. Winters

Art Direction: George B. Chan

Music: Henry Mancini

Cast: Charlton Heston (Whipple Hoxworth), Geraldine Chaplin (Purity Hoxworth), John Phillip Law (Noel Hoxworth), Mako (Mun Ki), Khigh Dhiagh (Kai Chung), Don Knight (Milton Overpeck).
C-134m. Letterboxed.

by Emily Soares



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