

# Jamaica, the Land of Film



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By

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Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Cover photo: Vanessa Polack – Blue Mountains, Jamaica

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8991-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8991-9

*This book was inspired by my beautiful granddaughter,  
Victoria Israelles Polack, to whom it is dedicated with  
greatest love and affection.*



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## PREFACE

Like many cinema patrons in Jamaica, I was a beneficiary of the Audley Morais-founded chain of Palace Amusement theatres that included the Regal, Carib, Premier, Odeon, Palace and others over the decades. Sitting in the balcony of the Regal at Cross Roads, now a haberdashery, clutching a piece of chicken and hard dough bread in the comfort of relatively new air conditioning, mesmerized by the big screen in front of me, was the acme of happiness.<sup>1</sup>

Years later my well-meaning wife propelled me into amateur film production, although her intention was to document our family history. Assisted by my chief and often only actor, Nasi-Menyelek Ben-Yisrr, we would careen around the Cayman Islands on a Saturday shooting our grand trilogy: *War Party*, *Crackdown* and *Swamp Ninja*. Like many artistic pursuits in the Cayman Islands, there was always a certain amount of misconception about Jamaicans staging what appeared to be faux illegal activity.

As time passed and Jamaica continued to dominate international short-track events, as well as the popular musical genres of reggae and dancehall, it occurred to me that our century-long accomplishments in international film production were being overshadowed, if not forgotten altogether.

Titans of our governmental and private-sector efforts, who have promoted Jamaica as the ultimate Caribbean film location, have often not received the credit they deserved – Sally Porteous, Natalie Thompson, Maxine Walters and Chris Browne among them.

Historically, the head of the first Jamaica Film Unit in 1951, Martin Rennalls, is also remembered for his early and extensive work towards the establishment of local film production.

At the end of the day, however many awards and medals we win on the international stages of music and athletics it will be for naught unless they translate into jobs and the improvement of our economy back home.

Jamaica's film-location status has accomplished just that for over a century.

One of the best-regarded hits by the petite South African singer with a big heart, Brenda Fassie (unfortunately, no longer with us) was *Vulindlela*, or "Clearing the Way".

The topic of this book was the subject of immense research by Dr. Emiel Martens for the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis in his thesis “Welcome to Paradise Island: The rise of Jamaica’s cine-tourist image 1891-1951” (see Appendix 2), which is acknowledged with gratitude on behalf of the people of Jamaica.

The verification of films that have, over the last century, used Jamaica as a location – many of which have disappeared – has been an onerous exercise. In one case, confirmation came in the form of a cancelled cheque to a local bank by a production company for a local supplier, which was offered for sale on the internet.

I am unable to claim this work as a solo effort due to the many who have contributed to this publication in large and small ways, but they are all thanked profusely below.

This is a long-overdue attempt to record most of the numerous film productions from abroad that made Jamaica their home for over a century, and to recognize the many directors and producers who journeyed to paradise while others merely pretended to visit.

One disturbing element of my research for this book was the least being provided by those expected to contribute the most.

There was a total lack of support from relevant elements of the Jamaican Government, who indulged in a protracted game of “pass the buck” or “pin the tail on the donkey”.

Pre-eminent among these elements were JAMPRO (the relevant agency of the Government of Jamaica’s Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation) and the Film Commissioner, both of whom are yet to approve my request for the use of images from their website, and who also stated that

*“We do not physically visit many film sets and so, we would not have in our possession, images of production, cast and crew of film projects executed in Jamaica. Do have a wonderful day.”<sup>2</sup>*

To be fair, a total lack of assistance also came from the National Library of Jamaica, Jamaica Information Service, the Ministry of Tourism and the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission.

For use of a single image of an old Jamaica Railway locomotive, available on the internet, the National Library of Jamaica required a contract, payment, three free books and two in DVD format. The only omission was a partridge in a pear tree. If one were to bear in mind the Spartan nature of academic research and publication, especially in cases where many images are required, such a request borders on the insane.

Shining exceptions were the Institute of Jamaica, led by their brilliant director Vivian Crawford; the National Water Commission, who helped with images of Hermitage Dam; the Urban Development Corporation, for Green Grotto; the Jamaica Housing Trust, for Emancipation Park; Dorrick Gray/Claudene Forbes of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust; and Joseph Powell of the University of the West Indies (UWI) Press.

There can be no doubt about the existence of a massive bureaucratic disconnect, and about the question of why we have had no major international film productions come to Jamaica since 2010 – with none on the horizon, either. Instead of finger pointing, however, perhaps the clarion call can be heeded and “remedy instead of mouth” be applied.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> “Mr. Audley Morais dies, funeral today”, *Daily Gleaner*, 19 July 1967.

<sup>2</sup> JAMPRO email, 6 October 2016.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My persevering mother Clarisse, who was wooed by my father, after he searched for her on bended knee in the half- light of the Palace Cinema in Kingston. Thank you, Palace – or I may have not been here.

To Marc Banville, who gave me the pearl of the Banville family, my unwavering wife Monique, with love and appreciation.

My greatest assistants, and sometime rivals, my daughters, Olivia the Pirate and Vanessa the Director.

My family, including our new arrival, for constant love and support, with the occasional cognac.

My brother George for his persistent kindness, assistance and love for nearly half a century – with his able crew: Cherry, Miss Maggie, Spike and Gina.

A future leader of the Cayman Islands and the sharpest intellect of his generation, Leon Buckeridge, for considered advice and benevolent criticism.

To the saving grace of the Polack family, Mrs. Doreen Hinds.

The “Capability Brown” of the Cayman Islands, Robert Powell.

The “head” and “arms” of the Polack family: my sisters, Janette and Angela.

My brother, who has spent a lifetime dodging bullets and artillery fire, Nasi-Menyelek Ben-Yisrr, for encouragement in all things film.

My gratitude to Victoria Carruthers, Amanda Millar and Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their confidence in bringing this record of Caribbean excellence to the fore.

The generous photographer with a perfect eye for Frenchman’s Cove, Alice Gao.

The two best Jamaican film-location super sleuths, George and Deborah Cumming, with apologies for stoning the Gibson family-home roof as a wayward child.

Richard Kane, who took a chance and put me on the road less travelled.

Sarah Uttridge of Amber Books, who allowed me to join an august group of contributors for the encyclopedia project.

Respect to the great Jamaican patriot and JUTA driver, Nico Gray, the best Kingston tour driver (876-480-8736).

The mighty Tiger and Junior, who are the masters of speed on the range.

Thanks to a lawyer's lawyer, Arthur Hamilton, the top man in his field in Jamaica.

My dear friend Richard Buban, who gave me a treasure trove of film-history books that provided early knowledge on this topic.

Joseph Powell of UWI Press, for extract permission.

Learned assistance from Trident hotelier, Dwight Powell.

Thanks to the following hotels for images: Trident Hotel, Round Hill Hotel and Villas, Sans Souci and Jamaica Inn.

Congratulations to the outstanding collection of the Media History Digital Library by David Pierce and Eric Hoyt.

My appreciation to Antoine Liddell of Noranda Bauxite for the amazing Port Rhodes photos.

Timely assistance from Tony Dykes of the British Film Institute for the Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire extract and images.

*The Sugar Barons* author Matthew Parker for kind use of the Roaring River and Drax Hall pictures.

Director of the Institute, and famous organist, Vivian Crawford, for invaluable assistance.

Local actress, journalist and film historian Marguerite Gauron, who has enriched this publication by her contribution; in memoriam, fellow actor Claude Gauron.

The bright stars and best examples of how government departments should operate:

1. James Pearson, assistant manager of Emancipation Park for extract permission.
2. Dorrick Gray and Claudene Forbes of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust for extract permission.
3. Karen Williams of the National Water Commission for the Hermitage Dam photo.

Paul Catchpole, of World of Model Railways, for the Jamaica Railway pictures.

Roy Page of Caribic Vacations, an example of our great Jamaican CEOs who daily carry water with a basket.

The fire master, and emerging talent in many ways, Gadiel Piercy.

The oak tree who helped an acorn, English master Ken Ryder of Denstone College.

David Roper for allowing me the privilege of shining his shoes at boarding school, and his long-suffering wife Donna, whose taste in footwear is unrivalled.

Brian “the Bird” Roper and his mother Faith, who spirited me off to another world and changed my life.

Hugh Small QC for photographic assistance.

Sam Fleischner for the *Wha Do Dem* photos.

With gratitude for our long-standing friendship with the Albisu family of Uruguay

## INTRODUCTION

If Jamaica were an actor she would have appeared in more than 141 films, according to a popular internet database.<sup>1</sup>

The tally of “movies”, to use the American term, in which the name Jamaica plays a prominent part is probably closer to two hundred, but this number pares down substantially if it is limited to those films that were actually shot, in part or whole, in Jamaica. Very often films shot mostly in other countries, such as Fiji, would have additional footage coming from Jamaica and the Bahamas, which were two popular spots for tropical-island footage.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest known such film was discovered quite by chance during overall research: the now-lost 1910 silent production comprising less than a thousand feet of footage, *Between Love and Honor*, produced at an unknown location in or near Kingston.

Whilst there is a modern trend to protect Brand Jamaica – with the popularity of Bob Marley and the success, latterly, of athletic superstar Usain Bolt – Jamaica has been used in books and film for some time to promote a tropical or Caribbean flavour without significant economic revenue being collected for the benefit of the country. The producers and cinemas have long been able to keep the lion’s share of revenue from a genre unconnected to Europe or North America.

Perhaps reparations, in the form of royalties, could begin here.

There have been more benefits in recent years, as confirmed by a 1990 comment in the *Hollywood Reporter* that “*Club Paradise was the foreign production that most benefited the local economy, adding US\$5.3 million to the coffers.*”<sup>3</sup>

One of the costliest films for its time, at US\$1 million, was the 1916 drama *A Daughter of the Gods*, which not only saw substantial set construction in Kingston but also one of the earliest examples of nudity, from actress Annette Kellermann, in mainstream cinema. At least two

early pictures bore titles sourced after a cash prize had been offered to the Jamaican public, including *A Daughter of the Gods*.

Jamaica was associated with at least one other cinematic first, with *The Devil's Daughter* in 1939 being the first American black feature film shot on location in Jamaica.<sup>4</sup>

A few films shot in Jamaica were startling at the time in their imagery of neo-colonialism, violence, black exploitation and even homosexual rape, such as the 1968 film *Dark of the Sun* – released in the UK as *The Mercenaries*, and in France as *The Last Train From Katanga* – which was about events in the Congo.

Stars including Rod Taylor, Yvette Mimeux and Jim Brown performed for a film that also preserved useful historical footage of a working Jamaica Railway steam engine, used in aeroplane strafing shots at Frankfield and Suttons in Clarendon.<sup>5</sup> The engine was eventually destroyed as part of the script.

Jamaica has been home to at least one example of the horror genre, with the 1991 film *Popcorn* shot in part at the Ward Theatre in downtown Kingston – renamed Dreamland Theater for the production.



Dr. Carl J. Stratmann ARPS, courtesy of Mrs. Lyn Stratmann  
Fig. 0-1: Jamaica Railway locomotive No. 55 crashing in Clarendon, 1967

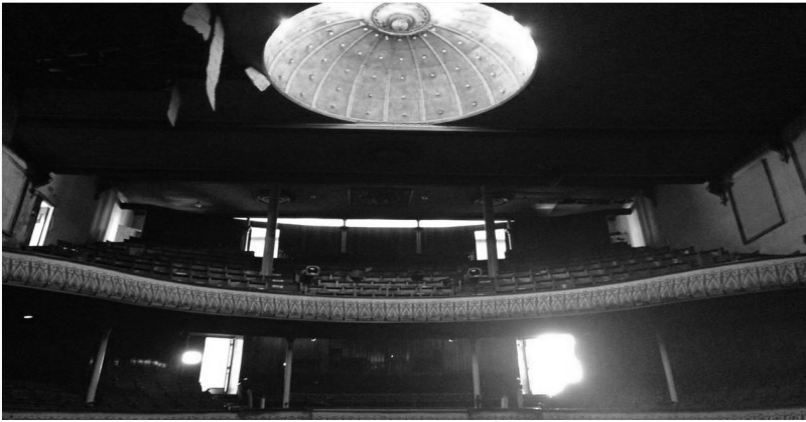


Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire  
Fig. 0-2: St. James Railway Station, 1913



Fig. 0-3: Ward Theatre, Kingston

Rosie McNamee



Rosie McNamee

Fig. 0-4: Ceiling cupola, Ward Theatre, Kingston

The progression towards more made-for-television films also found Jamaica to be a useful location for ventures such as the Viacom production *Scam* with Christopher Walken in 1991. This video film also recorded the acting debut of Jamaican-descended reggae singer, Maxi Priest.

Even documentaries found a home in Jamaica – such as *The Land of Look Behind*, produced in 1982 with a variety of locations including the Cockpit country.

There have been a few unfortunate occasions when productions such as *Island in the Sun*, shot in Barbados and Grenada during 1957, have been mistakenly attributed to Jamaica even by official sources.<sup>6</sup>

The 1957 British film *Heart Within*, about a Jamaican immigrant in England, although listed as a film shot in Jamaica was in fact filmed entirely in England.<sup>7</sup>

The Italian produced *Our Man in Jamaica* of 1965 appears not only to have had no location in Jamaica but seemingly to have used some Haiti footage as background.

The romantic adventure of a marooned boy and girl called *The Blue Lagoon*, with the young Brook Shields, released in 1980 by Columbia Pictures and directed by Randal Kleiser, saw the nubile Shields emulating Annette Kellermann by covering her upper nudity with long hair until she

swam *au naturel* in a lagoon. However, that was the extent of the comparison with Jamaica: *The Blue Lagoon* was shot entirely in Fiji.

Although several sources, even books, point to the Blue Lagoon in Portland, once known as Blue Hole, as the location, this is not the case.<sup>8</sup>

The lagoon recently came under the management of the Alligator Head Foundation, in collaboration with the University of the West Indies, to monitor the marine resources of east Portland. This promising development will hopefully preserve what could be an outstanding attraction and film location.<sup>9</sup>

One film, the 1970 jungle production *Skullduggery*, appears on some records to have been shot in Papua New Guinea and Samoa, when in fact it was filmed on location in Jamaica for safety reasons. Part of the reason appears to have been a late change in the production company.<sup>10</sup>

Jamaica was sufficiently popular as a location to have hosted several productions in one year, such as *Live and Let Die* as well as *Papillon* in 1973. *Live and Let Die* featured the new Bond, Roger Moore, while the popular and enduring *Papillon* led with the iconic Steve McQueen. Both used locations in Falmouth, while *Papillon* also had swamp scenes from Westmoreland.

One's heart could almost burst with pride to watch the many Jamaica scenes of *Papillon* in full display while ensconced in the luxurious seat of a premier London cinema, relishing the exclamations of pleasure by the assembled audience at various points.

Jamaica-based productions have also provided a few substantial opportunities for local actors over the decades – pre-eminent among them being the outstanding Claudia Robinson in 1993's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, described by the *New York* magazine as “A remarkable actress”.<sup>11</sup>

The popularity of earlier Jamaica-location film productions was a consequence of low production costs; in some cases, the proximity to Florida; the availability of extras, many with prior experience from the frequent productions on the island; and the exotic locale, with both producers and actors desirous of escaping colder climes. The trend has sputtered in later years, owing to competition by location countries prepared to offer a portion of financing and tax relief.

Nevertheless, however much or little of the actual film footage from Jamaica ended up on the editor's cutting-room floor, audiences were left with a taste of island paradise.

A list of international film productions in Jamaica:

### **The Earliest Years**

1. *Between Love and Honor* (1910)
2. *Tom Cringle in Jamaica* (1913)
3. *The Old College Badge* (1913)
4. *A Flirtation at Sea* (1913)
5. *The Creole's Love Story* (1913)
6. *The Overseer's Revenge* (1913)
7. *The Planter's Daughter* (1913)
8. *Lieutenant Daring and the Labour Riots* (1913)
9. *Lieutenant Daring and the Dancing Girl* (1913)
10. *The Favourite for the Jamaica Cup* (1913)
11. *Flame of Passion* (1915)
12. *The Pearl of the Antilles* (1915)
13. *A Daughter of the Gods* (1916)
14. *Queen of the Sea* (1918)
15. *Love's Redemption* (1921)
16. *Satan's Sister* (1925)

### **Pre-World War Two**

17. *Ouanga* (1935)
18. *Obeah* (1935)
19. *The Devil's Daughter* (1939)
20. *The Black Swan* (1942)

### **Post-War**

21. *Island of Desire (Saturday Island)* (1952)
22. *All the Brothers were Valiant* (1953)
23. *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954)<sup>12</sup>
24. *Manfish* (1956) – Jamaican Eric Coverley played police officer Chavez in in this production, also called *Calypso* in the UK
25. *Sea Wife* (1957)
26. *Passionate Summer (Storm over Jamaica/Storm over Jamaica)* (1958)

### The Roaring Sixties

27. *Dr. No* (1962) – with parts by Reggie Carter, Marguerite Lewars and the UK transplant Timothy Moxon<sup>13</sup>
28. *Lord of the Flies* (1963)
29. *Father Goose* (1964)
30. *The Confession (Seven Different Ways/Quick, Let's Get Married)* (1964)
31. *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1965) – with Charles Hyatt<sup>14</sup>
32. *Come Spy With Me* (1967) – with a part played by Jamaican actor Eric Coverley
33. *In Like Flint* (1967)
34. *Oh Dad, Poor Dad Mamma's Hung you in the Closet and I'm Feelin So Sad* (1967)
35. *Dark of the Sun (The Mercenaries)* (1968)
36. *Flatfoot* (1968)

### The Decadent Seventies

37. *Skullduggery* (1970)
38. *Live and Let Die* (1973)
39. *Papillon* (1973)
40. *The Treasure of Jamaica Reef* (1974)
41. *Jamaican Gold* (original title *The Treasure Seekers*) (1979) – with Dermot Hussey and Bobby Ghisays

### The Exciting Eighties

42. *Eureka* (1983)
43. *Club Paradise* (1986)
44. *Hammerhead* (1987)
45. *Clara's Heart* (1988)
46. *Cocktail* (1988)
47. *The Mighty Quinn* (1989) – with Carl Bradshaw

### The Naughty Nineties

48. *Marked for Death* (1990) – with Jimmy Cliff
49. *Treasure Island* (1990)
50. *Lord of the Flies* (1990)
51. *Popcorn* (1991)

52. *Prelude to a Kiss* (1992) – with Peter Lloyd<sup>15</sup>
53. *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1993)
54. *Cool Runnings* (1993)
55. *Legends of the Fall* (1994)
56. *Fool's Paradise* (1997)
57. *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1998)<sup>16</sup>
58. *Belly* (1998) – with Mr. Vegas (Clifford Smith) and Sean Paul (Sean Henriques)
59. *Shattered Image* (1998) – with Leonie Forbes, Fay Ellington, Pablo Hoilett and Billy Wilmott
60. *Instinct* (1999)<sup>17</sup>

### **The New Millennium**

61. *Almost Heaven* (2005)
62. *Made in Jamaica* (2006)
63. *Nichts als Gespenster (Nothing but Ghosts)* (2006)
64. *Roots Time* (2007)
65. *License to Wed* (2007)
66. *Hanging in Hedo* (2008)
67. *A Perfect Getaway* (2009)
68. *Wah Do Dem* (2009) – Reggae Film Festival 2010 International Feature Film Honour Award
69. *Knight and Day* (2010)

This list, and book, does not include many local, independent, made-for-television or documentary productions that also found Jamaica to be an enticing location or subject.

The prodigious output of films shot on location in Jamaica led the *New York Times* to proclaim: “*An Island Rediscovered Its Role as the Little Hollywood Of the Caribbean*” in a 1988 article. Jamaica also received the ultimate double accolade, with portions of the 1963 original *Lord of the Flies* and its 1990 sequel being filmed on location in Portland.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1992 and 2006, twelve international film productions came to Jamaica during the tenure of Prime Minister P. J. Patterson, including:

- Prelude to a Kiss* (1992)
- Wide Sargasso Sea* (1993)
- Cool Runnings* (1993)
- Instinct* (1999)

This was in the fullness of time, a great achievement that has outshone all his predecessors and successors – a record which, like that of Usain Bolt, is likely to remain unbroken. Patterson was also the architect of Highway 2000, a section of which was recently given his name, which provides a sizeable network of modern roads for any international film company coming to Jamaica.<sup>19</sup> Apart from his many professional and extracurricular talents, Mr. Patterson excelled as host of the film production of local attractions, *Jamaica: The Ultimate Tour*, with travel journalist Peter Greenberg, which was unveiled to great acclaim in 2006.<sup>20</sup>

Much credit for bringing foreign film production to Jamaica should also go to Sally Porteous – now Custos of Manchester, but formerly with the film office of JAMPRO – for her extraordinary efforts.



Nico Gray

Fig. 0-5: Police station and church, Manchioneal, Portland

It is surprising that these locations have not presented a worthwhile opportunity for a Jamaica film-location tour, not dissimilar to those active in other countries. In recent years, the Cayman Islands dock set for *The Firm* starring Tom Cruise provided an interesting stop for tourists before being destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

The Parish of Portland seems to have emerged as the historical and landscape favourite, followed by the port town of Ocho Rios, particularly

Dunn's River Falls, with Kingston becoming a local favourite recently for its dance halls, gangs, violence and music videos.



Nasi-Menyelek Ben-Yisrr

Fig. 0-6: Highway 2000

Some film production used Jamaica not only for background footage but as part of the story line, such as the 1988 *Clara's Heart* with Whoopi Goldberg playing a Jamaican housekeeper at a vacation resort helping a young American boy dealing with family difficulties.

The converse position appeared the same year, with *Milk and Honey*. Although not shot in Jamaica, it featured a Jamaican theme of immigration to Canada; Jamaican actors, including the renowned Leonie Forbes; and a script co-written by the doyen of Jamaican playwrights, Trevor Rhone.

This use of Jamaica for a story line in fact began much earlier, with the location for *Captain Blood* (1935) – portrayed as Port Royal. It was, in fact, Three Arch Bay in Laguna Beach, California, which perpetuated the subterfuge.<sup>21</sup> The deception has been sufficiently complete to mislead even film archivists and academics.

Its star, Errol Flynn, came to have a more realistic and enduring attraction to Jamaica, and Port Antonio in particular, later in life. His grandson, and rising star Luke Flynn, was born on the island.



Robert Florczak

Fig. 0-7: Three Arch Bay, Laguna Beach, California: the actual location for *Captain Blood*



Media History Digital Library

Fig. 0-8: *Motion Picture Herald* shot of Errol Flynn and Lili Damita at the *Captain Blood* premiere, 1935



Nico Gray

Fig. 0-9: Errol Flynn Marina, Port Antonio

Jamaican-themed films not shot on location also included *City Beneath the Sea* (1953), based on the book *Port Royal: The Ghost City Beneath the Sea*; *Jamaica Run* (1953); *Swashbuckler* (1976), filmed in Mexico; and *Home Again* (2012), shot in Trinidad. This was a continuing worldwide phenomenon, with the latest blockbuster *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales* being shot in Australia and its predecessor, *On Stranger Tides*, using Hawaii.<sup>22</sup> It is left to cinema audiences to reject this visual “plagiarism”.



Nico Gray

Fig. 0-10: Port Royal

Nonetheless, the number of movies shot in Jamaica has grown exponentially post-2000, with the advent of relatively affordable camera gear that saw many amateurs with small or non-existent budgets entering the field – some with wild abandon, while others sought to perpetuate old clichés. Whilst this book has essentially been confined to early major productions, often where Jamaica or Jamaican actors played a substantial part, the future will be left to the next generation for self-dissection.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE EARLIEST YEARS

It would seem surreal that an American film-production company would decamp to the city of Kingston, Jamaica at the turn of the century not only to use this Caribbean urban community as a film location but also to spend \$1 million dollars to accomplish this event. The production involved the creation of a Moorish city in an imagined India, and employed three thousand persons a day.

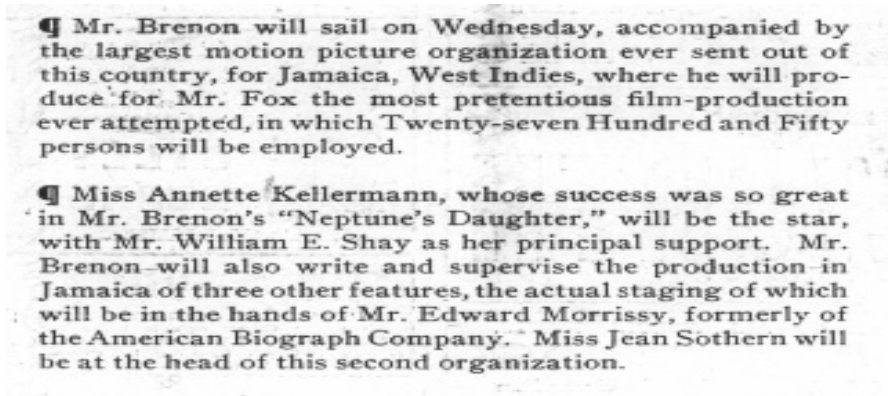
This 1916-released film, *A Daughter of the Gods*, was produced by Hollywood pioneer William Fox for his Fox Film Corporation, which ultimately distributed the picture.<sup>23</sup> The Hungarian-born Fox, originally named Wilhelm Fried, had established his film-production company in 1915. It grew to include a chain of cinemas and still exists today as 21st Century Fox, owned by Rupert Murdoch.<sup>24</sup>



Media History Digital Library

Fig. 1-01: A history of the movies: Annette Kellermann and Hal De Forest in *A Daughter of the Gods*, 1916

The prolific director of the film was another immigrant, the Irish-born Herbert Brenon, who angered producer Fox by massively exceeding the budget, which reached the unprecedented US\$1 million-dollar mark. Fox initially refused to allow Brenon to receive his director credit, but conceded after the latter brought a lawsuit against him.



Media History Digital Library

Fig. 1-02: *Variety* article on *A Daughter of the Gods*, August 1915

This silent-film production was all the more remarkable for containing footage of partial nudity, controversial for the time. Actress Annette Kellermann, a former Australian swimming star, appeared naked but veiled by very long hair, which acted as a cover for her bare body. A December 1915 report had half a million pounds sterling being spent in order to include locations rarely promoted today, or lost to memory, such as Rose Gardens,<sup>25</sup> Oxford Cave and Clifton Falls – the latter said to be in the White River Valley.<sup>26</sup> The following February, 1916, Jamaicans were astonished to see a picture of a camel at Fort Augusta on the front page of their daily newspaper; the creature was among a sample of animals brought in to create caravans for the Middle Eastern-themed fantasy film. The biggest event had arrived, and Jamaicans flocked to support the venture.



Nico Gray

Fig. 1-03: Fort Augusta, Portmore

A few weeks prior on New Year's Eve 1915, Jamaica's daily newspaper, the *Gleaner*, confirmed that the film crew would be travelling to the Green Castle estate of Sir John Pringle near Annotto Bay, where Kellermann would perform her famous dive from the tower. At this time, no less than six miles of footage had been recorded – helped in no small part by Sir John Pringle, who gave the crew free run of his property.

A few years later, the Jamaican release of the completed moving picture was announced while suggesting that the film had been named by an unknown Jamaican lady “who received three guineas for her effort drawn from the words of a poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson: ‘*A daughter of the gods, divinely tall, And most divinely fair*’.”<sup>27</sup>