

ARTS & LEISURE

Wes Craven can 'Scream' all the way to the bank

By BERNARD WEINRAUB
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HOLLYWOOD — Few films survive in theaters beyond a month. Far fewer linger after two or three months.

And then there's "Scream."

Directed by Wes Craven, whose career includes such a horror film hit as "A Nightmare on Elm Street," "Scream" opened last Christmas and has not only turned into a cult classic for young moviegoers but also the most unexpected success of the year.

Made by Miramax for \$15.3 million — with \$20 million spent on promotion — this scary movie is still playing at theaters in large cities and has taken in more than \$100 million at the box office. Earlier this month it won the MTV Best Picture Award, defeating such favorites as "Jerry Maguire" and "Independence Day" in voting by viewers.

This week, at least 500,000 videos of "Scream" will be shipped to stores around the country.

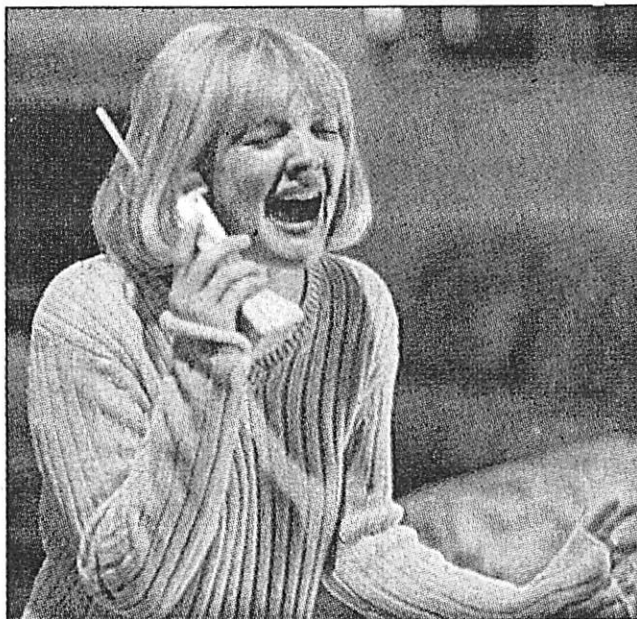
Craven has already begun filming a sequel.

"People are seeing 'Scream' five and six times," said Cary Woods, the producer who bought the sought-after screenplay by Kevin Williamson. "It's become a communal experience. They're repeating lines from it."

Asked what had appealed to him about the screenplay, Woods said, "It was unusual. It scared me, but it was really funny and clearly written by someone who knew the genre. It's unpredictable and unpretentious: It didn't take itself too seriously but at the same time didn't put down the horror genre. In fact it loved the genre; it treated it with respect."

In a sense, "Scream" reinvents the horror film, turning the classic elements of the genre upside down. It is a chilling film as well as a spoof, a movie about a serial killer who uses his love of scary movies to outwit the police and terrorize a picturesque California town.

On another level, the odd and complex story immerses itself



That's one call too many for Drew Barrymore, whose "Scream" is a box-office winner and a cult classic.

almost totally in the bleak universe of teen-agers whose lives revolve around school, sexual anxiety, horror movies and tabloid television.

"I make movies about fear," said Craven, who is 57. "And 'Scream' confirms my belief that thrillers can be great character

pieces that often get deep under the skin of human psychology. It's a very shocking and wickedly complicated film, and there's a dark but funny edge to it.

"It's both within the genre and outside of it. And it is unpredictable and politically incorrect, which is liberating."

What he found liberating was the film's starkly blunt approach to violence, he said, and its utter lack of anything that could be termed "family values."

"It doesn't treat the audience like idiots," said Craven, who earned a master's degree in writing and philosophy at Johns Hopkins University and was a New York cabdriver before beginning a career as the creator of horror films like "The People Under the Stairs" and "Shockers" and the TV series "Nightmare Cafe."

"And it's about the darker side of human activity," he said. "In scary movies we're looking behind the scrim of propriety and finding things not pretty to look at, ancient in nature and primal in their importance. We're finding here, and in other scary movies, humanity at its funkiest."

Craven and Woods said the film's success could be attributable partly to its casting. While most horror films cast unknown and sometimes forgettable actors, the performers in "Scream" are highly popular among teen-agers and young TV viewers.

The cast includes Neve Campbell ("The Craft" and television's "Party of Five"), Skeet Ulrich ("The Craft"), Courteney Cox ("Friends"), Drew Barrymore ("Batman Forever"), David Arquette ("Beautiful Girls") and Rose McGowan ("The Doom Generation").

Miramax, which distributes mostly sophisticated films like "The English Patient" and "The Piano," will probably make more money with 'Scream' than any movie it has released with the possible exception of "Pulp Fiction," which has grossed more than \$106 million. The Disney-owned company has set up a separate division called Dimension to increase its distribution of horror or genre films.