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Antonio Das Mortes (BRAZILIAN-COLOR)

Cannes, May 20.

Mapa-Rocha-Antoine release and production. Features Mauricio Do Valle, Odete Lara, Othon Bastos, Hugo Carvana. Written and directed by Glauber Rocha. Camera (Eastmancolor), Alfonso Beato; editor, Edouardo, Escorel; music, Marlos Nobre. No other credits. Reviewed at Cannes Film Fest (Competing). Running Time, 100 MINS.

Antonio Das Mortes...Mauricio Do Valle
Laura.....Odete Lara
Professor.....Othon Bastos
Police Chief.....Hugo Carvana
Colonel.....Jofre Soares
Saint.....Rosa Maria Penna

It might be called a tragic western, a popular parable on the politics, religion and ingrained social problems of sprawling Brazil, but film transcends any labels to make a ritualistic comment on man fighting, nobly or not, a destiny created by man and superstition. Here man can face up to Gods and symbols, and try to change things and exorcise the past to fact the present.

Glauber Rocha has already made a name for himself at fests with his "White Devil and Black God" and this pic takes up where the other left off. It is more mature in conception and a dithyrambic, operatic, almost excessive exploring of myths, and symbolically treated realities, that avoid excess by sheer bombastic excitement.

Perhaps a little knowledge of the sertao, a dry, poor part of Brazil, is needed. Mystical bandits, the Congaceiro, tried to help the poor and fight the authorities. Hired killers of the Establishment, jaguncos, tracked them down. The film is about one of the latter who, thinks the bandits have been wiped out but is called to a small sertao hamlet where a group of poor people have come to squat, led by a Congaceiro.

The killer, Antonio Das Mortes, realizes he is a distorted image of the many dedicated bandits he has slaughtered. When he gets there he sees a grasping, blind owner, with a sluttish wife carrying on with the local police chief, who will do nothing to help the starving squatters led by the bandit and a Saint, a young girl with some sort of mystical calling.

Antonio begins to change sides and finally faces up to a band of other specialized killers, called in for ritualistic slaughter, and mows them down, with the help of a school teacher, in a scene of sound and fury that makes gun fights at the O.K. corral look and sound like Boy Scout escapades.

Rocha has a dynamic sense of place, time and movement and an ability to create a tragic, implacable rhythm that raises it above ordinary derring-do or overdone melodramatics. The use of songs, operatic arias and the timelessness of the tragic and classic struggle, plus sudden returns to more modern Brazil, give this a romantic lyrical, primitive tang that makes all its forays into violence a means of ritual rather than exploited mayhem.

The landowner's wife stabs her policeman lover countless times when found out to save herself and is made love to, on and around the body, by the teacher as a fanatical priest tries to pull them apart. The poor are cut down ruthlessly until only the Saint and a black disciple are left, with the latter first beaten by the teacher for just being alive and later killing the landowner.

Dances, songs and measured, larger-than-life acting help this reach a cathartic power. Since it shows the things that are usually denied or ignored by so-called Establishment people, pic hits a high crescendo of lyrical violence that has a true revolutionary fervor and insight into a need for change with a warning that chaotic bloodletting will otherwise ensue.

The film's brilliant, highly colored dynamism still calls for care for foreign chances. But art possibilities are definitely there. However it will take careful handling and placement due to explosive qualities that might be taken for exoticism by those who refuse to look or feel. It is technically extraordinary with brilliant hues and composite acting, espe-

cially by Mauricio DoValle as the implacable, fanatic killer who changes sides. Mosk.