



By **JOHN WIRT**

Movie critic

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Christy Oldham made the leap from Plaquemine to Hollywood. She's had big and small parts in independent movies and a featured role in a Jerry Seinfeld special. During an appearance on The Andy Dick Show, she squirted ketchup on the star while he was dressed as a giant hotdog.

Oldham's latest venture, an independent film called Cain and Abel that plays like Starsky & Hutch meets Superfly, premieres Saturday at the Other Venice Film Festival in Venice, Calif. She's the film's co-producer and a supporting player in the cast, which includes rapper Flavor Flav.

Unlike the heavy dramas that regional filmmakers back in southeast Louisiana are making lately, the first feature film from Mercury Rising Films, a company she founded with actor-filmmaker Shane Woodson, is pure comedy.

'People want to laugh,' Oldham said from the land of swimming pools and movie stars. 'No one wants to be reminded of how hard life is. People live that every day. Let's have some fun for a change. Laughter's good for the soul.'

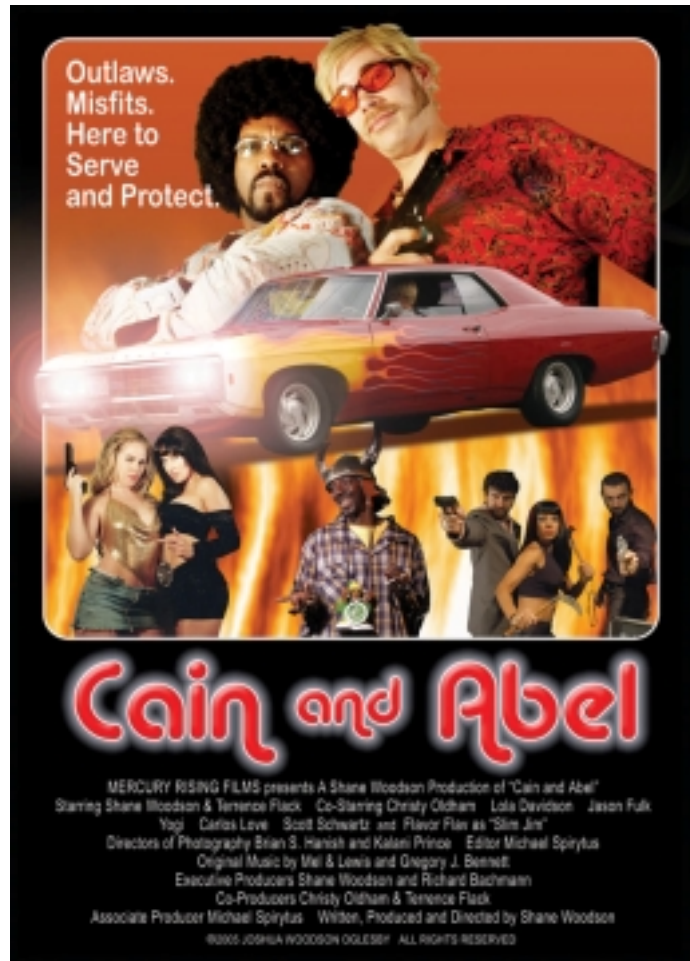
The next project from Mercury Rising Films, The Truth About Men, is a dark comedy. Oldham plans to direct and star. Mercury Rising Films, she said, "will approach subjects that are important and that people want to know about, but there's a way to get serious subjects across through comedy."

Most of The Truth About Men will be shot in Los Angeles, but Oldham also plans to shoot in a small town in Louisiana.

'We might even go to downtown Plaquemine,' she said. There are some major characters that I think can only be played by Southern actors.'

With Cain and Abel's big night at the Other Venice Film Festival looming, Oldham and Woodson are busy promoting the film and seeking distribution. The film is in corepetition at the festival, which runs March 16 through March 19.

Oldham devoted much of the past four years to bringing Cain and Abel to the screen. The actress-producer met her Mercury Rising Films partner on the set of 2002's Damsel of Death. She played Aileen Wuornos in



the film, prior to Charlize Theron's Oscar-winning performance as Wuornos in 2004's *Monster*. Woodson co-stars in *Damsel of Death* as a detective tracking Florida's infamous female serial killer.

"After we'd been on the set and seen the process of making the film, we wanted to pursue behind-the-camera as well," she recalled.

Oldham and Woodson previously produced *Joseph and Claire Bell*, a short film about a couple separated by World War II. The film played the California Independent Film Festival in Livermore. Oldham's journey to Hollywood began with high school drama classes at St. John Catholic School in Plaquemine.

"We never put on any shows because the theater department was so small," she said. "But we had a lot of fun at rehearsals."

Some years later, Oldham was attending LSU and planning to be a veterinarian. And then she saw a Swine Palace production of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

"Of course, it's a comedy, but I was in the audience weeping because I had this overflow of emotions. I finally knew what I wanted to do."

Oldham changed her major to theater. She got on stage for the first time the following year in the role of Vibrata, a wild courtesan in *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum*. Meanwhile, she supported herself as a model for LSU art classes. The heavy, difficult-to-remove makeup and black nail polish Oldham wore as Vibrata made it obvious to the art students that she was the same girl playing Vibrata in *Forum*.

Oldham also attended an intensive summer theater workshop in Denver. Already way out west, she and a friend drove to Los Angeles. During that week in LA she spotted the Stella Adler Academy of Acting on Hollywood Boulevard. The aspiring actress had read about Adler, a famous acting teacher, in Marlon Brando's autobiography.

"I knew that that's where I needed to be," she said.

More ambitious than ever, Oldham returned to New Orleans, where she'd been working as a bartender in various French Quarter establishments. She saved her tips for a year and, in May 1998, "I put all my things in a U-Haul and went out to Los Angeles. I didn't know where I was gonna stay, but I was gonna go to that Stella Adler theater and become a movie star."

Oldham found acting gigs in TV shows and commercials, but not enough to survive. So she worked as a swimming instructor, lifeguard, telemarketer, model, door-to-door knife saleswoman and bartender.

"I've become a Jane of all trades. Once you get out here you realize how expensive it is. Everyone's doing the same thing that I'm doing. Everyone has the same dream. So you really have to buckle down. That weeds out the people who are doing it for the wrong reasons. Since I've been doing it for the right reasons, I've had longevity at it."