ie's re-release helps Welles' reputation

TORONTO (AP) - Hollywood has discovered a new box-office star: Orson Welles.

A re-edited version of "Touch of Evil," first released in 1958, is playing to sold-out theaters in New York, Los Angeles and at the Toronto International Film Festival. The director's charismatic thriller about corruption and decadence in a Texas border town will be opening nationwide throughout the fall.

The return is also a tribute to Universal, which finally put out Welles' film the way he wanted it.

"The feeling I got was that this was done on their part as 'Let's do something honorable," the project's producer, Rick Schmidlin, said of the executives at Universal. "All that they were concerned about was that they would make their money back, not that they would make a big profit.

Cut to 96 minutes when first released, "Touch of Evil" now runs 111 minutes and its once-disjointed plot is far easier to follow. The new version was edited by Walter Murch, who won Academy Awards both for film editing and sound mixing of "The English Patient." The film

scholar and critic Jonathan Rosenbaum was of his studio films after "Citizen Kane" flopped, in the sound. Welles helped introduce a techhired as a consultant.

Touch of Evil" continues the restoration of both the movies and the reputation of Welles, who died in 1985. A victim of poor funding, studio politics and a rather eclectic attention span, Welles was seen for much of his life as an undisciplined genius who never grew beyond his early success. His career after "Citizen Kane" was defined by unfinished films, badly edited films or films of near-primitive production standards.

"The studios, the brass, the money people, they were down on him," Leigh said.

But as Welles predicted not long before he died, the industry would learn to love him once he was gone. Over the past few years, such Welles films as "Othello" and "F for Fake" have been re-released to great acclaim. Schmidlin is trying to get money for an unfinished film, "The Other Side of the Wind," which starred Welles and John Huston, and efforts are being made to restore the Shakespearean production, "Chimes at Midnight."

When Welles signed on for "Touch of Evil," he had been out of Hollywood for 10 years. Most

and by the late 1940s, Welles had moved to Europe and was appearing in as many films as he could to raise money for his own work.

He first joined "Touch of Evil" as an actor, but when Charlton Heston learned of his involvement he insisted Welles also be allowed to direct. Welles, anxious to make a comeback in Hollywood, quickly transformed what had been an ordinary crime story into one of his most innovative and daring movies.

The casting alone was inspired to the point of hallucination: Heston as a Mexican narcotics investigator; Marlene Dietrich as a gypsy madam; Mercedes McCambridge as a lesbian Mexican gang leader; Zsa Zsa Gabor as a nightclub owner; and Dennis Weaver as a trembling hotel manager. Welles, who played a crooked American police chief, wore heavy makeup and a fake nose and added padding to his already substantial midsection.

Filmed in sweaty, shadowy black and white, Touch of Evil" was marked by blunt references to drugs and sex and politics.

But the real breakthrough was in the look and

nique known as "worldizing," in which the music is deliberately recorded poorly so it will sound more realistic. The long, seamless camera shot that opens the film has been a favorite of directors and was imitated by Robert Altman at the beginning of "The Player."

When Universal executives saw the completed film, however, they were both confused and concerned. With Welles off in Mexico trying to direct an adaptation of "Don Quixote," several cuts were made and additional scenes were filmed. Few of the recommendations in Welles' memo were used, and the version released was both more confusing and less provocative.

The film flopped in the United States and got mixed reviews. As had become typical, Welles' work received a better reception in Europe. Touch of Evil" quickly became a favorite of such young filmmakers as Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. Edits and all, it became, after 'Citizen Kane," Welles' most celebrated movie.

Welles, meanwhile, never again directed a movie in Hollywood.

And he never did finish "Don Quixote."

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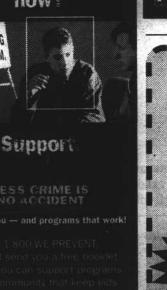
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