



by Maritza Cosano

Maureen "Mo" Fitzgibbon is not a production company, and she doesn't want to be one. But she is a talented, funny, independent producer/director, who wants to be behind the cameras and behind FLA 100%.

Mo is a native of Florida who was raised in the business as an on-camera talent since the age of 12. Through that experience, she learned about what's important when in front of the camera. Later, as she grew in her field, Mo realized it wasn't enough for her as a woman to be a "star" or an actress. To only go as far as reading from a script and becoming a certain character was no longer satisfying, and she began looking for that something which is. "I think my turn-on was a director's insight into the character and how to make the image come to life?"

To find out these answers, Mo decided to get hands-on training in every aspect of television and film production. She left the on-camera business and went behind the scenes when she was only 18 years old. She proceeded to get that experience by working on every production position— from production assisting, scouting locations, stylizing wardrobe, painting sets, scripting, coordinating, directing, producing...

"I really believe that people only take you seriously if you know what you are doing and you have the background," Mo says.

From all those levels of experience Mo eventually ended up in a producing position. "When you produce you deal with money; you deal with your director, with the show—you are ultimately responsible. And when

THE NEW CAMERA GAL ON THE BLOCK

you are ultimately responsible for a project, you'd better know how to do it; otherwise, don't get yourself in the fire, because it's rough, it's tough, it's hard."

In basically what is a man's world, Mo finds it not intimidating, but exhilarating, to be a woman in a man's territory. She knows the turf, understands the rules and plays at the same speed as her male colleagues. "I think for the 100 years of filmmaking it has always been a man's industry. In the last twenty-five years women have come into the field, and in the last ten years we have come into full focus as directors, cinematographers— even grip and gaffers. I think if you are good and know what you are doing that's the plus." Mo stated, "It's almost like a singer— there are so many singers. Anybody who has a good voice can sing a song, but when you're a writer/singer, when you are a Mariah Carey or a Whitney Houston, you are going to go a lot further because you have the talents of two. I think for me it is not hard to be a woman filmmaker because I know what I am doing. I've come in from the back door and worked my way up."

And work is exactly what Mo is doing, but she does not like to be known as a one-woman show. She likes to wear her jeans, cowboy hat and cowboy boots. That's the real Mo and the only way you're going to find her when she's on the set.

With credits that include radio and TV commercials, music videos, feature films and documentaries, Mo's crowning achievement to date is the creation of the award-winning, internationally-acclaimed televisual production "FILM IN FLA."

Mo considered there was need for a unifying concept to give deserved recognition to local filmmakers, production companies and vendors. She envisioned a 30-minute, in-depth documentary; the result being "FILM IN FLA," a fast-paced MTV format presentation featuring Florida footage from fa-

mous films and commercial spots, involving interviews with leading members of the local Film/TV commercial production industry. The video's driving force is the fast-cut style which resembles the opening credits of "Miami Vice"; the upbeat music of a chorus blaring out its theme, "FILM IN FLA."

Although the finished product is something that requires respect, Mo is the first one to admit it was not an easy task to get it on its way. She sought financing, but to no avail. State and local agencies had no budget nor any kind of promotion. Thus Mo's mission began. She contacted South Florida production companies, support services, and independents, persuading them to donate tape stock, cameras, edit facilities, computer graphics, people, talent and time. Companies such as Limelite Studios, Image Devices International, Magnetech, Post Edge and Island Club Entertainment are just a few who contributed their time, facilities and manpower. More than a hundred companies eventually volunteered their services at Mo's behest.

"FILM IN FLA" is now considered to be the South Florida production "Bible." It highlights the 75 years of experience, the support services, the crew personnel and production facilities available in South Florida. As the intro says: "LA? No, FLA! LA? No, FLA!"

"FILM IN FLA" was a joint effort by everybody. We shot for 45 days, but the whole affair took seven months to put together," explains Mo. "More than 500 copies of "FILM IN FLA" have been distributed worldwide. It is basically non-broadcast. What it does is feature and promote our industry." The dollar value of the project has been estimated at over \$150,000, yet it was written, produced and directed on a budget of zero by a driven and dedicated Mo Fitzgibbon!

What is she up to now? Mostly directing. Recent projects include the "Power 96" TV commercials which are presently on the air, and of course her new piece, "Miami Beach-Florida's Hot Spots," which carries Mo's trademark of upbeat and quick-cut styling.

"My style of visual art is to project feeling good, beauty imagery. I love the feel of documentary, real life visuals." "Hot Spots" is a





four-and-one-half minute promotional 35mm film sponsored by the City of Miami Beach, the Pillars, and the Visitors' Convention Bureau. It will be distributed on PAL and NTSC internationally, particularly in Germany, France, Canada, and Spain. Director Mo shot the piece during a seven-day period, spending only a fraction of the estimated \$150,000 budget, thanks to the collaboration of the City of Miami Beach, and both the City's Fire and Police Departments; Director of Photography, Randy Towers; Writer, Debra Chiat; Audio and Post Consultant, Robert W. Walker; Editing, Limelite Studios; Casting, Janet McLean of Heitz McLean Casting (Orlando); Camera, Cinevideotech; Crane, Image Devices International, and Voice Over, Ellen Michaels.

While both "Film In Fla" and "Miami Beach—Florida Hot Spots" are wooing out-of-state and international talent and production representatives to come to South Florida, Mo is busy again at the reels. She does not wait around for the work to come to her. Although she knows she's the

new camera gal in town, she also knows what she wants and how to go after it. "I get my work on my own and through my own talents. Nobody sells me or reps me." But thinking ahead, she realizes her job is becoming too large and important to not have someone who can help auction her talents and creations. She chuckles, "Hopefully, in 1992 there will be somebody out there to rep me because I'll be looking for you!"

"Mo Fitzgibbon only wants to create and direct," she says, looking straight at you with eyes that shine with passion and honesty. "She just wants to make pictures; she wants to bring together the right elements to make the pictures happen—The right people, the right music, the right graphics—the total look, from concept to completion."

Mo's enthusiasm for Florida is apparent. Just ask her if she would ever leave and you'll get a quick and most stern "No". As a member of the South Florida Chapter of Women of the Motion Picture Industry (WOMPI), she feels it is her duty to showcase the Sunshine State as a contender in the big leagues. "We have everything here in Florida for full productions, and people in other markets need to really understand that. Florida needs to stop thinking so locally and think like the L.A. people do. Why not? We've got what it takes and can do it for less!"

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In the last four years, Mo has dedicated herself to promoting the industry in South Florida, and this is evident through her work. She has done it, not through the government nor the city commissioners. There are no appointments for her; her work is for us, for the people, for the industry.

"We producers and directors, vendors and crew people need the work. A person who has a salaried position and is making decisions for others does not understand what it takes for the artist or the creative, the grip, lighting company or camera house to stay alive, so I'm definitely for the people. Right now we're numbers away from being second in the nation. Locations are what sells Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and the rest of South Florida. We have had locations for 75 years and will continue to do so! So, there will always be a thriving and

progressive film industry here."

Although Mo feels L.A. is the "mecca" of the film industry, she also stands firmly on the belief that South Florida can be the International

Film Capital, with Spain and South America as industry ties. "Hispanic production alone is 60% of the actual producing going on. Every commercial, or anything I do, is always cut in English and then in Spanish."

But all in all, Mo's mission is to unite not only the Hispanic and the Anglo into her new vision— "Hispanglo", but to make Florida think of the film industry here as a whole, not as a piece of a pie sectioned in four or five parts: Orlando, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach and Key West. No, the new camera gal wants us to wake up and smell the roses!

"I think of the many years of abuse when L.A. productions would come here to film bringing hundreds of their own people when we had them here. Now they are changing their attitude and so are we."

Mo Fitzgibbon, at 32, is planning ahead. She is not afraid of the jolts and bruises, she is not afraid of the bucking horse. She's obstinate and hangs on to the reins with fierce but gentle hands. The picture one captures is not of a glamorous woman, but of a natural, surfer-cowgirl who thrives on taking life with a swift kick.

"I'm very young in my field, but I've kicked ass, Babe, and you can quote me on that one!" There's definitely "Mo" to come.