

Joe Seneca (background) and Ralph Macchio (foreground) play two musicians in search of a legendary old blues song, with Jami Gertz (center) as a teenage runaway who joins them. Macchio (below) looks like a real professional on guitar, but in reality he took three months of intensive lessons to prepare for his role as a Julliard classical guitar student.

CROSSROADS



In Walter Hill's *Crossroads*, two musicians take to the road in the deep South on a quest: Eugene (Ralph Macchio), a young man hoping to gain fame by rediscovering a fabled, but long-lost, Robert Johnson blues song and Willie (Joe Seneca), an old man willing to surrender his soul to the devil in order to become a legendary blues figure.

Together they flee the old man's dingy Harlem rest home, crisscrossing the heart of the Mississippi delta. Their destination is a crossing, where two dusty, sunbaked roads meet, for a strange encounter under an old gnarled tree.

Along the road, they are joined by a teenage runaway (Jami Gertz) on a quest of her own.

Filmed mostly in the cradle of the blues—Greenville, Mississippi and the surrounding Delta towns just off U.S. Highway 61—*Crossroads* is about the relationship between Eugene and Willie, who share a love of blues music, and the

meanings of their evocative tunes.

Directed by Walter Hill, famous for such bullet-paced movies as *48 Hrs.* and *Streets of Fire*, *Crossroads* explores a familiar theme, that of dream-seekers who end up finding themselves.

"It's really a sweet story about three people, two of whom are learning from each other on their journey through the Mississippi delta and its music," says Macchio, the Karate Kid-turned young guitar prodigy.

In this movie, he plays Eugene Martone, one of Julliard's most gifted students, who hopes to launch his own blues

career by springing upon the world a missing Johnson tune.

He searches out Willie Brown (Joe Seneca), the only living link to that blues giant, and together they head down South. Willie shows the ambitious white boy that the only way to master the feel of blues is to live like a bluesman.

"This is what it was like," the 24-year-old teen idol says, "waking up in the morning and not knowing where your meals are coming from and where your family's going and what's happening with your life and then drinking Jack Daniels for lunch."

Even though Seneca has never received any formal training in blues, he

contends that there is a blues world in him, because of his experiences.

"I've observed and lived with blues people. I think there are people who are aware of their roots and pay attention to them. They will know that (inherently) they belong to the blues group," Seneca says with conviction.

Without such intimate contact, a musician can never become a true-to-his-heart bluesman. "He's got to have more feeling for the music," says Seneca, who played an honest doctor in *The Verdict* and has gained critical acclaim from a host of stage roles on Broadway.

A catalyst of the movie is Francis, a 17-year-old gutsy and vibrant runaway, played by Jami Gertz who recently starred in *Quicksilver*. She sparks Eugene's drive to succeed and brings out his vulnerability as well.

The heavily roots-influenced music of *Crossroads*' soundtrack was produced by celebrated slide-guitarist Ry Cooder. Cooder stresses that blues music has a sound to which almost everyone can relate. The fundamental qualities of the music, he said, are its simplicity and ability to make people feel good.

Although Director Hill and his stars are coy on the subject of how the film's journey concludes, it is evident that Eugene, the white guitarist with a fervent desire to play the greatest blues ever, adds much more to his life than a mere song.

Crossroads will be released nationwide by Columbia Pictures on March 21. ♦

