Woody Allen once remarked “More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.”

By 1974, director Radley Metzger could have been forgiven for recognizing this dilemma as he considered his next film project.

On the one hand, he had just released “Score”, based on an off-Broadway play that had featured the then-unknown Sylvester Stallone, which for the first time in his directorial career had included brief scenes of hard core sex.

On the other hand, the immense success of “Deep Throat” in 1973 had established a lucrative market for fully explicit fare, despite the fact that many of the early adult films lacked any form of artistry.

Ever the pragmatist, Metzger had learned from an early stage in his filmmaking career to balance aesthetic ambition with commercial realities. And so the dilemma he now faced was simple: should he continue his critically-acclaimed Audubon franchise of exquisite soft-core symphonies which had brought him critical acclaim and no shortage of commercial success? Or should he hold his nose and jump head first into the burgeoning business of hard core pornography?

It was not a decision he took lightly. So he decided to retire. That is, he would retire the Metzger name. Apart from the masterful “The Image” (1975) and two minor films that formed the coda of his career, the ‘Radley Metzger’ imprimatur would never again grace the credits of the sophisticated soft-core sex melodramas that he had mastered so extravagantly and effortlessly in the previous decade and a half.

Instead he would invent a new hard-core persona, the appropriately European and aristocratic-sounding ‘Henry Paris’, who would go on to create five of the most remarkable adult films ever made. Indeed, such was their success, Metzger would later ruefully observe that Henry Paris became far more successful than he ever was.

In the words of Charles VI loyalists, “The King is dead. Long live the King!”
Radley Metzger was born in the Bronx on January 21, 1929. His life long passion for the seventh art developed as a result of his childhood hay fever coupled with the lack of residential air-conditioning in Gotham; as a result, he would seek refuge in well-ventilated theaters where he would often see as many as four films each day. After studying at New York’s City College and Columbia University and serving in the US Air Force, he found work at Janus Films, cutting trailers and making TV commercials. Here his interest in film was further fuelled as he came into contact with the work of maestri such as Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni and Francois Truffaut.

In the late 1950s, Metzger left Janus Films with a colleague, Ava Leighton, and started his own distribution company, Audubon Films. Over the next few years, he would make, import and distribute taboo-exploiting films that were both commercially successful and that quickly formed the genesis of his unique style.

His own films from this period are unmistakable; exquisite European locations, actors seemingly peeled off the pages of Vogue magazine uttering witty and surreal dialogue, and shot in sensual tones by his talented long-time cinematographer, Hans Jura. Not for him the black and white kitchen-sink sexual melodramas of his East Coast contemporary, Joe Sarno, nor the West Coast blue-collar pneumatic Robert Crumb cartoon world of mammary-fixated Russ Meyer; Metzger instead invented a world of decadent excess, sexual dolce vita, and deliriously jaded abandon.

In 1967 Metzger directed the first of his masterworks, “Carmen, Baby”, a visually sumptuous and colorful triumph that succeeded in embracing sizzling eroticism despite containing only brief glimpses of flesh. This was followed by his triumphant triumvirate “Therese and Isabelle” “Camille 2000” and “The Lickerish Quartet” — all inspired from impeccable literary sources, benefiting from extravagant mise-en-scene and wonderful scores, and depicting glossily erotic tableaux of pleasure.

By now Metzger’s films were achieving mainstream recognition — in the permanent collection of the New York Museum of Modern Art, featured in ‘serious’ forums such as the magazine ‘Film Comment’, and reviewed favorably by the national press.
At first this success was aided by the ratings system as his films were advertised as being “for mature audiences only” – and thus reviewed and marketed in the same way as any other film, be it by Bertolucci, Godard or Andy Milligan. However when the ‘X’-rating was introduced by the MPAA in November 1968 and subsequently applied to his films, Metzger found his work increasingly marginalized when the same rating started to be used for hard core pornographic features in the early 1970s. Theaters and advertisers now balked about exhibiting and promoting X-rated films of a more mainstream variety. Not to mention the audience’s own increasing fascination and preference towards the novelty and prurience of the nascent hard core phenomenon.

And so on December 26, 1974, Radley Metzger became Henry Paris, when his first hard core film “The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann” premiered in New York. Pornography had at last found its premier auteur.

“Maraschino Cherry” is the fifth and final of Metzger’s hard-core outings. His first three (“The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann” (1974), “Naked Came the Stranger” (1975), and “The Opening of Misty Beethoven” (1976)) are logical extensions of his soft core triumphs – plot-driven, witty and breezy sex comedies, except now they were embellished with more explicit couplings. The last two (“Barbara Broadcast” (1977) and “Maraschino Cherry” (1978)) are more episodic affairs, where series of sex scenes are linked by loose framing devices.

Made in the spring of 1978, it tells of the Madame of an upscale New York bordello, Maraschino Cherry (played by Gloria Leonard), who is visited by her sister Penny (Jenny Baxter) who has decided on a career change.

The cast is successfully drawn from the unofficial repertory company that made up the New York adult film industry in the mid-1970s. Gloria Leonard, who had made her film debut two years before in Metzger’s “The Opening of Misty Beethoven”, is a convincing lead. Born in 1940, she
was noticeably older than most of her peers having enjoyed a career on Wall St and in PR before she entered the industry, but she still smolders with a sparkling intensity. Metzger remembers that it was actor Jamie Gillis who brought her to his attention – resulting in a friendship that continues to this day. Leonard remembers the shooting of “Maraschino Cherry” with great fondness clearly recalling the relaxed atmosphere compared to other film sets that she was involved on.

It was at this time that ‘High Society’ magazine owner Carl Ruderman hired Leonard to be its publisher – taking over from the titular and under-performing publisher Sue Richards (another New York film adult actress who went by the name of Bree Anthony). Leonard was so successful at this – as well as being the public face of the industry for many years and the pioneer behind profitable business ventures such as phone sex lines – that Metzger later joked, “I once thought my tombstone would be inscribed, ‘Here lies the man who discovered Gloria Leonard’”. She would remain a fixture in the east coast adult films for the remainder of the decade – maintaining a work rate that was all the more remarkable given that she was a single mother during this time. (A fact that was not lost on the media who even interviewed Leonard’s daughter on the Tom Snyder show about her mother’s choice of career in 1978).

Now retired, though involved in community groups and theater, Gloria has nothing but happy memories from her involvement in “Maraschino Cherry”; her strong performance contrasts well with her naïve sister played by Jenny Baxter. Baxter is an unsung but talented actress who acted under a large name of different pseudonyms, and most notably appeared in several of Joe Sarno’s mid-1970s forays into adult filmmaking.
Gloria Leonard was not alone in having appeared in previous ‘Henry Paris’ films. Of special note is C.J. Laing; having appeared in a show-stopping sequence in “Barbara Broadcast” with Wade Nichols, she outdoes herself here in “Maraschino Cherry’s” most memorable scene – a jaw-dropping S&M dungeon scene where she is violated by Annette Haven (who had played the titular role of ‘Barbara Broadcast’) as she is forced to balance a glass of spirits on each of her outstretched hands whilst precariously balanced over a hotplate.

Though confessing that she now has rather hazy memories of many of the films she appeared in, Laing nevertheless has no difficulty remembering her role in “Maraschino Cherry”; being more interested in doing something different sexually in each film appearance and never thrilled by the prospect of reciting lines in adult films, she recalls always being keen for the action to start and, in this case, enjoyed the submissive role-playing side of her film character. She adored Metzger and remembers the production as being on a much bigger scale than she was used to.

Other actors have similarly good memories of working with Metzger; Sue McBain (also the mother of a teenage girl at the time of filming), who appears in a throwaway role as a human clock fondly recalls how intelligent and considerate Metzger was with her and how humorous he was on the film set. Perennial character actor, Michael Gaunt, remembers Metzger’s attention to detail and assiduous focus on the visual element of the film, but also the way he worked with the limitations of each actor to produce the best results in each scene.

It is also worth noting the presence of Spaulding Grey in an uncredited role – celebrated for his later mainstream monologue films “Swimming to Cambodia” (1987), “Monster in a Box” (1992) and “Gray’s Anatomy” (1996).

The story behind the appearance of Constance Money – who makes her third appearance in a Metzger film in “Maraschino Cherry” – is more fraught. Born Susan Jensen in 1956, she made her adult film debut in “Confessions of a Teenage Peanut Butter Freak” before appearing in the lead role in “The Opening of Misty Beethoven” opposite her real-life on-off boyfriend Jamie Gillis. The experience was not a happy one; claiming that she did not sign a release for her appearance and was not paid, she then took legal action when she found that footage that had been shot for “Misty
Beethoven” appeared in Metzger’s subsequent two films “Barbara Broadcast” and “Maraschino Cherry”. Metzger in turn named her ‘Constance Money’ in response to her constant demands for extra pay. The matter was eventually settled out of court but not without considerable ill-feeling being generated on either side which continues to this day. Constance Money appeared in the July 1978 issue of Playboy where she revealed that she was managing a restaurant in Alaska; she returned briefly to the adult film industry for the last time in the faux-documentary “A Taste of Money” (1983).

The vexed question still remains of how much original footage was shot for “Maraschino Cherry” versus the use of discarded scenes from previous Henry Paris films. The framing scenes featuring Gloria Leonard were newly shot as were others that are set in the Manhattan cathouse that forms the backdrop for the film. (As a barometer of the falling production standards by this stage, Metzger used a relatively non-descript luxury apartment for “Maraschino Cherry” compared to the luxurious house he had used in ‘The Image’ a few years before – a house that belonged to legendary attorney, Roy Cohn).

However scenes such as C.J. Laing’s dungeon ordeal and Constance Money’s tryst with a model sailboat enthusiast are more likely to have been filmed at an earlier stage for possible inclusion in other projects. Either way, they are melded together effortlessly by Metzger’s trademark sparkling repartee between the characters.

The one-sheet for “Maraschino Cherry” was designed and painted by Armand Weston, a noted adult film director in his own right (responsible for the pioneering documentary “Personals” (1972), and the classics “The Defiance of Good” (1975), and “Take-Off” (1978)).

“Maraschino Cherry” was unusual for Metzger in that it was made for a third party company, Maturpix. It was to be his last Henry Paris excursion; he later commented that any more would have been superfluous.

Video-X-Pix is proud to present here a brand new tele-cine print of this classic to celebrate the 30th anniversary of its original release.

Benson Hurst

MARASCHINO Cherry

STARRING HIGH SOCIETY'S GLORIA LEONARD

A NEW FILM BY HENRY PARIS

WITH JENNY BAXTER, CONSTANCE MONEY, LESLIE BOVEE, ANNETTE HAVEN, C. J. LAING, AND WADE NICHOLS