

BURKE- OLIVIA

ATLANTA (AP) -- The guest of honor at Emory University blew the crowd away, Thursday, at the 72nd anniversary of the "Gone with the Wind" premiere.

Olivia de Havilland, the actress who played Melanie in the 1939 Civil War movie, was the star of the event at Emory's Evelyn Perun Theater in Atlanta. It was sponsored by the Margaret Mitchell Society. Margaret Mitchell authored "Gone with the Wind."

The president of the society, Dr. Stuart Kaminsky, who is also the Ruth Frost Memorial professor of film history at Emory, introduced de Havilland. "Gone with the Wind," Kaminsky said in his introductory remarks, still comes out far ahead of "Star Wars" as the most popular film of all time when ticket prices are adjusted for inflation. De Havilland sat on stage with her interviewer in easy chairs for 90 minutes.

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“I loved Melanie,” de Havilland said of her character. “I loved everything she stood for. In those days the particular qualities that made her so admirable, and she’s a deeply feminine person, were endangered, and they are in a perpetual state of danger.”

De Havilland reflected on her character to an overflow crowd of more than the 750-seat capacity at the event. She loved her character despite it being a less-aggressive role compared to Scarlett O’ Hara played by Vivien Leigh. She also spoke of her nomination for best supporting actress and losing to her costar. Hattie McDaniel won the award for her performance as Mammy and was the first black performer to claim an Oscar.

“Of course, I was disappointed,” she said. “But her win was historic. And I soon thought, ‘That’s absolutely wonderful that Hattie got the award,’ Hattie deserved it and got it. I thought I’d much rather live in a world where a deserving black actress who gave a marvelous performance got the award.”

De Havilland also talked about her reaction to Clark Gable’s famous line, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.”

“Well, it was the thin edge of the wedge, let’s face it,” she said. “What we’re hearing today, which I think is really quite unnecessary and truly coarse, we’re hearing because of that line. He started something. But it had to be. It belonged in the film.”

In “Gone with the Wind” Gable played Rhett Butler; Leigh, Scarlett O’ Hara; Leslie Howard, Ashley Wilkes; McDaniel, Mammy; Butterfly McQueen, Prissy; de Havilland, Melanie Hamilton. David O. Selznick produced the movie.

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Still elegant, healthy and sharp-witted at age 95, de Havilland traveled to Atlanta from her home in Paris. Wednesday's event was her first visit to Atlanta since attending the movie's premiere on Atlanta's Peachtree Street in 1939. De Havilland is the lone survivor from the main cast.

"Isn't that strange?" she said, recalling the untimely deaths of her co-stars. "And Melanie was the only principal character who died."

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