



BY NOAH COWAN

CANNES — I expected many things when I arrived at Cannes for the first time. "The Queen of Festivals" promises a bevy of stars, oodles of films and virtually all the industry major players. On all three counts, it delivered.

What I didn't expect — and what was infinitely more interesting to discover — was a thriving groupie scene.

They gather in four main locations — outside the Palais des Festivals (the main screening and Film Market facility) and in front of the Carlton, the Martinez and the Majestic — the three classic hotels on the Croisette (Cannes' beachfront promenade). Their combined numbers often exceed 1,000 people, and rarely dip much below 200.

They want to see the stars — take their photos, get autographs, have sex, even a wave of the hand is sufficient. "All we ask is to be recognized. It is us who made them what they are today, right?" says Pierre Dupont, a high-school student from outside Paris, on holiday with his parents.

Hollywood's progeny are most popular and attract the largest gatherings. But Europeans (particularly young, sexy men like Hippolyte Gardot from *Un Monde Sans Pitié*) can also muster a healthy assembly.

Some groupies come for specific personalities associated with films screening on certain days. For example, John Cook, on holiday from Bristol, England, made sure his travel plans included Cannes so he could catch a glimpse of Emma Thompson,

star of Merchant/Ivory's *Howards End*: "She is so beautiful, and to see her here, at her most glamorous, is just brilliant!"

At the hotels, gatherings seem to happen more spontaneously, prompted mostly by rumor and limousine sightings. "I heard that Tim Robbins would be arriving here," says Madeleine Poirrot, bedecked in a *Bull Durham* T-shirt she won in a Paris contest. "Perhaps he has a few minutes and will let me take his picture." When I announce that I, in fact, saw Robbins at a beach restaurant, I cause a mini-stampede as people ready their cam-

eras and move to the poor proprietor's establishment.

It is difficult to explain why Cannes — more so than Berlin, Toronto, Venice, Sundance — attracts this adulation of the masses. Part of it has to do with the nature of the festival itself.

Cannes is simply a spectacle, in every way. In the evening, the Palais takes on an almost mythic appear-

ance — its facade resembles a Mayan temple on prom night, with a huge flight of stairs carved into a stone monolith, carpeted in red and bathed in floodlight. The streets around it are closed to traffic so the army of limousines arrives unhindered, carrying notables in tuxedos and haute-couture gowns. Every other film event pales in comparison and, here, the legend is recreated every night.

Brigitte Grézes, camera in hand outside the Palais, perhaps speaks for all her groupie colleagues when she recounts: "Seeing Madonna last year, when she waved to us, was my dream come true. I felt so close to her. I thought, 'Maybe some day we will be friends.'" ☺

## Looking for a slice of limelight

# Groupies grope for stars at Cannes