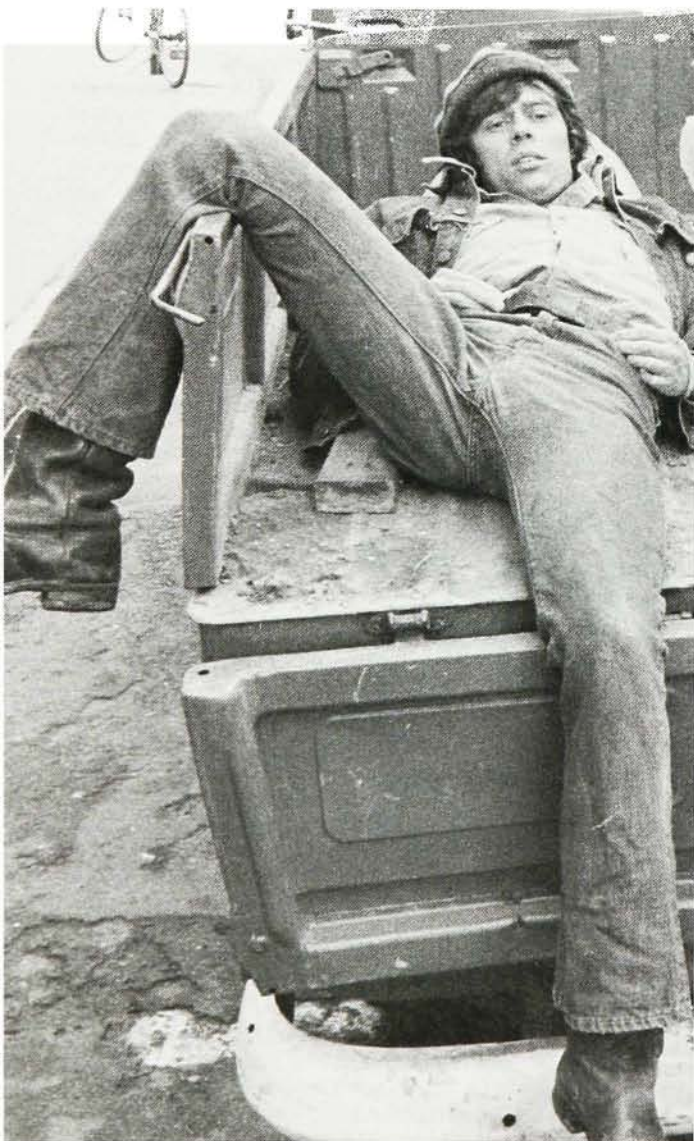


# Jim Henshaw

## *making it in Canada*

David McCaughna



"My dream," says actor Jim Henshaw, "is to be the first Canadian actor to make it in the movies without leaving the country." That may sound like a bit of far-fetched fantasizing but after reviewing the film career of Jim Henshaw one can't help but be impressed by the phenomenal number of films he's done in this country in the past few years. "I've worked more than any American actor recently," Henshaw adds. During the span of one year Henshaw will appear in about four or five films which shall be released and that's an impressive work record for any actor these days. After a performance this spring of the play **Underground** at Toronto's Factory Theatre Lab, in which Jim Henshaw had one of the three roles, I overheard two ladies speaking. "I've seen him before," said one lady, "in the movies . . . or TV . . . I know I've seen him." Henshaw is clearly on the road to his goal.

Lanky, boyish twenty-five year-old Henshaw grew up in the West. Born in Regina, he began acting during his final year in high school and later attended the University of Saskatchewan where he took a degree in theatre arts. A valuable student exchange programme allowed him to spend time in England where he watched Peter Brook and Laurence Olivier direct. Returning to Regina, he worked for a year and a half at the Globe Theatre but as that is the only professional theatre there and few films were made in the West then Henshaw found the possibilities for an ambitious young actor very limited. "But since I left four years ago they've made four movies out there and now Robert Altman is out West shooting Paul Newman in a screen version of **Indians**."

But Henshaw has no regrets about coming East to pursue his career because it has blossomed. When he first arrived in Toronto he did TV commercials and bit parts until a very good break came his way. Henshaw was cast in a quite significant role in the American film **The Last Detail** which was largely filmed in Toronto. He played Seaman Sweek who is the character at the beginning of the film that sends Jack Nicholson off on his journey. An actor couldn't be more fortunate than doing his very first movie scene with Jack Nicholson and the role gave Henshaw's fledgling career a great boost. His stage work has included roles in a lineup of productions at the smaller theatres in Toronto and he's also done all the film work and managed to complete a couple of screenplays.

The first of Henshaw's films to be released this year was **Divertimento**, a short based on a story by Anton Chekhov. About two young skinny-dippers who meet inadvertently and have their clothes stolen. **Divertimento** featured the music of Maurice Solway and in it Henshaw co-starred with Lynn Griffin. They had to spend a good deal of time in a cold pond that was full of leeches that had to be burnt off of them and actress Griffin came down with pneumonia. "But that was nothing," says Henshaw, "in **Lions for Breakfast** we actually had to break through the ice for our swimming scene and we had to come out of the water looking happy."

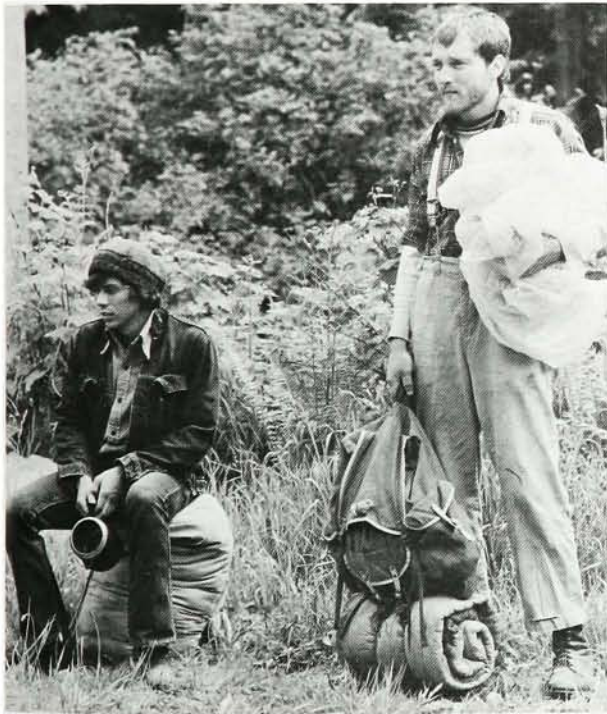
Henshaw enjoyed working in Morley Markson's film **Monkeys in the Attic** which was released in Toronto last winter to a series of critical pans. "Markson is a meticulous filmmaker and **Monkeys in the Attic** is technically perfect," Jim explains. "There are many long scenes which were done



in one take and Morley made certain that everything was perfect." The film concerns two couples who live together and whose relationships are falling apart. One of the women finally decides to commit suicide and as she's going about it she decides to call a friend for a farewell but she calls a pizza parlor by mistake and orders a pizza. Henshaw played the pizza delivery boy and arrives at the house and all of the characters play out their games with him. Henshaw found the film intriguing but admits that it leaves the audiences searching for its meaning.

**Lions for Breakfast** is a children's film made by Burg Productions. It's about a city boy and his brother who escape from their urban environment, meet up with a gypsy, and have a series of fun-filled adventures in the country. The film, directed by Bill Davidson, will be released shortly. In it Henshaw plays the older brother and he reports that the movie is full of moments that children will enjoy.

Henshaw went out to Vancouver to film **Supreme Kid** which was directed by Peter Bryant. It's a Canadian road movie about two aimless young men, inspired by the wanderings of Jack Kerouac, who take to the road and have a series of misadventures. "It's a funny film. The two guys in it are catalysts that never cause anything to happen but things just happen to them. They accidentally rob a bank and get involved in a gun battle and they just keep drifting. The movie kicks the male ego around."



Henshaw with Don Granberry in "The Supreme Kid"

Except for **The Last Detail**, all of the films Henshaw has appeared in have been fairly low-budget and he finds working in them very worthwhile. "In low budget films everything must be done on the first take. If it's technically right they use it so you have to be on your toes. It's boring on a big budget film where they take 3 days to shoot one scene. I find it more exciting doing low-budget films where often you must do 5 pages of script a day or 3 or 4 scenes a day. It's rough on everybody but you are constantly discovering new things."

There has been television work recently too. Henshaw starred in a forthcoming CBC play called **Fight Night** which has been directed by Clarke Mackey in which he plays a man who works in an advertising agency and must pick fights to

prove his manhood. And last summer he repeated his stage role of Fedya in Carol Bolt's play **Red Emma** when Allan King filmed it for the CBC. The play was cut down to an hour in length and it was filmed among the abandoned warehouses near the Toronto Free Theatre. Henshaw says that **Red Emma** will be very well received when it kicks off the CBC drama season this fall.

At the moment Henshaw is most enthusiastic about a film called tentatively, **A Sweeter Song**, which will begin shooting on September 5. Not only will Henshaw be playing the lead but he also co-wrote the script. It will be directed by Alan Eastman, a Winnipeg filmmaker, and Susan Petrie will co-star, while John Hunter will produce. Henshaw likes sports and the part he's written for himself in **A Sweeter Song** is that of a sports photographer of extremely nationalistic tendencies: he won't even sell his photos to American papers. "I have no illusions about it being a great Canadian film, it will be a sex farce in part," explains Jim, "but I think people will enjoy it." In the film he plans to spoof the traditional Canadian attitude towards Canadian movies. Two of the characters will go to a Canadian film and there will only be three people in the audience and they will be cutting up the film.

Henshaw writes a great deal. He's already finished another script about an aging hockey player trying to make it through one final season and he finds writing a good way of unwinding after performing. "When I'm doing a play at night I have all day to write and often I'm so hyper after a performance that I come home and write for a few hours. It's a good way to come down, and don't forget that actors go through long periods of unemployment and writing fills the time." He says that in five years' time he'd like to be acting in his own films exclusively.

The major difficulty with most Canadian movies, Henshaw finds, is that they tend to bore audiences. "And that isn't necessary," he adds. He says that all we really need is a good Canadian movie that doesn't sell-out and has mass appeal and once the gates have been opened audiences will accept Canadian movies readily. "English Canadian filmmakers are too concerned with making meaningful movies," he explains, "and they think that will get them to Hollywood. While Québec filmmakers are much more successful because they know there's no-where to go so they work for their own society and try to entertain the populace."

Henshaw has two more feature possibilities that he's waiting to hear about. As always, it's a matter of the money being raised and he hopes that at least one of the films will materialize. In the meantime there's plenty of stage work in Toronto. He's played major roles in a number of significant new Canadian plays in the past two years and he finds it very exciting to be acting in brand new plays and working often with the playwrights as they shape the material to suit the actors. He was in a production of **The Adventures of Johnny Canuck**, about the Canadian comic book hero of the past, starred in Québec playwright Michel Tremblay's latest work **Bonjour, La Bonjour**, played a mass killer in an American play called **Heat** and in Bryan Wade's **Underground** he played one side in a triangle relationship. "On stage you get time to work at a character," he says, "so the characters tend to be fuller than on film. In film you have to make a few definite choices. For films I load my characters up with a lot of little tricks to give some feeling of character. Onstage you can find things within a character and it's more internal and you do more intense work in a play. But a film is certainly more fun because everything is real. I go crazy when I'm not working at all."

The chances are quite good that Jim Henshaw won't be faced with any stretches of unemployment in the foreseeable future. He's super-nationalistic, he says, and has vowed that he'll never be lured to the States for work, but he did recently sign on with an agent in New York. "But he's just keeping his eyes on American movies that are going to be made here," Henshaw adds. □