

Keeping Track: On-line, on-time, on-budget

FCF's main Ogilvy Street studios in Montreal, a large, square-angled, beige building, the very picture of bland high-tech efficiency, is unusually colorful and bright on this pre-Christmas week-end. On customarily bare walls, highly stylized yellow – and – black cards reading *Keeping Track* mix with bright Christmas decorations to garland the usually musty halls. Now equipment boxes, racks of winter coats, a ravaged buffet table and a milling crew vie for every available square foot of hallway.

The *Keeping Track* set itself is amazingly small and crowded, a cubicle dominated by 21 television screens to one side. The converted TV control room, already a compact environment, has become denser and even more crowded with the addition of lights, screens, main camera, cables, mikes and various technicians setting-up for the day's shoot. There is a subdued tension in the air as the crew struggles to set-up in the restricted space.

To one side, seemingly oblivious to the general hubbub around him, sits director Robin Spry studying the 'pinks' of this day's script. On first sight, one might mistake him for an absent-minded professor rather than the highly-ranked TV and film director he is. Winner of a multitude of prestigious national and international awards including two Nellies, nine Genies, a British Academy Award, first prize in both the Chicago and Melbourne Film Festivals, and so on, Spry, in his loose gray blazer and blue slacks, looks instead like a don from the London School of Economics or Oxford. And, in fact, he's been both.

Despite the palpable tension caused by the very narrow set, Spry retains a sense of quiet, low-key authority that stands out in the noisy chaos swirling around him. Speaking in a soft, quasi-basso voice, Spry discusses production details with line-producer Bob Presner. Presner's compact nervous energy, his constant movement and hurry contrasts yet nicely compliments Spry's slow, thoughtful purpose. As they speak Presner visibly slows down. "It's amazing how Robin Spry takes you inside with him in the making of a film," Presner says later. "If anyone else had called to ask me to be line-producer on this film, I might have refused. But not for Robin. We all have immense respect and admiration for him."

Keeping Track was in its seventh and final week of shooting, the last days in a tight 35-day schedule. Four weeks of these were exteriors (of which half were nights) where crew and actors alike suffered the vicissitudes of Canadian late-fall and early-winter weather. In one night of shooting, clear skies were followed by rain, wet snow, freezing rain and finally hail. "All the crew



photo: James Rae

• Eyeline match: *Keeping Track*'s Michael Sarrazin and Margot Kidder

were tops. An amazing performance", Presner says, proud that the film has stayed on-line, on-time and on-budget.

Some of the location shooting took place at the Railway Museum in St-Constant, the U.S. border crossing at Rouses Point, Montreal's Windsor Station, Place St-Jacques, and Place St-Henri. The super modern St-Laurent Post Office, jewel of high-tech automation, was transformed for the film into a facsimile of a giant computer company. At the suburban Fairview shopping center, amid an estimated 75,000 hurrying Christmas shoppers, a 720-degree Steadicam shot (two full slow circles) was performed within the teeming crowd, as crew swirled behind the camera like the tail of Hailey's comet.

For another complicated scene, some 15 taxicabs were converged simultaneously to one spot. A myriad other vehicles were used in this production: limousines, CFCF News vehicles, police

cars, two Winnebagos, one Honeywagon, seven five-ton equipment trucks, in addition to the accompanying crew of 55.

Based on an original story by Spry and Montreal writer Jamie Brown, and written by Brown who's also co-producer with Spry, *Keeping Track* is an adventure spy story dealing in international intrigue, high-tech weaponry, murder and triple treachery. It has been described as "*Three Days of the Condor* with a funny-bone." Internationally known Canadian actors Margot Kidder and Michael Sarrazin play two strangers bonded together by twisted fate and by the realization that they can trust no one, except each other – maybe.

Even though its methods, intention, multi-million-dollar budget and use of two major 'name' actors keeps *Keeping Track* aimed straight at the international market place, this film retains an intensely Canadian setting and atmosphere. Montreal is played exactly as it is

(no sign reading 'Welcome to Chicago' fronts the Montreal skyline on this one), and the actors as well as the roles they play are Canadian, both in description and fact. French-Canadian actors (such as Donald Pilon, Léo Iliak and Renée Girard) refreshingly play their roles without disguising their Québécois accents. Montreal taxi drivers can be as authentically churlish as Manhattan cabbies.

On this day's shoot, for example, actors Ken Pogue, John Boylan, Vlasta Vrana and Jim Morris are involved with leads Kidder and Sarrazin in a scene of confrontation and story twist. Says Vrana, "This year I've been involved in three films: *Morning Man* where I played a convict, *Choices* where I played a minister, and in this film, I play a cameraman. Perfect!" Boylan, Vrana and Morris are among the 15 primary and 35 secondary cast who, with the crew, form the totally Canadian complement.

As the crew finish their set-up it is the actors' turn. Margot Kidder emerges from make-up, clutching a handful of the Christmas cards that she has been furiously writing during her every spare moment. She is joined by Sarrazin on the crowded set as they all gather around Spry in a run-through. Carefully, they feel for the scene and its intricacies. Sounds on the set automatically grow strangely hushed. In deference to the work of the actors, the crew continue on with their business but more silently now.

The tension is soon replaced by fatigue. One crew member actually falls asleep in a chair, weariness etched on his young face. They will all be here till midnight, another long day at the end of a series of 12-hour days.

André Guy Arseneault

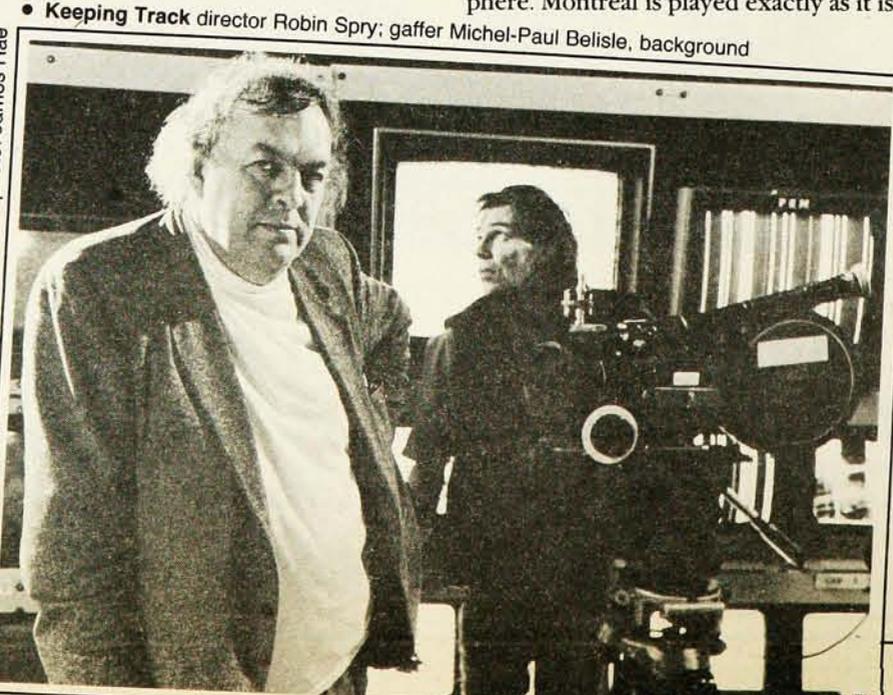


photo: James Rae

• *Keeping Track* director Robin Spry; gaffer Michel-Paul Belisle, background

Dancing In The Dark: Collectively creation

Producer Tony Kramreither is slowly pacing the sidewalk in front of the Toronto mansion as executive producer Don Haig and I arrive at the *Dancing in the Dark* location. Kramreither's his usual funny/charming Viennese self. As we head inside, we tell him we only came for lunch. It is being noised abroad that the catering on this feature is superb.

Leon Marr stands in welcome in the hallway, half-way through directing his first feature film. It's over two years since he read the novel *Dancing in the Dark* by Joan Barfoot, bought the rights, and started to write his script. Now, on a cold, bright November day, it's finally in the process of being committed to celluloid. An incredibly slim and youthful Martha Henry (all actresses *must* starve themselves) bears the full weight of *Dancing in the Dark's* fascinating but unsettling story of Edna and her seemingly perfect marriage to Harry, eventually torn apart by tragedy. The location is peaceful – a lot of voice-over will be necessary for the interior monologues of Henry's character.

It's a quiet, efficient crew of around 20 or so people going about their appointed tasks with a minimum of fuss. They've been at the mansion location for about a week, then move on to other Toronto locations – an office, a detention cell, a restaurant, and then to the Credit Valley Hospital.

Telefilm came in at the script development stage, but then the agency ran into financing problems of its own. The producers had to move, so they went to private investors. When Telefilm wanted to come back in later, private funds were already in place.

Haig and Kramreither talk how they hate a film being categorized by its budget. Kramreither declaims, "What has the budget to do with it? A film is good, or not." And, forestalling the question bubbling on my lips, "When anyone asks me about the budget, I say that it is less than *Heaven's Gate*." He adds that the shooting schedule is 25 days and the production is on time. Kramreither is arranging for U.S. distribution and talking to major companies, and will take a short promo reel to the States. He's interested in a company acquiring U.S. and world rights, excluding Canada.

Director Leon Marr was a Ryerson film student 1970-74, and has written and directed a number of short dramatic half-hours for CBC-TV. He was a Director's Guild observer on Norman Jewison's *Between Friends* in 1983. Martha Henry first read the book about 18 months ago and said she would be interested in seeing the script. She agreed to the role of Edna, and then the project start was delayed. Fortuitously,



• Martha Henry Dancing In The Dark

when Henry finished her other commitments, the film was ready to shoot.

Cinematographer Vic Sarin also mentioned the twist of fate that brought him to this film. He was set to do a CBS movie with Lindsay Wagner, which fell through, leaving him free to work on *Dancing in the Dark*. "I'm enjoying this film because I got involved earlier than usual. About a month before shooting I sat down with Leon and the production designer, Lillian Sarafinchan, and discussed the film's overall design, and how colours, make-up, costumes develop a strong visual style for the film. I've never done as stylized a film as this before and I have an opportunity to play with colours. The film starts in the hospital, which is cold, and the flashbacks are warm. As the flashbacks get nearer to reality the two become one. We're half-way through the film and I'm very satisfied. This is 'our' film, not somebody else's, and I'm not a hired hand."

John Ryan, a jolly young Brit who's both co-producer and line producer, arrived late at the location. Someone had smashed into the back of his car. And, he announced dramatically, "they want \$3,000 for the use of any provincial courtroom on account of the insurance policy!" After a huddle with the director and others, it was decided to do the small scene with a wall in Don Mills...

As I stood in the entrance hall waiting for a taxi (after an excellent lunch), a shot was being set up. Martha Henry was sitting on the stairs preparing to dust between the bannister rails. She turned to the director and, with great charm, said: "Leon, just tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it."

Pat Thompson •



• *Dancing's* bearded D.O.P. Vic Sarin, with Steve Deme, first a.d.