Shooting a Coke Czar

V ans full of people pull up at executive producer Bernard Zuckerman's house (creator of CBC's The Journal) in Toronto for a party. The rugs are pulled back for an interior shoot of And Then You Die, a two-hour CBC drama to be telecast this month. It's a birthday party for Eddie Griffin, cocaine czar of Montreal's West End.

"This is our last day of shooting, we're in our last hours of this film and we're exhilarated by what we're seeing on the screen," says producer Brian McKenna, documentarian for The Fifth Estate.

The television drama was "shot like a movie" by director of photography Richard Leiterman, whose credits range from Goin' Down The Road to My American Cousin. While the exteriors are set in Montreal, the interiors are in Toronto, "for financial reasons."

"It's a big movie that we've made," says director Francis Markiewicz, whose 1978 feature film Les Bons Débaras won eight Genie awards. "It was 26 days for a film that has an enormous number of locations, night shooting and day shooting, a lot of complex scenes, stunts and special effects.

Actor Kenneth Welsh, who won an ACTRA award for his performance in CBC television's Empire, Inc., leans against the wall chanting with his eyes closed. He plays Eddie Griffin, a character based on the first Irish-Canadian gangster to make millions in illegal soft drugs.

R.H. Thompson, who played the title role in the award-winning CBC television film Charlie Grant's War, co-stars with Welsh, but the two men never meet in the film. By this time, Thompson has put detective sergeant James McGrath behind him, to get on with live theatre in Toronto. McGrath, one of the few English Canadians on the Montreal Police Force, is obsessed by Griffin and tirelessly pursues the gangster.

And Then You Die isn't meant to be a police story as we know them. "In a sense it's a piece of reporting as well as, we hope, drama that's going to grab people by the throat and hold them to the end," says McKenna. Zuckerman and McKenna set out to produce something more realistic than The Godfather. For six months, a researcher recorded his observations while immersed in Montreal's criminal sub-culture.

McKenna explains, "We've researched every scene in detail. As you might not have seen on the CBC before, this is the way someone dies when they're shot. There's a certain kind of bloodspill, and they fall in a certain way, and we've got that right."

The story is told from the criminal's point of view. "It's based on a real guy, but I can't emphasize enough that it's fiction." The script was written by journalist Wayne Grigsby and playwright Alan Hibbert.

"I think if we get the story right and capture the way these guys operate, then when the gangsters see it they're going to say we got it right. In the same way, Mario Puoz, author of The Godfather was celebrated by the mafia themselves because they enjoyed the way he got it right," McKenna finishes.

Francis Markiewicz is a director whose reputation is built on "his ability to capture the way people relate and express themselves. He "insists every detail be right." Markiewicz says, "What we've tried to do is not so much develop a character in Eddie Griffin that would seduce the audience by his appealing qualities, but a character faithful enough to what he is fundamentally, and interesting enough for an audience to want to watch him."

Kenneth Welsh describes Griffin as a child and his job as partly play-acting. "Griffin is still a boy at heart and he behaves like one. I remember doing this as a kid. As an actor playing it, it was very much cops and robbers. Like the scene where I get shot myself. 'Bang' and you have to fall. These little charges with the blood in them explode on your chest, you fall back against the wall, then you fall on the floor holding your breath. It's action-filled cops and robbers and everybody likes to watch it."

If Welsh sees it as a game, that's exactly what Zuckerman and McKenna had in mind. "My sense of guys who operate in this kind of world is that it's an incredible game, they really get a charge from living on the edge. When they talk to one another and you listen to the wire taps and you hear them talk in the bars, it's a banter, but below there's this lethal subtext always running. And so, in our movie, you have a sense of these characters playing this game with one another," says McKenna, who has "kept his ear to the ground" for years, hoping to tell the story one day.

McKenna takes time to thank everyone individually before leaving for his home in Montreal. When all the scenes are moved and the carpets back in place, Bernie Zuckerman hosts a party for an exhausted but exhilarated crew. "People have a stereotyped idea of what the CBC should be doing," says Zuckerman. "It's the image that it's a movie about prairies and a spinster."

"After 12 years, hundreds of different stories, different parts of the world, you get a fix on reality, you don't just hang around with other show business people, caught in a circle, feeding off each other's stories. You're in real situations with real people," Zuckerman concludes.

Richard Leiterman and Francis Markiewicz shooting And Then You Die

Prostitutes, Pimps and Others

The last shoot of Motion Canada Media Productions' first feature, Die isn't meant to be a police story as we know them. When the gangsters see it they're shot. There's a certain kind of bloodspill, and they fall in a certain way, they're shot. There's a certain kind of action.

The television drama was "shot like a movie" by director of photography Richard Leiterman, whose credits range from Goin' Down The Road to My American Cousin. While the exteriors are set in Montreal, the interiors are in Toronto, "for financial reasons."

"It's a big movie that we've made," says director Francis Markiewicz, whose 1978 feature film Les Bons Débaras won eight Genie awards. "It was 26 days for a film that has an enormous number of locations, night shooting and day shooting, a lot of complex scenes, stunts and special effects.

Actor Kenneth Welsh, who won an ACTRA award for his performance in CBC television's Empire, Inc., leans against the wall chanting with his eyes closed. He plays Eddie Griffin, a character based on the first Irish-Canadian gangster to make millions in illegal soft drugs.

R.H. Thompson, who played the title role in the award-winning CBC television film Charlie Grant's War, co-stars with Welsh, but the two men never meet in the film. By this time, Thompson has put detective sergeant James McGrath behind him, to get on with live theatre in Toronto. McGrath, one of the few English Canadians on the Montreal Police Force, is obsessed by Griffin and tirelessly pursues the gangster.

And Then You Die isn't meant to be a police story as we know them. "In a sense it's a piece of reporting as well as, we hope, drama that's going to grab people by the throat and hold them to the end," says McKenna. Zuckerman and McKenna set out to produce something more realistic than The Godfather. For six months, a researcher recorded his observations while immersed in Montreal's criminal sub-culture.

McKenna explains, "We've researched every scene in detail. As you might not have seen on the CBC before, this is the way someone dies when they're shot. There's a certain kind of bloodspill, and they fall in a certain way, and we've got that right."

The story is told from the criminal's point of view. "It's based on a real guy, but I can't emphasize enough that it's fiction." The script was written by journalist Wayne Grigsby and playwright Alan Hibbert.

"I think if we get the story right and capture the way these guys operate, then when the gangsters see it they're going to say we got it right. In the same way, Mario Puoz, author of The Godfather was celebrated by the mafia themselves because they enjoyed the way he got it right," McKenna finishes.

Francis Markiewicz is a director whose reputation is built on "his ability to capture the way people relate and express themselves. He "insists every detail be right." Markiewicz says, "What we've tried to do is not so much develop a character in Eddie Griffin that would seduce the audience by his appealing qualities, but a character faithful enough to what he is fundamentally, and interesting enough for an audience to want to watch him."

Kenneth Welsh describes Griffin as a child and his job as partly play-acting. "Griffin is still a boy at heart and he behaves like one. I remember doing this as a kid. As an actor playing it, it was very much cops and robbers. Like the scene where I get shot myself. 'Bang' and you have to fall. These little charges with the blood in them explode on your chest, you fall back against the wall, then you fall on the floor holding your breath. It's action-filled cops and robbers and everybody likes to watch it."

If Welsh sees it as a game, that's exactly what Zuckerman and McKenna had in mind. "My sense of guys who operate in this kind of world is that it's an incredible game, they really get a charge from living on the edge. When they talk to one another and you listen to the wire taps and you hear them talk in the bars, it's a banter, but below there's this lethal subtext always running. And so, in our movie, you have a sense of these characters playing this game with one another," says McKenna, who has "kept his ear to the ground" for years, hoping to tell the story one day.

McKenna takes time to thank everyone individually before leaving for his home in Montreal. When all the scenes are moved and the carpets back in place, Bernie Zuckerman hosts a party for an exhausted but exhilarated crew. "People have a stereotyped idea of what the CBC should be doing," says Zuckerman. "It's the image that it's a movie about prairies and a spinster."

"After 12 years, hundreds of different stories, different parts of the world, you get a fix on reality, you don't just hang around with other show business people, caught in a circle, feeding off each other's stories. You're in real situations with real people," Zuckerman concludes.

Stephanie Gould
Outrageous Comeback

Turning the depressing, snowy streets of Toronto into the back drop for real life narrative mixed with the lure of legend and myth, Richard Benner's classic Outrageous (1977), showed us at our most Cana- dian: dreaming of success, a success most often defined as more valuable for occurring south of the 49th parallel. Robin Turner (Craig Russell) wanted to "make it" in New York doing his im­ pressions of the silver screen's most re­ membered ladies, and Liza (Hollis McLaren) wanted to be "as famous" as Robin by creating fantastic stories out of her experiences in the mental health ward, where she was often a resident. Not really an unusual pair if you hang around Yonge Street long enough.

Like many stories that bring you memorable characters, Outrageous was due for a sequel. Too Outrageous, which recently finished shooting in To­ ronto and New York, catches up with Robin and Liza and their friends ten years later. They haven't quite 'made it' yet but they are still trying.

On the final day of shooting in To­ ronto the atmosphere on the set was an expected mixture of exhaustion and ex­ citement. The scene is set in a dinner on New York's Christopher Street on Hal­ loween. Robin has just had his an­ niversary show at the Jack Rabbit club, that quintessential gay bar whose clien­ tele wear both leather and lace. Our Mr. Turner and his 'entourage' have come in from the street's madness for a bite to eat.

Director Richard Benner jokes with his cast. Like a leader on the final day of summer camp, he attempts to rally ability, less costly.

Paul Henry found it difficult to play himself. "When the camera goes on, you feel you have to play yourself, but at the same time, it's difficult to do because you always see yourself as being some­ one else." Indeed, at the shoot I at­ tended, Paul's voice dropped two oct­ aves and he sounded more like John­ ny Cash than Paul Henry. As Evan­ chuck summed up, "There is a problem in working with non-professionals. They can't seem to be themselves. They all want to act and I don't want them to. I want real people, not actors."

Platinum has been in production for the past two-and-a-half years. It is the first film in the War Trilogy ("The war between men and women", one of the character's explains), which will also include Mothers and Nervous Disorders.

Evan chuck hopes that now the team is together, the rest of the trilogy will be completed within three years. Other Canadian actors in the cast are too numerous to mention, but all play crucial roles in this parody of middle-class relationships.

Doug Allan •

ness consultant, Philip Jackson, produc­ er of Music of the Spheres. The film has gone through a number of title changes, and has also kept Kiki busy in the cutting room with major re­ visions. The music, apart from the title song, is being produced in Toronto by John Doerr and Marcelle Amrac, original members of the rock group, Canco. They are writing the principal and electron­ ic sound tracks.

The principal actors are all non-ac­ tors. Few of the people involved with the film are in the business full-time, ex­ cept for Sarda, Jackson and Frank Cole. "The original idea of the film was to form a group of people, that is, techni­ cians and performers who could work on a low-budget road picture where many locations are covered as part of the development of the film story," Evan chuck says. Everyone in the film has other work. "This is an experiment to see if people could make feature films and continue their regular work, and all participants are still working and living their regular lives."

Platinum opens with the haunting sound of Hank Rivers yodelling from atop an old steam train. Hank, of course, is Canada's "Singing Soldier", Gene Autry. He plays Johnnie Doe's missing father. Johnnie is played by independ­ ent filmmaker Frank Cole, currently completing his own feature, A Life. Helene Lacelle plays the principal female character, Libbie Dough, who has numerous relationships throughout the film, always looking for Johnnie, or at least a reasonable substitute. In the substitute's role is Jacques Couillard, whose portrayal of John Smith, a lawyer, is convincing. Numerous other bit parts are taken by whoever Evan chuck could dig up to fill in at the time of the shoot.

Israel Shaked, of Transcontinental Pictures Industries, sees the film as a series of vignettes made into a feature, which he predicts will be popular with youthful viewers because of a Similarity which he predicts will be popular with youthful viewers because of a Similarity between men and women because of a Similarity which he predicts will be popular with youthful viewers because of a Similarity between men and women, which will also be popular because of a Similarity between men and women, which will also be popular because of a Similarity between men and women.

Platinum was the first film in the War Trilogy ("The war between men and women", one of the character's explains), which will also include Mothers and Nervous Disorders.

Evan chuck hopes that the new team is together, the rest of the trilogy will be completed within three years. Other Canadian actors in the cast are too numerous to mention, but all play crucial roles in this parody of middle-class relationships.

David MacLean •

character has been developed and her individual struggle to lead a fully integ­ rated life, in spite of that bag full of pre­ scriptive drugs, brings a fuller sense of drama to the sequel. We know these characters. We can almost imagine how their lives have continued in that Man­ hattan loft.

In spite of all the sequel's new twists and turns, the film's success will be due to the metamorphic Craig Russell's abili­ ty to erase some of those bad memories of the post-Outrageous performance fiascos which are not always easy to forget. As an ardent fan, I remember sit­ ting in the audience at the Royal York's Imperial Room in 1978, disappointedly watching as Russell tumbled off the stage. Any discussion of Russell be­ comes impossible without intersecting these unfortunate incidents. The ways in which the persona of 'Robin Turner' interweaves with the myths and stories that surround the 'real' Craig Russell ap­ proaches the uncanny in the new film.

In one scene, when Robin is about to sabotage a backer's audition for a Broadway show, his long-time friend and as a Bob (McIlwraith) tells him to "grow up". In the tradition of the 'come­ back' – for which many of the Russell ladies were themselves famous – Too Outrageous could well prove to be the phoenix. Craig Russell has the talent to navigate into effortless flight.

Craig Russell – Too Outrageous! •