

The fantastic reality of twins

After the final take, the corpse dons a green bathrobe and makes her way to the director's chair. David Cronenberg graciously obliges the extra's request and provides an autograph while thanking her for a job well done.

The much-publicized Toronto shoot of *Twins* has the city (or at least the tabloids) enamoured of its stars, Jeremy Irons and Geneviève Bujold, is finally in the works. Several false starts, including last year's pullout by the de Laurentiis Entertainment Group, delayed the production. With the participation of Telefilm and advances from 20th Century Fox and, in Canada, Astral Films, producer Marc Boyman rescrumbled the picture's financing and cameras started to roll February 1st.

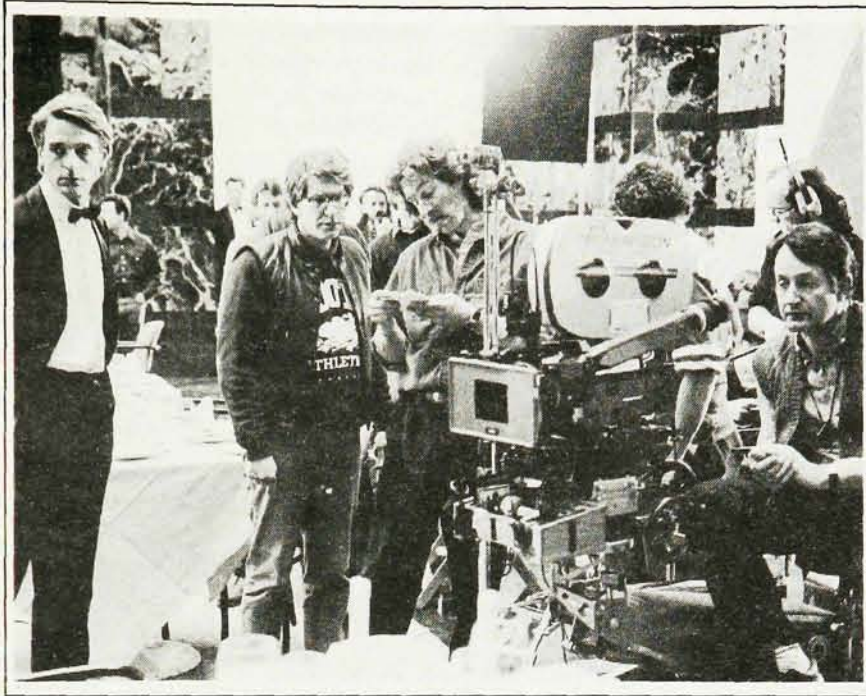
They won't stop rolling until mid-April. Part of the reason for *Twins'* extended shooting schedule is the fact that Irons plays two roles, the title characters. Simply, some scenes have to be reshot with Irons playing the other role.

Other complications include, of course, the problem of technology and special effects, by now a requisite of Cronenberg's films. The twinning effect will be created by the tried and true split-screen method. By updating the existing technique with multiple splits in the screen rather than the standard vertical split down its centre, as well as computerized motion control which enables the camera to retrack its movements with a high degree of precision, the film's special effects and optical experts, Gordon Smith (*Near Dark*, *Platoon*) and Lee Wilson (*The Fly*), will achieve a sophisticated, perfectly reduplicated image with newfound mobility for both actor and camera. It'll be possible for a standing Jeremy Irons to bend over a seated Jeremy Irons during, say, a pan or tracking shot, and offer himself a drink. Nuances to be sure but a far cry from *The Patty Duke Show*.

Twins is about the ties that bind the lives of identical twins, brothers Elliot and Beverly Mantle, renowned gynecologists. A beautiful actress, Bujold, problematizes the brothers' bond, complicating the relationships into a love triangle that results in their destruction.

As a psychological thriller, *Twins* is somewhat of a departure for Cronenberg. As he says, "the challenge is the reverse - to make the realistic seem fantastic." According to some, his fascination with the phenomenon of twins dates back to more than a decade. Part of the research included a visit to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis where a massive study of twins was and still is taking place. *Twins* the movie has itself been in development for seven years.

In Casa Loma, Lady Pellat's Blue Room has been rearranged to look like a hotel suite. Two identical sisters playing twin prostitutes prepare



On the set with Jeremy Irons, David Cronenberg, Marvin Midwicki and Peter Suschitzky

for their scene with Elliot, the urbane and extroverted brother. While make-up personnel fuss with the actresses' porcelain complexions, Cronenberg and DOP Peter Suschitzky (*Empire Strikes Back*, *Falling In Love*) fuss with the eyeline and the blocking of the actors. "Jeremy! Jeremy! Have you seen Jeremy?" Between takes, Irons has taken to roaming the castle.

"It's like peeling an onion - the layers in Jeremy Irons' performance," remarks Brigitte Berman. The beneficiary of the Canadian Centre for Advanced Film Studies fledgling Director Observer Program is finding the experience on the \$10M U.S. production an invaluable one. "It's very important to me to watch how he's working with the actors, how David and Jeremy interact - together they create the role. When two people click creatively and run on the same track, nice things begin to happen - little bits of magic. They give each other the space to find it - David gives it with his actors and his crew."

Cronenberg is "very giving," Berman continues. "He explains patiently." The sci-fi master is everything a megalomaniacal director is not. Although he is generally soft-spoken on the set, Berman maintains that his presence is pervasive. Cronenberg's calm demeanour and meticulous attention to detail help him gain a command of pressures, she thinks. "If I can do even a third as well on my first set," she says, "I'll be really happy."

What initially intrigued Berman about the story were its subtleties and Cronenberg's and Norman Snider's tightly written script. "It's an interior film." For Irons, switching roles sometimes several times daily, the part invites a particular acting: playing off himself, two characters just a shade apart. And from all reports, he was more than approving of Bujold's involvement in the project.

There's a minor spill on the set: the twin actresses rise simultaneously from the velvet-upholstered chesterfield and Irons, leaning on the sofa's back, jostles the wineglass in his hand. Props assistants and set dressers descend upon the disturbance - it's between takes anyway.

Even amid the chaos of shooting a film, Boyman, like Cronenberg, seems remarkably serene. The production, he says, is an incredibly smooth one with a happy, unified crew. With ample studio support and distribution deals intact, things couldn't be better. After a troubled history, *Twins* is finally being born. The baby is due this fall.

Helen Lee •

Urban cowboyz

Following his most recent production, *Platinum*, which achieved modest success at the Montreal World Film Festival, Peter Evanchuck has launched himself into yet another controversial new film, *Cowboyz*. This film, budgeted at \$300,000, is an energetic black comedy about dreamers and their inability to make their dreams come to fruition. A story of hope and despair, *Cowboyz* vacillates between powerful fantasy and hard reality.

The most recent shoot took place in Kingston at the home of one of Evanchuck's friends. Within an hour of arriving, he had transformed the front and back parlour, the porch and the upstairs landing into a studio. As is his usual custom, he decided to use the house's occupants as actors, along with the female lead Helene

Lacelle, and quickly briefed everyone as to the effect and mood he wanted to create. He tossed out a few lines to get things rolling, started the camera and recorder, and 'voila', action.

On location in Kingston, Evanchuck says of his most recent production, "I'm trying to make documentaries that look like dramas. What I mean is that before I write a 'script', I wander around the clubs, taverns, streets, stores, and wherever else one finds interesting people, looking for people and their stories. When I think that I've met the right individuals whose stories are interesting and fit into the idea I want to document, I design the sequences loosely. I don't tell them what to say but rather suggest the general topic of conversation, which ultimately leaves them with the final draft work. Scripts by proxy - but it works. For example, I know that Len thinks he's the reincarnation of Hank Williams and the 'King of Country Music' when he's drunk. I then adapt all these things for the appropriate sequence. I do the same for all the characters, since I've known them all for at least three years or more, and have a reasonably good idea of what they're capable of handling in terms of playing themselves, what they like and what is essential to the movie." Evanchuck goes on to explain that in order to "clean up some of the loose ends, a narrative element has been developed between Cleo and the cowboy. It more or less resembles the kind of conversational dialogue you'll find in films like *My Dinner with Andre* or *Hiroshima Mon Amour*."

Helene Lacelle comes through the door and shouts, "Warren, Warren?" Then Evanchuck shouts, "Slate it. That's it!" The shoot took several hours to prepare but only about five or 10 minutes of film was shot. Time to move on to the next location, Ottawa then Montreal, then back to Toronto, and all in three days! The following weekend Evanchuck is off to Maniwaki in Northern Quebec, Wakefield, and Hull, just across the river from Ottawa. The list goes on as this road picture goes from place to place to create the right atmosphere and location.

"We're a very small crew. Often there are only two crew members and the performers. Sometimes I'll do the shot myself and the actor will handle the sound. This is just one of the realities of low-budget filmmaking. You just do what has to be done." Next Evanchuck, his crew and actors, (who are often one and the same), are off to Nashville and the Eastern United States where they will do the necessary pickup atmosphere shots. "I guess it's many a cowboy's dream to make it in Nashville. I know that Len thinks that if he gets the chance to go there, he'll end up in the Hall of Fame without any doubt. That's his dream. That is what a lot of this movie is about."

Last month they were at Tic Toc Stables near Luskville, Quebec. "It was very interesting," Evanchuck begins, "because it proved that if a low-budget producer / director can't adapt, he's in a lot of trouble. I was told by all these sidewalk



PHOTO: P. M. EVANCHUCK

Western cool with Len Corey, Dushan Mircovitch, Helene Lacelle, Jack Webb, Lisanna Garrett and Jacques Couillard

musicians that they could ride horses. So off we went to do a dream sequence in which Len, sleeping in a bar, is dreaming that he is in the Old West and the head of a gang of desperados. Well, the original plan was to copy a typical ride-fast, rein-in, shout and scream type of cowboy entry-exit, with guns blazing. Then, Len would wake up in the bar. Instead, I found out that none of these concrete cowboys could ride! They took the horses - two were afraid to get on, and the other two couldn't make the horses move. The young girls who were handling the horses had to take the reins and move them back and forth. It was a complete disaster, so I decided to rewrite the scene. We pretended that they had lost their horses and were fighting and yelling over each other's stupidity. The following weekend I found a couple of guys who could ride, and we did the scene as planned. Ironically, they were computer programmers. I can't complain, I got a short comedy piece from the other shots."

There are other hazards that Evanchuck has encountered during the shooting of *Cowboyz*. "I was shooting in the Raceway Tavern in Ottawa, a long-established haven for the skin trade, when one of the more aggressive prostitutes, obviously annoyed with what I was doing, broke a beer glass in my face. The manager grabbed her, knocked her out, and threw her out into a snowbank minus her shoes. I took myself off to the nearest hospital to have stitches put in. I now bear the scars of this encounter, but take it as part and parcel of my profession."

In what is becoming the Evanchuckian tradition, many of the cast and crew are from *Platinum*, and all are non-professional actors including the new faces in this latest venture: Len Corey, Dushan Mircovich, and Lizanna

Garrett. As Evanchuck points out, "Who's not an actor? I think it would take one hell of a lot of courage to be yourself all the time. So most people act in different situations. I just want to see them play those roles when I shout 'Action'."

One of the regular actors, Helene Lacelle, who plays Cleopatra in *Cowboyz* states that, "I enjoy working in something creative with dedicated people. It beats hanging out and trying on a new pair of shoes." The rest of the company echo the same sentiments. Jacques Couillard who played John Smith in *Platinum* and now appears as Johnny in *Cowboyz* says, "Let's say we're going to do a shoot at the restaurant where I work, The Bohemian, Evanchuck and the others will arrive a while before closing. We'll drink, then he'll sort of outline something that he's seen us do before but with some slight alterations to fit the scene. We'll walk through it, shoot it, and that's that." George Goracz, assistant camera and aound man for *Cowboyz* agrees with the team effort. "I even had a small part in *Cowboyz*. One of the actors didn't show up so Evanchuck had me walk through a shot and say a line, then I went back to operating the sound."

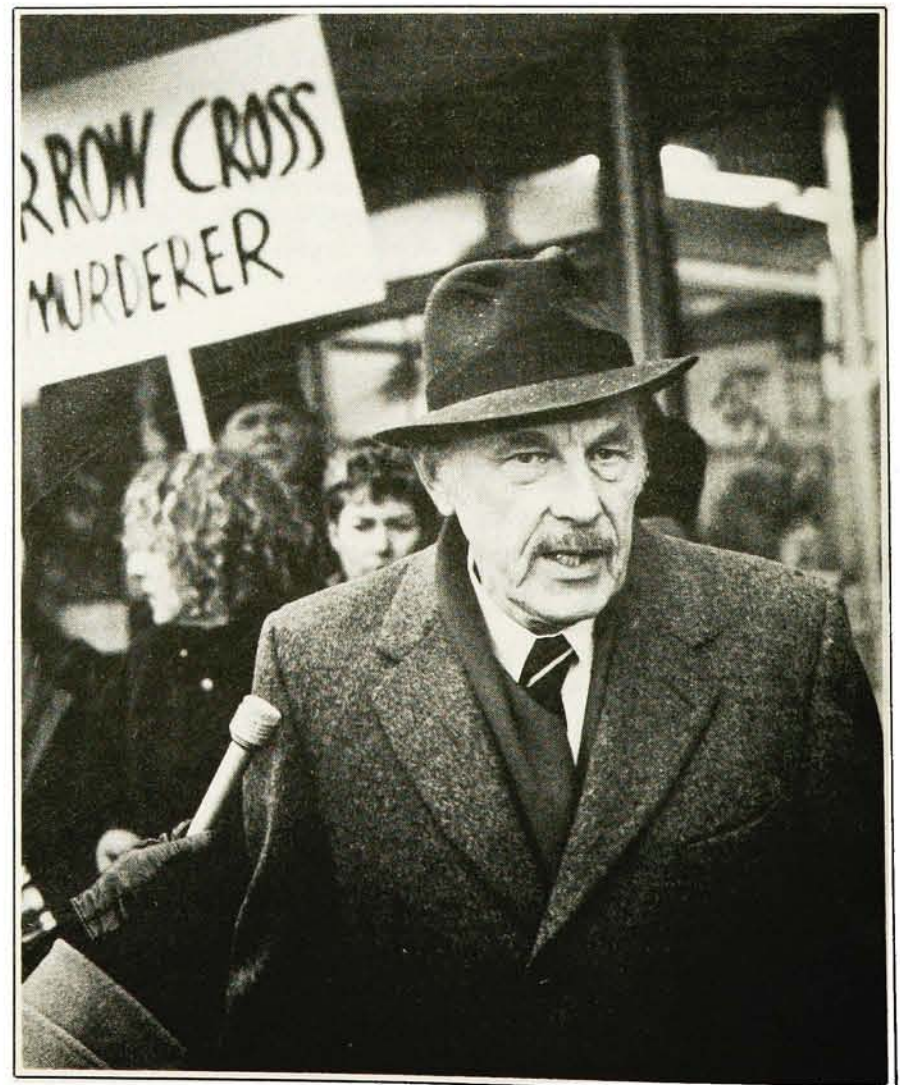
Len Corey, Ottawa's most photographed sidewalk musician, was taken from the street to play a lead character in the movie. "I've known Peter for years. We'd drink at the LaFayette Hotel or the Raceway Tavern together. One day he asked me if I wanted to be in one of his films. I said sure. Then about a week later, he shows up on the street where I was playing and starts filming. He tells me thanks, gives me some money then leaves. He did this a few times then finally asked me if I wanted a bigger part. I was sleeping in the mission or outside by the river. He offered to give me money each time. It was

better than what I got playing the sidewalks. Then he gave me a place to stay at his house. The movie is about me. About cowboys like me. Not the Old West ones but the real, modern ones."

Len, an itinerant street musician, has been playing the sidewalks for seven years after suffering the indignity of a messy divorce which resulted in the loss of all his worldly possessions, except his guitar. He feels he can't or doesn't want to return to his previous vocation. "My wife hated music, so I took it up full-time," Len says vindictively. "I got a job playing the streets so that she couldn't get any money from me. I'm not a welfare bum! I play for my money. I work for it!"

Serge Losique, head of the World Film Festival said in an interview in the *Montreal Gazette* that along with *Un Zoo, la nuit* and *Kid Brother*, *Platinum* was one of the successes of this year's Festival in Montreal. Ina Warren, staff writer for *Canadian Press*, in her article "It was a Memorable Year for Films in Canada," mentions Evanchuck as one of the most promising up-and-coming "New Wave" film directors. If the popularity of *Platinum* is any indication, Evanchuck's latest film *Cowboyz* is sure to make waves at upcoming film festivals.

W. Doug Allen •



No comment from Jan Rubes

Take two

Gordon Pinsent is thinking about hands. He leans against the refrigerator, in the basement of a Scarborough home full of television cameras, and talks to John Vernon. "If the hand is there and the face hasn't changed yet, that's the thing..." And later, as Martha Gibson walks into the bedroom and turns on a light, "I'm going to start this one with her at the lamp. Elaine Barna in the other scene turns off her lamp, and the very first thing we see here... It's the reach that does it."

The reach, the hand - these are perhaps the central symbols in Anna Sandor's TV drama *Two Men*, which Pinsent is directing. It is the story of a man who did not lift his hand against atrocity, and a man who, decades later, must decide for himself what his own action must be.

"This is going to be an important film," says Sandor. "Everyone came to the thing very committed... They're the best rushes I've ever seen."

John Vernon sings to himself as he puts on his overcoat, preparing to shoot a scene. I look over

the bookshelves of the home the crew has temporarily occupied. There are a number of inspirational Christian paperbacks and two copies of Igor Gouzenko's *This Was My Choice*.

Two Men is the story of Alex Koves (Vernon), who lost his family in Auschwitz, and of Michael Barna, a former Nazi bureaucrat (Jan Rubes), whom Koves believes is responsible for their deaths. Sandor, Hungarian and Jewish herself, sees this script as an exploration of her own past, especially her stepfather, "a very closed-up life, a very closed-up personality. I've always been fascinated by what happened that made him like that... (but) I wanted to do something that explored both the antagonist and the protagonist. These things are usually very black and white; I wanted to deal more in the greys, the pencil-pushers - what happens so many years after to someone... he didn't actually kill anyone, but someone who didn't fight back."

A make-up man sits, stoically knitting something beige, while John Vernon stands in the entranceway removing his overshoes. "(In this scene," explains David Webb, the assistant director, "he's just come back from seeing his stepmother Rose in the hospital. She said to him, well, try and become a Jew again, that's how you're going to beat this guy, you obviously can't go and kill him or something; so he had this sort of breakthrough there...")

"I've used sound a lot," says Sandor, "rather than flashbacks. The character will hear snatches, which don't always make sense to the audience until the end."

The mikes and cameras are precariously carted through the tiny suburban rooms, circling around sofas and an exercise bicycle. Scraps of conversation fly back and forth. "Where did all these Scottish accents come from?" asks someone.

"We're all Scottish here," says someone else.

A dark-skinned young man managing one of the cameras looks up. There is a slight glint in his eye. "Speak for yourself," he says firmly.

Maggie Helwig •



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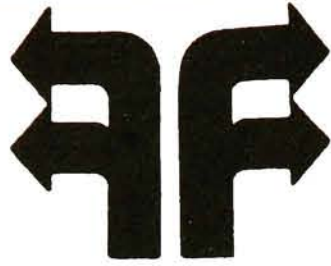


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