

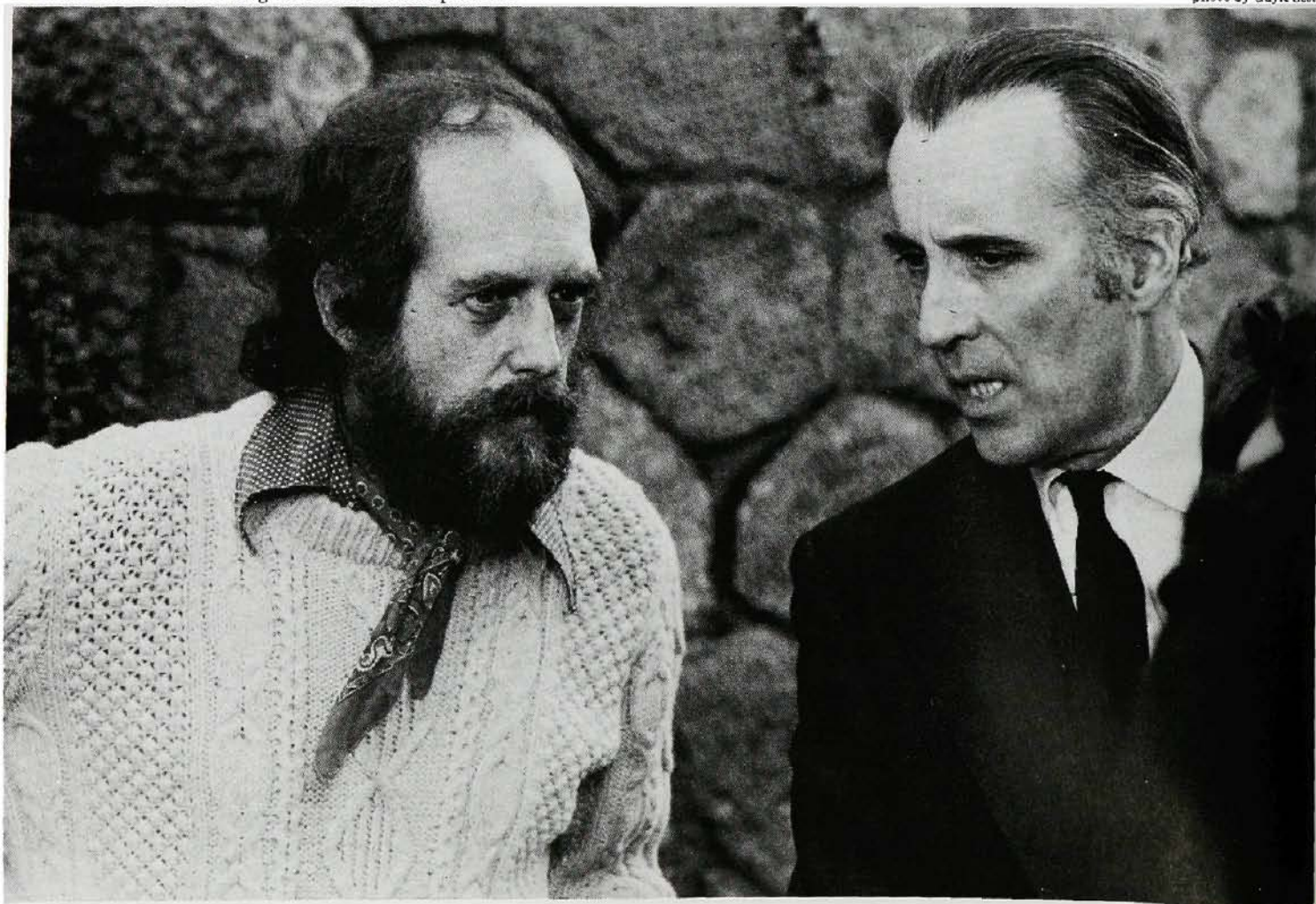
Gayle Scott sat in on the rushes and Peter Bryant interviewed the star. Which gives us a sneak preview of Tom Drake's *The Keeper*, filmed in and around Vancouver and scheduled for release this next fall.

a sneak preview

by Peter Bryant
and Gayle Scott

Director Tom Drake talking with actor Christopher Lee

photo by Gayle Scott



The Keeper

d. Tom Drake, asst. d. Martin Walters, ph. Doug McKay, asst. ph. Cyrus Block, ed. Sally Patterson, sd. Zale Dalen, a.d. Keith Pepper, cost. Enda Bratt, l.p. Christopher Lee, Tell Schreiber, Sally Gray, Ross Vezerian, Ian Tracey, p. Don Wilson, p. manager. Martin Walters, p.c. Lionsgate Productions Ltd., 1975, 16mm, color.

Notes on Tom Drake, Director

Tom Drake began his career in "show business" when he was nine years old, as a radio actor in Vancouver. He spent fifteen years working in Los Angeles, first as a member and manager of rock groups, and later as a screen writer. He says survival came through doing work for television, while he worked in his spare time on the screenplays he wanted to write.

He first became involved in **The Keeper** as a writer, called in for a rewrite after the original proposal had been made to the CFDC by producer Don Wilson. Later the project was resubmitted with Tom Drake as director, and accepted.

Drake considers himself a writer first. His talents are evident in his script on the early days of Buddy Holly, **Not Fade Away**. It is a fine, funny, moving story on the early days of rock and roll, where a group of young Texas musicians find themselves mistakenly booked on the "chitlin circuit" as a Black group. **Not Fade Away** went into production under Twentieth Century Fox at the same time **The Keeper** started shooting in Vancouver. Unfortunately the studio was unhappy with the director, and after a week of production the film was aborted.

However, as the man said, there are more good scripts lying around than good movies, and **Not Fade Away** is one of them. The next person who laments that there are no good screen writers in Canada can take a look at Tom Drake's script.

Peter Bryant

at the rushes

by Gayle Scott

During the first evening's rushes there was standing room only – and that was out in the hall – as cast and crew turned out in force to view the dailies. Granted, the screening room was smaller than Liberace's wardrobe closet, but there was a sizeable crowd nonetheless.

The admittedly biased audience was nothing if not wildly enthusiastic, applauding the hero, laughing on cue, and generally responding with kudos for Doug McKay's fine photography. After several such appreciative outbursts director Tom Drake offered as an aside, "If we do that well on opening night, we'll make money!"

Ah yes,... money. It remains to be seen whether this high-spirited, low-budgeted Canadian feature film will pass the crucial box office test, but the talk is optimistic.

First there is the script. Originally suggested by David Curnick and Don Wilson, the story was rewritten by Tom Drake and peddled to the CFDC and private investors by Wilson, a young Canadian producer whose boyish looks and shy grin conceal a shrewd business mind.

The story takes place in 1947 in urban British Columbia. (All right... Vancouver.) The plot revolves around the fiendish Keeper of the Underwood Asylum, played to the arch by veteran British character actor, Christopher Lee, the sole import in an otherwise home-grown production.

The Keeper's methods of dealing in madness have come under the scrutiny of the local police, shepherded by the laughable/likeable Inspector Clarke, played by Ross Vezerian. Enter private detective Dick Driver, played by Tell Schreiber, one of several Canadian actors recruited from Drake's stomping ground in the interior Kootenays of B.C. Private dick Dick, hired by a mysterious client, must fool the cops long enough to foil the villain in true hero-detective style. He is aided by assorted accomplices, including Sally Gray (aka Mrs. Tom Drake) as Mae B. Jones, and Ian Tracey making his film debut as an enterprising young shoeshine boy considering a career as a private eye, and hoping to pick up a few pointers from the pro.

The Keeper was shot during most of October, amidst the colors of fall. There were just enough sunny days for a few exterior shoots, and plenty of downpour for the torrential rain sequence, obligatory in any Vancouver film.

Director of Photography Doug McKay was backed up by an experienced crew which included Cyrus Block, assistant cameraman, Bill Newberry, gaffer, and Reg Tunnicliffe, props manager. Zale Dalen handled sound, assisted by boom man B.J. Clayden, Keith Pepper served as art director, and Enda Bratt provided the costumes for the 1947 setting.

Sally Patterson, who doubled as continuity/script girl on the set, is currently editing the film. The action on the set was kept moving right along by assistant director/production manager R. Martin Walters, with assorted wags and waves of his cane, and an occasional stand-in by the 2nd assistant director, Patti Robertson.

Erich Hoyt is currently producing an original music score, and Al Razutis is working on some special optical effects. If all goes according to plan, **The Keeper** will premiere in Vancouver in April. The film's comedy-thriller genre, and the presence of Christopher Lee, have guaranteed the film's distribution, but Wilson is still shopping around for the best deal in town. □

photo by Gayle Scott



Sally Gray as Mae B. Jones and Tell Schreiber as Dick Driver with Christopher Lee in the Keeper's room

Gayle Scott is a freelance writer and photographer who has worked as production manager, film researcher and still photographer on films in British Columbia. She was recently still photographer on **The Keeper**.

the keeper speaks

by Peter Bryant

Although Christopher Lee has made the role of Dracula synonymous with his own, he has in fact appeared in a wide variety of roles in more than a hundred films. He recently completed a North American tour in which he publicized **The Four Musketeers**, in which he played France's ace swordsman, The Duke of Rochefort. Lee was currently in Vancouver to make his North American film debut, in Don Wilson and Tom Drake's **The Keeper**.

You have undoubtedly talked to many people about the Dracula films for Hammer, so perhaps we can avoid that?

Lee: Yes. There's been too much general and insignificant discussion about the character which I never intend to play again. It represents a part of my career that is definitely over.

Perhaps we can talk about the British Film Industry?

Lee: I am not sure I am qualified to answer your questions there. Someone asked me this morning if the British film industry is in a bad way, and I answered that since 1947 the industry has had one crisis after another. One sometimes gets the impression there is an unending crisis in the business; which at times is perilously close to the truth, and at times not. Certainly in the last three or four years the industry, like the British economy, has had a bad time of it. This is a matter of public record. However, the ball bounces back after hitting the ground, and I hope next time it can bounce a little higher. I can't really tell you more.

At least in England you have internationally known stars, and directors...

Lee: How many?

More than Canada...

Lee: Well, I wasn't thinking of that comparison. There are not more than half dozen. There is Sean Connery, Michael Caine, and Roger Moore. You name the next one.

Olivier.

Lee: In films, I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know if he was box office. Today everything depends on being Bankable.

*Were you the Bankable in **The Keeper**?*

Lee: Yes. Well I'm the only person in the film known in almost every country in the world. However if the film cost five million, I would not be chosen for the leading role. You see you are bankable only up to a certain point. Beyond that, you can be bankable as a member of a group. The lead in a five-million-dollar picture would go to another actor; I am realistic enough about that.

What kind of role do you enjoy playing?

Lee: Well, the easy answer is any part that is well written and interesting and a good part. It is difficult to say more. I do enjoy the different, the unconventional.

You have a background in boxing and fencing. Are you still active in these areas?

Lee: Fencing I do. I've done about twenty different sword-fighting movies. I have fought duels with Errol Flynn, Burt

*Peter Bryant, filmmaker, is active with the British Columbia Film Industries Association and has contributed news from Vancouver regularly to **Cinema Canada**. His first feature film, **The Supreme Kid**, should be released this spring.*

photo by Gayle Scott



Sally Gray and Tell Schreiber being kept in **The Keeper**

Lancaster, Peck, Oliver Reed, Roger Moore. With different kinds of swords.

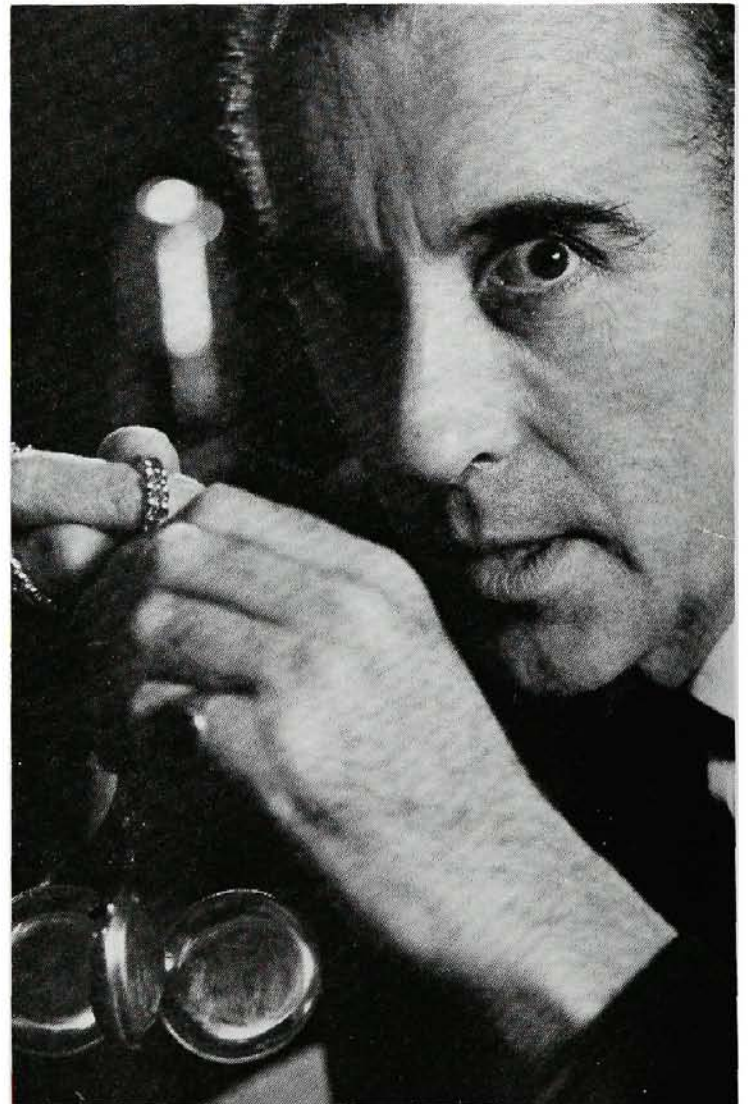
You enjoy it.

Lee: When I am in shape, when I feel I can do it. It can be quite rough. With the heat, costumes, and my age...

Canada has just signed a co-production treaty with the U.K.

Lee: I didn't know that. I can't think of a better place than here. But you cannot make domestic pictures except for the domestic audience. I think the downfall in my country had been in the domestic film, or films without international

photo by Gayle Scott



British actor Christopher Lee in the starring role

appeal. It has been important to me to be known as an international actor, to be known in France, Germany, Italy. Here you have climate, geographic areas, cities. But you should use international stars and stories, in my opinion.

A lot of people share your perspective.

Lee: My next part is in Africa. An African adventure with Trevor Howard and Brian Faulkner. There will be black and white African actors in it. I can't think of a better way to help integration, myself. An integrated film crew and cast.

It's a start.

Lee: Yes. There is no political motivation in the film. Just good guys and bad guys. With black and white on both sides of the fence.

You have worked in many films that are co-productions?

Lee: Well, I have to complete a film in Munich, Germany. A co-production between Germany and England. This is the era of co-production. I believe in it, international stars, international stories.

Actors in England generally have a theatrical background. Do you prefer the theatre?

Lee: I prefer film. They are two different areas, with different techniques. But there is a lot of hypocritical nonsense about theatre. The techniques are different, I emphasize that. After all, film requires different timing. Particularly in comedy. You time in theatre to the audience, you wait for the laugh. But in film you don't have that, do you?

*It was mentioned that the actor playing opposite you in **The Keeper** played better with you in the scene.*

Lee: Quite honestly I wouldn't know. Any actor can help another. There are lots of actors who bring out the best in me. It depends on what you get back. If you get some actors who are only obsessed with themselves, obviously you are not going to get anything. So you have to knuckle down and do it all on your own.

But any professional actor will give it to you back. And that is a tremendous help. Because you react, and acting is reacting, just as much as acting. I remember the scene I played with Faye Dunaway in **The Musketeers**. Right away she put her finger on it, the sexual undertones, the light touch, just like that. Marvellous. I was enormously impressed, she had never met me before that. The best actress I ever worked with by a long way.

And who is the best director?

Lee: Billy Wilder. What more could you ask. I liked playing comedy with Billy Wilder. (**The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes**.)

photo by Gayle Scott



A sinister meeting between Malcolm Britton, Tell Schreiber and Michael Meade in **The Keeper**

Stunt man Sean Phillips making an escape, doubling for Tell Schreiber in **The Keeper**



Photo by Gayle Scott

And among the English directors?

Lee: Now that is difficult to answer. I suppose the one I had most fun with is Guy Hamilton. (**The Man With the Golden Gun**.)

You mentioned that you must always play a part seriously...

Lee: Yes. Comedy should come out of the situation. If you watch Laurel and Hardy films you will see what I mean. Oliver Hardy was always serious, and to me funnier.

Do villains offer you more scope?

Lee: Well, they are more unconventional. I think they offer a wider spectrum, and they seem to be characters people remember. I also think there is a little villainy in all of us. I try to keep mine limited to the screen.

*Any comments on **The Keeper**?*

Lee: I thought it was a good story, unconventional. My interpretation is probably different from the director's.

Would you like to work here again. I don't mean just Vancouver but in Canada?

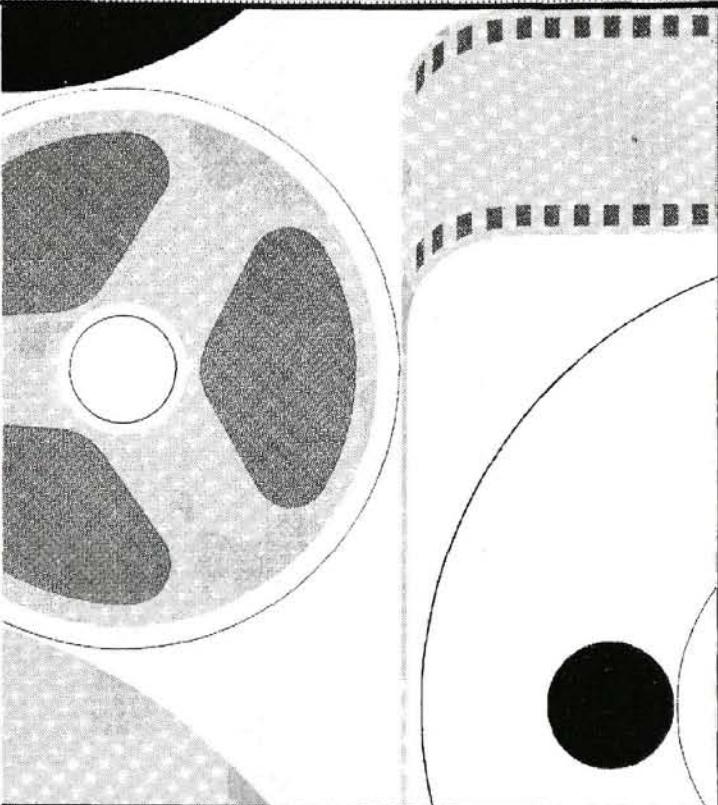
Lee: Yes, I wish I had seen more while I was here. (Note: Mr. Lee endured a bout of flu during the film, and saw it rain during his whole stay.)

Do you have any comments to make about film production in Canada?

Lee: Well, I think basically you must convince the government that it is a good country in which to make films. And as I say, they should be international. But this is not for me to say, but for you to say to the Canadian government. □

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