

# FILM REVIEWS

**Martyn Burke**

## The Clown Murders

d. Martyn Burke, asst. d. John M. Eckert, sc. Martyn Burke, ph. Dennis Miller, sp. effects Warren Keillor, ed. Alan Collins, sd. Douglas Ganton, sd. ed. Peter Burgess, sd. re-recording Clarke Delprato, a.d. Jeffrey Holmes, props Jacques Bradette, m. John Mills-Cockell, m. ed. Oliver Manton, Marcus Manton, cost. Lynda Kemp, l.p. Stephen Young (Charlie), Susan Keller (Alison), Lawrence Dane (Philip), John Candy (Ollie), Gary Reineke (Rosy), John Bayliss (Peter), Albert S. Waxman in a guest appearance, William Osler (Harrison), Cec Linder, Philip Craig (Tom the handyman), Michael Magee (Compton), exec. p. Stephen Stohn, p. Christopher Dalton, p. manager John M. Eckert, p.c. Magnum International Productions Inc. (Tor.) 1976, color, blow-up from 16mm, running time 95 minutes, dist. Astral Films.

After avoiding any kind of film that could be readily characterized as a genre work, last year Canadian filmmakers seemed to leap into obvious types. Lured possibly by the potential economic rewards – distributors are easier to deal with if you tell them you've got a 'horror' or a 'thriller' – Toronto filmmakers made a good half-dozen thrillers in the last half of 1975. But although on the surface the appeal of suspense may be seen as easily achieved, it's not once you get down to shooting, and, above all, editing. Martyn Burke's **The Clown Murders** is fully polished in these areas, but there are problems, and they lie in his script and direction.

The story fits the formula: it's simple and straightforward, and concerns four rich guys, old buddies, who, for a lark, kidnap a former flame. Unfortunately the joke turns real, as the police search, and tensions and old

Stephen Young, held captive in **The Clown Murders**



sores grow among the conspirators. Added to the situation is a nasty farmer and his sinister handyman who run the farm they all hide in. Then the murders and attempted murders begin, leading to a surprise ending.

Burke and Dalton have assembled a cast and crew of above-average ability, and they give this CFDC low-budget effort production values that indicate a cost of four or five times as much. Producer Chris Dalton squeezed every cent, and, even blown up to 35mm, the visuals support the story very well. Dennis Miller's photography, mostly shot at night, creates a world of shadow and inner demons, a world that can allow the unrestrained exposure of character, whether it's the dark side of the jolly practical joker or the logical extremity of the blonde teasing goddess. But it's then up to the script and the actors to give the events life, and the former falters despite support from very competent talent. Gary Reineke and John Bayliss are admirably in control of parts that tempt an actor to be much too theatrical; John Candy, usually seen in comedy roles, is superb as the fat, non-sexual mascot who is degraded by the goddess. And Larry Dane and Al Waxman give direct, convincing performances as the girl's husband and the policeman, respectively. Stephen Young is far too wooden, and Susan Keller conveys no personality whatsoever. One wonders why, beyond obvious good looks, the others want her so badly.

It's not entirely her fault. Burke's script falls down in one essential

area: plausibility. He sketches his characters swiftly and reasonably well, mainly through a polo match and a card game in the clubrooms, but there is never any breadth to Keller's character, and one just can't discover why these four guys are friends or even acquaintances, not to mention accepting the references to very close bonds in their past. There are no common links, besides polo and attraction to Keller, another plot necessity that is never indicated. No deep hidden character traits or complicated sub-plots are asked for; just a light brush to get the audience to accept the kidnapping; if the audience doesn't accept it, they can't become involved enough to care about what happens to the characters.

Burke's pacing is good, but the tone, helped along by John Mills Cockell's admirably eerie score, starts off on too high a plane, and so has very little space to build up suspense. His direction of action scenes is spotty, but he shows that he can, given the opportunity, create a milieu.

The low-budget film, and the genre film, both insist on establishing very definite and limited boundaries for the filmmakers. If they can stick to those areas and satisfy most of the type's requirements, they should be rewarded with positive box office results. Despite some extremities – a couple of shots of totally gratuitous violence in this case – Burke and Dalton have come up with a film that projects box office success.

**Stephen Chesley**

**Film Credit Abbreviations:** d.: Director. asst. d.: Assistant Director. sc.: Script. adapt.: Adaptation. dial.: Dialogue. ph.: Photography. sp. ph. eff.: Special Photographic Effects. ed.: Editor. sup. ed.: Supervising Editor. sd.: Sound. sd. ed.: Sound Editor. sd. rec.: Sound Recording. p. des.: Production Designer. a.d.: Art Director. set dec.: Set Decorator. m.: Music. m.d.: Music Director. cost.: Costumes. choreo.: Choreography. l.p.: Leading Players. exec. p.: Executive Producer. p.: Producer. assoc. p.: Associate Producer. p. sup.: Production Supervisor. p. man.: Production Manager. p.c.: Production Company. col.: Colour Process. dist.: Distributors.