

need for a master shot (a shot which covers all the action from a single position) because the editing of the film is almost pre-visualized.

Michel René Labelle (playing a Parisian student studying in New England) is likewise impressed by Thompson's on-set style. "He knows what he wants from the actors and, very often, he will go through the action himself. Consequently, I feel secure working with him." Michel René played Louis in Gilles Carle's *Fantastica* (scheduled for Canadian release in September). "Thompson's style is different from Carle's. Carle was more prone to construct his film around his actors' on-set personalities, while Thompson will work with you until your actions fit a preconceived notion."

This is not to say that there is no spontaneity on the set. According to

Michel René, Thompson decided to improvise whenever the dialogue sounded forced, sometimes doing two takes — the first scripted, the second completely improvised.

A large portion of the shooting is taking place at the Loyola campus of Concordia University, and McGill, while the stage sets are being filmed in a curling club Dal has refurbished as a studio. *Birthday* is being produced with the participation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation and Famous Players. The private placement of the film is being handled by Filmco Limited, a Winnipeg-based company. Theatrical release is scheduled for early 1981. We'll have to wait until then to see how successfully Thompson blends his brand of "characterization" with Dal's brand of marketing and shock effects.

Howard Goldberg

Melanie

p.c. Melanie Productions Inc. p. Simcom Ltd. : Peter Simpson exec. p. Richard Simpson d. Rex Bromfield sc. Robert Guza Jr. & Richard Paluck ph. Richard Ciupka p. design. Roy Forge Smith p. man. Gerry Arbeid sd. mix. Douglas Ganton ed. Brian Ravok 1st a.d. Ken Goch loc. man. Brian Ross pub. Pat Whittingham l.p. Glynnis O'Connor, Paul Sorvino, Burton Cummings, Trudy Young, Layne Coleman, Jamie Dick

an illiterate woman from the Ozarks (O'Connor) who sets out to find her young son and wayward husband in that mecca of the uprooted, Los Angeles. The vagaries of her quest lead her to the doorstep and bedroom of a down-on-his-luck rock musician (Cummings). By film's end, love and gold records bloom on the horizon as Melanie is reunited with her son, and the rock musician with success.

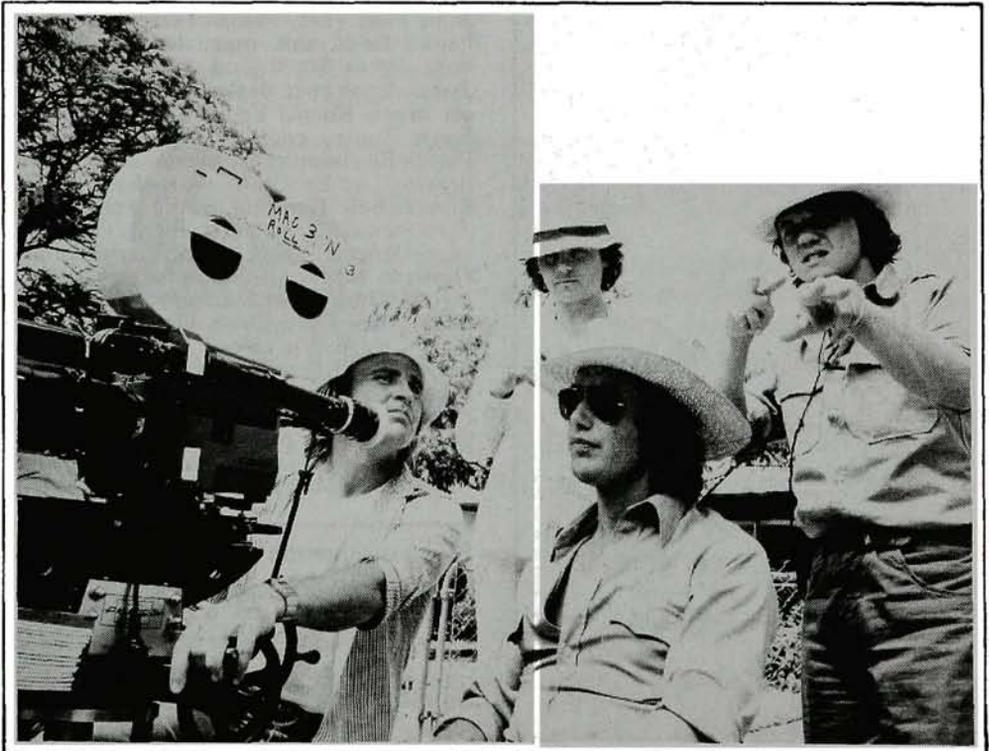
Time: 8 p.m., Tuesday, July 22, 1980
Place: Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles

"Hey, good-looking, buy me a bed?"
"Watcha got in your pants, beautiful?"
"Get me a drink at Carlos and Charlie's?"
"You have an Export A, eh?"

What's this, hiding in a parking lot off the Strip? A Canadian what? Film? What are you guys doing down here, eh? Exteriors? You mean, you want exteriors of Los Angeles for a Canadian film... Look, I know there are a lot of us Canucks down here, but L.A. still doesn't qualify as a Canadian location. Oh, the whole story is set in Los Angeles... and the Ozarks, too?... You sure this is a Canadian film?

Well, yes. At a time when film and television production south of the border was brought to a standstill by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) strike, *Melanie*, produced by Toronto-based Simcom Ltd., was busy lensing just down the street from SAG headquarters on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. The production was in town for a three-week stint after four weeks of shooting in Toronto.

Starring Glynnis O'Connor and Burton Cummings, *Melanie* relates the story of



Cats in their hats! Here, director Rex Bromfield (left rear), d.o.p. Richard Ciupka (right rear), camera operator Fred Guthe (far left), and focus-puller Andy Chmura (centre) on location with *Melanie*



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photo: Peter Riches

Ignoring the fact that illiteracy has never been a barrier to success in Hollywood, the story trades on Melanie's disorientation in the big city and her struggle for literacy, ergo dignity.

Third-time director Rex Bromfield (*Love at First Sight, Tulips*) shot most of the film's interiors in Toronto in June, with a section of the Toronto Zoo substituting for the Ozark Mountains (complete with a shack uprooted from the backwoods of Ontario), and a Toronto-area mansion filling in for Cummings' Beverly Hills hideaway. Then it was on to L.A. where Simcom's subsidiary, Simcom International, has its headquarters. Canadian production heads and seconds were supplemented by a non-union American film crew, the majority of Canadians not being members of any American-based union.

On this particular Tuesday night, aside from dodging SAG vigilantes, the production also had to cope with an eclectic mob of extras, keeping them happy with rich infusions of bagels and cream cheese. The extras, an assortment of blue-haired punkers, fag-hags and roller skaters, were to form the backdrop for Melanie's first brush with L.A.'s street scene. The only problem was that the affected weirdness of the extras could hardly compete with

the reality of Sunset Strip. But, compared to sedate Toronto...

With the extras and the bagels keeping low in a parking lot, Bromfield and director of photography (d.o.p.) Richard Ciupka had their hands full setting up the shot of Melanie's arrival in L.A. Looking like college kids inebriated by the Strip's smash-flash, the two crisscrossed the street trying to resolve a lens and lighting problem. The L.A. County Sheriff finally nipped their problem in the bud by booting the production off the street until midnight. A foul-up either by the production or the City Permits department struck the set.

Undaunted, the crew set up anew in the parking lot of Tower Records a few blocks away. The scene: Melanie, asking for directions, is nearly picked up by a stereotyped black pimp at the wheels of an uncharacteristic limousine. The scene behind the camera, though, had more local flavour as Tower customers and crew trucks vied for parking spaces, and an onslaught of passers-by pestered anyone with a clapboard for a bit part. L.A. being a city of extras, the crew demons-

trated unusual patience and uncharitable sarcasm as every John Doe unloaded his burden of missed casting calls. Amidst this gnawing of teeth arrived Glynnis O'Connor, looking every inch the transplanted country bumpkin. The scene was shot quickly, and then everyone trekked back to the parking lot to await the midnight hour and the final scene of the night.

Other scenes shot in L.A. included a live concert featuring Cummings, and interiors left over from the Toronto shoot. Even the Ontario backwoods shack ended up on the West Coast — no doubt travelling further than its occupants ever did. Shooting ended on schedule on July 28, sending everyone back north dreaming of margaritas and bagels. The word from the screening room so far indicates that the rushes are what everyone hoped for. The film is due to be released early next year, complete with that West Coast marketing stroke of genius, the tie-in album featuring original songs by Burton Cummings.

René Balcer

Gas

p.c. Filmlan International exec. p. Pierre David, Victor Solnicki p. Claude Héroux d. Les Rose sc. Richard Wolf original story Richard Wolf and Susan Scranton p. man. Roger Héroux d.o.p. René Verzier art. d. Carol Spier, Rose Marie McSherry (1st assist.) a.d. John Fretz (1st), Patrick Ferraro (2nd) ed. Patrick Dodd unit. man. Jean Savard (1st unit), James Arnett (2nd unit) stunt co-ord. James Arnett cost. design. Gaudeline Sauriol set dress. Ronald Fauteux, Patrice Bengle, Serge Bureau cont. France Boudreau sd. Patrick Rousseau prop. master Jean Bourret dresser Luc Le Fla Guais make-up Louise Rundel hair Constant Natale assist. cam. Jean-Jacques Gervais elec. Richer Francoeur, Jean-François Pouliot boom Thierry Hoffman construc. superv. Claude Simard spec. effects co-ord. Gary Zeller loc. man. Guy Trinque stills Pierre Dury, Denis Fugère casting d. Ginette d'Amico p. co-ord. Danielle Rohrbach gaf. Kevin O'Connell key grip François Dupère transp. captain Charles Toupin l.p. Sterling Hayden, Susan Anspach, Helen Shaver, Keith Knight, Donald Sutherland, Peter Aykroyd, Howie Mandel, Sandee Currie, Mike Hogan, Paul Kelman pub. Pierre Brousseau, Kay Gray

The production has used over 40 stunt vehicles, jumped a car over a moving train, and blown up a gas station. But today it's unexpectedly calm at the Canadian National Diesel Yards in Point St. Charles, on location with *Gas*. The crew works beside what looks like a rusting, 30-foot-high oil tank, but actually it's an elaborate plywood and cardboard prop constructed by the art department. Inside

the tank are five catcher cars, which will absorb the shock when a speeding tow truck crashes through the tank's cardboard cutaway during a stunt a few days from now. This morning's shooting is what director Les Rose likes to call "geography" — nothing intense, just getting people in and out of cars and doing the work that will set up the gags in this unusual comedy.

At the base of the tank, screen veteran Sterling Hayden and a newcomer, a peregrine falcon named Igor, work through a scene. The script calls for Hayden, and his pet predator to discover Hayden's son tampering with the oil tank containing hoarded gasoline; inadvertently, someone gives Igor's command to attack. Consequently, the bird soars into the sky after a helicopter, with the inevitable result — a pile of feathers tumbling down upon the dejected Hayden.

But right now, they're trying to get the falcon to fly straight up into the air. Igor's trainer, perched on an adjacent scaffolding, has tied fishing wire to his bird's claws so he won't fly far. Three cameras, one hand-held, stand ready to record the action. Crouched on one knee behind Sterling Hayden, poised to fire the blank gun that should send the falcon flying, is Les Rose. Fun jobs are a director's prerogative.

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