

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 Benge, 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 Trinqué 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.

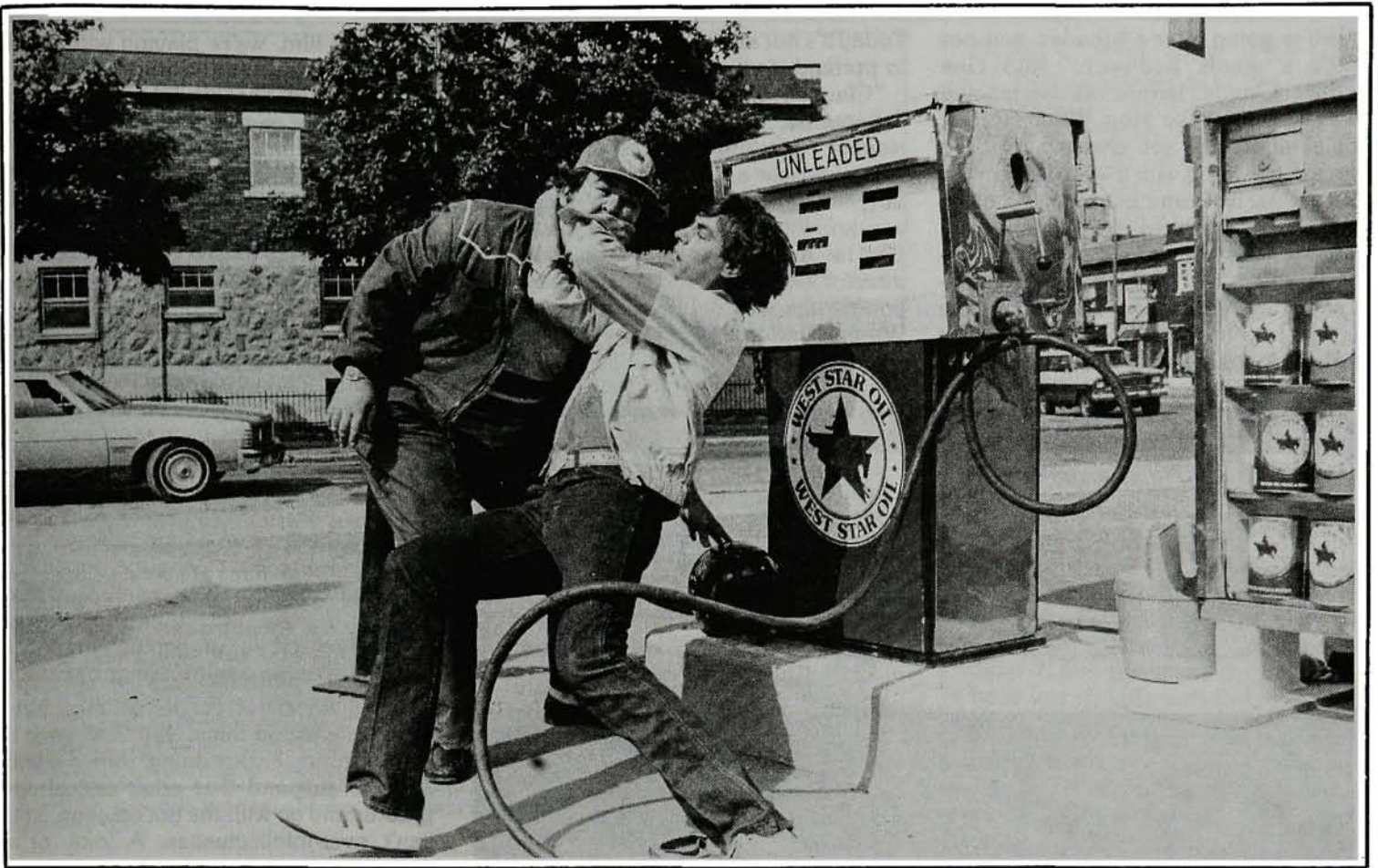
At the base of the tank, screen veteran Sterling Hayden and a newcomer, a peregrine falcon named Igor, work through a scene. The script calls for Hayden, and his pet predator to discover Hayden's son tampering with the oil tank containing hoarded gasoline; inadvertently, someone gives Igor's command 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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Keith Knight (left) and Peter Ackroyd, unleaded or otherwise, are really a Gas!

Rose calls for a take. They're shooting MOS (without sound) but most people stop grabbing anyway, to observe. Rose calls, "Action." Hayden delivers his lines. And off-camera, first assistant director John Fretz gives the falcon's command. Rose then pulls the trigger, and the expensively-trained falcon flutters awkwardly to its trainer's perch a few feet away.

"Oh, Jesus," mutters Sterling Hayden, laughing and walking away.
"Cut!"

The scene repeats itself three times, then Rose gets an idea. He fires three shots instead of one. The falcon darts up into the air. Rose consults director of photography René Verzier: they got it. Time to break for lunch.

A \$6 million Filmlan production, **Gas** concerns the gasoline shortage which produced long line-ups and short tempers at filling stations across the United States last year. Set somewhere in Southern California, sometime in the present, the screenplay features eight to ten principal characters. Sterling Hayden plays Baron Duke Stuyvesant, the millionaire owner of the West Star oil chain, who is hoarding gasoline to artificially drive up the prices.

Donald Sutherland plays a disc jockey flying a megaphone-equipped helicopter for radio station WREQ in search of the shortest gas line-ups. Susan Anspach portrays a television journalist, playfully patterned after Jane Fonda's character in **The China Syndrome**. In the gas lines, Keith Knight plays a surly service station

attendant, and Helen Shaver a hooker working the lines from her van. Sandee Currie plays the girl who accidentally discovers the hidden gasoline, Howie Mandel her love interest, and Peter Aykroyd her jealous brother, whose karate attacks usually inflict more damage on himself than on his adversaries.

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"We're going after a broader, and not strictly a youth, audience," says **Gas** producer Claude Héroux, who last teamed with Rose to make **Hog Wild**. Héroux ambles about the set, chatting with the director, clowning with the cast and crew, an amiable, welcome man. It's the ninth week of a twelve-week shoot, and everything appears to be going smoothly; the only problem has been the weather. Although they've run out of cover shots, the wettest July on record has not put the production a single day behind schedule.

Today it's hot and sunny, perfect weather to pretend it's California.

"Claude Héroux is the best producer in the country," says Les Rose with obvious respect. "He runs a class organization where people are treated well, with respect and dignity. He's such a nice guy, but you know he's tight when he has to be. But he always has a reason, so as a director you don't mind. He'll say, 'Do you mind if we don't wreck a car today? We can't afford it because we wrecked one last week.'

"In this film, we're playing with some pretty surreal ideas. Some may work, some may not. That bit with the falcon is a broad kind of gag. Claude is taking a big gamble."

Only his fourth feature film, Rose's work on **Gas** has been pleasing. "Because of Les, everyone is working well," says Sandee Currie. "He's always there for advice. He makes me feel comfortable, so I'm not afraid to ask questions. And he has a real knack for comedy." Adds Sterling Hayden, "He's interesting. Reminds me of Frankenheimer. Before that scene with the falcon, he told me, 'Just pretend he's your old drinking buddy.' And it worked!"

"This is a tremendous opportunity for me," says Rose, "because there are so many aspects of the medium involved. The big budget films are giving Canadian directors a chance to work on a much larger scale than before — work with huge crowds, stunts, special effects, animals." The difficulties of directing comedy have not yet intimidated him. "Sometimes you think, 'My God, what if it's not funny?' But doing comedy, you have to suspend that adult critical apparatus and go with the gut reaction. You can't over-intellectualize. A joke, or a poignant moment on the screen... if you take it apart intellectually, it falls like a house of cards. You have to *feel* it."

The 32-year-old, Saskatchewan-born director feels strongly about building an indigenous Canadian film industry. "Whatever the problems in Canadian film, they are not in front of the camera, or directly behind it.

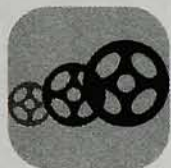
"No offense to my American colleagues, but Canadian talent is going to make this picture. Peter Aykroyd is just as brilliant as his brother, if not more. I think Sandee Currie is going to be really special in this film. And Keith Knight is a master of comedy, a real student of everything from Buster Keaton to The Three Stooges to The Marx Brothers."

Rose blames the executive producers for being neither courageous nor innovative enough. "**Hog Wild** was a well-done film, but it was cynically conceived, to make money. You can't fool an audience; if a picture is cynically conceived, they'll know it. The industry must start taking more risks. The riskiest thing right now is to continue copying other films, because we're never going to be a good B-industry."

And is **Gas** just another cynically conceived Canadian film?

"No. It's different. Different enough. It's a lot less cynical than most things I've done, and I've got to give the executive producers credit for that."

Bruce Malloch



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