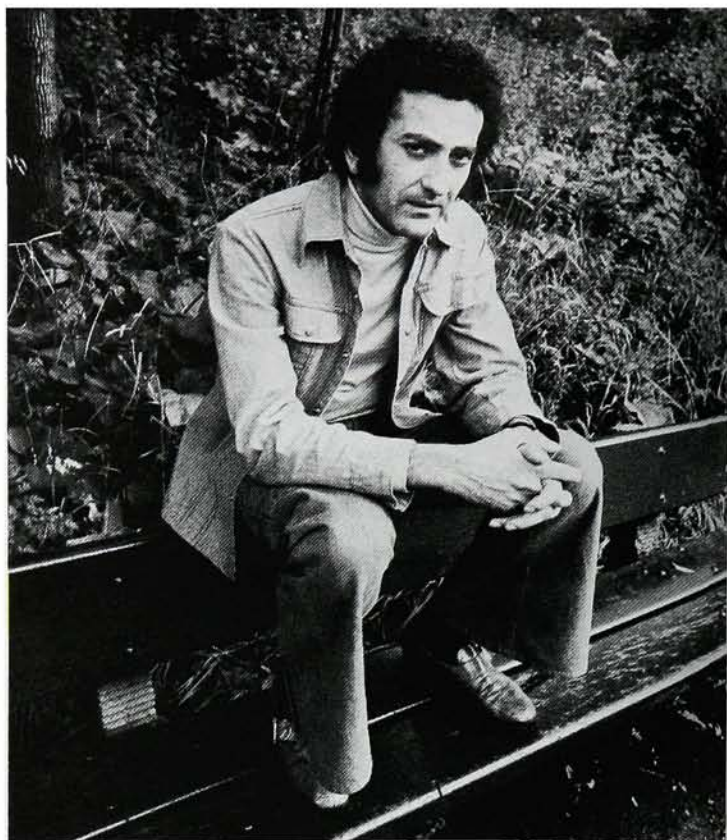


U-Turn director To Chase The Elusive George Kaczender

Produced and directed by George Kaczender, screenwriter: Douglas Bowie. Director of Photography: Miklos Lente CSC, music composed by Neil Chotem. Art director: Wolf Kroeger, sound mixer: Russ Heise. Starring David Selby, Maud Adams, Gay Rowan, William Osler, Diane Dewey, Mike Kirby, Robin Ward and George Robertson. Filmed with Panavision equipment in 35mm Eastmancolor, executive producer: DAL Productions. Distributed by Cinepix. Produced with CFDC assistance.

— George Csaba Koller



At 40, director George Kaczender looks like a young gypsy in his prime. A trim, athletic figure belies his age, as does his well-tanned, classically European face capped by thick, black curls and long sideburns. You almost expect to see a golden earring as his teeth flash with a smile, and his jet black eyes dart at you with the scrutiny of experience.

"I don't remember not wanting to be a filmmaker. I remember when I was a kid, right after the war, I was 11, and every day I sat in a movie house watching American movies. For a while we got them in 1948 and '49, until the communists came and banned them all. But for a few years this is all I did. Now I only remember Humphrey Bogart and the American musicals."

Today, he prefers Fellini to Busby Berkeley, and as he sits in a cafe on Montreal's Mountain Street, he ponders how anyone could not love Bergman, Antonioni, Resnais, and Truffaut. He recalls how he had studied at the Budapest film academy in the fifties, and after having graduated into the Hungarian film studio for his apprenticeship, being introduced to Fellini by accident.

"It was around 1955, at a time when no western film was permitted in Hungary. I was studying Italian at the Italian Institute and one day they screened *La Strada*, and that was a revelation! I was crying after the screening and decided that I must leave Hungary. And not just *La Strada*, 8-1/2 for me is just something extra special, you know, *the Bible*. But so is *Marienbad*, and so are Resnais' other films. And Bergman is an unbelievable genius. Hungarians always talk in superlatives. I either hate something, or love something. For me there is no middle way."

It was a full seventeen years ago that the revolution in his native land enabled Kaczender to flee. He wound up in Montreal, working at the National Film Board, doing a lot of editing at first, until his textbook English developed into today's conversational fluency. A slight, very charming accent still betrays his continental past (it helps him to raise money for films, investors think he's an eccentric genius) as does his European way of thinking.

"Often a director from another land is much more aware and perceives better what is typical of a culture than the natives. *U-Turn* is as Canadian as apple pie. Or maybe I should

have said maple syrup. It is an unmistakably Canadian film. It's not the kind of Canadiana that comes up in the National Film Board that drips of maple syrup, but it's a film about Canadian characters. It was shot in Canada by Canadians about the preoccupation of Canadian social problems. But they're also North American, since it's about the changing concept of marriage today. English Canadian films have to be much more universal in their theme, you know, than French Canadian films. They have to reach a larger public in order to be viable financially."

How did the immigrant editor at the NFB get into the position of being at the helm of a half-a-million dollar production called *U-Turn*, both as director and producer? He cut 85 films at the Board in his first five years there, then wrote and directed 12 more during the next seven. Perhaps his best known work during this period is *Phoebe*, a superbly sensitive look at teen-age pregnancy, which gleaned him rave reviews (the Montreal Star praised Kaczender for his "humor, understanding, and a fine eye for cinematic language," while Bob Blackburn called the film "a small gem of humane perception") and seven top awards from New York to Oberhausen. But he also claims credit for discovering Michael Sarrazin (*You're No Good*, 1965) and Michelle Magny (lately of *Taureau*, but starring in Kaczender's *Little White Crimes* from 1967).

In addition to making several award-winning documentaries, Kaczender specialized in writing and directing sympathetic studies of youth and sex, honing his talent for drama and sharpening his sensitivities for his first feature. "Artistically and technically the film is a small miracle," wrote Gerald Pratley of *Don't Let the Angels Fall* in *Cinema Canada*, 1969. It was the first Canadian feature film ever selected for competition at the Cannes film festival, and Pratley described the reaction of the audience there: "... its uncompromising, tragic, almost hopeless view of lost people in today's unsettled society left them in silent admiration."

Having achieved the ultimate at the Board, his own feature film, Kaczender left the same year with the distinguished producer John Kemeny (also a Hungarian of 1956 vintage) to set up International Cinemedia Centre and Minotaur Film Productions. As vice-president of these companies, he directed

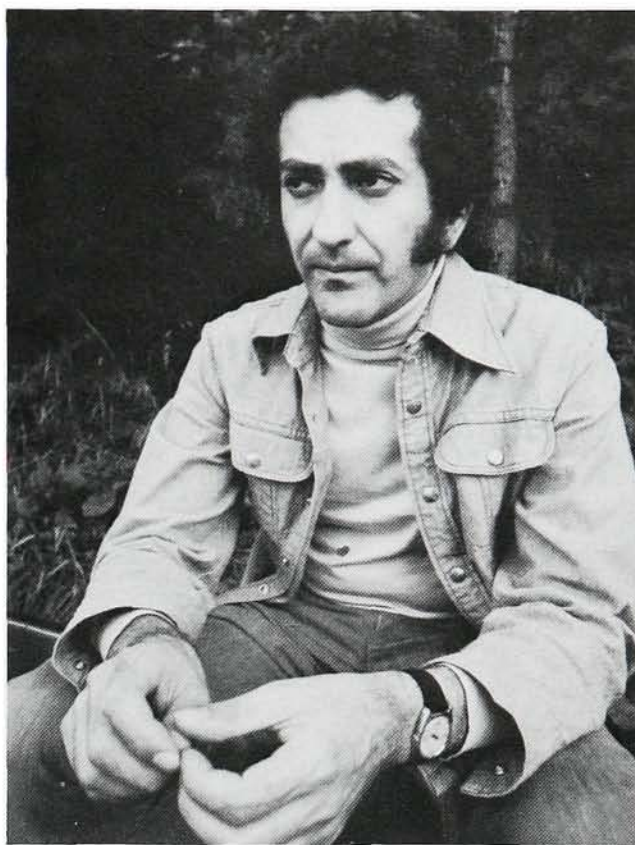
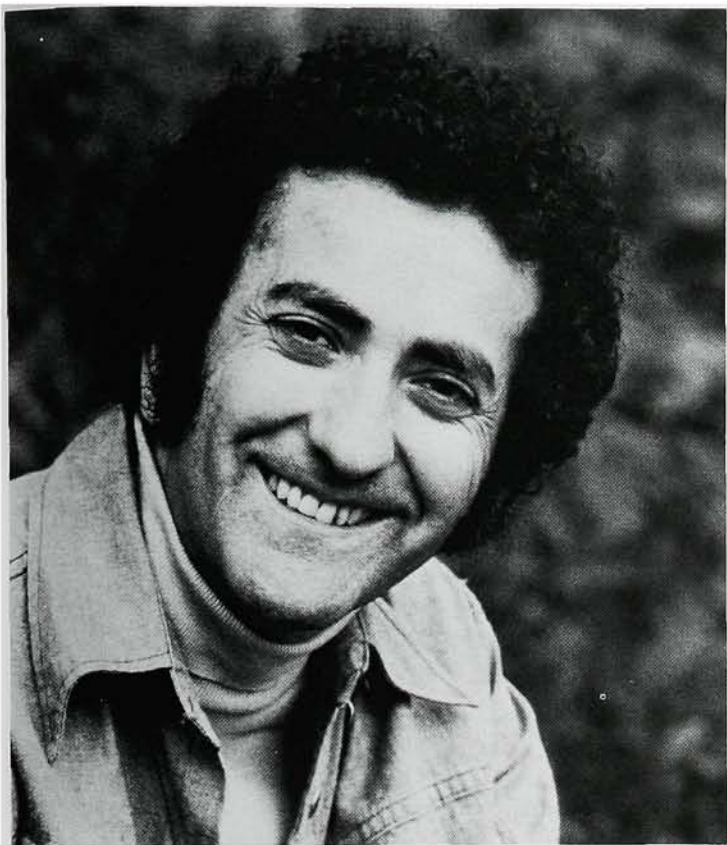


Photo: Baltazar/Koller

a number of educational shorts, including *Freud*, *Marxism*, and *Newton*. But Kemeny and Kaczender didn't always see eye to eye, in spite of their shared heritage.

"With due respect to John, who's a good businessman producer, we didn't agree on policy. He wanted to do films like *Seven Times a Day* which I loathed and told him I wasn't interested in doing it. So he hired Denis Héroux. Kemeny is too commercial in my opinion. I don't mean that I'm not commercial, but in a different way. I want to make a successful film, but I'm not commercially minded, you see. He has to be commercially minded, because he's a producer. I want to make a successful film so I can make another one, but I'm not a money grabber. I'm not, I can live without money."

From the very start, Kaczender was interested in doing only features, while Kemeny had other ideas. So the younger, more eager director showed the producer an outline for a picture called *U-Turn*. Kemeny didn't like it, so Kaczender sold him his shares in the companies and walked out. He founded George Kaczender Productions Ltd. in 1971 and started setting up the machinery which resulted in the release of *U-Turn* in August of this year to good reviews and audiences in Montreal, and more recently in Toronto.

But first came the arduous task of raising money, having a final script (by Doug Bowie) approved by the CFDC, and getting together a cast and a crew. Kaczender remembers over coffee on Mountain Street:

"After all those wonderful years and failures to set up a feature film I decided to do it alone. I didn't believe that anybody is as good a salesman as I am. I was confronted with the question of my career and my life and my future, so I set myself to it and hustled for a year and got the money together, quite a lot of money actually, from all kinds of sources (the Canadian Film Development Corporation, Bellevue-Pathé and Briston and Creative Films of Montreal, as well as private investors). And we had no personal security, actually, except my wife was working. And it took us eight months to write the script, you know, feature films don't get written overnight. We had about fifteen versions by the time we started shooting. And we still kept changing it every day on the set. Doug was also working with me as an assistant, but most of the time he

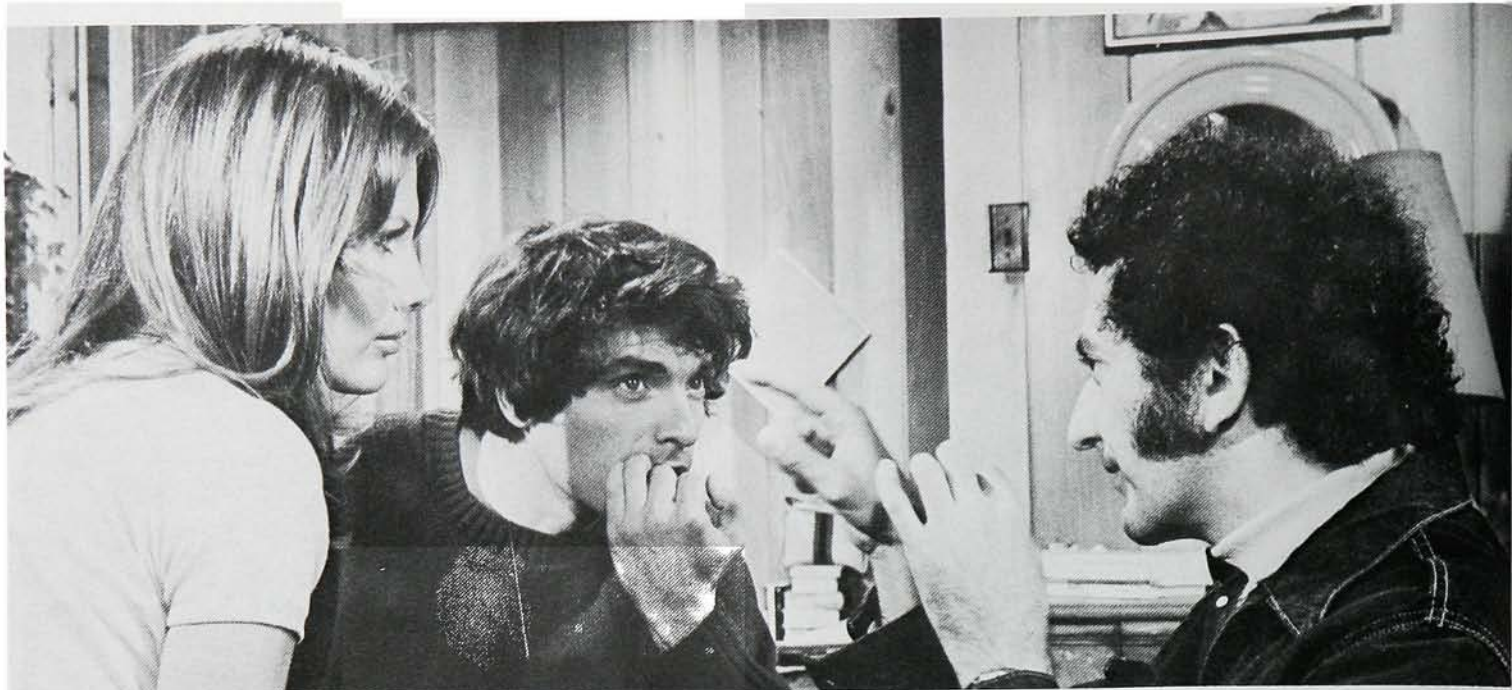
was re-writing."

The 'set' of *U-Turn* could have been any of the 30 different locations required by the script. The film was shot on a 7-1/2 week schedule during August and September of 1972. The first half of this production time took the cast and crew (forty-five speaking parts, dozens of extras, and a crew of thirty-five) to the Rideau Lakes area of Eastern Ontario, while the remainder of the picture was set at various locations in and around Montreal. Why couldn't some of the locations be faked?

"I was trying," continues Kaczender, with an exasperated sigh. "I was trying, but I couldn't find the right look, the right ambiance, the right life called for in the script. I had to find a quaint small town, which I couldn't locate anywhere except in Ontario. It had to look right for the story. We had to find a ferry landing, and actually we had to use two of them, because neither looked perfect. We had to build a ferry boat, the kind I was looking for just couldn't be found. So it took a lot out of us. It was very, very hard, in terms of Canadian filmmaking. It was a very large project and a very ambitious project from a technical point of view as well."

Another Hungarian, Miklos Lente CSC, was director of photography on *U-Turn*. The director has nothing but praise for his cameraman. Adjectives like "terrific," "involved," "conscientious," and "greatest" resound throughout the Montreal restaurant. "He's going to shoot my next feature as well. With Mike, I'm never disappointed when I look at the rushes." But Kaczender himself takes some of the credit for the pleasing visuals:

"I'm used to telling everybody what to do. I'm very graphically minded. I used to paint, by the way, when I was young. I have a very good visual sense, I think. It developed early, through painting. That is no problem. Shooting for me is the easiest thing. Getting the money is the most difficult thing, and for me editing is just lovely. I always edit all my films. I can't see why anybody would not want to cut his own film. I love editing, you know, it's so relaxed, and when you have everything in the rushes, it's just fabulous. I had an assistant (Helen Buschbaum) but the way I like working is what actually happened with *U-Turn*: shooting in late summer and editing in the winter, sitting and cutting in the winter."



Directing Maud Adams and David Selby

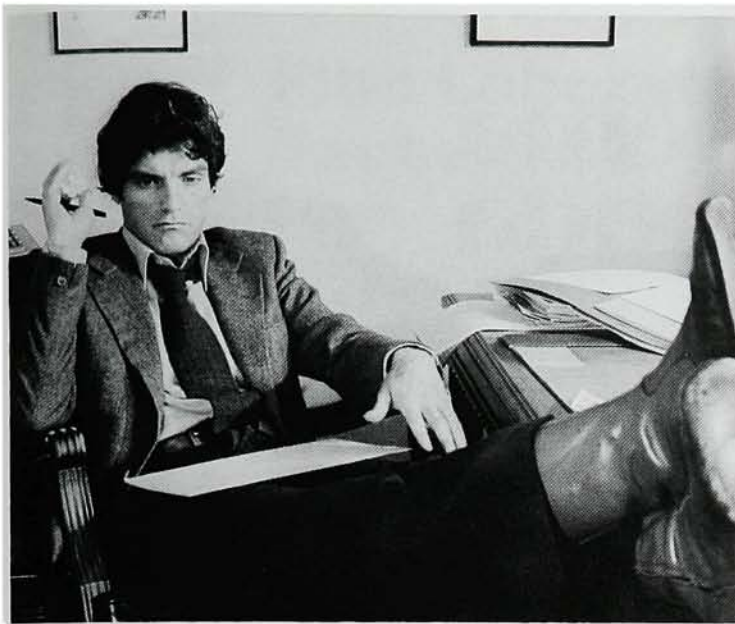
Maud Adams portraying the elusive and beautiful Paula



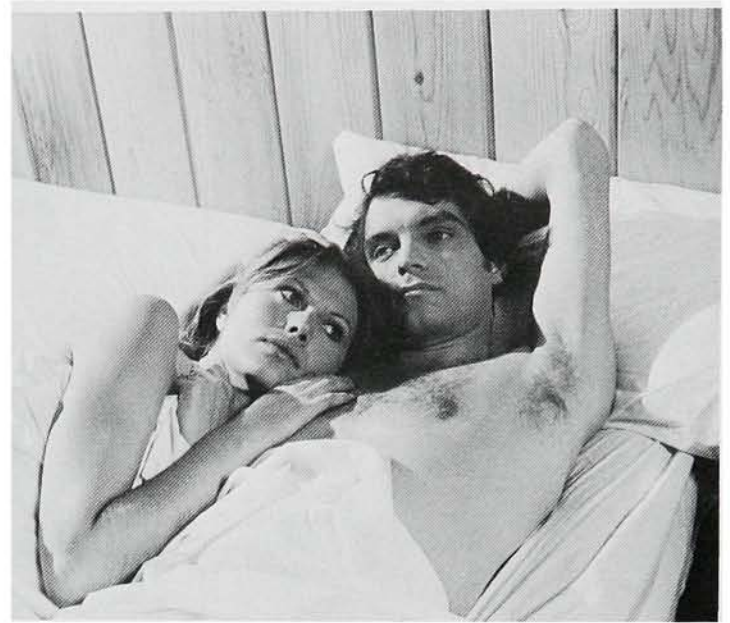
On location for "U-Turn"

Bonnie (Gay Rowan) and Scott (David Selby)





David Selby in his lawyer-office



What finally emerged from the snow-bound Montreal cutting room is, in Kaczender's words, "a romantic story, without being sentimental. It's sort of a semi-art movie. It's too intelligent to be an outrageously commercial film, and it's not high brow enough to be an Antonioni film. It's the kind of movie, like *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, that has the potential to become a successful film. You know, one of those sleepers that comes out by word of mouth and develops into a big success."

Box office grosses seem to collaborate the director's wishful thoughts. The film played for months at Montreal's 800-seat Avenue theatre to good-sized audiences, and is presently in its third week at Toronto's York 2 cinema. It was well-received at the Berlin film festival earlier this year, where it was Canada's official entry, along with Don Shebib's *Between Friends*. Not that the critics are all unanimous in their praise of *U-Turn*: "The pursuit of an elusive dream is dragged out tediously in the film *U-Turn*," complained the *Toronto Star*, but even that less-than-enthusiastic reviewer had to admit that "the incredible script is salvaged somewhat by George Kaczender's direction." In all fairness, the German critics loved the picture ("A great film!" "A beautiful, lovable film") and even *Time* magazine called Kaczender "an obviously talented director."

Indeed, the man, by this time in another place, another time 2 months later in the Toronto apartment of yet another pair of Hungarian-born Canadians (who happen to publish a film magazine) can speak for himself very well:

"My film isn't actually a romantic movie. The story on an obvious level is romantic, true. But the sub-themes in the film, like the problems of marriage, the changing ideas of marriage, and the relationships between men and women today, these are very contemporary ideas, and lacking a romantic content. The subject of the film is really the pursuit of an ideal and also a character study of a man who is using the search as an excuse to find himself, to be able to make a decision, whether or not to get married, whether or not to get out of corporate law and write a book. That is what the theme of the film is about and not just his romantic longing for this girl.

"Probably the difference between my way of thinking and Don Shebib's cynical approach is that Shebib may be cynical about Canada and he acts it out in his movies, but what I try to do in life is not to be a cynic, and what I do in my films is to counteract that kind of cynicism. What's important in life is the act itself and not necessarily the result — this is sort of existentialist thinking. Therefore, for me the fact that the hero of *U-Turn* set out to do something that people often just consider but don't act upon is very important. And it's very difficult not to be a cynic.

"I'm not trying to suggest, don't misunderstand me, that Shebib is not doing what he should be doing. This would be

ridiculous. It's just that I'm counteracting with what I think is reality and by trying to make the hero act accordingly. The actions of his heroes are half-assed actions, they always get caught in the action and ruin themselves in the end.

"You have to see *U-Turn* two or three times to get all the little nuances. If you look for them the first time around, they will cost you the real meaning of the film. If you see it only once, what you get is the story, it sucks you in and you don't pay attention to every little detail. Then you go back and see all these small things come alive and they put the film into a different light altogether. They add another dimension to it, and make it work on a different level. I wish everyone saw it twice."

At this Kaczender breaks into good-natured laughter. Perhaps he realizes that what he's advocating is that audiences should actually make u-turns to see *U-Turn* again and again. Or perhaps, just for a brief moment, he might have had a cynical thought. But his mind is always working, and he mentions that he has to rush off to gauge the reaction of the Toronto audience to his film. One last question, however, about his next project.

"I'm working on a script now that's about corruption. It's a political allegory acted out by children. Fourteen corrupt kids. Actually it's not a new idea. I had this idea five years ago, based on an *Esquire* article called *Microboppers*. I'm calling the film *Micro Blues*. Doug Bowie and I wrote the first draft of the script before *U-Turn* was shot, while waiting for the money to come through. And we are now in the process of completing it, and I hope to shoot in February. The budget isn't too high, it's around \$400 thousand, but I haven't worked it out yet."

So it seems that in the true spirit of the cyclical nature of things, for George Kaczender the merry-go-round is about to start again. More accurately, it has never stopped. The cycle of idea, treatment, script, fundraising, production, editing, distribution, promotion is going into high gear. Working 24 hour days, seven each week, no weekends, no holidays, administrative hassles, distribution problems, promotion tours, is catching up with him. He's looking for a partner now, since he finds it very hard to cope alone. All he does in his spare time is see movies and tries to read as much as he can, but finds very little time for even that. For him there is only cinema ("It's in my blood, you know") and loving his wife. But even that is partially work, since all his experiences become part of his filmmaking. And what about hustling, selling his own movies?

"I did some hustling in Berlin, but that was embarrassing enough. Praising my own movies as a director, it's very difficult, you know. I don't know how anybody can go on doing it. I felt like a gypsy." ●

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As part of our constant efforts to keep the Canadian film industry supplied with the best of talent, Frederik Harwood-Manter has left *Cinema Canada* to become Director of the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre. He will be replacing David Tompkins who's taking a leave of absence to produce our West Coast correspondent Peter Bryant's first feature, and afterwards to open a Vancouver branch of the Distribution Centre.

Other former *Cinema Canada* regulars to make it big in the ever-frantic Big Beaver Race out there include Phil McPhedran, now working the CBC Anthology series after AD-ing four features; Harris Kirshenbaum freelancing for *Canadian Film Digest* ever since his triumphant return from Morocco and points farther out; Kathryn Wing, still studying photography and practising it on the *Shakespeare Murders*, promoting the film *Only God Knows*; Granada Gazelle divine-ing it up on the cover of *File*; Jill Scott working her way through life at York University; Chuck Cassidy still enmeshed in the grueling world of Canadian publishing; Walter Dmytrenko trying to run *The Rock on Toad Lane* single-handed (with a little help from ...) while keeping Anansi humming on time; John Williams once again riding his ten-speed to work at graphics designs; John Dzus, now a freshman at university and enjoying it; Robin Jones having moved Spadina Copy up to Dupont without changing the name; Louise Chenier completing a film on artist David Rabinowitch at Ryerson; Leone Pippard observing whales for the whole summer on the East Coast and going back next year; and Michael Clancy - who drew the cover for issue number eight - illustrating away for *Toronto Life* magazine. Not to mention those who are still very much with us, Natalie Edwards reviewing for *Toronto Citizen*; David Beard, who started his book reviews in *Cinema Canada*, branching out into most of the other similarly oriented publications; Chuck Lapp, now our Maritimes correspondent as well as Co-ordinator of the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-operative; Kirwan Cox, who is Executive Director of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers; Sandra Gathercole who has become the Co-ordinator of the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op; Laurinda Hartt who also worked on *Shakespeare Murders*; Marie Dawson who graduated from *Petroleum* to *Shoe and Leather* as assistant editor at Southam Publications; Rick Eppstadt who is deluged by freelance offers for design and layout; and Michelle Moses who is now in Scotland doing research for a feature film script. We love them all and wish them continued success.

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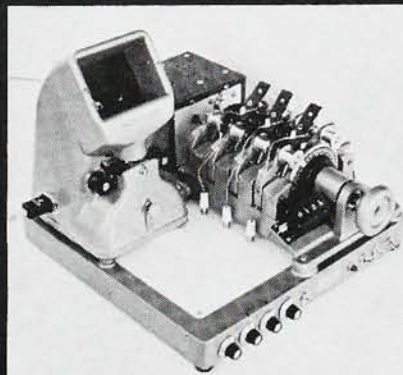
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