

Shooting a Coke Czar

Vans full of people pull up at executive producer Bernard Zuckerman's house (creator of CBC's *The Journal*) in Toronto for a party. The rugs are pulled back for an interior shoot of *And Then You Die*, a two-hour CBC drama to be telecast this month. It's a birthday party for Eddie Griffin, cocaine czar of Montreal's West End.

"This is our last day of shooting, we're in our last hours of this film and we're exhilarated by what we're seeing on the screen," says producer Brian McKenna, documentarian for *The Fifth Estate*.

The television drama was "shot like a movie" by director of photography Richard Leiterman, whose credits range from *Goin' Down The Road to My American Cousin*. While the exteriors are set in Montreal, the interiors are in Toronto, "for financial reasons."

"It's a big movie that we've made," says director Francis Mankiewicz, whose 1978 feature film *Les Bons Débarras* won eight Genie awards. "It was 26 days for a film that has an enormous number of locations, night shooting and day shooting, a lot of complex scenes, stunts and special effects."

Actor Kenneth Welsh, who won an ACTRA award for his performance in CBC television's *Empire, Inc.*, leans against the wall chanting with his eyes closed. He plays Eddie Griffin, a character based on the first Irish-Canadian gangster to make millions in illegal soft drugs.

R.H. Thompson, who played the title role in the award-winning CBC television film *Charlie Grant's War*, co-stars

with Welsh, but the two men never meet in the film. By this time, Thompson has put detective sergeant James McGrath behind him, to get on with live theatre in Toronto. McGrath, one of the few English Canadians on the Montreal Police Force, is obsessed by Griffin and tirelessly pursues the gangster.

And Then You Die isn't meant to be a police story as we know them. "In a sense it's a piece of reporting as well as, we hope, drama that's going to grab people by the throat and hold them to the end," says McKenna. Zuckerman and McKenna set out to produce something more realistic than *The Godfather*. For six months, a researcher recorded his observations while immersed in Montreal's criminal sub-culture.

McKenna explains. "We've researched every scene in detail. As you might not have seen on the CBC before, this is the way someone dies when they're shot. There's a certain kind of bloodspill, and they fall in a certain way, and we've got that right."

The story is told from the criminal's point of view. "It's based on a real guy, but I can't emphasize enough that it's fiction." The script was written by journalist Wayne Grigsby and playwright Alun Hibbert.

"I think if we get the story right and capture the way these guys operate, then when the gangsters see it they're going to say we got it right. In the same way, Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather* was celebrated by the mafia themselves because they enjoyed the way he got it right," McKenna finishes.

Francis Mankiewicz is a director whose reputation is built on "his ability to capture the way people relate and express themselves." He "insists every detail be right." Mankiewicz says, "What we've tried to do is not so much develop a character in Eddie Griffin that would seduce the audience by his appealing qualities, but a character

faithful enough to what he is fundamentally, and interesting enough for an audience to want to watch him."

Kenneth Welsh describes Griffin as a child and his job as partly play-acting. "Griffin is still a boy at heart and he behaves like one. I remember doing this as a kid. As an actor playing it, it was very much cops and robbers. Like the scene where I get shot myself. 'Bang' and you have to fall. These little charges with the blood in them explode on your chest, you fall back against the wall, then you fall on the floor holding your breath. It's action-filled cops and robbers and everybody likes to watch it."

If Welsh sees it as a game, that's exactly what Zuckerman and McKenna had in mind. "My sense of guys who operate in this kind of world is that it's an incredible game, they really get a charge from living on the edge. When they talk to one another and you listen to the wire taps and you hear them talk in the bars, it's a banter, but below there's this lethal subtext always running. And so, in our movie, you have a sense of these characters playing this game with one another," says McKenna, who has "kept his ear to the ground" for years, hoping to tell the story one day.

McKenna takes time to thank everyone individually before leaving for his home in Montreal. When all the cables are moved and the carpets back in place, Bernie Zuckerman hosts a party for an exhausted but exhilarated crew. "People have a stereotyped idea of what the CBC should be doing," says Zuckerman. "It's the image that it's a movie about prairies and a spinster."

"After 12 years, hundreds of different stories, different parts of the world, you get a fix on reality, you don't just hang around with other show business people, caught in a circle, feeding off each other's stories. You're in real situations with real people," Zuckerman concludes.

Stephanie Gould •

Prostitutes Pimps and Others

The last shoot of Motion Canada Media Productions' first feature-length film, *Platinum*, takes place at the Raceway Tavern, Ottawa's oldest established hooker bar. The bar is home to scores of prostitutes, pimps, and other assorted unsavories. The air is dense with smoke and smells of stale beer. A few new Christmas decorations have just been added to pep up the leftovers from last year. The camera crew and sound man are trying to clear an area for the evening's shoot.

The regular clientele are somewhat disturbed by all the activity but as the evening wears on, take after take, they begin to accept the crew. Peter Evanchuck, co-producer and director of *Platinum*, is trying to capture Paul Henry - King of the Ottawa City Cow-boys and resident entertainer in the Raceway - singing his title song, *America Bleeds*, on his last few feet of film. Well into the second take, some of the local patrons, pimps, and prostitutes want a part in the action.

"Why not?" Evanchuck says. "One of the premises of the film is that I use people on location who I have known for a short or long time, including my mother." This night Evanchuck has managed to find parts for a pimp, several prostitutes, and myself.

"I see the movie, in some ways, as a moving, extended family album," Evanchuck explains during a short pause in the action. He goes on to say that the film is, in his mind, "... about two notches above a home movie. It's a mixture of John Waters' movies and *Liquid Sky*."

The film has been shot in locations from Niagara Falls to St. John's, and from New York to Key West. The producers have used bars, hotels, busy southern streets, and people's homes for on-scene locations.

"We tried to use locations that both Kiki (co-producer Kiki Sarda) and I were familiar with, and which the movie-goer might easily identify with. We may have shot a scene where a lot of viewers live, or have caught some viewers on camera walking down the street. We wanted to use all natural or living locations as opposed to studio space."

Kiki Sarda, co-producer and editor, agrees with Evanchuck but adds, "In our film, there were also budget constraints. With the exception of a \$10,000 grant from the Canada Council, Peter and I have put up all the money ourselves. It's very difficult when you are trying to produce a major feature film on a limited budget." Recently, however, Motion Canada Media and Los Angeles-based Transcontinental Pictures Industries signed a completion funding-distribution deal, through the film's busi-

• Richard Leiterman and Francis Mankiewicz shooting *And Then You Die*

