

A Land of Milk and Honey

Rush hour in Toronto is announced by the restless crowds pouring into the St. Clair East subway station. It's five o'clock and office workers impatiently make their way home to enjoy the last rays of sun on this unseasonably warm April day. For the cast and crew of Peter O'Brian's Independent Pictures' latest production, **Milk and Honey**, however, the day is just approaching the halfway mark.

Before breaking for lunch, co-directors and husband-and-wife team Glen Salzman and Rebecca Yates decide to work over one more scene. Glen walks over to cinematographer Guy Dufaux, (**Decline of the American Empire, Pouvoir Intime, Equinoxe**) and discusses the mood he wishes to create in the scene while Rebecca speaks with actors Josette Simon (Royal Shakespeare Company, England) and Lyman Ward (**Ferris Bueller's Day Off**). There is only minimal consultation between the directors before they move to organize the activity on the set.

In a few minutes Salzman's soft voice calls for quiet and Simon and Ward play out a chase scene through the subway. Once, twice, three times before Glen and Rebecca look around at their tired crew and decide to break for the next hour.

The 50-odd cast and crew members make their way to a secluded, grassy corner to enjoy the midday meal set out for them picnic-style. The buzz of traffic on St. Clair Avenue, only blocks away, is just barely audible in the background as Glen and Rebecca begin to discuss their working relationship.

They have been collaborating together for 12 years now, since making their first film at York University's film school. Always working as a team, they went on to co-produce and co-direct short, dramatic films including **Reaching Out, Introducing...Janet**, and

Jen's Place. Rare as directing teams are in the film industry, both agree that this method of collaboration is the most productive for them. Glen is quick to add that they will continue to work together in the future. Rebecca concedes, "When there are two people involved you have to prepare very astutely so we do a lot of rehearsal and talking through with the actors. This way we make sure that there isn't a great deal that can go wrong on the set."

Milk and Honey is a project they began developing in 1983. The story focuses on a young Jamaican woman, Joanna Bell, played by Josette Simon, who immigrates to Canada, the land of milk and honey. In search of a better life, she temporarily leaves her eight-year-old son behind. After finding work as a domestic in a rich Toronto household, Joanna brings her son over for a visit only to discover that she can't part with him again. In her battle to keep her son, she becomes a criminal fighting the Canadian immigration system.

The story was inspired by a woman Glen and Rebecca knew who left her own children in Jamaica with hopes of later bringing them to Canada after building a good life for them here. Glen started to write her story down but after numerous revisions with another Canadian writer decided that a West Indian perspective was needed. Jamaican playwright Trevor Rhone (**The Harder They Come, Old Story Time, and Two Can Play**) became a co-writer with Glen and brought this perspective. After a nine-month writing stint in Kingston, Jamaica, a working script emerged. Glen smiles when recalling writing the screenplay with Trevor. "It was a good process. Sometimes it had its ups and downs since we wrote every day for five or six weeks at a time and always together in this small studio apartment. We didn't each work on our own and then bring in what we had. It couldn't work that way for us."

Although **Milk and Honey** touches on the social issue of immigration, it attempts to be more far-reaching. "It is a universal story about human values. About people leaving their kids in search of a better life for themselves and for those kinds," says Glen.

It was this humanist element that appealed to the people at Robert Redford's

Sundance Institute, probably the most influential film development centre in the United States outside of Hollywood. On the basis of Glen and Trevor's script, Glen and Rebecca were invited to participate in a month-long intensive film workshop last summer in Utah. They were one of the seven filmmaking teams from around the United States, Europe and Japan and the first Canadian project ever undertaken by Sundance.

Rebecca remembers Sundance as "an extraordinary experience" that has greatly influenced both her own and Glen's working techniques on this project. Run by the top names in the North American film industry she adds that the most positive element of the workshop was "the open spirit with which everyone worked, no matter who they were. You had the best people in the industry giving their time here and it wasn't to advance themselves but to really work together for everyone's benefit in a giving spirit."

Sundance played a large role in getting **Milk and Honey** into production as in order to procure funding from the Ontario Film Development Corp. to attend the workshop the project needed a prospective producer. Here Peter O'Brian (**The Grey Fox, My American Cousin, and John and the Missus**) stepped in. Glen and Rebecca had presented him with the script in the spring of '86. Although O'Brian was impressed by the "really tight, and well-constructed screenplay which had a great deal of integrity," he was tied up making **John and the Missus** and couldn't commit himself to producing **Milk and Honey** at that time. This commitment came however, when Glen and Rebecca were invited to attend the Sundance workshop last June.

Almost a year after completing the program, the Sundance people continue to offer fresh insights for Glen and Rebecca's project, keeping in close contact via telephone. Judging from the husband-and-wife team's mutual optimism about the time spent in Utah, **Milk and Honey** promises to be a positive experience for Canadian moviegoers when it is released later this year.

Lorena Bekar •

A Canadian Kennedy

With only a quick glance, busy commuters would pass by the old Canadian Tire warehouse assuming it is still stacked to the ceiling with fishing rods, paint and car parts.

But open the door to the warehouse and walk around for five minutes and you soon realize it's a world away from sporting goods and exhaust pipes.

In fact, it's Washington in the Kennedy era with duplicates of the Justice department offices of Bobby Kennedy, and J. Edgar Hoover. Down the hall is an exacting replica of the oval office of John F. Kennedy.

Toronto-based Sunrise Films Limited has set up shop to film the \$8 million television mini-series **Hoover vs the Kennedys: The Second Civil War** to air on the U.S. group of independent television stations making up Operation Prime Time.

On the set Canadian actor Nicholas Campbell sits behind a massive wooden desk in his role as U.S. Attorney-General Robert Kennedy. Banks of telephones and teletype machines, stacks of files, a fireplace graced by a prize Marlin mounted over top, wood panelled walls, paintings and photographs recreate the era. Total spending on sets is about \$750,000.

Campbell, in a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, portrays Kennedy with a more than credible New England accent.

Along with producer Paul Saltzman of Sunrise, Americans Daniel Selznick and Joel Glickman are executive-producers of the miniseries.

Saltzman says it will be an accurate portrayal of J. Edgar Hoover and his power struggle with the Kennedys, promising it will be more courageous than other efforts on the subject. He says it will touch on the sexual affairs of Bobby and JFK and the manipulation used by Hoover.

Selznick, in a press release, says "We will bring to light previously untold facts about Hoover as well as the Kennedys, that were uncovered while researching **Blood Feud**."

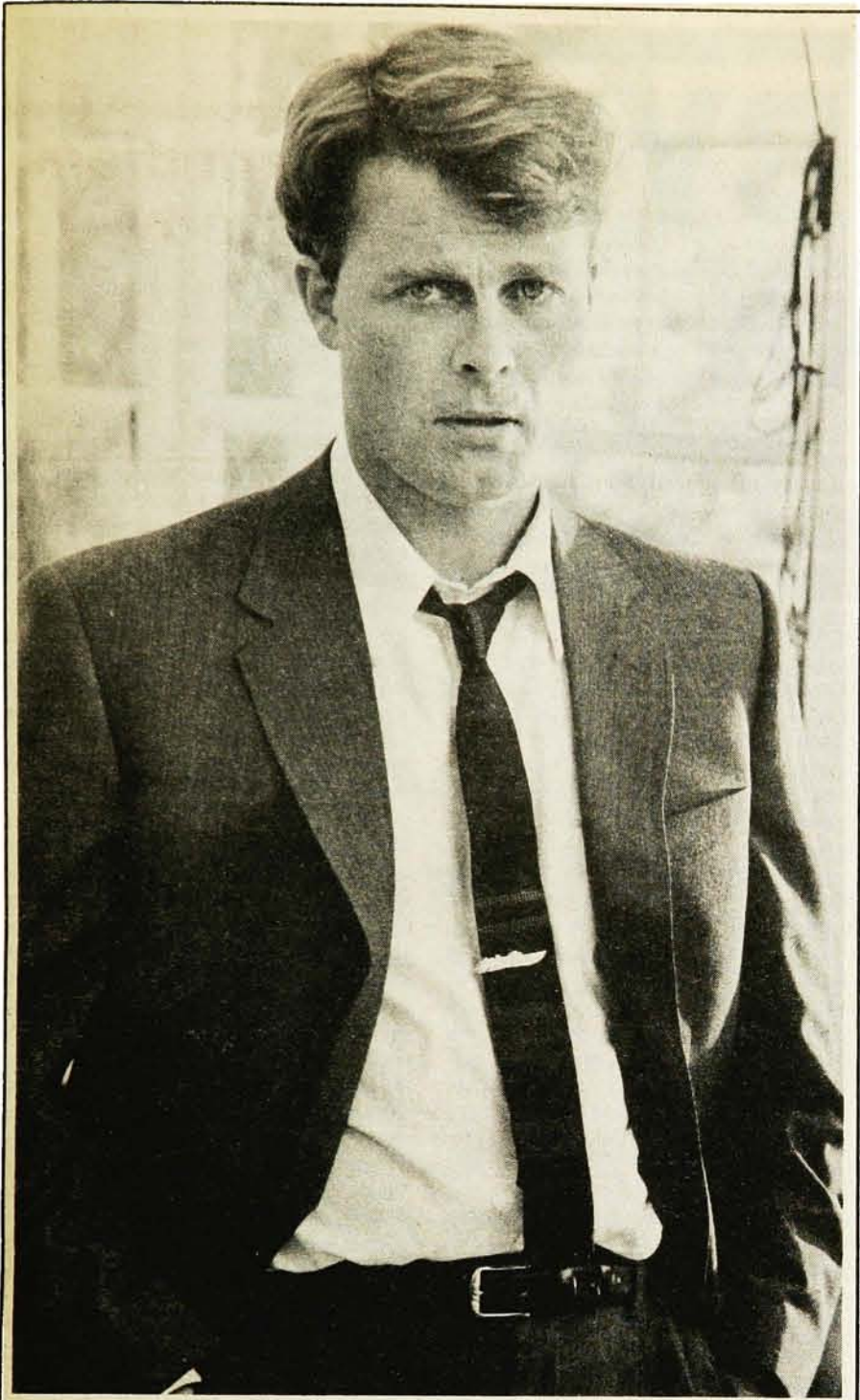
Selznick/Glickman Productions made the 1983 **Blood Feud** for Operation Prime Time. The Emmy award winning story portrayed the battle between Robert Kennedy and teamster union president, Jimmy Hoffa.

In an interview with *Cinema Canada*, the 34-year-old Campbell says he didn't know that much about Bobby Kennedy when he first landed the role, but added he took the time to complete extensive research of the part.

Campbell says Hoover, who was FBI director for more than 36 years, and Bobby Kennedy were at odds throughout their whole time in Washington.

• Cinematographer Guy Dufaux measures the light for a shot of **Milk and Honey**





• Nicholas Campbell in a business opportunity as Robert Kennedy

"The Kennedys, especially Bobby, pissed off a lot of people...Bobby thought he was being politically astute and doing the right thing, but he had no idea what he was actually doing," he explains.

"I think after his brother died he went through a tremendous metamorphosis. He started to realize that he couldn't just do the safe thing or the right thing politically. He had to analyze things more from a personal view and that's when he became this folk hero."

Asked about working on an American story being shot in Canada, Campbell replied that it really boils down to a business opportunity.

Campbell said he is completely opposed to Canada content regulations that he describes as holding back the development of "decent" quality Canadian productions.

"I think we really handcuff ourselves with that," he explained during a break from filming.

He says just because **Hoover vs the Kennedys: The Second Civil War** is about the Kennedys doesn't mean it doesn't have Canadian content. Campbell says it is written by a Canadian (Lionel E. Siegel) and is being "produced by one of our prominent up and coming

producers.

"This is definitely a Canadian production as well as an American one. I don't know that there should be a difference between Canadian actors or Canadian stories or American actors or American stories. I don't think it really matters.

"I consider myself an actor, not a Canadian actor," Campbell explained.

Despite Canadian content regulations Canadian producers and actors face as difficult a task as always, he added.

Campbell praised the organization of the production, the script and directing and added that he is really pleased when he looks back on the day's work.

"I don't think that Bobby has ever been portrayed as clearly as he is in this script."

Rod Steiger was originally cast as Hoover, but was forced to withdraw with Jack Warden now taking his place. Heather Thomas plays Marilyn Monroe. Robert Pine will play John F. Kennedy with LeLand Gantt as Martin Luther King Jr. and Barry Morse as Joseph Kennedy. Michael O'Herlihy is director.

The production wraps the week of July 7 with the mini-series scheduled to air on Operation Prime Time in November 1987.

Attracting Attention

The scene is the Music Gallery Room, Hart House, University of Toronto. Streamers and lanterns create a party atmosphere. A few couples are slowly dancing around the room, while others are sipping punch in clear plastic cups. At the back, seated on folding chairs, three young girls giggle self-consciously. A feeling of anticipation and fraternity permeates the air. It all seems so real...yet, there is no music and a closer look reveals a single camera, a dolly, scaffolding and film lights.

We are on the set of **Sandor**. The scene in progress is a parish hall dance involving the two main characters, Sandor (Paul Babiak) and Sally (Christina Holditch) as well as some 60 extras. It is intended to be a romantic boy-meets-girls scene and will last a minute or so.

In a corner, crouching against the wall, the director Aaron Shuster surveys the scene, a look of intense concentration and pent-up energy on his face.

Suddenly, breaking the magic spell, Ron Hewitt, the assistant-director, strolls to the middle of the room and starts rounding up the extras in a loud voice. "O.K., can I have your attention. We're going to shoot the dance sequence. But we need more couples, don't be shy ladies, find yourself a partner."

Beside me, a young girl dressed up in her party best, eagerly scans the room...as per usual there are more women than men. Looking disappointed she sits back and proceeds to check her make-up in a pocket mirror. In answer to my question, she tells me that most of the extras are friends of the director. Then pointing to an older man who is trying to round up more dancers, she informs me that he is Shuster's father. Near the window, there is his mother and over there on the dance floor, his sister. Everybody is pitching in.

As the evening progresses, the dancers' faces become blurred with fatigue...like in real life, some have taken off their shoes, others chat quietly sprawled out on the sofas around the room.

Everyone I've spoken to has expressed admiration for the crew and enthusiasm for the project.

"Aaron is a genius," says Babiak (Sandor), the production's only professional actor. "He's managed to reconcile me with a profession I was about to abandon. Directors like that are hard to come by."

Sandor will be a film about alienation. The story of a young Hungarian immigrant, recently arrived in Canada, who is struggling to adjust to a new culture and way of life. The film, seen through the eyes of Sandor will consist of a series of flashbacks. And through it will be essentially a psychological portrait, the production is filled with scenes of action, drama, romance and sex.

Sandor will have a total of seven scenes and will be 10 minutes long.

Written and directed by Aaron Shuster, this mini-film is neither the product of a short attention span nor of a lack of imagination but rather an unusual solution to a common problem: lack of funds. The idea came to Shuster after unsuccessfully trying to raise the money for a full-fledged project entitled **The Summer I Went to the Moon**.

Sandor is his attempt to prove that he has both the talent and the knowledge to direct a feature-length film.

"Each scene encapsulates a different film style while maintaining continuity," he says. "It is my way of showing what I can do, with a shoestring budget."

The son of a film studies teacher, Shuster developed an interest in film at a very early age. He made his first movie with a super-eight camera when he was 10 years old and since then his love of film has never waned. Prior to **Sandor**, he wrote and directed a short film entitled **Barbara** based on a story by Herman Melville, which was shown at the Montreal Festival du nouveau cinema et video and received a creative writing award.

Sandor is a tribute to determination and teamwork. It is a small project with big ambitions. The film has a budget of around \$50,000, part of which is a grant from the Ontario Arts Council. Most of the crew, particularly Ron Hewitt (assistant director), Marty McNally (camera) and Steve Tsushima (lighting) are friends of Shuster's who previously worked with him on **Barbara**. But though **Sandor** already has a slew of fans in Shuster's friends and family, what it needs is to attract attention on a wider scale.

And in the end, who knows, with **Sandor** to his credit, perhaps Shuster will have acquired that elusive 'track record' which often seems to be more important than talent to the powers that be, both public and private.

Josée Miville-Dechene •

• A scene of 'alienation' from **Sandor**

