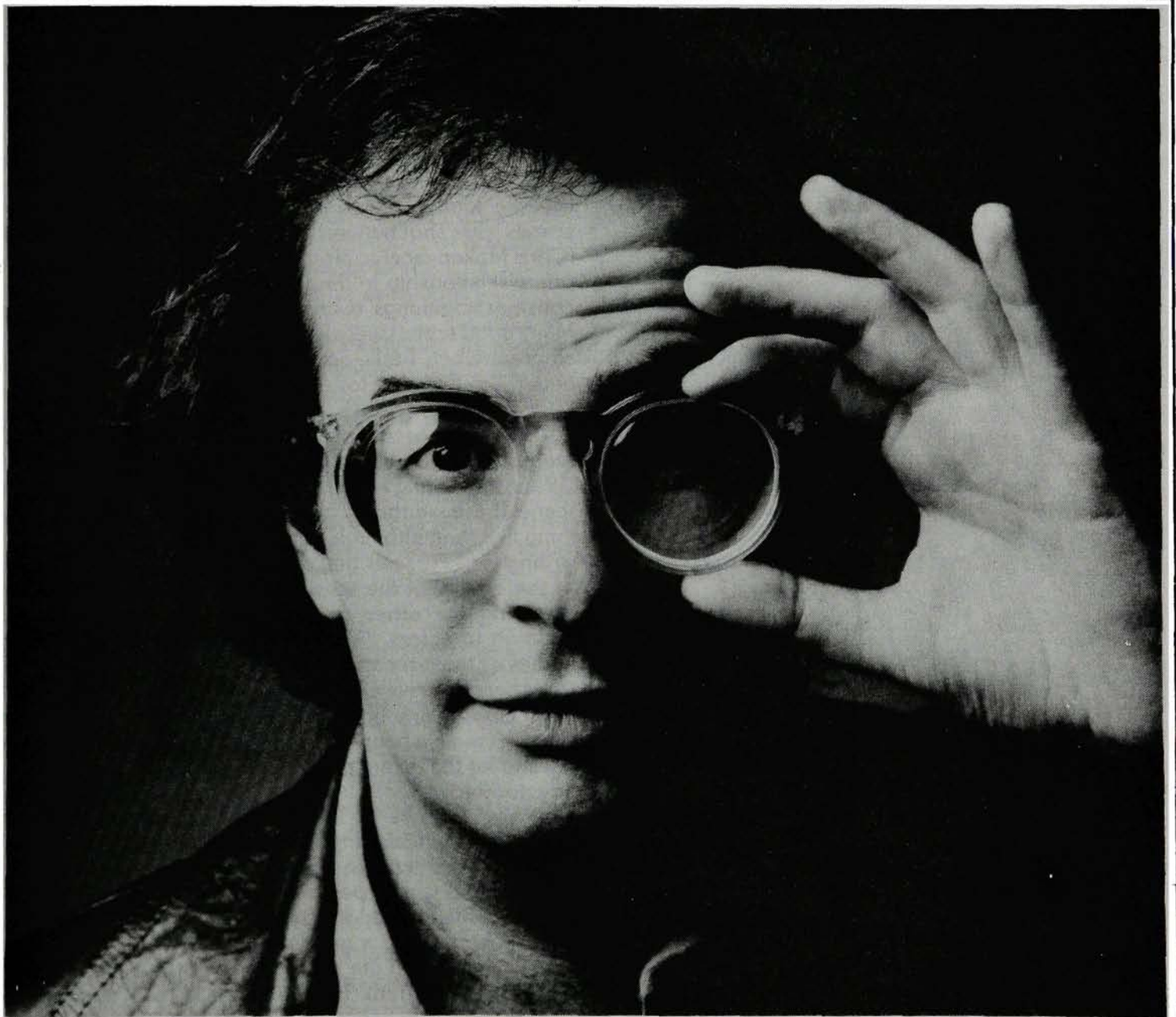


# ever ready!

by jim henshaw

Versatility is the name of the film game ; and Danny Goldberg knows how to play. With more than his fair share of energy, this pragmatic optimist grabs hold of opportunities, learns from his mistakes, and risks failure in order to succeed.



Producer Danny Goldberg — sharpening his focus through experience

photo : Mark Hanauer

"Mainly, I just work hard and hope I'm talented enough to make something happen." That kind of self-deprecating yet positive remark is typical of Danny Goldberg, writer-producer of Canada's most successful film, **Meatballs**. Talking with Danny is like getting shot up with a few hundred grains of pure positive energy. His speech is riddled with terms that seem to spring from a textbook on Psycho-Cybernetics. He makes you aware that, with enough hard work, it's amazing how lucky you can get.

The financial success of **Meatballs** (top Canadian-grosser ever, and No. 16 and No. 110 respectively, on *Variety's* 1979 and All-Time Profit lists), seems to have done little to alter Goldberg's daily schedule.

He, and his writing partner of ten years, Len Blum, (co-winner with Goldberg and Janis Allen of the 1980 Genie for original screenplay for **Meatballs**) start work at 8:30 a.m., six days a week, and — save a lunchbreak — force themselves to keep filling empty pages until six in the evening. Though backbreaking, the schedule is the only way he feels a writer can stay focused on his material. Admittedly, the pressure, on occasion, drives the two into an adjoining room to pick up drums and guitars and wail their brains clear for a few minutes. But after a week spent hammering out a structure ("On our latest, it was about

two weeks, with an average of 1.3 new structures every day."), the synopsis is nailed to the wall, literally, and the two split up scenes and begin to write separately. "Len sits here, I sit there. If we do talk, it's along the lines of...Is this funny? Is that funny?" The finished pages are put in a pile and corrected together. What works and what doesn't is discussed, and interminable rewrites begin — one often rewriting for the other.

First drafts are long. Too long. Jokes that keep topping each other, scenes and characters that go off on tangents... "Thirty to forty percent of writing is confidence: getting an idea and just doing it. Not worrying that it might be terrible." But the ultimate goal of the rewriting is a script that amounts to 115 pages: a size Goldberg feels is the right length for feature film comedy. "Every scene has to both move the script forward and be funny; fifteen lines honed to six or four that get the same point across. For us six lines is a lot of dialogue."

Danny's experience with **Meatballs** and his years of working with John Dunning and André Link of Cinepix have taught him that, as much of the creative work is done *after* the last frame has been shot, as before. "The attitude at Cinepix was, 'Let's screen it and let's change it.' Films were cut and mixed thousands of times to make them better." In its completed form, **Meatballs** ran three-and-a-half hours. "With fifteen major characters, the ad-libbing became kind of algebraic." During editing, entire new scenes were shot between Tripper (Bill Murray) and Rudy (Chris Makepeace) to strengthen what was to become the prime relationship in the film. Long editing sessions and constant screenings restructured the movie several times. Many good scenes were lost, but as Goldberg puts it, "I feel so great when I take something out and the film works better. I'm tied to it for maybe five seconds."

This hard-nosed approach to his own written work seems to be reflected in his approach to producing a film. "When I'm writing I don't think about producing. I don't do scenes because they'll be easier to get together, or anything like that; although I do try and think about who I'm writing for." He feels that casting properly is as important as the quality of the script, but that that has to apply to acquiring the other members of his creative team in addition to actors. "You choose people not because of names or track records, but because of creative energies. And those creative energies should be able to withstand a lot of clawing and fighting to make the best film possible. Among creative people there is no fear. The same way you have to let the actors play it, you must realize that the art director knows more about art than you do." Enamored and impressed as he is by Ivan Reitman's direction of **Meatballs**, he feels film is not a one-man medium: that it is up to the producer to stand up to his director on creative grounds and supply perspective on the level of... "I don't care how meaningful the scene is, it isn't working."

Because making a good film seems to be Goldberg's major ambition in life, the growth of the Canadian film industry excites him. He feels that here is the greatest opportunity to experiment. To risk failure. To try things you would never be able to attempt in Hollywood because

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it could be your only shot. His only worry is that films here are often made for the wrong reasons.

"I get so many people who tell me, 'Well, the script's not so good, but have a look at it, and 'We're gonna get real big stars for it.' I figure why? Why bother? Make the script good! You only get a few opportunities to make a movie. Once a movie's bad, there's nothing you can do about it. It's there, it's bad. Nobody's going to see it. I want to make them good. I don't ever want to look at one and say, I wish I hadn't been tired that day. Because that scene just isn't good enough."

He finds the move to larger-budget films has given him the luxury of time to work on things, and make them better. And he doesn't see the current, big-budget trend, as a threat to the small filmmaker. "I sense the frustration, but I think it's just bellyaching! If you want it... you just do it!" In addition, he sees the future for all film people in Canada as a bright one. "I have a lot of faith in this country. Money might tighten and investors smarten up, but people have to be forced into a situation. If you can make hundreds of thousands of dollars simply by putting your name on a picture and saying you're a producer, I guess you'll do that. If suddenly somebody says, you'll have to make good movies or I'm not going to invest in them, then maybe movies will get better. I have a feeling the pressure will help."

With all of this, Goldberg's main concern is the ugly spectre of politics. "If a movie doesn't work, forget it! No matter how many Canadians you have in it, or how much integrity you have, if nobody wants to see it, it doesn't matter. On the other hand, if it's a hit, everybody loves you and you get to do it again."

No matter what you think of **Meatballs**, its success means Danny Goldberg will get to do it again. Of that success he shrugs and smiles... "Most of the stuff I know is because of the mistakes I've made. I've made enough mistakes that I'm a little smarter, that's all."

Smarter, harder-working, caring — and in love with making movies. Danny Goldberg will be around after other producers are just names on salads in the bistros where they cut their deals. Ultimately, that is going to be very good for all of us. □

## Danny Goldberg Filmography

**Meatballs** (1978) : producer / writer  
**Blackout** (1977) : sound supervisor  
**Rabid** (1976) : associate producer / sound supervisor  
**Shivers** (1974) : assistant director / sound supervisor  
**Deathweekend** : sound supervisor  
**Tout feu tout femme** : sound supervisor  
**Cannibal Girls** (1972) : producer  
**Foxy Lady** (1970) : associate producer



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for your caring and splendid work on

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**Toronto release date : May 2, 1980**

**Dick Benner, director**