

# clark on cue

by charles lazer

"Best Director" Bob Clark is too busy to let success go to his head. His current projects, and opinions on the industry are outlined in the following interview by Charles Lazer.

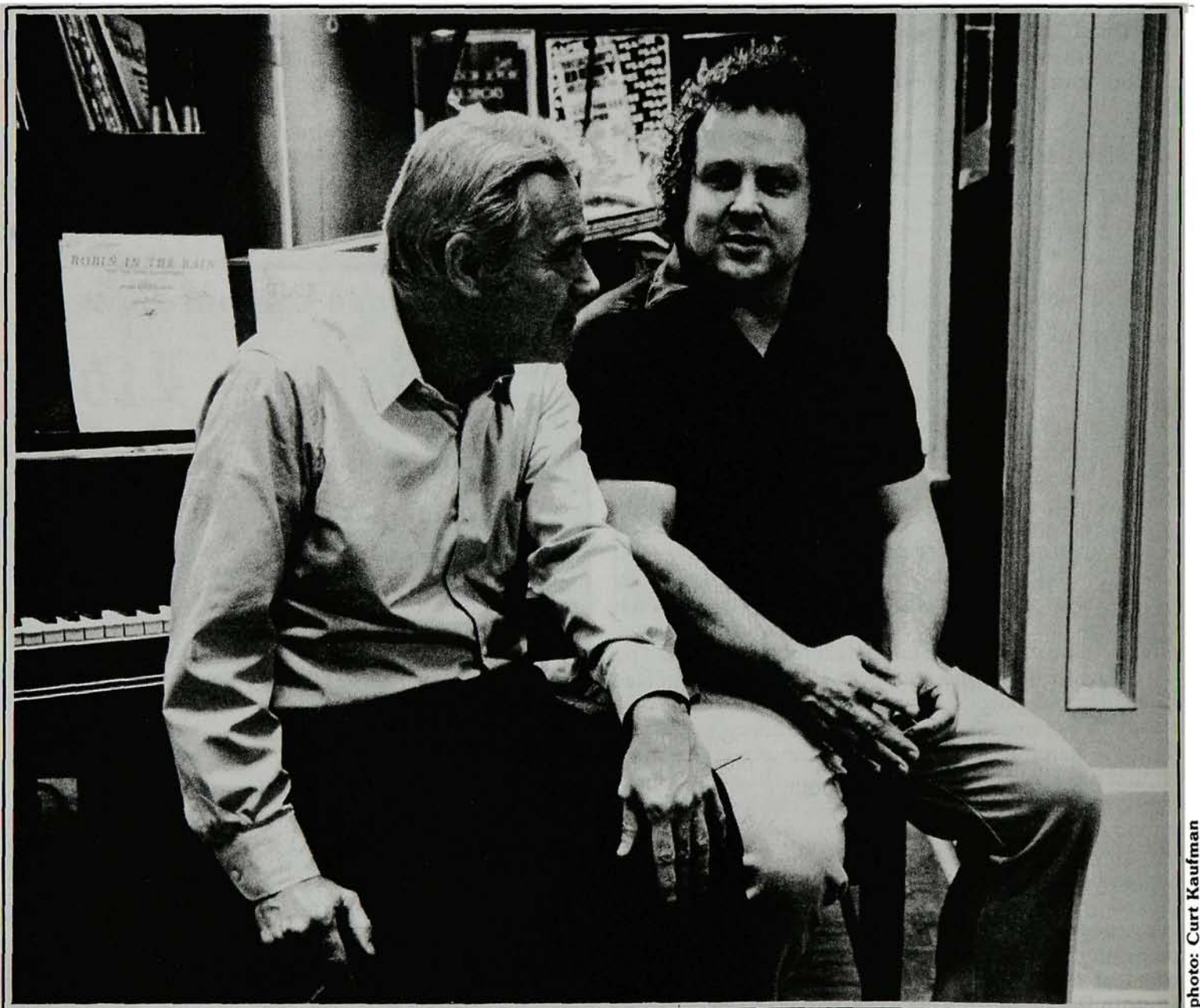


photo: Curt Kaufman

On location for *Tribute*, Jack Lemmon and Bob Clark perch on a piano bench to talk shop

Bob Clark isn't forty yet. He has just won a Genie award for his direction of **Murder by Decree**. He just finished shooting **Tribute**, starring Jack Lemmon, Robby Benson, Lee Remick and Colleen Dewhurst. And as if that's not enough, he is already into pre-production on **The Matese Circle**, based on the Robert Ludlum thriller, and a story of his own called **Porky's**, about growing up horny in America.

We talked on the set of **Tribute**, which has a family flavor to it. The cast and crew were relaxed because the shoot was a week ahead of schedule. Watching Lemmon work on a scene with Benson, Gale Garnett, John Carlin and Kim Cattrall was a delight. Clark joked that with a cast like this the best thing he could do would be to keep out of their way.

Clark has lived and worked in Canada since 1973, when he came here to co-produce and direct **Dead of Night**, starring John Marley and Lynn Carlin, for Quadrant. (He was up here once before when Quadrant picked up the world rights to his horror film, **Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things**.) He ended up staying.

"I just fell in love with Toronto. I need the pulse of the city, but love the lush green of Toronto too. There was also a film industry here. It was young and it was raw, but that was alright. It gave me the opportunity to have control over what I do."

What he did was make movies. Bob Clark built his own career by making his own films. In 1974 he produced and directed **Black Christmas** starring Olivia Hussey, Keir Dullea and Margot Kidder. The film received good reviews and did well at the box office. Then he made **Breaking Point** with Robert Culp, and in 1979 **Murder by Decree** was released.

With a fine cast, including Christopher Plummer, James Mason and Geneviève Bujold, **Murder by Decree** has received international recognition, in addition to the Genie award for director Clark. **Tribute** is the first film that he has directed without producing. And he is enjoying that luxury: "It's a hell of a lot easier!

"Most of the hard work is the producing. The enjoyable work is the directing. It's numbingly difficult, but almost always rewarding and fulfilling."

His experience as a producer has helped him work to the rigid demands of a shooting schedule. "I come to the directing completely prepared, so that I can meet the schedule. I expect to have my cut of **Tribute** in three weeks. On **Murder by Decree** we had an answer print in twelve weeks!

"My editors keep up with me so that we know things are working. If they're not, we pick up the pieces. I know exactly what I want when I'm shooting, so I don't give myself a lot of choices, and I don't shoot standard coverage.

*Charles Lazer is a free-lance screenwriter and producer currently working on projects in Toronto and Montreal.*

"In every scene I drive for a single cut point — a point where I expect to cut. The cut is a delusion. I avoid cuts unless they are there to drive a scene.

"But basically, if you've got two great actors in a great scene, you want to keep those two great actors in the frame and change the frame, change the background, and let the scene come to you, instead of cutting. If the actors are working, let them work.

"Great actors like Jack Lemmon, Christopher Plummer and James Mason really understand just how the camera helps them, how valuable the dimensions of a shot can be. So instead of fighting the camera and the technical necessities of the shot, they enhance it.

"But in order for me to do the type of shooting I do, with gracefully-moving camera shots, the actors have to know how to play to the camera. And the director has to plan every shot. I plan every shot in the film before I start shooting. I adjust a lot, but it's easier to adjust when you've got a plan to begin with."

Clark's career has been spectacular, and he feels that films like **Murder by Decree** and **Tribute** are tremendously beneficial to the development of the Canadian film industry.

"I think **Murder by Decree** was terrific for the industry here, because it was a film admired around the world. It was an innately Canadian film — created by, produced by, and controlled by Canadians. It just happened to have been shot in England.

"**Tribute** is a little different. Isn't one of the greatest resources the writer? And Bernard Slade is still a Canadian. I don't care if he's written in America, he's still a Canadian. In that regard, I'm glad it came here. If it's a hit, it'll do us a lot of good.

"Nothing helped more than **Meatballs**, and I liked it, too. What a difference that makes!

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"If our industry becomes strong enough, then the indigenous films will be made — things like the Donnelly story, Margaret Atwood's material. Does anyone want her to be merely Canadian? Not at all! She's much larger than that!

"But there are severe problems with indigenous talent, with ACTRA. And we can't ignore their problems. Their cries are justified. Unfortunately, they've been so abused that they're not in the frame of mind to wait any longer. And I can't say that I blame them. We have to address ourselves to that problem."

The irony of Bob Clark's position is that **Tribute** was the focus of the bitterest ACTRA/producer confrontation in years. The negotiations between producers Drabinsky and Michaels, and ACTRA, over permits for the American stars in **Tribute** were long and, as reported in the press, occasionally acrimonious. Then, their use of Canadians who were working mostly outside Canada at the time, didn't soothe ACTRA's feelings — and incensed many local actors.

"It's a very tough question. I have a lot of trouble accepting the position that would consider people who moved out of the country not to be Canadians. They deserve to work in this industry; they are still a strong part of this industry, even though they've gone on to make careers elsewhere. They can't be blamed; they're Canadians, too.

"But at the same time, the local talent is being very badly served. No reasonable person could question that. I think

that ACTRA has to take exactly the stand it took, and the producers have to fight back.

"It's like a democracy. Each body has to keep straining and protecting its own interests, but not, I hope, to the detriment of the whole body. It's a growing, living, breathing thing. Let's not cut its throat because things aren't perfect."

The continued growth of a commercial film industry in Canada is very important to Clark, and the Capital Cost Allowance is vital. But one must be careful.

"Don't kid yourself for one second that ending the tax shelter won't end the industry — as a world force. Then you'll have a small indigenous industry which will produce some very nice films, but it won't be a force, and it won't be a business.

"I think producers (here) have a right to get comparable salaries to the market they compete in. If they take more than that, then I'd like to have some questions answered myself. Just because a Canadian is producing a film, I don't think he should suddenly get twice as much as he would get in the States or England. I hope other people are screaming about this, because as a producer, I scream.

"I get in the States exactly what I get in Canada, not a dime more or less, and it's a lot. But I don't say in Canada I get more because you need me. That's nonsense! There are some actors doing that and that's reprehensible. Your fee is based on what your market value is anywhere in the world."

Bob Clark doesn't have to worry. Anywhere in the world his market value is going up. ■

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