IN PROGRESS...

Happy Birthday To Me

p.c. The Birthday Film Co. Inc. **p.** John Dunning, André Link **line p.** Stewart Harding **assist. to Dunning** Irene Litinsky **assist. to Harding** Marilyn Majerczyk **p. man.** Carole Legault **p. sec.** Carole Laflamme **unit. man.** Ginette Hardy **loc. man.** Cary Ross **p. account.** Lucie Drolet **office p. a./driver** Stuart Woolley **d.** J. Lee Thompson **assist. d.** Charles Braive (1st), François Ouimet (2nd), Robbie Ditchburn (3rd) **cont. superv.** Monique Champagne **casting** Dani Hausmann, Francine Brasseur (assist.) **d.o.p.** Miklos Lente **focus puller** David Douglas **assist. cam.** Mathieu Décary (2nd), Claude Simon Langlois (3rd) **key grip** Johnny Daoust **grips** Emmanuel Lepine, Pierre Charpentier **gaf.** Don Saarl **best boy** Chuck Hughes **3rd elec.** John Lewin **sd. mix.** Richard Lightstone **boom** Jim Thompson **art d./special set ups** Earl Preston **assist. art d.** Michel Dernuet (1st), Claude Benoit (2nd) **spec. efx. co-ord.** Gary Zeller, Jacques Godbout (assist.), Ernie Tomlinson (assist.) **prop. vehicle co-ord.** David Phillips **set props** Charles Bernier, Ryal Cosgrove (assist.) **props buyer** Katherine Wadas **dresser** Denys Proulx, Armand Thomas (assist.) **p.a./props** Jim Hodgson **p.a./art dept.** Mark Montebello, Réal Paré **ed.** Michael & Debbie Karen **stunts** Rémi Julienne (co-ord.), Max Kleven **costume design.** Huguette Gagné **ward.** Marie-Hélène Gascon, Élizabeth Lamy (assist.) **make-up** Jocelyne Bellemare, Stephan Dupuis (spec. efx.), Tom Schwartz (spc. efx.), Michèle Burke (assist., spec. efx.) **hair** Bob Pritchett **stills** Piroska Mihalka **unit pub.** Elizabeth Morris, Ann McRoberts + associates **p.a.** Jacques LeFlaguais, Gregory Dunning **driver captain** Neil Allan Bibby **driver/p.a.** Christopher Gilmore, Marc Hébert **driver/Melissa Sue Anderson** Michael Borlace **driver/Glenn Ford** Edward Sanden **craft service** Gisèle Bolduc **caterer** Byron Ayanoglu

With **Happy Birthday to Me**, Dal Productions hopes to cut its share of horror genre box office pie. Its press release notes "currently raking in box office receipts are **The Shining, Friday the 13th**, and **The Fog**." Veteran director J. Lee Thompson (**The Reincarnation of Peter Proud, Eye of the Devil, The Guns of Navarone, The Greek Tycoon** and others) does not consider himself part of a marketing formula; he's more preoccupied with characterization and a visual interpretation of the script, than with equaling or surpassing the receipts of **Meatballs** (a past Dal success). "There is no formula for translating 'there is a chilling moment when X discovers the body' into filmed images. I would ask myself how Hitchcock would have shot it, but that's hardly employing a formula."

Birthday revolves around a series of bizarre and untimely "disappearances" amongst the "top 10" most outgoing and popular students of a New England university town. The film will try to leave audiences in the dark until the theatre lights go on. No one from the press is permitted on set for fear a reporter will see and record something which could spoil the surprise for theatre audiences. In fact, after roughly half the shooting, neither cast nor crew are aware of the identity of the killer, not even the killer him/herself. (This "In Progress" report was pieced together from off-set discussions with Michel René Labelle — one of the two Montreal actors in the "top 10" — and director J. Lee Thompson.

Thompson says **Birthday** ought to resemble a film like **Psycho**, more than, say, **Friday the 13th** or **Alien**, in the sense that the horror or scariness of **Birthday** will derive from the audience's involvement in complex and sometimes perverse relationships. This said, a sizeable percentage of **Birthday**'s $3.5 million budget will be spent on special effects, in order to ensure the film's competitiveness with the mini-blockbusters cited in the public relations release.

Thompson's past involvement with Hitchcock (he worked as "dialogue director" on **Blackmail, The Lady Vanishes** and many other of Hitchcock's early British works) shows on set. Camera operator David Douglas says that every shot is planned in advance; there is **no**
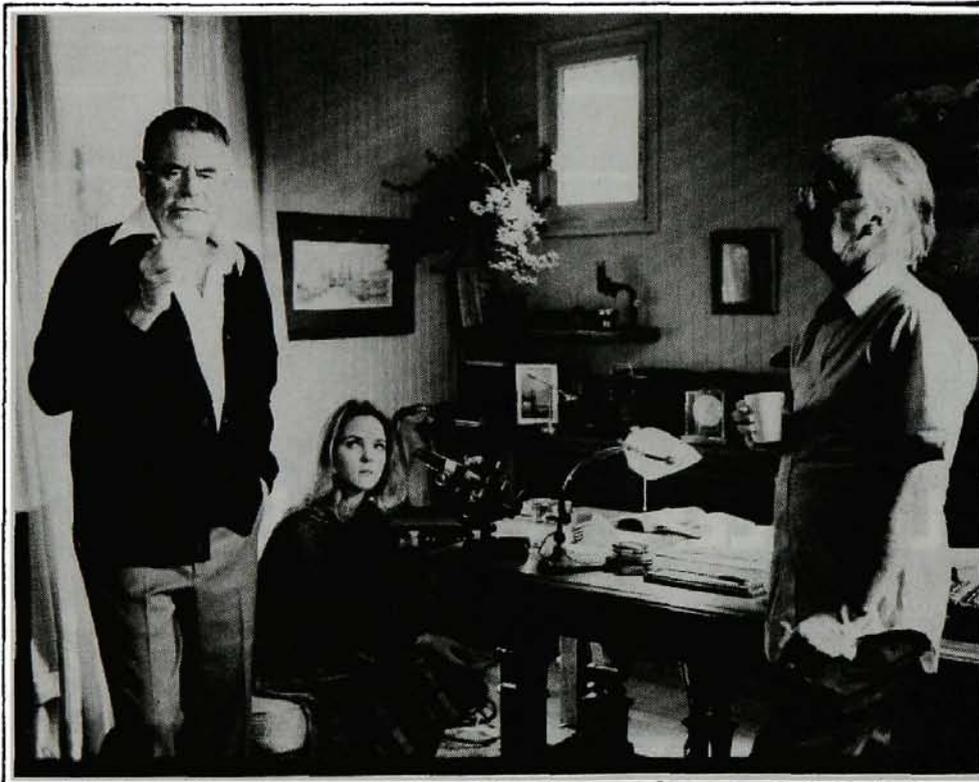

This **Birthday**'s more than just a piece of cake! Here, Glenn Ford, Melissa Sue Anderson and director J. Lee Thompson

photo: Piroska Mihalka

need for a master shot (a shot which covers all the action from a single position) because the editing of the film is almost pre-visualized.

Michel René Labelle (playing a Parisian student studying in New England) is likewise impressed by Thompson's on-set style. "He knows what he wants from the actors and, very often, he will go through the action himself. Consequently, I feel secure working with him." Michel René played Louis in Gilles Carle's **Fantastica** (scheduled for Canadian release in September). "Thompson's style is different from Carle's. Carle was more prone to construct his film around his actors' on-set personalities, while Thompson will work with you until your actions fit a preconceived notion."

This is not to say that there is no spontaneity on the set. According to Michel René, Thompson decided to improvise whenever the dialogue sounded forced, sometimes doing two takes — the first scripted, the second completely improvised.

A large portion of the shooting is taking place at the Loyola campus of Concordia University, and McGill, while the stage sets are being filmed in a curling club Dal has refurbished as a studio. **Birthday** is being produced with the participation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation and Famous Players. The private placement of the film is being handled by Filmco Limited, a Winnipeg-based company. Theatrical release is scheduled for early 1981. We'll have to wait until then to see how successfully Thompson blends his brand of "characterization" with Dal's brand of marketing and shock effects.

Howard Goldberg

Melanie

p.c. Melanie Productions Inc. p. Simcom Ltd. : Peter Simpson exec. p. Richard Simpson d. Rex Bromfield sc. Robert Guza Jr. & Richard Paluck ph. Richard Ciupka p. design. Roy Forge Smith p. man. Gerry Arbeid sd. mix. Douglas Ganton ed. Brian Ravok 1st a.d. Ken Goch loc. man. Brian Ross pub. Pat Whittingham l.p. Glynnis O'Connor, Paul Sorvino, Burton Cummings, Trudy Young, Layne Coleman, Jamie Dick.

Time : 8 p.m., Tuesday, July 22, 1980
Place : Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles

"Hey, good-looking, buy me a bed ?"
"Watcha got in your pants, beautiful ?"
"Get me a drink at Carlos and Charlie's ?"
"You have an Export A, eh ?"
What's this, hiding in a parking lot off the Strip ? A Canadian what ? Film ? What are you guys doing down here, eh ? Exteriors ? You mean, you want exteriors of Los Angeles for a Canadian film... Look, I know there are a lot of us Canucks down here, but L.A. still doesn't qualify as a Canadian location. Oh, the *whole* story is set in Los Angeles... and the Ozarks, too ?... You sure this is a Canadian film ?

Well, yes. At a time when film and television production south of the border was brought to a standstill by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) strike, **Melanie**, produced by Toronto-based Simcom Ltd., was busy lensing just down the street from SAG headquarters on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. The production was in town for a three-week stint after four weeks of shooting in Toronto.

Starring Glynnis O'Connor and Burton Cummings, **Melanie** relates the story of an illiterate woman from the Ozarks (O'Connor) who sets out to find her young son and wayward husband in that mecca of the uprooted, Los Angeles. The vagaries of her quest lead her to the doorstep and bedroom of a down-on-his-luck rock musician (Cummings). By film's end, love and gold records bloom on the horizon as Melanie is reunited with her son, and the rock musician with success.
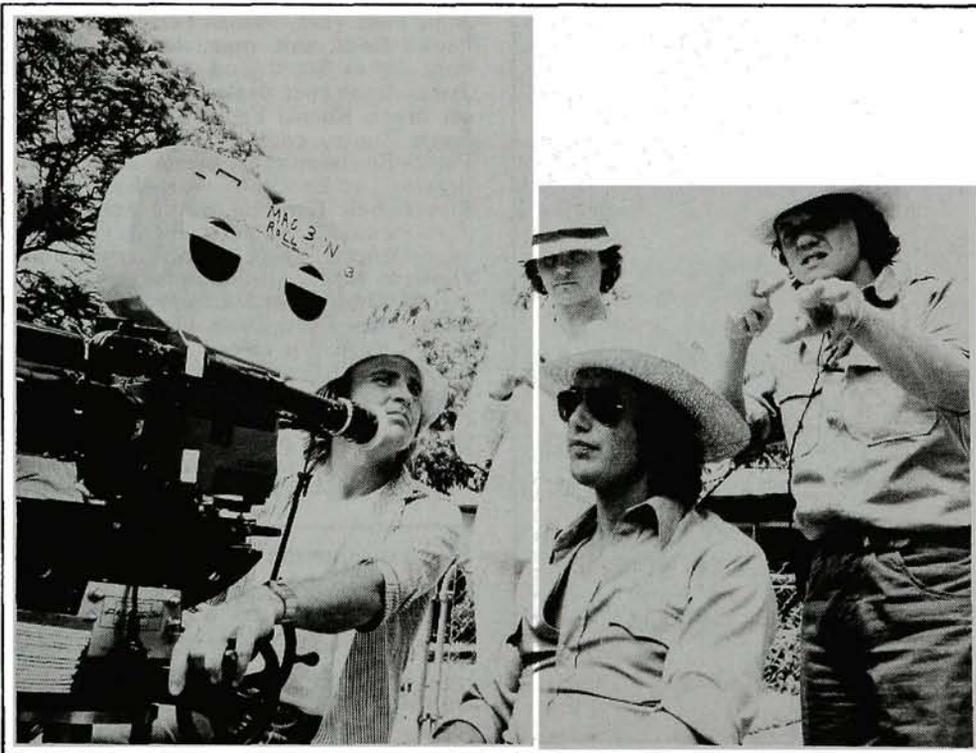

Cats in their hats ! Here, director Rex Bromfield (left rear), d.o.p. Richard Ciupka (right rear), camera operator Fred Guthe (far left), and focus-puller Andy Chmura (centre) on location with **Melanie**

photo : Peter Riches