

more experienced comic.

"If I had to categorize it, I'd say it was the **A Chorus Line** of comics," says Clark. "It's a film about a group of ambitious young people trying to make it big. The truth of it is, most of them don't." Adds Howie Mandel: "It's not a wacky comedy — it's a *real* comedy. There's nothing in this film that shouldn't or couldn't or hasn't *actually* happened."

**Comics** deals with some of stand-up comedy's harsher aspects, among them the comic's greatest fear: *bombing*, failing to make the audience laugh. "Approval is so much needed," says impressionist Maurice Lamarche. "If you bomb on stage, you've only got yourself to blame." To Howard Busgang, bombing is "an empty pit of loneliness, the most lonely feeling ever. You accept it, but you never get used to it."

Paramount originally bought the rights to **Comics**, but according to Clark, they wanted to soften the script and change the emphasis. "They wanted primarily a love story about a guy who was already an established comic, which of course changes everything." Paramount and Clark parted ways amicably over the project and **Comics** lay dormant until Pierre David arrived in L.A. earlier this year, in need of a script with which Filmplan could complete a previously negotiated three-picture deal. Of the dozens of scripts he read, David liked **Comics** best. Shooting began the first week of November; the eight-week schedule included seven weeks in Montreal and one in L.A., at a budget of \$3 million.

"There would have been no deal if I couldn't have directed," claims Clark. "I didn't want to explain the material to anyone else." Of his first try at directing, Clark says, "I like it. For **Silent Movie** I took the concept to Mel Brooks, and then he hired me as a production consultant. I followed that whole film through every stage — pre-production, post-production, and scoring. It was terrific training. If I hadn't done that I wouldn't dare direct."

Many of the film's young comics, Maurice Lamarche, Mike McDonald, Howard Busgang, Marjorie Gross and Tony Molesworth, were discovered at Yuk-Yuk's comedy club in Toronto. Lamarche and McDonald, along with Howie Mandel, perform original material for the film. A feature film role is a long-awaited break for many of the stand-ups. "It's like a dream come true," says Busgang. "It's something a lot of us have been waiting for."

**Bruce Malloch**

## The Grey Fox

Director Phillip Borsos says he "just goes out and makes films."

Pretty humble words for a man who, by making **The Grey Fox**, is also turning a lot of dreams into reality. Some of them are his own — for six years, Borsos has wanted to bring to the screen the story of Bill Miner, a man with the dubious distinction of being Canada's first train robber. The fact that it's Borsos' feature film debut at age 27 is a bit incredible in itself.

On a larger scale, this \$3.48 million production embodies many peoples' dreams of actualizing a feature film, a good feature film, that's a born-and-bred west coast Canadian production.

The dream-come-true spirit has infected the entire production crew since shooting started in the Rocky Mountains on October 7. Now, on location in an old alley near the North Vancouver waterfront, Richard Farnsworth, who plays the lead role as Miner, summed it up: "The weather has been fantastic. The countryside... beautiful to shoot. And the crew is so very enthused. It's just been going awful smooth."

For Farnsworth, **The Grey Fox** is providing him with "the role of a lifetime." He's been riding horses and performing stunts for the likes of Henry Fonda, Montgomery Clift and Kirk Douglas in over 300 movies since 1937. Now at age 60 Farnsworth has finally been recognized as a competent and talented actor capable of handling major roles. He was recently featured in **Tom Horn** with Steve McQueen, and was nominated for Best Supporting Actor in Alan J. Pakulas's **Comes A Horseman**.

Farnsworth more than physically resembles his character. There is something in his gentle and gentlemanly ways that echoes the legendary Miner.

"Miner was a fantastic old man," Farnsworth said. "I identified with him the first time I read the script."

Bill Pinkerton of the famous detective agency described Miner as "the master criminal of the American West." He was a curious blend of hood and Robin Hood. Even in the heat of a robbery he never forgot his manners, apologizing to passengers for the delay while he robbed their train.

After serving 33 years in San Quentin prison for robbing stage coaches, Miner was released. He then realized that his old trade was obsolete. The 20th Century had arrived, and with it the steam engine.

Being a survivor, he turned his talents to train robbery. Eventually, two of his marks were Canadian Pacific trains that made their runs through the Fraser Valley in 1904 and 1906.

"His character attracted me," Borsos said. "He is out of time and out of place."

**The Grey Fox** picks up Bill Miner's story on June 17, 1901 — the day he was released from prison. Two exteriors centered around that day were shot in the North Vancouver alley that set designer Bill Brodie (**Superman**, **Barry Lyndon** and **Silence of the North**) had effectively turned into a 1901 San Francisco street. A 12-foot fence built at the bottom of the alley blocked out the 1980 traffic. Awnings, old barrels and a sign proclaiming "North Star Steam Beer" were added to existing buildings. A catwalk was built at the second-story level to block out a skyscraper that appeared in the camera's line of vision.

The first scene involved Miner walking into the shop where he bought his first gun after his release. The alley was filled

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When it came to robbing trains, the foxy Bill Miner had a major reputation (Richard Farnsworth, right): his companions in crime are George Dawson (left) and James McLarty. Photo: Phil Hersee

with swirling machine-made fog as first assistant director John Board coached one of the extras where to walk so that he would cross Farnsworth's path at the right moment.

After checking for details (such as a wristwatch on the arm of a second extra — an employee of the fastfood restaurant that backed onto the alley) production manager Paul Tucker yelled, "Clear the alley at the bottom, please!" Crew and onlookers in woollen leg-warmers and down ski jackets scurried out of the way and the cameras rolled for three successful takes.

Half-an-hour later, cameras were set up at the bottom of the alley for the second scene — Miner's first encounter with a horseless carriage; a beautiful 1910 Buick. An onlooker appeared with his pet German Shepherd, which wandered up onto the set. Director of photography Frank Tidy (*The Lucky Star*, *The Duellist*) decided the dog "added a note of authenticity" and the cameras rolled.

Both the car and the dog performed admirably — the old Buick putt-putting up and down the alley for take after take, and

the poor shepherd sitting patiently through the clatter of the engine and the sickening smell of artificial fog.

The idea for *The Grey Fox* has been in Borsos' mind since 1974, all the while he was producing his award-winning documentary shorts — *Cooperage*, *Spartree* and Academy Award nominee *Nails*.

After allying his company, Mercury Pictures Inc., with Canadian producer Peter O'Brian (*Love At First Sight*, *Blood and Guts*, *Fast Company*), John Hunter was added to the team to create a script that would "strike a balance between documentary and drama." After eight rewrites Borsos and O'Brian were happy enough to set production wheels in motion.

The documentary style of Borsos' earlier work continues through *The Grey Fox*. The film is amazingly accurate in its recounting of the Bill Miner legend. Many of the scenes were filmed on or near the spots where they actually occurred; much of the dialogue is accurate, taken from actual court transcripts of Miner's trial. The capture scene, where Miner and his sidekicks Shorty Dunn (Wayne Robson of *Popeye*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *Buf-*

falo *Bill and the Indians*) and Louis Colquhoun (David Petersen of *Skip Tracer*) were arrested, was filmed within 300 meters of the actual site near Douglas Lake.

The only substantial deviation from history is Miner's romance with Kate Flynn (Jackie Burroughs of *The Psychiatrist*, *If Wishes Were Horses*, *A Fan's Notes*), a feisty photographer from the East who wound up in Kamloops in her search for adventure.

With spirits so high and the production going "awful smooth", Borsos commented that "it's kind of depressing having only four days left to shoot."

Despite the cliché, *The Grey Fox* has been a dream come true. Its release, slated for September 1981, will be the final test of reality.

Glenda Bartosh

## The Grey Fox

p.c. Grey Fox Pictures Inc. 1980 exec.p. David H. Brady p. Peter O'Brian sc. John Hunter d. Phillip Borsos co-p. Barry Healey d.o.p. Frank Tidy des. Bill Brodie admin. consult. Sandra Gould Sale asst. to exec. p. Linda Baca asst. to admin. consult. Kate McBride p.man. Paul Tucker p.acct. Elizabeth Pontsa, Victoria Emery (asst.) p. co-ord. Patrice Allen loc./unit man. Michael Steele a.d. John Board (1st), Mary Ellits (2nd), Tom Rowe (3rd) p. office asst. Wendy McGillvray art d. Ian Thomas, David Wilson (asst.) construc. co-ord. Charles Leittrants chief carp. Thom Wells chief painter Phil Morgan scenic art. Richard Humenick prop. mas. Grant Swain prop. buyer Bill Thumm set dec. Kimberley Richardson set dress. Ann Marie Corbett cam.op. Ron Orioux key focus Sandy McCallum asst. cam. Bruce Ingram sd. mix Rob Young boom Lee Walking gaf. John Bartley best boy elec. Len Wolfe gen. op. Steve Jackson key grip Barry Reid dolly grip John Brown ward. Christopher Ryan (design), Jane Grose (asst.) seamstress Linda Langdon spe. efx. Cliff Wenger make-up Ilona Herman (superv.), Phyllis Newman (artist) stills Phillip Hersee transp. capt. Scott Irvine drivers George Grieve (capt.), Rocky Zantolas (co-capt.), Brian Boyer, Ken Johnson, Dave Bowe head wrangler Tom Glass chef/driver Shelley Heatherington chef asst. Kim Armstrong craft services Joanne Ryan ed. Ray Hall, Bob Boyd (asst.) sync. ed. Maureen Levitt post-p. asst. Nigel Hollick elec. Jerry Zaverucha l.p. Richard Farnsworth, Jackie Burroughs, Wayne Robson, David Petersen, Tim Webber, Gary Reineke, Samantha Langevin, Tom Heaton, Don Mackay, Heath Lamberts, Stephen Miller, Sean Sullivan, Jack Leaf, George Dawson, James McLarty, Ray Michal, Dona White, Jon York, James Defelice, Frank Turner, Angus Macinnes, David Crowley, Duncan Fraser, Bill Murdoch, Morris Pancyh, David McCulley, Jack Ackroyd, Nicholas Rice, Paul Jolicoeur, Bill Mellen, David Raines, Mel Tuck, Lisa Westman, David Ackridge, Paul Whitney, Murray Ord, Peter Jobin pub. David Novek Associates