

IN PROGRESS

The Neighbour

Dead dog leads to cat-and-mouse

Most recently Max Fischer directed *The Lucky Star*, which won solid reviews, a prize at Cannes, and a desirable U.S. distribution deal. Luckily, he's been able to keep up the momentum, while many in the industry are now out looking for work.

There he is on the streets of Montreal directing *The Neighbour*. He's got George Segal, Irene Cara (of *Fame* fame), a fine crew and \$6 million to work with. The money is courtesy of producer Claude Léger, the CFDC, the Royal Bank, and a lot of little people who happen to be doctors, lawyers, and accountants.

The screenplay, written by Max Fischer and Leila Basen (whose credits include *Your Ticket is No Longer Valid*), is based on a novel by Laird Koehn

entitled "The Neighbor." The change in spelling is not the only confusing thing about this adaptation.

For one thing, there has already been a movie made from the novel: Louis Malle's *Atlantic City*.

For another, there is already a film out on the market called *The Neighbors*, starring Dan Ackroyd and John Belushi. It, thank goodness, is not based on "The Neighbor."

But perhaps the confusion is more apparent than real. Even so, *The Neighbour* is due to be retitled, probably to *The Neighbour From 5A*.

Although *Atlantic City* was based on the same book, there appear to be few, if any, similarities between that film and the script Fischer and Basen have come up with. The occupation of the female lead, for instance, has been changed to that of a professional singer; *The Neighbour* will feature Irene Cara performing several numbers by Canadian composer Art Phillips, with choreography by Arthur Faria.

This is not to say that *The Neighbour* is a musical. Nor is it a comedy, or a drama. It's sort of a comedy-dramamusical, with emphasis on the drama. I was getting suspicious when I heard the film described differently by each person I talked to on the set. But Fischer

made it all seem quite reasonable when he invoked the films of Vittorio de Sica (*Umberto D* in particular), to describe the spirit of his film. As he put it, "It's a mixture of comedy and tragedy, because, of course, life is like that."

In a nutshell, *The Neighbour's* plot is 'boy meets girl' - largely because the boy's dog is killed by the girl's friend, who the boy then kills. The boy and the girl then play a cat and mouse game; with the boy being the mouse, the girl being the cat, and the dog, no longer of any importance, being dead.

In a slightly larger nutshell, the film is about the relationship that develops between a down-and-out Broadway stagehand, played by Segal, and an up-and-coming young singer, played by Cara. They happen to be neighbours, and one day the man's dog - who happens to be his best and only friend - is in fact overdosed by a drug-dealing friend of hers. An enraged Segal kills the dealer who, he discovers, has \$5,000 on him, and then starts simultaneously throwing the police off his track and spending the money. Cara starts off hating him and wanting revenge for her friend, but ends up... well, they wouldn't tell me the ending, but you get the picture.

It's sort of the Broadway-life-isn't-a-

bed-of-roses storyline than can warm your heart and make you feel good if it's done properly. As... er... *Fame* was. A lot depends on getting the atmosphere right, and on having the right actors.

Irene Cara obviously has the credentials. One look at her on the police station set in Montreal demonstrated that *Fame* was no fluke. She had little to do in the scene, but sit outside the room where George Segal was talking with a police officer (played by Toronto actor Andy Thomson), and then react when their eyes met through the window. But she looked as much like a sympathetic-young-girl-in-the-big-city as Audrey Hepburn used to, and her reaction was as silent-movie-expressive as Charlie Chaplin's.

George Segal's credentials are vast. But his role as a broken-down old guy is a big switch from his usual parts, in which he plays middle-class professional types who are afraid of turning into exactly this person. (His role of Dick in *Fun With Dick and Jane* is an example). Casting him was a coup, because he plays against his own movie persona and convincingly transforms himself. Bearded, dressed in a shabby corduroy jacket and an Irish fisherman's cap, on set Segal looked splendid.

The atmospherics I saw were fine.



On location in New York shooting *The Neighbour*: cinematographer François Prôtat, Irene Cara, director Max Fischer (centre) and George Segal

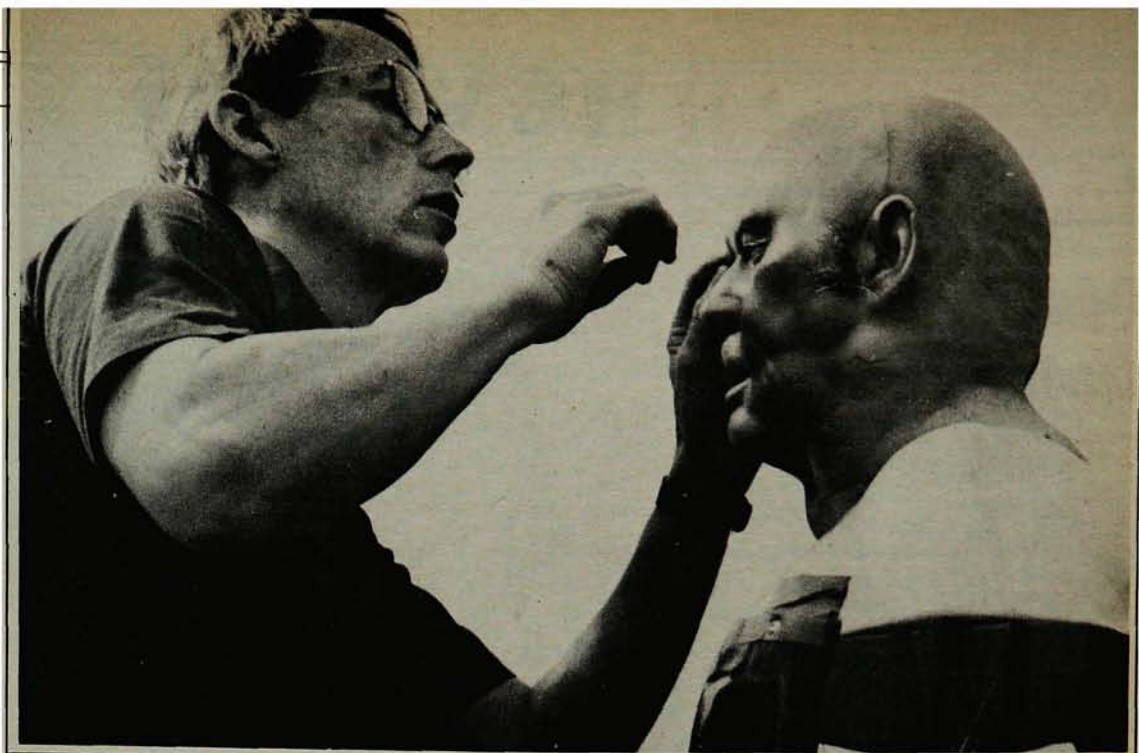
The police station set was actually a fire hall, and during the shoot the firemen amused themselves by taking snapshots. They didn't seem at all perturbed as the connecting wall to their office was sprayed with green paint and made as filthy as a real N.Y.C. police station. It all looked like the Big Apple to me. And Françoise Berd, a Montreal actress with a small part in the movie, looked and spoke just like the bag ladies who give that city its distinctive character, which we all know and love.

What I saw of the shoot is hardly enough to speculate on. And even then, there were four weeks of shooting still to go before the film would be put into the hands of editor Marion Segal. But I did see Max Fischer at work, and he had the crew purring in his hand. Then in the middle of the fire-police station shoot I was quickly convinced that the crew members were winners. Suddenly, there was a fire alarm. As the firemen started racing around there was more than a little confusion. But the film crew was back to work in record time, leaving little doubt that it could handle the business of making 'Broadway' and its environs look real - even if all the interiors are being shot in Montreal.

If I was a betting man, I'd bet that this film is going to work. If it does, it will give Irene Cara's career another boost, although as she put it, "I've gone from being a black actress to being considered an actress" already. George Segal, I would think, is taking a chance in playing such a challenging role, considering his fans' expectations. I respect him for that, and for his judgment in hitching his career to Max Fischer's rising star.

David Clarke ●

THE NEIGHBOUR p.c. Neighbour Film Inc. (1981) p. Claude Léger p.asst. Anne Burke d. Max Fisher d.'s.asst. Suzanna Fisher 1st a.d. Pierre Magny sc. Leila Basen, Max Fisher cont. Marie La Haye p.man. Francine Forest comp. Micheline Bonin p.sec. Jacqueline Wanner art d. Anne Pritchard art dept. coord. Barbara Shrier d.o.p. François Protat sd. Patrick Rousseau cost. des. François Laplante make-up Marie-Angele Protat hair Gaetan Noiseux **NEW YORK CREW 2nd a.d.** Roger Pugliese trainee Ann Egbert intern. Richard Schlessinger p.man. Pete Runfola asst. to p. Diane Foti p.coor. Sarah Carson art.d. Misha Blotow set dec. Daniel Von Blomberg prop master John K. Wright cam.op. Don Sweeney 1st asst.cam. Don Biller sd. mix. Michael Tromer key grip Edwin Quinn grip Tom Gilligan, William Kerwick gaffer Richard Quilan elec. Ray Fortune, Charles Meere, Francis Brady, Mike Proscia Jr. generator Vincent Brady cost. des. Edna Hart, Ruth Morley (consult.) ward. superv. Jennifer Nichols ward. asst. Eddie Brenner make-up Joe Cranzano hair Phil Lito transp. capt. Harry Leavey drivers James Sweeney, William Buckman Sr., Chester Malinowski prod. asst. Alan Steinfeld **MONTREAL CREW 2nd a.d.** Marie Therberge 3rd a.d. Martha Laing unit man. Michelle St-Arnaud cost. dir. Arden Ryshpan art design Charles Dunlop art dept. adm. Tina Boden prod. asst. Roger Dufresne set dec. Serge Bureau asst. dec. Denis Hamel const. Harold Trasher, Normand Sarrazin head carp. Bruce Jackson, Claude Simard sp. efx. John Meighen props master Jacques Chamberland props Vincent Fournier 1st asst. cam. Yves Drapeau 2nd asst. cam. Michel Girard boom Thierry Hoffman key grip Serge Grenier stills Takashi Seida ward. Louise Jobin ward. dresser Diane Paquet prod. asst. Michèle Forest, Christian Bernard p.r. Monique Mallet-Léger (514) 288-6251 l.p. George Segal, Irene Cara, Nicholas Campbell, Clark Johnson, Barbara Cook, Joyce Gordon, Andy Martin Thomson, Laura Harrington, Bob Lawrence, Terry Hellis, Peter Wise, Emidio R. Michetti, Antonia Ray, Charlotte Jones, Matt Craven, Arleigh Peterson, Tony Sherwood, Chris Russo, Joel Kramer, Polly Magaro, George Harris, George E. Zeeman, Ernesto Gasco, Evan Hollister Mirand, Norris Domingue, Pierre Lalonde, Irene Kessler, Gloria Irizarry, Roland Nincheri, Johnny O'Neil, John Aichinger, Steven Lanke, Paul Bédard, Jose Santos, Michael Dnyia, Frank Antonson, Harold Holden, Jean Thivierge, Ingrid Vanderwater, Evere Ferguson, Robert Spivak, Kevin Brownie, David Samain, Francis Lamer, Ada Fuoco, Charles Manuel, Marty Star, Ben Lawson, Christine Reamus, Deepak Massand, Jacqueline Williams, Robert Jezek, Lynn Griffith.



● Touching-up Al Waxman No. 2 for the death scene, special effects man Dick Smith

Death Bite

A mean appetite

In the basement of Stage Three, two different Al Waxmans patiently wait while special effects wizards work to make *Death Bite* as effective as *Jaws* and *Alien*. It's the last of four days of shooting in Toronto's Lakeshore Studios, the second-to-last day in an eight-week schedule that began on August 24, Peter Fonda and Oliver Reed have already left, and the "pièce de résistance" of one effect is being prepared.

The first Al Waxman holds out his arm while Carl Fullerton, make-up assistant from *Altered States*, carefully attaches a skin of foam rubber. "Last night we did a five-hour death scene," Waxman says, "and it was one of the high moments in my acting career. Everybody came together in one terrific moment. When I went home, I said to my wife, 'I've just been working with giants.'"

But after five hours, Waxman is not dead yet. Playing a petty villain, he has been bitten by the world's most dangerous snake, a Taipan from New Guinea. The venom in one bite from this real-life snake can kill 600 humans or, as tested, 173,912 mice (the 173,913th had a bad night). Waxman has blood stains on his shirt and a photo taken the night before shows his face swollen grotesquely by bladders disguised as skin. Today, *Death Bite* will take a step towards innovation and finish his off.

The second Al Waxman says nothing - he is a mechanical bust with eighteen plastic tubes running into him from a complicated pumping device - and like a robot turned stuntman, he'll do the rest of Waxman's dying. Dick Smith, the man responsible for make-up effects in *The Exorcist*, *Scanners*, and *Altered States*, and the chief of the team with *Death Bite*, explains how, as he gently gives the cheek more color. "Most organic solvents tend to attack rubber and if it's foamed rubber, the chemical attack is multiplied. The destruction is remarkably similar to the effect of venom on tissue. We prepared this head weeks

ago, already distorted to the point that Al reached last night. What's new is not the bladders, but what happens next when we pump trichloroethane into the swellings. It'll be a more leprosy kind of swelling, made more hideous by pre-tearing the rubber. The fissures will grow into ruptures and show a bloody interior, a dirty green color in the solvent will add a bit of nastiness."

Upstairs in the studio's main area, director Bill Fruet oversees the preparation of a ship's hold where a young and greedy sailor (Patrick Brymer) will open a container expecting to find dope, and come to the shock - and the end - of his life. "*Death Bite* has good commercial potential," says Fruet, known as the scriptwriter for *Goin' Down the Road* and director of *Wedding in White*, *Death Weekend*, and, last year, *Chatwill's Verdict*. "We evaluated what is working today, took the original novel and updated it. We didn't just go for violence, though some markets like Japan and Europe want a stronger version. We have shot enough material to take it in any direction. A film like *Alien* showed us how less is better. We perfected special devices that helped us keep the monster hidden. More effective cranes and dollies gave us speed and let us shoot along two feet off the floor."

Snake models lie in different parts of Stage Three - one with a body as thick as a fire hose, three heads without bodies... All designed for terror. While the sailor rehearses his reaction to the sudden hissing of a steampipe, the second unit repeatedly films the strike of the snake for a different scene. A row of levers controls the hydraulics as the Taipan lunges around the corner of a hallway. At the end of the hall the broken glass of a shower stall remains from an earlier set-up in which a woman has been terribly interrupted. For added effect, the crew built a hallway tilted vertically with a mattress at the bottom. When struck, the woman will fly across the screen with all the force of a fall.

Production manager Gord Robinson says the rushes are looking "excellent." Although the final script was completed only a week and a half before shooting, the 60-member crew has kept the schedule right on target. Much of the filming took place at the Jackson Estate, close to the Metro Toronto Zoo, where Jason Kincaid (Oliver Reed) in his mansion

feels a psychic attachment to the snake, Guardian of the Gates of Hell. This is not the realistic Taipan of the novel, but an intensified, deified monster. With his niece, Suzanne Cavadon (Kerri Keane) and scientist Tom Brasilian (Peter Fonda), Kincaid arranges to have the snake captured and brought to a university in San Francisco. When Crowley (Al Waxman) attempts to steal it for a religious cult, the snake - and all hell - breaks loose. A 'San Francisco' greenhouse was built at Toronto's Pier 35, and seven 20-by-20-foot nets hung on poles, plus 50 "aborigines", brought New Guinea to the Jackson Estate. A building next to Cinequity's offices on Mercer Street provided a police station and veterinary clinic, and the Scarborough Bluffs doubled for flashbacks to New Guinea.

Cinequity Corporation and its head, John Pozhke, have moved from the deaths of Vietnam in their production of *The Ten Thousand Day War*, to deaths by a supernatural creature. Publicist Quinn Donoghue briefly lets a worry loose when he wonders if people's fear of snakes will be great enough to keep them away. After all, snakes have had bad press ever since the Bible. In statistical terms *Jaws* exploited a fear based on twelve deaths a year worldwide; in contrast, according to the researchers for *Death Bite*, 30,000 people die annually from snakebite.

Ah well, there is some hesitation about the title and even Fruet calls it "blatant," but the novel by Michael Maryk and Brent Monahan sold a million and a half copies since October 1979 with no more subtle title.

David Sharpe ●

DEATH BITE p.c. Hyperion Film Production & Distribution Co. Ltd. exec. p. John G. Pozhke p. John G. Pozhke and Maurice Smith cop. Gord Robinson line p. John Newton p. man. Gord Robinson p. sec. Susan Kavesh asst. to p. sec. Addison Duncan unit loc. man. David Coatsworth sc. Don Enright d. William Fruet 1st a.d. David Shepard 2nd a.d. Richard Flower, John Rainey art d. Gavin Mitchell asst art d. Carmi Gallo, Rolf Harvey cont. Gillian Richardson d.o.p. Mark Irwin focus puller Paul Mitchnick light Jock Brandis key grip Maris Jansons grip Carlo Campana gaffer Jock Brandis elect. Scotty Allan, G.L. Phipps sd. Stuart French sd. asst. Cory Siddell props Andrew Deskin cost. des. Gina Kiellerman ward. Arthur Rowsell make-up Sandi Duncan hair Barbara Alexander set dec. Patricia Gruben film ed. Ralph Brunjes cast. Clair Walker l.p. Peter Fonda, Oliver Reed, Kerri Keane, Al Waxman, Miguel Fernandes, Marlyn Lightstone.