

Dancing In The Dark: Collectively creation

Producer Tony Kramreither is slowly pacing the sidewalk in front of the Toronto mansion as executive producer Don Haig and I arrive at the *Dancing in the Dark* location. Kramreither's his usual funny/charming Viennese self. As we head inside, we tell him we only came for lunch. It is being noised abroad that the catering on this feature is superb.

Leon Marr stands in welcome in the hallway, half-way through directing his first feature film. It's over two years since he read the novel *Dancing in the Dark* by Joan Barfoot, bought the rights, and started to write his script. Now, on a cold, bright November day, it's finally in the process of being committed to celluloid. An incredibly slim and youthful Martha Henry (all actresses *must* starve themselves) bears the full weight of *Dancing in the Dark's* fascinating but unsettling story of Edna and her seemingly perfect marriage to Harry, eventually torn apart by tragedy. The location is peaceful – a lot of voice-over will be necessary for the interior monologues of Henry's character.

It's a quiet, efficient crew of around 20 or so people going about their appointed tasks with a minimum of fuss. They've been at the mansion location for about a week, then move on to other Toronto locations – an office, a detention cell, a restaurant, and then to the Credit Valley Hospital.

Telefilm came in at the script development stage, but then the agency ran into financing problems of its own. The producers had to move, so they went to private investors. When Telefilm wanted to come back in later, private funds were already in place.

Haig and Kramreither talk how they hate a film being categorized by its budget. Kramreither declaims, "What has the budget to do with it? A film is good, or not." And, forestalling the question bubbling on my lips, "When anyone asks me about the budget, I say that it is less than *Heaven's Gate*." He adds that the shooting schedule is 25 days and the production is on time. Kramreither is arranging for U.S. distribution and talking to major companies, and will take a short promo reel to the States. He's interested in a company acquiring U.S. and world rights, excluding Canada.

Director Leon Marr was a Ryerson film student 1970-74, and has written and directed a number of short dramatic half-hours for CBC-TV. He was a Director's Guild observer on Norman Jewison's *Between Friends* in 1983. Martha Henry first read the book about 18 months ago and said she would be interested in seeing the script. She agreed to the role of Edna, and then the project start was delayed. Fortuitously,



• Martha Henry Dancing In The Dark

when Henry finished her other commitments, the film was ready to shoot.

Cinematographer Vic Sarin also mentioned the twist of fate that brought him to this film. He was set to do a CBS movie with Lindsay Wagner, which fell through, leaving him free to work on *Dancing in the Dark*. "I'm enjoying this film because I got involved earlier than usual. About a month before shooting I sat down with Leon and the production designer, Lillian Sarafinchan, and discussed the film's overall design, and how colours, make-up, costumes develop a strong visual style for the film. I've never done as stylized a film as this before and I have an opportunity to play with colours. The film starts in the hospital, which is cold, and the flashbacks are warm. As the flashbacks get nearer to reality the two become one. We're half-way through the film and I'm very satisfied. This is 'our' film, not somebody else's, and I'm not a hired hand."

John Ryan, a jolly young Brit who's both co-producer and line producer, arrived late at the location. Someone had smashed into the back of his car. And, he announced dramatically, "they want \$3,000 for the use of any provincial courtroom on account of the insurance policy!" After a huddle with the director and others, it was decided to do the small scene with a wall in Don Mills...

As I stood in the entrance hall waiting for a taxi (after an excellent lunch), a shot was being set up. Martha Henry was sitting on the stairs preparing to dust between the bannister rails. She turned to the director and, with great charm, said: "Leon, just tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it."

Pat Thompson •



• *Dancing's* bearded D.O.P. Vic Sarin, with Steve Deme, first a.d.