

Bill Murray of Saturday Night Live, meatball to end Meatballs

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of The Free Press

TORONTO — "Okay 46; come in 49." By all indications Bill Murray, one of the stars of TV's Saturday Night Live, could have been an air-traffic controller guiding planes in and out of some airport.

But this was a mid-afternoon press conference in the 31st-floor suite of the Four Seasons Yorkville and Murray was hustling Paramount's latest film, a summer camp farce called Meatballs, in which he stars.

Studio insiders predict it will catapult Murray to movie fame just as Animal House made Saturday Night Live co-star John Belushi a "cafeteria-hold" name.

Bill Murray — who rose to television prominence with such roles as Nick the lounge singer, Lisa Loopner's nerd boyfriend Todd (Pizza-face) and the Weekend Update anchorman and movie critic — a movie star!? Get outta here!

Only four years ago Murray, Belushi, Saturday Night Live co-star Gilda Radner and Animal House and Meatballs scriptwriter Harold Ramis played London's Fryfogles with the touring National Lampoon Revue. And Murray remembers the week clearly.

Before their engagement another act, Maclean and Maclean, was told to clean up the obscenity in the show by the Liquor Licence Board. So the National Lampoon Revue, known for its risqué routines and skits, came into town at a sensitive time.

"The whole obscenity thing was deadly for us," Murray recalls, "because we only had one show. In Philadelphia or New York, they'd clear the bar and we'd have another, completely different audience. With the size of London, though, you only have one audience. We were bombing out, so we asked the crowd what they would like. Someone yelled, 'Tell hockey jokes.'"

Dressed in a brown T-shirt inscribed I Born Here, Tortola B.V.I. (British Virgin Islands), blue Bermuda shorts and bare feet, Murray was an absurd contrast to the elegant decor of the suite. He paced stealthfully in the hotel suite and waited for all the reporters to arrive, entertaining those already there with his outrageous antics, very similar to the head counsellor Tripper he plays in Meatballs.

"Expecting fog?" he asks an old friend who shows up to see him wearing a fluorescent orange windbreaker.

As public relations people hover nervously nearby, Murray takes over. "Who needs a drink? Don't worry about me. I don't mind spending the money and spilling the drinks. After all, it's not mine; it's Paramount's money." Then, as he pours, he croons the theme from Gone With The Wind: "Oo-oo-woo-woo."

Picking up his room service steak sandwich and delicately balancing his drink, he walks over to the rococo couch and sits down. "Here's the adventure, folks. Will he spill his drink on the couch or not? But there's no suspense. If I do, Paramount will pay for it."

"You! Get outta here," he yells at one of the PR girls as he jumps up and carries her out of the room. "What a mensch! God, she can ruin your mood! All we need is deadwood at a party."

Soon it was obvious from Murray's repartee that he developed his acting and comic skills well with Chicago's improvisational Second City troupe and during his years with both National Lampoon magazine and the National Lampoon stage shows. Every reporter's question or comment was like a skit suggestion.

"Last night was a glorious night," he said referring to the premiere. "But it was the stupidest thing I have ever been part of. Imagine taking me to the theatre in a horse-drawn buggy with a dozen guys with walkie-talkies making sure the horse got there on time. In New York, I stole a car. That made much more sense."

Director Ivan Reitman acknowledges Murray was an integral part of the production, improvising many of his scenes, rewriting and contributing dialogue. Murray claims he slept in his car on location in Haliburton.

"Most of the scenes were written the night before. Ivan would come up to my car where I was asleep. Knock, knock — 'Bill I want the scene.' So I'd write it for him and go back to sleep. But Ivan didn't like us to improvise our own lines, like 'It's too hot in here.'"

In Meatballs, Murray gets his first screen kiss with Kate Lynch, who plays Roxanne. "It was really tough," he recalls, "because she kept getting the wrong idea. Every time I kissed her, I'd

have to say 'I don't mean this.'

"But I'd like to go to Haliburton again, especially if I ever get a crippling disease. Nothing happens there but it's so lovely."

There is a good-natured rivalry and bantering between director Reitman and Murray. When asked if the Czechoslovakian-born Reitman was the model for Steve Martin's and Dan Ackroyd's "swinging wild and crazy guys," Murray replied: "It's pretty common knowledge that Ivan still dresses that way (with flowered shirts and checked pants). These clothes he's wearing are really Paramount's."

Reitman fires back: "You owe me \$1,000 for that campfire scene. He cost me \$1,000 that night." Murray explains: "It was freezing cold and I got drunk. But they did a marvellous job editing the many takes of that scene. If you look at it carefully, you'll see a human being desperately trying to catch up with his words."

Murray claims the only reason he decided to make Meatballs was that he was offered 80 per cent of the gross and Reitman's second child.

"I wanted to help out Ivan," Murray confesses. "He made a lot of money from Animal House but he and Matthau blew it at the track . . . terrible. Seriously, I just like to work. You see, I'm cutting lawns this summer 'cause you just don't mess with them."

"All my best stuff was cut out anyway. There was a song I sang which was in the movie for about — ohhhh — 40 minutes, but it's gone now."

Murray says Carson hasn't asked him to do the

Tonight Show yet, but Paramount has. He isn't looking forward to sitting next to Charo for seven minutes.

He says he will return to Saturday Night Live in the fall because "they know where my family lives." But he doesn't think John Belushi or Dan Ackroyd will be back. "I'm pretty sure John won't be back. I've asked him not to."

Murray claims he has talked to his alter ego, the Weekend Update movie critic, and asked him his opinion about Meatballs.

"He's gonna see it again and again. He's an emotional, sensitive kinda guy; he's already seen it seven times. And he says he's gonna go again. He really broke up when he saw the part where the kid wins the race."

Will he promote Meatballs on Saturday Night Live? "If it's a real dog, I'll come out in favor of it."

Murray may eventually become a heroic role-model for the world's nerds. He is preparing for his next roles, a cameo as "a gay, Jewish interior decorator" opposite Steve Martin in Carl Reiner's The Jerk, and as gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson in Where The Buffalo Roam. Murray, who has known Thompson for a couple of years, says he is going to take a lot of drugs to prepare for the role.

Is he afraid of success going to his head?

"Naah," he replies as he sinks in the couch, turns to the bedroom and yells: "More champagne!!!"