



Bill Murray and Kate Lynch get romantically involved in scene from the movie *Meatballs*, at the Uptown 2

# Meatballs a tender delight

## TV's Bill Murray a wacky hero in Canadian funny film

By Bruce Kirkland Toronto Star

Don't judge a meal by the menu. *Meatballs*, the title of a new Canadian funny film, sounds as appetizing as a nasty noodle dinner from a can. It sounds gross.

Surprise! Get past the name and *Meatballs* is a feast of tender, tasty delights. It's occasionally crazy, slightly off-the-wall, sometimes cleverly sarcastic and cynical, usually flippantly clichéd, and often remarkably sentimental. But it's never gross.

The \$1.6 million production could become one of the most commercially successful movies in Canadian film history. It received its world premiere last night in an invitation-only screening at the Uptown 2. It opens to the public today in the same theatre.

*Meatballs* is a send-up on life at a summer camp for kids. The central character is chief counsellor Tripper, portrayed with wacky zeal by Saturday Night Live refugee Bill Murray, in his movie debut. Tripper, with help from a motley crew of lovable counsellors-in-training, tries to run Camp North Star as a hybrid of M\*A\*S\*H and Hogan's Heroes, to the everlasting anguish of the camp director. No rules. No discipline. No hangups. Lots of fun orchestrated by Hawkeye Hogan.

### Sketchy story

The story line within that setting is pretty sketchy. The movie begins with the hectic day the kids arrive and ends on the wistful day they leave.

Almost everything else involves comic vignettes loosely tied together with a series of overlapping subplots, most of them involving romantic entanglements between the counsellors and competitive confrontations between the working class North Star gang and their hated and hateful rivals, the snot-nosed rich kids at nearby Camp Mohawk. The humor is often slapdash and slapstick. Tripper

and friends pull pranks on the camp director, such as carrying his bed, with his snoring body on it out to the woods or a raft on the lake. The guys raid the girls' cabin, with disastrous results. The Hallowe'en fever holds up all summer long.

Thrown into the comic fray are bizarre lines that zap in from other planets. Tripper supplies them all with constant chatter on the camp intercom. One evening he jubilantly awards a prize (the camp director's car) to the kid who guessed the main course at supper contained "some kind of meat." You have to hear this material yourself. Most of the lines lose their impact out of context.

Crucial to all of this succeeding are the contributions of the excellent supporting cast (most of them Canadians) and the perfect rhythm crafted by director Ivan Reitman and editor Debra Karen.

### Crazily creative

The Reitman-Karen team ensured the movie never lingers dangerously overlong on any one joke; if one falls flat there's another close behind to lift spirits right back up. Yet the pace is never frenetic; you don't feel you're being taken for a television sit-com ride, in spite of Elmer Bernstein's maudlin music, which smacks of phony dramatics.

Murray, of course, would have sabotaged the movie if he had been substandard. But the man is crazily creative. He's a high quality comic who can act with authority. He shows far more depth of character than he ever does in the now tired and failing Saturday Night Live TV show. Two singularly impressive scenes proved the point — his rallying speech during the campers' sports olympiad and his macabre ghost story antics.

Still, it's his supporting cast that forms the crucible for the humor to snap, crackle and pop out at us.

Kate Lynch is zesty and clever as

the romantic interest for Murray's Tripper character. Chris Makepeace, a 15-year-old Grade 10 student at Jarvis Collegiate, is outstanding as the reluctant camper befriended by the heart-of-gold Tripper. In fact, when you bask in the movie's warmth, you realize it is as much a soft-hearted love story as a wacky comedy. It was written by Len Blum, Dan Goldberg, Janis Allen and Harold Ramis.

*Meatballs* will never be included among Canada's finest artistic achievements on film. But it's a funny, friendly movie; a soft touch that will certainly touch most of its audience.

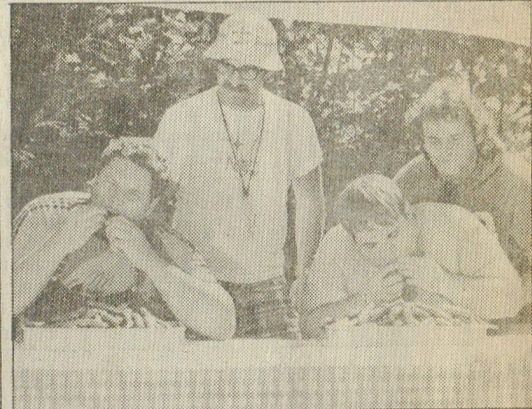
□ *Meatballs'* director is interviewed on page D3.



Jack Blum and Keith Knight make a wacky pair



Larry Solway, Bill Murray



Harvey Atkin, Bill Murray judge hot dog contest