

Centrespread

# Local kids make good Meatballs

## And they're hoping the new film will spice up their screen careers

By Bruce Kirkland Toronto Star

You can feel the ache of anticipation as the new Canadian movie *Meatballs* gears up for its world premiere tonight in a gala presentation at the Uptown L.

Don't panic. This ache is strictly private. The public will encounter a madcap movie designed for entertainment only. Set in an undisciplined and fun-loving summer camp for kids, *Meatballs* is a vehicle for TV's Saturday Night Live comedian Bill Murray to expose his wild ways to a film audience.

The full-graining ache behind the scenes involves many of the actors in secondary roles, the movie's Canadian contingent, the folk for the American star.

*Meatballs* is more than a movie to them. It holds their dreams and its success could transform them into exciting new career breaks. Failure would see those dreams explode in their faces.

There is already concrete evidence that success even a huge dazzling success, is possible. People involved in the film can almost taste the success in *Meatballs*.

Producer and cowriter Dan Goldberg told *The Star* that the \$1.6 million movie, financed through the Montreal team of *Asses and Cakes* and *Asses*, has already made a significant profit. Two months ago, *Meatballs* was sold for distribution to Paramount Pictures for the biggest advance ever to an independent film producer anywhere in the world. Goldberg refused to quote specific figures but claimed the price went to several millions.

### Biggest profit-maker

Without even being released yet, *Meatballs* has become one of the biggest profit-making films in the history of the Canadian movie industry, he said.

So why a *Meatballs* opens in 70 theatres across New York City. By July 13, it will have opened across North America. But for the moment, Goldberg concentrates on the Toronto premiere tonight.

"It really works," he says of the film, which he has sneak previewed in several U.S. cities. "God, I hope the Canadians are as co-operative as the Americans."

The *Star* talked to three of the Canadians who play prominent roles opposite Bill Murray — Kate Lynch, Sarah Torgov and Chris Makepeace. Their stories are different but their anticipation is the same — tonight's premiere and what happens in the first few weeks of the film's release are crucial stages in their careers.

### He's naive but nice

"The movie has restored my ambition — I really want to do acting as my career," says 15-year-old Chris Makepeace, a Grade 10 student at Jarvis Collegiate. Makepeace plays 12-year-old Rudy, a naive but nice kid who is forced to go to summer camp against his will but who ends up a minor hero for his exploits.

*Meatballs* is Makepeace's film debut. He's a cool, confident youth who says he had no trouble handling the movie role.

"I had done a lot of commercials so I wasn't scared. There was pressure to get it right but not too much pressure."

Makepeace has plugged products from candy bars to garbage bags to breakfast cereals. When it first began, at age 10, his face became famous on Toronto television. People whispered behind his back when they recognized him. Four giggling girls once asked for his autograph. He struggled to sign on the wax coating Mof a Coke container, the only available scrap of paper.

The commercial business was fading for Makepeace but he had left his impression. When the call went out for actors for *Meatballs*, someone at the CBC who was familiar with the youthful actor mentioned his name to writer Janis Allen, who then steered Makepeace into a special audition.

Fortunately for him, he managed to buy the cattle call audition which brought

out 1,200 other hopefuls looking for parts in these demeaning rituals.

Makepeace had a natural affinity for Rudy's role. "I could sympathize with the character," he says with the air of a seasoned pro (there's something uncannily mature about this 15 year old).

"The summer before I went to camp myself and hated it. That summer (in 1978 when *Meatballs* was filmed at Camp White Pine in Haliburton) my mom asked me if I wanted to do it again. I said, 'No.' But then I got the part and had to do it anyway." He laughs. He doesn't want you to think *Meatballs* is at all autobiographical. "I could relate to the character more than the situation."

Makepeace's work in *Meatballs* impressed director Ivan Reitman enough that five additional scenes were filmed in Montreal in January to enhance the screen relationship of Makepeace as Rudy and Bill Murray as the wacky chief camp counselor.

When *Meatballs* was privately screened in Los Angeles, his work prompted film executives to start asking, "Who was that kid?" There is strong talk about giving Makepeace a lead role opposite Robert Redford in his newest film.

That's the ache of anticipation. There are mixed feelings involved. Kate Lynch, the chief female counselor at the *Meatballs* summer camp, is trying hard not to get too

excited. She has heard nothing but positive feedback from Los Angeles industry people about *Meatballs*. She is savoring the notions but suppressing them too.

A relatively slow starter in acting, Lynch has appeared in only one other feature film, *Summer's Children*, as well as several TV films for CBC. Also one of the four on the ill-fated CBC-TV series *Custard Pie*, Lynch needs something to break her through.

Yet *Meatballs* has already had a significant effect in letting her understand her own relationship to acting. Several years ago, "I never really saw myself trying to do comedy. . . . I had dreams of Shakespeare and Chekov and I seem to find myself in *Custard Pies* and *Meatballs*."

She is changing her dreams accordingly. "I'd like to explore more of that side of me." Now "my favorite thing is doing a character in a funny movie, as opposed to doing a funny character in a movie."

Her Roxanne in *Meatballs* was originally set up as a M\*A\*S\*H-style Hotlips.

"There was no way on earth I could do that. She was supposed to be very repressed, very uptight, very efficient. I didn't think the lead character (Murray) should fall in love with a woman like that."

So Lynch helped remold Roxanne into "the single together person at the camp."

### Kate's in awe

Murray's on- and off-camera antics kept it light and easy for everyone concerned, Lynch reports.

"I certainly never worked with anyone else like that before. I've always worked with actors. That's not to say he can't act. He's different. I'm in awe of his work. I'm in awe of most really good comedians but I still don't know where it comes from in Bill."

Sarah Torgov fits into this mix as a neo-

phy with big credentials. The only other acting she had ever done was a leading role in Robin Swicord's made-for-the-CBC film, *Drying Up The Streets*, a probing look at the drug subculture in Toronto. Torgov, 23, in a remarkable debut, won a Canadian Film Award nomination as best actress in a non-feature film.

In *Meatballs* she plays Candace. She needs this film to open up new doors, because the Toronto-born actress is simply not moving ahead in spite of her proven acting ability. To pay the rent, she works as a waitress in the Queen Mother Cafe.

"*Meatballs* is exposure. It's just one more chance for the public to see what I can do."

Torgov knows the frustration of "starting at the top and then having all this silence." The film nomination gave her a heightened sense of what to expect. Unemployment brought things into perspective. "When I first heard of the nomination I thought they had made a mistake." Later, she realized "it was a thrill and an honor but it didn't mean work. Nothing means work." Well, not quite. *Meatballs* could help.

She once wanted to be a lawyer but that interest disappeared. Later came a brief stint in radio and television arts at Ryerson. Working on *Drying Up The Streets* brought some perspective.

"I actually take acting quite seriously. It's the thrill you get riding a roller coaster. It's a gut thrill."

The uneven nature of the acting career brings doubts, "but the part of me that loves it says I can't do anything else."

Perhaps that's the answer for all of the struggling actors. They push for recognition. They scramble for billing. They bristle at criticism. Beneath the surface, an unexplained love for what they do makes them wait for moments such as tonight — the world premiere of a film they can claim as partly their own. And they ache with anticipation for it to be just right.



Banking on the success of *Meatballs* are, from left, Kate Lynch, Sarah Torgov and Chris Makepeace

# Bill Murray live other times too

By Richard Friedman Toronto Star special

NEW YORK — Comic Bill Murray was meeting the press, pressing the flesh, feasting at his best.

The occasion was a press reception for two dozen reporters sponsored by Paramount Pictures, which stands to make a lot of money from *Meatballs*, a made-a-Canada flick that stars Murray. He plays Tripper, the fun-loving head counselor of Camp North Star.

Murray will be in Toronto tomorrow for the film's debut but the setting for this reception was a twenty-second floor suite in Marriott's Essex House on Central Park South.

More than one critic — Murray included — would observe that day that Murray plays himself in the flick. He was

eager to talk about his starring, catalytic, unofficial director role in the movie, was more than willing to talk about Saturday Night Live and the state of the art of comedy, and was considerably less anxious to discuss any aspect of his private life.

"Who needs a cocktail?" asked Murray, who would consume more than one drink himself as the hour wore on. Clad in an insouciant T-shirt of uncertain inscription, he introduced himself to each guest, offering pillows from his own bed to interlocutors.

"Is anybody hungry? I'm not paying for this. Don't worry about me. This is Paramount's money and they made The Godfather," said Murray, who wore faded jeans and a belt that said Billy on the back. That's in case I get lost," he explained.

Murray was lured to Haliburton by Canadian director Ivan Reitman from Oregon, where he had intended to play Triple-A baseball last summer. Shooting had begun, the script had been polished to Murray's standards — he had initially been disenchanted — by old pals Len Lujan, who wrote *After The Opera* in Toronto, Dan Goldberg, Janis Allen and Harold Ramis, who had worked with Reitman on *Animal House*.

### Murray's many hats

"Bill was, in many ways, a director and a catalyst," recalled Kate Lynch, who played Roxanne, the object of Murray's affections in *Meatballs*. Murray re-wrote scenes, supplied dialogue, and was "head counselor" of cameras as well as on.

"I'm pretty much playing myself in the movie," said Murray. "I don't go in for analyzing what Tripper does in the off-season. For me, he didn't exist and I didn't concern myself."

"I didn't have any statement to make about summer camps. I never went myself. When I was young, summer camp was a chain in the backyard."

"But one reason I took the part was that I'd be playing a solo lead, rather than bunching off other characters. I knew I'd get a chance to write many of my own scenes. I was literally re-writing scenes in my car at night."

Murray expects that movies will be a regular thing for him now, but has no intention of quitting his "day job" at Saturday Night Live. In July in Los Angeles, he goes before the cameras in the

role of gonzo journalist Hunter Thompson, author of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and the basis of the Duke character in the Doonesbury comic strip.

*Meatballs* was a low-budget movie and Murray claims that he slept in his car at the camp just to get some peace and quiet. In many ways, working in Haliburton was like working on any movie set. It was self-contained, the players had no sense of where they were, and it could as easily have been Mars as Canada.

### Black flies

"It was pretty," said Murray. "I'd love to get back up there in the autumn. One thing I do remember, though, is the Canadian black flies — those huge deer flies. The worst thing that could happen to you was trapping one of those in the car when you went to sleep at night."

Shifting gears, he spoke about the tender relationship that developed between Tripper and Rudy, played by Torontoian Chris Makepeace, a shy, somewhat alienated boy who Tripper advises. "If you make one good friend all summer, you're ahead of the game."

"After that," says Murray, "you can rest assured that he will be hiding out."

An avid people-watcher, Murray's major adjustment to fame has involved the loss of his own anonymity in public. "I used to be able to slip into a restaurant, or any situation, but now it's 'Wow, it's Bill Murray' and it makes it harder for me to get information. When I first came to New York, and I was writing for the National Lampoon, I used to walk down to Madison Avenue whenever I got writers' block. There'd be a million people on the street, and I'd be all pumped up."

"Now, people are sending it back at me and they're not themselves. They're too busy being whatever they think they're supposed to be. A husband and wife team will come up to me, and the man will say, 'My wife would love it if you gave her a noogie.'"

Murray's eyes narrow. "I always do it. These people are obviously right on the edge of insanity."

Murray cut his teeth on comedy with Chicago's Second City troupe, but refuses to pigeonhole himself.

"I'm an actor, not a comedian," he insists. "In Second City, you're trained to act. We learned everything. You put up or shut up, or you end up floating in the Calumet River. Chicago is a tough crowd."

He looks intently at a questioner who wishes to know something about the particular kind of verbiage that accompanies Murray's voice to the top of show-business. Bill Murray's voice adopts that melodic dramatic voice familiar to anyone who has watched Saturday Night Live or anyone who will see *Meatballs* this summer.

"I'm very confused normally," he says deliberately. "So I assume there are more serious problems ahead."



That camp, with Star summer and educational business was fading for Bill Murray of Saturday Night Live fame