

Hollywood North

Big movies, big budgets roll into Canada -- and you could bump into Burton or spot Sutherland on the sidewalk

By Sid Adilman Toronto Star

Stroll through Queen's Park on a hot summer's day.

My goodness, there are Suzanne Somers and Donald Sutherland making a movie; she's gorgeous off screen and he's signing autographs.

Drive in the Carlton-Parliament Sts. area a week later, and she's sitting on the sidewalk outside Parkes Restaurant, her bodyguard close by, patiently waiting to be called for a scene.

The movie is *Nothing Personal*, a \$5-million comedy and one of at least 10 Canadian films to be shot in Toronto this year.

In Bon Echo Park near Belleville, tousled-haired Joseph Bottoms is mobbed by a bus-load of teenagers who press him with questions about TV's Holocaust in which he starred; Bottoms is headlining *Surfacing*, the movie from Margaret Atwood's novel.

In Montreal, excited conventioning Lions Club members give Norman Fell (Stanley Roper on TV's *Three's Company*) little breathing room; he's there starring in *Crunch*, a Canadian-financed high school comedy.

Skipping off weight

Trip along Toronto's Yonge St. and literally bump into Rita Moreno who's fresh from skipping off weight at 21 McGill, the women's club; she's filming a U.S. movie, *Happy Birthday, Gemini*.

Madeline Kahn, her co-star, shows up at the Summerhill neighborhood fair, very unstar-like in a Hawaiian T-shirt and licking an ice cream cone.

Canada has become Hollywood North; big-time movies with big-time stars, big-time budgets (from \$3 million to \$8 million), and big-time sales around the world and, most particularly, to U.S. studios and TV networks.

Even Toronto Mayor John Sewell recognizes the boom; Canada, he said recently, has become North America's third largest movie production centre, next to Los Angeles and New York.

Look who else is either coming soon or has just left: Richard Burton, Ann-Margret, Elliott Gould, Shirley MacLaine, Richard Harris, Ellen Burstyn, Michael Murphy (Woody Allen's pal in Manhattan), Sally Kellerman, Tom Skerritt of *Alien*, Tatum O'Neal, George Kennedy, and even Harry Reems of *Deep Throat* (fully clothed).

In Toronto, it seems as if everybody is getting a piece of the action.

Hail a taxi, as I did this week and Karl Goodman, its bearded driver, chuckles: "Did you see me in the movie *Running*, with Michael Douglas, that was made in Toronto last year? Wasn't I terrific?"

"Because I have the only yellow Checker cab in town and, because many of the movies shot here are supposed to take

place in the U.S. where yellow Checker cabs are common, I'm doing all kinds of movies. Three in the last three months. I'm a business extra.

"I find out about the movies from your column in *The Star*. And production managers are getting to know me."

A sales clerk at Pink Whiskers, a boutique on Bedford Rd. beams. "Yes. Some skirts and tops that Suzanne Somers wears in *Nothing Personal* were bought here, four outfits the same because she had to go into the water with them. The movie's wardrobe lady shops here regularly. She also got clothes here for *Running*."

The Courtyard Cafe at the Windsor Arms Hotel on St. Thomas St., an 'in' spot, is even more 'in'. Donald Sutherland is there regularly but, in sun glasses and trying to be inconspicuous, he dines at Cafe des Halles on Eglinton Ave. E. It's not much of a disguise and to avoid other patrons he ducks out the back door when the meal is over.

At the Courtyard, Somers and husband, Al Hamel, are snacking at one table; at another, Hollywood screenwriter Robert Kaufman (*Love At First Bite*) with director, Stan Dragoti, who recently was busted in Germany for possession of cocaine; later in the week, director Jules Bassin visits the Courtyard.

Kaufman also hangs out at Winston's on Adelaide St. W., laughing at the differences between the Courtyard and Hollywood's celebrity-chic Polo Lounge.

"At the Polo Lounge, producers talk deals. At the Courtyard, these guys are still talking about serious stuff. They'll learn. At the Polo Lounge, you've got to have six or eight balls bouncing at once, one of them will get made. Canadian producers have a lot to learn."

In a dark disco, a city cocaine dealer also raves about the booming movie making. "Good for our business, too," he mumbles into space. "More money around for what I have available."

Flowers at midnight

Several others are now plugging into movies but with a healthier array of services; Sandra McDonald, for example. She's set up a company, operating out of the Park Plaza Hotel on Avenue Rd., to scout accommodation for visiting stars, and for other services for them — such as locating a chiropodist, and finding stores that sell flowers at midnight.

Local actor Graham Haley and partner Alf Humphreys have also formed a company, this one to help producers scout locations. Originally, it was to aid TV producers but now says Haley, "we're into film work."

But it's not all sweetness and light.

Sleepless residents of Beverley St. are upset because *Happy Birthday, Gemini* is being filmed in two houses on that street.



Suzanne Somers, Hollywood screenwriter Robert Kaufman and Donald Sutherland making *Nothing Personal* in Toronto

There have been complaints of excess traffic noise and disruption of their usually placid summer.

Their fury directed at City Hall led to a request from city officials that producers apply for a building permit for the movie set. After much arguing back and forth, the matter was settled.

The ruckus prompted a meeting with Sewell, movie producer association president Bill Marshall and federal and provincial film officials.

Sewell later came out in full support of the movie makers and told his executive committee: Put city industrial officer Naish McHugh in charge; make him the liaison person with the film industry, to smooth their path and to alert neighborhoods of any possible dislocation.

Montreal's Mayor Jean Drapeau, ever a showman, upstaged Toronto several weeks ago to the cheers of Quebec movie producers by naming a city film officer.

Civic co-operation can't prevent private arrangements from going sour; house renting, for example.

Suzanne Somers and Al Hamel thought they'd leased a north Toronto house (with swimming pool) for \$1,000 a week, only to learn at the last moment the owner jacked the price to \$1,500.

"We took it anyway," says Hamel, "but we were annoyed. We had agreed the temperature in the pool would be 85 degrees. We like it that high. The owner said 'yes' and then reneged because it would have taken three propane tanks a week and she only wanted one. They cost

her \$100 each and she didn't want to pay more; outrageous, considering the rent. She's now rented the house for August to Bruce Dern and I don't know him well enough to warn him."

"Hollywood North," muses Michael McCabe, executive director of the Canadian Film Development Corp., the 11-year-old federal film investment bank.

"If you mean, that between Toronto and Montreal, Canada has become a major production centre, yes. Hollywood North is a fair enough description.

"All Hollywood means to me is the place where they make the best pictures in the world."

Just before and during Cannes Film Festival time, Canadian producers tallied up international sales for their pictures totalling \$61 million. That's compared with \$3 million the previous year.

Grumbles are rampant that Canada is nothing more than a B-movie industry for Hollywood.

"Most movies made are B-movies," replies McCabe. "We will have our fair share of A-movies."

"I don't know if you call *Meatballs* (a Canadian film) a B-movie if it opens in 900 theatres across the U.S. It's a piece of summer entertainment which doesn't cost as much as *Moonraker* or *Alien*. Is *Alien* a B-movie? I guess it is. No country produces the majority of its films as A-movies."

Why is Canada so suddenly in the international movie business?

□ A 100 per cent tax write-off makes

movie investment, next to oil exploration, the most favorable deal for investors.

□ McCabe's entry into the scene last year and his immediate marketing push was supported by cash for producers to get moving.

□ Official co-production treaties were signed with the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Israel and West Germany.

□ The past few years have seen more producer teams willing to take risk.

□ Partnerships of producers with brokerage houses are selling movie investments to the public.

□ Endorsements from the provincial securities commissions are giving added protection.

Lower dollar

Because of the 15 per cent drop in the Canadian dollar, American movie companies are now looking to film in Canada; *Happy Birthday, Gemini* is one (backed by United Artists). Because salaries for crews are slightly less than in the U.S., those companies can film longer than south of the border with the same budget.

The last few years, American-financed movies made in Toronto have included *Equus*, *Little Big Man*, and portions of *The Silver Streak*.

"If your taxable income is \$50,000 or more annually and you have other money, films are a good investment as part of a portfolio," is the advice offered

by Lorne Graham of Greenshields, one of the brokerage firms with ties to movie producers.

Doctors, lawyers, accountants, restaurant owners and record dealers are responding; they're delighted to write a check for their investment but most of all, to meet the stars. Even the most blasé director in the country have been tongue-tied meeting some of the stars headlining Canadian movies.

McCabe says \$100 million worth of Canadian-produced movies will be made this year.

Cameramen and other crew members are now demanding pay-or-play for a picture to be made later.

"There are still cases of uncontrolled greed instead of controlled greed," snar producer Marshall. "Assistant hairdresser on some movies are making more in a year than a director of photography made last year. That's got to stop."

The rush to movie making has even made money for some lawyers who have nothing to do with showbusiness. The Ontario Labor Relations Board heard a case pressed by non-union crew member who claimed they had been unfairly forced to join the union for *Nothing Personal*. A decision is pending.

Investor money is more than available; producers are rolling, and McCabe optimistic it will continue.

"It may not be Hollywood North quips Marshall, "but it's looking a lot like the Saudia Arabia of the West."