

## Dunning-Link recipe for success is a made-in-Canada Meatballs

**C**ANADIAN-MADE films often have been criticized for their inability to make it in the lucrative U.S. market. Recently, this trend has begun to reverse itself, as several Canadian films have found success in the U.S. — most notably, this summer's comedy *Meatballs*, which revolves around the antics of Saturday Night Live's Bill Murray, at a not-so-typical summer camp.

Produced by Montreal-based John Dunning and Andre Link, the film already has grossed almost \$27 million in North America (\$3 million in Canada), after less than two months of distribution, making it the number-one grossing Canadian-made film.

Dunning and Link have been working together since 1962: "We started off with Cinepix Distributing Co., bringing U.S. and European films into the country," says Dunning, who grew up in Montreal and has spent most of his life in the film business. "By 1969, we felt that we could make our own films just as well as the ones we were distributing."

This led to the formation of DAL Productions, and a string of low-budget films followed, the first of which was *Valerie*, made for \$85,000: "We tried to follow the cycles in those days for low-budget films, that seemed to vary from sex to action and back again."

The early 1970s saw a trend to horror, and the Dunning-Link combination was ready to capitalize with a trio of spine-tingling efforts, *Shivers*, *Death Weekend* and *Rabid*.

Andre Link was born in Hungary, and came to Canada in 1954, working in film distribution and TV sales until he teamed with Dunning.

He explains their operating style: "John works primarily on the artistic side of things, while I deal with the legal and financing end. We're really each other's alter ego, since during the course of a film, we may even change roles for a while. We just complement



each other so well."

The idea for *Meatballs* was conceived last spring, with the original title planned as *Summer Camp*. However, a Los Angeles film company cleared a movie of that name, so the title had to be shelved. "Someone suggested the name *Meatballs*, and it just seemed to grow on all of us," Link says.

The production cost of the film was \$1.6 million, with preliminary financing coming from the Canadian Film Development Corp. Famous Players and, shortly after, from a group of investors in Western Canada.

Paramount provided the corporation, Haliburton Films, with a guarantee of \$3.3

million, and is spending \$4 million on publicity for the film. Worldwide distribution is projected for the fall, and potential U.S. television rights still have to be negotiated.

Both Link and Dunning are proud of the advance being made by Canadian films, but they share the concern that budgets are escalating too quickly. They point out that the risks inherent in a \$6-million-\$9-million film may be quadruple those found in a \$3-million-\$4-million project. They fear the present ready stream of investment could dry up if too many film ventures undertake budgets that make the recouping of their investment chancy.

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