

Steven Miller

## Team Work Makes Hog

MONTREAL — The first of the three Filmplan International productions for 1979 wrapped on Sept. 18. *Hog Wild*, aimed directly at the youth market — a comedy which takes off on a confrontation between a group of smart kids and a cycle gang — had a smooth shoot. It should be ready for screening by next spring, and will be released during the summer or early fall.

Pierre David and Victor Solnicki of Filmplan saw that the film got made, but the original impetus came from the third executive producer, Steven Miller. It was Miller's first time out as a producer, and he sat down with CineMag to share his thoughts on this first experience.

Miller, best known to Montrealers as one of the two owners of the Seville repertory theatre business, has spent most of his adult life looking at films and programming an awesome number of them first into Cinema V and then into the Seville. He has been on hand to watch the audiences react, and knows what works.

"I can judge films once they are made. I know what will work and what won't work," he says, commenting on his years as an exhibitor. He also knows that "Hollywood makes the most entertaining cinema alive. It allows the viewer to escape into another world. It

creates magic." And this magic is something Miller wants to be a part of.

Sitting on the Caflton terrace two years ago at the Cannes festival, he realized that he had seen all the films at the festival but still wasn't involved in the movie business he saw all around him as the producers and distributors put their deals together. He began looking for avenues other than exhibition and, having decided that distribution involved too much paper work and not enough creativity, decided to produce.

From there on, Miller's story sounds deceptively effortless, and it was. Thanks goes, says Miller, to Pierre David, then of Productions Mutuelles.

"I knew I needed a property to get started and looked at a few things. When nothing seemed to come together, I decided to write the story line for *Graduation*. Then I went to one of the best film lawyers in town, Robert Vineberg, and he suggested I go to an experienced producer before going any further."

In his own words, Miller was looking for the most honest, open, energetic producer in Montreal, and phoned Pierre David. They got together, talked a bit, shook hands, and the film was on.

Miller and David hired writers to work on the script, but the more it was refined, the more

it began to sound like Animal House: the kids against the administration. It was Victor Solnicki, the third of the Filmplan principals with David and line-producer Claude Héroux, who came up with the idea which became *Hog Wild*.

"Victor decided that we should aim at something that hadn't been done yet, that the obvious response to all the biker films and the heavy violence was a satire, a comedy on the subject." So the smart kids were pitted against the bikers and played for laughs which broke up the crew repeatedly during the shoot.

*Hog Wild* is a study of how one original idea gets reworked by several people to become a film which belongs to the production team rather than to one individual. Miller feels that the credit or the blame for the finished film should ultimately be shared by several and not just by the director.

"We chose Les Rose to direct because he had the youth, the fast paced thinking and the energy to do this kind of film. He also has that spark, that something extra which can really make a scene. We screened his previous films, especially *Three Card Monte*, and saw special moments which can only come from the director."

The producer and director turned to Hollywood, first to find a writer to get the idea of the film into shape. "One of the biggest problems in the last five or ten years has been that there were few good writers anywhere. We chose Andrew Marin because he had experience in fast paced comedy. He loved the film, and brought a lot of good ideas to it."

Miller also spent five weeks in Hollywood, casting the film with Rose and Solnicki. His experience has reconfirmed his opinion about Hollywood.

"In North America, there is only one goal: to make a Hollywood film. Anyone who isn't trying to make a Hollywood film shouldn't be given any money to make a film in Canada," Miller concludes. He welcomes the presence of producers like Arnold Kopelson, up from L.A. as executive producer on Filmplan's *Dirty Tricks* and feels that foreign producers should be encouraged to come North. "We can learn from them. You can't compete until you know what you are competing against."

*Hog Wild* is the most modestly budgeted of the three Filmplan projects (the third being Cronenberg's *Scanners*), but Miller is convinced that it may be the most profitable of the three. "It is hard to make a youth oriented film which goes well at the box office but when one hits, it hits big."

cont. on p. 23

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### Team (cont.)

cont. from p. 4

he says, referring to the success of *Meatballs*.

As a neophyte producer, coming from exhibition, Miller was comfortable with the questions: to whom will this film appeal? Who will buy it? Will the market return the investment to the backers? Because the three productions are packaged together in one prospectus, he feels that the Filmplan offering is the best offering being made in Canada. "Just one film has to make it to carry the other two," he says, although he graciously suggests that all three Filmplan productions will make their money back, he is confident that *Hog Wild* won't need to be carried

by the larger productions.

Michael Goldman of Manson International is handling the world sales of the film. As for Miller, he is itching to try his hand again, and soon, on another feature. Any regrets about *Hog Wild*? "Only one, and I guess I shouldn't complain. I went to David because I wanted to work with professionals. But between him and Solnicki and Claude Héroux, they are so professional that I didn't get to do as much as I would have liked."

So Miller is actively soliciting scripts and treatments, ready for a second try. And next time around, he is ready to get into the thick of things. He is a bit hog wild himself about production.