



**C**asual Sex? the new film comedy from producer Ivan Reitman, started out a few years ago as a three-song skit for the stage. There was no question mark after the title in those days. That was because in those days there wasn't much question about the popularity of casual sex for a lot of young folks. AIDS, as we are reminded every day these days, has changed all that.

So the question mark has been added now and along with it a whole new angle on the subject of passing sexual liaisons — a decidedly more serious angle, though *Casual Sex?* remains very much a comedy. As Reitman explains, "What is interesting to me is the telling of a serious underlying story with a comic voice."

Reitman, a Canadian now working in Los Angeles, first noticed *Casual Sex?* in 1985 when he was playing at the *Groundlings Theatre*, sort of a West coast version of *Second City*. The play was written by Judy Toll and Wendy Goldman and Reitman remembered Goldman from a small role she'd had in *Ghostbusters*, a previous Reitman production. So he went to see it, together with his wife, Genevieve Robert (the two were married in 1977 after Robert, a French-Canadian, had spent five years as Reitman's assistant).

# CASUAL SEX

## COMEDY FOR THE 80'S



They liked what they saw. And what they saw was the story of two friends, Melisa and Stacy, in their mid-20s, and trying to make sense out of men and sex. How, for instance, to combine those two vital things with one's own sense of independence and identity? It was a story, Reitman and Robert thought, that came out of social situation and dealt nicely with human frailty.

After coaching Toll and Goldman through a rewrite that took into account the new realities of sex and the single world, Reitman put the picture into production with Robert making her feature film directorial debut (she had already won an award at the Paris Women's Film Festival for directing a 20-minute short *A Little Victory*). As Stacy they cast Lea Thompson, the former ballerina who played Michael J. Fox's mother in *Back to the Future* (and was less successfully paired with a duck named Howard after that). For Melisa they tapped Victoria Jackson, who

spends many Saturday nights trying to convince midnight audiences that "I am not a bimbo!" (Jackson also had a brief but memorable cameo in *Baby Boom*, playing a babysitter Diane Keaton caught with her boyfriend and no clothes).

In one sense *Casual Sex?* is an old story for Ivan Reitman, a Czechoslovakian who emigrated with his family to Canada when he was five. Having gotten into show business as a Toronto stage producer, he went back to the theatre to find the source for his first big screen hit *Animal House*. "That show was so different from most things around back then" says Reitman. "It spoke to an entire generation of kids — I'm talking about kids who go to movies right now, the major moviegoing audience today, between the ages of 16 and 30. Most important, it was very funny. It made people laugh and applaud and really, that's all one can say about it. For some reason people go to their don't

go, and you just can't fool an audience."

After producing and/or directing several low budget movies in Canada in the early 1970s, Reitman moved to the States. He means no disrespect to Canada, he insists. "Look, it's not that there isn't talent here. It's just that in the U.S. you've got ten times as many people and it's just easier to find that one very special person for a film. "Plus", he adds "they've been doing it a lot longer. And they're very good at it. They don't survive being incompetent."

North or south of the border, it's a difficult, back-breaking business, he says. You work 18 hours a day and don't get to see your family for long stretches of time. You always have to be on your toes. It's demanding from a creative point of view and it's demanding from a business point of view. "But I'm in it because it satisfies a creative force in me. I've been doing this since I was three years old one way or another — putting on puppet shows for all the kids on the block back in Czechoslovakia."

Plus, he has come to see filmmaking as the sum total of all the great arts. "You know, there's writing, there's production design and art, there's theatre. You put them all together and you've got movies. I never really wanted to do anything else."

— Lyle Stack

