

Conversation

with Steve Lack

Though having made only three films, Montrealer Steve Lack is among the best young actors around. Starring in *Montreal Main*, then Gilles Carle's *L'Ange et la femme*, and finally *The Rubber Gun*, Lack has found his acting talent. During the filming of his fourth movie, *Head On*, at York last fall, Lack took them to the subway system, which is loaded with Nazi graffiti. They say that the subway system is loaded with Nazi graffiti around 1948, legitimized it in '57 and became constant fear and desire.

So just ask me a question, for Christ's sake. Or do you want me to just free associate with the thoughts of the page on your thighs?

How do you like Toronto?

I'm having a great time. Actually I love Toronto. You know this city is loaded with bread. I can just smell it. They say that the subway system is loaded with Nazi gold, and that is where they all live. The Nazis built it so that they could get from city to city and from continent to continent. They surfaced in Toronto around 1948, legitimized it in '57 and became overground, creating all the entrances that Torontonians use today in their daily transportation. The deeper ones that go to Brazil and stuff, they still don't know about.

You must be kidding?

No.

Your film *The Rubber Gun* was seen by a lot of people in its initial English Canada run last year at Cineplex. When did you write it and how did Alan "Bozo" Moyle come to direct it?

Bozo and I worked on it right from the beginning. He'd already seen Jack Hazan's *A Bigger Splash*, a documentary on painter David Hockney, and had it in his mind to do a portrait of me as an artist, but in Steve Lack style. And then we both saw *Superfly* together. We came out of the film and he said, 'I'm going to do you as the drug dealer. I'm going to take that little piece of your life and we'll blow it up. What do you think? We'll do a dope movie.'

Anyways, Moyle and I co-wrote the script. What Moyle would say was, 'What happened to you yesterday?' And I tell him, 'this and that.' He would then say, 'Well some of that sounds good, let's use this.' We would discuss what we needed to show—a character being mad, another successful, another sympathetic. All those things had to be structured.

Why is the end of *Rubber Gun* did the dealer not get away with the dope?

That's just a film device. We had to have an ending to it. We couldn't have Steve's friends getting away with the brick, leaving him in the cold. We couldn't have his friends end up making money, after he's chosen to lose money. The audience's sympathy would be divided. We had to give them that old classical moral.

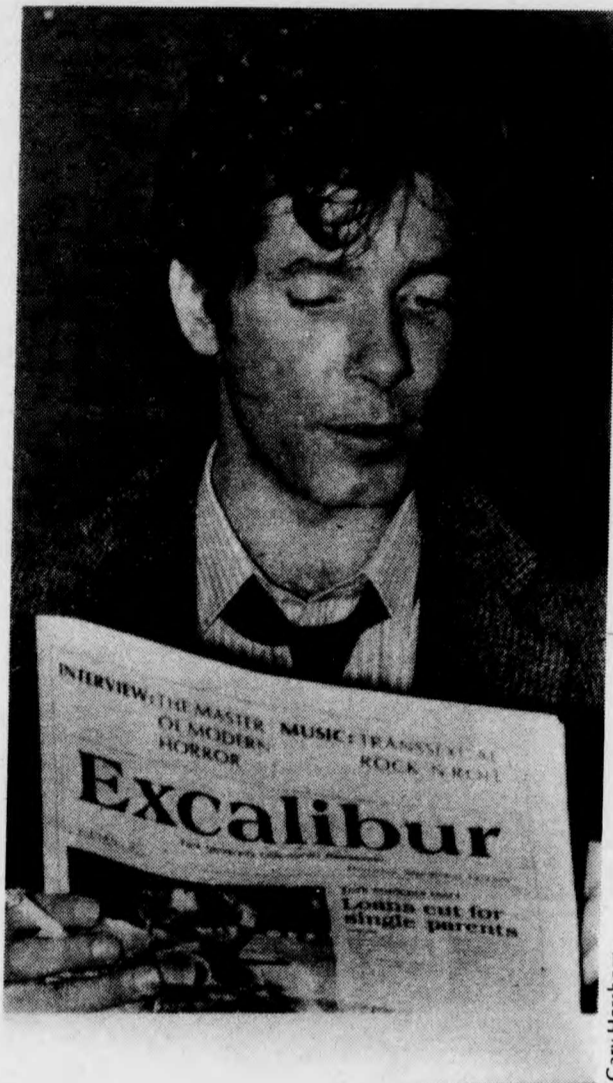
You know we could have done the film the other way. The movie I originally wanted to do was to show a person can have a lot of money from dealing drugs, but would have no other place to put the money but back into drugs. So I wanted it to be the "Sierra Madre" of drug addiction.

***Rubber Gun* was made on a very miniscule budget. How did you find the crew?**

We tried to find people who needed the work. For example, we broke someone in who's now working full time in movies. He was with a symphony orchestra somewhere in the United States. He bought his own equipment with his savings and somehow came up to Canada because he was sick of the American situation. We were lucky he bumped into us and did the sound, once again on a free basis. (Nobody in "*Montreal Main*" or *Rubber Gun* took any money for acting and Vitalie photographed *Rubber Gun* returning the favor.) I think we got him some money because he had a wife and two kids to support.

Sadly, though, one of his kids was killed by a hit-and-run driver, just after *Rubber Gun* was completed. Julian Olsen. A good worker. You know you have a six o'clock call or a seven o'clock call. He lived maybe a thirty-five minute walk from my house. And he would always be the first one on the set. He would walk there carrying all his equipment in a knapsack. He was fantastic, carrying thirty-five to forty pounds of equipment in freezing weather. All sorts of weather.

The NFB was good to us also. They couldn't give us



Gary Hershorn

money because we were non "inhouse," but they did get us facilities and equipment and helped us with the sound mixing.

How did Lewis Funey come to do the music for *Rubber Gun*?

We're friends. I've done all three of his album covers. Lewis' album came out in '75 and we had already started filming probably first at the time. Then Lewis did the second album. If you look at it, song for song, it goes scene for scene to a musical version of *Rubber Gun* that he and I worked on but which never got off the ground. I wrote one of the songs, "Top Ten Sexes" with him. I created the concept, and barked out the lyrics and some of the music. I don't know how to play any instrument, so it was just a rap session with a tape recorder on the piano.

You wore a special leather mask in a comical scene in *Rubber Gun*. Is there a story behind it?

The mask was made by an architect's assistant who spent four years being a leathersmith. Once he had the example of someone having fun in the art world he got back into it and within two years he was doing freelance work for the big agencies. Now you can see his work in Time Magazine and travel agency booklets and all kinds of things. We worked on the mask two weeks, three nights a week. I designed it and he executed it.

When talking about Bozo you don't always have the kindest things to say. Usually, it's difficult to work with a partner. Why then do you work with him?

Bozo, when he gets mad, is like a wet weasel. But that's okay cause that's just the force applied in a negative direction. Nevertheless, he has the force and it can be positive in other places. And that's why I work with him under normal conditions, and even abnormal conditions.

Bozo's working on a new film now in New York called *Times Square*. It's a big budget film about teenage runaways who come to 42nd Street and fall into drugs, prostitution and other evils. Bozo has Tim Curry as the star and some good punk bands doing the soundtrack. It's being produced by Robert Stigwood who did Saturday Night Fever and Grease so it's guaranteed to get a lot of promotion behind it.

Your first film with Bozo was entitled "*Montreal Main*." The film is a favorite around York film circles, but it is treated like a dog by its distributor and by the

press. What is your reaction to the Toronto Sun who call the film "tedious and boring" and do not even bother to list the names of the film's stars?

Are they crazy? And only two stars. I mean Nye Makloikas. You know who she is? The girl that they pick up in the van, and want to look down her front.

Ester Ormanye, I don't even know. Suzy Lake, you can't even see her, you can just hear her. Somebody is pulling a vicious goof. Somebody at the Sun knows me and hates me. Canada is cool, Toronto is not.

It's a great little movie, but not for television, because of the commercial breaks, which make it smaller, and it's already small. At least on the big screen it balances itself out. Yeah, *Montreal Main* is an official great little movie. If we all keep working, maybe it will come back to the public. Or it will be like a painter's early depressed work, as we get slicker and die on the vine of commerciality. Which is our constant fear.

Where did you find the young boy named Johnny, who played such a central role in "*Montreal Main*"?

Frank Vitalie went to over a hundred gym classes of young boys. God, it was awful to see that big, hunking, Catholic, hairy, bearded, bohemian, intense creature up against the walls. We had a casting call on one of the daytime television shows, and this one kid did it. He didn't have a clue what the movie was about. The kid was a total cherry. And a doll. Perfect for the part and that was it. We ripped off his innocence like any good filmmaker would.

I understand you're a good photographer and recently had the opportunity of an exclusive photo session with that sensuous Canadian starlet Carole Laure. What kind of photographic tricks did you use to capture her beauty?

She's so beautiful, I didn't know how to photograph her. When something's beautiful and you're a pervert, you have to subvert the beauty. So I took a lot of shots, and I knew that they were just normal, average things and I didn't have the courage to just go in and take the eyes and the mouth being beautiful. Almost anyone can do that. I like to have some sort of interaction: So we had taken all those pictures and I didn't have a thing. So just at the end, like the second last picture I had on the roll, we were in the kitchen and I said, 'Stand against the wall,' and I got her into focus and I said, 'Come out a bit,' and as she came out I pushed her into the wall and clicked it as she was bouncing. I just got this look on her face, that is so 'What did you do that for,' the lip was really pouting.

Great beauty upsets me, it's hard for me to deal with it. I would rather take somebody with a lot of flaws and create the illusion of beauty than take something that's very beautiful and just repeat it.

What was the reaction of the New York public to *Montreal Main*?

We had a very good showing at the Whitney Theater. We packed in four, five shows a day, even though it's a hundred seat theatre. We were encouraged by the reaction to the movie.

Is Andy Warhol too much of an obvious influence for your work?

No, I think we love Warhol except for the fact that he hasn't forced the entertainment side. Because he's an artist and because he has always been recognized very well for his paintings he hasn't bothered to entertain. He's more of an experiment.

You've been quite busy lately. Tell us about some of the other activities you've submerged yourself in lately.

Well, I have a short story in this month's *File* magazine. It's part of a collection of short stories that I hope to release as a book, shortly. On March 9 at 9 pm, I'm going to be starring in an episode of the CBC's 'For the Record' series called "Maintain the Right." In it I play an ordinary police officer who gets involved with a girl who is into demonstrating. Through her I'm led to the RCMP's "Dirty Tricks" Squad, Canada's secret police. I'm just completing *Head On*, the film we shot partly at your lovely campus, and I will be heading home to Montreal soon to star in David (The Brood) Cronenberg's new horror film called *Scanners*. Plus I've got my painting exhibits. So by spreading myself thin, I hope to be a master of some of those trades.