

# DON JOHNSON STARS IN DEAD BANG



Much to his satisfaction, John Frankenheimer's most famous film *The Manchurian Candidate* was recently reissued.

The acclaim was even greater than that of its original showing in 1962.

Frankenheimer is a highly individual, strong-minded artist, with a courage and vision which has seen him through many difficult battles to get films made his way. He came to the cinema from "live" TV with *The Young Stranger* in 1956, and attended the Montreal Film Festival last summer to accept a tribute to his long career with a showing of *The Manchurian Candidate*.

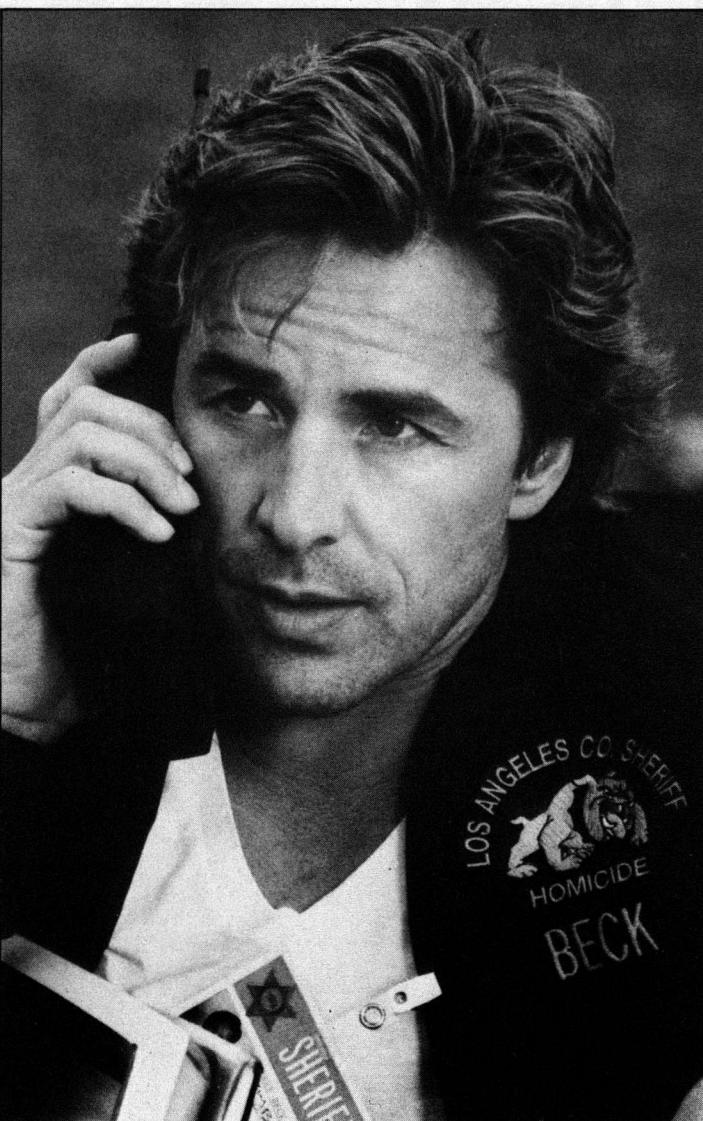
While this film is rightly considered to be his masterpiece, there are many others among his thirty-odd films now considered classics of the cinema including *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962), *Seven Days in May* (1964), *The Train* (1964), *Seconds* (1966), *The Fixer* (1968), *The Iceman Cometh* (1973), *French Connection II* (1975) and *Black Sunday* (1976). His 1986 version of Elmore Leonard's 52 *Pick-Up* is one of the most powerful, yet under-rated, crime films of this decade.

During his stay in Montreal however, much as the director fully enjoyed discussing his past films with the audience, his mind was obviously preoccupied with his latest movie, **Dead Bang**. The shooting was completed and he was leaving for London the next day to finish editing and to arrange the recording of the score.

Based on a true story involving racial intolerance in the southern states, **Dead Bang** concerns a momentous event in the life of Los Angeles homicide detective, Jerry Beck — an incident which turned out to be one of the most significant and frightening in Beck's long career.

Frankenheimer, always on the lookout for powerful subjects involving social and political issues of our time, heard of Beck's story and was attracted to it without reservations.

"I was hooked immediately" he said. "It's tough and true and func-



tions on two levels: plot and character. On the plot level it's basically the story of an L.A. detective whose murder investigation of a fellow officer takes him halfway across the country. In the course of solving the case, he finds himself involved in a national conspiracy of the Far Right. It's a kind of a thriller, a suspenser with political overtones.

"On the character level, it's the examination of a driven man, Beck, on the brink of a breakdown. His marriage has failed, he is separated from his children, he drinks too much and he's obsessed with his work which has taught him to trust no one.

"We see what happens to him in the course of one week. At the end, you see a ray of hope for this man.

Through his relationships with a woman and a small-town police officer, he begins to allow himself to trust again — perhaps. He's a microcosm of what we all are — terribly locked up in ourselves and afraid to give and to love."

Frankenheimer engaged Robert Foster to write the screenplay, and turned to Steve Roth to produce the film. Said Roth "I found the aspect of a man who's a fish-out-of-water and goes off on an assignment that turns into a personal quest very appealing. There was also the draw of a true story and the topicality of the White Supremacist element that Beck uncovers. One reads a lot about this activity in the papers lately, and I think that movies should have something to say about it too."

These things, plus John Frankenheimer's gift for enriching material like this with force and a driving energy, convinced me I'd have no trouble getting it financed. As soon as we sent the script out to the studios we received three offers and we made a deal with Lorimar; but there was a caveat. We had to go out and get a star."

The most suitable actor who came up at the top of their list was Don Johnson, who accepted the role with enthusiasm. After a series of meetings in Florida, where Johnson was working in *Miami Vice*, an agreement was reached and **Dead Bang** became the second feature film for this experienced actor since achieving his immense success in *Vice*. The first was *Sweet Hearts Dance*.

For Don Johnson, who has a long career behind him on stage and in films and TV (starting in 1970 with *The Magic Garden of Stanley Sweetheart*) the role of detective Jerry Beck was a natural outcome of his role as detective Sonny Crockett in *Miami Vice*. "It appealed to me mainly because it's a true story. It still astounds me that in this day and age there are groups of people who for various reasons have hatreds for people who are not like them — who haven't recognized that we are all people with the same feelings and emotions."

And the real-life man of the story, Jerry Beck, has this to say "My main concern about this film was to make it clear that I'm still a deputy sheriff and proud of it. I didn't want the department portrayed in a bad light, or myself either, for that matter."

Others in the cast include Penelope Ann Miller (*Miles from Home*), William Forsythe (*Patty Hearst*), Bob Balaban (*Absence of Malice*) and Tim Reid (*WKRP in Cincinnati*).

The American-British-Canadian technical crew included noted set designer, Ken Adam (*James Bond*), the brilliant cinematographer, Gerry Fisher (who filmed most of Joseph Losey's movies) and editor Robert Shugue. The Canadian contribution comes from the film's three month location shooting in Alberta.

Interestingly, at the same time Frankenheimer was shooting **Dead Bang**, Costa-Gavras was also in Alberta filming *Betrayed*. Yet neither director met and each had only the haziest idea of what the other was doing, so shrouded in secrecy were both projects.

"How two films, or three now with *Mississippi Burning*, with similar themes could be made in the same place without us knowing" commented Frankenheimer "is just another of the many quirks which come with film making."

His next project? William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness*.

— Gerald Pratley

