

Defenestration

A Literary Magazine Dedicated to Humor



“Strange Role, Strange Brew”

By Allan Bonner

2023 was the fortieth anniversary of my roles in the Bob and Doug McKenzie movie *Strange Brew*. These were two of the most difficult roles in motion picture history. It's time the real story was told.

Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas created the characters on the hit SCTV show featuring John Candy, Martin Short, Andrea Martin, Catherine O'Hara, Joe Flaherty, and Eugene Levy. Rick and Dave had to fill two minutes on the Canadian version because there are two more minutes of commercials in the U.S. where the show also aired. We have fewer things to sell each other in Canada.

The two minutes of Canadian trivia was a hit and became the germ of the movie.

About 59 minutes in I appear in my first role. It's the “courtroom steps” scene in which Bob and Doug's lawyer beats up a group of reporters. He decks one. That's where the challenge in my role began. I was asked to stand in for the either dead, unconscious, or perhaps dying body. The director was no doubt unhappy with the take the first actor was giving to the role, and sensed I could do the part justice.

I considered the degree of difficulty. I'd not been struck by the actor/lawyer and fallen over with the appropriate feeling of a beaten journalist. No. I had to get into the mind of an actor now playing dead, unconscious, or dying and make that part real and consistent. I noted that I couldn't channel unconscious, dead, or dying energy.

Since the movie is loosely based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I improvised. No one said “Goodnight sweet Prince...” to me, but as a possibly dying actor, I had to imagine “flights of angels” singing me to my rest. Watch. I think you'll agree that I pulled it off.

Less than a minute later I play a cop in the courtroom scene. You first see the back of my

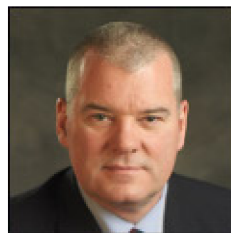
head, and then two scenes in which I'm intently watching the lawyer who's speaking. Like others in the scene, I had to look as if I'm trying to fathom what's going on. Happily, I'd studied Shakespeare a great deal. I was well prepared to not know what was going on. “Who's there?” the play begins. But there's no answer, just another question, “Nay, answer me, stand and unfold yourself.” I admit I had an advantage over the other actors. Not only did I not know what was going to unfold in the courtroom, but I also didn't know how to act. I drew on that well of inexperience.

Rick and Dave are listed as co-directors. But I took direction from someone lower down—a second unit director perhaps. I have always viewed this as a great show of confidence that Rick and Dave had for my work.

Did the great Max Von Sydow ask about my acting techniques? No, but I sensed my process had influence on many around me.

This was my only feature length movie. My role is uncredited. This was long before uncredited roles became fashionable by Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, David Bowie, Sean Connery, Hugh Jackman, Robert Di Nero, Johnny Depp, and many others.

I take some pride in having this influence over so many great actors.



Allan Bonner is a Canadian guy through and through. He has lived in most of the provinces and knows Canada the way only a news reader at CBC can. He has managed the snow-ball throwing team at TV Ontario, created a Communications Management business carrying his own name thirty years ago, and is still training trainers today. He is

distinguished and clever and knows how to warm up well with laughter, music, and conversation after a cold dash from the car. Batting with the best, Allan speaks Canadian.