



ALUMNI PROFILE

Bon Cop Bad Cop producer Kevin Tierney, S BA 71, GrDip 78, is laughing, although not necessarily all the way to the bank

PARK EX PRODUCER

BY HOWARD BOKSER

This summer's smash-hit Canadian movie *Bon Cop Bad Cop* may one day make its producer and co-writer, Kevin Tierney, S BA 71, GrDip 78, a wealthy man. Not yet, though. "People keep asking me if I'm rich," Tierney told a crowd gathered to celebrate the record-breaking success of the cop-buddy action comedy on October 23. "So I walk around pretending to be rich."

Two weeks later, sitting in the modest St. Henri district offices of his production company, Park Ex Pictures, Tierney explains that despite *Bon Cop*'s \$12 million in domestic ticket sales, making it the top-grossing film in Canadian history, it still isn't in the black. "For a movie to actually make a profit, it would probably have to do about three times its costs," he says, after the distributor and the theatres take their cut. With *Bon Cop*'s \$8.2-million budget, "we're at about half of that."

The two-time Concordia graduate looks less like a slick, big-time and big-moneyed Hollywood movie producer than like a college teacher — which he once was. After completing his BA from Sir George in 1971, Tierney spent a busy, intrepid decade that included a two-year stint in Africa, a McGill degree

in education, a Concordia graduate diploma in communication studies, teaching at a high school and at John Abbott College, writing for *Cinema Canada* and a year of teaching and writing in China.

"When I came back from China in 1982," Tierney recalls, "I was really broke. I started doing freelance publicity for a Montreal company called David Novek and Associates, specializing in the film business. And that led me to being a unit publicist on a bunch of feature films."

In 1988, Tierney hooked up with Quebec producer Rock Demers, best known for his children's films. "I was developing projects and doing international sales for them," Tierney says. "The first thing I produced with Rock was *The Memoirs of Pierre Trudeau* [1994], a five-and-a-half-hour documentary series for CBC and Radio-Canada directed by Brian McKenna — a Loyola boy [L BA 67]!" He also produced films in association with the American cable channel Showtime, including *More Tales of the*

City (1998) and *Bonanno: a Godfather's Story* (1999), and *P.T. Barnum* (1999) for A&E, earning several Emmy nominations along the way.

Around 2000, Tierney left to set up Park Ex Pictures, named for his native Montreal neighbourhood. "The first film that I did under my own banner was *Varian's War* [2001], written and directed by another Concordia graduate, Lionel Chetwynd [S BA 63]. Next I co-produced two TV movies: *Choice: The Henry Morgentaler Story* [2003] and *One Dead Indian* [2006] for CTV. Then came *Bon Cop Bad Cop*."

Pitching *Bon Cop*

Tierney's involvement with *Bon Cop* started in

2003, when Quebec actor Patrick Huard brought him an idea, via the distributor Alliance Atlantis Vivafilm. "A brilliant idea," Tierney says, "that was a paragraph. And then it became 10 pages, then it became 20 pages, and so on. And now we're here three and a half years later, and that idea won't go away. It's beginning a whole new life: international, the festival circuit, the film prize



circuit, the report to investors.” (For a description of Tierney’s role as producer, see sidebar, opposite.)

As Tierney explains, “Canada is not a country known for making high-concept movies, but this is a high-concept movie, which means that it was sold on a pitch: French cop, English cop. They meet at the border. There’s this body hanging over the sign that says ‘Bienvenue à Québec’ and ‘Welcome to Ontario.’ The English cop says, ‘He’s a true Quebecer — his heart’s in Quebec.’ And the French cop says, ‘Yeah, but he’s got Ontario up his ass.’ That’s the movie.”

Right from the start, Tierney says, “everybody got really excited. It was perceived as an attempt to make a very commercial comedy, which is exactly what it was. Patrick wanted to write it himself, but he spends his time acting and performing. When the person I brought in to write with Patrick didn’t work out,” Tierney recalls, “I thought, do I bring in another writer and start all over? Instead, I said to Patrick, let’s just write the goddamn thing. So I went to his house every day and we wrote it.”

When Tierney and Huard emerged with a script, he relates, “people liked the idea but they weren’t sure of the action, and at that point they weren’t even sure if I could judge the English Canadian humour, because I had lived in Quebec too long!” By then, Tierney admits, “I had sort of temporarily abdicated my role as a producer, because what we had written was really not affordable — it was preposterous! The climax of the movie took place at the Bell Centre, with the clock falling, 15,000 people in the stands, and chase scenes in the parking lot of the Air Canada Centre.” He continues, “At that point, Eric Canuel [fine arts 88, the director] said, ‘Are you out of your mind?’ That’s when it really is about the compromises you have to make because of your own ambition, and it’s precisely at this point that it’s great to be able to collaborate with the likes of a Canuel and a Huard.”

The final product, Tierney describes, “is a really funny, hip kind of

action comedy.” With Huard’s uncouth Montreal cop and Colm Feore’s uptight Toronto officer investigating a series of violent murders in the two cities involving Canada’s national sport, hockey, *Bon Cop* succeeds in lampooning most English and French Canadian stereotypes. Tierney states: “The project was always going to be *über* Canadian. People were going to speak both languages and the jokes were going to be about Canada and Canadian culture, and this lunacy of living side by side. We wanted to see if we could make French people and English people laugh at the same situation. Maybe not exactly the joke, but the same basic situation, to laugh at ourselves and each other.”

Canadian content

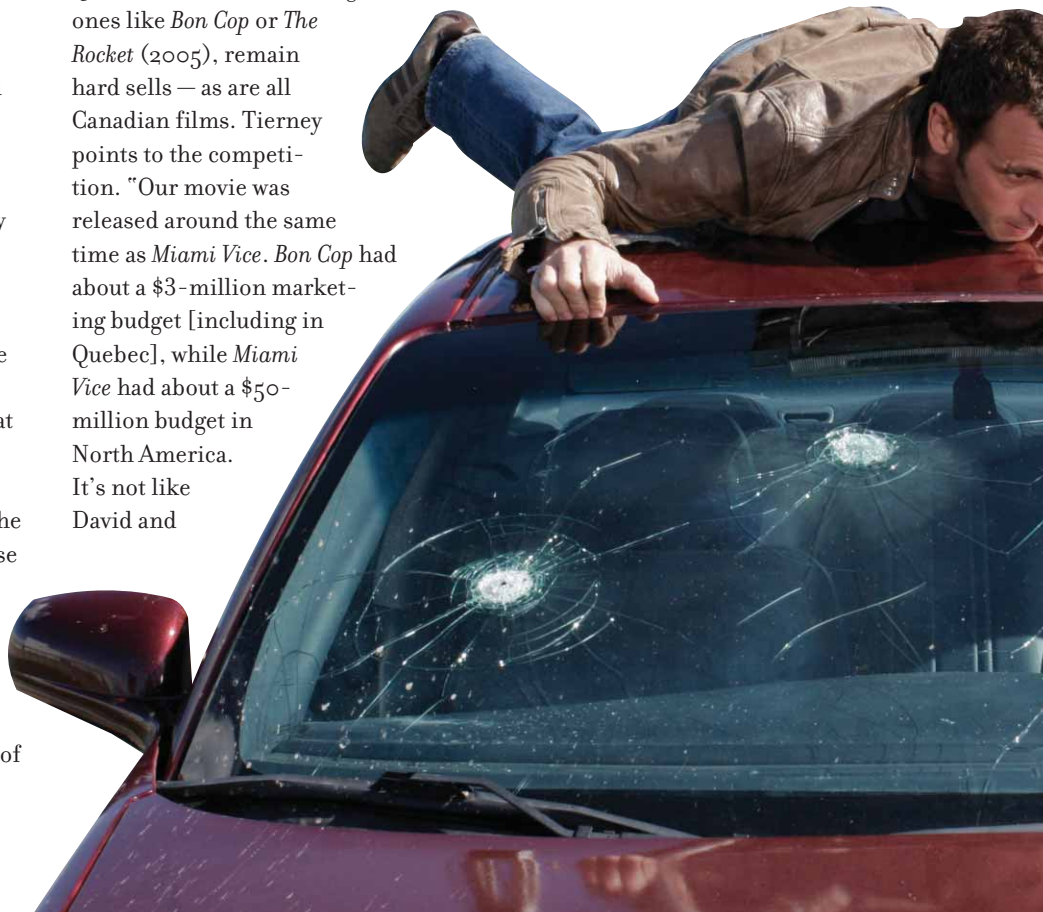
The results have been boffo — at home, at least. “If you think about how many people saw *Bonanno* or *P.T. Barnum* or *More Tales of the City* — we sold all around the world, we got Emmy nominations — it doesn’t compare,” he says. “But believe me, it’s much nicer to have a domestic hit, one that’s purebred. It’s obviously had an impact culturally.”

In the rest of Canada, however, Quebec movies, even bilingual ones like *Bon Cop* or *The Rocket* (2005), remain hard sells — as are all Canadian films. Tierney points to the competition. “Our movie was released around the same time as *Miami Vice*. *Bon Cop* had about a \$3-million marketing budget [including in Quebec], while *Miami Vice* had about a \$50-million budget in North America. It’s not like David and

Goliath, but more like the elephant and the ant.”

Tierney believes French movies like *Bon Cop*, *C.R.A.Z.Y.* or *Les Boys* hit it big in their home province because Quebecers make a huge effort in embracing their culture. What would it take to recreate the Quebec phenomenon in English Canada? “A lot more money,” he says. “We took the actors on a tour of Quebec on a bus, but you can’t do that in Canada unless you put the actors on a plane. Should we be doing that? Yes, absolutely.” He adds, “In the end we’ll probably do about \$3 million in English, which by Canadian standards is great. But I think we all know how we’d do it differently if we had to do it over again. I’m still intrigued by the challenge.”

Tierney points out that *Bon Cop* did actually reach a new audience. “The thing to me that is most telling,” he says, “is the amount of money it made in English in Quebec” — more than 10 per cent of the Quebec box office. “That means that the marketing campaign worked, and that when people were exposed to it, they showed up. And when they showed up, they really liked the movie.”



The next hurdle will be to take this very Canadian film out of the country. "I think there is a potential international market for *Bon Cop*, but not huge," Tierney acknowledges. One option is to re-imagine and remake it, à la *The Departed*, the recent Martin Scorsese film that started life as a 2002 Hong Kong movie, *Infernal Affairs*. He reveals, "I've had lots of calls from Los Angeles, and from people who specialize in remakes — including both companies that did *The Departed*. But the irony is that we took an American genre and remade it in our way. I said to them, 'If you remake *Bon Cop*, you may end up with *Lethal Weapon V*.'" One idea for a new version that could work, Tierney suggests, would be to place it along the Mexican-American border.

Bueno Cop Bad Cop?

After this very commercial effort, his next project is a real change of pace, a small-scale drama from Concordia film professor Guylaine Dionne, BFA 90, called *Serveuses demandées*, which starts shooting in February. But fans of Tierney's hit film should have no worries. "I have a couple of films in the works along the lines of *Bon Cop*," he says. "I like comedies."

Quebecers — and many others — seem to like Tierney's comedies, too. 🍷



THE PRODUCER

Kevin Tierney explains his role

The comedian Jackie Mason once said that everyone in Los Angeles hands out business cards that claim they're a producer, but the only thing most of them seem to produce are business cards.

Kevin Tierney produces movies. But what does that mean? As he explains it: "At the beginning there's the writer, in the middle there's the director and in the end there's a movie. But the producer's job is before the beginning, during the middle and after the end. The lifespan of the project for the producer is forever. You don't get to give it away."

The producer is involved in every aspect during that lifespan. Once Tierney chooses a project, he must put together a budget and then find investors. He says, "You also have the artistic responsibility. To sell the project, you need credibility. You need to have a vision of what the project could be, and then you have to surround yourself with the right people to make that vision come to life, because you have to deliver on what you promised."

A producer must sell the film to a distributor to get it into

Bon Cop Bad Cop producer and co-writer Kevin Tierney (left), on the set with François Flamand, an executive producer, and stars Colm Feore and Patrick Huard. Writing the film with Huard, says Tierney, "was just enormous fun. Patrick is very witty, very smart."

theatres and market it to audiences. "If the movie runs three and a half hours and the theatre owners say, 'Forget it, we're not going to play it,' that's your responsibility," Tierney says. "When SODEC [Société de développement des entreprises culturelles] wants the movie to show as part of the Semaine du cinéma Québécois in Paris, that's still me."

He continues, "Right now we're preparing the release of the DVD of *Bon Cop Bad Cop*. I'm doing commentary with the director, Eric Canuel. Then there's the international life, the television life, and financial and tax reports. Plus you're dealing with government funding."

Tierney says he's never done service productions, that is, American productions that come north with mostly American casts in tow, such as *I'm Not There*, the Bob Dylan biopic with Richard Gere and Cate Blanchett that was shot in Montreal this summer. "The stuff I've done has always been Canadian content," he says. "I'm not a line producer; I'm not a great organizer of crews or negotiating contracts. I like to think of myself as a storyteller."

