

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Camerman eyes the action in 'Taps'

By Victor E. Swanson
special writer

RICK BOTA of Birmingham (and Los Angeles) agrees that "The Challenge Sequence" is the highlight of the movie "Tap," starring Gregory Hines and Suzanne Douglas. Bota was camera operator on the film now playing metropolitan Detroit theaters. He said in a telephone interview from Los Angeles, "I heard a lot of reviews say that it's the highlight of the film in terms of the dancing. It's where all the old hoofers come in - you see all the old-timers . . . Sandman Sims, Bunny Briggs, and all these guys. Sammy Davis Jr. and Gregory come in, and they do an improvisational dance."

"In that scene, we just rolled cameras, and they just went for it," he said so delightedly that he sounded as if he were about to burst. "And we just kept rolling and rolling and rolling on it. I don't know how many times we did that scene."

He burst. "But it was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me to be watching these guys dance and for everybody involved. I mean, it was just a thrilling day, couple of days to watch it."

THE MOVIE about tap dancing is set in New York. It was written and directed by Nick Castle and filmed in New York and Hollywood over a 12-week period early last year. David Gribble is the director of photography under whom Bota worked a Panavision camera.

Weekly trade publication Variety stated in its review, "Tap is a pristinely rich and affecting blend of dance and story that transcends its respectful deference toward the great hoofers of a bygone era to deliver plenty of glowing contemporary entertainment."

Another scene that Bota is proud of is "the sounds of the city," in which Hines and Douglas dance to-

gether on a building. It took more than a day to film.

Yet another stunning scene is the opening sequence in the jail cell. Bota said, "It's an incredible piece of dancing." Bota exclaimed, "And, unfortunately, the opening sequence, I think, probably runs about three or four minutes, but the dance that he (Hines) did, I think, was about eight minutes long, and it was just, throughout the whole film - particularly the jail scene - it was so hard as an operator to keep my eye glued through the optics of the camera because of what was going on in front of me."

"I had a great view. Because I was able to watch the whole thing . . . so breathtaking . . . the dancing so exciting and exhilarating. It was tough to keep concentrating on what we were doing."

BOTA IS A graduate of Birmingham's Seaholm High School. He attended Central Michigan University for two years, then the University of Michigan for two years, where he received a bachelor of science degree in 1981. He had begun studies in premed, but during the last year at U-M he found himself helping a friend a lot with his film projects.

Bota recalled, "I pretty much put more of my energy into a lot of his projects than I did into what I was doing. When I graduated, I sort of pursued work (film work) in the Detroit area, trying to figure out if there was actually a market. If you actually could make a living doing it."

From 1981 to 1985, he worked in metropolitan Detroit as a camera technician, or "focus puller."

"The focus puller is a technician who manages the equipment and makes sure the subjects are in focus, usually by pulling a measuring tape or sometimes looking through the camera," Bota said.

"AND THEN at the end of '85, I sort of started getting kind of itchy

working in Detroit and wanted to pursue some bigger projects." He said the big turning point for him was when he worked on "Beverly Hills Cop," when it was shot in Detroit, for about two weeks.

Not long after, Bota found himself in Los Angeles, where the work was scarce for him at first. Then a break came, as a camera assistant.

"I ended up landing a feature that I got on through a friend of a friend," he said. The show was "Body Slam," with Dirk Benedict and Rowdy Roddy Piper. More jobs followed.

He worked on theatrical films, such as "Lady Beware," and videos. "I did a bunch of music videos when they were at their peak . . . I must have done 20 of them in a year." (He has worked on one David Bowie video and three Prince videos.)

For Director of Photography Jon Kranhouse, he served as camera assistant on "Stillwatch," a TV movie with Angie Dickinson and Lynda Carter that was shown on CBS on Feb. 10, 1987, and on "The Infiltrator," a CBS Summer Playhouse entry with Scott Bakula that was aired Aug. 14, 1987.

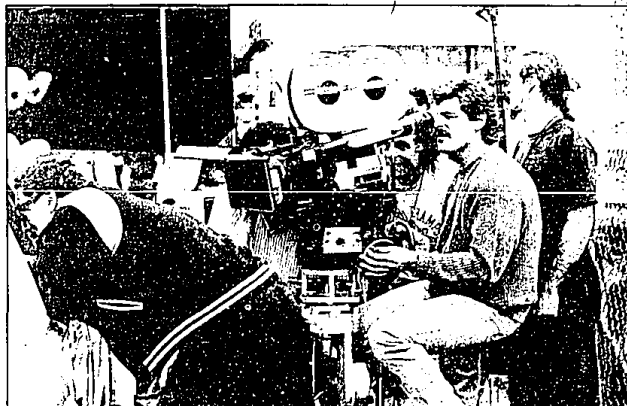
KRANHOUSE GAVE Bota the opportunity to be a camera operator, for the Fox television series "Werewolf," with Jon York and Chuck Connors, which premiered July 11, 1987. Kranhouse was director of photography, the individual concerned with lighting aspects of a production.

"Operating - you're composing images," said Bota.

"When I worked on 'Werewolf,' I was operating on that . . . and that was one of my first shows that I was actually the 'V' camera operator."

On "Werewolf," he even worked as director of photography after Kranhouse had gone to work on another project and an experienced director of photography was not found as a replacement. "I was very fortunate to shoot 12 episodes."

When "Werewolf" was canceled,



Rick Bota, who went to high school in Birmingham, is behind the camera for the movie "Tap." Also on the set are star Gregory Hines

(left); Nick Castle, the director (behind Bota), and David Gribble, director of photography (right).



In scene from "Tap," Max Washington (Hines) displays his artistry when he is challenged by other dancers during a surprise visit to tap studio. Looking on are Arthur Duncan (left), Pat Rico, Harold Nicholas, Steve Condos, Sandman Sims, Henry LeTang and Sammy Davis Jr.

Bota returned to duties as a camera operator, such as on the miniseries "Something Is Out There," with Joe Cortese and Maryam d'Abo; the tele-

vision series "Something Is Out There," and "Tap."

Bota said he would like to return to the Detroit area as a director of

photography when he knows more about the business, so that he can compete with the many good directors of photography locally.

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