

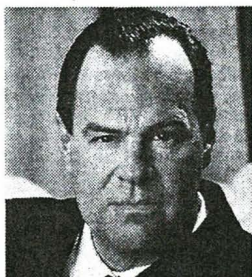
INTERVIEW

THE PATRIOT
MISSIVE

The Arrow star, Dan Aykroyd, gets personal about his role, his childhood remembrances and the CBC

He has descended from the CBC Broadcast Centre's higher floors where he took part in Pamela Wallin's champagne-juiced, star-packed, year-end *Newsworld* broadcast, and now Dan Aykroyd settles down in the green room of the Glenn Gould Studio to talk about making *The Arrow*.

For this giant CBC mini-series, Aykroyd plays Crawford Gordon, the passionate boss of A.V. Roe, a part that in some ways parallels Aykroyd's own role within the production. In 1951, Gordon was Canada's big man in munitions brought in to turn A.V. Roe, an aircraft company that couldn't seem to get its planes made, into an aeronautical powerhouse capable of building the Avro Arrow. It was some time around 1992 that Aykroyd, our big man in Hollywood, was sent a script for a Canadian feature film that couldn't seem to get itself made. It was his bankable presence that made *The Arrow* possible. "I think it was just a matter of economics,"



says Aykroyd. "I think I was one of the first to suggest why don't we go and do it as a mini-series and I'll be involved."

It was a natural for Aykroyd — he's a self-described Canadian patriot, and this story had personal resonance. As a kid growing up in Ottawa, he had an Arrow model plane. As an adult, he's an aviation buff able to spout streams of aeronautical data. And his mother was once executive secretary to the minister of munitions and supply. "She knew Gordon, and spoke of him as being a very hard-driving guy with a twinkle in his eye."

Playing Gordon, a man who went from king to fool in his time at A.V. Roe, proved one of Aykroyd's tougher challenges. "It's difficult to play a guy's fall, you know. To be really down and do the depths. It required a little more concentration, focus and isolation than I normally use." Usually friendly with cast and crew members, Aykroyd would sit alone in his location trailer for an hour before his harder scenes. "I sort of closed in," he admits.

The mini-series depicts Gordon as a broken man after the cancellation of the Arrow. But Aykroyd, it may surprise some, has a more businesslike attitude. "I can understand why the plane itself might have been cancelled, because it was expensive and defence needs were changing at the time." But still he's angered by the government's decision to abandon A.V. Roe, a company then at the forefront of weapons technology. "It was the defence components that could have really built a Canadian electronics industry and an aerospace industry into a powerhouse. And then the vindictiveness of destroying the planes, that really got to me."

And in case some are wondering, yes, Aykroyd brings the same attitude to the funding cuts at the CBC. "It makes me feel bad," he says. "But, you know, money is tight everywhere. I just hope that it can be done efficiently. If programs have to go, I hope they pick the right ones and don't do idiocy like, you know, cutting *Morningside*."

Our Hollywood patriot has spoken.

by Trevor Cole

PROFILE

One-man band

Jimmy Nail is back acting, writing, directing, singing and ringing dramatic bells

Check the credits on most Jimmy Nail projects and you'll see him listed as creator, writer, director and star. Jimmy Nail isn't just busy — he's a one-man business empire. "If it impresses the bank, I'm a producer, and if it impresses the girls, I'm a musician," he deadpans on the phone from Los Angeles. He's there for the premiere screening of *Evita* in which Alan Parker shrewdly cast him as the pimp who guides Eva Peron (Madonna) in her early life. Nail's business empire may be tiny compared to the mammoth Madonna machine, but they must have made a fascinating working duo and Nail's assessment of his co-star is respectful. "She's a very headstrong girl, you might say. I wasn't sure what to expect but she was always very well prepared and I respect that. We both come from a music background, so we hit it off."

Nail's music — New Country, which he says is "just folk music" — is at the core of *Crocodile Shoes II*, which starts soon on Showcase and follows the enormously successful first series. Nail's back as Jed Shepherd, the singer from the north of England who becomes an unlikely but much-loved star, guided by an unreliable agent. The drug-addled agent, played with relish by James Wilby, is missing from the first episode of *Crocodile Shoes II*, by the way, but there are hints that he's not entirely dead and gone. Again, Nail is creator, star, director, writer, songwriter and musician.

Crocodile Shoes II, like the first series, is mostly about the vagaries and venalities of the music business. Nail had several hit songs in

After *Evita*, Nail stars in *Crocodile Shoes II: Unlikely but much loved.*



England, even before the first series. (*Crocodile Shoes* is now being repeated Wednesdays on Showcase at 10 p.m.) The obvious question arises — is the cynical picture of the music biz in the TV show based on Nail's own experience? "It's not really a reflection of my own path," he says. "I've been a musician longer than I've been anything else and, on the show, the music biz is depicted by typical characters — they ring dramatic bells for people. I hear stories and I incorporate them, but

they're anecdotal and the show is just entertainment."

Nail's starring role in *Evita* is not going to derail his one-man industry. He says he's happy to make his own way, always looking for another creative project for himself. Years ago, according to his official biography, Jimmy Nail was told that he should stick to being a bricklayer and forget about "entertainment." Now it doesn't matter. Whether it's music, acting, writing or directing, Jimmy's got it nailed.

■ *Crocodile Shoes II* begins Wednesday, Jan. 22 at 10 p.m. on Showcase

by John Doyle