

John Michael Howson's Hollywood

Australian Colin Higgins on the *Nine To Five* set with stars Tomlin, Parton, Fonda.



so desired. He has a schedule of hot projects lined up and will direct the movie version of the hit stage show *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*, which will star Burt Reynolds and Dolly Parton.

How difficult was it for a director to direct superstars? Did they, as some are said to do, throw tantrums, turns and shed tears?

"Well, Jane Fonda is a two-time Oscar winner," said Colin, "and early in the making of *Nine To Five* I felt she was saying lines the wrong way.

"Now, how do you tell a two-time Oscar winner she's wrong? I guess the scene had to come first, so I told her."

Tantrums, turns and tears?

"No," Colin said. "Jane asked me how I wanted them delivered and suggested I show her, so I did. She saw exactly what I wanted and then she did it perfectly.

"She is a total professional," he added admiringly.

Colin Higgins added that he had wondered how three women who were so different in style and temperament might work together on the set.

"I must admit that I expected some tension," he said, "but they were totally professional, great fun and a joy to work with. I just wish everything would be as easy. They have their different ways of working and it's in-

teresting to see how they approach their roles.

"Dolly hadn't acted before but just had an instinctive way of performing. Besides, I'd seen her concerts and realized that her shows are polished and rehearsed and that she had a terrific warmth.

"Lily will work on a scene and see 50 different ways of doing it. She will even come back hours after we've shot it and suggest yet another way of doing it. She's one actress who's a true perfectionist."

Colin admitted that being accepted as a movie director as well as a top script writer wasn't easy at first.

"Let's just say that people liked my scripts but weren't too keen to accept me as a director. I really had to mount quite a campaign to get to direct *Foul Play*. The producers wanted me but the studios were doubtful.

"But once you've had a hit they want to throw money at you — and I mean lots of it."

And what about the possibility of coming back to the old home town to direct a movie?

"I know everybody says it, but it's true — Australian films are having considerable impact and I really would like to do something in Australia. It would be great." □

There's a showbiz saying about artists who are having a run of success: "When you're hot, you're hot!" And in Hollywood today there's none hotter than Colin Higgins. Colin Who?, you ask. Colin Higgins, I answer. *The Colin Higgins*.

Higgins' current film, as writer-director, is *Nine To Five*. It may not have thrilled the critics but audiences love it and it's doing very nicely, thank you very much, at the box office.

Nine To Five stars Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton as three secretaries who have to cope with a boss who makes the Wicked Witch of the West seem like Goldilocks. Higgins' last film was *Foul Play*. He wrote and directed the winning comedy starring Goldie Hawn and featuring Dudley Moore.

Prior to these films, Colin Higgins wrote the Gene Wilder-Richard Pryor comedy *The Silver Streak* and created a screenplay that has become a classic — *Harold And Maude*. Starring Ruth Gordon and Bud Cort, it was about a love affair between a life-loving lady in her 80s and a suicidally-bent youngster in his early 20s. The theme made people wonder, but Higgins' script was beautiful, touching and sensational, and the film has now become a regular on the re run circuits.

Amid all this international fame and success it's nice to know that the brilliant Mr H has close family links with Australia. Colin Higgins' father is an American and his mother is Australian. He was born in New Caledonia and raised in Sydney. He spent his childhood and his school days in Australia.

"I love Australia, I think I'll probably finish up with a beach house on Sydney's North side. It's paradise — no hassles and so relaxed," he told me before going on to recall hours spent watching movies at Sydney's famed picture palaces like the Regent, the State, the Plaza.

"Now, they're what I call picture palaces. They were fantasy lands," he said comparing them to the sleek, modern, computerized, profitable complexes that are gradually replacing them today.

"When I went back to Sydney I had to admire the way movies are marketed but I missed the glamour of those old places."

The way the money is rolling in, Colin Higgins could very well build his own personal picture palace if he