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## Billy Connolly plays the undead

By JIM SLOTEK - Toronto Sun

TORONTO - He's travelled the world for decades, doing standup comedy and acting. And the world still surprises Billy Connolly.

For instance, who knew you could travel 12,000 km from Scotland to make a Canadian movie in B.C.'s Okanagan Valley and still find yourself in proximity to a lake monster?

"Ogopogo! Bad name," Connolly sniffs. "Who's going to take 'Ogopogo' seriously? Nessie at least has a female thing going. Ogopogo has no gender. He's a hermaphrodite!"

It's a good-natured little rant, the very least you'd expect from the loquacious and (onstage at least) bawdy Glaswegian.

But ironically, the acting job in the zombie comedy *Fido*, which is screening in the film fest's Canada First! series, required the noted chatterbox to remain mute -- "to scream without making any noise," as he puts it.

The boy-and-his-zombie movie from B.C. director Andrew Currie (*Mile Zero*) posits a Leave It To Beaver-style '50s world where a zombie invasion has been quelled with technology that turns the living dead into docile servants. Dylan Baker and Carrie-Anne Moss play the parents of Timmy (K'Sun Ray), who has turned his carnivorous household servant into a pet. It's a weird love story that required Connolly to do all his acting with his eyes, and not incidentally to play the straightman.

"I had to commit to the silence, just growls and squeaks and noises was all I had available to me. I had to act with my eyes a lot, which is an absolute joy. And it's a joyous thing to be allowed to act without anybody laughing." He adds, "It's funny to be a comedian and live in terror of people laughing at you."

As weird as it sounds, many have picked his performance in *Fido* as one of the better ones at this year's fest. He credits the late Shelley Winters with an acting tip that turned the corner of his career. "I saw her do a master class interview on television where she said the art of film acting is to speak quietly and think out loud. And that had a profound impression on me." He said he first applied that in *Mrs. Brown*, the movie that garnered him a British Oscar nom.

Of course, off-camera all bets were off. Director Currie likens it to "a teenager with a stereo who turns it down when the parents are around and turns it up when their backs are turned. As soon as I yelled, 'Cut,' he'd be telling another anecdote or something."

Connolly's major audience was his child actor co-star. "K'Sun was raised by his mom, and it was great to be a dominant male in his life. He's such a wise, funny wee man, 14 going on 35."

So why did Connolly say yes to a Canadian indie movie?

"Well, none of them are small movies," he says. "Even the low-budget ones, everybody's ass is on the line to exactly the same degree as the guy with a \$100-million movie. In fact, the guy who's borrowed \$10 million to make his wee movie is trusted less than the guy who's borrowed \$100 million to make *The Last Samurai*. It's like they always say, if you're going to borrow money, show up in a Rolls Royce, don't show up with no ass in your trousers like you really need the money."

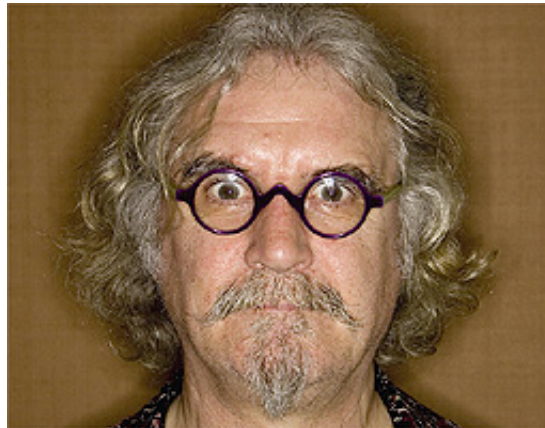
"Of course, I like the big stuff, you get treated nice. But the whole cheese for me is when these things land on your desk and they say, 'This is a real offer, Billy. If you say yes, it's yours.' And then you read it differently."

Connolly, who'll be back in Toronto in October at Massey Hall, says he's a bit of a homebody. But his daughters are all in East Coast U.S. colleges, and his wife, comic actress Pamela Stephenson, is busier than ever. "We're all like ships in the night, so I find the best way is to go with the flow," he says.

When he's not on tour or filming, he divides his time between his Scottish home in Aberdeenshire and one in Malta. "I can't take the cold as well as I used to," he says.

I tell him in Canada we refer to the likes of him as snowbirds, and ask if there's a Scottish equivalent.

"I don't think so," he says. "'Rich bastards' I suppose."



Scottish actor Billy Connolly who plays Zombie in movie *Fido*, seen during an interview as part of Toronto International Film Festival coverage. (Alex Urosevic/Sun)