

'On a bright day, a boat's a boat and the sea's the sea...'

Bob Baker on not-so-exotic British locations doubling for the Bahamas

When Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman first approached Lew Grade with the idea of turning *The Saint* into a TV series, Lew instinctively knew it was a winner. All that remained was for him to do the deal and check the credentials of his producers...

Bob Baker recalls those early meetings and the day-to-day problems of being co-producer, and sometimes director, on a series where the budget for your supposedly exotic locations would just about get you to Portsmouth.

How did you first come to work with Monty Berman?

I met Monty Berman during the Second World War when I was working in the Army Film and Photographic Unit as a combat cameraman, making PR films for the army.

Monty was already a well-established cameraman, and we decided that after the war we'd try and set up our own film company and make our own pictures. About 18 months later we financed our first picture, *Date with a Dream* with Norman Wisdom, Jean Carson and Terry-Thomas. Of course they were all unknown then. I think we paid Terry-Thomas £50.

The film wasn't a financial success—we made some deals we shouldn't have—but a distributor saw it and liked it and with their backing we made 49 feature films up until 1960 (including horror Bs like *The Trollenberg Terror*, *Blood of the Vampire*, *The Siege of Sidney Street*, *Flesh and the Fiend*, a horror spoof *What a Carve Up* featuring soon-to-be *Saint* guest star Shirley Eaton and a war epic with Dickie Attenborough, *Sea of Sand*—'our best picture').

And then the director John Paddy Carstairs suggested to you the idea of *The Saint* as a TV series?

Well, John was very friendly with Leslie Charteris (Carstairs had actually directed the earlier film *The Saint in London*). I'd been speaking to Paddy one day in our offices and he introduced us. I persuaded Leslie Charteris—and I must have been very good then—to give us a totally free option on *The Saint* for a period of time. He protected *The Saint* like a bulldog—and many offers had fallen flat on their face.

What were the main stumbling blocks doing the deal with Charteris, after Lew Grade had given you the okay?

Money! I spent a rather unpleasant week in Florida with Leslie but in the end he got what he wanted and I went back to Lew. He then very wisely recommended a Canadian story editor Harry Junkin, who had worked for many years in New York on a soap opera called *Love of Life*. He was a very good writer and we got on well. So we set up a *Saint* bible together—what you could and couldn't do on the show—and then got in other writers.

ROBERT S. BAKER FILMOGRAPHY

AS DIRECTOR UP UNTIL
THE SAINT

1950 *Blackout*

1952 *13 East Street*

1953 *The Steel Key*

1956 *Passport to Treason*

1959 *Jack The Ripper*

1960 *The Siege of Sidney Street,
The Hellfire Club*

1961 *The Treasure of Monte Cristo*

SAINT EPISODES AS DIRECTOR

The Golden Journey

The Saint Sees It Through

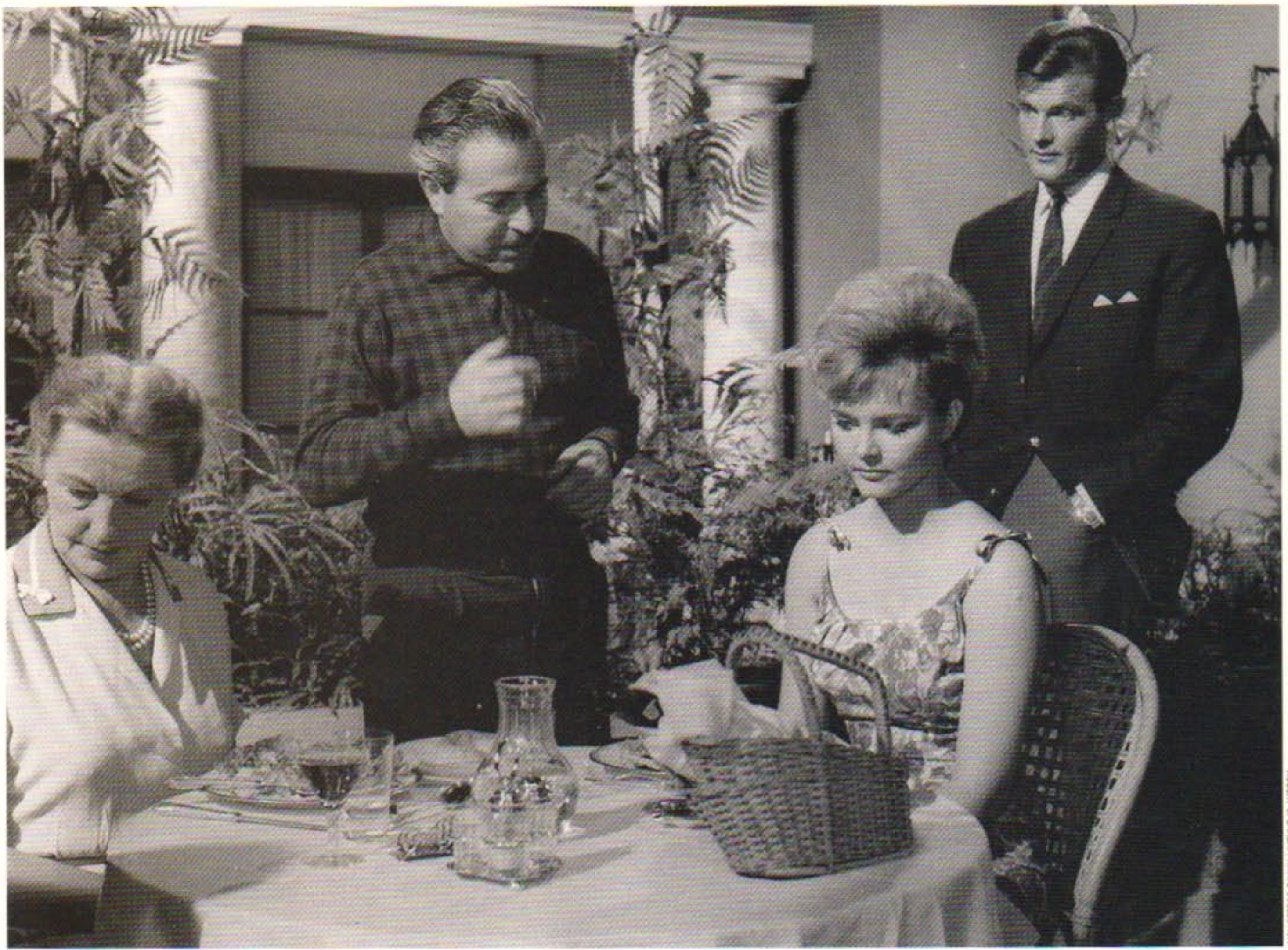
The Saint Plays With Fire

The Wonderful War

*The sea's the sea, a step's a step. Roger,
still on the back-lot in The Pearls of
Peace*



POPPER/OTO



ROBERT S. BAKER PRIVATE COLLECTION

'Nice girls rarely hitchhike in Spain.'
Director Robert S. Baker gives Erica Rogers some advice before she sets off on *The Golden Journey*. Roger Moore and Stella Bonheur, as Aunt Joan, contemplate the studio floor

Could you talk a little more about this bible?

In those days violence was a big no-no. Television here was pretty strict and it was also strict in America. So in all the fights the Saint would play by the Marquess of Queensberry rules—he wouldn't kick you in the balls as he could do now. In the books the Saint wasn't that much of a gentleman—it was just the code. Violence had to be very minimal.

And yet there is violence there. In *The King of the Beggars*, Warren Mitchell threatens to stick corks in a hood's ears and nose and blow his head up with a tire pump till it explodes.

I don't remember that, but I guess it wasn't deemed so bad if they were just talking about it. You certainly couldn't show it.

The other thing the bible dealt with was the First Act, Second Act and Third Act.

Throughout the series the scripts are remarkably tightly plotted with usually a good twist in the Third Act. How much of this came from the source material?

Well, the first 70-odd black and white pictures were all based on Leslie Charteris' books, so you had the basic material there. However, most of Leslie's stories were short stories, so we found that when it came to transferring them to the screen for an hour show we only had about 30 minutes of material we could use.

His stories were constructed like this—you set the problem up with which the Saint becomes involved, First Act. Then they went straight from there to his resolution of the problem, which is basically half of the Third Act. So what we were short of was the middle act and a little bit of the Third Act. What that meant was we had to invent something in the First Act that would complicate and further develop the plot to get us to a stage where the Saint could then unravel it again.

Quite often we would have to alter the structure of the First Act, which was where most of our confrontations with Leslie came from. We would create new situations which he would object to and some-

times—and this really got him upset—we'd even invent new characters. Leslie wanted to have a veto on the stories which we couldn't, and wouldn't, agree to. It's alright to do that if you're doing a one-off, but when you're making a television series you're shooting for two weeks then you're going straight on to the next show. There's no question of anyone vetoing your show—you've got to carry straight on.

I think he eventually saw this point, but we agreed that the scripts would be sent to him for his comments and consultation. We used to get these very abusive replies from Leslie, and if we could accommodate his suggestions we would, but a lot of the time it was down to structure which we couldn't change simply because of that bloody Second Act he was missing.

Anyway, after the 71 black and whites we stopped for six months. Then I approached Lew again about doing some color episodes—color had very much come in in America—and it was back to negotiating with Leslie.

I explained that I didn't think there were many more of his stories which were suitable to transfer for TV so I asked him if we could invent a few more. That brought us back to the whole veto thing, but in the end it worked out well. Suddenly we were relieved of the confines of the written word and we could do stories which were much more suitable for one-hour television slots.

How did Lew Grade tend to involve himself with the day-to-day workings of *The Saint*?

He wasn't hands-on. Lew deals with people. He knows your reputation. He knows you can do the job and from that point on he doesn't interfere. Once you've set the deal, you know what the budget price is, he just lets you get on with it. He relied entirely on his producers. That said, he'd made plenty of enquiries about Monty and me with people we'd worked with in the past. We had a pretty good reputation of producing inexpensive, commercial pictures.

Lew is the greatest deal-maker in the world. He hasn't really stopped being an agent—that's what he is. It's ingrained in him. He has to do a deal—no matter what—and it works. He's the last of the great showmen. There's no-one left. Not in this country at any rate.

What's the story of Patrick McGoohan's near involvement?

Patrick McGoohan had done *Danger Man*—*Secret Agent* they called it in America—and Lew suggested we use him. We had a meeting with Patrick McGoohan...(pauses)...McGoohan's a rather *aggressive* person, amongst other things. He was being a little difficult in the meeting and we felt he did not have the lightness of touch. I think he's a great actor. He's good to watch and a good technician. But he did not quite have that laid-back sense of humour that we wanted for *The Saint*.

Didn't McGoohan also feel the character was too promiscuous?

Yes, oddly enough he had a thing about women—he never touched women in his shows. I presume McGoohan's a Catholic. I don't know whether he's a devout Catholic, but he had this thing about women.

Did you do a screen test with Roger?

No, we didn't need to. We'd seen enough of his work to know he was right. Lew did that actual deal with Roger—he wouldn't let anyone else do the deal if he was available himself. Then at the press conference to announce it all there came the famous moment when he said, 'And now, here's Roger Moore who will be starring in our hour-long series of *The Saint*...'

'Half hour,' said Roger.

'Hour,' said Lew.

Afterwards Roger told me he just thought the script had been well padded!

But *The Saint* made Roger. The second we saw the first day's rushes we knew straight away it was going to be a hit. It just gelled.

Was there much deliberation over which should be the first *Saint* episode filmed, to set the tone for the whole series, because *The Talented Husband* is quite dark—almost like a Roald Dahl story? In the last shot, after the wife has broken down on the stairs, Roger walks off looking slightly horrified by the whole sorry affair...

My memories of that are that there was one significant change we made from Leslie's original story. *The Talented Husband* is about this fictitious housekeeper, Mrs. Jafferty, whom the husband has created to do his dirty work, poisoning his wife. And in the original story Roger would have disguised himself at the end as Mrs. Jafferty.

I'm sure Roger would have loved doing that, wouldn't he!

Well, we didn't think in the first episode we could really have the Saint in drag. It wasn't on. So we cut it, which riled up Leslie a bit.

**'The Saint
wouldn't kick you
in the balls, as
he could do now'**

**Bob Baker on TV censorship
in the 1960s**

You'd worked with Shirley Eaton before and she was already very successful at that time. But were you often lucky in getting young actors and actresses before they'd really become established?

Yes, Julie Christie was a case in point (in *Judith*). It was an interesting thing with Christie. When she was playing her first scene she was very hesitant. She kept forgetting her lines and the director ended up breaking them down into small sections. Watching her on the set we weren't terribly impressed but when we saw the rushes the next day the whole thing lit up. Amazing. This was before *Darling*.

Was it policy to look for new names, rather than hiring established actors as the guest stars?

Well, we didn't have that much money to get big names in, so we really just started by finding anyone who was suitable for the part. We didn't worry about names. But of course when the show became established it became much easier to get guest stars.

Another great plus of the series is the variety of stories that Charteris provided...

Yes, one week we'd have a drama, the next week we had a chase story, the next something that was tongue-in-cheek and humorous—that variety kept the audience going. The trouble with American TV shows, in particular, in the 1960s, was that if you'd seen one you'd seen them all. They stuck rigidly to the formula, while with *The Saint* the viewer never quite knew what they were going to see. This was a good period in television series' development in Britain.

One of my favorites of the early episodes is *The Golden Journey*, which you directed. It's almost a two-hander between Roger Moore and Erica Rogers.

Yes, it's a road picture really. As a matter of fact Lew Grade wasn't very happy with *The Golden Journey*, essentially because there was no fighting in it. Lew always liked each show to have at least one battle. I could have altered the story, but in this case I decided to keep close to Leslie's original.

As an aside, it's also entertaining spotting Roger and Erica Rogers' doubles doing all the location work. One second there's a close-up of Roger splashing water on his face, the next it's this long shot from behind of him bathing. Did he ever get to go on location in the black and white episodes?

No, he was always in the studio. Those shots of the doubles climbing over the hills, which in *The Golden Journey* were meant to be Spain, were actually shot in Wales.

The Second Unit shots were always silent and they'd be carefully worked out beforehand so you knew specifically what was needed.

Apart from local scenes, we hardly ever went on location. Sometimes it was meant to be the Bahamas, but all it was was a palm tree with a girl in a bikini freezing in the middle of winter.

One of the locations was meant to be Bimini, but we just went down to Hamble and shot the boat stuff on the estuary there. On a bright day a boat's a boat and the sea's the sea. It may not be quite so blue here as it is in the Caribbean, but it was good enough. A lot can be concealed with skilful lighting.

Was it enjoyable for you to put on the director's hat for a change?

The difference between films and television is that in television the producer is very much involved in the script. So it was simple for me to direct as I knew the script inside out before I even went on the floor. But the input of directors in television is minimum. They might ask for some alterations, but they really have no influence on where the story is going to go. That has already been decided. Television is the producer's medium.

Would that mean most shots would be got in one or two takes?

No, not necessarily. A director has to shoot about 4½ minutes of screen time a day. About 20 set-ups. So if a director is falling behind he will certainly settle for a take which is not perfect. But if it's an important master scene then he may take up to 15 takes.

Did you ever have major problems with a scene?

Not really. Roger has a photographic memory. How he learned pages and pages of dialogue day after day I will never know. All he'd do in the evening was go home at the end of a day's work and read the next day's shooting script. He read it two or three times then forgot about it for the rest of the evening. Next day he'd be doing his own make-up—he never had anyone do his make-up—and just glancing at the scenes. Then we'd do the first run-through. He'd probably still have the script in his hand, then he'd dump the script and ad-lib his way through the scene. But though he altered dialogue it was always a natural alteration. He would never throw anyone else out of kilter with it. He was very professional in that way.

Did you ever fall victim to any of his practical jokes?

Oh yes, he was always making practical jokes. And we'd always see the results on the rushes. Suddenly he'd pick

'We didn't think we could really have the Saint in drag in the first episode'

Bob Baker on story changes that riled Leslie Charteris



ROBERT S. BAKER, PRIVATE COLLECTION

the villain up and start dancing round the set with him. But that's a good thing because it kept the unit happy.

There's a story that's been documented before about Roger doing a car scene where he's driving in profile. For such a scene you could either use back projection, or if it's a night scene you had a big drum on which you would paint trees and bushes and so forth. You turned the drum and for a side-on shot it looked very effective.

Anyway, I was watching the rushes of this scene when suddenly one of the camera assistants appeared in the driving seat with Roger running alongside the car apparently trying to keep up. Roger held up this sign, 'Stop!' then kept on running. The assistant held up another sign, 'Why?' Roger kept on running. Then the final sign, 'Because my cock's caught in the door!' That was the sort of thing you could expect almost every day.

The thing was, Roger was liked by everybody—the electricians, the entire crew. And at that time in the 1960s the electricians' union was extremely militant—very left-wing—and at the slightest problem the brothers would all hold a meeting. There was a rule that if you were in the middle of a shot in the last 10 or 15 minutes of the working day, the unions would allow you an extra quarter of an hour to finish the shot. But they could be bloody-minded about it. But with Roger they'd say to me, 'Ok, you can do this shot. But we'd like you to know we're not doing this shot for management, we're doing it for Roger.'

Roger knew that if you were going to work in a long-running series you made things as simple and happy as possible. I'm pretty sure he'd picked that up from working in America.

How did you find Oliver Reed in the two episodes (*The King of the Beggars* and *Sophia*) he appeared in?

He was alright. He hadn't gone quite off the rails in those days. Now, of course, he's unbelievable. I ran into him once in the South of France and he was as drunk as a coot. He's a strange sort of guy when he's in his cups, I must say.

Was there much of a breather between each of the four series?

Well, just enough time to get the next scripts ready. We would usually start each series with six completed

'Television is the producers' medium.'
Saint producers Monty Berman, Robert
S. Baker and Mr. Moore chortle in
anticipation of all the lovely moola



scripts ready to go. But by the time we came to the end of the series we were often writing the scenes in the office and sending them straight down to the floor to shoot. You would keep losing ground all the way through.

One of the last episodes we did, *Island of Chance*, Harry was practically finishing off the script as they shot it downstairs. In the story the three characters were wandering through caves and one of them says, 'What's that I smell?' I wrote back, 'It's the script!' gave it to Harry and he cracked up.

How would Monty and yourself divide duties as co-producers?

Monty would look after the business end of the operation. Although he was a cameraman he would totally run that end, while I would spend most of my time with the writers, the director and the editors. It worked very well.

How did it change when you and Roger became the show's producers?

Basically, I had more to do with the finance then and had no time left to direct. So in a way, Roger took over from me in the director's chair. But if you're a good technician, as he is—don't forget he'd been Hollywood-trained—then it's not a problem. I worked a lot with American actors and they would turn to the cameraman and ask him what lens he had on. Then they would adjust their performance according to the lens. If it was a wider angle lens they could make it a little bit bigger, if it was close they'd keep it in the eyes and no more—just think the thing.

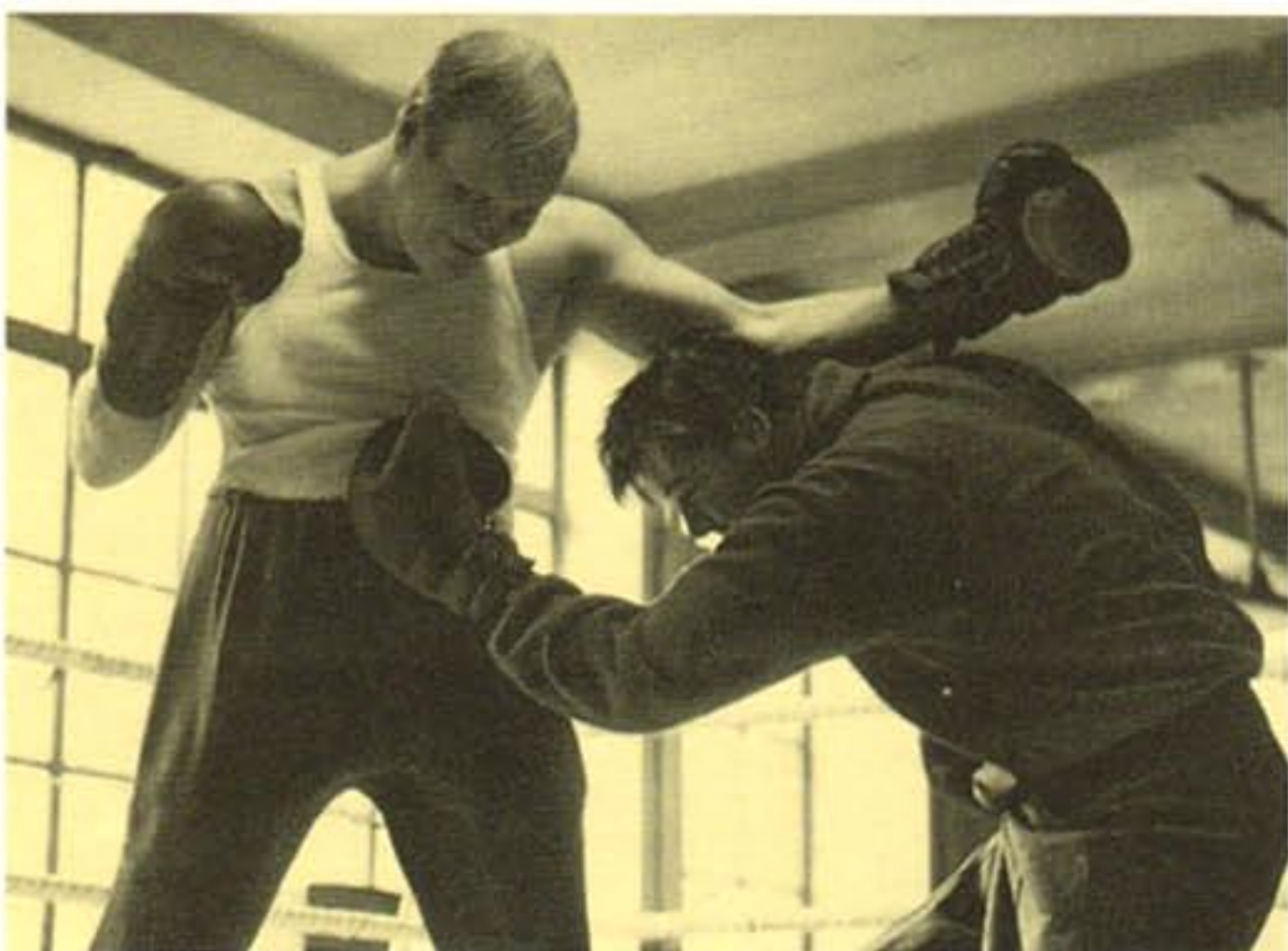
That said, we didn't have that many American guest stars in the series. We got David Hedison because he was a friend of Roger's. He was over here and Roger offered him the part so he said sure, why not. Otherwise, if we'd had to negotiate with him through his agent, we couldn't have afforded him. They usually came in on the old chums basis.

Later, it was the same with Terry-Thomas when he appeared in *The Persuaders*. We could not have afforded Terry, but because he'd done those first two pictures with us, *Date with a Dream* and *Melody Club*, he came in and did it at a nominal salary. Just for old time's sake. He was very good in it actually. It was a shame the way he finished. He lost a lot of money. He and several other actors got swindled by a guy who was supposed to do pig farming. George Sanders lost a fortune on it and I think Terry lost money too.

The Saint episode *The Ex-King of Diamonds*, in which Templar falls in with a Texas oil baron/playboy in the South of France, is basically a pilot for *The Persuaders* isn't it?

Yes, it was a dry run. I just wanted to see how certain elements would work, so what we did in that episode was actually downplay the Saint a bit and give the American (*The Champions*' Stuart Damon) an equal share of the story—just to see the balance. So Roger played it ever so slightly differently.

Former champ and part-time thespian Noshier Powell gives Southpaw Roger a few pointers in the fine art of on-screen pummelling, in *The Crooked Ring*



Was there any thought that Stuart Damon could then have carried on the role?

No, we had to get a 'name' from America. That was essential. The first person we tried to get was Rock Hudson, so it would have been an Englishman and a Texan. But we couldn't get him and couldn't get Glenn Ford, who didn't want to leave America, but Tony Curtis was on the network's wish-list and Lew said, 'Leave it to me'. In the end it was the best thing that could have happened to the series, changing it to a guy from the Bronx, because it made it much more 'with it'. So much so that the actors used to ad-lib a lot of the dialogue. Tony's quite quick and Roger's very bright, so it worked great.

Where did you find the composer of *The Saint* theme, Edwin Astley?

Edwin Astley had already done some music for ITV and he lived close by—a few hundred yards from me here in Stanmore (north London). He was very commercial and he had a library of his own music which we could call upon when we needed it.

So he provided all the great incidental music...

He recorded the incidental music, but on top of that he had his own library so we had the choice of using all of that as well. He was very competent, very good.

The *Saint* series also has a very defined, a very stylized look—as the *Bond* series had at the cinema. Was there a similar style bible for the look of the show?

Yeah, glossy. And the same went for the photography. You could light a scene dark or you could light it glossy. A lot of back-lighting to give the characters a slight halo effect. It was particularly good for the women as it made their hair look alive. It was the opposite end of the spectrum to film noir.

The colors are almost Technicolor...

Yes, but by then the film stock had been replaced by Eastman colour. That was what was used on *The Saint*.

Was there ever a storyline considered that the Saint might marry?

Oh no. That was in Charteris' contract. He couldn't get married, he couldn't really get injured and he couldn't get venereal disease. We wouldn't have wanted him to get married anyway, as the idea of having a different girlfriend in every episode was very appealing.

Presumably, wearing your producer's hat, there was never any thought of killing him off either. Hardly!

Do you have a favorite episode?

It's very hard to say, but probably *The Queen's Ransom* with Dawn Addams. I like it because it's very flippant. It's a little bit like those Hollywood comedy-thrillers they used to make. It's very American and Roger spends the whole episode sending Dawn Addams up. That amused me. That's what I liked best—the battle of the sexes. That was the buzz in the show. If the Saint thought a woman to be pompous, or think a lot of herself, he would love taking her down a peg or two. It was *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Were there not plans hatched between you and Roger to do a period film of *The Saint*?

Yes, I've actually got a couple of very good scripts. I wanted to do *The Saint* set in the 1930s when Leslie originally wrote them, which would have worked frightfully well, but the powers-that-be wouldn't go along with it. They wanted to update him. One of the scripts I have, by John Goldsmith, is set in Germany just before Hitler came into power against the background of the Brown Shirts. And the other is based on Leslie's *The Saint Plays with Fire*, which I directed in the TV series. I've gone back in time for that one and it's set against Oswald Mosley's Black Shirts movement. You have the Communists on one hand and the Fascists on the other. It all focuses on an attempt to assassinate the Prince of Wales, as he was then, before Mrs. Simpson.

The Fascists were going to kill him and make it look like the Communists had done it.

And who would you have cast as the Saint?

Well, I had a meeting with him but I couldn't get him at the time that we were trying to put it all together. That was Pierce Brosnan. He's made a first class Bond and he'd have made a good Saint as well. There's a great similarity between the two roles, except one was working for the government and the other was a freelancer.

I'm an executive producer on *The Saint* film that's out now for Paramount. But I wasn't really active in the production of the thing.

Do you think we'll ever see a renaissance of action/adventure series like *The Saint* and *The Persuaders*?

I don't know. One of the problems, I think, with television today is that a series is never given a chance to develop. They make six episodes then they stop. With *The Saint* we had started with 26 episodes, so you developed a pattern that people would watch. I suppose that pattern now has been taken over by soap operas.

Is that purely a financial consideration, do you think?

I think they're just frightened to take a chance. If you make a series of 26 and they flop you have problems...But the Americans still do it. They still take a gamble on shows.

Is that because there isn't someone else like Lew Grade around?

Yes, is the simple answer. The thing with Lew is he would back his own judgment. If he liked an idea—if it smelt right to him—he'd go ahead and do it. And there was no-one to argue with him—he was the guv'nor.

'I trust you will understand that I do not choose to sign myself as yours sincerely, truly or even faithfully; and the adverbs which come to mind... are not in conventional business usage'

Memo from Charteris to Bob Baker after a Harry W. Junkin adaptation had 'really got up his nose', re-told in the *Daily Mail*, 1965

