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Dick Bakalyan's Detective Dunbarton searches for clues to catch an elusive serial killer in Cape Cod-set scene from Mark Wilkinson's dramatic thriller **Dischord**. (Photos courtesy of Mark Wilkinson)



DISCHORD (2001) ♂♂♂

D: Mark Wilkinson. Thomas Jay Ryan, Annunziata Gianzero, Dick Bakalyan, Andrew Borba, Rick Wessler, Michael DeLuise, Alex McArthur. 102 mins. (TBA)

Longtime Phantom fave Dick Bakalyan receives one of the best roles of his illustrious career in debuting director/writer Wilkinson's complex serial-killer thriller. Though he's been busy in TV and West Coast theater, **Dischord** marks the erstwhile wild-youth specialist's (**Cool and the Crazy, Hot Car Girl**) first big-screen credit since 1994's **Confessions of a Hit Man**. Wilkinson's central storyline focuses on the troubled relationship between emotionally distant New Age keyboard star Lucian (Borba) and his free-spirited protégé/wife, the even more successful alt-rock violinist Gypsy (Gianzero), who's abruptly cancelled her world tour after losing her lust for music due to its attendant draining celeb demands. Tension amps up considerably when Lucian's long-absent half-brother (and secret serial killer) Jimmy (Ryan, resembling a lethal variation on his **Henry Fool** character [VS #30]) invites himself for a weekend at the bros' Cape Cod family home, where a short-fused Lucian is racing the clock to complete his new CD. After casually beating his girlfriend to death on the drive up from Jersey and dumping her body in a Rhode Island river, Jimmy arrives and quickly befriends the idle Gypsy, much to a distracted Lucian's annoyance. In the nearby Boston 'burbs, retired detective Dunbarton (Bakalyan) is bugged that the police and FBI can't catch the killer and so sets out to solve

the case, first with a little help from his uniformed cop son Billy (DeLuise), then on his own. Meanwhile, back in Cape Cod, old family wounds open between the half-brothers—whose own mom either committed suicide or was slain by Lucian's father—while Lucian tries to coax Gypsy to return to her instrument, and Jimmy finds release by offing a local barmaid. Also on the scene, in a supernatural touch, is a second-sighted elderly beachcomber (Wessler) who appears to Gypsy at several key intervals. Wilkinson deftly weaves his disparate themes into a unified, satisfying, deeply unsettling whole. While the three leads descend into heady blame games and psychodrama, Dunbarton adds a forceful counterpoint as a refreshingly direct, conflict-free, single-minded man of action. All four principals turn in sterling perfs, but Bakalyan earns special kudos for his often physically strenuous work as the jaunty little tough guy (a septuagenarian update of his signature 1950s roles) who, regardless of risk, refuses to be derailed from his self-appointed mission to uncover the truth and collar the culprit. Director Wilkinson and cinematographer Ernst Kubitzka's evocative wintry location lensing lends **Dischord** an air of atmospheric specificity. Co-star Annunziata Gianzero, whom we met at the film's April 2002 screening at Florida's Palm Beach International Film Festival, revealed that the budget was a shade under \$180,000, making **Dischord** an even more amazing accomplishment. Here's hoping it finds a big-screen, cable or video home soon.

—*The Phantom*

BAK IN ACTION! DICK BAKALYAN ON DISCHORD As Told To The Phantom

Fan fave Dick Bakalyan has been through several big- and small-screen careers, from his signature wild-youth roles in films like **Juvenile Jungle** and **The Delinquents**, through combat movies like **Von Ryan's Express** and crime classics like Roman Polanski's **Chinatown** to a regular stint as Bobby Darin's neighborhood pal on a '70s variety series to a producing fling on the 1971 western **The Animals**. Recently, Dick scored one of the flashiest roles of his long career as a bulldog detective in the upcoming thriller **Dischord**.

PHANTOM How did you get involved with **Dischord**?

DICK BAKALYAN Well, I was doing a play and Mark came to see the show a couple of times and said, "If I ever write this part can I bring it to you?" And I said, "Sure!" Next thing I knew the guy showed up with a script. So I had this nice role to play. It was a good horse to ride, y'know. I don't get to play detectives that much, at least not in films. Anyway, he put together a great cast. Nunzi is delightful. Andrew Borba, he's more of a Shakespearean actor, y'know, the classics, and I'd like to see more of his work. Thomas Jay Ryan, of course, when I first heard he was gonna do the movie, I went and rented **Henry Fool**. Wonderful job. He followed that cigarette around the whole movie; he always had it sticking out of his mouth!

PHANTOM That was a very challenging role.

BAKALYAN Very much so, and he handled it. Same here. He revealed a lot by simple choices. He didn't get overdone.

PHANTOM He's a serial killer but—

BAKALYAN —yeah, you had a lot of empathy for him. There are people walking around like this right now and we don't know the whole backstory but they have their problems and could erupt at any time. Society didn't deal him a good hand. But one guy handled it one way, one the other. Again, it could have been genetics because they're only half-brothers. Anyway, Mark and Nancy put it together and did it on their own. For me it was wonderful, to go on location. It was like doing summer stock, but with cameras, y'know?

"It wasn't about money, it wasn't about everybody saying *me*. It was about making this movie."

**Dick Bakalyan
on *Dischord***

PHANTOM *That's not far from where you grew up, right?*

BAKALYAN Right! I grew up in Watertown, Mass. It was great to be in some of the areas I had run around in as a kid. And it was nice to be up there in the off-season so I could get the feeling of that cold wind on the Cape. And some of my old pals came out on the set to see what was going on—guys I started the first grade with I still stay in touch with. When we were kids we'd say we're outta here when we grow up, we don't want *that*, y'know. But it was nice to go back and get a taste of it. Knowing I live in California—that's why I live here!

PHANTOM *Did you have a lot of input into how the character was played?*

BAKALYAN Yeah, well, Mark just told me, "Here's the horse, ride it." All good actors are jockeys. And I always liken a role to a thoroughbred horse and you're in a Stakes race. You bring what's necessary; you ride your horse. He was wonderful to work with, Mark Wilkinson, as a director. I'm hoping that I get a chance to do something in the future with him or just *see* something he does in the future.

PHANTOM *This is his first feature film.*

BAKALYAN Yeah, this is the first full-length. They did a short, **Sally and Angela**, a marvelous 14-minute short you should see.

PHANTOM *As opposed to the other characters, your character in the film is very direct.*

BAKALYAN Well, he's the guy who serves as the shoelace that runs through it, who keeps us abreast of what's going on. My character is like a hunting dog. The first scene you see me and my wife is feeding the dogs. And I'm there having my tea. And I'm questioning. So she packs a lunch for me; she feeds the third dog—that's *me*. I go. The closer I get to the prey I'm looking for, the quicker my pace. He [Dunbarton] wasn't overjoyed that he had a problem he had to solve. But it showed the routine. And there are a lot of guys like that out there in small communities throughout this country—detectives and forensics experts that search along and *boom*, y'know.

PHANTOM *It was also a pretty strenuous role.*



Dogged detective Bakalyan sniffs out the truth in scene from new indie serial-killer thriller **Dischord**.

BAKALYAN Well, it was great for me. I mean, I didn't have to punch anyone out. I'm on the chase all the way to the end until he takes me down. But fortunately, in that interim, she's able to get away and then the local cop shows up. Even in the smaller roles, everybody did a nice job. The kid that worked in the record store. The captain of the ship—wonderful actor.

PHANTOM *They were local?*

BAKALYAN They were local people. And they talked to you, not *at* you. Sometimes you go on location, you get some local people, they say the words but they don't really know what they're saying. Not their *fault*. I mean, actors have to investigate the *why* behind what a character's doing or saying. I also enjoyed working with Michael DeLuise, from **NYPD Blue**. He did a wonderful job on that. And, of course, I've been a fan of his dad's for a long time. It was just a nice group of people to be around. And the crew—everybody was out there to make this movie. It wasn't about money, it wasn't about everybody saying *me*. It was about making this movie. And Mark and Nancy brought it in. I'm proud of them. And hopefully we'll get some sort of a distribution deal where more people can enjoy this guy's work because I expect he'll be doing more.

Y'know, I'm a character actor, I'm a journeyman, 45 years now, and they still hire me. I still steal their money. And I've worked with a lot of directors—**Chinatown**, Polanski, Mark Robson in **Von Ryan's Express**. People that have been around that know what they're doing. And this young man isn't trying to be someone else. He knows what he wants and he hopes to get there.

PHANTOM *I wanted to ask you about a couple of directors you've worked with. What was it like working with Polanski?*

BAKALYAN I loved it. Y'know, 'cause he cast me into the film, as Detective Loach. What impressed him was the fact that *he* cast me in it

and then when Nicholson came on the set and we gave a hug; he didn't know that we knew each other from before. We played ball together in the Entertainers Softball League and stuff like that. Jack I know from *way* back in the old days when we were *all* scuffling, doing small things in **St. Valentine's Day Massacre**. And Nicholson is wonderful 'cause he's never changed. He's the same guy. A little *older*, as we all are. But Polanski was great to work with because *he* knew what he wanted. And in spite of the language barrier in trying to *articulate* what he wanted, he would arrive at it. I mean, we'd shoot it a few extra times till he got what *he* wanted.

PHANTOM *I've heard that about him, that he liked to do a lot of takes.*

BAKALYAN I was surprised, because to me cinematographers, they were the kings. And after the first day's dailies, y'know, he fired Stanley Cortez and brought in John Alonzo to be the cinematographer. Because he didn't, evidently, like the way it was lit or whatever—you'd have to ask Roman that. The picture was lit like the period, there was a style and a rhythm. And when everybody does their job and they're right on the money that synergy just takes over the whole project, so the film became a classic. And in this little film here—and I say "little film" because you don't have a major studio behind it—you're doing it all yourself. These kids were running around doing it all.

PHANTOM *Yet it looks like a big film.*

BAKALYAN Well, we got lucky too; God was good to us. Because when they were out shooting that scene when they were walking near the lighthouse by the beach, you saw the porpoises leaping out of the water. It was like, y'know, we ordered some Disney fish! And they were *all* professionals. Even though some of our crew were local people, they were professional. And I was impressed, y'know, being in Boston; I mean, I grew up there, they didn't have any kind of film stuff going on when I was a kid.



Dick poses as psychic to grill bogus serial-killer suspect in **Dischord**.

PHANTOM You played one of the demons?

BAKALYAN Oh yeah, called "Abum." A-b-u-m: a bum. Bill Macy went up with me. Not William H. Macy, the younger actor, but the one from **Maude**. He played one of them, I played one, and two actors they got up there.

PHANTOM I wanted to ask you about another director you worked with—Robert Altman.

BAKALYAN Oh, Bob Altman—hey, he got me started, as far as jobs are concerned—he got me my Guild card! **The Delinquents**. We went to Kansas City and made it. That was his first film also. I enjoyed working with him; I mean, he was a nice guy. Now and then I'll run into him, but he's up doing what he does, and I do what I do. Another director I enjoyed working with was a guy named Bill Whitney. Quentin Tarantino likes his work. Bill Whitney was a guy who did a lot of the old serials way back. He could deliver the piece, with enough action and enough talking to make it work. A good man and a good director.

PHANTOM You worked on a couple of the *J. D.* movies with him.

BAKALYAN Cool and the Crazy and...

PHANTOM Juvenile Jungle?

BAKALYAN Juvenile Jungle, right. I think he directed **The Bonnie Parker Story** too.

PHANTOM So this time you get to play a good guy.

BAKALYAN Yeah, and I don't get to play that too often. With guys like me, crime pays! I'll tell ya, I'm pleased with the technology catching up with this 'cause now we can get copies of the stuff we do, we can study it, where we can get better and improve on our own work. Plus now I'm getting copies of the **Untouchables** I did, they're classics now. Some of the old **Batmans**. I did three of them.

PHANTOM More recently, I believe you were in a **Millennium**.

BAKALYAN Yeah, that was fun! 20th sent me up to Canada, we shot it up there, British Columbia. A little over four hours of makeup. It was a fun show because it was about four demons who meet for coffee and shoot the breeze about their demonology and their expertise! And I worked with some just super people.

PHANTOM Someone else you worked with a lot was Jerry Lewis.

BAKALYAN Yeah, I worked with Jerry on **Delicate Delinquent**, which was my second film. And whenever he had a spot for me, I'd go in and they paid me well and I'd get to do it. I never had a main role. **The Delicate Delinquent**, that was kind of fun.

PHANTOM That was a good role, I thought.

BAKALYAN Originally I think it was called **Damon and Pythias**. And it was supposed to be Jerry and Dean Martin. That's a nice guy too, I really enjoyed working around him, Dean Martin. Y'know, the real superstars I've encountered over the years, they've been some of the nicest people. It's the guys in the middle who think they're superstars that irritate you. And think it's all about them.

PHANTOM I also wanted to ask you about one of my favorites—**Panic in Year Zero!**

BAKALYAN Oh yeah, Ray Milland directed it! And Frankie Avalon. Yeah, we had fun doing that!

PHANTOM And you played a super-tough guy.

BAKALYAN We were doing something about the big bomb going off, what would happen, and there's still thuggery. As there would be.

PHANTOM It really holds up. At the time, I think it was considered a B movie.

BAKALYAN But, y'know, I don't even know what a B or a C or a Z or a D movie is. All I know is everything I've ever done—fortunately, a lot of them are cult movies now, from the '50s—were all learning tools for me. Every show you do, you learn something new in. That's how you get good at what you do. I consider myself to be very good at what I do. Give me the part to play and let's go have some fun. And it's supposed to be fun.

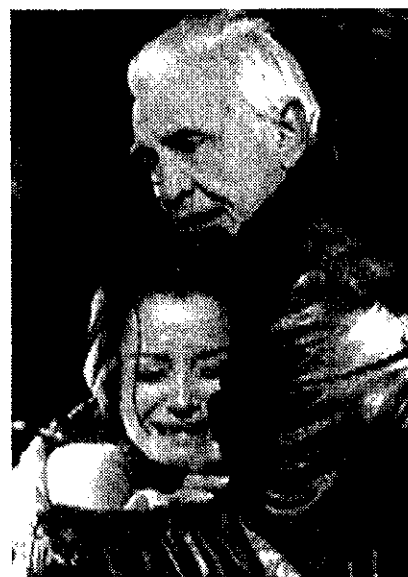
PHANTOM Lately you've been doing mostly television and theater.

**"The real superstars I've encountered over the years, they've been some of the nicest people. It's the guys in the middle who think they're superstars that irritate you."
Dick Bakalyan**

BAKALYAN Right, because they don't write roles for old geezers anymore and I'm not a spring chicken, y'know. Well, let's see, I did a **J.A.G.** a while back with Ernest Borgnine and Lou Meyers and I. We played three old geezers, former underwater demolition guys who come out of retirement and go after the drug dealers. We're deadly. We have technical knowledge and, y'know, the balls to do it. It was sort of a backdoor pilot for CBS but they didn't pick it up. But otherwise there aren't that many good old geezer roles around. You know, I do voices. I've worked for Disney a lot of years. I did a voice for Disney, it won the Academy Award in 1969, called **It's Tough To Be a Bird**. And I'm working on a project right now, part animation.

PHANTOM Hopefully, when **Dischord** comes out, that could lead to more film roles.

BAKALYAN Hey, I would love it. To me, when a gig comes along to play, y'know, that's like stealing money. Because if you know your craft and someone gives you the opportunity to do it, you have fun then. The work is saying, "What am I gonna do next!?"



Dick comforts near victim Annunziata Gianzero in tense moment from Mark Wilkinson's indie winner **Dischord**.