



# STRANGERS

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## Episode 31: *CHARLIE'S BROTHER'S BIRTHDAY*

Written by Murray Smith

Directed by Roger Tucker

tx 13.10.82



Bulman and Willis go undercover in a jazz band and have to find out why a gang of masked men goes to considerable lengths to steal a coffin.

A weird script but it has interesting ingredients - stunts, lots of action, night shooting, a splendid cast. I'm going to let the director do the talking.

"The most astonishing thing happened on the casting of that show. The script called for a romantic interlude between Bulman (...) and a woman police officer. Now, Don had a terrific following as a quirky character actor, but it took a real stretch of the imagination to think of him as a romantic lead. So, to play opposite him I needed an actress who was both tough and attractive - but not to such an extent as to make the relationship unbelievable. After a while the casting director left me to go through the giant Spotlight Casting Directory. When she came back I showed her a picture and said, "What do you think?" At first she gave me an odd look, and then asked if I was making a joke. Out of the hundreds of actresses in that directory, unbeknown to me, I had picked the woman to whom Don was actually married in real life, Shirley Stelfox. Up till that time they had never appeared together on screen.

I also struck lucky with locations. The climatic chase sequence, as written, was a dull affair, down back alleys, etc. I had an idea to do something like the end of *The Third Man*, and sent my location scout off to see if he could find any local sewers which might be suitable. For one reason or another he couldn't, but he did hear tell of an underground river beneath the small town of Stockport. We went out to see it, and could hardly believe our eyes. Right beneath the main shopping precinct was a vast concrete-lined cavern with metal inspection baskets running on rails along the ceiling. The only way into this was through a door in the side of a gents lavatory, and was completely unknown to the vast majority of people living in the area. (When we came to film you can imagine their startled reactions as a long line of females in anoraks trooped in and out.) It took a day to pre-light (which is not normally possible on a TV series), and the filming was touch and go. First I had an actor injured, and then his stunt double - I had to shoot the hands of one, and the feet of the other - but we got it in the can. We came across the shaft where they emerge from the ground - an on-going sewage works - quite by chance, at another

location altogether. It was, later, said that this sequence was the nearest a TV series ever came to doing James Bond.

The soundtrack, I think, also adds greatly to the effect. Series, such as this, usually did not have money in the budget, or time in the schedule, to have music composed to picture. There was normally opening and closing title music, and a selection of links, and that was about it. Otherwise you could use tracks off library discs, which were usually a pallid pastiche of other music, or ... Here I set out to build up a track using extracts from commercially available records. Besides effects tracks of water, industrial sounds, and the like, there are four music tracks in three layers - two different tracks by the German electro-band, Tangerine Dream, and two tracks by the way-out English jazzists, Pigbag; all mixed seamlessly together. You could say, this was deejaying in the contemporary sense, before the term was invented. To direct Don was really quite a feat; not because he was at all difficult, but because one had to attune to his unique way of doing things. From a bit part player, who sent out shoals of letters to directors decorated with asterisks, wavy underlining, and the like, he turned himself, quite late in life, into a TV star with a considerable following. In Manchester people would shout out to him in the street as they might to a pop star, and this all came about through the character-part of Bulman."

### Cast:

**Suzanne Danielle** (Gail Merrian) **Colm Meaney** (Peter Smolett) **Lol Coxhill** (Sonny Boy Saltz) **Keith Washington** (Ahmed Seerwak) **Daragh O'Malley** (Finbar Malone) **Martin Oldfield** (Freddie) **Shirley Stelfox** (Insp. Jenny Faber) **Ian Redford** (DC Harry Collins) **Troy Foster** (DS Charlie Baker) **Roy Alon** (Stan) **Peter Martin** (Joe) **Ian East** (Edwards) **Rose Hill** (Bella) **Stephen Tomlin** (Detective) **Max Smith** (PC) **Anthony Schaeffer** (Doctor) **Peter Ivatts** (Customs Officer) **Beverley Oldham** (Girl in Customs Shed) **Maggie Lane** (Shopkeeper)

### Crew:

Production Manager **Don Bell** Production Assistant **Sue Pritchard** Floor Manager **Josh Dynevor** Photography **Mike Popley** Operator **Doug Hallows** Sound Recordist **Ken Reynolds** Editor **David Stocks** Dubbing **John Whitworth** Jazz Club music composed by **Lol Coxhill** Makeup **Tina Bradshaw** Costumes **Doreen Whiteoak** Graphics **Ray Freeman** Research **Barbara Muxworthy** Casting **Jose Scott** Designer **David Buxton** Music **Mike Moran** Producer **Richard Everitt**

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