

Some scenes from the wonderful life of up-and-coming actor, champion kickboxer, proud Italian and all-round nice guy. Vince “The Boss” Murdocco.

Sitting at the rear of his father’s Calabria Bar on Commercial Dive. Murdocco tells his life story. In mid-description of his most remarkable metamorphosis from chubby teen to dashing thespian/jock, he spots a familiar face. It’s someone he knows from the Breck Academy for the Performing Arts. While exchanging pleasantries, Murdocco smiles, revealing a marvel of orthodontics and dental hygiene—lots and lots of perfectly aligned, sparkling white teeth.

At a New Year’s Eve rehearsal for *The World of Beauty*, a zany theatrical spoof of insidious talk shows in the Oprah Winfrey and Geraldo Rivera mode, Murdocco improvises. (The play, a Fringe Festival remount, runs January 4 to 28 at the Waterfront Theatre on Granville Island.) The scene calls for Murdocco, playing the flirtatious hairdresser Warren, to attend to Brad, one of the show’s co-hosts. During a commercial break, Brad huffs and puffs while Warren smiles and brushes. Then, in an inspired and unscripted moment, Murdocco’s Warren pretends to spit into his palm and spread the goopy gob all over Brad’s pristine locks.

It’s that old story, the one about the gawky kid—either too skinny or too fat—who can’t get no respect. In Murdocco’s case, he was supposedly a porker. East Van peers picked on him for his girth and consequently Murdocco suffered badly in the girls department.

“I went to the beach with this girl, the first girl I ever picked up.” recalls Murdocco. “The jocks of the school said. ‘Get out of the way, Vince. I was intimidated. I could never really hold on to anybody during that period of time. I was really choked, to tell you the truth.’”

The young Murdocco compensated for his low self-image by becoming the class clown. He started to lose weight in grade 10 but kept on being a merry prankster.

The apotheosis of his buffoonery occurred in a much-despised French class at Notre Dame high school. (Murdocco couldn’t see the point in learning a language in which he was already fluent.) He borrowed a priest’s collar and mock-blessed his classmates—and the principal, who happened to walk in. He was turfed from the school for that blasphemous transgression, arid ended up graduating from Burnaby North.

After graduation, he worked in his father’s cappuccino bar, where he met “a gentleman from New York” with whom he struck a deal: Murdocco would give the gentleman free food in exchange for training in the martial arts. After that fateful meeting, Murdocco went on to acquire black belts in karate and taekwon do. Last year he won the Canadian Cruiser-Weight Kickboxing Championship. He settled on kickboxing because the sport consists of more than just left and right hooks and fancy footwork—there’s also the sheer thrill of mid-air 360s, culminating in swift, painful kicks to the opponent.

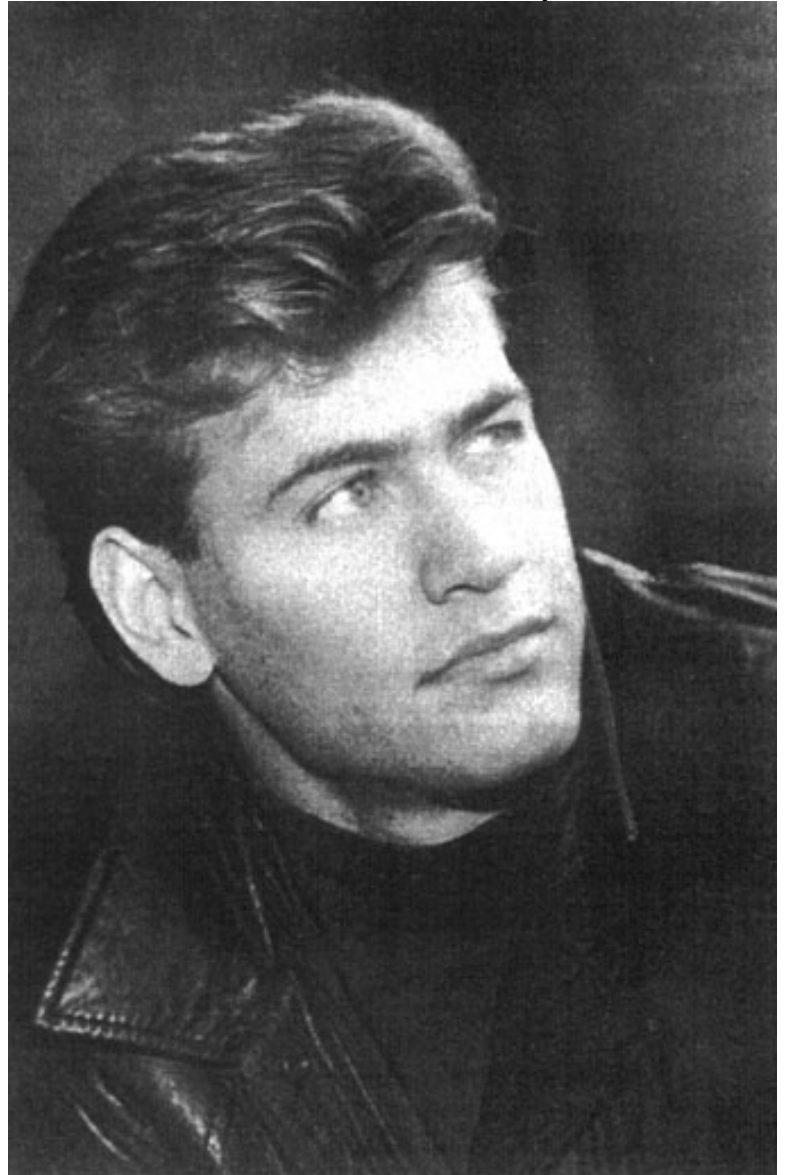
Everybody says it’s such a brutal sport. When you’re good at it, you kind of don’t see that” says Murdocco. “It’s just so beautiful.”

Then there are benefits outside the ring. “I can walk down the street with my girlfriend and know I can at least take care of myself and she’ll feel safe.” Do I detect machismo rearing its ugly head? “If I had a daughter I would hope that the guy she’s seeing could handle himself and the girl doesn’t have to beat up whoever.” In general, Murdocco lets a lot go by. “I’m a really easy going guy,” he says. “But the odd time I got mad and they deserved it.” He didn’t warn the offending parties by announcing, “Watch it, buddy I’m the Canadian cruiser-weight kickboxing champion.” It was more like. Listen, just don’t mess with me.

## Getting away From the beef-Hunk thing

By Chris Wong

THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT January 5-12, 1990



With the starring role in *Flesh Gordon Meets the Cosmic Cheerleaders* and a Canadian Kickboxing championship behind him, Vince Murdocco still craves respect.

Storme Morrison photo.

## Vince Murdocco

Murdocco plays therapist for a moment and examines his behavioral patterns, "I need to be in control. Wherever I am, I always try to be a person who instigates, I guess because my childhood was so terrible. I hated it. It's sad to say, but every time I see a fat kid. I always say, hey man, you're going to be beat."

While in Miami for a kickboxing competition, Murdocco met a woman, a top model and actress, with whom he had a cozy long distance relationship. It came to a crashing halt shortly after she came to Vancouver for a movie audition. The movie? *Flesh Gordon Meets the Cosmic Cheerleaders*. Murdocco drove the woman to the audition and ended up going for a screen test himself. They made a pact, both had to get parts or they walked. Murdocco got the role of Flesh; the woman got the big rejection. At that point, the silly pact meant little.

Murdocco wants to get one thing straight. "Okay, the movie is not a porno it's funny, when I say *Flesh Gordon Meets the Cosmic Cheerleaders*, everybody thinks it's a porno." Murdocco also had his doubts after viewing the original *Flesh Gordon*. "It was semi-porno and it was so terrible, I didn't want to do it. But don't print that. Well, you can print that. It wasn't terrible, it was just different. And where I come from, I've got my fan club (consisting of about 40 percent prepubescent girls), I'm Italian, my parents are a big thing, I couldn't have their respect if it was like this."

He was assured of the movie's relative respectability and accepted the part. "This movie is clean enough. There's going to be some breasts showing, but it's nice." Filmed primarily in Burnaby and Los Angeles, the sequel to *Flesh Gordon* is a wacky, farcical adventure movie, according to Murdocco. *Cheerleaders* from a planet cursed with impotence kidnap the virile Flesh. Flesh's

girlfriend Dale tries to save her beau and gets nabbed herself by an evil guy. Flesh and the evil guy eventually have a big showdown.

Murdocco gives the movie, due for release next summer, an unqualified thumbs up. "It's so funny, it isn't funny. I mean, you can't believe it, it's so funny."

Did Murdocco do any nude scenes? "I'm lying on a bed and there's a towel over me and these girls are saying, 'What a specimen. Jeez, this guy is good looking.'" And all of a sudden I wake up and run for the door... I have this cloth in front. They show my butt. I figured... who's that *guy*? Mel Gibson. I love Mel Gibson. If he showed his butt, I can do it too."

Murdocco's father, Frank, doesn't know much about the content of *Flesh Gordon Meets the Cosmic Cheerleaders*, but he has faith in his son's judgment. Frank also sees the movie's central action—busty, lusty cosmic cheerleaders chasing after an A-1 stud—as a kind of cinema verite. "That's what happens in life too," says Frank about his 23-year-old son, who still lives at home. "Even at the house, everybody phones for him. All the women are after him."

Murdocco loved playing the lead role in the movie but says he never let status go to his head. "I had my chair, it said Flesh on it but honestly, I didn't want to feel like, 'I'm the star. I'm here, you're there.' I'd eat with the cast. I'd eat with everybody. I never wanted to be separated. So it was a big happy family, even with the extras."

Now I'm trying to get away from that beef hunk kind of thing and do some serious acting," says Murdocco, who works as a shaping coordinator at Western Stevedoring's North Vancouver office. He's making his stage debut with *The World of Beauty*, which also features Brad Gough, Denise Lane, D.O.A.'s Joe Keithley and Karen Campbell. And he is up for a major part in *Kickboxer 2*. But he hopes to do

something more dramatically complex. "I'd really like to do a play. You know what I mean by a play? This (*The World of Beauty*) is great. This is a great way to get my feet wet, but I want to do a play where they say, 'That was acting.'"

"I don't want to be, 'Vin nie, he's good for kickboxing, he's got a good face, nice body, a bull hunk type of guy.' I want to be respected as an actor."

Again, the notion of respect. Granted, Murdocco could face somewhat of a dilemma. The combination of his good looks, relentlessly upbeat manner, and unique athletic skills seem to doom him to perpetual typecasting.

Then there's that pervasive motif of what it means to be Italian. Murdocco, who speaks Italian and names Al Pacino and Robert DeNiro as his favorite actors, places his heritage and family ties above all. "To me, Italian stands for authority. Italian clothes are the best. Italian shoes are the best. Italians search for perfection. Maybe people say they're sleaze balls, you know, Guido. But they bring up their kids properly. Family is the most important thing. That's what kept me *going*."

That said, what would Murdocco do if he got rich and famous?

"It's funny, this is the one thing that I've always thought about ...I'd spoil them. I'd do like Elvis did to his mother. I'd buy her everything. To me, I can be broke. Even the money I've made so far, I've spent it. Not on me, on everybody else because I figure if they're happy. I'm happy. I'm so happy on life, I don't need money."

Back to Pops, blissfully smoking a stogie before going to a hockey game with his son, for a final word Frank obviously has great pride in his boy's accomplishments. Blown-up photos of Vince in action have prominent spots on the wall of the Calabria Bar. "We support all of our sons," he says of himself and his

wife. "But him we've got to watch more than the others... He's more on the wild side. But deep inside, he's a very nice boy I've got no complaints."