

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS CASTS THE DON CAGEN ORCHESTRA

► SOUND

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS FOR CHICAGO BAND LEADER

It's just like the old movie plot: a casting agent calls up out of the blue from L.A. asking you to interview for a possible movie scene; you're given a screen test and ultimately chosen for the part. But this is no Hollywood fable for local band leader Don Cagen and his orchestra. The orchestra was chosen from among 15 bands that auditioned to appear in the new film *Opportunity Knocks*, which was shot in Chicago last summer.

The band consists of seven musicians and a vocalist, Cagen's wife Becky. The thirty-year-old Cagen has been performing with his orchestra for eight years, but this was the group's first time on the big screen. The band performs four songs in a large party scene filmed at an estate in Winnetka. This was not unfamiliar to Cagen, who along with his orchestra performs all over the Chicago area at various private parties and benefits. Cagen says that "it was the easiest party I ever played, but it was also the longest." The band had to "play" the same four songs during five days of filming. Actually, the band recorded the songs for the soundtrack the week before shooting began, and then pretended to play and sing for the actual filming.

"The shoots began at 6:30 a.m. and would last up to fourteen hours," Cagen says.

Cagen and his band learned the intricacies of movie-making in just two days between the recording and the actual shooting. If that wasn't enough, the band performed at four real-life parties over that weekend. This meant extra work for Becky, who not only sang at these functions, but also had to prepare to lip-synch all four songs perfectly for the film, which included several close-ups.

Not one to be outdone by his wife, Don Cagen had his own moment on the spot. In the last twenty minutes of shooting on the final day at the estate location, director Donald Petrie decided that he wanted to shoot a scene of a conga line led by Dana Carvey going around the pool. There was a possibility that it might be used as the credits were running at the end of the movie. There was one problem. Music cannot be performed in a movie without the

permission of the composer. With no such music handy, the director asked Cagen to compose a song and perform it. Cagen composed it on the spot, the band rehearsed it for fifteen minutes and then performed it for the camera. Cagen then had to quickly write for a copyright. At the time of the interview Cagen had not seen the film and only hoped that the conga line didn't end up on the editing room floor.

After all of the long hours, hard work and sudden changes, would Cagen do it all over again? "Definitely," he says. "It was an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. We are eagerly awaiting our next offer." For those eagerly awaiting the movie, it is due for an April release.—*Arawa McClendon*

inside CHICAGO March/April 1990

SCREEN
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Dana Carvey (center), star of "Opportunity Knocks," the feature that wrapped last week after a summer of filming here, takes ten with band leader Don Cagen and his wife and band vocalist, Becky Cagen. The Don Cagen Orchestra is featured in the film performing four selections. Carvey is also the "Church Lady" on "Saturday Night Live."

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