

The Odyssey of the Pacific

being made by "technically the best crew and cast ever assembled in Canada." Michel Brault (director of *Les ordres*, and director of photography of *Mon oncle Antoine* and *Kamouraska*) and his French Canadian crew dart about the set with wit and professionalism. They somehow manage to attend to their cameras while sustaining a repartee in accented English on the vicissitudes of World Series baseball.

Art director Anne Pritchard, exhausted after only three hours of sleep, smiles wanly as she tries to explain the effects she expects from the opaque white she has used in the operating rooms. There will not be an antiseptic glare in any of the scenes shot on this set. It seems that the actors will be cast in a faint penumbra of light on the periphery of the bright pool created by the surgery lamps. Pritchard suggested that this aura could lend the scenes an unearthly quality. Considering the film's theme this ethereal effect may be intended to hint at the surreal possibilities presented by medical science. Sax promises that the surgery footage "won't look like operating-room scenes ever seen before." He describes the effects as, "otherworldly. Not surrealistic, hyper-realistic!" When asked how these effects would be attained, he replies that "there are big secrets" for which we must "wait and see."

But *Threshold* will not be just a bag of medical special effects. Sax says the story is about "the effects of an artificial heart on the characters." Central to the drama is a young girl's need for an artificial heart in order to live. But Sax emphasizes that the story "is not morbid, but insightful." The audience will see the drama from the surgeon's point of view, not the patient's. From this perspective the film assumes an objectivity that will prevent it from becoming melodramatic. Sax believes that "the audience won't feel it is a victim." Instead, it will see a film that "develops characters the way a novel does, dealing with the intricate relationships between people." Sax also stresses the film's coherence: "Everything fits in. There is no cliché dialogue. There are no silhouettes. Even the bad guys are human. Mayor Moore portrays a gruff bastard, but he is not two-dimensional."

Threshold aims to be an uplifting film. It is possible that medical science will be attributed an omnipotence superior to that which it already has. So far, indications are that those making this film may well succeed in capturing the depth and significance they are after.

Walter Owen

"A film for adults, but mostly for children," is how director Fernando Arrabal describes his latest project, *Odyssey Of The Pacific*, a \$2 million Canada-France co-production filmed on location this fall in Montreal.

The Spanish-born, internationally renowned playwright and director conceived the *Odyssey* story after his own children's tales of their extraordinary adventures in their sleeping and waking dreams intrigued him. Writing the script, with old friend Mickey Rooney in mind for the starring role, Arrabal and Romaine Legargeant, the Paris producer of Arrabal's last two films, contacted Montreal producer Claude Léger, whose last film was the favourably acclaimed *The Lucky Star*. The creativity and imagination of Arrabal's script convinced Léger to undertake the project.

Like his previous film work, *Viva la muerta*, *J'irai comme un cheval fou*, and *L'arbre de Guernica*, *Odyssey* combines Arrabal's richly poetic vision of avant-garde fantasy and imagination with an awareness of a harsher reality drawn from the director's own difficult and painful childhood experience. But the playful and whimsical style of his latest film is a radical departure from the darker nature of his earlier work.

The story begins as nine-year-old Lis

and seven-year-old Toby (Annick and Jonathan Starr, in their first screen roles), spend their summer vacation in the country with their aunt Elsa (Monique Mercure), and their uncle Alex (Jean-Louis Roux), wrapped in a comfortable world of television, daydreams, and electric model train sets.

Enter Hoang (Ky Huot Uk, also in his' first film role), a seven-year-old Cambodian refugee placed temporarily in Elsa and Alex's custody, who has lost his father and was separated from his mother on a Cambodian beach when the boat took him away. The children become fast friends. Toby is a passionate dreamer whose fantasies involve a major part of the film; he dreams of walking a circus wire, commanding a tank brigade, travelling in outer space, or conducting a symphony orchestra (shot with members of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and 75 extras at Montreal's Monkland Theatre) alongside his pet duck Federico. Toby's dreams of grandeur are contrasted with Hoang's more painful imagination, as he recalls memories of his father and the scene at the beach where he was taken from his mother.

One day while exploring in the woods, the children discover a hidden Pacific steam locomotive and later, the home of Old Thubal (Mickey Rooney), a feisty



Chewing the fat over a coke and a stogie are Mickey Rooney and Guy Hoffman

IN PROGRESS

renegade who once piloted the engine. Now, though crippled, he still opposes efforts by the Mayor (Guy Hoffman) to place him in a rest home. After Thubal swears the children to silence about his secret locomotive, he lets them fix it up.

But reality intrudes when Hoang must leave to live with his permanent sponsors and Thubal is forced to go into the rest home. Discovering some coal in an abandoned mine, the children start up The Pacific and plan a fantastic escape to Cambodia, where Hoang would be reunited with his mother and Thubal safe from the rest home. But at the last moment Thubal stays behind, allowing the children to elude the authorities and escape on their fantastic voyage.

Getting Mickey Rooney for the role of Old Thubal was not easy. During the six-week shooting schedule he was performing six nights, Monday through Saturday, on Broadway in the hit play **Sugar Babies**; so a six-passenger private jet was leased for \$25,000 to fly Rooney, his wife Janice, and his travelling companion Dick Paxton into Montreal Sunday mornings. His scenes were done exclusively on Sundays and Mondays, and Rooney was flown back to New York in time for Monday night's performance. Three successive weekends of this arduous routine completed Rooney's six-day contract.

"He's just fantastic to work with," says production manager Suzanne Roi. "And such a professional. With him, it's one or two takes and that's it."

"I show up," is how the veteran of 58 years in show business and over 150 films explains his preparation for a role. "Actors

The Odyssey of the Pacific

Co-production Canada/France. **p.c.** Ciné-Pacifique Inc. 1980 **p.** Claude Léger (Montréal), Ken et Romaine Legargeant (Paris) **asst. to p.** Anne Burke **p.man.** Suzanne Roy **asst. p.** Yolaine Rouleau **p.man.** Michel Siry **p.man.a.** Harold Trépanier **p.sec.** Jacqueline Soussan **sec. of p.** Pascale Reiher **sec.** Fernando Arrabal **d.** Fernando Arrabal **1st a.d.** Michel Gauthier **2nd a.d.** François Chopineau **2nd a.d.** Michèle Mercure **art. d.** Claudine Lagrive **art. d.** René Petit **cont.** Catherine Breton **d.o.p.** Ken Legargeant **cam.** Claude Larue **1st a. cam.** Daniel Jobin **1st a. cam.** (cam. 2) Jocelyn Simard **2nd a. cam.** Camille Maheux **sd.** Claude Hazanavicius **boom** Denis Dupont **set dec.** Fernand Durand **props** Serge Bureau **props asst.** Simon Lahaye, Pierre Gros D'Aillon **sp. effects** Jacques Godbout, Louis Craig **1st elec.** Denis Baril **2nd elec.** Brian Bakear **machiniste** Raymond Lamy **cost. des.** François Laplante **ward.** Dominique Forest, Louise Rousseau **make-up** Micheline Foissy **drivers** Pascal Roulin, Daniel Mercure, Yves Lamarre, Pierre Siry **children governess** Sandra St-Laurent **accountants** Micheline Bonin (Canada), Natacha Poloudnenko (France) **stills** Takashi Seida, Fred Smith **i.p.** Mickey Rooney, Jonathan Staar, Annick, Ky Huot Uk, Jean-Louis Roux, Monique Mercure, Guy Hoffman, Valda Dalton, Jean-Pierre Saunier, Maurice Podbrey, Vlasta Vrana **pub.** David Novek Associates

are the luckiest people in the world — grown-up children getting paid damn well to do something that's a lot of fun!" Reflecting on his own status as the movies' most famous grown-up child, he adds, "All grown-ups have a child within them but are afraid to show it. For the actor, the minute the child dies, he's on the way out."

Locating an authentic steam locomotive

was necessary for the film, and it was found in Ottawa's Museum of Science and Technology. A Pacific-type G5 class engine built by Canadian Pacific Railways in 1944, it is the last existing locomotive of its model in Canada. Insured for a quarter of a million dollars and rented for \$15,000, the Pacific was driven by its own steam to a location in Hudson, Quebec. Since the museum's curators cautiously forbade the engine to be operated after October 1st, for fear its steam might condense to ice in sudden cold weather, a two-week shooting schedule in Hudson was reduced to two days, where all scenes involving the moving locomotive were filmed with over 400 extras. The Pacific was then moved under its own power, and by crane, to a location at the Canadian Railway Museum in St. Constant, Quebec, for the sequences in the woods.

A further challenge to Arrabal is making the film in English, a language he does not speak. "Actually, it's an advantage, because it gives me time to stop and think about the words and how they should be conveyed," he said, through an interpreter. Arrabal communicates in French with the predominantly Québécois cast and 47-member crew, and even with Mickey Rooney, who surprised the set with his capable knowledge of the language.

Principal photography was completed in Montreal in the middle of October, and **Odyssey** is being edited in Paris. The producers anticipate a world-wide release by September 1981.

Bruce Malloch



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Key to Credit Abbreviations

p.c. production company **p.** producer/production **d.** director **d.o.p.** director of photography **sc.** script/screenplay **ed.** editing/editor **mus.** music **sd. rec./re-rec.** sound recording/re-recording **a.d.** assistant director **asst.** assistant **loc. man.** location manager **ward.** wardrobe **cost. des.** costume design **set dec.** set decoration **cam. op.** camera operator **elec.** electrician **carp.** carpenter **special efx.** special effects **acct.** accountant **compt.** comptroller **sec.** secretary **i.p.** leading players **pub.** publicity **col.** colour **dist.** distributor.

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