Beryl Fox
with a cameo appearance by Claude Jutra
by Penelope Hynam

Beryl Fox: All right, I'll give you my sales pitch. The story is about two beautiful, contemporary, smart, successful fashion designers, Helen and Angie, who run a boutique—a design studio. And they have everything; they have life in the fast lane, they have their own fashion photographers, Terry. They have four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They went to discos and they check out men living together. Then they end up sharing a room at a boutique, and everyone lives happily ever after... It's a very nice little film, very contemporary.

Cinema Canada: Where did the script come from, who wrote it?
Beryl Fox: The idea originated in Vancouver with the co-producer Werner A llen. I forget the name of the man who first brought it to him. It was first drafted, I think, as a kind of soft-core porn. Then Werner got hold of it and he saw something, and took it to Claude Jutra. Claude looked at it, and he also saw something in it. So he flew out for journalism in the U.S.

Penelope Hynam worked at the CBC for 12 years. She is presently a free-lance writer with a strong involvement in film. She has worked, primarily as a script supervisor, on over 15 Canadian features.

Claire Watson, among others. In the following years she was to produce many programs on her own, and with Douglas Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.

In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board. In 1976 Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter—Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OEC) and for the National Film Board.
to Vancouver and sat down with the writer, Joe Wiesenfield, who is, I think, very well known as a playwright in Canada. They drafted a script which was basically the same as the one we saw. Nothing really happened with it for about three years, and when I first went to Claude to discuss Surfacing he was quite discouraged because he was involved with By Design. He decided that that was the next film he was going to do. He really cared for it; he turned down all the projects that came his way...

Well, I finally talked to Ralph Zimmerman who is Claude's agent, and Ralph said Claude was really pushing on the basis that I would produce By Design; so even though I wasn't really ready to produce another one... I had an obligation to Claude— and I liked the script and the whole idea as much as he did. For me, it was in a sense a political film because it had two strong, women protagonists. And even though they were lesbian, I think the acceptance of sexual choices is something that are entitled to. If we can get people to care about two lesbians, that is making a stride forward...

When we went out to sell it, you can't imagine the trouble they had. People looked at the script and they said, that's not funny. They were looking for gag lines. I thought, what's Jutra and Jutras sense of comedy? It's very special; it's almost European; it's more Cage Aux Folles. People looked at it and they wouldn't buy it. Even the CFDC turned it down when they first looked at it. They even turned it down a second time. They weren't sure that Claude could direct a comedy.

A lot of the investors I went to said "Jutra's a brilliant filmmaker, but can he direct an English-language comedy?" Most of the money people are looking for safe formulas. And this is definitely not a formula film. It's an original film from an original Canadian screen-writer with one of the best directors in Canada, and it is a brand new topic—a topic that's little-dangerous; so I would go around and say to Jutra: "You're a brilliant director and great. But maybe it's a new genre." And $49 million one year and $50 million the next year, and this is the same genre. Furthermore, I love that in this film, the film is right, and if we can capture it, we can make money on this.

Well, nobody really believed that... and I didn't have Surfacing distributed, so there were lots of problems getting it launched.

Cinema Canada: When you tried to launch Surfacing you also had incredible problems, didn't you? You had to make yourself and your film known.

Beryl Fox: Well, we did that again on By Design. It wasn't any easier— partially because of the subject, partially because the film is not a Hollywood type script. Everything was done in Claude's head and he knew exactly what he wanted to do with it. The best thing that we did was write to him and give him what he needed. Almost. I mean we started out promising him 10 weeks, but we cut it down to six weeks, and eventually he cut it down to five weeks because he was involved with By Design. And that's in the works right now.

Cinema Canada: There was no way of your getting the American to play the male lead and we had been looking for a young Elliott Gould. And then, when you got to separate them up. Because raising money is a very special skill. If you want to be a producer with the kind of power which Claude has, then you've got to be able to handle the finances. That's a skill that women have, but are often unaw... 

Beryl Fox: I've always liked the acceptance of women who know how good they are, how cunning they are, what good little businesswomen they are. I've got business training in my mother's grocery store, and there are a lot of women who have been handling their own finances for a long time but are not used to dealing in large sums and they are scared shitless. When you think of $45 million you think it's a lot of money, and when you think of $2 million or half-million, it's also a lot of money but the same principles apply.

The financial world is really a male club. But there are a lot of women in there now and the networks which are starting to come about are very important. One of the things I plan to do this year is start a network...
friend of mine—a woman named Gail Singer, she's a fine filmmaker—who came to me and asked if she could be a trainee with Claude to learn about drama, and I thought it was a great idea. That's something that's done all the time in the U.S.; they even credit them. When I was at the Film Board I talked the Board into sending two trainees down to work with Norman Jewison on FIST and that was excellent for both of them. So I thought we should do it, especially on By Design... So Gail went to the CFDC and I backed her. And the CFDC paid for her to go. They were the help with the CFDC or somebody's got to stick their neck out and push. So Gail came on the set. It was a tremendous experience for her. And she was so important to it that people missed her when she wasn't there, and Claude missed her when she wasn't there. That kind of thing has got to be put into place. And what I'd like to sug

...You know, I've gone through so many ups and downs... I mean people have loved me, have hated me, I can't get in the door, no one will answer my phone calls, or I'm splattered across the press and I'm a hero. All that is horseshit. You just have to keep your eye on what you're going after.

You know, I've gone through so many ups and downs... I mean people have loved me, have hated me, I can't get in the door, no one will answer my phone calls, or I'm splattered across the press and I'm a hero. All that is horseshit. You just have to keep your eye on what you're going after.

...I thought it was unusual, very original; it's a subject matter that's very rarely treated. There have been for a few years films treating the subject matter of women and sexuality but women very seldom, and whenever it's done it's so heavy-handed or it's always freaky. It was a subject in the air that had never been treated adequately.

When I first got acquainted with the project it was not at all what it is now. When I met Genevieve Bujold, I thought we should do it especially on By Design, because we had no money for a hotel.

Cinema Canada: Were there any times that the project was in jeopardy? Claude Jutra: That was a very close relationship. I stayed at Beryl's home for a few years films treating the subject matter of women and sexuality but women very seldom, and whenever it's done it's so heavy-handed or it's always freaky. It was a subject in the air that had never been treated adequately.

When I first got acquainted with the project it was not at all what it is now. When I met Genevieve Bujold, I thought we should do it especially on By Design, because we had no money for a hotel.

Cinema Canada: Were there any times that the project was in jeopardy? Claude Jutra: That was a very close relationship. I stayed at Beryl's home for a few years films treating the subject matter of women and sexuality but women very seldom, and whenever it's done it's so heavy-handed or it's always freaky. It was a subject in the air that had never been treated adequately.
Design was that all those involved were basically involved as filmmakers. The producers are all filmmakers. We were not in it to make large funds which we would take off the top. In fact, all of us, including Claude, put all our fees into standby positions so that if we didn't sell out we would own a piece of the film.

Cinema Canada: So what do you see as the answers to the larger problems of where we're going in Canadian film? Claude Jutra: I don't give a shit...

Cinema Canada: You just want to make your own films...

Claude Jutra: Well, I'm not that selfish, but first of all, personally, if I'm involved in a community problem it's in Quebec, and in Quebec the problem is much more real. Most of the Quebec filmmakers that I know are film lovers, and hardly any have this attitude that most Canadians, English Canadians, have of turning this into an exclusively industrial enterprise. We don't do it like that, and we have other problems besides political problems. So I'm involved in a way that it's in the cause of the Quebec cinema. I have a few friends in English Canadian cinema and they are very close to me, and to my heart. People like Beryl, and Ralph Thomas, for example, and a lot of people, artisans, craftsmen that I've worked with, but I don't think that the Canadian cinema has a cause and I don't think that any cause is being fought at the CFDC or at the unions, or at the Canadian film associations.

Cinema Canada: What about you Beryl? If an industry doesn't have a cause does that mean it's not going to exist, not going to survive?

Beryl Fox: I don't have any grand answers because I'm aware of how complex it is. Making a film is one thing, but selling the film is another thing, and the selling of the film is where it's at. Last year there was this expression in the industry—because the industry and money is getting tighter—that "we're going to separate the men from the boys." And as a woman I say fuck that. It's time to give it to the filmmakers.

Never mind the men and the boys and the accountants. Give it to the filmmakers and let the industry support the filmmakers, let the CFDC support the filmmakers.

The question of whether we should go for big-budget or low-budget films. I represent the low-budget film side. I'm also aware of the fact that, with the bane of the television, the union has on the industry, there's no way you can make films under $2 million. So I'm suggesting that what has to happen is that the unions and the producers associations, which are incredibly important because they spearhead the industry, should work together. We have to show a profit on the films otherwise the money will dry up. But you can show a profit on a good little film. You just have to work harder. You have to be willing to take less money up front, you have to give more commitment to the film and less to your own personal profit. The difference between this office and the glamorous offices of the Canadian film moguls (most of whom are my friends) represents that I, that we, are in it for the film.

Cinema Canada: What about the Capital Cost Allowance? If that is removed do you think that Canadian film will survive it? Beryl Fox: It depends on what you're talking about. If you're talking about industry I don't want to make any grand pronouncement. If you're talking about whether I'll survive, sure I'll survive because I'm a filmmaker and that's all I do. If I can't find the money to make a $3 million film, I'll do a $500,000 film. But there's nothing to say that low-budget films can't be as good. When we took Surfacing down to the U.S. everybody assumed it was a $6 million film. It's a $2 million film and it was well done...

If it's a low-budget film more people of talent will get a chance. You don't have to go with the guys with the gross box office track record, you give other people a chance who are good filmmakers. For instance, when I said we have Claude Jutra to direct—to me Claude is the premier filmmaker in Canada—they said OK but what have his films grossed at the box office? You know, "show me the pro forma, show me the balance sheet." That's not the way you judge a filmmaker... I hope that By Design will make people aware that a film which is authentically Canadian and original can sell because it's going to be a winner; it's going to make a lot of money. And it's going to make money for the investors and these investors will be there when the Capital Cost Allowance is not.

Cinema Canada: To move into another area completely... you started at the CBC didn't you, on "This Hour Has Seven Days"?

Beryl Fox: Actually I started as a script assistant at the CBC in sports with Fred Scambatti.

Cinema Canada: And then you worked your way up to producer/director. You have always been a producer and director in fiction film, dramatic film?

Beryl Fox: Yes. Cinema Canada: What made you switch, was it just a natural progression?

Beryl Fox: I found that you could no longer stay in television, you no longer had the freedom on television that you have in pictures. And moving, having to cut the ton pencil of the television bureaucracy is very difficult and very often impossible. I still believe in television. As a delivery system, nothing compares.

Cinema Canada: But you feel that it is a limit the film now?

Beryl Fox: Yes. Well, nobody would let me direct a television drama—what you get for drama—nobody would hire me. You know, after being the "pet" of the CBC for many years, nobody would hire me because I was too old. I was 42, 43, and they had training courses for young drama directors, but I could not get in...

Cinema Canada: The statistics there for beginning directors are very depressing when you think that the CBC is still the main area where almost anyone in this country interested in drama can get a chance to start...

Beryl Fox: How many women do they hire for drama? How many women do they put in their director training courses? Women aren't getting anywhere. When I started there as a documentary producer no women were there either. We had to fight our way in, we had to prove that we could do it by starting as script assistants and taking over when the directors were drunk.

Cinema Canada: When you're finished with Design where will you go from there?

Beryl Fox: Well, one thing I want to do is make films without murder and mayhem, without women as the victims or sex pots... On the other hand, I'm the one who insisted that we had all the sex in By Design!

Cinema Canada: I also heard a story about the tits in Surfacing that you and your editor were at loggerheads over in By Design...

Beryl Fox: Well, yeah. I feel that it depends how you use it. There are more tits in By Design than in Surfacing, but I feel...

Claude Jutra: Hardly any tits in By Design!

Beryl Fox: Are you kidding? There's a wall full of them!

Claude Jutra: Ah, a wallful, but they don't move...

Cinema Canada: (to Jutra) You've never really done anything as deliberately comical as By Design, have you?

Claude Jutra: Sure. I would say "The Wordsmith" and "Seer Was Here" were comedies, and there is comedy in all my films.

Cinema Canada: Speaking of "The Wordsmith" and "Seer Was Here"...
For a while you made a switch to television. Why did you do that? Was it for a financial reason?

Clauude Jutra: No. no. no, it was just that I had a very very hard time, it was very difficult in Quebec, there was a slump period in the production and after Kamouraska I waited... I had learned by then that if you want to make a film, you have to stick with it until you make it, or until you decide to give up making it. If you do anything in the meantime it will not work. Projects disappear, so I had waited two years to set up a film called For Better or For Worse and finally I made it, but it had a very little audience... In Quebec it's much worse than in Canada, because Quebec is so small and circumscribed. And just imagine, you know, that if you've been two years working on a film and it comes out and Gina Maliet destroys it with one review. Those are things that can very well happen in Quebec and do happen all the time. So at that point I was very discouraged, because the film had had lots of positive response - you know, the potential of the film - and it just came and went. At that point Ralph Thomas (of CBC's "For the Record" series) had been coaxing me for more than a couple of years. So I said OK, I'll go to Toronto and I'll make little TV films and that'll take my mind away from my problems and I'll have a little money on the side. John Hirsch had just arrived. And Ralph Thomas was there and there was Anne Frank, and it was very exciting. And I was discovering the theatre in Toronto... And I went to see them. And I cast the whole... And I was doing all sorts of things like teaching, and working in English, and I think I would still like to do that. I live in a little hotel (in Toronto) and now what I see through my window is the back of the Adelaide Court and it's very dear to my heart because I played there twice, once in French and once in English and it's a whole new thing and I'd like to pursue it, to go on diversifying my activities. But certainly the main one will always be filmmaking.

Cinema Canada: What advice would you give to young directors who are trying to get a foot in the door. How can they encourage other people to look for their work?

Claude Jutra: It's been going on quite a while and I have no intentions to stop. One thing that happened to me in the last few years after Mon Oncle Antoine and Kamouraska was that I went private and I diversified. I began doing all sorts of things like teaching, and working in English, and I think I would still like to do that. I live in a little hotel (in Toronto) and now what I see through my window is the back of the Adelaide Court and it's very dear to my heart because I played there twice, once in French and once in English and it's a whole new thing and I'd like to pursue it, to go on diversifying my activities. But certainly the main one will always be filmmaking.

Cinema Canada: What advice would you give to young directors who are trying to get a foot in the door. How can they encourage other people to look for their work?

Claude Jutra: It's been going on quite a while and I have no intentions to stop. One thing that happened to me in the last few years after Mon Oncle Antoine and Kamouraska was that I went private and I diversified. I began doing all sorts of things like teaching, and working in English, and I think I would still like to do that. I live in a little hotel (in Toronto) and now what I see through my window is the back of the Adelaide Court and it's very dear to my heart because I played there twice, once in French and once in English and it's a whole new thing and I'd like to pursue it, to go on diversifying my activities. But certainly the main one will always be filmmaking.

Beryl Fox: I believe in taking chances - not just use the same people all the time because they have produced commercial films. Then we also, have to have the potential of the film - and it has to be a film which is real and worth making a film about - not just something which is a copy of a copy - the role of the producer is to move it, to make it a film that people will want to see. It doesn't have to be Scanners, it doesn't have to be Prom Night, but it has to be a film which has something to give to the audiences around the world. I think there are people out there who want to see good films.

Part of the problem is the power of the producer to decide what will be done and what will not be done. And I'd say it was a natural growth in the industry that it should go to the business people, the lawyers, the accountants, the stock brokers, but they are not the people who should have the final say as to what will sell, because they don't know... anymore than the people down in Hollywood know what will sell. What they call a "hard sell" is often the most worthwhile film.

Cinema Canada: Why are the most consistently interesting films - both filmmakers who are interested in film. They put their minds and their hearts in their films and not in their bank accounts, or their tax shelters, or all that crap. They are devoted.

Beryl Fox: (to Claude...) I should add here that the crew we had in Vancouver was, I think you said, one of the best you've ever worked with, and a lot of those crew turned down larger budget films, films which looked better and more stable going, and they took a chance with us because they were more interested in the film.

Cinema Canada: Beryl has said she would keep making films no matter what. I'm sure the same applies to you...

Claude Jutra: It's been going on quite a while and I have no intentions to stop. One thing that happened to me in the last few years after Mon Oncle Antoine and Kamouraska was that I went private and I diversified. I began doing all sorts of things like teaching, and working in English, and I think I would still like to do that. I live in a little hotel (in Toronto) and now what I see through my window is the back of the Adelaide Court and it's very dear to my heart because I played there twice, once in French and once in English and it's a whole new thing and I'd like to pursue it, to go on diversifying my activities. But certainly the main one will always be filmmaking.

Cinema Canada: What advice would you give to young directors who are trying to get a foot in the door. How can they encourage other people to look for their work?

Claude Jutra: Don't do anything that you don't like.

Cinema Canada: (to Beryl) You would agree with that?

Beryl Fox: Oh, no. Because I've done so many things. I don't like...

Cinema Canada: You once said that the success that counted, was the doing?

Beryl Fox: Did I say that?

Cinema Canada: Yes....

Beryl Fox: That's lovely.

Cinema Canada: Then you still believe it...

Beryl Fox: I believe in taking chances... I have found people in the financial community who go along with that, but you have to work very hard for it. I haven't had to say... well, it's sort of standard around this office that the first film you make is going to...

Claude Jutra: But the next nine are very painful!... (laughter).

Beryl Fox: Yes. The next nine are painful - and when it gets to the tenth you should think about an alternate route...

For a report on the By Design shoot, see p. 41.
Where Canadian film comes together.

BELLEVUE Pathé

MONTREAL
Motion Picture Laboratories & Sound Studios
Andre Collette, President
2000 Northcliff Ave.
Montreal, Quebec
H4A 3K5
Tel: (514) 484-1186

TORONTO
720 King St. West
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 2T3
Tel: (416) 364-3894

PATHE SOUND & POST PRODUCTION CENTRE
Joe Grimaldi, vice-president
121 St. Patrick St.,
Toronto, Ontario M5T 1V3
Tel: (416) 598-2521

ASTRAL BELLEVUE Pathé

April 81 - Cinema Canada/31