Claude Fournier’s

**Bonheur d’occasion**

It’s the easiest thing in the world to dismiss *Bonheur d’occasion* (The Tin Flute) as just another six-handkerchief weeper. God knows misery, and tears abound in this two-hour French-language adaptation of the late Gabrielle Roy’s novel of the same title in which young Florentine Lacasse, daughter of Montreal’s working-class St. Henri district, learns that when you’re poor life isn’t about what you want. It’s about what you can get.

Father shiftless, mother perpetually aproned and pregnant, little brother dying of TB (and in the bountiful arms of les Anglais, no less) — hell, the sacred heart polychrome is practically bleeding for the pages turning (the whole thing has been boiled down from a much longer version destined for television), and yet — yet — maybe someone will make a film about that.

Marilyn Lightstone, who plays Florentine’s mother with decidedly mixed and bathetic results, has been cackling to the press about the movie’s reception at the Moscow Film Festival earlier this summer. The Soviets thought *Bonheur d’occasion* was portraying present-day Canada. “I think it appealed to the Russians,” Lightstone said, “because they like to see North Americans in pain.” She went on to say that an introduction was added to the film to explain to Moscow audiences that it does not depict current conditions. Maybe that’s true, maybe families of ten no longer live in slum conditions in St. Henri. For that maybe you have to travel farther east to, say, the Centre-Sud district, where the average yearly income for a family of four is $7000 and where life expectancy is ten years less than on the western end of the Island of Montreal. In another 40 years or so, maybe someone will make a film about that.

Will Aitken

**BONHEUR D’OCASION**


A miserably shaded (and frequently sarcastic) Florentine (Nicole Pelletier) and Madeleine (Christine Desrochers) is as she schemes her way upward into respectability by marrying a man she doesn’t love into marrying her. For an experienced film actress, such a carefully shaded and frequently funny Florentine would be a major accomplishment; as Deyguln’s first screen role, Florentine is nothing less than a triumph.

BONHEUR D’OCASION

When Circle of Two was finally shown, after several false starts, on CBC’s winter series of Canadian films, it looked like an end the rather sorry history of the Film Consortium of Canada. The hopes engendered six years ago after the unexpected success of *Outrageous*, that Bill Marshall and Henk Van der Kolk would be the bright lights of the English-language film boom, have been proven to be yet another of the many mirages that came and went in those years. In fact, *Circle of Two* stands as a prime example of what went wrong.

The first, and perhaps the most basic mistake the producers made was to attempt to adapt Marie-Terese Baird’s not so much a love story as the scripts read like a book. The film is something of an incariable romantic in genres where sentimentality prevails; it is a comedy as the quirky Miss Patricia and the frankly silly Flashdance bear witness.

And Circle of Two’s plot offered more than a few sinkholes for the audience and director Jules Dassin to fall into. It is the story of a romance between Sarah Norton, a 16-year-old private-school student, and Ashley St Clair, a sixtyish artist who has been suffering from a creative block for ten years. Sarah first meets him in a theatre where she has snuck in to see a production of *Hamlet*, and then again in a Yorkville restaurant after she has a fight with her boyfriend. For some reason, Ashley is fascinated by this superficially precocious girl, and she agrees to sit for him. Sarah, meanwhile, works overtime trying to seduce the reclusive painter. Paul, the erstwhile boyfriend, gets into a fight with Sarah, who fractures his skull. Sarah’s parents, who consider Ashley just a dirty old man, lock Sarah in her room, where she goes into a deep depression. Eventually Ashley and Sarah reunite, but are forced to admit the end of their platonic relationship.

Richard Burton, who plays Ashley, fares only marginally better. That rich intonation, as it has in many films before, can cover a multitude of sins, including the ravages of several decades of hard living and even harder drinking.

Jules Dassin’s

**Circle of Two**

**Triumphant first timer:** Mireille Deyguln as young Florentine Lacasse steals the show in Bonheur d’occasion

***REVIEWS***
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REVIEWS

Jack Darcus' Deserter

War, to judge by its monuments and celebrations, is something to be remembered. Not so the Vietnam war. Forgotten too is that the war in Vietnam was an important sense also Canada's war, that some Canadians fought in it, that Canada's high-tech industries profited immensely from it. Now Vancouver filmmaker Jack Darcus has made a film that attempts to remember.

Deserter, Darcus' fourth feature film (after Great Copps of History, 1978; Prozhyawks, 1972; The Wolfskin Principle, 1974) was one of the gems among an otherwise meager offerings of Canadian films at Montreal's 7th World Film Festival. With all the clarity of a suddenly recollected nightmare, Deserter propels one back, for a relentless 110 minutes, to 'American 1969' with its trains and railway stations full of soldiers, the travelling salesmen of a nation at war.

Alongside such a train, two young grunts, duffel bags packed and Vietnam-bound after boot camp, are fleeing from a shadow. Abroad the train the shadow materializes into their drill instructor, Sgt. Ulysses Hawley, United States Army, marvelously portrayed by Alan Scarfe. Gum-chewing, boorish, with a slight southern accent, Hawley, a three-tour Vietnam veteran, is headed for a five-day drunk between shifts of new draftees. During the train ride he terrifies the two grunts with macabre Vietnam jokes, and sasses a staff captain who can't help overhear Hawley's criticism of the conduct of the war. Disembarking at an unspecified station, Hawley attempts to convince the two to go drinking with him. They reply they first have to say goodbye to their waiting parents outside. The captain suddenly appears, telling Hawley his two men have just gotten into a car, and headed straight for Canada which is just up the road. 'But they're my best men,' Hawley says, flabbergasted, 'If those are your best men, this country's in trouble.' The captain answers. Just up the road, Canada is the office of immigration officer Noel Manufot (Dermot Kelly) for whom the war is a Heaven-sent opportunity to put the principles of liberalism into practice: to bend the immigration rules, and to offer shelter to deserving war-resisters. One such young hero is Peter (Jon Bryden), who somewhat hesitantly accepts Manufot's invitation home.

But Manufot's home is also that of his wife, Val (Barbara March), who if she does not share her husband's zeal for the cause, does on the other hand desire the friendship of the young men her husband brings home, as she intimates to Peter when Manufot is called away on an emergency.

When Noel returns he has brought back with him yet another 'deserter', still in his sergeant's uniform: It is Ulysses Hawley searching for his runaway men. And so the scene is set for the ensuing confrontation between the Soldier, the Youth, the Liberal, and the Woman. What transpires between the walls of the Manufot home is a domestic version of guerrilla war in the sense that, as in Vietnam, nothing is what it seems.

Peter is a deserter only because his college grades were bad and he got his girl friend pregnant. Noel's liberalism is only this year's fashion in a desperate search for personal meaning: the year before it was Zen and pottery. Val's marital discontent is only sexual. Only Hawley's sham desertion turns out to be genuine after all.

In a Nietzschean transvaluation of values, Peter decides to go home and fight for his country; Noel's and Val's marriage irreparably collapses; and Hawley bitterly accepts the defeat of his militaristic ideals. But the others can and will survive at the price of some self-understanding. Peter, one realizes at the film's end, will die, sacrificed to the remains of moribund national ideals. But Deserter is also about our war within, the conflict between Canadian and American Identities. If the Americans do have national ideals to fall back upon (Peter) or to rebel against (Hawley), Canada, which at one point Hawley calls 'This little country that can't even get in on the action' - has only a weak liberalism as the semblance of a national ideal, one that threatens to collapse under the slightest pressure, exposing the cavernous nihilism behind. And yet even this feeble facade offers an occasion for the frontiers to come back with fresh hope.