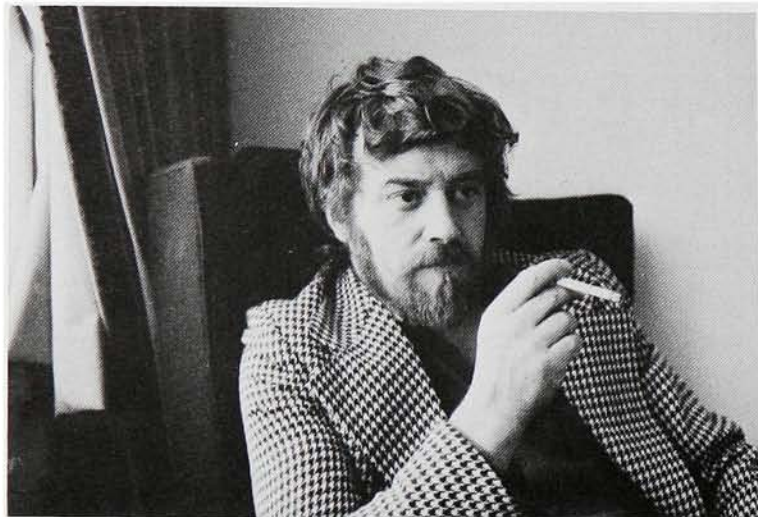


# THE RAINBOW BOYS

## Gerald Potterton Interview

by Laurinda Hartt



*The Rainbow Boys: written and directed by Gerald Potterton; produced by Anthony Robinow; photographed by Robert Saad and assistants Rick Maguire and Paul Mitchnick; edited by Marlene Fletcher; location sound recorded by Patrick Spence-Thomas and Billy Nobels; sound re-recorded by Joe Grimaldi; sets and props by Reg Tunnicliffe and Bob Gurski; costumes by Ilse Richter and Maureen Sweeney. With Donald Pleasence, Kate Reid, Don Calfa. A presentation of Potterton Productions Inc. with the participation of Mutual Productions, Famous Players and the Canadian Film Development Corporation.*

When *The Rainbow Boys*, a live-action feature-length adventure film starring Donald Pleasence and Kate Reid, was filmed in British Columbia last summer and was released this past spring to an unjustly cool and critical box office response, it marked a significant departure for its writer-director Gerald Potterton and Potterton Productions.

Potterton's arrival in Canada from Britain in 1954 was followed by several years work with the National Film Board, primarily in the field of animation, as a director of animated and live-action films. Two of his NFB short films — *My Financial Career* (1962) and *Christmas Cracker* (1964) — were nominated for Academy Awards. In 1968, he formed Potterton Productions Inc. and since then the Potterton name has become more and more associated with animated films. His company was directly involved in the production of sequences for the 1968 animated Beatles feature, *The Yellow Submarine*, and produced *Pinter People*, a fascinating one-hour television special on the work of playwright Harold Pinter. Directed by Potterton, the film consisted of several animated interpretations of Pinter's material interspersed with filmed interviews of Pinter himself.

More recent Potterton productions include a half-hour animated interpretation of Oscar Wilde's short story, *The Selfish Giant*, and *Tiki-Tiki*, a combination live-action/animated feature film released shortly after *The Rainbow Boys*. Presently in production are two more half-hour animated children's films — another Oscar Wilde story, *The Happy Prince*, and Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid* — and another live-action dramatic feature, *Child Under a Leaf*, starring Dyan Cannon and directed by George Bloomfield. As with *The Rainbow Boys*, the film is being produced in association with Mutual Productions.

Late in March, 1973, as *The Rainbow Boys* was being released in Canada, Gerald Potterton talked with *Cinema*

*Canada* about the origins of the film and his decision to make a completely live-action feature; about the problems encountered in shooting the film; and about the film's critical reception.

A few years ago, while shooting a documentary in British Columbia, Potterton was quite taken by the beauty of the rugged B.C. terrain and hoped that he might, in the future, make a film about an old gold miner living in this beautiful, isolated setting. Having little writing experience, he employed three or four writers over the course of as many years in order to develop his basic idea. But the scripts were far from his liking, with a consistent emphasis on hippies, draft-dodgers and dope. Potterton had no intention of becoming involved in that sort of film — a type of film he felt would soon be "passé" and far too reminiscent of the *Easy Rider* school of film-making. Potterton explained his decision to write the script himself:

"Finally, I sort of moped around the office and someone said, 'Look. Either write the thing or . . .' And I said, 'Well, if we're going to get it in to the CFDC this year . . .' That was last year and there were just five or six weeks left in order to have the film shot that summer. Otherwise I was going to forget about it. But it was a thing I wanted to do because I was fascinated by the country out there. And Donald Pleasence was very hot on the thing — he helped me a lot. Someone said, 'Why don't you just write the script yourself?' So I just closed the door, sat down, wrote it and got good reactions about it. It's a very simple script with a very thin plot. We got it in just under the wire and the CFDC approved it. We got the rest of the financing, and then went out and shot it. Even if it submerges forever, I'm pleased that we did it."

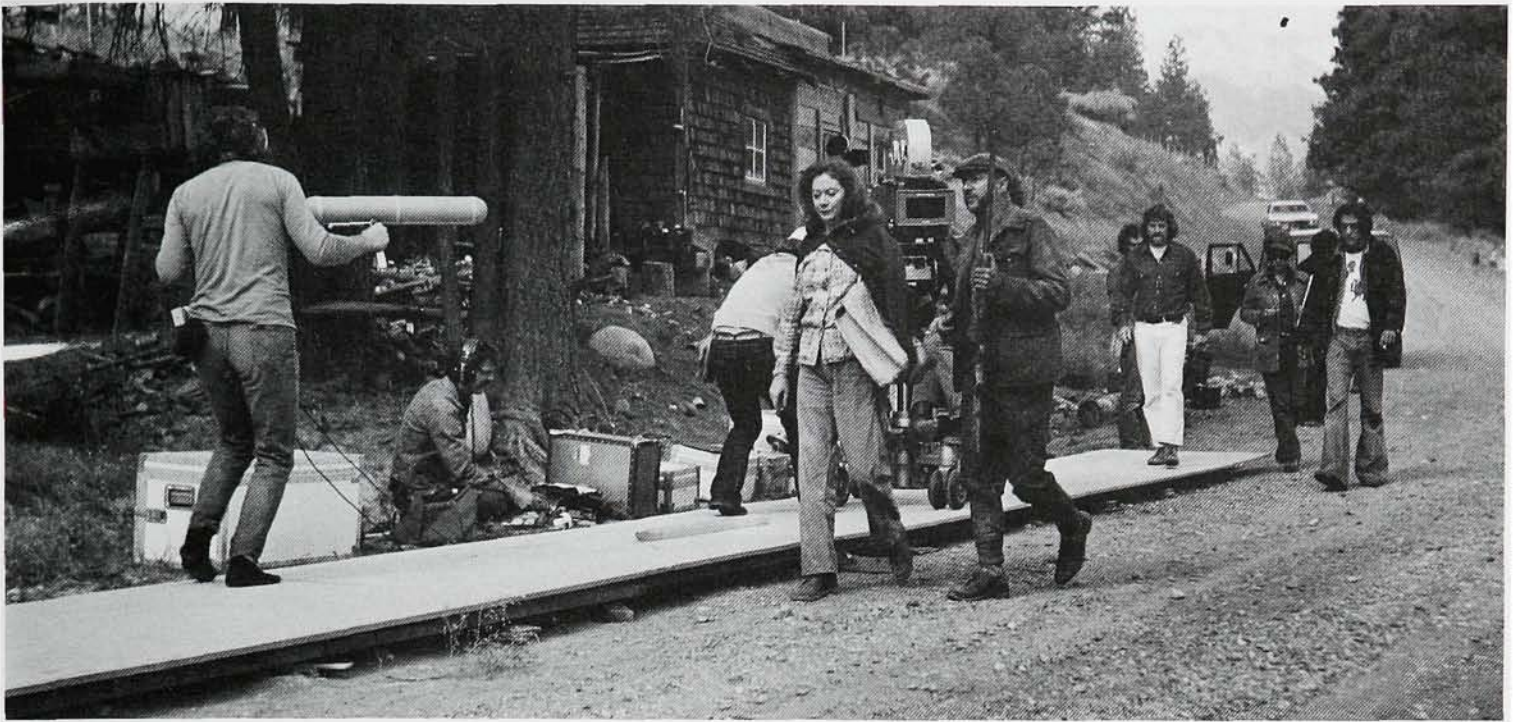
When asked if his writing had been influenced by Harold Pinter's style, Potterton responded:

"Yes, there are a lot of things in it that I think are similar. I'll tell you, I think what really made me do the film was the fact that I sent the final draft to Harold and he very kindly sent me a letter back saying he loved the script. He said that there was only one line which he thought was getting into the romantic, and, funny enough, I had changed that. Harold is a very straight, honest guy. If he doesn't like something, he says so. I respect his work a lot, and the fact that he supported it made me think, 'Well, if *he* thinks it's all right, it can't be that bad!'"

Donald Pleasence, who eventually was to star in the film as Logan the gold miner, and who knew Potterton because they had worked together on *Pinter People* in 1968, described his own reaction to the script: "He wrote a brilliant script. The first draft was marvellous. I knew Gerry because we were involved in a film together . . . We talked about the first draft. Then he wrote some more drafts, and finally came up with a very strong script indeed."

The actual experience of shooting the final script proved to be as rugged as the terrain Potterton wanted so much to capture on film. Inclement weather blotted out two weeks of the shooting schedule. An expensive piece of equipment called a "monorail", consisting of a track on which a large camera can be mounted to facilitate tracking and general movement in rough territory, actually proved to be of very little use: the Panavision camera wobbled on it wildly, and only one tracking shot could be used. Even mounting a camera on the film's three-wheeled motorcycle provided only one useable shot; the rest were far too shaky. Thus, in a film depicting an action-filled motorcycle trek up a mountain,





Potterton was forced to rely primarily on static camera set-ups. But certainly the most disturbing set-back was an accident which occurred one week into the shooting. Potterton described the incident:

"We nearly killed the three of them (Kate Reid, Pleasence and Calfa – the principal actors). There was a terrible accident on that bike which was unfortunate. It was in the scene when they are going down to the ferry at the beginning. Kate was scared stiff on the bike. I was all set up for the shot and suddenly somebody yelled, 'They've gone over the edge!' We went rushing up there. The bloody bike had gone plunging over. Kate was lying down there with her face all smashed up, blood pouring down her chin, and her leg all twisted. Donald had fallen off practically immediately – he jumped off like a real pro. Calfa, meanwhile, had ridden the bike down across rocks, across barbed wire and almost into the Fraser River.

"Kate unfortunately had fallen into old rusty barbed wire and rattlesnakes, as we later discovered, and the bike had run over her foot. Petrifying! We rushed her to the hospital and she was off for four days. The sound man, Patrick Spence-Thomas, had jumped to their rescue – he leaped over the top of this bloody cliff and fell right into some barbed wire. He had a gash under his eye and had torn off half the lobe of his ear.

"It was a very scary scene; we all became much more accident conscious from that moment on. The bike was actually a dangerous thing to drive and all the gravelly mud we had to drive on made it difficult. In fact I was kind of glad when the bloody thing went over the top finally, because we shot it in sequence."

In spite of all the difficulties, Potterton doesn't use them as ready excuses for inadequacies in the film. In fact, the film was completed in six weeks, right on the budget and with a shooting ratio of 3½ to 1 – a fact he attributed to the excellence of his actors:

"They know what they were doing. I don't like making a lot of takes. I think you start losing it after about the third take."

When the film had just been released, Potterton's views about its future were cautiously optimistic. He described the film as "a wide-screen, big audience, light entertainment film" and said that this was the reason he had made it. Although he felt that audiences would enjoy the film, and predicted that it would do well in England and might have a chance in the U.S., he was pessimistic about its critical reception in Canada. Already the film had received what Potterton termed an "interesting reaction" from two Vancouver critics:

"I mean, one critic raved about Donald Pleasence and it was a good review. He said it was an Academy Award-winning performance. That was in *The Province*. The other critic (Les Wedman, *The Sun*) wrote the worst review I've ever read for any film I've ever seen or heard of. He raves on about inexperienced direction and bad acting. I just can't accept that it's a badly acted film.

"The film is a tongue-in-cheek thing. This is the thing Wedman missed completely. He said that it's impossible that those people could have gone up that great big jagged cliff, and that they pick up a sign which looks like it's freshly painted. Of course it's impossible! The thing is a fantasy really; it's a fairy story kind of situation . . . The music is a send-up, really. Particularly when they see the top (of the mountain) and the piano plays and all that – it's ridiculous, and it was intentional, but for some people it doesn't work."

Less than a month after this interview, it had become apparent that *The Rainbow Boys* was destined to test Gerald Potterton's unintentionally prophetic statement: "Even if it submerges forever, I'm pleased we did it." ●

*Gerald Potterton on location.*

