

ron hallis

# montreal cowboy

Ron Hallis has also done things his own way and has become independent of others. He, personally, has the best lab facilities for black and white film in town, it's said. Then why does no one notice and why is he off to Mozambique?

by Lois Siegel

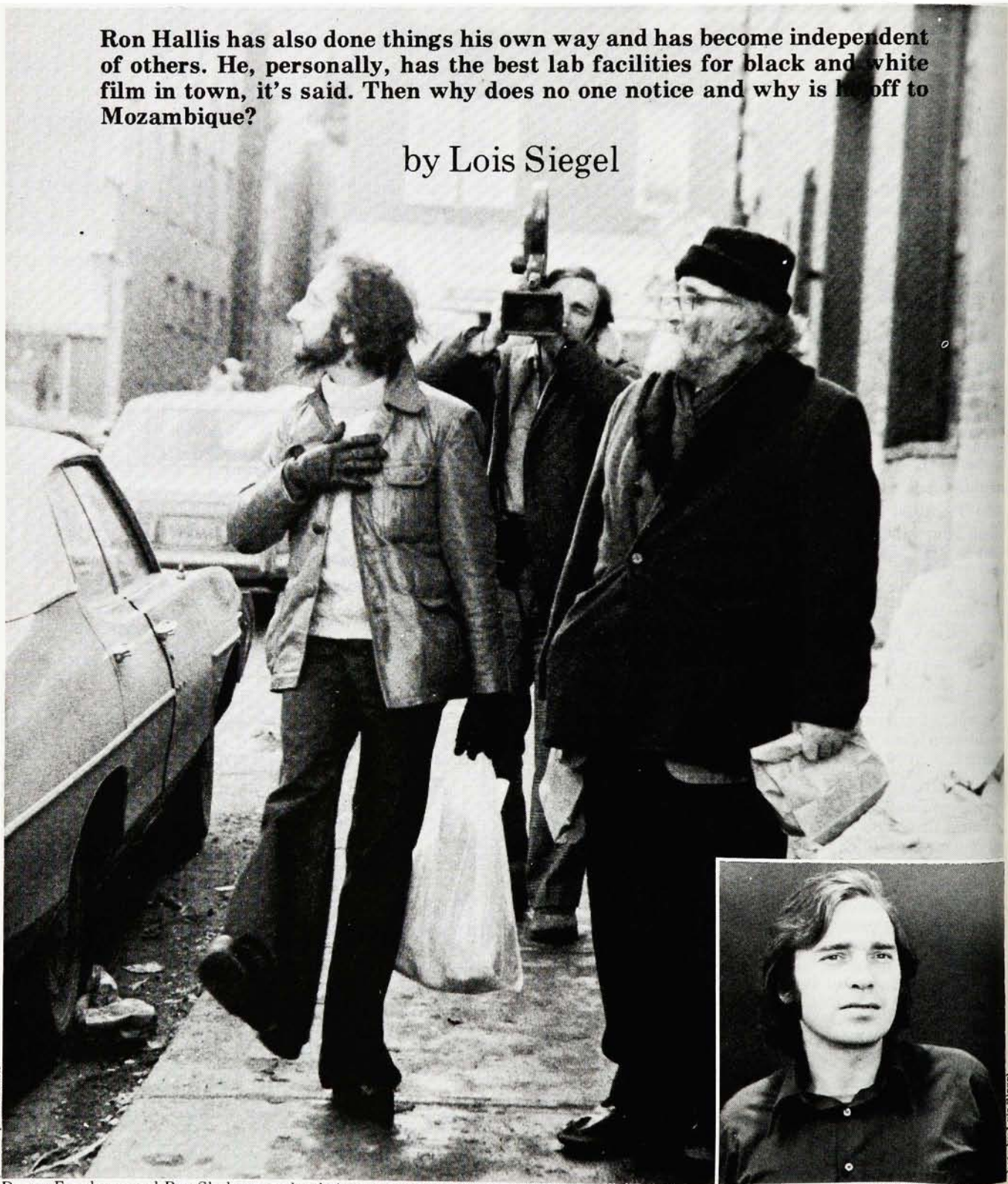


photo: Ophera Hallis

Danny Freedman and Ben Shulman make their way down the street with Hallis close behind

Hallis, who's on his way to Mozambique

Ron Hallis is probably the most self-sufficient filmmaker from Montreal. He owns his own film equipment and laboratory and is able to shoot, process and print film stock, record and transfer sound.

His "jack-of-all-trades" ability goes back to his student days when Ron used to haul around a big, black, leather satchel full of tools, copies of Popular Mechanics, a Ham Radio Operators Manual and all sorts of paraphernalia and was known as "Oil-Can Hallis".... teachers who lost the keys to their desks merely had to borrow Ron and his black bag for a few minutes, and they were sure to come up with some kind of solution to their problem.

Ron worked as a sound recordist for a CBC documentary program called "Focus." Then he began writing scenarios. As a construction worker he saved enough money to buy a wind-up Bolex.

His first film was a surrealist short entitled **Hollywood Cut**.

"I was never able to finish it because Quebec Film Lab lost the original negative. That's what really got me thinking about processing my own film."

Ron's second film, **Toni**, concerned a transvestite dancer. The 20-minute, black and white production cost only \$350 because Mont-Royal Laboratory gave him a 50% discount when he paid cash.

"The guy there would throw the bill in the garbage and put the money in his pocket."

"I knew absolutely nothing about distributing at the time, so I took the yellow pages and Peerless Films struck my fancy. I went to them with my film under my arm. Lottie Roher, director of Peerless, thought my film had potential. She set up a screening with Famous Players, and they said they would show it as a short on a double horror show program at the Strand if it was blown up to 35mm."



Ben Shulman in the role of Zaida

"In 1967 I was working as a bartender at Expo Theatre and the Ritz Carleton. I saved up enough money to buy some time and shot **Randi**, a 25-minute film about a male prostitute. It was originally entitled **Night Shift**, and won a prize for Best Cinematography in Black and White in 1971 at the Canadian Film Awards."

During the public screenings of the awards, **Night Shift** was screened 9 a.m. on a Monday morning. At this prime time there was one person in the audience, Ron's brother-in-law.

"Then I shot a terrible feature called **Rainy Day Woman**, followed by **Marie**, a 30-minute, black and white film about a female hooker."

Next I shot **Bull**, a film about a truck driver who is a country and western singer. Bellevue Pathé lost a roll of original footage. This convinced me, and I started looking around for processing equipment. It took me one year to

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Fierce face in **Pride of the Panthers**

get the equipment together and two years of testing to attain the quality that was apparent in **L'ange et la femme**, which I processed for Gilles Carle.

"After **Bull** came **Zaida**, a short documentary-drama about the problems of old age, and finally **Pride of the Panthers**, a 40-minute film about young hockey players. It explores their personal lives and the ambitions of youth.

Yet, after eight films, Ron Hallis still regards his work as relatively unknown.

"I've tried in many instances to invite people from the press to screen my films, and I've encountered almost total apathy. Only through the help of a few individuals such as Lottie Roher from Peerless Films, or Stephen Miller of the Seville Theatre, have my films been shown."

"I believe that Canadian films should be shown in theatres. Room should be made for them. Only those Canadian films which are produced on a grand feature scale are presently screened."

But Ron has plans for the future. He was recently hired to coordinate and train laboratory workers at the Instituto Nacional de Cinema in Maputo, Mozambique. He already spent six weeks there and will soon return for a two-year stay.

"Mozambique is on the southeast coast of Africa. It has a population of about 9 million people and about 90-95% illiteracy. There is no television. All the cinema houses in Maputo are in 35mm. They show all sorts of films: American, European, Spaghetti Westerns, Kung fu-Karate films."

"The price of admission is about \$0.75, which is rather exorbitant compared to the average salary of the Mozambican worker which is \$18-\$20 a week for good wages."

"When I arrived, there were 5-6 productions under way. Crews were sent out to record events, but they didn't have the means to mix sound, to print with optical effects, to make an optical sound track in order to execute a composite print.

"Many incomplete films just sat on the shelf. Now the Mozambicans are able to finish films. There are about 8 young Mozambicans who are studying film at the institute."

"I'm committed to a purely technical task at this point - to keep the machines running, to establish quality control, to teach chemical analysis, printing and special effects, but I'm going to make a few films in Africa. I plan to shoot my first color film in Mozambique."

"When I was in Mozambique I felt I could stay there for a long, long time and do much more important work than I could in Quebec. If I do return to America I would be much more oriented towards New York or Boston. In two days in New York, I experienced more interest in what I was doing than in two years in Montreal." □