

daryl duke

a prince of a man

by Anne Cameron

Daryl Duke's latest film, *The Silent Partner*, should be released in the fall. Cinema Canada asked Cam Hubert to write a profile on the man who had given her important lessons on how to work in film. What we received was a tribute to Duke from a warm and western point of view.



Daryl Duke

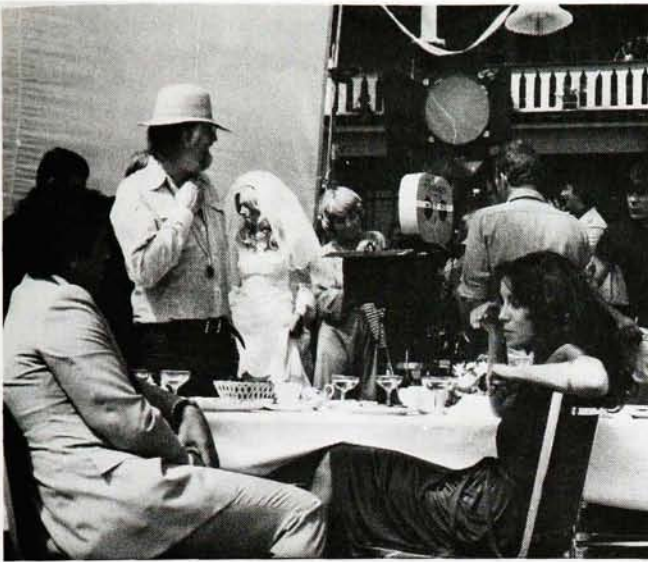
I first met Daryl Duke some five years ago when he was casting for *I Heard The Owl Call My Name*, and came to Nanaimo to audition the members of my theatre group, "Tillicum Theatre". I had been aware of his work for a number of years and, in fact, it was his program for the old 'Manipulators' series, a one-hour drama called "Spike In The Wall", that lay to rest forever any doubts I had about the possibility of television as a viable art form.

When I was asked to consider writing an article on the man I immediately sat down and began to list his film and television credits; then it occurred to me that anybody reading this

Anne Cameron was once known as Cam Hubert and is the author of many poems and plays and of the screenplays for the films "The Dreamspeaker" and "A Matter of Choice."

magazine would probably be familiar enough with film not to need the list, and anybody who did need the list or was unaware of the man's contribution, probably wouldn't be caught dead with a film magazine. So, if anybody expects the usual 'curriculum vitae', disabuse yourself immediately.

Daryl Duke is West Coast and it shows in the way he walks, the way he talks and the way he relates to people. There is something special and honest about West Coasters, and if you don't believe me, ask anybody from the West Coast. Daryl has worked on fishboats and still walks as though picking his way carefully across a wet deck; he never seems to lift one foot without being sure the other is firmly planted, but he gets there before the rest of the crowd. He has worked in a fish cannery, and perhaps it is the memory of guts and stink and the eternal buzzing of flies that keeps him open to



Duke surveys the set of *The Silent Partner*.

and in touch with ordinary people. Certainly his home is a virtual meeting place for people from every walk of life; I have seen writers, actors, musicians and 'television people' there, and I have seen people of the Nootka band at Ahousat made equally welcome. I have seen Daryl dressed to the nines dealing with boardroom experts, and I have seen him in jeans and hiking boots pouring beer on the head of his production assistant at a wrap party. I have heard him talking softly and firmly about business matters and heard him roaring out the words to a West Coast song that might, in some square circles, be considered less than socially acceptable.

I had been writing poetry and stage plays and dreaming of doing "something" based on the great Nootka chief Maquinna. Because I was heavily into stage at the time, I had been working on a stage play; I knew I wanted the interior of a Nootka longhouse for the set, the support posts with the carved faces could issue forth disembodied voices of the dead, the dancers could fall from the rafters on ropes the way they often do in the winter ceremonies, and the Spanish, English and American invaders could..... it went from a rough two-act play to a three-act to a four-act and I realized that what was happening was that I was turning out a sort of King Lear set on the West Coast. And in the process I was losing Chief Maquinna, the man who flew in the face of tradition and in an effort to save his people, nearly lost his culture and his heritage. I felt terrible. Did a lot of moaning about how Maquinna was a product of his time, his place, and there was no way I could move the West Coast of Vancouver Island to the stage at the Playhouse Theatre in Vancouver. The trees alone wouldn't fit, and what did I do to show it was high tide?

Daryl said very quietly that what I was talking about was a film. "Oh, but I've never written a film script," I replied, with my usual shy, ladylike modesty. (Actually, what I said was more like "Christ, I don't know how to do that!"). He pointed out, as any good Coast person would, that I wouldn't learn any younger. And I gave it a try. I'm not sure how good that first script was, but it was thick! And I felt I had captured Maquinna and the period of total transition that was his life.

Daryl read the script and took out an option on it and then began a two-year task, teaching me how to write a film script. Whenever either of us had the time I would head over to his

place to spend a couple of days with Daryle and Eve and he would read over what I'd written and then give me feedback. He taught me that at all times the audience must *care* what happens to the characters. He taught me to use visual images rather than relying on endless dialogue. He taught me to dig deeply into myself when searching for a character. And he taught me it is just as easy to swim in deep water as it is to swim in shallow water, and to, at all times, "press on".

Sitting on the sea wall in front of his West Vancouver home we would watch the sailboats, speedboats and assorted water fowl, and we would discuss film, people, motivation and music. Or sandwiches. Or the relative merits of potato salad with and without horseradish. To me, the birds floating on the waves are either "gulls", "cormorants" or "ducks". Having been born and raised on Vancouver Island any bird that can swim has to be one of the three. Unless it's a puffin. When I said "duck", Daryl would tell me what kind. He can probably identify every bird there is, and when I commented that not everybody could do that, he said not everybody had a member of his family who was a world famous expert on the subject. It strikes me now that Daryl could well have been the second member of his family to share that distinction! To me, they remain "ducks", but it's nice to know Somebody knows what kind of duck they are.

Whatever else he may be, he is definitely not a quote male chauvenist pig end quote (gag, barf, choke). I have never heard him make the slightest sexist remark, and never seen him in any way threatened by or turned off by a woman's independence. He seems to have the rare and wonderful ability to see People. As a feminist who is increasingly puzzled as to just where in hell the feminist movement is going, it is a relief to be able to relate to someone else who sees People instead of an ongoing battle between the sexes that we are all in danger of losing. Daryl makes film and Eve makes music and somehow I have always felt that to both of them each priority is equally important. I know I have found it equally wonderful to be able to talk with him and then lean back and listen to Eve's music; she sings and I cry, it's a sort of duet we have going, and I'm sure if ever I started to sing, she'd cry, but for different reasons!

Daryl's sense of humor is Vancouver Island sense of humor. West Coast humor is hard enough for the humorless oxford-shod slackasses from the dryland, flatland, east-land parking lots to understand, but Vancouver Island humor is even further out to sea and Daryl, though neither born nor raised on this rock, laughs the way we do; from the gut, often. Ask him if it is raining and he'll probably reply "I don't know, call the dog in and see if he's wet". It makes no sense to mainlanders, but those of us who have spent as much as five months under a pelting rain so severe the dog won't even go outside, crack up at the mental image.

It was from Daryl Duke that I learned the full meaning of the word "professionalism", and the phrase "paying your dues". I have never seen him ask anybody else to do a job he himself would not be willing to do. I have seen him impatient, but never inconsiderate, I have seen him angry, but never unreasonable, I have seen him laugh, but always with, never *at* anybody.

I have an Etrog sitting atop a Tsimshian bent cedar box, and I know that without the help, encouragement, and support of Daryl and Eve, I would never be doing what I am doing today, I would never have dared go out into the deep water.

"You made me what I am today, I hope you're satisfied!" □