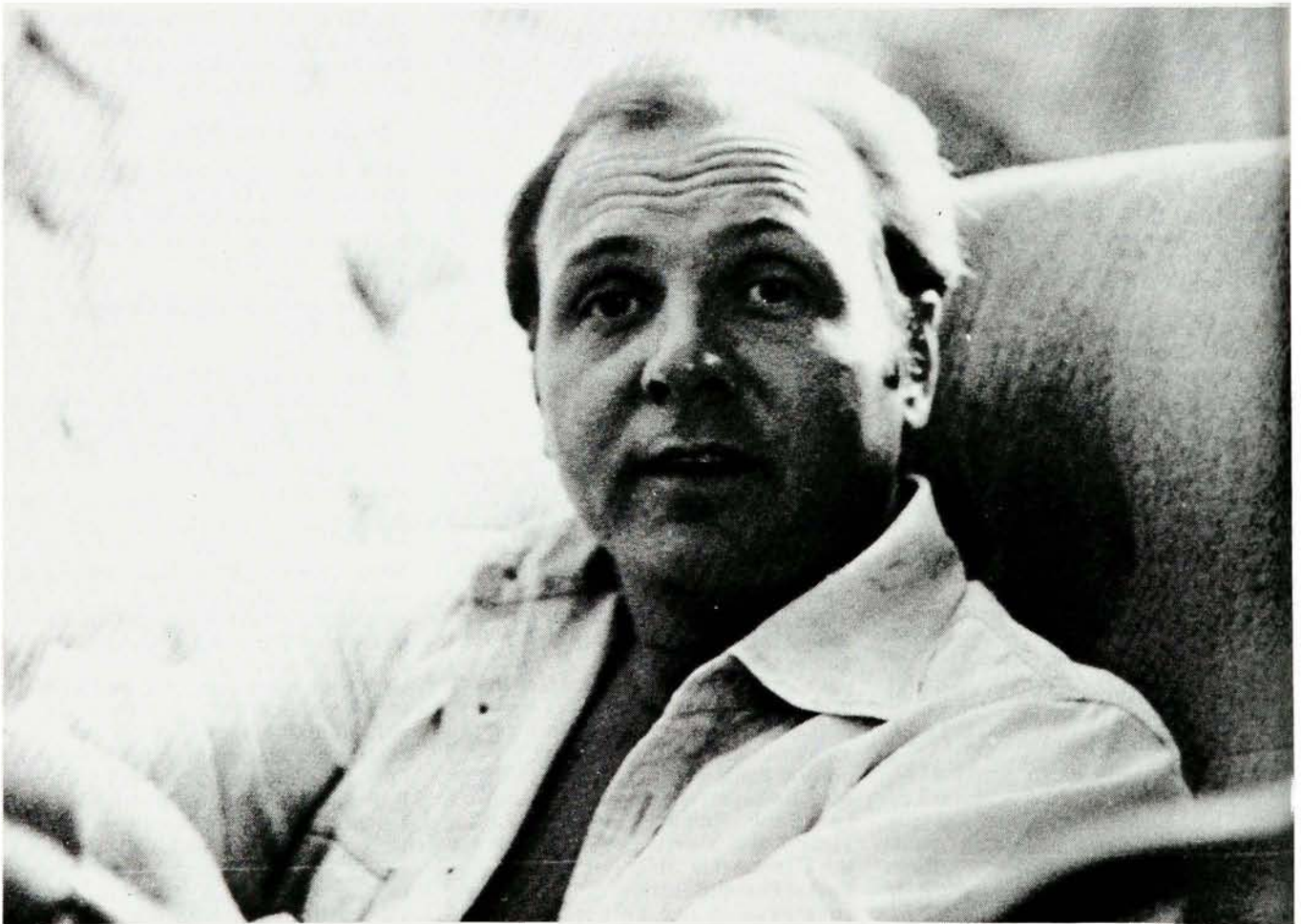


richard gabourie

electric confidence

by Krystyna Hunt

Some actors get 'discovered,' but most have to work pretty hard to get recognition. Not many, however, go so far as to write and produce the film in which they finally break into the public consciousness. But that's what Richard Gabourie did with *Three Card Monte* as Krystyna Hunt tells us.



Richard Gabourie in conversation...a happy man

Richard Gabourie: Actor, writer, executive producer, financier, Best Actor of 1978, winner of the Wendy Michener Award for all the afore-mentioned accomplishments, entrepreneur extraordinaire, remarkable fellow.

And he is revelling in every glorious moment of it. Apple cheeks bulge with enthusiasm as we talk in the den of his home in suburban Weston, Ontario, his boy-next-door face lights up like a lightbulb with any compliment, "I did it!" written on every muscle of his body. He has done the near-impossible, and there's no way he is going to be self-deprecating about it. He even points with pride to his thinning hair (a fact some critics disparage), and reminds everyone that Jack Nicholson has thinning hair, Humphrey Bogart had it too, and that's the company he plans to move in, so there's no way lack of beauty is going to hold him back from stardom.

So what's all the excitement about? It's about a movie called **Three Card Monte** that he built from scratch. A humble little movie, with a simple plot, made on a tiny budget by people who were working on hopes and dreams more than on money that just happened to become nominated for 11 Etros in the Canadian Film Awards, and won for Rick Gabourie, who until then spent more time in the waiting rooms of the CBC and TV commercial production houses than he did on camera, the Best Actor Award.

"I think it's fantastic. Every day since I got it, that award means more to me. In 3008 people will be able to look back in the records and see that in 1978 I was voted the Best Actor in Canada, and that means a great deal to me. If someone had offered me \$1,000,000.00 not to accept the award, I would have turned them down cold."

It all started about three years ago when Rick Gabourie, who had been kicking around the acting scene for years getting nothing but nice-guys-next-door roles, or the policeman, or the reporter, decided that the only way he was going to break that mold was to write his own movie. He picked the brains of directors he'd worked with and found out how it was done, who the people are to see, what the money problems are, etc. He wrote a script about an amiable con man named Busher, and a smart aleck kid drawn on characters he had met and seen in his growing up days in Toronto's Parkdale district, and called it **Three Card Monte**. He decided against trying to sell it to the CBC. "I knew my chances of playing the lead at the CBC were zilch — and there was no way anyone else was gonna be Busher." It had to be a theatrical feature. So more poling around and picking brains and asking questions led to the offices of Rob Iveson, who read the script and loved it. Rick Gabourie had a producer. "I wasn't thinking of any nominations. I just thought we would make a nice little movie like **Goin' Down the Road** and maybe get lucky and show it at the New Yorker for a couple of weeks. I just wanted to show people that I had more scope than what I had been doing."

The script was right, the producer was right, now the director had to be right. "Rob Iveson told me he would find a director, and I was to find the money." This was where the true genius of Rick Gabourie flowered. He is a salesman —

a superb salesman who knows that the first qualification of selling is the belief in his product — and his product has always been himself. At school he sold chocolate bars, later it was encyclopedias, magazines, the paving of driveway. He also sold securities in between acting jobs, and this is where he went for the money. "It's just not true that Canadians aren't willing to take chances on anything. People are very interested in movies, in showbiz. These guys who play the stockmarket gamble all the time and 97 percent of the time they lose — so they know the score. I was just gung ho, and they were willing to take the risk. I don't think they'll be sorry."

Rick was raising the money and Rob Iveson came up with Les Rose, a director who had experience with documentaries, but who had never directed features. Rick had seen **Time of the Jackal**, an action-packed TV docu-drama Les Rose had shot in Vienna, and was convinced Les was his man.

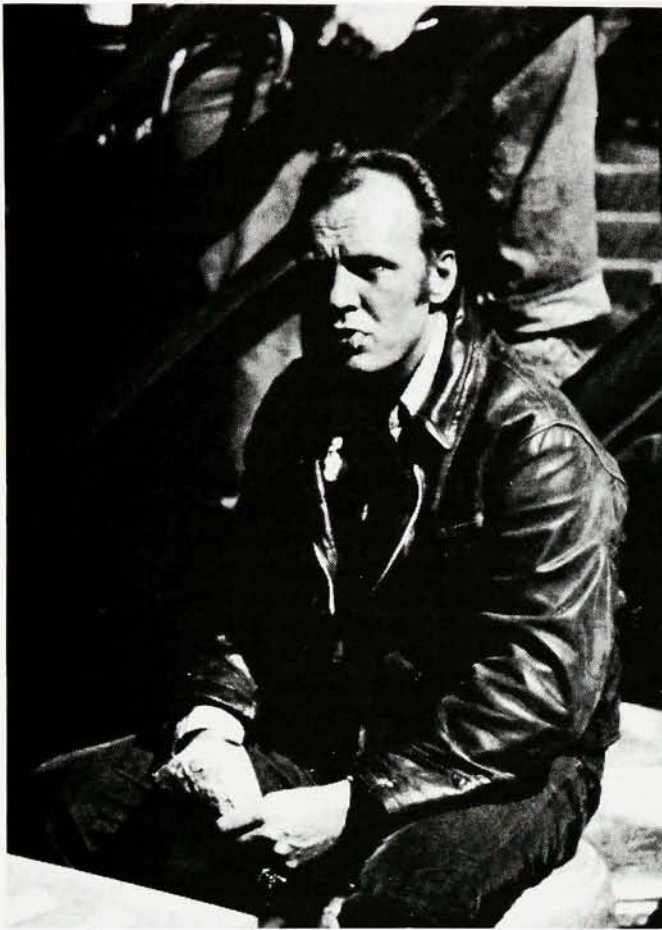
"You know, it's funny. After we heard about how many nominations **Three Card Monte** got, Les called me up and he was beside himself, and said 'I'm so glad you got me involved in this thing!'" It is funny because Les Rose did everything not to get involved in the first place. He had agreed to do the picture because he was in between shoots and looking to fill the time, and his friend Rob Iveson seemed to be keen on the idea. When it became clear that he was going to be directing a feature that was written by an almost complete unknown, who wanted to star in his own vehicle on a budget of \$250,000.00, he did everything to back out of it including begging Rick to cancel his contract. But Rick talked Les Rose into doing it.

"I knew he was my man because I'd seen his work, and I could tell he was not afraid to improvise or change lines. I like the idea of being able to change something in the script. I must have made over 50 commercials, and I can't work with a director who won't change a word or a line. An actor has to act, and he needs all the help he can get. There are some directors that sit back and you could do almost anything and they won't say a word. Les is very sensitive, he *knows* what's right. Very few people *know* what's right, but he *knows* what's right. And he really lets you know when you've done something right."

Once the shoot was started however, trepidations set in. Rick was sensitive to the fact that he had not been cast by the director or the producer, but had bought his way into his own movie, so he was anxious about faith not coming from the cast and crew. Also it was one thing to believe you could do it, but doing it now, step by step, was another thing. He was worried that indeed he had never done a full-length feature, so how could he be sure he could do it? Proving to the world at large that you have range beyond guys-next-door in commercials by taking the lead in a feature film is the same as entering the Olympic pole-vault competition to prove you can jump.

But **Three Card Monte** was a diamond in the rough, and it started to sparkle. Everyone was amazed at what was happening, and when the picture was in the can, Rick hopped on a plane to Los Angeles "... because I didn't know anything else. Where else do you sell a picture except Hollywood?" Hollywood didn't accept, and neither did most Canadian distributors. In fact, there remained only one distributor to see before settling for the New Yorker: Len Herberman of Ambassador Films. "He saw it and five minutes after it was over,

Krystyna Hunt has a background in fine arts, and has worked as an actress, designer and production assistant on films and in television. She is also a freelance-writer and contributes regularly to several publications which cover the Toronto entertainment scene.



Waiting for a partner to play his con games

he said, 'I'll take it,' and said he was going to book it into the Imperial Six Cinema. I jumped out of my seat and grabbed him and said, 'Mr. Herberman you have made me very happy!'

The acceptance by the CFA committee came next with 11 nominations and the final scenario is Rick Gabourie walking up to the podium on September 28 to accept his Etrog as Best Actor, and Wendy Michener Award as Best Everything. The picture won for sound re-recording too.

So here's a rags to riches story that Rick attributes to his ability to achieve — a skill he has studied and practiced and learned. His bible is a book by Napoleon Hill called "Think and Grow Rich." It says you should think you are what you want to be, and you will be what you want to be. He must have seen every film that was ever made, movie titles poured off his tongue in a continuous stream throughout our three hour conversation. Unabashed electric confidence races through him, and his great success is in expressing it and igniting others with those same sparks. Everything about him roars "I'm going to the top" and like a rocket he blasts off before your very eyes. He speaks of "Hank" Fonda and "Duke" Wayne as buddies he has yet to meet.

"The thing is that I achieved something I thought I never could achieve. That to me is the essence of life. I've got some-

thing here, that has never been here before, and no one can take that away from me.

"I think of myself as an actor, and as far as being a producer, I can't get out of it fast enough. But I'm damned if I'm going to sit and wait for some casting agent to call me. If I have to write my own films for the rest of my life, I'll do it."

Which brings us to step two. It's called **Title Shot** and again Rick Gabourie wrote it and will star in it, Les Rose will direct and Rob Iveson will produce. This time they have a budget of 1.4 million.

Rick learned some disheartening realities in his search for a distributor. U.S. distributors want names. That would make some sense if people like Paul Newman or Clint Eastwood could be hired. They do sell movies. But what sense does it make to headline Canadian films with Stacy Keach or Jean-Pierre Aumont or Clint Walker when these people are not box office and clash considerably with the Canadian personality? Canadian scripts and talent may have Grade "A" potential, but Canadian budgets are Grade "B" and can only hire Grade "B" actors with Grade "Z" audience appeal. So for **Title Shot** Rick Gabourie and company have figured out a budget. They slid their fingers along Hollywood's rate card to see what "names" they could afford and settled on Tony Curtis and John Amos. Good enough. Now they can make a movie the Americans might want to buy without argument, and have a chance to show their own talent — maybe. Rick believes that these are the rules that have to be played for now, and in the future the Canadian film industry will become strong enough to make its own rules.

"The Americans see Canada as a big market for them. They're interested in selling to us, they're not interested in buying from us. So if we sell to them it's got to be on their terms. But nothing's going to change if the attitude here does not change. The Americans are successful because they recognize quality and build on it. The agents here for instance, are incredible. You can be starbilled one day and the next day they're calling you in to do an Ivory Soap commercial. In the States advertisers would have to pay through the nose to get you. It amounts to recognizing value and standing behind it. I think we're sadly lacking in P.R. When a film is made you have to continue interest in it. You have to keep the ball rolling. I've been keeping myself in the public eye as much as possible. Radio, TV, newspaper and magazine interviews, everything. I will not allow interest to slip with any of my films.

"**Three Card Monte** has done everything I wanted it to do. Actors, directors, producers I'd never met are shaking my hand and congratulating me for it. All you can do is know where you want to go. If you get there, great. But you know, the fun's in the trying — that's what it's all about — the gamble. I've been gambling all my life, and this is by no means where I'm gonna stop. I want to be the first internationally recognized Canadian star, from right here in Canada. Bald-headed, nice-guy-next-door star. That's where I want to go, and if I wasn't aiming towards that direction, I would just give up and become a truck driver."

No half measures for him. He would probably own his own fleet within a year, and become the best truck driver in the country. □