

The following three articles inaugurate Cinema Canada's On Location section which, each month, will profile feature-length productions as they are being shot. In each report, only certain aspects of the shoot will be highlighted.

Below, Pat Thompson gives us a glimpse into a day-in-the-life of a novice actress as she takes a role in *The Peanut Butter Solution*. Then Lois Siegel documents the trials of being a Cinema Canada photographer on the international co-production *Hold-Up*. Finally, Farid Barsoum talks with the director of *Pouvoir intime* as the principal photography wraps.

Miss Prume examines The Peanut Butter Solution

by Pat Thompson

Les Productions La Fête producers Nicole Robert and Rock Demers, following the great box-office and critical success of their first film, *La Guerre des tuques* (The Dog Who Stopped The War), which was awarded the Golden Reel Award for 1984, are presently well into post-production on the second of their planned series of family feature films, this one entitled *The Peanut Butter Solution*.

The original idea and screenplay for *The Peanut Butter Solution* come from the film's director, Michael Rubbo. With this film, Rubbo, who has spent close to 20 years as a much-acclaimed documentary filmmaker with the National Film Board of Canada, (*Waiting For Fidel*, *Solzhenitsyn's Children*), makes his debut as a fiction feature director.

Although Rubbo, by his own admission, is not accustomed to the lack of flexibility and strict scheduling tensions that the making of a feature film requires, he has adapted masterfully to his new role.

"One of the most difficult things about making a scripted film," Rubbo told *Cinema Canada*, "is that the freshness has to be planned. Everything is calculated and there is very little room, if any, for improvisations."

The freshness of *The Peanut Butter Solution*, undoubtedly, will stem from Rubbo's masterful control of the actors' performances, as well as his under-

standing of how scenes will on with the screen. The energy and dedication of the film's leading players, Mathew MacKay (Michael), Siluck Saysanasy (Conrad), Michel Maillot (Signor) and Alison Podbrey (Suzie), most of whom are children, will also, more than likely, radiate a sense of freshness on the screen.

The technical crew of *The Peanut Butter Solution*, lead by first assistant director and line producer James Kaufman and director of photography Thomas Vamos, are also largely responsible for the particular character of the film's production. Producer Nicole Robert told *Cinema Canada*, "What is special about this film is that everybody who is directly involved in the production feels a personal attachment to the film."

Much of this feeling of dedication can be attributed to Rubbo's easy-going, controlled style of directing and to the nature of the film itself. "It is a pleasant film to work on," said one technician, "We're surrounded by toys and little kids." In the following, Pat Thompson shares what certainly was a pleasure for her: a chance to act in the film.

If Rubbo can muster as much enthusiasm at the box-office for *The Peanut Butter Solution* as he did in its production, Nicole Robert and Rock Demers have a sure winner for *Les Productions La Fête*.

Producers Nicole Robert and Rock Demers - flushed with the box-office reception of their first family film, *La Guerre des Tuques* (The Dog That Stopped The War) which netted them the Golden Reel Award for 1984 - are well into the second of their planned series of nine features.

By a strange twist of fate (as all the best spine-tinglers remark) this writer was called upon to perform as, indeed, performers are sometimes called upon to write... A longstanding acquaintance with producer Rock Demers brought forth an unexpected telephone call. "I have a part for you in my next movie," said Rock. "That's what they all say," I

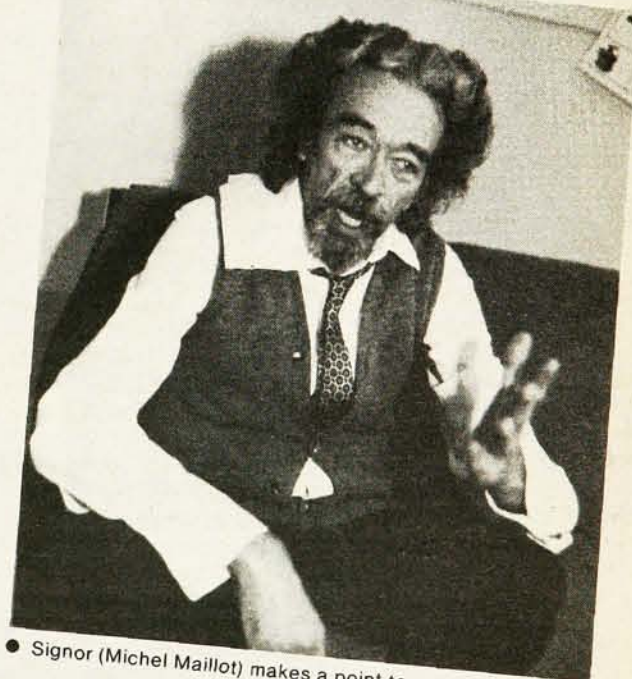
replied. However, the flattering offer of two days' work in Montreal plus an assurance that I looked 'just right' for the role, caused me to cast caution every which way and say, "Er, well, yes."

Within a few days, the script of *Michael's Fright* - now *The Peanut Butter Solution-ed* - arrived. I was to play the school principal Miss Prume (that's right - Miss Prume) described as "A small round warmhearted woman, but tough as steel underneath." Let me tell you, that's me, I think. So I counted up my lines, was called to a videotaped audition with the director/screenwriter Michael Rubbo, got the part, and received the final script (they hadn't cut out any of Miss Prume's lines). I dashed to ACTRA for my work permit.

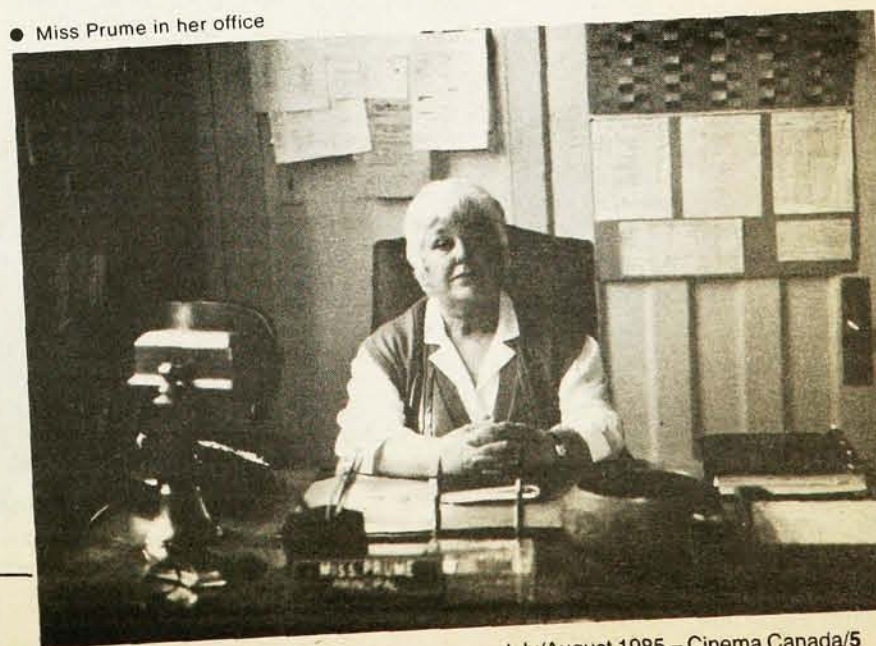
Then at the beginning of May, I took off for Montreal, clutching chunks of my



● Director Mike Rubbo reads a shot as...



● Signor (Michel Maillot) makes a point to...



● Miss Prume in her office

Pat Thompson is editor of the *Canadian Film Digest*.

photos: Warren Collins



● Behind the scenes, Pat Thompson gets made up



● Miss Prume at the ready



● Going over the lines with Patches and his trainer, Raymond Lacasse

clothing for consideration as film wardrobe, and feeling the first pangs of panic. The costumière, Huguette Gagné, arrived at the hotel to inspect my duds, fresh from dyeing 20 kimonos for a sequence with the kids. Revived with a few sips of wine, she pronounced my three changes OK, gathered them all in a garment bag and departed into the night. The 2nd assistant director, Blair Roth, telephoned and then delivered my call sheet for the next day. I tried to sleep...

The first day

This was the biggie – two scenes in one day. On arrival at Roslyn School in Westmount just after 9 a.m. the atmosphere was calm at the old brick building. Just some scaffolding with lights outside one of the windows, and the two lead kids, Michael (Mathew Mackay) and Conrad (Siluck Saysanasy) doing a tiny scene – running home from the front entrance.

I trotted inside and was directed to wardrobe where I put on my first set of clothes, and was made up. It was then I caught sight of Signor, the art teacher (Michel Maillot), having his abundant mane of iron-grey hair raised to some considerable height by the application of the curling iron. Then I was whisked away to have some stills taken in 'my office' – you see, there's going to be an enlargement of Miss Prume in the factory where the kids... well, I won't give away the plot, just get your admission money ready.

Then came the acid test – my first scene with words. Tagged as "Ms. Prume reprimands the boys," it was done quite a few times – I rose to my feet, walked round the desk and spoke to the two boys sitting on the blue velvet couch and dangling their feet. And so we came to lunch-time.

The afternoon was devoted to the scene: "Ms. Prume fires the Signor." The principal's office filled rapidly with the crew, equipment and lights. And then came animal trainer Raymond Ducasse with his dog Patches, who plays the Signor's dog, Jim. An unbeatable team. Jim is a lazy dog, but he follows the Signor into the principal's office and jumps on a table. His trainer indicated quietly that he couldn't do that – too fat – and the table is too high. The velvet couch, however, presented no problem, and it was decided to shoot Jim's entrance separately. Ducasse took Jim outside the door, came back to crouch down by the camera and, right on 'Action', the dog ambled in, jumped on the couch and collapsed in a heap (we all refrained from applauding). The director, trainer and cinematographer (Thomas Vamos) had a conference. Perhaps the dog could come in a little faster? Or course, said Ducasse. Perhaps he could move a little further along the couch? Of course, said Ducasse. And good old Jim/Patches did just that for a few more takes, and additional shots on the couch. At one point, the wonder-dog had an ear up and the other down, and was slowly blinking his eyes. What a scene-stealer.

How to follow a dog act? Very cautiously and with a certain degree of fortitude, so the rest of the scene was launched and shot first from Miss Prume's perspective. Since there was little space to manoeuvre behind her desk, sacrifices had to be made. I sat on a crate instead of a chair; I had to remember not to sway to my left and thus come

into frame; I was asked to place my hand lightly on the desk top because a tiny mike was taped behind the telephone; the room seemed crammed to bursting – Rock Demers arrived and waved encouragingly from the doorway.

I watched the lighting being adjusted, heard camera angles and lenses being discussed, and listened to director Rubbo giving advice as to how he wanted the lines to sound. God, how I tried to relax, to remember my lines, to sound natural, to feel really ticked off with the Signor – but as the afternoon wore on I decided that the best and most interesting place was the other side of the camera.

Playing opposite Michel Maillot as Signor the dotty art teacher, was both an entertainment and an education. His Shakespearean voice, grand gestures and mobile face were wonderful to behold – so much so that my lines kept slipping out of mind. But he was also very helpful to this neophyte.

Wrung out and nervous, the day's shoot finally came to an end. Only one scene tomorrow. Should be a breeze...

The second day

This time the arrival at Roslyn School was considerably noisier than the previous day. At least 25 extras – all kids – were swarming in the corridors. What appeared to be mayhem was quickly perceived to be organized chaos under the firm hand of 2nd a.d. Roth. "Listen up, kids," he roared, "everyone back in the gym and shut the doors!" And the crowd dutifully rushed off to the other side of the building at his command.

Equipped with a radio mike attached to my sweater and a pack taped inside of my skirt band, I coped gamely with my one scene, regulating traffic at the junction of three corridors as the kids ran to their classrooms. While tossing off various commands, the Signor passed by with Jim. The children were boisterous, I was buffeted about a bit, and Jim seemed confused by all the rushing around. Ducasse had told me earlier that Patches/Jim had been up since six a.m. and was, he thought, getting a little tired.

The overwhelming impression of the two days spent with *Michael's Fright* was of professionalism. There was no screaming and yelling, and even though (not unnaturally) you could feel tension in the air on a number of occasions, everything seemed to get ironed out in a suitably civilized manner. Director/writer Rubbo, in his fiction-feature debut, was working to a tight timetable, and he and cinematographer Vamos often consulted together. An incredibly meticulous continuity person, Marie Théberge, seemed to be everywhere, but the line producer/1st a.d. Jim Kaufman pushed things along with a firm hand. I recalled the name of Serge Beauchemin, coping with sound, from many an NFB production – he was slightly stunned when I told him it was great to meet 'the credit' read many times on the screen. Sound people don't get too much recognition.

The shoot was at about the half-way point when I arrived, and on schedule. The crew worked as a team well-accustomed to each other, fast-paced and efficient – many of them told me that it was a really nice film to work on.

I was delighted to be a privileged snoop on *Michael's Fright*, though perhaps not cut out for an acting career in my twilight years. But I can't wait to see the completed movie though, come September/October...