

Equinoxe: Arthur Lamothe's return to fiction

Tangled among seaweed and fisherman's nets, the islands of Sorel are located 45 miles northeast of Montreal, where the Richelieu meets the St. Lawrence. At first glance, these tranquil waters seem an unlikely place for a moment of Québécois film history. But then Arthur Lamothe, shooting *Equinox*, his second dramatic feature since 1967, could well do for these islands what Pierre Perrault, another ex-documentarian, managed with *l'Île aux Coudres* in his legendary *Pour la suite du monde* (1963).

Equinox tells a poetic tale that takes place all in one day among these islands where nature's presence overwhelms. Guillaume (Jacques Godin) is haunted by a lifetime of struggle as he begins a friendship with his 12-year-old granddaughter, Nathalie (Ariane Frédérique). Despite the pastoral surroundings, she insists on wearing her Walkman, and blasts "Duran Duran" into the wilderness populated by ducks and birds. Technology overwhelming nature.

How to preserve what is no longer, an achievement accomplished with such mastery by Lamothe in his ethnographic documentaries, is also the theme of *Equinox*, whose shooting recently took place here for 21 days.

"I like documentary films very

much," explains Lamothe, "but documentary is limited. I want to tell stories. I want to tell them on film. But I want to preserve what I acquired in the documentary in my fiction films. My documentary style is one of risk.

"As in my documentary films, I don't cover everything with close-ups when shooting fiction, nor do I shoot reactions shots. I take the same chances that I do while shooting a documentary. I invent and change scenes constantly. My script lady doesn't like it, but if it's good for the film, I put it in. I shoot a fiction film with the spirit of the documentary."

That presented all kinds of problems for the *Equinox* shoot. "The cows on the sidelines were very bored and came to see what we were doing. They even tried to get on our food barge, but they were camera-shy and would take off when we began to film," Lamothe grins.

Instead of the usual Winnebago, the production rented a house boat as water-taxi, which they took from location-to-location. It served as home base. Although they had guides to lead them through the hundreds of inlets, so that they wouldn't break motor-boat propellers or take ages crossing the river, often a small boat would get lost.

Every shot was a chore while on the water. Cameras and crew were constantly being juggled between boats of all kinds: canoes, motor boats, and barges. The smallest barge was dully nicknamed "Baby Jaws."

Since *Equinox* takes place in one day, continuity was crucial. Light also became a critical factor. "Shooting on water is more complicated. It's difficult to use lights, even though we had a generator. We had to play with the angle of the light," explains Guy Dufaux, director of photography. "We shot in the morning or later in the day, or we had to shoot with clouds. And the angles of shooting were limited, as limited as shooting in a car. We had to shoot

the canoe full-frame. A medium close-up on an actor or a wide angle was most interesting. Just shooting half-a-canoe was too dull."

With the geography of the location, Dufaux explains, "There were no zooms — we shot with a fixed lens, with lots of water travelling shots.

"We shot a great deal with backlight. In this way we could work with the chronology of the story because you can't tell what time of day it is."

The days were long. Since two-three hours were required just for transporting materials and charging boats, the days stretched to 14-15 hours. "It would have been better to shoot this type of film over a longer period with a smaller crew (the crew numbered 30), but it would have been more expensive to pay the actors," Dufaux adds. "And *Equinox* is a low-budget film — \$930,000."

If it was easier for the boats to move from place-to-place when the water was higher, the level of the water changed every day. After the full moon, the water was two inches higher than when the film began. According to river guide Roger Gladu, the water-level would change as much as six inches in one day.

Communication was difficult because the director and the director of photography weren't always on the same rig. Walkie-talkies were mandatory. Even so when you're in the middle of the water and something goes wrong with a camera or motor, Panavision is a world away.

Sound too posed problems. Since sound travels easier on water, you hear everything that anyone says, and you constantly hear motor boats in the background. In addition, the ambient sound changes with the time of day. "Noon will sound different from night time or the morning," explains soundman Yvon Benoit. "Birds sing in the morning, and at noon it's quiet; they

sleep." Many of the sound effects would be added later.

Lamothe was born in 1928 in Saint-Mont (Gers), France. He became a landed immigrant in 1953 and a Canadian citizen in 1960. Since then he has been an extremely active member of the Quebec film community, working on everything from radio programs, to research on various social and political problems in Canada, to teaching film.

For his outstanding dedication to cinema — from his first short, *Les Bûcherons de la Manouane* (NFB, 1962) to the 15-part saga *Les Indiens montagnais de la Côte-Nord* (1974-1980) — he was granted the first Prix Albert Tessier awarded by the Quebec government in 1980.

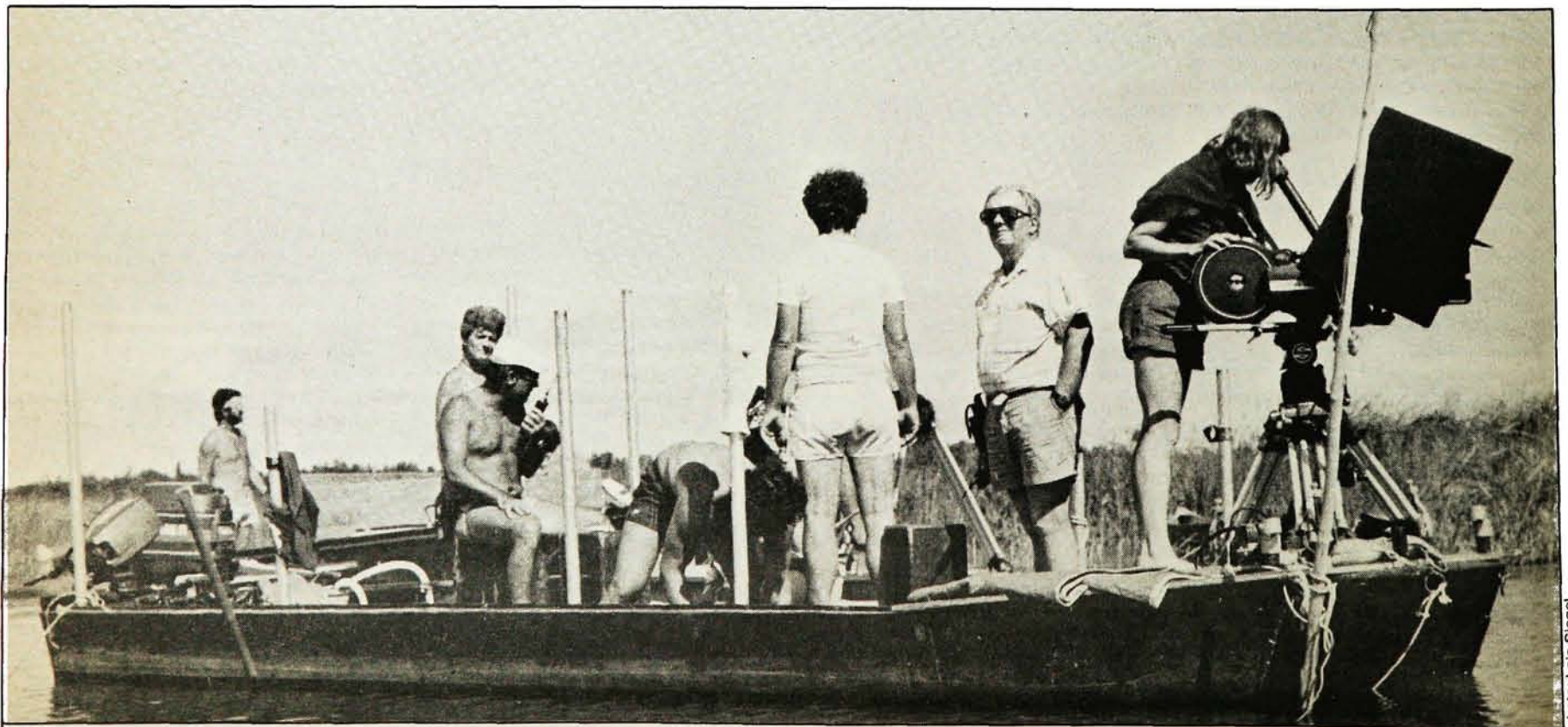
Just as his films reveal a great sensitivity to ordinary people of all varieties of background, Lamothe's own background reflects a breadth of concerns unusual in a filmmaker. Lamothe has been a farmer, vine-grower, lumberjack, taxi driver, and refrigerator salesman.

Today his biggest concern — besides the subject matter of *Equinox* — is how to seem finance the films he strongly needs to make — films which a conventional producer might not find commercial enough or even feasible for a general audience.

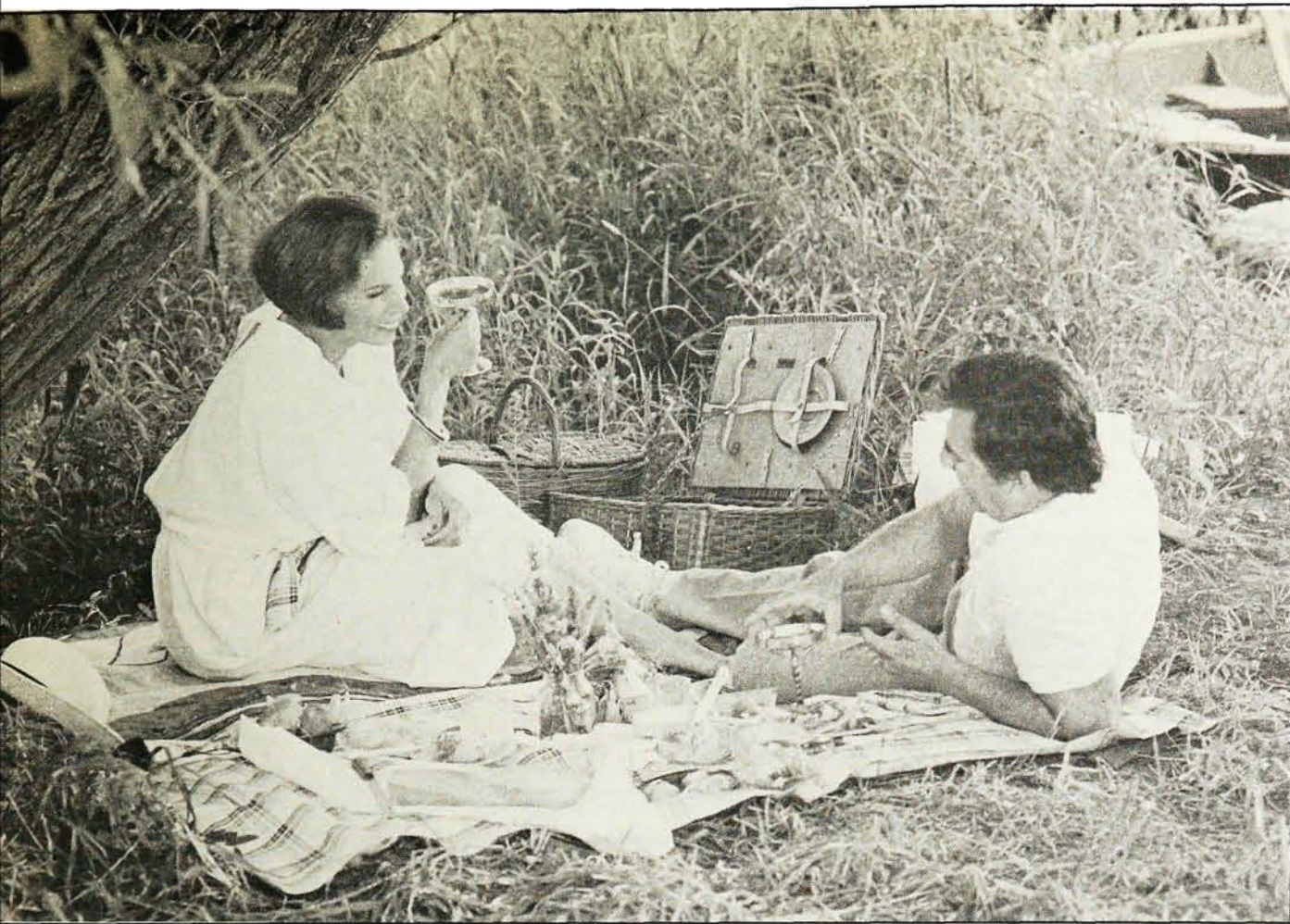
But Lamothe has been able to find a way to make these films he so strongly believes in. With the help of his producer/wife, Nicole, with whom he founded the company in 1972, Les Ateliers Audio-Visuels du Québec, has produced all his films, including *Mémoire battante* (1983) and currently *Equinox*.

After inspiring a generation of social documentarians, Lamothe's return to fiction marks a significant moment in the evolution of Quebec cinema. *Equinox's* theatrical release, tentatively scheduled for February, has all the makings of an event.

Lois Siegel •



• Arthur Lamothe (in sun-glasses) during the shooting of *Equinox*, a film that could make the Sorel Islands as famous as Perrault's Île aux Coudres



• Rethinking feminism: Monique Mercure and August Schellenberg in *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?*

The mature feminism of *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?*

The name says they are four, but it's actually a threesome that run La Maison des quatre inc., a small production company located on Montreal's Cherrier Street. Founded in 1977 by Louise Carré, the idea behind La Maison des quatre was to allow women scriptwriters and directors greater control over their own work.

Today, Carré, together with associates Suzanne Laverdière and Claire Stevens, head a company that's doing well, producing both documentary and fiction films by and about women, including the company's second feature film, *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?* (La Maison des quatre's first feature, *Ça peut pas être l'hiver on n'a même pas eu d'été*, netted Carré the award for best Canadian film out of competition at the 1980 Montreal World Film Festival.)

Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour? was originally to have been shot last summer, but was delayed a year due to funding problems. With its budget of \$1.4 million in place — financed by Telefilm, La Société générale du cinéma, La Maison des quatre and Radio-Canada — the 35mm shoot took place from Aug. 8 through Sept. 15, on location in Sorel and Montreal, with Carré directing from her own script. The film should be finished post-production by the end of

winter, and is due for commercial release next fall.

Women are the central characters in this film, as they have been in most of La Maison des quatre's productions. *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?* tells the story of a mother, Madeline (Monique Mercure) and her daughter, Renee (Guylaine Normandin), as they spend one last summer together. Madeline is torn between her disillusionment with marriage, the family, the world of work, and her desire for justice and some "Ideal." She naively continues to search for a "better world" to offer her daughter. Renee, just turned 20, shares her mother's lust for life and vision of a better future. As the summer passes the two women come to understand one another, and each lives out "leurs histoires d'amour."

While not explicitly a feminist film *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?* suggests a rethinking of feminism as Madeline comes to question the ideas of her younger years. Carré suggests that some older feminists have — or are coming to — the realization that, caught up in their politics, they might have denied, to a certain extent, that, as women, we need our love stories.

The question in the film's title is evocative but has no real answer. "Amour" here, according to Carré, is an all-inclusive term; it refers to all our loves in life — ourselves, our friends, our work. But who has taken away our love stories? And why can't we have them anymore? Carré is considering *Shall I Ever Dream of You Again?* as the title of the English version. In Carré's view, our love stories will never be as they were, but the film leaves the question open.

There is a recurrent image in *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?* — that of a trapeze. Monique Mercure's character, Madeline, decides to take up

trapeze, no small feat for a woman of 50. The trapeze scenes of Madeline, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, are woven into the film's narrative. They are signs of Madeline's courage, a woman who dares.

Carré explains that the trapeze is a metaphor for "nos histoires d'amour." In the insecurity of contemporary society, love isn't as it used to be. It isn't that love was better before, just different. People used to think there were recipes for happiness, but they didn't work, and feminism sought to point out the falsity of those so-called recipes. Left in a world where there are no formulas for happiness, a person today can only dare.

As an actress of 50-odd years, Monique Mercure had to be daring to perform her trapeze stunts. She trained hard throughout the summer. Her experience is comparable to that of her character's. Carré mentions one morning's shoot when Mercure succeeded at a trick she had never been able to do before — and was thrilled.

Making films too has been a trapeze act for Carré. She was 40 when she began. If her first feature came easily, it's been harder since. She was patronized by other filmmakers, both as a woman and as a neophyte. But, Carré points out, when it comes success feels wonderful.

For Carré movies are a part of life, an open-ended experience in our lives.

If *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?* has a realistic basis, Carré hopes she's been able to take the film a step further, making it larger than life. How she has risen to that challenge makes *Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?* a film to look forward to.

Meanwhile, Carré promises that her next film will have a short title.

Lost!: Cold, wet, confident

The benign artificial pool had been converted into a menacing ocean wracked by a Pacific summer storm.

An overturned sailboat bobbed helplessly in the six-foot waves and 35 mph winds.

As suddenly as it began, the storm abated. In the calm, three cold and weary actors climbed into an inflatable rowboat to be ceremoniously deposited onto the hull. The waves started again and the inflatable boat rocked and rolled around the pool.

Helen Shaver (*Desert Hearts*), Michael Hogan (*Vanderburg*) and Kenneth Welsh (*Loyalties*) star in Peter Rowe's production of *Lost!*, a true story of two men and a woman trapped inside the hull of their capsized trimaran for 74 days.

Lost! is a 90-minute Canadian film produced by Rowe's company, Rosebud Films and the CBC, with the participation of Telefilm Canada. The production budget was not revealed.

The film is scheduled for a theatrical release in spring 1986 and slated to air on the CBC in winter 1987.

Filming began in mid-September on Lake Ontario in 10° C water temperature and, from the start, cast and crew had to adapt to the constant cold and wet — almost three weeks of 12-hour days were spent on the heaving waters. By the time production moved to the artificial wave tank in Hamilton, Ontario on Oct. 3, cold, wet and windy had become a way of life.

Rowe (his first ocean-related film was *Horse Latitudes* in 1975; his latest, *Adventures On Shark Reef* (1984)) who wrote the *Lost!* script and directs the film, said he chose the principal actors with the consideration that they could handle the difficult physical conditions.

"There is nothing that we are doing that is dangerous, but there are things that seem dangerous, and seem harrowing to the actors and crew and are uncomfortable and difficult," says Rowe. "It's quite a physical film, no doubt about it."

Lost!, based on the Thomas Thompson book of the same name, is the story of Jim (Welsh), an overzealous fundamentalist missionary who, in July 1973, set sail from Vancouver to Costa Rica with his brother Bob (Hogan) and Bob's pregnant wife, Linda (Shaver).

Two weeks into their journey they capsize in a storm and the three become locked not only in a struggle to survive, but in a battle against God, nature and each other.

Adrift for two-and-a-half months, the trio faced enormous physical and spiritual challenges. Linda miscarries and dies after 34 days. Bob and Jim live to be rescued, but Jim dies two days later.

For Shaver, Hogan and Welsh, re-creating the event required physical stamina and good health.

After logging in more than 200 hours in Lake Ontario alone, they had to

spend one more night outside, exposed to rain, wind and lashing waves. Gas heaters, sounding like blowtorches, provided some comfort by the side of the pool.

Those 12 hours in the wave tank account for only about 45 seconds of screen time.

Despite the hardship, all three share an enthusiasm for the project and the physical challenges that it offered.

"I've never done a film that's as physically demanding as *Lost!*," says Hogan. "It's unusual to be asked to do such physically dangerous work, to a certain extent, but it's something I love. I would always rather do it than have someone else do it. (And although) I've never really been a strong swimmer, I don't have any fear of the water."

Welsh had never sailed before and was inexperienced on the water in general. Doing *Lost!*, he says, was a big thrill for him.

"Being on the lake was fun. I loved it. You don't get a chance to do movies very often where you're actually almost living the experiences in the script.

"I have a terrible fear of the water, but as long as I'm standing on something (I'm OK)."

Shaver was particularly tasked during the production as she was doing another film concurrently in Los Angeles.

Lost! is physically and emotionally demanding," she says. "The wind and water are completely uncontrollable elements, and I was very scared actually, about a week before we started shooting. (But) when I deal with each day at a time, it actually forces a kind of concentration that I really find invigorating."

All three said they didn't make special preparations for the physical demands, and only occasionally did they wear wet-suits to keep themselves warm.

One of the biggest challenges was keeping the actors from getting hypothermia because, for the most part,

they eschewed the wet suits; the bulk made them too healthy-looking.

On this October night in Hamilton, however, Welsh is wearing a wet suit and four flotation devices. Hogan is dressed in a survival suit which floats.

Welsh looks forward to his night in the pool "like some ride at the Ex," he says.

Hogan's experience with the waves, wind machines and fire hoses sounds just as fun, and scary: "The hull must be rising eight, 10 feet and coming down. I had an anchor and I'd pull myself and Helen down below the water and then, in all that froth and swirl, swim up between the pontoons. It was just a totally awesome sight.

"And not once, but over and over and over again."

A big grin appears on his face. "I'm really enjoying it," he adds.

"I'm a survivor, not a victim, of the water," Hogan continues, "and I think that has an awful lot to do with the way you relate to the situation; the character has an awful lot to do with your physical ability to handle it."

Shaver agrees: "Your mind (controls the way) your body deals with the physical cold. Once you start saying 'I can hardly breathe, I'm so cold' and concentrating on that, then the cold takes over, at which point it becomes next to impossible to get warm.

"It's very, very odd," she adds. "I've never really been through this before."

Finally, after four arduous weeks, their tired, battered bodies were given some relief.

On Oct. 10, for 10 days, the production moved to a studio in an unused school gymnasium in Etobicoke where a replica of the overturned hull was built for interior scenes - complete with 30,000 pounds of warm water.

While conditions weren't any drier, they were certainly guaranteed to be calmer and, best of all, warmer.

Leslie Goodson •



• Shirley Pimple's suspended fairy godmother (Nettie Harris), while Richard Tremblay, standing, assists

The saga of Shirley Pimple

The firing squad at the military base in Farnham, Quebec, took aim and fired. He dropped dead. But what's this? There he is again, up on his feet alive and well. No, this can't be real life, but it is one of the scenes in the student epic, *Shirley Pimple in the Temple of Doom* now shooting in Quebec until well into the winter.

Bombing, arson, shooting - all that contemporary mayhem is being portrayed in this second feature by student cinematographer Demetrios Estdelacropolis. As in his first successful film (*Mother's Meat Freud's Flesb*), Estdelacropolis is the writer, producer, director and casting chief of this epic. He's been at it for more than a year now.

The general idea is that Shirley Pimple has been recruited to dance her way into the hearts of Americans while spreading the John Wayne philosophy throughout the United States and presumably the world. It is Ronald Reagan's philosophy too. You know how it goes. "Let's arm the Americas to the teeth. Let's take on the world and show who's boss of this planet!"

But Shirley becomes anti-war, anti-establishment, anti-convention anti-anything that encourages a comfy groove while warmongers pile up nuclear arms. Instead of a cute little girl dancing and giving away John Wayne souvenirs, she sets out to ruthlessly maim anyone who got her into this mess.

I'm in this film as the fairy godmother who is supposed to keep Shirley Pimple in line. I must convince her to keep the marvelous John-Wayne-America-First philosophy alive. For the role I wear an outlandish costume, complete with snakes, wings and a pair of glasses featuring one eye. We fairy godmothers aren't what we used to be.

Estdelacropolis is shooting *Shirley Pimple* on a wing and a prayer. As a Concordia student he is being helped by a youth grant since he is a youth and, after all, this is International Year of the Youth. Also, the NFB has given him access to facilities. His enthusiastic crew consists of fellow students who, as I dis-

covered firsthand, think nothing of working around the clock, 18 hours a day. Most of the props are products of Estdelacropolis' vivid imagination - including the hoist I dangle from while flying through the air as a fairy. He uses only two cameras. His soundwoman is a charmer named Cynthia Poirier while his chief camerawoman is another charmer called Coleen McIntyre. As for lighting, Estdelacropolis' norm is usually "Well, if we can cram this scene in before sundown, I think it will be great."

Nothing runs smoothly. After getting permission to visit U.S.A.F. base at Plattsburgh, New York, Estdelacropolis couldn't resist getting his camera into motion to photograph some ancient planes on the tarmac. After all, it was open house at the base - or so it was advertised on TV. Within 10 minutes of shooting, the military police were on his neck. "Out!" The entire crew and cast were escorted off the base, complete with military police in a car in front of ours and a second car behind us.

In Montreal, one of his smaller cameras was stolen while the crew shot on Rachel Street. And when he tried to shoot in Westmount, the police shooed him away pronto until, after much negotiation, he got a permit from city hall. Recently, Chelsea McIsaac, the 14-year-old girl playing Shirley Pimple resigned and there was some talk of having her "killed off" so Estdelacropolis could get on with the show. But then she changed her mind and is back. And just before we were scheduled to go to Farnham to shoot, his camper station wagon was totalled in a freak accident. And so the writer, producer, director had to scrounge up seven private cars into which we all piled.

Now all is in mothballs - the tents, plastic guns, artificial bombs, cameras, lighting equipment, electrical coils plus most crew members, plus lunch for the hungry - until the camper is repaired.

The shoot at the Farnham base was in marked contrast to the non-welcome in Plattsburgh. The military brass was most understanding - couldn't have treated us nicer. They even brought coffee out to their obstacle course where most of the actors were rushing away from a simulated bomb attack.

There we were, shooting an anti-war, anti-establishment movie on a Canadian military base and a good time was being had by all. Only in Canada.

Nettie Harris •

• *Lost!*'s wet and weary trio: Kenneth Welsh, standing; Michael Hogan; and Helen Shaver

