**Equinoxe: Arthur Lamothe's return to fiction**

Tangled among seaweed and snarled man'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 *Equinoxe*, his second dramatic feature since 1967, could well do for these islands what Pierre Perrault, another ex-documentarian, managed with *Ille aux Coudres* in his legendary *Pour la suite du monde* (1963).

*Equinoxe* 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 *Equinoxe*, 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 reaction 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 *Equinoxe* 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 *Equinoxe* 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 rooms—we shot with a fixed lens, with lots of water travelling shots. "We shot a great deal with backstage. 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 *Equinoxe* 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. With the geography of the location, *Equinoxe* 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 *Mémôre bataille* (1985) and currently *Equinoxe*.

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

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