

Un Zoo la nuit

Almost immediately after being ushered on to the set of Oz Productions' \$1.9 million **Un Zoo la nuit**, co-producer Roger Frappier proudly points out that the camera team (except for director of photography Guy Dufaux) is exclusively made up of women. "You'll observe," he says, "that on this set, women hold positions traditionally occupied by men." First assistant camerawoman, Nathalie Moliavko-Visotzky, later adds: "This is the only two-woman camera team I can think of (in the private sector)."

According to Nicole Matton of the STCQ (Syndicat des techniciennes et techniciens du cinéma du Québec), Visotzky's remark is highly relevant, considering that there are only two first and three second assistant camerawomen in the union.

Upon examining the set, however, an interesting contrast emerges. We are in a small, typical Italian restaurant in Montreal's West End. Among the array of Italian liqueurs, pastries, and confections, filling the bar's wall unit are numerous pictures of male hunters and fishermen posing with their catch. Overlooking the typical football machine in the corner, the espresso machine on the counter, and the poster of an all-male soccer team, stuffed heads of deer, wolf, bear, and moose hang on the walls. Undoubtedly, a male universe.

To a certain degree, this is a reflection of the entire film, which contains only two secondary, female characters. "That is not to say the film is anti-woman or anti-feminist. Not at all... Quite simply, it's a film that is more interested in men than in women," says Dufaux.

Zoo is primarily the story of a relationship between two men: a father and his son. Marcel (Gilles Maheu), the son, has just been released from prison. His father, Albert (Roger Lebel) is now alone, and dying. What's more, two corrupt cops relentlessly pursue Marcel, forcing him to renew their illegal association. With fatal walls closing in on

them, Marcel and Albert, who never really got along, now urgently make up for lost time. Albert constantly dreams of the hunt, and so Marcel wants to oblige him one last time. Yet the woods are too far for the little time they have left. Where else to go but a zoo in the night...

The emotional range of the characters is what attracted Maheu and Lebel to this film. Says Maheu, "The violence of certain scenes (which depict male rape, murder, and "hunting") will shock people since it's beyond what is normally seen in the media... but the tenderness between father and son, so clearly presented, will also break down some barriers."

Made-up and in costume, Maheu, dressed in black and with his dark hair slicked back, possesses the hard, urban look of his character. Yet beneath the slightly weathered face, his small brown eyes, like his laugh, have the warmth of a child. Interestingly, he embodies this composite of emotional opposites.

At 38, this is Maheu's first film role. His background is in theatre, specifically the European school of corporal theatre as taught by Etienne Decroux, Yves Lebreton, and Eugenio Barba.

Maheu talks about distinctions between theatre and film acting. "To me, cinema is inward, while theatre is outward. In cinema, there is an implosion; in theatre, an explosion... film involves a different kind of concentration and technique, whereby there is no chronology to your performance, where your movements are more finely orchestrated with respect to the frame, and where characterization is expressed in time spans of 30 seconds."

Earlier in the day, Maheu's scene was broken up into two shots, each of which lasted about 30 seconds.

Director Jean-Claude Lauzon remains soft-spoken in his criticism after each take, occasionally hugging Maheu after a successful one. There appears to be no tension on the set; the first assistant director hardly has to raise his voice to achieve total silence. Part of the reason for this is that for five to six weeks prior to shooting, nearly the entire film was rehearsed on video. This permitted Lauzon and crew to have a more practical focus on how to construct the film. For Maheu, this allowed more opportunity to study his character, while at the same time establishing a rapport with his fellow actors, most important among them being Roger Lebel.

Lebel is a veteran performer of theatre, television, and film, and as such has that kind of ubiquitous face that is nevertheless still hard to place. Lebel is a graduate of the Conservatoire d'art dramatique in Quebec City. He's worked in television, theatre and in such films as **Les Bons Débarras** and **Réjeanne Padovani**. Presently, he can be seen as Police Chief Lamothe on the TV series **L'Agent fait le bonheur**.

With such an extensive background, how did he study for this role? "Well, I'll tell you one thing I didn't have to study - Albert's cardiac problem. I did a play once at Place des Arts called *The Last of the Don Juans*. It's the story of a man who at 50 decides to risk an affair for the first time in his life." What happened? "Nothing. I had a heart attack by the second act of opening night. My second one. Although I was back to work the next day." We both laugh heartily at a not-so-funny situation made funny by Lebel's good nature.

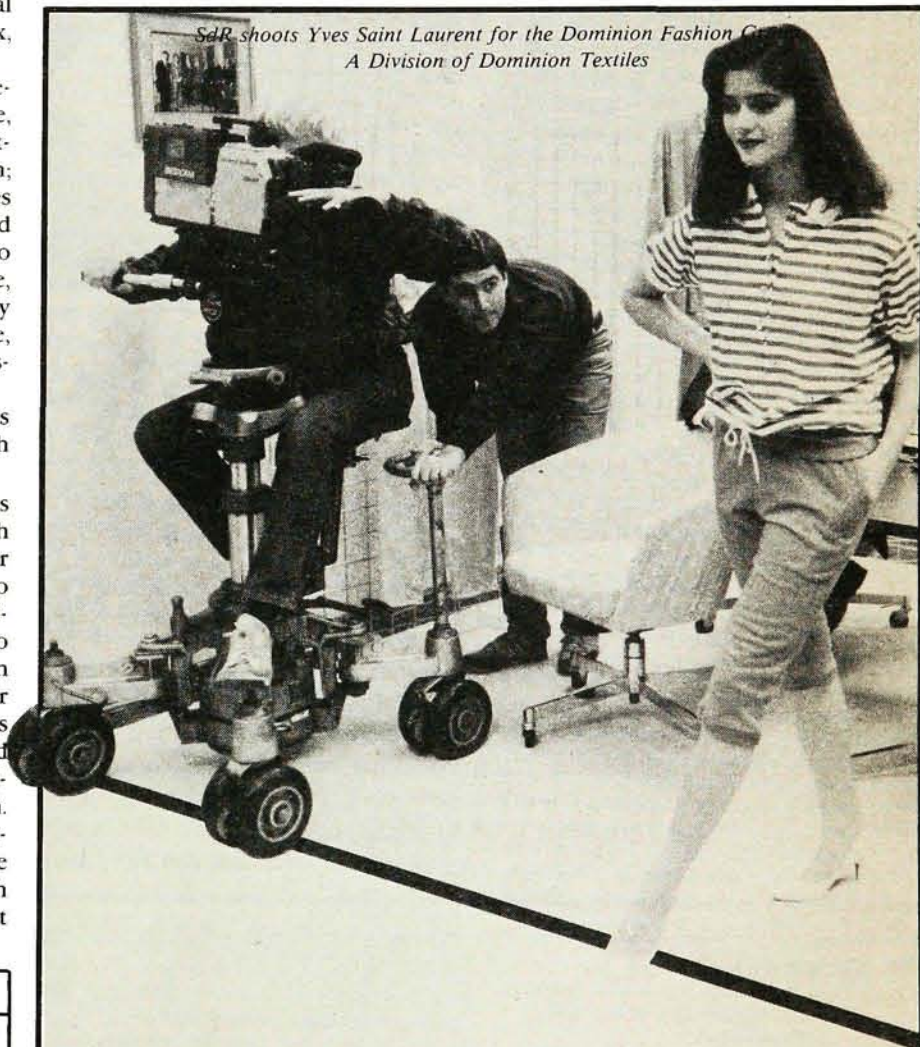
The other thing that is evident is Lebel's confidence in Lauzon, who knows what he wants in all aspects of

production. He should. He has been trying to get this film off the ground for over four years.

Zoo's screenplay is also written by Lauzon. This idiosyncratic world of men and hunting and some of the events in the film are autobiographical. Hence, there are questions that can be answered only by him. "Ask Jean-Claude," is a common refrain on the set. By early afternoon however, film publicist Pascale Hébert informs me that Jean-Claude prefers not to be asked anything. During the shoot he needs to concentrate on only one thing, and that is making his film.

Hébert explains: "He is under a lot of pressure. This is his first feature. (He made a short called **Piwi** in 1981 which won the jury prize at the Montreal World Film Festival.) He doesn't have a string of hits behind him. Also, contrary to a decade ago, young filmmakers are not protected by the tax shelter wave or the NFB. He can't afford to miss his chance."

Sherif Atallah •



SdR shoots Yves Saint Laurent for the Dominion Fashion Collection
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• Ready to roll, director Lauzon with Guy Dufaux and Nathalie Moliavko Visotzky



photo: Lyne Charlebois

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