

# Seigneur ROCK

by Maurie Alioff

It is the beginning of July, and the summer heat is just beginning to roll into Montreal. On Sherbrooke St. East, across from a breezy little park, Rock Demers is sitting in his comfortable office, stretching his arms in the gathering shadows of the late afternoon. A lamp clicks on. Demers — round face, high forehead, greying beard — is in a high-backed chair behind his desk. The ceiling is also high. A small bust of Bach sits on the mantelpiece.

Demers initials one last document, leans forward, and commences to let go of the stresses and strains of a hectic, climactic period in his unique career as one of the most successful producers in the history of Canadian movies. The sixth in his series of 12 feature films for children, or *Tales for All*, will start shooting in less than three weeks, the seventh about a week later — and the scripts for both are still being revised and refined. In a few days, director Marta Meszoros will be flying in from Budapest to discuss her story for Tale number 8, a picture Demers will co-produce in the fall.

He has spent the day thinking about distributor contracts and completion bond documents. At one point, he investigated the mysterious illegal screening, in Tel Aviv, of Tale 1, *La Guerre des tuques* (1984) — and then suddenly, he had to find \$300,000 needed immediately to fill a two-week investment gap. During all this, he has also thought about a little boy who travels on a magical stamp, a little girl who talks to whales, and a wolf with the red beating heart of someone in love — all characters in the upcoming films.

Rock Demers is juggling three features that are in progress and has, since 1983, rapidly produced one distributable Canadian film after another (a miracle, according to some). He has drive, and he has success. But he is also far removed from the popular stereotypes, and sometimes realities, of the breed known as Movie Producer. We are not dealing here with an oaf, his spread-sheets, and his bimbos. Demers has a gracious, almost formal manner. His cultivated air, expressive gestures, and thoughtful, sometimes brooding, expressions are those of a person you imagine to be an intellectual, a poet, a professor who teaches something from, or in, the 19th century. In fact, at the end of *Bach et Bottine* (1986) the third *Tales for All*, Demers plays what might be a self-parodying bit part as a connoisseur of music on the ultra-refined jury of a *concours d'orgue*.

Then again, this impression of Demers can quickly dissolve into another one. Michael Rubbo, who wrote and directed Tale 2, *The Peanut Butter Solution* (1985) and is now filming *Tommy Tricker and the Stamp Traveller*, sees Demers as a different type of 19th cen-

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tury character – a certain “jolly Dickensian” type, who “laughs a lot.” Rubbo says that when you discuss a script with Rock, “he’s a really good audience. You just feel like doing another turn, coming out and strutting your number. He’s fun.”

On a hot Sunday afternoon, about 10 days after that first meeting in his office, Demers is relaxing on the porch of his country house, discussing with some guests a favorite subject – that there is no such creature as a completely good, or a completely evil, person. Someone asks him if a certain individual, who once caused Rock what must have been a barrel of trouble and pain, is fundamentally good or bad. “Bad,” Demers rasps and chortles like a character in a fairy tale. “Very Bad!” His body quakes with laughter, and then still chortling, he adds, “But I must admit. He’s not completely bad.”

None of this means that you don’t also sense in him a strong will and a clear, fatherly pride in the success of his company, Les Productions La Fête. He loves to reel off minutely detailed facts and figures. The number of countries each film has reached. The long lists of festival prizes. The bigger and better guarantees from American distributors. The box office grosses and the TV ratings. “On conventional TV,” he says, “*La Guerre des tuques* got the highest rating ever for a Canadian film, and the highest since *Jaws* in Quebec. It’s incredible.”

Which film got the best reception from Europeans when he went to Cannes last May? Well, he replies, without missing a beat, “the French prefer *Bach et Bottine* and *The Young Magician* (1986, Tale 4); the English prefer *The Peanut Butter Solution* and *The Young Magician*; the Italian and the Spanish, *The Great Land of Small* (Tale 5, which will be released simultaneously in Canada and the U.S. in the autumn); the Japanese, *La Guerre des tuques* and *Peanut Butter*” and so on.

Demers seems to have a passionate attraction to the idea, and to the reality, of things growing, multiplying, proliferating. Audiences. Profits. Ideas. Scripts. Films... Abundance! He often likes to express himself in statements that feature rapidly multiplying numbers, for example, in an old *Le Devoir* interview: “In Quebec, there are 700,000 children between 5 and 11, in Canada 3 million, in the United States 30 million, in Latin America 80 million.”

Before things got as hectic as they are now, one of Demers’s greatest pleasures was working with his wife Viviane Julien, a clever, lively woman, in the impeccably tended garden behind their 98-year-old country house, overlooking the lush green farmlands and hazy mountains of the Eastern Townships. “I love,” he says, “to put seeds into the earth, to go into the garden and work with my hands.” Again, abundance. Big purple cabbages, tomatoes, eggplants; peas, sage, garlic, and roses. The vegetables look like flowers, and the flowers look good enough to eat. In fact, Demers and Viviane do.

Watching Demers tramp across a field,

carrying a long stick, and thinking back to Montreal, to the producer – with his blue eyes, sometimes piercing, sometimes wandering off toward some dreamy memory – you begin to see Demers as a kind of *seigneur*, the lord of his various domains.

**From Sainte-Cécile to the Baluchistan**

Demers was born in a farming village called Sainte-Cécile de Levrard, on the night of a snowstorm. When he thinks about the place, and his childhood in the '30s, he says things that remind you of the tender moods in Roch Carrier’s stories about rural Quebec. Because the land was flat all the way to the St. Lawrence River, “We saw,” he recalls, “the fields very, very far away, and the churches of other villages.” He remembers himself standing in the window, at the age of five or six, looking at “the wind blowing the haze, the grains, the powder snow during the winter.”

Demers’s father was a farmer, his mother a teacher. He remembers his father, in barns and stables, telling the fairy tales and fables like *Le Petit chapeau rouge* and *Barbe Bleue*. He remembers getting hooked early on adventure novels and watching his first film (*V for Victory*) on the floor of the parish hall. Eventually, even before there was electricity in the village, his father bought a radio, so that the day the lines were connected, the family was ready.

Like everyone else in Quebec at the time, they immediately became eager devotees of *Un Homme et son péché* (*A Man and His Sin*), a pre-Plouffe serial that ran for 20 years. With amused affection, Demers recalls the soapy details: Séraphin Boudrier, the greedy village mayor, constantly preventing his saintly wife Donaldda from doing her good works. The handsome, elegant, and kindly stranger who appears in town and encourages Donaldda to do her good works. The inevitable, irrevocable swooning attraction between the two. *Un homme et son péché* was so popular in Québec, the name Séraphin became a synonym for greed; even teenage kids in the '80s say, “T’es ben Séraphin” (“you’re a real Séraphin”).

Demers sees the people he grew up with, and the people who still live in Saint-Cécile (these include two of his brothers and his 82-year-old mother), as leading hard lives, but lives in touch with some harmonious simplicity. These are people capable of gestures that touch you with their beauty and grace. Demers recalls his mother writing to him about the “music” of the snow melting, and, at his father’s funeral, a scene he would like to film one day – a farmer carefully placing a wild rose in the dead man’s hands.

Vojta Jasny, the Czech director of *The Great Land of Small*, recently spent a week in Saint-Cécile, meeting Demers’s family and is now preparing a script for a short film about the village. Demers says it doesn’t make “commercial sense,” but he wants to produce it anyway. It



La guerre des tuques / The Dog Who Stopped the War



The Peanut Butter Solution



Bach and Broccoli



The Young Magician

might be called **Opera of Trees**, and he aspires for it to be a "work of art – with the trees, and the rivers, and the four seasons: the old people and the young people – in the way Jasny can do it."

Demers met Jasny, an old friend and colleague of Milos Forman, during one of his many trips to Czechoslovakia, a country he first visited, and was seduced by, in the late '50s. Rock had arrived in Europe on a scholarship to study, in Paris, the use of audio-visual techniques in education. When his studies were finished, he had the equivalent of \$200 and an irresistible impulse to hitchhike from France to Tokyo. If he could survive on a dollar a day, Demers reasoned, he would be in Japan in 200 days.

In the end, he received a new grant for \$2500 (considerable in 1958); met, married, and had a child with his first wife, Paule; travelled far and wide, meeting people involved with children's films, plays, and radio; taught English in Japan; and didn't return to Quebec for another two years.

One morning, on the way east, Demers and Paule found themselves on the edge of the Baluchistan desert, 150 km from the nearest town, not a single house in sight. When Rock tells this story, of course, in increasingly proliferating details – the storyteller and the filmmaker in him emerge. We get vivid images, suspense, humor, themes.

"We were waiting for something to happen," Rock begins. "Paule played the guitar; I read. At noon, we saw one man, very far away, coming toward us. We were a bit nervous, because we had been told in Tehran that we shouldn't hitchhike on that road. The Baluchistan people are descended from the Moguls, and they are very rough people. We would get killed, there would be wiferape and all those stories. But we were there.

"The man didn't say a word. He walked around us, and then he sat on his heels, and just started looking at us. I was trying to get in touch with him, to contact him, and there was nothing on his face. I wanted to show him that we had no more water, and we were thirsty. But nothing. After about 20 minutes, he left. Then nobody passed during the whole day. No camels, no trucks, nothing."

But the man reappears and invites Rock and his wife to eat with him in an earth-floored house. After the meal, the man asks Paule to play her guitar. *Bon!* An opportunity for two proto-hippies to share a cultural experience with a desert tribesman. "She started with songs like *Sous les ponts du Paris*. But it was very boring to him; it was not the type of music he was used to. He asked her to stop; it was too boring." Suddenly, the man gets suspicious about some calcium pills in their baggage and induces them to swallow a few. Once he sees that the pills are harmless, he takes some himself. And then, as Demers puts it with a chuckle, "he was dancing all over the place. He was happy; he was feeling much better." Unfortunately, suspicion seizes the man again. He calls some friends over,

and the night wears on in glaring watchfulness.

But desert fears shift and subside like desert sands, and the man eventually offers Rock his most precious possessions: the two tapestries he bought in Bagdad, during a 9-month pilgrimage to Mecca on foot. "Can you believe it?" Demers asks, still incredulous. "Those people were supposed to be barbarians, and he was offering the most precious thing he had."

Demers's story encapsulates two of his most strongly felt convictions – one being his contempt for the idea that people, or the world, can be divided into, as he puts it "straight black and white, good and evil," an idea which leads to fear, prejudice and "all that is shit." The second conviction is that the *Tales for All* should never portray the world this way. The split between good and evil, Demers argues, "is a deformation of reality" that promotes intolerance, and the

Grimm Brothers fairy tales, most of Disney's films, *Star Wars*, Spielberg (except for *E.T.*) all do just that.

You can huff and puff and try to blow this argument down.

Let's face it: some of the things kids fantasize about would send their parents screaming into the night. Isn't it a healthy and very cathartic human need to confront images of pure evil – from Satan to Dracula to Dennis Hopper's Frank in *Blue Velvet*? People often laugh with pleasure when they remember the witch in *Snow White*, or the way some bogeyman jumped out of a fireplace. Doesn't a film sometimes need the tremendous dramatic and often comic kick of a deliriously malicious villain?

You can huff and puff, but Demers is steadfast. "Maybe I'm wrong," he says, "but I strongly believe it, and I at least want to present an alternative." He goes on to make an indisputable point: "When children have dark fantasies, they generate the fantasies themselves. When they have reached their limit, they stop. But when they are in front of a film, they cannot stop it. It's there, and it goes on. And the effect is very different."

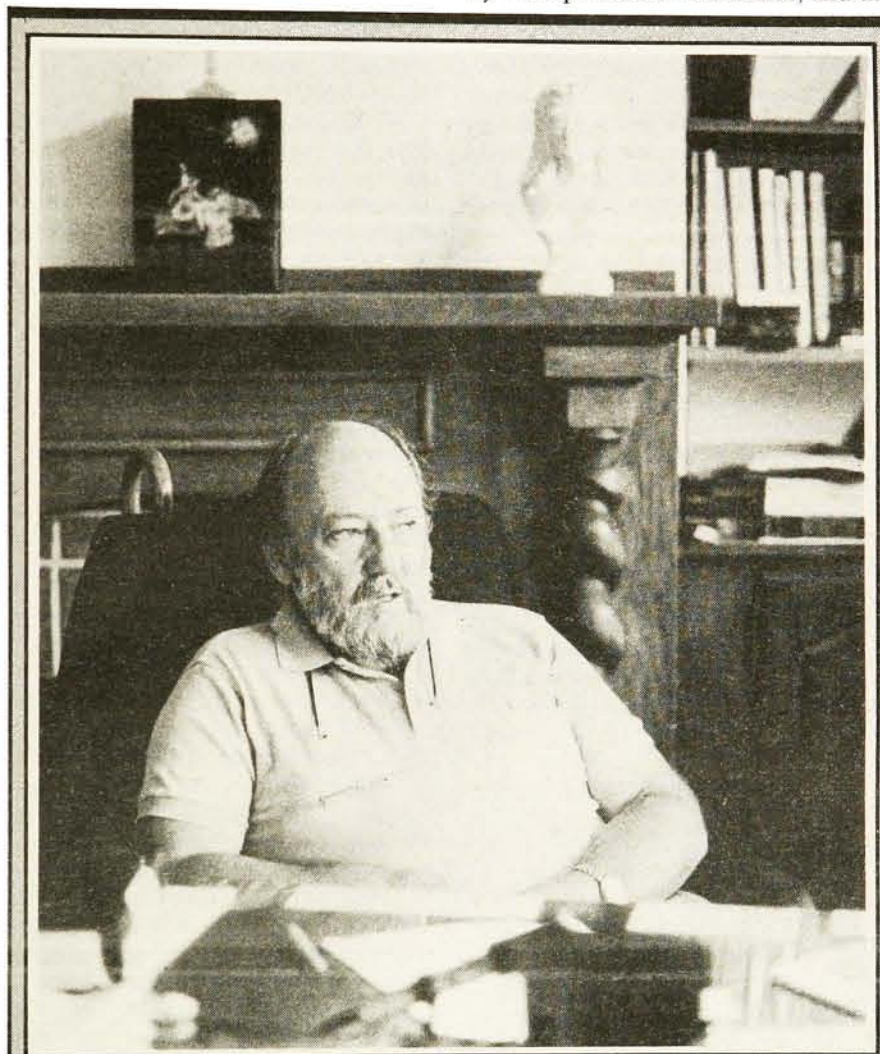
Demers also believes, based on various evidence he's collected, that children today have been assaulted by so much screen violence, compared to kids at the time of *The Wizard of Oz*, or *Snow White*, that "they are wounded; they are hurt. Things which were possible to show in those days are not possible anymore, because they are offered to wounded people. You can build something very strongly without using good and bad. I want to try to show life as something very hard and very difficult, but at the same time, something very rewarding. We should be able to go through it, keeping some hope, and some freshness – that's what I want to use for the dramatic structure, not the good and the evil."

"He has his way of seeing the world, and seeing the world of children," Mike Rubbo says. "He says that things in a film can be tough, but there seems to be a difference between tough/unhealthy and tough/healthy." Despite his convictions, Demers's reactions aren't bound by inflexible rules. Rubbo continues, "I thought he would object to Tommy Tricker putting firecrackers in another character's pocket – which is a pretty nasty thing to do – but he didn't."

#### From Farou to La Fête

Rock Demers returned to Quebec in 1960 and was almost immediately offered a job with the original, almost forgotten, Montreal Film Festival that ran until 1967. The organizers knew that Demers, in the years before he left for Paris, had been planting cine clubs all over the province, and helping to put out a film magazine called *Images*. Although he did not see his first movie until he was 10, by his late teens, Rock had the film fever that was just beginning to take hold of people.

It was an exhilarating, naive time. Great films were being made right here



### Successful Distribution According to Demers

- A film which is seen by 5 million, or 10 million, or 20 million is much more cultural than a cultural film which has not been seen.
- The film that you produce has to be designed for a very specific market. This is essential.
- Make sure that during the shooting and the editing, the target is not lost.
- During the production of the film, immediately prepare the launching campaign. Make sure the press kit is complete. Many films don't even have a proper set of stills.
- Make sure you've got the right title. *La Guerre des Tuques* was originally called *The Snow Castle*, which sounds like a picture for small kids.
- Once you have the title, you should have artists working on graphics to illustrate it so that the posters, TV commercials, and newspapers ads enhance the title and support it.
- Organize a big event to premiere the film. Invite a variety of people.
- Work on trailers. For the foreign markets, get as many festival prizes as possible because they help people believe in the film and do something worthwhile with it.
- Put out books and records that are based on the film but also work on their own. There isn't money to be made from ancillary marketing in Canada, but it helps to build the film's presence.
- Ideally, the launching of a film starts, if possible, at the time the script is still being written.

by Gilles Groulx, Arthur Lipsett, Michel Brault, Norman McLaren. Magic foreign names were imprinting themselves forever on people's consciousnesses. "Alain Resnais, François Truffaut, and Godard," Demers recalls, "and Kobayashi, and Bondarchuk, and Fritz Lang, and John Ford — they all came to Montreal in those years. At the Kino Club, after the last show, everyone gathered to talk and dance and sing."

What does Demers feel about the present World Film Festival, with its relentless onslaught of flicks and legions of earnest viewers? "It is a very important event, and it does a lot to promote cinema, but in my opinion, it's too big, maybe a little bit too impersonal. It isn't necessary to have so many films, and try to be the biggest or the most important."

In the early '60s, at the beginning of his career, Demers was already following up on an interest in children's films that was clinched forever when he saw *The Adventure in Golden Bay*, the only live action film made by the Czech animator, Bretislav Pojar. (A circle will be completed when Pojar makes his second live-action feature — for Demers's company.) After Demers became Director of the Film Festival (1962-67), a co-founder (with Guy Côté) of the Cinémathèque québécoise, and the President of Faroun Films, a distribution company he set up, he continually programmed and promoted children's films.

During the late '60s and '70s, Faroun grew rapidly, distributing imported films by Fassbinder, Malle, Jansco, Varda, and Wenders; exporting pictures by Gilles Carle and Jean-Claude Labrècque; even getting involved in a few productions. It was a company operating on an international scale, a fact that, Demers acknowledges, has been crucial in the success of Les productions La Fête. For example, during this period, Demers met a Parisian called Claude Nedja, who now advises him on how to "work in Europe, who to contact." Also, his present connections with eastern Europe, Australia, and Scandinavia "took roots in Faroun's time."

Demers had developed a solid reputation in Quebec's film milieu. He was respected as an active, resourceful person who loved and understood good movie-making. At the same time, people were beginning to associate him with his persistent interest in children's films. Not many were surprised when, in 1978, he was appointed the first director of the Institut québécois du cinéma (a government agency mandated to support and invest in Quebec film that Demers had helped establish).

For a long time now, the fates had been working with Rock in perfect synch. Then, in the spring of 1979, there was a thunderclap, and darkness came down.

Looking back, Rock chortles that, in the long run, it was "maybe darker for others," one of whom was Guy Fournier, then president of the Institut québécois du cinéma. Fournier, in what was — one imagines — supposed to be a sharp move, sent out a press release stating that Demers had resigned from the Institut. De-

mers hadn't. A week later, Fournier, who had received a mysterious anonymous letter about Demers, fired him, claiming conflict of interest. Allegedly, the now ex-director of the Institut was still involved financially in Faroun Films, and was driving a car that belonged to the company.

Demers denied the allegations and sued on various counts. His lawyer, Claude-Armand Sheppard, told the press that his client was being "thrown out like a dog with rabies." There were headlines like: Demers Affair Shakes the Film World; there was an angry wave of protest from the Quebec film community. Gilles Carles, Claude Jutra, Robert Lantos, Fernand Dansereau, Gilles Groulx, and many others, publicly stated that they were "profoundly revolted" by the firing of Rock Demers.

"The morning I was fired," Demers remembers, "I picked up my things and went home, and when I arrived, it was sunny. Then suddenly, there was a big storm with trees broken and all that. Twenty minutes later, it was sunny again. I was in my window, and I told myself, 'That's exactly what I'm going through right now.'"

In the years between L'Affaire Demers and today, Rock settled with the Institut (a few days before the court date), healed his wounds, worked on various projects, and made a success of *La Fête*. He used to say that he couldn't really understand what happened at the Institut. Today, he believes that, at the time, his public criticism of a new cinema law — full of drastic changes and designed by someone who had little knowledge of the film world — provoked the firing. "I was, Demers explains, going against the minister (Louis O'Neill, who supported the new law). As a civil servant, I was not supposed to say it." He has been told about a dinner conversation during which a *chef du cabinet du ministre* said, "We will get his head. We will get it."

### The Producer

Marc Gervais, writing in this magazine, has called Rock Demers "one of the major architects of Canada's new success — a success based on experience and professionalism." Honey Drescher, a media consultant, and a director on the Société générale du cinéma du Québec when Demers's production company was picking up steam, says that he had an on-time idea in a "propitious" environment.

She points out that the Société générale du cinéma du Québec (S.G.C.Q.) and Telefilm Canada, were becoming eager to find investment alternatives to both overly hermetic personal filmmaking and tax break junk. The government agencies were also seeking, as she puts it, "coherence, consistency, structure, continuity" as opposed to occasional spurts of production activity. Not only did Demers have a "marketing and distribution plan," he was proposing a series of films in his own original "niche." The idea of specializing, of prop-

osing a very particular type of film, was, according to Drescher, "quintessential" to Demers' success in attracting investment.

Demers himself has an absolute conviction that Canadian films must specialize. He believes that 97% of *La Guerre des tuques's* penetration of foreign markets was due to the fact that it's a children's film. Let's face it, he argues, "It's so goddamn difficult to bring people into the theatres" especially when, from the point-of-view of people in foreign markets, "you have no-name stars, no-name directors, no-name producers, a no-name country."

*Variety* once printed a list of the 1200 films that were the biggest box office hits in the U.S. "Thirty-six out of one-thousand-two-hundred were not American," says Demers. "Bergman was not there; Fellini was not there; Truffaut was not there." The solution to the problem — in the U.S. and elsewhere — is producing a product that few others are offering, and is, in his case, "necessary" in a world in which children have been, as he puts it, "deeply wounded."

During the past four years, Demers has been developing his approach, aided by collaborators like André Melançon, who directed *La Guerre*, *Bach et Bottine*, and has participated in the three other completed films; Mike Rubbo; Vojta Jasný; and others. *A Tale for All* is not even a children's film in the traditional sense.

It is made primarily for older kids (from 9 to 12), and it is also meant to attract adults. Demers is fond of pointing out that in Quebec, 52 per cent of the people in the audience for *La Guerre* were not children. One of the adults who saw it was actress Geneviève Rioux, one of the ladies in *Decline of the American Empire*. For her, *La Guerre* "makes its point without moralizing or condescension. And that's not easy to do."

Demers has other criteria for his *Tales for All*, for example, fantasy developing out of a strong sense of reality and a "familiar environment," and characters who are not demonic or violent. When Demers thinks about what attracted him to Roger Cantin's and Danyele Patenaude's script for *La Guerre*, he talks about "the freshness of the approach, the originality and the sincerity of the characters, the humour. At the same time, there were important themes: the relations between male and female, the reflection on war and peace."

The series concept is also very important to Demers. It attracted attention right from the beginning. And he has discovered that it is much easier to find distributors if you're selling a package of movies with a good track record, together with the promise of more to come. The distribution of features needs, he says, a "pattern, a network, a structure, which is much too expensive to build for the release of one or two films."

But the series is being produced at a fast rate, which, some feel, affects the quality of the films. In *La Guerre*, a fable about two gangs of kids engaging in a

futile and comical snowball war, we see the kids playing their battle games, but there should be more on the screen to take us *inside* their fantasies.

*Peanut Butter Solution*, a story about a boy who loses all his hair and then can't stop it from growing, is audacious, often witty, and entertaining. However, certain scenes lack the magical power they need. *The Young Magician*, involving a boy with telepathic powers, has got funny slapstick and one particularly strong character, but some of its attempts at Spielbergian blue flash are mechanical. Only *Bach et Bottine*, the tale of an orphaned but high-spirited little girl and her withdrawn aesthete of an uncle, seems almost perfect, a visually delicate film that goes right for the tear-ducts.

Demers does not feel that the speed of the productions has anything to do with the quality of the films. "It's even the contrary," he says. "Producing them at that rhythm makes it easier for me to get the money I need." If there were large time gaps between productions, the confidence-building impact of the previous films would be completely lost, and so would investors and distributors. Without the money you need, you can't put quality into a film. Demers is pleased that he is now at a point where he sometimes refuses prospective private investments — for example, \$150,000 that people wanted to put into *Bach et Bottine*. He's also pleased that he recently refused an offer from Cannon Films to package *Tales for All* with their recently completed *Movies for All* (fairy-tale adaptations that are "ugly things, in my humble opinion," he says).

Although he is obviously proficient at the business side of film production in Canada — with its high risks, dependence on, and changes in government policy — Demers says that the business side is no pleasure. "Even with the success I've had, it's still a nightmare to put the financial structure together. All the rest is fun. It's difficult; it's hard work, but at least it's fun. But putting the money together, believe me, it's really something."

When it comes to the part that is "fun," Demers believes that the role of a producer is to be intimately involved with the production at every stage. "Every day, you have to make real creative decisions in order to be able to achieve what you have to do within 30 days, or 35 days, or within two or three million dollars."

Demers gets thoroughly wrapped up in the script, continually suggesting revisions — to Melançon, to Rubbo, to Jean-Claude Lord, who co-wrote and will direct *The Frog and the Whale*. "You look at the script in his hands," says Mike Rubbo, and you see that 20 or 30 pages have been turned over. We discuss things like how to start a scene faster, how to put more magic in it, how to make a character more mysterious. "I want to challenge the scriptwriter a lot," explains Demers, "sometimes adding new ideas, or making sure that the script corresponds to the concept that I have established for the *Tales for All* package."

Demers believes that the concept of

the *auteur* is both mythical and old-hat. "If one person wants to be called the author of the film," he explains, "he has to be, at the same time, the writer, the director, and the producer." To work with Demers is to enter into a process of intense collaboration with him, and sometimes things get a little rocky. "It was a bit more difficult to work with Waldemar Dziki (the Polish director of *The Young Magician*), says Demers, "but not as a human being. In socialist countries, the director is the king. In some cases, it needed special handling to work with him." Demers laughs and adds, "But he wants to make another film with me, and I will produce it."

Roger Cantin, co-screenwriter of *La Guerre*, sees Rock Demers as someone who "has really created something interesting" and as a "kind of locomotive, pulling everybody into his idea and the path he's following. That's the quality you need to be a good producer." But Cantin also recalls a Demers who didn't "really like to argue things. There were moments when I thought we were getting forgotten easily." For Mike Rubbo, everything is discussable, and that "when I think he's wrong, we tussle over it." According to him, Demers's most remarkable qualities are the facts that "when he's

for something, he never wavers" and that "he never engenders a rebellious spirit. He never shoves things down your throat."

But what about producers who do shove things down your throat, and even worse? Demers is a man with a sophisticated sense of film. What about crass bottom-liners and government functionaries, whose only creative acts are their schemes to aggrandize power? "There are good producers and bad producers," says Demers, "just as there are good directors and bad directors. But it's not an accident that *Le Déclin* was produced by Roger Frappier and Pierre Gendron, or that those guys have followed so strongly with *Un Zoo la nuit*."

#### The Special Place

Sometimes, the role of film producer can be a ticket into the twilight zone. Apart from the crew saying, "We are paid badly, so we work badly" and laughing about it, strange things went on in Poland during the shooting of *The Young Magician*. There were, for example, what Demers calls the "luminous pulsations" that appeared on some shots when the rushes were screened. Everything

was checked – from the camera equipment to the raw stock – and, Demers says, "We still had those goddamn pulsations. The cameraman became very paranoid about it, and he threatened to stop shooting."

Other incidents occurred. One day, a window shattered into a thousand pieces for no reason. On another, a spotlight fell on a little girl's face without causing even a scratch. Then there was the afternoon a school bus being used in the film almost plummeted into an ambulance. A 40-day shoot mushroomed into 85. Demers explains that the director, Waldemar Dziki, "is convinced that there was somebody on the set with an uncontrolled power, and that's why those things happened. Very often, it was close to a complete catastrophe. But it was as if there was *une force positive*, which was protecting us at the same time."

On a rise above his country house, Demers has a "special spot" he likes to go to, where he can stand and enjoy an unobstructed 360°-view of the countryside. He dreams of building a replica of a type of ancient, immediately post-caveman stone dwelling that he once saw in Sardinia – and he wants to build it in the special place, where, he says, you can feel strong vibrations. "Maybe there's a

river under there," says his wife Viviane a little later, carrying a basket full of vegetables and flowers she's been collecting in the garden.

Viviane Julien, who has been married to Rock for 20 years, and who has her own career, participates actively in his film adventures and has either translated or written several of the *Tales for All* novelizations.

They have two sons – each from their previous marriages. Jean Demers, a photographer, does the production stills for his father's company.

There have been many fortuitous connections in Demers's life – the links between his village, and eastern Europe, and children's films, and the film festival, and Faroun, and Les productions La Fête.

It is inevitable and natural to ask him if he believes that everything is written.

"Not everything," he answers, "but a great part of it. However, you should do as if nothing is written, knowing that most of it is. You should strongly believe that your way of doing things is the only way, knowing, at the same time, there are many other ways. If you're able to work within those paradoxes, they give you strength, and at the same time, keep you open to other's ideas. Your mind is open, while your will is at work."

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