Cowboys Don't Cry

French-Canadian actress was recently quoted as saying that "films shot in Toronto and Vancouver and Alberta have an identity crisis. People are worried about how they are different from the Americans." Obviously, the actress has not spent much time in western Canada. If she had, she would realize that true westerners are not concerned with being different from Americans. True westerners are paranoid enough, or maybe just stupid enough, to believe that they are different from everyone. And true western films do not have an identity crisis.

Cowboys Don't Cry, the $2.9 million feature Anne Wheeler directed for Atlantis last August/September should prove the point. The whole production is about as purebred-western as you could find. (As purebred, in fact, as the palomino colt that was raffled to attract extras for a rodeo scene.)

Anne Wheeler is a western director by geography (she was born and has lived in Edmonton all her life), and by attitude. Her films do not discuss the problems of Americanization, they discuss her world: Loyalites followed the relationship of two women in a small Alberta town. A War Story described her father's World War II experiences, and her next project, Bye Bye Blues is based on her mother's wartime experiences. It comes from working up from the bottom. "With the exception of Wendy Wacko, almost every producer in the province has come up through the crafts. Anne Wheeler was an editor and then a cinematographer."

According to Wheeler, the shoot was a labour of love for a lot of the crew. "A lot of these guys turned down projects in Vancouver that paid a lot more to work on this. It's given them the chance to come home and do something they feel part of."

The subject, and not just the location, comes close to home. "All of the guys who drive for movies in this province are rodeo guys," said Wheeler. "I knew a lot of them without knowing (it)." John Dodds, head wrangler on Cowboys and a film veteran, was a four-time Canadian bull-riding champ. While Cowboys' pedigree can certainly compare to that of western films like Loyalites and My American Cousin, it will have to prove its quality. The script competently outlined the struggle between father and son but tended to lack bite: some journalists were warned not to mention 'Disney' on set.

Nevertheless, it managed to offend Marilyn Halvorson, who was apparently unhappy with Wheeler's emphasis on the adult relationships.

Regardless of opinions about the script, the final judgment of Cowboys will come when it airs on CBC next March. (Producers are hoping to distribute it as a feature internationally.) The point, however, is proved. Cowboys is a western film, whether it is a good western film remains to be seen.

Stacey Bertles •

Pin

A house is perched along the banks of the Richelieu River in Iberville, a small town southeast of Montreal. It's a raised stone mansion, grandiose and imposing, colored by local legends about mysterious escape tunnels that no one has ever been able to find. The cold look of the stone is eerie even in the sunlight. The house's grey facade lies in stark contrast to the autumn colors in the trees that surround it. On the inside, made to look very nice by its owner, a doctor and his over-meticulous wife, the rooms appear to be museum displays. The furniture looks unused, monuments to the obsession with perfection that they are obviously meant to reflect.

It is here that Pin, a psychological thriller, written and directed by Sandor Stern, is shooting. Two-thirds of the film take place inside the house, making the setting almost one of the characters.

The title character Pin isn't human. It is an anatomical dummy used by the doctor to amuse his two children. But the doctor and his wife are failures as parents. Dr. Wheeler becomes atruistic, or maybe just stupid enough, to believe that they are different from everyone. And true western films do not have an identity crisis.

When the two children, Leon and Ursula, (David Hewlett and Cyndy Preston) become young adults, their parents are killed in an accident. It is then that Pin, a psychological thriller, written and directed by Sandor Stern, is shooting. Two-thirds of the film take place inside the house, making the setting almost one of the characters.

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