



Why are these men frowning: Maybe it's because they have to shoot a film in mid-winter Ottawa

PHOTO: GEORGE KNATYCH

That's just for the principals from scratch, as opposed to the stock for, I imagine, about 800 extra characters for various situations."

Ron Ror, property master, agrees: "One of the real challenges of the show is that we're dealing with that segment of society. We're not just dealing with old things, we're dealing with very, very good old things, and they become very, very hard to find... We had a lot of cooperation in Ottawa. The ski museum in Ottawa lent us all the skis for the ski scene. I didn't even know there was a national ski museum until I needed skis. There's a national museum for everything in Ottawa."

Their concern for the details, the look, the tone is shared by director Don McBrearty, who found it particularly beneficial to shoot on the actual locations. "We were lucky, we filmed in Laurier's office, the office that he worked in, filmed in Government House where the Mintos (the Governor General and his family) were. So we really were in a lot of the real places and the actors found that quite stimulating, literally sitting in the same chair that he (Laurier) used."

Accessing those "real places" was, for production manager Pauline Malley, a test of endurance. Bureaucracy Ottawa-style made securing locations and obtaining permission into an exasperating challenge. She now says she would discourage others from embarking on such a task.

Nonetheless, filming began in Ottawa in January and continued until last month at various locations in Ontario. Other locations included Port Hope, where they dressed the interior of a huge Victorian house, and Bowmanville, where they found a whole street

of Victorian houses for the exterior shots.

In Studio Seven, the band plays while the court cheers the departing Strathcona's Horse, the most famous of the Canadian regiments to fight for the Queen in the Boer War.

Locke explains, "This is the turn of the century, the height of empire and the height of Canadian imperialism. And before the war is over Canadians have become disillusioned. This is when imperialism is replaced by nationalism."

This seems an appropriate time for the Canadian audience to be reminded of its vulnerable nationhood. A January, 1989 air-date is projected for the full network of the CBC. Who could miss the opportunity to watch the Ottawa court openly gilded and plumed, bowing and curtsying amongst themselves?

Ruth Mandel •

## Bonjour Monsieur Gauguin

It's June 2, 12:45 p.m. and the press have been invited to a vernissage - the inauguration of a Paul Gauguin retrospective. Coincidentally, there is a Gauguin exhibition taking place in Washington. Could there be two? I arrive to find that the

d'Art Moderne de Montréal, featuring a mod exhibit of the works of the 19th century post-impressionist, complete with pamphlets and phoney book covers. A passerby from outside comes in, having been deceived by a large red banner announcing the exhibition.

Location manager José Drolet receives a message or her walkie-talkie and shouts "Qu on the set" as the crew shoots the last scene before breaking for lunch and meeting with reporters. Producer Claude Bonin (*Anne Tris Pouvoir intime*) is enthusiastic about the project as he talks of the possibility of blowing the film up from 16 to 35mm for theatrical distribution citing the success of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* (which was also made for TV). He also comments on the improving quality of 16mm film stock due to competition from the video market. In other words, film is not dead.

Director and cameraman Jean-Claude Labrecque (*Le Frère André*) calls *Bonjour Monsieur Gauguin* his "first contemporary film" - a mystery with a sense of humour. He calls the film a fable... "avec un gros clin d'oeil à Gauguin (a wink in Gauguin's direction)". When asked if the film is a departure from his documentary/historic films, he indicates that is leaning more and more towards fiction. "Today documentary costs just as much as

Université du Québec à Montréal's Centre de Design has been transformed into the Musée



Yes, you can be arrested for playing the accordion in Montreal, especially if your selections include *Lady of Spain* or *Feelings*

## Knockin' on Neruda's door

**Take one:** A young man dressed in a jogging outfit, sporting black fishnet arm-stockings and white gloves, postures seductively in front of the camera. Another man, slightly older than the first, enters and lies in the younger man's arms. Both wear heavy theatrical, clownlike make-up. The jogger pulls up his shirt and proffers his breast which the other takes and suckles. The jogger faces the camera and in a harsh voice barks military commands in a mixture of Spanish and French.

Experimental film meets experimental political theatre on the soundstage of the NFB in Montreal where Alberto Kurapel's *Off, Off, Off ou Sur le Toit de Pablo Neruda*, a highly-acclaimed performance piece, is being filmed. Kurapel, a Chilean exile since the military coup in his country, has created a unique theatrical language combining French and Spanish text, music and projected images (video, film and slides). It is an attempt, as Kurapel explains, to create not a theatre for exiles, and therefore of nostalgia, but a theatre of exile; a theatre in which the experience of exile – the alienation from the new, the longing for the old and the resulting schizophrenia – is communicated.

It's May 6, the second to last day of shooting on the NFB's main sound stage. The actors are rehearsing the scene (described above) in which Mario (Kurapel) is seduced by the jogger (Denis Dallaire). It is one of six scenes which make up the original stage performance. All six revolve around the interaction between Mario and his tormentor, the jogger. The onstage company is completed by a piano player, while other people, including Mario's lover who has been abducted by the military, appear either in video or film on the screens hung on either side of the stage.

Producer Martin-Paul Hus (his company is named Roudoudou and his production experience is with Montreal's Mainfilm Co-op) and production coordinator Susana Caceres, Kurapel's partner and co-founder of their Compagnie des Arts Exilio (the organization through which they produce their theatrical performances as well as publish books and produce recordings), stand watching d. o. p. Philippe Amiguet frame his shot. If they're somewhat anxious it's because there's a long day of shooting ahead in order to finish by tomorrow. However, the overall mood is positive and the small crew works efficiently to set up the last shot before rushes and lunch.

I marvel at the concentration of Alberto Kurapel. Susana Caceres agrees that the task of recreating a stage performance as intense as his in *Off, Off, Off* for a film should be difficult indeed. But, she smiles, it doesn't seem to be a problem for him. And, certainly, at lunch in the NFB cafeteria (a Kafkaesque experience worth

an article in itself) Kurapel is animated and passionately energetic in a discussion about his art. Both he and director Jorge Fajardo are quick to point out that they're not out to simply film the play, but, rather, are trying to render it cinematically using the multi-media elements already present in the performance. The use of exterior shots around Montreal will also help the film to breathe, they say.

The success of *Off, Off, Off* at last year's Theatre Festival of the Americas here prompted director Jorge Fajardo to apply successfully for a Canada Council grant to film the performance. Most of the rest of the approximately \$250,000 budget is being provided by the NFB in production and technical services under its program to aid young filmmakers. Fajardo, also a Chilean exile, was making a feature-length documentary on Easter Island in 1973 when filming was interrupted by the September coup. Since coming to Canada, Fajardo has been associated with the NFB, where he contributed one film to the trilogy entitled *Il n'y a pas d'oubli* (*There is no forgetting*). He has also produced film footage for previous Compagnie des Arts Exilio productions and has just recently completed a short film entitled *La historia de Julio*, with Victor Regalado, a Salvadoran journalist and filmmaker who has been threatened with deportation from Canada but has not been allowed to know the reason why.

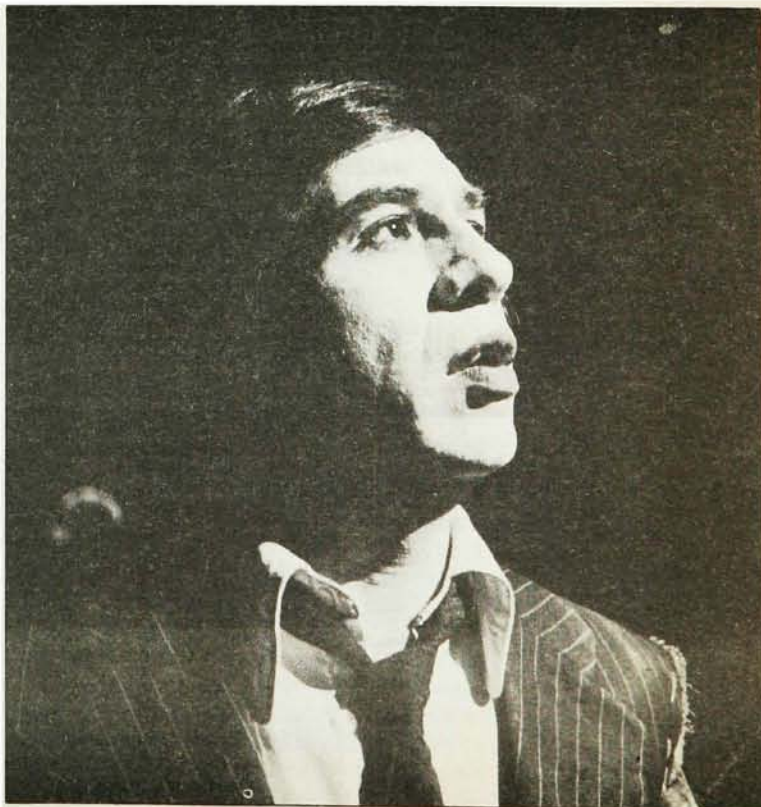
Although Fajardo and Kurapel didn't know each other in Chile, both were active in the fields in which they now work, although, as both

admit, the experience of exile has sharpened the political edge to their work. Alberto Kurapel was working in pre-1973 Chile as the classically-trained actor he is. In 1969, after graduating from the theatre school at the University of Chile, he toured the country starring in a play by the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes. Dissatisfied with traditional theatrical forms, Kurapel began looking elsewhere and found in music and the ritual of Chile's native peoples' influences which would mature in exile into his innovative theatrical language.

The image of Alberto Kurapel in make-up for his role as Mario stays in the mind's eye. Like Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp, he evokes both pathos and mirth. When one considers that Kurapel is in exile from a culturally rich country that enjoyed over 100 years of democracy before being plunged into despotism (thanks to an American government and business interests who viewed the democratically-elected Allende government with disfavour), the sadness for what has been lost is not only understandable, it is profoundly shared.

**Take two:** The jogger forces Mario at gunpoint into a small circle in the middle of the stage. He strips Mario and then covers him in black paint as the image of flickering flames appears on the screen. The jogger turns on his heel and leaves. The final projected image is of a woman, a resistance fighter. She motions with her hands but is unable to speak and can only emit a low, guttural moan.

Frank Rackow ●



Alberto Kurapel in *Off, Off, Off ou Sur le Toit de Pablo Neruda*

fiction to make and it's more difficult to get produced," says Labrecque. He adds that he will always retain documentary as a base, but becomes irritated at the notion of mixing documentary and fiction. To Labrecque, there is a clear division between the two which must remain pure. His next project, *Ernest Livernois, photographe* is a documentary.

Labrecque and Bonin, along with screenwriter Jacques Savoie (*Les Portes tournantes*), pose for photographs while other members of the press take the opportunity to speak to actress Myriam Cyr, a New Brunswick native, last seen in Ken Russell's *Gothic*, and composer Richard Gregoire who has scored all of Yves Simoneau's films.

Gregoire, not usually seen on set, is present to supervise the improvised accordion-playing of actor Gerard Poirier who plays the role of Monsieur Vincent, an elderly blind man who unwittingly takes part in the theft of Gauguin's *Seins aux fleurs rouges*. Art director Louise Jobin, whose task it was to duplicate the priceless works, did so by taking photographs of the paintings from books and blowing them up to their actual size – a process so effectively done, it had many asking if the works were authentic.

Lothaire Bluteau (*Les Fous de Bassan*) plays Johnny, a street-wise electronics whiz who befriends M. Vincent and involves him in the heist – his accordion being a key element in cracking the museum's security system. As the story develops, the pair are forced to flee while police try to trace them through Marie-Jeanne (Myriam Cyr), a mutual friend of the two unlikely partners in crime. Bluteau, who has worked with Labrecque before on *Les Années de rêve* says he enjoys working with the director, noting that his experience as a cameraman is a definite asset to his direction. "He knows exactly what he wants," says Bluteau, who is also very happy with his own role in the film. "It's a different type of character for me, more upbeat."

The diligent yet friendly crew makes for a relaxed atmosphere; the extras slowly take their positions, while Labrecque and entourage prepare for a 320 degree dolly shot which will focus on Johnny and M. Vincent in the centre of the exhibit hall. Publicist Christiane Ducasse and I, making sure we are not captured on film, duck behind a partition which blocks our view till the end of the take. I later find myself a discreet spot away from the action as the next shot is being set up. It's a close-up of Poirier made-up to resemble the late artist, looking a lot like a Gauguin self-portrait which is present on the set. M. Vincent's fascination and later obsession with the French master is an integral part of the plot and one that pays tribute to the artist.

The feature, which will air next January on Radio-Québec, is the seventh in a series of 10 films made by Les Producteurs TV-Films Associés.

Jim Lévesque ●