



Isaach de Bankolé, Roberta Bizeau and Alexandra Innes crossing the McGill University campus in *Comment faire l'amour...*

scenes of the film onto celluloid. According to all, the 33 days of the shoot have gone very well, without a hitch and in an atmosphere of passion and good humour. "The nucleus of four principal actors lived and thought in terms of the film," says Laferriere. The nucleus was made up of Isaach de Bankolé (*Black Mic Mac, Chocolat*), Maka Kotto (*La Vieille dame et l'Africain*), Roberta Bizeau (*Night Heat, The Dead Zone*) and Myriam Cyr (*Gothic*).

An example of this great availability is Maka Kotto. He arrived in Montreal two weeks early with Charlie Parker records, the Koran, and the works of Freud in his luggage, all the better to enter the skin of Bouba. He took to sleeping on a mat in his hotel and walking around the city at night. In fact, both Kotto and De Bankolé were observed by Sadler and Laferriere walking the streets of Montreal by night in preparation for their roles.

Speaking of actors, the cast brings together an interesting collection: an international cast which conforms to the mandate of an 80 per cent Canadian and 20 per cent French coproduction, and to the necessity of assuring an international impact. And perhaps also a cast which reflects that Montreal which Laferriere depicts. "It's a very realistic film, but at the same time it's a fable on fantasies. So we had to play with those two dimensions and find actors who were both very competent, and who also personified these fantasies. The producers are satisfied with their choice," says Laferriere. "The actors give on screen what they are in life, with all the required subtlety," stressed producer Ann Burke.

What is interesting is that the black actors do not feel they are playing cliché roles. "It's very rare that we're offered characters like those in this film. Usually we see black actors in caricatured roles, endlessly repetitive archetypes, the negative roles of dealer, pimp, outlaw... The richness of my character, Bouba, has greatly inspired me," comments Maka

Kotto. And according to Richard Sadler, the other producer, a film with such a complete racial mix has no precedent.

In all, 39 actors and 570 extras have occupied the set of "*Comment...*" in the course of the shoot, only a third of which was filmed in studio.

"And to think it all started because I bought a Remington..." Having the distinct impression that everything has snowballed since the publication of his first novel, I ask Dany Laferriere to tell us about the road he has travelled since that time. Shortly after its appearance, Richard Sadler bought the adaptation rights, seduced by the type of "hymn to liberty" which the novel inspires. So began for the two men the difficult but enthusiastic adaptation of the novel for the screen, a project which took them several months. Laferriere took on adapting the dialogue and Sadler attacked the structure of the screenplay. New faces, new locales and more dialogue were added to transmit the humour which permeates the novel. From the book they kept all the flavour of the text and the penetrating insight of a stranger into the society he is discovering.

"I have no regrets and no scruples about distancing myself from the original text. It's a new creation... Film has its rules which are not those of literature... for me art is something very concrete: a deadline, a budget," says Laferriere. When the laborious process of screen adaptation was finished, both the Société Générale (SOGIC) and Telefilm Canada asserted that it was the best screenplay they had received in a very long time.

A screenplay for which producers Richard Sadler and Ann Burke, together with Henri Lange on the French side, found a budget of \$2.5 million. Telefilm and SOGIC guaranteed close to 75 per cent of the Canadian financing. This financial backing was very difficult to get because it's the first work for both writer and director.

There has rarely been a film which, even during its shooting, has inspired so much infatuation from the media and distributors. When production began last June, Aska films of Montreal bought the distribution rights for Canada and the rest of the world, except France. But there too, the film is keenly anticipated. Two important distributors are showing interest.

And, to the inevitable question, "where will the film be launched?" producers and distributors are said to be betting on a breakthrough "Black Package" and on rising stars for a spring '89 attack on Cannes. Optimism abounds among the team and Richard Sadler has no fear of competition, even if it means some powerful lobbying to carve a place next to Denys Arcand's next film. Sadler rules out nothing: the Director's Fortnight or even the official competition. "The film has all the ingredients." As for Dany Laferriere, he has no fear of campaigning for his film. For some time he has prepared himself to take on the French media, and here in Quebec, he is already a familiar, nearly ubiquitous figure.

As we leave the studio, I ask Dany what future he would like for his film. "A film that lasts, as we say! That makes a large or medium debut, but which lasts. I like the films one sees at the repertories... A film that lasts, that's it!"

Christine Martin •

(Translated from the French by Naomi Guttman)

Alberta Bye Bye Blues

This place is big. So big in fact, that I'm having a fair amount of trouble finding out which building I'm supposed to be in. This is the new Allarcom Studios in Edmonton, now one of the most complete film and television centres in Canada. The press release boasts a "52,000 square foot complex housing a 15,000 square foot soundstage, an underground pit and Allarcom's state-of-the-art post-production facility." The local film community is convinced that this facility, coupled with the new \$7 million in funding for indigenous productions coming from the Alberta government, will induce radical change in the local film industry. As I finally find the correct entrance, I realize that the studio is in the process of losing its virginity. *Bye Bye Blues* is Allarcom Studios' first feature.

After seating myself in the gleaming reception area, I notice the security guard ask an extra to sit behind her desk for her. She disappears for a few moments, and upon her return is full of the kind of giddy excitement one only ever expects from a 15-year-old cheerleader. "Where did you go?" inquires the extra. "I had to get some autographs," she replies, "I got Stuart Margolin and Kate Reid!" She has been collecting autographs since the beginning of the shoot.

The cast is an impressive one and includes Rebecca Jenkins, Luke Reilly, Michael Ontkean and Susan Woolridge in addition to Margolin and Reid.

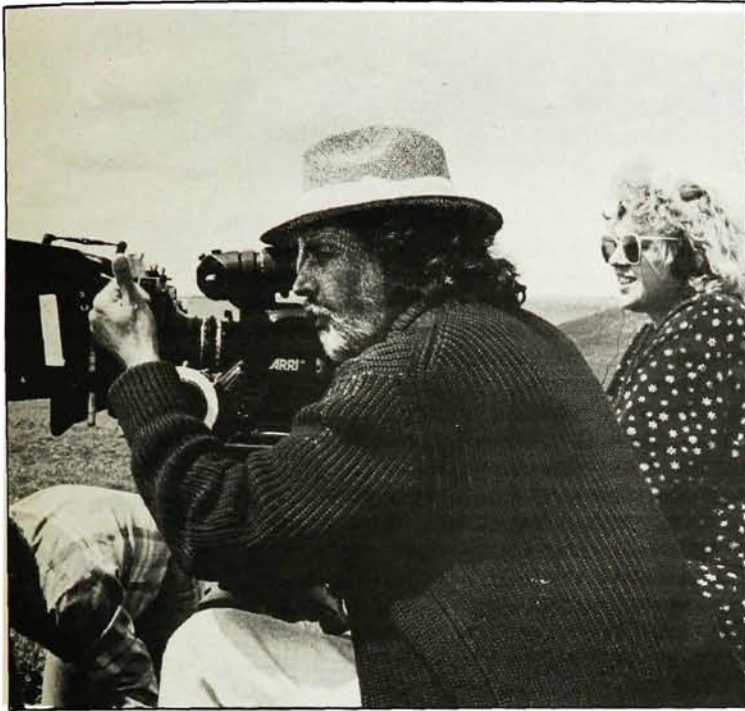
After being led down the hall and into an office, I meet an equally excited woman who is raving about the new studio. "It's magic! It's like a gift from the gods, really. This is the first time I've ever shot on a soundstage - it's an extraordinary facility. I've laughed out loud thinking about this place." The woman is Anne Wheeler, director of *Loyalties* and *Cowboys Don't Cry*, and she is filming segments of her third feature *Bye Bye Blues* on the soundstage here. The crew have already finished a two-week shoot in Rowley, Alberta and another shoot is scheduled in Pune (poo-nah), India later this year.

The screenplay for the \$4.5 million production, written by Wheeler, concerns a young Dr. Cooper and his wife, Daisy, who are stationed in the British Medical Service in India in 1941. He is transferred to Singapore, and Daisy and their two children must return home to smalltown Alberta. On her arrival Daisy learns that Singapore has fallen to the Japanese and her husband has been taken prisoner. Without any money, Daisy decides to join a swing band and sing for a living. Finally, Daisy is torn between her work and the memory of her husband.

Bye Bye Blues is, in an odd sort of way, a sequel. The prequel was the take of Wheeler's father, who was a Japanese prisoner of war during World War II. Wheeler, after a great deal of research into the period, wrote a script based on her father's diaries, and the result was a feature-length docu-drama entitled *A War Story*. *Bye Bye Blues*, a film "inspired" by her mother's experiences, could then be seen as the other side of the story. A pseudo-sequel, perhaps.

This has put Wheeler in a delicate situation. She kept *A War Story* as close to reality as possible, while *Bye Bye Blues* is a predominantly fictionalized account of her mother's experiences. Wheeler cringes when she hears someone say the film is based on her mother's life. "I'm trying to avoid that label now. I say that it was inspired by my mother's wartime experience. I've taken a character and put her into the situation my mother was in during the war. But (unlike *A War Story*) I play a lot of fiction into it."

As Wheeler talks about her mother, it is clear that she has great admiration for her. What an interesting angle on *Bye Bye Blues*: an interview with its inspiration. I'd like to interview Wheeler's mother. "She doesn't want to be interviewed. She's a fantastic woman, but she's also a very shy woman. It's been a fragile line I'm walking because I put this character in the script into situations my mother never would've found herself. She's been very supportive, just as long as I make it clear it's inspired by her situation and not actually about her. I said 'Mom, I'd like to make a movie about you and your piano-playing.' She said 'Well, pretty



Vic Sarin and Anne Wheeler shooting *Bye Bye Blues*

boring. You'll have to spice it up a bit.' So, I spiced it up a bit."

Wheeler has said time and time again in interviews that stylistically, she likes to keep things as close to reality as possible. Coming from a background of documentaries, that would make sense. *Bye Bye Blues* presents a real challenge for Wheeler. "In *The War Story* I kept things as accurate as I possibly could, trying to recreate scenes from diaries. This is fiction - you want to get inside your character's head. I take a few liberties. I allow characters to have premonitions and memory flashes. Basically though, things will stay fairly realistic - I'm trying to present history as it was, not as we hope it was."

Bye Bye Blues is different from her previous filmmaking experience, largely because she is the sole author of the screenplay. "You have more freedom to change things while you're shooting. You don't have to worry about hurting anyone's ego. You just change it and make it your work. You can really exploit your actors and crew this way, merely by ironing out a scene until it works."

"I see myself as the watcher. That's my greatest role on set as a director. I try to watch everything and try to get back to everyone that's creating that image - the actors, cinematographer, whoever - and tell them if what I saw didn't feel real. I guess that's what changes when you've made a couple of films and they haven't been bad. People start to listen to you and trust you. You become a much more effective director because you don't have to argue every point."

Wheeler is aware of other expectations placed upon a director who has had a success like *Loyalties*. "I try to ignore these pressures. I treat my work as a series of challenges, and I try to do better each time. I've never initiated a project that I haven't completed. I've been a very cautious filmmaker. I work on each film like a painting, and continue to work until it's as good as I can make that particular painting."

So far, says Wheeler, this painting is turning out much to her liking. "We're very happy with the rushes. It's a very complicated shoot because there's a great deal of music involved. Then we had to set up the shoot in India, and there's a great deal of bureaucracy there. The fact that it's a period piece makes it tougher. It's an enormous film to be doing on the budget we're on. \$4.5 million may sound like a lot, but it's a tremendous challenge to every department involved with the film. So far everyone has met the challenge. The rushes look terrific."

And her next painting? "I'd like to do something for my children, quite frankly. I've written a script with Jim DeFelice (Genie Award winner for *Why Shoot the Teacher?* screenplay). It's sort of a Bugsy Malone detective story. I think I'm going to take next summer off actually. I enjoy writing, and if I could find someone to direct my stuff, I'd be happy. I feel like I'm a storyteller. And I've lots of stories to tell."

Funding for *Bye Bye Blues* has come from Allarcorn Limited, Telefilm Canada, and the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation (AMPDC). The film is scheduled for release in the spring of 1989.

Matt Hays •

Nova Scotia

The Bell Ringers

The illusion of the 19th century is almost complete. The village sits on the banks of a slow-flowing river. Along the dirt streets one can see only a couple of women in long dresses and white lace hats. A solitary man is splitting firewood with a double-bladed axe. A small flock of geese make their noisy, honking way across the lawns. The only anachronism is the constant crackle of walkie-talkies:

"Sheilagh, we're sending over some extras for scene four... Alice, could you come over to the production office?... I'll be there in a minute, I'm stuck on a tree... Ernie, are you on walkie?... " Then first A. D. John Houston's voice breaks in: "O.K. everybody, quiet on set... and rrrroll sound!" and once again everything falls back to the pre-technological silence of the 19th century.

We are in historic Sherbrooke Village, Nova Scotia, on location for the filming of Gamma Production's *The Bell Ringers*, one of 15 episodes in the CBC *Family Pictures Anthology* series. Based on an incident in the life of B. C. writer Sam Roddan, *The Bell Ringers* has been adapted for television by Nova Scotian Tony Foster and by casting coincidence both Roddan and Foster have roles in the production. For Roddan, a jovial man in his late '70s, being on location is a moving experience. *The Bell Ringers* is the first of his many stories to ever reach the screen and brings back many memories of the Port Arthur of the 1920s where the events which inspired the film took place. Twelve-year-old Ian Reid of Sherbrooke has been cast as the young Sammy Roddan while veteran Halifax actor John Dunsworth plays the Rev. Roddan, his father. Meanwhile the real Sam Roddan is playing McGruffy, the local milkman.

"And cut," comes Houston's voice, "Thank you very much everyone. That was excellent. We'll now be moving over to the Perelli's Store

for the next scene." Art director Ernie Tomlinson and assistant Denise LeBlanc scramble to adjust and put into place the various props and articles which must convincingly transport 1890s Sherbrooke to the 1920s. Costume designer Sheilagh Hunt and assistant Pat Walton flip through Polaroids and continuity notes before running to change socks and bowties on various actors.

The production sails smoothly along. Although weather, some technical problems and the necessity of working slowly with the two 12-year-old leads who have no prior acting experience slow down the filming somewhat and cause the six-day shoot to spill over into seven, the production sails along on a remarkably steady tack. It was not always so. Early on in the development a three-way quarrel broke out between original screenwriter Kent Stetson, producer Luciano Lisi and the CBC who wanted changes in the script that Stetson found unacceptable. An impasse ensued and finally Stetson stepped out to be replaced by Tony Foster. Sam Roddan is philosophical about the changes to the story which he now feels has more of a hopeful tone and a sense of resurrection - "Almost like Easter!" he says with a chuckle and a gleam of his ever-sparkling eye.

This is director Herménégilde Chiasson's first English-language drama. He is well known to Atlantic audiences for his films *Toutes les Photos Finissent par se Ressembler*, *Cap Lumière* and *Le Grand Jack*. Last month, the *Atlantic Festival Atlantique* showcased his most recent film *Madame Latour*, a dramatic feature about one woman's struggle to regain political control of the new colony of L'Acadie. Crew members who worked with him on that shoot say that he is gradually finding his directorial voice and exerting his vision more effectively on *The Bell Ringers*.

Toronto actress Janice Nutter, fresh from a successful season at P. E. I.'s King's Theatre, arrives one morning at 4:30 am, works fiendishly all day and departs at 11:00 pm to catch a morning plane for T. O. Amazingly she looks bright and untired throughout the entire experience.

Snapshots of activity: Joyce Nicholson

Director Herménégilde Chiasson rehearses a boxing sequence with Melvin Sangster (referee), Daryl 'Pee Wee' Flint (Crusher Carstairs) and Ed MacLeod

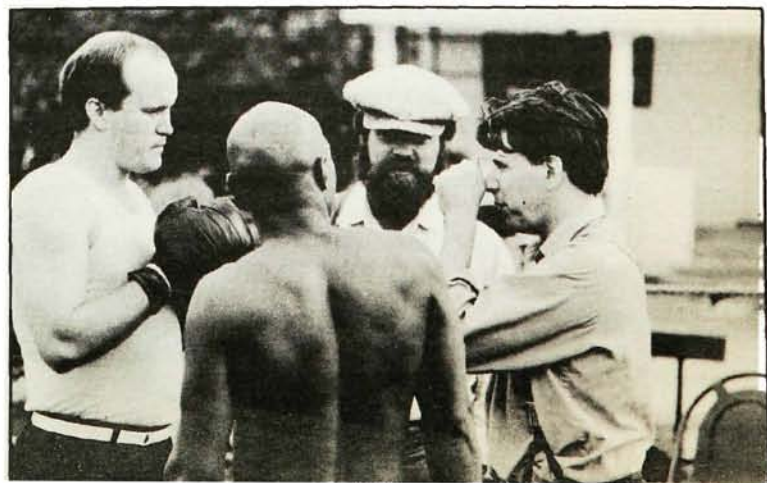


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