Divided Loyalties

Divided Loyalties is an epic historical drama, but using a "little artistic licence" to make the earlier colonial days come alive in an interesting and entertaining fashion.

Director Vic Sarin says that "period films always work," and he should know, having worked on Bye By Blue, Batuerr (2nd Unit DOP), Chiril Grant's War and Choctaw Girl. Vic is hoping that his latest documentary, Safety Journey will be screened at this year's Festival of Festivals in Toronto. "I used a lot of my own money on it."

Divided Loyalties is an epic historical drama with a shooting schedule of 31 working days, and a large cast of 34 principals, 34 secondary actors and around 200 extras. The crew work in fallible harmony, moving quickly and neatly about the business of filmmaking, and sometimes lightening the labour with a little bit of clowning. About 25 extras shelter from the sun under a blue tarpaulin in the holding area. They mixed bag of wedding guests, the men in breeches and hose, and knee-length cloth coats; and the women in charmingly voluminous petticoats, lawn and lace, straw hats perched on their coiled hair, suitably tilted at the back to display ribbons and lace.

A quartet of British officers is dressed to the hilt (and perspiring) in white breeches, top boots, red coats, wigs, and tricorn hats. Two of the officers, Arne Ljungholm and Sven Busch, are friends of mine, and they gleefully inform me that there's not a Brit among them -- they are Swedish and German, and the other two, Macedonian and US-Canadian! A couple of chiefs from the Six Nations are among the extras. The native men wear breeches and light leather shirts; some have headdresses, while others clasp blankets around themselves. The women are dressed in loose, colourful dresses with bead decoration that click musically as they move about.

A vaguely familiar figure in T-shirt and shorts wanders into view, sits down, and says "Hi, I'm John Kim Bell." The well-known pianist/condutor is composing an original score for the film. Though he will wait to see a rough cut before starting to work, he's here today because of a sequence containing a reel for which he wants to get the tempo. Gazing over the organized chaos, he says: "Even this somehow spoils the illusion."

During the hot wait, Tantoo Cardinal (Loynities), who plays Joseph Brant's sister, Molly, is coralled under some trees and interviewed for a documentary on the making of Divided Loyalties. Director Azzopardi is deep in discussion with DOP Vic Sarin, and cold drinks circulate, and then rays of watermelon slices -- everyone happily dips the seeds in all directions.

The camera track has been relaid with a minimum of fuss, lights are in place, and the wedding reception tent in front of Sir William's house is filled with extras and principals. Joseph Brant sits with his family -- Jack Langedijk, the actor/director portraying him does, I am told, bear an uncannily resemblance to the real Brant. It's a great show with everyone assembled at tables with white clothes, glistening silver, and an assortment of foods. There's a lot of colour, including the bright Scottish kilts and plaids, the four British officers in red coats in the background, and two footmen in green velvet livery and white gloves hovering around.

Now a reversal: the champagne cork pops to show and applaus from the assembly: a footman brings in the cake; Chris Wiggins as Sir William bellows, "All right you rogues", and proceeds to toast the bride Lady Mary and, as an afterthought, his son. Then there are several takes - the footman is nervous and has problems bringing in the large square of wedding cake decorated with cherries and friends of fern. "Let's go, let's go," shouts Azzopardi as Vic Sarin's assistant picks up the cake and demonstrates exactly where to set it down. The sound man is harrased by passenger jets drone overhead at all the wrong moments.

It's really sweaty in the tent with the sun high in the sky, and Vic Sarin finally tosses out while the crew set up for close-ups inside. So take off for a short jeep tour with publicist Bill Vigars to check out sets designed by Gerry Holmes. There's a replica of Fort Stanwix (which was in upstate New York, just outside Syracuse) built to scale in lumber -- one part of it in stone double as Fort Niagara -- plus Brant's little house surrounded by a planting of corn, which is growing nicely. Interiors have been built on Toronto International Studios sound stages. As I check out with the Production office, in the hallway by the exit, a costumed extra is on the pay phone, "We've been doing a wedding reception in a sort of tent, and I think there's a good left profile of me... Ahh, the magic of the movies!"

Pat Thompson