

Beryl Fox

with a cameo appearance by

Claude Jutra

by Penelope Hynam

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1931, Beryl Fox spent her childhood in Flin Flon. She later studied history at the University of Toronto, and joined the CBC in 1961 where she started her film career as a script assistant in the Sports Department, working with Fred Scambatti. Working her way up through the ranks she became a producer/director of public affairs, and joined the team that produced the acclaimed program *This Hour Has Seven Days*, working with Douglas Leiterman and Patrick Watson, among others. In the following years she was to produce many programs on her own, and with Douglas Leiterman.

In 1965 she made journalistic history as the first woman to film the Vietnamese war first-hand; the subsequent documentary on her experiences *Mills of the Gods*, won her several awards, including a Wilderness Award, and the George Polk Memorial Award for journalism in the U.S.

Following the demise of *Seven Days* she worked at CBS in New York, and then joined Philip Hobel and Douglas Leiterman at Hobel-Leiterman Productions Ltd. She co-produced the long-running television series *Here Come the Seventies*.

In the late '60s Fox married Leiterman. They have one daughter - Leiterman having four from a previous marriage. They bought a farm in the Ontario countryside where Fox could indulge her love of horses and set up a riding school. She continued to work with Hobel-Leiterman, and to freelance, producing programs at the Ontario Education Communications Authority (OECA) and for the National Film Board. In 1976 she became Director of Program Development for the Ontario Region of the National Film Board.

Fox turned to feature film production in 1976 when she bought the movie rights to Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, which had previously been optioned in the U.S. After years of hard work and financial negotiations it finally went before the cameras in 1979, starring Americans Kathleen Beller and Joseph Bottoms, and Canadians Margaret Dragu and R.H. Thompson. Originally, Eric Till had been contracted to direct, but when he opted out of the project at the last minute, Fox persuaded Claude Jutra to direct his first feature film in English Canada.

Their collaboration continued with *By Design*, the feature produced by Fox and directed by Jutra in Vancouver in the fall of 1980, and now in post-production.

Fox was interviewed in her Toronto office where she had recently returned from distribution dealings in Los Angeles. Claude Jutra dropped in during the interview.

Cinema Canada: Tell me about the project which is closest to your heart right now, *By Design*. What is the story about?

Penelope Hynam worked at the CBC for 12 years. She is presently a free-lance writer with a strong involvement in film. She has worked, primarily as a script supervisor, on over 15 Canadian features.

child because they are two single women living together. Then they consider artificial insemination, and just as they steel themselves to go in, a drunk comes staggering out, so they decide, well, how do they know they're not mixing up the bottles? Then they decide they are going to go and look for a man, so they go to discos and they check out waiters, and they look at construction people, and they look at bankers, but everybody's found wanting.

Finally, they decide they are going for their own fashion photographer, Terry. He is young, sort of a very jock little guy played by Saul Rubinek, who is forever putting his hands on the models; he's always out to score and his secret hobby is photographing single, perfect breasts which he makes into a mural in his bedroom... They approach him. And he, after first being insulted at being used as a sex object, decides he'll go along with it because secretly he has been in love with Helen all along. Unknown to him, Helen is lesbian, in love with Angie, and Angie swings both ways.

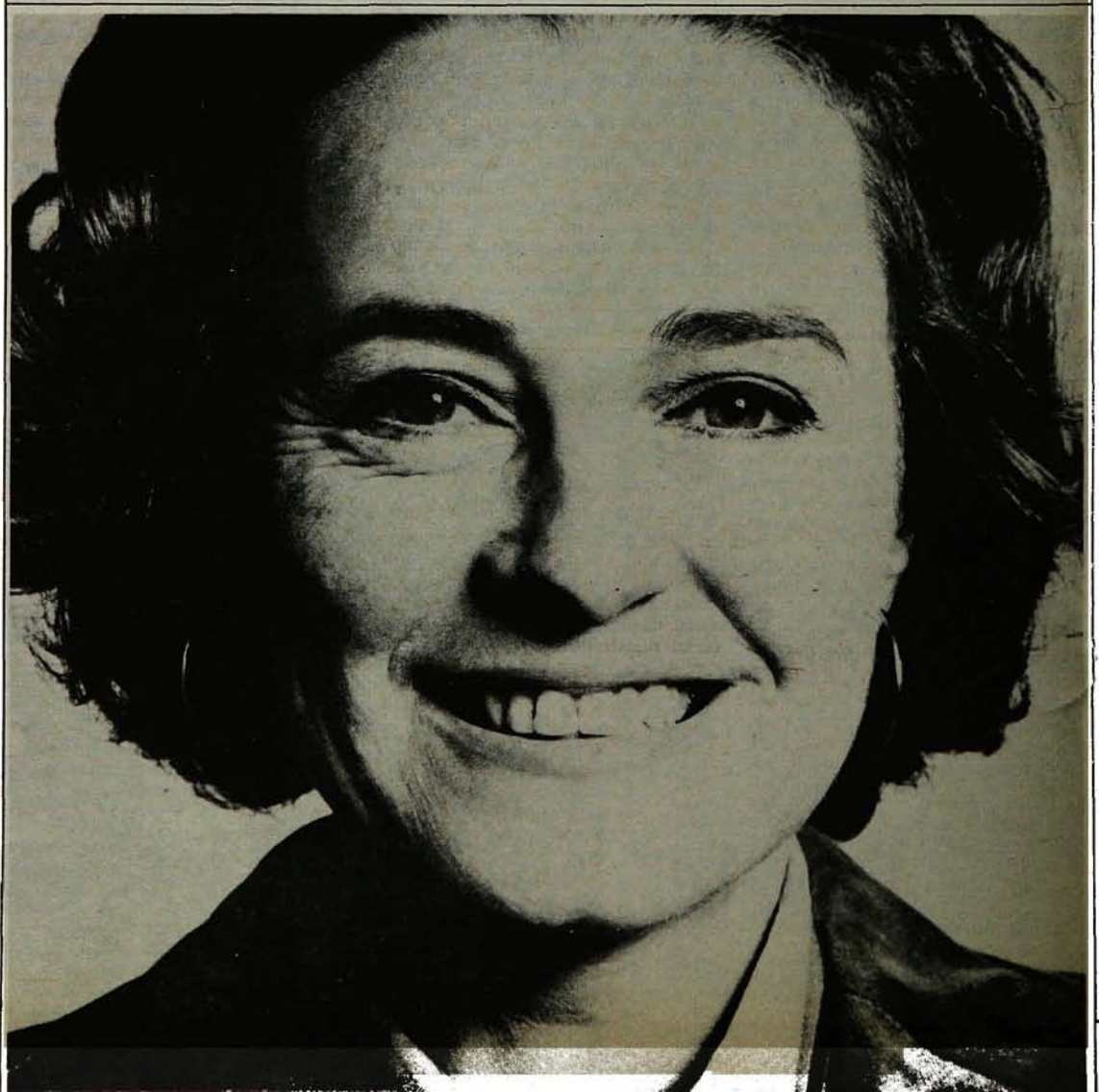
So you get this little sexual triangle... They decide they are going to go and impregnate Helen, and they get drunk

and they have a big evening in a fancy restaurant. On the way up to Terry's apartment Helen is very nervous and very upset, and Angie is feeling isolated and a little jealous. She ends up getting separated from them and picking up a young kid, and they get drunk together. Angie and this young kid go to bed, and Helen and Terry go to bed. Both women end up pregnant. Helen's baby dies - this being a *serious* comedy - but Angie's baby, which was conceived the same night, lives. So they end up sharing the baby, they both breastfeed the baby, and Terry goes off to Los Angeles, opens a boutique, and everyone lives happily ever after... It's a very nice little film, very contemporary.

Cinema Canada: Where did the script come from, who wrote it?

Beryl Fox: The idea originated in Vancouver with the co-producer Werner Aellen. I forget the name of the man who first brought it to him. It was first drafted, I think, as a kind of soft-core porn. Then Werner got hold of it and he saw something, and took it to Claude Jutra. Claude looked at it, and he also saw something in it. So he flew out

● Award-winning producer Beryl Fox, once named Canada's Television Woman of the Year



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"For us women who are now producing, whether it's me or Maxine Samuels or Renee Perlmutter or Elsa Franklin... all of us who are in the industry — from whatever position we're at— we really have to make sure we help other women along. It's not reverse prejudice. It's simply making sure that we get the chance to end-run the blocks..."

to Vancouver and sat down with the writer, Joe Wiesenfeld, who is, I think, very well known as a playwright in Canada. They drafted a script which was basically the script we have now. Nothing really happened with it for about three years, and when I first went to Claude to do *Surfacing* he turned me down because he was involved with *By Design*. He'd decided that that was the next film he was going to do. He really cared for it. He turned down all the projects that came his way...

Well, I finally talked to Ralph Zimmerman who is Claude's agent, and Ralph talked Claude into doing *Surfacing* on the basis that I would produce *By Design*; so even though I wasn't really ready to produce another one... I had an obligation to Claude — and I liked the script and the whole idea as much as he did. For me, it was in a sense a political film because it had two strong, women protagonists. And even though they were lesbian, I think the acceptance of sexual choices is something which women are entitled to. If we can get people to care about two lesbians, that is making a stride forward...

When we went out to sell it, you can't imagine the trouble we had. People looked at the script and they said, that's not funny. They were looking for gag lines, and Jutra's sense of comedy is very special, it's almost European: it's more *Cage Aux Folles*. So people looked at it and they wouldn't buy it. Even the CFDC turned it down when they first looked at it. They even turned it down a second time. They weren't sure that Claude could direct a comedy.

A lot of the investors I went to said "Jutra's a brilliant filmmaker, but can he direct an English-language comedy?" Most of the money people are looking for safe formulas. And this is definitely not a formula film. It's an original film from an original Canadian screen-writer with one of the best directors in Canada, and it is a brand new topic... a topic that's a little dangerous; so I would go around and say, "Look, *Cage aux Folles* made \$40 million one year and \$50 million the next year, and this is the same genre. Furthermore, Liv Ullman is doing a lesbian film, the time is right, and if we can capture it, we can make money on this." Well, nobody really believed that... and I didn't have *Surfacing* in distribution, so there were lots of problems getting it launched.

Cinema Canada: When you tried to launch *Surfacing* you also had incredible problems, didn't you? You had to mortgage your house and farm?

Beryl Fox: Well, we did that again on *By Design*. It wasn't any easier — partially because of the subject, partially because the script was not a Hollywood-type script. Everything was in Claude's head and he knew exactly what he wanted to do with it. The best thing that we, as producers, did was to give him what he needed. Almost. I mean we started out promising him 10 weeks, then we cut it down to six weeks, and eventually he cut it and we did it in five weeks. But basically what he asked for, he got, the performers he asked for he got. And the

nice thing is that all the performers are really first rate. Even the secondary performers. All the performances are so good that you never lose the sense of believability in the film. One of the things that American films have is that secondary performers are as good as their leads, and that's one thing *By Design* has.

Cinema Canada: Did you feel you took a great risk in casting a Canadian "unknown" — starring Sara Botsford opposite Patty Duke Astin?

Beryl Fox: Yes... Sara came to me when I was casting *Surfacing* and I thought she's terrific, she's marvelous, she has a strong character and she's very contemporary and quite beautiful. And very straightforward, very honest. But I couldn't use her for *Surfacing*. Then, when we came to casting *By Design* and she auditioned for one of the lesser parts I remembered her and said, that'll be it. And Saul too... We were basically looking for a young Elliott Gould. And because it was a low-budget film we thought, we have to have one American for international sales; so we were thinking of getting the American to play the male lead and we had been looking in Hollywood.

As we got closer to production I talked again with Ralph and he reminded me that Saul was about to go into a \$9 million major American feature, so we thought, well, we can use him — aside from the fact that Saul is a brilliant actor! I wasn't aware of his comic strength, I'd only seen him in serious drama; but the guy is a brilliant comic. His timing and the honesty of his performance, his ability, without saying a word, to go from pathos to comedy, just facial registration, it's all there. And Claude got it from him.

Cinema Canada: To return to *Surfacing* for a moment, have you got Canadian distribution yet?

Beryl Fox: No, I don't have Canadian distribution. I'm working on Canadian and American distribution right now. I've just come back from Los Angeles where I screened for a number of people. Some liked it, some didn't... Most of them liked it. I'm now getting quite a few offers back from people to carry foreign distribution. I was going with ICM for domestic and foreign — that is, domestic U.S. and foreign — but we have parted ways because I wasn't at all

happy with what they were doing for us, and also they had changed administration. So I left ICM and am now in the process of making deals with a foreign sub-contractor and also domestic sales. So that's in the works right now.

Cinema Canada: Originally, you had planned to direct *Surfacing* and then you decided not to and went into producing. Why the change?

Beryl Fox: No one would let me direct it. I couldn't raise the money...

Cinema Canada: There was no way of breaking the barrier?

Beryl Fox: I didn't know how. There were people who were willing to produce it but not with me as director... I had to raise the money myself and in trying to raise the money I realized that there was no way I could raise it with myself as director. Now there are lots of other situations where male first-time directors get a crack. There are very few of them in Canada, but more in the States now. Very few in Canada...

In relation to this, one thing I want to say to women is: work together. Don't separate yourselves. Create a network and help each other. For us women who are now producing, whether it's me or Maxine Samuels or Renee Perlmutter or Elsa Franklin... all of us who are in the industry — from whatever position we're at — we really have to make sure that we help other women along. It's not reverse prejudice. It's simply making sure that we get the chance to end-run the blocks that are there. Like the fact that there are no women, very few women as first or second A.D.'s, except in Quebec where they are terrific. Women are now locked into certain positions. For some women who have become producers there are incredible blocks to finding money, partially because of the old-fashioned thoughts that women can't handle large sums of money. I hit that when I went across the country looking for money. In Winnipeg, which is my home ground, my old friends — kids I went to public school, or high school with — who are now millionaires, still have this nice old-fashioned idea that they don't really trust women with \$3 million or with units of \$50,000, which I was going after. So what I'm saying is, when anybody phones me who is a woman, those are the first calls I give back. If I can't help them then I try to make sure that they get the extra little attentions so that they don't lose hope or their morales don't zoom; or that somehow or other if I can't do anything with their script that I at least give them the benefit of my thinking or how to deal. You know, I've gone through so many ups and downs... I mean people have loved me, have hated me, I can't get in the door, no one will answer my phone calls, or I'm splattered across the press and I'm a hero. All that is horseshit. You just have to keep your eye on what you're going after.

Cinema Canada: How did you deal with those barriers?

Beryl Fox: I cried. I went home and cried.

Cinema Canada: But when you were in their offices, when you were talking to people, about raising money and about the scripts...

Beryl Fox: Well, you've got to separate them up. Because raising money is a very special skill. If you want to be a producer with the kind of power which producers have, then you've got to be able to handle the finances. That's a skill that women have, but are often unaware of. I have pointed out to a lot of women that I know how good they are, how cunning they are, what good little businesswomen they are. I got my business training in my mother's grocery store, and there are a lot of women who have been handling their own finances for a long time but are not used to dealing in large sums and they are scared shitless. When you think of \$4 million you think it's a lot of money, but when you think of \$2 million or half-a-million, it's also a lot of money but the same principles apply...

The financial world is really a male club. But there are a lot of women in there now and the networks which are starting to come about are very important. One of the things I plan to do this

Filmography BERYL FOX producer director screenwriter

- 1980 *By Design* (Feature) p.
- 1979 *Surfacing* (Feature) p. *Black History* (NFB) p. *Bateman* (NFB) p. *Rose's House* (NFB) p. *Dr. Women* (NFB) p. *Filmcraft* (NFB) p. *Hot Wheels* (NFB) p.
- 1976 *Heavy Horse Pull* (NFB) p.
- 1975 *Take My Hand* (CAS) d./sc. *How to Fight With Your Wife* (CBC/vtr) d. *The Visible Woman* (FWTAO) d./p.
- 1974 *Target the Impossible: Man into Superman* (CTV) d./sc. *Wild Refuge* (Hobel-Leiterman Ltd.) d./sc.
- 1973 *Toward the Year 2000: Jerusalem: Habitat 2000* (CTV) d./sc. *Travel & Leisure* (Hobel-Leiterman Ltd.) d. *Walrus* (OECA) p.

Beryl Fox also produced, directed and/or wrote numerous films for CTV, CBS and CBC from 1963 to 1970 — a list too extensive to include here.

year is start a network, a women's network, in film... In film I think it's especially important...

Right now I don't think there are very many women first A.D.'s in Canada. It's a perfect role for women. But you can't get to be a first until you're a third. Try and hire a third A.D. that's a woman. Tremendous blocks. So you've got to shove in trainees... Take for instance one of the things we did on *By Design*: there's a

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friend of mine – a woman named Gail Singer, she's a fine filmmaker – who came to me and asked if she could be a trainee with Claude to learn about drama, and I thought it was a great idea. That's something that's done all the time in the U.S.; they even credit them... When I was at the Film Board I talked the Board into sending two trainees down to work with Norman Jewison on *FIST* and that was excellent for both of them. So I thought we should do it, especially on *By Design*... So Gail went to the CFDC and I backed her. And the CFDC paid for her to go. They were a little reluctant. But somebody's got to stick their neck out and push. So Gail came on the set. It was a tremendous experience for her. And she was so important to it that people missed her when she wasn't there, and Claude missed her when she wasn't there. That kind of thing has got to be put into place. And what I'd like to sug-

You know, I've gone through so many ups and downs... I mean people have loved me, have hated me, I can't get in the door, no one will answer my phone calls, or I'm splattered across the press and I'm a hero. All that is horseshit. You just have to keep your eye on what you're going after.

gest is that we lean on the unions, because a Catch-22 exists at the unions. You can't get in until you have a certain amount of work in a certain position. But you can't get on a film unless you have a union card. This nicely blocks women. So I think what we have to do is, maybe with the help of the CFDC or whomever (or if we don't get the help of anybody else we do it ourselves) ...bang on the doors of the unions until they put women trainees in place so that they can get more into the technical side of feature filmmaking.

(Enter Claude Jutra, director of Surfacing and By Design, who drops in unexpectedly during this interview and stays to take part in the discussion):

Cinema Canada: Claude, Beryl and I have talked about the story of *By Design*. Why is this project so close to your heart, why is the story so close to you?
Claude Jutra: It's like when you fall in love, you know, is it the colour of the skin or is it the... I don't know... I just fell in love with the project. I thought it was

unusual, very original; it's a subject matter that's very rarely treated. There have been for a few years films treating male homosexuality but women very seldom, and whenever it's done it's so heavy-handed or it's always freaky. It was a subject in the air that had never been treated adequately.

When I first got acquainted with the project it was not at all what it is now, but I went to Vancouver, met the author of the first draft and I was really excited when I read that script... I wasn't really enthusiastic about it until I heard that that was the first draft and the people involved, the writer and the producer, did not want to go any further until there was a director of the project; they wanted to work along with the director. So that was really the first opening of the possibilities for me. I went there and met Joe Wiesenfeld, who indeed is a fine writer and a very good guy, and in 10 days we wrote together practically a new script. And from then on I was hooked. Because we had this thing dealing with a very hot contemporary social problem – quote unquote – and it was treated in depth, but lightly, with a sense of humour; and it is material where everybody is nice. There are lots of conflicts and everybody has problems of all sorts, but nobody is evil... The people in the film are just trying to tackle a situation which is there, which exists, but there's no bastard.

Cinema Canada: Surfacing was the first theatrical feature film that you made in English-Canada?

Claude Jutra: Feature Film, yes.

Cinema Canada: Did you find the attitudes of the English-Canadian crews to be different from the French-Canadian crews? Less or more involved with the project?

Claude Jutra: Well, there are differences but, how can you say... French Canadians express themselves a lot more about the film, and what's going on. If they don't like it they just insult it. But then if they really like it, they show enthusiasm. The English are more reserved and well, one typical example is guys you go to the pub with, you go to the parties with, you know intimately, as soon as you are on the set they call you "Sir" – that was one thing I had difficulty with, that startled me. Every time I hear that "Excuse me, sir"... you know the French Canadians would never say that, would never adopt an attitude like that.

Cinema Canada: You two have made two movies together, that's equivalent to living through a lifetime! What kind of producer/director relationship have you developed?

Beryl Fox: I'll give you an example. (to Claude) Do you remember when we were sitting in the Underground Café? It was in the early days when we were trying to get *By Design* going and, believe me, it was very difficult. Remember, when you first told me the story and you got to the part where the baby died, and we both cried...
Claude Jutra: Oh, yeah, yeah... true.

Beryl Fox: And then I was deeply in debt for a while with *Surfacing*, and we had no money, and Claude put up his own money to go here, to go there: at one time we flew down to Los Angeles to try to get Genevieve Bujold to star, to play the lead, and for a while we were living off Claude's money.

Claude Jutra: That was a very close relationship. I stayed at Beryl's home for a long time. Slept off the kitchen because we had no money for a hotel.

Cinema Canada: Were there any times when you thought this is impossible, it'll never work, and you were about to give up?

Beryl Fox: Oh, never to give up. There were lots of times when he walked in here and I was crying. He'd just say, "It's gonna be OK, it's gonna be OK." Then I'd come to his place and he'd have his head in his hands and I'd say, "It's gonna be OK, it's gonna be OK."...

Cinema Canada: As a producer, did you exercise a lot of control? And did you find that a lot of control was exercised over you by your executive producers?

Beryl Fox: Well... we had co-producers on *By Design*. Co-producers like Werner Aellen of Vancouver; it was originally Werner's idea. Werner brought it to Claude and got the first financing to develop the project, and basically Werner and I worked together at both ends of the country. In terms of control on this one I think that the best thing that Werner and I did as producers was to try and give Claude everything he needed. It was not a matter of telling him what he could or could not do, but it was a matter of collaboration, and Claude was involved in all the early deals. He fought at the CFDC... You want to tell about some of the CFDC meetings?

Claude Jutra: Not really. I'd rather not remember.

Beryl Fox: There were some very difficult meetings. In the end the CFDC would not back this film without a personal guarantee from me and Werner – personally guaranteeing the \$250,000 which was their money. So that again Werner had to mortgage his restaurant and I had to mortgage the house! In the end, because it was difficult to find interim funds, bridging funds, it was Doug Leiterman who saved our skins at least twice... By mortgaging the farm this time, we all put up everything we could. Claude worked for a year unpaid. All the producers, of course, worked unpaid, but that's taken for granted... So really, financially, creatively, and in every way it was an incredibly positive team effort.

Cinema Canada: It sounds like dedication is the word... And if you don't have a script or a property that you consider to be the absolute best, then it's probably very hard to generate that kind of enthusiasm.

Beryl Fox: Everybody knew the problems, we all knew that we could be the next *Pure Escape* in terms of bankruptcy, but we hung in and nobody would let go. I think even the crew was

ready-to work with us unpaid to make this film... We were into shooting already when people were saying "I hear you're not going to finish"... The attitude was that *By Design* was just not commercial. And now I think we're going to prove them wrong, because now we are getting calls from the majors and everybody wants to see it. Everybody hears it's a winner.

Cinema Canada: The financial climate is getting worse, based on the statistics coming out at the end of 1980.

Beryl Fox: OK, well that's another thing; everybody was busy making high budget films – 6,7,8 million dollar films. We budgeted this film very very tight at about \$3.3 million. We promised Claude 10 weeks, he ended up getting five. After we budgeted at \$3.3 I cut it down arbitrarily to \$2.8 million because we wanted to be sure that we could sell out. And because we were down to \$2.8 million we were one of the few who actually sold out and paid back all our interim financiers. Not only that but, you know, we spent months going to the brokers asking them to help us sell. They all turned us down. And in the end it was a saving, in the end each one of us individually had to get out and sell. We had to do it all ourselves, that's the only thing that saved us. Because if the brokers had to sell for us, we would still be waiting for them...

Cinema Canada: It seems then that the moral of that story is that we are probably trying to produce movies that are overbudgeted.

Beryl Fox: Well, I don't say that. It all depends on the film. The important point of this film was that, because nobody would help us we did it ourselves, and in the end, that's why we sold out, that's why we made our money. We weren't relying on somebody else to do it for us.

Cinema Canada: The situation with Canadian films seems very shaky right now...

Claude Jutra: Well, one of the main problems is that nobody really cares what film they are making. They have no respect for their product and they look for formulas; they take the more obvious ones and they just write and shoot according to those rules. And they have no respect for what they are doing. You can feel that, you know, physically. You can read it on people's faces. There were a couple of films that were made in Vancouver, people staying at our hotel. You could read it in their faces. They didn't give a shit. All they talked about was schedule, money, expenses, whatever. I'm sure there are exceptions, or partial exceptions, and certainly this film was a total exception because everyone was so involved in it, every member of the crew... They loved the characters, they loved the situation, and at the end of takes people would clap, would laugh, would go on talking about the things we'd shot, how good it was and talking about the performers, talking about the situations.

Beryl Fox: Yes. One thing about *By*

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Design was that all those involved were basically involved as filmmakers. The producers are all filmmakers. We were not in it to make large funds which we would take off the top. In fact, all of us, including Claude, put all our fees into standby positions so that if we didn't sell out we would own a piece of the film.

Cinema Canada: So what do you see as the answers to the larger problems of where we're going in Canadian film?

Claude Jutra: I don't give a shit...

Cinema Canada: You just want to make your own films...

Claude Jutra: Well, I'm not that selfish, but first of all, personally, if I'm involved in a community problem it's in Quebec, and in Quebec the problem is much more real. Most of the Quebec filmmakers that I know are film lovers, and hardly any have this attitude that most Canadians, English-Canadians, have of turning this into an exclusively industrial endeavour. We don't do it like that, and we have other problems besides, political problems. So if I'm involved in a cause it's in the cause of the Quebec cinema. I have a few friends in English-Canadian cinema and they are very close to me, to my heart. People like Beryl, and Ralph Thomas, for example, and a lot of people, artisans, craftsmen that I've worked with, but I don't think that the Canadian cinema has a cause and I don't think that any cause is being fought at the CFDC, or at the unions, or at the Canadian film associations.

Cinema Canada: What about you Beryl? If an industry doesn't have a cause does that mean it's not going to exist, not going to survive?

Beryl Fox: I don't have any grand answers because I'm aware of how complex it is. Making a film is one thing but selling the film is another thing, and the selling of the film is where it's at. Last year there was this expression in the industry - because the industry and money is getting tighter - that "we're going to separate the men from the boys." And as a woman I say fuck that. It's time to give it to the filmmakers. Never mind the men and the boys and the accountants. Give it to the filmmakers and let the industry support the filmmakers, let the CFDC support the filmmakers.

The question of whether we should go for big-budget or low-budget films, I represent the low-budget film side. I'm also aware of the fact that, with the hammerlock the unions have on the industry, there's no way you can make films under \$2 million. So I'm suggesting that what has to happen is that the unions, and the producers associations, which are incredibly important because they spearhead the industry, should work together. We have to show a profit on the films otherwise the money will dry up. But you can show a profit on a good little film. You just have to work harder... you have to be willing to take less money up front, you have to give more commitment to the film and less to your own personal profit. The dif-



● Come hell or high water, fast friends Claude Jutra and Beryl Fox mean business

ference between this office and the glamorous offices of the Canadian film moguls (most of whom are my friends) represents that I, that we, are in it for the film.

Cinema Canada: What about the Capital Cost Allowance? If that is removed do you think that Canadian film will survive it?

Beryl Fox: It depends on what you're talking about. If you're talking about the industry I don't want to make any grand pronouncement. If you're talking about whether I'll survive, sure I'll survive because I'm a filmmaker and that's all I do. If I can't find the money to make a \$3 million film, I'll do a \$500,000 film. But there's nothing to say that low-budget films can't be as good. When we took *Surfacing* down to the U.S. everybody assumed it was a \$5 million film. It's a \$2 million film and it was well done...

If it's a low-budget film more people of talent will get a chance. You don't have to go with the guys with the gross box office track record, you give other people a chance who are good filmmakers. For instance, when I said we have Claude Jutra to direct - to me

Claude is the premier filmmaker in Canada - they said OK but what have his films grossed at the box office? You know, "show me the pro forma, show me the balance sheet." That's not the way you judge a filmmaker... I hope that *By Design* will make people aware that a film which is authentically Canadian and original can sell because it's going to be a winner, it's going to make a lot of money. And it's going to make money for the investors and those investors will be there when the Capital Cost Allowance is not.

Cinema Canada: To move into another area completely... you started at the CBC, didn't you, on "This Hour Has Seven Days"?

Beryl Fox: Actually I started as a script assistant at the CBC in sports with Fred Scambatti.

Cinema Canada: And then you worked your way up to producer/director. You have always been a producer and director of documentaries, so this is a whole new area for you, that of fiction film, dramatic film?

Beryl Fox: Yes.

Cinema Canada: What made you switch, was it just a natural progression?

Beryl Fox: I found that you could no longer stay in television, you no longer had the freedom on television that you have in pictures. And moving the one-ton pencil of the television bureaucracy is very difficult and very often impossible. I still believe in television. As a delivery system, nothing compares.

Cinema Canada: But you feel that it is a limiting factor now.

Beryl Fox: Yes. Well, nobody would let me direct a television drama - what you get for drama - nobody would hire me. You know, after being the "pet" of the CBC for many years, nobody would hire me because I was too old, I was 42, 43, and they had training courses for young drama directors, but I could not get in.

Cinema Canada: The statistics there for beginning directors are very depressing when you think that the CBC is still the main area where almost anyone in this country interested in drama can get a chance to start...

Beryl Fox: How many women do they hire for drama? How many women do they put in their director training courses?... Women aren't getting anywhere. When I started there as a documentary producer no women were in there either. We had to fight our way in, we had to prove that we could do it by starting as script assistants and taking over when the directors were drunk.

Cinema Canada: When you're finished with *By Design* where will you go from there?

Beryl Fox: Well, one thing I want to do is make films without murder and mayhem, without women as the victims or sex pots... On the other hand, I'm the one who insisted that we had all the sex in *By Design*!

Cinema Canada: I also heard a story about the tits in *Surfacing*, that you and your editor were at loggerheads over a very amply-endowed leading lady, and that you felt that you needed those tits, needed that sort of exposure in order to sell the film...

Beryl Fox: Well, yeah, I feel that it depends how you use it. There are more tits in *By Design* than in *Surfacing*, but I feel...

Claude Jutra: Hardly any tits in *By Design*!

Beryl Fox: Are you kidding? There's a wall full of them!

Claude Jutra: Ah, a wallful... but they don't move.

Cinema Canada: (to Jutra) You've never really done anything as deliberately comic as *By Design*, have you?

Claude Jutra: Sure. I would say "The Wordsmith" and "Seer Was Here" were comedies, and there is comedy in all my films.

Cinema Canada: Speaking of "The Wordsmith" and "Seer Was Here"...

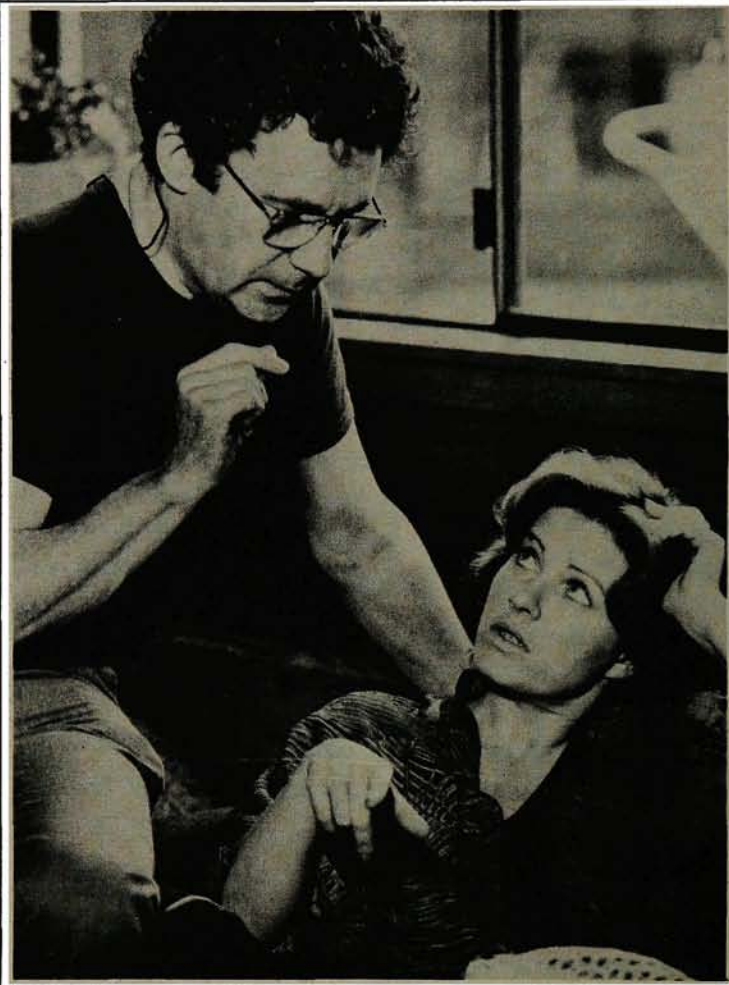
INTERVIEW

For a while you made a switch to television. Why did you do that? Was it for a financial reason?

Claude Jutra: No, no, no, it was just that I had a very very hard time, it was very difficult in Quebec, there was a slump period there in the production, and after *Kamouraska* I waited... I had learned by then that if you want to make a film, you have to stick with it until you make it, or until you decide to give up making it. If you do anything in the meantime it will not work. Projects disappear, so I had waited two years to set up a film called *For Better or For Worse* and finally I made it, but it had a very little audience... In Quebec it's much worse than in Canada, because Quebec is so small and circumscribed... And just imagine, you know, that if you've been two years working on a film and it comes out and Gina Mallett destroys it with one review. Those are things that can very well happen in Quebec and do happen all the time. So at that point I was very discouraged, because the film had had lots of positive response - you know, the potential of the film - and it just came and went. At that point Ralph Thomas [of CBC's "For the Record" series] had been coaxing me for more than a couple of years. So I said OK, I'll go to Toronto and I'll make little TV films and that'll take my mind away from my problems and I'll have a little money on the side. John Hirsch had just arrived, and Ralph Thomas was there and there was Anne Frank, and it was very exciting. And I was discovering the theatre in Toronto... I came up with two little projects, but then *Ada* appeared again so I said, well, why not *Ada*... Immediately after that I got involved and I said OK, now who do I cast? All these women! And I was at Nicholson's Restaurant. Remember Nicholson's downstairs at the Bay Street building of the CBC? I was there, and there was a bunch of 20 people around a huge table, they were all TV people, directors and producers and what-have-you, and I said "Look I'm leaving tonight, late tonight and I have to go see a play or something. I want to cast, I want to meet the Canadian actors." Nobody could suggest a play. Nobody in that room could suggest a play! Isn't that incredible? That says a lot for the English TV community, including Ralph Thomas who was there - I think he's changed since! So then I go to the drugstore and John Hirsch is browsing there at the newsstand and I said "Oh, John, you're the one I need. What is there to see in terms of theatre?" So John started, "Well, first there is the Tarragon Theatre, they're doing this, it's a new play..." and he'd give me the whole cast, and I said, "It's just for tonight, tell me one play to go and see." "Well," he said, "go and see *Passe Muraille*, they're very interesting." I went to see them. And I cast the whole film with the cast of that play, all the cast except Eric Petersen - there was no room for him, but later on I used him.

Cinema Canada: *It seems to me that the films that are about our own experience, that are about our own history, are the films that people are in-*

● Working over a scene, Claude Jutra with leading lady Patty Duke Astin



terested in in this country. I've just seen 14 Canadian films recently at the Academy of Canadian Cinema screenings, and the films that the audiences responded to were films like The Hounds of Notre Dame which was done on a shoestring out west.

Beryl Fox: I want to remind somebody that the CFDC refused to invest in *The Hounds of Notre Dame*. Now the CFDC does not belong to us so we can't really tell them what they have to do. But I know that André [Lamy] is looking for a new approach to filmmaking and I think he's sincere in this. And I also want to say that the first people who gave me any help on *Surfacing* was the CFDC, so they are searching for the right way...

The question of the distribution of those films is the problem that the producers have to wrestle with. But the producers, and I now consider myself a financing producer, have to honour the talent which we have in this country, which is enormous. In terms of filmmaking we have a brilliant background of producing really great films and the filmmakers are there, in French Canada, in Vancouver, in Winnipeg, right across the country. These are not people with track records... We have to look for new

talent - not just use the same people all the time because they have produced commercial films. Then also, we have to look for our own ethos, instead of looking for formula films. And if we find a script which is not ready, but which has something which is real and worth making a film about - not just something which is a copy of a copy - the role of the producers is to move it, to make it a film that people will want to see. It doesn't have to be *Scanners*, it doesn't have to be *Prom Night*, but it has to be a film which has something to give to this country or to the audiences around the world. I think there are people out there who want to see good films.

Part of the problem is the power of the producer to decide what will be done and what will not be done. And I'd say it was a natural growth in the industry that it should go to the business people, the lawyers, the accountants, the stock brokers, but they are not the people who should have the final say as to what will sell, because they don't know... anymore than the people down in Hollywood know what will sell. What they call a "hard sell" is often the most worthwhile film.

Cinema Canada: *Why are the most*

consistently interesting films - both cinematically and in the story - coming out of Quebec and not out of English Canada?

Claude Jutra: Because the people who made those films in Quebec are interested in film. They put their minds and their hearts in their films and not in their bank accounts, or their tax shelters, or all that crap. They are involved.

Beryl Fox: (to Claude...) I should add here that the crew we had in Vancouver was, I think you said, one of the best you've ever worked with, and a lot of those crew turned down larger budget films, films which looked better and more stable going, and they took a chance with us because they were more interested in the film.

Cinema Canada: *Claude, Beryl has said she would keep making films no matter what. I'm sure the same applies to you...*

Claude Jutra: It's been going on for quite a while and I have no intentions to stop. One thing that happened to me in the last few years after *Mon Oncle Antoine* and *Kamouraska* was that I went private and I diversified. I began doing all sorts of things like teaching, and acting and working in English, and I think I would still like to do that. I live in a little hotel [in Toronto] and now what I see through my window is the back of the Adelaide Court and it's very dear to my heart because I played there twice, once in French and once in English, and it's a whole new thing and I'd like to pursue it, to go on diversifying my activities. But certainly the main one will always be filmmaking.

Cinema Canada: *What advice would you give to young directors who are trying to get a foot in the door. How can they survive, what encouragement can you offer?*

Claude Jutra: Don't do anything that you don't like.

Cinema Canada: (to Beryl) *You would agree with that?*

Beryl Fox: Oh, no, because I've done so many things I don't like...

Cinema Canada: *You once said that it wasn't success that counted, it was the doing?*

Beryl Fox: Did I say that?

Cinema Canada: *Yes.*

Beryl Fox: That's lovely.

Cinema Canada: *Then you still believe it...*

Beryl Fox: I believe in taking chances. I have found people in the financial community who go along with that too, but you have to work very hard for it. If I had something to say... well, it's sort of standard around this office that the first three turnovers don't count...

Claude Jutra: But the next nine are very painful!... (laughter).

Beryl Fox: Yes, the next nine are painful - and when it gets to the tenth you should think about an alternate route...

Cinema Canada: *Why are the most* For a report on the By Design shoot, see p. 41



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