

Cross Country Naked, bloody and dead

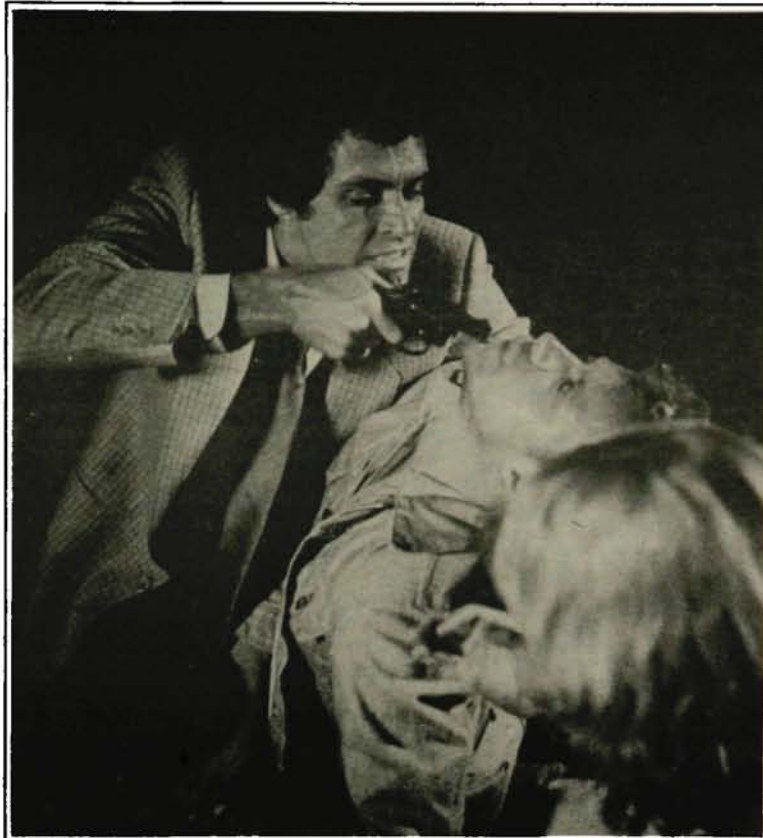
Cross Country is a formula murder mystery that strings all the right clichés in proper order from the moment the waddling black maid discovers her beautiful mistress – naked, dead, and bloody – on her penthouse bed until innocent boyfriend-suspect, epicurean Philadelphia ad-man Evan Bley, and blonde siren Lois Hayes (secretly the psychotic lesbian killer) hurl themselves, bodies entwined, into the Grand Canyon. There it is in a nutshell.

And make no mistake, this a nutshell movie, a tidy package ribbon-bound in a United Artists negative pick-up. Paul Lynch, has his APC/SNC crew working Parisian days (noon to 7:30 p.m. non-stop with a running buffet), averaging 14 or 15 story-boarded set-ups. Filmline producer, Pieter Kroonenburg, is on set throughout to see that the no-name actors stand in the light and say exactly the words ordered from Bill Gray, who re-writes John Hunter's original scenes, sometimes mere hours before they're shot. Hours after each day's rushes are screened, editor Nick Rotundo works through the night assembling, timing, pacing, guarding against holes in the story and dropping a timely clue here and there. All goes well.

René Verzier's veteran camera crew set up quickly, and the ease of lighting Kodak's new 250 a.s.a. stock (5293) allows ambitious night shooting with daytime efficacy and great production value. Verzier himself, operating with the new Sachtler head under the Panaflex, has never been finer. Though the casting lacks box-office punch (Richard Beymer, Nina Axelrod, Brent Carver and Michael Ironside), all the hard-working actors suit their roles to a tee and deliver professional, well-measured performances. Beymer starred in *West Side Story* and not much else 20 years ago. He has matured into an attractive California oxygen-eating guy who seems to have lost none of the talent and creativity he displayed before dropping out of the scene. Nina Axelrod, an engaging green-eyed blonde, was a jet-set kid. In her early twenties, she already has a respectable record as a B-movie siren (*Motel Hell*, *Demon Seed*). Toronto's Mike Ironside (*Scanners*, *Visiting Hours*) departs from the maniacal in his portrayal of a tired Philly homicide detective. Carver, better known as a cabaret man (at least until we see *The Wars*), has proved a delight as a high-energy street player.

Lynch and casting director Deidre Bower have assembled a supporting cast of some of Canada's finest workaday actors, notably Michael Kane and August Schellenberg, and Paul Bradley making a comeback without his usual comic baggage.

Interesting to note, there is no TV buy-out in the contracts of the day players who shuttle into Montreal. Combine



● A scene from *Cross Country*

this with U.A.'s hold on publicity, a tight rein on exposed film and a clock-work schedule without overtime, and it seems producers Kroonenburg, David Patterson and Ron Cohen are en route to deliver a tailor-made package wholesale.

Paul Lynch, then, is left the charge of directing the film within specification. To this, he responds as a craftsman. Lynch is a cartoonist expanded up off the paper. He drew the entire film in pre-production, showing the way the bad guy flew over the table when the good guy socked him, and illustrating the shape of the dancers' tits. Now on the studio floor, he looks at his pictures and stares at his sets, then walks to the production manager's desk to let her know what lenses he'll require the next day.

All his best laid plans, of course, go awry as green after blue after pink script revisions arrive with the daily call sheets. Nevertheless, despite all the juggling of actors, sets and scenes, the film has never fallen more than a half-day behind schedule.

The small crew and minimal fleet of unmarked vehicles have worked almost invisibly at various Montreal locations throughout May and June. The cast seldom exceeds three on a given shooting day. Fewer than 300 extras have been booked for the entire seven-week shoot, many of whom barely make it to the donut line in the morning before they're dismissed without ever getting in front of camera. Lynch doesn't like a lot of background action cluttering up his sets.

Montreal has served the story ably, doubling as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Columbus, St. Louis, and even Tucumcari, New Mexico. Production manager Mychele Boudiras and unit manager Carole Mondello have secured a degree

of cooperation from city and provincial authorities that has allowed them to park vehicles and close streets, seemingly with abandon. With cameraman Verzier's preference for shooting with wide apertures and little depth of focus, the proliferation of French signs in the city has proved much less a problem than imagined.

The francophone technicians who crew English-language films in Montreal add wonderful zest to movie-set lingo with such expressions as "Stand by, les gars," and "S'addresser on the plate à cinq heures sharp!"

A reduced unit of key personnel and actors now move to Arizona to round out the filming with four days of "cascades dans le Grand Canyon."

Suzanne Lortie ●

CROSS COUNTRY p.c. Filmline Productions Inc. exec. p. Ronald Cohen, James Beach p. Pieter Kroonenburg, David Patterson d. Paul Lynch scr. John Hunter p. man. Mychele Boudiras 1st a.d. Ray Sager p. sec. Daniele Rohrbach unit man. Carole Mondello 2nd a.d. Mac Bradden script person Brigitte Germain p. design. Michel Proulx set dres. François Seguin props buyer Frances Calder props David Phillips props (apprentice) Christopher Gilmore cost. superv. Paul-André Guerin cost. superv. asst. Laura Drew hair-make-up Tom Booth d.o.p. René Verzier focus puller Denis Gingras 2nd asst. cam. Jean-Jacques Gervais stills Takashi Seida gaffer Jacques Fortier elect. Gilles Fortier key grip Serge Grenier grip (apprentice) Marion Mailhot ed. Patrick Rousseau boom Veronique Gabillaud ed. Nick Rotundo asst. ed. Jean-Marc Magnan cast. dir. Dierdre Bowen cast. (extra) Nadia Rona prod. acc. Susan Lewis prod. asst's Don Riordan, Jean-Pierre Lauréneau, Patrick Clune, Pierre Houle pub. Marc Lalonde, David Novek Associates Lp. Richard Beymer, Nina Axelrod, Brent Carver, Michael Ironside, David Conner, George Sperdakos, Michael Kane, Shea Garner, August Schellenberg, Paul Bradley Jacqueline Williams, Desmond Campbell, Anna Vitre, Pam Colver, Jérôme Thibergien, Robert Spivak, Neil Affleck, Bill Spears, Len Watt, Christiane Pasquier, Sheena Larkin

The Tin Flute/ Bonheur d'occasion Translating the reality

Claude Fournier eats his lunch alone, working out details for the film version of Gabrielle Roy's novel, *The Tin Flute*. Actually, he is directing two feature films, shot simultaneously in both French and English, and a television series consisting of five one-hour episodes to be aired on both the French and English networks of the CBC, all on a budget of \$3.45 million. Not only is Fournier the writer and director, he also does his own camera work. Something he has done in the past with his other features. He does not have time for long lunches.

Mireille Deyglun, who plays Florentine Lacasse in this tale of hard times and hope in the Dirty Thirties, rushes bleary eyed out of her bedroom.

"Personne ne m'a réveille!"

"On a essayé," her brother replies.

"Cut, print," Fournier shouts. "Même chose en anglais."

Claude Fournier is working fast. He is ahead of his 20-week shooting schedule. This is normal for him but less so for the crew from The National Film Board. The NFB is co-producing *The Tin Flute*, supplying \$1.1 million in financing, facilities and crew. Bob Verrall, the executive producer of *The Tin Flute*, acting on the behalf of the English Section of the Film Board, says, "This is a rough and tumble experience for the NFB people, used to the serene and protected environment of the Board." The NFB crew is running with Fournier. "Our people were very skeptical about the schedule," Verrall says. "But, they were impressed with Claude's skill. If he hadn't been up to it, the whole thing would have fallen apart."

Marilyn Lightstone, who plays the beleaguered mother, Rose Anna Lacasse, has also taken out membership in Fournier's fan club. "Everything comes from that guy at the top," she says. "He makes everyone feel loved and important." Lightstone, although nervous at first, feels privileged to work in the French milieu. It is the first time in her professional career that she is reunited with her francophone contemporaries from the National Theatre School. She remembers taking all classes except voice with the French students, one of whom, Michel Forget, plays her husband Azarius Lacasse. At that time, she felt the school was developing a style that was "Uniquely Canadian;" – much like this picture. The bilingual set gets a bit schizophrenic at times, but there's always room for one more. Referring to the actors playing the Lacasse family as "a whole family of schleppers," Lightstone brings a third influence to the culturally crowded set.

Even the man at the helm gets mixed up sometimes. Fournier has admitted that, during the final drafts of the script, when the pressure began to get to him, he would at times forget which language he was supposed to be working on.



● Marilyn Lightstone as Rose Anna

Luckily he has a sympathetic producer in Marie-José Raymond, one who understands both his technical and creative problems, and who has worked with him for years on the script. Fournier and Raymond are partners in life as well as in their production companies, Ciné St-Henri and Rose Films. They have worked together since 1969, when Fournier's first feature film, *Deux femmes en or*, had audiences lined up around the block, breaking all attendance records for a Canadian film.

It was Marie-José Raymond's determination that brought *The Tin Flute* out of the libraries and on to the screen. The novel, published in 1945 in French as "Bonheur d'occasion," by Manitoba-born writer Gabrielle Roy, has been a standard in Canadian classrooms. Raymond loved the novel but Fournier was less enthusiastic. "For the first two years, I was a loner on this project," she says. "Claude thought I was being very intellectual. There he was, doing commercials to support the company and I was hunting down the rights to *The Tin Flute*." It took two years of intense negotiations to repatriate the movie rights from Universal Studios in Los Angeles back to Canada.

With the support of the CBC and the Institut québécois du cinéma, the scripting could now begin. The novel wasn't easy to adapt. The story depicts the despair of life in the working class district of St-Henri in Montreal between the Depression and the outbreak of The Second World War. The characters do a lot of thinking and despairing but not much doing. The treatment took Fournier six months. Raymond remembers that they did an extensive analysis of the mood of the story and of how to translate that mood into action and dialogue. Their aim was to keep the characters as true to the novel as possible.

A detailed synopsis was sent to Vancouver writer, Anne Cameron (*Ticket to Heaven*). She worked on the English draft while Fournier and Raymond worked on the French. A lot of cassettes flew between Montreal and Vancouver. Raymond admits that while the dialogue in the final English draft is mostly

Cameron's, there was a conceptual disagreement between the French and English sides. Fournier and Raymond believe in scripting extensive stage directions, spelling out the setting, the costuming and the emotional subtext almost verbatim from the novel. Cameron believes that providing this sort of detail is not a screenwriter's job and that ultimately, the director must make those decisions. This division according to language at the scripting stage was a harbinger of things to come, and Fournier finally polished both the English and French drafts.

"A Unique Event," is how the press release bills the simultaneous shooting in French and English. "For the first time in the history of Quebec cinema," it goes on to say.

Marie-José Raymond admits, "simultaneous shooting requires a big intellectual rigor from both the director and the actors. But after the first week, they've all taken a liking to it." All except ACTRA, who has filed a grievance against the National Film Board.

The problem is precisely, "The Unique Event", the simultaneous shooting in original French and English versions. Raymond admits the film was difficult to cast. This is because she preferred most actors to be bilingual. "In the English version," she says, "the actors speak English to attain perfect sync but will be revoiced by another actor if they have too much of a French accent." Although all proper nouns will remain French to give it a Québécois flavour, she does not plan to leave any French accents on the English version. "It's difficult enough capturing the attention of an audience, why make life harder by exposing them to five hours of people who don't speak English in an understandable way."

Bob Verrall points out, "it will not be the same as Maurice Chevalier performing in an American movie."

Given the premise that the original English sound track will only be used as a guide track, Ciné St-Henri, the principal producers, contracted the majority of performers under Union des Artistes guidelines. UDA rates are lower than ACTRA rates as the union has not been successful in negotiating a new contract.

Judith Harvey, ACTRA branch repre-

sentative in Montreal says, "Although Marie-José Raymond states she is making a French film with an English guide track, ACTRA has discovered that they are preserving sections of the English dialogue in the case where the actors are totally bilingual. These actors are being asked to work in two films without the benefit of a double contract and the additional remuneration they are entitled to."

ACTRA tried to get together with UDA over this matter with unsuccessful results. ACTRA considers the NFB to be the co-producer of *The Tin Flute*. But is it the primary producer? Guy Gauthier, chief of staff relations at the NFB believes not. "The National Film Board is a co-producer, not the principal producer or the engager. ACTRA is vague about what obligations the co-producers have."

Although Ciné St-Henri, the engager, is not a signatory to the ACTRA/CAMPP CFTA/NFB Independent Production Agreement, the NFB most certainly is. Despite the NFB's stated position as co-producer, ACTRA finds it to be in violation by not requiring the engagement of performers in *The Tin Flute* to be subject to that agreement.

"Any insinuation of some kind of subterfuge on the part of the NFB is incorrect," says Bob Verrall. "The Board was the last to come into the film and by that time the planning had been done and most of the budget secured. Initial meetings between ACTRA, UDA and Ciné St-Henri had occurred without any apparent problems."

Now the problems are very apparent. The protest by ACTRA has gone past the grievance stage. A standing committee consisting of members of CAMPP, CFTA, NFB plus equal members of ACTRA will meet to decide the fate of the 'guide track' issue. An unexpected benefit of "The unique event" is that ACTRA is now negotiating with UDA to deal with the future of double shooting.

The production of *The Tin Flute* is a testimony to the determination of those involved. For Claude Fournier and Marie-José Raymond, *The Tin Flute* marks a departure from the majority of their previous films. Some might term *Deux femmes en or* and *Chien-chaud* exploitation films but Raymond prefers



● Mireille Deyglun as Florentine

to call them, "sexy comedies." Whatever they're called, these films provided the producer and director with the experience necessary to even contemplate such a large scale project on such a small budget.

Bob Verrall is impressed. He refers to Fournier and Raymond as, "Bright young people," and although the French arm of the Film Board refused to touch the project, not wishing to tie up their resources for six months, Verrall went with it. He considers the project a good investment, but his over-riding concern is to bring this uniquely Canadian story to the screen.

The Great Depression provides the setting for *The Tin Flute*. The Great Recession is what film-going audiences are trying to escape, at least for two hours every couple of weeks. Other Canadian producers are serving up escapism: *Porky's* and *Paradise*. *The Tin Flute* is about hope - and not just in the plot.

Leila Basen ●

● Emmanuel introduces Florentine to a better time (Martin Neufeld plays Emmanuel)



BONHEUR D'OCCASION / THE TIN FLUTE p.c. Ciné St-Henri/National Film Board of Canada p. Marie-José Raymond exec. p. Bob Verrall assoc. p. Dorothy Courtois, Pat Ferns scr. Marie-Josée Raymond, Claude Fournier engl. adapt. B.A. Cameron d. Claude Fournier 1st and 2nd a.d. Mireille Goulet, Pierre Plante cont. Monique Champagne p. man. Sylvie de Grandpre unil/loc. man. Marcel Malackiet, Michel Dandavino p. acc. Manon Bougie-Boyer p. acc. Micheline Cadieux d.o.p. Savas Kalogeras cam. op. C. Fournier 1st and 2nd asst. cam. Jean-Marie Buquet, Zoe Dine stills Attila Dory gaffer Guy Rémillard elect. Guy Cousineau key grip Marc de Ernsted grip Jean-Maurice de Ernsted ed. rec. Jacques Drouin boom Jean-Guy Normandin p. des. Charles L. Dunlop art d. Denis Boucher coord. Elinor R. Galbraith props buyer Charles Bernier set dress. Jacques Chamberland props asst. Jean-Vincent Fournier cost. des. Nicole Pelletier ward. asst. Martine Fontaine. Sylvie Rochon, Celine Coulombe dresser Michele Dion make-up Marie-Angèle Protat hair stylist Gaétan Noisieux chief ed. Yves Langlois p. asst. Bernard Fougères, Philippe Pager craft person Martine Beauchemin driver Jean Joyal p. Mireille Deyglun, Pierre Chagnon, Martin Neufeld, Marilyn Lightstone, Michel Forget, Charlotte Laurier, Thyrn Pranke, Jean Belzil-Gascon, Thomas Hellman, Valérie Schneck, Johanne McKay, Frédérique Brossot, Linda Sorgini, Gratien Gélinas, Françoise Berd, André Lacoste, René-Richard Cyr, Louis Cyr, François Gratton, Claude Jutra, Jeannine Sutto, Jocelyn Beru bé, Monique Spaziani.