

INTRODUCING...

bette chadwick

"Get me a hundred extras out on the set in half an hour!"

It is the kind of demand that gives a casting agent nightmares, and one that Bette Chadwick has had to cope with. For the last two and a half years, the petite, curly-headed young woman has been running The Other Agency with an energy that belies her diminutive size.

"I figured there had to be something I could do on my own," she explains, recounting her past experience writing copy for radio, then running a voicing agency. But finding voices for radio commercials just wasn't generating enough business. With more and more inquiries coming her way for on-camera actors, Bette decided to make the switch. At the time she opened her office, it was the only casting agency in Edmonton that was strictly that — not a public relations firm or ad agency. The office is small, but the roster of names on file continues to build up and the phone is constantly busy: "Are you free from 9 till 2 today? Good, you get to be a spiffy older man shopping for china... Yeah, with your wife, so dress up."

Commercials and production films constitute the major portion of the work, keeping local actors and actresses in bread and butter. A recent documentary type mini-series for Tinsel and Sham Productions, for example, called for eleven principals and twenty extras. But there has been an upswing in the number of features being made in Alberta, and Bette has felt the effects. Although she was not the casting director for Fraserfilms' *Marie-Anne*, she was involved for several weeks filling in the small parts. She handled all casting apart from principals on *Fast Company*, the Cronenberg drag-racing film, a fast-paced project which she found stimulating because it was not all on a local level. Lately, ITV has become involved in made-for-TV films, including the American-backed *Inhabitants of Venus*, a one-hour item to be shown on CBS in September, and more recently, *Terror on the Hill*, an all-Edmonton production, both of which Bette participated in.



Bette Chadwick: "I figured there had to be something I could do on my own"

Inhabitants of Venus was shot this past winter in Banff, the location representing the German Alps. This brought the challenge of finding many German-speaking extras who could look like "authentic" villagers. Bette started out sitting in the hotel, trying to make contacts by phone. But she quickly realized that standard procedures would not work. Undiscouraged, she headed out into the streets and simply started approaching people — in the shops, cafes and hotels. "It was amazing," she comments enthusiastically. "Completely inexperienced people would turn into really good actors." Like the hotel electrician, asked to portray a hostelier — "He just became the role, surprising us all with German adlibs, adding little flourishes."

It was an enjoyable job for Bette, and one that had its close calls as well. The American actress who was to have portrayed a wealthy Italian Con-

tessa, sweeping into the ski lodge with great panache, suddenly became unavailable a couple of days before shooting. "Where were we going to find, in two days, an actress who was good, gorgeous, and spoke fluent Italian on top of it?" After much hurried digging and phoning, Bette found her lady in Vancouver. "She was perfect — she fit the part beautifully. But it was sheer luck," she concedes, relief still apparent on her face.

There are many contingencies that arise in a casting agent's day. "They needed a baby for *Marie-Anne*. It sounds simple enough, but one got sick or one cried all the time or one didn't look right." Bette smiled. "I like working with kids... we had a bunch of eight-year-old little girls in here the other day. Maybe I am a sucker, but they are all so cute, and they get so excited." She worried about the disappointment suffered by those not se-

lected.

Ultimately, it is not the casting agent who is responsible for the final choice of actors and the potential disasters or successes that may ensue. But although the filmmakers themselves make the final decision, a person like Bette can take them half-way there, and she feels responsible for providing a suitable selection. "It is really satisfying to get good feedback from the actors or producers; to hear that something went really well, that you sent in the right person."

So far, it has been good. As to her long-range hopes of *The Other Agency*, Bette Chadwick reflects the wishes of so many others in the business of film — the challenge of working on full-blown features.

Martha Jones



photo: Lois Street

Vartkes Cholakian: "I remember seeing *Lawrence of Arabia* 90 times"

vartkes cholakian

The most remarkable trait about Vartkes Cholakian is his enthusiasm. One can feel and hear it across a large room.

A letter from Vartkes in Hollywood...

Dear Lois... **Breakfast Included**, big company has read the script. They like it. I ask from them 4 million. I have met film editor of **Rocky**. He will be working for me. I have met Vilmos Zsigmond, cinematographer. I have met Anne Bancroft's agent. I have met Brad Davis, the actor. He played in **Midnight Express**. I want him to play the part... I met literary agent of Aldous Huxley, he is reading my script. John Cassavetes' cameraman is shooting a 10 minute film for me. I can tell you one thing, Canada is a dream place. They are living in a child's world. Hollywood is something... you have to be strong, talented, and a million other things, but, for me, it's a perfect place. I love Los Angeles. So I will succeed for sure in Hollywood... Vartkes.

Vartkes Cholakian is a filmmaker with ambition. He was born in Syria, but he is of Armenian heritage. His parents were survivors of the Turkish genocide. When he was in his mid-teens he immigrated to the United States because he loved what he saw in American films. He attended Hollywood High and worked as an usher in a Stanley Warner

movie theatre every day after school.

"I remember seeing **Lawrence of Arabia** 90 times," Vartkes exclaims. "The manager couldn't believe it. He told me "What's wrong with you?" But I was learning editing and directing by watching."

After high school, Vartkes received a scholarship for painting and graphics from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. And in 1968, Brandeis University started a film course. Vartkes met people there who had access to cameras, and he was able to complete his first film **Machina**. The film was a 7 minute black and white production which cost \$300. Vartkes earned the money for **Machina** by working in a factory at night.

Then Derek Lamb, who was teaching animation at the Carpenter Center in Boston, and who is presently head of animation at The National Film Board, suggested that Vartkes go to Canada.

He did and worked as an assistant cameraman, film editor and finally as a director: **The Cage**, 1972; **The Basement**, 1974; **Rappelle-toi**, 1975 with Luce Guilbeault and Marcel Sabourin and **A Simple Complex**, 1978.

Vartkes has received assistance from The National Film Board, CBC, The Canada Council, L'Institut Québécois du Cinéma and private investors. He has sold all his films and his reaction to independent filmmaking is "I survived..."

If anyone could sell anything to anyone — Vartkes could. For his open-

ing of **A Simple Complex** at The National Film Board, he talked Dubonnet, into supplying the drinks and Esso into "backing" the food.

About filmmaking in Canada: "I find people here very hard to collaborate with. They are very competitive — everyone wants to be a director. People have to help each other. I feel filmmakers don't want to exchange ideas —

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like everyone is trying to keep a secret. I don't have a connection with other filmmakers. I have my own energy. I don't have the means of mixing with them. If someone comes to me, I am very open, but I don't have much social time. I have a family, and I try to make enough money to survive."

Vartkes is married to filmmaker Mireille Dansereau (*La Vie Rêvée*).

"I don't want to mix film business in my domestic life. Each of us does his own work; however Mireille did produce my film *The Basement*.

"My friends understand my craziness and my ambition. Other people think I am talking too much or am too excited. I love making films — that's what I'm living for. Sometimes I don't get a job because of my character. I tell the truth and am energetic. People often think I'm pretentious. I suffered a long time — 6 years — surviving day to day. No one can destroy that dream..."

Vartkes in 33. His next dream is Hollywood. He has a script *Breakfast Included* written by Toronto writer Charles Israel.

"The film belongs to Hollywood to make it properly. It's about a young man, 25, who is living with a wealthy woman, 45, and why the relationship doesn't work.

"I was in Hollywood two years ago. I called Paul Mazursky (*An Unmarried Woman*) at 8 a.m. He liked my excited voice. He couldn't refuse me. He said, "Why don't you come to my studio and have lunch. Bring something to show me."

Vartkes explains, "The States work

on a larger scale. They are not caught up in personal ego. In Canada the industry is very small and survival is very vital. People try to kill each other, especially between women filmmakers.

"I believe in competition, but not if it becomes destructive. Competition comes from insecurity in life: who's best. Professional people get rid of this competitive hang-up. Schools here are not like European schools where in 4 to 5 years an individual learns a trade."

Vartkes' first films were autobiographical about peoples' relationships with each other as he saw them. The subjects were heavy; now he wants to reach a mass audience with a more commercial approach.

"I don't see progress in the Canadian film industry. Canadians have a complex that they can never beat the Americans. Why do they want to be American?"

The film *Rocky* — they tried 4 years. My film *Breakfast*. Someone will like it, especially Hollywood being a crazy place like it is. The Canada Council refused *A Simple Complex* 3 times. They wanted changes. Finally they gave me \$8,500.

"I'm not making a feature in Canada because at a certain age you have to make a film with a guaranteed distribution. I can make it in Hollywood and always come back here."

"In Canada, I'm not being respected. I was turned down by the CBC and the NFB to make a drama. And after you are refused over and over you begin to say — "What's wrong with me?"

"To perform perfectly, your mind has to be free."

Lois Siegel

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