

# REVIEWS

Yves Simoneau's

## Pourquoi l'étrange Monsieur Zolock s'intéressait-il tant à la bande dessinée ?

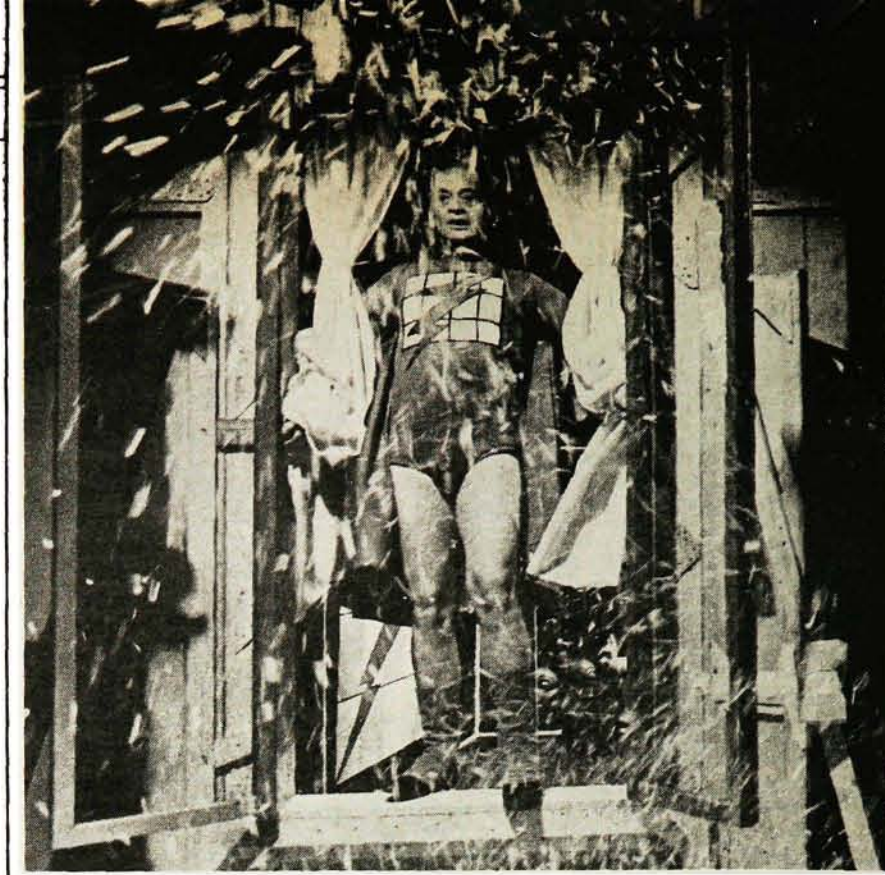
*Pourquoi l'étrange Monsieur Zolock s'intéressait-il tant à la bande dessinée ?* ... the title intrigues... Mr. WHO, you think, the bande WHAT, you wonder... but there really is no time to wonder. From the moment it bursts onto the screen, this film grabs you by the hand and sends you crashing through the frames of a giant comic strip, introducing you, at reckless speed, to its heroes and villains... and, leaving you, in the end, either baffled or seduced ... if not entirely informed.

Winner of a Special Jury Award at the Banff Television Festival in 1983, as well as a Genie in 1984, *Pourquoi l'étrange Monsieur Zolock...* is directed by Yves Simoneau. And if, nothing else, it pro-

vides proof again that documentaries can be, in form, both dynamic and refreshing.

Like Gilles Carle in *Jouer sa vie*, Simoneau constructs his documentary as a fiction, through the combined use of film footage, animation and dramatization. But, whereas Carle managed to bring out the drama both inherent to the game of chess and surrounding international chess matches, Simoneau's film avoids all controversy and, to my mind, brings out only the blandest facts about the *bande dessinée*.

WHAT, you may ask, IS this "*bande dessinée*" which so intrigues Monsieur Zolock?" This is where the problem starts. Although nowhere in the film is the American comic book mentioned or even alluded to, the *bande dessinée* is essentially a by-product of American comics. The film attributes the origins of the *bande dessinée* to Bécassine (1910), a very linear, frame-illustrated account of the trials and tribulations of a Breton nanny. This may truly be the origins of Tintin, but much more significantly, *bande dessinée* is both inspired by and a reaction against its American counterpart. While the comic book is an integral part of U.S. culture, reflecting its values and its social structure, as well as providing it with heroes, European *bande dessinée* is often a comment on Ame-



● Jean-Louis Millette's Monsieur Zolock in an excess of enthusiasm

rican comic books; highly polished in form and structure, it denounces the American culture portrayed in comics and usually features an anti-hero. In any event, it has become a veritable industry, and can now be found translated and published in American comic books, such as *Heavy Metal*.

However, the fact that Yves Simoneau opts to treat the *bande dessinée* as an isolated phenomenon, although a serious omission, does not detract from the film's other qualities.

So, back to *Pourquoi l'étrange Monsieur Zolock s'intéressait-il tant à la bande dessinée ?*

A fan of both detective stories and comics, Simoneau has cleverly mixed both genres to create a documentary-wrapped-up-in-fiction. Thus, while introducing us to some twenty French, Belgian and Québec *bande dessinée* creators, *Pourquoi* weaves its own comic-strip style storyline complete with villain, sci-fi settings and moralistic dénouement. The interviews therefore become only one of the elements of a fiction.

As the film opens, the villainous Monsieur Zolock (Jean-Louis Millette) is found asking the naive Dieudonné (Michel Rivard) to report on what he has found since being hired to penetrate the mysteries of the *bandes dessinées*. This sets the stage for a series of interviews, seen as flashbacks, where some of the great names in the field—Greg, Moebius, Bilal, Gaboury, Fred, Reiser and others—talk about their work, their methods and their objectives. Moving swiftly, the camera catches them at different angles in a succession of zooms, close-ups, pans, side and overhead shots. And, as it closes in on Claire Brétécher's face, travels alongside Christin and Goetzinger, plunges down on Druillet at work in his studio and pans over the printed page, it recreates the quick-paced plane and perspective changes of the comic strip.

Simoneau travels playfully through the dimensions of reality, bringing the heroes to life while reducing their creators to comic strip characters, all the while maintaining unity through imaginative editing and subtle music and sound effects.

There's no need to be an ardent fan to enjoy all this... still, it may help. If you are totally immune to the visual style and the pop cultural appeal of the comic

strip, you might be a hard candidate to win over, especially where the dramatization is concerned. Mixing different art forms is no mean trick in itself, but transposing the comic strip into the three-dimensional is virtually impossible. It certainly demands a great act of faith on the part of the viewer, and I, for one, had to pause and reflect before agreeing to play the game... to cast my vote for Mr. Zolock. Even then, I would have liked to see more of the work and heard less of the explanations.

As the film sheds light on the *bande dessinée*, Monsieur Zolock's intentions become clearer; the documentary serves to unfold the narrative, and vice-versa. But at the end, the artifice becomes too apparent. One wonders which of the rather banal observations has impelled Monsieur Zolock to jump through the window proclaiming "J'ai réussi à traverser la page... à moi, le monde." Was it because Bilal creates atmosphere with colour, or perhaps because Brétécher hates routine, or maybe because Astérix has grossed 100 million dollars in one year (that's reason enough)... No, I think the dice was loaded from the beginning. Our Monsieur Zolock knew from the start that, as the villain, he would try and conquer all... and this is what really pushed him to try and fly like Superman. Or maybe it was just an excess of enthusiasm for *bande dessinée*, brought on by a film that tries a little too hard, and says a little too little.

Josée Miville-Dechêne ●

### POURQUOI L'ÉTRANGE MONSIEUR ZOLOCK S'INTÉRESSAIT-IL TANT À LA BANDE DESSINÉE?

d. Yves Simoneau p. Nicole M. Boisvert res. & sc. Marie-Loup Simon cam. Jean-Louis Chevrefils. Abel Kane cam. asst. Pierre Pelletier sd. Jean-Guy Bergeron ed. François Dupuis a.d. & p.man. Lucie Paquet mus. Michel Descombes stills Claudel Huot cost. Georges Lévesque masks and mural Paul Colpron add. sd. Michel Charron logo concept Geoffroi de Bontemps set des. Vianney Gauthier make-up Jasmine Desjardins hair Alain Thiboutot props Pierre Masse key grip Eloi Deraspe gaffer Jean-Paul Houle p. asst. Stéphane Wells graphics Real Godbout titles Josée Perreault, Réal Godbout puppets Micheline Legendre image cons. Yves Millet mus. ed. Jules Le Noir animation Groupe Film Opticals lab. Bellevue-Pathé running time: 90 mins. colour 16 mm dist. Filmoption Internationale Inc. (514) 931-6180 lp. Jean-Louis Millette, Michel Rivard, Yves Desgagnés, Paul Colpron, Jasmine Desjardins.

**BETACAM**  
is Production!

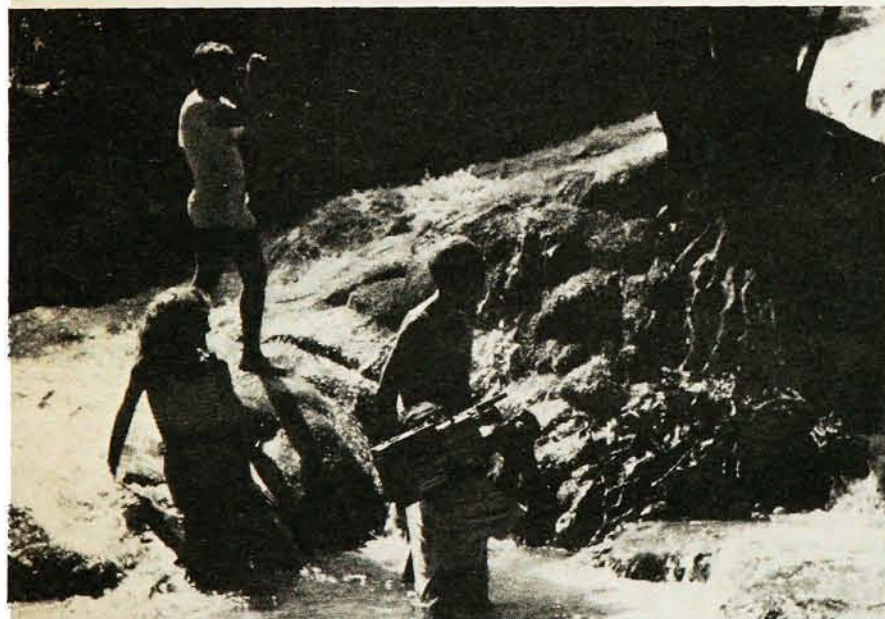


Photo courtesy of  
Visual Productions 80 Ltd.

For further information, contact:

**SONY**

Broadcast

Marketing Headquarters  
411 Gordon Baker Road  
Willowdale, Ontario  
M2H 2S6

Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver

**NEW**

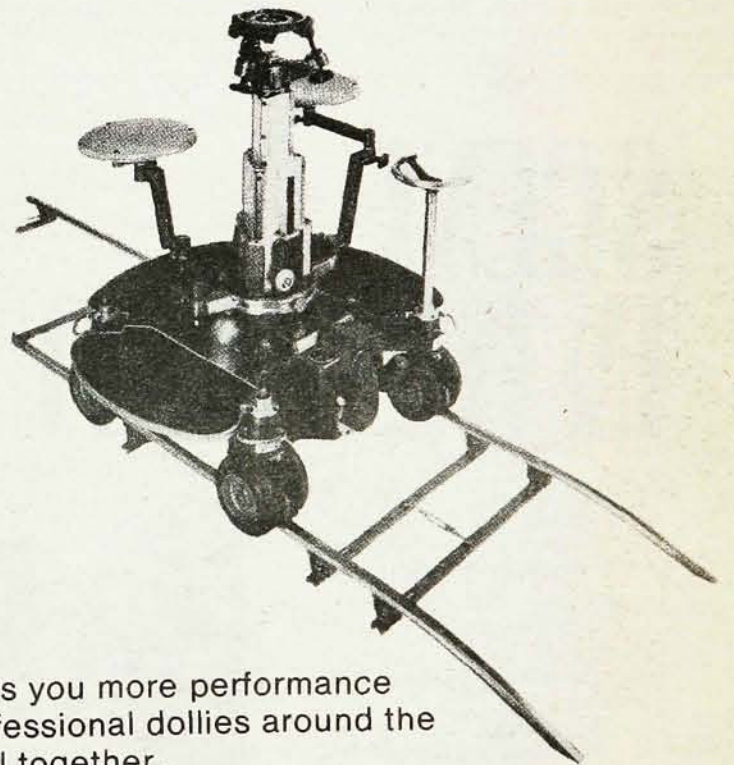


## 6K HMI LAMPS



The new 6K HMI LAMPS are the latest addition to our comprehensive range of these super efficient "daylight" lamps, yet draw only 25 amps of 220/240 V. a.c. power.

## CRICKET



Cricket gives you more performance than all professional dollies around the world put all together.

### Complete Film Equipment Rental

16mm and 35mm Cameras  
Sound and Lighting Equipment  
Generators, Sound Studios

### Sales

Distributors of Tiffen, Rosco, Lowel and Osram

#### Montreal:

Administration and equipment (514) 487-5010  
5252 De Maisonneuve West, H4A 1Y6

Studio and Lighting  
2020 Northcliffe Avenue, H4A 3K5

#### Toronto:

793 Pharmacy Avenue, M1L 3K3 (416) 752-7670

#### Vancouver:

43 West, 6th Avenue, V5Y 1K2 (604) 873-3901