

Directorial passion of *The Morning Man*

What separates the great filmmakers from the not-so great, and the great films from the ordinary is the reflection of the filmmaker's character and passion on the screen. This passion is evident in the approach Montreal-based filmmaker Danièle Suissa is using to make the \$2.4 million feature *The Morning Man*, where her directorial intensity is a reflection of her personal character.

The Morning Man is the dramatization of the real-life adventures of Robert Lavallée-Ménard's escape from prison to his rise to fame as a popular Québécois radio station "morning man".

"What could be considered different in my approach of this particular subject is that I am striving to bring out and to reach the interiors of the characters which are being portrayed. It is what is inside them that really counts", Suissa told *Cinéma Canada*. "This is what I do best. I love actors and I love working with actors. They're my passion, and I have been able to get what I want from my actors on this film.

"A male director would have probably read the script for *Morning Man* and right away thought 'action film'. But I was more sensitized to the personal conflicts of the characters," Suissa adds.

The location for *Morning man* on this particular day was a room filled with technicians, equipment, props and extras at Ruby Foo's Motel on Montreal's Décarie Boulevard. Through the set's organized chaos pierces Suissa's passion for her actors and sensitivity towards the characters they are portraying.

After each take of a long poker-game sequence, Suissa confers with the film's lead, Bruno Doyon, to see how he felt about the take and to discuss possible adjustments that should be made in the performance, all the while reminding him of what she is looking for.

The scene is repeated over and over until Suissa is completely satisfied with what has just taken place in front of the camera. The smile on her face and the gleam in her eyes let everybody know that the last take was perfect.

The camera is placed at a different angle and the whole scene is repeated. Again, after each take, all eyes fall on the director awaiting the grin and the gleam that gives them the go-ahead for the next set-up.

"The number one priority for me as the director is to make sure that the viewer will understand the story," explains Suissa. "After all, as a filmmaker, I am first and foremost a storyteller. But even though the film is written and produced for commercial purposes with a very North American pace and rhythm, I tend to stay away from just presenting



• Danièle Suissa directing *Morning Man* lead Bruno Doyon: "Being close to the actors is very important"

what lies on film's surface. This is why being close to the actors is very important to me - and to the film. I did not stay close to the actual facts of the real-life story. I prefer to look for the personality of the man and understand

what made him do what he did. This is a lot more important.

"Because you cannot play only on the level of the surface and the dialogues. In fact, I've eliminated useless dialogues. Audiences today are a lot more sensi-

tive to subtext than many give them credit for," Suissa continues.

"There is only as much dialogue as is necessary to tell the story. The same is true for the way I am approaching the visuals. We are lighting only the things which have to be seen to order the story. There are no unnecessary props and dressings.

"I always put in my films things in which I believe. I think all filmmakers put their stamp on their work in this manner. This is also part of the reason I was selected to direct this feature."

Gaston Cousineau, *The Morning Man's* producer for SDA productions Ltée., acknowledges that the choice of Suissa as director was based on her reputation in working with actors.

"The reason we wanted Danièle Suissa to direct this film is because she is the best in Montreal when it comes to directing actors," Cousineau told *Cinéma Canada*. "If we had wanted an action film we would have looked for someone else, but since we wanted a film about people and we had only five weeks in which to shoot it and on a modest \$2.4 million dollar budget. So we had to get someone who is very good with actors.

"Perhaps the fact that she is a woman director makes her more sensitive both to the treatment of the film's characters and in her relations to the actors. I do, however, know that she can make a film which is commercially viable for the North American English market while maintaining a definite artistic integrity."

But, says Suissa, "I do not think of myself as a 'WOMAN' director." Then she grins and gets that gleam in her eyes: "I am a happy director."



• Real-life dramatization of a man's rise from prison to radio morning man fame

photos: Pirooska Mihalka