

Film Reviews

André Melançon's **Fierro** (The Summer of the Colt)

Number eight out of the starting gate in the *Tales for All* series, *Fierro* looks to have legs equal to its forerunners, and demonstrates the same warmth and sophistication that have made winners of previous entries from the (producer Rock) Demers stable.

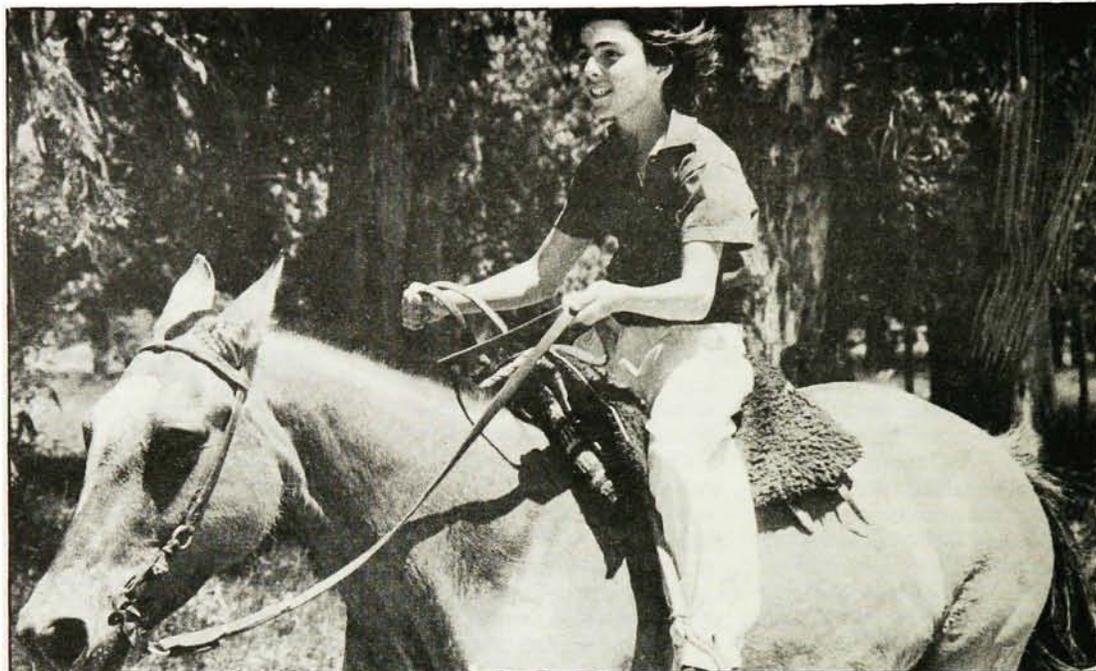
Director André Melançon (*The Dog Who Stopped The War, Bach and Bottine*) is back in the saddle and, along with co-scripters Geneviève Lefebvre and Rodolfo Otero, has fashioned a satisfying film; one that occasionally meanders down the backstretch, but eventually rounds the clubhouse turn and crosses the finish line in good form.

Fierro's pairing of kids and horses is a can't-miss formula, especially if the kids and horses in question *can* act, which, fortunately, is the case here. (They all, horse included, flash winning smiles). Daniel, Felipe and Laura (Juan de Benedictis, Mariano Bertolini, and Alexandra London-Thompson) are three city kids who spend their summer holidays riding horses around the ranch owned by their grandfather, Federico, played by Hector Alterio (*La Historia Oficial*). This Canada-Argentina co-production was the impetus for the treaty signed between the two countries last year.

The story is essentially an amalgam of classic coming-of-age themes – the intrusion of both sexuality and of political awakening into the reverie of childhood. As the film opens, the three youngsters arrive in the foreman's truck for their happy, annual reunion with Grandfather Federico, Great-Aunt Ana (China Zorrilla), and – for 13-year-old Daniel especially – with Martin (Santiago Gonzalez), the foreman's son and his friend. This, however, is to be the last idyllic summer before the stormy onset of adolescence. Of course, the bad weather shows up a little sooner than expected (or there wouldn't be much of a film).

Fourteen-year-old Laura has attained physical maturity in the past year, and her growing resemblance to her grandmother – who deserted grandfather Federico many years back – shakes the old man and causes him to reject his formerly beloved granddaughter. Unable to understand this rejection, Laura resorts to a variety of attention-getting tactics while searching within herself for some fault. In the process of trying to regain Federico's acceptance she runs head-on into her grandfather's sexist double standards and the other major plot line.

Sensing that her problems with Grandpa stem



Santiago Gonzalez as Martin, in (but not on) *Fierro*.

from the fact that she's female, Laura cuts her hair and joins the boys in their competitive riding games. Unfortunately, her actions provoke greater disapproval from Federico. Meanwhile, Daniel and Martin are having their friendship tested by their love for a horse. When Federico offers Daniel his choice of the wild horses on the ranch to break and train, he chooses *Fierro*, a lovely golden stallion. But *Fierro* is already the secret favourite of Martin, who for some time before Daniel's arrival has been working with the animal himself.

What ensues is reminiscent of South African writer André Brink's *A Chain of Voices*, a classic anti-apartheid work in which the friendship between two boys, a white farmer's son and the black son of slaves, is torn apart as they take up their adult destinies (all but irrelevant in childhood). Here, the friendship between the two boys crumbles as Martin, the foreman's son, silently accepts Daniel's right to arrogantly assert his ownership of *Fierro*. In one particularly effective scene, the point is driven home by a simple gesture; Daniel silences his friend by handing him the reins of a horse in a way that strongly implies the master/servant relationship.

This is where you realize – in spite of the standard kids and horses formula – that you're not in Disneyland anymore. In addition to the class-conscious element of Martin and Daniel's rivalry, the conflict between Laura and Federico comes very close to suggesting incestuous feelings on the grandfather's part. Perhaps director Melançon's experience working on a film about incest (*Le Lyse Casse*, 1987) served as inspiration. As well, Laura's announcement to

her aunt that she now has her period, and the straightforward treatment of other "delicate" subjects – Daniel comes upon Martin's mother breastfeeding her newborn – shows a refreshing intent to sever the artificial distinctions between children's and adult cinema (which is, of course, one of the laudable hallmarks of the *Tales for All* series.)

Just when all this adult, psycho-drama stuff threatens to overwhelm (one wonders what kids under 10 are going to make of this?), Melançon picks up the pace with wonderful, winning scenes of graceful horses and riders on the Argentine *pampas*. Daniel and Martin compete over an ingenious obstacle course on horseback, as well as in a fast, colourful, rugby-like game, also played on horseback. This is another important element in Melançon's films: the portrayal of kids as having specific and realistic (not magical), talents and responsibilities, like caring for animals and watching over smaller children.

Relief from the heaviness also comes from the younger brother, Felipe. Just nine years old – but carrying on a regular correspondence throughout the summer with his girlfriend in Buenos Aires – Felipe is the embodiment of the adage "from the mouths of babes..." His humour and common sense eventually cause the others to see the foolishness of their ways, as he becomes the catalyst for their eventual reconciliation. His is also an important character in the sense that, though he may not have the physical skills of his older siblings, his personality and affability mark him as an important member of the family – a reassuring notion for younger siblings of any age.

Important too is the film's ending. The characters may reconcile their immediate conflicts, but there is never any suggestion that the future will be entirely bright, or that they will all live happily ever after. One senses that there are many more life lessons ahead for all involved.

Frank Rackow ●

FIERRO (THE SUMMER OF THE COLT) p. Rock Demers, Lita Stantic d. André Melançon sc. Geneviève Lefebvre, André Melançon sc. collorig. idea Rodolfo Otero d.o.p. Thomas Vamos art d. Esmeralda Almonacid line p. Daniel Louis, Jose Strier mus. Osvaldo Montes ed. André Corriveau p. mgr. Dolly Pussi 1st. n.d. Carl Delaroché-Vernet, Victor Dinenzon a.d. Ana Maria Bas cont. France Lachapelle loc. sd. Yvon Benoit sd. des. Claude Langlois post. p. sup. Lorraine du Hamel 2nd n.d. Cristina Civalo cost. des. Lucrecia Matilde de Ricart asst. cost. des. Maria Molina cast. (Can.) Danyele Patenaude (Argentina) Ana Maria Bas asst. to p. Louise Belanger p. admin. Bernard Lamy, Stella Fontan cam. op. Daniel Vincelette 1st. asst. cam. Michel Girard cam. assts. Jose Manuel Cajaraville, Luis Casteleti 2nd. asst. cam. Guillermo Alvarez Mesas app. cam. Grigori Craer boom Perfecto de San Jose props Oreste Sacchi, Jorge Oscar de la Renta stills photo Jean Demers props assts. Sophie Ethier, Irene Banchik makeup Ines Morrone hair Rodolfo Spinetta asst. hair Nelida Aued gaffer Carlos Enrique Centeno elec. Juan Carlos Centeno, Javier Sergio Centeno, Ruben E. Menendez, Gustavo Hungaro, Nicolas Adalberto Gatto key grip Philippe Palu grips Miguel Juan Zarkovich, Edesio Rogelio, Imbert sp. fr. Tom Cundon/Los Centuriones S. A. asst. ed. Teresa de Luca, Anne Jose Boudreau mix. Michel Descombes asst. mix. Luc Boudrias mus. dir. Jimmy Tanaka orch. Gilles Ouellet guitar solo Roque Carbajo song "Siempre en Ti" sung by Mercedes Sosa, sd. fx. Viateur Paiement, Jerome Decarie, Monique Vezina horse trainers Felipe Gallegos, Lucio Gallegos, Hugo Lemus, Carlos Mena, Mario Perez *Fierro's* trainer Pedro Vargas p. sec. Ines Vera p. coord. Geneviève Lefebvre p. assts. Miriam Bendjua, Silvia Polecollo, Aldo Guillermo Arregui app. p. Nancy Defilipi d. promotion Kevin Tierney. An official Canada-Argentina Coproduction. Les Productions la Fête.

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Toronto, Ontario M4S 1E8 Canada
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