

## patrick rousseau

Patrick Rousseau's description of a good soundman might read, «Dancing diplomat with a gambling instinct.» Knowing how to 'win his points', he fills the bill.

# sound choreography

by barbara samuels

Ah, these imports. The soundman with the bedroom eyes prowls the set of **The Lucky Star** like a Gallic wolf, wending his way through crew members who scurry to prepare a new camera setup. The stop-and-start process of filmmaking doesn't faze the technicians who are used to it, and Patrick Rousseau is a veteran. He has devised his own method for killing time: it is a kind of personal set patrol, a leisurely stroll through the pandemonium that surrounds him. At one point in his rounds, he turns back toward the hub of activity surrounding the camera. "Le son est prêt," he announces to no one in particular, an unnecessary message, as the setup won't be complete for a good ten minutes. He wanders back to his Nagra, plunks himself down behind the machine, and chews thoughtfully on a pen — the quintessential image of Patrick Rousseau, captured by a myriad of set photographers over an impressive number of years.

With those brooding good looks and wicked smile, he might have made a career in front of the camera; instead, he is one of the best soundmen on the Canadian motion picture scene, with a list of screen credits almost unparalleled for a Canadian technician. A naturalized citizen, the thirty-three-year-old native of France has completed all his training and the bulk of his work in Canada. **The Lucky Star** is his fourth feature for 1979, coming in just under the tax deadline, and forming another link in the long association between Rousseau and producer Claude Leger.

"I have very good feelings about this film," Rousseau says during the break in filming. "There's a marvellous intimacy about it, a lot of quiet dialogue between characters. And it brings me and Claude back together again as well." Their careers seem inextricably bound together — the story of two childhood pals who grew up to succeed in different aspects of the Canadian film industry. Eleven years ago, when Leger was intent on forming a documentary film company, buddy Rousseau suggested that Canada might provide a suitable home base, having visited this country himself during Expo '67. They arrived here with plans to produce a study of the Cajuns in Louisiana, sunk all their funds into the project, and watched their dreams dissolve after a car accident destroyed their footage, equipment, and — very nearly — Patrick.

"I ended up in the hospital for a time," he recalls. "Meanwhile, our visas were running out. That led to problems with Immigration, and we got through a long waiting period by working on farms outside of Montreal. I eventually landed a job as a driver on **Eliza's Horoscope**, and when the boomman left the picture, I asked for a crack at that job. The unions didn't exist then, so we weren't breaking any rules: I earned the amazing sum of ninety dollars a week."

Rousseau continued gaining boom experience on one of the first major Canadian productions, **Fortune And Men's Eyes**. He remembers it as "the trickiest job for me, because I didn't speak any English at the time. There was a lot of camera movement, so you had to be able to 'follow' in every sense. So the script girl and I worked out a code: whenever someone was about to speak, she'd tug on my pants, and I'd move the boom over to them. The complicated

nature of the camerawork helped as well, because scenes would run about four minutes sometimes, and that meant a lot of rehearsal. That was how I finally got my 'moves' down."

Rousseau completed approximately eight films as a boomman, an experience that confirmed to him the interdependence of crew members. "The interaction between camera and sound is central to me," he states. "It's like a choreography. A special relationship develops, for instance, between the gaffer and the boomman: he's got to be willing to work *with* you, avoid flagging a light so that it blocks access for the boom to an actor. If they can manage with a light lower down rather than higher up, it'll eliminate boom shadow. You're also working with the camera operator in terms of his framing and your place out of it. And the prop department has to be aware of the problems noisy accessories are going to cause. It's a complicated series of relationships."

In Rousseau's eyes, therefore, the soundman is also "a superb diplomat. It's always a matter of 'winning your points' the first days out, because sound is often one of the least understood departments on set. You've got to get the respect of every technician you work with, and you must have a director who understands the principle behind your work. It all means getting what you demand, which is essential when you're working with live sound. Since Canadian pictures could never afford the expense of dubbing, the crews here know what it means when you ask for silence during a take. With the Europeans, it can be harder."



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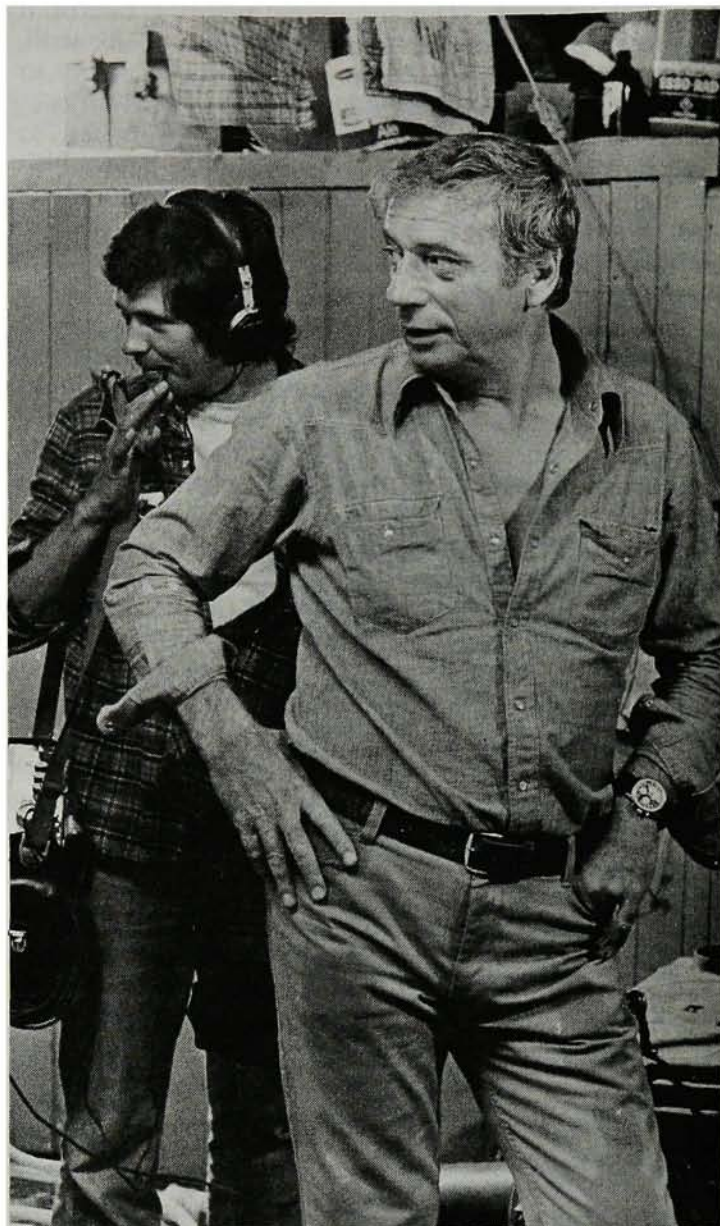
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Barbara Samuels is a free-lance writer working in Montreal.

He has been known to teach respect for his department. One of the sets on the French production *La Menace* was an old chateau with wooden floors. When the camera crew and assistant directors turned up for the shoot in cowboy boots, Rousseau called a halt to production, and sent someone out to buy running shoes for the crew. The rather indignant technicians "thought I was a bit of a twit until they heard the rushes. That's what you're building to for the first few days, and that's the moment where you gain respect. From that day on, there were no more problems."

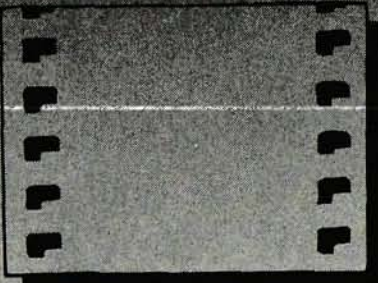
The transition from boomman to sound engineer was "a matter of convincing the director that I was able to do the job. I look at it this way: if I was asking to do his picture as a soundman, I must have been able to do it. If I screwed the job up, the whole industry would know it in no time flat, and that would be of no benefit to me." Rousseau is grateful to former NFB soundman Jos Champagne, with whom he worked three times, and to René Clément's soundman, Guy Villette, for having demonstrated some of the best methods through the example of their work. "The combination of Villette's craft and Clément's technical expertise made *La Course du Lièvre* an incredible experience. When you've got a director who knows the machinery, he forces all the technicians to come up to his standard. That kind of extension of oneself is the best teacher you could ask for."

Finally, it was Denis Héroux who offered Rousseau the chance to make the transition for good. Although Patrick



In one of his characteristic pencil-chewing poses, soundman Patrick Rousseau with Yves Montand and company on the *La Menace* set

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first worked as a sound engineer on Jean-Claude Lord's *Les Colombes*, it was Héroux who indicated that the position would be open on his next major film — which turned out to be the Canadian-French co-production *J'ai Mon Voyage*. He worked for Héroux many times after that, and branched out into English Canadian productions as well. One fascinating, recent experience was his teaming with Italian director Lina Wertmuller on her first English-language feature, *The End Of The World In Our Usual Bed In A Nightful Of Rain*. "It took some doing," he reflects, grinning, "to convince Wertmuller that I wasn't trying to interfere with her *mise-en-scène*. It was her first real experience with live sound: they dub everything in Italy. It was also Giancarlo Giannini's first English-language work, and he was concerned that the quality be of the highest. That's a perfect example of how essential it is for

the soundman to 'win his points' right off the top. She's a tough, extraordinary lady to work with, and it turned into an excellent working relationship."

Straddling two different film traditions, as he does, Rousseau's perspective on the qualities of the Canadian industry vis-à-vis its European counterpart is unique. "It's a matter of different sensibilities," he insists, "and one is not necessarily better than the other. I believe that a European director of photography is going to light the interior of a cathedral with a more knowing hand because he's got years of tradition behind him. That architecture is part of his background, his roots. But an understanding of the North American context is usually North American territory. It's tough to think of any European who's made the transition successfully. So I think there are points on both sides."

He believes Canadian crews are "well up to international calibre now," and sees the tax shelter, if properly used, as "a kind of door-opener. When it comes off, the producers will have made the connection with, say, the head of Paramount in the States. Those links are essential if you want a world-ranking industry." To attain that end, there are elements here he would like to see altered: "We haven't got enough special effects sound people, and we're going to need them badly at the rate we're expanding. I'd also like to see a Technical Commission of Cinema Experts get after the theatres here, as they do in France. They should be forced to conform to a standard, because otherwise, you're working for the rushes and that's it." He recalls seeing *Violette Nozière* in France, and then again in Montreal, "and believe me, it was a different movie the second time around. The quality had disintegrated badly. The exhibition halls just have to be improved."

He watches Rod Steiger make his way through the jumble of cables and lights that clutter the studio floor, then disappear into the mockup stable that is the centre of activity. Patrick shakes his head somewhat regretfully. "When you have good feelings about a film, as I do about this one, you feel badly about your lack of input into post-production. It would be wonderful to become involved in the sound editing, but how can I possibly commit myself to something that'll happen months from now — who knows what production I'll be on then, where I'll be?" He is interrupted by the assistant director, who pokes his head out of the stable toward the waiting crew.

"Alors, on est prêt?"

"On est toujours prêt," Rousseau retorts, as Esther Auger comes to collect her boom from its holder on Rousseau's table. "It should also be noted," he grins slyly, "that I'm one of the few soundmen to work with a female boom operator." Auger grimaces ferociously, then pulls her boss's hair with affection. She hauls the boom off into the stable as Rousseau slides headphones over his ears.

"Interdependence," he says again. "We're like dancers who depend upon each other getting our moves right. And above all, mutual respect." The studio bell sounds, the assistant director calls "Motor," and Rousseau switches his Nagra into gear.

"Speed," he replies, setting that complicated series of relationships into action all over again. □

## Filmography:

### Patrick Rousseau

#### Boom Man:

*Eliza's Horoscope* — dir. Gordon Sheppard

*Fortune And Men's Eyes* — dir. Harvey Hart

*Journéy* — dir. Paul Almond

*La Maudite Gallette* — dir. Denis Arcand

*La Course du Lièvre* — dir. René Clement (France)

*Tauro* — dir. Clement Perron

*Quelques Arpents de Neige* — dir. Denis Héroux

#### Sound Engineer:

*Les Colombes* — dir. Jean-Claude Lord

*J'ai Mon Voyage* — dir. Denis Héroux

*Mustang* — dir. Marcel Lefevre

*Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* — dir. Denis Héroux

*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* — dir. Ted Kotcheff

*The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane* — dir. Nicholas Gessner

*Special Magnum* — dir. Alberto de Martino (Italy)

*Angela* — dir. Boris Sagal

*The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Nightful of Rain* — dir. Lina Wertmuller (Italy)

*La Menace* — dir. Alain Corneau (France)

*Blood Relatives* — dir. Claude Chabrol

*Violette Nozière* — dir. Claude Chabrol

*City on Fire* — dir. Alvin Rakoff

*It Rained All Night The Day I Left* — dir. Nicholas Gessner

*Yesterday* — dir. Larry Kent

*Girls* — dir. Just Jaeckin

*Dirty Tricks* — dir. Alvin Rakoff

*The Lucky Star* — dir. Max Fischer

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