



## Bethune turns reviewer into Gene Shalit

by Azed Majeed

*Bethune: The Making of a Hero* directed by Phillip Borsos produced by Filmline International

A little while ago, I was told by my editor at Excal to check out *Bethune*. Upon returning a couple of hours later, I announced that due to the overpowering stench of stale beer and vomit, I was unable to continue my tour of the College.

After a Pinteresque silence, I was politely told, "Not the College, you \*\$%\*\*, THE FILM!" Sheesh, what a hothead! Anyway, now that the information was clear, I hurried on my way to catch the long-awaited Canadian feature *Bethune: The Making of a Hero*.

Dr. Norman Bethune, the brilliant surgeon and idealist, was born in Gravenhurst, Ontario (go figure) on March 3, 1890. This information is totally useless, but — hey! — it sounds important.

*Bethune*, played by Donald Sutherland, is portrayed as a mish-mash of good intentions and humanity with a generous helping of weakness and hostility towards anyone who doesn't see his way. The film follows this volatile visionary through his quest for socialized medicine and the eradication of fascism.

*Bethune* travels all over the world developing ideas for radical reform in medicine and politics. The filmmakers travelled to Spain

and China searching for authentic locations. The filming there was especially authentic as Bethune spent the last two years of his life in China, where he has been considered a national hero since his death in 1939.

*Bethune* is an epic film which sweeps you up and refuses to let go (Cripes! — I'm starting to talk like Gene Shalit! Hell, I'm starting to look like Gene Shalit!). The film uses the ol' *Citizen Kane* device: a reporter interviewing Bethune's close friends, relatives and acquaintances, reconstructs his turbulent and exciting life.

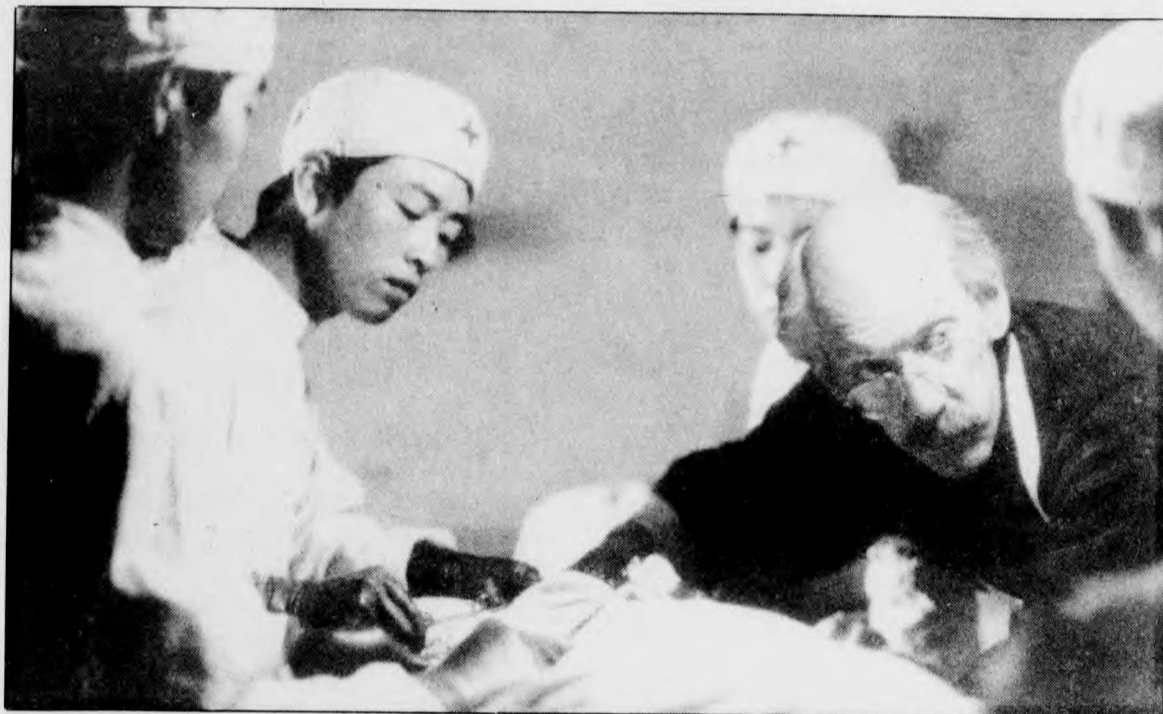
The reporter is Chester Rice (played by Colm Feore, the fella who starred in *Beautiful Dreamers*), a character based on screenwriter Ted Allan. Allan actually did travel to Spain with Dr. Bethune in 1936.

Noble, or what?

Helen Mirren plays Bethune's wife, Frances, whom he married twice. Mirren turns in her usual pale, frail performance, and is pretty forgettable. (Yeah, like I could do any better. Jeez!)

The other Helen, Shaver that is, starts out fine, and then kinda just disappears. One of the PR people at the screening told me that Shaver was supposed to be in more scenes, but got sick during filming. Hey, Helen, ya crazy nut, get well soon, ya hear?

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Bethune* is that it was produced in conjunction with



Donald Sutherland leans over an operating table in the role of Dr. Norman Bethune. The third time is definitely a charm.

China, with full Chinese support. The film used a separate Chinese crew for all sequences in China, including a separate Chinese director, Wang Xingang. The sequences in China are the best in the film, and I'm not just talkin' scenery; the acting by James Pax, Guo Da and especially Harrison Liu (Dr. Fong) is excellent.

The best thing about *Bethune* is the character himself. Director Phillip Borsos (*The Grey Fox*, *The Mean Season*) does not allow this

film to become a mushy tribute to a lilly-white moral monster; instead, he digs deeper into the personality of Bethune and presents a very human hero with motivations that are clear and acceptable. Bethune had his greasy side, as we all do (especially David Lynch), and Borsos is not afraid to show it. High five, Phil.

The remaining kudos go to Donald Sutherland. All I can say is... Donald, you are soooo beautiful... to me. Sutherland has been so good in so many roles, and this is really one of his best. He is Bethune (ooops! — now I sound like Rex Reed).

This is the third time Don has played Bethune, once on Patrick Watson's supercool TV show *Witness to Yesterday*, and again for the CBC drama *Bethune*. I guess Don has found his doppelganger, eh?

So, listen up, everyone! Go check out *Bethune* — no, not the College — the film! It's playing at the Eglinton Theatre on Monday, September 10 at 7pm as part of the Festival of Festivals.

Now, for the important part... on the ol' Azed Majeed film rating scale, I give *Bethune: The Making of a Hero* 342 out of a possible 379 1/2.

## Perfectly Normal is perfectly ordinary

by Jim Russell

*Perfectly Normal* directed by Yves Simoneau produced by Bialystock and Bloom Ltd.

*Perfectly Normal* is an unhappy marriage of a good film and a bad story.

It's bad because the story (mysterious figure comes into boring man's life) is tired. Poorly executed characterizations, with the exception of the two leads, and a contrived ending don't help.

*Perfectly Normal*, a comedy with more than a few genuine laughs, opens forcefully with the melodramatic death of the mother of Renzo (Michael Riley). She is a sweet old lady whose passing initiates the series of events that gradually pump life into her reclusive son's dreary existence.

Renzo is an assembly line

worker in a brewery. His sweaty, hellish job consists of hosing off bottles of beer as they parade relentlessly before him. At night, he drives his father's taxi, hoping to one day fulfill his dream of building his own home.

Afraid of women, unable to socialize with his coworkers and burdened with a dream that will never come true, Renzo lives a dark existence that is enlivened only by his love of opera.

Enter failed restaurateur Alonzo Turner (Robbie Coltrane), a benign and lovable con man who has come to "Long Bay" (Toronto) to escape from yet another business failure. It seems that he had a little problem with a cook, who convinced Alonzo that he was one of the few men that knew how to extract the poison gland of the Blow Fish, a task that must be completed before cooking the delicacy.

Unfortunately, the bogus cook's auto mechanics certificates in Japanese neither prepared him for the task nor warned Alonzo of

mother's nest egg to transform a dilapidated Cherry Street warehouse into a gaudy palace.

Both Coltrane and Riley give creditable performances. The chemistry between them is good, sometimes great.

Coltrane, in a role that could be described as the Zero Mostel of the restaurant trade, provides the crazy energy that propels the movie. Riley, in addition to holding the world record for THE LONGEST SUSTAINED BLANK GAZE BY A LIVING PERSON, is the perfect straight man.

Renzo's girlfriend, Denise (Deborah Duchene) seems schizophrenic, not by intent, but because neither the writers (Eugene Lipinsky and Paul Quarrington) nor the director (Yves Simoneau) noticed or cared that her character continually vacillates between swooning schoolgirl and sensitive career woman.

Alain Dostie, the director of photography, had a great time, using every piece of equipment that could be rented in the Free World. Low angles, high angles, camera sweeps, tilts, pans and optical distortions drove me to distraction.

Dostie's masterful use of every technique available would certainly earn him an A in cinematography class, but distracted unnecessarily from *Perfectly Normal*. It was an example of the medium interfering with the message. To his credit, he didn't apply the same heavy-handedness to the lighting.

*Perfectly Normal*, which is being shown at Toronto's Festival of Festivals, is a film that, unfortunately, fails to fill the big screen, but is likely to feel quite comfortable on television.

I give it a 5 out of ten.

## Egg rolls on us

by Letitia Tendentious

It was all so Hollywood. A man sat in a corner, talking animatedly to somebody on a cellular phone, while the woman across the table from him ate a chocolate covered strawberry and drank white wine.

Hors d'oeuvres, nasty rumours and Canadian film executives circulated freely at the first press conference for the Festival of Festivals' 15th anniversary season. Festival director Helga Stephenson started speaking half an hour late, graciously allowing everyone to read the promotional package and get a head start on the alcohol and/or Perrier.

And, what a promotional package! Clint Eastwood's new film, *White Heart, Black Hunter*, based on Peter Viertel's experience writing *The African Queen* for John Huston, will be a gala presentation at this year's Festival.

*Bethune: The Making of a Hero*, starring Donald Sutherland, will finally be seen in a "special presentation" (a sort of gala plus). If the story in the film is anywhere near as good as the stories behind the scenes, this should be some movie!

Other galas include Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (starring Gerard Depardieu — can that hunk act, or what?) and Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation*, which was banned in his native Poland until December, 1989 (a great recommendation if I ever heard one).

The Festival will also have programmes dedicated to Portuguese and Contemporary World Cinema, as well as the popular Edge and Midnight Madness Programmes. I personally can't wait for the Open Vault: The Dawn of Sound programme — you ain't heard nothing till you've heard Al Jolson saying, "You ain't heard nothing, yet!"

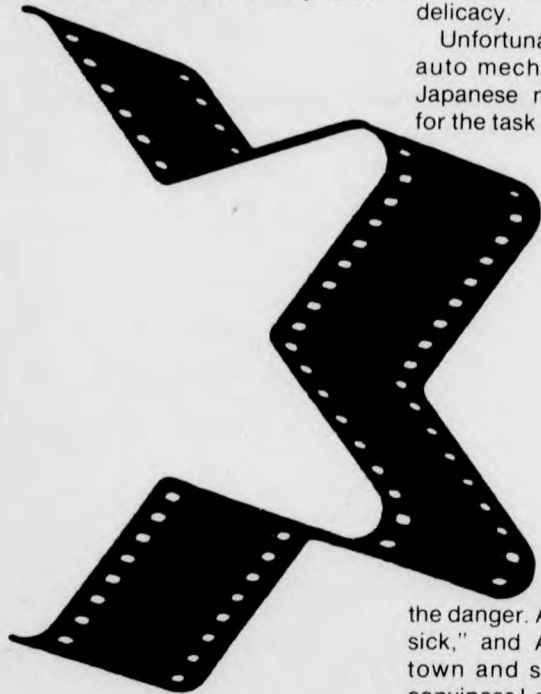
"We could sit out on the patio," a woman close to me said. "We wouldn't be able to hear anything," her companion objected.

"Would that be a problem?" she asked.

As it turned out, no. Stephenson said very little before turning the floor over to Bugajski, who said even less. Not that a lowly print journalist could see anything over the battery of television cameras that ringed the podium, mind you...

"We need some good pictures out there —" one man said, "we haven't had many — especially in Canada. It would lift the whole industry up." With that, he raised both hands up to the sky, as if expecting good pictures to suddenly appear from out of the heavens.

Then, somebody came around with a tray of miniature egg rolls, and good pictures were forgotten.



the danger. A few diners got "very sick," and Alonzo had to leave town and start afresh. Alonzo convinces Lorenzo to use his dead