

Acadjonne Film

Local success

by Eric Simpson

The dark room was filled with a strange buzzing sound. Eyes perceived dim shapes, yet ears received only an unidentifiable jumble of throaty and nasal utterances.

Suddenly there was a flash of light and some words appeared graphically engraved on a silver screen. The hum had ceased, but it was replaced by music sung in the same exotic tongue.

Could all this be happening in the sedate capital of Nova Scotia? Yes. And to those who were present at the National Film Board Theatre on Barrington Street on Wednesday, February 7 it was no surprise. Most of the audience had expected a special performance and they were well-versed in the language in which it was to be presented—Acadjonne.

The occasion was the Halifax premier of **Les Gossipeuses**—the first feature film produced entirely by members of the Acadian community of Nova Scotia. The film, which had its world premiere at L'Université Sainte Anne de la Pointe de l'Eglise, on November 20, 1978, was filmed in Baie Sainte Marie during the summers of 1977-78.

The fact that the Acadjonne dialect from Southwestern Nova Scotia used in the film was at times incomprehensible to the non-French speaking members of the audience (and even to some of the supposedly bilingual persons present) did not detract from

the enjoyment of the film. Indeed the intensity which was necessary to glean phrases from the dialogue seemed to heighten the viewers' sense of achievement and appreciation.

As an artistic work **Les Gossipeuses** was full of moments of brilliance. Considering the dismal, although fully appreciated, funding for the production (through NFB-Regionalization / Acadie) and the amateur status of the actors in the film, the result was impressively professional. A few lines may have been stiltedly delivered and a few camera shots may have lacked precision, but in the final analysis the film had continuity, clarity and cohesion.

Les Gossipeuses is a revealing story of life in a small rural community in the county of Claire. In this placid setting nothing passes unseen—largely due to the unflagging and insidious tongue-wagging of the local gossips: hence the title **Les Gossipeuses**. As the opening line remarks: "A tout les p'tits villages de L'Acadie 'ou c' que tout l'monde se counnait."

The relentless snooping of Anastaisie, a "hypocritical liar and slave of the telephone", results in false accusations against Bernard and Carole, two young lovers who have recently settled in the village. Anastaisie, a divorcee, invents stories to make life more interesting. In doing so she incites the rest of the village to righteous indignation and wrath.



Anne Marie Comeau, who plays Anastaisie, was marvellous; her facial expressions were excruciatingly effective and full of pure emotion. A fox-like face and penetrating eyes gave her an air of convincing power as she screamed her password—"scandale". The rest of the womenfolk were less powerful but nonetheless well cast. The scene with the figure of Agathe strutting across the lawn followed by Seraphie will be an Acadian classic. Only Père Merlin (François Thibault) fell a little flat. His pious exterior seemed artificial and

insincere—maybe I just find rotund priests distasteful.

The humour—most of the scenes were extremely funny—was laced with unbridled satire. The sacred sanctum of village gossip was ruthlessly ridiculed by the author/producer/director Phil Comeau. In fact one wonders if he didn't exaggerate a little. Is there no virtue at all in the tradition of a close knit community? If it reaches such an extreme that newcomers are attacked for no reason, d'accord mais. . . .

The evident conflict be-

tween the different generations and their respective morals is a relevant theme and one that might shock a few people. (The scandal concerns Carole, unmarried and living with Bernard, whom Anastaisie claims is having an abortion.)

However, the real triumph lies in the incorporation of the Acadjonne dialect into the film and the quality of this Atlantic production. The final splicing took place in Montreal, but the bulk of the work was done on location and in studios in the Maritime region.

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