

Fantastica: un film musical original

The hottest Canadian movie star right now is Carole Laure, whose *Get Out Your Handkerchiefs* (made in France) won this year's Academy Award for best foreign film. The hottest Canadian director is Gilles Carle. Together they are finishing *Fantastica*, which will cost \$2.5 million and will be, loosely speaking, the first Canadian musical. The third major participant, Lewis Furey, wrote the musical score and plays the male lead.

Fantastica is precedent making by the past standards of both Carle and Quebec: it is costing a great deal of money and it will be distributed to a wide international market.

Its music, singing and dancing develop as naturally as its fighting and love making. A tycoon plans to build a factory on the edge of a wilderness lake, destroying an Eden created by a philosophic old man. Lorca, the star of a band of travelling musicians (played by Laure), is in love with both the old man and the band's young leader, Paul (Lewis Furey). She takes up arms against the industrial intruder with a guerilla group that includes a dynamiter who dreams of blowing up the world, the town fool, a homosexual auto mechanic and a youngster who sells meteorites.

Dans la forêt

Fantastica was shot this summer in a forest at Grand'Mère, near Shawinigan, 150 miles north-east of Montreal.

The company is casual; the cameras, hand held; and only the chauffeur-driven Mercedes-Benz 300 SD limo that brings Laure to the set suggests Hollywood. The actors and technicians, eating lunch in a tent by the idyllic lake, are like a picnicking family, with a dynamic father, Gilles Carle, at

the head of the table. Carle has been directing provocative, small-budget films since 1965. He began with *La vie heureuse de Léopold Z.* and continued with *Le viol d'une jeune fille douce* (1968), *Les mâles* and *La vraie nature de Bernadette* (1972), *La mort d'un bûcheron* (1973), *La fête de Normande St-Onge* (1975) and *L'ange et la femme* (1977).

The notion that with a relatively large budget he is moving on to grander things is deceptive. *Fantastica* is still personal: the \$2.5 million budget is not really large, and much money is being spent on the perfection of detail — Eden has been created in the wilderness with a custom-made lake, log cabin, shrubbery and flowers — and on the salaries of Laure and Furey; Serge Reggiani and Claudine Auger, French actors of stature; and John Vernon, a Canadian with impressive credits.

After lunch the company moves through the forest to a grubby gas station set, on the edge of the pine-covered hills. A smiling mechanical man in front of the station waves elbowless arms up and down in a jerky, mechanical rhythm.

Carle dominates, talking softly, working swiftly and praising often. A stocky young man in mechanic's coveralls walks across the apron, confronts and imitates the mechanical man — stiff arms up and down — then strolls on and rolls in a somersault to the top of an ancient auto's hood, and Carle says "coupez."

"We are condemned to originality," says Carle, speaking of Quebec directors in general. "If we try to copy we are finished." He is optimistic about this film — "It is so good we will sell it after we make it, not before" — and about the industry. "The flame of filmmaking goes from one country to another — Sweden, France, Czechoslovakia, Italy — suddenly I feel it is coming to Canada. Quebec can have its place in the sun."

La barrière n'est pas toujours impénétrable

Most Quebec films are in French, a few have English subtitles, very few are in English as well as in French; but one need not know a word of French to appreciate some that are neither dubbed nor subtitled. *L'eau chaude l'eau frette* can be enjoyed even by those who cannot translate the title into *Hot Water, Cold Water*. *Comme les six doigts de la main* (*Like the Six Fingers of the Hand*) will make you laugh and so will *Ti-Cul Tougas* (*Short-Ass Tougas*). They are films of action and visual humour.

Others judged worthy in Quebec are much more elusive. Talky feature films, such as *Éclair au chocolat*, ones with a particular Québécois context, such as *J. A. Martin photographe*, and documentaries, such as *Les servantes du bon Dieu*, lose much by non-translation.

The viewer, bilingual or not, who sees a good, intelligible, small Quebec film is likely to find it lodged in his memory. Quebec films are almost always intimate expressions of a single person — the director — and the best of them present a full-flavoured, accurate time, place and culture — Quebec today.

Since few people are tempted to go to a film in a foreign language, Quebec films have had a limited market. This may change soon. The new trend (as in the film *Fantastica*) is to use a double dubbing: English-speaking actors speak English, French speakers speak French, and then they are cross-dubbed for the French and English soundtracks. This technique, which originated in Italy, has become common in Europe where most films are co-produced by groups from different countries.