

Features

Close-up: Behind the screens

The Handyman

Not too long ago, she used to sit for hours in the dark watching films, and falling in love with the images on the screen. Now, at 29, she's the Genie-nominated star of one of the all too few high-quality films made in Canada in recent memory.

Andree Pelletier sits relaxed in the Fiesta Restaurant more than a little amused at the new wave direction the little restaurant has taken since she was here last, five years ago.

The lovely French Canadian actress' new film, *The Handyman*, has just been released and she's come from Quebec to Toronto, along with director Micheline Lanctot and co-star Jocelyn Berube, to conduct interviews and keep up the momentum that has followed the film first through its run in Quebec, and later in New York.

Squeezing some lime into her beer, the dark-haired, petite bilingual actress revealed that she is very single, lives in a loft on Montreal's Main, and confesses to being a big boxing fan who knew about Jake LaMotta long before he became Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*.

Pelletier began her acting career as a 19-year-old, big blue-eyed naive charmer. Pulling on a Gitane cigarette, and sipping her beer, and underlining her speech with the occasional obscenity, she quickly demonstrates that ten years of maturation have changed her character.

She admits that she didn't take acting seriously until 1978 when she played Louis Riel's courageous and heroic grandmother in *Marie-Anne*, a feature film that has yet to be shown.

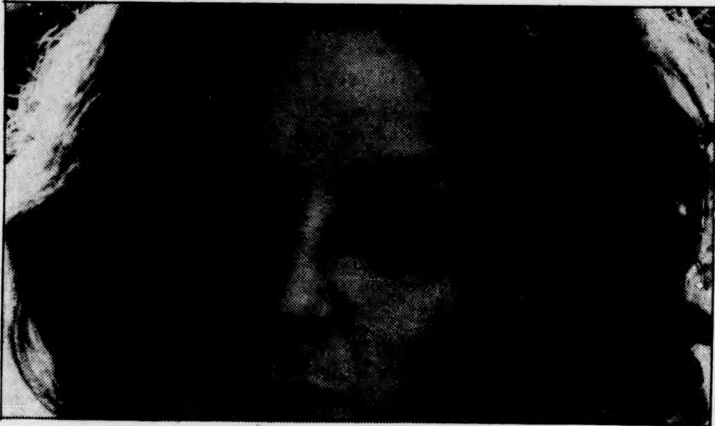
"Up to then I was just projecting an image," recalls Pelletier. "Even imitating other actresses that I admired. Then I realized that you had to get inside a character, to let it live in you. Then all the aspects of the character will naturally come out."

Pelletier's role in *The Handyman* gave her an opportunity to develop her new found confidence. It was also a chance to work with director Lanctot, one of the free spirits of the Canadian film industry. (Lanctot is best remembered for her role as Richard Dreyfuss' lover in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*).

"Our relationship was terrific," says Pelletier. "I feel that she brought out my best work to date. She just had to say a word and I'd understand."

After *Handyman*, which ironically was her first French-speaking role in five years, she went to Alberta to film *Latitude 55* directed by John Juliani, who taught at York until recently. Juliani cast Pelletier as one of only two main characters in his psychological thriller. She jokes about the project's tear filled scenes requiring about two gallons of the glycerine used to induce crying. "The filming took five weeks, and I cried during three and a half of them," she says truthfully.

Pelletier doesn't know how the film will turn out though. "It was a hard shoot with a lot of problems; I've no idea, what I've done in it. I was too much inside the role. You know I couldn't even watch rushes, I was so involved."



From her work in the last few years, she's built up some notoriety on both sides of the border. She also has become known as the attractive seductress who stole Richard Dreyfuss' heart when they were both acting in *Duddy Kravitz*. She since left both Dreyfuss, and a subsequent relationship with a Canadian actor. Pelletier suggests that she left her last beau as a result of the experience of playing the archetypal bored housewife in *Handyman*.

"The film did something to me," Pelletier says. "I was living a pretty domestic life at the time. When I did the film it made me think about domesticity and being trapped within four walls. I couldn't live that way anymore."

"It's a risky business. Maybe that's why actors are paid more. You have to continually put yourself on the line emotionally. Sometimes it leaves scars."

Pelletier took a breather from acting after *Latitude 55*. She received a grant and began writing a script with her sister Louise, a screenwriter. Besides the first screenplay, they've got another project with a Quebec scriptwriter. On top of that Andree will direct a play Louise wrote.

She is looking carefully before she does another film. She's torn between making films to better her career—to work just to work—and to do films that will improve her metier. That decision is compounded by the fact that she isn't an Anglo.

"It doesn't matter how good or bad I am; I'm French. That's a big barrier to jump."

Now that *Handyman* is a success she hopes that there will be more films which feature Canadian actors in the leading roles. "We should be able to make films without American stars. We should create our own stars. Bogart wasn't born Bogart."

She is also upset at the English Canadian film industry which she says is colonized by America. "Our industry is only 20 years old for fuck sakes. We should take care of it."

Text by Elliott Lefko



Les Bons Débarras

Born in Shanghai China in 1944 Francis Mankiewicz has risen quickly among the ranks of talented Canadian film directors. His filmography began in 1972 with a 90 minute drama *Le Temps D'Une Chasse* and 15 films later continues with *Les Bons Débarras*, an emotionally packed work that was recently nominated as Canada's best picture of the year.

Mankiewicz is a shy, sensitive and soft-spoken young man who takes a lot of pride in his work, and is extremely pleased that his latest film has been a hit both in film festivals and commercial runs, in both Quebec and New York. He was in Toronto recently to supervise the opening of his film which curiously was written and is spoken in French verse.

Is it a problem being a director in the relatively young and inexperienced Canadian film industry?

No, I think in Canada, and Quebec, a director has the most chances of making a film and getting it shown, simply because there is a lot of money put in by the various levels of government. I think that the competition is much greater in England, or France, or the United States.

How is it that French Canadian directors seem to be capturing Canadian culture in their films, something the Anglo directors are missing, for the most part?

If we're going to make films about our area of the world, they're going to be in French, and to a certain extent that excludes the possibility of using an American actor unless there was a role for an American character. So circumstances, geography, culture, though it's a disadvantage in certain ways, is an advantage in that it forces us to be ourselves.

If someone has a good idea, could you take their idea, and work with them and construct a good screenplay?

It depends because there are a lot of good ideas around. What there

isn't a lot of imagination. In a sense you can say that any ideas will make a good film. It just depends on the imagination of the writing of it.

Is the sign of a good script that you can tell the story in a few sentences?

You may not be able to tell the story, but you should be able to say in a few words about what it is you're dreaming of. For example, I could tell you that the story is about a girl and her mother but that's not it. It's about a struggle for life. About the fragility of people, and how people are emotional, and intense and passionate. And I would put that all together by saying it was a film about a romantic sense of idealism versus a sense of reality.

You seem to be a very easy going, gentle person. How does that translate into your direction?

It depends on the film. If I were doing a detective story, I wouldn't direct it the same way I directed *Les Bons Débarras*.

We spent about four or five weeks in preparation with the actors, basically getting them into their characters, and also defining the style, and the rhythm of the film—what was going to be important.

For example we decided during the preparation that all the colours in the film would be subdued. And we would always shoot the exteriors under cloudy skies, and

whenever it would be sunny we'd go indoors to achieve that kind of texture. So a great deal of the film was made in the preparation. That's the only time that you can see the thing in its entirety.

You use music very subtly. In fact you hardly hear any music in the film until one scene when you use some very spirited opera.

There was a reason for that. It's a film that looks like a social drama but it isn't. It's really a tragedy almost, in a classical sense, and I didn't want Guy (a retarded youth who kills himself) to end up in a gutter. He dies but it's not a morbid death. It's a death that takes him into another world. I felt that the music should give a sense of something that opened into something else. And I also thought that it had something of an operative death, rather than a realistic death. Take away the mental images he is dreaming about, and take away the music, and what you see is Guy ending up in a ditch in his broken up truck.

Do you think you'll ever make a nice happy comedy?

I've always had the idea to do such a film but I've always ending up doing tragedies, and slightly heavy films. I don't know why. There's something in me that goes in that direction, maybe my French-Canadian heritage. I guess we have a lot of scores to settle with life.

Francis Mankiewicz has recently completed a new film, *Les Beaux Souvenirs* (Happy Memories).

Inside Moves

The struggle to make human, personal films is as much a struggle in the United States as in Canada. Director Richard Donner, who picked up his directorial experience on *The Twilight Zone*, believes he is extremely fortunate to have made such a film in *Inside Moves*.

Based on the novel by Todd Walton, this underdog film revolves around the characters in Max's Bar, where being handicapped qualifies one for membership. Each of the very colourful characters, are almost proud of their handicaps, like a kid with his first shiner.

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