



Micheline Lanctôt



Director George Bloomfield



Shooting "Child Under a Leaf"

Montréal Report

— by George Csaba Koller

Contrary to prevailing myths in English Canada, the streets and studios of Montréal aren't exactly bustling this summer with features being shot. Nor are Québec's theatres showing anything right now but the usual foreign or porno product. (An unofficial count of Montréal movie houses at the beginning of August turned up 24 sex films playing — some French, some English — alongside the same number of U.S. features, while only one locally produced movie was being shown: Larry Kent's *Keep it in the Family*; and even that only as second fiddle to *Cabaret*.) No Québécois film could be found, except at the Outremont theatre which is running an excellent festival of choice international art films interspersed with *La Mort d'un Bûcheron*, *The Rainbow Boys*, *La Maudite Galette*, and half-a-dozen other Canadian features, but only on a single-showing basis. (To be fair, Bûcheron and other films are reportedly playing Québec-wide outside of Montréal.)

And to be fair again, a quick check of Québec production houses did turn up considerably more activity than the same poll would in Toronto. Although there are no major features being shot at this precise moment, two big-budget motion pictures just wrapped and many others are in the pre- or post-production stage. Still others are sitting on distributors' shelves just aching to be released. (Most of them are due to be — in the Fall.)

George Bloomfield just finished directing *Child Under A Leaf* here for Potterton Productions; and Cinévidéo Inc., in conjunction with Les Films du Nouveau Monde Inc., have recently ended actual production on Denis Héroux' eleventh feature film, a Québécois comedy entitled *Y a toujours moyen de moyenner* (the title is a local idiom meaning roughly "there's always a way to manage in any situation...")

Child Under A Leaf cost half-a-million to shoot and stars Dyan Cannon, Donald Pilon, Micheline Lanctôt, Joseph Campanella and Sabina Maudelle. It's an original screenplay by director Bloomfield — a tragic story of two lovers engulfed in a nightmare. Don Wilder CSC was director of photography on this 35mm colour shoot with a mixed syndicat crew. Murray Shostak

is the executive producer with Bob Bayles delegated to fill producer's chores on location. In addition to Potterton Productions, the money was put up by Ethos Productions, Famous Players, Les Productions Mutuelles and the CFDC. Mutual Films will distribute the picture slated for a March, 1974 release.

Y a toujours moyen de moyenner, another collaboration of 'les frères Héroux' (Denis directing, Claude producing) is a screen farce based on a screenplay by Marcel Lefebvre. (This kind of film seems to be the only one with a ready-made audience in Québec. *Tiens-toi bien après les oreilles à papa*, a movie of similar nature, grossed \$2.4 million in Québec alone for producers Richard Hellman and Michael Costom. It's a good, bawdy but light comedy which takes occasionally hilarious swipes at the English 'bosses'. The success of films like this, and the failure of certain serious Québec 'ouvres' at the box-office would indicate that at least some Québécois are tired of heavy, message films, no matter how noble of purpose.) The Cinévidéo produced *Y a toujours...* stars Jean-Guy Moreau, Yvan Ducharme, Dominique Michel and Danièle Ouimet (whom you might remember as Héroux' *Valérie*). Basically a series of gags, the film was shot in four weeks mid-summer in and around Montréal, with René Verzier on camera. It is scheduled to be rushed into twelve Montréal theatres simultaneously on September 28th by Cinévidéo's new distribution arm — Les Distribution Cinévidéo Inc. (a joint venture with a Montréal broadcasting group, Télé-Capitale, who had financial interests in Cinévidéo's previous project — *Je t'aime* with Jeanne Moreau. This new company will handle all of Cinévidéo's feature output from now on.)

Gilles Carle's seventh feature *Les Corps Célestes* (*The Heavenly Bodies*), produced as a Québec-France co-production, is in Paris at the moment, being musically scored. Starring Donald Pilon, Micheline Lanctôt, and Carole Laure, this \$500,000 feature will open in Montréal simultaneously in four theatres on September 7th. (Carle regrets that he didn't spend \$75 or 100 thousand more to shoot an English version right away. He's very disappointed in the reception *Bernadette* received in Toronto. Now he plans to take both

Bûcheron and *Les Corps Célestes* to Paris and New York first, before he even thinks about English-Canada.) For full details on *The Heavenly Bodies*, please see Cinema Canada, issue no. 7.

The National Film Board has wound up shooting on the first full-length film in its language series, starring Gordon Pinsent, and Larry Dane. (For a report on recent NFB activities, please wait for the next issue of this magazine). Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's *On n'engraisse pas les cochons à l'eau claire* (roughly: "one does not fatten pigs with thin water"), and Jean Cousineau's *L'Île Jaune* (yellow island), both CFDC-financed: \$100,000 features, are now finished, having been co-produced by Cinak and Prisma. More about them in the next issue, as well.

L'Association Coopérative de Productions Audio-Visuelles, the Montréal production co-op composed of young cinéastes, seem to have boundless energies, judging from their output. They've just finished co-producing Roger Frappier's *l'Infonie Inachevée* (see elsewhere in this issue), and are now post-producing Jean Chabot's *La Nuit en Amérique*, and shooting a new one by Alain Chartrand, entitled *De l'autre côté de fleuve* (a working title only, meaning "of the other side of the river"). The latter is the seventh feature-length film for this extraordinarily prolific group of young filmmakers.

John Dunning and André Link of Cinépix have set up their own production company, DAL Productions Ltd., and they are co-producing a feature-length documentary on Stompin' Tom Connors, with the singer's own label, Boot Records. Michel de Grandpré, president of Onyx Films (since January), and executive producer of *Alien Thunder* (the \$1.5 million 'biggie' shot some time back in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, directed by Claude Fournier and starring Donald Sutherland and Chief Dan George) reports that *Thunder* is presently in Paris, being dubbed into French, and it will open in Montréal on October 25th. The film was shot in English, but the dubbed version will be released first (presumably to test audience reaction and enable the producers to make a better deal with a U.S. distributor.) *Alien Thunder*, according to Grandpré, was financed entirely with private capital (hard to believe, but no



St. Catherine Street, Montréal



Don Wilder CSC

CFDC money is involved) mainly through the shareholders of Onyx, "who, as you probably know, are very influential people." They're handling the film very gingerly, since it will have to make somewhere between \$4.5 and 6 million at the box-office in order to make its money back. Few films have ever done that in Canada alone, and no Canadian film has ever grossed that much, anywhere.

But the President of Onyx Films claims that *Alien Thunder* has precisely that winning combination to enable it to succeed, where others have failed. A great script, an all-star cast, a director with a good track record (Fournier's *Two Women in Gold* grossed almost \$3 million in Canada alone), great sets and locations, and an excellent musical score. The story is based on an actual incident in the Northwest Mounted Police files, and concerns "a clash of values between red people and white people." Needless to say, the RCMP don't like the film too much. Neither did MGM, who pulled out with \$300,000, a guaranteed world-wide distribution deal, and other fringes, including the unit publicist (the reason some publications like ours haven't yet received an advance press kit on this picture). The U.S. major wanted to doctor some scenes to make them more commercial, and they disagreed with the script in general. Out they went, but miraculously the budget remained intact, and *Alien Thunder* just might be the Canadian film to make it big.

As for imminent and future production in Québec, producers here seem to be divided on how much the Department of National Revenue's closing of the tax loophole affects them directly. Pierre Lamy of Carle-Lamy, certainly one of the most prolific and respected of film producers anywhere in Canada, commented that it might be a bit easier if the tax thing were cleared up, but wisely added that there's always money for good films by good directors like Gilles Carle and Claude Jutra. It's not surprising that Lamy is producing both Carle's and Jutra's upcoming features (films as yet in the script stages) as he has done with *Bernadette*, *Bücheron*, and *Céleste*, as well as *Kamouraska*. Carle-Lamy is also producing still another André Brassard/Michel Tremblay collaboration, entitled *Once Upon a*

Time in the East (*Il était une fois de l'est*), a 35mm color feature film, incorporating all of Tremblay's characters. It's due to go into actual production soon. With a track-record like that, Pierre Lamy is right: for him, it's not that hard to raise money. Not with the best Québécois talent to back him up — a talent which he's responsible for harnessing.

George Kaczender, on the other hand, whose *U-Turn* is opening here on August 16th at the Avenue theatre, claims that many factors serve to dissuade potential investors, including — of all things — a recent *Time* magazine article, which stated that the Canadian film industry is in bad shape (Pierre Lamy's comment on the same article was "they talked to the wrong people, didn't mention what's happening in Québec!"). Kaczender feels that the only thing that would make it easy to raise money for his next project, is a smash success for *U-Turn*, or any other Canadian film.

Murray Shostak of Potterton Productions claims it's still possible to raise a half-a-million for a feature, although it's somewhat harder now because of the tax situation and — a point he feels very strongly about — overly strict CFDC stipulations, which seem to change with the wind. But of course Shostak, unlike an independent producer like Kaczender, has a thriving commercial production house behind him (Potterton makes animation and live action shows for the U.S. networks) which adds immeasurably to his credibility and enables him to get money even after taking a loss on *The Rainbow Boys*. Having wrapped *Child Under A Leaf*, Potterton Productions has just announced that they're going ahead with Brian Moore's *The Revolution Script*, which will be the first film to make it past the script stage dealing with the October crisis in Québec, 1970.

Last year there were 39 feature films produced in Québec alone. This year's total probably won't reach that figure, but chances are Québec will once again produce considerably more films than the rest of Canada combined. Hellman and Costom's Mojack Films Ltd. will probably film *Schmucks* (based on the Seymour Blicher best-seller) some time this year. John Dunning of Cinépix and Pierre David of Mutual Films have re-

cently announced that their respective companies will co-produce and distribute two 'Québécois features' within the next few months. Ted Kotcheff, Denys Arcand, and Ben Gazzara are said to have features due in Montreal this year, but details are unavailable. Paul Almond is looking for scripts to direct (Quest Film Productions Ltd., 1272 Redpath Crescent, Montréal 109, Québec), but doesn't anticipate getting started on one until October. Maxine Samuels (producer of Harvey Hart's *The Pyx*, slated for a Fall release) has set up her own company here to produce other features, the first acquisition being the Harry Boyle best-seller, *The Great Canadian Novel*. The script is presently being written on that one. And Gilles Boisvert's Citel Inc. which specializes in soft-core sex product, are aiming for an October release on a Québec-France co-production shot earlier this year, here and in Paris. Described only as a 'film comique', the 35mm color 'long métrage' includes Marcel Sabourin in its international cast, with some lovely ladies, to be sure.

That completes the survey, except for all the industrial, documentary, educational, and television films (which we always fail to mention due to lack of space) not to forget animated shorts and commercials, government and other sponsored films, and travelogues. Plus a lot of underground film activity goes unreported, merely for lack of time to track it down and energy to deal with it properly. Somewhere in Montreal there probably is a young Kubrick shooting his first epic in his basement, using super 8, two floodlights, and all his classmates as actors. But in the meantime, Frank Vitale, who has a professional background in both film and videotape, is editing his first dramatic feature, entitled *Montreal Main*. And Tom Burger is going to Ontario to shoot a fiddle contest, first as a documentary, then hopefully as a background for a feature. Ron Blumer is finishing a documentary, shot by Pedro Novak, entitled *Rescue from Isolation*, about old patients at the Maimonedes Medical Centre. And of course there is always that impenetrable labyrinth, the National Film Board, with its English and French crews out shooting day and night. But more about that, in my next report from Montréal. ●