

Knockin' on Neruda's door

Take one: A young man dressed in a jogging outfit, sporting black fishnet arm-stockings and white gloves, postures seductively in front of the camera. Another man, slightly older than the first, enters and lies in the younger man's arms. Both wear heavy theatrical, clownlike make-up. The jogger pulls up his shirt and proffers his breast which the other takes and suckles. The jogger faces the camera and in a harsh voice barks military commands in a mixture of Spanish and French.

Experimental film meets experimental political theatre on the soundstage of the NFB in Montreal where Alberto Kurapel's *Off, Off, Off ou Sur le Toit de Pablo Neruda*, a highly-acclaimed performance piece, is being filmed. Kurapel, a Chilean exile since the military coup in his country, has created a unique theatrical language combining French and Spanish text, music and projected images (video, film and slides). It is an attempt, as Kurapel explains, to create not a theatre for exiles, and therefore of nostalgia, but a theatre of exile; a theatre in which the experience of exile – the alienation from the new, the longing for the old and the resulting schizophrenia – is communicated.

It's May 6, the second to last day of shooting on the NFB's main sound stage. The actors are rehearsing the scene (described above) in which Mario (Kurapel) is seduced by the jogger (Denis Dallaire). It is one of six scenes which make up the original stage performance. All six revolve around the interaction between Mario and his tormentor, the jogger. The onstage company is completed by a piano player, while other people, including Mario's lover who has been abducted by the military, appear either in video or film on the screens hung on either side of the stage.

Producer Martin-Paul Hus (his company is named Roudoudou and his production experience is with Montreal's Mainfilm Co-op) and production coordinator Susana Caceres, Kurapel's partner and co-founder of their Compagnie des Arts Exilio (the organization through which they produce their theatrical performances as well as publish books and produce recordings), stand watching d. o. p. Philippe Amiguet frame his shot. If they're somewhat anxious it's because there's a long day of shooting ahead in order to finish by tomorrow. However, the overall mood is positive and the small crew works efficiently to set up the last shot before rushes and lunch.

I marvel at the concentration of Alberto Kurapel. Susana Caceres agrees that the task of recreating a stage performance as intense as his in *Off, Off, Off* for a film should be difficult indeed. But, she smiles, it doesn't seem to be a problem for him. And, certainly, at lunch in the NFB cafeteria (a Kafkaesque experience worth

an article in itself) Kurapel is animated and passionately energetic in a discussion about his art. Both he and director Jorge Fajardo are quick to point out that they're not out to simply film the play, but, rather, are trying to render it cinematically using the multi-media elements already present in the performance. The use of exterior shots around Montreal will also help the film to breathe, they say.

The success of *Off, Off, Off* at last year's Theatre Festival of the Americas here prompted director Jorge Fajardo to apply successfully for a Canada Council grant to film the performance. Most of the rest of the approximately \$250,000 budget is being provided by the NFB in production and technical services under its program to aid young filmmakers. Fajardo, also a Chilean exile, was making a feature-length documentary on Easter Island in 1973 when filming was interrupted by the September coup. Since coming to Canada, Fajardo has been associated with the NFB, where he contributed one film to the trilogy entitled *Il n'y a pas d'oubli* (*There is no forgetting*). He has also produced film footage for previous Compagnie des Arts Exilio productions and has just recently completed a short film entitled *La historia de Julio*, with Victor Regalado, a Salvadoran journalist and filmmaker who has been threatened with deportation from Canada but has not been allowed to know the reason why.

Although Fajardo and Kurapel didn't know each other in Chile, both were active in the fields in which they now work, although, as both

admit, the experience of exile has sharpened the political edge to their work. Alberto Kurapel was working in pre-1973 Chile as the classically-trained actor he is. In 1969, after graduating from the theatre school at the University of Chile, he toured the country starring in a play by the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes. Dissatisfied with traditional theatrical forms, Kurapel began looking elsewhere and found in music and the ritual of Chile's native peoples' influences which would mature in exile into his innovative theatrical language.

The image of Alberto Kurapel in make-up for his role as Mario stays in the mind's eye. Like Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp, he evokes both pathos and mirth. When one considers that Kurapel is in exile from a culturally rich country that enjoyed over 100 years of democracy before being plunged into despotism (thanks to an American government and business interests who viewed the democratically-elected Allende government with disfavour), the sadness for what has been lost is not only understandable, it is profoundly shared.

Take two: The jogger forces Mario at gunpoint into a small circle in the middle of the stage. He strips Mario and then covers him in black paint as the image of flickering flames appears on the screen. The jogger turns on his heel and leaves. The final projected image is of a woman, a resistance fighter. She motions with her hands but is unable to speak and can only emit a low, guttural moan.

Frank Rackow ●

fiction to make and it's more difficult to get produced," says Labrecque. He adds that he will always retain documentary as a base, but becomes irritated at the notion of mixing documentary and fiction. To Labrecque, there is a clear division between the two which must remain pure. His next project, *Ernest Livernois, photographe* is a documentary.

Labrecque and Bonin, along with screenwriter Jacques Savoie (*Les Portes tournantes*), pose for photographs while other members of the press take the opportunity to speak to actress Myriam Cyr, a New Brunswick native, last seen in Ken Russell's *Gothic*, and composer Richard Gregoire who has scored all of Yves Simoneau's films. Gregoire, not usually seen on set, is present to supervise the improvised accordion-playing of actor Gerard Poirier who plays the role of Monsieur Vincent, an elderly blind man who unwittingly takes part in the theft of Gauguin's *Seins aux fleurs rouges*. Art director Louise Jobin, whose task it was to duplicate the priceless works, did so by taking photographs of the paintings from books and blowing them up to their actual size – a process so effectively done, it had many asking if the works were authentic.

Lothaire Bluteau (*Les Fous de Bassan*) plays Johnny, a street-wise electronics whiz who befriends M. Vincent and involves him in the heist – his accordion being a key element in cracking the museum's security system. As the story develops, the pair are forced to flee while police try to trace them through Marie-Jeanne (Myriam Cyr), a mutual friend of the two unlikely partners in crime. Bluteau, who has worked with Labrecque before on *Les Années de rêve* says he enjoys working with the director, noting that his experience as a cameraman is a definite asset to his direction. "He knows exactly what he wants," says Bluteau, who is also very happy with his own role in the film. "It's a different type of character for me, more upbeat."

The diligent yet friendly crew makes for a relaxed atmosphere; the extras slowly take their positions, while Labrecque and entourage prepare for a 320 degree dolly shot which will focus on Johnny and M. Vincent in the centre of the exhibit hall. Publicist Christiane Ducasse and I, making sure we are not captured on film, duck behind a partition which blocks our view till the end of the take. I later find myself a discreet spot away from the action as the next shot is being set up. It's a close-up of Poirier made-up to resemble the late artist, looking a lot like a Gauguin self-portrait which is present on the set. M. Vincent's fascination and later obsession with the French master is an integral part of the plot and one that pays tribute to the artist.

The feature, which will air next January on Radio-Québec, is the seventh in a series of 10 films made by Les Producteurs TV-Films Associés.

Jim Lévesque ●



Alberto Kurapel in *Off, Off, Off ou Sur le Toit de Pablo Neruda*

“WE’VE MERGED!”

As of July 1, 1988, the world’s largest entertainment insurance broker and Canada’s number one entertainment industry insurance broker have joined forces.

Albert G. Ruben & Company, Inc. (world’s largest) and Arthur Winkler Entertainment Insurance Broker (Canada’s #1), have merged to better serve the insurance needs of the entertainment industry. Arthur Winkler is now known as, RUBEN-WINKLER ENTERTAINMENT INSURANCE LTD. and will be located at 20 Bay Street, Suite 1809, Toronto, Ontario M5J 2N8, telephone number (416) 868-2442, FAX (416) 868-2443.

Now, wherever or whatever your insurance needs are, the Ruben Company offers a complete program of coverage that’s right for you. With our new partners in place, Ruben will now offer in Canada one-stop service for producers, directors, talent, as well as business managers and their clients.

Expanding our services through the acquisition of Arthur Winkler is another example of Ruben’s commitment to be your single, best, worldwide, source of entertainment insurance.

When you look for insurance solutions, call the company that is #1 in the world for the entertainment industry ... call the Ruben Company.



Scott Milne, Chairman



Albert G. Ruben & Co., Inc.

2121 Avenue of the Stars • Suite 700 • Los Angeles, CA 90067

Albert G. Ruben & Co., Inc.
(213) 551-1101, Century City
Bob Jellen, President

Albert G. Ruben & Co., Inc.
of Beverly Hills (213) 274-8891
Shel Bachrach, President

Albert G. Ruben & Co.
(New York), Inc.
(212) 627-7400
George Walden, President

Ruben Sedgwick Insurance Services
(011-44-753) 654-555, London
Robin Hillyard, President

Ruben-Winkler Entertainment Insurance Ltd.
(416) 868-2442, Toronto
Arthur Winkler, President