

Film's women make their own kind of 'Love'

"Long Beach was sweltering," reports the script, but along the shore of Lake Ontario there is a distinct chill in the air. Nevertheless, Toronto's Beaches area must stand in for California's Long Beach, a challenge to which it has risen nicely, providing sun, an awesomely still lake and gulls swooping artfully along its surface.

On the roof of the Balmy Beach Club, which has a little dirt stained across its stucco to approximate the roof of a beauty parlor, reclines an actress named Toni Kalem. She is disarming in a pink slip, humming the Halls Of Montezuma as she greets her returning Marine boy friend (played by Nicholas Campbell). Nobody told the swirling gulls but it's 1945, at least as far as a new Canadian movie called Love is concerned.

"Looked good for me on camera, Nancy," offers cinematographer Norman Leigh to the director after Kalem has finished humming and someone has flipped off the sound track banging out the Marine anthem.

"Well, it didn't look good for me," director and screenwriter Nancy Dowd offers right back.

Controversial screenplay

She wrote the controversial screenplay for Slapshot, and won an Academy Award. But this is her first opportunity to have a part in directing a feature. She bends over the ac-



The producer: Renee Perlmutter got the ball rolling on Love, a 'once-in-a-lifetime' project.



RON BASE
Movies

trous. "Toni, how do you feel about doing this without music?"

Toni feels just fine and hums away once again as the camera records the moment. In fact, on the set of Love, into its second day of an eight-week shooting schedule, everyone is feeling fine.

"I do feel fine," Dowd exclaims a few moments later, as if she is somewhat surprised by the fact. "People tell me they didn't sleep last night." She blinks a couple of times. "I slept just fine."

If good spirits have anything to do with excellence, then Love should be a very good movie indeed. Certainly it is an attempt to do something original and risky in a Canadian movie industry that has yet to be accused of doing either. That alone makes Love noteworthy.

Not only is this an anthology, the sort of thing Hollywood has traditionally shunned, but it is an anthology without any name stars, written by nine famous women writers who offer "their extraordinary personal visions of this most complex, exasperating and exhilarating emotion." What's even more unusual, the picture is directed by four women, Dowd, Liv Ullmann, Mai Zetterling and a Canadian, Annette Cohen.

'Can't believe it'

With the exception of Zetterling, none of the women previously has had a hand in directing a full-scale feature movie. "It's a very risky thing," says Nancy Dowd over lunch a few days after shooting of her segment has been completed. "No one in the U.S. gets to direct like this, certainly not under the Hollywood system. I mean I just can't believe it."

Suddenly, she is very excited. "According to the Director's Guild, since 1949 there have been only seven distributed feature pictures directed by women. To think that four women are directing in one film. That's more than 50 per cent of what's been done in the past. It's unbelievable. It's like it can't happen."



Writer/director Nancy Dowd, left, rehearses Toni Kalem and Nicholas Campbell on set of anthology film Love.

It is happening because of Renee Perlmutter, wife of movie producer and financier David Perlmutter. She had worked for some time as a script developer at her husband's Quadrant Films, but never produced a movie herself. She came across the script, originally commissioned by London producer Barry Levinson, at the Cannes Film Festival in 1979.

"It was one of those projects that comes to you once in a lifetime," Perlmutter explains after joining Dowd at lunch. "It had all these wonderful elements, so I thought, 'Okay, I'll buy it and do it.'"

Germaine Greer, author of The Female Eunuch, wrote a vignette about a 10-year-old girl discovering love and its nasty complications for the first time.

Lady Antonia Fraser, known for her bestselling historical biographies and her marriage to playwright Harold Pinter, wrote about a couple on their wedding day. Irish author Edna O'Brien wrote about a man who encounters a woman with whom he'd had an affair five years earlier.

Singer Joni Mitchell (who also appears in her segment) contributed the story of a rejected lover, while author Gael Greene provided a liberal-minded wife who gives her husband an unexpectedly sensual

birthday present. New York critic Penelope Gilliatt and actress Liv Ullmann both wrote pieces about love among elderly people.

Swedish actress Mai Zetterling, who covered the territory years ago in Night Games, once again investigated an incestuous relationship between a mother and son.

In bed with camera

Nancy Dowd's story is perhaps indicative of the provocative way in which the movie deals with the whole subject of love. It is about a frankly sexual moment in the lives of the soldier and his beautician girlfriend. It's done with an explicitness not ordinarily found in mainstream movies. But, Dowd hastens to add, it's also done with great sensitivity.

"Instinctively, I think, women have great common sense," Renee Perlmutter says. "When they get into bed with a camera, they really get into bed with it."

"Nancy, for example, has shot one of the most torrid love scenes ever filmed. Men can't do that. I've never seen a torrid love scene from a Canadian male director. Sexuality, after all, is vitally important in our lives, and it's not very often reflected in movies."

Dowd, who wrote the original

screenplay for Coming Home, with its explicit love scene between Jane Fonda and Jon Voight, believes one reason sexuality is avoided in movies is that male directors exploit it.

Love, as Buddy Holly used to say, is strange. Certainly you are never going to find Nancy Dowd in an apron, praying she didn't burn the pot roast. In fact, she doubts she will ever marry.

She is 36 years old, with short dark hair, silver earrings in the shape of stars and one of those voices that just naturally cuts shrilly through everyone else's conversation.

She grew up in Boston, attended the film school at UCLA and became an overnight sensation by writing a vulgar, bawdy screenplay about minor-league hockey called Slapshot.

"After that," she says, "I was offered every sports picture going, but I

don't know anything about sports. I was really writing about my family — my brother, Ned, was a professional hockey player."

She was pushed out onto the publicity circuit by Universal Studios, vilified by some critics because of Slapshot's strong language.

She had a well-publicized fight with Jane Fonda over the script of Coming Home (a subject which she now will not discuss) and in general became tougher and more assertive.

Those are traits, Perlmutter says, that all the women connected with Love have in common. "Men can't marry women like these," she pronounces. "They will always be romantically involved with lots of men, but they won't marry them."

That's another story, but it's one that may well be told if Renee Perlmutter ever makes a sequel to Love.

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