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Once a sex symbol herself, Sweden's Mai Zetterling, now in her 50s, is in Toronto directing two segments of *Love*, a nine-part film anthology (one of them written by Canadian songwriter **Joni Mitchell**).

Zetterling changed careers 20 years ago, after the explicit sex scenes in two of her films, *Night Games* and *Loving Couples*, caused a furor. She has written three novels and is working on autobiography.

Sex bomb is a director now

By Jack McIver Toronto Star

The ubiquitous cream Winnebagos, emblematic of yet another made-in-Toronto movie, are wrapped around the southwest corner of King and Bathurst streets, holding the Wheat Sheaf tavern hostage for a day. Although it's his day off, Don Felora, manager of the pub for the past 35 years, is stationed on the sidewalk, apologizing to loyal customers who've dropped by for a pint or two: Sorry, folks, we're closed; come back tomorrow and the soup's on the house.

Inside, the usual 20,000 or so people it seems to take to put a movie together are smacking into each other, tripping over cables, squawking into walkie-talkies (in this case to listeners within lip-reading distance), and wheezing on the man-made fumes of smoke bombs. A few are wearing gas masks to filter the smog.

Sickly haze

A half-dozen extras are spread around a snooker table that's been brought into the bar for this particular scene; the smoke bombs are spewing out their sickly-sweet haze in an attempt at verisimilitude.

In the sequence being rehearsed, the "waiter" has to walk onto the set with a tray of beer, offer glasses to the pool players, and exit. The huge Panavision camera will be recording his every move. Simple.

His every move, unfortunately, and those of the young men around the table, aren't quite what the director has in mind. The waiter and the pool players, wielding their cues as though they were 20-foot lawn rakes, keep colliding or walking in front of each other. One lad persists in watching the waiter's approach with a look of panic in his eyes, as though the beer tray was laden with vials of nitroglycerin.



In the forties, Mai Zetterling was a well known actress.

"Cut!" cries the director once again. "This is not Shakespeare, fellows. This is just an easy game. Okay, once more, with feeling!"

The director is wearing bright red shoes and a velour cranberry top and matching slacks. She's a tiny woman, a shade over five feet tall, with a plump figure and short, reddish-brown hair. Her blue eyes are watering heavily from the blanket of acrid smoke in the room, but she's attacking this scene like a trouper, balancing on tiptoe to check the angle of the camera, asking for quiet, please, rearranging the positions of the extras, and offering encouragement to all: "Tod, don't be shy, don't hide back there. Right, let's have a real rehearsal this time."

The owner of the Wheat Sheaf, Jerry Borins, has closed his tavern

for the day in return for rent from the film company and a chance to play a bit part in the movie, as a bartender. He says the director is a gem to work with: "Every time she finishes a scene she asks, 'How was that for you?' She's really concerned about everyone."

And Gordon Thompson, who's playing the male lead in the film, says she's "been a treat — one of the most positive persons I've ever worked with. It's one of the first times in my life I can look at a director and trust her completely."

Shifted careers

The director's name is Mai Zetterling, and she is indeed a pro, a former Swedish "sex-bomb" actress who shifted careers 20 years ago and went on to become one of the most controversial writer-directors in the movie business. In the mid-60s, two of her films, *Night Games* and *Loving Couples*, churned up a worldwide furor over what were then labelled "franky torrid sex scenes." When *Night Games* was shown at the Venice Film Festival in 1966, only journalists were allowed to view it; the public was banned from the screening.

More recently, her tour of Stockholm in producer John McGreevy's *Cities* series was slammed by some for being too critical in its examination of her birthplace.

Zetterling, now in her mid-50s, is in Toronto to direct two segments of *Love*, a nine-part film anthology for which women such as Germaine Greer, Nancy Dowd, Liv Ullman and Lady Antonia Fraser have written scripts dealing with various aspects of love. As well as the sequence she has written, *Love From The Market*, which includes this scene at the Wheat Sheaf, Zetterling will be di-

recting a portion written by Canadian songwriter **Joni Mitchell**.

Zetterling's accent is still as thick as a fjord fog, but her English, the language in which she does all her writing, is excellent. *Love From The Market*, she explains, is about a mother and son and their shared passion — for food. "It's an ironic, incestuous, rather baroque piece about food."

The story, she adds, is also about incest, "not in a physical way, but in their closeness to food. Incest, after all, can simply mean a closeness, and food can be a sort of love, or a substitute for love. The mother and son are rather isolated in their own particular way, and, instead of a relationship, they have this relationship to food. Some would say it's sort of Fellini-esque. Of course others would say, 'Oh, that's typical Mai.'"

There seems to be little that is "typical Mai" (it's pronounced "My"). As early as the 1940s, she had established herself as an actress of note, appearing in a couple of early Bergman films (*Torment* and *Music In The Dark*) and with Peter Sellers in *Only Two Can Play*. But acting wasn't enough: "I'm a mover; I like to set things in motion. I decided I didn't want to be always sitting at the end of a telephone, waiting for a call."

And so she turned to directing, winning a prize at the 1963 Venice Film Festival for a short feature called *The War Game*. After that came features such as *Night Games*, *Loving Couples* and *The Girls*, documentaries, including her brilliant study of weightlifters in the film about the 1972 Olympics, *Visions Of Eight*, and a film for young people, *The Moon Is A Green Cheese*. Along the way, she's written three novels, a collection of short stories, a chil-

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dren's book, screenplays; and is currently working on her autobiography, *A Woman Who Did...Who Does*.

"I love contrasts," says Zetterling. "I feed on contrasts. One night I'll be in a Hilton Hotel somewhere, with a television that gets 13 channels; the next day I'll be living in a tent on the ice edge of Greenland, where there is no television at all. One has to decide for oneself what one really wants.

"I would hate to go from movie to movie, just directing. If I'm doing a big movie, I can't wait to go back home and write. I decided long ago that I'm only going to do things I want to do. I don't like to compromise; I'm a very bad compromiser."

Writing, she says, is "something I feel very strongly about. It's something that comes from a need to write. But I never do any pre-selling of what I write. In a sense, I don't consider myself a writer — it's a bloody struggle."

All her books have been translated into Swedish, but she feels more comfortable writing in English, although everything requires four or five rewrites. When she began writing in her late 20s, says Zetterling, she chose English because of "a backlog of all sorts of inhibitions.

"I stopped school when I was 13 and had to work in factories and at all sorts of odd jobs. When I went to the (Swedish) National Theatre School, all the other students were much older. I was the only sort of working-class lass, a Swedish cockney type, and I can still remember feeling crushed by the pomposity of the others.

"Because of this, I've always had a terrific hangup about writing in Swedish. The basic thoughts of childhood stick for a hell of a long time."

One of her childhood fantasies, she says, was to be an explorer, and that eagerness for change helps explain her love of diversity, but beyond that is "a love of the art. And, sure, it's survival, too. If you're free-lance, you have to have many boats out. Some come back, others float out and away into the big ocean."

Zetterling has survived quite nicely. Twice-divorced, she now lives about two hours from Avignon, in the south of France, "in a ramshackle old farm in the mountains which I fixed up. Mind you, I certainly don't have a Rolls Royce; I drive a Deux Cheveaux."

Zetterling's two children are grown: Her son is a professor of sociology and English at the University of Barcelona; a married daughter lives in Stockholm, "doing pottery."

"I think it's very difficult for children to take the same job as their parents, particularly in this strange business." She seldom returns to Stockholm herself, but made an exception for the Cities television series. "The people who understood it," she says of the segment she wrote, directed and appeared in, "liked it very much. Those who didn't like it didn't understand it. Stockholm wasn't meant to be a travelogue; the whole point was to make a very personal story and, doing that kind of personal story, also show the city.

"I couldn't possibly have just said, 'Here is so-and-so and here is such-and-such.' It was very risky — I took risks. I had to show that it's not all roses, that it's got its drawbacks."

And the Swedes? "Oh, they wouldn't like it at all. But then, you couldn't possibly expect everyone to like it."