

Oh! Revoir Julie

Montrealer's fine first feature is a tiny revelation

Thursday night, Cinéma Libre threw itself a party at the Media Lounge. The 6 to 8 p.m. cocktail of ferred wine and beer to the many friends, film-makers, film-makers' children and assorted festival roués who gathered in the wired Stygian gloom of the Lounge's Just for Laughs Museum space to celebrate the local film distributor's substantial presence in this year's event.

No fewer than 10 strong films made the cut, ranging from Erratic Angel, Donigan Cumming's harrowing portrait of a recovering substance-abuser railing at the night; Étienne Desrosiers and Nicolas Fricot's Pot de Colle, a street love triangle positioned around a guy who puts up posters for a living; and Oh Mother!, a picture of the changing role of motherhood, by Sandra Dametto and Sara Morley.

Clips from the films filled a triptych of screens along an end wall of the third-floor loft, and glowed from scattered TV monitors in the room designated as multi-media lab for festival president Daniel Langlois and section head Alain Mongeau.

Amazingly, people broke with the time-honoured tradition of mobbing the bar to actually watch the clips, listen to the intro speeches and comment on the remarkable variety of work being done in different formats. And not all of those doing the earnest commenting were necessarily intimately associated with the projects in question.

New Cinema director Claude Chamberlan was spotted wandering along this black-walled, sofa-strewn, hi-tech rec room, pointing his brand-new hi-8 video camera toy at anything that moved and asking for on-camera impressions of the Lounge.

"Where are the windows in this place?" was one such observant response, though in a moment of post-glib reflection, it occurred that a floor devoted to sound and image on screen is one of the few that can get away with no known references to the outside world.

And once the eyes adjusted to an area even darker than the clothes most of Thursday's invitees were wearing, there was Montreal filmmaker Jeanne Crépeau perched on a chair, finishing an interview for her fine first feature, Revoir Julie.

Crépeau had nothing to do with the party or Cinéma Libre — she was off to see Lee Herschman Leeson's *Conceiving Ada*, starring her idol Tilda Swinton — and *Revoir Julie* is distributed by Film Tonic. But the film community being the size it is in Montreal, she knew half

the crowd, said her hellos and accepted compliments about her movie with disarming modesty.

Revoir Julie is essentially a two-hander for talented, clear-eyed actors Stephanie Morgenstern and Dominique Leduc. As the picture opens, Morgenstern's blonde, busy Juliet is hustling around her Montreal flat, crossing items off a definitive lifestyle-modification list on her fridge door.

Top of that list is written "revoir Julie," and it will be the last thing left to do as Juliet finishes the makeover of her life.

She hops in her Honda Civic, hits the Eastern Townships Autoroute and stops at a gas station to consult a map. In one of many moments that reveal *Revoir Julie* to be the work of careful observation of the little things, Juliet wrestles with the map in a tailwind, slaps it back together and continues on her journey.

She arrives at a vintage Townships farm house in an area we know to lie somewhere between Ayer's Cliff and Stanstead.

Another mystery. Juliet could walk up to the front door, knock and extend a hand to her long-lost friend Julie (Leduc). But she doesn't,

instead peering in a window. There's history behind these two, behind their separation, and Crépeau will spend the rest of the film explaining it.

Revoir Julie isn't a film that's going to change the world, but it's a tiny revelation just the same.

Shot for next to nothing during frightful late-winter/early-spring conditions, it makes no more claims for itself than chronicling the reunion of two women — one English, one French, one fair, one dark — who were very close as teenagers and may be falling in love now, as they near 30.

Exploiting uncluttered camera set-ups, gorgeous rural light, the intelligent, divergent beauty of her leads, and a script that manages to be both talky and spare at the same time, Crépeau effectively defines the space between people and how that space is closed.

Her history as a maker of animated films serves her well. She brings a poster of the great French rocker Jacques Higelin to life in a bedroom; shows maps of geological flow lines to explain Julie's profession; and cuts from a genuinely steamy lip lock between the two women to plunder the world's art collections of famous women, altering the Mona Lisa, for example, to arch an eyebrow and crease that enigmatic smile.

There's a definitive scene in the farmhouse kitchen, as motor mouth Juliet laboriously peels a potato for dinner and rattles on. While

she's talking and assaulting that poor spud, Crépeau edits Julie prepping the entire meal and pouring another glass of white wine for herself. So she's the practical one, the scene says, and moves on.

Revoir Julie also gets out of the house at regular intervals. It's good for everyone's health. The girls visit a neighbouring farmer at his historic round barn (Quebec legend Marcel Sabourin). They go fishing, and Juliet watches while Julie works in the garden. A swinging, empty hammock, and Holstein cow are repeated motifs.

These aren't major expeditions, but they break the film out of potential claustrophobia and offer more evidence that Crépeau thought every detail through to its logical, satisfying conclusion.

Of course, she had the time. *Revoir Julie* is a film that's been in various stages of creation for eight years.

"The film you're seeing now bears almost no relation to the script I originally started working on. It was going to be about an Olympic swimmer, but by the time we finally got around to shooting, I figured no one would believe Stephanie could still be a competitive swimmer."

Revoir Julie's on-again, off-again life finally jelled when Crépeau realized she was nearing the "best before" date of a modest Telefilm Canada grant.

A call to action was sealed when the filmmaker went to visit a friend in the Townships, fell in love with the house that would become her principal set and asked the owner if she might rent it for two months.

The reply was affirmative, Crépeau furiously rewrote her entire script to reflect her experience of reuniting with a friend after 15 years, phoned the two actors she'd had on the hook for the decade, and went to work.

"The shoot was nerve-wracking," Crépeau recalled. "The weather was horrible. It snowed when we were supposed to be shooting in spring. It seemed nothing went the way it was supposed to."

But some things went well. Higelin was generous with his time and songs. Renowned Hudson musician Karen Young put together an atmospheric score. And Marcel Sabourin found two days in his hectic schedule to put on rubber boots and play the farmer.

Thursday, tired and shyly happy, Crépeau looked back on the experience and expressed satisfaction. But she wants to work with a real, live producer next time.

✦ *Revoir Julie* screens at the NFB cinema today and tomorrow at 3:45 p.m. It opens commercially at the Cinéma Parallèle Oct. 29.



JOHN
GRIFFIN
MOVIES

Dominique Leduc (left) is Julie, Stephanie Morgenstern is Juliet, two long-lost friends who find each other again in Jeanne Crépeau's *Revoir Julie*.

