

Silent Norman, an Alien Named Phil and a Guy Who Sells Limbs



Director of photography François Dagenais csc and director Federico Hidalgo on location in Mexico for *A Silent Love*.



From left, Susana Salazar (Fernanda), Vanessa Bauche (Gladys) and Noel Burton (Norman) in a Montréal scene for *A Silent Love*.



Rob Stefaniuk as Phil (left) talks philosophy with Mike Beaver as the Trapper in *Phil The Alien*.

Norman, a quiet, middle-aged college teacher from Montreal, embarks on the adventure of his life when he goes to Mexico to propose to Gladys, a young woman he met through an Internet agency.

That's the bare-bones outline of *A Silent Love*, a sedate little romantic feature, with a twist, that was shot by Montreal-based DOP François Dagenais csc. It is one of those countless low-budget Canadian films that earn a few gold stars at various film festivals, then illuminate a dozen or so art-house screens before drifting to television and perhaps a special Canadian corner of the local video store.

This is not damning with faint praise. *A Silent Love* is more human and attractive than many of this past summer's Hollywood blockbusters, and Dagenais has made the Super 16mm blowup look just right for the low-key story and characters.

From Atopia, *A Silent Love* is directed by Federico Hidalgo, produced by Pascal Maeder, written by Hidalgo and wife Paulina Robles. The feature, Hidalgo's first, was showcased at last month's Montreal World Film Festival after winning best screenplay awards at the Brooklyn International Film

By Don Angus

Festival and the Miami Latin Film Festival. It has also garnered public and critical acclaim at Sundance 2004, the Guadalajara Muestra de Cine, and the Museum of Modern Art's Canadian Front: New Films showcase.

Canadian theatrical release opened in Montreal Sept. 10, Vancouver Sept. 17 and Toronto Sept. 24, preceding a TIFF Film Circuit tour of the film across Canada this fall. The film opens at the Quad Cinema in New York City Oct. 15, followed by openings in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and Miami.

Hidalgo asked Dagenais to find a low-contrast 16mm film that would look good when blown up to 35mm, and the DOP chose the now-discontinued Kodak Vision 500T 7263 stock - "the most desaturated stock we could get."

He said 7263 "has a rating of 500 ASA, which is really, really high and really, really risky for Super 16, because when you blow up you see the grain a lot more. But the director really wanted to get a desaturated look. What he wanted the most was for the exteriors to be desaturated, for the colours to kind of go away."

Dagenais said he shot over by a third of a stop. The 7263 is very tricky, he added. "If you under or overexpose it too much, it becomes muddy. You have to be kind of right on it. I think that's one of the reasons the stock was discontinued."

Dagenais started his film career by directing a series of 23 short documentaries around the world for the CBC. Between 1995 and 1997, he earned an MFA from the American Film Institute in Los Angeles where he shot his first feature film, *Mascara*. Since 1999, he has photographed seven features including *Between the*



Peter Stebbing as Gabriel Goode keeps warm in a scene from *The Limb Salesman*.

Moon and Montevideo, One Eyed King, A Silent Love and *Cube Zero*, the prequel to the cult movie *Cube*. *Undying Love*, a feature documentary on Holocaust survivors, earned him the 2003 CSC Award for Best Docudrama Cinematography.

Associate member D. Gregor Hagey, something of a veteran now at lensing low-budget indies, told *CSC News* he had two features at this year's Toronto International Film Festival. One was the comedy *Phil The Alien*, directed by Rob Stefaniuk, and the other was the sci-fi gothic *The Limb Salesman*, directed by Anais Granofsky (*On Their Knees*, see *CSC News*, November/2000). Hagey also had a short at TIFF, *Mothers, Fathers and Other Strangers*, directed by Carl Knutson.

Phil The Alien won a NNNN rating from *Now* magazine, which called it "Canadian Bacon, with aliens, as retold by some very funny Gen-X barflies," and *The Limb Salesman* got a five-column, above-the-fold photo treatment in the *Toronto Star's* Sept. 10 Movies section.

Stefaniuk wrote, directed, edited and starred in *Phil The Alien*, which *Now* describes as "the inspiring story of an alien who crash-lands in northern Ontario, develops a drinking problem, becomes a born-again Christian and battles American spies in a secret bunker under Niagara Falls." The reviewer thought it was "hilarious, but because a friend of mine is in it I called in a disinterested third party for a second opinion. He laughed all the way through it. 'It's Canadian,' was his verdict, 'but it's funny.'"

Hagey said *Phil The Alien* was shot in Super 16mm, 1.85 aspect ratio, on Fuji 250T 64D stock loaded in a converted Arri SR11 camera from PS. The release print was blown up from a DBeta master at SoHo Digital.

He shot *The Limb Salesman* in 1.85 on a Panasonic DVX-100A miniDV camcorder. The tape-to-tape colour correct was done at Magnetic North, with the release print blown up from a DBeta master at SoHo Digital.

(P.S. - In June, Hagey worked on a documentary in Ethiopia for TV5 of France.) •

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