



Jean-Claude Lauzon, left, with cinematographer Guy Dufaux shooting *Un Zoo la nuit*

Lauzon/Lauzone

2001 90m prod Lyla Films, p Lyse Lafontaine, Pierre Latour, d Louis Bélanger, Isabelle Hébert, sc Isabelle Hébert, ph Guy Dufaux, ed Claude Palardy, s Serge Beauchemin, Marcel Pothier, Hans Peter Strobl; with Pierre Bourgault, Jean Charbonneau, Pierre-Henri Deleau, Guy Dufaux, Pierre Falardeau, Roger Frappier, Pierre Gendron, Louis Grenier, Isabelle Hébert, Lyse Lafontaine, Alma Lauzon, Gaston Lepage, Gilles Maheu.

News of the sudden and untimely death of filmmaker Jean-Claude Lauzon, on August 10, 1997, sent ripples of shock through Quebec. He and his girlfriend, actress Marie-Soleil Tougas, died when the plane he was flying crashed in the woods of Northern Quebec. Both of them held important places on Quebec's cultural horizon; she as a familiar face of daily television, he as a star filmmaker filled with promise.

Though he only left two feature films – *Un Zoo la nuit* (1987) and *Léolo* (1992) – Lauzon had a reputation that exceeded his art. Born in Montreal in 1953, he made his first short film, *Super Maire l'homme de trois milliards*, while studying communications at l'Université du Québec à Montréal in 1979. It won him the Norman McLaren grand prize at the Canadian Student Film Festival. His first professional film, a 1981 short titled *Pivi* starring Gaston Lepage, won the Jury Prize at Montreal's World Film Festival.

Lauzon took on the project of *Un Zoo la nuit* in 1987 after a successful stint in advertising, a field he would return to at vari-

ous stages in his career. The soulful and intriguing tale of a father-son reunion deftly walked the line between tenderness and violence, making its way into the hearts of critics and audiences alike, winning a whopping 13 Genie Awards (the most ever) and propelling Lauzon into the spotlight. A few more years working in advertising went by before he returned to cinema in 1992 with *Léolo*, an ambitious fresco based loosely on the fantastical universe of his childhood. The film's impressionistic multi-layering, though fallible at times, revealed Lauzon as a filmmaker of surprising capabilities, as much poet as image maker. It won three Genies and was nominated for six more, in addition to being nominated for a Golden Palm at Cannes.

Despite the bated breath with which his adoring audiences waited, Lauzon again turned his back on cinema to work in advertising. *Léolo* would be his last feature.

Lauzon/Lauzone is a documentary of striking intimacy. Penned by the filmmaker's closest friend, actress Isabelle Hébert, it brings the viewer into the crevices of a life that now belongs to realms of the mythic. Lauzon was known for his buoyant, incendiary character, seen simplistically as the bad boy of Quebec cinema because of his occasionally vicious tongue and vehement anti-institutionalism. Footage of a television interview, during which he denounces the pitiful state of arts funding, shows the side of him that made him a media favourite:

the quick, sharp-witted artist filled with the anger and dissatisfaction afforded only by geniuses. He left behind a trail of disgruntled actors and staff members wherever he went, and even today round-table discussions with ex-victims of his lashings continue to fascinate television audiences. The tragedy of his early death did nothing to assuage the myth, but rather cemented it, guaranteeing his martyrdom.

The pain of losing someone too soon, and someone of unusual creative talent particularly – the wasted promise, the thwarted genius – is expressed in *Lauzon/Lauzone*, but not to the exclusion of real, complex portraiture. The film guards itself against wallowing, idealization and sentimentality and offers through the wide-ranging testimonials of friends and family a new understanding for the man behind the art. Filmmaker Louis Bélanger (*Post Mortem*) wrote that he was more than reticent to take this project on before reading Hébert's screenplay. A feature filmmaker by experience, he feared the troubled waters of a documentary project, especially one about a fellow filmmaker of such tragic renown. But as soon as he put the screenplay down, he was convinced. Bélanger seems to have found a way to complement the emotional intensity of Hébert's tribute to her friend. His camera remains unobtrusive when facing the talking heads, but becomes expressive in times of transition. Bélanger was intent on illustrating the conflicting motivations that lived within Lauzon and is mostly successful in this attempt.

Lauzon was a nomad to a fault, perpetually itching to be on the move, escaping from the now. He was haunted by a profound fear of both depression and insanity, ailments that affected various members of his family. He wrote frantically throughout his life – some of the film's most beautiful words

come from his writings – but suffered from a crippling low esteem of his own written work. Moviemaking was for him the greatest of challenges, each time plunging him into the depths of creative anguish, bringing with each blissful accomplishment an investigation of self that left him spent. His one true solace in life came in the form of a communion with nature – in his mind, a return to the roots of his Native grandfather – which he indulged through hunting, fishing and flying. The documentary is peppered with snapshots of Lauzon the hunter with freshly slaughtered prey, as well as home-video footage of walks through the woods in his muddy khakis, a pleasant contrast to the suited intellectualism of his public persona. One of the film's funniest passages is when Lauzon's mother recounts the time he shot a bear and rather than show his hunt off by bringing home a photo of the beast, decided it would be a better idea to bring the whole glorious corpse. He strapped it to his car and drove all the way to Montreal, plopping the monster on his mother's back doorstep with a proud "Look, Ma!"

The interviews conducted with Madame Lauzon, Isabelle Hébert herself and Gaston Lepage stand out as particularly endearing, though all contributions, especially the unexpected presence of a psychoanalyst who pleasantly explains the significance of Lauzon's films, add interesting angles. Lauzon seems to have drawn out the best in some people, inspiring unparalleled loyalty and friendship alongside a healthy dose of irreverence. To know and love Lauzon was to enjoy the challenge of overwhelming personalities; as Hébert says, he was a misogynist, an egomaniacal and temperamental child at times, but he was electrifying. The verve with which he consumed life seems to have been compelling above all else, and *Lauzon/Lauzone* communicates this eloquently.

ISA TOUSIGNANT

TAKE ONE

Léolo: Lauzon was a filmmaker of surprising capabilities, as much a poet as an imagemaker.

