

# The language gap

Quebec is famous for the language divide between its French and English communities. One of the challenges facing DP Serge Ladouceur was shooting the entire TV mini-series celebrating the life story of **René Lévesque** in both languages. "Most of the cast were comfortable in English and French," he recalls, "though sometimes they forgot which language the take was supposed to be!"

As well as numerous TV series and films, Ladouceur's résumé includes the hit family comedy **Mambo Italiano**. He won a CSC Award for Best Theatrical Feature Cinematography in 1997 for his work on **Night of the Flood**. Also in 1997, he won the Golden Sheaf Award for Best Cinematography on **Zie 37 Stagen** at the Yorkton Film Festival. His work in cinematography brought him 12 various nominations including an ASC nomination in 2003 for the Sherlock Holmes TV movie **The Case of the Whitechapel Vampire**.

The series focuses on Lévesque's political career during the period of Quebec politics known as the end of the Dark Era and the Quiet Revolution. A six-hour series, to be shown in three two-hour episodes in English and six one-hour shows in French, **René Lévesque** was due to be shot in HD. However, a producer friend in Ireland persuaded Ladouceur's producer, Claudio Luca, to shoot on film

instead. This helped Ladouceur create a stylised effect during the early years of the story.

"Lévesque's history in the series takes place during the late 1950s and into the 1960s. I wanted to create a distinctive difference between the first two hours and the rest of the series.

"To create this look, Ladouceur shot on 7274 and 7218 for the first two hours and emulated a bleach bypass process during timing. "The 7274 gives a slightly more contrasty look," says Ladouceur. "And colours have a harder edge than the VISION2 films. So I took advantage of that and pushed it further in timing, desaturating the colors, raising the whites and bringing the blacks down. The 7218 is such a versatile stock that I used it in combination with the 74 for the night and low light interior scenes.

But I didn't want that change to be extreme. People with a technical eye would see it right away, but most of the audience will react emotionally: the effect will be on their subconscious."

The rest of the series was shot using VISION2 stocks only: 7217 and 7218.

As well as the usual difficulties of making 50 extras look like 500, Ladouceur had the challenge of recreating the period in a modern environment. "Shooting in an era of 40 or more years ago, the biggest problem is set design. Everything in view must be consistent with the period. That wasn't so bad for interiors, but the exteriors meant hard work to source period vehicles and ensure the architecture and the practical lighting were correct."

Below: A scene from René Lévesque



A lot of stock footage from the 1950s and 60s was coloured in post-production and incorporated into the series. Ladouceur found a clever solution to the difference in look between the films. "The grain in the stock footage meant there was quite a marked contrast between what we had shot and what we wanted to include. Removing the grain from older film stock would have been tricky or impossible, so we added grain to the scene just before and after the older clips to give a more seamless entry and exit for stock scenes." The production remained true to the period also: one example being the use of a dolly rather than a Steadicam. "The idea was to stay in sync with the means of the era as well."

Without the extravagant means of a really big production, Ladouceur has remained faithful to the historical period during the 71-day bilingual shoot. "This is going to be a great show," he concludes. "Historically it is sharp and well-researched. As much as possible it respects the true events during a period of huge political importance. I think it will be around for a long time to come." ■

Right: Emmanuel Bilodeau as René Lévesque and Pascale Bussières as his wife.

