

film

Once in a Blue Moon

by Mylène Ava Pilutik

Once in a blue moon a film producer reads a script that is so magical she has to produce it. That was the case when 33-year-old North Shore resident Jane Charles read Philip Spink's script, *Once In A Blue Moon* which would soon become the most important project of her career to date.

Jane Charles began her film career in 1985 reporting for a show called *Metro Magazine* at Roger's Cable which gave a behind-the-scenes look at Vancouver's film industry. As the industry had just started to take off, with North Shore Studios and Cannell Films bringing six TV series to the city, it was relatively easy to access sets and conduct interviews with many influential producers and directors.

In 1986, Jane became a permittee with the Directors Guild of Canada and worked in the locations and assistant director departments on shows like *Booker* and *Bird On A Wire*, calling upon the valuable connections she made while reporting for Rogers.

In 1989, Jane accepted a full-time position at Shane Lunny Productions, where she wrote, directed, edited and produced video projects. It was there, while working on a commercial project, that she first met Philip Spink. Jane ventured into feature films in 1991 and production managed the \$1.2 million film *Rockers* which Philip Spink directed for an interactive theme park in Japan.

In 1992, Jane left Shane Lunny, setting out on her own to production manage the film *August Winds* and to produce a half-hour teen program, *Knockin' On Heaven's Door*, which recently appeared on CBC. In 1994, she produced her first feature film, *Cyberteens In Love*, a digital-betacam project funded by the National Film Board's and B.C. Film's "Next Wave" program. The project is now being distributed by Sullivan Entertainment.

Jane Charles heard about *Once In*

a *Blue Moon* while location scouting for a Playland commercial with Philip Spink for Apple Box Productions. She recalls, "It was 7 a.m. We were waiting outside VanDusen Botanical Garden for the gates to open, when Philip told me the story. I was laughing so hard, I couldn't breathe." But it was the script and Spink's artistic vision that convinced Charles to produce the film.

In 1993, Charles invited producer Sarah Duncan to work with her on *Blue Moon*. They applied for Telefilm's "New Views" grant and received 49% of their funding. It took a year to raise the rest of the money through B.C. Film and the NFB. Principal photography began in May 1995. "We were lucky," says Charles, "it was the sunniest May in Vancouver in years." The clear, dry weather gave the film a natural, bright look and effectively reduced their lighting budget. It also meant less "weather days."

Blue Moon is a story about nine-year-old Peter Piper who lives in a larger-than-life fantasy world. His ten-year-old First Nations friend Sam shares Peter's love of mischief, and together they construct a rocket to send the neighbourhood bullies to the moon. Their hilarious series of comic adventures remind viewers that anything is possible for those who dare to dream big. Charles, who has a young daughter of her own, admits working with children is a challenge.

"They get tired easily, and you can't push them. Sometimes we just had to call 'wrap' and start again the next day."

Jane says producing in Canada is challenging because of the limited funding which is almost exclusively through government agencies like Telefilm, the NFB, and B.C. Film. When asked about private sector funding, she laughs, "We have a good thing with government funding."

Even with the wealth in Vancouver, private sector funding

means giving control to a person who may not know anything about filmmaking and doesn't have a vested interest in the industry. "If someone wants to give me six million dollars for a feature, I wouldn't say no, but I'd evaluate it closely before jumping in."

The average government-funded feature receives about \$2 to \$3 million, which means you're not going to get Jim Carrey to star in it, but you can create a very solid film. Today, money is made through distribution. The key is the script: if it is good, the film will sell. "Even with a limited budget of \$1.2 million for *Blue Moon*, it was easy to get crew," says Charles, "we just had to get them to read the script."

Blue Moon premiered at the Toronto and Vancouver Film Festivals and has been nominated for a Genie Award for Best Costume Design. The movie will have a national theatrical release this spring and will be marketed by Malofilm to TV, video and foreign markets.

Charles upcoming projects include *Dimitriana*, a period film about a Russian woman who walks across Canada to return to her home land, and *A Time For Justice—The Karen Miersma Story* a movie-of-the-week about a Canadian woman who changed the sexual assault laws in Canada. ☺

Mylène Ava Pilutik is a North Vancouver freelance writer, actor and director.

Jane Charles on the set of *Shane Lunny Productions*.

