

Entertainment

Visiting the set of Jewison's Moonstruck

THE BARRIS BEAT
By Alex Barris

The day I visited the set of Moonstruck, the new Norman Jewison film being shot partly in Toronto, was the 19th day of filming, with only a few

more days left to complete the shooting schedule.

Cher and Nicolas Cage star in Moonstruck, a romantic comedy whose cast also includes Vincent Gardenia, Danny Aiello, Anita Gillette,

John Mahoney and Julie Bovasso.

In the film, Cher plays Loretta, an Italian-American girl living in New York (where the other half of the filming was done) with her old-fashioned family. She becomes engaged to Danny Aiello and then realizes she really loves his younger brother, Nicolas Cage.

The set, in a suburban Toronto warehouse, represents the interior of Loretta's family's home in Brooklyn,

every detail painstakingly duplicated — the cluttered kitchen with an oil-cloth on the table, the front parlor, the dining room with its heavy old furniture, the front door and the entrance hall, and even a tiny back yard.

The pressure of trying to get the filming done on time was showing. Cher was scheduled to leave in a couple of days to begin work on another film. Jewison was not actually thrilled with the delays that kept intensifying the pressure on all concerned.

"It reminds me of Francois Truffaut's film, Day For Night," Jewison told me with a nervous laugh. (In that 1973 film, the famed French director dealt with the tribulations of making a movie.) "You know, he's trying to make this great film, and things keep going wrong. There's the actress who keeps going into a closet to study her lines and every time she comes out, they think she's ready, but she's not. After a while, all the poor man wants to do is finish the damn film."

There are no birds, a croaking toad is a nightingale."

The elder Challapin married an Italian prima ballerina and they left Russia in 1925, moving to Paris. The family moved to the United States in 1926, and young Feodor, Jr. began working as an actor in silent films. His brother, Boris Challapin, became a successful artist who painted many of the Time Magazine covers.

Feodor, Jr. worked as a character actor in Hollywood for many years, appearing in films with Greto Garbo, John Barrymore, Gary Cooper, Ingrid Bergman and others. He returned to Europe in the 1950s and continued to act in films. He lives in an apartment he bought in Rome. He last appeared in the Sean Connery film, The Name Of The Rose.

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It was Jewison who steered me toward an elderly, white-haired, bearded gentleman sitting in an area of the set that wasn't then being used. "Talk to him," Jewison said. "He's the most interesting man here."

The man was Feodor Challapin, Jr., aged 81. He is the son of one of the world's most famous opera singers, a Russian-born basso whose rich voice and superb acting made him one of the most respected artists of his time.

(The singer was a towering man, both physically and artistically. He also had a temperament and ego to match, and no reticence about asserting himself. Once, at a rehearsal for an opera, the conductor became annoyed at Challapin's attempts to take over the orchestra. He laid down his baton and said: "Kindly remember that I am the conductor." Challapin's instant reply was: "In a garden where

Barris Beat

Challapin has visited Russia many times and takes pride in the fact that his famous father is still revered there. The great basso is one of the Russian artists recognized in the Bahurichin Theatre Museum in Moscow, which was established in 1903 and is still maintained. Challapin, Jr. was in Moscow last year for the unveiling of a monument honoring his famous father.

"Now that I've grown a beard," says the actor, "I look like my father and people think I am him, which is idiotic. He died over 40 years ago. And now that he has a monument in his memory, I am the son of a saint."

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When I finished chatting with Challapin, Jewison was rehearsing a scene in the kitchen — with all the principals involved. (Challapin plays Cher's grandfather.) It was the climactic scene of the film and after several attempts, Jewison complained that he wasn't getting much of the energy from the actors that he felt the scene called for.

He ordered the set cleared — all technicians, all visitors had to leave the kitchen. The doors closed. Jewison was going to have a heart-to-heart with his actors. He was the coach, about to implore his players to give their all. That's one of the trickiest functions of a film director, especially when time is running out. But Jewison has a good reputation for being able to fulfill it.

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