

The BILLIE BLUE Team

“Summer is a woman!”

If feminism starts with giving compliments, then BILLIE BLUE is a truly feminist film. Director Mariloup Wolfe, screenwriter Sarah-Maude Beauchesne and lead actress Lilianne Skelly continuously pat each other on the back, and the way they express their proudness about each other – rightly so! – and the film – rightly so! – is contagious and encouraging. The film’s sprawling, summery atmosphere continues perfectly on the terrace of a café in Zlin, where BILLIE BLUE celebrated its international premiere at the festival, and where I swoon in a flood of summer freckles and friendly voices.

At 16, Billie is lagging behind with her peers. In a hurry to catch up, she begins her summer as a lifeguard at the water park with her friends and her oh-so-perfect older sister. Everything goes wrong when both siblings fall for Pierre, a talented local cyclist. Fortunately, a long summer grants you a lot of time to grow up and discover what you really want from life.

Opening with a menstruation scene makes it clear what this film will be all about...

Sarah-Maude Beauchesne: About girls, transition, and the real stuff that happens in a woman’s life; including menstruation and period blood. It’s not a blue liquid like in TV commercials, it’s blood. If we want to talk about women, we talk about blood, tears, sex, desires, and feminism. Our main goal was to be authentic; this is how Mariloup made the movie, this is how I wrote it and this is how Lilianne acted in it.

Mariloup Wolfe: Initially the visual image of the blood was not in the script. But the film contains many poetic scenes in the water, so I thought an abstract visualisation of menstrual blood through water in the first images would set the tone.

Authentic means: true to what happens among girls at that age.

Lilianne Skelly: What you hear in the film is truly the discourse among me and my friends in Quebec. But I didn’t improvise – all the words were there



and they were perfect.

As important as the female approach is the summer setting.

Beauchesne: The summer became a character on its own; summer is a woman! Because winters are so cold, Quebec only gets lively in summer. That is when everything happens: you fall in love, meet new friends, live your life... As a teenager I worked in a water park all summer long; that part is taken from my own life story.

Skelly: I grew up in the town where the water park is located, about an hour away from Montreal. It’s where I spent many summer days, and in winter I work there as a skiing instructor,

as the place turns into a skiing hill.

Wolfe: Summers are also visually more interesting. That park was a perfect playground for me in the depiction of countryside-life.

But it wasn’t a perfect playground for Lilianne.

Skelly: BILLIE BLUE was a summer movie, shot in the fall from September to mid-October, once the water park closed. We had some lucky days when it was 30° and sunny, but much more I remember one night when it was 10°, everyone was wearing winter coats and I had to go into the pool wearing nothing but a bra and underwear. We couldn’t even shoot the en-



tire scene and had to finish it in the studio. Me and some crew members took a special training in feeling comfortable in the water - how to control the ear pressure and breathing - as I had to act underwater with my eyes open. And I wasn't the best swimmer in the first place.

The result is a bunch of dreamlike, surreal swimming scenes that seem to mark every new chapter and look magnificent.

Beauchesne: Those scenes were already in the book on which the film is based. The book is rather contemplative, it's all about words and feelings and not a lot about action. I had to find a way to translate those feelings into images and the swimming scenes contributed to that.

Wolfe: They helped us to take our time to tell the story the way it should be told. Billie's heart has many steps to take, which is something we shouldn't rush.

There were 700 candidates for your role!

Skelly: I felt lucky to be chosen. I don't study acting or cinema, I study science and want to become an astrophysicist. Maybe being tall helped me to get that role... I had a bit of a transformation for this film, and I liked it.



The BILLIE BLUE Team - Sarah-Maude Beauchesne, Lilianne Skelly & Mariloupe Wolfe

My natural hair colour isn't red, but it was coloured for the movie and then afterwards I kept it like that. And they gave me extra freckles!

Every teenager has their reasons to feel different or clumsy. Is it a burden to be tall?

Beauchesne: Every teenager has issues about their physical appearance or personality, and being tall can be a burden. My burden was being late on everything; it was weird to lag behind on all my friends, not knowing what life as a woman would be like.

The original title - COEUR DE SLUSH - fits beautifully with the movie's atmosphere.

Beauchesne: Slush is a kind of summer drink. Coeur de slush stands for a heart that melts, that is sweet, that changes... Slush comes in different colours, and Billie likes it blue - it makes her tongue turn blue. Outside Quebec the title of the book was changed into BILLIE LOU, and then for the movie BILLIE BLUE was the title that should resonate internationally.



One quote to remember: "Guys drink, girls cry, and in the end no one is happy."

Beauchesne: Throughout the teenage years there is a permanent silence between boys and girls when it comes to communication about feelings. When Billie tells Pierre that yes, she wants to come to his house, she wants him to be "her first one", that is such a bold thing to do. As a teenager I lacked such truthful conversations with guys. When I saw all the boys here in the audience, I felt like 'yes, soon they will find out that you actually can speak about real feelings with each other'.

So far, you had one screening for the 'beau monde' on the opening night, and one school screening for teenagers.

Beauchesne: The boys showed a lot of interest. I'm happy that they will hear the message too, and understand the discourse and the interiority. The story is told from a woman's point of view but it is essential for men to listen.

Skelly: Many boys came to talk to us and were curious. And some adults

came to tell how the film made them nostalgic about their first love. I like it when different audiences show different reactions.

Wolfe: Though one man came to tell me how the opening scene made him feel uncomfortable.

The bonding between the sisters feels very real to me.

Beauchesne: My relationship with my sister is by far the most important relationship in my life, and the most complicated one.

Skelly: Like in the film, I have a sister that is two years older than me. Nowadays she's living on the other side of Canada so I'm seeing less of her but over the last few years we've grown much closer. I could easily relate to that bond in the film.

And there's Billie's father, who is in some way truly heartbreaking. He is doing the best he can, driven by nothing but good intentions.

Wolfe: He is loveable! Beforehand I was wondering what a father could add to a story about teenagers. But after shooting with François Létourneau, I'm ashamed that I once doubted his role. He has such nice scenes that add some comic relief to the movie. Whereas teenagers sometimes fly up high, he brings things down to

earth again.

What's the year?

Wolfe: The year is now! But we have indeed plenty of vintage references: the car, the walkman and cassettes, father's Dark Metal Combat computer game (I really like that name!), the music of Joe Dassin... I hope that mixing all these references will help the film to look timeless and age well. The producer wasn't sure how my musical choices would go down with youngsters. But what worked for STRANGER THINGS should work for us too! Those songs have been around for 50 years and teenagers have the choice if they want to further explore some of the new musical references that we offer them.

That music must have cost a fortune! You even have Elvis on the soundtrack.

Wolfe: We had a budget to pay a full fee for three famous songs, and then for the other ones - like Elvis - we did a re-recording, with a female voice to better match with Billie's feelings.

Colleagues in Quebec have been knocking on the doors of producers and funders for ages, begging for support for young audience films. Where does this 'Quebec wave' sud-



denly come from? To whom should we give the credit?

Wolfe: When I was young there were so many films from Quebec. I grew up on the 'Tales for all' from Rock Demers, and they've been so important to me. They've planted many references in my mind - I was proud to do voice acting in the animated remake of THE DOG WHO STOPPED THE WAR! Beauchesne: All those movies are in my heart forever. They made me who I am today.

Wolfe: Then for many years there was nothing. Producers kept on pitching, but those projects never got picked. Why has it suddenly changed? Based on a legacy from the past, I guess now the right people have found each other

at the right moment.

—
Gert Hermans

