

Interview with Sarah Spring

Producer of À St Henri le 26 août



The documentary : À St-Henri, le 26 août is a film that was shot over 24-hours by sixteen filmmaking teams. We wanted to capture a day in the life of this community, and the result is a very touching, beautiful and fascinating journey through the neighbourhood of St-Henri.

The team : Yes, it was a great coup to have so many talented people working on the film. The director, Shannon Walsh, invited Montreal filmmakers whose work she liked and also people from our community we enjoyed collaborating with. Some people we already knew quite well, but others were not personally known to myself, Shannon or Selin Murat the Associate Producer. It has been a wonderful experience making these new friends and collaborating with such talented people. Patrick Watson was interested in the film from very early on, and when he officially agreed to do the musical score, he'd been casually looking at footage for quite some time as was extremely inspired already

by what he could do with this film. The excellent editing by Sophie Leblond was very much done to music and Patrick's score has a central place in the project. His team of musicians are incredible, and you'll hear slide guitar, harp, viole de gambe and saxophone while watching the film. Our cinematographers were also incredible and we had a lot of discussion about what camera to use to get the most beautiful imagery while having something that is well suited to cinéma vérité filmmaking. We consulted a lot with Julien Fontaine, whose footage is very present in the film, and also we were lucky enough to have people like Jacques Leduc, Jean-Pierre St-Louis, Katherine Giguère and many other excellent cinematographers. There were so many people who helped make this happen, all in all there were about 80 people in St-Henri working on the film on August 26th last year!

The financing : I was very lucky to get the support of the Office National du film du Canada and Canal D, and then later SODEC and the Rogers Documentary Fund came on board to help us finish the post-production of the film. Shannon Walsh and Denis Valiquette, who conceived of the film and wrote the script, got early support from both CALQ and SODEC to do all their research.

ACEM : In film you always need to find interim financing for the duration of the production, because even if you manage to get funding it comes in fits and starts – a bit here, a bit there, not necessarily when you need it! So I was looking for a way to interim finance the film but I was not interested in working with the banks, and having the film's financial support end up in investment portfolios for oil companies and other profitable and problematic scenarios. I actually found ACEM online, and when I came in for a meeting I was very impressed by the idea that money paid to ACEM goes towards other projects. This micro loans model that has worked so well in many developing countries is something that was unknown to me in Montreal and to many people I know in the arts community. It is a perfect way to handle the sporadic cheques that arrive from the film's partners and to have an organized cash flow throughout the production. Also I like knowing that this money is helping other people, and staying on the Island of Montreal.

It has been a real pleasure working with the ACEM team. Everyone has been so supportive, and it's been about a year or so now since I first met with them about this film so they have been one of the oldest partners of the project! Overall it's been quite easy and very enjoyable to partner with the ACEM. I hope to keep working with them, for sure.



Business woman? Interesting question. I would say that when one looks at the leadership roles of men and women in companies and in creative positions across the country, it's clear that it is very difficult to be a business woman. Personally, I can only speak from a position of being a female film producer but yes, I'd say there are specific obstacles and these are very much relating to a systemic sexist view of women's role in the film industry. I was speaking to a university class a few

months ago and I mentioned that I'd experienced this problem myself, and a few young women came up to me after and told me that they'd thought it was just them who has experienced this attitude that women just can't assume positions of power in a film or on a production. There is an instinctive assumption that men will take a leadership position, and it feels awkward at first to challenge that. But once you realize that you are entitled to your opinion and through trial and error, you will succeed, the confines of a sexist system become much easier to navigate. There is of course structural sexism that is still very present, but I believe that by continuing to support creative female voices we will get there.

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