

"To have shot two films in the north has really opened me up to a whole other reality." Filmmaker Benoit Pilon

ARTS

## MONTREAL WORLD FILM FESTIVAL

BIOLOGICALLY PREPARED for their roles as pregnant women, the co-stars of *The Baby Formula* enjoyed acting on a set that allowed them the luxury of being themselves

## Life imitating art



JOHN GRIFFIN

The lines between art, life, reality and fiction get good and worked over in *The Baby Formula*.

In 2006, Toronto director Alison Reid made a short film called *Succubus* about a lesbian couple wanting a baby that was their true biological creation, i.e. no guy sperm allowed.

She was about to pitch the movie as a series of Webisodes at Sundance in 2007 when she heard from one of the girls, Angela Vint, who said she was pregnant. Then she heard from her other star, Megan Fahlenbock. She was pregnant, too.

Reid came to the rapid conclusion this confluence of fortune, fate and all the stars under heaven was too good to waste on the Web, and decided to make a feature film. A feature film with a rather alarming deadline of around nine months, beginning, oh, about the time the second phone call landed.

"In the short, only one of them was pregnant," said Reid, sharing the love with her co-stars Vint, Fahlenbock and Hal Eisen at festival HQ yesterday, before the film's world premiere last night. "Suddenly everything was bigger, more, faster."

Drawing on her extreme good will in the Canadian TV and film community as a longtime stunt co-ordinator (the *Saw* series, among many), first-time director Reid hustled cast and crew together while Richard Beattie got busy on a script and producers James Mou and Stephen Adams got busy on everything else, like a budget.

"It was wild," she remem-



Angela Vint (left), Alison Reid, Megan Fahlenbock and Hal Eisen on the site of the Montreal World Film Festival yesterday. They are in town for the premiere of their film *The Baby Formula*, about a lesbian couple wanting to have a baby.

bered, but "with both of them really pregnant we were half way there."

Which is another way of saying that when Vint and Fahlenbock got seriously hormonal, had sore feet, needed their tummies oiled, craved odd food products and all the other stuff that goes with crafting a new life, it served the film. "It was a really relaxed sort of set," Fahlenbock said. "There was the luxury of doing things pregnant women do."

Because they weren't acting, biologically-speaking, and because Reid had enough faith in

her actors to let them run with a script that was being written as the cameras rolled, *The Baby Formula* feels curiously like the real thing, captured on film.

"TV and film sets are normally so confining," Fahlenbock (Resident Evil, Le Femme Nikita) explained. "But this was financed with favours and out of pocket. It was made with real friendship."

Eisen, who is hilariously over the top as Fahlenbock's boozy, gay father, picked up the conversation. "We'd do a couple of takes according to the script. Then we just got to go. For me,

as an actor, this was a gift. Everyone was so great. It was like family."

Being the trooper she is, Vint (This Is Wonderland) agreed to fake having her water break on a motorcycle during Toronto's Gay Pride parade. But then her method acting jones kicked in and her water really did break — three weeks early — on Gay Pride day. The motorcycle scene was out.

"The people were real enough that we didn't have to rationalize our actions," said Vint of scenes like, say, having her water break. "If emotions built up,

we didn't have to censor them. The chemistry was just there."

Which is why *The Baby Formula* blurs most of the known cinematic boundaries. It's funny, rueful, absurd, angry, hysterical, deadly serious, sometimes self-absorbed and entertaining as hell. Sort of like life.

**The Baby Formula screens at Quartier Latin today at 2:40 p.m., Friday at 7:20 p.m. and Saturday at noon.**

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## TODAY'S FESTIVAL PICK

## Ce qu'il faut pour vivre (Canada) \*\*\*\*

Noted documentary director Benoit Pilon's feature-fiction debut is quite simply one of the best Québécois films of the year. The film is a deceptively simple story about an Inuit man, Tivii (Natar Ungalaaq), suffering from tuberculosis in the 1950s, who is taken by the government to be treated in a sanatorium in Quebec City.

That's really all there is to the story but Pilon handles it with such care and finesse that it's impossible not to be moved by a film that is part invaluable social document, old-fashioned melo-

drama and fascinating exploration of two completely-alien cultures — Inuit and Québécois — meeting up in a sanatorium jam-packed with people who have one thing in common whatever their ethnic roots: they're all suffering from a terrible disease. There are many reasons to see this but here's just one: see it to savour the performance of Ungalaaq, who may have the most expressive face ever to grace a movie screen. *Screens today at 2 p.m. at the Imperial Cinema. It begins its commercial run Friday, Aug. 29.*

BRENDAN KELLY

**WFF online**  
Read Gazette Film Critic John Griffin's review of *Home* on the Ciné Files blog at [montrealgazette.com/film](http://montrealgazette.com/film)

## PILON Director's documentary experience comes out in film

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"As soon as I read Bernard's screenplay, I felt very close to this universe," said Pilon. "I found that many of the themes in the screenplay were close to things I'd looked at in my documentaries. A man isolated and alone, up against an indifferent world. I think that the character played by Natar isn't that far from Roger Toupin in his grocery store. Also, my son is eight now but when I first read the screenplay, he was around three, and I was thinking about the whole notion of transmitting your heritage to a child and, in this film, the act of transmitting your cultural heritage to a child, is the very thing that gives Natar's character the drive to come back to life himself."

Ce qu'il faut pour vivre had its world premiere in official competition at the Montreal film fest Monday, with two screenings, and it has its final festival screening today at 2 p.m. at the Imperial Cinema. It begins its commercial run in town on Friday.

Right at the start, Tivii (Ungalaaq) is diagnosed with tuberculosis and is immediately shipped down south, leaving his wife and children behind. Like Pilon, Ungalaaq was immediately taken with the screenplay, but for much more per-



PHIL CARPENTER THE GAZETTE

Ce qu'il faut pour vivre's Natar Ungalaaq (left) and Benoit Pilon talk about their film at the Hyatt Regency Hotel yesterday.

sonal reasons.

"My grandfather had a similar experience to Tivii's and I heard the story from him when I was a kid," said Ungalaaq,

who had flown in from his home in Igloolik in Nunavut for the premiere. "It really touched me."

This is Pilon's second straight film

with a Far North flavour following *Des nouvelles du Nord*, a look at the folks who live in the James Bay town of Radisson, 1,350 kilometres northwest of Montreal. Though as Pilon is quick to note, people in Iqaluit, where the new Pilon was partly shot, think of Radisson as a southern burgh.

"To have shot two films in the north has really opened me up to a whole other reality, one that we know very little about here," said Pilon. "But we are hearing more about the north, with the talk of northern sovereignty."

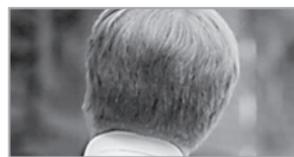
Naturally enough, Pilon makes good use of his documentary experience in *Ce qu'il faut pour vivre*, providing a fascinating glimpse of one small social microcosm in early '50s Quebec.

"What I tried with the film was for the story to be as close as possible to documentary reality," said Pilon.

**Ce qu'il faut pour vivre screens today at 2 p.m. at the Imperial Cinema as part of the World Film Festival. It opens commercially Friday, including a copy with English subtitles, under the title *The Necessities of Life*.**

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## Public loves baby pics



DOUG CAMILLI

Does it seem crazy to you that gossip mags pay millions for celeb baby pix? Then you don't understand marketing.

People mag's edition with the *Brangelina* babies on the cover sold 2.6 million copies, says WWD, making it the fourth-biggest-selling issue in People's 35-year life (behind Sept. 11, *Diana Spencer's* death, and *JFK Jr.'s* death). You'll recall that People and the British Hello! together paid \$14 million for the pix.

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It's a girl for *Jason Lee* and his lady friend *Ceren Alkac*. The baby was born Aug. 10. I'm waiting eagerly for the name, because four years ago, when he had a baby with actress *Beth Riesgraf*, the poor kid got saddled with *Pilot* sponsor.

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*Cary Grant's* grandson will be called *Cary Grant*. The late actor's daughter *Jennifer Grant* gave birth Aug. 12 in L.A., says USA Today. We don't know who the father is. "Cary Benjamin sleeps dreamily on my stomach," Jennifer said. "He's phenomenal."

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*Chris Kattan*, who used to be on Saturday Night Live, has filed for separation from model *Sunshine Tutt*, six weeks after they married. They'd been dating for three years. Isn't it sad when these things fall apart before the couple even has time to sell their wedding photos?

Kattan filed the papers, citing the usual "irreconcilable differences." There's not much money involved here, but they did have a pre-nup. He's 37, she's 31.

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Canadians *Ryan Gosling* and *Rachel McAdams* are back together, it appears. They're not talking about it, but they were spotted smooching, really seriously smooching, in Toronto the other day. They dated from 2004 until they broke up last year. He's 27, she's 31.

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*Oliver Stone* made a movie called *W*. It's about the president who has that middle initial, not the magazine which has that name, but course the magazine had to write about it.

The movie, being by Stone, is of little interest, but *Elizabeth Banks*, who plays *Laura Bush*, had a pretty good line, in the mag, about stand-up comedy:

"There are no very pretty standup girls that are successful. And there's a reason. I don't want to hear pretty girls complain about their problems."

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**Quote of the day:** British singer *Lily Allen* knows it's wrong. She just doesn't care: "I'm not gonna say I'm never gonna do drugs again," she told Paper mag. "I just know I'm not a good person on drugs."

That last sentiment would be shared, I suppose, by the poor girl she punched in the head the other night, after the passerby insulted her outside the well-known club *Ronnie Scott's*, in London.

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Remember *Benjamin McKenzie*? Played brooding, troubled *Ryan* on *The O.C.*? Well, it looks like he's finally found work.

According to the *N.Y. Post*, he's "in serious talks" to play a brooding, troubled police officer on a new cop show for NBC.

Called *LAPD*, it also stars up-and-coming TV talents (boy, how's that for faint praise?) *Regina King*, *Michael McGrady*, and *Kevin Alejandro*.

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