

Les Productions MH Cousineau and Arnait Video Productions presents

RESTLESS RIVER

PRESS NOTES

Starring

Malaya QAUNIRQ CHAPMAN as Elsa
Etua SNOWBALL as Isaki

with

Taqraliq PARTRIDGE as Winnie
Matthew YORK as Jimmy (young)
Nick SERINO as Jimmy (teenager)
Magalie LÉPINE-BLONDEAU as Ms. Beaulieu
Patrick HIVON as Mr. Beaulieu

Director	Marie-Hélène COUSINEAU in collaboration with Madeline IVALU
Screenplay	Marie-Hélène COUSINEAU in collaboration with Madeline IVALU
Producer	Marie-Hélène COUSINEAU
Co-Producers	Madeline IVALU; Lucy TULUGARJUK
Director of Photography	Edith LABBÉ
Editor	Michel GROU
Original Music	Vanessa MARCOUX

Based on the novel

LA RIVIÈRE SANS REPOS / WINDFLOWER

By Gabrielle Roy

Running Time: 99 minutes

DCP – Dolby 5.1

Produced with the participation of Telefilm Canada, SODEC, Nunavut Film Development Corporation, The Harold Greenberg Fund, Tax Credit Quebec and Tax Credit Canada.

Navigating the social norms of the colonizers and the reality of her own family situation, the young Inuk Elsa draws courage from her land to become a woman as strong and independent as the restless river that cuts across it.

SYNOPSIS

Kuujuuaq, Nunavik 1940s. Surprised at the loss of her innocence, the young Inuk Elsa draws courage from her rugged land to become a woman as strong and independent as the restless river that cuts across it. She becomes the very young mother of a child whose remarkable life breaks with the millennial traditions of her ancestors. Navigating the social norms of the colonizers and the reality of her own family situation, the dreariness of a relationship that is not right for her and the rebellion of her teenage son, Elsa's path follows the winding course of the indomitable river that accompanies her every turn in life.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT – Marie-Hélène Cousineau

Reading Gabrielle Roy's novel *Windflower* for the first time, I immediately saw the story unfold very clearly in front of my eyes. Beginning as a young naïve girl, Elsa was becoming the independent woman she might never have planned to be. She was taking decisions nobody thought she would take, surprising her family as well as the White settlers of her Nordic village. Gabrielle Roy had portrayed vividly the life and trajectory of a strong young Inuk woman. The dark green spruce of the boreal forest and the mighty Koksoak river serve as the story's backdrop, but the background is also the second World War and the beginning of a more aggressive colonization of the North.

Elsa, an Inuk teenager in Northern Quebec in the 1940s, encounters people and sees things her parents and grandparents could never have imagined. She embraces these new realities with the passion and naiveté of a teenager. She is smart and independent, desiring the "new world" as much as she longs for the comfort of past traditions rapidly disappearing. It is through her eyes that I wanted the audience to see the world. As the great Koksoak flows through her country, so her emotions flow through her body and carry her across the seasons of life; taking sinuous turns as we watch her evolve from a sixteen-year-old girl to a forty-year-old woman.

Perhaps Gabrielle Roy conceived the original story as a tragedy, Elsa finally overcome by forces and circumstances of societal change she cannot foresee or control. When I started to work with actress Malaya Qaunirq-Chapman, we gave another turn to Elsa. In the film Elsa attempts to take control over her destiny despite the multiple adversities she faces. Rather than wallow in regret, she takes ownership over her fate and fashions an interior world of her own.

To the men around her Elsa seems incomprehensible. They do not understand her happiness and disapprove of her life choices. They want her to marry, to stop spoiling her son, to live in one place or another. But Elsa, as the ever-flowing water of the river, accepts that life is, by nature, constant change. As we watch her letting go of what she loves the most, we come to this realization with her. This sense of enlightenment comes with a reaffirmation of her independence and desire to live at peace with herself.

It is my work with the Elders of Arnait Video, 25 years of close collaboration with Madeline Ivalu and Susan Avingaq, that allowed me to adapt the novel with confidence. Our past experiences on the features *Before Tomorrow*, *Uvanga* and *SOL*, gave me the trust I needed

to take this story and present it with the objective of reaching a wider audience. This is a feature that contemplates how the process of colonization up North, on Indigenous land, is part of a collective history that changed us all. History makes us as much as we make it. Particularly, as a feminist, I am interested in examining how history impacts women's lives. No one was better suited to understand and embody this than actress Malaya Qaunirq-Chapman, who herself has lived through so many northern realities.

BIOGRAPHER'S NOTE -

François Ricard, author of *Gabrielle Roy, A Life* (Éditions Boréal)

Gabrielle Roy loved cinema very much, and she wished throughout her career that her books would be adapted for the big screen. But we can't say that she was spoiled on this level: during her lifetime all potential projects fell through. Fortunately, things began to change after her death (1983), and now a feature film from one of the novels she cherished the most, *Windflower*, is finally released.

This novel, published simultaneously in its original French version and in English translation (*Windflower*) in the fall of 1970, she had written it from a memory she had of a trip to Ungava some ten years earlier. This memory was of a grandiose, austere and magnificent landscape, and especially of a young Inuit girl from Fort Chimo (now Kuujjuaq) whom she had seen stroking her curly-haired child, inherited from a white father. From this image was born the figure of a heroine whom she named Elsa and endowed with a destiny which, in the eyes of the novelist, embodied both that of a woman like all women, caught up in the games and dramas of human love, and that of a great traditional civilization suddenly confronted with the invasion and values of modernity brought by the whites from the South. From then on, it was the "restless" struggle, it was the heartbreaking hesitation between these two worlds, one representing fidelity to the immemorial past and the other, the irresistible call of "progress", which would govern Elsa's entire existence and of which her son, Jimmy, would be the living incarnation. What was she to do with this child from two opposing worlds? How should he be raised, what models, what values should he be taught? And she herself, torn apart like the tumultuous Koksoak River that both separates and unites the new Fort-Chimo and the old village of her ancestors, how was she to live her motherhood and her status as a woman, in the same way as her own mother and the women of her people or as modern mothers did?

Obviously, there is no simple answer to this dilemma, and the novelist does not propose any. But through Elsa and her indigenous family, she raises the question to the end, not as a theoretical or sociological problem, but through the concrete existence of the beings for whom this question taints their very identity.

In the late 1970s, a Hollywood producer wanted to adapt *La Rivière sans repos* to the screen; she signed an agreement with Gabrielle Roy and had a complete script prepared. But the project, as has almost always been the case, fell through. We must pay tribute to Marie-Hélène Cousineau, Madeline Ivalu and their team for picking up the torch and daring to offer their cinematic reading of this great novel. And above all to have done so with a sensitivity and a

look that is perfectly faithful to Gabrielle Roy's work. I am thinking in particular of the presence they give to the Nordic setting which is here, thanks to Edith Labbé's camera, of breathtaking beauty and which not only surrounds Elsa's story but accompanies and punctuates it from beginning to end, like music that is the most appropriate expression of her soul, her exaltations and her torments. I am also thinking of the performance of the actors, and particularly that of Malaya Qaunirq Chapman in the role of Elsa, which is of exemplary sobriety and accuracy, without artifice or easy effects, but all in nuances, in restrained gestures, in suggested as well as expressed interiority. Finally I am thinking of the scenario itself, which avoids clichés and simplifications in order to constantly follow the trail, which is the essence of the character's adventure and the novelist's thinking.

I think, I am sure in fact, that Gabrielle Roy would have been happy with this vision of her novel.

- François Ricard

ABOUT THE CAST

Malaya Qaunirq Chapman

Malaya Qaunirq Chapman grew up in many places, where all extremes account for who she is: Pangnirtung, Iqaluit and Los Angeles. Finding her career in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Malaya started her career in in “Qanurli”, the popular Inuktitut-language comedy show, where she now plays a main character. She starred in the 2014 Alethea Arnaquq-Baril’s (Angry Inuk) short film *Aviliaq*, and currently hosts “Nunavummi Mamarijaut” a cooking show where she travels to different Nunavut communities, discovering local food traditions through hunting, butchering and cooking. Outside of acting she spent two years in her home town of Pangnirtung as a journalist with APTN National News, covering key issues and events important to Inuit.

Etua Snowball

Etua Snowball was born and raised traditionally in Ungava Bay. He is a singer-songwriter, carver, and actor who has performed throughout Canada and abroad. Singing in Inuktitut and English, his album *Sinuupa* (2012) was voted Best Rock Album at the Aboriginal Peoples Choice Awards. Outside of music his sculptures can be found in collections and organizations around the country. Concerned with the preserving of Inuit culture, Etua is also a Director of Education Services for Nunavik, for which he won a Prime Minister’s Award for teaching excellence.

Taqralik Partridge

Taqralik Partridge is a multidisciplinary artist, singer, and writer originally from Kuujjuaq, Nunavik. Her performance work has been featured at festivals across Canada and Europe. She currently has textile and beadwork on tour with the exhibition *Among All These Tundras*. In 2009 she toured as a throatsinger with the Montreal Symphonic Orchestra under Kent Nagano. In 2020 Taqralik will be a featured artist at the Sydney Biennial of Art.

Magalie Lépine-Blondeau

Magalie Lépine-Blondeau is an award-winning television, film, and stage actor. She has starred in celebrated adaptations of notable plays such as *Dangerous Liaisons*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Her filmography includes roles in *Les Amours imaginaires*, *Laurence Anyways*, and *Le Règne de la beauté*. She is perhaps best known for her starring roles in the 2018 television series' *District 31* and *Plan B*, for which she won an Artis and Géméaux Prize for best lead female role.

Patrick Hivon

Patrick Hivon is a television and film actor who first made a name for himself in the hit Quebec television series' *Lance et compte*. He has played in over 20 television series, including such hit shows as *Rumeurs* and *Nouvelle adresse*, where he won a 2015 Géméaux for best supporting role. Recently, he starred as Karim in Monia Chokri's *A Brother's Love (La Femme de mon frère)*, which won the jury's coup de coeur prize at Un Certain Regard 2019.

Nick Serino

Nick Serino is an actor originally from Thunder Bay, ON. He is perhaps best known for his role in the 2016 film *Sleeping Giant*, for which he won a Canadian Screen Award for Best Supporting Actor. More recently he played a recurring role in the popular 2019 crime series *Cardinal*.

Matthew York

Matthew York was born and raised in Kuujuaq, where he goes to elementary school. He loves spending time fishing and boating with his family. *Restless River* is his first acting role.

ABOUT THE CREW

Marie-Hélène Cousineau – director, writer, producer

MARIE-HÉLÈNE COUSINEAU is a filmmaker and video artist. In 1991 she moved to Igloolik, Nunavut, and helped establish the Tarriaksuk Video Centre, the first artist-run video and film centre in the Canadian Arctic. There she met Madeline Ivalu, a unilingual Inuit elder, storyteller and seamstress. The two of them, along with Susan Avingaq, founded the women's film collective Arnait Video Productions, with the goal of producing independent video and film from the perspective of Inuit women. Their collaboration has led to the production of over 25 films, documentaries, television series' and video explorations. Along with Ivalu, she has written, directed and produced works including *Before Tomorrow* (Best First Canadian Feature TIFF '08) *Uvanga*, and *SOL* (TIFF Top Ten '14). More recently, Cousineau co-directed the feature film *Angélique Isle*, and produced the children's feature *Tia and Piujuq*. Cousineau was also instrumental in the development of the Nunavut Film Commission. *Restless River* is her latest feature.

Madeline Ivalu (co-director, co-writer, actor)

MADÉLINE IVALU co-founded Arnait, and has been a key participant in all its work, as an actor, producer and director. She co-directed and starred in *Before Tomorrow* and *Uvanga*, and

was an executive producer and actor on the children's film *Tia and Piujuq*. She has also played important roles in other Isuma films including *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. Outside of acting she is known around Nunavut as a storyteller, singer, seamstress, language expert and respected elder. She often represents Inuit women in international events through different cultural organizations like Pauktutit and the Pan-Canadian Inuit Women's organization. She co-directed *Before Tomorrow* and *Uvanga*, the first and second Inuit feature-length films. She also co-directed and acted in Inuit's upcoming feature film *Restless River*.

Edith Labbé – Director of Photography

Passionate about photography, Edith Labbé completed her studies in cinema before studying in the camera department of Panavision Montreal. Over the past dozen years, she has worked as director of photography on many projects of fiction and documentary, including *Reel Injun* (2009), *Tia and Piujuq* (2018), and *Dreamcatcher Bios* (2019). Her commitment to the representation of Indigenous peoples is a recurring element in professional career. Driven by a keen interest and love for northern communities, she is especially involved in projects that showcase their culture and talents.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

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