

EN EXKLUSIV INTERVJU OM MOONRAKER MED DEN HALVSVENSKA BONDBRUDEN ANNE LÖNNBERG I MARS 2012

Intervju av Anders Frejdh, redaktör för From Sweden with Love, med hjälp från Enlil Albanna, journalist och projektledare för Cinewebradio i Frankrike.

You were born in Berkeley, California to a Swedish father. Please tell us more about your “Swedish background”. Do you speak any Swedish? How often have you visited Sweden?

[Anne Lönnberg:] My father was a captain on merchant marine ships for the Johnson Line so we hardly ever saw him. He met me for the first time when I was 2 ½ years old as he was on the Far-East run. The first thing he said to my mother was that I looked like Wallace Beery. I picked up some Swedish when I went overseas with him for a six-month trip on one of his ships when I was fifteen (took my school work with me). But no, do not speak it.

In Stockholm I told my father I wanted to go to Paris and that I had friends there – a half-truth, friends from California but who were no longer living in Paris – so he just put me on my first airplane! I was only fifteen. That’s another story.

My father’s older sister and her husband had a vacation house on the Baltic Sea, called Högsjö, near Valdemarsvik. I went several times there, when I was 15 on that trip for the first time, then when I was 17, the fateful year I ended up in Greece and started my film career. Also, several times much later on with my children. Each time it coincided with my father being there too. We fished, mushroomed and fought the mosquitoes but, what a paradise. We swam naked in the cold water off rocks... there was a Viking grave on a little island... magical.

You entered the film business in the 1960’s – how did it all begin? Had you always wanted to become an actress when you were young?

[AL:] In 1966 when I graduated from high school my mother took me and my older sister Tina on a year’s camping trip, I had been accepted to the University of California in Santa Cruz for the year after. That was the fateful trip. We travelled from Sweden in a new Volvo and camped our way to Greece. We were having coffee in Syntagma Square when a Canadian film director spotted me; he was roaming the streets looking for a girl to play in his film. (A film that never came out, can’t even remember his name!) Anyway, I tried out and got the part. I had done some acting in high school, was a member of the Children’s Theatre but had never aspired to make that a profession. I was going to be a scholar, and one day perhaps a teacher!

Anyway, I did this film, and met various filmmakers, one of them the famous Greek director Vassilis Georgiades (2 Oscar nominations for best foreign film under his belt). The first thing I said to him when I met him was, in my budding Greek, was ‘I like your shoes.’ That made him laugh and he hired me on the spot to do Koritsia Ston Ilio. My life changed from that moment on.

Who were your mentors and influences when starting out? What was your ambition?

[AL:] Vassilis Georgiades and Yannis Voglis, the marvellous actor who played the shepherd in Koritsia Ston Ilio, were my mentors. They taught me everything, but left me “virgin” enough to preserve the “innocent, pure” aspect of Annabelle in the film. It was a very small crew... everyone helped me. I remember one day in the beginning of the shooting, the director of photography, Nicos Gardellis - a wonderful, talented man - told me I must move slower, make all my movements slower... that piece of advice has helped me throughout the years.

It was initially a short film of 40 minutes. But when the producer saw the rushes, he immediately ordered Georgiades to lengthen it to a feature film. At that time, my intention was to fly back home and start University I had to choose to stay on for a few months more to complete the film. Then, success hit: First prize at the Salonika festival etc etc... I threw away my former life and started my film career. My mother was fantastic, she gave me her blessing: letting her 18 year-old daughter stay in Greece.

In 1975, you appeared in Woody Allen's Love and Death. How was it like meeting Woody Allen for the first time? How was he like as a director and as an actor?

[AL:] This will make you laugh. My agent sent me to meet Woody Allen in Paris at a very chic hotel. He had the flu, with a very high temperature. He was very ill and very funny. He received all the actors in his room. He was wearing pyjamas. He loves tall blond women so he said I had the part. Like, right then.

He was an extremely demanding director, sometimes doing 40 takes. And with merciless. He fired the main actress after several days of shooting and hired another one and had to do it all over again. But very very funny.

I'll never forget my scene: my line was, "Boris you forgot your blinis" and I had to sort of yell it across the full ballroom or buffet room... I pronounced "blinis" like "penis" and not the "ee" at the end. Woody burst out laughing, and so did all the hundred or so extras. It was a hilarious, if not embarrassing, moment.

In life, he was exactly like in acting. He played the same role in both. True to himself. That was my impression. Constantly anxious, eternally funny.

What is the story behind your involvement on Moonraker (1979)? How did you end up having two parts in it? What attracted you to appear in the film?

[AL:] As I had done previous films with Lewis Gilbert, he contacted me to audition for Moonraker. As I was a "certified" actress compared to the other girls who were for the most part models, he gave me the small part of the museum guide, which also blended in with the plot – us "perfect specimens" to recreate the "perfect races" in outer space – were also implicated in the story to create false leads.

What attracted me? I was never particularly a fan of James Bond films but of course, the legend of James Bond girls was a strong attraction. Me!? A James Bond Girl!? WOW!

Tell us more about your work on Moonraker. Where were your scenes filmed? How long were you shooting? Did you attend the world premiere in London and any other of the premieres around the world?

[AL:] All my scenes were filmed in studios here in France, Studio Billancourt for the museum scene (too bad, would have loved to go to Florence!) and the python scene, and Studios at Epinay-sur-Seine for the Great Chamber set. We were blocked for 6 months but I only shot maybe a couple of weeks in all. I accepted to attend the smaller première in Montpellier, and didn't attend either the Parisian or the London première. I think the organizers in Montpellier were happy to get one of us there! I also attended the première in Hollywood.

What do you remember about seeing Moonraker for the first time?

[AL:] I was spellbound but furious because they dubbed me with a British accent!

What are your strongest memories of 'Cubby' Broccoli?

[AL:] Oh, oh, a tickly question. After the showing in Hollywood, I found myself sitting next to Mr. Broccoli. During the dinner, I asked him the taboo question (stupid girl that I was!) "What again are the two vegetables that make up broccoli?" He turned red with anger, didn't answer me and ignored me the rest of the evening. It was awful.

What is your impression of Roger Moore as James Bond? How was it like working with him on set?

[AL:] I, like many, preferred Sean Connery - I think no actor since can meet his standards presence-wise – but Roger Moore is a great actor, with wonderful humour, and he fit the role of James Bond perfectly. He was also great to work with, serious, professional and very sweet to us unknown girls.

You worked with Lewis Gilbert before Moonraker, in Paul and Michelle (1974) and Seven Nights in Japan (1977), what is your view on him as a director, and fondest memories?

[AL:] Lewis was adept in doing huge marathon movies like the James Bonds, very organized, polite with everyone, calm, never lost his temper but under all that he was like steel. Knew exactly what he wanted.

[AL:] My most fond memory was not at all on a set: I ran into him in Cannes (I used to go to the Cannes festivals with my kids, as my first husband worked for the festival) and I had my first son Yann in my arms at some swimming pool and Lewis took my baby and cuddled him with such tenderness... That is my best memory of him.

Can you tell us an anecdote, a special memory of your time on the film?

[AL:] I remember the day Roger Moore had to be submerged in water all day long fighting with that giant python. At the end of the day he was wet, exhausted and fed-up. After the last shot, he said, "Now, at last, I can go back to my hotel and take a hot bath!" When an assistant whispered in his ear, "You may have forgotten, Mr. Moore, you have a press conference in ten minutes." Roger answered, dripping wet, with a polite smile, "Give me ten minutes."

What do you feel about the current Bond films?

[AL:] Sorry to say, am not interested. I do watch them on satellite TV when they come on. A nice and enjoyable moment to be quickly forgotten. But, and I must admit, I am always impressed by the special effects. Fantastic.

Did you ever read any of the Ian Fleming books?

[AL:] No.

This year, it is the golden anniversary of Dr. No, the first Bond, why do you think the Bond film series has lasted fifty years?

[AL:] There is an obvious fascination for this character who manages to squirm his way out of a million near-death situations, who manages to seduce every single female who crosses his path, who is always impeccably dressed even if he falls out of an airplane and crashes onto a train, and who, above all, keeps an intact sense of humour. Handsome, sexy, and successful. The word "adventure" and "evasion" come into mind, people today need to forget their problems for a couple of hours and enter into a world of mystery and adventure. Men like to project themselves into the skin of James Bond, and dream. Recipes for eternal success. And girls would give anything to cross his path and to catch his eye.

Going back to Seven Nights in Japan, Charles Gray and James Villiers both appeared in it and the script was written by Christopher Wood. All three have worked on some of the Bond movies, what are your memories from this film?

[AL:] Great memories. Just the fact I had to fly to Japan was exciting. And working with Michael York was a dream. So sweet! So nice! James Villiers too; great sense of humour. The only regret is that I never saw Japan, we stayed at a huge hotel and only ate in the hotel and I hardly had time to do any tourist outings. Except take a train for the shooting at the military port of Yokahama. My best memories? Eating Kobe beef for the first time, scallops cooked in their shells in front of you, and seeing a performance of Kabuki theatre. To die for.

In 1988, you appeared in the excellent film *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. The film starred Daniel Day Lewis, a young Juliette Binoche, plus famed Swedish actors Lena Olin, Erland Josephson and Stellan Skarsgård. Could you tell us about your memories from this film?

[AL:] I had to learn a Swiss accent for the audition so I called my good friend Marthe Keller and she recorded my lines so I could work on the accent. I only had one day shooting, and I woke up with a high fever and a bad cough. It was a nightmare. I was really ill... and that day was so important for me. I didn't do well at all; I know I could have done much better. I remember being so impressed by Juliette Binoche... what an actress! She had the courage and the gall to try all kinds of ways to act every moment... intense, totally concentrated... she would cry, laugh, look anxious or actually get hysterical until the right tone came out and satisfied Philip Kaufman, the director. She was incredible. I felt like a beginner, a toad, in the presence of this fabulous actress.

As far as I know, you haven't appeared in any films since 1989. Have you left the industry or what is the current status?

[AL:] I did a TV short film; one I wrote with my husband, somewhere around 1991... we both played the main parts. After that, I decided to call it a day. We had moved to the country, we were caught up in writing scripts, I had my two youngest sons to take care of, my horse, dogs... vegetable garden -no more desire for acting.

Apart from working as an actress you have also released an LP in 1969 and in 1975 you worked on the soundtrack for *À cause de l'homme à la voiture blanche*. Tell us about these experiences.

[AL:] As with acting, it all happened by itself, I never looked for nor imagined ever recording a record! Someone heard me sing with my guitar – I loved writing my own songs, but just for my own pleasure- and told someone at Barclay records about me. They had me coming to record six songs and sign a contract for an album. I was too young and inexperienced to realize that the big orchestra arrangements were not for me: every song was recorded by 35 musicians and me at the guitar but if I had known better, I would have asked only for maybe a cello, a drum, nothing else. But it was a fabulous experience anyway. I hated the other stuff, the TV shows, the singing in public, not for me. After 2 more singles, I stopped. I loved composing however, and when the director of *A cause de l'homme à la voiture blanche* asked me to write the soundtrack, that was wonderful. For only two guitars. Very rewarding. Too bad the film never made it commercially.

It seems writing is another talent and passion of yours, having co-written forty medium-length novels and two full-length novels published in recent years, what are you working on right now?

[AL:] Now this, this is the biggest thing in my life. I have had an incredible life but writing these novels has given me the most joy and satisfaction. I have always wanted to write but never ever imagined I would be published one day. Also, I write in English, so who is going to read my texts here in France?? But it happened; a long story; a magical story, and to be published by one of the most important publishing houses worldwide, Hachette (Marabout belongs to Hachette) is too good to be true.

I write suspense, thrillers. They are translated into French. My second novel, *Les couleurs de la peur*, just came out. The third, working title “Alex's Baby”, is finished and I am currently working on a 4th.

I now live for writing. I live with my characters. It is my life now, and hopefully, my entire future. I love it. I love it.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ANSWERS, ANNE, VERY MUCH APPRECIATED!

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