



photo by Jim Huemmergard

*Cinematographer Tom Sigel, left, works on an airplane scene for the movie "Salmonberries" with Director Percy Adlon in Kotzebue. Story, page eleven.*

# Aleut actress gets break in Adlon movie

by John Creed and Susan Andrews  
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**KOTZEBUE** — Every year in January many Aleuts of weatherbeaten Southwest Alaska disguise themselves in masks and costumes and tread from house to house, dancing to accordion music, to see whether their neighbors can identify them.

Grounded in this tradition since childhood, Aleut Jane Lind still dons costumes, but today it's on stage before thousands — and tomorrow, on the silver screen before millions.

"We are a people of dance and storytelling," she said. "We came from that place of ceremony, from that place of ritual, which to me, performance is all about."

Jane Barbara Lind, born one of seven children in a sod hut on her father's trapping grounds in Humpback Bay, left her Aleut roots at a young age in the late 1960s for formal theatrical training in New York City. Over the ensuing years, Lind's credits have grown steadily as she has acted, directed, sung and danced across the United States and Europe.

In January, for example, she begins stage rehearsals in London for "Black Elk Speaks," in which she will co-star with David Carradine.

Most recently, though Lind spent six weeks on the set of "Salmonberries," a \$3 million Hollywood film directed by Percy Adlon and shot in Kotzebue and Berlin. "Salmonberries" stars well known Canadian country singer k.d. lang in her film debut and Rosel Zech, a famous German stage and television actress.

For Lind, this biggest break to date — a supporting role in "Salmonberries" opposite Chuck Connors — comes, ironically, in her home state of Alaska.

"I am very lucky," said Lind with the calm, sophisticated demeanor of a big city actress. Simultaneously, though, the Aleut's brown eyes mist over as she resists a fleeting desire to raise her fists in childlike ecstasy at good fortune and shout "Yahoo!" into

go home and see the animals, talk with the elders, watch the children laugh."

Back home, Lind grew up traditionally, when living off the land meant simply living off the land. In those days the lifestyle of Alaska's tribal hunters and gatherers did not evoke the same mystique that much of the modern world adorns it with today.

The Lind family hunted, fished and gathered from the lakes, land and sea for nourishment in an era when a small ship delivered mail and supplies just once a month to their remote village.

Lind's oldest sister, Virginia Aleck, a mother of three who remains in the family's Aleut homeland and still hunts, traps and lives off the land, recalls sister Jane's bent for acting from an early age.

"When she was a little girl, she was always pulling kids in from the village and dressing them up in costumes and dancing and twirling herself," said Aleck, who lives in Chignik Lake.

Lind's own strongest childhood memories retrace that Aleut masking ritual, which combines Alaska Native spirituality with that of the Russian Orthodox colonists.

The Aleuts believe that masks and disguises contain a spirit that might enter the body if wearers do not wash their faces after an evening of characterization. Today, Lind takes off her makeup immediately after every performance.

"You must wash you face or a spirit will stick to you," Lind said. "Some actors who don't do that have a problem of their stage character interfering with their own psyche."

In "Salmonberries," though, Lind's role does, in fact, meld with her own psyche because she plays an Alaska Native character whose Inupiaq Eskimo lineage closely parallels her own real-life Aleut heritage.

Lind plays Noayak, meaning "seagull" in Inupiaq, who is married to a Caucasian named Bingo Chuck (played by Connors), a trader and womanizer who in years past had traveled the villages surrounding

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release, "Dances With Wolves" — is emerging to present Native Americans to a mass audience more accurately.

So the burden of avoiding stereotypes now falls to up-and-coming Native actors such as Jane Lind.

But Lind's Inupiaq character, said k.d. lang, is one of a highly educated woman trying to become more educated in a remote area.

"There's a contrast there that breaks a lot of stereotypes of Native peoples," lang said. "This movie, I believe, definitely shows a respect for Native culture, but doesn't glorify it. The director is trying to be very realistic."

country. Lind landed the part immediately.

During filming in Kotzebue, though, Lind's depth as a stage actress initially handicapped her work on "Salmonberries." With her instinct to project to a live audience, she overwhelmed the subtle demands of the camera's more intimate eye.

"It was hard work for both of us because she was not an experienced camera actor," Adlon said. "One needs a lot of knowledge and understanding of what the camera demands."

When he's directing on the set, Adlon slides to and fro around the camera, his half-moon glasses perched



Aleut actress Jane Lind plays "Noayak" in "Salmonberries."

**'John Wayne killed us in more ways than one,' said Lind, recalling how with siblings she would cheer on the cowboys against the Indians in Westerns shown in their village. 'My father would say, 'What are you doing?'**

the treeless horizon surrounding icy, windswept Kotzebue.

"Yes, I am lucky, but I must say, I worked very hard for my break," Lind adds, her mouth full of brilliant white teeth contrasting with straight, almost blue-black hair that flows across her shoulders and down to her waist.

Spontaneously, she whisks the considerable weight of her mane into a temporary pony tail. A single silver star earring dangles from her left earlobe.

Lind scans Kotzebue Sound, frozen for weeks now, the low November sun splashing but a few reddened rays across the white landscape and onto the modest hills in the middle distance where she sets her gaze.

"Acting gives me no similar feeling elsewhere in life — only when I

Kotzebue.

"I love my character because she has a vastness, from very sweet to very wild," she said. "But I'm playing people very close to me."

This scares Lind, for fear of stereotyping her own people after Hollywood has portrayed Native Americans for decades as either noble savages or barbaric warriors.

"John Wayne killed us in more ways than one," said Lind, recalling how with siblings she would cheer on the cowboys against the Indians in Westerns shown in their village. "My father would say, 'What are you doing?'"

No ethnic group has been so maligned for so long by Hollywood as have Native Americans, though a new trend — notably Adlon's "Salmonberries" and Kevin Costner's recent

Director Adlon scoured the country casting this film in his quest for realism, including looking for Lind's character.

"I was searching for a beautiful young Eskimo-looking woman with charm, passion and who was a good actress to play Noayak," he said. "We saw many, many faces."

During auditions in Seattle, no one suited Adlon's vision until he received a FAX of Lind's photograph from New York. It was an image that so intrigued him she was flown across the

halfway down his nose. On this day, Connors, Lind and others have been re-taking the same scene all afternoon.

Adlon pores over his script, then scans the set for details, his gentle European elegance an anomaly in an American business where many directors rant.

In between shooting, Connors and Lind wait patiently with the other actors for the props people to arrange the set. Connors rises to stretch his 6-foot,

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# Filming in Kotzebue offers challenges

by John Creed  
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**KOTZEBUE** — A helicopter wop-wops across Front Street, close to the white frozen earth, tilted to the side, its doors open, a motion camera lens shooting aerial images of this isolated Inupiat Eskimo settlement 30 miles above the Arctic Circle in Northwest Alaska.

"That's our crew," said Aleut actress Jane Lind, her squinted eyes following the chopper until it slides out of sight.

Hollywood comes to Kotzebue. Local residents watch some 75 Los Angeles types overtake the local hotel this fall, setting up a command post on the first floor and filling rooms normally empty after the summer tourist season.

The moviemakers descended upon this mile-long permafrosted village for about six weeks until mid-November to film "Salmonberries," a full-length Hollywood movie set in Kotzebue and Berlin. To finish filming, cast and crew members then flew to Germany.

"Salmonberries" is scheduled for release next fall.

During local filming, it was easy to spot the visitors around town in their shiny new, oversized moon boots and about \$1,000 worth of Patagonia gear from head to toe, or rumbling by in makeshift vehicles stuffed with movie equipment.

But why Kotzebue?

"Because of the name," said writer-director Percy Adlon, a 55-year-old German filmmaker who created dozens of documentaries before moving over to feature

films.

Apparently, a few years ago Adlon noticed Kotzebue on an Alaska map, reminding him of August von Kotzebue, a 19th century German playwright.

Then, more recently Adlon met country singer k.d. lang, who somehow triggered a magical connection to Kotzebue in his mind.

After flying north earlier this year to check out the setting, Adlon returned to Hollywood, wrote the "Salmonberries" script, chose lang to co-star as a character named "Kotzebue," and decided to film on location "to be true to the place."

In "Salmonberries," k.d. lang plays "Kotz," a half-white, half Inupiat orphan searching for her roots, who meets a middle-aged German woman (played by German actress Resel Zech) who witnessed a tragedy at the Berlin Wall 20 years before and ran away to Kotzebue in an attempt to forget her roots.

If Adlon purposely set his best-known film, "Bagdad Cafe," in California's Mojave Desert because of its harsh, barren environment, then Kotzebue's stark, Arctic desert landscape doesn't seem so farfetched.

"I like minimal landscapes," Adlon said. "The warmth of the desert has many of the same elements as the cold of the Arctic."

Shooting on location in Kotzebue, though, presented novel challenges. For instance, Adlon struggled to scare up enough local faces as extras, making media pleas for local talent in an otherwise fiercely competitive industry. The filmmaker faced other crises, too,

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Director Percy Adlon listens to soundtrack as sound mixer Jose Aravjo looks on.

photo by Jim Huenergardt

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5-inch frame. He dominates his surroundings, his disheveled white hair, stubbly beard (which he grew for the movie and hates), wool pants, flannel shirt, vest and suspenders resembling many of the crusty old white guys who have lived in predominantly Native Kotzebue for decades.

Connors looks down at Lind, his huge, light-blue eyes in a half-fatherly, half-sensual stare.

"Did I pause long enough after that line for you?" he whispers. Lind pauses herself, then nods, appreciating the veteran actor's concern.

"She's very good," said Connors off the set, a 69-year-old chain smoker and former professional athlete who grew up in New York City and is best known for the series, "The Rifleman," in the early days of television.

"Jane is totally New York sophisticated — a very bright woman, very polished. This picture should be a break for her, if it turns out to be a little gem. With her talents and good looks, she should do really well. But as for her potential in the movies, I'd say that's in the lap of the gods."

If Adlon and Connors assisted Lind with her transition from stage to screen, Lind herself coached fellow Natives in "Salmonberries" who had little or no experience in the business.

"More than anyone else, Jane really put me at ease," said Oscar Kuwagley, 56, a doctoral candidate at the Univer-

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such as needing hundreds of jars of salmonberries in a bad year for the Arctic crop — and equipment failure.

Then, after weeks of relatively balmy weather for this extreme northern clime, the final weekend of filming found cast and crew battered by a typically fierce three-day Arctic blizzard that roared through town on 50-mph winds and blinding snow, creating poor visibility and cumbersome drifts.

Despite a wind chill factor of minus 50 degrees, the Hollywood folks went ahead and set up a mock festival out on the ice, prompting some locals to wonder how authentic such a scene would be when most Arctic residents stay inside during such weather.

After filming on these harsh days, the tortured players would flee back to the hotel to soak in hot baths.

"Nature is the star number one here," said Zech, the German actress. "Here, the first thing is you must survive, because nature is so strong."

Nevertheless, Adlon was elated to capture exactly what he wanted on film from the storm: high drama.

"I love this kind of weather," the director said with a satisfied smile the morning after the winds subsided and local filming ended.

If you've seen his off-beat "Bagdad Cafe," you might understand Adlon's quest for the fanciful, especially in capturing nature's

power over human existence, a refreshing if risky departure from mainstream Hollywood fare.

At any rate, Adlon admits to limited knowledge of Alaska Native peoples, depending instead on his outsider's point of view to tell a credible story.

**'This is just another variation on the theme of the human condition.'**

**—Percy Adlon**

"Cultures are not so different around the world," he said. "This is just another variation on the theme of the human condition. I'm not telling an insider Native cultural story. I'm telling the story of a German woman and how she sees this world. It's through her eyes."

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*L.K. Lang is the co-star of "Salmonberries," filmed in Kotzebue and Berlin.*

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sity of British Columbia, who plays Lind's father in the movie.

"She'd crack jokes on the set and I'd relax," said Kawagley, a Yupik Eskimo from Bethel. "It really helped me to get in to my part."

George Barril, 57, a Tlingit originally from Juneau, read for his part in Seattle and a short time later found himself on a movie set in Kotzebue.

"The director just told me to be myself," said Barril, who plays the sheriff of Kotzebue. After he still felt inadequate, Barril approached Lind for help.

"I had never met an Alaska Native who was in the business," he said. "She worked with me for about four hours one night. I told her I was really grateful."

Lind has worked with fellow Natives before in Alaska. For instance, in 1988 she directed university students in Bethel in a production called "Spirit in All Things." She'd like to return home permanently some day to develop Native theater in Alaska.

"I want to plot the dream of the drama and legends that are alive — but they're buried alive — in my people," Lind said.

Meanwhile, "Salmonberries" plots a new course for Hollywood feature films on Alaska as it explores Alaska Native and Western culture using the age-old, universal theme of the human search for identity.

"Percy Adlon is not glorifying Natives by any means, but he's not de-glorifying us either," said Lind. "He might not succeed in this movie, but the attempt is genuine. And I've a strange feeling he'll do it."

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