

SHOOT ALBERTA

by Linda Kupecek

CALGARY - Symposium '81 in Edmonton (February 15-20) attracted filmmakers from Alberta and Los Angeles to participate in a week of forums and screenings. A recurring theme emerged in the discussions: the view of film as art without borders, without geographic barriers.

Robert Altman (U.S. director based in Los Angeles), commenting that he would move to Canada "in a second" if he thought he could make films here, said: "National boundaries don't mean a thing to me. I have no flag except the flag of art. It's a vision, a view, and everyone possesses it."

Micheline Lanctôt (Canadian actress/director from Quebec): "I wish we were all part of the same globe without any frontiers" ... "I think films should be universal."

Tom Peacocke (Genie nominee for *Hounds of Notre Dame*, Edmonton): "It's crazy not to allow artists to move back and forth across the border."

Marushka Stankova (Czech-trained actress now living in Montreal - *Revolution's Orphans*): "Artists leave one place. Other artists come. It is a reciprocal agreement."

Barry Healey (producer/writer/director, Vancouver) commented on the cooperation between western film crews last fall: "Everyone helped each other last year. There was a feeling of esprit de corps between the two provinces (B.C. and Alberta)."

Altman's *Health*, Lanctôt's *L'homme à tout faire*, and Healey's *Outtakes* all received enthusiastic response at the screenings. One audience member commented to Lanctôt: "*L'homme à tout faire* may be a Quebec film, but I think we can all enjoy it and appreciate it."

In turn, Altman so appreciated Winnipeg director Norma

Bailey's film *Nose and Tina* (NFB) that he requested a print for his personal library. Ditto the NFB short *Why Me?*

Altman commented, "Every time I join a group of people like this, I come away the winner. I learn more." And, "Being in Alberta has been like a wash for me. I'm coming away with more than I'm giving you" ... "I saw films today I had never seen before."

The rousing ovations accorded most films, the spirited discussions, and the generally convivial atmosphere, indicated the success of the week's shared experiences. Also there to share the experience were Christine Walsh of the Academy of Canadian Cinema (for the Calgary and Edmonton screenings), Anne Frank of CBC Toronto, Fil Fraser of Fraser Films, Gary Reading of NFB Calgary, Arvi Liimatainen (President of AMPA), Bill Marsden of the Provincial Film Development Office, Eda Lishman of The Producers Ltd., and several hundred others.

Directors Robert Altman and Micheline Lanctôt both had harsh words for film distributors at the recent film symposium held in Edmonton.

Altman (*MASH*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *Thieves Like Us*, *Nashville*, *Popeye*) was in Edmonton to screen *Health*, his recent venture, which 20th Century Fox refuses to distribute. *Health*, an unusual, demanding, intelligent film, was not considered an easily advertised or marketed commodity by Fox. Consequently, Altman, a cult figure in North America, and highly respected in Europe, cannot get his film released theatrically, as Fox controls it.

"Distributors don't want the same things as filmmakers," he said. "Television has deluded the public and has brought everything down to the lowest common denominator ...

"You have to meet a film

half-way. The distributors are taking away that half-way. The film has to do it all now."

Regarding pay-TV he predicted a gradual change in audience for film. He pointed out that an in-theatre experience is ongoing, uninterrupted, while pay-movies at home can be interrupted by the telephone, friends, etc., with a resulting change in audience demands and concentration span.

"Eventually, film will be made for an elite audience," he said.

Altman used the analogy of Broadway, which he says has become too commercial for good production. Regarding his own individual (and therefore, sometimes non-commercial style) he said, "I have a lot of press in film quarters, and I have a cult following. But *Popeye's* making so much money, I've destroyed the mystique."

Micheline Lanctôt agreed with his views, saying, "Hollywood frustrates me beyond belief. Their lowest common denominator approach is an insult to an honest filmmaker."

At a later time, she added, "An art film has no access to the commercial system." But, regarding the Canadian scene, she allowed, "We're still in the best position because we're still shaping our industry."

Perhaps Tom Crighton (one of the symposium moderators) summed it up best, when he opined, "Altman and Lanctôt are like the (near extinct) craftspeople who make handmade shoes and handmade boots."

Altman, referring to the recent glut of tax-inspired Canadian film, said, "I hope this thing is not successful. I hope you do not make *9 to 5*, *Popeye*."

Asked how Canadians should develop their industry, he replied, "Find ways to finance it."

Asked where Canadians should be looking for material, Altman responded: "In their hearts."

Bob Cooper to produce for Fox

TORONTO - Despite announcements in the Toronto media, Robert Redford is not signed to star in *Off the Record*, a film based on Toronto producer Robert Cooper's experiences as CBC ombudsman.

The film, which is set to be produced through Redford's Wildwood Productions and funded "from dollar one" by Twentieth Century Fox, is to be produced by Cooper with a screenplay by Oscar-winner Steve Tesich (*Breaking Away*).

"I initially went to Redford with the goal of having him star in the film," said Cooper, "but to get him to this point in the production is very exciting. "What was wrong with the

story in the papers is that they have him signed to star. As anyone in this business knows, you have to have a screenplay first. He is working with Tesich and me on developing the screenplay."

Cooper did not rule out the possibility of Redford starring in *Off the Record*. "If you look at his past work, you know that when he is involved in a production, he plays an important role in a film."

No schedule has yet been set for the film beyond a tentative July deadline for the screenplay.

Off the Record will be an American production and not a certified Canadian film.

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