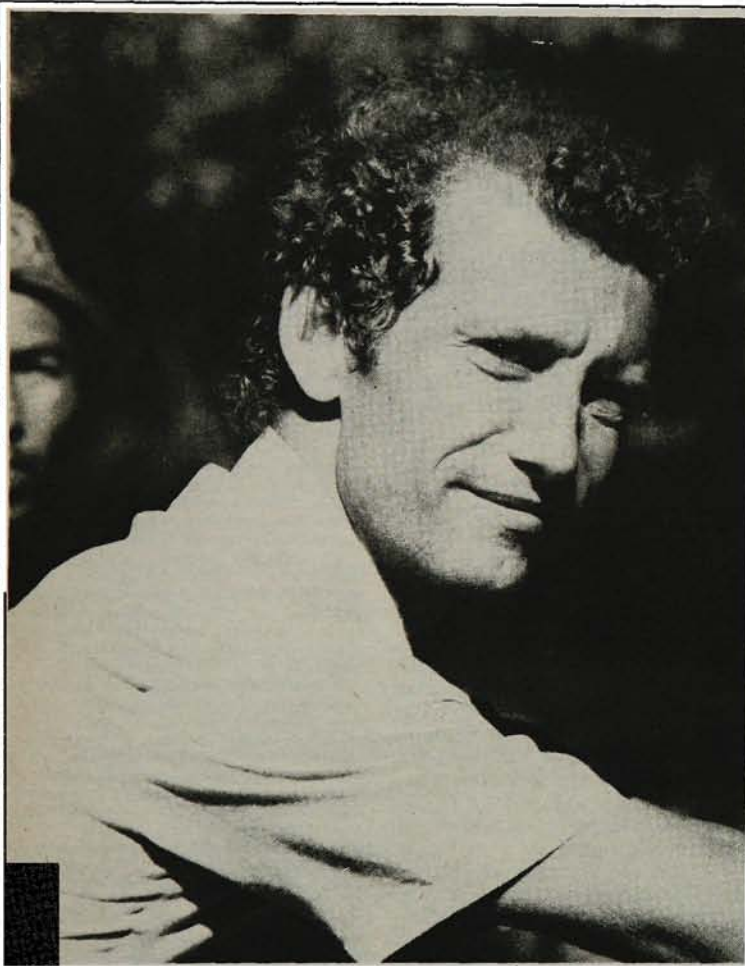
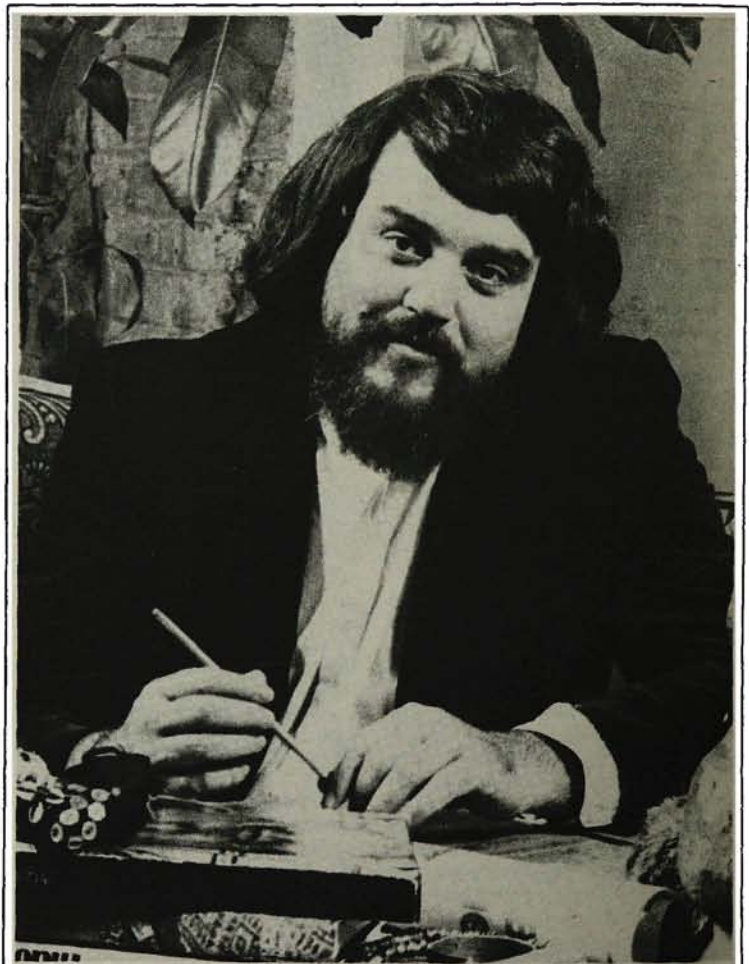


Documentary's dynamic duo

by Alan Herscovici



● François Floquet



● Daniel Bertolino

Daniel Bertolino, and François Floquet, thrive on doing the impossible. Via Le Monde Inc., which the dynamic duo began in 1967, has produced films about some of the most isolated and little-known peoples of the globe – an astounding output of more than 140 documentaries, most of them shot in extremely difficult conditions. But one could say that their most remarkable achievement has been Via Le Monde itself: the survival and growth of an independent Canadian company making films almost

exclusively for television.

The key to their success – apart from the apparently boundless energy of the 40-year-old Bertolino and 43-year-old Floquet – has been a well-orchestrated programme of co-productions, and aggressive exploitation of the European market. Most recently, Bertolino's *Indian Legends of Canada*, (a series of 14 half-hour episodes co-produced by Via Le Monde, with Radio-Canada, CBC, The Department of Indian Affairs, and the Quebec Film Institute), was followed by some 12 million viewers on France's Antenne 2, and the series has been purchased by networks from Sweden to Algeria and the Ivory Coast. One of the legends won the UNESCO International

Youth film prize in June 1982, and an LP recording based on the series was awarded the European Audio-Visual Grand Prize by l'Académie des disques français, in November.

"We understood quickly that if you try to depend only on Canadian money, you're dead!" says Bertolino. "That meant looking for subjects that could interest an international audience – not just staring into your own navel like so many Canadians were doing. My own travels had made me very sensitive to the international dimension."

While still in his early 'twenties, Bertolino set off to tour the world with a camera and \$100 in his pocket, and in two years filmed 26 half-hour episodes

for his series *Camera-Stop!*, before settling down in Montreal.

"From the beginning, CTV and Radio-Canada were ready to work with us because we had experience making films in remote parts of the world... and we had the advantage of being multi-disciplinary; we could research and write our own projects – we weren't dependent on what a producer said we could or couldn't do. Our goal was always to work towards autonomy, not dependence," Bertolino says.

But the secret to their survival was a talent for luring the industry giants into joint-ventures:

"Radio-Canada might not have enough money for a new series, but what they

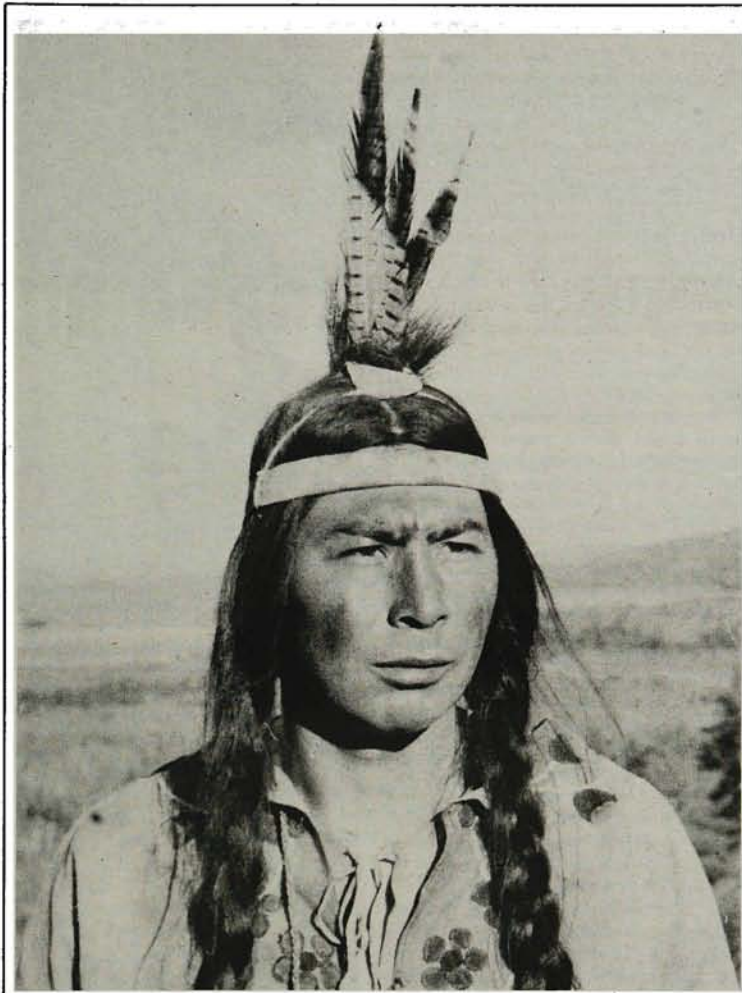
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did have to spend was for us an effective 'déclencheur', a catalyst," says Bertolino. "And of course, cooperation with Radio-Canada assured us distribution - it guaranteed that our work would be seen. Sometimes we could bring unlikely partners together; in 1972 we brought CTV and Radio-Canada together for a project - that was something. And we were the first to bring Radio-Québec and Radio-Canada together!"

Other government agencies, like the Canadian University Students Overseas (CUSO) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), were co-opted whenever possible, as for the 1976-77 series, *Challenge*, about Canadians working in difficult conditions in remote parts of the world. More often than not when Via Le Monde went on location abroad, it was to film two or three projects at once, to keep down expenses. Ironically, now that the company is relatively established in the industry, the problem of balancing the ledger seems harder than ever.

"Costs are up terribly, but the networks don't have much to spend," says associate producer Carle Delarochette-Vernet, who's been with the company since 1969. "We compensate by trying to do much more preparatory work here in Montreal than we used to. It's absolutely essential now that we find partners who can cover most of our expenses 'in kind'. If we're shooting a legend in Portugal, for instance, we'll try to work out a deal with the tourist bureau there. They might be able to arrange plane tickets and accommodation for our crew, in exchange for which we give them a print of the film that they can use to promote tourism. Our goal, ideally, is to have no expenses at all to pay once we leave Montreal to start shooting. It's the only way you can survive today."

The same labour-intensive/low-invest-



● A warrior's quest for his wife takes him to the frontier between life and death

ment formula characterizes the aggressive marketing tactics Via Le Monde employs to crack competitive overseas markets. For the launching of *Indian Legends of Canada*, Bertolino brought to Paris four of the Indians who played in the series, in full regalia (one of the men was dressed as a cornucopia), to meet the press. For a week-long children's festival, native carvers produced a totem-pole, on the spot, and donated it to the city, and Canadian embassy officials, even minister of Communications Francis Fox, were recruited for the gala celebrations.

"You must remember that this was literally the first time a Canadian series was aired on prime-time European television, so the Canadian government was very cooperative," says Bertolino.

Cooperative indeed. Under the skillful coordination of Bertolino, a carefully organized media-buzz was unleashed: Air Canada provided 11 tickets to fly French media editors to visit Indian communities in Canada, to see the realities of Indian life in the twentieth century, so they could write about the TV series in the proper perspective - and avoid the charge that Bertolino had exploited the image of the Indians.

"We didn't want to be accused of mystifying the situation of the Indians; on the contrary, our goal was to break through the stereotypes and give people a glimpse at the real Indian culture, which has a great deal to teach us."

French youngsters have been invited to write in their own stories and legends, and this summer four of them will be flown (again courtesy of Air Canada) to visit one of the villages where the series was filmed. A satellite hook-up will allow children in France to ask questions while the four lucky winners squat contentedly beside the Indian chief.

● The Yana or chief of the Yendi tribe, his warriors, and François Floquet (behind camera) during the filming of an episode of *Lost Kingdoms*



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Another tie-in with the broadcast of the series has been the publication by Flammarion of a book, and the release of two LP recordings which have 20 pages of text and photos from the TV episodes.

"All 15,000 copies of the book sold out in Paris in three months, and Flammarion will be printing a second edition," says Bertolino. "Flammarion has full responsibility for the book and we just collect royalties, but of course our contract with them included assurances that the series would be televised. Radio-Canada and CBC, for their part, have their logo shown all over the world where the book is sold."

The success of the series has permitted Bertolino to begin filming a new project, *Tales and Legends of the World*, which will be filmed in 13 different countries, and, in the U.S., PBS is interested in screening the *Indian Legends of Canada*.

"They want us to produce another 13 episodes of legends of American Indians. They've been unable to develop a good working relationship with Indians in the United States, perhaps because of their violent history, and they want to use our experience to break the ice," says Bertolino.

This opening into the US is a very important step, especially since that vast market is generally closed to outside producers.

"In our 17 years, I think we've managed to sell the U. S. about four times," says François Floquet. "The American attitude is that they don't buy - they sell. If by chance they like your product, they'll say they need a big American star to do the narration, so they'll pay you, say, \$400,000 for your series and then charge you back \$100,000 to re-do the narration. More likely than that, though, they just steal your idea. 'Where did you say that Chief lived?' they'll ask, and then send out their own crew. Unfortunately, the Americans still think that they're the only who can do good work. That's the attitude that we have to work to change, but it's a long slow process."

As animated and jovial as is Daniel Bertolino, François Floquet, who has a doctorate in Geography and was President of the Quebec Association of Film Producers (APFQ) in 1979, strikes one as introspective and philosophical. He sees the irony that after 17 years as one of Canada's more active filmmakers, he finds himself in the position of packing his films into a suitcase and setting off to the U.S. to sell his wares.

"You have to sell, and you have to open new markets. I've armed myself with video-cassettes of my series, *Lost Kingdoms*, and an open ticket to California - I won't come back until I've found a buyer, it's as simple as that. You can't stay there in Montreal and expect to survive. PBS is interested in *Lost Kingdoms* [a series about traditional chiefs in different countries] but they say we must find the sponsor! I have an agency in N.Y. looking after that now. They gave me an itinerary of the 17 major film companies in California, and I'll see them all. Ideally we can work out some kind of co-production arrangement, that's the only way to break into the American market. So I'll load my suitcase with films and off the go."

On the go is certainly the hallmark of Via Le Monde. The outsider, stepping into their third-floor offices in old Montreal, is struck with the impression of having stumbled into the center for some kind of international conspiracy. Large aluminum cans of film stand in stacks in the middle of the room, labeled

with exotic place-names from Asia and Africa; across one full wall is a floor-to-ceiling map of the world, riddled with coloured pins that mark locations where Via Le Monde has filmed. Carle Delaroché-Vernet comes in from the bank with his pockets full of escudos; he's off to Portugal tomorrow to begin filming an episode for the *Legends of the World*. Gilles Parent comes in to discuss the progress of a new series he's preparing about the Hubbards, a husband-wife explorer team who were the first non-Indians to penetrate the interior of Labrador. Parent, himself an avid mountain-climber, has made seven trips into Labrador, on foot and by canoe, retracing the voyages of the Hubbards.

"It's very exciting," says Parent, "I've found some of the exact spots they photographed in the interior. They were an amazing couple... and she was probably one of the first woman explorers in the world, you know."

Like the Indian legends, the Hubbard story will be a dramatic re-construction. "The networks aren't that interested in straight documentary style anymore," says Floquet. "Everybody wants the sagas, the long stories..."

"Via Le Monde was always interested in dramatic representation," says Bertolino. "Even when we were doing the documentaries in remote areas, there was a great deal of experience directing people who weren't professional actors. That experience was very useful when it came to shooting the *Indian Legends of Canada*. None of the people who played in the legends was a trained actor, but they were marvellous. They had no fear of the camera whatsoever, and they are very proud of their culture and their traditions. As much as possible, we tried to find people to fit the parts - for example, in *The return of the Child*, the man who plays the chief really is the chief of that village, so he didn't find it a hard role to play. If we were filming a story about a woman who's heart-broken about losing the man she loved, we tried to find the woman in that village who really was in love... and her lover too. The deep human element really came through, and that's why people everywhere, from Sweden to the Ivory Coast, responded to it - the human experience is international."

Bertolino will be tackling the international question on a far larger scale in his next project - a \$2-million film version of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *World Challenge*, scheduled for broadcast in 1984.

"Radio-Canada and Antenne 2 are already committed, and we're negotiating with CBC," says Bertolino. "It's a sweeping study of world history - how we've come to the present impasse and where we're headed for the rest of the century. Servan-Schreiber's book sold three million copies in 17 languages. We'll be trying to show the world impact that events have today. For example, in tracing the oil crisis, we'll recall the Suez confrontation by splitting the screen in four to show how hour-by-hour events in the Middle East were related to what was happening in London and Washington and so on... We're preparing six hours of film that will be aired every night for a week, and on the Saturday night we'll have a panel of world-known intellectuals discussing the consequences. This is really a natural focus for us, because all our work has aimed at showing the international dimension of our world - that's why we call ourselves Via Le Monde."



• The sudden death of a beloved spouse begins the quest for the meaning of life



• Jibwes becomes a moose-man when he loses touch with his tribe in this Abenaki legend



• Mandamin, the "marvelous seed," incarnates the secret of maize in this resurrection myth