

Film Canada Center's Ladouceur writes in defence of international programming

I believe the question of international programming should be examined beyond the editorial of Cinema Canada (January) entitled: "1983: The Year of the American Compromise." I refer in particular to the following statement:

"There is no such thing as 'international' television programming. One can't opt to watch Spanish programs or Japanese programs or Mexican programs. Around the world, one watches either locally produced programs or American programs."

To me, international programming means sharing money, creative input and distribution territories in order to produce worthwhile projects. It does not imply working solely with a Yank partner, using pseudo-U.S. locales or casting Hollywood stars in each case.

I feel it is quite possible and desirable to assemble international elements to achieve national production of great merit. Furthermore, such programs will be in a better position to impact both the home and foreign audiences. The following illustrate my rationale.

- *Five Mile Creek*, the excellent 13-part series set in the Australian outback of the 1860s, has been described as the highest budgeted TV series produced in that country. Yet, three-quarters of the \$5,800,000 cost was underwritten by The Disney Channel. At a premiere screening in Westwood last October, Aussie producer Henry Crawford expressed particular pleasure at working with the U.S. pay service, saying "there had been no creative interference." The partners are now producing a second block of 13 episodes.

- The 10-hour Italian mini-series *Marco Polo* produced for RAI by Vincenzo Labella was made possible by Proctor and Gamble putting up about \$10 million of the estimated \$25-30 million production cost. In this case, Jack Wishard acted as program supervisor for the mogul of soapmaking and he provided some creative input as well.

- How about the English mini-series such as *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Citadel*, *To Serve Them All My Days* and others? They retain a clearly identified national character and have been acclaimed widely outside their home market. Yet many of these series were made possible through U.S. financial underwriting from Mobil Corporation and creative supervision by WGBH in Boston.

- Other examples of international programs now in the making include *Rush*, a multi-million dollar series of 13 one-hour shows produced by the Australian Broadcasting Company in co-production with Antenne 2, Scottish and Global TV Enterprises; and *Mars And War*, a six-hour dramatic mini-series set in Japan and China, produced by Nikkatsu/Earthguide Japan and Western World.

The big clamor in production and broadcasting all over the world these days is how to reconcile escalating costs with the need for original programming that reflect national concerns and character. Let's see now how some of the key players feel on that problem.

Pierre Desgraupes, the topper at Antenne 2, visited the U.S. recently and pitched projects with potential partners such as MGM, Metromedia and HBO.

Speaking to the Hollywood trade press, Desgraupes said new trans-Atlantic alliances have not only an economic grounding but an artistic foundation as well. He added: "Americans are saturated by the traditional TV series and want a little change in horizon, and coming to Europe is a way of changing the horizon, with different subjects, different settings - settings that are different physically and mentally."

Alan Landsburg, an old pro of U.S. TV production, looks at it this way: "If you did a TV movie, maybe the most you could expect from British revenue is \$100,000. But if you co-produce with them they might put as much as \$1.5 million into the pot. Not only is that a production saving, it can increase the creative scope of what you are doing."

For John Eberts, manager of Embassy in London, it is by co-production that the main European networks can get into prestigious programs which sell in the U.S. and elsewhere. That approach also gives the participating webs domestic rights to an upercase program for a fraction of the cost.

Per Australian Film Commission ex-boss Joe Skrzynski, the industry's economics underlines the need for overseas income to help recoup original investment and to make profits. As he wrote in his last annual report:

"This is quite different, however, from making films which copy overseas films, particularly U.S. films, in the expectation that they will, as a result, sell better in America. Overseas experience shows that Hollywood makes the best Hollywood movies and that imitation is folly. This Commission believes that while Australian films should strive for international accessibility by avoiding unnecessary parochial elements, they should also maintain the Australian identity which has been the keystone for their success so far."

The strategy of using international links to boost domestic TV program production is also applicable to theatrical features. For example, would *The Terry Fox Story*, a full maple leaf production, have been done without the HBO connection?

How about *The Man From Stony River*, the feature based on a classic Australian novel? It became the most financially successful theatrical picture made Down Under and received worldwide release. Yet, it clearly owes a lot to Kirk Douglas, a Hollywood star.

Let's keep in mind also that a large portion of the theatrical features which came out of France, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland over the last twenty years were the result of a substantial sharing of creative and financial input beyond national borders. Yet they retained their own distinctive style and flavor.

At home, the recently released *The Wars* lists as producers Nielsen-Ferns International, the NFB and Polyphone Film-und Fernseh. The role of the German partner apparently did not hurt the national character of the product. In the same issue of Cinema Canada, a reviewer described it as "a Canadian classic." ...

Clearly, the judicious assembling of international elements can lead to fine

theatrical and TV productions with a genuine national identity. Such alliances provide better budgets, allow more substantial production value and give access to wider audiences. They bring to life projects that would not exist otherwise. Is this not what we need for the well-

being and growth of our own film and television industry?

Roland Ladouceur •

Roland Ladouceur is executive director of Film Canada Center in Beverly Hills.

LETTERS

Genies: a plea

Herewith my reaction to this year's Genie Awards screenings of Canadian feature film industry's output of 1983.

Lamentable.

As the years roll by, the expectation that *this* time we would turn the corner is increasingly aroused, and alas, increasingly disappointed.

Two years ago, on the occasion of these screenings, I wrote, "At the beginning of 1982 we are still missing what we miss the most - original, unself-conscious, deeply felt work. You know, that feeling we had when we first saw *Mon Oncle Antoine*."

I regret to say that things haven't changed a bit. One still yearns for an authentic voice, a film with an echo. Something. The most dispiriting fact is this lack of voice, lack of sense of direction, lack of self.

Nothing seems to pierce the much ballyhoo'd but actually half-hearted automatism of current production. The pictures are there, the production is there, people work, films get made, and have been for the last eight years now, and yet... Zero. Nada. No progress. No evolution.

Judging by the results one cannot but conclude that in a very real sense government policies have been, and are, a failure. A yawning dead-end. That is where we are.

If the making of films in this country is to survive, I suggest that everybody in the industry, starting with the government bureaucrats in the various agencies, and the producers, not excluding the directors either, sit through these screenings, watch these films. Open their eyes. And come to terms with the reality of where filmmaking in this country is at. And then sit down around a table and begin again.

Dani Hausmann
Montreal

No censorship

In your extensive interview with Timothy Findley concerning *The Wars*, in the January edition of *Cinema Canada*, it is erroneously stated that some of the homosexual scenes from the book were censored in the film. It is perfectly true that two scenes - a homosexual rape and a homosexual encounter in a whorehouse - do not appear in the film. This was a decision by Timothy Findley. At no time did I suggest that these scenes should be omitted, nor did anyone else connected with the film make any such suggestion.

Mr. Findley also states that various scenes of male nakedness were shot but edited out. This too is false. There were

no nude scenes in the script which were not shot, and none were edited out. The shower scene, replete with penises and pubic hair, remained in the film as shot. I doubt also that male nudity can any longer be considered "homosexual" content. A number of women of my acquaintance, including my daughter, expressed appreciation of the shower sequence.

I would like to add that *Cinema Canada* should, in future, not accept unsubstantiated allegations of censorship without checking with the producer involved.

Richard Nielsen
Primedia Productions
Toronto.

CINEMA

Next month in Cinema Canada

- Goodbye Oz, Hello Holland: Dutch cinema's lessons for Canada
- 1983 Canadian film & TV production: the complete statistical story
- Peter Harcourt on Jean-Pierre Lefebvre
- National box-office grosses

And more!

André Carrière

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