

WESTERN VISTAS

Telefilm Canada as seen from the West

VANCOUVER – The 15th floor of a new beige office tower at the corner of Bute Street. To the right, beside the large brazen numerals "1500," was the entrance to the reception area. Burgundy velveteen chairs, reproductions of historical world maps on twilled fabric walls, one wall a mirror. The receptionist, shared by several offices in the suite, was confidently answering the phone "Telefilm," and not, as I had half-expected, "Canadian Film Development Corporation." She said that Donna Wong-Juliani was on the telephone, and would I please have a seat.

I waited, scanned the table for a copy of *Cinema Canada*, found only *Maclean's* and *Equity*. I was quiet, a little exultant at having penetrated the inner sanctum of Telefilm.

After she got off the phone, Ms. Wong-Juliani, friendly and appealing, appeared personally to lead me to her office.

I sat on a small sofa, she in a chair opposite a low glass-topped table. On the inner walls were brass-framed posters for *Why Shoot the Teacher*, the Vancouver Children's Film Festival, and *Latitude 55*, the 1982 feature produced by Donna and co-written and directed by her husband, John Juliani. By way of preliminary I asked her what she thought her function was as a Telefilm officer (the only one west of Toronto).

"I regard it as trying in any way possible to help local producers."

But does she have power to decide whether Telefilm will back a project, or is her function to help a producer prepare

his application for consideration in the East?

"In the scheme of things it finally has to be approved by Toronto. But if it's a script development application it's much better if it's done here because my access to the producers, to get information, is much easier. Basically it's a recommendation situation."

Does Telefilm examine a project primarily in the light of recovering its investment?

"Absolutely, in the sense that the endeavor that we're involved with is a business endeavor. But preceding that, especially in its early stages, that [the project] is a good story, that it has broad interest, especially if we're talking about projects that intend to be financed through the Broadcast Fund, so that it can reach into a television market. If it's not, if it's more for theatrical, of which we're seeing very little right now because of the difficulties of financing, then we'll look at other criteria, or at least look to its marketability in that situation."

"Is there a 'feature' industry anymore?" I asked. "Or does the Broadcast Fund reflect an international tendency to produce 'programs' that may or may not have theatrical windows before hitting other distribution media?"

"One can question whether or not there was really a strong feature industry anyway," she said. "I think it's just more difficult at the present time for the producer to put together the theatrical film with the kind of distribution guarantees up front that make sense propor-

tionate to the budget."

Donna Wong-Juliani's phone buzzed, loudly. She answered it, and I stood to look down at Georgia Street, 15 stories below. The traffic, light at 10:20, moved slowly and silently along the shady street. I was wondering how to get a satisfactory answer, one I could convey to filmmakers, to the question of why the West was having such a hard time, compared to the East, in tapping the Fund. (According to calculations made by would-be tapper Laurence Keane five days later, only a little over 1% of the Fund's first year allocation found its way into B.C. productions.) When Ms. Wong-Juliani hung up the phone I presented her with the charge that the powers of the East hold western producers, especially Vancouver producers, in contempt.

"I can understand where that perception exists," she said, carefully. "Maybe it even has some basis given a specific person's experience, but I think it's dangerous to generalize. What in fact I think we're going to see is that it very much depends on the abilities of the individual producers, whether they can put something together. That will depend, to some extent, on what they've done in the past, whom they know, how they can make those kinds of contacts to put a large [project] together. Nobody's questioning abilities in the sense of, do they know what they're talking about or doing?"

The questioning, then, is of the producers' business skills, or more particularly, how well 'networked' they are for elici-

ting investments and pre-sales, conventionally the domain of the executive producer.

"If somebody comes who has never made a feature before," she said, "and proposes to make a first feature for \$3 million, and basically has a very fine story, good script, then we'll say, okay, let's see where the pieces are falling. How are you putting this together? You want us to invest a million dollars; have you got the broadcaster? What's the broadcaster in for? We're not about to turn our backs on something that makes good sense."

"But isn't there a danger," I said, "of demanding too much other support before Telefilm involvement? Shouldn't the government agency be the 'easy sell,' so an applicant can use Telefilm's interest as a lever on other investors?" I was thinking of the difficulty some producers have in banking their broadcast letters. The CBC, for example, in a typical deal, withholds 50% of its commitment till completion of the film. Fully 80% of the CBC pledged money is disbursed only after the rough cut, which amount must be financed in the meantime – no simple feat, given the caginess, to independent investors examining the deal, of the CBC contract.

"I think there's a tangible way you can do that, which is to get us involved early, into the development of [a project]. That is real support of it, not just a piece of paper saying it's interesting." Vis-a-vis CBC's payment schedule she said, "Ours doesn't run that line; we understand the difficulties, and so we negotiate a schedule with the producer. We don't have some kind of rigid structure of 10%, 10%... What we do is withhold about 20% till completion. We're talking, in a sense, opposite: we're ready to disburse

80% during production."

It wasn't till later that I understood the problem as an "executive producer gap." If promising Vancouver producers had been drawn out of the city, why would any executive producers be left hanging around? Why should local new and would-be feature producers resist the involvement of the old hands in the East? Because of two fears: 1) capitulation of creative control; 2) being fired from their own films. These are legitimate worries, but what large sum of money ever came without strings attached?

Vancouver natives are starting to become most restless; but further examination of their concerns will have to wait till next month.

Paul Vitols ●

Cineplex gets corny

TORONTO – Cineplex Corp. has bought Kernels Gourmet Popcorn Ltd., a Toronto-based manufacturer and retailer of candy-glazed and savoury-flavoured popcorn, from Kernels founders Scott Staiman and Richard Sadowski.

Purchase price was 175,000 Cineplex treasury shares (valued at \$2.75 each) and \$315,000, \$110,000 cash and \$205,000 to be paid over 12 months.

Staiman and Sadowski, who announced the deal with Cineplex president Garth Drabinsky May 1 in Toronto, will remain to manage the operation.

Kernels now operates three outlets in Metro Toronto, and immediate plans are to open outlets in Bramalea, London, and Kitchener, as well as a second location at Toronto's Eaton Centre.



TORONTO FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS

September 6-15, 1984

PRE-SELECTION SCREENINGS FOR CANADIAN FILMS

Pre-selection screenings of Canadian films for the 1984 Festival of Festivals will be held in Toronto June 25-29, 1984. Please call or write to the Festival office for entry forms if you would like to enter your film in the 1984 Festival or if you require further information.

ELIGIBILITY:

1. Any Canadian film (except sponsored or industrial film) is eligible – feature, short, documentary, animated and experimental.
2. Films must be certified Canadian productions or co-productions.
3. Films must have been completed after October 1, 1983.
4. Preference will be given to Canadian premieres.
5. Films for preview screenings may be submitted in 16mm, 35mm, 3/4" or 1/2" video.
6. Films will be presented in the Festival in 16mm and 35mm only (optical sound) and in their original language with English subtitles.
7. Deadline for receipt of entry forms is Monday, June 18, 1984.
8. Deadline for receiving prints or tapes for preview is Friday, June 22, 1984.

FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS

Suite 205, 69 Yorkville Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5R 1B8
(416) 967-7371 Telex: 06-219724



FESTIVAL DES FESTIVALS DE TORONTO

du 6 au 15 septembre 1984

VISIONNEMENTS DE PRÉ-SÉLECTION DE FILMS CANADIENS

Les visionnements de pré-sélection de films canadiens pour le Festival des Festivals auront lieu à Toronto du 25 au 29 juin 1984. Veuillez écrire au bureau du Festival ou communiquer avec lui si vous désirez obtenir des formulaires d'inscription pour soumettre votre film au Festival de 1984 ou avoir de plus amples renseignements

ADMISSIBILITÉ:

1. Tout film canadien (sauf les films industriels ou commandités) est admissible, qu'il s'agisse d'un long métrage, d'un court métrage, d'un documentaire, d'un film d'animation ou expérimental.
2. Les films doivent être certifiés comme étant des productions ou des co-productions canadiennes.
3. Les films doivent avoir été terminés après le 1^{er} octobre 1983.
4. La préférence sera donnée aux premières canadiennes.
5. Les films, pour les visionnements préalables, peuvent être soumis en 16 ou 35 mm, ou en bande vidéo de 3/4 ou de 1/2 po.
6. Les films seront présentés, pendant le Festival, en 16 et 35 mm seulement (son optique), dans leur version originale avec sous-titres anglais.
7. La date limite pour la réception des formulaires d'inscription est le lundi 18 juin 1984.
8. La date limite pour la réception des copies ou des bandes pour les visionnements préalables, est le vendredi 22 juin 1984.

FESTIVAL DES FESTIVALS

Suite 205, 69 Yorkville Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5R 1B8
(416) 967-7371 Telex: 06-219724