

Storming American screens Drabinsky-style



From the top-floor of Cineplex Corp. president Garth Drabinsky's King Street office, you can see Roy Thompson Hall. This reminder of another Canadian media giant is no accident. If Thompson from the hinterlands of Canada was able to take London's Fleet Street by storm, Drabinsky has likeminded ambitions in his assault on the American movie motherland.

Drabinsky is single-handedly trying to change the nature of the movie-going experience. In a recent interview with Cinema Canada, he notes that most moviegoers fall into the 15-30-year bracket - "that represents something less than 20% of the 350-million strong North American market." Drabinsky wants to lure the over-30s into cinemas by creating what can only be described as a yuppie environment of plush seating, upgraded projection and sound facilities, cappuccino cafes, popcorn with real butter and a decor that includes specially commissioned works of Canadian art. The investment in ambience alone totals \$3 million to date.

He dismisses cries of the death of the movie house. Certainly, they're dying in the small towns, partly because of demographics and partly because the theatres are unattractive places to spend one's time. Drabinsky sees a future of crowded housing which will drive people to live outside the home

as much as possible. He plans to give them a place to go.

He sees no threats from new technology such as High Definition Television. "I've been talking to Sony since 1978," he said and he's still waiting for something to happen. "Give me 2,000 lines," he demanded, referring to scan-lines. HDTV promises 1125 lines.

He is confident that the Cineplex chain can expand by at least 200 more theatres. He has a special eye on the States, having already repurchased the Beverly Center Cinema Complex in Los Angeles. In the works is further American expansion. No details are forthcoming.

As far as video is concerned, Drabinsky says it helps the movie industry by providing an additional source of ancillary financing. It can only be a spur to production which helps exhibitors by giving them "greater choice and greater flexibility."

Another prong in the Drabinsky strategy is an aggressive booking policy. "We will pay a premium for films I want," Drabinsky said. The result is that top-grossing films like *Amadeus*, *Country*, *Places in the Heart* and *Ghostbusters* have found their way to Cineplex screens.

He doesn't feel that Famous Players' current problems - the competing chain is up for sale and has been in a state of limbo for over a year - has given him a competitive advantage. "I have not seen their

management any less zealous."

A third prong is more subtle. It involves configuring Cineplex theatres in the most economical way. Drabinsky would rather have two 300-seat theatres with simultaneous projection than a single 600-seat theatre. In most cases, he declared, it doesn't make sense to have a larger theatre when, except for weekends, theatres run at 25% capacity.

Along with his stature in the industry comes commitment. "We have a mandate to support Canadian production," he said. Concomittant with that is the strongly held view that "Canadian distribution needs to be protected." He doesn't have much faith in Communications minister Marcel Masse's negotiations with the majors.

"Discussions don't mean anything. It takes one-and-a-half to two years for a minister to grasp the problem." Changes to FIRA are not positive signs. It remains to be seen what the Conservatives mean when they say they will protect cultural industries. "If they want to sell out there's nothing we can do," shrugs Drabinsky philosophically.

Washington woos Harry Rasky

Director/producer Harry Rasky, winner of more than 100 international prizes and citations, will be honoured by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington in February, the CBC has announced.

Rasky will show two of his latest films at a Gala Weekend, Feb. 8 and 9. He will talk on his newest film, *The Mystery of Henry Moore*. The Canadian embassy in Washington will host the



reception for Rasky. The Smithsonian calls Rasky the "Master Canadian filmmaker."

Rasky has also been recently invited by the Board of Governors of the Motion Picture Academy to become a full member, one of the few non-fiction filmmakers of the world to be so honoured.

PBS stations began a retrospective of Rasky's work in January.

The Boy In Blue star on winning streak



One of Hollywood's most exciting young actors, Nicolas Cage seems to be everywhere these days: starring in *The Cotton Club*, in *Birdy*, and now as an athletic superstar of the 1890's in Twentieth Century Fox's *The Boy in Blue*.

In *The Boy in Blue* Cage plays Ned Hanlan,

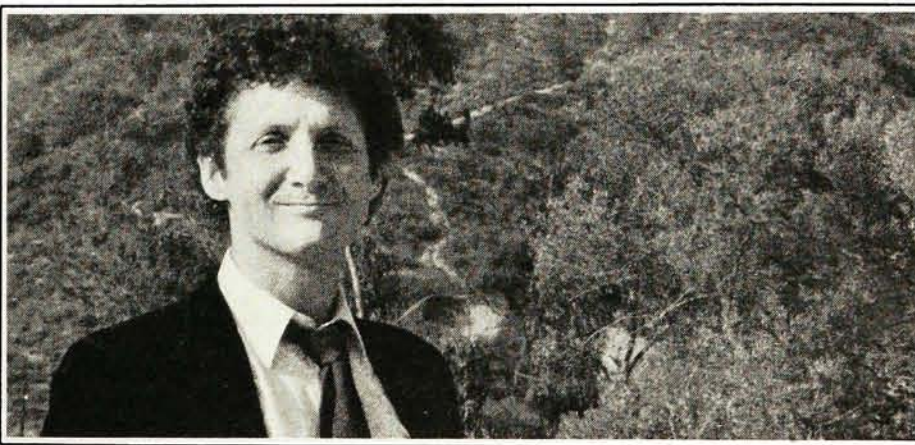
the world-champion oarsman of the 1890's. Hanlan, a larger-than-life character, was a bootlegger who learned to row with the speed of lightning in order to elude the police pursuing him along the shores of Lake Ontario. But once he got into competition Hanlan took it very

seriously, and he became a national hero.

Cage had only one day off between the start of location filming outside Montreal for *The Boy in Blue* and completion of his previous film, Alan Parker's *Birdy*, in which he plays a burn victim of Vietnam. "I was a skinny bag of bones when I started this film," he laughs. "One of the reasons I really wanted to do it was that I needed a crash course to get me out of that guy in *Birdy*."

Cage's crash course for *The Boy in Blue* consisted of arduous training on an Olympic schedule with his coach Atelido Magione, an Olympic sculling champion. ("I can't explain how painful it was," recalls Cage. "For the first three days I couldn't stand up.") In 10 days Cage regained the 20 pounds he had lost for *Birdy* and mastered the tricky business of propelling a shallow-bottomed racing shell without tipping over in the water, which enabled him to row all his own races in the film, much to the delight of director Charles Jarrot.

The Boy in Blue is a John Kemeny/Denis Heroux production starring Nicolas Cage, Christopher Plummer, Cynthia Dale, David Naughton, Sean Sullivan and Melody Anderson. Steve North is executive producer. With a screenplay by Douglas Bowie and directed by Charles Jarrot, it is produced by Montreal's I.C.C. - International Cinema Corporation in association with Telefilm Canada and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The motion picture will be released worldwide by Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.



Green cards, anyone?

David Holiff - the chap who brought you funnymen Howie Mandel and Jim Carrey - is ready to open the gates of Hollywood to an influx of Canadian talent. Having dealt with a flood of phones from actors wondering how to do what and when to do it, Holiff has opened a consultancy business called Canadians Only.

"The first piece of advice - and it's free - is I don't come down here!

Call me first," says Holiff, ready to stave off the heartache of actors who wander around Los Angeles unprepared. Working mainly on the phone, with occasional trips to Toronto, Holiff is ready to use his network of agents, managers, casting people, lawyers and others to help actors get publicity, establish press kits, shoot pictures, make videos and - most importantly - get a green card and working papers.

Meanwhile, he's busy developing a deal with Warner Bros. to showcase Carrey, and is happy to announce that Howie Mandel will lead in *The Music Box*, a \$15 million Blake Edwards pic which should be ready for next Christmas. Not content with that, Holiff is dealing on his own behalf, working to get a few productions together... about which, we'll all hear soon enough.