

The Eastern Wave

by Chris Majka

Another year has dawned on Canada's eastern seaboard. The lakes are frozen and pensive skaters glide on their surface pondering their New Year's resolutions. Although the film industry here is still on rather thin ice, it seems at least to have stopped treading water, to mix seasonal metaphors. The last year saw a degree of activity unparalleled in the past in this region and there is a genuine sense of optimism on the street as a generation of filmmakers, who have cut their teeth on low-budget or no-budget productions, have begun to find opportunities closer to the main funding channels of the country.

Talking with the Island Media Arts Coop in Charlottetown, I learned that planning has again started for the Atlantic Film and Video Producers Conference, the yearly fête which they host on Prince Edward Island. This conference has already become an important opportunity for producers from around the region to workshop on a variety of issues. The organizers tell me that this year they hope to attract more participants from outside of the region as well. The winter months have tightened their grip upon the island and the Northumberland Strait is once again thick with ice. This has not kept Islander Brian Pollard from work on a sunny documentary shot partly in Kenya on co-operation between farmers of Prince Edward Island and that African state. More on this in the future.

In Newfoundland preparations in earnest are continuing on *Finding Mary March* (misspelled *Funding Mary March* in a *Cinema Canada* article on Telefilm; much to director, Ken Pittman's delight), a feature-length drama planned for seven weeks of production in July and August of this year. Those cinephiles who have seen the NFB's production *Shanaditti - Last of the Beothucks* will be familiar with one of Ken Pittman's obsessions, namely the genocidal fate of the indigenous tribe of Newfoundland Indians who vanished almost without trace in the early years of white settlement on the island. Like the previous film, *Finding Mary March* will focus on an attempt to discover and unravel some of these long-lost threads. This time the story will be set in dramatic form

starring "made-good" Newfoundlanders **Bob Joy** as well as others yet uncast. Expressing faith in the new format, Red Ochre Productions is planning to shoot in Super 16mm for blow-up to 35mm. A partnership has been formed with the Ontario-based Film Arts group to share the responsibilities for the production of this venture.

The usually quiet season of December in Nova Scotia saw the making of a made-for-TV historical drama called *The Lamplighter* in the east-shore coastal town of Sherbrooke. Produced by the Halifax-based Media Co-op Services, and di-

rected by William MacGillivray, it is the story of Abraham Gesner who in 1842 was the discoverer of kerosene, a substance first made from the famous "Albertite" coal, found only in New Brunswick's Albert County. In this era of electricity we often forget what a significant boom it was to have a medium of lighting superior to candles and that it was a Maritimer who was responsible for this discovery. This is the pilot of what producer **Ralph Holt** hopes will be a five-part series to be shot in the summer and fall of 1986 about inventors and discovers of this region. Produced through a CBC-Telefilm broadcast fund agreement with further funding from the province through the Departments of Education and Development, it is slated for broadcast in February or March of this year.

Rita MacNeil is a folk-musician who is part of a long legacy of Maritime bards who include **Stan Rogers**, **John Allen Cameron**, **Don Messer**, and "Stompin'" **Tom Connors**. These are singers of the people who sing directly to the people of the east of broken dreams, vanished prosperity, and good times "down home." This past year Rita MacNeil went to Japan and Red Snapper Films, a.k.a. "Lovely" **Lulu Keating** followed her to shoot a half-hour documentary called, —prosaically enough, *Rita MacNeil in Japan*, shown early in January on CBC. The images were exotic and beautiful with peculiar juxtapositions such as Rita telling of her childhood in Cape Breton while sitting in a Japanese house of rice-paper screens.

Productions, scripts, cutting copies and story-boards seem to be swirling so thick in Halifax these days you might almost think you were on Wardour Street (well... at least the buildings here are better heated). **John Brett** is in the final stages of post-production on his half-hour documentary on cormorants for CBC's *The Nature of Things* which will follow in the path he blazed last year with the NFB's *Where the Bay Becomes the Sea*, a documentary on the Bay of Fundy ecosystem which was shown on the same venue. The film on cormorants is slated for broadcast on CBC sometime this spring. *The Puracon Factor*, a feature-thriller drama, has finished production in Chester on Nova Scotia's south shore.

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