

FRONTS WEST

by Kathryn Allison

The fall is shaping up to be a busy one for screenwriters who take advantage of all the workshops and courses that are available. In addition to the New Play Centre's lecture series, workshop with Jean Pierre Lefebvre, and intensive screenwriting course with Phil Savath, there is a newly-created national program starting up at Simon Fraser University called Praxis. The program is described by interim director Patricia Gruben as a professional development workshop designed for people who are already doing work in the film industry. The program is being sponsored by the SFU Centre for the Arts and is funded by a \$240,000 grant from the B.C. government for Excellence in Education.

All writers and directors in Canada are eligible to apply for the free program which is divided into three sessions. The fall session will run from November 1 to December 7

and will be a workshop for the 8 participants to work on scripts that are in the second draft stage. Scriptwriters Kit Carson (*Paris, Texas*) and Hanis Kureishi (*My Beautiful Launderette*) will be leading the fall workshop. Praxis will be advertising for entries from across Canada for the spring workshops in February and May which will focus not only on polishing scripts but also in various phases of pre-production including budgeting and funding. Applications for the spring sessions will be accepted until December 15, 1986 at Praxis, Centre for the Arts, SFU, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6.

Hours before deadline, I attended the first lecture in the New Play Centre's four-part lecture series for screenwriters. John Gray, who has written teleplays of his theatrical hits "Billy Bishop Goes to War" and "The King of Friday Night," and is currently working on an

adaptation of Erika Ritter's "Automatic Pilot" for Norman Jewison, spoke for an hour or so about the techniques of screen adaptation. He opened his informal monologue to the audience of 35 with a caution: note that he had no magic formulas to share, just his own experiences, and promptly gave some sage advice. "Start every project as if you know dick all. You'll learn more that way." His presentation covered both the nuts and bolts of making a living as a writer - "Expand and diversify. I tried writing novels, but it didn't work so now I'm trying screenplays" - and negotiating contracts; "Ask for whatever you like - they'll probably buy you out after the first draft anyway." He spoke of the technical problems in adapting a script from stage to screen, "You don't need to know what Hamlet had for breakfast in the theatre - he lives on a stage called Denmark and you accept it. But in film, he has to have a believable life outside the main action."

Gray encouraged writers to learn as much as possible

about video techniques if they are writing for television and, if working with a particular director, to study that person's work to see what kind of style they have. "You may as well work with a director's style, because he or she is going to impose it on your script whether you like it or not."

In response to a stream of questions about "the right way" to find an agent, a producer, a contract, Gray observed, "one of the biggest mistakes you can make is to assume that there's a system - there isn't. There's only people and personalities and anarchy out there. You have to find your own way."

Had a very interesting weekend at the International Conference on Women's Issues in the Performing Arts in September. Spoke with Australians Ann Britton and Genevieve Picot who had some qualifying remarks to make about the so-called successful Australian film industry. They pointed out that Australian theatres, like ours, are dominated by U.S. and British product, with only 5 per cent of screens showing Australian films. Although quotas are in

place for television (and have been vigorously opposed by many as symptomatic of "fortress mentality") the airwaves are filled with U.S. reruns. Off-shore productions are on the rise, and the actors union is strong enough to have enforced a clause in their collective agreement which states that Australian performers who work on foreign productions must be paid at the union rates of the visiting producer.

Wayne Sterloff, our man at Telefilm, was at a meeting in Saskatchewan which was the first in a series that will work to increase film production in that province. The well-attended gathering came up with six fundamental areas of action: 1) create awareness of the film industry in the private sector, 2) establish a more equitable procurement policy for government contracts, 3) establish training and educational programs (particularly for writers making the transition to writing for film, as Saskatchewan is rich in dramatists, novelists and short story writers already), 4) compile an inventory of human resources

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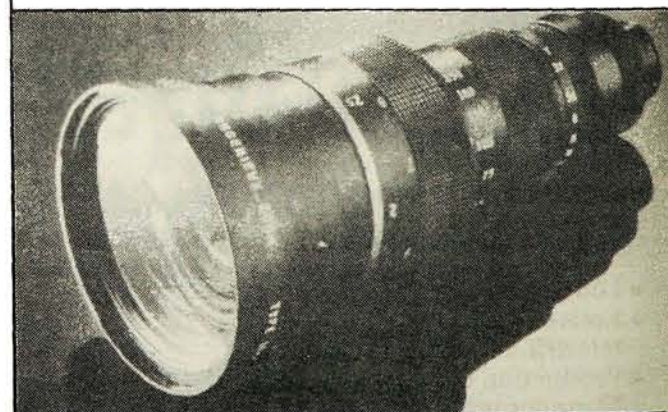
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in the film or related industries, 5) set up a script development fund like Film Manitoba's or AMPDC's, and 6) establish a motion picture production fund. Looks like they'll be calling for Paul Audley soon. The next meeting is scheduled for mid-October.

kuma has the lead role and Ray Hall is executive producer.

The Meta Group is in development on **Jingles** a half-hour comedy pilot which they hope to produce next spring. They're also adapting a one-hour special, **Life After Hockey**, based on the one-man stage show which has played to good response across the country. Meta's Stephen Foster is also developing a movie script called **The Outside Chance of Maximilian Glick** from a novel. BCTV is committed to development on that one. BCTV is in co-production with the Disney Channel on a partially improvised soap for teenagers called **Fifteen**. Michael Watt is directing the 13 half-hours, and John Binkley is executive producer with Richard Baker producing. The series will be in production until early November. Hy Perspectives Media Group's **A Life of Independence** is ready for distribution, with George Matta (Mundovision) arranging the distribution. Thomas Howe will distribute Chris Wooten's half-hour **Rebirth of Haida Canoe** which has just finished posting. It'll be part of Howe and CFDW's native Indian series which is going to market in London in November.

Ricochet, a script by John Conti is in development with

Conti teamed with John Creary (an entertainment lawyer who was active in film projects during the late '70s) who is executive producer. Conti's last project was a short that had the backing of Peter Brown of Canarim.

Ed Richardson of Zorah Productions is in development on **Survival Guides**, five half-hour comedies by Earl Pomerance, Bernie Slade, Wendy Wasserstein and Dave Thomas. The scripts are reported to be hilarious. David Hauka is on his third rewrite of **Easy Street**, a half-hour pilot. Merv Campone is in the marketing stage on his 65 half-hours called **Take Part**. The children's series shot a lot of footage at Expo. The hosts and writers are from Nelson, B.C.

Mal Colett's **Mouse Hockey League**, a half-hour animation will be in the can by the end of October, and will air on the network at Christmas time. Ivan Horsky's **Which Way to Carnegie Hall?**, a documentary about child prodigies, has been picked up by TVO.

Carnaval, the production

arm of CKVU is editing **Black Tie and Blues**, a variety show based on the party CKVU threw to celebrate its 10 year. Work has also started on a half-hour documentary on Armistice Day. CKVU has given a broadcast letter to Cal Shumiatcher and Charles Wilkinson's feature **Visa** with which Wilkinson is currently in Berlin rustling up some co-production interest.

Linda Stunell, a local writer who got development money from Telefilm to write the feature script **Alias** has found a co-producer in Torontonian George Menduluk. They are in the middle of negotiating distribution agreements for the feature which will shoot in Vancouver in 1987.

Peter Bryant's **Fat Patty** is written and ready to shoot, but stalled over some nagging difficulty, as is **Heartbreak Motel** which has been in limbo for months now. Chris Bruyere is looking at his first answer print for his feature **Turned Out** which will go to market this winter.

Vidéotron moves into Alberta operation

MONTREAL - Le Groupe Vidéotron, the giant Montreal-based cable company, has extended its operations from Quebec to include Alberta with the recent acquisition of OCTV Ltd. Edmonton.

Serving part of Edmonton and 24 other communities, Alberta's second largest cable company was sold to Vidéotron for \$28 million. This CRTC-approved acquisition gives Vidéotron, already the second largest cable company in Canada, a 52 per cent controlling interest in OCTV Ltd.

Included in the ambitious proposal submitted to CRTC by Vidéotron is a promise to buy the remaining shares in OCTV Ltd. and spend \$10,800,000 during the next four years in support of a new children's channel in Edmonton, a reading service for the blind, closed-caption programming for the hearing-impaired and specialty services in 12 rural communities.

Film Manitoba seems to be having its hoped for effect - there are more dollars for productions in that province than ever before. Several projects are gearing up including Dale Unruh's half-hour drama pilot, **All Sales Final**. Unruh is also in negotiations on a one-hour drama **Are You Happy?** Gabriella and Jean-Carlo Markiw are in development for a movie of the week called **Mob Story**, and the Winnipeg Film Group is gearing up for production on their half-hour comedy, **The Washing Machine**.

In B.C. television pilots seem to be all the rage. Wade Fearnley will direct **Blu's Folly** a half-hour drama pilot which is loosely based on local actor and volunteer social worker Blu Mankuma's work with homeless teenagers. Man-



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