

FRONTS WEST

by Kathryn Allison

Andra Scheffer, executive director of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, was in town in early January to host the Vancouver kickoff of the Academy's cross-country screenings for the Genie awards.

While 24 features, 12 documentaries, 10 live-action short dramas and 8 animated shorts were entered, the Vancouver screenings were restricted to features. The only feature entry from B.C. this year was Harry Coles' (Erin Films) outdoorsy kidnap adventure **Abducted**, which Boon Collins directed last summer. Harry's wife, Marilyn, has formed a distribution entity called MCM (Modern Cinema Marketing) which is involved in the release of **Abducted**. MCM placed it with Famous Players for a test run in Vancouver and Edmonton recently and plan to open it in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa in late January.

First Choice took English-language pay-television rights, with *Première Choix* going for a dubbed version. Foreign sales include RCA/Columbia (video) and Prism TV for the home video market in the U.S. and Canada. MCM is also representing five Canadian pictures and two U.S. features at the upcoming American Film Market — not bad for a brand new company.

Erin Films is now in development (with First Choice development money) on another murder/adventure called **Lighthouse** which should begin principal photography in mid-April, with Boon Collins directing and Robert McLachlin doing camerawork. Meanwhile, Collins is off vacationing in Mexico, while McLachlin heads for the Philippines to shoot a documentary.

Also at the screenings were Jack Darcus, who has been busy in Toronto directing three **Airwaves** episodes this winter. He hopes to return to the Coast in February and get

back to his other love — painting. Ray Hall was there, and informally announced that he's stepping down as President of the British Columbia Film Industry Association (BCFIA). He hopes to gain more time to pursue producing and teaching. A new president will be elected at the end of January.

The Vancouver office of the Academy is waiting for the pre-selection process for the National Apprenticeship Training Program to be completed in Toronto so that a Vancouver jury can be set up to choose the Western winners (two will be chosen from B.C., and two from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba combined). The winners, which will be announced in March, will receive 16 weeks of training in the technical/craft area of their choice.

Application forms will be available at the end of January for any Westerners who are interested in submitting short films to the Academy's first annual Canadian Independent Short Film Showcase, which will award honorariums to the winners, and provide 35mm blowups to be distributed to exhibitors across the country.

The Vancouver International Film Festival offices have moved downtown (as will the festival itself if festival director Hannah Fisher gets her way) to 303-788 Beatty Street, V6B 2M1, tel.: 685-0266. Fisher is attending a film festival in India this month and will return to Vancouver via Toronto. Her plans for the next festival include another tribute to a Canadian filmmaker (last year's, the first, was to Norman Jewison), and an annual program of new Canadian films. No word yet on whether the festival will be switched from the early summer to the fall.

Meanwhile, over at the Telefilm office, Wayne (he's cute, but where do you put the paper?) Sterloff is taking his xerox machine label by Daryl Duke with characteristic good

humour. He's been busy moving his office across the street to 1200-1185 West Georgia Street, V6E 4E6. Same phone, same fax.

Speaking of moving, there has been a bit of a reverse to the usual trend of producers moving east. Toronto producer Michael Lebowitz has moved to Vancouver and, while he's settling in, he is very graciously assisting the Praxis Screenwriter's Workshop in setting up a producers' seminar for the spring. Rumours are that a husband and wife team who worked at the executive level on **Turtle Diary** are in love with the Coast and are planning to move here. Also, Australian Richard Davis is now living here with his Vancouver-born wife. She's working on **Airwolf**, and he's quietly checking out the Canadian scene. He has already signed to associate produce **Visa** with Charles Wilkinson and Cal Shumiatcher.

Sandy Wilson got a free trip to Toronto as *Chatelaine's* Woman of the Year — in addition to having a lot of fun, the free trip saved her one \$1,000 cup of coffee. In December she directed a half-hour comedy with Candice Bergen, Jackson Davies and Bruno Gerussi for the Zorah Productions/CBC/PBS anthology series **Lies From Lotus Land** (CBC's name). Insiders say it's going to be another award-winner for the Vancouver director. She's working on a second draft of her script **Broken Dates**, which is backed by the CBC, and is reading scripts that are coming to her from the States. So far, she won't predict what her next project will be and is keeping her options open.

Thomas Howe (THA Media Distributors) is in development on a co-production with the NFB and CBC (regional offices) to produce a biography of Tom's grandfather, C.D. Howe. Howe, a member of McKenzie King's wartime Cabinet, enacted the legislation that created the CBC and was founder of Air Canada. Thomas Howe is looking to do two versions of the story: an

hour-long for television and a half-hour version for schools.

Howe is spending most of January and February at the U.S. markets pitching a number of projects which include a five-picture package of Western features, and a pilot for a celebrity outdoor comedy series called **Breakaway (with Terry and the Tiger)**. The pilot, which was shot last August in Campbell River, B.C. is hosted by Terry David Mulligan and Tiger Williams who talk with John Candy while fishing in the great outdoors. The production company, Fame (Foster and Mulligan Entertainment) is run by Terry David Mulligan and David Foster, the Canadian record producer and composer who recently produced **Tears Are Not Enough**. They are hoping to cut deals in the U.S. and in Canada for the series which will feature assorted artists from the film and music industries in various outdoor activities.

Howe's company seems to be expanding in all directions. He credits Telefilm's Wayne Sterloff for steering him toward theatrical distribution and introducing him to David Winning's feature **Storm**, to which Howe now has worldwide rights. He has hired some new people to help with the non-theatrical side of things including Roberta Columbin (former head of acquisitions and scheduling at Access) to head educational broadcast sales, Janine McCaw, who has moved from Toronto to handle syndicated television sales, and Christiane Cote who is now assisting Paulette Kerr in non-theatrical distribution.

The company has picked up world-wide distribution of Hy Perspective Media Group's documentary **A Life of Independence**, and reports good response at the London Market to the West Coast Native Indian series which Howe is co-distributing with Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West (Cari Green).

In addition, Howe is actively seeking partners to join him in a project which involves revising 71 short educational films

from Universal Education Visual Arts (UEVA) library. Howe has been the Canadian distributor of the films since 1979, and recently signed an agreement with MCA (which also owns Universal City Studios Inc.) for the worldwide distribution rights to the library. According to Howe the films, which vary in length from 10 minutes to one hour and were made in the U.S. from 1965 to 1979, and are of very high quality. He hopes to make the revisions in Canada and meet Cancon requirements so that broadcasters can be wooed as well as the educational market.

The New Play Centre has a new television writers program scheduled for February. Cherie Thiessen (**Beachcombers, King of Kensington**) will teach the six-week course, which will focus on conceptualizing and writing specifically for half-hour television series. 12 writers will participate in the workshop. Also, the New Play Centre is developing six new half-hours for the CBC's **Lies From Lotus Land** series. The organization had already assisted in developing two scripts for the series: Sherman Snuckel's **Market Forces** which was shot in January, and John Lazarus' **Our Last Saturday** which will shoot in February.

By the end of January, Praxis Screenwriters Workshop will have chosen eight writers for their spring screenwriters session, which begins in late February for a week-long workshop with guest writers Sharon Riis, Kit Carson (who was a big hit at the fall session) and Ted Allan (**Love Streams, Lies My Father Told Me**) among others.

As well as the writing workshop, there will be a public seminar held on an as yet undisclosed topic, as well as public screenings of the films that the guest writers have worked on. The group reconvenes in May, when the writers meet with a rotating group of experts (directors, art directors, cinematographers and producers) to continue working the scripts towards production.

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