

FRONTS WEST

by Kathryn Allison

With summer having arrived early in Vancouver, hundreds of sun worshippers are hitting the city's beaches, but film people aren't among them – four series, one mini-series, three features and three TV movies are currently in production in the province.

The spectre of a Directors' Guild of America (DGA) strike still hangs over the summer production schedule, with DGA negotiations having begun in mid-May and expected to last as long as three months. Several months ago, the tentative strike date was hovering at the beginning of June, now insiders predict if there is one, it'll be closer to September. Directors' Guild of Canada (DGC) president John Juliani, meanwhile, is continuing work to bring the two guilds into a more cooperative relationship – he met with DGA president Gilbert Cates in April and reached an agreement in principle to support each other in their collective bargaining with feature film and television producers. A draft reciprocal agreement stemming from their Vancouver meeting was presented to their respective executive boards at the end of April in the U.S., and in mid-May in Toronto.

The B.C. Film Commission has lost its production/location consultant – Brent Clarkson left the Commission in late April for a job with Cannell Films of Canada. He is currently production manager on Cannell's TV series *J.J. Starbuck*. The Film Commission has already been deluged with applications for the vacant position.

Harvey Crossland of Hy Perspectives Media Group is in Saudi Arabia through July shooting a documentary for the Saudi government. It's one of a series of 42 films that the government has commissioned on various aspects of life in that country. Meanwhile, Crossland's partner, Rick Beairsto, will continue work on their first feature film project, *Come With Me*, which has development money from Telefilm and from Astral Films Ltd. Apparently, theirs is the first feature to get cash from a distributor for development. He and Crossland are co-writing the script (which was originally a 90-minute TV drama) and are committed to producing a final draft and a complete creative team by the fall. They hope to shoot next summer in Vancouver and the Gulf Islands.

John Conti of Talk Art Films was in Los Angeles in May talking to actress Chloe Webb (*Sid and Nancy*) who reportedly is interested in Conti's new-wave action-suspense thriller *Ricochet*. The stylish fugitive story will shoot this summer in Vancouver if Conti gets his leading lady.

Phil Savath is writing the pilot script for a half-hour series being developed (for U.S. cable) through Columbia's new television arm Coca-Cola Television. The premise involves a group of orangutangs that inherit a large sum of money and move into a mansion in Beverly Hills. Savath was in Las Vegas in

May catching the act of the series' stars – The Berosini Orangutangs. Their trainer, Bobby Berosini is executive producer on the series along with former Torontonian Larry Mollin. According to Savath, the simians' credentials are not to be laughed at – their credits include *Any Which Way But Loose*, *Silver Spoon* and *Going Ape*.

On the post-production end of things, Tegra Enterprises announced in late April that its Alpha Cine Lab has been selected as the film processing lab for *Bethune, The Making of a Hero*. The Canadian / Chinese / French co-production, directed by Vancouver's Phil Borsos, began shooting in China in April and will continue there for three months. Alpha Cine is processing the dailies.

Pinewood Soundtracks has expanded its sound services facilities to accommodate the film industry's expanding needs. In May it opened a new mixing theatre that has a 10-foot-wide screen and a super high-definition Sony video projector; the equipment room accommodates 80 tracks of tape and features mag playback. Pinewood is currently mixing Cannell Film's *21 Jump Street*.

The New Play Centre (NPC) is continuing its work developing screen and TV writers. To date it has been involved in developing 10 half-hours for CBC's *Lies from Lotus Land* series, and are also in development with CKVU on a feature script. A five-day screenwriters workshop with Quebec screenwriter Jacques Paris was held in early May by the MPC, with participation

by Cineworks (the local film cop). A feature film workshop which will involve not only scripting refinements but the taping of 10-15 minute segments of the three participating features will be held in June and July. Thirty-two submissions were received.

Tom Howe has been elected to the Board of Directors of First Choice's Foundation to Underwrite New Drama (FUND). He and partner Bob Fredericks (Orange Productions) are putting together the financial package on their first feature, *First Season*. The family drama was scripted by Vancouver's Victor Nicolle.

Howe's distribution news has a new twist this month – in addition to the myriad of Canadian product that Thomas Howe and Associates is distributing here it

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- Canadian content
- Voluntary industry standards
- Violence
- Sex-role portrayal
- Free-trade's impact on the Canadian cultural industry
- Independent production
- Broadcast Fund, etc.



The Canadian Association of Broadcasters,
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has acquired Canadian rights to some solid foreign properties. Among these are Paul Simon's *Graceland* concert (Zenith Production) which Howe acquired from central Television in the U.K., and the CBC TV movie *Escape from Sobibor* which Howe acquired from the Chrysler Corporation and has

already sold to the Global network.

The resolution of the conflict over ownership of CKVU still hasn't come. The trial drags on, with local and national media commentary reiterating the conflict's identifying features in two catch phrases: "endless

complications" and "bizarre twists".

The Department of Communications released a glossy 80-page background information paper on cultural industries called *Vital Links: Canadian Cultural Industries*. The report is a handy, clearly written refer-

ence guide to what's going on in the cultural industries themselves and also provides illustrations of the government's perceptions of what's going on in the cultural industries.

A very interesting philosophical point was made in the Feature Film chapter, in a subsection entitled "A positive approach for the future." After outlining the creation of the fea-

ture film fund, and describing the Canadian distributor involvement requirement to access the fund, the report states very clearly the purpose of the fund:

...the intention is very much that this new fund will favor films valued for their cultural significance in Canadian terms. The objective is to enable Canadians to communicate their stories and perceptions with each other. The fund helps Canadian filmmakers to finance projects without having to immerse their values in those of a foreign commercial market. The gamble is that Canadian cinema will, with enough concentrated initial support, earn a sufficient reputation for quality and appeal to permit Canadian films to succeed elsewhere on their own terms.

The cultural bias expressed in the paper must have Telefilm decision-makers doing double-takes. The Telefilm line has always been that fiscal responsibility and commercial viability of submitted feature projects were the primary areas of concern in the Telefilm vetting process. Now that the federal government is pushing for cultural considerations, it will be interesting to see how Telefilm will adjust its philosophy to suit. One can only suppose that there'll be fewer comments such as, "We're not a studio, We're just a bank" wafting down the Telefilm administrative corridors in the future.

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