

# The bash at BANFF

by **Connie Tadros**



• Proudly holding his special Rockie, awarded to the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC Television head Bill Cotton caps his visit to Banff, flanked by president Pat Ferns and executive director Carrie Hunter

The Banff Television Festival, now in its eighth year, is funded by the Banff Television Foundation of which W. Paterson Ferns is president. Executive director of the Foundation is Carrie Hunter; director and programmer of the Festival is Jerry Ezekiel.

The Banff Television Festival has a lot going for it — the right geography to draw professionals away from their offices, a serious competition which attracts impressive programming from many countries, a competent staff which remains pleasant and generous under fire. This year, for the first time, it also has the financial support to feel easy about the coming years.

All of which has brought the festival to a crossroads. After eight years, using a formula of panel discussions, workshops and screenings, the festival is mutating, becoming a most important meeting place for people to vet ideas for projects, make contacts and deals, and have those long talks for which the pace in the city seldom allows.

The festival means to control and orient the direction of the changes and, to this end, polled participants about the shape of the Banff festivals to come. The following are some reflections about the 1987 edition.

## Who?

The Banff festival this year was a gathering of about 500 people who came and went — many stayed for the duration — over seven days from June 7-13.

It would be hard to gather a more diverse crowd: from Canada came a bevy of bureaucrats from Telefilm Canada, CBC, the department of Communications, the National Film Board of Canada, the provincial educational television stations, young TV directors and old, screenwriters, world sales agents of television programming and producers of the same and, in greater numbers than ever, journalists.

The U.S. and Europe were the sources of the second largest groups of participants, attracted by Banff in general, but by the tributes to MTM Enterprises and the BBC in particular. Again, distributors, syndicators, agents, producers and representatives of many television stations, both public and private, made the trek to the Rockies for the week.

In all, participants from 17 countries accompanied programs from 32 countries to make the 1987 edition of the Banff Television Festival the most diverse.

## What?

Banff is a patchwork festival, with pieces lying side by side and overlapping to make a rich if sometimes frustrating event.

The morning panels were given prominence and addressed topics like the impact of satellite transmission, the future of national cinema, co-production and the marketing of projects. They were structured so that all participants could attend and, in fact, the members of the panels made up some of the most high-

Photos: Simon Hoyle





• National cinema panel: Fil Fraser, John Kennedy, Lindsay Law, Stephen Roth, Linda Beath, Paul Morton, Arthur Weinthal, David Rose, Catherine Lamour, Bill House, Lorne MacPherson and, in front, Larry Shorter

• Co-production panel: Larry Jacobson, Franz Josef Wild, André Harris, Ingrid Edstroem, Don Taffner, Arthur Weinthal, Rebecca Eaton, Stephen Roth and Richard Price



• Directors panel: Don Brittain, Norman Campbell, Danièle J. Suissa, Alan Erlich

• Satellite transmission panel: Gyorgy Baló, Les Brown, Bernard Ostry, Nicolai Birukov, Reiner Moritz, Simon Duffy



• Market simulation panel: Nick Bakyta, Louise Carré, John Brunton, Patrick Dromgoole, François Floquet, Pat Ferns, Christa Singer

powered participants at Banff.

In the afternoons, workshops on writing and directing for television competed for attention with a three-part series on archival questions and the ATEC workshops, where the Agency for Tele-Education in Canada (the provincial educational stations) screened and discussed work by young filmmakers.

All the while, the 124 programs in competition (reduced from an original 398 by a pre-selection committee) were screened according to schedule on the sets in the screening rooms and on the channels in the bedrooms of the Banff Park Lodge where the festival maintains its headquarters and where most delegates to the festival are housed. For those who found the schedule unwieldy, on-demand screenings were available until midnight every day.

Add to the above the requisite receptions, cocktail parties, western barbecue, awards ceremony and dinner, and finally a wrap party, and it's easy to see participants get their money's worth at Banff.

## Why?

This is perhaps the most crucial question.

The "why" of the Banff festival is to select, judge and celebrate the finest in television programming. The emphasis is on excellence, and great pains have been taken over the years to structure credible juries. A Rockie from Banff is said to be now one of the most prestigious international prizes a program can win internationally.

Although the television competition as its cornerstone, the festival is organized around the panels, workshops and gatherings which are the elements which attract the participants. And so the tail seems to be wagging the dog.

Some of the participants take the time to screen programs. Many of the foreign delegates got an introduction to Canadian programming, and some Canadians took time to catch up on shows they had missed. Sellers used the facilities to screen for potential buyers. But this activity was not the crucial focus of the festival.

For most participants, watching TV was a simple diversion, a respite from the pace of the meetings: a chance to see the pilot of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, for instance, or to see the Finnish entry which will never be bought by North American stations. There was little sense of celebration around the quality and diversity of the programs available, and little discussion about the relative merits of the shows.

As for the morning panels, they lacked a certain urgency this year, a victim, perhaps, of the stunning success of the festival in attracting such a diverse crowd.

Take, for instance, the opening one on satellite transmission. The panel attacked the question from various points of view. Gyorgy Baló from Hungarian Television thought it created a sociocul-

tural problem of global proportions. Simon Duffy of Parallel Media in the U.K. suggested that it sounds like a good idea but wondered how to pay for the programming. Reiner Moritz of RM Arts in West Germany introduced the impenetrable problems of copyright and territorial sales, problems which threaten to overwhelm the current business structure of the international industry. Nicolai Birukov from Soviet Television was for settling all the above through bilateral, international treaties whereupon Les Brown, editor of *Channels* magazine in New York, tried to reassure the audience, saying American business interests would sort it all out and that he, personally, was rather optimistic.

It was like discussing the nature of God. Overwhelmed in its turn, troubled by the enormity of the subject at hand, the audience was unable to cope with the topic and the session broke early.

A similar inertia seemed to attach itself to the subject of national cinema, and it may be that the old hands who come to Banff and the younger generation which is starting up have few common concerns which they can address together. Much more successful were the afternoon sessions which, with their narrow focus, delivered the goods to more selected audiences.

## What now?

The festival is being pressured by those who know it and love it — and they are many — to refocus itself. Some would have it become an international market but the festival organizers are wisely resisting the idea. The very chemistry which creates the energy at Banff would be threatened by such a commercial influx.

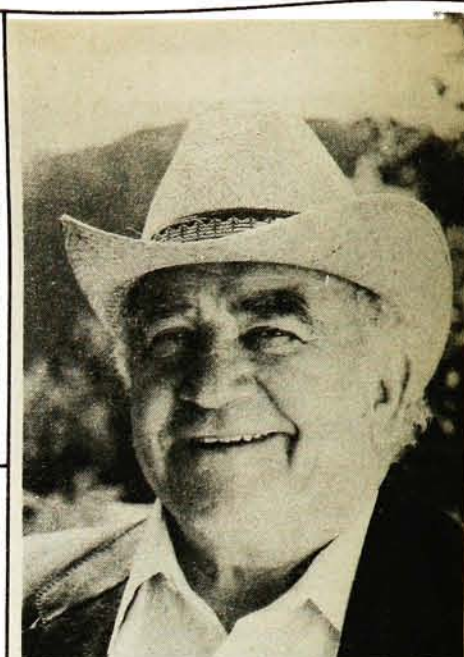
Others think the festival should grow: that 500 participants are too few and that ways should be found to increase the numbers. Still others think more emphasis should be given to the programs themselves, and ways found to make the programming available to a larger public.

It is tempting to use the old adage, "If it's not broken, don't fix it," but Banff is a very successful event. Ask anyone who has been there. Banff is also a simple, uncomplicated, friendly event. A place where a Toronto producer finally was able to sit down with the reps of the CBC, Telefilm and the NFB and have the meeting he had failed to organize during the preceding six months.

But the success of Banff is going to impinge on the numbers at Banff, and a bigger festival will be, by definition, a different festival. Organizing the 1988 edition of the Banff Television Festival so as to preserve the quality of the contacts, the respect for the television programs and the diversity of the participants is no mean job. Fortunately, with Carrie Hunter and Jerry Ezekiel directing things, chances are the job will get done. Well.



# FESTIVALS



• The Calgary herald opens festivities and, later, the clan gathers for the western barbecue. Ed Asner was on hand to receive special recognition for outstanding achievement while the opening panel debates the consequences of satellite transmission. Pat Ferns animates the market simulation in another morning panel and Stephen Roth, Paul Morton and Les Brown relax with cocktails



## The Winners



• Jean-Michel Sauvage, Toshio Iwasaki, Ingrid Edstrom, Joan Bieder, Fernand Dansereau, Birgit Weidinger are members of the Banff jury.

### GRAND PRIZE

including a \$5,000 cash award to the director/ writer of

#### THE WRESTLER

Yleisradio/Finnish Broadcasting Company  
87 min., Finland

### SPECIAL JURY AWARD

including a \$2,500 cash award to be shared by the director and writer of

#### WHERE TO AND BACK: WELCOME IN VIENNA

Thalia Film, Vienna  
122 min., West Germany

### SPECIAL JURY AWARD

including a \$2,500 cash award to the producer of

#### COMIC RELIEF

Moffitt-Lee Productions  
249 min., United States

### BEST TELEVISION FEATURE

#### THE HOUR BEFORE MY BROTHER DIES

Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
76 min., Australia

### BEST CONTINUING SERIES

#### HILL ST. BLUES: WASTED WEEKEND

MTM Enterprises, Inc.,  
47 min., United States

### BEST LIMITED SERIES

#### THE SINGING DETECTIVE

British Broadcasting Corporation  
139 min., England

### BEST DRAMA SPECIAL

#### LE LYS CASSÉ (DEATH OF A SILENCE)

Nanouk Film in association with Société Radio-Canada  
47 min., Canada

### BEST PERFORMANCE SPECIAL

#### DIALOGUE DES FORMES (DIALOGUE OF FORMS)

Czechoslovak TV  
19 min., Czechoslovakia

### BEST CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

#### LE GROS DE LA CLASSE

Spirafilm  
26 min., Canada

### BEST TELEVISION COMEDY

#### ROOM AT THE BOTTOM: WINTER SCHEDULES

Yorkshire Television  
55 min., England

### BEST SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DOCUMENTARY

#### THE CHAMPIONS (PART. III: THE FINAL BATTLE)

National Film Board  
90 min., Canada

### BEST ARTS DOCUMENTARY

#### ARENA: SCARFE BY SCARFE

British Broadcasting Corporation  
60 min., England

### BEST POPULAR SCIENCE PROGRAM

#### DOSSIERS - LE COEUR D'UN AUTRE

Société Radio-Canada  
51 min., Canada