

by Connie Tadros

**Arthur Weinthal:** Television is a very complicated business and it's a cooperative business. If a project comes to us which we like and are interested in, we'll throw in our effort to do whatever we can to help the producer do a good job for us and ultimately, obviously, for himself.

We have, in the past three years, substantially increased our involvement with the independent production sector. Virtually all of our drama production is done with independents. All of it. At the moment that is, **Check It Out**, **The Campbells**, **Hard Shots**, **Mount Royal** – which will start on January 3 – and **Night Heat** which is into another season. That's all being done with independents and it's all being produced with a budget substantially greater than anything we've ever had on the air before.

We are a very small country and we cannot afford the television programming that our public demands of us. We play in a theatre in which 68% of the seats are facing the back of the auditorium and we have to satisfy the very exacting demands of our audiences. Now a lot of money doesn't make for great shows all the time but, in terms of production values – scripts, and wastage of scripts, and getting good actors, and pulling back some of the expatriate Canadians and so on – we had to finance these things. So, because of the growth of the independent production sector, and the initiative of Telefilm, we are now substantially in the drama field. As of this fall though we are supposed to do two-and-a-half hours a week of regularly scheduled drama, we're going to be doing three hours a week.

**Cinema Canada:** *Could you describe the working relationship you have with the producer concerning program content: the relationship that makes them say, "Weinthal really helped me address the audience with my project."*

**Arthur Weinthal:** Well, with John McGreevy and Ustinov's **Russia**, we spent a lot of time talking about finding a path between giving the audience a huge amount of information about a very remote, exotic, mysterious and sometimes hostilely-viewed country, and finding an entertaining, charming, attention-getting way to hold an audience. I was impressed by what McGreevy was doing and, certainly, with Ustinov's knowledge of the subject and his television personality, which is significant. But in order to do a proper job in that sort of program, they have to impart a lot of information about the Soviet Union. Not about today but in the 12th century and 14th century and so on, so it gets to be very rough going.

My conversations with McGreevy were always to temper what we were doing with the audience's ability to absorb and sustain interest. So there were



## Arthur Weinthal's Audience

*It was not that long ago that the ACTRA Awards were the only prizes given to television programming. "We usually got one nomination, which I considered a bone rather than a full meal," remembers Arthur Weinthal, CTV's vice-president of Entertainment Programming. The upshot was that CTV boycotted the awards, disapproving of the notion that one guild could or should attempt to represent a whole industry.*

*Enter the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, and its presentation of the Gemini Awards to be held this year, Dec. 9. CTV will be there with its 35 nominations in categories from drama to news to sports to children's shows.*

*"We felt it was inappropriate and misleading for a guild to put out awards and create the impression that these were industry awards. So we have gone from no nominations to 35! We'll take our chances with the industry; we just didn't want to take our chances with a guild. Once the industry starts to respond, it's a much more intelligent system," he concludes.*

*It may be misleading to credit CTV's 35 nominations this year solely on a restructuring of the annual television awards. While the nominations underline CTV's commitment to Canadian programming, this commitment results from market dynamics and, yes, considerable nudging from private producers and the CRTC.*

*Weinthal is responsible for the programming of drama and entertainment, and deals with many independent producers each year. In this interview he takes stock of CTV's activities and comments on his personal perspectives.*

*To round out Cinema Canada's look at CTV entertainment, we spoke with three producers whose programs have been nominated this year for the Gemini awards and asked them about working with Weinthal and CTV.*

changes... We introduced some light moments, some periods in the program when you relax. This is probably a terrible example, but it's like when you're at the dentist and you're getting your head drilled off. Every so often you'd like him just to stop so you can catch your breath, and then continue again. When you're doing an information program, you have to do that sort of thing because it gets to be a little too much to absorb after awhile.

**Cinema Canada:** *How is it that you come to know what the audience can sustain?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** Well, I don't know that you ever know what the audience can sustain. You presume to know because that's your job. That's what you're supposed to do. I watch a lot of television and I've been doing this for 25 years. You see what works and what doesn't work. A lot of programming in that sense is at your fingertips. You know you either have it there or you don't. You're not right all the time, but you'd better be right more often than not. You just have to have a sense of your audience and you have to be in touch with them and what they watch and what they like. You must read scores of magazines and newspapers, and see the movies that they see; and you develop a very respectful attitude. The fact is that most of the time people want to be entertained by television. They want some information and they want some enlightenment but *most* of the time they want to be entertained, and they really want to be entertained with meat and potatoes, not with *escargots* and hearts of palm and macadamia nuts and sushi. They'll try that once in a while, but most of the time we like pot roast and **Cosby**, not steak tartar and **Brideshead Revisited**. So you develop warning signals in your head which are really an accumulation of years of doing it.

**Cinema Canada:** *Do you have any perception, after all these years of programming in a Canadian market, that there is any kind of different sensibility in a Canadian audience which makes certain kinds of programs possible or is it just a uniform mass with the American market?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** I think that most Canadian taste is similar to most American taste. Canadians watch North American television. Some of it is Canadian-produced. But I do find that the Canadian public does have certain differences. They have a greater appetite for news, public affairs and information programs. They support those programs a little bit better. They also have a little more appetite for non-Canadian or non-American programs. They're not rigid in terms of looking for programs that are constantly following the American mold.

They have a sense of fair play about programs too. You have to be polite. Canadians are polite. It always amuses me when two people bump into each other



in any country in the world, one of them might say to the other "Excuse me" Canadians always say "I'm sorry", and they are, they are, they're sorry. We're very polite, we're very proper, we're very orderly and the audience seems to appreciate programs that are a little more like that. Like most people in the world, they're impressed by the American rough-and-tumble, exotic view of life, but the rest of the world is too. The rest of the world loves watching American programs because it fuels their fantasy of Americans. Canadians are like that too. You really have to be a sociologist, I guess, to pick away at how we're different. I'm not sure that I'm knowledgeable about that.

**Cinema Canada:** *The Canadian filmmaker used to have a slower pace than his American counterpart. Do you see any reflection in a Canadian audience of an ability to tolerate a slower pace or an impatience, say, with the mounting violence of American TV?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** No, I don't see any. **Night Heat** is a rough-and-tumble, action-packed show. Nobody's ever complained about that. They accept it for what it is, a good program.

One of the interesting dichotomies in our country is that the elitist and the common man will use the same words exactly to comment on our programming. The elitist will say, "It looks just like American programming," which is his way of being scornful and critical. The man on the street, whoever he is, will say, "Your program looks just like American programming," which is his way of giving you praise and showing you that he admires what you've done. But that's the nature of who we are. We want to be like them but we don't want to be mistaken for them.

**Cinema Canada:** *What do you think of the quality of CTV's programs? I was talking to a producer about meeting with you and he said, "Ask Weinthal what they're going to do that's going to be truly memorable." He was talking about something extraordinary, that would mark the industry. Is there any aspiration to do something more?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** Yes, there is and we're doing it. First of all, this past season we did a number of episodes of **The Campbells** in the winter; they're going to go on the air in January or February. I was really delighted to see that we captured winter in those episodes and I thought of how rare it is to see winter in drama on television. Half of the programming comes from the United States, so that's all Beverly Hills. The rest of it ... never deals with winter on television or in drama - you're either indoors or you're running in and out of a slushy street. But in **The Campbells**, we got winter which is a very exotic thing to see on television; people tramping through snow up to their knees as the earlier settlers would have, and great vistas of fields of white and trees that are dripping with great balls of snow and people bundled up in great hats and parkas and mufflers and so on. That's us and that's the exotic side of our country. It's nice to sit in the living room and look at the winter that way 'cause we never see ourselves in a winter environment. That's one thing.

We're going to be doing stories that haven't been told before. We're going to be doing a mini-series, **Black Robe**, which is based on the Brian Moore book and is the story of the very interesting conflict between the Algonquin and the Church and the priests of the Church, both of whom brought a lot of determination to their particular point of view.

We're doing a film, **The Legend of Grey Owl**, about an Englishman who lived as an Indian and persuaded everybody he was an Indian although God knows he wasn't. We're going to be telling Canadian stories and we're going to be telling Canadian stories for the world audience: ourselves and the world audience. That's pretty good.

**Cinema Canada:** *In the Canadian milieu, CTV had a pretty lousy reputation before as a non-participant in Canadian drama. How is the network situated now, when you do a project like **Black Robe**. What kind of participation do you have, financial and creative?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** Our financial participation is to pay for the license of the program in Canada. We sometimes take a small equity position in these projects, not always.

But in terms of the creative, we have absolute right of approval over the principal elements of the program, which are the lead performers, director, final script, the rough cut and the final cut, and there's not a single project that we're involved in where we don't participate in all of those things. We don't just tell the producer, "Fine. Go ahead and do it and we'll put it on the air." We really are in there with him, working at it. We were on **The Canadians**, which is a four-hour mini-series with Michael McClear. Another one with Farley Mowatt called **In the North** has finished production. In all of these we participate, write copious notes on the script, etc.

**Cinema Canada:** *Do you find that your situation in the industry is changing because of this involvement? Are people feeling better about CTV? Do you feel better about the station being*

*involved in the industry? A few years ago, the industry was very harsh about CTV.*

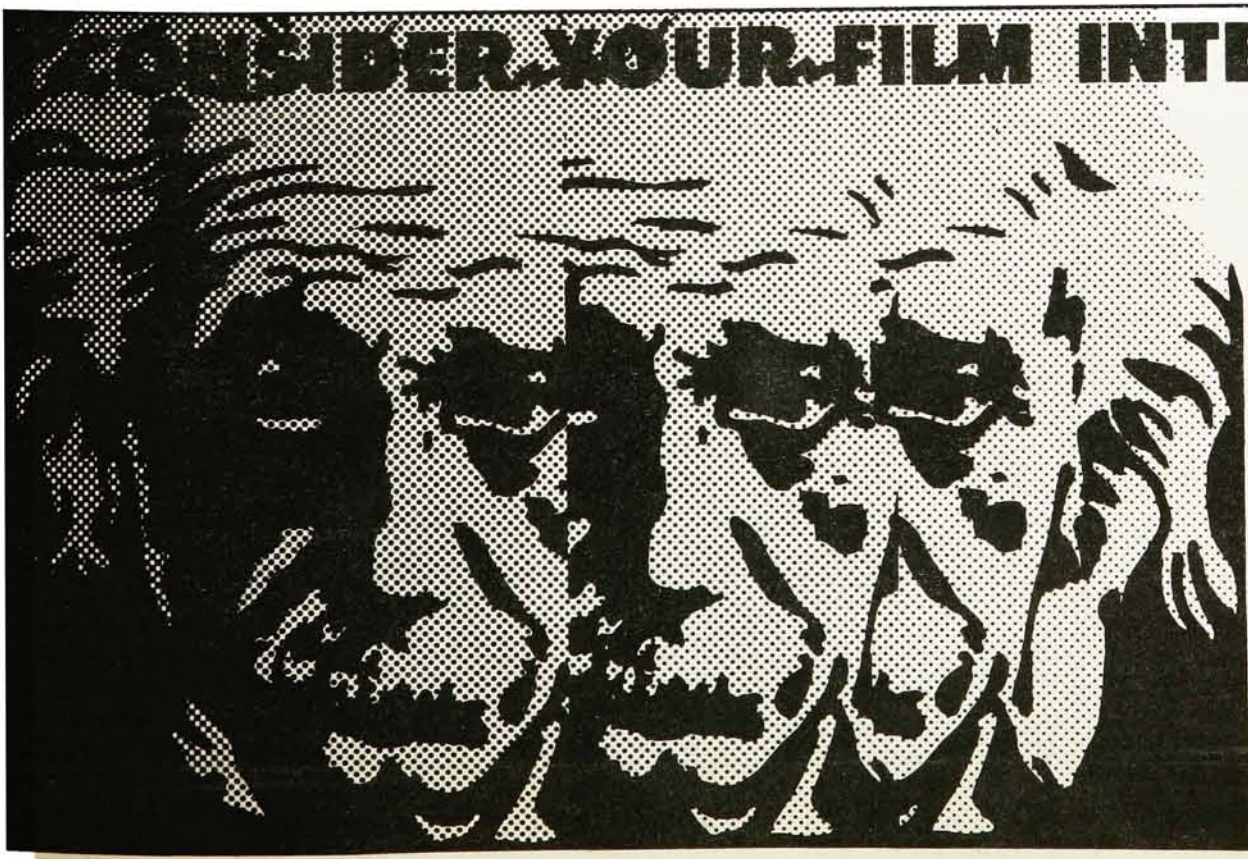
**Arthur Weinthal:** There wasn't a whole lot to work with then. There weren't that many producers who knew what the hell they were doing, and there were certainly not that many scripts. But drama has become much more of an important issue and a lot of that has had to do with the development of the broadcast fund. Now we can see ourselves being able to produce and sustain drama.

**Cinema Canada:** *There is a perception that, had the CRTC not been there pushing on you at license renewal hearings about upgrading Canadian content, CTV might not have moved in this direction; but I remember last year you seemed to say that the only thing which differentiated CTV from the American networks was that Canadian content. Would you have gotten to this point without CRTC niggling at you?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** It became clear to us that with the amount of program services available to our viewers, we were going to live or die by our Canadian programming because all the American programming is available here anyway. Anybody can buy it and anybody can see it. If we didn't buy the **Cosby Show**, that wouldn't prevent 70% of the people in Canada from seeing it. And that applies to every other American program, most of which do well. So the only thing that is going to make us succeed - the only area of real growth - is in programs which are exclusively ours. Well, to be exclusively ours, they have to be Canadian.

**Cinema Canada:** *Is this a recent conclusion that you've come to?*

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**Arthur Weinthal:** Recent? I would say in the past four or five years.

**Cinema Canada:** Has something concretely changed in the milieu to cause you to come to that conclusion?

**Arthur Weinthal:** Two things have. One of them was the broadcast fund, and the other one was the ongoing proliferation of foreign signals coming into the country.

**Cinema Canada:** How has the current situation with Telefilm Canada changed the prospects.

**Arthur Weinthal:** Notwithstanding the current problems, which are quite serious, there are still many funding opportunities and many organizations – like the OFDC, and the agencies in Quebec and Alberta, and one that's growing in British Columbia. But the problems at Telefilm, while they're severe and quite shocking to all of us, will be repaired. We are going to get that thing back on course. This is really more an interruption of good faith more than anything else. We're going through a financial turmoil just now. Telefilm has caused it, the stock market hasn't helped, the capital cost allowance has punched a bit of a hole in us. The fact is that we, the broadcasters, all have a major requirement for programming which must be met. In that sense, it's a good marketplace to be working in. It's not as if we were in the shoe business and nobody's buying Canadian shoes anymore. One of the byproducts of this financial crunch we're in at the moment will be to shake out those who will survive and those who won't survive. It may be unfortunate that it happened this way, but it is also a reflection of market forces. On a per capita basis, the Canadian broadcaster spends more money per capita on domestic programming than those in any other country in the world that I know about. If you think of what we spend on a program to serve an audience

of approximately 19 million English-speaking people and then you look at what an American network spends on a program to reach a domestic market of 225 million people, we're spending a lot of money on Canadian programming and that's not going to change much. The demand for the producer is to come up with programming ideas which are not exorbitant in their price, and/or to find markets for their programs outside of Canada. The programs will get made,

and they'll get made by producers of talent.

**Cinema Canada:** In talking about satellites, you have said that the audience still watches one show at a time. Is that still true, now that people can zap around, even tape the news?

**Arthur Weinthal:** We're told that while people will very often buy a VCR with the intention of using it for time-shifting, it quickly settles down to be an

appliance to be used for cassettes that they borrow or rent or buy. People will time-shift soap operas in the afternoon – working people, women I guess probably more than men – or sporting events and maybe a movie. But most of the time after the novelty of the appliance wears off, it allows people to watch what they want to watch when they choose to watch it.

It has been a huge success. Again it's one of those things that teaches you humility 'cause you think that you know what's going on and you don't. Everybody thought the VCR was a rich man's toy, which would obviously do well, but that nothing spectacular would happen. Well, it is now damn close to being a common household appliance. It has reminded everybody that the public really, ultimately, decides what they want and pick what they need. But between that and other programming options being available, the need to improve programming performance becomes more and more clear, and the only way you can do it is with programs that are unique to you, that you have some kind of control over. It's obviously going to be Canadian programs. So that, and the broadcast fund and I guess a little bit of stimulation from interested parties, producers associations, regulatory agencies and so on have conspired to make us more aggressive in that area.

**Cinema Canada:** What of the finances? The advertising revenues for Canadian programs.

**Arthur Weinthal:** For the moment, the mandate and the money don't meet. I'm sure there will be changes in CTV over the next five years because the costs of programming and the revenues to support the programming do not meet. And the prognosis is not very good. We have one source of income and that's the advertising community. Some guy goes out and he adds up the number of boxes of Jello he's going to sell and on the basis of that, he spends money on advertising. And if he sells a little more, he spends a little more... sells a little less, spends a little less. We are after all a very small country.

Business is also more competitive. When you had the only shoe store on Bloor St., you were doing just fine. Then four others came in, and you're still doing fine. Now there's 10 and you've got to have a better-looking window, and you better have good shoes at a good price. Otherwise the other nine are going to kill you.

**Cinema Canada:** Is there anything that a network can do to increase the pleasure of the viewer without diminishing ad revenue: moving the ads, or restructuring the ads or getting them out of certain programs? Advertising is getting more and more disruptive, and the better the program, the more ads there are in it. Peoples are recording just to zap past them.

**Arthur Weinthal:** Well, first of all the advertising people tell us that the indi-

## Bill Stevens The Tin Soldier Atkinson Film Arts

Getting a Canadian broadcaster meant getting access to Telefilm. That was what it was all about. We've been most fortunate that Arthur Weinthal has given us broadcast letters for some of our most important work. **The Bestest Present** won the Gemini last year for the best animated film in Canada. It was one of the top-10 *TV Guide* readers' poll nominations and it was also a Children's Broadcast Institute winner. That's because Arthur had the foresight to say, "Of course Lynn Johnston's comic strip is going to be a great TV show. Let's go for it!"

We also have the first co-production with the People's Republic of China; we signed the co-production treaty before the Department of Communications signed it. **The Nightingale** is in the can, the first Canadian/Chinese co-production to be finished. And God bless Arthur because he had the foresight a year ago to say, "Go for it."

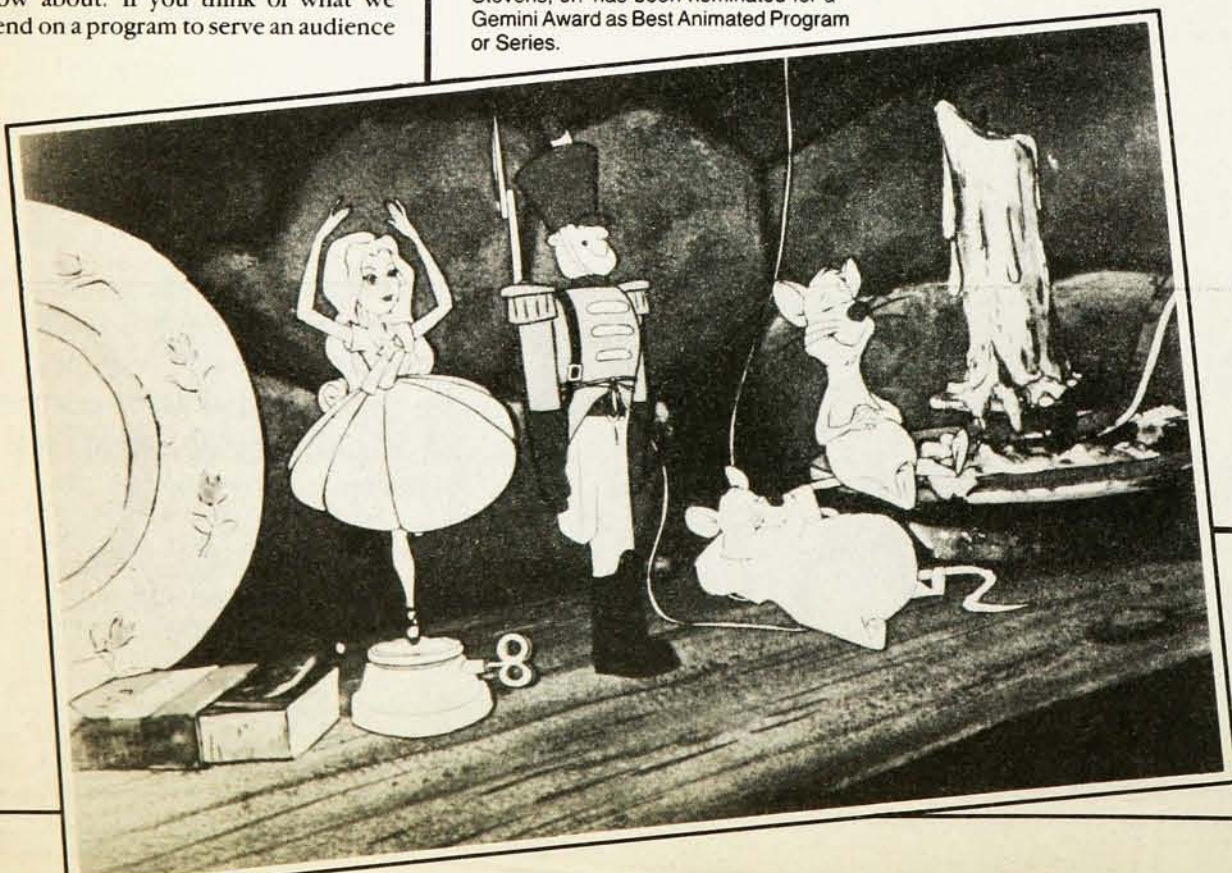
CTV has confidence in us, and

• **The Tin Soldier**, produced by W.H. Stevens, Jr. has been nominated for a Gemini Award as Best Animated Program or Series.

they've expressed that confidence by not getting involved in the creative thing. Arthur has the right to meddle, to approve at different stages, but he's been very supportive and delegated that right back to us. Only at very key stages has he had input. Like at scriptwriting, for example. His input has been very good, very constructive, so he has helped from the creative standpoint.

Arthur has said, for instance, "The story's not complicated enough. It's got to be more of a family show than just for children because we're going to be running it on prime access. We'll be setting up a major network program, running at 7:30 p.m., so let's make sure it appeals to the whole family and not just the kids." That direction has helped us model this series, **The Cartoon Classics**.

Arthur's tough. He doesn't just spend an hour to kick it around. He wants to know what you have to say and then get on with it. And that's good, especially for Canadian producers.





vidual fast-forwarding through the commercial is getting the commercial impression. In some cases he's getting it even better than he would normally get it because he's concentrating on it more actively than if he were sitting there while the ad was on and was rearranging himself in his chair or putting up his feet or whatever. He's sitting there and paying very close attention to the fast-forward process because as soon as it goes to black he wants to go back on regular speed. So the advertiser doesn't seem to be exercised about that. If he's not exercised about it, I'm not exercised about it. Since most timeshifting is for that purpose, the ads aren't eliminated.

There are certain programs in which we restructure our formats to take the edge of the commercial interruption. It doesn't happen all that often because programs that are produced for television are produced with the commercial breaks in mind. One of the interesting things about people's perception is that when they complain about commercials in the movie, what they'll say is "You ran more commercials in that movie than you normally do." Inevitably they are watching a feature-length motion picture, where you have to break in artificially to put in commercials, as opposed to a movie which is produced for television where you're lured into the commercial. There's the climactic scene, you fade into black and go into the commercial. When you're running a movie which was never produced for commercial interruption, as often as not your break-ins are awkward, sudden, abrupt. So people have the perception that they're seeing more commercials where you're putting more breaks in. We don't get complaints from people about commercials.

**Cinema Canada:** *Earlier this year, Bill Cotton of the BBC addressed the Canadian Film and Television Association in Toronto. He talked about the market-drivenness of television and the fallacy of believing that if your network was beholden to commercial interests, then you were playing in a free market which would give choices to the viewer because the advertiser would respond to the viewer's likes and dislikes. He maintained that homogenization of programming and diminished choice resulted.*

**Arthur Weinthal:** He's talking about a marketplace that has four television signals! The chap from Channel 4 at the Banff Television Festival was talking about the movies that he makes for a system which delivers 8% of a four-channel market. You can imagine what Channel 4 would do in Canada! But they're able to do what they're able to do because of their market.

We do what we have to do because of our market. When I look at a program I don't necessarily judge it as being good or bad. I look at it in terms of, is it going to stay alive or suffer in our market. There's no such thing as a bad program or a bad program idea. There are only

## Robert Lantos Night Heat, The Sword of Gideon, Control

### Alliance Entertainment

**A**rthur gets involved mainly on the production side – the decisions involving creative matters and content on a day-to-day basis. Whether it's script or casting or editing, that's done with Arthur. They (CTV) read every script, they exercise their full rights of approval over the star casting decisions; it's a sort of ongoing consultation. I make my decision but, before I sign people up, I let Arthur know and show him the material on the people I want to go with. Most of the time we agree. Some of the time we don't. When we don't, we debate, and most of the time we end up accommodating each other.

It's been a very symbiotic relationship between Alliance as a group and CTV, and between myself personally and him personally, which is probably why we supply so much of CTV's Canadian drama. The relationship is not highly structured, but it is continuous. We talk often, and we take each other's ideas seriously; he has affected and influenced and shaped various shows that we do for CTV. Sometimes, it makes me change my mind, like on **Mount Royal** with some of the casting decisions or some of the script-content decisions. When people get along, the relationship tends to be unstructured. It's when things are strained that they become highly structured. In this case, it's fluid.

Arthur has a role which is different from mine. His obligation is directly to the audience which is watching

• Alliance's **Night Heat** is up for 9 Geminis. Allan Roy, Scott Hylands and Jeff Wincott star.

CTV. Mine is broader than that. Some of the contributions he makes remind me that pleasing that audience is the primary purpose of the show. We operate on the assumption that he knows who that audience is.

I'll give you a specific example. I come from a film background, not a television background, and there are certain things that, as a movie producer, one forgets. People have a different way of reacting to material when they go out of the house and pay money and stand in line to see something than when they come into the living room which is the centre of the family activities. They react to the same thing differently. For example, in one of the episodes of **Mount Royal** we had one of the leading characters who is married have an affair. The way I was going to handle it was that he would have the affair and there would be no repercussions. Arthur felt that the audience would not be pleased by that – not by his having an affair, but by the fact that there were no repercussions. It had to do with keeping the audience's sympathy for the main character. If people have to tune in week after week, they have to want to know what happens to him. They have to have deep interest in him. Arthur was concerned that if he had an affair and he got away with it, then that sympathy would be jeopardized. I think Arthur was right, but that's not necessarily the way my mind works. That's one example of the way we collaborate.

programs which are more attractive in the marketplace or less attractive in the marketplace, given the fact that the marketplace is very crowded with choices and people have many many choices.

Most people most of the time make a decision to watch television and then pick a program that would give them pleasure or information or whatever it is that they're looking for. Whether you assemble an audience through the tax on your television set or whether you assemble an audience by selling warm bodies to an advertiser or whether you assemble an audience by subscription where you give me \$15 a month and I give you TSN and Much Music and blah blah blah, you have to finance the assembling of that audience. I think that the BBC is well off not having to deal with commercial interests but that doesn't mean that they necessarily get larger audiences. There are certain things which the public has to support and pay for.

They have to pay for museums and they've got to pay for school, and they've got to pay for hospitals and they've got to pay for libraries. Those things have got to be supported by the public. I'm a great believer in public television and I would be talking a different story if I was working for public television. I think that public television is very important. I'm glad we have it in our country and I applaud all the good things CBC does. I don't applaud them when they compete with us for foreign programming and pay more money than they should be paying. But I think public television is very important and I think we should have ballets and operas and discussions and things like **The Journal** and so on playing in prime-time. And that can only be sustained by public monies. We have a good system in that sense.





The Americans don't. I think that America is very badly served in their television service. If you can eliminate from your mind news readers and network logos, you can sit for an evening and watch three American networks and they're indistinguishable because they're all getting their programs from the same six or eight sources. For a country of that size and dimension not to have a richly funded public broadcasting service seems to me to be a sad comment. Now there are more services coming in but people have to pay for them.

I think that the Canadian public is very well served, enormously well served. Nobody comes close to Canada when it comes to having a diversity of programming. All the American services plus all the Canadian services in two official languages plus certain independent services and a smattering of programs from England and so on. What country comes near Canada in terms of the choices that are available? Some of it is commercially sustained, some of it is not commercially sustained. But you have to look at the system as a system and if you are a very discerning, difficult, demanding, intellectually-minded human being you will still find in Canada the opportunity to watch 10, 12 hours, 15 hours a week of good programs. You can watch a lot of news, you can watch nature shows. You can watch dramatic shows.

The fact is that it is largely an entertainment media and everybody likes to be entertained. The intellectual likes to be entertained as much as the common man. A matter of fact, many years ago NBC did a study on the television habits of the top leaders of the society. They did a survey of people like doctors and lawyers and psychiatrists and heads of corporations and vice-presidents and presidents and you know all the big guys, college professors...all the people who looked down their nose, sometimes, at the common man.

They learned a number of things about them. First of all, these people have more resources at their fingertips in terms of how they spend their time. They go out more, they entertain more, they travel more, they read more, they talk more, they have a wider range of interests. I don't remember what the exact numbers were, but if a blue-collar worker watches 30 hours a week of television, this crowd watches 10 hours a week of television. But they watch the same mix of programs. I think the example was, some guy that has been sitting on a bench all day long judging other people's behaviour, who shall live and who shall die. He comes home at the end of the day and he wants to watch *Charlie's Angels*. So that you're dealing with a circumstance where people watch less television but they use it for the same purposes.

After all, everybody's got a television set, virtually everybody has at least one, and it's supposed to serve their needs at the time they want them served. Oddly, people don't like what other people are

watching. Think of that whole issue of the Playboy Channel... Nobody ever asked them to watch it. People don't have much faith in other people's ability

to judge their lives. That's the whole interventionist view of life.

The fact is, people select what's good for them and what they want and televi-

sion is the most democratic institution in the world.

**Cinema Canada:** *Following up on that, what do you think about the question of regulation vs. deregulation and the quality of television which results from the one or the other situation?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** Well, the honest answer is that it's tough. It is a regulated industry and we accept the fact. When you have access to people's minds, you have to be dealing in a regulated industry and there has to be some sensible balance because there is always the danger of excess. There is the danger of the richest and most powerful having the greatest ability to contact the public. It's the same reason why there's a limitation as to how much money people can spend in an election campaign. If you didn't set some limit, the rich man would have a greater chance to tell his story than the poor man or the common man. There have to be certain rules in our society to make course corrections so that when all things aren't equal they should be made to be a little more equal than they would normally be. I'm a great believer in the marketplace but I also believe the marketplace has got to be tempered with certain humane, ethical considerations.

I think that deregulation essentially has followed on from technology. Technology has made the regulations impractical. Regulations were essentially based on the fact that there's a limited number of signals available in the spectrum and therefore they had to be guarded. Well, there is no limitation anymore. Sony can put out a set with 120 channels on it.

**Cinema Canada:** *What is the justification for regulation then?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** To try to find some balance to what will make a system work. There is a system in place, and the system in Canada as enunciated by the Broadcast Act and supported by successive governments, is that broadcasting in Canada must provide an east-west flow of information, must explore the fabric and texture of Canadian life so that there's some shared experience in our country. Broadcasting is the only link in our country. We have no national press. The only thing that binds communities together is broadcasting; nobody denies it, nobody fights it, certainly we don't. So there has to be some central core watching to make sure the theory is being applied fairly, evenly, sensibly, and walking that line between "should," "could" and "what is." People talk about "should," everything is a "should." People like me who have to deal with the real world every day talk about "what is." We're a country that lives in those worlds which are a bit dichotomous.

**Cinema Canada:** *Do you see any major shift in the way CTV operates given increasing fragmentation of the market and the arrival of pay stations and specialty stations?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** I think we're in for a



● Flora MacDonald gets the VIP treatment from Settler's *The Campbells*

## John Delmage The Campbells Settler Productions

I haven't had any problems with the network—none of any importance. They pay the bills, they make certain demands on me but in terms of script and their involvement, it's an overview. Once the parameters have been set, basically, they let us get on with it. Arthur has someone who reads all the material and evaluates all the scripts but in most all cases, the comments are positive.

I give credit to Arthur for knowing his audience better than I do. Usually, his comments are focused on what market and what audience he's playing to. In my case with *The Campbells*, a family-adventure, I look to Arthur for several things—a guideline to issues, topics and the tone one can use in a 7:30 p.m. slot.

This is one of the largest dramatic shows that CTV has done and, in that way, it's a bit of a gamble. It's a newer kind of programming, and a little more solid, too, I think. CTV gets the credit for standing behind a relatively strong, yet noncommercial family series.

We get input from CTV at the be-

ginning of the year, when we're evaluating what we've done and what we can do better. They get involved in the main casting of the series. They have a perception of what image is good for their series and we have to concern ourselves with that. Basically, they are real supporters of the series, so it's hard to be critical. Their suggestions are usually positive. What we usually get is, "I like this, but I wonder if you can do this as well." What they want usually means adding a bit more family involvement, or not being quite so harsh in the action.

At the beginning, when we were getting into the series, I would have been nervous if I had been Arthur. CTV made a rather large investment, as did the Scots. Given the fact that we had no track record, I have to say that I would not have been as confident as Arthur was. Arthur and I still talk every day. He still invites me to dinner, so I guess we're getting along sort of O.K. It has been so rare that there have been any real differences that I take them very seriously and try to fix them. I have to give him credit for knowing his audience.



period of great growth in this industry and there's a new generation of people coming on who are going to find ways to make it work.

It won't necessarily require large budgets. We'll find sometimes we get so hard up for material we sometimes scrape the top of the barrel. There will be new techniques that develop to tell stories and to entertain people. I'm sure that if we were to be sitting here five years from now, we would be amazed at how much we have changed. We have a program schedule out this year which would have seemed impossible several years ago. We're doing a show with CBS that's on every week and is successful, and we're doing a show with Scottish television and it's successful. We're going to do another show that's going to be on every week and its also going to be on Radio-Canada and TF1 in France and they are delighted to have that kind of relationship.

**Cinema Canada:** *You mentioned a new generation and yet you and Murray Cherkover have been on the job over 20 years. What's the plan?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** Murray has done what he's done because he's damn good. He is quite a unique human being. He is one of the most complex human beings I've ever met and I've literally lived with him for a long time now. He has got such skill and flashes of... He has got great energy which is remarkable to have over that period of time. And he knows the business. He just knows it. He is probably one of the best in the English-speaking world.

**Cinema Canada:** *How about you? Somebody said to me, "You're interviewing Weinthal? That's like talking to the devil."*

**Arthur Weinthal:** Really, that doesn't sound very nice, does it? When you have the kind of job that I have, you spend most of your time saying 'no' to people and nobody likes to hear 'no'. It doesn't matter, the mountain of logic or opinion that supports the 'no', all the person hears is 'no.' When was the last time somebody said 'no' to you and you liked hearing it? And when you've been doing it for many, many years you get an accumulation of scar tissue in the community. I'm sure there are a lot of people who don't like me, think I'm maybe mean or harsh or abrupt and cold, unfeeling and maybe there are some others who think I'm alright. But all I really try to be is fair and that's all you can really be is fair. There are a lot of people that come to you with really stupid ideas and stupid suggestions and even the really stupid ones you try to be patient with and talk them down from wherever they are. You can't be in a decision-making capacity without people getting mad at you. But I don't like the idea of people thinking that I'm the devil.

**Cinema Canada:** *Over the long haul, where does the energy come to renew the effort, to keep at it?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** I really like it. I really love television. I've always really felt privileged to be doing what I do. It's incredibly demanding work, but it's the demanding work that's good for me. It uses up my energies and skills and tolerates my foolishness, I guess.

**Cinema Canada:** *What do you feel on the personal level about your relationship with that person who turns on the set every night?*

**Arthur Weinthal:** I pay a lot of attention to them. I never take them for granted and I read every piece of mail that I can from them and I try to get to know them. I was lecturing at Ryerson in January and somebody in the class said to me, "What's the hardest part of your job?" And I said "Staying in touch is the most demanding part of my job," and to do that I read and look and pay attention and watch and try to get close to people because one of the problems of people in television is that they don't come in contact with real people. They sit up in these rooms and it's a bunch of elitists talking to each other, and again its "could", "would" and "should."

The public knows what it wants and you have to get close to them. Well, it's hard to get close to them when you're sitting in an office all day or when you're wheeling and dealing, when you're travelling around.

There are signposts in your life that remind you who you are and what you are. Almost 10 years ago we put on two new shows, an ice show and **The David Steinberg Show**. Our sales department didn't want to know from the ice show and everybody liked **The David Steinberg Show** because David is charming and affable and cute and knows how to deal with the press. Well, **Stars on Ice** started off with a fairly nominal audience and it built every week. Ultimately, it went on to run seven years. Meanwhile, **The David Steinberg Show** started off with a more substantial audience and slipped. It just plagued me. I moved the Steinberg show once. It didn't do a damn bit of good. It just kept on dribbling away.

And I remember being in the east-end of Toronto one early Saturday morning, driving to go pick up something, and it was a cold, drizzly, rotten late November morning. I was driving down some street around Pape, really bothered by the fact that I just couldn't make the Steinberg show work. There was row housing and fading rosebushes and the cold rainy day, and it was where the real people live. I drove down the street and, I remember, it was like some sort of visitation from God. If these people were home last night watching television and they had a choice of watching **Stars on Ice** or the **David Steinberg Show**, not one of them would watch the **David Steinberg Show**. He's not one of them. He doesn't touch them. They like Robert Young, they like Raymond Burr, they love Lloyd Robertson. They loved Harvey Kirck. And you got to keep working your way back to those people. ●

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