

MARK O'NEILL



A year ago, four unsuspecting directors of the Vancouver International Film Festival were ousted during a boisterous, closed-to-the-press AGM. The surprise attack resulted in the resignation of Hannah Fisher and the appointment of Alan Franey as Director just six months before the 1988 event. This year's gathering, April 11 at Pacific Cine Centre, was considerably less exciting, perhaps to the disappointment of the curious scribes in attendance.

The VIFF ended a tumultuous year in good shape; ticket sales were up \$22,000, memberships by 7,000. Expenses shrank by \$26,000, leaving a \$30,000 surplus (plus about \$165,000 in donated goods and services).

Bill Millerd, Artistic Director of the Arts Club Theatre, was returned to the Board after having been caught in the crossfire last year. He's joined by Sandra Banister and Diane Clement. Garth Drabinsky of Cineplex fame is retiring.

Director Franey announced that Daryl MacDonald will return as Director of Programming and that Amon Bookbinder has been signed up to assemble the "Canadian Images" series.

OPEN AND SHUT CASES

Movie theatres are opening and closing at an alarming rate in Vancouver. Famous Players is shutting down the aptly named Fine Arts on Georgia Street and is rumoured to be phasing out both Denman Place and The Bay. All three theatres serve the densely populated West End; the closings will be hard on senior citizens who don't feel comfortable venturing onto Granville Street's somewhat sleazy Theatre Row.

Cineplex-Odeon is also axing some screens. Two twin theatres, the Fraser and the Dolphin, went dark at the end of March.

On the bright side, there's finally a repertory screen on Granville; the former Lyric/Studio/Towne has reopened as the Paradise. Terry Weir, general manager of the Vancouver Island Caprice chain, has taken out a 10-year lease. He plans to offer second-run Hollywood fare, classics, and art films at \$2.50 for double bills. Each program runs for a full week, and the price doesn't change on weekends.

INVESTING IN KNOWLEDGE

B.C.'s Knowledge Network is investing \$175,000 in 13 local educational TV shows or series. Half the money goes to five projects already being developed by universities, colleges, community groups, and independent producers. The rest will go into program acquisition.

The money comes from the B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training; the Network is hopeful there's more to come since they received 163 requests totalling over \$2 million.

SUPERCHANNEL FUNDS WRITERS

Five West Coast filmmakers have received money from Superchannel. \$45,000 in development funds is being split between Patricia Gruben and Michael Lebowitz (*Deep Sleep*, the story of a teenage girl trying to find out why her father died); Gary Fisher (*Red Rain*, an environmental murder mystery); Chris Bruyere (*Fieldwork*, a feminist criminology student and a sexist cop team up to solve the murder of a gynecologist); Brian Dick (*Princess Park*, about two rival teenage gangs); and Lindsay Bourne (*Naked In A Small Town*, love story involving a steel worker and an exotic dancer).

BOOK 'EM DANNO

Join a Union, See the World!

Or at least Hawaii. IATSE Local 891 and Teamsters 155 have signed an agreement with the Maui Motion Picture Coordinating Committee. This should work to the advantage of producers looking for locations that can be found in B.C. or the Aloha State; the Maui Committee has agreed to endorse work permits for key personnel, who will be assigned Hawaiian crews. In return IATSE and the Teamsters will OK permits for Hawaiians who want to shoot here.

Pilot One
goes down

CBC youth mag folds

BY IAN HUNTER

It was a brave experiment that sort of worked, a show you either found interesting or hated. It was CBC's attempt to reach a youth audience with young writers, young hosts, and a hip set.

Pilot One ran every Friday at 11:30 p.m. Then, at the end of March, it was given the axe. Producer David Marsden received the phone call the Friday afternoon before April Fools' day and took off for Washington State without telling anybody. Despite official optimism about returning for a second season, the graffiti was on the wall.

Two weeks into the CUPE strike, with bad ratings, and with critics, cast and crew divided over what was good TV, good writing and acting, the series stalled midway through the second-to-last show of the season.

The show, previously called *Young Street* (dropped because of the seedy connotation of Toronto's main drag) was four years in development through the children's drama department of the CBC.

Ads went out in alternative newspapers across the country last summer to find those "iconoclastic" writers and hosts needed to make the youth-oriented show the production adults in the children's drama department wanted.

What was originally going to be a teenagers' Mid-Day style public affairs show running an hour a day, five days a week, (with five-minute dramatic serials packaged into a 25-minute drama for daytime Saturday), turned into an hour a week, late night, "Molson's Rock" sponsored magazine show "with rapidly flipping pages".

The change came when the producers discovered their target audience (ages 15 to 21), were doing other things after school and that the most popular show for that age group was *Saturday Night Live*. So after the pilot *Pilot One* (see C.C. 156), the show changed to its Friday night slot, bumping Stu Jeffries and *Good Rockin' Tonite* back an hour.

Marsden, best known for his innovative radio work — he started Toronto's "alternative"

station CFNY, and eight years ago tried to form a commercial radio drama company — came to *Pilot One* a year and a half ago. Given Marsden's reputation for innovation, the CBC built an amazing set inside one of the surviving buildings on the EXPO 86 site. The set is a total media environment similar in concept to CITY-TV's headquarters as studio, where every inch, down to the bathrooms, could go on air. The set is fashioned like a warehouse, complete with catwalk surrounding the open pit of the stage. Everything that looks like metal on the set is actually wood. Ironically, the only metal piece in the set is painted to look like wood. Propped up in every spare space and corner are old TV sets tuned to the show in progress, items coming up, rock videos, white noise. The pit/performance area remains constant while props ranging from bumper cars, to elaborate constructions, to stages for the borderline bands performing on the show, move in and out of space. Surrounding the pit, on floor level and above on the catwalk, are the 200 teenagers who make up the audience. Dry ice is pumped in to create a smoky, illegal, all-ages club atmosphere. Four or five cameras, one fixed on a crane, the others hand-held, are fed into the CBC switching truck parked outside.

In Toronto the show was called "the pig" because of the huge number of resources thrown behind it. While the show's budget was never released, 72 people were receiving pay checks, and the rental fees, sets and promotion would have cost a fortune in real money.

For the four writers and five hosts, the show gave them a lot of fun, excitement, and tension. Most of them had never been on, or written for, TV before. The hosts seemed to be picked on the basis of fitting into alternative types, hip models for the teen/TV/Pepsi generation. Three of the writers had previously worked as a team on school videos and movies. An "older" woman (age 24) was hired to balance out the teenage writers, and punk rock legend Chris Houston joined the show later on to work on some segments and relieve some of the tension.

The best parts of the show were some remote video segments, the live bands, and Sex with Sue. The worst parts were clumsily written, badly paced "real" pieces with the hosts being sensitive about teen dating, drugs, parents and money.

The show shifted focus so much, and fit so many different elements (both in pace and content) that it was tiring to watch, seeming to drag on longer than its hour slot.

Still the show was interesting because it was so different. It was as if the CBC were trying to fuck up in an interesting, professional manner, or do experimental filmmaking on a huge budget.

It's hard to know who to blame for *Pilot One's* demise. David Marsden created a great concept, sort of a whole media ecosystem, that fit the CBC the way a Beta tape does a VHS VCR. The hosts and writers tried hard, probably too hard, but were suffering both the overt censorship of the adults and the stifling self-censorship which comes from being burnt too often. The crew were only doing their job.

A victim of the CBC restraint axe, *Pilot One* will be remembered as one of those aberrations of brilliance which hits the corp. every decade or

two and having created what it set out to, destroy the show because of its success. With *This Hour Has Seven Days*, the CBC buckled under the political heat. With *Pilot One*, they created an alternative, an "iconoclastic" youth program, that was different from anything else on the CBC, different from anything on TV in North America. Too different.

To wit: The first broadcast of *Pilot One* included a sickeningly slick production number with clean-cut dancing youths in sequins singing "we're better than you" mercifully machine-gunned to death and carried off by terrorists while the set fell around them. Following the death and destruction, the casually dressed punk/normal hosts walk on the set to the cheers of their teenaged peers in the audience. They had a national TV show; the youth had power.

No terrorists machine-gunned the *Pilot One* cast and crew. They were dealt their death blow by the silent stroke of a pen in Ottawa. The slickness, and sets, and set way of doing things are back. The brave new breakdown of the separation between audience and TV cast and crew has broken down. We will now resume our regularly scheduled programming.

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KIDS FEST GETS TV

The Vancouver Children's Festival is expanding into film and television. The third annual Arts For Young Audiences Symposium will be part of the Festival, May 19-22. Keynote speaker will be **Linda Schuyler**, co-creator of the multi-Gemini-winning *Degrassi Junior High*.

Forums and panels galore will include "Kids' TV: A Turn-on or a Time-waster?" led by OWL-TV creator **Annabel Slaight**. **Louise Profeit-LeBlanc's** "Ancient Stories — New Ways" will address the challenge of transferring native legends onto film and members of Spain's Els Aquislino theatre company will be on-hand to explore new concepts in children's television.

Full fee is \$250, but BC Film is offering bursaries to local filmmakers. Contact **Chris Moffat** at 604-684-3323 for information, or 687-7697 for more on the Symposium in general.

SISTER FROM ANOTHER PLANET

Jonathan Kay, the Winnipeg-born, Vancouver-based maker of the reincarnation documentary *Walking After Midnight* is planning to begin shooting his first feature in August. *Starlight* may be fiction but it's not entirely removed from his interest in matters psychic.

Rae Dawn Chong (*Quest for Fire*) has been cast as an alien from the Pleiades star system. She lands in the Rockies — the film will shoot in Nelson — and falls in love with a local boy.

HISTORICAL DRAMAS

Two historically based films in early stages of development:

President of the B. C. Writers' Council of ACTRA, **Helena Zukowski**, is working on a script about **Clara Brett Martin**, the first woman lawyer in Canada or, for that matter, the British Empire. She fought all the way to the Ontario Law Society before being admitted to the bar in 1897.

Writer **Terence Loychuk** and Producer **Werner Aellen** (*By Design & Sally Fieldgood and Co.*) are working on *Hell's Gate*, the story of a Chinese man brought to B. C. to work on the railroad and persecuted once the job was done.

LIKE A DRUNK IN A MIDNIGHT CHOIR

Universal Productions Canada is in the middle of shooting *Bird on a Wire*, a \$40-million-dollar feature described by Director **John Badham** as "an action comedy not unlike *North by Northwest*. A \$4 million zoo, complete with exotic animals, is being constructed for the final scene.

Badham (*War Games*, *Saturday Night Fever*) is working with Producer and Second Unit Director **Rob Cohen** (*Witches of Eastwick*, *Mahogany*, and TV's *thirtysomething*); *Bird on a Wire* is part of a multiple-picture deal the two have signed with Universal.

Mel Gibson and **Goldie Hawn** star, but about 20 Vancouver actors have landed speaking roles: **Alex Bruhowski**, **Paul Bernard**, **Jackson Davis**, and **Lawson Chambers** in high-profile parts.

The film will be quite a test for B. C. locations. Mel Gibson is on the run all across the U. S. A.; places like Victoria, Cache Creek and Langley will be doubling for just about every state in the union.

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