

scanlan's overview

Canawest Film Productions, Vancouver's largest production house and a division of KVOS-TV (B.C.) Ltd., has done two made-for-TV movies for 20th Century Fox Limited. The director of both films is Joe Scanlan, a landed immigrant from the United States now living in Toronto. The productions are wholly Canadian except for the starring role. Scanlan, here interviewed by Jack Ammon, talks about his experience in Canada.

by Jack Ammon

Joe Scanlan with performers Gay Rowan and Ray Danton



Joe Scanlan: I'm a landed immigrant, and I've been in Canada working for two and a half years. The last thing I did here was the **Salty** TV series for 20th Century. It was a full Canadian production. We shot it in the Bahamas. Immediately before that I did the **Star Lost** series which was multi-camera video tape from CFTO. It was syndicated by Fox, and also on ABC. A monumental task.

Before that time I spent most of my shooting time in New York. I also worked in Los Angeles. Stan Colbert, the Fox producer on these films, was involved in the **Salty** series with me.

Is this your first feature shot in Canada?

Joe Scanlan: Yes, although it's not a feature. It's a movie for TV. They're not the same. The initial plan was to do two films, back to back—a monumental task for one director. We decided to put a break between them.

I understand Mr. Stan Colbert is Executive in Charge of Production for 20th Century Fox Limited, and Andy Anderson, Canawest's Vice-President, is the producer. With one exception the cast and crew are all Canadian?

Joe Scanlan: Right. Wendy Riche is Associate Producer.

Have you directed in Vancouver before?

Joe Scanlan: No, nor have I worked with this crew before. We've had several production meetings, and I have rather good feelings about them. This is an interesting challenge to us all. The ABC Mystery Movie, in this case **Our Man Flint**, has always been on video tape—without an enormous amount of success. This is the first time they decided to put it on film with a comparable budget and a six day shoot. There has never been a 90-minute movie done on film in six days anywhere in the world.

(Note: It actually lensed for nine days. Ed.)

You've had a chance to observe Canadian production. What is your opinion of Canadian technicians? Or Canadian actors? Or Canadian producers?

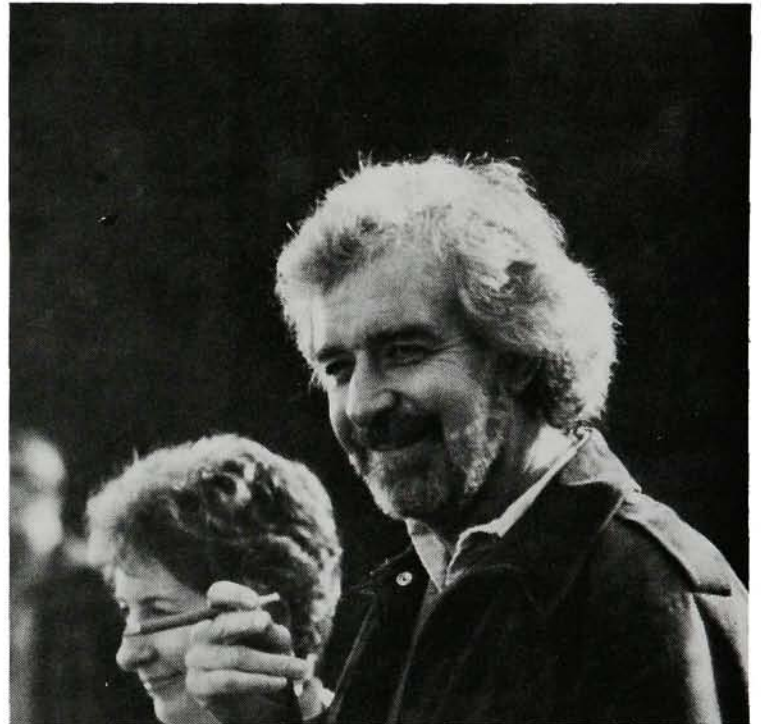
Joe Scanlan: In Canawest we've got a unique set-up. Because of their record, their connections, and because of KVOS-TV (B.C.) Ltd., they should be able to arrange a lot of co-production with America. Now, for the film series I did in Nassau I had one of the best units I've ever worked with. They slogged very hard, a very tight, constructive, cohesive crew... a super, super crew. **Star Lost**—I had done three four hundred shows in New York on video, and I thought the best cameraman I ever used was at CBS. That was until I went to CFTO... I have to tell you they truly were better. I have a very positive feeling about Canadian crews, and I'm not saying that because I am here. As far as the actors are concerned... their attitude is as strong and positive as one can imagine. But, their frustrations are monumental. Because there is not enough *work!* They can't get that bloody green card from the States these days.

Do you find Canadian actors lacking?

Joe Scanlan: No. I'll tell you why I think that's the case. You've got Stratford of course... and a mass of theatrical productions in Canada. I'm strong for theatrical people anyway, but they can't live on their theatrical exposure. They have learned their trade. In the beginning their experience

coming off the proscenium is easy to adapt to TV or film. It is more difficult for the writers.

A writer who has written only for television, which is like writing little plays, finds it hard to suddenly turn out a film script. Because a film script is constructed differently: it is a break up of scenes, a break up of locations, a whole different flow, a whole different kind of pacing, and this is where the Canadian writers need a little help. Because you *can* get a decent kind of script and this is where Stan Colbert's expertise is needed. It can be done without changing a word of dialogue or one scene, just a juxtapositioning of scenes. That's the only failing Canadian writers have in my estimation. But the actors don't have that problem.



Ilsa Richter who does the costumes and Joe Scanlan, director (l. to r.)

They have lots of theatre exposure here now. What has been your theatrical experience?

Joe Scanlan: I did a couple of Off-Broadway plays in New York. I loved it, more satisfying than TV or film in some ways.

You've said some nice things about Canadians... tell us your experience with the other aspects.

Joe Scanlan: One of the negatives I've experienced at first hand is in my efforts to package programmes. There's a reluctance... a lack of courage, or fear of making decisions that is rampant among the TV executive group. Without naming names, they have some of the finest crews I've worked with—scripting is still a bit of a problem in Canada, the actors are okay. Take this film... 100% Canadian with the exception of Ray Danton. But, these reluctant virgins in the networks will not respond. I can't understand why, because it is impossible to get TV off the ground in Canada without making it some kind of co-production deal with the U.S. And you can't get more than \$10,000 to \$40,000 for an hour for a network sale. You can't produce a television show for that kind of money. People up here are too slow to move.

If you could just get that changed, and that isn't my bag. But with people like Stan Colbert, with his years of experience, and who continues to make presentations, it could be a helluva breakthrough.

*Jack Ammon is the Vancouver stringer for **Variety**, and has worked in film and broadcasting for many years.*