

## CHRIS MAJKA



## THE LITTLE KIDNAPPERS

In 1953, the British Rank Empire released a film called *The Kidnappers*. While set in a rural Nova Scotia village, the film was actually shot in Britain. This wasn't good enough for Vancouver writer, teacher and producer **Gerry Testar** who liked the original well enough that he thought a real Canadian version should be shot. His quest began in 1979, and ten years later he has the rights from Rank and a \$3 million production deal with money from Disney, Jones 21st Century (a U.S. Cable TV company looking to get into production) tied up with a bow from the CBC and - look twice - no money from Telefilm.

Now called *The Little Kidnappers* it's a made for television, 100 minute drama which shot for four weeks in places as varied as Lawrencetown, Lunenburg, Sherbrooke Village and Cape Breton. Testar's wife, **Coralee Testar**, a former Nova Scotian herself is the writer, while expatriate Canadian **Jim Margellos** (now an L.A. mogul) is one of the producers.

During filming, the appearance of the aircraft carrier USS Coral sea in Halifax harbour caused such excitement that *Kidnappers* lead actor **Charlton Heston** wandered down from the set (on land - no spectacular parting of the Harbour). Quipped the former Moses; "The admiral tells me this is the Coral Sea's last cruise and that it's 42 years old. I'm a lot older than that an I'm not retiring." Heston, coincidentally, will appear early next year in a remake of *Treasure Island* shot on the Nova Scotia built sailboat, the *Bounty*.

Other notables in the cast are **Leah Pinsent**, **Bruce Greenwood**, **Patricia Gage**, **Dan MacDonald** and **Richard Donat**. The children who play the two leads are played by two young British kids, **Leo Wheatley** and **Charles Miller**.

## BEYOND CHARITY

Atlantic filmmakers, once reluctant to stray east of the Ottawa River for fear of falling off the edge, are now travelling with a vengeance. **Brian Pollard** and **Lulu Keating** are no strangers to the dark continent, **Paul Donovan** shot a feature in remotest Argentina, while **Martin Duckworth** is everywhere, most recently to Sri Lanka to shoot footage for **John N. Smith's** fine feature, *Welcome to Canada*. Equally adventurous is Dartmouth filmmaker **John Versteeg**, who travelled to India to shoot *Beyond Charity*, a half-hour documentary about **Bruce and Elizabeth Carroll**, a retired telephone company executive and his daughter, who went to India to work at Mother Teresa's clinics for the destitute and ill.

Versteeg, who runs Impact Videographic Services, was a one man team, shooting all the material himself over a nine day period before leaving the country in fear that his film might be confiscated by a government which is not anxious to publicize the extreme poverty of its streets. Post-production was done by ATV, which aired the production this fall.

## SALTER STREET FILMS

Salter Street Films (now in fact on Barrington Street) is moving to Brunswick Street and historic Jonathan McCully Building. "Whose building?" I enquired of **Michael Donovan**, whereupon I learned that the aforementioned gentleman was one of our esteemed Fathers of Confederation and that this building, which Salter Street has just bought from the city and plans to restore, is his former residence. Their post-production studio will be located here and they hope to have the complex open by May of 1990.

Salter Street's newest drama, a children's fantasy feature directed by **Paul Donovan** called *George's Island*, has just opened to a standing ovation at the Frankfurt Children's Film Festival. As a result they have secured German distribution for the film which will premiered at a Halifax screening in late October. Meanwhile their acclaimed CODCO television series, co-produced with the CBC, is coming back for another season. As I write, scripts are being written (hear those keyboards tapping...) and they will be back in the CBC Halifax studios in May shooting the next installment.

## VIDEOPOST

Salter Street are not the only people interested in developing post-production facilities. **Whitman Trecartin**, a longtime member of the local film and video community, has just opened a new company in Dartmouth called VideoPost. He is not planning to take on any production work, but is interested in offering an up-to-date video edit and post production facility to interested parties. Joining him in the venture are senior editor **Elliott Ingraham** and associate editor **Paul Sampson**.

## ACTRA restructuring causes rift

TORONTO - On October 10th over 60 members of the Writers' Guild of ACTRA met at Toronto's Press Club and endorsed the creation of a separate Writers' Guild of Canada. "A resolution to support the formation of a WGC was passed by an overwhelming majority," former ACTRA National President Jack Gray told *Cinema Canada*. He called the WGC a "parallel organization" and said an 18-member organizational committee has been set up to spearhead a national membership drive.

This came about after the National Board of Directors of ACTRA, meeting in an extraordinary session in Toronto Sept. 9-10, voted to alter the structure of the 9,000-plus member union of performers, writers and broadcast journalists. "A group of our members are over-reacting to the events of the board meeting," said ACTRA General Secretary Garry Neil. "The new structure is not an emasculating of the Guilds, but a rationalization of ACTRA." However, Gray disagrees. "The years of development (of the Guilds) have been wiped out," he said.

Under the proposed changes, a new board consisting of five performers, two writers and one broadcast journalist will replace the present national board of 62 members. Two other members, the general secretary, and an "outside advisor" will have a say but no vote. The

national guild councils will be made larger and, according to Neil, will still be responsible for collective bargaining and setting Guild policy. However, in the restructuring that was recommended in a Price Waterhouse study, the national board would be the final authority in any decision-making. "The buck stops at the Board," said Neil.

In the early eighties, the Association of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists became an Alliance of the three guilds, under the only writer ever to become president of ACTRA, Jack Gray. However, the structure proved cumbersome, and a minority of writers, mostly, but not all, Toronto-based, called for complete autonomy. Feeling the effects of a top-heavy structure and a general downturn in production activity, the Alliance began to operate in the red. Price Waterhouse was brought in and essentially recommended a return to a more traditional management structure and suggested ways that ACTRA could reduce its \$600,000 debt.

The September meeting in Toronto was "difficult" and focused almost entirely on the political issues, Neil said. The constitution was revised and the entire membership has been asked to vote Yes or No for the new structure as embodied in the revised constitution. The results are expected Oct. 23.

## Dissension in DGC art department

TORONTO - Several members of the DGC's art department have become disaffected with their guild representation and have joined the Art Directors of Canada, IATSE local 928. However, since the new local has achieved contracts on only two productions, one in Alberta and the other in Nova Scotia, members continue to be represented by the DGC elsewhere. This has caused a great deal of internal tension within the DGC, as I.A. 928 moves to secure its first production agreement in Ontario.

Don Percifield, senior staff representative for the DGC, Ontario district council, admits "we have disaffected art directors and production designers", but takes dim view of local 928 increasing its membership at the expense of the DGC, "causing serious damage to the industry. If the Americans get a whiff of labour unrest, they will not come here."

Art department personnel who have joined local 928 would not speak on the record for fear of stirring up more trouble, but the main complaint seems to be that the Guild does not represent them nationally. The DGC does not have standing in either B.C., where the art department is represented by I.A. Local 891, or Alberta. "The I.A. local was formed to be national," said one art director, who now holds both cards. "The DGC is not national and its

claims otherwise are fraudulent. I do not want our futures to be run by P.A.s in the Guild."

I.A. Local 928 claims a membership of 44, however Percifield thinks the core group is no larger than 10 or fifteen. "They are not accomplishing any more than we are," he said. "Some members are dissatisfied with the service they are getting from the Guild, and the Guild needs improving, but this is an internal matter and should be handled internally. I.A. 928 has never signed a contract in Ontario and the production community does not want to be fractionalized."

However, the local is demanding its first Ontario contract on Norstar's *Prom Night III: The Last Kiss*, which is now shooting in Toronto. The production designer is Ruben Freed, who was one the first to join local 928. Freed wouldn't comment on the matter, but the DGC's right to represent the art department has been challenged at a pre-conference hearing of the Ontario Labour Relations Board. "We are not out to destroy the guild", said I.A. 928 spokesperson Dan Yari. "Our members are only exercising the right of an individual to choose who they want to represent them." Whether the matter reaches a full hearing of the OLRB is to be determined at future meetings between the warring parties at the Board in December.