



Alberta Film & TV

# Alberta : introduction to a cultural ethos

by Dave Billington

Most people, when asked where the major filmmaking centers were in the country, would automatically think of the big three - Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Very few would even consider the possibility of including the province of Alberta on their list.

In a land which tends to pigeonhole people by their geographic location rather than the things they produce or the kinds of human beings they are, this is perhaps understandable, though certainly not particularly commendable.

Thus Alberta is equated with oil wells, cowboys, rodeos, lavish wealth and a brash brand of contemporary conservatism which tended to view Joe Clark as a dangerous radical.

But the Alberta those of us who live here know and love contains a great deal more than those cliché images, and one of those things is a very vital, productive and high-quality film business embracing everything from one of the world's most prestigious, yet still largely unheralded film festivals, to a cadre of some of the best documentary filmmaking communities in the country.

It is always difficult to encapsulate an entire cultural ethos in a few hundred words, but perhaps the best place to start is at a point on the compass far to the south of the two major cities of Calgary and Edmonton.

The town of Cardston has two major claims to fame, at this point in its history. It contains the only fully-fledged Mormon Tabernacle in the province, (probably the only one outside Salt Lake City, Utah) and it's the birthplace of film director and former National Film Board guru Colin Low.

Low became something of an icon with the Board when, back in the '50s, he made a modest little film about a cowboy riding a green-broke horse on the vast Cochrane Ranch a few miles northwest of his home town.

Modest though its aspirations were, *Corral* stamped Low as a major artist in filmmaking, and it added yet more laurels to the already heavily garlanded Film Board.

Dave Billington is an entertainment columnist for *The Edmonton Sun*.

And from that day to this, *Corral* has been looked upon and recognized as a masterpiece of lighting and camera-work, though one of its most famous scenes, when the horse runs into a slough, was actually an accident.

I met the cowboy who was in the film a few years ago and he told me quite candidly that "that damn horse got its nose in the air and I couldn't bring it down. The only way I could stop it was to run it into the slough, but I didn't bother to tell the boys who were making the film that because they seemed so tickled with the pictures they got."

inaccurate examinations of the regions.

As a direct result of Low's work, the North West Studio of the NFB was established in Edmonton and it has been producing some fascinating material ever since.

Two of the best recent examples are Anne Wheeler's moving tribute to her father, *A War Story*, in which she recreates the prison camp hell her father survived.

And *China Mission*, Tom Radford's gentle portrait of one of the country's greatest diplomats and humanitarians, Chester Ronning, which traced that man's remarkable life from his life in a

the profile of a contemporary, middle-aged Indian who lives on the Blood Reserve on whose southern boundary perches the town of Cardston.

It was a fitting return, as if to bring Low's cinematic life back to full circle from the roots of its genesis on the Cochrane ranch.

But the NFB is not the only organization in the province which produces excellent documentary material, as the Peter Haynes story proves.

Haynes is a soft-spoken migrant from Britain who privately assembled enough capital to make an amazingly evocative documentary on the four seasons of an Inuit family whose largely traditional life still carries on on the edge of the Arctic Circle.

Entitled *Inupiatin* it was a prize-winner at last year's Banff Television Festival and it has charmed and enchanted all who have seen it.

Haynes and his partners hustled the bucks for their film, themselves and their reward was a work which was not only artistically satisfying but entertaining as well.

Its award at the Banff Festival might be dismissed as parochial by those who do not know how high the Festival's standards are, but it had to compete with first-rate documentaries from around the world, and was judged by a world-class jury.

The measure of the Festival's standards is best taken by looking at what happened to three of its prize-winning entries.

This year, for example, the CBC's documentary *Just Another Missing Kid* won an Oscar in the documentary category. The film had been similarly rewarded by Banff two years ago.

Two British dramas, *A Voyage Round My Father* and *Cream In My Coffee*, were also first-prize winners at Banff last year and the year before and they went on to finish one-two in the Prix Italia, one of Europe's most prestigious competitions which covers two years of European television at a time.

Now it may seem odd to include a TV film festival in a broad look at the film business of a particular province, but the Festival was a direct result of some pretty heady times which prevailed out her five years ago.



● Colin Low's *Corral*: riding a hobbyhorse against the bureaucrats

Tickled they may have been, but the subsequent growth of Low's career based on the film's acceptance was to lead to an important change in the way the NFB viewed itself and its mandate in the country.

Low's hobbyhorse, which he rode steadily against the bureaucracy of the Board, was the establishment of regional production studios which could more accurately reflect the country's widely varied culture than those visiting firemen (usually from the Montreal, Toronto area), who would produce hit-and-run works which were often unintentionally

mission shool in China, back to his roots in Alberta and then back to China again as a diplomat.

These are a couple of examples of the "larger" documentaries which have come out of the North West studio under Radford's tutelage, but there have been scores of smaller, more intimate works, each one evoking the character and personality of the province and its people.

Low himself, his ambitions achieved, gave up the executive suite and returned to the director's chair a few years ago to turn out a film called *Standing Alone*,

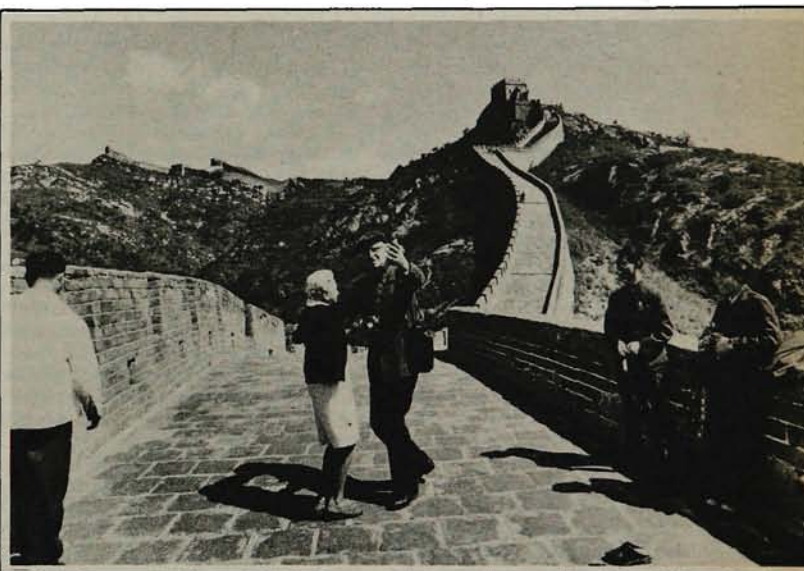


**Alberta Film & TV**

scenic landscape within easy reach of the city.

You can go from bald prairie, through verdant foothills to primeval mountain back country in less than two hours. Add to that a modern city with plenty of first-class hotel space surrounded by good four-lane highways, and you have a producer's dream.

When you've got high-powered Hollywood types (and their Canadian equivalent) constantly checking out your turf like prospectors looking for a mother lode, it's little wonder that the local filmmakers catch gold fever themselves. But very few, if any Hollywood types



● Great man on the Great Wall: Chester Ronning in China again

It was then that the redoubtable Fil Fraser, fresh from his critical triumph in producing *Why Shoot The Teacher*, was all set to turn this province into the living proof that genuine Canadian stories, filmed with care and integrity could move right out there into the ranks of world cinema and stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of them.

Fraser and his colleagues thought that, if they could bring together as many important film people as they could find into the resort town of Banff; fill them with fresh air, western hospitality and a banquet of major international television films, that investment money would buzz in like hungry bees heading for honey.

At the same time the festival was launched, there was another mood afoot in Calgary which was to add even more yeast to the ferment, making the brew even more heady.

A group of businessmen in Cowtown bought some land in the hills just west of the city and announced the beginning of Tri-Media, a studio, sound stage, hotel complex which was going to be the biggest and most modern filmmaking facility in Canada capable of producing everything from 30-second commercials to feature films.

Back in Banff, Fraser and his colleagues were slowly pressuring the provincial government into establishing the Alberta Film Development Corporation to offer aid to the province's filmmakers in the pre-production work.

But the whole bubble burst through a combination of things, all of which could be traced to the provincial government's inability to find enough extra cash to keep the pot boiling.

The result was that the television festival had to suspend operations in its second year while it was refinanced and Tri-Media stumbled when the economy did. Just this year its backers announced that the project was all but finished unless mega-bucks were forthcoming from the provincial treasury.

But the Festival, thanks to the dogged determination of director Carrie Hunter, is not only alive and well, as the prestige of its winners shows, but it is still growing in reputation and in size and this in spite of the fact that getting money from the private sector these days is like

getting blood from a stone.

Just as significantly, the Film Development Corporation was successfully launched at last year's Festival with an initial pool of \$3 million and has already bankrolled several projects.

Perhaps the most important point to make here is that all of this film activity takes place in the service of between 100 and 150 filmmakers scattered from Lethbridge in the south to Grande Prairie in the north and in a province of just over two million people.

Most of the people involved in film in Alberta belong to the Alberta Motion Picture Industry Association, a fractious organization which attempts to serve the needs of everyone but whose internal operations are often badly split between the province's traditional rivals - Edmonton and Calgary.

Now you wouldn't think that, in a province this size, there would be very much room for the kind of inter-city paranoia and sense of rivalry as exist between, say, Toronto and Montreal, but Edmonton/Calgary is precisely the same and is even rooted in the same kinds of attitudes.

Edmonton, like Montreal, doesn't believe it is superior - it knows it is - and this condescending attitude absolutely infuriates Calgarians who suffer from the same kind of uncertainties which make Torontonians such blatant boosters for their own city - they blow their own single horn to drown out the brass band that lives in the other town.

But there is no doubt strong differences exist between the two cities and these differences are particularly obvious to an eastern migrant like myself who has lived in both cities.

To use a gambling metaphor - the Calgarians are crapshooters, while in Edmonton they play five-card stud.

Calgary's atmosphere is one of shooting for the big pot which is why there is much more of an inclination toward the major feature film, an atmosphere which was stimulated first by the making of the ill-fated Robert Altman film *Buffalo Bill And The Indians* and most recently by the *Superman* films.

The main reason for this has less to do with the pool of talent available in Calgary (though there is certainly plenty of that), than the incredible variety of

(except those who follow the fortunes of the Los Angeles Kings) have ever heard of Edmonton, so that city's filmmakers tend to concern themselves much more with the smaller-scale film.

Add to that the fact that Edmonton is the seat of the provincial government, a pork barrel for commissioned documentaries, and you begin to get a picture of a good place for the small filmmaker to hang his or her hat.

This latter fact is a sore point with the Calgarians who feel that, in spite of the fact that all government films are only awarded on the basis of tender, the Edmontonians have the inside track, regardless of the Calgary price.

In fact, the Calgary people got so gumpy a couple of years ago that they formed their own group called the Calgary Independent Filmmakers' Association in order to convince themselves that they were independent of the larger and better-known Edmonton film producers.

Still, it would be wrong to characterize the province as a place filled with warring factions which defeat their ultimate aim of making films by constantly squabbling among themselves.

Each year the hatchet is buried and the annual AMPIA banquet is held, at which time the Alberta film people reward each other with craft and artistic awards designed to encourage excellen-

ce in the field. Again, this may seem to be parochial, but, as someone said after this year's awards, "you may treat them lightly if you want, but once your name is read out, your attitude changes because your peers have recognized that you've done something well."

"And that means something whether it's an Oscar or an Ampia."

But if there is one thing which has acted as a catalyst to bring everybody in the province together in recent years, it was the advent of pay-TV, particularly when a local company, Allarco, was awarded the Superchannel franchise for both Ontario and Alberta.

With the Canadian content stipulations written into the pay licenses, visions of feature films danced through the heads of every independent producer in the province, only to draw mostly blanks so far.

Ironically one feature film has already been made for pay-TV, but it was sold to First Choice, the Toronto-based national service, and not to Superchannel even

● Tom Radford of the NFB: the documentary as macrocosm



Photo: Trig Singer

though the film - *The Wild Pony* - was set entirely in southern Alberta and produced by an Albertan, Eda Lishman.

And now that all the pay services are in varying degrees of financial trouble and many projects already commissioned have been put on hold until the cash flow situation improves, the situation is even more gloomy.



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# Portrait of an industry

by Natalie Maclean

As early as the 1940's, Walt Disney Productions recognized what Alberta had to offer the film industry: the great outdoors in every camouflage Mother Nature had devised. So the crews trekked west from Calgary, travelling past 80 kilometers of prairie to the foothills of the Canadian Rockies and the Rafter Six Ranch. Disney's wilderness series was only the beginning.

Stan Cowley is the present owner of the 60-guest capacity, two-storey ranch-house which has housed Marilyn Monroe, Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman. Cowley's family is part of Alberta's history and, as a legacy to that history, he has a profound appreciation for the country around him and the process of free enterprise. In this respect Cowley typifies the Albertan character; in many others respects he is unique - an honorary Indian chief, bit-part actor and location scout. His ranch is equipped with all the comforts of home away from home as well as horses, buggies, stage coaches, western and Indian gear, not to mention camera-wise relatives and ranch hands. Close-by are raging rivers, placid streams, wooded terrain and mountain bluffs.

Great scenery, yes but what's this province got that would make it more attractive than Yugoslavia to an international producer or encourage home-grown involvement in the industry? Part of the answer lies just a few kilometers up the road from Rafter Six in Canmore, Alberta.

## The necessary components

Canmore (population 4,000), nestled between the Three Sisters Mountain and the Spray Lakes, is the home of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation. Established in 1981 under the auspices of the Alberta Government Department of Economic Development, the AMPDC office opened in October, 1982.

The corporation resulted from a task force report recommendation which had been completed by the department of Economic Development in '76. Primarily as a result of that report and in conjunction with the Alberta govern-

ment's policy of diversifying the economic base of the province, the motion picture industry has been blessed with advantages unavailable elsewhere in the country.

AMPDC's major role is to provide development financing for motion picture production. The bank has resources of \$3 million and provides loans for up to 60% of total pre-production needs to a maximum of \$200,000. Secondary objectives to be developed over time include marketing and production financing assistance.

Content must be deemed Canadian and the motion picture should be of significant benefit to Alberta, i.e. 50% of personnel should be Albertan, 50% of below-the-line production costs are to be spent on Alberta residents or services and Alberta locations are important. Producers should be residents of the province for at least one year although this can be waived depending on other factors. Loan applications are judged on commercial viability, permanent financing sources and marketing strategy.

Repayment is required prior to principal photography.

Canmore looks like a typical western, country town. But it's a town where speculation has always been a second industry because it sits just outside both the Kananaskis Provincial Park and the Banff National Park, prime year-round resort locations. The industry no doubt will peak now that the 1988 Olympics are a reality. So it seemed apt enough to place the AMPDC office in this speculative atmosphere in the heart of the Canadian Rockies. The AMPDC is housed in one of the newest buildings on 8th Street (otherwise known as Main Street) and its offices are tastefully decorated in a western folk art motif which sanely does not try to compete with the panoramic views in the windows.

Lorne MacPherson is the Corporation's president. For 15 years prior to his appointment he practised entertainment law and ran a production company. Over lunch in one of Canmore's new cafes he discussed the components needed to make film a viable industry in

the province.

Five essentials made up the package: entrepreneurial spirit, technical and crafts people, the creative element, services and, of course, money. With a dramatic history of entrepreneurial success intrinsic to the fibre of Alberta, MacPherson feels the AMPDC will give local producers the impetus to put together the sophisticated business packages required for high-budget feature films. The technical and crafts components are already in place as is the creative element. MacPherson stresses that some of Canada's best writers are home-grown. (I later learn that he is on the board of the Edmonton-based Television and Film Institute. Run by Jaron Summers as a non-profit organization and supported in part by the Alberta Government and Allarco Broadcasting, TFI offers screenwriting seminars and film and video production workshops.)

Film industry services are available to fill present needs and these would naturally expand as the business did. As for money, 50% of the national total invested under the provisions of the CCA in the past five years was put up by Albertans! "Of course," continues MacPherson, "it's not the gravy train it was a couple of years ago, but there's still a lot of money in this province."

He goes on to provide some of the details of the Corporation's workings. The loans are at prime, AMPDC takes to equity share in the venture, and the content and residency clauses are flexible. As of April 1983, 13 loans had been approved and seven advances made.<sup>1</sup> An advisory group of five local producers (Eda Lishman, Doug Hutton, Arvi Liimatainen, Nick Bakyta, and Ron Brown) comments on budgets and technical aspects of the applications. Approvals are given by AMPDC's board which includes Orville Kope of CHAT Television, Lucille Wagner of Alberta Theatre Projects, Aristedes Gazetes of the University of Lethbridge, Ken Chapman of the Edmonton law firm Chapman, Finley and Gawne, and Tom Peacock of the University of Alberta.

**Developing entrepreneurs**  
Wayne Long and Ed McMullan of the Faculty of Management, University of

● Official portrait: the crew of *The Wild Pony*, a national premiere.



Photo: George Webber

Natalie Maclean is a Calgary freelance writer.

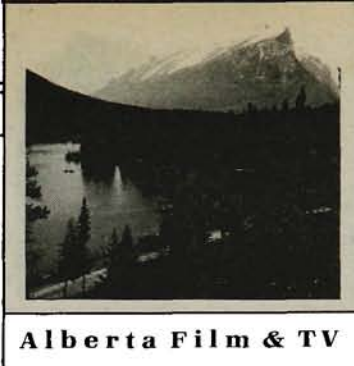
Calgary, are co-authors of "Towards Professionalizing Entrepreneurship." "Entrepreneurship", they state, "involves three things: 1) uncertainty and risk; 2) business knowledge and 3) creativity and innovation."

Long and McMullan appreciate the complexities facing the entrepreneur in 1983:

"We live in a world that is becoming increasingly more technologically sophisticated and internationally more interdependent. These changes are im-

Alberta has to offer.

Externally produced features such as *Superman* which caused as much excitement as the Stampede last summer proved beneficial to the local industry in a number of ways. Local technical and crafts personnel (both IATSE members and freelancers) got another major credit to bolster resumé's while the publicity created enhanced the year-round work of the Alberta Motion Picture Industry Association (AMPIA). In a recent promotion Charles Porlier, freelance



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save Thunder Road from financial difficulties.

Nick Bakyta, president of AMPIA and owner of Tinsel Media, echoes a gloomy present for Alberta producers. Economic factors have forced most producers to concentrate on bread-and-butter work. Tinsel itself seems to have weathered the storm and plans to start the National Film Board co-production *River of Bones* in August. A second co-production titled *Blood, Sweat and Cheers* will be undertaken with the CTV affiliate CFRN Television of Edmonton. It will be a pilot for a sports-oriented TV series. An AMPDC loan provided the start-up cash.

So things have been tough for the industry, but there's good news. The Conference Board of Canada predicts that the Alberta recovery would be underway in 1983 to the tune of a 4.7% increase in production (for the province as a whole), a sharp turnaround from 1982's decline of 3.6%.

#### Success stories

The industry's creative activity is evident through events such as the annual AMPIA awards competition which had over 70 entries in '82. The mosaic of factors that have fostered and maintained this level of activity despite the poor economy indicates that there is a firm foundation of indigenous producers. And it is growing...

Bob Barclay has re-settled in Calgary, his hometown and his first venture was to produce a million-dollar feature on the Lizzie Borden murders financed by CFCN Television.<sup>2</sup> Highlights of Barclay's career include the first colour film for the CBC, the Telephone Pavilion extravaganza at Expo '67 and Disney's *Magic Carpet Tour Around the World*. With the Lizzie Borden film in the can he has plans for a big budget feature analogous to *The Wizard of Oz* using state-of-the-art effects.

Barclay met director Silvio Narizzano in the late '40s in Ottawa where they were both involved in repertory theatre.



Special effects turn Calgary TV's Gil Tucker into a 90-year-old.

Photos: N. Maclean

posing greater demands upon individuals and organizations wishing to turn an idea into a successful business venture." There is recognition as well that technical business expertise is only part of the package and "should be subordinated within a framework of creative expression."

In Australia, new venture formation workshops have become a nation-wide phenomenon and the U.S. has national innovation centres such as the high-technology centre at the University of Utah. Canadian universities offer a variety of new venture-type courses, but the proposal put forth by Long and McMullan to teach entrepreneurship at the post-graduate level is indicative of the value Albertans place on entrepreneurship and the framework established to nurture it.

The shining star in Alberta's entrepreneurial arena is producer Eda Lishman. Her first major production, *The Wild Pony*, premiered nationally on First Choice this spring. The pre-sale to the pay-TV station was a coup she fully appreciates from her perspective as a female western-based producer. Described by a colleague as "a first-class filmmaker who is artistically honest, perceptive and intuitive," Lishman is setting standards for local producers by creating low-cost (\$800,000 for *The Wild Pony*), high-quality films that have a waiting market.

Two other productions are in the planning stages: *The Unseelie*, a horror picture to be directed by Randy Cheveldave later this year, and a feature Lishman describes as "a glamorous picture" written by and starring Marilyn Lightstone, the star of *Wild Pony*.

Lishman emphasizes her commitment to the province and the industry. She knows she has the talent to develop people in the trade and to exploit - in the best possible sense - the potential

special effects make-up artist, 'aged' Gil Tucker, host of "1040 Tonight", CFAC Television, before a live audience in the make-up department of Calgary's downtown Eaton's. While AMPIA's focus is strictly Albertan, the impact of high profile features for both its members and the average person in the street can't be denied.

#### Present gloom, future recovery

Technical crews in the province have kept their hopes up but overall 1981-1982 hasn't been a financially successful year. Barry Merrill, business agent for production with the Calgary local of IATSE, stated that the production work which usually makes up 50 to 60% of the members' annual employment, has for the past two years been only 20%.

Equipment suppliers agree that 1982 brought down times but vary in their present appraisals. The Calgary branch of the William F. White Company, whose head office is in Toronto, has experienced continuous growth since its opening just a few years ago but a spokesman said that competition is much keener these days. M.T.M. Equipment (owned by Melvin T. Merrills, president of IATSE) the largest locally-owned supply house, has found business slow through '82 and into the first quarter of '83.

The recessionary effects experienced by the rest of the country hit Alberta late, making the recovery time lag as well. Thunder Road Studio which is equipped with a film lab and sound recording facilities was caught in the down-turn and has gone into receivership. David Bromwich of Ernst & Whinney Inc. is now acting as the receiver/manager. The intention of the receiver is to continue to run the company until alternative financial arrangements can be made and to actively pursue expansion possibilities. Bromwich noted that as of February there had been an upswing in business but that it had come too late to

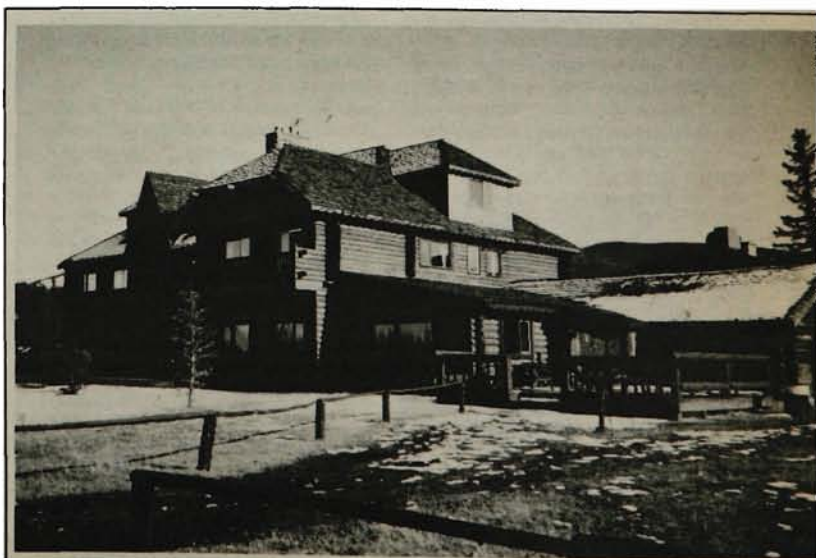
In recent years they had decided to do a film together and the Lizzie Borden film was the result. Barclay found CFCN's commitment to the project "extraordinary" and Narizzano described the venture as "... one of the easiest shoots I ever had." High praise for the talented crew who were relatively inexperienced in undertaking of this magnitude.

Barclay also managed to locate an ideal studio for the film whose single largest budget item was sets. ATCO, the Calgary-based international shelter corporation, uses former airplane hangers as a construction facility. With the economic slump, many of ATCO's tradesmen were left with time on their hands, making the deal Barclay offered a made-to-measure one. The crew moved into a hanger on the ATCO grounds which came with 24-hour security, on-site medical support and experienced woodworkers who built and decorated the lavish sets.

For Barclay, the province offers almost everything: talented writers, cooperative professional personnel, great locales and, at the ATCO site, a perfect studio. The hang-up is effective distribution. Having worked first hand with Buena Vista, Disney's worldwide distribution arm, Barclay appreciates the complexities of distribution. CFCN will first air the Lizzie Borden film through the CTV system; after that the sales department will look towards international distribution, especially in Britain where Narizzano's work has a very large audience.

A new process using 16mm negative film which is transferred to video allowed the editing to be completed ten days after the shooting ended. Narizzano supervised the work and then returned to Spain to begin shooting John Wain's *High Shoulders* for the BBC. As part of his investment in coming to Alberta, Narizzano says he "hopes to develop a continuing source of future work."

No doubt Maxine Samuels has similar thoughts. Known most widely for her CBC television series *The Forest Rangers* and *Adventures in Rainbow Country*, Samuels also has a major feature film to her credit, *The Pyx* and recently completed an 'Adventures in History' series for the NFB. Alberta has been home for almost two years now where she has joined forces with Les Kimber to begin Four Nine Productions. Their first project is the story of John Ware adapted from the work by Alberta historian Grant McEwan. Ware, dubbed by the Indians a



The Rafter Six Ranch: Marilyn Monroe and Robert Redford called it home

"black whiteman", was a runaway slave who escaped to Canada and became a successful cattle rancher, contributing a great deal to the province's development. The details of his life are fascinating but the substance of his story comes from the type of man he was.

Samuels has negotiated a pre-sale to First Choice, but because of the scope of the effort (approximately \$3-3.5 million) she is also looking south of the border to Home Box Office.



## Alberta Film & TV

Her repeated work with outdoor stories is no accident. She is an avid rider who

# Independent thinking

by Anna Gronau

*Technologically Native*, the first workshop production of the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers, had its premiere on June 10. And while that in itself was something to celebrate (for the members and Board of Directors of this co-op) the event had wider significance. It was concrete evidence of the success of new directions and philosophies affirmed and developed by the Society over the past year (In May, 1982 the current Board - Marcella Bienvenue, Douglas Berquist, Andy Jaremko, Leila Sujir and Wendy Hill-Tout - were elected as a slate at a time when the organization was suffering from a lack of identity and purpose.)

To be sure, much had been accomplished since the initial meeting in 1977 established the Calgary Film Group, incorporated later under its present name. A permanent location with office, production areas and an excellent screening-room had been set up, and a number of productions had been completed. But cohesion had become difficult to maintain. The original members were all technically proficient filmmakers, many of them already working in media-related organizations. When sincerely interested but less experienced people began to join, it became much more difficult for the co-op to serve all members equally. On top of that was a problem Marcella Bienvenue, the Society's current co-ordinator, attributes to the very broad interpretation that can be given to the word "independent" when applied to filmmaking. "We had to keep telling people this is not a place for hobbyists" she recalls. On the other end of the scale, filmmakers who were "independent" in the sense of having no affiliation to large institutions or organizations, but whose work was indisputably commercial in intent were also using co-op facilities.

C.S.I.F. members were also beginning to realize that the group's dispa-

rate functions were making their public image unclear. And in Alberta, where arts funding seems to be at a very formative stage, groups lobbying for public money have to present themselves in a forceful, clear and visible manner. According to Bienvenue, provincial funding bodies, unlike the Canada and Ontario Arts Councils, tend to regard film only in terms of an industry. Independent and experimental film are new and not well understood in the province. "It's hard to be taken seriously," she claims. "Our values are seen to be out of step." A strong case for non-industrial film had to be made, and new approaches that would help to drive home the point had to be discovered.

Leila Sujir, who has been on the Board of Directors of the C.S.I.F. since it began, also sits on the Board of the Independent Film Alliance du Cinéma Indépendant, a national federation of film co-ops. Some of the Federation's first conferences provided an opportunity to meet other like-minded filmmakers and to see how the co-ops had successfully (or otherwise) dealt with problems. Another model was the Association of National Non-profit Artist-run Centres. Both Sujir, a writer, and Bienvenue, a performance artist, had previously worked for Artons, an artist-run organization now operating in Toronto. They felt that strategies borrowed from the artist-run centre could be successfully transferred to this filmmaker-run enterprise.

In discussion of the C.S.I.F.'s policies of the last 12 months with co-op members, the term "arts context" seems to come up again and again, along with apologies for the inadequacy of the phrase which, like "independent", could easily become a catch-all. But the difference lies in the assiduous program of implementation that has been initiated and followed through. The co-op has gone back to its original mandate of providing a means for the production of films of social and cultural import, "in an indigenous context." Hobbyists are out. So are commercial films - regardless of how independent they may be. Marcella Bienvenue is quick to explain this position. "Most independents would view their films as being creative or culturally orientated, and

chooses her home address on the basis of its proximity to both the office and the stables. Her goals as a producer sound simplistic: to produce the thing well, and make sure it's viewed. She backs the statement up with an air of conviction and toughness that tells you she'll succeed.

### Developing writers

The quality and quantity of local material available to producers is due in part to the long-standing writer's program run by Alberta Culture. Grants are awarded annually to novice, advanced and senior authors to a maximum of \$15,000. For 1982-83, \$120,000 was distributed to 40 writers. Culture's support is typified in the Sharon Riis story. In 1974 she received a \$500 grant to revise the novel, "The True Story of Ida Johnson." Three years after its publication in 1976 she got another grant to turn the novel into a script. The result is the movie *Latitude 55* which was produced by Fil Fraser of Edmonton and directed by John Juliani.

David Scorgie, assistant director, Film and Literary Arts, Alberta Culture, lists what's happening now and what his office hopes to achieve. Writing workshops on various literary topics and at different levels of expertise are held throughout the province. A prime example is the two-day script writing symposium to be held in early summer at the University of Lethbridge. Support also goes to the Television Film Institute and to a program in the schools which fosters film literacy. (Not surprisingly, Stats Canada pegs Albertans with the highest level of movie attendance per capita in the country.)

Another integral part of the program is the "Alberta Authors Bulletin" which is distributed to any writer in the province free of charge six times a year. It discusses markets, workshops, trends and opportunities and provides an invaluable link for the province's literati.

What Scorgie hopes to add as early as the spring of '84, pending approval, is a Film Arts Program. It would have roughly the same structure as the writer's pro-

gram, except that its recipients would be film and video artists who hadn't as yet established a track record. This would be an entry program to develop production and direction talent.

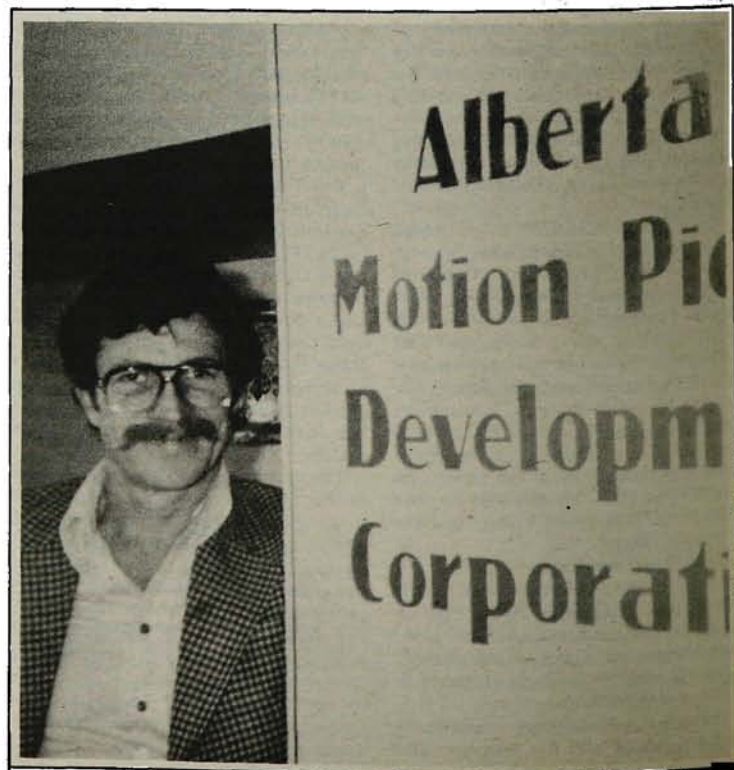
### Special events

The services essential to the industry come in all forms. For international and local producers, the Banff Television Festival is an ideal opportunity to make contacts and do business in a relaxed atmosphere. Carrie Hunter, the Festival's executive director, worked closely with AMPIA this year to ensure that attention was given to areas of concern to Canadian producers, as well as focussing on issues that make the Festival appealing world-wide. Scheduled for August 14-20 it includes sessions on marketing, international co-productions, ratings and how they affect what we see. Special guests are American series writer Stephen Cannell, Pat Ferns of Primedia and Harold Greenberg of Astral Bellevue Pathé, Inc. Other notables who will be attending are: Murray Chercover, president, CTV; Bill Armstrong, executive vice-president, CBC; Colin Watson, president of Rogers Cable Systems Inc.; Don MacPherson, president, First Choice; Mark Fowler of the American FCC; and John Miessel, chairman of the CRTC.

The Alberta Government is one of the Festival's many sponsors and will contribute \$200,000 to this year's event.

For the province that housed the Commonwealth Games, runs the greatest outdoor show in the world, is home to Superman and has a lion's share of year-round tourism, providing support services to any size movie venture is second nature. For out of province producers, Calgary has a Film Industry Development office run by David Crowe. Crowe's job is to cut through red tape and smooth the way for those unfamiliar with the Calgary scene. It also means advertising the city internationally as a production site and generally promoting available services and locales.

Crowe keeps in close contact with Bill Marsden, Director of Film Industry



Headed by Lorne MacPherson, the AMPDC shows consistent growth



● Producer Maxine Samuels: making the future happen

Development with the provincial Department of Economic Development. One aspect of Marsden's job is to provide the same service Crowe does, except on a provincial basis. Other duties include liaison at trade fairs, development of new markets, scouting for opportunities and determining what could be most beneficial for industry development. In the past six months Marsden has appointed consultants in England and Los Angeles to be marketing resources for local producers.

For Marsden the future of the Alberta film industry looks rosy.<sup>3</sup> The local producer is being given expertise and accessible start-up cash while 'outsiders' are actively sought and sold on a land that has no sales tax, a favourable rate of exchange, and available personnel cognizant of their needs.

### Money finally

Money is the remaining element. Producers have been looking to national pay-TV for that resource and First Choice was first in laying big money on the line. Superchannel's approach has been perhaps more cautious. Ed Richardson, director of creative development, indicated that as of mid-April the company had paid out just under \$1 million in production and development fees. About three hundred proposals had been received and each one rejected had been given a detailed evaluation. Some of those accepted were two major entertainment programs, a 90-minute dramatic series, sports specials other than hockey and three children's programs at varying stages of development.

Limited resources may also become available from the government through Vencap Equities Alberta Ltd. Vencap is just being set up by the government and estimates of its investment budget range from \$500,000-\$5 millions. Money will be invested in areas other than conventional oil and gas, real estate and banking. While policy hasn't been finalized, a diversified risk portfolio might include film investment.

There are also the men and women in the street. While Canadians are notorious for banking their dollars rather than investing them, Alberta was the exception before the recession hit. Hot investment tips were bandied about on the ski slopes, over bridge hands and at the local watering hole. That atmosphere is dead today. Many of those hot tips led to financial disasters such as the multi-million dollar Reed affair. However, what is now available to the legitimate producer is an investment-wise population. Cautious yet, but not unwilling to take a well-explored risk.<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusion

The big picture of the Alberta film industry shows it's made up of many small components and no one element, film or producer will be responsible for its success. The combination rather than any one particular item may enable Alberta to develop an industry that is more than various large fish in a small pond somewhere west of Toronto. People from all walks of life in the province want a film industry to happen. For its part, the government has provided incentives in line with its free enterprise policy. Large-budget international features have given technical and crafts personnel opportunities to demonstrate their skills. And certain producers like Lishman and Barclay have shown it can be done.

Bill Marsden can't find anyone to give him odds... the future does look rosy. ●

### Notes

1. With a total of 21 projects approved by end-June (16 to Alberta productions and five to out-of-Alberta producers), AMPDC is showing consistent growth. Eleven features have received or been approved for funding for a total of \$700,000; four TV series for \$116,000; three TV pilots for \$70,000; and three video projects had pre-production budgets approved to \$204,000. Total approved for pre-production budgets: \$1.2 million. AMPDC has received applications for 64 projects to date. In '83 two features and one TV pilot will go into production.

2. A legal case in connection with the film's title and authorship was recently settled out of court. As a result the film's original title will be changed,



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though no decision has been reached as of this writing

3. While no statistics are kept on levels of U.S. investment in Alberta film production, industry sources reveal that foreign production in the last three years is "up and increasing", as one source put it.

4. While public issues in film are not being pushed by brokers these days due primarily to the economic climate, the poor payback record and the 50% CCA, there has been an increase in private placement in films. One industry source knew of six probable private placements in film for '83. The difficulty with keeping track of private film placements in Alberta is that these investments are not specifically identified as films.

often they are," she states, "but in many cases the creativity is associated with trends and/or giving the public what it wants. And in most cases the bottom line is making money." The bottom line for C.S.I.F. productions now is exploration. And members who do commercial work are encouraged to keep it entirely separate from their work at the co-op.

A concerted effort is being made by members to educate themselves and their community in "what is possible and what is contemporary," in Leila Sujir's words. An exhibition series this winter featured personal visits by several filmmakers from The Funnel in Toronto. A quarterly tabloid-format film journal that will explore media arts with particular emphasis on criticism as a part of the art process is also in the works. Plans for the future include an artist-in-residence program that would bring out-of-town filmmakers to the co-op to produce new works, an expanded exhibition schedule, and a curated Super 8 series featuring work by C.S.I.F. members and other local artists. Liaisons, both formal and informal have been set up with other Calgary artist-run groups - both to encourage the exchanges of ideas, services and audiences, and to lobby for more adequate arts funding on a local and provincial level.

But perhaps the most important step has been the emphasis on "workshop productions." The new Board instituted a tiered membership policy which provided a "flow-through" apprenticeship structure. More accomplished members can receive considerable support from the co-op for a project in the form of funds and labour. Less skilled members can learn the art and craft of filmmaking through the hands-on experience of crewing on these productions. Earlier introductory technical workshops had been well-attended but had not resulted in the making of films. The new

system, however, launches newer members into the middle of the creative process. Members may also pursue projects apart from the "workshop production" scheme provided they stay within the co-op's mandate and agree to give the organization privileged access to the finished work. But the priority is always the workshop productions, which, obviously, kill two birds with one stone. In fact, they epitomize the "economy of scale" typical of the new thinking at C.S.I.F. - big budgets aren't possible, yet a lot of activity happens due to the effort and energy of people working very carefully with the money and resources that they have.

*Technologically Native* - the first workshop production to be completed - is a 16mm film, 13 minutes in length, that was made for about \$4000. Leila Sujir and Douglas Berquist, collaborators on the film, call it a "narrative document." As in some of the works of Michael Snow and of Jean-Luc Godard, the intellectual territory is language. "The figures in the film become tangled in language and attempt to discover how they and we structure our world," explains Sujir. *Technologically Native* is definitely not a film by or for hobbyists. Instead, it is a mature and sophisticated example of independence - an independence of thinking.

The second C.S.I.F. workshop production, *Desire*, by Wendy Hill-Tout is now in post-production. And the first edition of the film journal will be out shortly. It looks like Alberta's funding agencies aren't the only ones who will be getting the C.S.I.F. message loud and clear. Marcella Bienvenue summed up this message rather well when she said "C.S.I.F. is a place where ideas may develop free of the constraints imposed by an industry. We are interested in getting the work out, getting it seen, and being part of an ongoing process which will contribute to Alberta's coming of age, culturally."

● Technological natives: Marcella Bienvenue and Douglas Berquist



Photo: Berquist/Sujir



Alberta Film & TV

# 'A' as in Alberta actor

by Linda Kupecek

"If you're an actor, what are you doing in Alberta?" laughed the Toronto talent agent.

Good question. The popular viewpoint in central Canada is that every Canadian actor eventually migrates to Toronto... to wait for calls from agents, to wait for news of films in the trades, to wait in the lounge of the CBC, or to wait tables between gigs. The waiting game, familiar to actors around the continent, is played in Alberta too, but with slightly different rules.

The third largest talent pool in the country is located in the Alberta ACTRA membership. In addition to the ACTRA Writers' Guild Alberta Branch, the Northern Alberta Performers Branch, and the Southern Alberta Branch (a small composite group) represent performers. About 200 actors in Edmonton and about 100 in Calgary combine to present an impressive array of speaking credits in major feature films - most of them American and British.

Happily, in recent years, more Canadian films have exploited the talent of Alberta with the open-mindedness of the Hollywood crowd. In the past, films originating in Toronto tended to arrive in Alberta, bringing with them everything but the coffee and the horses, and tossing but a few crumbs of extra work to Alberta actors. Now, times have changed, and a producer begins to weigh the cost of airfare of a Toronto actor flown in for one line against the skills of an Alberta actor with substantial credits.

Don Buchsbaum, production manager of *Running Brave*, which shot on location in Edmonton and Drumheller last fall, commented during that shoot, "I'm surprised at the depth of the talent resource here," referring to the active theatre scene, and the number of working actors.

Actors here are subject to the whims of the business, and, like actors elsewhere, must endure discouraging periods of 'creative unemployment', but at times, the scene here is surprisingly busy.

Generally, actors in Alberta survive on a combination of activities: theatre,

*Linda Kupecek is an Alberta actress who recently played the young Doris in the Wendy Wacko film Doris McCarthy: Heart of a Painter.*

radio drama (for the good old CBC); educational television (for wonderful ACCESS, a major engager in Alberta); very occasional commercials; industrial and sponsored films and narrations (on anything from creative pipelining to job opportunities in Tuktoyaktuk); and... the occasional feature film.

Alberta's spectacular terrain and cooperative film offices have lured an impressive number of film and television productions to shoot on location in the province... and Alberta actors have benefited. Resumes here may sport credits of principal and supporting roles in, for example, *Superman*, *Superman III*, *Death Hunt*, *Amber Waves*, *Harry Tracy*, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*, *The Boy Who Talked to Badgers*, *Pioneer Woman*, *Skilift to Death*, *High Country*. And those films produced by Alberta companies and producers, *Why Shoot the Teacher?*, *Ghostkeeper*, *Powderheads*, *Marie-Anne*, *Hounds of Notre-Dame*, have spotlighted even more Alberta actors.

Jack Ackroyd, Elan Ross Gibson, Stephen Walsh, Dennis Robinson, Georgie Collins, Murray Ord, Darlene Bradley, Jan Miller, Stu Carson, Joanne Wilson, Sharon Bakker, Graham McPherson, Jeremy Hart, Frank Pellegrino, Bill Berry, Jack Goth, Joan Hurley, Alan Stebbings, Judith Mabey, Bill Dowson, Claire Caplan, Bill Meilen, Stephen Hair, Judith LeBane, Jim Roberts and Tantoo Martin may not be household names, but they are names that have popped up in the credits of a number of films.

*Superman III*, a Dovemead production opening in theatres in June, features a number of Alberta actors in speaking roles. English casting director Debbie McWilliams interviewed exhausting numbers of actors, and cast 22 from Calgary, including Gordon Signer as the mayor of Smallville, and Margaret Bard as the hysteric at the gas station.

"We were a little hesitant because Calgary isn't known as an acting centre", smiled associate producer Bob Simmonds during the *Superman III* shoot, "but Richard (Lester) was very happy with the local players."

More recently, Silvio Narizzano directed a TV-movie version of the Lizzie Borden story for producer Bob Barclay and

CFCN Television. "We spent four days in Toronto, interviewing the best actors", says Narizzano. "Finally, I said to Bob - 'There's nothing here that we haven't seen out west. We're just being elitist in Toronto.'" In particular, Narizzano praises Maureen Thomas of Calgary, who played the leading role in the production.

Tom Peacocke, who played Pere Athol Murray in *The Hounds of Notre-Dame*, won the 1980 Genie Award for best actor, despite his Edmonton address, an indication that the members of the Academy of Canadian Cinema, do respect achievement over geography... an award which should have squelched rumours

isolation of the regions... and the very real disadvantage of the distance from those major casting calls in Toronto.

The reality of the business may dictate that talent, in order to advance and grow, must elevate itself to more sophisticated markets, and most actors in Alberta are aware of the potential in other centres. On the other hand, some artists may argue that if all talent migrates to a central point to homogenize the national dream, then who will be left to interpret the regions?

Also, there may be various reasons for maintaining an Alberta base: a spouse or family entrenched in western soil;



• A depth of talent resources: Jude Beny, Jeremy Hart and Elan Ross Gibson

of prejudice against the regional actor.

But an earlier Cinema Canada article quoted a Toronto producer on Peacocke: "He's an actor, for God's sake, and he's from Edmonton. What does he know?"... a statement which capsulizes the double strikes against the regional performer.

The performer in Canadian film is often the last consideration. ("What! We're shooting tomorrow?? We gotta cast this!" or "You the actor? What? You wanna know which scene we're doing????") Add to that the supposed

love of the mountains and the space; a partisan loyalty to the West; a commitment to the regional artist; or, more crassly, and more practically, a sense of increased opportunities in some areas.

For example, an actor in Alberta may have auditioned for Lynn Stalmaster, Jennifer Shull, Debbie McWilliams, or Peter Hunt, Robert Altman, Silvio Narizzano, Joseph Sargent, Harvey Hart, Allan King, William Graham, to the astonishment and envy of many an actor with corresponding (or more impressive)

credits in Los Angeles. In the biggest pond of all, it may be difficult or impossible to get an audience with the reigning biggies. But in the relatively small pond of Alberta talent, there is more opportunity to circulate. Perhaps, in Toronto, the maze of red tape woven by harassed casting directors would exclude from the call the same actors who were cast in Alberta.

In Alberta, the best known casting director is Bette Chadwick of The Other Agency Casting Limited in Edmonton. Chadwick has just expanded into Calgary with representative Diane Rogers, to cover the province. If she is not available, a producer or out-of-province casting director may simply call one of the ACTRA offices and hold an extensive open call of the ACTRA list. (ACTRA does not cast, only supplies a list of

You never know when you might spy an actor born, raised, trained, or still working in Alberta. Fay Wray was born in Cardson, then fell into the arms of the first King Kong. Rod Cameron roamed Alberta before he roamed B-westerns. Conrad Bain graced Calgary stages before starring in U.S. sitcoms. Stuart Gillard, raised in Alberta, trained at the University of Alberta, now is busy as an actor/writer/director in Los Angeles.

Doug Paulson, one of the most striking of homegrown stars, has zoomed from Edmonton to CTV as the host of *Thrill of a Lifetime*. Sherry Miller, the Spumante Bambino blonde, may land back in Edmonton occasionally for a Stage West gig.

Meanwhile, back on home turf, pay-TV projects perk up the careers of the local talent. *Bush Pilots*, a three-part



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recently co-starred in *In the Fall* for CKNB, Winnipeg, as well as playing featured roles in two CBC Catalyst Productions. "Here, the actors are starting to take charge of their own lives. And when there is no work, they are making work for themselves!"

Perhaps the pioneer spirit of Alberta inspires enterprise. Many actors, particularly women (could this be because of the limited roles available for women?)

highly successful actor/director workshop with several high profile imports.

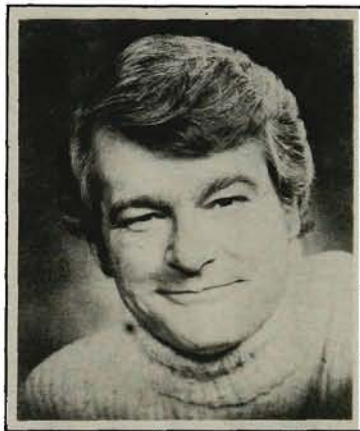
Margaret Bard has expanded her horizons beyond her major career as an actress, into directing (for theatre) and writing (an audition book with co-authors Miriam Newhouse and Peter Messaline; and a rather juicy novel published under a pseudonym). Elan Ross Gibson and Jude Beny (*Ticket to Heaven*) produced their own backers' audition of *Getting Out*.

And Greg Rogers, already a busy actor, has taken on the assignment of radio drama producer at CBC Calgary.

"I could sit and wait by the phone till the cows come home in Toronto", says one actor. "In Alberta, I have more control over my life. I can try to get my own projects rolling... even if I don't succeed... at least I will have tried."



● Maureen Thomas



● Tommy Banks



● Linda Kupecek



● Frank C. Turner

members and photos.) Both the Northern Alberta Performers Branch and the Southern Alberta Branch publish talent catalogues available to production companies. Also, Chadwick has her upbeat book, *The Face File*.

But, despite this, the meatier roles are more often cast in Toronto before the director even looks at Alberta talent. And many actors in Alberta must frequently weigh their reasons for being here against the frustration of being excluded from major calls. "I couldn't have got the Narizzano shoot if I had been in Toronto," believes Maureen Thomas. "Yet, on the other hand, too often, unless you are addressed in Toronto, they won't even look at you."

Ironically, some Alberta actors who have tested the waters in both L.A. and Toronto report that their resumés and origins are treated far more favorably and courteously on Sunset Boulevard than on Yonge Street.

But the Canadian aspect is brightening. Not only are more Toronto-based films auditioning (if not casting), in Alberta, but even the CBC (once notorious for shooting in Alberta with nary a line to local talent) moved into southern Alberta in 1982 with the splashy special *Chautauqua Girl*, casting a number of Calgary actors in major roles. Margaret Barton, trained in England and popular on Calgary stages, played the banker's wife, while Douglas Riske, the artistic director of Alberta Theatre Projects, played the minister.

Meanwhile, *Wild Pony*, which recently aired on First Choice, featured a number of Alberta actors in prominent roles, including Paul Jolicoeur, Jack Ackroyd and Murray Ord, all with extensive feature credits. Ackroyd's background includes a principal role in *Harry Tracy*, while Jolicoeur shone as *Squeaky in High Country*.

pilot for pay-TV, featured many Alberta performers, including Frank C. Turner (who registered stongly as Bruce Dern's farmer friend in *Harry Tracy*) Francis Damberger (winner of the Best Actor Award at the 1983 AMPIA Awards for his work in *Workers at Risk*) Jan Miller, Greg Rogers and Fred Keating.

The effervescent Keating also co-hosts *Movie Week* for Superchannel. *Lost Satellite*, another Superchannel offering, features Lorraine Behnan, Joan Hurley and Christopher Gaze (now in Vancouver).

Despite the range of work available, from a shot at a major feature like *Superman III* to CBC Catalyst Productions to narrations to sponsored safety films, at times an actor may have to diversify out of necessity. A number of actors have branched into other fields (i.e. writing, directing) in order to survive, both financially and creatively.

"I'm in Alberta because I find Toronto a trap," says Elan Ross Gibson, who

are becoming active, not passive, in their enforced role as struggling artist.

For example, Jan Miller of Edmonton has organized and produced a number of workshops and seminars aimed at the professional film actor, including a

So, why Alberta? Because acting is a tough race no matter which city you choose, but, at least in Alberta, it is possible to change horses, ride several at once... or even rent the racetrack and run the show.

## Blue ribbon director

Anne Wheeler, producer-director with the National Film Board North West Production Studio in Edmonton, has once more imprinted herself on the international map. Her film, *A War Story*, has won the blue ribbon for Best Historical Documentary Feature at the American Film Festival in New York.

*A War Story*, shot in 1979-80 for \$250,000, is an emotionally powerful docudrama based on the diaries of Canadian doctor Ben Wheeler, who recorded his four years of caring for fellow P.O.W.s in a mining camp on Formosa. The doctor was also Wheeler's father, and *A War Story* is her tribute to his years of pain, shared through his secret diary.

The film also won the Best Overall Production Award at the 1982 AMPIA Awards, and has been picked up by PBS as a fund-raising film for Christmas.

"It would be philosophically wrong for me to be making films about people and regions that I don't care deeply about," says Wheeler, whose other films include *Teach Me to Dance*, *Great Grandmother*, and *Augusta*. "I'm in Alberta because I try to make the best films I can, and this is where I can make them. I came into films because I opposed people



coming here to make statements about Alberta when they didn't know anything about Alberta."

In Wheeler's future is a feature which will reflect her western sensibility. She is slated to direct *Horizon*, a feature based on the classic Canadian novel. *As For Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross, to be produced by Margret Kopala of Maggie's Movies, an Edmonton-based production company.



● From Catalyst Television's *Suicide*





Alberta Film & TV

# What this country really needs is more foreign television

by Jerry Ezekiel

The ingratitude of it all!

Here I sit with a veritable smorgasbord of electronic goodies at my fingertips – an array of programs and options to appease, if not overwhelm, the most gluttonous video junkie.

ABC, CBC, CTV, CBS, ITV, NBC, PBS, and a significant chunk of the rest of the alphabet. And pay-TV on top of that, and a VCR to put the icing on the cake – so I can rent movies or “time shift” television programs. (Such a device becomes a necessity of life when, for example, you find it mildly inconvenient to watch *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* on one of the 35 occasions it was offered during a single month.)

Surely the Golden Age of Home Entertainment is upon us, and only the incorrigibly cranky would dare complain. True, there is the vexing problem of Canadian program production, but that too will be resolved in the fullness of time or in the next world, whichever comes first. What more could a person want?

Well, for starters, how about more foreign programming?

More foreign programming on Canadian television? It isn't enough that we get the best (and the worst) of Hollywood piped into our living rooms twenty-four hours a day? It isn't enough that we get *Fantasy Island*, *The Love Boat*, *Dallas*, *Hill Street Blues*, and enough *M\*A\*S\*H* to make *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* look like a rare occurrence by comparison?

No, it isn't enough. Not nearly enough. And I offer as a case in point the story of Miki Sawada.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, during the American occupation of Japan, Mrs. Sawada founded an orphanage to shelter and care for the illegitimate, unwanted, and abandoned offspring of Japanese women who had “fraternized” with American soldiers.

Over 30 years later, camera crews

from the Nippon Television Network travelled 250,000 miles to track down many of those children who had been adopted and had grown up abroad. The program which resulted, titled *The Children Have Crossed the Seven Seas*, had, as one of its irresistible emotional highlights, a satellite “reunion” between Mrs. Sawada, in a Tokyo studio, and her erstwhile children now living overseas.

Controversial though it was, *The Children Have Crossed the Seven Seas* was Japan's best documentary in 1978, and was one of the most talked about entries in the 1979 Banff Television Festival. It was a sensational story, in the best sense of that word, and it was more than just a television program: it was a program made possible by television and its related technologies.

That was four years ago, my first year selecting programs for the Banff Television Festival. Four years and many hundreds of program hours later, *The Children Have Crossed the Seven Seas* stands out as only one of too many vivid reminders of the elation and depression that make August such a strange month.

Elation, because I invariably get enthusiastic about the number of quality television programs out there; and depression when I get back to the real world of television and see what's on my own set – or, more precisely, what's not on my set.

The fact is, there is precious little foreign programming on Canadian television. Forget about *Poltergeist*, *Urban Cowboy*, *Three's Company* and *Dynasty*, all of which are as foreign as baseball and apple pie. Forget, too, about the occasional hit foreign film that makes it to pay-TV (*Das Boot* and *Montenegro*). And above all, forget about the wretchedly dubbed versions of Truffaut's *The Last Metro* and Costa-Gavras' *Z* so recently inflicted upon us.

I'm talking about television programs. Programs like *Lunatics*, *Lovers and Poets*, Andrea Andermann's meditation on the life and death of Pier Paolo Pasolini, which won the grand prize

and lots of critical acclaim at Banff in 1981.

Programs like Hungarian Television's dramatization of the life of Franz Listz, of T.F. 1's superb documentary series, *The Plant Adventure*.

Programs like Axel Engstand's *About Judges... And Other Sympathizers*, which documents the Nazi criminal justice system and its disturbing consequences in contemporary West German courts. Or Peter Morley's *Kitty: Return to Auschwitz*, which remains in my memory the single most vivid portrait of the horrors of that era, and you don't even see a corpse.

Morley, of course, is British, and we like to think we get at least a reasonable diet of British programs on our home screens. Yes, I know about *Upstairs, Downstairs*, *Brideshead Revisited*, and the rest. But how many of us have seen Dennis Potter's brilliant teleplay *Cream In My Coffee*, which won two prizes at Banff in 1981 and the coveted Prix Italia for drama in 1982?

And has anyone out there had a look at *Jean Michel Jarré – The China Concerts*, from Central Independent Television? It is not only a surprisingly imaginative record of the concerts themselves, but a portrait of China that is more convincing, original, and evocative than most conventional documentaries on the subject.

The list could go on, but the point has been made: there are a lot of terrific foreign programs – including American programs – that we just don't get to see on our home sets. What we are getting, with very few exceptions, is an exceedingly narrow selection of what is possible and what is available. That's what I call narrowcasting. For all the choices we think we have, or are told we have, our television sets make our movie theatres look cosmopolitan by comparison. (There's a dubious achievement for you.)

Undoubtedly, there are good, sensible and obvious reasons for this, all having to do with the economics of program

purchasing and questions – or assumptions – about public tastes and preferences.

While I'm not at all sure those assumptions have been tested often or adequately, I will readily admit that no one is going to make his fortune in this world programming, say, an off-beat documentary on Islamic women (*Daughters of the Nile*, from Dutch television).

Nor do I harbor any illusions of television audiences switching in droves from *The Winds of War* to a two-hour Yorkshire Television documentary on asbestos-related cancers (*Alice: A Fight for Life*).

But it does seem sad and aggravating that with so many hours of program time across so many channels, there are so few surprises and so little that deviates at all from conventional North American television fare – in substance or style.

Programs like *Quilts In Women's Lives*, by American filmmaker Pat Ferraro, or a 20-minute Soviet documentary on giant octopuses may not be a programmer's ticket to the mother lode. But they would be gems in anyone's schedule, and it's my guess that if you ever stumbled upon them by accident, you'd find them vastly more satisfying and entertaining than so many of the “fillers” currently on view.

Do Canadians want more foreign programming on their sets?

Would they tolerate it?

I don't know. But Francis Fox claimed recently that we “do not wish to exist in some sort of electronic cocoon, even if such a thing were possible.” He also said this: “Canadians, in broadcasting, as in other areas, want to benefit from the best the world has to offer.”

I wish that were true. Perhaps it is true.

But for now, it sure feels like a cocoon to me. The threads may be expensive and pretty, but the whole apparatus fits a bit too tightly four our creative and cultural well-being.

Jerry Ezekiel is program director for the Banff Television Festival.

# Boundless horizons : the filmmaking of Allan Kroeker

by Gene Walz



● Storytellers three : W.D. Valgardson (left), the camera and Allan Kroeker

Photos : Allan Kroeker

On the industrial equivalent of the endangered species list Manitoba filmmakers must rank somewhere between the whooping crane and the passenger pigeon. While the small, hardy flock has grown since a film co-op was formed and the NFB established a prairie production unit during the 1970s, every season still seems like open season. And survival of the fittest is the reality of every day.

For filmmaker Allan Kroeker this means working at every facet of the business - everything from screenwriter to soundman, from producer to editor, cinematographer, and director. It also means making movies for a variety of employers. "I've worked everywhere but in the real world," he jokes.

Fresh from film production courses at York University, Kroeker took a job with the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. From 1974 to 1977 he made films with titles like *Food Chain*, *Lambing and the Care of Lambs* (his favorite), *The Wheat Kings*, and *The Trouble with Sprayers* (which he claims is "the *If You Love This Planet* of ag films"). Not the sort of inspiring topics that guarantee Genie

Gene Walz is head of Film Studies at the University of Manitoba.

nominations, but good work for an apprenticeship. For these were all "shoe-string films" (the most expensive cost less than \$10,000); they provided the kind of keep-your-eye-on-the-budget discipline that still characterizes his work. His boss at the time, Vern McNair, remembers being so impressed with Kroeker's first weeks on the job that he wondered how long he'd stay. What caught his eye were the two distinctive cinematic qualities that were evident even in this early work: evocative, pictorially-stunning images and intelligent, understated editing.

In his spare time Kroeker made a series of "parables for real life" for Mennonite Brethren Communications. Again, economizing was the keynote. In 1976 Kroeker did 40 minutes of filmed parables for less than \$5,000; in 1978 he made nine 16mm parables for \$15,000.

The biggest budget, \$3500, was set aside for a wry Bergmanesque work called *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* Based on a Leo Tolstoy story, it follows the escalating greed of a land speculator who has made a deal with a mysterious *Seventh Seal*-type monk to keep all the land he can stake out in one day provided he returns to the original stake by sunset. In effect, the filmmaker struck the same deal. Because of the small budget, he had to shoot the film in the same amount of time it took the speculator to complete his circle - but without suffering the same ironic fate as the speculator. He barely made it.

*How Much Land* was planned as a "showcase" film. And it worked. Kroeker's skill as a filmmaker and his way with a budget quickly brought him to the attention of Mike Scott, newly installed as executive producer of the NFB's prairie

regional production unit and anxious to establish Winnipeg as a place that made dramas (and animation) as well as documentaries. He gave the young filmmaker the go-ahead to adapt a Rudy Wiebe story into a short mood-piece titled *Tudor King*. The Manitoba Department of Education was also interested in making fiction films - to be used in the province's schools. They rejected proposed adaptations of Chekov and other public-domain writers and recommended that local authors be used. On one of his frequent trips to the Interlake District for farming footage, Kroeker had casually picked up a book of stories by W.D. Valgardson. He proposed three stories, adapted one into the award-winning *God is Not a Fish Inspector*, and threw in as a bonus a documentary portrait of Valgardson called *Waiting for Morning*, ingeniously put together from out-takes and interviews.

With the success of these two ventures Kroeker was launched into his "Valgardson period." He filmed two more adaptations of the Gimli writer's stories for the NFB - *Capital* and *The Pedlar*, and one for CKND-TV - *The Catch* (based on "On Lake Therese"). Since then he has moved on to work by other Canadian writers,



● The merchant as a social outcast: Lubomir Mykytiuk in *The Pedlar*

all for CKND; he has written and produced *The Reunion* by Saskatoon writer Guy Vanderhaeghe (which won this year's Governor-General's award for fiction) and written and directed *Hunting Season* by Helen J. Rosta and *In the Fall* by Nova Scotian Alistair MacLeod. In addition, he has freelanced as an editor and/or cinematographer on several other prairie productions, notably films on the Edmonton games and W.O. Mitchell and *The Strongest Man in the World and Laughter in My Soul*, both by Halya Kuchmij. Withal Kroeker has probably been the busiest filmmaker in the province over the last ten years, with more films to his credit and more awards than anyone else. This isn't surprising to Mike Scott, who observes: "Allan lives filmmaking. More than anybody I've ever known, he's totally committed to it."

One of the secrets to Kroeker's success is undoubtedly his ability to keep two or three projects going at the same time. When he first started out as a filmmaker, he says, "I couldn't sleep some nights because I had so many things that I wanted to do." He still doesn't seem to get much sleep. Right now he is putting the finishing touches on *Hunting Season* and *In the Fall*, arranging to shoot a one-hour drama based on Gabrielle Roy's "The Tramp at the Door," and doing research on a documentary on prairie painter William Kurelik. Not bad for a kid who grew up in a virtually movie-free environment.

Manitoba is a province notable for its distinctive ethnic groups, several of them celebrated on film: the Ukrainians of Winnipeg's north-end, (*Paul Tomkowicz*, *Ted Baryluk's Grocery*); the largest French-Canadian community outside of Quebec; the largest Icelandic community outside Iceland (*Iceland on the Prairies*); and one of the largest concentrations (60,000) of Mennonites anywhere. An agrarian people who first came to the province from the Ukraine in the

1870s, the Mennonites live mainly in the rich farmbelt south of Winnipeg. But their names stand out in the city's phonebook as they would nowhere else: five columns for Wiebe, four for Dyck and Penner, three for Loewen, and two for Rempel and Enns and Kroeker.

Unlike the Amish, Hutterites, and Pennsylvania Dutch with whom they are sometimes confused, Mennonites have no distinguishing physical or cultural peculiarities: no beards, no bonnets or horsedrawn buggies, no aversions to electricity and other trappings of Western civilization. What has chiefly defined these followers of Menno Simons are their belief in anabaptism (baptism only when a person is mature enough to fully

understand) and their refusal of civil oaths and military service. Hard-working and family-oriented, they have had little truck until recently with the "frivolities" of modern life. In his book *In Search of Utopia* E.K. Francis notes that even in 1950 "most modern amusements such as spectator sports, dances or even movies remained taboo for the majority of Manitoba Mennonites."

According to Kroeker, it wasn't the movies that were the problem but the people associated with them. The reasoning, he remembers, went like this: "You might think you were going to see *Old Yeller*, but they were also going to show you a dirty short." It was the Mennonites' fear of dirty shorts and bad companions

that would have almost completely deprived Kroeker of movies were it not for his grandfather, A.A. (Abe) Kroeker.

Abe Kroeker was the spectacularly successful agribusinessman featured in the Winkler chapter of Heather Robertson's *Grassroots*. Abe had a still camera when the church regarded photography as a sinful vanity. When his grandson was old enough to handle it, Abe gave Allan a 35mm still camera and a free charge-account for film, processing, and accessories. He introduced his grandson to the world of images.

Abe also loved movies. No gathering of family or friends was complete without a screening of rented movies in his basement. It was Abe who steeped young Allan in the movies of Abbott and Costello. And it was probably Abe who now prompts Allan to offer the opinion that *Capital* is his "most Mennonite movie." For in 1983 the Mennonites of Manitoba are better known for their shrewdness and business acumen than their religious fervor.

*Capital* is not what the church elders would like to consider a Mennonite movie. It's the story of an old man and his young son. They make their living by fancying up junk cars with paint and polish and pilfered car radios and then selling them to unsuspecting greenhorns. In the process the old man passes on all the lore he has amassed, emphasizing especially the need to keep your venture capital separate from your "livin' money." In the end the boy amusingly demonstrates that he has learned his lesson all too well.

Though the Mennonites have in many ways become just another variation on a homogenized twentieth-century protestantism, there is one way in which they remain fairly unique. That is their strong sense of family. From this angle each and every Kroeker film can be seen as a reflection of his Mennonite heritage. For each film is concerned with a small group of people, usually a family, in turning-point situation, often a business proposition. For Fusi Bergman in *Fish Inspector*, for instance, it involves giving up fishing and retiring to an old folks' home. For the family that is the focus of *In the Fall*, it involves the selling of an old and useless but beloved horse. In each of the films the situation threatens to disrupt the fragile cohesion of the group or destroy one of the members in it. The stories are rendered all the more poignant by the fact that the characters are so isolated, by geography and temperament, from everybody else.

What attracted Kroeker to the Valgardson stories, however, goes beyond their possibly autobiographical overtones. Initially it was the sense of place in the Gimli writer's works. Crisscrossing the Interlake district to get footage for his agricultural films and spending many a summer vacation there awakened Kroeker to the cinematic potential of the area.

"What makes the Interlake such a great set," he says, "is the purity and simplicity of detail there. It removes us just enough from our everyday lives." It can give a story a kind of timelessness. "I like the magic of a 'once-upon-a-time' story that can come from setting it in the Interlake."

In Valgardson's stories there is, says Kroeker, "a sense of universal experiences stripped right down to the bone." While they express certain regional qualities, they also transcend them. "I'm not saying that this is Manitoba or this is small-town Canadian life," Kroeker insists. "*The Pedlar* could be set any-



● God is Not A Fish Inspector: Ed McNamara as Fusi Bergman

# MANITOBA FILM

where. *Capital* is not just a story of small-time life on the Canadian prairies." Robert Altman, who saw and liked *Fish Inspector* on one of his frequent trips to Canada, expressed it this way: "National boundaries are a state of mind."

Universal as they may seem, adapting Valgardson's stories to film was not an easy undertaking. In the first place, Kroeker warns against reading stories in search of good film subjects. "It's too dangerous; you overlook the true potential and the problems of the story." He has never been attracted to a story on the basis of its being easy to film. In fact, at first he didn't see any filmic possibilities in the stories of Alistair MacLeod, whose *In the Fall* is the source of his most recent film.

A story starts to become a film when "some kind of ghost comes back to me, an after-image." It's an irrational, subconscious process. For *Capital* it was the image of two guys standing like hawks waiting for their prey. For *The Pedlar* it was the image of the road and the young girl the first time she sees the pedlar and his tattoos. Once this happens Kroeker goes back to the story to "absorb it fully." When he has done this to his satisfaction, he puts aside the story and doesn't reread it again. He explains the actual scriptwriting process in this way: "there is something mysterious happening and I'm just writing down the clues."

However it happens, Kroeker does not see the need for simply illustrating the story on screen. His films are not

faithful image-for-word translations. "I don't see the need for it," he explains. "The challenge in writing an adaptation is to expand on the story, to make it more cinematic. You actually do an injustice to the story by just trying to repeat it verbatim on film." The main difficulty comes from the fact that there are "many more credibility problems on film than there are in print." Reconstruction is essential. Dialogue, characters, even incidents have to be altered.

Take the case of *Fish Inspector*. The most affecting moments in the film occur during several exchanges between Fusi Bergman and Jimmy Henderson. At one point Fusi buttons Jimmy's sweater wrong and finally gets him to laugh. Without these moments the death of Jimmy at the end of the film would not be nearly as effective. Yet the Jimmy Henderson character is only fleetingly alluded to in the original story.

With *The Pedlar* Kroeker took a few more liberties. Searching for a reason to explain why the travelling merchant is such a social outcast, Kroeker recalled what he had learned while working as cinematographer and editor on *The Strongest Man in the World*. In that film, Mike Swystun is also shunned. So Kroeker transformed his pedlar into a magician and a juggler. The result is that he is a warmer and less mysterious character than he is in Valgardson's story. But the change has repercussions that alter the entire story.

Although Kroeker has adapted four Valgardson stories to film, they have

been different enough so that each film has meant newer and bigger challenges. *Fish Inspector* was essentially a one-character drama. *Capital* dealt mainly with the old man and his son. For *The Pedlar* there were three strong-story was more difficult to orchestrate. *In the Fall* deals with a family of five. In addition, *Capital* is a wry comedy and *The Pedlar* an almost mute psychological drama, while *The Catch* and *Hunting Season* are both suspense-thrillers in the style of Hitchcock's television work.

Although he likes the short-film format because it is more controllable, Kroeker has lately been attempting longer and more complicated films with better, more experienced actors. *In the Fall* stars Cedric Smith in approximately a 50-minute film, *The Tramp at the Door* (to star Monique Mercure, Ed McNamara, and August Shellenberg) is planned as a one-hour drama. And he would love to do a feature-length manhunt film like *Mad Trapper* by Rudy Wiebe or a film version of Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*. Sometimes he worries, however, about how long he can "get away with Prairie stories." For it's important to him that he keep expanding his horizons, keep advancing.

Not that making films in Manitoba isn't challenging enough. Former executive producer Mike Scott puts it succinctly: "Like most other prairie filmmakers, Allan has had to learn everything and do everything on his own. There are very few people here to teach him the tricks of the trade." This problem is compli-

cated by the fact that Kroeker is working on fiction films.

On this point Scott becomes both animated and heated. "Drama is the most important kind of film today," he states vigorously. "It will do more for our sense of self than any other form. We have to pursue drama in popular as well as cultural terms. Otherwise we'll be completely overwhelmed by other countries." For Kroeker it means "telling a story regardless of what Hollywood says it should be." To him it is essential to "write and make movies in your own language about things going on around you."

But because of this determination to make fiction films, Kroeker is, according to Scott, "underrated by others in the region and by the NFB in general. His achievements are already important enough to have gained him much more attention." The awards he has won are starting to change this. And everyone who has seen *In the Fall* believes it to be his best film so far - quite possibly the film that will give him the exposure and recognition he needs.

He is one of Canada's most prolific and proficient short-story adaptors. He is also the Prairie's most complete filmmaker. In the words of regional programmer Andreas Poulsson: "Other directors have only one or two strengths; Allan has a very strong hand in all aspects of filmmaking. His range of interests and talents is extraordinary: his sense of discipline and attention to detail is absolutely astounding."

● "National boundaries are a state of mind," said American filmmaker Robert Altman after seeing *God Is Not A Fish Inspector*

