

# OPINION

## Whither ( or is it wither?) The Small Film

*"In movies it (Secretary of State's department) will certainly require that the CFDC disentangle itself from its relationships with Hollywood businessmen and Hollywood-style Canadian businessmen — relationships that have been, for the most part, artistically and financially disastrous."*

*"The CFDC should re-examine its approach to film funding and perhaps concentrate on making more and cheaper movies."*

... Robert Fulford  
*Toronto Star — 27/12/74*

As a director of Vision IV Productions Ltd., it will come as no surprise to anyone that I totally disagree with Bob Fulford's first statement. I'd be happy to present my arguments on this at a later date, but I would like to confine my comments in this particular column to the second sentence quoted.

I do agree with Fulford that the Canadian Film Development Corporation should re-examine its approach to the funding of low budget films, but along different lines than I think Bob has in mind.

In the real world of movies, internationally speaking, a low budget film means something under \$1 million. By CFDC definition, a low budget film is thought of as something in the neighbourhood of \$125,000. In my opinion, if the CFDC takes Fulford's advice and concentrates on "making more and cheaper" movies they will simply be wasting money on an increasing number of movies that will never be seen.

Someone with incredibly great powers of persuasion actually got *Monkeys in the Attic* into a theatre in Toronto supported, in fact, by a not bad print campaign. It lasted a couple of weeks. The excellent-of-its-kind, *The Hard Part Begins*, was not only given a reasonable chance at exhibition as well as sound promotion, it had unanimously rave reviews going for it, as well. Still nobody went to see it. How frustrating for all concerned!

Alright Mr. "Hollywood-style Canadian businessman", (as I'm sure I'm tagged by Mr. Fulford), if there is no CFDC low budget program for the making of theatrical features, how are fledgling writers, producers and directors going to get to make pictures?

I suggest the television route, obviously. Here's how it could work. . . .

Once a project is approved as viable by, say, the CBC and the CFDC, the CBC matches the CFDC's \$60,000 investment. By viable, I suggest the most important elements are script, director and producer. . . probably in that order. The independent producer finds another matching \$60,000 from private sources as at present. (Corporate funding or 'sponsorship' as on NET in the U.S. could be explored.) In addition, if the project fits within the parameters of OECA, it could come in last with \$10,000 — \$20,000 as development money in exchange for rights to secondary showings on existing provincial educational channels plus ancillary education rights.

Then, with a budget of \$180 — \$200,000, the promising producer could go off and make his film for the small

screen. Perhaps with guidance from an experienced member of CAMPP. While the kind of money we're talking about is low by U.S. standards, the Canadian budgets, particularly above-the-line, could be pared down to a minimum.

In addition to the sense of fulfillment the independent producer would have at being able to mount his project, he would have the satisfaction of knowing that there would be a viewing audience for it. Sure, he may feel he would have to compromise a little in terms of film content, but that's getting to be less and less of a problem these days and it's a small price to pay, anyway.

The CBC would, to quote Judith Crist, "triumph in an arena it can well make its own — the small, personal art film that cannot survive in the theatrical marketplace" for relatively little money compared to costs of other drama programming.

And the CFDC would be playing the truly developmental role assigned to it by the Secretary of State. Hopefully, it could recoup its investment from TV sales outside Canada.

Over to you new Independent Producer and Michael Spencer and John Hirsh.

*Richard R. Schouten*

## Let's Repatriate

Now seems to be an opportune occasion to bring back some of the Canadian money that's filtered across the Canadian/U.S. border daily. Nationalize the auto industry? No. Forbid sunny sojourns to Florida? Hardly. Prevent *Time Canada* and *Readers' Digest* from publishing? That's a step.

The federal government is taking the initiative in the publishing industry by setting down guidelines for American produced subsidiaries. Any magazine with a parent office outside Canada must make significant changes in content to benefit from the assistance now afforded magazines produced in this country.

The third week in February saw the beginning of a takeover bid by Standard Broadcasting Corp. Ltd. of Toronto of Bushnell Communications Ltd. of Ottawa. Stuart Griffiths, president of Bushnell, will not oppose the takeover. Apparently his company, through its TV station CJOH, has suffered dramatic losses in advertising revenue. It appears that CJOH can't compete. One could say that if CJOH can't compete with CTV or Global for the advertising revenue in the Ottawa market then it's not a viable company. In *The Globe and Mail Report on Business* of February twenty-second Griffiths identified his main competitor, WWNY. Is that Global, C.B.C. or CTV? In fact it's a station broadcasting on channel seven from upstate New York. However, it doesn't operate from New York state. WWNY has advertising offices in Ottawa and competes directly with CJOH courtesy of the local cable television company.

CJOH is not an isolated example. In Winnipeg a similar situation exists with at least one North Dakota station maintaining sales offices in Winnipeg. The U.S. broadcasters are able to apply a much lower advertising rate than their Canadian counterparts and so naturally the adver-

tiser will seek the best return for his dollar. Businessmen in Buffalo and other border cities don't advertise up here because most U.S. cities are not as completely covered by cable companies as we are here.

What about *The Edge of Night*? *The Smothers Brothers Show*? *Sesame Street*? While trying to repatriate Canadian television advertising revenue there is an obvious danger of limiting Canadian viewers to a diet of domestic programs. That is neither necessary nor preferable. All the programs listed above can be seen on Canadian stations. If the public wants to watch programs that are produced in America then the answer is simply to continue our practice of buying the product and receiving the financial returns ourselves. To my knowledge, no one has seriously considered importing the B.B.C. or Thames TV on cable and yet we still receive programs from both these British outlets. The American border stations are not necessary to our continued viewing of American programs.

All elements of the film production chain would benefit from this change in policy towards American television stations that are currently using our cable systems as direct link to the Canadian advertising dollar. Domestic production would become financially possible. Men like Paul Almond and Norman Jewison learned some elements of their craft through Canadian television production. When they worked in the industry here we were in our TV heyday. That period is over. Rather than lamenting over the good old days, let's bring home the bacon and begin again.

For readers in communities where this phenomenon doesn't occur here are a couple of examples. Being an avid Canadian I watch Canadian hockey players play hockey for American teams. In the case of the Buffalo Sabres, I can watch a hockey game Sunday afternoon or evening on WKBW-TV from Buffalo. Many of the commercials are for a state savings bank. Fine, that doesn't appeal to anyone but Americans. But "(whistle deleted) Mable, Black Label!" does. Carling Breweries is a Canadian firm. One of the other examples I can cite will appeal to most Canadian nationalists. *The Tonight Show* is carried by WGR-TV in Buffalo and can be seen by many cable subscribers in southern Ontario. Recently, during one of the extended commercial breaks, there was a public service announcement for a library. WGR-TV, like all broadcasters, was trying to maintain its image as a service to the community. The library system in this case was operated by the city of Toronto. If one is willing to stay up late enough you can hear the Canadian national anthem played before *The Star Spangled Banner* at sign-off. Keep the customer satisfied.

Bringing the Canadian advertising dollar home will mean a great deal to a number of people in related industries. If Global was competing with Canadian-owned television stations then that corporation's struggle to get out of the red would probably be shortened by months, possibly even years. As it stands there are too many groups vying for the limited Canadian market. In the *Globe and Mail* article Mr. Bushnell claimed that the rates charged by WWNY are more on a par with radio advertising price structures.

D. Trevor Davies

## Entertainment Films

After having had a very long and varied experience in Motion Pictures beginning in England prior to 1924 and continuing since that time in Canada, this writer feels he may have some contribution to make through these opinions, observations and suggestions in respect to the making of entertainment films in Canada.

Whenever a writer views a film via television, the

question which comes to mind is, "Is this a see-again movie or not?" Some of those I have classified in the see-again category are films like *A Christmas Carol* (Britain), *Enter Laughing* (USA), *Pimlico* (Britain) and *Shane* (USA) among many more. To date, I have been able to grade only one Canadian film as see-again.

That film was not a story in the strict sense of the word, but an extremely well-made, well-acted and convincingly told episode on television. It concerns a little boy who wanders away from his parents while they are transacting engrossing business in a downtown bank. It is near closing time, and the child strays into the vault, unseen, and hides. A turmoil naturally occurs, revealing that the vault cannot be opened until the next morning. The remainder of the film is taken up with what must be done to rescue the child before he suffocates. This is not a new film theme, but the point is that a good film can be made in Canada.

The impression received by this writer is that Canadian film makers work too hard to label their products as Canadian. Their films have been too provincial in character, as though filmmakers have been too concerned with trying to capture a Canadian Atmosphere while very noticeably striving to avoid copying U.S. or British films.

This may stem from the knowledge that U.S. films created an image for the United States by means of their westerns, etc. But it should be remembered that these began very early in the making of entertainment films — at a time when Canada was mainly rural in character. Furthermore, even as early as this, U.S. productions were not confined to shooting only U.S. stories and locales. Movies such as *Orphans of the Storm* with the Gish sisters and *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (both shot in France) or *The Sheikh* or *How Green was my Valley* about coal-mining in Wales, illustrate that the foremost consideration should be the Story and its Entertainment Value, rather than country of origin.

Imagine a Canadian film maker deciding to make a costume film! He would probably avoid a tale about Napoleon or Oliver Cromwell or Robert E. Lee in favour of some more or less local affair like the Riel Rebellion — about which the world at large knows nothing since these events were not world-shaking enough at the time they occurred.

Why not make just 'good pictures' and let it go at that? Any entertaining subject could be chosen — suspense tales, tales about motorcycle gangs, 'sit-com' comedies — like so many successful U.S. and British films. Why be so afraid of following along the same grooves as these? Why try so hard to avoid copying something which has proven itself to be good entertainment?

In times like these, when people need the tonic of a good laugh, it is a good time to consider comedy. One of the types of comedy which I believe could be handled in Canada has as its main theme the deflating of pompous egos — usually at the hands of a downtrodden little man who fights back. There are people in this country who could be coached to perform this kind of comedy. After all, this was the country from whence came such well-known comics as Marie Dressler and Mack Sennett.

Recognizing the fact that U.S. and other producers long ago solved distribution problems by building their own theatre-chains, perhaps a group of Canadian producers could build their own 16mm mini-theatres in Canada as an independent chain opening a real Canadian Film Industry free of current setbacks and frustrations.

Francis C. Moultrie

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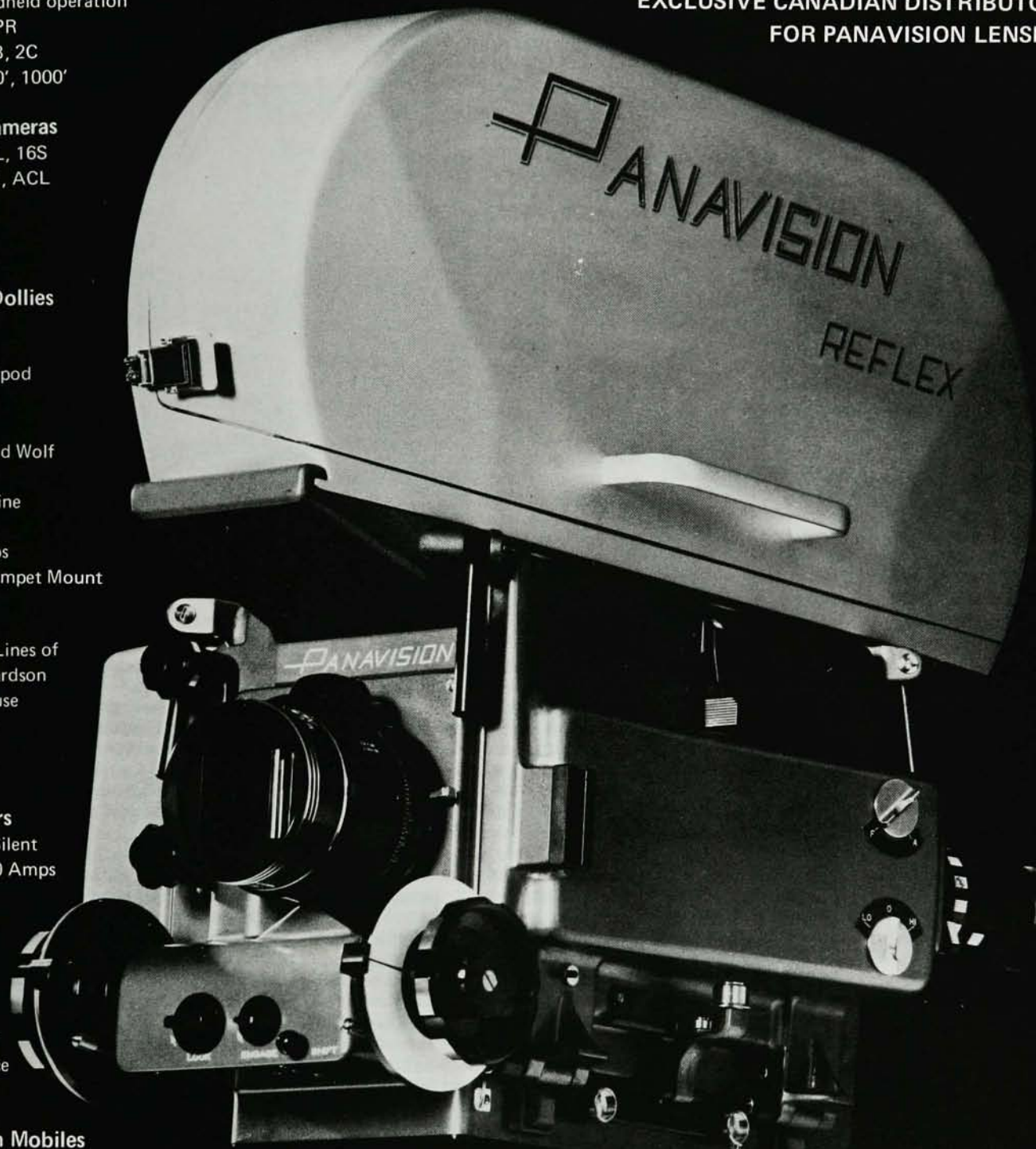
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