

# Journey Into Film Financing

Jack Ammon  
interviews  
Trevor Wallace

**You've had considerable success with "Christina".**

**Christina** is doing exactly what it set out to do. It was never made as a great epic, only as an unpretentious, but saleable commercial product. It is doing great business at this moment, held over for the second week in Portland, Maine; held over in Boston; doing well in Pittsburgh; running in 60 or 70 theatres across the U.S. The air lines have 170 prints; it's sold in France, the Luxemburg countries, and Greece. It is on the brink of a distribution deal in England, Australia, and the South African markets. When all that's finished, there's a sale for television for over half a million. The investors will receive a two to three hundred per cent return on their money, which is not bad at all.

**Did you have much difficulty raising \$2,000,000 locally (Vancouver) to make "Journey Into Fear"?**

It was oversubscribed, which was more of an embarrassment than not having sufficient money. We put together the money for **Journey into Fear** based on the success of **Christina**. As opposed to **Christina**, it is a more prestigious and a very safe film to make because all the ingredients including cast are there. There's something for everybody. I don't think there is a filmgoer in the world that could not find at least one member of this cast that they liked.

**Somebody mentioned Michael Caine?**

He was originally considered as the lead role, but it didn't work out. We were fortunate to get Sam Waterston, who I think is better for it and very much in character.

**How are the relations with the Canadians in the crew, and the Canadian locale?**

Very good. I'd put this Canadian crew against any crew in the world. They've been first class, and they've really been bloodied because I took them into Athens, Genoa, and Istanbul, and they came out with flying colours. We shot our scenes on schedule, on time, and we got everything we went in to get. Excellent, first class material. How the hell can you knock the crew!

**How many speaking bit roles are there in "Journey" using local Canadian talent?**

I think around 15 to 20.

**How many Canadian extras are you using?**

We have one scene where there are 150. We've already used 70 or 80, and we'll probably use about 200-300 in total.

**How many Canadian Technicians?**

There are 51 people on the crew, four of whom are foreign.

**Do you foresee the day when you might be using one or more Canadians in a lead role?**

As you know from previous talks we've had, this is what I want to do. This is the whole thing. With Canadian players I can do what many people have done to qualify for CFDC

donations. They take a famous American name whose birthplace was Canada, claim he is a Canadian, and stick him in. I don't want to do that. I would sooner keep using my Canadians at the present moment in small parts until I find a player who merits a star part. When I find such a man, when I have seen him play a small part, and I know what he's capable of, then I'll use him or her in a lead role.

This way, you see, you create a genuine pool of international talent as opposed to a forced pool of talent, and you're still able to sell your product and stay alive. And you'll be able to finance your next picture because you've made money on this one.

*Yvette Mimeaux in "Journey Into Fear"*



If we hadn't sold *Christina*, we wouldn't be making *Journey Into Fear*. I would say if we didn't sell *Journey Into Fear*, we wouldn't make whatever the next picture is, and so on. But gradually we shall come into making two films a year, and instead of using 300 extras, we'll use 600. Instead of only 15 bit parts, instead of just speaking parts, they'll be in featured roles. Theoretically, our local actors — if there are some good ones here who come to the surface — will gradually be brought into star roles and they'll be names.

Unfortunately, if we do create a demand for that actor, before he can be brought into a star role, he will be absorbed and swallowed by the Americans. The only way to forestall that would be to put him under contract right away, which we would of course do.

#### How do Canadian scripters shape up?

A script is a funny thing. In the world at this moment, there are probably 2,000,000. Some are excellent, some are crap. But I've found that a script has to have a plus — in other words, there has to be a wad of money attached to it — or there has to be a great director who wants to direct it — or there has to be a terrific actor who'd love to play in it — or a great distributor who wants to push it . . . it *has* to have a plus with it.

You just don't make a film because it's a script. The pieces have to initially fall into place. There are too many other bricks you have to put into place as well as building a very basic foundation. So, if somebody (who is a great writer) comes to me with a wonderful script, I'll look at it. I wouldn't say I wouldn't take it normally . . . I would look at it and see if there was a plus in it, but I would always look for that plus before making a decision just to take it.

There are good Canadian writers, but they all go south of the line.

#### You still believe that British Columbia is ideal country for feature filming?

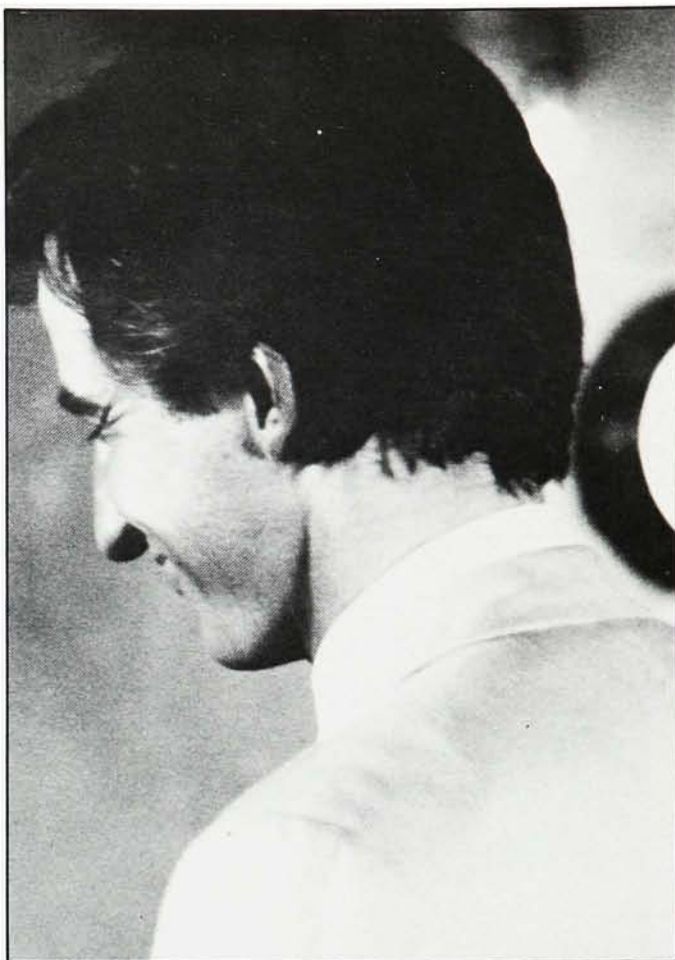
Yes, for many reasons. One, the extraordinary country. The varied terrain — deserts, mountains, rivers, and fjords — any country can be shot here . . . We're duplicating scenes we took in Greece, Italy and Turkey for *Journey Into Fear*. And then there are the plusses . . . in *Christina*, we shot one exciting scene from a downtown store being wrecked. This country has all kinds of extravagant sets for filming.

#### Your experiences overseas were not entirely happy, I understand.

We had our problems. I think the fact of the Greek change of government being imminent made it jumpy. It was a frightening experience . . . But it is an example of how they behaved toward everybody. They have become a very arrogant people, I found. Very arrogant indeed. They knew that what I was doing was not wrong, and they realised they'd made a mistake, but they wouldn't back down and apologise. You see, I had a letter of credit from the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce for \$250,000. I changed \$10,000 into drachmas, gave five thousand to my production manager, and intended using the rest to meet necessary expenses. I always pay out, receive a chit, and put it in my brief case, and as my accountant hadn't arrived, I had a few dollars paid out, when we got an emergency call from Istanbul. Anyway, we got our tickets, I closed the brief case, and we rushed to the airport. We got our seats, got to the customs and I was asked how much money I had. I said, "About \$5,000." The customs officer said, "Would you step this way", and took me into a little back room with two fellow officers, and asked if I would open the briefcase.

When they saw the money, they went mad. The long shot was they accused me of trying to take money illegally out of Greece. I explained I brought the money in — I showed them the letter of credit — good in practically all countries.

They took me down to the police station and charged me. They wouldn't let my production manager Bob Linnel anywhere near me. I explained I would be spending something



Sam Waterston

like \$125,000 in their country in a week. That I was merely going to Istanbul for the day and would be back that night. They insisted I had perpetrated a criminal offence . . . I had to get a lawyer . . . I would have to go to jail. We went before the Public Prosecutor — he said it was clearly a case for the courts . . . "You go to jail!" I said this is ridiculous! For a minor misunderstanding? There is no such thing as bail in Greece . . . This isn't America . . . This isn't Canada . . . Their attitude was very nasty. "We don't deal like you do." . . . "We're not idiots like you." . . . That was their attitude!

Outside, the policeman said, "I don't want to do this — but if I don't take you in to jail, I'll get fined 600 drachmas . . ." My lawyer whispered to me, and we gave him a thousand drachmas . . . and went back to the hotel. At 6 o'clock, the phone rang . . . it was the policeman. He was going off duty and had to hand me over to his relief . . . So I'm paying off another guy. I went to the police station that night and the police chief was too high in the scale to be bribed. He offered to let me stay in the police station if I wanted to. So I spent the night in his office — the Hilton Hotel sent a bed in for me.

We waited all the next day before going before the tribunal . . . which was like a comic opera. The whole affair was Mickey Mouse . . . My lawyer showed the letter of credit, explained what had happened . . . The Public Prosecutor said, "This is ridiculous . . . This man could not possibly be smuggling money out . . . he's got ten times that amount . . . why should he smuggle out five thousand dollars in drachmas?" They dressed the customs man down . . . The three judges agreed . . . except one who whispered something, and we were asked to wait outside.

In half an hour we were recalled — they said "Look, we

understand no law has been broken. We understand what happened was a mistake — a misunderstanding” — they were sorry it had occurred, BUT, technically the law had been broken . . . “your fine is five thousand drachmas, or we put you in jail for 15 days! AND, WE ARE ALSO GOING TO KEEP THE MONEY !!”

My lawyer argued about that, got the fine reduced and the sentence to nothing, or about \$75. The real money was confiscated and they refused to give it back.

But I must tell you that their attitude was very reminiscent of when I was a small boy and my father took me to Nazi Germany in 1937. And I had a momentary flashback to a small boy in 1937 — with armed guards, machine guns all over the place, police, the people looking around corners, people starting to say things and then shushing up . . . it was very bad.

So now that's changed, hasn't it, with the military government gone. Maybe things will smooth over?

They haven't sent my money back to me. I wouldn't advise anyone to go to Greece, their attitude is Nazi — they have been the seat of Democracy, but the legs came off the chair.

Have you anything more you want to say?

It's going to be a fantastic film . . . the stuff we shot was terrific. I'm convinced this picture is going to be a real milestone for the Canadian Film Industry. I think it will be one of the biggest Canadian films made. □

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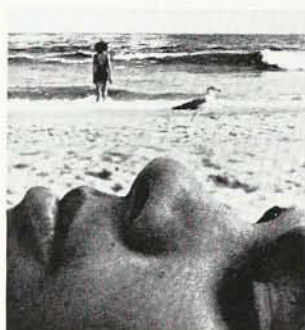
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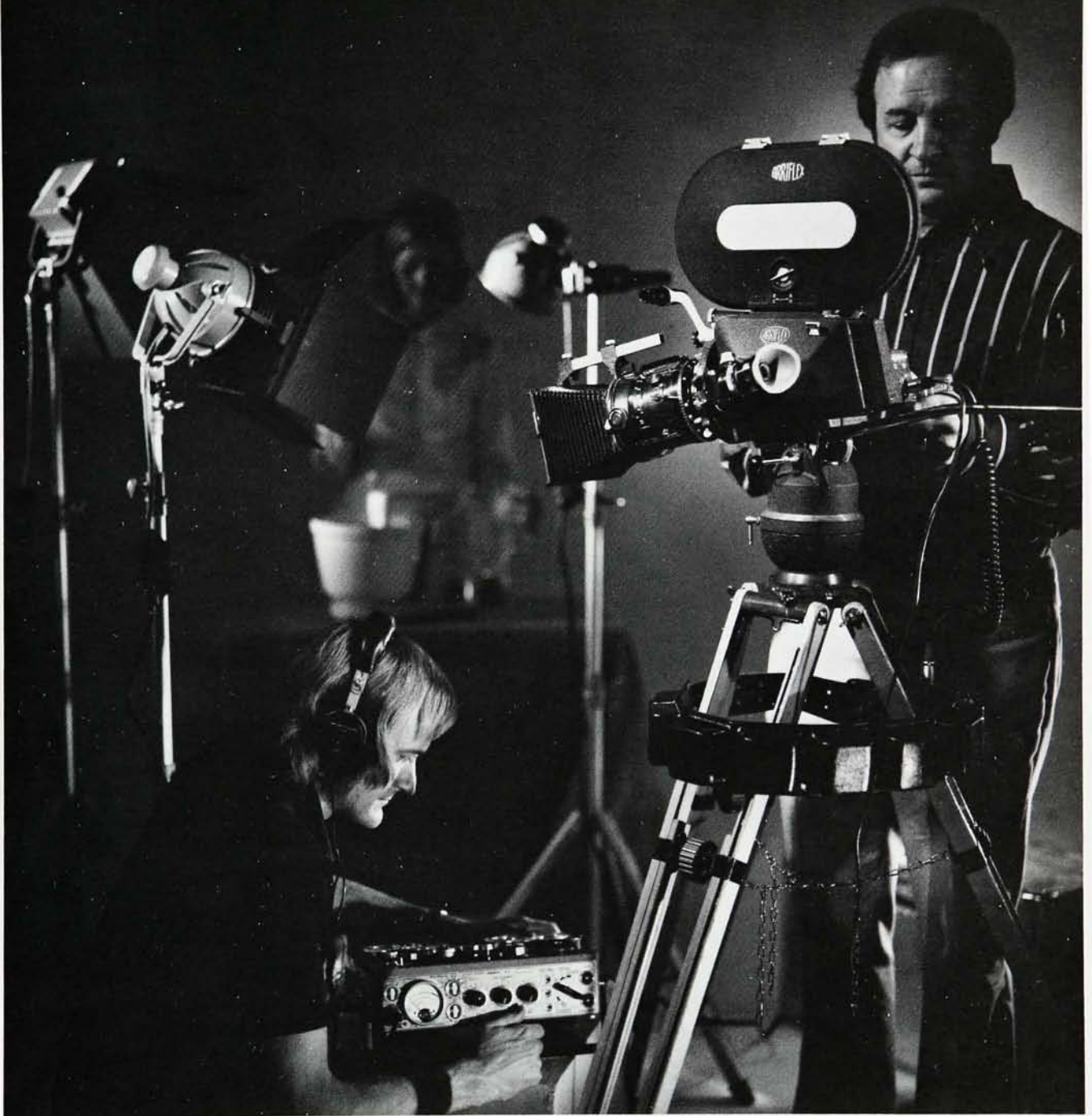


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