

imprint is the key

by Connie Tadros

Did someone say that Canadians don't know how to market a film? Well, Harlequin Enterprises and Danton Films are spending a lot of time and money to prove that someone wrong. Below, the inside story on the marketing of *Leopard in the Snow*.

The snowbound stars



"She closed her eyes and felt again the surge of urgent need he aroused within her and wondered how she could ever have imagined that she was without emotion. But no man had aroused her as he had done, aroused her and yet left her with a hunger that only complete surrender to him could assuage."

Leopard in the Snow

**Coming soon
to your
neighborhood theatre!**

Harlequin Enterprises is a Canadian publishing company which sells 'romantic fiction' to ladies all over the world. Sales have soared from 6 million books in 1965 to 78 million books in 1976. By this year, sales will top the hundred million mark and, no doubt, keep climbing.

*No wonder, then, that when the publishers of Harlequin books take their initial step into film production, that step represents a quantum leap in the marketing and distributing of a Canadian film. And Harlequin is ready to release **Leopard in the Snow**, the Canadian-United Kingdom co-production produced by John Qusted of Seastone Productions in London and Chris Harrop from Harlequin in Toronto. Daniel Weinzwieg's Danton Films is the distributor.*

Harrop and Weinzwieg spoke to Cinema Canada about the project and, especially, about the marketing aspects of the distribution. If the film is successful, they will know why. If it is unsuccessful, they will know why as well. Either way, it's important.

What follows are highlights of that conversation.

Chris Harrop: At present, I am running the Harlequin Film Division which is a new outgrowth of Harlequin Books. In the past years, Harlequin has spent all its energies expanding internationally into new markets such as France, Germany and Holland. We had never really looked at getting out of books into another medium.

I guess the pressure just kept growing, and finally we decided to make a film. As we have over 2,000 titles, it wasn't easy to decide which book to try, so what we did was to take a look at our authors. One of our more prolific authors is a lady named Anne Mather, so we looked at her books and decided that one of the novels which appeared to be more cinematic was **Leopard in the Snow**. We did a survey among our readers and they said, 'yes,' that was a book they remembered quite well and they would be interested in seeing it in film form. So from there, we went and did a screenplay with the author and a professional script-writer.

As for the production process itself, I found it both frustrating and yet very similar to what I had been doing before. Prior to my experience with **Leopard**, I had been in the investment banking business, specializing in mergers, acquisitions, corporate financing and, from the structuring standpoint – the legal, and financial dealings – a lot of it just came very naturally.

As far as the filmmaking part of it was concerned, it was, and still remains, an area about which I have considerable qualms, to say the least. It always strikes me as being incredible that, finally, all that raw film gets up on the screen in some sort of coherent form.

Instinct told me that the success of the Harlequin books would have an effect on marketing **Leopard in the Snow**. In a sense, there is a natural handle, a built-in audience and an extremely large one at that. It had a natural tie-in with the marketing technique used at Harlequin.

What we're going to do here is to market the film in the same way we market our books. We come out with 12 new titles every month. And, unlike most publishers, Harlequin has a following. Our ladies don't buy the books by the name of the author or by the title. They go into the bookstore at the end of the month and say, "Are the Harlequins in yet?" Nobody asks, "Are the Bantams, are the Dells in yet?" because those names don't mean anything in particular. The name Harlequin means Romantic Fiction.

We spent a lot of money promoting that name, promoting that imprint. In the film area, we want to do the same thing. A large percentage of the population who read our books also go to films regularly. And we want to reach those people.

On the other hand, there's a significant portion of our readers who are not regular filmgoers. We want to reach out and make the point that there's a Harlequin film available. We're really going beyond the normal theatre-going public.

Dan Weinzwieg: From our point of view as the distributor, one of the most significant points is that the Harlequin name is a brand name. There's only one other brand name in motion pictures that I can think of and that's Walt Disney. Paramount, 20th Century Fox and Warner Bros. have good films, bad films, horror films, science fiction and everything else. The public can't rely on them for consistency, whereas Walt Disney and, I think, Harlequin, will have a consistency that will invite the public to become regular filmgoers.

Chris Harrop: We have a very simple method. We're a publically owned corporation and our main obligation is to our shareholders. I think the bottom line will tell us whether it's working or not.

In terms of the first film, we will only be disappointed if we don't learn what we've set out to learn: can we translate what we do so well in one medium to another medium? I think we've got some preliminary ideas from early testing on that already, and the results seem to be positive. If things work well, we should like to do 1 or 2 films a year on a regular basis.

As the producer of **Leopard in the Snow**, I've been involved in the promotional campaign, and I've worked very closely with Dan on it. He has certainly been involved in every step.

We have created the campaign which will be used in the United States, and in Canada. We have tested the film with selected groups of ladies and from their reactions to the film, we have been able to get a definition of what the film is; what it delivers, what they got out of the film.

In that way, we hope to develop a campaign that will draw in the kind of people who are going to enjoy the film. It's very important to us because the film is carrying the Harlequin name; we don't want to get any people in there under false pretenses. We could have taken out the few minutes of action scenes in the film, the racing scenes, and played them over and over in a trailer and attracted a large number of males. But quite frankly, most males are going to be turned off by the film. It's a love story – it's a romance. And what we have to do is make sure that our message is delivered to the ladies who will enjoy that. Then if they want to take their husbands, the husband is going because the woman wants to see the film. We're not having any illusions about that.

As a result, the campaign has to build up certain expectations for the lady. And when that lady goes in to see the film, we want those expectations to be fulfilled. We don't want to oversell, but our testing has shown that we appear to have a very broad audience for the film.

We screened the film several times in Denver with a few groups of ladies. The primary reason for that was not to get preview cards filled out, but to have a professional moderator go in there with small groups and say, "Why did you like the film? Why didn't you like the film? "How would you describe the film? How did you perceive the film?"

As a result, we've got a stack of verbatims about 3 inches tall from the ladies. We've gone through those, and they've played a large part in the construction of the campaign. We came up with 3 different campaign ideas in terms of art work. And then, we went out to the field and tested those in 5 different cities.



The highs and lows of an unlikely – but romantic – relationship



We did what's called a monadic test which basically means that an individual lady was shown one piece of artwork. (In all, there were 3 pieces of artwork which we were considering for the campaign and 2 different theme-lines. That made six different posters altogether. We took them out and market-tested them).

We showed one lady one poster and said, "This is a film that's coming out. On the basis of this poster, do you think it's the kind of film that you'd like to see?" And a number said, "No", and a number said, "Yes" and some responded very strongly to one piece of art with a theme-line, while others responded strongly to another.

Then we came back and threw all the results into a computer, as we're so inclined to do. We came up, surprisingly, with results that were not markedly different among the whole spectrum of ladies. Then, we went further and isolated which pieces of art worked with which different age groups. One particular piece of art work with one particular themeline worked very well across the board, but especially strongly with the 18 to 30 year group, and that's the campaign we're going to develop further now.

Dan Weinzwieg: There's a massive marketing job being launched for this picture. The initial Canadian premiere will be on February 3, 1978 in the Winnipeg area, then will roll out across the West and into the Eastern Seaboard in the Spring, and then Ontario probably next Summer or early Fall.

It's all being done on a massive TV saturation-type of approach. It's a 'four-wall' technique though we're not actually renting the theatres.

The four-wall technique is a specialized form of marketing a motion picture. We're not trying to duplicate what they do in the States because there, they market a very specific kind of film. With **Leopard in the Snow** there's a difference; it has genuine quality and a long run potential. We think that people are going to enjoy it and talk about it; it's a film that could probably succeed without a four-wall technique. Nevertheless, we feel that by four-walling it, the success should be enormous.

We're using from between 30 to 50 prints of the picture and probably four times that many trailers as opposed to the normal 2 to 1 ratio. Trailers will be in the theatres a minimum of 6 to 8 weeks prior to the opening of the film and will be used on a cross-plug basis in other theatres in the town in the area.

We'll be using TV orbits and very strong TV buying with a 19-day TV buy in each orbit. We take a large city, for instance Winnipeg, and buy a lot of television out of Winnipeg, but we include the peripheral towns as well. There might be from 20 to 30 towns that receive television reception from Winnipeg and, therefore, get the benefit of the advertising that's bought on that station. We'll use the spot starting approximately 7 days prior to the opening of the picture and run through the first 2 weeks of engagement.

Concretely, in the Winnipeg and Brandon areas, we'll open approximately 30 theatres all the same week. Then we move into the Saskatoon, Prince Albert orbit and we do the same thing there. ...following through Calgary, Edmonton, etc.

We have about 2,000 playdates on the books already. The key cities are booked in on an indefinite run and we expect the picture to run as long as it possibly can, as long as it's making money. We expect it will be a significant run. The small towns have limited ability, because of population, to go for longer than from 4 to 7 days.

In our approach, we've included all the significant grossing towns within a given area, based on the number of prints that we have available and the number of towns that can throw off a gross that is worthy of contributing to the advertising costs and the print costs.

In addition, there are going to be a number of other ties in when the picture opens. The major one is naturally with the Harlequin book. We'll be coordinating, with the Harlequin Book division, to cross-reference our advertising and our media so that there's a consciousness of the book as well as the film at the same time. And there'll be special promotions which will be used on radio and TV having to do with the book tie-in as well.

As you know, Harlequin prints 12 new books a month and, already, inside the front cover, there's an ad for **Leopard in the Snow** in each book they've turhed out recently. These ads will go on for a considerable number of months, as long as the film is in its initial release. The people who read the books will be conscious of the film.

The promotion is a collaborative distribution approach, coordinated through Harlequin, Chris Harrop, Danton films and myself with Media Buying Service buying the television time.

The picture has quality. It's entertaining and it works at the level of the books. And the books entertain; the sales of the books bear that out.

If it doesn't work, we're going to know why it doesn't work. And if it works, we're here to make our dollars out of it.

And yes, in answer to your question, the ladies are definitely going to cry. □