

# 'Television is everything,' says Broadcast Fund head Pearson

Once, Peter Pearson was a brash, outspoken film director, head of the Council of Canadian Film Makers and president of the Directors' Guild of Canada. In those days, he stormed Parliament Hill to lobby for an indigenous Canadian film industry and berated the Canadian Film Development Corporation for its failure to create an atmosphere in which Canadian talent could flourish. He took prizes for his features and praise for the CBC docu-dramas of which *The Man from Ingersoll* and *The Tar Sands* were outstanding, if somewhat notorious, examples. He was not shy.

Today, Pearson works for Telefilm Canada, and has just completed his first ten months, administering the Canadian Broadcast Program Development Fund. By the end of March, he had disbursed \$23 million to projects whose total budgets top the \$95 million mark. Feeling that it is still premature to talk about whether or not the Fund is a success, he has become reluctant to talk to the press.

Pearson was interviewed by Cinema Canada from the Banff Television Festival where he was preparing to give a speech about the Fund, "a radical departure in Canadian cultural strategy." Just as the man is apparently changed, subdued by the responsibilities and opportunities of the job, so the production industry has changed. Gone is the hyperbole of the tax-shelter years with their mirages. On hand is the new era of steady production for television, backed up by generous government investments, broadcasting support, and the entrance of new "major partners" from abroad to put Canadian programs on the world map.

What follows are excerpts from a longer conversation. Pearson was circumspect about questions dealing with the recent CBC announcement concerning financing, and suggested that it was still too early to judge whether or not the 150% drama credit available from the CRTC would be attractive to producers. These questions, and several answers in which he listed recent Broadcast Fund projects have been omitted.

Pearson was asked to evaluate the performance of the Fund to date.

**Peter Pearson:** The fund came into business at an odd time. Most broadcasters evaluate their programming decisions in the fall. They look at every proposal that they've got up until Christmas. After Christmas, they go into the financial and other aspects of their work and it's only at the beginning of

the fiscal year in April, that they commit monies to programming and production. The Broadcast Fund arrived long after the production evaluation and commitment process had happened. We arrived eight months after the fact. We have just come through the first cycle now. In coming through the first cycle, I think that we have some reason for optimism. You have the figures in front of you.

**Cinema Canada:** \$95 million is a lot of production.

**Peter Pearson:** Yes. We're just starting. The most important thing is that of the 77 projects that we had at the end of March, there are only a few which we anticipate won't get their financing together. Which means that our presence is

causing a lot of things to happen.

There was some real doubt in the beginning as to whether one third [of the required budget] would make a significant difference. I think it's not only the third, but the third with the enthusiastic participation of Canadian broadcasters, and the moral suasion of the Canadian broadcasters and ourselves being able to persuade other major partners to come in. We have a lot of foreign partners, and they have been really the major surprise.

*Pearson mentioned a long list of projects and their foreign partners. Among those now doing business with Canadians are 20th Century-Fox, Orion, Disney and New World in Los*

*Angeles, all three French channels, Yorkshire Television, and the BBC, among others. Yet, despite the foreign participation, all but a couple of the accepted projects were initiated in Canada.*

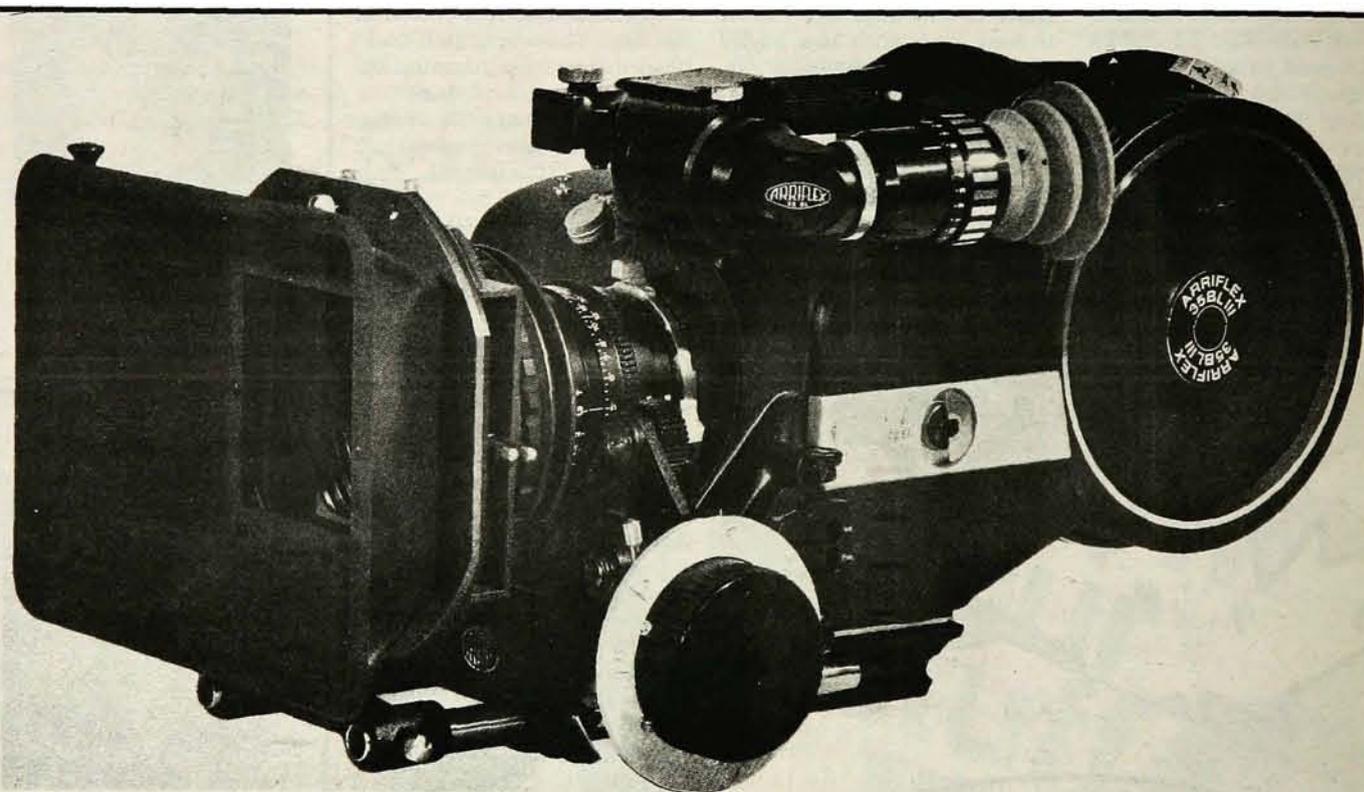
**Peter Pearson:** The Canadian producers had projects of such quality that they were capable of going outside of the boundaries and picking up major partners for major investments.

**Cinema Canada:** When you stand back from the particulars of the individual deals, what do you see developing as a production pattern?

**Peter Pearson:** First of all, television is not movies. The real pattern is for Canadian independents to become abso-

lutely aware of the needs of the Canadian broadcasters. Clearly the most dramatic change is the dialogue that's now going on between independent production and the Canadian broadcasters. For the first time ever in Canadian production history, we've got production heading to a distribution system. And, as distributors, the broadcasters are taking their responsibilities very seriously. They're not interested in fiddles, they're not interested in diddles, they're not interested in tax loop-holes. They're interested in quality prime-time programming.

**Cinema Canada:** How does that orient the options that the filmmakers - or the video-makers - have?



## Ne Plus Ultra

Since its introduction only one year ago, the Arriflex 35BL-III with new positive-locking (PL) lens mount has become the most sought-after camera for serious commercial cinematography.

Why?

Simply because the best producers and D.O.P.'s will not gamble their investment and reputation on anything but the best equipment. They now have a camera system that works month-after-month reliably without fail.

Its technical innovations have suddenly opened up a completely new vista of creativity only dreamed about before. The integrated materials and internal construction now produce sound levels so low that no blimps are required - even in extreme close-shooting environments. The PL lens mount allows the quickest lens changes in the business, with certain accuracy.

Extraordinarily, the viewfinder may appear even brighter than the scene being filmed. Zeiss complements the system with optics of unsurpassed quality in their new series of high-speed lenses. This, together with today's faster film stocks, combine to dramatically reduce lighting requirements.

The whole system unleashes your creative potential, for fresh options may be quickly evaluated with no disruption to your production schedule. Call us for sales, technical details, or the location of available rental units.

**ARRI/NAGRA**  
INC.

6467 NORTHAM DRIVE, MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO, CANADA L4V 1J2

TELEPHONE: (416) 677-4033

TELEX 06-983694