

# A claim to a place in the sun

by Eric Green

British Columbia's motion picture industry is now heading toward a banner \$100-million-plus production year.

Spokespeople for the industry, however, are emphasizing that the statistics may only be another case of peaking before the inevitable trough. But there is unanimous agreement that if this trend is sustained, and reinforced by more Canadian production, the foundations for a genuine industry will have been well-laid.

Producers and directors, most of whom are from the U.S. industry, cite the already well-known factors which attract them here: location, technical talent and a growing creative talent pool.

There is no question that the present disparity in value between Canadian and American dollars — giving U.S. producers a 40% advantage off the top — plays a vital role in where the 'transportable' motion picture industry works.

"They're here because the industry is worldwide and transportable. They won't be here when the financial advantage isn't there," said one industry person.

A certain urgent note in the voice comes from historic experience with the 'peaks' and 'troughs' of the notoriously cyclic film industry.

The seasons of highest activity have traditionally been spring and summer, and the production of local commercials tends to happen in the same period, reinforcing the swings in the extreme.

Many of the central players in industry in B.C. are so busy they haven't time to look at the critical issue of industry foundations. But they know that western Canadians must become deal-makers.

If B.C.'s production industry has struggled to become 'Hollywood North', it has remained largely a provider of services, equipment and acting talent. Until deals are put together here, supported by Canada's financial industry and producers, the third most populous province will be subject to the same vicious boom-and-bust that characterizes resource industries.

Brent Clackson, location consultant for the Film Promotion Office of the Ministry of Tourism (which in B.C. is the ministry responsible for film industry support) says the resources of the industry in B.C. are so strained that productions have actually been turned away.

Noting the irony that B.C. filmmaker Jack Darcus is filming *Overnight* in Toronto, and that all of Elvira Lount and Laurence Keane's feature *Samuel Lount* was shot in eastern Canada, Clackson points out that the range of services offered by the Promotion Office are for everyone in the industry.

"Our production and location assistance is here for everyone. We definitely are not here only to assist foreign producers," Clackson said.

Clackson takes a long view of the process of industry development, saying that it's still the case that everything being done is breaking new ground.

With Los Angeles only two hours away, the issue of greater Canadian proximity comes up in reference to B.C. producers and directors ability to relate to the decision-making process within CBC and Telefilm. "A Toronto producer can walk down a street or a hallway and have a chat with the people making decisions. They meet socially and in other ways. The cost of one flight back and forth from Vancouver is a thousand bucks," one producer says.

However, the impact of distance is to lay in added administrative and development costs, and kill projects simply because no one is prepared to put speculative funds into the pre-feasibility stage of a project. Networking, an essential part of every form of business, is hindered.

Beyond the traditional laments about the lack of equity in the national production picture, there is still a deep, residual concern that the combination of more active eastern companies and producers capable of deal-making, and venture money, tends to leave B.C. and other western areas out of

the national production scene. So the current activity of American filmmakers is viewed as a presence that redresses the national imbalance somewhat.

"The fact is that we sent away \$47.5 million in production between July 1 and the end of September because of our inability to service producers," says George Chapman, business agent for IATSE, and also a vice-president of the B.C. Film Industry Association.

Chapman was part of a group which held a May 1985 breakfast meeting with producers in Los Angeles. Forty U.S. producers attended, and from that group alone 12 projects were confirmed.

"But in early July, I sent them all letters thanking them, and telling them we were booked solid. Even with that we had to turn away that much production. Had we not sent the letters, the interest would have been even higher."

Under totally ideal circumstances, 1985 could have seen as much as \$200 million in production, and possibly more.

Chapman calls the results "overwhelming" and described the B.C.-Los Angeles axis as informal and relaxed, arising from attitudes, identical time-zones and closeness. The closeness to L.A. has, in turn, produced greater pan-Canadian largesse. "We started referring productions to Alberta, and the other prairie provinces, and finally to Quebec," Chapman says.

Chapman explains that some of the good results from promotional activity come from a five-year plan to develop the quality of services and expand equipment availability.

Another major factor has been a policy in which creative and technical services have been "purposefully undervalued."

For a TV feature this can result, over a 19-day shooting schedule, in savings from \$100,000 to \$500,000, and crew savings can be up to \$20 per hour. Added to that, fringe benefits are lower.

"This was done to encourage the emergence of a year-round

## Film promotion process now cooperative, sophisticated

The world of business pays billions of dollars in North America every year for explicit forms of advice about market and general forms of business development and promotion.

One of the glaring problems with Canada's hot-and-cold film business throughout its history has been deal-making and professional promotion, including marketing in general and specific marketing programs for each film.

In the resource of manufacturing sectors of business, anyone who planned a business without working up a marketing plan would be considered crazy. And yet for decades our filmmakers have done that, and our governments have been inept at professional promotion of the industry in general.

Traditional mindsets (inferiority complex, bureaucratic amateurism, and management-union ideology) have managed to keep the industry from operating as a seamless 'cycle' of people operating from the creative to the box-office ends. We paid a price in Canada.

In recent years, however, the desperation associated with the failure of resource-sector industries to deliver more jobs has finally made the managers of the system aware that promotion is a critical element of the process.

B.C.'s Film Promotion Office in recent years, under the direction of Diane Neufeld, has been demonstrating what the results of a cooperative attitude can do. And, for their part, the industry unions have given the lie to an assumption that labor by its very nature is inflexible. (So persuasive is the myth that B.C.'s new policies are better known in the United States film industry than it is in Canada.)

The fact that B.C. is having a record year in production is a sign that the new attitudes are paying off. Everyone is winning.

Brent Karl Clackson, of B.C. Film Promotion Office (Ministry of Tourism), says the buoyancy in film production hides the fact that "everyone wins" when promotion is systematic and professional. And when one region in Canada grows, the pie grows, and spinoffs are evident throughout the industry. Clackson is adamant that authentic "made in Canada" stories and productions are coming as part of the new production world.

In an interview (Neufeld is one leave) Clackson listed what the Film Promotion Office does in its attempt to provide integrity to promotion within and outside Canada:

- Intending producers send the Film Promotion Office (FPO) a script, with comments about locations, and the FPO does a location breakdown.

- FPO staff try to find main locations, within the limits of its human and physical resources.

- Producers are supplied with photographic evidence that the film can be shot in B.C.

- Information about accessibility of locations, accommodations, costs, crew availability, etcetera, is sent to the producer, with a package that details services.

- Representatives of the production company are invited to B.C. for scouting trip. FPO takes representatives (producer, director, production designers, cinematographers etc. in various permutations) on a scouting trip.

- Production reps are introduced to union representatives, shown studio facilities, introduced to equipment and service suppliers, and to post-production houses. Freelancers are identified where required in each skill area.

- FPO analyzes situation re: potential production and attempts to persuade the producer that it is both financially and creatively attractive to shoot in B.C.

- The Producer says "YES" or "NO" Deals are struck with IATSE, D.G.C. and ACTRA. FPO tries to cut any red tape that gets in the way.

"We view ourselves as facilitators, catalysts, red-tape cutters," says Clackson.

FPO describes its list of services as initial scouting, photographs, maps and any other budget and production information required to stimulate British Columbia as a film location. It also goes out its way to say it is not supplanting freelance service companies.

Industry professionals welcome this attitude and the new and consistent energy being put behind the promotion of the industry as a whole. Since B.C. was able to direct producers eastward, it is clear the logic of systematic promotion is going to contribute to Canada's entire production industry.

It is in these areas of structural industry support that government is most effective.

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## A claim to a place...

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film industry," says Chapman.

The views of the unions and others involved in the industry, who generated a business game plan for B.C. a number of years ago, has been that "activity breeds activity." The industry has recognized that it needs to be able to plan its future as any other industry does.

Chapman agrees with others who believe the activity and growth in basic creative and technical talent pools will create a situation in which many people in the western Canadian industry will achieve credit levels internationally, as well as an international experience base that will result in Canadian deals.

"People are loathe to make long-term investments until all the elements of the equation are in place," he says.

"We're growing even in the depths of regional depression and recession," Chapman says. But the industry still hasn't achieved the recognition it deserves from governments who view film-arts industries as 'flakey'.

The industry's associations and unions are trying to establish momentum and critical mass in the industry, to ensure that when the Canadian dollar is at par or higher than the U.S. dollar, the industry "competes on the basis of merit."

Chapman says a study under-

taken under direction at the B.C. Institute of Technology states that the B.C. film industry should average \$70 million in production minimum. "Once we realize that we could have done \$150 million in business this year, even acknowledging that not all that money is spent directly here, we are talking about an industry that should be acknowledged as vital in hard times."

The claim to be taken seriously as an industry is taking place against a backdrop of deep concern in the B.C. film industry that very little 'made in B.C.' product will appear in Expo '86. The major film production to date is a SHOWSCAN production scheduled for the B.C. Pavilion.

The film has been described by insiders as a travelogue with B.C. as the star. Nominally Fairuza Balk plays the lead in an adventure story overlain on the travelogue.

Expo '86 has resulted in only a small number of significant production contracts for the film and related industries by B.C. producers. The secretive executives of Expo can't or won't say what they expect the overall value of film and multi-image production might be for the fair, but most of it in any case has been produced elsewhere.

Guesstimates from industry insiders place the total value of sight and sound productions in the "hundreds of millions of dollars" level. Few people expect the experience to leave an experienced, better-financed industry after it is over.

## B.C. Productions

**Theatrical and made-for-TV films that are rostered in B.C.'s season cover a spectrum of the commercial classifications and creative categories.**

### CAPTIVE HEARTS Paramount

Feature (Est. budget \$7.5M)  
p. Gary Nardino d. Duncan Gibbons l.p. Kate Reid, Virginia Madsen, Craig Sheffer.  
*Modern Romeo and Juliet story about young lovers who run afoul of the law.*

### THE STORY OF LINN YANN ITC Productions

TV Feature (Est. budget \$2.5M)  
p. (Line) Bob Goodwin exec. p. Dennis Brown d. Simon Wincer l.p. N/A  
*Religious American couple sponsors Cambodian family. Linn Yann is the young daughter. Adventures in a new homeland.*

### THE HITCHIKER Quintina Productions Ltd.

HBO - 13 Episodes (Est. budget \$5M)  
p. Markowitz/Chester d. (13 directors) l.p. N/A  
*The producers don't want to talk about the content of the series.*

### APRIL FOOL'S DAY YCTM for Paramount

Feature (Est. budget \$6M)  
p. Frank Mancuso Jr. d. Fred Walton Cast: N/A

*A takeoff on Agatha Christie's Ten Little Indians with a twist of some kind.*

### ROCKY FOUR Chartoff/Winkler Productions for UA

Feature (Est. budget \$10M)  
p. Irwin Winkler, Robert Chartoff exec. p. Jim Brubaker d. Sylvester Stallone l.p. Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire, Dolph Lundgren.  
*Rocky goes to Russia and beats hell out of the Commie champion.*

### LOVE MARY Westchester Productions for CBS

TV Feature (Est. budget \$2.5M)  
p. Ellis Cohen d. Robert Day l.p. Kristy McNichol, Piper Laurie  
*Based on a real story, a juvenile delinquent/dyslexic child overcomes all odds to eventually become a doctor.*

### THE BOY WHO COULD FLY Feature (Est. budget \$10M)

p. Gary Adelson and Richard Vane d. Nick Castle l.p. Colleen Dewhurst, Fred Gwynne  
*Plot information kept secret at producers' request.*

### STIR CRAZY

TV - five episodes (Est. budget \$5M)  
p. Larry Rosen, David Latt d. James Sheldon l.p. N/A  
*A series based on the feature film of the same name.*

### JUST ANOTHER MISSING KID

20C Fox TV Feature (Est. budget \$2.5M)  
p. Joe Stern and Tony Ganz (Major H. Productions) d. Roger Young l.p. Ellen Burstyn  
*Fictional account of a story from CBC's The Fifth Estate.*

### A LETTER TO THREE WIVES

20C Fox TV Feature (Est. budget \$2.5M)  
p. Karen Moore and Terry Morse (Michael Filerman Productions) d. Larry Elkins l.p. Loni Anderson, Michele Lee, Stephanie Zimbalist, Ben Gazzara, Ann Sheridan  
*A remake of the Mankiewicz film of same name.*

### DANGER BAY

CBC/Disney Channel/Telefilm TV Episodes (Est. budget \$10M)  
p. John Eckert d. N/A l.p. Donnelly Rhodes, Christopher Crabb, Ocean Hellman  
*A pay-TV series about adventures on the same coast as Beachcombers.*

### SHOWSCAN FILM

Province of British Columbia B.C. Pavilion Corporation Quasi-Feature for Expo (Est. budget \$2.5M)  
p. Peter O'Brian d. Rob Turner l.p. Fairuza Balk  
*A made-for-Expo travelogue with a dramatic story woven into it.*

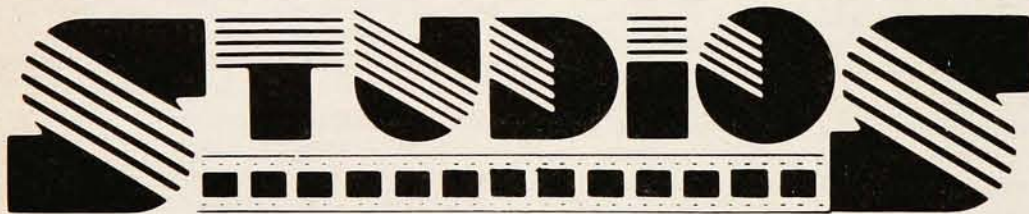
### TO COME:

**RUNNING MAN**  
A high-budget feature starring Christopher Reeves.

Also produced in 1985:  
**RAINBOW WARS**  
A \$1.5M industrial film for Expo.  
**PICKING UP THE PIECES**  
A \$2.5M CBC TV movie starring Margot Kidder.  
**GOING FOR THE GOLD**  
A \$2.5M show starring Dennis Weaver, ITC for NBC.  
**STRIKER'S MOUNTAIN**  
Partially shot in B.C. (Value N/A)

NOTE: The \$100-million-plus figure represents the estimated value of major productions. Not included are a host of other project film productions in the commercial area. Not included also is a record year of video and multi-image production. The figure given is probably a conservative estimate of the overall value of film and film/A-V related production in B.C., all of which draws on a common talent pool.

Rona Gilberston is Cinema Canada's Vancouver columnist. Vancouver writer Eric Green is the author of a study of the film industry for British Columbia's Ministry of Economic Development.



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# The sirens of cinema

by Rona Gilberston

In the 1984 overview update of programme production in the film industry, the federal government department of Communications, in a memorable understatement, declared that "until such time as an indigenous industry can become viable and self-sustaining, there is an urgent need for employment opportunities for local personnel." The report went on to say that "the work done on American productions locally is said to hone the skills of our technicians and to contribute greatly to the development of our own infrastructure." And indeed it is so... for about seven months of the year.

Last year in British Columbia, \$60 million worth of production budgets moved through the province, dispersing \$40 million in their creative wake. From the centre of film involvement to the periphery of associated enterprises, the financial spin-off, judged optimistically at three times the initial investment, has spurred the interest of all. Clearly the film industry now rivals such endemic B.C. industries as mining, lumber and homegrown.

A retrospective glance illuminates that the infusion of foreign-funded job-creation is not only lucrative, but goes back a long way. Lu Perry is celebrated as the progenitor of film work in the province. When the B.C. Film Industry Association (BCFIA) commemorated its greatest year and the recognition of past triumphs in a grand fete last Fall, Perry was honored for his long-time presence and contributions.

Perry was also a contributor in Vancouver's gaining early distinction as one of the three most neon-covered cities in North America, after New York and Chicago. But, when Perry's employers Neon Products Engineering turned their interests to the war, Perry also turned his elsewhere. In 1944 he joined Leon Shelly's Screen Ads, making one-minute spots for theatres. Shelly's father had been minister of finance in the

The mid-'60s hailed the appearance of first strong influx of American production. The Storer Broadcasting Com-

pany of New York, which had of five of their own stations to distribute to, enlisted Perry and others for the first two years of *The Littlest Hobo* series. The sixty-four episodes that followed sparked a sudden interest in Vancouver as a film centre. The "union got its feet into the mud." A hesitant Hollywood began to deal with IATSE, though their physical presence was still years from materializing.

It was late in the '60s that Perry spearheaded the formation of the BCFIA, marshalling a crew of 14. Promotion extended as strength gained, and the first brochures were sent out, advertising a bountiful B.C. The provincial government in Victoria was galvanized for action. Trans Canada Films became the first lab capable of producing color and Panorama Studio was erected as a beacon on the hill above the city.

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At the same time that French Canada's filmmakers were lobbying for greater government support, English Canada was realigning its attitudes. Judy LaMarsh, then Secretary of State, came to Vancouver to

study the situation and returned to Ottawa resolved to prevail upon the powers that were to establish seed money for the floundering industry.

Fred Ranson and Bill Newberry, proprietors of Vancouver Studios, also head the list of the city's first film activators. They remember well when IATSE meant theatre people who worked on the single film project that arrived after 18 months of waiting. In those days, says Ranson, productions moved south and east. If Vancouver and environs were decided upon as locations, a mass of local organizations mushroomed to ensure that pre-production earned its nomenclature. Equipment was sought and sent for from far-off suppliers, and improvisation and invention flourished. The cadre of technicians was small, but even at that, many had to have self-employing businesses to survive.

For them, as others, *The Littlest Hobo* also marked the moment of change. What two years of steady employment did for the people involved was to allow that first accumulation of funds to give inspiration to independence. The weave of commercial houses, skills development and mobilization provided by a union became the fabric of today's potent industry.

In 1978, as Alberta wooed some notable productions onto its territory it became clear that BC too needed a film commission. An attempt had been made two years earlier, but somewhere between the blueprint and the application of theory, the effort had folded. It was Grace McCarthy, who from her ministerial post, recognized the financial resources that were slipping by unnetted. She sought out Justice Green who was engaged as the business manager for the technician's local, and in him found a like-minded comrade.

Green had been witness to the workings of film commissions from Alberta, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas, and had gained an understanding of their methods - enough to see the inherent problems with BC's

earlier attempt.

Basic to the industry, as all who work in it understand, is the ability to hire individuals on a daily basis. The film industry cannot sustain the likes of civil servants and bureaucracies. Safeguarding a need for autonomy and with McCarthy as his political angel, Green founded the BC Film Promotion Office, which acts as ambassador for the province. What began on a six-month trial basis, now runs as a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week enterprise.

Thank to the Film Promotion Office's hard work, word of mouth and an established competence have meant there is less of a need to portfolio the province to distant synods of producers. On the bulletin-board inside the office, where pinned titles denote current projects in motion, there are seven underway.

A tally of the year's productions to date totals 16, for both theatrical and television release. As usual, the principal players are the Americans - Columbia, Paramount, ITC, HBO, Lorimar MGM, United Artists and Disney.

In the last 10 years, the percentage of Canadians crewing has gone from 40% to 90% in Vancouver. And (though pride might slow wholesale admit-

tance) exposure to U.S. methods, equipment and ideas have given a unique look to Canadian productions - as evidenced both by written appreciations and the return of foreign funders.

Justice Green, who produced *Glitterdome* in 1983 and production-managed *Agnes of God* in 1984, questions where else a producer could go with such confidence and so few of his tested fellow-Canadians. "It's a daunting experience to find yourself as five among 100 strangers." With *Agnes of God*, he relished both the on-set amiability and the ultimate look of distinction achieved with a grand mixture of a Canadian director, a Swedish D.O.P., and British production designers.

Perhaps no other industry is as widespread as film in its rapid distribution of funds. To use a visible and recent example, *Rocky IV* put a fast million into the city and the estimate of spinoff equals \$3 million. From the enthused extras to equipment suppliers, from hospitality to hardware, the impact was apparent. One American so fell in love with the look of the Canadian west coast that he produced a \$7,000 totem-pole to take home for his front lawn.

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The figures are exhaustive and fascinating. In 1984, airfares amounted to \$450,000, car rentals for one company alone totalled \$150,000, helicopter usage came to \$750,000, construction materials to \$150,000, and polaroid film, from one drug-store phone, to \$6,000. To cite a favored example last spring, *Rocky IV* required exuberant documentors for the Stallone vs Soviet stand-off. That sent production-assistants rushing out daily for hundreds of dollars worth of flashes for cameras. Tourists may have noticed a paucity of flashes, but retail stores relinquished their wares willingly.

Even with the equality of the Canadian dollar to the American, many believe that film work here would not slacken. The scenery and expertise of crews is, most consider, above par. Still, savings of between \$200,000-\$300,000 on a television movie, coupled with the mere two-and-a-half-hour flight from the mecca of moviedom, offers an exceptional lure. Between 1979 and 1983, there was a 10% increase in production within the province. By 1984, both domestic and foreign production in this territory amounted to an impressive \$46,125,000 dollars.

According to IATSE business agent George Chapman, there are more people on the roster than ever before, but no compromises are being made with entrance requirements, though demand is extreme. "A producer must know he will receive consistent competence, or this long-nurtured industry has no chance of fully reaching its potential."

For Chapman, this is an especially salient issue. Now an industry mainstay, he began his film years in lighting, doing the

necessary theatre work to survive the ubiquitous lean periods. When 'lean' became too tangible, he left the industry, opting for architectural and interior design.

The point to be made is that though he found his way back into the industry, such is not always the way with many — an example of what can happen when you don't protect the people and the industry: you lose your regional resources. Working from his survivor's instinct, Chapman and the Film Promotion Office are seeking ways to promote, diversify and survive the seasonal crisis inherent in a mono-industry.

The technicians' local numbers 160 members, with 50 camerapersons, and, together with the Director's Guild of 105, seven levels of positions. A staggering of crews has been necessary to accommodate the incoming work during the summer months. According to Chapman, "It's a matter of consistency of advice, testing the market, keeping figures, working in the same method of operation and providing due warning to would-be productions." Such creative juggling brings work back. In the last few summers, Vancouver has seen a run of back-to-back projects. A flow of people have kept the momentum of pre-production, production and wrap-up, before moving on to the next set of pictures. Sad, though, that such things are seasonal and short-lived.

As consequence the prevailing attitude is one of accommodation. In comparison to Los Angeles, where 23,000 people work within a 30-mile radius are represented by one union local, there is no complacency about employment in Vancouver. Canadians are more apt to work at scale than their American counterpart and

often the fringe benefits add only 18%, as opposed to 33% to 42% in the U.S. All this goes down as fair argument for finding reasons to 'make it happen in the north.'

To date, according to the federal government's Communications department report on the industry, there are no set requirements in crewing minimums, as in the U.S. As one L.A.-based producer put it, "the same picture would have taken 70 persons in L.A., whereas +5 had managed, through the liberties of no minimum crewing in B.C."

Since the inauguration of the Film Promotion Office, the city has had two mayors whose support has lent marked and marketable muscles to an industry which historically has not had that many. Jane McDonald, communications assistant to Mayor Harcourt, attends to problematic production issues, working closely with Tourism. McDonald says that though budgets are memorably large with visiting projects, the city itself realizes little direct monies, other than small amounts in permits and the like. However, with the stark city budgets of past years, any infusion of real dollars into city economics is welcomed.

For some time Vancouver representatives have gathered where the commingling of clients occurs. Cineposium, the annual American gathering of state and city film promotion offices, gladly welcomed the Canadian contingent from the start. Vancouver officially became an association-member in 1981.

At the yearly gathering in the U.S., representatives, like hagglers at a grand flea market, offer up their regions, each with its own enticements. Aside from the obvious benefits of the Canadian super-

saver dollar, Vancouver offers one-stop shopping. In a world overwhelmed with paper work, Vancouver prides itself on the issue of a permit that sanctions such things as sign removal and replacement, supply truck usage, regulation of traffic, public access and sanitation, and so on, without the necessity of working through each item separately. This pliant municipal wave-of-the-hand has been more than a small draw for visiting patrons.

Early in its game-plan, the city decided three factors must be addressed in the interest of stirring outside support — the general atmosphere had to be one of congeniality and encouragement, the unions had to be exemplary in skill and quality, and the cooperation of the city and provincial film promotion offices had to be steady and reliable.

This year, at her fifth Cineposium, McDonald says the labor put in from a decade ago is paying off, and a 'good-will network' flourishes. The credibility of film commissions grow with the willingness to redirect work when it cannot be accommodated. By June of this year, Vancouver had sent \$33 million worth of feature and commercial production westward. When that special, 360-degree horizon is necessary to make the best picture, it's better in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The impact on employment is difficult to gauge, as much because of the ambulatory nature of the business as its mercurial functioning against the usual odds. The federal government, which, to some extent monitors, the existence of the film industry, states that in B.C., "somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 people work as freelancers, dependant on the arrival of foreign work." If

in such terms, the idea of "a stable industry" becomes a matter of perspective, 80-90% of Vancouver crews depend upon a seasonal visitation of outsiders.

In the past high seasons of the summer, there have been no fewer than five projects shooting simultaneously in B.C. and the panic over studio space is mounting.

Within the city itself, three studios exist, each with their own lures and limitations. Vancouver Studios, though willing to lodge any production, is small and principally operates as a locus for commercials. Panorama Studios, long-time host to production, is seeking to re-zone and divest itself of its occupation. As recently as 10 years ago, the studio held a steadfast position, but it has since become an architectural anomaly as high-priced housing engulfs it.

Built in 1962, the 37,000-foot complex has seen the filming of *The Changeling*, *Star 80*, *Golden Seal*, *Packing It In*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Clan Of The Cave Bear*, and Expo's recent 30-minute industrial-fantasy, *Rainbow Wars*. Currently, *The Hitchhiker*, a 13-part series for HBO, is shooting until Fall. Studio director John Powell estimates that since 1982, approximately \$50 million worth of production budgets have worked through the building. The age of the studio is best exemplified by the still-received phone calls from prize winners of *Let's Make A Deal*.

Owners of the studio feel that the film industry has its own esoteric workings and should therefore be left to them. That, and the encroachment of the city, has convinced the Panorama Estates to sell the shrivelling 2.8 hectare site



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Film Resources Officer  
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to developers. Though small by today's standards, the studio is one of the largest in the great radius north of L.A. With a price tag of \$1.9 million, Powell feels the studio itself comes free.

Certainly B.C.'s film community has never been more focused, but the unease left from the infamous tax-shelters has not helped in unearthing investors. At governmental levels, the policy of tight restraint makes financial assistance seem unlikely to many. The financial trepidation in both private and public sectors produces no small amount of consternation in film promoters.

So a battle now rages over the Burnaby property known as Dominion Bridge, which last year provided space to Sellick's *Runaway* and at present to Lorimar Production's *The Boy Who Could Fly*, the summer's long-running feature shoot.

As a studio, Dominion Bridge is ideal because of its colossal size and unfaceable environment. Its sheer size allows for great detonations and enhancement to occur without mishap. As a *bona fide* studio, it would house equipment, a film lab and perhaps a restaurant. The hope is to eventually capture lost post-production work by installing facilities in the building. Currently, 33% of production budgets are lost as producers head back from whence they came to complete their projects.

The Dominion Bridge project would demand a start-up time of three to five years and at initial cost of almost \$15 million. Given the yearly increase in action, with an average daily rental of \$1300 while shooting and \$850 per holding day, there is optimism that this is a safe investment.

The healthiest rival to Dominion Bridge is the shopping-mall proposed by Alberta developers Triple Five of West Edmonton Mall fame. In a recent report commissioned to juxtapose the two alternatives, the British Columbia Institute of Technology looked at the dollar-to-acre projection over the next 10 years.

Results clearly show the B.C. film industry as something of consequence. The shopping-mall proposal, while investing an initial \$300 million, would see a yearly rendering of \$20 million for fifteen acres. The repercussions to the retail-trade of the lower mainland have their own tale of woe, but the economic focus would be considerable.

However, the studio proposal would utilize fifteen acres of land with a yearly return of \$50 million per acre. The prognosis is that a studio could

manage well on seven acres of land, therefore bringing in \$100 million per acre and optioning half the pricey land for other use.

For George Chapman, if studios are "white elephants anyway," they do present a point of bargainability when trying to woo producers one's

way. A studio of premium size and quality would act as a doorway to the rest of the province, opening northern B.C., the Yukon, and the interior to big productions that have made rare visits in years past.

The film community argues that a television movie, on average, brings in over one

million dollars every nineteen days. A feature can be expected to spend an average of three to eight million for the duration - all dollars with direct investment that would otherwise not be captured by the province. And so - caught with a choice between a shopping-mall and a firmer film

industry - an impasse endures until decisions are made by government and private investors examining the issue.

A studio could remedy the seasonal slowdown, but increasingly the commercial sector is permeating the regional market. Traditionally



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west coast operations have been different, leaning more heavily on longer productions, but palpitations in this creative traffic are being felt. Prior to Christmas, the sister IATSE local in Toronto was crewing at least 14 commercials a day, while the Vancouver union might not do 14 in a year.

Immigration has always been a factor for transgressors of borders – and no less so for short-time movie marketeers. Recently the Japanese, like the German co-producers of *A Never Ending Story*, found out that the Canadian government can be less rigid and more solicitous. Two years ago at the San Jose film commission gathering, the Japanese advertising agency Dentsu pleaded with the American contingent to lobby on their behalf for less stringent entry regulations. Of the \$30 million they wished to bring into the U.S., they were only being allowed six.

The Vancouver union and Film Promotion Office representatives rapidly alerted them as to the northern potential. Though the U.S. didn't alter their restrictions and Canada didn't get all the remaining \$24 million, Dentsu is now shooting big-budget commercials for Toyota and Mazda in B.C. and Alberta.

The resulting cultural interface introduced its own unintended education. The Japanese serendipitously encountered oddities such as 'grips' and now find them as indispensable as does any crew.

This meshing of international film cultures may have its high moment next year when EXPO '86 brings the world to Vancouver. The film community, far from the pessimism one might expect, feels it will simply move operations further from the core of the city. Meanwhile, it'll be shooting as usual as the principle hotellers have already reserved rooms for their summertime film customers. Like the L.A. Olympics before it, EXPO '86 could simply make Vancouver a more ordered place to live and work, as fear stimulates action and coordination.

In the meantime, production continues to increase. Presently on the West Coast, either shooting or confirmed, are *Showscan*, *Hitchhiker*, *The Story Of Linn Yann*, *Captive Hearts*, *April Fools Day*, *The Boy Who Could Fly*, *Stir Crazy*, *Abducted* and *Running Man*. Here, in the land of make-believe, it is a time for applause to promoters and the industrious fellowship of film crews.

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