

## E A S T E R N W A V E

by Chris Majka

The Atlantic Filmmakers Coop, now in its 14th year, the oldest film co-operative of its kind in the country. Despite a changing film environment, the challenges of video, periodic financial crises, a changing organizational and ideological structure, periodic migrations to new premises, and a variety of coordinators and staff people, AFCCOOP has managed not only to survive but to thrive.

From its beginnings as the only independent film organization in the Atlantic region, to its current position as one of numerous and diverse media companies and organizations, it still remains one of the central foci of the community. AFCCOOP members, past and present, are everywhere visible; in every production nook of the National Film Board of Canada; as owners and employees in many of the independent production, distribution and exhibition ventures of the region; in most of the other community media organizations; as crew and producers on feature film shoots which have come here from other parts of Canada or abroad; and as expatriates from Vancouver to Great Britain. Many of these people cut their production teeth at AFCCOOP and to this day remain actively interested in its activities.

Gary Swim, the current overall coordinator of the co-op, told me about some of the ways in which AFCCOOP has changed in the past and is continuing to rethink its position and role. When the co-op was first established members saw it as an organization involved in producing non-commercial, experimental and alternative films. They saw their mandate as oppositional to the public and commercial sector — any thoughts of reaching out into that crass commercial arena were anathema. Now that philosophy has changed substantially. While still continuing to have a commitment to training young filmmakers and provid-

ing a venue for the production of experimental or alternative films, the co-op has planted one foot very firmly within the commercial world. It does so by rentals of production and post-production equipment to commercial productions; by actively promoting its services and those of its staff and crew to productions shooting in the region; and by undertaking film projects which have carefully worked out commercial prospects. Swim tells me that he fields daily calls from producers from within and outside the region who are looking for crew, location scouting, production management or whatever.

Another area which has come to be an important one for AFCCOOP is its involvement on national issues through its active membership in the Independent Film and Video Alliance. It is now actively lobbying for the establishment of both a provincial film commission and a source of funds for co-ops through Telefilm Canada. Swim told me that members are appalled that \$17 million would flow from telefilm back into the Treasury Board for lack of broadcast letters. Its growing public stance on local, regional and national issues is an important part of AFCCOOP's work.

AFCCOOP continues to be ever more active in the area of training and development. Its workshop committee organizes a variety of in-house and open workshops throughout the year that Swim feels have grown in their scope and degree of expertise. For a number of years AFCCOOP members have taught a film production course at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NASCAD) and this year they have received permission to teach a second more advanced course there. Through the assistance of Job Development grants from Canada Employment and Immigration they have been able to take on six people as production trainees. These people have received extensive hands-on experience in various sectors of the film in-

dustry. The first three trained in art direction, production management and equipment maintenance and the current group of three are working in sound and music editing, cinematography and they are also producing.

These grants have been a great success both for the people involved, for the programme and for AFCCOOP in general. The Department of Employment and Immigration has also assisted AFCCOOP with development grants which have made possible a wide variety of staff positions within the co-op to help with some of its ongoing work.

There are still many challenges and difficulties which it faces. For a long time the more longstanding and experienced members of AFCCOOP came to feel that there was no longer any place for their projects within its framework. As ambitions and budgets grew, the co-op seemed incapable of accommodating such projects and members increasingly moved into the commercial sector. Over the long term this had the impact of depriving AFCCOOP of the active knowledge, expertise and help of precisely those members who were best equipped to teach and help the less

experienced ones. AFCCOOP has made an active attempt to turn this around by changing its structure (Swim is currently engaged in a wholesale rewrite of the bylaws of the organization which will give it more room to manoeuvre and which will accommodate some of its current concerns) and by soliciting the involvement of longstanding members. This year's Board of Directors marks the return of some of those faces and there seems to be a growing apprehension that the co-op is not a "moribund" institution.

Equally pressing is yet another home for the co-op since its lease expires in November and the future of their current premises is in question. Two options they have been exploring are to either move somewhere on their own and securing a long-term lease in a building with considerably more space, or entering into an association with a number of like-minded arts organizations and seeking to buy a building as a permanent residence. AFCCOOP along with the Centre for Art Tapes, Picture Plant, Brett Films, and the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Atlantic have already initiated such a structure and are actively assessing their options.

For an organization like AFCCOOP, constantly walking a tightrope of precarious financial support and drawing on the energy and goodwill of its members, the future is never fully secure but if its past vitality and resilience is any measure, my bets are on AFCCOOP to play a continuing active and diverse role in the media community of the Atlantic Provinces.

## Atlantis shines Northern Lights to China

TORONTO — Atlantis Television International Inc. has sold four more episodes of the **Northern Lights** drama series to the Central China Television network.

It's the second sale this year by Atlantis to the Chinese network, which has an audience of about 370 million people.

No financial details on the sale of the half-hour programs was released.

Atlantis, through the CBS Broadcast Institute in New York, earlier sold three other episodes of the same series to the Chinese television network.

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