

Tenders called for production centre

MONTREAL – Proposals for a Film Production Centre in Montreal for the production of feature films and high-budget television series are being sought by the governments of Canada and Quebec.

Under the Canada-Quebec Subsidiary Agreement on Cultural Facilities, the private sector has been invited to submit proposals by June 30. The proposals will be evaluated on the basis of their ability to meet the needs of the Canadian and Quebec film industries and to attract foreign productions.

This project is one of several projects promised under the (Quebec/Canada) agreement which was ratified in 1985 the invitation for proposals has been circulated widely throughout the private sector.

A federal government spokesman told *Cinema Canada* that it is not a resurfacing of the Cité du

Cinéma project which had been the subject of much speculation over the past several years.

Gilles Lalonde, director of federal-provincial relations, communications Canada, says the project is on a much smaller scale than the Cité du Cinéma.

"We are talking about one maybe two major sound stages," says Lalonde, "at any rate we are talking about production facilities only."

Lalonde says the recently announced film distribution policy and a promise of a \$200 million infusion in the industry has created a renewed interest in the building of a production centre in Montreal.

"Montreal is already heavy with video production facilities but there is room for more film production facilities," says Lalonde.

"There has been declared interest in this project in the past. We will have to wait and see what happens."

The proposal invitation stipulates that the project must be at least 80 per cent Canadian owned.

The management committee of the agreement, co-chaired by Ken Hepburn, senior assistant deputy minister of Communications Canada

and André Juneau, assistant deputy minister for the Cultural Milieu of the Quebec department of Cultural Affairs, will make its recommendations to the responsible ministers in July.

Vancouver fest tightens belt

VANCOUVER – The Vancouver International Film Festival will go ahead in late September but at two-thirds of the originally planned size. Interim director Alan Franey, who was appointed after Hannah Fisher resigned following the Festival's annual general meeting, says the last month has been a time of "finding our feet".

Leonard Schein's "Vancouver Community Slate" won approval when the AGM voted for the board of directors on April 20; since then, Fisher has left along with business manager Sheila Beveridge and two other staffers. Franey says the priority is to hire a director of communications and a special events co-ordinator. A small clerical staff will be looking after business management.

"We've got to tighten our belt," Franey told *Cinema Canada*. "We've pared the festival down to about 100 films from the projected 150. The dates won't change and we'll allow two screenings per film. The word we've been hearing from audiences is that to market a festival that has too much for people to get a handle on is counter-productive. Especially these days when Cineplex and Northstar are spreading out into the area of specialized films, art films."

He says the VIFF will continue with Fisher's plan to focus on the Pacific Rim countries.

"Hannah had a great many things up in the air and her personal talents will be greatly missed. I don't think anyone can pretend to come in and capitalize on what she had done. We'll try and get our priorities straight and carry on with those things that are most important for the long-term of the festival."

Franey says he feels somewhat caught in the middle of the philosophic disagreements that saw Schein take over the Board and Fisher leave. "I've worked with Hannah for the past year-and-a-half and I'm very much sympathetic with both what she was trying to do and with the aims of the festival before Hannah arrived. I think that, unfortunately, because of the high emotions of the thing, there was no reconciliation possible. I don't think Leonard's mandate was to take the festival back to what it was... I don't think anyone knew the emotions would start a domino effect.

"I agree 100 per cent that there has been damage conferred because of seemingly petty issues. The Board I know... there was much alarm about this kind of jumping the ship. I

think that the common good and the responsibility to the long-term goals of the festival was lost in the emotions of the moment," he continued.

"If we get over this year as gracefully as we hope to... I think that the picture will be clearer. This has been an unfortunate glitch but I think everybody wants the same thing: a quality film festival which will have meaning for Vancouver audiences and for the international film industry as a whole."

Famous launches construction drive

TORONTO – Calling it "the largest single construction commitment in the history of film in this city," Famous Players chairman Walter Senior has announced eight new theatre complexes to be developed in the Toronto area over the next three years, including a downtown location that reclaims the name Imperial Six.

The old Imperial Six was lost when rival exhibitor Cineplex Odeon bought first half, then all, of the building in which it was housed, renaming it the Pantages.

The new Imperial will be built underneath the historic Ryrie building at Yonge and Shuter streets. Construction on the six-theatre, 2300-seat complex is set to begin next spring, and will take one year to complete.

The Ryrie is located in the heart of the city's "theatre block," an area designated by the city to be developed as an entertainment district. The block includes Massey Hall, the soon-to-be-reopened Elgin-Wintergarden theatre, and the old Imperial Six, now being redeveloped into Cineplex's live theatre venue, the Pantages.

Famous Players' Uptown theatre is also slated for redevelopment following completion of the new Imperial Six. Both plans are seen as an effort to reestablish the downtown presence of Famous Players, which has been outmaneuvered twice by Cineplex recently. In August 1987, Cineplex bought the University theatre on high-priced Bloor Street, which had been closed by Famous, and announced plans to turn it into a theatre, hotel and shopping complex that would serve as the home of Toronto's Festival of Festivals. Then, this spring, after a bitter legal struggle, Cineplex finally gained control of the Imperial Six complex, also located on prime downtown land.

Allan Gregg, chairman of the Festival of Festivals, was on hand at the Famous Players announcement to show his neutrality in choosing theatre space. "Our demand for cinemas is so great that no one cinema complex will ever be able to accommodate it all," he said.

Continued next page

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Continued from previous page

Senior assured the audience that the Famous Players' association with the festival "will continue in these new theatres."

"The festival needs the cooperation of both circuits."

Senior also denied that the announcements were a new salvo in a long territorial battle between the two exhibitors. "We don't expand reactively," he said. "We expand because we think there's a need."

In addition to the Imperial Six and Uptown projects, Famous Players will also build a new complex at Yonge and St. Clair in midtown Toronto, and five more in surrounding areas, including: a six-screen complex in Scarborough scheduled to open in December; the Gateway cinemas, a six-screen complex in Bramalea, located west of Toronto; the Glen Abbey, a six-screen theatre in Oakville.

Drabinsky defends expansion to shareholders

TORONTO - At an annual meeting marked more by orchestrated responses than outright conflict, Cineplex Odeon chairman Garth Drabinsky defended his expansionist policies to an audience of nervous shareholders.

Despite stock prices that reached a 52-week low the day before the shareholders meeting, Drabinsky presented an aggressively upbeat profile of his corporation, outlining its dominance of "the important markets" in film exhibition, and its diversification into other areas. Cineplex's goal, he said, is to create "a well-balanced and highly profitable leisure and entertainment operation by the end of the decade."

There were 747 shareholders, holding over 39 million shares, represented at the meeting in person and by proxy. Although some of the questions challenged Drabinsky's version of the company's performance, the actual business of the meeting was handled without opposition. Directors were nominated and voted onto the Cineplex board with orchestrated precision. At one point Drabinsky said, "We should have the scrutineer's report (on a vote) in about 30 seconds." Exactly 25 seconds later, it arrived.

Drabinsky took the crowd through the company's recent performance, characterizing 1987 as a "year of consolidation" after the rapid expansion of 1986. Still, Cineplex plans to open



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"100 screens in the U.K. by the end of 1990," and Drabinsky hinted at moving into the Japanese market as well. He tried to downplay any risk in the corporation's activities, and insisted that Cineplex will not move into film production.

"I wish to state categorically that we are not in the business of producing motion pictures," he said. Cineplex will, however, provide distribution guarantees, which a producer can then use to obtain more money from other sources.

One shareholder pressed Drabinsky

repeatedly on the corporation's performance, citing the cost of lavish new theatres, and stock prices that have continued to slide since the October 1987 market crash. Before the crash, stocks reached a high of \$26, and are now trading in the \$10 range.

"If shareholders decide to sell, nobody can stop them," Drabinsky responded. "I know where we're going. Our directors know where we're going. We have tremendous confidence."

Drabinsky's aggressive defence of Cineplex policy is matched by similarly aggressive accounting practices. Cineplex reported

revenues of \$520,153,000 (U.S.) for 1987 and net income of \$34,558,000 (U.S.), but the corporation includes real estate revenue in its yearly profit rather than counting it as extraordinary gains, boosting the on-paper profit beyond what a more conservative accounting would show.

For the most part, though, investors left the meeting impressed with Drabinsky's confident plans for further development. On leaving, each shareholder was presented with a ceramic miniature of a Cineplex popcorn bag, with the words "Made in USA" stamped on the bottom.