

Dust off those filmic treasures

Wanted: 16mm, 8mm and Super-8 mm home movie collections for possible inclusion in a one-hour television documentary on the history of the family in North America. The film is called *Portraits de Famille (The Family Filmed)*.

We are looking at films from all over Canada and the U.S. We are finding some wonderful footage, and yours might be wonderful too. Films will be handled with care and returned in the original condition, and credit will be given in the film for material which is finally used.

For more information call (514) 521-7103 (Aska Film International).

Brian Lewis
Michael Dorland
(writers)

As for the Kathleen Shannon Documentary Award, I would like to point out that to the best of my knowledge, the decision to present the award to a National Film Board film was made by Kathleen Shannon. The jury and festival made the last minute change at her insistence. The Yorkton Festival director, board and jury can only be faulted for buckling and yielding to the Kathleen Shannon myth.

The Yorkton Festival is the only festival I have been able to enter. I did not enter to win but, to get feedback from the jury and fellow participants. I am well aware of my film's limitations. As a filmmaker working outside the major centers, I welcome any and all criticism of my films, as long as it's honest. I left the festival clutching an audio tape of the pre-selection committee's and juror's comments about *Break The Cycle*. I expected the critique to be honest (maybe even brutal). It was very positive. As the afternoon session just prior to the awards banquet, Lawrence O'toole stated that at one point, the jury simply stopped recording their comments. They felt they weren't being honest. I was relieved to discover that they didn't stop before my film, but I'm left pondering the value of that cassette. How honest were they wint my critique?

I did not expect to win an award at Yorkton and as one who attended the awards ceremony, I believed that I had not. Imagine my surprise when I returned home to Ontario early Monday morning and begin receiving calls of congratulations. They were thrilled, delighted, and they wanted to send telegrams. I thought they were crazy. "No, no" I tried to explain. "I was there. Foster Child won. It's a fine film too." "No, no they insisted, you're just being coy. Why don't you tell us these things: Why do we have to wait to read it in the Toronto Star?" My frustration grew as the day wore on. The calls continued. I tracked down Saturday's Star to see for myself. There it was alright, but why did the article have so much information about the film? How could they make such a mistake? I called Yorkton.

Ian Reid was very apologetic and explained that an early press release had gone out to CP. A last minute emergency meeting had been held at Kathleen Shannon's insistence. She wanted the winner changed and indeed it was. It seems the jury "misinterpreted" the criteria.

There is no question that an injustice has been done. You simply do not change awards at the last minute regardless of whether or not the criteria have been "misinterpreted". If there was any question as to the interpretation, the jury's choice should have prevailed. Following the festival, Kathleen Shannon, the National Film Board and the Yorkton Festival should have consulted to ensure that next year's criteria were clearly understood and suitable to all parties. The idea of taking an award away from a filmmaker at the last minute is totally inappropriate and morally wrong.

I was curious as to what this mysterious

criterion was. I wanted to know why Ms. Shannon found my film so vile as to take \$1,000.00 out of my hand and give it to a NFB produced film. I was curious to know why she seemed to hate it so that she didn't want her name associated with it, why she didn't want the film to get a little exposure, why she didn't want the film to get a little exposure, why she didn't want to help an independent, why the change was made so tackily at the last minute. I wanted feedback. I wanted honesty. I called her in Montreal.

I politely explained the situation I had been caught in due to the Toronto Star story. I was being pursued by the local press for a comment. I didn't have any answers and I hoped she could fill me in. Ms. Shannon said she was "appalled" that the Yorkton Festival could have messed up so badly with the press releases. She claimed "There were many last minute changes made and yours just got missed." She felt badly that a woman had to get caught in this position. She said that "they (the winners) weren't etched in stone at an early date".

This was not what I was expecting. I thought she'd say that this was all very unfortunate, then she would rattle off the missing criteria. I thought maybe she would say she didn't agree with the film's politics, or that technically it wasn't very good. I thought she would give me feedback. I thought she would give me honesty.

Ms. Shannon never did tell me what the criteria were. I impressed upon her the fact that I was heading to Banff in a couple of days and that possibly the western press would want answers too. "Tell them a mistake was made" she said. I said that perhaps that wouldn't be good enough and that I was caught in the middle. She said she would be willing to handle her share of the press inquiries but, as to the reasons for her decision "I guess I'm going to have to give some thought to this" she said. We tried to arrange a meeting in Toronto before my departure. The day before I left, I received a message from Joanne in Studio D. who was calling on Kathleen's behalf. "Ms. Shannon is

sorry she can't meet you in Toronto and she wishes you a good trip."

It has been over a month since I got Ms. Shannon's message. I haven't received a call or note from her since. I'm still dealing with the calls of congratulations, the queries about what really happened and the letters of condolence. I'm still waiting to hear about this mysterious criterion. Still waiting for feedback. Still waiting for honesty.

Debbie Cartmer

Bad timing

Re: Randi Spire's review of *Hoover Vs. The Kennedys*. The greatest flaw with this television mini-series was the time slot provided by CTV. Broadcasting *Hoover Vs. The Kennedys* over four consecutive Monday evenings did more damage to the audience's opinion of the show than deserved. How is the television viewer expected to understand the historical details and dramatic developments of the series over a period of four weeks? An initially enticing historical drama proved ultimately confusing and disappointing because of this programming decision.

This demonstrates CTV's lack of respect and commitment for alternative Canadian programmes to the usual soap operas and cop shows they broadcast.

A show like *Hoover Vs. The Kennedys* deserved a better program time, especially in this day and age when our society's young people are not even aware of vital historical figures like Martin Luther King and J. Edgar Hoover. Today's youth rely on films and television shows like *Hoover Vs. The Kennedys* for their education because it is an exciting and entertaining way to understand history.

Lars E. Eedy

Still waiting for honesty

The following is a response to a letter sent by Montreal filmmaker Lois Siegal to Debbie Cartmer, director of *Breaking the Cycle*.

Thank you for your letter today re the Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival. Your concern is appreciated. It is difficult for one who has been victimized to speak out. The danger here is that we will be perceived as "sore losers". I am not concerned with winning or losing but with ethics, fairness and honesty.


I had initially decided to remain silent about this injustice. I, more so than the other participants, have been caught as an innocent victim. Unfortunately, it was at the hands of someone for whom I had a great deal of respect. Your letter has prompted my response.

In all fairness to the Yorkton staff, I would like to point out that the entry form for the festival does stipulate that "awards may not be given in categories where, in the opinion of the judges, the entries do not merit distinction." I see no problem with this or the rationale given by Laurence O'Toole. However, the elimination of six categories does seem excessive. It is my hope that the jury arrived at this decision because "the entries do not merit distinction" and not (as it has been suggested), because they couldn't agree.

As soon as the decision was made (provided the festival had not already started), the Yorkton Festival staff could have contacted those nominees whose category had been cut. It would have been the fair thing to do.

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Open letter on Telefilm Canada's export assistance policy

Films Transit is an internationally established and recognized export company for Canadian feature films and television programmes, which has been in operation since early 1980.

We would like very much to comment on Telefilm's recent decision to open up the export assistance programs for foreign sales agents to anyone who is able to find him or herself three Canadian feature films.

Ten years ago there was no export experience in this country. Occasionally a producer sold his own productions, but most of the time, the films which were considered 'exportable' went to American companies, and not only did producers and filmmakers lose track of their films, also very little money eventually flowed back to their producers in this country. During this period Canada obtained its worst reputation as a filmmaking nation, because the films these American companies exported on behalf of their Canadian producers were mostly tax shelter films without any cultural or national value and in most cases without even any commercial value.

When companies like our own came to life in the early '80s, we were immediately confronted with this very bad reputation. Most of the foreign buyers for television and for theatrical distribution we met did not want to know about Canadian film because hardly anything they had seen in the previous years was any good. At that time, a French Canadian film occasionally became known via the international film festival circuit and the National Film Board of Canada was the only institution safeguarding the reputation of Canadian cinema because of its high quality production of great documentaries.

In the early '80s a generation of Canadian-owned and controlled export companies came to life which started carefully to rebuild the international reputation of Canadian television and feature films. Producers learned more about the international market and made better, more saleable films and together we succeeded. Today, Canadian films are represented in every important film festival around the world and the reputation of the Canadian film industry has never been better. We think that there is a very special reason for this phenomenon.

The experienced sales agents and export companies have functioned as a filter between the producers and the international market. We have made the sometimes difficult decisions whether a film is exportable or not, but it is our profession to take these decisions.

With our experience in the international marketplace, the sales agents are the only individuals who are completely aware of the fluctuations of the world market and are in a much better position to judge if a film is exportable than a producer because we do not have the same relationship to the film in question.

We think that this filter between the producers and the market is absolutely necessary because buyers do not want to waste their time with inexportable product. Buyers like very much to work with experienced sales agents because the agents know them very well and also know what to offer and what not. This is very important.

Because of the recent high barrier at Telefilm to obtain export assistance (15 hours of exportable programming, two years of experience, etc.) producers and fly-by-nights were deterred from trying to sell product themselves and left this specialized job to the experienced sales agents.

We believe that out of the entire Canadian production of films and television productions, most probably only 20-25 per cent really has a chance to be sold on the foreign market. Furthermore, we believe that a production is really proven to be exportable when there are at least 10-15 direct sales to different territories.

Today we learn that Telefilm throws the doors wide open to anyone who wants to launch him or herself into export by lowering the barrier to an incredible level because getting the rights to three feature films is hardly a problem. Mostly this is done by finding some films which have been refused or shopped around by three or four experienced sales agents as the producers of these films will sign any contract in such a situation.

There are many productions available for those who want to become eligible for taxpayers' money to go to Cannes. But flooding the international market with unsellable product is the worst that can happen at this very moment and will destroy our carefully built reputation.

At a market like MIP-TV in Cannes, Canada has already become the fourth largest delegation on the floor and the buyers are getting confused because they'd rather deal with 10 sales agents each handling 15-25 productions than with 45 mostly unknown newcomers, who carry each three or four productions. A professional sales agent will visit six to eight markets a year plus an x-number of personal visits to clients, while the newcomers will go to Cannes, the AFM and maybe Mifed. We do not think that this limited presence is enough to become established.

The new regulation of Telefilm will boost attendance figure of Canadians at the international markets even more and we are afraid that what we were carefully able to avoid, will now happen:

The number of sales companies will probably double in the next year and for what product? Isn't there a crisis in production? More

companies who will each have less to sell create a general confusion.

The number of Canadians present at the markets will probably triple over the next two years. All these people will spend enormous amounts of money on travel and lodging and serious questions could be asked about the actual results for the Canadian film industry. Information about what people really accomplish at these markets is harder to obtain than top secret information from the Ministry of National Defense.

The number of titles available for sales will probably become five times higher than today. Product will come out of the woodwork from across the country as the new sales agents will hound the grounds for product to sell and probably pick up almost anything.

When Telefilm's international marketing assistance program was put into effect three years ago, all of a sudden there were more than 70 Canadian features at the Cannes market... to everybody's stark astonishment. This is the most dangerous of them all. A buyer who has sat through four bad Canadian movies, will not go and see a fifth one.

The inexperience of many of the newcomers will drive them into the hands of non-Canadian sales agents who buy up for certain territories. This means that the Canadian seller will eventually lose track of the film, because the non-Canadian sales agent will sell-through again. At the moment more than 80 per cent of all the sales are direct sales and this is a very important experience brought back into this country.

We do not believe that Telefilm's decision has been taken on the basis of serious consultation among the professional export companies. Because there is only talk about feature films, this is obviously a lobbied deal and therefore irreversible because who wants to lose face? It is a pity, but this seems to be the Canadian reality.

Most of the people who will now start export activities will find out sooner or later that it is more complicated than it all seems:

- that there will not be enough really exportable films;
- that exporting is more expensive than they think because to do the job properly, they will have to attend six to eight markets a year,
- that if a film is bad, even spending of thousands of dollars in advertising will not help it sell,
- that plenty of government money does not buy all the solutions and certainly does not make an unsellable film, sell.

We seem to recall that Telefilm Canada not only assists the promotion of a production, it is also investor and interested to earn its money back. Making our life difficult this way is in direct contradiction with Telefilm's interest because dozens of new sales agents will apply dozens of new rules (especially deductions from revenue) and Telefilm will find it extremely hard

to keep an eye on their investments.

Films Transit will brace itself for a little while because it will be harder for us to get good films as an unrealistic bidding war will now start among the dozens of exporters this country will have a little while from now. Huge minimum guarantees will be promised for Canadian films for international rights but these sums will not have any realistic relation to the real market value of a film in the international market and the poor producers will not see the color of their money.

The experienced export companies will have to battle their way through a period of utter chaos, but without a doubt, these companies will survive in the end. It is sad that we will have to go through this again.

Jan Rofekamp
President, Films Transit Inc.

514-282-1631
416-924-6441

Life
productions

CASTING DIRECTORS

Rosina Bucci
Vera Miller
Nadia Rona

with offices
in Montreal
and Toronto

3981 St. Laurent
Suite #700
Montréal, Qué.
H2W 1Y5

501 Yonge Street
Suite 224
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 1Y4

Toronto contact:
Angela Wright