

SPECIAL EVENTS

CBC: TRAINING FOR THE PEEP SHOW

CBC Training Programme

When John Hirsch first assumed the mantle of CBC Drama Head, not exactly the most-loved position in the country, he looked around and saw - hardly anything. A hard core of producers, directors, writers and solid actors had virtually kept CBC drama alive for a decade, after the mass emigration of the early Sixties. He knew that to achieve long-term goals he needed fresh blood to stimulate programming; enough work to keep them in Canada, and a way to train the inexperienced people he would draw from theatre and film into the art of video. In the Spring of 1974 he enlisted George Bloomfield, along with Beverly Roberts and Deborah Peaker, in the hunt for new talent, as well as in the establishment of a specific training programme. Gerry Mayer, with his extensive experience in Hollywood TV, as well as **Police Surgeon** here in Toronto, was added to the group. Film has been kept separate from video with Mayer working in the former and Peaker and Roberts in the latter. The preliminary results of the first year will be seen on CBC in a show called **The Peep Show**.

Actually there were two facets to the programme and in examining them we can see why the changes that are currently under discussion are possible. First a series of workshops in video were set up. What Peaker calls a "lurking" programme, that is allowing potential directors to observe on set, was begun. Mainly theatrical directors were sought because they had worked in drama and with actors, and Eric Till ran a fast programme in the Summer of '74.

"I was phoning about joining Bloomfield's Video Directors' training programme" said Peaker, "and I was chosen to attend. I think he was looking for people with passion, drive and some success. Bloomfield has that rare ability to teach. An aura was created where we could learn and experiment without fear. Then I was approached to produce in the series planned. At first it was twenty-six half hours but as budgets dropped and as studios were overbooked, we were cut down. Now there are eleven projects under video: one film allotted before Gerry joined, and four films under Gerry. The directors include David Cronenberg, Morley Markson, Dennis Zahoruk and others, from the workshop.

"I'm trying to find new programming with new writers and new directors. Often their inexperience is an asset, because they won't use es-

tablished methods. But it's not public masturbation. It's experimental in many ways but entertaining too, the same as in their theatres. And for the most part there was a set crew for all the shows, so the newcomers were surrounded by experience. The crews were eager too; the technical director asked to work on the series. They like to ask questions. That's also why I was hired: I know how to ask questions. I'm responsible but I don't get involved artistically, really. At least we had a situation of working with our peers."

Gerry Mayer has been a director in Hollywood TV for many years, and numbers among his credits everything from **Bonanza** to **Ben Casey**. As producer his goal is to develop craft, and above all, teach the necessity of narrative and the role of conflict. In fact, in his early years at **MGM** - he's the great Louis B.'s nephew he directed a short. "It had five or six people and it fell apart. A similar thing is happening to these directors. If the filmmakers learn something - if they come to realize the importance of conflict, of the full master shot - then the programme is successful.

"I looked at dozens of films. I chose guys who had stuff that moved, guys who were story tellers. Most of the films I saw just lay there. Many moved from documentary to structured drama, and they showed what needs to be taught to anyone in this country: craft and technical knowledge of what constitutes a viable teleplay. There has to be conflict - interplay, disbelieving of information, divulging information out of character. Hirsch wanted someone who had a lot of U.S. film experience; he felt that CBC films could be improved. He also felt we better get a lot of new directors."

Hirsch has, in fact, been a main supporter of the programme since it began. "He stepped in to insure a sufficient number of shows would be made," says Peaker, "and if he has done nothing else, he's made all directors freelance, so there exists an atmosphere of competition and change."

Mayer worked with Martin Lavut, Tadeusz Jaworski, Clarke Mackey, Frank Vitale and Peter Rowe. He was pleased overall with the results, and his very active role - he cut most of the films himself - supports the validity of his appraisal. And Peaker, involved in the same type of exercise but not officially conversing with Mayer about the programme on a day-to-day level, agrees with his summation. "We realize now that we need more shows. Or rather the directors do:

one is not enough. We need more funds for the programme, even though, if the CBC didn't have this programme, these guys wouldn't be working. And they should work."

"Training without programming is just tokenism," says Peaker. "In this country we do too much too soon or not enough too late. There must be long-term planning. Being miserly and frugal doesn't work; we're suckers if we accept it."

That's the criticism of the programme and the top brass agree. Muriel Sherring has recently been appointed head of training programme, and one new approach is the use of the dry run, where a show is done fully, but without shooting. The programme is in flux; it will change over the next year. The important point is that the attitude at the CBC has changed.

Peep Show

The schedule for broadcast of the CBC's Peep Show series has been released, and the time slot has been set at Thursday at 10:30 pm, beginning November 20, with the **CODCO** Company, directed by Alan Erlich, in **Festering Forefathers and Running Sons**. On the 27th was **The Kill**, wherein an unseen person terrorizes a father and son. December's lineup consists of, on the 4th, **A Brief History of the Subject**, directed by Eric Steiner, written by Brian Wade, and featuring Brenda Donohue and Neil Monroe. On the 11th is **Melony** by Martin Lavut with Carol Kane. Clarke Mackey's **Fight Night** is on the 18th, with Jim Henshaw, January's schedule includes Frank Vitale's **The Outcasts** on the 1st, about two small town young people over their heads in the big city. Theatre Passe Muraille's **A Country Fable** on the 8th, about a young man in love with Mary Tyler Moore; Louis del Grande's **So Who's Goldberg** on the 15th, with Saul Rubinek and Martin Short and directed by Stephen Katz; David Cronenberg's **The Victim** on the 22nd, and Peter Rowe's **Susan** on the 29th. February still has two slots open, but so far on the 5th will be **Death** with Donald Pleasance directed by Stephen Katz in a teleplay about a rich man consumed by the desire to manipulate his own death. On the 29th André Th  berge's **Close Call** will be broadcast, about two women sharing an apartment who turn it into a battleground.

by Stephen Chesley