

PIERRE DAVID

Interview

edited by Laurinda Hartt

photo: Baltazár/Koller



Shortly after the March release of *The Rainbow Boys*, Pierre David of Mutual Films talked with George Csaba Koller about Mutual Films; about their distribution of *The Rainbow Boys*; and about his company's approach to the crucial subject of the promotion and distribution of Canadian films in Canada.

I'm excited about what Mutual Films is doing in terms of the promotion of Canadian films from coast to coast. Would you care to elaborate on what your plans are?

Yes. It's a very complicated situation with the English-Canadian or Canadian-made films in the English language. We've been very successful in Québec with French-Canadian films. As you probably know, our company is part of what you could call a "holding" headed by a French-Canadian lawyer. We own and operate six radio stations – the Mutual Broadcasting Network. I've been with the Mutual Broadcasting Network for years before going into films. I was doing all their promotions, concerts, launchings of station activities. Public relations and promotion is my work. And for certain reasons, three years ago, we decided that we would go into film distribution which then brought us into film production because there's a complement and both work together.

In two years we have produced about ten films that we are now distributing in Québec, and we are planning the production of five. One is already in production. When I say "we" I mean the producer (Claude Héroux – Cinévideo) and ourselves at Mutual Films, because it's really a very close relationship. Mutual invests in films and sometimes we even find the stars, like Jeanne Moreau for example. I even have a direct line to my producer. I don't have to dial – I just pick up the phone and it rings in his office. So there is a very close contact which I think is absolutely essential.

We've had some success and now Mutual has some major films in Québec. We released about 30 films this year and we're going to release 35 next year. The situation's very clear now. I have an office in Paris on the Champs Elysée, with a full-time staff working on our world sales and on the buying and the selling of our films. I decided that you couldn't have a company that was really working, you know, without being involved in English Canada. Québec films are having great successes but at the same I needed a set-up in Toronto. It's a modest set-up but we're very well equipped. We have an office in the Carlton Tower and the staff (under the leadership of Gordon Lightstone) is going to handle our French-Canadian-made films in the rest of Canada. They are also going to handle our English production and our distribution of a lot foreign films – from *The Family*, with Charles Bronson, to *State of Siege* by Costa Gavras.

We've been involved with *The Rainbow Boys* for many reasons. One of them is that we are developing a very close relationship between Potterton Productions of Montreal and my company for the English market. Potterton is directly involved in our distribution operation and in financing, and we're really working together. So it is normal that we would be involved with *The Rainbow Boys*. And we are now definitely going to shoot another one in June called *Child Under a Leaf* with George Bloomfield directing. We've got the CFDC's approval, have found the money, and yesterday we came to an arrangement with Dyan Cannon who will be in the film. This is the kind of film I'm pushing for. The coming of Jeanne Moreau into French Canadian films is an important event which means a lot. (Jeanne Moreau is starring in *Je t'aime*, a film written and directed by Pierre Duceppe, and being produced by Claude Héroux of Cinévideo Ltd.)

It's also a very important thing to have in the English Canadian film industry . . . I think that they – even more than Québec's films – really have to be made for a completely international audience and that's why they need some international names. I think *The Rainbow Boys* is an attempt in that direction . . . In that film, we chose to use Donald Pleasence and Pleasence is creating an interest in the film. We're getting him on radio and TV. Without him, no one would know about the film. Without him, you know how the radio station would be – "We don't want him. That's not interesting for our listeners. We don't want to give you a promotion." It's Pleasence. We have some other stars in the film. We've got Don Calfa. But no one wanted Don Calfa on the air. They wanted Pleasence. He's a name, you see.

I'm giving **The Rainbow Boys** a big launching. I don't know if we'll make it, but my first thing is this: if we spend \$400,000 in the making of a film, it's worth spending \$10,000 to promote it in a big city. I think this is one of my strongest points. Right now they don't want to hear about it, but I hope it will come to that one day, because the CFDC should put up 10 per cent of the money it's investing, for the *launching* of the film. It would help. Because, you know, it's stupid — everyone thinks of producing and no one thinks of what is happening afterwards! For example, Destounis is putting his own money into films. Now, I know it may be for political reasons, *but* he is putting money into films and he's got to *think* about what's happening to these films *after* they've been made.

So the CFDC should help in the launching of a film. If they grant \$200,000 of a film's budget, they should grant \$20,000 for the film's launching. We would submit a launching plan, they would have it checked, and it would help, you know. It would help the exhibitor. You will then have more publicity surrounding the launching of the film which means more knowledge and more awareness on the public's part.

And on the other side, with a film quota, the exhibitor would *have to* show the films. It's like with the minimum Canadian content quota in radio. The exhibitors would *have to* show Canadian films for a minimum of six weeks per year, or better still, I would go to two months per year, per theatre. Every theatre would have to play them. I agree it's tough for the theatres. But I mean this is the price we must pay if we *want* an industry. If we don't want an industry, then let's forget it. Because I think that now there are enough Canadian films for any theatre in Canada to make a good two months. Think of **Wedding in White!** Think of **The Rainbow Boys!** Those are good films; they can be played to a general audience. You know, we didn't have a bit of a recording industry before the CRTC imposed the 30 per cent Canadian content rule. And now there's something really happening!

I think that every week we are losing by not taking definite steps. Right now everyone is talking, talking, talking, talking and no one is doing anything. Actually I really don't mean *no one* is doing anything, I just hope there will be *more* action. It has to come to precise conclusions, with someone doing something, and doing something means making big decisions.

There is no problem in Québec, quite honestly, because we've proven to be so successful and we've brought so much money into the exhibitor's pockets. There's no problem with them; we get everything we want. All my productions are made with Famous Players and they never interfere. I ask for a certain amount of money; they give me the money. They don't read the script, they don't interfere in my publicity or anything because they know I do the best I can and we are really having success.

With English Canadian films, they're much more "*inquiet*", much more worried. Like when I say I want to open in Montréal in three theatres and I want to spend \$6,000 or \$7,000.

Don't you feel like you are going up against a brick wall what with Odeon and Famous Players controlling 80 per cent of the theatres in Canada?

No, not a brick wall, because for example, with **The Rainbow Boys**, we have the theatres we wanted. (The film opened, in March, 1973, in seven theatres across Canada — three in Vancouver, three in Montréal and one in Toronto. David explained that only one Toronto theatre was involved because that theatre, the Fairlawn, "is bigger than the theatres in either of the other centres.")

It was exciting when you spoke at the ACTRA-CFDC panel. I saw that you had this very definite idea as to what you want to do with Canadian films.

I want to give them a chance, at least in the first week, to be launched like a big film. You know, they were surprised in Vancouver when we came with the biggest campaign in history down there. In Québec, when we launch a film — every French-Canadian film, the good ones and the bad — all of them are launched with at least \$10,000 the first week. They all have a big launching. And that is certainly responsible for a part of the success of a large number of our films in Québec.

Do you want to go into detail as to what is involved in a launching? Do you get TV and radio spots?

That's it. I think a launching means reaching the people through all the media. If they look at TV, like I did last night at 1:30, they would see the TV spot for **The Rainbow Boys**. Or if they listen to CHUM tomorrow at 11:15 they'll hear about **The Rainbow Boys**. It's to create an awareness of the film — the film is here, and the film may be exciting. That's the first thing which is very, very important. But by that I don't mean we should continue if the film is a flop. And I think Gerry Potterton will agree that if we're not drawing people — which is possible, you never know in this industry — we won't continue pouring money in for nothing. But at least it will have its try like a major production.

You mean you're giving it a fair chance alongside all the American films that are playing?

Oh, I'm giving it as good a promotion as for the biggest American films. And we will do it the same way for the next film, until we have a success or until we just feel there is no more hope — and then probably we will have a blockbuster and make a million dollars! You never know when the big hit is going to come. I'm *sure* it's going to come. Sid Adilman was saying, "Well, everyone is dreaming for that big hit in English Canada." It's going to come, that's for sure. But when? In Québec, we did films for years and years and then one day **Valérie** came and changed everything. ●



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