

INTRODUCING...

Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler



Linda Schuyler and Kit Hood: "A meeting of form and content" with the Spencer the Cat as Muse.

photo: Bill Dunn

There's an eccentric old building, part house, part storefront, sitting all by itself on Queen Street East in Toronto. For years it was known as the Ferron Real Estate office and I know people who would bike for miles just to see the gigantic Boston fern that filled its front window. Then one day, several months ago, the fern disappeared. A new sign went up outside the door — *Playing With Time Inc.* It's not a name the average passer-by might associate right away with a film production company. But it's the name of the first film, and most epic project to date, of a two-and-a-half-year partnership between Kit Hood and Linda Schuyler. Somehow it seemed fitting to keep the name and

the film's piano-clock logo for the ongoing company. It also serves as a reminder of the surreal possibilities inherent in the film medium.

Jimmy: *Playing With Time* is an hour-long study of a 73-year-old marathon piano player and his gruelling attempt to better his own world record by playing non-stop for 117 hours at the Canadian National Exhibition. The film has been sold to CBC and is now making the rounds in world television markets and in the education circuit at home. Hood and Schuyler (pronounced Skyler) are handling their own distribution — a strategy they feel is important both for their long term financial success and for the immediate results of audience feedback.

"We've made mistakes and we still have a lot to learn," says Schuyler. "For instance, on the CBC deal we were so excited to make the sale and get the money (\$8,500) that we didn't pay much attention to the terms. Now we are locked into two showings over three years. Another time, we might try for just a one-time contract so we would have the option of re-selling it the next year, instead of having to wait three years.

"We tend to think we are not doing very well," says Hood modestly of their self-distribution system, "until we talk to other people and discover their surprise that we've sold 14 prints of a film called *Cultural Fabric* since November. And that's only in Ontario."

Playing With Time's sales efforts so far have been directed primarily at the school and library market. A mailing is prepared for each new film and if the buyers are interested, they are sent a preview print. Each print is accompanied by an evaluation form.

"The evaluations are very rewarding," says Hood. "We've shed many a tear over some of them, but it's a good way of keeping in touch with what our market wants."

The company's initial sales drive has been in Ontario, but they are beginning to expand their library mailings outside the province. It's a full-time job and Amy Cooper has been hired to handle that end of the business. Hood and Schuyler are also talking to the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre for additional marketing help.

"An established distributor either wants all or nothing," explains Hood. "Whereas the Distribution Centre will take some things and we can still handle some films directly ourselves."

Hood and Schuyler have come to this partnership from quite different backgrounds. Hood, 36, started as a film editor in his native England and was working with Walt Disney Productions in London before coming to Canada in 1969. Since then he has worked extensively in advertising circles, editing commercials for companies like Rabko, Montage, Cinegraph and Projections.

Schuyler, 30 was teaching a media course to grade eight students and using available equipment to make some films of her own. One of her films, *Between Two Worlds*, created quite a stir when sections were aired out of context on NBC to support a story on race problems in Toronto. Success didn't follow success, however. Her next venture was, in her own words, "a disaster." She sought the aid of an experienced editor to try to save the muddled footage. The film never did materialize, but a partnership did.

"We look at it as a meeting of form and content," says Hood. "I had lots of technique from 15 years cutting commercials, but I felt I lacked con-

tent. Linda had lots of good ideas for films, but her technical skills left a bit to be desired."

Their first major project together was *Jimmy: Playing With Time*. Originally they planned to make a three-minute filler for CBC on this curious old man who spent his life travelling from one seedy arena to another playing marathon piano, but the more they pursued it the deeper involved they got. With \$7,000 of Canada Council money they began operating as Jimmy's agents and set up a forum at the Canadian National Exhibition. Mark Irwin spent three days shooting the event and Hood spent several months editing the marathon footage to 90 minutes, meshing the three different levels of time which operate in the film. Before the CBC sale was made another half-hour was taken out. The two-and-a-half year evolution of the film became the evolution of the company. For awhile ends were met by teaching jobs and commercial editing assignments, but now Hood and Schuyler have enough film projects in progress, aided by the cash flow of grants and an NFB contract, that they can be full-time producers of their own ideas.

Our *Cultural Fabric*, a half-hour program showing how clothes influence our ideas about different cultures, has been sold and aired on Global TV. The film was made with the help

of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews and is the first of a projected series on multiculturalism. A child's film, *Ida Makes A Movie*, has \$7,000 from the Ontario Arts Council and a pre-sale to CBC's children's department. They hope to start filming in June. The NFB contract is for *Mirror Mirror*, an \$85,000 half-hour on the 100-year history of advertising in Canada. That's slated for an August shoot.

And, of course, there's *The Feature* "Don't we all have plans for a feature somewhere down the road?" laughs Hood. Theirs is a modern-day musical version of Joan of Arc with music and lyrics by the father and son team, Archie and Lewis Mannie.

When you first walk into 935 Queen Street East you step back in time, imagining the real estate deals that must have been made here during two generations of the family-run business. Everything is still intact after 97 years. The dark wood bannister rail which marks the office from the waiting area is still in glowing condition and the pressed tin ceiling has been changed only by a coat of white paint. But the posters on the wall and the editing and screening facilities hidden beyond the next door, tell of a different stock in trade. Imagine a stately old Victorian dame like that starting a new life in the nefarious business of film.

Linda West

Eda Lishman

Of the current crop of emerging Alberta film producers, Eda Lishman must be one of the most strong-minded. Her unflinchingly objective appraisals of herself and her work have kept her independent production company, The Producers, in business for the last eight years, largely through production-type short films. At the rate she works, she could easily keep going for another eighty.

Sharing the dream of many an as-

piring producer, however, Eda's goal is to work on features — only features. This is why she is now turning down a major job on an average of one every three weeks. "There comes a point when you just have to stop doing the bread-and-butter thing that's going to pay for what you really want to do and start *doing* what you really want to do," she emphatically explains. "You have to say, 'No, I don't do this type of thing: I do *this* type of thing.' Otherwise you'll just wind up doing the shit

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Alberta film producer Eda Lishman: "I've never been out of work."

work forever." It's a brave step, away from security and into the unknown. But Eda has ventured into the unknown before and found that it's not that scary.

As a teenager, after winning several provincial drama awards, Eda ran away from the very small Alberta town of Vulcan and headed straight for the big city — Toronto. She wound up acting in two productions and directing a play right off. She then landed a job at Calgary's Mac Theatre as Assistant Director. After attending the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Radio and Television Arts, Eda became a production assistant at MEETA, then a commercial producer at CBXT-TV. She travelled on to Vancouver, where she produced for the CTV network.

All these experiences reinforced her firm belief that work is available if you want it: "I've never been out of work. Conditions aren't always perfect, but you fit yourself to the conditions. You can't just dream about the perfect job. People who say, 'Oh, I'm too laid-back to hustle for this or that,' I don't understand that attitude. To me, 'laid-back' is the worst thing you can say about someone." Then, "What does it mean, anyway?"

muses the young woman who has taken exactly two holidays in the last fifteen years — and one of those was really a professional excursion to the Cannes Film Festival, a turning point in her career. "I needed to see the seedy side of the business — the hype, the bullshit, the worst aspect of things. I did; it was there. But it also convinced me that film is the one thing I've got to do." It was after the Cannes experience that Eda made her decision to accept only feature film work.

Eda has learned not to be afraid

of risks: "When I was growing up, I was told, 'Be a good girl and work hard and follow the rules, and you will be rich some day.' Of course that's not true. The people who are rich are the very ones who break the rules." And so she has ventured into a profession where there are few females in top positions: "assistant producers, yes. Producers, no," she states. But she is bolstered by her basic optimism and faith in human nature. "I take people at face value. Even if I'm knifed in the back, I don't let it affect me." Knifed in the back? "Oh, sure. Once I had a secretary hiding important telexes on me for 4 months. I wound up looking like an idiot. Why? She couldn't get used to having a woman as her 'superior.'" The whole woman thing does enter into the picture according to Eda. "Women, because of their programming, can't believe they can really be successful. For years, I would do something really well but think it was just luck: something I'd gotten away with and would eventually be found out for the fraud I was. When I wrote and produced a sponsored film, *The Grand Opening*, it won five awards at the 1977 Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association (AMPIA) presentations, including Best Film, out of 75 entries. My reaction? I wanted to hide. I didn't even want to talk about it. I thought it was a fluke, an accident, and I was ashamed of fooling everyone. That company then made a \$2.7 million deal because of my film. I finally started to understand that I had won because I really was good."

Eda is currently working on three projects, two in Edmonton and one in Vancouver. She is surveying scripts both for herself and for other producers. She is also one of the directors of AMPIA and volunteers as editor of the bimonthly AMPIA newsletter, *Film-biz*.

Martha Jones □

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