

15 years: time to take stock

It seems more than 15 years ago. In 1972, the Canadian Society of Cinematographers waived the rights to the name *Cinema Canada*, allowing George Csaba Koller, Phil McPhedran and Agi Ibranyi-Kiss to turn what had been a CSC in-house magazine into an industry-wide bi-monthly.

Then, 12 years ago, the present editors inherited the magazine, visited *Cinema Canada* in Rochdale College – then co-habiting with the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre and the nascent Toronto Filmmakers Co-op – to pack up the shoe boxes full of files, open a Montreal office, and begin publishing a monthly.

That was then: Shebib, Jutra, Owen, Héroux, Carle, and King already had their first films behind them and the energy was irresistible. But there was little structure and less money – just the will to make movies and that crazy post-'60s optimism that one could indeed do one's own thing. In this case, that meant making Canadian movies.

This is now: we've grown beyond all reasonable expectation into a strong and dynamic industry, recognized throughout the world – at Berlin, at Cannes, at the Oscars – as a force to reckon with.

On the occasion of its 15th anniversary, *Cinema Canada* polled those who were present "then" in the production sector to talk about the health of our industry, and to measure the growth over the period.

Observers find that the body is in good shape: finally the framework is strong. The enormous influx of money through Telefilm Canada is certainly nourishing that structure. The tax shelters, both federal and provincial, contribute, as do the new provincial film agencies and their regulations.

The industry has grown in the protective atmosphere of Canadian content requirements from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. Our 75-cent dollar and the aggressive work of provincial and municipal promotion offices has attracted foreign producers, all of whom confirm that we are as good as we think we are. The climate has never been so propitious.

The muscle on those bones is, of course, the talent. Throughout the tax shelter period – which was most often referred to as catastrophic for our industry – everyone learned. The producers grew up, the technicians and actors worked steadily for several years, writers were assigned to projects and the financiers came to understand what was really involved in filmmaking.

So the people learned to use the structures well, and viable production companies grew up: Alliance, Atlantis, Filmline, Nelvana, and SDA, to name a few. A certain solidity became apparent. A solidity which came from the bottom-line: from making deals which had pre-sales, from collaborating with networks and distributors from the States and abroad on programs and films which had easy access to mainstream distribution.

We've paid our dues over these 15 years, and earned the right to pause a moment and ask ourselves to what end we will use our new-found strength.

It was sobering to read in the recent federal spending estimates that the monies going to Telefilm are larger than those allotted to the Canada Council by a quarter. It would seem that the government is banking on the industry to carry its cultural flag and that, for the moment, we are held in more favour than all the writers, artists, potters, dancers and – yes – alternative filmmakers for whom the Canada Council is an important source of support. At the same time as both the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board of Canada are being severely cut back, we not only have the time to take stock, we have an obligation to do so.

Even the most optimistic filmmaker knows that a sudden removal of Telefilm funds would generate a bust of enormous proportions. If the industry is not able to

justify its use of government money, there is no reason to suppose that it will remain permanently available.

Which brings us to the question of accountability and, modestly, to the role which *Cinema Canada* has played over the years.

Good times, bad times, the magazine has endeavored to report the news, provide the analysis, and intelligently criticize the directions of the industry. It has served as a forum where all voices can be heard, and it has stood at arm's length from the interests of its advertisers. Mindless boosterism was never part of our mandate.

Today, the post-'60s optimism has been replaced by a cheerful Reaganism – everything's fine, business is booming, and ignorance is not necessarily a handicap.

Telefilm is lousy with money. It can't manage to spend it all. The result is interesting.

On the one hand, just about every producer in the country is beholden to the agency and is, therefore, loathe to criticize. To question the agency publicly might call attention to certain shortcomings and that, in turn, might jeopardize future funding. Since Telefilm money is the current bloodstream of the industry, no one is willing to take such a risk.

So the press alone is in a position to ask questions, but these days, there are few answers. At Telefilm, Peter Pearson cannot or will not furnish any criteria whereby projects are accepted or rejected, even though there is consternation in the industry about the internal workings of the agency.

Meanwhile, there is no effort to accommodate the aspirations of innovative, experimental filmmakers, and even the documentarians are being eased out of the picture, victims of the new emphasis on "entertainment." The bottom-line mentality homogenizes, reducing what used to be a lively, multi-faceted industry into an increasingly uniform business.

The irony, of course, is to see a producer like Don Haig come up year after year with young filmmakers to whom he gives a chance and who pay him back royally. One Oscar nomination (*Artie Shaw*) and two invitations to Cannes' Directors Fortnight (*Dancing in the Dark* and *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*) is a better track record than the bottom-line producers can boast. His successes are the result of that *will* to make films, the one which got us started in the first place.

It is a fact, and one which will make many producers squirm, that the National Film Board of Canada has been the single, largest force in the production of the current spate of excellent films – what the press refers to as the renaissance of Canadian film. Not only did it co-produce *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*, it took the Genie for Best Short with *Get a Job*. It was the place where Denys Arcand and Anne Wheeler (not to mention hordes of others) cut their teeth. It co-produced part of the CanLit series with Atlantis, *Anne Trister*, *Pouvoir intime*, and *Un Zoo la nuit* which is also going to the Directors Fortnight. Yet despite the evidence of the NFB's importance, the level of discussion in the industry about its future – and, for that matter, about the CBC and the Telefilm criteria – has never been so low, so reactionary.

There is the old adage about the spirit being willing but the flesh being weak. We've turned that around today. The industry is strong, the structures are in place, the whole body is getting a bit muscle-bound. It's clear from the comments of those interviewed in this issue that we have all it takes to be a superb branch-plant industry, serving the Americans, working full out and making a lot of money.

But the risks are great if we don't wonder, for a moment, whether this is what we really want, or whether we're old enough and strong enough to accept the responsibilities which come with strength. We can throw our weight around, produce that standard product which the system is prepared to sell, and feel satisfied. Or we can remember where we came from, rediscover that old will to participate in a Canadian culture project, and give rein to those whose will and imagination exercise the spirit which will endure.

LETTERS

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It has come to our attention that the COLORIZATION® has been misused in the January 1987 issue of *Cinema Canada* on page 45 in an article authored by Michael Bergman entitled "Controversy in color"

COLORIZATION® is a registered trade mark of Colorization Inc., and is used in association with a process of transforming black and white film into colour videotape. In that COLORIZATION® is a particular brand of film transformation process and a trade mark, it must not be used as a generic term to describe the name of a product or a process.

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marks are of great importance not only to the seller of goods or services but to consumers who rely on the marks to identify the goods or services they wish to buy. Only Colorization Inc. has the right to use the COLORIZATION® trade mark. Any disparagement or other usage that threatens its exclusive proprietary rights in the trade mark will be vigorously pursued.

We therefore request that in your next issue, you print a correction to read something like: "We regret the misuse of Colorization Inc.'s registered trade mark COLORIZATION®. Any reference to the COLORIZATION® trade mark was reference to the COLORIZATION® brand of film transformation process". Kindly advise the writer when this correction will occur.

In future, if your publication has occasion to refer to the COL-

ORIZATION® trade mark, we would appreciate your using it properly. Further, please make certain that when the COLORIZATION® trade mark appears, it is distinguished typographically by setting it in capital letters or by placing it in quotation marks. We would be pleased to review future copy for trade mark concerns before it is run.

Wilson Markle
President

Bergman replies

(Michael Bergman replies: "When I wrote my piece I was unaware that

'colorization' was a trade name or registered trademark. Nevertheless, the reference in my article to colorization is not to the mechanical or technical process by which black and white films are turned into colored ones but to the notion or concept of doing this.

As I have not seen the trademark certificate I do not know the ambit of the word "colorization" as a trademark. Nevertheless no one can trademark a word in the English language so as to exclude that word from use in the language other than by the owner of the mark. Consequently the owners of this trademark cannot suppress the use of this word when its use does not refer to the process which the mark represents. Certainly my article was not designed to call into question the efficiency of the technical process which is represented by the trademark.")