

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.")

Happy 15th Birthday

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Caring for Writers

In issue No. 138 you devoted a whole page to the independent film **Taking Care**. In the article the following people were named and quoted: the producer, the director, the actors, the continuity person and the backers. One of the backers, Stan Fox of TV Ontario says, "...we are so confident in Clarke, his writer..." as to why they invested in the film. The writer's name is not mentioned.

Taking Care is an original screenplay. It was written by a writer. The writer's name is Rebecca Schechter. Without her hard work all of these fine people would be twiddling their thumbs..

Shame on you, *Cinema Canada!*

Bena Shuster

Omission

Thanks so much for Leslie Goodson's *On Location*, about my most recent feature, **Taking Care**. (Feb. issue).

I would like, however, to correct an error of omission that was made. The inspiration for the film, as Leslie mentioned, came from a series of articles which appeared in the *Globe and Mail* about the nurses from the Hospital for Sick Children who had been working on the cardiac care ward during the time of the baby deaths. After reading June Callwood's articles, I became interested in making a film about nurses, and their position in the health care system. I brought this idea to Rebecca Schechter, a screenwriter and journalist, who worked with me over a two-year period to develop the story and characters in the film. Becky also collaborated with me on the script of **Pulling Flowers**, a half-hour drama made for TVOntario in 1983, and in 1970, she recorded the sound for my first feature, **The Only Thing You Know**. It's unfortunate that no mention of the writer on this project, or of our fruitful collaboration found its way into your article.

Clarke Mackey •

No Credibility

Cinema Canada should have people review films who are going to look at them for their qualities and faults on the screen.

Unlike John Harkness (*Cinema Can.* 137, March '87) who looked at **John and the Missus** with "a basic problem" with the producer's past films.

Harkness tells us that when he saw **John and the Missus** he felt that he was supposed to be impressed. And that he has "no sympathy or comprehension of these movies". Does this sound like fair criticism of an open-minded reviewer?

I do see a degree of credibility in one of Harkness' points. He is definitely the wrong person to review this film. Anyone who longs for "crass commerciality" and "vulgar stupidity" is perhaps the wrong person to review any film.

Mark Hamilton •

Growling error

We would like to point out that in your *Update* of February 9 a mistake has been made in your article "Berlin Promises High Canadian Profile." The last Golden Bear Award presented at the Berlin International Film Festival to a Canadian film did not go to **The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz** but to **History of the World in Three Minutes Flat** (awarded in 1981) to Michael Mills.

Fraude Vollert

Michael Mills Productions Ltd.

Second-rate writers?

This letter is in response to a review of the film **Crazy Moon** that appeared in *Cinema Canada* in March 1987. In the review, Stan Shatenstein does his utmost to "demolish" our picture. He has nothing positive to say about the storyline, the writing, the directing, the cinematography, the music or the actors in the film. He finishes the article by not only describing the personnel who worked on **Crazy Moon** but the entire Canadian English-language film community as being second-raters. Here is the direct quote:

"... there is no daunting barrier to keep English-Canadians from going to Hollywood. Therefore, an otherwise healthy talent pool gets drained, and the only bodies left to mount a purely domestic show are the second-raters."

Stan, at a recent survey, **Crazy Moon** was enjoyed by 98% of the spectators who had just viewed the film, and of those 90% said that they would recommend the film to their friends. Fifty percent of the audience said that they would see the film a second time on other media. Not too bad for second-raters.

Crazy Moon was picked up by Image Organization for foreign-sales distribution and at the recent American Film Market they sold the film to the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Italy, Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Holland, Scandinavia, Greece, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, almost every major media market in the world. Again, Stan, not bad for second-raters.

Crazy Moon has been picked up by Miramax Film Corporation for U.S. distribution with a substantial guarantee, and a large guaranteed advertising expenditure. Very few Canadian or foreign films for that matter can boast of such a deal in the United States. *Variety* has reviewed **Crazy Moon** favourably. Stan, there must be something good about this film.

Allan Eastman, the director of **Crazy Moon**, is now one of the hottest directors in Canada, having since completed two mini-series, **Race for the Bomb** which recently aired on CBC, and **Henry Ford - The Man and the Machine** which just completed principal photography. Not bad for a so-called second-rater.

Kiefer Sutherland, the star of the film, has gone on to fame and fortune in Hollywood and by Stan's own definition this would now make him a first-rater. Peter Spence, who held another leading role in **Crazy Moon** has also moved to Los Angeles.

Vanessa Vaughan who, despite her deafness, so marvellously portrayed Ann in **Crazy Moon**, has received rave reviews everywhere the film has played. She hasn't yet moved to Hollywood, so according to Stan she's still a second-rater.

Crazy Moon has received favorable reviews everywhere it has played and in Montreal, three out of four daily papers gave the film very positive reviews. Moreover, **Crazy Moon** was sold on Canadian soil to First Choice, CFCF-TV, Premier Choix and Société Radio-Canada. Not bad at all for second-raters.

Crazy Moon is not an exploitation film, yet it has captured the interest of people around the world. It's very dis-

turbing to see a magazine which claims to be the industry paper of the Canadian film community treat the country's English-language filmmakers like this. In the same issue two other English-language films, **The Blue Man** and **The Morning Man**, are given the same treatment as **Crazy Moon**. However, experimental and underground films, no matter how bad or irrelevant, seem to invariably receive positive reviews in *Cinema Canada*. I suggest that *Cinema Canada* either be more objective in its reviewing (by hiring a few reviewers who understand commercial cinema) or content itself with reporting industry information.

Oh yes. I almost forgot, Stan. You know, there is no "daunting barrier" to keep *Cinema Canada* reviewers from going to Hollywood either, and maybe "the only bodies left to mount a purely domestic show are the second-raters."

Franco Battista

Allegro Films Inc.

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