

BOOM!



Neilvana Limited - M. Hirsh, P. Loubert, C. Smith

TORONTO TAKES OFF

It was hard to miss the hoopla surrounding the opening of Cinevillage in Toronto. Nevertheless, this new studio is only the most recent building in what is an incredible developmental boom in Toronto. The boom is being fed by American production, and is predicated on the stability of that production. Below, the facts and figures which round out the story.

by John McClyment

It's not the part of Toronto passersby would normally associate with such a lavish party.

The Carlaw and Eastern Ave. area is better known for the nearby concentration of industry and modest working-class homes than for valet parking, waiters freely dispensing hors d'oeuvres and refreshments and a very live performance from Toronto soul band *Junior Barnes and His Cadillacs*.

More than that, as a throng of guests mill about, federal Communications Minister Flora MacDonald is about to make a noisy entrance led by Scottish pipers.

Not the usual nighttime scenario for this east Toronto

area, but then some things have changed with the arrival of the Cinevillage movie-making complex.

Cinevillage, a film and video production centre located on a four-acre site, is the latest evidence of a studio building boom in Toronto.

The Cinevillage complex is a privately funded joint venture of P.S. Production Services, a movie equipment rental firm, and Academy Award-winning Atlantis Films Limited. As well, it is home base to 14 other film and video production, editing, distribution and equipment rental firms.

It boasts a 10,000 square foot soundstage at which 13 half-hour episodes of Atlantis' *Airwaves* series, aired on CBC, have already been shot.

Ramona Q., a children's

television series for PBS and CHCH-TV, later moved in for an 11-week stint.

The need for production facilities in Toronto has prompted Atlantis and Doug Dale's P.S. Production Services to announce the construction of another Cinevillage soundstage slated for completion this year.

The scope of the project, which involved extensive renovations to two 1913 warehouses bought from Toronto Iron Works, as well as the construction of additional buildings, has attracted widespread attention throughout the film community.

The four-phase Cinevillage project, the first phase of which is reported to have cost more than \$3 million, is a quantum leap from Atlantis' origins in 1978 when the company started out making industrial documentaries.

Flora MacDonald, the federal minister of Communications, kicked off the recent bash, celebrating the official opening

of Cinevillage, with a speech on the importance of the private sector initiative that created the facility.

"That spirit that is so alive here tonight is what is going to guarantee the success of this venture in the future," MacDonald says.

Along with the companies now set up at Cinevillage about 20 more firms have moved into the neighborhood just to be near the studio complex, she adds.

"They will be able to help support, service and nurture the activities of the third largest film production centre in North America, namely Toronto," MacDonald told a crowd of about 800.

The team of Janice Platt, Seaton McLean and Michael MacMillan are the founding partners of Atlantis, a company that won a 1984 best-action short Academy Award for its half-hour drama *Boys and Girls*.

With a rapidly growing film production industry, Toronto has recently been home to

other studio construction projects.

In the last two or three years a pattern has emerged within the downtown area with old warehouses and factories being bought and turned into modern film and television production houses.

In an interview with *Cinema Canada* MacMillan says a host of factors have led to a boom in film facilities construction in Toronto.

A major improvement in the last decade is the development of ongoing, reliable, profitable and creative production companies, MacMillan explains. "The industry is growing up and some solid, established companies are emerging."

The industry has also learned from its past mistakes such as those of the tax shelter heyday of the late '70s, where many of the films produced were completely supply-side driven. In other words there was financing, but no marketing, no distributor and no broadcaster, he says.

The film industry, MacMillan points out, is now closely in tune with the demands of the market and puts money into productions based on that knowledge.

Also the lower value of the Canadian dollar in comparison to U.S. money has attracted American projects into the city, he says. He adds that other major factors in the maturing of the industry include government incentive programs and in the last decade the development of top quality Canadian crews and directors.

The construction boom is a sign that a more solid foundation for the industry is arriving, the Atlantis partner says.

Evidence of Atlantis' confidence in the future include plans for a third and fourth soundstage, editing suites and video post-production facilities.

Leaving Atlantis and heading west along Toronto's lakeshore to a warehouse area north of the Canadian National Exhibition, reveals another huge film facility.

Nelvana Limited, a major Canadian production company and probably the country's largest animator, moved into its new facilities in July 1986.

An old munitions factory was gutted and rebuilt into a 27,000 square foot facility housing offices, editing suites, sound composition rooms, screening rooms and space for animators.

Nelvana is the producer of the animated *Care Bears* movies, various animated series, feature films and is co-producer of the *Edison Twins* adventure series.

Nelvana, founded in 1972 by Patrick Loubert, Michael Hirsh and Clive Smith, moved from spread-out offices at Sherbourne and Parliament Streets into the new facility to widen the range of production and smooth out the process of filmmaking.

Smith said the new building, worth about \$5 million, gives Nelvana the chance to try new projects.

"We feel that there is a good healthy future for animation," he told *Cinema Canada*. In explaining the success of Nelvana he said: "You build the market for yourself by doing better animation."

Nelvana has a staff of about 200 during its busiest production period between May and November with much of its creative staff working on a

contract basis, he explained.

With potential for three series and a feature this season Smith adds, "This year is going to be crazier than last year."

Smith, like MacMillan, also talks of changes since the tax shelter days, the lower value of the Canadian dollar and the improved track record of the Canadian film industry when discussing the firming up of production here.

When visitors walk in the front door of the studio complex they are met by an expansive interior, which is fully renovated and the size of an airplane hangar.

Naish McHugh, a film liaison officer for the city of Toronto, rattles off an impressive list of film companies that have already decided or are planning to build film studios in Toronto. Many, but by no means all, renovated old buildings.

To name a few, there is Schulz Productions which converted an old manufacturing building and added studio

space in a \$2 million project in 1985, and Trinity Studios which totally rebuilt an old warehouse and adjacent buildings, McHugh says.

An expansion of Film House, now part of Garth Drabinsky's Cineplex-Odeon Corporation, is one project in its initial stages. McHugh says an old shoe factory will be totally renovated into a multi-million dollar facility.

The Adelaide and Sherbourne Street area project will be one of North America's most modern sound facilities when completed, McHugh says. Stan Ford, the sound department manager at Film House, says it is a more than \$4 million project to build sound mixing and re-recording facilities for film and video. Ford says it will be the largest sound studio in Canada.

McHugh says Toronto's old warehouses and factories are well suited to the needs of many film companies.

They have got the size, open

spaces and some office areas, which are all needed, McHugh explains.

"It is much easier and much less expensive to take an existing structure providing it is a sound original structure...and renovate them and bring them up to grade...rather than to buy a vacant piece of land or buy something and knock it down and build from scratch," McHugh says.

"You're talking about an incredible difference in price per square foot of construction for a new building as compared to an old building."

McHugh talks about possible new studio projects and the continuation of growth in Toronto's film industry.

"A lot of the companies have grown so large in the last two or three years they're bursting at the seams."

Film and television production in Toronto last year hit record levels with business so swift that film crews were in short demand during the busy

summer months.

According to city hall statistics, 102 productions were made in 1986 in comparison to 62 productions the year before.

Behind the boom in film facility construction is the large amounts of money flowing into the city from production.

Last year film and television productions with a total of \$280 million in budgets were made in Toronto, with those companies spending about \$180 million on everything from wages to accommodation to props and processing.

A recent City of Toronto study that focussed on the King Street and Spadina Ave. area reveals strong growth in the last two years in the film and video sectors.

An economic development committee survey shows that, since 1984, 32 new firms employing 453 people have located in that part of the city alone. The survey also shows the competitively tough nature of the industry with 19 companies having left the area in the same two-year period.

Although the film industry has grown throughout Metropolitan Toronto in the last few years, the survey shows that this downtown area has grown even more quickly for a variety of reasons.

The level of employment in the film industry in this part of Toronto's downtown, better known for its garment industry, shows the economic potential in the creation of film and television shows.

A total of 121 firms, mostly small companies, employ about 1,616 people. Feature, documentary, and commercial film companies, television production, editing and film processing as well as videotape, animation, equipment rental and distribution firms are located in the area.

Naturally enough the development of the industry has generated construction growth.

Although construction in the Toronto film industry has focused recently on the renovation of existing facilities, completely new projects are also underway.

Glen-Warren Productions, a subsidiary of Baton Broadcasting, the owner of CFTO-TV in Toronto, is planning to complete a massive 14,000 square foot movie studio in Scarborough this summer.

Ted Delaney, president of Glen-Warren, says if every-

• Partners MacMillan and McLean open Cinevillage with Minister MacDonald



thing goes as planned then the soundstage will be ready for use by November 1987.

Strictly for film and not videotape, the studio will be one of the largest built in Canada, Delaney says.

Delaney says Glen-Warren has no other film facilities and is strongly encouraged by Telefilm Canada's feature film fund. The \$33 million fund is designed to stimulate the production of Canadian-made movies.

He says customers are lined up now waiting to use the multi-million dollar facility.

"If the demand is great, we'll go all across the 30 acres of property with three or four more of them," Delaney adds.

No discussion of major construction projects in Toronto's film and television industry would be complete without mention of the CBC broadcast centre to be located north of the sprawling Metro Convention Centre.

The CBC is expected to announce the winning construction bid for the \$550 million

centre, which is to be the headquarters for the corporation's English-language operations, in the summer.

CBC facilities will be combined with 1.8 million square feet of commercial, office and retail space on a 9.3 acre site.

The CBC says the centre is desperately needed to bring together almost two dozen separate corporation facilities spread throughout Toronto.

Despite claims to the contrary from the public broadcaster, some independent production companies have expressed sharp concern that the centre will put an end to many private producers in the area. But whatever the final impact, the construction of the facility will be a major addition to the television and film production industry in Toronto.

The flurry of activity in Toronto's film and television industry is not restricted to large-scale construction projects, however.

On one floor of a Bay Street office building located near Yorkville, David Holiff has

created a centre of offices that cater to the business end of the film industry.

Holiff supplies a pool of business services such as secretaries, audition space and VCR screening facilities to a host of entertainment companies that only need a modest amount of office space.

A casting company, an entertainment industry financier, an entertainment lawyer, production companies, film distributors and the marketing offices for Walt Disney films have all set up shop. Holiff says it allows businesses in Toronto's entertainment industry to reap the benefits of working side by side.

Holiff, who counts among his past credits managing comedian Howie Mandel, predicts the film industry in Toronto will continue to grow.

"I now think Toronto is the Hollywood North that everyone talked about," Holiff says. He adds that you don't have to go to Los Angeles anymore to make it in the film industry.

In fact, a look at the enter-

tainment pages of Toronto's daily newspapers confirm that many American stars and production companies are coming north instead.

As a recent press release from an American public relations firm states, "Six years after a filmmaking wave in Hollywood has ground to a halt, Canada has become the Hollywood studios' hottest branch plant, with their generous bargains and ready supply of eager-beaver crews."

Centres across Canada, but especially Toronto have become a magnetic north for American producers, it adds.

Along with the increased American productions, Canadian companies have also stepped up production levels helping to spawn the development of more studios here.

Although it will inevitably level off at some point, Holiff says he foresees growth as high as 30 per cent in Toronto's industry in the next two to three years. Despite the hoopla about recent development he says people will be surprised

by next year's level of growth.

Despite a banner film industry year in 1986, many in the film industry expect the growth to continue at record levels this year.

The recently increased value of Canada's dollar doesn't appear to have had an impact on that trend.

But the City of Toronto survey echoes at one point a concern underlying much of the optimism.

Many of the post-production firms surveyed receive as much as 80 per cent of their business from American production firms partly because of the lower value of the Canadian dollar.

As the survey states: "If the Canadian dollar were to rise significantly against its American counterpart, it is likely that this competitive advantage would be lost."

But with huge investments being made in Toronto film production including the renovation and construction of film studios, the enthusiasm continues to bubble.



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