

New window for culture at TVCan

MONTREAL — "We don't want to recreate the CBC. Rather, we would like to make a fresh start," says government film commissioner and National Film Board (NFB) chairman François Macerola.

In May, Macerola filed an application with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) on behalf of a non-profit consortium called the Canadian Non-Commercial and Public Television Inc.

The consortium consists of board members from both the public (including the NFB) and private sectors who will oversee the administration of TV-Canada Télé-Canada — a non-commercial public interest specialty service in French and English on basic cable across

Canada.

As proposed (to the CRTC), the consortium would hold the license for both French and English networks to be administered by two boards of directors.

Each network would have its own programming committee with regional representation. General interest programming including drama, children's programs, arts coverage, foreign programs, broadcasts of the best Canadian productions, science and information programs would be aimed at specific segments of the audience.

Macerola told *Cinema Canada* that the concept of TV-Canada "fits comfortably" into the NFB mandate as distributor. He explains that the NFB is not presently well-served by exist-

ing private and public broadcasters.

"What we are trying to do with TV-Canada/Télé-Canada is strengthen our relationship with the existing systems (television). We know that in order to reach the Canadian public with a certain type of cultural product, we have to be imaginative and create a new window," says Macerola.

"We will be small, without any pretensions of competing with the CBC or Radio-Canada. When they zig we will zag. For example when Radio-Canada presents a fantastic drama we will zag with a documentary."

By no means, says Macerola, is there any danger of NFB product dominating TV-Canada programming. Original productions would be subject to a

co-production agreement whereby Telefilm funding would not be available without a private sector co-producer.

"TV-Canada is a fantastic window but it is by no means an NFB takeover," he says.

TV-Canada's major source of revenue would be a \$1 per subscriber fee charged to and through the cable system rising to \$1.25 in the second year and \$1.50 in year three. By this means, TV-Canada would assume a base cost of \$50,000 per hour for original Canadian production. The smaller Télé-Canada would assume \$20,000 per hour.

Production costs forecasted by TV-Canada are relatively high, says Macerola, explaining that a strong emphasis will be placed on regional production.

"It is more than what most of the private sector is getting now and I am talking about our participation only. We want to

open this up to people who don't have access to the television screen."

Asked whether TV-Canada will relieve pressure on existing public broadcasters to increase Canadian programming content and regional production, Macerola replied: "That is one danger. Frankly speaking, I don't know the answer but it is in their mandate that they reflect the reality of the country."

By year five (the final year in the proposed CRTC license agreement prior to renewal) in excess of 80 per cent of program budget for both services will be devoted to 70 per cent Canadian programming content. Also within five years, the overall operating budget will increase from \$35 million (in the first year) to \$100 million.

Although doubts have been raised about whether cable subscribers will accept a mandatory fee increase, repeated surveys show, says Macerola, that 70 per cent of cable subscribers are willing to pay for higher quality Canadian programming.

"What we are asking for is not a tax. It is a levy to increase the quality of service," argues Macerola. "After five years, the public can intervene and I hope that the CRTC will have the cultural courage to take the difficult decision, if necessary, to withdraw our license."

In addition to Macerola, the founding members of TV-Canada/Télé-Canada are the following: Dr. Theresa McNeil, head of the extension division at St. Francis Xavier University and chairman of the Cape Breton Development Corporation; Michèle Rossignol, actress, director of the theatre section of the Canada Council; Ed Provost, former chairman of Telefilm Canada, president and chief executive of O'Keefe Breweries; Antonio Sciascia, chairman of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, president of Communication Télé-Gente Inc.; Ken Binks, lawyer; Bernard Lamarre, president of Lavalin; Allison Clayton, vice-president of Crawley International; Bryn Matthews, vice-president and general manager of CJOH-TV; Ruth Koo Lam, radio and television producer; Irene Chabot, co-ordinator and director general of the Saskatchewan Region of the Canadian Association of Francophone Women; Janis Johnson, Winnipeg-based consultant; Fil Fraser, film producer and writer; Marie Moreau, lawyer; Glen Farrell, president of The Knowledge Network and acting principal of the Opening learning Institute.

The CRTC will begin hearings on all 36 applications for specialty services on July 20. A decision is expected in September.

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