

FRONTS WEST

by Calvin Wharton & Mark O'Neill

A sleepy January has given way, finally, to a busy February. It's just as well there's an extra day this year because projects are developing as quickly as the crocuses are waking up in Stanley Park. Or, to revel in the sort of metaphor accurate only on the West Coast, as fast as the skiers slalom down the new hills at Whistler-Blackcomb.

While on those slopes, keep an eye open for the **Police Academy** crew. They're pausing between sequels five and six to make a comedy (what else?) called **Ski Patrol**. Producer Paul Maskansky has his concept down pat; "It's basically **Police Academy** on the slopes," he says. Most of the action will take place at Whistler.

Another U.S. project now underway is **Plastic Nightmare** from New World Productions. It's a murder mystery that was originally to be shot in San Francisco, now to begin filming here in March.

At last count there were six Vancouver projects being considered for the CBC-TV series **Family Pictures** (formerly **Family Matters**). Chris Bruyère and Charles Wilkinson are writing **Double Income No Kids** and Con Thomas is scripting **Sky Fighter** for Cari Green Productions. The series requires 26 episodes with the deadline for proposals from various regions March 31.

Also from CBC Vancouver: **Blu's Folly** is an independent regional drama now being developed for the full TV network. Producer Wade Ferley has hired John Gray to work with editor/director John Newton. Shooting from mid-February until the end of March.

Not only has Cannell decided to go ahead with a \$20 million studio complex in North Vancouver, it has also announced a new TV series for the Fox Network to be filmed in Vancouver. **Return of the Prince** will bear a striking resemblance to the Fox/Cannell hit **21 Jump Street**; it concerns a young group of public defenders. Sort of a poor man's L.A. **Law**. **Jump Street** producer Patrick Hasburgh is also behind the new series which debuts on Fox in September.

A number of crews are scouting around B.C. at the moment: 20th-Century Fox plans a sequel to **The Fly**, Tri-Star/CBS is planning a two-hour TV pilot called **Higher Ground** with John Denver; and MGM-ABC has another pilot in mind, **Knights of the City**.

All those who enjoyed testing their funnybone on CBC's

Comedy College, which premiered in January, will be pleased to note that Primetime Productions is in negotiation with the network to produce another 10 half-hours of the show.

Executive producer Michael Lebowitz says the company is also negotiating with U.S. cable and pay-TV buyers to sell the program there.

The B.C. Film and Video Industry Association (BCFVIA) is gearing up for their 1988 membership drive. Membership in the association, which was established in 1965, is open to producers, writers, directors, talent - basically, anyone interested in the promotion of B.C.-based film and video production. And membership fees are tax-deductible.

In 1987, BCFVIA membership saw a 100 per cent increase, and they're hoping for the same in 1988. If you are interested or want more information, call Natalie McGowan at [604] 684-4712.

Chris Delaney, of Delaney and Friends Productions, says the Vancouver animation production company is working with Alchemy II on a half-hour pilot for an animated children's series for U.S. television.

The series, called **Value Tales**, is based on the children's books of the same name, written by Kobi Yaeger (who Delaney says is a co-executive on the animation project).

Alchemy II is a Los Angeles television and toy development company that also contracts production of the **Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin**. Negotiations are underway with both U.S. and Canadian television to produce another 12 episodes.

The budget for the pilot program is \$250,000, and production will require the company's eight to 10 regular staff be boosted to 75. "We try to use Canadian talent," says Delaney, "but we also use animators from L.A. and Toronto." If the series goes to a full 13 productions, they will have to employ about 300 people, Delaney claims. "Animation is very labour-intensive," he says.

Delaney and Friends has also been working on **The Bumble Beeple**, a children's series developed by them. They are also trying to market this series in the U.S., through syndication or to the networks. "For financial reasons - animation is so expensive to produce - we need to sell our productions in

the U.S. first, and then in Canada," Delaney says.

Directors are in discussion with a number of filmmakers including Kit Carson, Sharon Riis, Larry McMurtry, and Allan Rudolph.

Participants in the spring session at Praxis script development workshop have been chosen, and the workshop's di-

rectors are in discussion with a number of filmmakers including Kit Carson, Sharon Riis, Larry McMurtry, and Allan Rudolph. At least one script from the fall workshop is in serious negotiations with a Canadian producer and director, accord-

ing to Praxis co-director Michael Lebowitz.

Sylvie Fefer, who co-wrote this particular script (**Star Crossed**) with Glenda Leznoff, says the workshop was just what they needed. "We worked on the script for a year

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continuing to live day-to-day just ho-hum?). Who is it that needs an identified movement? And who says that the movement need be avant-garde in its impulse? Must experimental film be seen/judged only insofar as it challenges the establishment? Why do we even look to the mainstream cinema to note the effects of or to compare experimental film with, anyway? We know that, though both are film, Hollywood's use of the medium is industrial, market-driven and formulaic; experimental films are filmic and individual. Why compare? Experimental films are; they are not 'alternative to'. Experimental films present ways of seeing and experiencing through film. Let's look, see, live, learn, enjoy, be bored, be engaged, be aware, experience.

The article seems to bemoan the marginalization of experimental film and filmmakers. Reviewers won't cover "the crazy movies at the Whitney while experimental filmmakers are forced into the starvation and squalor of ghetto life". Yet, when Hoberman reports the inclusion of this film within "academic bulwarks" it is only with regret that "where once raving madmen became filmmakers, it was now the turn of genteel professors." We just can't win! But how much and for how long was avant-garde film taught in film schools? Is it not, within academia, a fringe? Most film schools teach the popular culture of movies and now TV (of the 51 panels at the last joint U.S. and Canadian Film Studies Association Conference, six concerned themselves with analyses of television). So, perhaps it is only fitting that artists subvert, or at least comment on popular culture in their work.

There may have been little strong work in the Biennial or just out there at the moment, perhaps because of the tendency to show immediately everything one makes, but let's discuss/write about what is interesting - and not worry about what to name the movement!

Open doors at NATPE

MONTREAL - Doing Business With Canadians is the name of a seminar to be introduced at this year's National Association of Television Program Executives Market (NATPE) to be held Feb. 26-29 in Houston, Texas.

In response to an increasing demand in the U.S. for more information on the Canadian industry, the seminar will be held for the first time at NATPE on Feb. 25 from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Canadian panelists invited to discuss issues like co-venturing with Canada and obtaining new Canadian product are: Robert Lantos of Alliance Entertainment Corporation, Peter Sussman of Atlantis, Jon Slan of Paragon Motion Pictures, Michael Hirsch of Nelvana Ltd., Paul Saltzman of Sunrise Films Ltd., John Brunton of Insight Production Company Ltd., Sheldon S. Wiseman of Evergreen Raccoons Television Productions, David Patterson of Cineplex Odeon Television, Bill Stevens of Crawleys International Inc., Chuck Green of New Wilderness Productions, Pat Ferns of Primedia and Tony Allard of Allacom Productions.

Julia Frittaion of Telefilm Canada says enquiries from south of the border and the subsequent seminar, organized by Telefilm, are a direct result of an increased amount of Canadian programs currently seen on U.S. television.

"Certainly programming is one reason for the seminar. Another is that our Los Angeles office lobbied very hard for this," says Frittaion.

A "Canada" booth will be set up at NATPE with the participation of the Ontario Film Development Corporation, Telefilm and eight Canadian export companies.

Other important television and film markets coming up are Monte Carlo Market (Feb. 8-13), Berlin Film Market (Feb. 12-23), American Film Market (Feb. 25-March 4).

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and took the first draft into the workshop," says Fefer. There, they worked on a final draft with writer Phil Savath, who Fefer says was great for ideas and support.

Star Crossed is about a woman who accidentally gets caught up in a blind date with an alien and, well, let's say it gets complicated from there.

With all this work to do, Vancouver filmmakers will be wanting to get an early start on the day. To that end the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television is presenting a series of breakfast lectures in conjunction with Thorne, Ernst & Whinney. Dale Andrews of that respected firm of accountants spoke on "Helter Skelter, the 1988 Film Financing in B.C." on February 3. Donald Brinton of CanWest Broadcasting talks about Pacific Television on March 9. Steve Sasson of Cannell is scheduled for April 6 and George Chapman of IATSE on May 4. All of these breakfasts take place at the Coast Georgian Court Hotel beginning at 8 a.m.

The B.C. Film and Video Industry Association has received \$16,650 from Pat Carney's Ministry for International Trade. The money goes toward publication of an international marketing guide and directory of film and video buyers around the world.

Three of Vancouver's dark movie houses - the Odeon on Granville Street, The Dunbar and the Varsity (both on the West Side) - should be reopened sometime this month. Famous Players took over the leases on the theatres after Cineplex Odeon moved much of its business into a new seven-screen complex, also on the Granville Street Mall.

Hannah Fisher needs help. The Vancouver International Film Festival director has lost two of her key staff and is looking for someone to fill a new position, director of communications. Righthand woman Sherline Stroud is off to meet new administrative challenges and programmer Amnon Buchbinder has left to make his own films. Hannah would prefer to hire a Vancouver programmer but is also looking elsewhere across Canada. Expect decisions in March.

We'll have to wait until April to find out how many people actually took in the 1987 Festival. Put off by the annual war of statistics between Toronto and Montreal, directors of the Van-

couver Festival won't whisper a word until the audited figures are presented at the annual general meeting.

Paul Smilsky of Centaur Films is back from three months in Saudi Arabia. He directed a 50-minute documentary for Ara International Productions. It was broadcast on both Saudi radio and TV. His next project is underway in Vancouver. **The Trial of Harry Rankin** focuses on one of B.C.'s most controversial lawyers and municipal politicians.

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