

## OFFPA speaks out

OTTAWA – The Ottawa Feature Film Producers' Association (OFFPA) is a new organization looking for a place on the regional map of Canadian film culture. Ramona Macdonald formed the association about a year ago with Hull producer Normand Allard of Talisman Films and filmmakers Frank Cole (*A Life*) and Peter Evanchuck (*Cowboyz*). She wanted to address what she perceived as the problems of the Ottawa-Hull being a "disadvantaged region" in terms of feature film production.

"Ottawa right now is just like Halifax was 10 years ago," says Macdonald. "There is a lot of vitality and co-operation, but people don't know about us yet." The National Film Board only operates a distribution office in the region, and since Algonquin College closed down its film program in 1984, there is a scarcity of production equipment. When Macdonald first came to Ottawa from Halifax she was told that the last editing bins in the city were being used as flower-pots.

Macdonald points to Telefilm's policy of funding regional centres of excellence as being part of the problem. "I don't think Telefilm is personally against us. But we are under extreme pressure to team up with outfits in other regions. I don't think Telefilm is anxious to see the startup of another regional centre. Yet none of us has the time or money to constantly travel to Toronto or Montreal."

The group is active, and according to Macdonald, "we're into each other's pockets all over the place." Evanchuck is completing the editing of his second feature, *Cowboyz*, at Macdonald's Dooomsday Studios while Macdonald is putting together a deal on *Silver Water, Golden Sand*, a \$3-million feature she has written. Allard has been developing *McGregor Queen*, also a \$3 million feature, although a recent "thumbs down" from Telefilm has put the project in doubt, and Frank Cole is preparing to return to the Sahara to shoot his second feature-length documentary, *Death's Death*.

"One of our objectives is to get the National Film board to recognize that there is film being made in Ottawa, and like Halifax, it should be considered a region of some importance," Evanchuck told *Cinema Canada*. "The NFB used to have production offices for French and English. The last to leave was the ONF and when they left there was nothing."

Evanchuck used to teach film production at Algonquin until it closed its doors to film and before that he was the editor and publisher of *Motion* magazine. His first feature *Platinum* was screened at the 1987 Montreal World Film Festival and picked up by German, Swedish and Australian distributors, but it still hasn't been released in Canada. Cinephile has picked up the rights to *Cowboyz*, a docudrama about a homeless street musician in Ottawa. The film cost \$300,000

to produce and Evanchuck still needs a further \$20,000 to compete the post-production. The Canada Council recently turned down his request.

Frank Cole agrees that Ottawa is a more difficult part of Canada to make films because "there are no labs here and no equipment suppliers which means we have to go through Toronto or Montreal." However, he doesn't mind this because he's happy to make his films in Ottawa and the Sahara Desert. "I decided in 1981 that I wanted to do the first east-west crossing of the Sahara by camel. *A Life* was a small part of that goal." *Death's Death* will record the actual trip, 4,000 miles over 10 months, which Cole expects to begin later this year, starting at Port Sudan, Sudan.

Normand Allard was in the telecommunications business until four years ago when he started his own film production company. He has developed a number of projects including the *McGregor Queen* which Cineplex has agreed to release when complete. However, Allard claims that "Telefilm has refused to look at the project." He feels trapped in a no-man's land of Quebec-Ontario regional politics. "The Quebec government doesn't want to have anything to do with me because I produce in English and they believe the Hull area is part of Ottawa. And if I go to Toronto, they say I'm from Quebec."

Allard feels the OFFPA will give a certain recognition to the Ottawa filmmaker/producer and make people aware "that not only Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver produces movies." Ramona Macdonald is optimistic about raising the association's profile nationally. "We're all very much independent filmmakers. When the industry is young like this, it's very exciting. I think there will be a lot of production coming out of here just like there is in Halifax. I think Ottawa will be the next hotbed of film."

## Lance et compte producer Claude Héroux and Radio-Canada part ways

MONTREAL – Communications Claude Héroux Inc., producer of the highly successful hockey/drama series *Lance et Compte* has dropped Radio-Canada (CBC) for the private broadcaster Télé-Métropole.

At a press conference in early February Héroux announced that he would produce 6x90 minute *Lance et Compte* specials with TM beginning this summer.

Héroux said that this switch of allegiance after three seasons is the result of protracted negotiations with Radio-Canada and insufficient development funding.

Radio-Canada served notice on Héroux that the main characters of the popular series, who will each be featured in one of the six programs, are the property of Radio-Canada.

However, at press time Jocelyne Doris, spokesperson for Communications Claude Héroux Inc., told *Cinema Canada* that there is no litigation and that Héroux and Radio-Canada are discussing their differences.

The fourth season of *Lance et Compte* programs will be directed by Richard Martin who is currently directing *La Misère des Riches* for Héroux produced in association with TM. This eight-hour mini series is expected to be completed in April.

Doris said Héroux is continuing to develop a mini-series based on the book by Alexander Solzhenitsyn called *The First Circle* in association with Radio-Canada.

## CBC's Canadianization plans in "serious jeopardy"

TORONTO – Financial constraints are threatening CBC's ongoing plans to replace foreign, mainly American, programming with Canadian shows. "With the financial problems we are facing, it could seriously jeopardize Canadianization plans," Richard Chambers, director of Public Relations for the CBC told *Cinema Canada*. "We are doing our budget planning for 1989-90 and CBC's financial situation is not as healthy as we would like."

The CBC is facing a \$136.9 million deficit in its upcoming budget and the planning and allocations committee has proposed that \$17.5 million earmarked by former Communications Minister Flora Macdonald for Canadian program be diverted "to protect the current level of service from further erosion."

Last year Macdonald pledged extra money every year specifically to help the corporation's English and French networks increase Canadian content in their schedules to 95 per cent over the next five years. In the first year, starting April 1, English CBC-TV is to get \$10 million and Radio Canada, \$7.5 million.

Chambers said that "no decisions have been taken yet on CBC's total budget for 1989-90. How much is going to be allocated internally, how much is going to English television, English

radio, French television etc. We're still working on that."

The Canadianization plans are for 95 per cent by 1994 in prime-time English television and 90 per cent in the overall schedule. However, a new telecommunications tax which comes into effect in the near future could very well absorb any new funds. And because Ottawa has cut back on the CCA, the CBC finds itself, like Telefilm, faced with independent producers with projects and no matching private investment.

Chambers was noncommittal about these problems. "We're still in the planning stages," he said. "We're still forecasting advertising revenue for '89-90. Advertising revenue is playing a very significant role in CBC's financial picture. We have to increase the ratio of advertising revenue to government appropriation, but obviously that revenue picture is very important to us in making any sort of projection. It's just too early to tell how the pie is going to be divided."

Sources say CBC's board of governors has rejected any plans to cut back on the Canadianization priorities and the issue will be dealt with again at a March board meeting.

## Praise for Bureau

OTTAWA – No approximate date has been set for the appointment of a successor to André Bureau.

Giving family reasons, Bureau recently announced his resignation as chairman of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, effective March 1. He also stated that it was prudent to resign before the reintroduction of the Broadcasting Act and let a new chairman handle that dossier from its inception. He was serving a seven-year term until Nov. 1990.

Marcel Masse, Minister of Communications, recently thanked Bureau for his contribution as head of the regulatory agency for five years.

"Under Mr. Bureau's tenure, the commission has made fundamental and often difficult decisions which will affect our telephone rates and what we hear and see on television and radio for years to come," said Masse.

During Bureau's term, the CRTC revised its broadcasting regulations and was instrumental in the regulation of pay television, Canadian content, and extension of services.

Michael McCabe, president of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, called Bureau "a man of great vision and integrity."

"The system he has shaped over the past five years gives consumers more programming variety than any other country in the world. He has managed to keep it strongly Canadian," said McCabe.