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HALL OF FAME 2012
TIFF’s Piers Handling earns industry builder nod

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How the deals go down at TIFF

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Playback takes you under the covers of this year’s Toronto International Film Festival where 32 Canadian features will be screened, including *Laurence Anyways* by director Xavier Dolan (see page 35).

The cover photo of TIFF director and CEO Piers Handling was taken by award-winning photographer Nigel Dickson (www.nigeldickson.com). Appropriately enough, the shoot took place at the TIFF Bell Lightbox.
MANY TO WATCH

With so many films headed to the Toronto International Film Festival this September, it’s foolhardy to predict ahead of time which title will come out of the eleven-day event as the ultimate buzz-winner.

However, indisputably one of the most anticipated movies heading into the festival is Deepa Mehta’s Midnight’s Children. Its story is spun upon the novel by Salman Rushdie, who also wrote the film adaptation. It retells the creation of India and Pakistan in the late 1940s, no doubt one of the greatest human upheavals of all time, through a multitude of characters born when the countries split from the British Empire. As is discussed in the story that begins on page 14, Mehta was able to overcome Rushdie’s reluctance to bring the narrative to life on screen. As well, producer David Hamilton conveys some of the stresses involved with the Sri Lankan shoot.

One thing that’s not hard to figure out going into the festival is the role of Piers Handling. You may have heard of him: TIFF in its current incarnation, and its permanent home, is his brain child. For those incredible feats TIFF’s director and CEO will be inducted into the Playback Film & TV Hall of Fame during a ceremony in September. Being feted with him will be an array of fellow luminaries, including the annual Playback 10 to Watch; to learn who made it this year turn to the stories starting on page 23.

Perhaps, down the road, Playback will have to consider dropping the “film” and “TV” parts of the award’s name, to better fit with the times, as the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television has done with its move to the combined Canadian Screen Awards (formerly the separately awarded Geminis and the Genies). As ACCT explains, the new name reflects how those traditional distribution technologies are becoming increasingly irrelevant as identifiers. Despite how fondly I feel about them (and I am fond of them; for instance seeing Star Wars across the border at the St. Alban’s, Vermont drive-in in 1977 is a lasting childhood memory) I have to agree that ACCT is moving in the right direction.

Speaking of breaking new ground, a smashing success was our social media foray into crowd-sourcing content (something, if you think about it, journalists have been doing for centuries, but I digress). Dubbed the New Establishment, the goal was to get you, the readers and followers of Playbackonline.ca, to tell us who amongst your peers you thought were doing the most innovative things in the industry.

As part of that effort we awarded a three-month free website subscription to one of the NE respondents. Chosen at random was Andrew Nicholas McCann Smith (thanks again Andrew!). To see who was chosen as among your peers you thought were doing the most innovative things in the industry.

As well, producer David Hamilton conveys some of the stresses involved with the Sri Lankan shoot. Speaking of breaking new ground, a smashing success was our social media foray into crowd-sourcing content (something, if you think about it, journalists have been doing for centuries, but I digress). Dubbed the New Establishment, the goal was to get you, the readers and followers of Playbackonline.ca, to tell us who amongst your peers you thought were doing the most innovative things in the industry. As part of that effort we awarded a three-month free website subscription to one of the NE respondents. Chosen at random was Andrew Nicholas McCann Smith (thanks again Andrew!). To see who was chosen as among your peers you thought were doing the most innovative things in the industry.

And so, one issue out, another one to go. Within days (OK, probably after we recover from the TIFF and Hall of Fame party hangovers) Playback will swing its attention to the end-of-the-year issue, the one where we focus on the most notable news and newsmakers of 2012. If you have any ideas for stories, please send them to me; all pitches will be looked at carefully! Look for that issue to hit your mailboxes by the end of November.

Matt Sylvain
Editor, Playback
Playback congratulates the 2012 Honourees:

Industry builder Piers Handling
Creative Colin Low
Television Bob Culbert
Deluxe Award for Outstanding Achievement Sarah Polley
Breakout Award Sarah Gadon
Swarovski Humanitarian Award Gary Slaight

Talent Graham Greene
Feature Film Rene Malo
Posthumous Jackie Burroughs

2012’s 10 to Watch

Thanks to all our sponsors
It’s red carpet month, and time to celebrate the real stars of the industry

Playback’s fall issue is always a labor of love. It’s also a bit of an anomaly, in that it strays from Playback’s typical deals and funding news coverage to focus on two red carpet events.

One of those, the Toronto International Film Festival, is actually a series of red carpets, glamorous reminders that when Canada sets out to achieve world class stature, that mission can be accomplished. TIFF is right up there with Cannes on the festival circuit now, but getting there (while not as technically hair-raising as the Mars rover landing) – required grit, finesse and creativity.

Changing the habits of studios and buyers – getting films first on a very competitive festival circuit – was TIFF’s key coup, but continually attracting, over 11 days, audiences willing to queue for mostly little-known films in a town with endless entertainment options (not to mention lineup-free digital film availability), in tandem with building an army of sponsors (brands who also have myriad events, sports and causes vying for their support), is worth celebrating. That’s why Festival Director and CEO Piers Handling is being inducted into the Playback Film & TV Hall of Fame this year in the category of industry builder, and why he’s on our cover, shot against the backdrop of TIFF’s permanent home, the Bell Lightbox (another coup).

Joining Handling as the 2012 HoF inductees are: filmmaker and distributor René Malo, who has helped myriad films get made and seen; animator and large format film pioneer Colin Low, who also helped paved the way for others; Oscar-nominated actor Graham Greene, an iconic performer who’s stood out in everything from Hollywood blockbusters to children’s shows (who once told Playback that he put baloney in his shoes to help play a slimy character); TV news and doc stalwart Bob Culbert, who helped set the bar for broadcast journalism in Canada; and Jackie Burroughs, who is being posthumously recognized for memorable performances across numerous iconic Canadian films and TV shows.

This year’s Swarovski Humanitarian Award goes to Gary Slaight, whose ardent support and advocacy of Canadian music and performing arts most recently resulted in the creation of the CFC’s Slaight Family Music Lab. And our mid-career inductee is filmmaker Sarah Polley, whose enviable directorial success claims the Deluxe Award for Outstanding Achievement this year. Finally Sarah Gadon receives the Playback Breakout Award for her standout year.

Playback thanks our advisory board, CBC’s Kirstine Stewart, Park Ex Pictures’ Kevin Tierney, David Paperny of Paperny Films, SCGC’s Maria Topalovich, TIFF’s Michele Maheux and DHX’s Michael Donovan, for all their guidance and time spent on this year’s Hall of Fame curation, as well as former publisher Catherine Bridgman and Swarovski’s Diana Mazzuca, who joined the board for the Humanitarian Award deliberations.

We’re also grateful for all the ideas, help and support from the team at the CBC, lead by John Wimbs and Judy Mann. The CBC is the perfect Hall of Fame partner, as it shares our goal of putting a spotlight on Canada’s top film & TV industry leaders and stars, past, present and future. And we also thank the CFC, ACTRA and Swarovski, for their ongoing support of this very special red carpet gala, and welcome Deluxe and Steam Whistle to the group of industry sponsors who are helping celebrate the achievements of Canada’s film and TV visionaries, as well as the next generation – the Playback 10 to Watch.

This issue we also look at the success of Space, which built a loyal following over the past 15 years by creating that rare entity on TV – a unique and focused brand identity. Playback also explores the impressive mark Shaftesbury has made on the industry, which celebrates its quarter century with continued innovation on the digital media front and international growth, under the leadership of ardent Cancon nurturer Christina Jennings.

And that’s why the Hall of Fame issue is such a favourite. It’s all too seldom the industry comes together to celebrate the achievements of those whose careers inspire and have lasting impact, as well as its future stars.

Finally, we’re happy to announce that in addition to our annual Ultimate Guide to Production in Canada, which hits top U.S. and European production industry events, we’ve added a new spring issue of Playback, just in time for the new Canadian Screen Awards. More red carpets!

Cheers, mm

Mary Maddever
Playback publisher
Congratulations on 25 years of outstanding productions.
RESHAPING THE FILM FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE

Novel initiatives promise to expand event market impact by reaching untapped audiences

BY DANIELLE NG-SEE-QUAN WITH RESEARCH BY JORDAN TWISS

How will this initiative enhance the audience experience of the festival?

Hot Docs Livest was focused on taking a normal documentary theatrical screening and turning it into a special event. Hot Docs and our main partner, Cineplex, wanted to deliver elements of the Toronto festival experience to new audiences in other markets. For audiences in Toronto, their experience was enhanced by knowing that what they were watching at the festival was being shared live with almost 40 other cinemas coast-to-coast.

Both Hot Docs Live! and the Floating Polar Film Festival extend the Hot Docs brand into other markets, which is interesting for us, but only so far as [they] support the goal of generating new audiences to screen and support these excellent films. We’re excited by [Floating Polar] because we are keen to pilot programs that find non-traditional platforms and partners [and] because its audience will be able to screen films in environments that provide special context about the films. For most film festivals, building sponsorship support and maintaining the participation of serious buyers are critical elements in their business model. By partnering with iFestivus, film festivals can now leverage their key assets – curatorial excellence and creating a “must attend” event beyond their home city.

Why are brand extensions such as this necessary?

Brand extensions can help these goals by providing a “Good Housekeeping” stamp of approval for audiences increasingly deluged with entertainment options – hopefully, they know or learn to trust Hot Docs’ programming decisions. We’re excited to support great documentaries – and especially Canadian documentaries – and build new revenue and audiences during the rest of the year. [Both initiatives] complement the other year-round activities we manage to support these goals.

How does the filmmaker fit into this model?

[iFestivus] allows filmmakers to send as many people as they can drum up, to attend the virtual screening, no limit on the number of seats and at a lower price point. For filmmakers, iFestivus provides another method for building an audience. For example, if a film is playing at the Atlantic Film Festival – how does a filmmaker ensure that people see the film? Traditional methods include sending out invitations, trying to build PR awareness, and a social media campaign to create some excitement around the screening. But what if the film only has three screenings scheduled in Halifax? iFestivus allows filmmakers to send as many people as they can drum up, to attend the virtual screening, no limit on the number of seats and at a lower price point.

Although nothing can replace the audience members’ heady thrill of attending a screening in person, festival organizers and content creators are nevertheless looking outside the traditional event model by launching initiatives to bring cinephiles novel experiences.

In Canada, the Hot Docs International Film Festival this year launched two – albeit different – initiatives that added a new dimension to traditional festival-going. The Floating Polar Film Festival is a partnership with U.S.-based travel company Quark Expeditions, who wanted to supplement their long cruises to the Antarctic with documentary screenings. And launched last April, the Hot Docs Livet partnership with Cineplex let theatre audiences across Canada watch a live-feed of two films that were premiering during the Toronto-based Hot Docs festival, including participating in the filmmaker Q&As via social media.

On the digital side, Toronto-based short-form video content producer and distributor iTentric is developing Festivus.com. An online platform for festival operators with iPad, Android and Facebook applications, it promises to let audiences “virtually” experience the films, their directors and stars. Playback talked to Hot Docs and iTentric to learn more about these projects.
There are an increasing number of apps and digital platforms hitting the market to help you manage and simplify your screen content creations. And who better to create those apps than someone who works in the industry?

Earlier this year, Toronto-based Secret Location launched FanViewr, a content distribution platform to create custom apps for entertainment properties. The platform lets you design custom pages that work with Facebook’s timeline platform, including an option to use a specific broadcaster’s branded player to stream episodes and other video content from the brand’s page.

More recently, Vancouver director Zach Lipovsky created shot listing app ShotLister while he was filming his first feature-length project, the Syfy-commissioned film Tasmanian Devils. He noticed there was a clear need for a digital solution to simplify shoot management. “The state of the art for shot listing was to build a custom Excel file with upwards of a thousand shots and print out only the ones you need each day. Then, as soon as anything changed, the AD and I would scribble all over it with a pen. It was madness,” explains Lipovsky, who spent six months developing and testing ShotLister.

He says that producers of small indie projects, commercials and music videos were early adopters but that its user base is quickly growing.

A key function is the ‘live mode’, which calculates how you’re doing to-the-minute during your shoot, and lets you instantly change the plan by moving shots around with a finger flick. “That way you always have an idea of what the plan is without having to get out a giant red pen or going back to a printer,” he explains. “People have emailed from around the world saying how revolutionary it is to be able to change the shot list as you shoot and have the app recalculate your day. It sounds simple but it’s a big leap forward.”

ShotLister is available through the App Store.

Vancouver director Zach Lipovsky says his shot listing app ShotLister stops the madness.

We asked, you answered

Playback queried readers about the work-friendly apps they use. Here are some products they discussed.

Celtx Script: A script/screenplay app developed by Saint John’s-based Celtx, it lets you work on your script or screenplay across multiple platforms (mobile, desktop or the cloud). Celtx offers other spinoffs like Celtx Shots, for creating storyboards, and Celtx Scout, for taking pictures of and making notes about various shooting locations.

Sun Seeker: From Australian iOS and mobile app co ozPDA, this augmented reality app helps you figure out proper conditions for shooting and sun mapping, which is useful for DOPs and location scouts.

Cinemek Storyboard: This storyboarding app developed by Seattle-based Cinemek is used for on-the-go pre-viz and storyboarding, and can be synced with other app users.

With research by Jordan Twiss

Apps to Shoot For
Streamlined solutions for screen content creation

By Danielle Ng-See-Quan

Playback
The Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, in follow-up to a May announcement that it would combine the Geminis and Genies into one award event beginning next year, has unveiled details of the new and beefed-up program. That show, bowing March 3 at 8 p.m. on the CBC, is The Canadian Screen Awards. It promises to be a two-hour, multi-platform, ratings-grabbing, pride-inducing primetime broadcast out of Toronto, says ACCT CEO Helga Stephenson.

“We are working very hard to produce a brilliant show that will reflect the quality of the programs and films and digital media that we [Canadians] produce every year. We want to have the most known faces possible so that we can connect directly with the Canadian public,” says Stephenson. Stephenson and ACCT board member Barry Avrich say the show and related events are the result of extensive consultation with the industry. The organizers also want the event to be reflective of the increasingly blurring lines between film, TV and digital content.

“A hard look was taken at the old terms of film and television and digital, and really, now it’s about the content and the delivery system. The board felt very strongly that they wanted to update to reflect the reality of the industry as we experience it today and as it looks like we’re going to be experiencing it all life goes on,” says Stephenson.

She adds the show is also a major milestone in a series of reforms the Academy has undertaken over the last year in a bid to reinvigorate the organization and the star system it promotes.

“Our digital media and our films have raised the bar enormously in the last five to 10 years and we want the show to reflect that the bar is much higher than it’s ever been before,” she explains.

And what of the awards’ name? Avrich says the board wanted the awards to sound prestigious and authoritative.

“It would have been easy to come up with a whole bunch of very clever, different, cutey names. I think at the same time, this isn’t the VH1 awards, this is a prestigious award, and I think we all wanted it to be a reflection of the pride that we have in our industry,” says Avrich.

“And it’s not to say the award itself might somewhere down the line pick up an affectionate nickname like the Oscar or the Emmy,” he adds.

In the lead up to the grand event, the Academy will stage Canada Screen Week, events that will bring the country’s screen industry together.
FILMMAKER KICKSTARTER TIPS

Toronto-based director James Cooper launched the e-book Kickstarter for Filmmakers on iBooks, Kindle and Nook in August after he successfully completed a campaign last October on the crowd-funding site. Cooper raised just over $21,000 for his short film, Elijah the Prophet, and was bombarded with questions about how he did it, so he put the e-book together as a catch-all information source for his industry colleagues.

PLAYBACK ASKED COOPER FOR SOME TIPS FOR LAUNCHING A REWARDING CAMPAIGN.

1. **More Than Money**
   Don’t let the funding part of the term crowd funding distract you — you’re getting more out of your campaign than money. Backers are early adopters, and are more likely than anyone else to champion your project and shout it from the rooftops. They are now invested, literally, in your success. They’ve become part of the process, so treat them as such. Don’t just take their money and say thanks — show them you’re grateful for their help. This can take any shape you choose, but make them feel like they’ve backed the right horse.

2. **Be Honest**
   This seems obvious, but it’s one of the most important things to keep in mind as you build your campaign. Don’t lie, don’t misrepresent yourself or your credits, don’t make promises you can’t keep. When people back a campaign, they’re making a deal directly with you; Kickstarter and Indiegogo don’t police your ability to deliver, so it’s up to you to do so. You don’t want to waste their money or ruin your reputation, so ensure you’re not promising more than you’re capable of.

3. **Be Realistic**
   It’s easy to be blinded by dollar signs when looking at other successful campaigns, but don’t get carried away when setting your goal. Maximize your odds of success by taking stock of your network and making realistic estimates of what kind of support you’ll be able to gain. Be conservative in these estimates. It would be a far better surprise to end up with more than you thought you’d have, than to come up with less.

4. **Tell Me Who Is Involved**
   Simple, right? You’d think so, but quite often you’ll read through a project’s entire description and still not know who else is involved aside from the person writing the description/appearing in the pitch video. It takes more than one person to make a film, and your audience will want to know they can all be trusted to deliver.

   Elijah the Prophet is produced by David Cormican (see page 32), written by Zachary and Jesse Hermann, and stars Art Hindle, Melanie Nicholls-King, Tonya Lee Williams and Carlos Diaz. The e-book is also available at kickstarterforfilmmakers.com.
LES FILMS SEVILLE would like to CONGRATULATE M. RENE MALO for his INAUGURATION into PLAYBACK’S FILM AND TELEVISION HALL OF FAME.

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How Toronto filmmaker Deepa Mehta won over a reluctant Salman Rushdie to help bring his incomparable novel *Midnight’s Children* to the screen

Anita Majumdar as Emerald and Rahul Bose as General Zulfi kar in Midnight’s Children. Photo courtesy Hamilton Mehta Productions

The most eagerly anticipated Canadian film at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) is arguably Deepa Mehta’s dramatization of Salman Rushdie’s Booker Award-winning novel *Midnight’s Children*. Not only was Mehta an Oscar nominee for her controversial film *Water*, which opened Toronto’s festival in 2005, Rushdie has carved a literary career that has made him famous around the world. The combination of the two star talents should attract buyers for the lucrative U.S. and Indian markets, the distribution rights to which were still available in the weeks leading up to its premiere, according to producer David Hamilton.

When asked whether possible U.S. and Indian sales would occur at TIFF, Hamilton’s response is a cagey “I would hope so.” Prompted, he admits that “in territories like India, they really do not buy a film off of the script. They want to see the finished film. We’ve begun to talk to people about it, but nobody has actually seen it from India.” In Canada, Mongrel Media will handle distribution, and with a national theatre release date of Oct. 26, a major publicity campaign will be launched soon after the festival.

For Mehta, having Rushdie write the screenplay for the film was unusual since she regularly writes her own scripts. But this was Rushdie after all, the critically acclaimed novelist and essayist who weathered a fatwa issued against him by Iran’s Aytatollah Khomieni after the publication of his “blasphemous” novel *The Satanic Verses* in the late 1980s.

Rushdie is among the most famous English-language novelists and *Midnight’s Children* is by numerous accounts his greatest work. Often called “magical realist” and “post-colonialist,” the stunningly stylish novel not only won the U.K.’s most prestigious literary prize when first published in 1981, it garnered the 25th anniversary Best of the Booker Award prize in 1993 and the 40th anniversary prize in 2008.

It depicts the life of Saleem Sinai, born at midnight on the day when the British Empire’s rule ended and modern India and Pakistan were created in 1947. Saleem has special powers and feels an intense connection with other “midnight children,” who started life at the same time as the two countries were born.

**SPECIAL SCREENING**

Mehta and Rushdie met when he attended a special screening of *Water* in New York. “He really liked it,” recalls Mehta. “I asked him to write a quote to help publicize the film and that’s how we became friends. We had known of each other’s work, of course.”

Soon after, Rushdie interviewed Mehta about the film when he guest hosted the popular Charlie Rose TV show.

When Mehta decided that her next big project would be an adaptation of *Midnight’s Children*, she asked Rushdie to write the script. However, according to the Toronto-based director, “he was reluctant to do it. I had to absolutely empower him to write...”
“He was reluctant to do it. I had to absolutely empower him to write [the film adaptation]. I felt very strongly that if anyone could write it, then it should be Salman,” says Mehta, of getting Rushdie on board.

Not only had he written the book but he had also written a four-part television miniseries for the BBC, which never got made – and he was really close to it.

“I felt very strongly that if anyone could write it, then it should be Salman. I said, ‘OK Salman, you write down what you think should be in the film in point form including where the themes should appear in the drama. I’ll do the same thing. Then, we’ll exchange pieces of paper and see if we’re on the same track.’ As you can imagine, it was really quite wonderful because when we exchanged the pieces of paper, they were almost identical.”

The inherently dramatic director pauses for effect, then continues: “Once we got going, Salman would write a draft and send it to me. I would tweak it for how I would direct it or say, ‘perhaps we need this scene’ or ‘perhaps we don’t.’ It was such a wonderful and creative relationship.”

Given the potentially incendiary pairing of Mehta and Rushdie, there was no way that the film could be shot in India – riots would have broken out as was the case during the shoot for Water. Mehta and her producer Hamilton turned that situation to their advantage.

“We chose Sri Lanka because if you go to Bombay, for example, you can’t find much of the 1950s city anymore,” says Hamilton. “Sri Lanka, I suppose partly because it’s been at war for 30 years, has not developed that much. You do find the cities and many of the buildings to be of that same colonial period. We could replicate India more easily in Sri Lanka than in India itself.”

Hamilton goes on: “There are so many different periods in the film. We had to do the early 1900s – around 1914 – then you had to go to (northern Indian city) Agra for the 30s, then you’re at the birth of India in the late 1940s. Then it goes through the 50s and 60s and 70s. It was an enormous challenge, in 60 locations.” Adds Metha: “And we shot for 70 days with over 120 actors.”

When asked how she thinks Midnight’s Children will do, in both festivals and when it’s commercially released, Mehta laughs. “My dad was a film distributor in India. He told me ‘There’s only two things you’ll never know – when you’re going to die and how well your film will do at the box office.’”

The characters played by Zaib Shaikh (as Nadir Khan) and Shahana Goswami (as Mumtaz/Amina) have an affair later in life. After being married to each other in their youth. Photo courtesy Hamilton Mehta Productions.

Is there a Deepa Mehta brand?
I think there is but how would one define it? She makes richly textured, emotional, beautifully shot films with authentic performances. She’s known as an actor’s director and you can see there isn’t a poor performance in any of her films. When people see one of her movies, they expect to have a rich visual and emotional experience. That’s what they expect from her ‘brand.’

Does that help in selling projects or getting finished films into the hands of the right distributors?
I think so. I think the fact that we were able to pre-sell this film so strongly does say something about Deepa and Salman. There are no stars in this film. Deepa and Salman are what I would call the star “elements” that distributors are looking for in Midnight’s Children.

It’s been pre-sold to most European countries, including the U.K., Germany and France, and Australia and many parts of Asia, including Korea and Hong Kong, as of mid-August.

I heard the Iranian government protested the film being made in Sri Lanka. What happened?
We were about a third of the way through the shooting and I got a notification from the government organization which provides permission for foreign shoots – and of course we had the permission from them – saying that the permission was withdrawn. Needless to say, this was a shock. We were all on set when I got it, just beginning our day, and they made it clear that if we didn’t stop shooting, the army was going to come in and stop it.

So I had to tell everybody, ‘I don’t know very much about what’s going on here, but it doesn’t look very good. Can you hang on for a few days?’ Anyway we did, after much effort, manage to get in touch with the president [of Sri Lanka], who overturned the decision.

We were all on set when I got notification from the government saying permission to shoot was withdrawn. They made it clear that if we didn’t stop shooting, the army was going to come in and stop it,” says producer David Hamilton.

The film is a Canadian co-production with the U.K.’s Number 9 Films. How did that come about?
Because of Salman — he’s British and he wrote the script so that made it necessary to make it a co-production. Otherwise we’d have to have a Canadian writer and Deepa and I felt it was important to keep his voice in the screenplay. We all agreed that he could be more ruthless with the source material than we could. And so is one of the key actors, Satya Bhabha, who plays Saleem, the hero, and so of course is our

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Waterloo, London, Montreal, Ottawa
Scottish editor Colin Monie and our director of photography, Giles Nuttgens. It’s a U.K. set up.

Did you get financing out of the U.K.?

No. I tried. It was not made accessible.

So how was the financing done? Was it all through Canada?

Yeah, it was all Telefilm Canada and the usual suspects; the Ontario Media Development Corporation, the Canada Media Fund, the CBC, and me.
BUYING AND SELLING AT THE FESTIVAL

An ever-growing list of indie films means distributors have to think more strategically

BY MARC GLASSMAN

(Top): Alexander Siddig in a rough scene from Inescapable; (right): a moment of contemplation in All That You Possess.

(Above): The Lesser Blessed is an adaptation of Richard Van Camp’s novel of the same name; (right): Antiviral, by Brandon Cronenberg, makes its Canadian debut at TIFF.

(Above): Michael McGowan’s Still is receiving a special presentation during TIFF.
Although the Toronto International Film Festival doesn’t have an explicit market, to be sure the restaurants, bars and hotels adjoining the TIFF Bell Lightbox on King St. and elsewhere will be thick with dealmaking as buyers and sellers from around the world descend on the city. To get a sense of what kinds of deals may come to pass this autumn, Playback spoke to a number of top distributors about their TIFF-related strategies and plans.

For Nancy Gerstman, co-president of Zeitgeist Films, TIFF offers a “chance to see films with an audience. I like to feel if there’s a buzz.” She and co-president Emily Russo make all acquisitions together, so she brings back DVDs to Russo at their New York base for final decision making. If she likes a film, “We have meetings with filmmakers and we have meetings with sales agents. If we encounter filmmakers or producers, we’ll have an introductory meeting and then we get introduced to the sales agent, or, if we go to the sales agent and are close to offering a deal, then it’s good for the filmmaker to know you and get a feeling of who is after their movie.” Zeitgeist usually handles less than 10 films per season and markets them selectively so relationships with filmmakers like Canadian Mark Achbar, whose film The Corporation was a huge hit for them, are extremely important.

Zeitgeist has released a large number of Canadian films over the past 20 years, ranging from early work by Deepa Mehta and Atom Egoyan to all the recent docs by Jennifer Baichwal and Yung Chang. Echoing her colleagues’ opinions, she feels that Canadian films don’t need artificial support and agrees with TIFF’s decision to eliminate a Canadian-only category (what was called Canada First). “I think it’s a positive step,” says Gerstman. “It’s possible that people might have thought, ‘I’m not going to go to a specific niche festival programme, I’m just going to go see whatever is good that’ll rise to the surface.’” Canadian movies, she argues, “can stand on their own.”

Arianna Bocco, senior VP of acquisitions of New York-based IFC Films, says what she loves most about Toronto is that it’s a festival, not a market. “You’re not obligated to meet with people who don’t have films in the festival, the way at a market you are. I do more screenings than meetings. But I also enjoy meeting producers and sales agents face-to-face that I’ve been communicating with on phone and email.” IFC has already acquired Brandon Cronenberg’s Antiviral for the U.S. market. She notes the company doesn’t distinguish Canadian product from films from other English language territories. “Unless they’re in French. And we’ve acquired some over the years,” she says of Quebec-made movies.

Bocco acquires films for all three IFC labels: Sundance Selects, which are generally Indies and docs, IFC Films, which are bigger budget features with name actors and IFC Midnight, which tend to be horror films or dark thrillers. “There is an obvious audience for genre films. For us, they’ve been doing very well. We’ve been releasing films (simultaneously) theatrically and on VOD. I think that it’s an opportunity to curate because there are a lot of these movies out there, so it gives us an opportunity to pick up the ones that we really love and think are different and unique.”

Dylan Leiner, executive VP of New York-based Sony Pictures Classics, has a different mandate. “What we look for is quality filmmaking and filmmakers. At Sony, we don’t classify according to genre.” Heading into TIFF Leiner is “very bullish. This is a great time to acquire films.” Films that Sony represents include two TIFF 2011 Canadian hits Incendies and A Dangerous Method. “We feel this is a good time for Canadian films but we don’t acquire films by one country. We’re looking for films with unique appeal and strong characters that can be released theatrically.”

This is a good time for Canadian films,” says Dylan Leiner, executive VP of Sony Pictures Classics.
EOne’s executive VP of Canadian film sales Charlotte Mickie says the company is very excited about the prospects for its films at TIFF, including Home Again, All That You Possess, and The Lesser Blessed. She continues, “Secret Disco Revolution is a doc with celebrities – KC and the Sunshine Band, Gloria Gaynor, the Village People, Theresa Houston – so that’s a hybrid and should be so much fun to market. Inch’Allah has no stars, but its producers, Montreal-based micro_scope, have had a string of extremely successful films like Incendies and Monsieur Lazhar, so we already sold multiple territories just on the basis of very strong early footage.”

Mickie adds that for eOne, selling to foreign markets, a key TIFF opportunity thanks to the multitude of overseas buyers who attend, is “our business and our main consideration. Over the years both Quebecois and English Canadian films have actually developed a very positive reputation overseas,” says eOne executive VP of Canadian film sales Charlotte Mickie. “Over the years both Quebecois and English Canadian films have actually developed a very positive reputation overseas,” says eOne executive VP of Canadian film sales Charlotte Mickie. Even with a cast of relative unknowns, Inch’Allah, produced by micro_scope, enters the fest with buzz, in part because of the prodco’s recent hits, including Incendies and Monsieur Lazhar.

For Caroline Habib, acquisitions manager of Mongrel Media, her prime objective at TIFF is “to screen as much as possible and make sure that we, as a team, cover everything that may be a good opportunity for Mongrel.” Unlike eOne, Toronto-based Mongrel Media isn’t in the business of selling product to foreign markets. This TIFF they are working on creating positive buzz in Canada for their indigenous features, which include Deepa Mehta’s highly anticipated Midnight’s Children (see page 14), Michael McGowan’s romantic Still and Peter Mettler’s philosophical documentary The End of Time.

“It’s also important to see what’s out there, to follow filmmakers, whether or not we necessarily end up buying their films,” says Habib. “For the films that we’ll be eyeing, we try to make it to the first screenings, as much as possible, but also we’re in a buyer’s market, so we don’t need to rush into anything and overpay. There are always more films than we have slots for, so we try to make the best choices, and not get too caught up in the festival excitement.”

As an example of Mongrel’s buying and marketing strategy, Habib cites last year’s TIFF Audience Award winner, Where Do We Go Now? “We knew it wasn’t going to do the kind of numbers that The King’s Speech [a previous audience award winner] did. It’s a foreign language film set in Lebanon.” Mongrel has a history of marketing films to niche audiences that will respond to the story—in this case, Canadian families from the Middle East and groups interested in peaceful initiatives in the area, she explains.
ASIA RISING

Slew of new initiatives aimed at building relationships with film industries of India and China

The romance between Asian and Canadian film interests appears to be heating up. Witness a few recent examples: the newly launched Toronto International Film Festival’s Asian film summit, Telefilm Canada’s overtures towards the industry across the Pacific and a deal between Indian production company Ramoji Film City and Toronto producer Afonso Adebayi to shoot scenes from his next two movies near Hyderabad.

TFF artistic director Cameron Bailey envisions yet more film and TV partnerships between Asia and Canada down the road, but says these are built on trust and so won’t emerge overnight.

“IT may only be on your sixth, seventh or eighth visit that you actually begin to get deals done, but the first part of that is establishing the relationship.”

Jane Minner agrees, adding Chinese production companies offer particularly strong partnerships for Canada because many own their own studios and distribution channels. “IT's a huge opportunity,” says the director of Whistler Film Festival's upcoming China-Canada Gateway for Film program, “because they have what seems like limitless production financing opportunities available.” The inaugural competition in which Telefilm has a role, is offering up to $15 million to finance bi-national projects.

Telefilm, meanwhile, has also been raising Canadian film's profile at select major Asian film festivals. And while its director of international relations Brigitte Monneau says a formal film coproduction treaty has yet to be signed between India and Canada, she’s bullish on the pact’s promised benefits for Canadian filmmakers, including easier entry by Canuck film crews and access to Indian financing.

Regardless of the treaty, large Indian and Pakistani communities here have convinced South Asian filmmakers they have a viable audience for their work on this side of the Pacific: “People in Toronto and the country care easily as much about [Indian star] Shahrarah Khan as they do Brad Pitt,” observes Bailey. He sees a similar trend for films from countries such as South Korea and Japan.

But the best part could be working directly with film companies in China. Minner says Chinese filmmakers bring an extraordinarily high level of technical expertise to the table with “basically everything that money can buy.” What they lack is Canada’s “creative sophistication,” especially in script writing and managing production and post-production.

“So that’s what the Chinese are after. They’re after us to work with them and bring that expertise to the party.”

by David Godkin

Robin Smith, whose Toronto company KinoSmith has developed arguably the largest catalogue of documentary film in Canada, enjoys meeting foreign colleagues during TFF but he has adopted a cautious approach towards buying product while there. “I use the analogy of, why would I buy fall fashion right now?”

“Right now, they’re new in the stores and nothing’s on sale. What I’m more interested in are the Bermuda shorts that are being sold off. That may sound like I’m not aggressively going after things, but it’s not quite the case. There’s always a film or two that will really spark my interest [like last year’s The Island President] and if it’s coming from a company or person that I have a relationship with, there might be a chance to talk about it.”

He says distributors need to be careful “because you can get carried away” by the “frenzy” which can occur during TFF: “I’m trying to avoid overspending, especially when it’s so tough to figure out what the back end is going to be” said Smith, who is CEO.

Alliance takes a far more aggressive stance than Smith. According to Mark Slone, the company’s senior VP, their strategy for buying non-Canadian films involves having “a large international acquisitions team who are tracking all the films that are going into TFF. Many times we are seeing the culmination of a film where the script was first introduced to people at either Berlin or Cannes – or maybe some scenes were shown at Cannes of an unfinished film – and buyers will often be given the chance to look at that very finished film for the first time at Toronto.

“Those are the ones that are the highest on our radar, because they’re coming on the market for the very first time for sale,” Stone continues. “For films that have been previously screened but didn’t necessarily sell, it’s an opportunity to take another look at them, perhaps at a lower cost.”

They’ll also look closely at pre-buys with the sales agents, including “for Canada or for multiple territories through the sales agents who will attend TFF’s informal market because, as you know, TFF isn’t technically a market.”

Regarding indigenous film product, he says “for the most part any films that are in TIFF either already have a distributor or are lower budgeted because that’s the nature of the [Telefilm Canada’s feature fund] system.”

“We do try to check out new talent and look at some of the unacquired films, not so much thinking we’re going to buy them necessarily. But, it’s a way to discover filmmakers or other parts of the filmmaking process that may be interesting to look at for future projects, or bigger projects.”

The films Alliance has showing at the festival include Ruba Nadda’s Innocence, Brandon Cronenberg’s Antiviral, Xavier Dolan’s Laurence Anyways and Laurent Cantet’s Foxfire.
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Another great crop of inductees are bound for the Playback Canadian Film & Television Hall of Fame. Being inducted into the hall are: Toronto International Film Festival director and CEO Piers Handling, actor Graham Greene, TV industry veteran Bob Culbert, animation pioneer and filmmaker Colin Low, filmmaker René Malo, and the late actor Jackie Burroughs. As well, three additional industry talents are being acknowledged for their contributions or successes – actress Sarah Gadon, radio mogul and philanthropist Gary Slaight, and filmmaker Sarah Polley. The stories over the following pages provide the insight into why they will be saluted in a ceremony to be held at the CBC’s Glenn Gould Theatre in Toronto Sept. 21.

A heartfelt thanks goes to the Playback advisory board judges for their work in deciding who to honour this year: Michael Donovan, chairman, CEO DHX, Michéle Maheux, executive director and chief operating officer, TIFF, David Paperny, President of Paperny Films, Kirstine Stewart, executive VP English services, CBC, Kevin Tierney, president, Park Ex Pictures and Maria Topalovich, executive director, Screen Composers Guild of Canada.
To begin to understand Toronto International Film Festival director and CEO Piers Handling is to know him first as a man of intriguing paradoxes. An avid historian of Canadian film, Handling is also a tireless promoter of emerging contemporary film. Labeled for helping create a stage for the best in international film, Handling’s eye was simultaneously fixed on the needs of domestic filmmakers. David Cronenberg, Atom Egoyan, Peter Mettler, Bruce McDonald, and Guy Maddin: all enjoyed Handling’s support even as their early work escaped the notice of mainstream film critics. “Canadian filmmakers really lacked a critical context,” Handling explains. “They lacked people who appreciated or even knew their work.”

Looking back on his 18 years as a TIFF director, no one is more surprised by how his life turned out than Handling himself. But for a talented pianist mother and his exposure to the arts at Queen’s University in the late ’60s, Handling might have gone on to write large academic tomes. Instead, he found himself increasingly hanging around the university’s film department. Within two years of graduation he’d “fallen in love with film,” a love that only deepened when he became head of the publications division of the Canadian Film Institute in 1971.

It was at the institute where Handling met someone with a passion for film equal to his own and who shared a desire to elevate Toronto’s then floundering Festival of Festivals (as TIFF was then known) into something to rival the best in the U.K., the U.S. or France. “He was persistent,” former festival director Wayne Clarkson says of the man who would eventually take over the festival in 1994. For inspiration, “everybody looks to the head of the organization and the festival and it took patience to move that dream forward. Piers is the real thing. He has the vision. He has the passion.”

One of the first things Handling did was to highlight the work of unknown foreign language filmmakers. Within days of the festival first opening in 1976, the names of niche filmmakers like Finland’s Aki Kaurismäki and Poland’s Krzysztof Kieślowski were on the lips of the world’s film industry. And it has grown and keeps on growing; this year’s festival will show 372 films from 72 countries for example, up from 337 films from 68 countries in 2011. A major step, even this pales beside Handling’s greatest achievement – the TIFF Bell Lightbox & Festival Tower, a massive five-screen cinema and cultural complex (and condos) opened in 2010 at the corner of King and John Streets in downtown Toronto. Coupled with year-round programming, the Bell Lightbox’s economic impact is expected to grow to $200 million annually by the end of 2012. Says Clarkson, “That building – the cinema tech, the library, the exhibition centre – that’s Piers Handling.”

Yet perhaps the biggest changes have occurred in Handling himself. The organization’s “corporate face” with a year-round operation and massive film complex to run, he has had to give up some “personal joys,” such as actual programming, “to create a larger space for other things,” including making the Lightbox “the most important film institution in the world.”

“When you want to create a larger organization with more impact that does more things…you realize you have to make certain sacrifices for that dream to be realized. I could have stayed in the same place, but that’s really not my nature.”

PIERS HANDLING

Industry Builder: Recognition for transforming the Toronto International Film Festival into a world renowned event and constructing its year-round home, the TIFF Bell Lightbox & Festival Tower.
On set or off, Graham Greene likes to get things right. That’s why he’s quick to scotch an oft-repeated ‘fact’ about this most accomplished of North American actors: Contrary to some reports, Greene did not attend Toronto’s Centre for Indigenous Theatre’s Native Theatre School—he helped run it, as executive director of a school-supporting local arts organization. His first professional gig was at a theatre workshop in 1970s London, England, where instead of first-time butterflies he displayed the calm, cool humour that would exemplify so many of his later performances. “It really didn’t bother me, because there were people running around nuttier than I was,” says Greene. “I said to myself ‘This is acting? Okay!’”

Today, Greene’s achievements in film read like a credit roll from a Cecil B. DeMille Hollywood movie: Thunderheart, Die Hard: With a Vengeance, Camilla, Benefit of the Doubt, The Twilight Saga, The Green Mile and of course the career-break out role in 1990’s Dances with Wolves all drive home one message: Graham Greene is a talent to be reckoned with. Regular TV gigs such as The Red Green Show and Northern Exposure and live appearances at Stratford have helped cement Greene’s reputation as one of Canada’s most gifted actors.

Contrary to what you might suppose, Greene’s favourite film was not Dances with Wolves, but a film closer to home called Clear Cut. There he teamed up with his dear friend, actor Michael Hogan, who today remembers his work with Greene over that six-week period shooting north of Thunder Bay, Ont. with enormous affection. “Graham was absolutely amazing. You wonder whether he’s a spirit or a human being in the movie. He’s just so totally original and magical, a natural.”

Ditto, says Canadian director Don McBrearty, whose last encounter with Greene was on the set of the 2007 TV movie Luna: Spirit of the Whale on Vancouver Island. “He’s such a wonderful actor. He’s so talented on so many levels.” McBrearty says Greene’s contributions as an actor have been stamped indelibly on the fabric of Canadian and U.S. film. But many believe Greene’s greatest legacy will be the generations of actors who follow him, notably Aboriginal actors who work with him on set.

“Boy, do they look up to him and do they ever learn about making sure they come to camera prepared, knowing their lines and ready to work,” says McBrearty, “because that’s something Graham takes great pride in.”

Greene says the key milestone is his life did not happen on stage, but at the altar twenty-two years ago. Since then, his life with wife Hilary “has been the best time of my life.” In keeping with the itinerant life of a working actor the pair seldom stays in one spot for very long, which may change as Greene nears retirement. Would he change anything about his career? Maybe “start earlier,” something he recommends for younger actors—that and a good grounding in live theatre.

“It helps you build a character. When you get into film you don’t have that luxury. The discipline of theatre is what I recommend to all actors.”

GRAHAM GREENE 
Talent: Honoured for unrivaled professionalism and commitment to acting in a career that spans decades.

CFC proudly celebrates our alumni honoured as Playback’s 10 to Watch, Mark Montefiore (’06), Dev Singh (’09), Patrick Tarr (’05) and Lisa Jackson (’10).

A special congratulations to Gary Slaight (The Slaight Family Music Lab) on receiving the Swarovski Humanitarian Award and to this year’s Hall of Fame inductee Piers Handling (CFC Board Member) and Sarah Polley (’01) for receiving the Deluxe Award for Outstanding Achievement.
RENÉ MALO

Filmmaking: Recognized for his groundbreaking sales and distribution business strategy to take Canadian films to foreign markets, always with an eye for maintaining cultural autonomy.

René Malo says his epoch-defining film The Decline of the American Empire is representative of the career accomplishments of which he is most proud.

And his accomplishments are many. In addition to producing 26 feature films and distributing nearly 1,600 over a 40-year career, he has played an instrumental if often behind-the-scenes role in the emergence of the Canadian film industry we know today.

He tirelessly advocated for the domestic industry's autonomy from governmental interference, allowing it to have as free a hand as possible in distributing indigenous films but also being able to access internationally-made independent movies. He also helped with the establishment of Telefilm Canada's feature film and distribution funds.

As well, he pushed for the implementation of the film tax-credit remit not only in Quebec but also at the national level.

Malo produced The Decline of the American Empire in association with the National Film Board, where it was first developed. Broad producer Roger Frappier had asked five writer-directors to write scripts on "whatever they want," recalls Malo. One of those writer-directors was Denys Arcand.

"Denys came with that story of having eight university teachers talking about sex around the table. It was supposed to be shot with a very small budget in 16mm, but Roger came to me and said, ‘René, read that and tell me what you think, because maybe we can do something bigger,’" Malo continues.

They would indeed do something bigger. After shortening the script – but keeping in its revolutionary and startlingly realistic discussions of complicated sex lives – and changing the ending, and rising to the ever-present financing challenge, the film set box office records in Quebec, netting $2.5 million at the Canadian box office and as much as $30 million worldwide.

Winning nine Genies, it was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and received the International Critic's Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

The success of the 1986 film, both domestically and internationally, signified for Malo both a strategic change in his business model, and was indicative of his dedication to being a producer and distributor.

“’I worked really hard for two years after the movie was finished. I took care of the film, as a little baby, in every country. I tried to find a distributor that I thought would be the best one – it was not just a question of money. I had countries where I was offered maybe more money, but I knew the distribution of the film would not be done in the best way for the picture.

“The work of a producer is not to only make the picture. The life of a picture is many years, and you cannot just make a picture and bye-bye, give it to your distributor. It’s very important that you are there to care about it and to get involved.”

At the time of the film’s release, Malo had already produced several Quebec films, and was helming Malofilm Distribution, which he founded in 1973. On the back of that successful international strategy he established Image Organization with producer Pierre David and Nelvana in 1987, a company to focused on selling, marketing and promoting Canadian films in foreign markets.

In recent years, Malo has focused on the René Malo Foundation, devoting his efforts to cultural and arts initiatives for youth in Quebec and Canada. He continues to produce, focusing on projects that reflect his humanitarian interests, such as the upcoming film project in the works on Craig Kielburger and Free the Children.
If Bob Culbert’s career as a broadcaster and documentarian – spanning 40 years – comes as a surprise to anyone, it’s probably to him. “I didn’t really start out thinking, ‘I definitely want to be in broadcasting over print [journalism],’” he says. “But once I got in there, I realized the power that broadcasting has. I stayed in broadcasting after that, and I got intrigued with the art of broadcast storytelling.”

In a fit of youthful adventure, Culbert and his wife moved from Northern Ireland to Canada in 1968, where he soon landed a job with the Winnipeg Free Press. Working as a political reporter at the legislature, it didn’t take long for the CBC in Winnipeg to take notice of Culbert, and he was asked to join the team in 1970. Of course, it wasn’t all smooth sailing for the Northern Irishman. “After I got there, they suddenly realized I had a funny accent, and in those days, it wasn’t actually welcomed. They liked everyone to speak the same,” he recalls. Despite this, the doors had opened for Culbert, who went on to work as an assignment editor, lineup editor, and eventually as the producer of the current affairs section of the six o’clock news.

From there, Culbert quickly established himself as someone who was fiercely devoted to the principles of journalism. “A lot of the journalism that gets done in current affairs and news is so process-oriented, and they cover politics like a horse race,” says former colleague and current head of the CBC’s documentary department, Mark Starowicz. “Bob saw beyond all that, and always kept our eyes on the ball of what the human story was, what the viewer needed, and what the viewer deserved.”

This, adds Starowicz, was why Culbert was recruited for CBC’s national current affairs program, The Journal – a program he worked on for ten years, eventually becoming its senior producer. Following the cancellation of The Journal in 1992, due in part to the death of host Barbara Frum, Culbert became CBC’s head of network TV for current affairs, before moving on to executive director of news and current affairs.

The position, which he held from 1994 to 1999, saw him take responsibility for all news and current affairs programming at both the network and regional levels, as well as for Newsworld, the public broadcaster’s 24-hour news channel (renamed CBC News Network in 2009). Shortly after, Culbert moved on to CTV, where he was made VP of documentaries. But he couldn’t escape his commitment to public broadcasting, and would eventually return to the CBC for an 18-month stint as executive producer of The Nature of Things. “Bob was a stout defender whenever public broadcasting was threatened,” says Starowicz. “He fought hard against any political interference in the editorial process. He was one of the strongest public broadcasting figures in our generation.”

Culbert, who now runs his own production company, Culbert Productions and Consulting, continues to be an active defender of the CBC and documentaries – especially in light of recent government cuts to both. “There’s a huge future for docs, we just need people, broadcasters and theatre owners to commit to them, make space for them,” he says. “Then we have to find a way to have them paid for, so the producers can continue to have the resources to do the proper research and maintain production values.”

He also shows no signs of leaving the industry. “I’m looking forward to a number of active years, and staying involved in documentary production, either as a producer or as a consultant on other people’s projects,” says Culbert.
Colin Low had just finished high school and a summer session at the Banff School of Fine Arts when the National Film Board came knocking and plucked him out of his rural Alberta home.

“My teacher suggested that I send some of my material to the NFB,” says Low of his decision to apply to the film board. “I didn’t know anything about the NFB. I had heard the name, but I didn’t really know that I had seen anything from it.”

At the time, he thought little of it, but just a few weeks later, Low found himself in Ottawa for a summer training session, working under his mentor and fellow Playback Film and TV Hall of Fame member, Norman McLaren, in the NFB’s budding animation department.

And so began Low’s illustrious career at the film board—a career that spans five decades and continues to this day with his filmmaker sons.

Following a brief period of study in Sweden, Low returned to the NFB’s animation department and, after being appointed head of the department by Tom Daly in 1950, quickly established himself as a man deeply dedicated to the board.

“He was not only able to sustain the life of the animation department for the better part of two decades, but was also, by his own example, an amazing filmmaker,” recalls Low’s former board colleague, Rob Verrall.

Low’s first success came with the animated short, The Romance of Transportation in Canada, which won a Short Film Palme d’Or at Cannes, and also earned an Oscar nomination.

Despite his beginnings in animation, Low soon found himself channeling his rural Alberta roots to also create docs, including Corral with long-time colleague Wolf Koenig, and Circle of the Sun.

Apart from his public reputation as a filmmaker, Low also inspired a generation of the profession’s young up-and-comers. “[Low] had an ethic with regard to filmmaking that became rooted in us,” says former NFB colleague, Tony Ianuzielo. “Young filmmakers came and left, but what happened was that the country was being seeded from coast to coast with filmmakers, and the NFB was the genesis of all that.”

Among those he inspired was 2001: A Space Odyssey director, Stanley Kubrick, who reportedly based some of the ideas for his sci-fi masterpiece off of the realistic animation in Low’s Universe.

Low also became known as an innovator and champion of the precursor to IMAX 3D film—a process he began work on with Roman Kroitor for the multi-screen film, In the Labyrinth at Expo ’67, and completed with Transitions at Expo ’86.

Yet to his colleagues, one of his crowning achievements will always be his work on the Challenge for Change, an NFB initiative to assist the struggling people of Fogo Island, Nfld., which saw Low produce 27 films.

“It was a place that had a big problem because its fishery was diminishing, and they had been on Fogo for 300 years,” recalls Low. “The government was about to kick them off the island, but the fishermen knew there were lots fish out there.”

Thanks to the initiative, the government arranged for the people of Fogo Island to have better boats, and the Challenge for Change program would spawn requests for similar social advocacy initiatives in other countries.

Verrall attributes much of his own success in the industry to Low’s constant willingness to help others in the industry. “I survived because of his support, and there are quite a few of us who would say the same thing,” he says. “He might have been preoccupied with his own endeavours, but not so much so that he didn’t have time for people who he was in charge of, or saw a reason to help.”

Creative: Acknowledging his contributions to the National Film Board, which helped to make it a world-renowned fount of cutting edge animated and documentary storytelling.
Create partnerships and exchange knowledge through workshops, keynotes, roundtables and 1x1 meetings.

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DELUXE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT: SARAH POLLEY

BY ETAN VLESSING

When you hear the words child star, most people think has been adult actor desperate for work and still craving the spotlight.

That would NOT be Sarah Polley, who began her career in Canadian TV as a cute child star on Road To Avonlea, playing a bubbly little girl in a sugar-coated '90s family drama based on the classic Anne novels by Lucy Maud Montgomery.

But on her way to becoming a brilliant Hollywood star by portraying wounded and conflicted young women, Polley parlayed her celebrity into becoming a fast-rising Canadian director and screenwriter, most notably with her Oscar-nominated directorial debut, Away From Her.

And that has earned the young actor, director and screenwriter this year’s Deluxe Award for Outstanding Achievement. The prize recognizes Polley’s contributions to the Canadian industry, despite her youth (she’s still in her early 30s).

Polley’s second film, Take This Waltz, like her first, bowed at the Toronto International Film Festival, as does her latest, Stories We Tell. The National Film Board of Canada documentary features Polley and caboodle,” says Slaight.

Slaight also joined the board of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television last November, at a time when the organization is undertaking a series of changes to reform and revitalize its mandate and activities. “We want to see the industry grow, and we want to see more Canadians do well in their chosen craft,” he says.

Besides championing homegrown creative talent both in the media industry and via countless youth and arts initiatives — also including the Shaw Festival, the Canadian Opera Company and the National Arts Centre Foundation — Slaight and the foundation are behind numerous charitable causes and community service and development projects across the broader humanitarian landscape.

Just to name a handful requires a big breath: The Hospital for Sick Children, War Child Canada, the Stephen Lewis Foundation (World Vision, Free the children and the United Way of Toronto, the Bloommore Kids Foundation and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Toronto.

“That’s just something our family’s always done,” Slaight says of the giving. He adds, “We’re very lucky and happy that we can do what we’re doing.”

PLAYBACK BREAKOUT AWARD: SARAH GADON

BY ETAN VLESSING

Sarah Gadon’s 10,000 hours to overnight success last year started out in childhood dance classes.

“That’s certainly where my training began as an artist,” says Gadon, who recently starred in David Cronenberg’s Cosmopolis and A Dangerous Method theatrical dramas.

Gadon even trained at the National Ballet School of Canada, before eventually doing episode TV acting over summers when off from school. “I would take a few jobs throughout the summertime, and that’s kind of what I did throughout elementary school and high school,” she reveals.

Despite her busy acting schedule, which includes international travel to shoots like the TV series World Without End and Denis Villeneuve’s film An Enemy, which was shot in Canada and Spain, Gadon continues her university education as a part-time University of Toronto film studies student. It’s really been an asset to me as a young actor because I feel like sometimes the industry can be so tough and so competitive and so dollar-driven, that it’s easy to get disillusioned when you are coming up,” she insists.

The Canadian actress also has the luxury of being selective in her scripts and acting gigs, which she recommends to those following in her steps. “I don’t think it necessarily matters what stage you’re at in your career, you should be making the kinds of films you want to make,” she advises.

Gadon reads indie and commercial film scripts, not caring too much about where the financing comes from. What’s important in the character and does she see herself filling its skin.

“Sometimes I end up not auditioning for a lot of work and sometimes I end up campaigning for things that I probably don’t have a shot at booking, but I think every artist has to fight for what they want out of their body of work,” Gadon says.

And the world exposure the Canadian actress received from co-starring in Cronenberg’s latest films is doing wonders for her career. “It did [A Dangerous Method with a British accent and so it got me a lot of exposure in the U.K., and I’m going to be there in September doing a British film,” Gadon says, pointing to starring alongside Tom Wilkinson and Matthew Goode in Belle, directed by Anna Alanse.
The National Film Board of Canada salutes Canadian film pioneer COLIN LOW on his induction into the Playback Canadian Film and Television Hall of Fame


Explore over 40 of Colin’s works on NFB.ca/colinlow
Playback’s search for the 10 to Watch, our annual list of the notable rising talent in the industry, keeps getting tougher as the professionals who make up the screen-entertainment industry keep getting better. Below are the ten exciting actors, producers, editors, writers and filmmakers chosen with input from a variety of industry sources and organizations. Check out why they made the list here and the longer versions of these Q&As on Playbackonline.ca. As in the past, this year’s ten will be given special attention at the Playback Canadian Film & Television Hall of Fame ceremony in Toronto Sept. 21.

THE BUZZ: After appearing in almost 200 episodes of Degrassi: the Next Generation the young Toronto thespian and aspiring singer leads the cast of hot property The L.A. Complex.

How did portraying Manny Santos on Degrassi: The Next Generation change your acting career?
Being on a TV series for so long with so many different issues covered was just a really great experience because I had so much practice.

Now your career is on a new plateau as you play actress Abby Vargas on The L.A. Complex. How has that role impacted your career?
I took a break from acting for quite a bit of time, and L.A.Complex was basically what I got after, so I was pretty lucky with that audition. It’s just nice to work with people I look up to because they’re more experienced than I am. So for a while it was kind of difficult because I had been playing Manny for so long, and then I had to get over that hurdle.

You’re also a singer with two albums. Was music a way for you to break free of the Degrassi mould and let your fans know there’s more to your talents?
Music is something I’ve always loved. I pretty much started both things at the same time – and I was just lucky enough to break into acting first. Music is something I really enjoy doing both things, and I really try to give them both a balance and try my best.

Ev

THE BUZZ: Bill and Sons Towing, the Imponderables sketch troupe-starring comedy web series that he co-created and produced, has generated a lot of social- and mainstream-media buzz, suggesting de Angelis and biz partner Charles Ketchabaw of Toronto-based Ready, Set, Panic may be figuring out the elusive online-screen model. His other credits include work on Dan for Mayor and The Ron James Show.

BSt has garnered a lot of mainstream coverage – what contributed to this?
We attracted a lot of high profile Canadian actors who traditionally work in TV; I don’t know if that helped [laughter]… The really cool part about the web is once it’s up there, it stays there, whereas with TV, you’ve got your 13 weeks to attract your eyeballs and it’s at a specific day and time, and you really have to hammer that home to get your audience and to get people to watch.

Speaking of grabbing those Canadian acting heavyweights, like Nicholas Campbell, Sonja Smits and Jane Eastwood, how did you get them on board?
Having had the advantage of working in traditional TV, I presented the package so that it looked like it was a TV series. They got a series bible, they got scripts, we had a shooting schedule… So I was very adamant that we have all those bases covered, so that we kept the questions really just on the content. [And] we deliberately decided to shoot in February, when it’s a slow time, and we were able to attract a lot of great crew… that [work] in film and TV all the time.

Where do web series fit right now in the content creation landscape?
I think web series are starting to become what the short film was 15 year ago… everyone was making short films to showcase their respective talent, and I think more and more people are being attracted by the idea of a web series. Some people are developing it specifically for the web, and staying there, which is amazing. And some people are looking at it as a place to put a series up that has legs for TV, and creating it like a backdoor pilot so they can go to networks and say, ‘This is the vision,’ and find out if they’re interested in developing it further. DNSQ
THE BUZZ: At just 30, the Saskatchewan native and former actor has been turning heads in the feature film world: he produced Faces in the Crowd starring Milla Jovovich, The Tall Man starring Jessica Biel and Stephen McHattie, and one of his upcoming projects includes the Captain Canuck remake.

What prompted your jump from acting into producing?
It started from being frustrated, being the underemployed, ‘always the bridesmaid’ actor. I decided what I needed to do was start writing my own material. So I got together with a few other actors who were in similar positions. We wrote a bunch of stuff and started pitching it around. Then we realized that in order to get stuff done you have to go one step beyond writing it. You have to actually produce it yourself.

What are your development strategies for properties built from scratch?
Lately… we’re treating the film industry a little bit more like a business community where you put things out for tender. We’ll go to a group of agents and ask for writers’ takes on things. Then really, the best idea wins. I like to use a collaborative approach. You’re not creating everything inside a vacuum, and thinking it’s perfect, then taking it out to an audience only to find out that you’ve missed some big holes.

What’s up next for you?
We’re working right now on this project called Seeing Red. It’s with director, Kari Skogland, and we’ve got Kate Hudson attached to it. That should be shooting over January, February and March of 2013. We’ll be shooting in Singapore, Australia and Canada. JT

Why do you think Sociable Films is a good model [artists pool resources “to make movies sociably”]?
There have been a lot of cutbacks as of late. It gets harder and harder to raise the funds that one needs to make quality films. So I feel like this kind of model – the model of everybody working together, pitching in and creating a sense of community – is important. By working together we can help each other make each of our projects.

Does your directing approach change when you’re doing fiction versus docs?
My approach to directing is project-specific. I tend to blend genres, but that always comes from the content of the film itself. I thought I would never do a zombie film, but I have because it suited the subject matter of residential schools to me in an interesting and thought-provoking way.

What are the challenges you face in being both the writer and director?
It’s something that comes naturally to me. Before I got into film, I was a writer. I find the fact that my roots are in documentary is a really good basis for being a fiction script writer, because you’re exposed to so many types of people. JT

THE BUZZ: This young Vancouverite tends to make Aboriginal-experience-based films and docs that transcend cultural boundaries: her credits include Savage, which screened at Berlinale and SXSW in 2010, and she is developing feature script Mush Hole and is attached to Jenny Two Bears, a feature, whose script writer is award-winning Canadian author Joseph Boyden.

What influences the subject matter of your projects?
The heart of my films is usually character. I generally like films that leave viewers with questions rather than answers. So if there’s something about a film that genuinely intrigues me and leaves me questioning something larger thematically, that’s what engages me.

Does your directing approach change when you’re doing fiction versus docs?
I just wrapped our first feature film, After Party, it was fully improvised. So I came up with 40 scenes, I talked the actors through their characters, and they were very involved in creating their characters. I integrated some of those character details into plot points. Then, on the day, we’d sit down and talk about the scene and go and shoot it.

What attracts you to a story or a script?
I love stories that are character-driven pieces. I found that over the films I’ve made, that’s a recurring theme, even if the genres change. My first film, Hooked on Speedman was a comedy, and This Feels Nice is more of a drama. They’re very different in terms of feel and mood, but it’s all about a person seeking something. JT

THE BUZZ: In addition to recently starting Sociable Films with Nicholas Carella and Ali Liebert, B.C.-based Ouellet has carved a short and sharp upward career arc with Canadian Comedy Award-nominated Hooked on Speedman, the TV-web series The True Heroines and the short This Feels Nice (in post).

Why do you think Sociable Films is a good model [artists pool resources “to make movies sociably”?]
I feel like this kind of model – the model of everybody working together, pitching in and creating a sense of community – is important. By working together we can help each other make each of our projects.

What are you working on through the shingle at the moment?
I just wrapped our first feature film, After Party, it was fully improvised. So I came up with 40 scenes, I talked the actors through their characters, and they were very involved in creating their characters. I integrated some of those character details into plot points. Then, on the day, we’d sit down and talk about the scene and go and shoot it.
What made you return to working on indigenous productions?
I returned to working on Canadian productions because, as exciting as VFX was, I've always preferred editing. In editing you're the storyteller and VFX is a part of that, but it's ultimately working inside the shot instead of shot to shot. I preferred seeing the whole film rather than elements without the context of the entire film.

How has your career progressed since?
It was hard at first, jumping into editing because most people knew me as either a VFX guy or an assistant editor. Dennis Berardi put me in touch with Digital Domain and I worked on a movie called Zoom. Finally, I landed my first feature which was The Last New Year, a small low-to-no budget film that Garfield Lindsay Miller and Alyson Richards were kind enough to trust me to edit — even though I hadn't edited a feature at that point. Then I went to the Canadian Film Centre Editor’s Program and that was the start of things progressing.

You have a 3D project coming up. How does editing for 3D differ?
I'm treating it like a VFX film with another stereoscopic element. I still try to simplify it to moments and suitable perspective. I take solace in the fact that it's all relatively new and most people who have done it over the past few years have just done it for the first time. I think it's another story element and ultimately is most successful when treated as that and the technical challenges will ultimately still service the story, not the other way around.

What are the differences in how you approach writing for an online series (i.e. Murdoch Mysteries: The Curse of the Lost Pharaoh) and writing a film script?
My way in to stories is always through mood, theme, and where I want to take the characters internally. So whether those elements get sketched onto one big canvas or thirteen small ones, the approach is always through the big picture.

What was going through your head in the writers’ room when you were coming up with the story for The Colony?
My co-writer Pascal Trottier and I first started The Colony in 2005. We wanted to write a thrilling genre movie with strong characters that we could get made on a small budget. We wrote the first draft in two weeks and got our producers [Paul Barkin, Marie-Claude Poulin, Pierre Even and Matthew Cervi] on board not long after that. Over the next six years of collaboration the project just got bigger and better, growing into a truly epic post-apocalyptic thriller.

You worked in the art department for a good part of your career. What made you decide to get into writing for TV and film?
I was always writing, but focused on short stories and novels at first. I loved the visual design aspect of movies so working in sets was a great education and also very flexible. I could work on a show for a couple of months and then go traveling and write. But the more I wrote, the more I realized that the things I loved writing - imagery, suspense, dialogue - were all geared to writing for the screen. So I wrote a couple of screenplays, and things just started to come together.

What are the differences in how you approach writing for an online series (i.e. Murdoch Mysteries: The Curse of the Lost Pharaoh) and writing a film script?
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THE BUZZ: This Toronto-based 2012 Writers Guild of Canada Screenwriting Award winner worked in set design for many years before turning his craftman’s eye to writing. His highest-profile current project is the recently wrapped feature film The Colony, starring Laurence Fishburne and Kevin Zegers.

THE BUZZ: After establishing himself as a VFX specialist with big budget U.S. films (including The Ice Harvest and Four Brothers), Toronto-based Singh moved into editing and has quickly amassed noteworthy experience, including cutting The Last New Year and An Insignificant Harvey; he’s currently working on Little Terrors, Picture Day (world premiering at TIFF) and Fangs of War 3D.

THE BUZZ: After establishing himself as a VFX specialist with big budget U.S. films (including The Ice Harvest and Four Brothers), Toronto-based Singh moved into editing and has quickly amassed noteworthy experience, including cutting The Last New Year and An Insignificant Harvey; he’s currently working on Little Terrors, Picture Day (world premiering at TIFF) and Fangs of War 3D.
As a cop, how did you shift into TV and film? The worlds are a lot more similar than they are different, once you get past the surface of it. In both you’re surrounded by really motivated individuals who are always thinking of creative ways of solving problems, and, as it comes to producing things, they are really structured and sticking to schedules. The reason has basically just been my love of story-telling.

With Cracked, what made you want to bring your experiences to screen, and how will it stand out from other procedural cop dramas? That world is full of stories, if you listen. It’s a world that fascinates me. I’m hoping it’s the perspective that we’re coming at it from. It’s a pretty street-level show that comes from an honest place, an authentic place, and then you add the story elements.

What’s the story behind the Lehane story? I fell in love with it years ago, and it took me that long to wear [Lehane] down. I finally got the chance to meet him and talk to him about how I saw [the film] happening. He’s an amazing storyteller. . . And after meeting him – I actually sat down and had a beer with him – he’s the real deal, he comes from a really cool spot. And those are the type of stories and type of people that motivate me to do things.

Can you recall a moment when you knew you’d arrived as a producer? There’s been countless number of moments that have shaped where I am right now. I keep two folders in my email box. One’s called “rejections” and the other ones called “bullshit.” The rejection email folder fills up frequently. . . Every so often I’ll open that up and I’ll take a look and go “OK,” for every ten rejections, there is one acceptance. And that’s what makes those acceptances sweet.

You’ve mostly directed or produced your own work. Is that a conscious strategy in building your career? I’ve wanted to produce my own content from the very beginning. There was never a time that I decided [now] I’m going to go it on my own. I worked with writers on ideas I developed or I’d written myself, purely to have something to produce.

Why are you drawn to comedy? That’s where I think my skill set is, where my passion is, finding what is at the heart of the story: What’s important and integral to the story and, knowing the resources we have available, finding ways to be able to achieve that for the director and the writer, that’s my challenge and passion.

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The Buzz: DeHartog co-created upcoming CBC drama Cracked, adapted Dennis Lehane’s Southern noir short story Running out of Dog, now in development with Leo DeCaprio’s prodco Appian Way, and has other projects in the works — while working as an active member of Toronto SWAT.

The Buzz: Among other things, Toronto-based Montefiore of Montefiore Films is producing the feature Cas & Dylan with director Jason Priestley, after producing the Comedy Network original series Picnicface.

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How did IndieCan come to be?
I exec produced a movie called Moon Point. We tried to get funding, and we got turned down every time. We made the film for $75,000. I couldn't get a distributor, couldn't get a broadcaster, couldn't get anything. So I said, 'To heck with it, this is the launching pad for my own distribution company.'

What's your mandate with IndieCan?
There aren't enough distributors for the amount of content we're making. The under $1.25 million [films] have the hardest time getting a distributor. I want to try to help that community. If other distributors can't take these films and I like the film, I'll do everything I can to help the filmmaker get the film out there.

What are some successes seen so far?
Since IndieCan started in November, I released Moon Point. It got a two-week run in February at the Yonge-Dundas theatre in Toronto. Then I played it in [cities across the country]. That garnered me a sale to Air Canada, a sale to TMN, and a DVD distribution deal. After Moon Point I distributed a doc named Peace Out. It started winning at film festivals; it won the audience award at the Vancouver International Film Festival. Then it came to Hot Docs and it won the special jury prize for Best Canadian Documentary. The moment it won at Hot Docs, I got it in [multiple theatres], and sold it to Air Canada and Super Channel.

Why did you start RVF?
I talked to a number of [Edmonton] filmmakers who are dying to make films, but don't really have the opportunity. So I said, 'I really think I need to do something.' When I opened up [IndieCan] I said, 'Maybe now's the time to make it happen.' I called Guy Lavallee. I said, 'I want to develop projects in Alberta, written by Albertans, directed by Albertans, shot in Alberta. What do you think?' He said, 'I love it.' So we thought of a name, and announced it [in November].
What’s next

Don’t miss these chances to reach Canada’s production community & beyond...

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Playback's annual year-end wrap offers the definitive look back on the news and newsmakers of 2012. All eyes will be on this issue, so take advantage and get your message in front of Canada’s industry leaders. BONUS distribution at the Whistler Film Festival!

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Just in time for the Academy’s new combined awards show, Canadian Screen Awards, Playback is introducing a new issue to its lineup (we’re an official quarterly!). Focusing on the digital space and interactive, you’ll also find this issue at the CMPA’s Prime Time 2013.

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CANADA

With distribution at top international events and a second straight year of expanded editorial content focusing on Canada’s world class talent and infrastructure, this annual guide to shooting in Canada reaches the global decision makers. Show the world what YOU have to offer!

To reserve space in any of these issues, please contact Playback account executive Jessamyn Nunez: jnunez@playback.brunico.com
PRODUCING PASSION

Over its 25 years Shaftesbury has proven itself not only a laudable business success but also a strong proponent of Canadian screen-industry and literary talent. With this profile Playback looks at the company’s past and its future.

Shane Kinnear was working as an executive coordinator at the Ontario Film Development Corporation (today the Ontario Media Development Corporation) when, about 1990, then novice producer Christina Jennings arrived with an indecent proposal. “This woman came in to meet with me about a movie she was going to make called Camilla,” he recalls of the encounter. “It was expensive – she wanted to make it for $12 million. It was unheard of in those days. . . The entire OMDC fund was I think $7 million. She said, ‘I’ll need to have your maximum investment.’”

Only problem was the maximum allowable was half a million dollars.

Jennings explained that acclaimed novelist and playwright Paul Quarrington was writing the script, Deepa Mehta would direct and she intended to secure Bridget Fonda, Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, who had just won an Oscar for her role in Driving Miss Daisy, for the cast. “I thought, this woman is delusional – she’s never made a feature set upon herself to do so and had done it so efficiently,” he says.

With that, Jennings received $750,000 in equity from the OMDC toward Camilla’s $10 million budget and a reputation as a tenacious producer that has endured for more than two decades.

Today Kinnear is working as the Toronto-based company’s SVP of sales and marketing, overseeing international distribution efforts. Over the past 10 years in particular, the company has grown from being a feature film producer into a TV production and distribution powerhouse with an average annual production volume in excess of $55 million that exports its home-grown series such as Life with Derek, The Listener and Murdoch Mysteries – and of course the Canadian writing and acting talent behind them – into global markets.

Its programs air on networks such as CTV, Shaw Media, Disney, NBC, Fox International Channels, BBC, ITV Studios Global Entertainment and UKTV and last year the company ambitiously pushed its operations into the U.S. market with a Los Angeles office headed up by former Cookie Jar Entertainment execs Tom Mazza and Maggie Murphy. Since founding Shaftesbury in 1987, Jennings, who is also CEO, has used her tenaciousness and dogged work ethic not only to make the company a laudable business success story but as a proponent of Canadian screen-industry and literary talent as well. To that end it has produced movie adaptations of Carol Shields’ Swann and Margaret Atwood’s The Robber Bride; Timothy Findlay’s The Stillborn Love (renamed for TV External Affairs), TV mini-series of Vincent Lam’s Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures and TV series such Murdoch Mysteries, based on author Maureen Jennings’ detective books, among many more.

“We’ve never done work just to make some money or because there’s a deal to be had,” says Jennings. “Life is too short. There are only so many hours in a day and one has to be careful in picking the projects. You have to be passionate,” or else court failure, she says.

That passion includes pushing into the worlds of digital series and branded entertainment, efforts that Shaftesbury exploits through its digital division Smokebomb Entertainment, which will produce eight hours of short-form web and mobile content this year (see story page 40).

TALENT SUPPORTER

Many up-and-coming writing and acting talents have risen through the industry ranks via Shaftesbury projects over the years. Alumni include Max and Adam Reid, the writing duo that worked on comedian Ken Finkleman’s
Good God, and ReGenesis writer Jeremy Bowen, who went on to write for Lost Girl and Endgame, and Jon Cassar, director of The Kennedys and a director/producer on 24. In addition to veteran Canadian actors such as Wendy Crewson and Victor Garber, rising names like Alison Pill (Jacob Two Two and The Hooded Fang) and Ellen Page (Mrs. Ashboro’s Cat and ReGenesis) – both of whom starred in Woody Allen’s To Rome With Love – and Shenae Grimes (90210 and Overruled!) have worked with the company. For her part, Crewson met Jennings when she was producing the low-budget 1986 indie film Whodunit. They would work together again 14 years later on six TV movies for CTV and Lifetime based on author Gail Bowen’s Joanne Kilbourn mystery books. The series marked the first time the Canadian actress, who had co-starred in Hollywood fare such as The 6th Day and Airforce One, was number one on the call sheet for a big series. Shaftesbury block-shot two films per summer over three years. “It was incredibly educational,” remembers Crewson. “You’re shooting two films at the same time depending on locations so it’s a matter of focus, concentration, being able to trust your instincts and walking into a scene and just going for it because you’re shooting 10 or 12 pages a day.”

“Christina never fails to mention when she comes on set how good the dailies look, how much she likes choices I’ve made, how well it’s going – Homegrown series The Listener is one of the company’s successful exports into the global market.
that’s a huge thing for an actor,” she says. “She understands that the most important thing she can do is instill confidence in her performers and she does that through a tremendous amount of caring and support.”

As Jennings shifts her focus to digital – an area with traditionally smaller budgets – Shaftesbury is more aggressively going after the next generation of young writers. “You have a little more freedom to work with some new talent,” says Jennings.

One such writer is Michelle Ricci, a Canadian Film Centre grad who is now working as a story editor on Murdoch Mysteries. Hired in part because she’s a self-professed Murdoch fan whose nickname in the writer’s room is “the Murdoch bible,” the 36-year-old wrote last year’s spin-off digital series The Murdoch Effect for Citytv and is working on a second for the show’s upcoming sixth season, which will air on new network CBC this fall.

Writer/producer Peter Mitchell involves her in all aspects of the production; she sits in on pre-pro meetings, attends the shoot and visits the edit room, a process that has shifted her thinking toward the practical concerns of scriptwriting. “I’m probably never going to have a job as good as this again in my life,” she says. “It’s such a supportive environment and I have absolutely the respect of my peers.”

The 24/7 reality of social media has also impacted the kind of skill sets Kinnear, as SVP sales and marketing, looks for in the marketing department. Much like an interactive digital series, the communications outreach around a program is similarly short-form, non-linear and itself becomes a form of storytelling. “The skills are different but interestingly the objective remain the same,” he says of meeting the information needs of viewers via the likes of Facebook and Twitter. “It requires a different part of your brain.”

In August, Shaftesbury held the first in a series of open houses for writers, part of its ongoing initiatives to source emerging writing talent which has included a total of $55,000 in sponsorship money for the Etobicoke School of the Arts to fund the Shaftesbury Student Filmmaker Awards. “We want to start mentoring a little bit more and see who is the next generation of people coming up,” says SVP of production Jan Peter Meyboom. He adds that as the company diversifies into unscripted fare, such as its food-centric adventure series for Food Network Canada and Cooking Channel in the U.S. called From Spain With Love, so too does its talent pool. “[Unscripted] is a whole different planet in terms of the types of directors and writers you work with,” he says. “A scripted series takes much longer to develop and on the factual side it’s about what is the idea right now. It’s a very different skill set for sure.”

As Shaftesbury more aggressively courts the tween market and younger audiences in the digital space, it will have to adopt a new set of business skills and savvy in addition to cultivating those same qualities among its collaborators in order to thrive for another 25 years. “The digital world is trying to figure out the revenue model,” says Jennings. “We all know the way to make television shows – and we know how to finance them and sell them – so in the digital space we’re all learning.”

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Congratulations to Shaftesbury on 25 years of excellence.
Shaftesbury’s digital unit focuses on tweens and figures out what works for mobile

Just as Shaftesbury, Smokebomb Entertainment’s parent company, first made a name for itself in feature films as an adaptor of Canadian literature, the Toronto-based digital prodco is hoping to carve out a space in the nascent world of online-based video with youth-oriented programming.

Throughout the fall, the division will roll out its next batch of original web and mobile series targeted at 18 to 24-year-olds with user-driven, interactive narratives that feature heightened brand integration.

The projects will follow Smokebomb’s first series, Totally Amp’d, a 10-episode live action musical comedy series for iOS smartphones and tablets that launched in January that courted eight-to-14 year olds, and its second, the 3D motion sci-fi-comic State of Syn, starring David Hewlett and Rainbow Sun Francks, aimed at the highly coveted 18 to 24-year-old set.

“I want to get a lot better at targeting where a show fits to build audiences around projects throughout production, so when we come to the release there’s an audience who’s engaged,” says Smokebomb VP of production, Jay Bennett.

Shaftesbury produced Totally Amp’d, a tween-focused live action musical comedy series for iOS smartphones and tablets, first launched in January.
Smokebomb produced Murdoch Mysteries spin-off web series, Murdoch Effect, and has a second, user-driven web narrative property in the works for the show’s upcoming sixth season.

Over the coming months it’ll complete the eight-episode web drama Unlikely Heroes, which will roll out with an Canadian broadcaster (whose name wasn’t released as of press time); the buddy road trip comedy series Backpackers; Treasures, a European-set adventure series written by Craig Wright (Lost, Dirty Sexy Money) and produced in partnership with Denmark’s Company P; as well as a female-skewing offering in the vein of HBO’s Girls.

All told, along with interactive spin-offs of broadcast properties The Listener and Murdoch Mysteries, Smokebomb aims to produce around eight hours of digital content over the next year.

“Tweens definitely are a sweet spot for us right now,” says Christina Jennings, Shaftesbury’s chairman and CEO. “We look at the way they’re consuming their content and we go, ‘What works for mobile? What works for digital?’”

The other side of Smokebomb’s business is what she calls “convergent” series – spin-offs of TV shows like last year’s web series The Murdoch Effect, in which 19th century police detective William Murdoch from Murdoch Mysteries finds himself solving crimes in the future. A second Murdoch web property will launch coinciding with the debut of show’s sixth season on CBC. While Murdoch Effect was akin to watching a TV show online, the next will be interactive, with puzzles, gaming elements and a user-driven narrative crafted by Murdoch screen writer Michelle Ricci in partnership with a game designer, CBC’s technical department and Smokebomb.

To attract viewers, Jay Bennett (who was recently promoted to Smokebomb’s VP in charge of production from its creative director following the summer departures of co-founders Daniel Dales and Jarrett Sherman) intends to build a social media strategy into the development process.

“We’re not going to cook up an idea, fund it, make it and then go out and say ‘who wants this?’” he explains. “In the conception of ideas, I want to get a lot better at targeting where [a show fits] and use it as an opportunity to build an audience around projects throughout production, so when we come to the final point [the release], there’s actually an audience there who’s engaged.”

Smokebomb produced Murdoch Mysteries spin-off Murdoch Effect, and has a second, user-driven web narrative property in the works for the show’s upcoming sixth season.
SPACE: BOLDLY GOING WHERE NO CHANNEL HAD GONE BEFORE

BY MARK DILLON

Once the butt of jokes for running every Star Trek series at the same time, the genre channel has in 15 years evolved into a destination of choice for sophisticated viewers seeking highly polished shows, many of which happen to be Canadian. Playback here charts its course.

Talk to producers and advertisers and you’ll hear a common refrain: that Space is one of Canada’s best-branded channels. Over its first 15 years, the station has managed to expand its programming while keeping its original flavor.

When the specialty arrived in 1996, it filled a void — that is, for a Canadian station to offer nothing but shows about distant galaxies and the supernatural. Once jokingly referred to as “the Star Trek channel” for simultaneously running each Trekkie series, it also has enjoyed success with Canadian-made dramas and has a couple of promising new ones in the works. One of these, Omni Film Productions’ Primeval: New World, continues a tradition of Space shows produced in B.C., which has helped the province become the hub of science fiction TV production.

The CRTC awarded the Space license to CHUM in the mid 1990s upon the broadcaster’s second application attempt, and the channel launched October 17, 1997. Space continues to flourish under new owner Bell Media, scoring with fresh programs such as U.K.-made fantasy Sinbad, which drew 497,000 viewers to its July premiere — the fifth-highest debut in the station’s history.

From its very conception, CHUM took the station name to heart — to the point that Moses Znaimer, then-president of the broadcaster’s channels, had waxed about the beauty and wonder of the stars at a license application hearing. But the channel’s offerings have broadened.

“Space is so much more than programming set in outer space,” says Catherine MacLeod, the VP of specialty channels for Bell Media. “Genres have evolved from science fiction, fantasy and comic books to comprising a larger range of pop culture, like horror, animation, video games and anime to appeal to the variety of our viewers’ tastes.”

Many of the channel’s current programs are U.S. and U.K. imports commissioned by Syfy and BBC, respectively. Its schedule mixes movies, magazine shows such as new film-review pickup Spoilers with Kevin Smith, and reality series...
like Fact or Faked, in which experts try to explain the origins of mysterious images.

Its dramas deliver a steady diet of sci-fi (Doctor Who, Torchwood), horror (Being Human both the U.S. and U.K. versions) and fantasy (Merlin). And, yes, it still airs the original Star Trek and the late 90’s Star Trek: Voyager. Rachel Goldstein-Couto, Bell Media’s director of specialty programming, comedy and drama, says that “any good programmer will tell you that a balanced schedule is what viewers are looking for.”

And viewers have been enjoying the balance from the get go. “Space came out of the starting gates amazingly well, specifically for adults 18 to 34 and 18 to 49,” notes Kim Dougherty, director of trading and accountability at media communication specialists OMD Canada.

As a media buyer, she says, “You can always count on Space delivering the audience you want it to. It’s one of those stations that has great programming and does what it’s supposed to do.”

One thing it was supposed to do was block the likes of Sci-Fi Channel (now Syfy) from getting on the Canadian grid. “An American channel wouldn’t be allowed to launch here if there was a Canadian counterpart, so it was always to the advantage of Canadian business interests and the production industry to have a Canadian version first,” says Paul Gratton, former CHUM VP of entertainment specialty channels, who took over managing Space from Marcia Martin in 1999 and did so until 2007, when CTVglobemedia took over CHUM. (Bell Media acquired CTVglobemedia last year.)

At the beginning of 2005, CHUM rebranded Space with a new on-air look and logo and soon afterwards dropped the subtitle “The Imagination Station.” Space HD launched in July 2011, offering the Space schedule in high definition and Dolby 5.1 audio.

It’s Canadian identity has been established by original dramas including Sanctuary, Todd & the Book of Pure Evil and The Collector, doc series Fanboy Confessional and informational interstitials. The flagship program is InnerSPACE, a daily talk show covering the gamut of film, TV, games and comics.

Space is required to air 40% Canadian content between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. and 50% between 6 p.m. and midnight. According to CRTC data, last year Space spent $13.5 million on Canadian programming and its 2011 revenues added up to $50 million; the percentage of revenue spent on Canadian programming was 27%.

However, Bell Media says its 2012 investment in original production will increase over 2011. “Delivering high-quality Canadian-produced series and specials to our viewers is extremely important to us as a network, as well as to Bell Media as a whole,” says MacLeod.

Space got a boost from Stargate SG-1, a TV adaptation of the feature film about a U.S. military group that embarks on extraterrestrial adventures via a wormhole. The expensive, VFX-continued on p. 45 >
A lot of hopes are being pinned to two promising new Canadian-made shows. Primeval: New World is Omni Film’s spinoff of U.K. prodco Impossible Pictures’ Primeval (another Space-carried program), about scientists who investigate temporal anomalies that allow monsters from the past and future to enter the present.

Omni earlier had been one of the producers that adapted Impossible’s Space Odyssey: Voyage to the Planets into Defying Gravity. Production on the first 13 one-hours of Primeval: New World, starring Canuck Niall Matter (Eureka) and Sara Canning (The Vampire Diaries) wrapped in July ahead of a planned October launch. Emmy Award-winning Vancouver shop Atmosphere Visual Effects is tasked with bringing the show’s fantastical creatures to life. Entertainment One is handling international sales.

Gabriela Schonbach, Omni VP and executive producer, can’t help but be effusive about the collaboration with Bell Media. “We’ve been impressed with their high level of creative and financial contribution,” Schonbach says. “We’re through the hard times – production and financing – and they’ve really stepped up. We’ve seen commitment to this show and you don’t always get that.”

Meanwhile, Temple Street Productions’ Orphan Black took a more circuitous route before landing with Space. The drama, created by Graeme Manson and John Fawcett, follows a streetwise character who inadvertently learns she has a clone, and, through a freak sequence of events, assumes her clone’s identity. On the first go-round, Temple shopped the project unsuccessfully to several Canadian broadcasters, including Space. The Toronto prodcos took it stateside and garnered interest from BBC America. Then Rogers Media spent some time co-developing it for Citytv before ultimately passing.

“Essentially we had a fully financed show with BBC America, so we pitched it around and this time Space responded very quickly,” recalls Kerry Appleyard, Temple’s VP scripted programming. “It was a home run for them in terms of themes and subject matter.” The series, going to camera in the fall, is expected to bow next spring.

Bell Media VP of specialty channels Catherine MacLeod is bullish on the pair, adding that the company was confident audiences would embrace them.
heavy show, which aired new episodes from 1997 to 2007, was produced in Vancouver by MGM and commissioned by Showtime and later Sci-Fi Channel. Space also played a role on the series, which, in CAVCO-speak, is 6/10 Canadian.

"The production needed a Canadian broadcaster to trigger its tax credits. It's a case where the Canadian channel is not driving the financing but can be a significant component of how the budget is put together. And we had the perfect environment for it, so it was a win-win," says Gratton.

"It was the top-rated show on the channel and happened to be Canadian. There aren't too many specialty channels that find themselves in that position."

Space also aired spinoffs Stargate Atlantis and Stargate Universe – which set a station record for highest series premiere with 624,000 total viewers – and experienced further out-of-this-world ratings with Battlestar Galactica, a U.S. show that also shot in B.C.

Being owned today by Bell Media brings with it great cross-promotional opportunities. For one thing, Space and the CTV network can share original programming, as has been the case with The Listener and international copro Defying Gravity.

"You've got people watching them on Space, then the shows flip to the network and you've got a whole new viewing audience, one that might then get drawn to Space. It's brilliant," notes OMD Canada's Dougherty. "CTV's very good about advertising their related stations, particularly when they've got new programming."

Fanboy Confessional is among the slew of shows which establish Space's Canadian identity.
Ontario scooped up the title of No. 3 ranked production centre in North America in 2011, knocking British Columbia off its perch – a feat that hasn’t been accomplished in nearly a decade. What accounts for Ontario’s edge is the growth it experienced due to competitive tax credits; the new economic driver of the film and television industry this side of Los Angeles (ranked No. 1) and New York (ranked No. 2).

“Tax credits have become the currency of Hollywood. But, it’s the total package that is continuing to bring the clients here,” says Donna Zuchinski, Ontario’s film commissioner. A total package means infrastructure, crews, technology and post-production facilities in addition to the provincial tax incentives producers have been so magnetized by.

But Ontario, with its 25% all-spend tax credit, got the idea from its neighbour, Quebec. Hans Fraikin, commissioner at the Quebec Film Council, says Quebec was the first province to introduce the rate in 2009 as a measure to attract more service productions from the U.S. It succeeded in its goal, and the industry is dealing with the spike in demand for new studio space. “We are at a point where we need more soundstages,” says Fraikin.

In this year alone, Montreal’s largest soundstage, Mel’s la Cité du Cinéma, has reeled in big-budget pictures including Roland Emmerich’s White House Down, the third installment of The Chronicles of Riddick, and Smurfs 2. Steven Spielberg reportedly set his sights on shooting RealApocalypse in Montreal, but is delayed. Meanwhile, location shooting is proceeding with films such as RED 2.

The picture is much different on the west coast, according to Peter Mitchell, president of Vancouver Film Studios. “I’ve never seen a lower level [of feature film production] in my career in Vancouver,” he says.

This year, two American and one Canadian TV series (Arrow, Arrow and Ringer) as well as two U.S. features, including Hidden, were shot on the VFS lot. All in all, there are four other major soundstages in B.C., including Mammoth, North Shore, Bridge Studios and the Canadian Motion Picture Park.

“We have much better developed infrastructure in Vancouver, because we have a history of 20 years of doing this. I think that we offer digital services that are unparalleled by any other studio facility. But, we have the challenge of the tax credit differential,” says Mitchell. Unlike the all-spend credit offered in Ontario and Quebec, B.C. offers foreign productions a 33% tax credit on B.C. labour.

Overall, $1.18 billion flowed into B.C.’s coffers from film and TV production in 2011, up from the previous year, but down 11% from 2009. The bulk of those dollars, $503 million, came from TV series, both domestic and foreign. “We are really hot in television at the moment,” confirms B.C. film commissioner Susan Croome, adding that the volume of miniseries and movies-of-the-week is high.

Mitchell is holding out hope the playing field will be evened out on the tax credit front. But, there isn’t playing field will be evened out on the tax credit front. But, there isn’t

BY MIRELLA CHRISTOU

Pinewood Toronto continues to attract films in that budget range. In fact, the Toronto outfit’s follow-up showpiece is Guillermo Del Toro’s $200-million 3D monster feature Pacific Rim.

“At one stage, [Del Toro] had every studio running it that we have on offer,” says Eoin Egan, international sales manager, Pinewood Toronto Studios. The facility currently has nine soundstages, including the 45,900 sq. ft. purpose-built “mega stage.” Del Toro concurrently produced a smaller feature called Mama, fitting both his productions in at Pinewood at the same time.

Momentum appears to be keeping pace as another big remake is set to take over Pinewood. RoboCop will shoot on the lot, according to the Ontario Media Development Corporation. Other films shooting there this summer include Carrie, the remake of the 1976 horror flick, and Kickass 2.

Blake Steels, president of Pinewood Toronto Studios, says that the Ontario tax credit is vital to the industry and to his studios, and is triggering the desired economic effect of fueling demand for more space, facilities and services.

By next summer, construction on three new soundstages will be completed to help facilitate TV production; a backlot for outdoor set builds and big special effects is in the works; and plans...
are being drawn up for a post-production facility on the Pinewood campus.

One permanent tenant on the Pinewood lot is lighting and equipment provider, William F. White, which supplies productions from coast to coast. The inventory flow gives White’s CEO Paul Bronfman, who also heads up Comweb Group and is a part owner of Pinewood, a good pulse of how the film and TV industry is faring.

Bronfman says the outlook for most provinces is positive, with the noted exception of Saskatchewan. That Prairie province was on the radar this spring when its tax credit was slashed.

“In Saskatchewan, the business is getting destroyed… it’s leaving the province,” Bronfman says. The aftermath, he adds, hit White’s hard.

“The entertainment industry is not recession proof, despite what people may think,” says Bronfman.

South of the border, Michigan’s state government pulled the plug on its 42% tax credit this year, which was the highest of any state. “From one day to the next, production just dried up. Jurisdictions have learned the lesson that it’s not so much about the number, but about sustainability and security,” says Montreal’s Fraikin. As for Quebec’s credit being matched by its neighbouring production centre, Fraikin insists: “we’re in a really good place right now.”

Richard Hughes, president of Backlot Film Studios, was in the film industry before he owned a studio. Hughes worked as a location manager for many years, and still does. So, when he discusses what producers are looking for in an ideal shooting location, he is well acquainted with the items on the checklist.

One of the first things Hughes did after purchasing a former packing plant — noted: with plenty of parking — and converting it into a 50,000 sq. ft. soundproof roof and walls. “If it rains, or if air traffic passes over, nothing comes through,” says Hughes.

The second thing he did was hope that Backlot would become a destination for Canadian TV series. Hughes says what happened instead was somewhat of a surprise.

In 2008, after a period of crisis in the industry, the Steven Spielberg executive-produced pilot Falling Skies became Backlot’s very first production. “After that, we never looked back,” recalls Hughes.

Backlot now boasts a growing list of impressive tenants, including Emmy-winning miniseries The Kennedys, Showcase crime procedural King, and most recently in the action genre, Transporter: the Series for HBO.

Having over-achieved on the wish for series work, filmmakers are also bringing their projects to Backlot, with recent features including Silent Hill 2 and Devil.

Hughes caters to mid-sized projects, and perhaps guided by his former remit, says that keeping a competitive price point guides his investment strategy: “I’ve let the productions dictate what they require; the producer can go in and control their destiny.”
When Guillermo Del Toro stepped foot inside Pinewood Toronto Studios’ bare mega stage for the first time a few years ago, Pinewood Toronto Studios’ president Blake Steels took note of his reaction. “He said he could create in this space. He was very taken aback by the stage itself,” recalls Steels.

At 45,900 sq. ft., the mega stage is incomparable to anything else on offer in Ontario in terms of scale. For directors like Del Toro, Hollywood helmers hired to orchestrate $100 to $200 million features, the mega stage and the nearby jumbo stage are like blank canvases, full of possibility.

“If you go to the Warner Bros. lot, the Fox lot or Sony lot, the stages are pristine – the bar is set. The objective at Pinewood Toronto is to give the exact same service that you would find in a Burbank lot, so that the big-time producers in L.A. can feel completely at home working here,” says Eoin Egan, VP of international sales for Pinewood.

Len Wiseman’s Total Recall remake and Guillermo Del Toro’s Pacific Rim were the first two tentpole features to use these purpose-built soundstages. At one point, it even housed CBC’s Battle of the Blades, complete with a full-length ice-skating rink and a live, cheering audience.

Currently, studio 54 is burning through a shoot of the remake of Carrie, with Julianne Moore.

As important as the foreign productions are to Pinewood Toronto, servicing Canadian film shoots is something Steels is very attuned to. This year features such as The Colony and Wolves marked scenes on the lot, while last year, David Cronenberg’s Cosmopolis and Sarah Polley’s Take This Waltz graced the soundstages.

As The Studios revs up its expansion plans, it is looking toward its U.K. headquarters as a touchstone. The first part of the expansion will include three new soundstages geared toward the needs and requirements of TV productions, at a more competitive price point than currently offered. The second is to open up Pinewood Toronto Studios’ backlot for outdoor set builds and special effects work. Thirdly, in two years time. The Studios intends to have up and running a new facility for post-production companies to co-locate and offer their services.

Pinewood Toronto Studios’ three-stage multi-year growth plan is fuelled by an over-arching goal to create a destination that surpasses its physical space and capability attributes. “It’s all part of a larger business strategy, to become a cultural hub for film in Toronto,” concludes Steels.
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As more and more producers hunt for space for a growing roster of film and TV projects in Ontario, they inevitably become acquainted with Toronto’s Cinespace Film Studios. As TV series in particular ramp up production in the province, with its wide variety of soundstages, producers have long recognized Cinespace as one of the go-to studios. Last year 148 TV projects were produced in Ontario, up 20% from the year before, and in 2012 the trend appears to be continuing. “The volume of episodic product is definitely on the rise,” confirms Jim Mirkopoulos, VP of Cinespace. “The TV studios keep calling us with new projects,” he says, adding that current occupancy levels are about 90%.

This year, a number of U.S. networks secured Cinespace for series work, with several new series becoming first-time tenants, such as the first season of Beauty and the Beast (CBS). Although the Canadian series Flashpoint finished its final season on the lot, Mirkopoulos was glad to welcome back Nikita (Warner Bros.) for another season, as well as returning series Warehouse 13 (NBC-Universal).

Over its 25-year lifespan Cinespace has been adding to its soundstage offerings to accommodate the growing volume of business. In its stables are 750,000 sq. ft. of space on 42 acres of land in and around Toronto: the Booth studios, Eastern Avenue Studios, Kleinburg Studios and the Kipling Studios, with a fully functioning backlot. Cutting-edge technology is an important component of what Cinespace offers; “with fibre-speed, high-capacity connections in all of our studio facilities, the possibilities are near limitless,” says Mirkopoulos.

On U.S. soil, Cinespace is amassing over one million sq. ft. of space for its ambitious Chicago Film Studio. “[It] will be the largest film studio complex in North America outside of Los Angeles,” says Mirkopoulos, who notes that it will also add the ability to shoot Chicago as Chicago to its repertoire, relevant in two examples of Cinespace’s TV productions: Boss and Chicago Fire.

Back on home turf, the Kipling backlot has been used extensively, and memorably, to stand in for many non-local locales: “South Etobicoke has been transformed into a post-apocalyptic alien battle ground for Fallen Skies, a Kandahar Air Force Base for Combat Hospital, and Moscow’s Red Square and New York’s Times Square for Resident Evil: Retribution,” Mirkopoulos recounts.

In addition, the location accommodates easy outdoor greenscreen shooting, and one added bonus: “The South Etobicoke skyline does not give Toronto away, unlike most downtown locations,” he notes.

In addition to attracting TV shoots this year, homegrown feature films have been gravitating to Cinespace as well. An Enemy, directed by Denis Villeneuve, The F-Word, directed by Michael Dowse, and The Mortal Instruments, produced by Don Carmody have all shot at Cinespace. Carmody is returning to the SPFX stage at the Kipling Avenue Studios after having first experienced it late last year as a producer on Resident Evil: Retribution. And one of Canada’s most renowned filmmaking families, David Cronenberg and his son Brandon, both shot features at Cinespace in 2011, and Brandon Cronenberg’s Antiviral will be part of the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival lineup.
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Who could have predicted that a police procedural set in Toronto would become one of the most successful scripted Canadian dramas – and international exports – of the last 10 years? Flashpoint’s boots first hit the ground on July 11, 2008 on CTV, in simulcast on CBS, and immediately got attention as the premiere netted a total of 1.11 million Canadians and a whopping 8.8 million in the U.S.* It went on to average 1.5 million viewers in Canada over the four following seasons, and continues to air stateside on ION Television.

The series, created by Mark Ellis and Stephanie Morgenstern, focuses on the fictional Strategic Response Unit, an elite tactical unit that solves high-risk and extreme operations, including hostage-takings, bomb threats and heavily armed bad guys. It evolved from CTV’s Writer-only development program in 2005 to a pilot (at the time, entitled Sniper), which was produced by Pink Sky Entertainment in 2007.

Flashpoint is produced by Pink Sky (Anne Marie La Traverse exec producing) and Avamar Entertainment (Bill Mustos exec producing) in association with CTV and CBS Paramount Network Television, and stars Hugh Dillon, Enrico Colantoni, Amy Jo Johnson, David Paetkau and Sergio Di Zio. It’s fifth and, as is well known, final season premieres Sept. 20 on CTV.

*Canada numbers according to BBM Nielsen Media Research, U.S. numbers according to Nielsen Media Research.

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