

# From Seat to Sea

## Contributors:

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## HALIFAX

Roman Bittman has left his position as chief executive of the Nova Scotia Film Development Corporation (NSFDC) after a dispute with the board of directors. Bittman, a respected and energetic producer, had been spearheading, with a consortium of the largest Nova Scotia production companies, an innovative government-private sector partnership to build a fully equipped soundstage in Halifax. Opposition from smaller producers, particularly the Atlantic chapter of the Canadian Independent Film Caucus and Bittman's own board combined to derail the proposal temporarily. The board, whose industry representatives quit in protest over the decision, was left with political appointees who then suspended Bittman and ordered an audit of the NSFDC's books. Finding no evidence of wrong doing, the board hired a public relations firm for damage control while the government, industry and media fumed. A restructuring of the NSFDC is now in the works with the strong possibility of a new board dedicated to better inter-industry communication. Meanwhile, the pace continues to accelerate with William D. MacGillivray's new feature from a script by George Eliott Clarke while MacGillivray waits for word on further episodes of his St. John's-based taxi series, *Gullage's*. Glace Bay native and Hollywood veteran director, Daniel Petrie Sr., is back in the province shooting a Movie-of-the-Week, *Calm at Sunset*, about the collapse of the East Coast fisheries. Canadian documentarians Chuck Lapp and John Brett have major projects in the works on different aspects of the same subject. Finally, New Brunswick has forcefully entered the picture with the official launch of its own provincial film and television development agency, christened Film New Brunswick. Armed with \$1-million and a series of aggressive programs including tax credits, an equity investment program and allotments for marketing and training, New Brunswick has already bagged an IMAX project and a major Hollywood sci-fi shoot. Selection of a chief executive has been delayed by difficulties in finding a candidate who can balance the province's strong French production sector based in Moncton and the English scene based mostly in Fredericton. ■

## MONTREAL

Two of Quebec's most interesting filmmakers are presently putting the finishing touches to their latest works. Shot last spring in great secrecy, very little "official" information has filtered out from the closed sets of Olivier Asselin's eagerly awaited second feature, *Le siège de l'âme*, and Robert Lepage's latest, *Le polygraphe*. But the buzz coming from the editing

rooms is really very good. Co-produced with France's Cinéa and Germany's Road Movies, *Le polygraphe* will also be the first film to come out of Lepage's new production company, In Extremis Images, which Lepage formed last winter with producer Bruno Jobin and two other long-time collaborators. The cast includes Lepage regulars Patrick Goyette and Marie Brassard (also co-screenwriter), as well as Peter Stormare (*Fargo*), Maria de Medeiros (*Pulp Fiction*) and James Hyndman (*Eldorado*). But if Lepage was able to produce his second feature in less than a year and a half after *Le confessionnal*, it's been a different story for Asselin. Despite surprising everyone in 1991 with his remarkable debut feature, *La liberté d'une statue*, produced on a shoestring budget, it took Asselin five years to convince institutions to invest in his second film. His meeting with Cinémaginaire's Denise Roberts was instrumental in getting the film made, and *Le siège de l'âme* should hit the screens in Quebec this fall. Finally, there's good news from the independent front, which recently found great support from veteran producer Roger Frappier, who decided to invest in Quebec's next generation of filmmakers. Produced with less than \$1-million, *Cosmos* is made up of six very different short films revolving around a Greek Montreal taxi driver. The six directors, André Turpin, Denis Villeneuve, Arto Paragamian, Manon Briand, Jennifer Alleyn and Marie-Julie Dallaire, had the final cut on their portions of the film. According to all involved, the experience was highly rewarding and it might open doors for other challenging independent projects. ■

## TORONTO

Director Jerry Ciccoritti (*Paris, France, TV's Net Worth*) has committed to directing Tony "Joe" Corindia's *Mama's Boys* (working title) in Toronto this fall. Produced by Corindia and John Bardwell's smallworldfilmco, the film tells the story of childhood friends who, after several years of separation, are forced to confront a painful truth about their past. Co-produced by TVOntario, the film stars Corindia, Silvio Oliviero (*Johnny Mnemonic*) and Nada Capone (*Side Effects*). Atom Egoyan (*Exotica*) is also in the process of shooting his first film in three years, *The Sweet Hereafter*, based on a novel by Russell Banks. Egoyan's much talked about move to Hollywood to direct Warner Bros.' *Dead Sleep* fell through earlier this year, the official reason being given as "scheduling problems." But sources close to Egoyan suggest that disputes over who had the final cut were the real reason. With *Once a Thief*, Toronto-based Alliance Communications has expanded its collaboration with famed Hong Kong director John Woo (*Hardboiled*) to develop all areas of production, including features and a series for TV. Alliance has also signed a first-look agreement with Luke Perry's Midwest Productions. This

# From Seat to Sea From VANCOUVER

is the first of such agreements with the former *Beverly Hills 90210* star. Other associations include Cineplex Odeon Films and the producers at Vanguard Entertainment to distribute Pamela Anderson Lee's (*Barb Wire*) next picture, *Naked Souls*. In production in and around Toronto this fall will be Dwight Little's *Executive Privilege* starring Wesley Snipes; Michael Ritchie's *The Fairy Godmother* starring Martin Short and Kathleen Turner; and Steve Zukerman's *North Shore Fish* with Mercedes Ruehl and Tony Danza. Recently completed filming here was Eriq LaSalle's (from television's *ER*) much-touted directorial debut, *Angel of Harlem* with James Earl Jones and Forrest Whitaker; John L'Ecuyer's (director of *Curtis's Charm*) *Men With Guns*; and Mark Lester's *Double Take* starring Craig Scheffer. ■

## WINNIPEG

This summer Winnipeg got a taste of Dan Ackroydmania. Ackroyd hung out at several bars and cafés performing with local bands and signing autographs while in town to portray the Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian corporation making the Avro Arrow in *Once There Was an Arrow*. The *Arrow* project is a \$7.5-million two-part Movie-of-the-Week about the ill-fated attempt to build a supersonic airplane during the Diefenbaker era. Directed by Don McBreaty (*Butterbox Babies*) and co-produced by John Aaron Productions, FilmWorks and Tapestry Productions, this TV movie also stars Sara Botsford and Christopher Plummer and is slated for broadcast on CBC-TV at the end of January, 1997. While Ackroyd was celebrating his 44th birthday on Canada Day at a downtown street party, celebrated Winnipeg filmmaker Guy Maddin, was tucked away in an old warehouse in the north end of town working on his most ambitious film to date, *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. Shooting in 35mm for the first time, Maddin says he's aiming for the "painterly look of the 1930's French cinema, of Renoir and Ophuls...or *Love Boat*." Maddin describes *Ice Nymphs* as "an unrequited love story of three couples each chasing the other through luminous forests in a land ruled by underground powers." Production designer Réjean Labrie has done an amazing job of recreating a mythical world. Written by long-time Maddin collaborator George Toles, the cast includes R.H. Thomson, Pascale Bussi eres and Shelly Duvall. Budgeted at \$1.5-million and produced by Marble Island Pictures, *Ice Nymphs* is set for nine weeks of editing in August and September and will be distributed by Alliance. ■

***Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*; Director Guy Maddin says he's aiming for "the painterly look of the 1930's French cinema of Renoir and Ophuls...or *Love Boat*."**

Photo: Louise O'Brien Moran

The Vancouver International Film Festival will once again feature the best of Western Canadian independents in the Canadian Images program. Among the highlights will be Vancouver director Lynne Stopkewich's feature debut *Kissed*, director Grant Harvey's *American Beer*, and Regina-based Richard Kerr's *the willing voyeur...* (see Kerr's "The Making of *the willing voyeur...*" in this issue). Adapted from Toronto writer Barbara Gowdy's short story, "We So Seldom Look On Love," Stopkewich's *Kissed* is a study of one woman's life-long obsession with death. Molly Parker is virtually luminescent in the role of Sandra Larson, an apprentice undertaker and necrophile whose own life force is seemingly drawn from the energy cast off by the lovers she's inexorably drawn to. Peter Outerbridge is wonderfully edgy as the medical student Matt, Sandra's equally obsessed suitor who'll do anything to win the ultimate place in her heart. Gorgeous camera work and art direction combine with a disarming emotional honesty to make *Kissed* an art house film with a heart. You can also expect *American Beer* at this year's festival, a truly refreshing Canadian indie from Grant Harvey and co-writers/cast members Brent and Jordan Kawchuk. *American Beer* is firmly set in the tradition of irreverent road movies and recounts the adventures of four young Canucks whose car breaks down while on a road trip to the mecca of watery malt beverages south of the 49th parallel. Things heat up when the guys strike out in separate directions in search of an alternator for their disabled 1966 Corvair. What begins simply as a buddy/road movie for 20-somethings quickly evolves into a hilarious, poignant and sophisticated ensemble piece that takes each character on a journey of self-discovery. ■



T A K E O U T

51