

THE PRAIRIES

Andrea Kingwell

The phrase heard most these days in Alberta and Saskatchewan's production circles isn't "Action!" or "Cut!" It is "Tax credit, please." And we still waiting. Industry lobbyists have been hard at work in both provinces encouraging their governments to adopt a tax-credit scheme similar to those in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, but progress is slow and nothing new is expected until early in the new year. In the meantime, productions do roll. In Saskatchewan, The Edge Productions' *MOW, Summer of the Monkeys*, is a marked departure for the province. Mark Prasuhn, general manager of SaskFILM, says it was the first dramatic production in Saskatchewan since the 1980s to go ahead without SaskFILM money, a fact he's proud of. "It means we're attracting productions on a locations basis, and in the past we haven't enjoyed that kind of profile," Prasuhn says. Also in Saskatchewan, a Heartland Motion Pictures/Shafsbury Films (from Toronto) feature called *Conquest* goes into production in September. A romantic comedy, it's one of the first features to be produced under the new CBC theatrical envelope of the Equity Investment Program and will be distributed worldwide by Malofilm. Over in Alberta, last year's pre-cut production heights may be a distant memory, but the fat lady ain't sung yet. Buena Vista Television's one-hour weekly comedy-adventure series, *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* will likely remain in production until March 1998. Also airing this fall are 13 new episodes of *North of 60*, shot in the spring. No official word yet on *North of 60's* future, leaving fans and crews alike waiting with bated breath. More series may be in the works, though, following two pilots shot this summer in Edmonton. Great North's *The Orange Seed Myth and Other Lies Mothers Tell* is a half-hour drama set in the 1970s, a kind of Chinese-Canadian *Wonder Years* and is set to air in the fall. *The Genius* (Anaid Productions/Minds Eye Pictures) stars Elliott Gould as Albert Einstein, a time-traveller turned mentor for a bright young computer whiz, and airs at Christmas on CFRN. Finally, A-Channel, Craig Broadcast Systems' new Alberta endeavour, makes its debut this fall. Its motto is "Interactive, Innovative, Independent," and looks to be a kind of CityTV West. With infrastructure (employees and a studio) as well as programming still to be put in place, the A-Channel team admits it will have to work hard to meet a scheduled mid-September air date. ■

VANCOUVER

John Dippong

It's been an excellent year for Canadian film and television production in Western Canada and in Vancouver in particular. Gary Burns (*The Suburbanators*) has just finished the sound mix on his second feature, *Kitchen Party*, which showcases the talents of some of Canada's hottest young talent, Scott Speedman, Sarah Strange, as well as Vancouver veterans Kevin McNulty, Jerry Wasserman and Tom McBeath. Burns has considerable talent for social satire and sets his sights on unravelling the quiet facade of suburban civility. One night when Scott's parents are away, he decides to have a few friends over for a party. As the evening unfolds, virtually everything that can go wrong does—both for the kids and their parents. Drive, they will. Mina Shum and her producer Stephen Hegyes (*Double Happiness*) hit the road to mix their second feature, *Drive, She Said*, at the Saul Zaentz studio in San Francisco, finishing just in time for the Toronto and Vancouver International Film Festivals. A few of the more interesting projects in development and/or close to going into production include: Jonathan Tamuz's first feature *Rupert's Land*, Ken Hegan's *The Deadline*, Sharon MacGowan and Peggy Thompson's *Sex & Chocolate*. The rumour is that Anne Wheeler might direct. The Vancouver indie community is still abuzz with Baton Broadcasting System's entry into the local television marketplace. VTV will launch in September, and has been purchasing existing and/or licensing new half-hour programming for their two new anthology series. Baton's production slate includes former CBC radio mainstay's *Gabereau*, with Vicki Gabereau, as well as Linda Cullen and Bob Robertson's *Double Exposure*. In the "Gawd, what we could do with that kind of money" category, John McTiernan (*Die Hard*) and entourage are in Campbell River shooting *Eaters of The Dead*, a mega-budget Viking epic for Disney, starring Antonio Banderas. *Eaters* has single-handedly created more apocryphal production stories than anything seen around here of late. Here are a couple: *Eaters* is rumoured to have an 85-person wardrobe department (!) and uses literally hundreds of extras a day—which means that pretty much half of the island's population has dyed their hair various shades of blond in the hopes of being in the film. Sadly, the budget for this one film alone (rumoured to be in the \$160-million range) could finance the entire output of the Canadian film industry for a year, something to think about next time you slap your eight bucks down. ■

The Genius starring Elliott Gould

