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The Prairies

Productions and location trips are keeping Prairie producers reaping rewards for their talents and hot pitches. Four Square Productions anticipates its current international coproduction will take it to China and Hungary within the next year and to Israel, Rome and Saskatoon to finish up another production. *Prairie Berry Pie*, a musical/comedy series for kids two to five by Minds Eye Pictures and Moose Jaw Light & Power Artistic Productions has financial participation from 12 backers. Minds Eye Pictures' and Vérité Films' *Incredible Story Studio* enters its third season of the half-hour youth-drama series. Reel Eye Media has a coproduction with Trimark for August filming in Regina Beach and Indian Head. A number of documentary programs are also in production.... SaskFilm reports that production in 1998 was \$58 million and that it will be holding steady for 1999. In Alberta, an estimated 1,000 Alberta film folk from experienced crews to extras combined with "one-stop shopping" facilities are credited with attracting \$199 million in production activity by the end of June. This is a rebound from 1998 when total activity was only \$98.5 million.... Local and American productions are moving into hangars converted to sound stages and commercial space at CFB Studios (formerly Studio Centre). Sixteen of the 47 buildings at the former military base have been taken over by film productions while film services are housed together in Building B8. Along with the expected, such as union offices, recording studio and independent film companies, a personal trainer is also on site with a fully equipped gym. Walt Disney Productions' *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* television series shoots there throughout the year while other productions come and go—Bradshaw MacLeod & Associates's *Bad Faith* and *The Sheldon Kennedy Story*, Miramax's *Texas Ranger*, East West Pictures' *Shanghai Noon*, and Paramount Pictures' *Snow Day*. Other productions in and around Calgary are *The Virginian* for the Turner Network which also has *Crossfire Trail*, another western, in production; the *North of 60* folks are prepping their new picture *Trial By Fire* written by Andrew Wreggitt; and Riverwood Productions continues with the *Just a Kid* television series until December. In Edmonton Josh Miller's and Margaret Mardirossian's series *Mentors* is ongoing. The Alberta Film Commission says a number of "other shows are circling".... And speaking of things in the talking stage, the 20th Banff Television Festival attracted nearly 2,000 TV producers, writers and broadcasters from around the world. The top winner was *Amongst Women*, produced by Parallel Films for BBC Northern Ireland. The same production also took the Air Canada Grand Prize. Martin Short accepted the Sir Peter Ustinov Comedy Network Award with sharp quips and one heartfelt comment about the significance of "recognition from home." Amen!

Tim Christison

West Coast

A talk with Canadian Images programmer Ken Anderlini at the Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF) leads one to believe that Western Canadian and indigenous B.C. filmmaking are in the throes of a production boom. Referring to Sheila Copps's film production proposals, Anderlini notes, "The films are there. Where added impetus is needed is on the distribution and exhibition fronts. So many films that deserve a shot will never make it on to Canadian screens." Local features at the festival will reach an all-time high this year with at least eight so far confirmed (with many more still to be seen) as we go to press. These include: Marc Rétailleau's *Noroc*, notable for being the first North American feature to adhere to the "Dogma 95" principles espoused by the likes of Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg; the Christine Haebler-produced *A Girl is a Girl* from Bruce McDonald's longtime editor, Reg Harkema; Mort Ransen's follow-up to *Margaret's Museum*, *Touched*, is also set to bow. Ransen and Raymond Massey have also produced *My Father's Angel* (a.k.a. *West of Sarajevo*), a deeply moving story of Muslim refugees from Sarajevo trying to carve out a life for themselves here on the coast. Longtime local filmmaker Oliver Hockenhuell will bring his latest documentary, *Building Heaven, Remembering Earth: Confessions of a Fallen Architect*, to the festival while other locals presenting features will be Scott Smith (*rollercoaster*), Ryan Bonder (*Day Drift*) and Ross Weber (*No More Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*). Alberta will be repped by *The Suburbanators* and *Kitchen Party*—producer John Hazlett's directorial debut, *Bad Money*, while Winnipeg's Terrance Odette will bring *Heater* to the coast.... With many of the features mentioned using the digital video format, it is no surprise that one of the hottest panels at the VIFF's Trade Forum promises to be "The Revolution in Filmmaking," featuring Dan Myrick, director of *The Blair Witch Project*, Bennet Miller, director of *The Cruise*, Todd Verow, director of *Shucking the Curve* and the aforementioned Marc Rétailleau, all of whom will give local filmmakers the benefit of their experience with this most democratic of production formats... Finally, as the summer sun beats down—at last!—Vancouver crews are working at a ferocious pace. Having reached the billion-dollar mark for the first time last year, the local industry looks likely to repeat that feat given the sheer volume of features, TV movies and series currently shooting. One local DOP told me that there is so much work that crews are short-staffed—he had to film a five-camera explosion without the benefit of a single trained focus puller—while a production designer friend had four films offered to him within four days. **Jack Vermeer**

Scott Smith's *rollercoaster*

