



## The Harold Greenberg Fund

BY Paul Townend

*Ararat, Between Strangers, Men with Brooms, The Five Senses, The Sweet Hereafter, Better than Chocolate, Such a Long Journey, Bollywood/Hollywood, Blue Butterfly, Red Green's Duct Tape Forever, The Art of Woo, Khaled, Rare Birds, Treed Murray, Marion Bridge...*and the list goes on. What do all these feature films have in common, apart from being distinctly Canadian? Each and every one of them received support—either script development or equity investment—from The Harold Greenberg Fund, now into its 16th year of operation.

Wendy MacKeigan, chairperson of the English-language component of the fund since 1995 and a former senior executive with the OFDC (now the Ontario Media Development Corp.), enumerated its impressive accomplishments in a recent interview with *Take One*: more than \$15 million in development loans to screenwriters and producers and over \$11.5 million in equity funding in 58 features in the English-language program; and more than \$2.5 million in equity funding supporting 46 productions, including features, documentaries, special events and musical programs on the French side. "Our success," McKeigan says, "has come about by being much tougher at the front end, in the development stage, and supporting writers and producers with projects we feel are going to make the best films. And with our equity investment, we make really good use of our money. For example, our return on investment is 27 per cent, which is very good. In the old OFDC days, the return was only a few percentage points."

Harold Greenberg, who died in 1996, was an unpretentious businessman and producer who expanded a retail photography business into Astral Media, one of the most powerful, fully integrated companies in Canadian media. Aided by members of his family, Greenberg did it all, from producing hit movies—including *The Neptune Factor, In Praise of Older Women, Maria Chapdelaine* and *Porky's*—still the reigning Canadian box-office champ—to launching pay-TV and specialty channels. Along the way, this genial entrepreneur and philanthropist contributed both time and money to the promotion of Canadian film culture. When Astral purchased what was then known as First Choice Communications, now The Movie Network, in

1986, one of the requirements dictated by the CRTC was that Astral give something back to the industry. At the time, no funding mechanism existed for script development, so it was Greenberg's idea to create a fund to foster Canadian screenwriters. After his death, FUND (the Foundation to Underwrite New Drama) was renamed The Harold Greenberg Fund in his honour. "I really believe Harold was a visionary," says MacKeigan. "He always believed the talent was here, in Canada, in all aspects of the industry. And he has been proven to be correct."

This is how the fund works. "The producer and/or writer submits a script to us," says MacKeigan, "and we have a cadre of about 20 readers, all working professionals. The more senior the script we get, the more senior the reader we assign to it. When we get the reports back, sometimes we will compare them with what Telefilm's readers have had to say, because I believe there is strength in numbers. The reports are then prepared for the board of directors, which makes the final decision. For development funds, we meet four times a year. For equity funds, with a cap of \$200,000, we are last in, and invest whenever the film is ready to roll."

Camelia Frieberg, the co-producer of Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter* and executive producer of Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood* (who is now also a member of the fund's board of directors), believes that it is absolutely vital that the fund exists. "If you don't have writers, you don't have an industry. It's as simple as that," she says. "The Harold Greenberg Fund has been tremendously supportive, and Wendy is very good at working with producers. She understands that quality takes time, and writers are given that time, support and nurturing. Having the fund makes my life easier and a lot less crazy."

Over the life of the fund, "the good news is that the bar has been raised," MacKeigan says. "The general quality of the scripts has improved. We are trying to hone in on the talent, focus on the best stories, and we try to be low-key and modest about our role. We really see our role as empowering producers and writers from beginning to end."