

Anne Troake's *Pretty Big Dig*

By Lindsay Gibb

A big, yellow hydraulic excavator slides across the screen. Followed by two more, the group breaks into a graceful dance as a waltz plays in the background. Their scoops become their heads and they look like swans as they bow to one another, then lift up and twirl away; yet, somehow these clunky, menacing machines are convincing as elegant ballerinas. This is all thanks to Anne Troake who choreographed the 45-ton dancers and directed the film that they came to star in, appropriately titled *Pretty Big Dig*. She says it is her extensive experience teaching untrained adult dancers that helped her to give these machines poise, but it is her great imagination that led her to create a dream world where passers-by can see machines dance on a construction site.

Troake needed more than just her imagination and a co-operative construction company to make this film happen, however. As a choreographer, granting systems were nothing new to her, so she knew just what she was doing when she went after a grant from Bravo!FACT. "It seems to me that Bravo!FACT is a really good place to try new ideas and experiment with innovation," says Troake. Bravo!FACT (the Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent) is owned by CHUM Limited and the Bravo! New Style Arts Channel. It's true that a good percentage of Bravo!FACT-funded shorts are

experimental in nature, whether it be through the use of dance, performance art or animation. Peter Lynch recently went to Bravo!FACT to help fund his departure from documentaries: a bizarre, silent film about the connection between human beings and nature called *Animal Nightmares*. A large percentage of the films given grants through Bravo!FACT have a dance element to them (most likely due to the inherently extra-short nature of dances as opposed to dramas) so Troake's proposal was the kind of thing Bravo!FACT's board of directors was looking for.

Each year five per cent of Bravo!'s profits is dedicated to funding Canadian short films of up to six minutes in length. After the films are completed, they are aired on the cable channel. "The idea is for artists to be given a chance to have their work exposed to the greater television viewing audience," says executive director Judy Gladstone. Each film can receive up to a maximum of \$25,000 to cover 50 per cent of its budget. "It's really brilliant that they're doing this," says Troake of Bravo!'s short film screenings. "Canadians need to be seeing Canadian artwork and anybody who facilitates that is really precious." Jonathan Hayes, the director of the sad-yet-funny film *The School*, which won the Audience Choice Award at the Worldwide Short Film Festival, knows

what benefits come from getting a grant associated with a network. "A friend was over a couple of nights ago and she said she was watching *Sex and the City* on Bravo! and *The School* played right after," says Hayes, pausing in awe of the thought of his first film playing in such a time slot. "A hundred thousand people tune in to *Sex and the City*. I consider that an incredible opportunity for a person starting out."

Not only does the air time help give exposure to otherwise unseen short films, but simply being associated with a grant from Bravo!FACT also doesn't hurt. This year both the International Women's Film and Video Festival in St. John's, Newfoundland, and the Montreal International Festival of New Cinema and New Media presented spotlights on Bravo!FACT films. Douglas Bensadoun's film *At the Quinte Hotel* was featured in the latter. His filmmaking debut is an interpretation of Canadian poet Al Purdy's poem of the same name starring The Tragically Hip's Gord Downie. "I think the fact that you succeeded in getting money helps bring credibility to your cause," says Bensadoun, whose film also aired at Toronto's Worldwide Short Film Festival and at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival. "And it makes your parents think you're not a complete waste."

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