

## Ontario

The Canadian Film Centre's Feature Film Project has embarked on its first development phase with three scripts: *Flora & Fauna*, by writer/director Lori Spring and producer Tina Goldlist, focuses on the relationship between a homeless teenager and a middle-class businesswoman; *She Can't Sleep* (working title), by writer/director Helen Lee and producer Jennifer Kawaja, tells the story of a Korean-Canadian woman caught between borders and relationships; and *Clutch*, by writer/director Chris Grismer and producers Allison Lewis and Chan Park, deals with murder and aroma therapy. "Each group focuses on all critical aspects of their projects, bringing their script to the highest level of creative quality, and preparing their project for low-budget production," explains FFP project manager Justine Whyte. "Even if the FFP produces only one of the projects, all three teams should leave the Development Phase with an effective package to shop their film around." The formation of the Toronto Film Critics Association was announced at the recent Toronto International Film Festival, stating as its mandate: "The promotion of cinema as an art form; the promotion and exchange of ideas among critics and to encourage freedom of expression; and the recognition of excellence in cinema through the presentation of annual awards." The first TFCA awards—for Best Film, Best Canadian Film, Best Director, Best Actor-Male, Best Actor-Female—will be announced at the end of January 1998. Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell's award-winning television series, *Straight Up*, has just embarked on its second season. Produced by Alliance Communications Corp. and Back Alley Films Ltd., the seven episodes about a group of urban teenagers will be directed by Mitchell and Jerry Ciccoritti and features the return of Sarah Polley in the role of "Lily." Ex-Kids in the Hall member Bruce McCulloch recently wrapped up production on his feature-film debut, *Dog Park*. Produced by Accent Entertainment's Susan Cavan (*Joe's So Mean to Josephine*, *Twitch City*), the comedy about a group of people working their way through the "dating chain" stars Janeane Garofalo, Gordon Currie, Kathleen Robertson, Luke Wilson, Natasha Henstridge and Mark McKinney. *Dog Park* will be distributed through CFP. Other recent wraps include Mark Steven Johnson's *A Small Miracle*, starring Oliver Platt and David Strathairn; Mike Christopher's *54*, starring Mike Myers and Ryan Phillippe; Eric Till's *Girl Next Door*, starring Henry Czerny; and Don McKellar's *Last Night*.

**Angela Baldassarre**

**Jerry Ciccoritti, right, directing *Straight Up*.**



Photo courtesy of Alliance

## Manitoba

Veteran Winnipeg documentary filmmaker Shereen Gyrates' new film *Kid Nerd* had many former nerds talking at the Toronto International Film Festival. Shereen says the film is about the "triumph and transcendence" of nerds who have successfully overcome their past. Shot over three years and based out of the Montreal office of the NFB, the film mixes interviews with a great range of former nerds, including Penn of the American comedy magic act, Penn and Tiller, and Josh Weinstein, executive producer of *The Simpsons*. The film also includes hilarious archival footage of 1950s dos and don'ts from social etiquette films. Producing for the Film Board was Adam Symansky. First-time independent filmmaker, Prebun Lunding, managed to lure Ron Howard's younger brother Clint up to the town of Swan River, Man., for a three-day shoot. The short film, *Foreign Body*, is about a female thief stumbling upon the home of a serial killer played by Clint. When driving Clint back to the airport in The Pas, Prebun ran out of gas and the two had to hitch a ride to get to his plane on time. Dean Naday's and Dennis Valdrón's short, *Starwatchers*, premiered as part of a compilation of sci-fi, fantasy and horror films from Winnipeg, called Western Alien Nation. The program included John Paizs's *Ed Zorax of the Future City*, George Godwin's homage to sci-fi serials, *Stella Starr of the Galaxy Rangers* and Steve Hegyi's werewolf classic, *Howling Nightmare*. Hegyi's mockdocumentary follows the stars of a fictional sci-fi TV series and their obsessive fans who meet every few years. Legendary publisher of *Famous Monsters* magazine, Forrest J. Ackerman, was present at the screening showing off Bela Lugosi's ring from Universal's original *Dracula*. According to Ackerman, today's horror movies are no more than "gore" fests. Neil McInnes's animated black comedy *Love Hound* is winning entry at animation festivals around the world and John Paskievich has finished his first cut on his film about Gypsies in Eastern Europe, tentatively called *A Place Called Swine on a Road Called Sorrow*. Although clearly living in incredible poverty, the Gypsy spirit burns through in their song and dance. John Kozark (*Hellbent and Dory*) is set to shoot a one-hour drama tentatively titled *The Funeral* in December. The story is about a group of siblings brought together by the unexpected death of their father and the consequent clash of their personalities.

**Dave Barber**