

The Prairies

Perhaps the most important moment in Saskatchewan producer Kevin DeWalt's life was watching *Gandhi* as the only white boy in a packed Bombay movie theatre in 1983. The powerful experience set up a dream he has steadily worked toward ever since—to one day make a film that would move people as much as he was moved that night. It appears he is on the threshold. As the winning bidder for the film rights to Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*, DeWalt and his partners in Minds Eye Pictures, Ken Krawczyk and Rob King, are embarking on the adventure of their lives. After they beat more than 25 bidders to the rights, DeWalt asked Vanderhaeghe himself to write the screenplay. "He has never had a screenplay produced," says DeWalt, "but there just isn't another writer who could tell this story." Nor is there a production company who could do it better justice. Eighteen-sixties Saskatchewan is the main backdrop for the epic tale, and DeWalt, a Moose Jaw native, knows from the inside out how to do this film. "I was brought up on the prairies; it's part of my grounding," he says. All the same, with a \$20-million budget in mind, *The Englishman's Boy* is something of a grand departure from Minds Eye's previous work. "Our biggest budget by far was \$8.4 million for *The Lost Daughter*" (a CTV miniseries starring Richard Chamberlain to air in March 1998), says DeWalt. Still, with a long list of credits since 1986, progressing from corporate videos to television specials (*The Great Electrical Revolution*), one-hour dramas (*Eli's Lesson*) to feature films (*Decoy*) and TV movies (*Guitarman*, *Lyddie*), DeWalt has a clear vision of what can be accomplished. Along the way, the partners managed to purchase a 50 per cent interest in Talking Dog Post and Sound, a completely digital audio posthouse, Postmaster, a video postfacility and a 50 per cent interest in Evergreen Releasing. Minds Eye New Media also came to life in 1996. At this moment, even while shooting two children's series, *The Incredible Story Studio* and *Mentors*, and preparing to shoot another feature, *The Dukes*, the company is firmly focused on the future. But for DeWalt, now more than ever, the past is the key to the future with the historical drama of *The Englishman's Boy* and a memory of *Gandhi* to spur him on.

Fran Humphreys

West Coast

While the city was thrown into a tizzy by X-Filer David Duchovny's "It rains too much in Vancouver" comments on *Late Night with David Letterman* (the *Province* newspaper put it on the front page while letters to the editor expressed hurt, rage or both, thereby proving yet again that Vancouver's self-image is still largely tied to its small town beginnings), Red Sky Entertainment was busy setting up shop at its new Gastown digs. A reception held at the Vancouver International Film Festival's Trade Forum launched the new theatrical-distribution company, formed by ex-Alliance executives Tony Cianciotta, Dave Forget, Mary-Pat Gleeson and Anna Maria Muccilli. With a mandate to provide "support, exposure and access to the marketplace for projects developed by British Columbia and western Canada filmmakers and television producers," Red Sky has promised a much-needed challenge to eastern (i.e. Toronto) dominance of the distribution scene. Vancouver writer/producer (and occasional actor) Kim Hogan wrapped production in late October on her \$2.5-million feature *Heart of the Sun*, a timely story adapted by Hogan from playwright Betty Lambert's *Jennie's Story*. Produced by Hogan and Brenda Liles of Dancing Stones Films Inc., the film is set during the Great Depression and details one woman's quest to uncover the reasons for her inability to conceive. Looming over the tale is the spectre of eugenics, the popular theory of "moral evolution"—adopted as law throughout North America during the 1930s—that led to the forced sterilization of an estimated 100,000 men and women. Aside from the positive advance buzz, the production is a rarity in that it was made without funding from Telefilm or any other government agency. Alberta's A-Channel kicked in a substantial chunk of the budget and Australia's Beyond Films (*Strictly Ballroom*) signed on early as the international sales agent. Advance word has been strong on writer/director Bruce Sweeney's *Dirty*, and its recent invitation to the prestigious Sundance Film Festival would seem to confirm the film's potential. Perhaps Sweeney and producers John Dippong and Linda Guns were right to hold the film back from the 1997 Canadian festival circuit in favour of a less hurried and more thoughtful postproduction phase. Is a Berlin or Cannes slot in the cards? Malofilm has the Canadian rights.

Jack Vermeë

Photo courtesy of Minds Eye Pictures

Richard Chamberlain in *The Lost Daughter*

