

FROM SEA TO SEA



The Prairies

The on-going saga of Alberta's film industry reached its climax this fall and now is in a gentle denouement. A sigh of relief was exhaled on October 8 when the provincial government confirmed there would be a new financial program to assist Alberta-based filmmakers and technicians. However, there remains a wisp of mystery around the new Alberta Film Development Program. There is indeed \$5 million per year for the next three years to provide grants to filmmakers which will be based on the percentage of proposed production budgets expended in the province. The amount cannot exceed 10 per cent of the eligible production costs up to \$750,000. Filmmakers are welcome to apply immediately, but in fact, details are being worked out as to how the funds will be administered and just how "cultural" the projects have to be and whether or not U.S.-based productions with an Alberta service producer can access the grant. While all this is being worked out, everyone is scratching their slightly singed heads, wondering how Alberta politicians managed to pull this one out of the fire at the 11th hour. Whatever. The industry is certainly glad they did.... Saskatchewan crews, not suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, have been shooting full-bore. The two CBC mini-series, *Big Bear* and *Revenge of the Land* wrapped in the summer, creating a little elbow room for the feature film, *Dark Summer*, a coproduction between Winnipeg's Credo and Cinereta of Germany which was shot last fall.... *The Incredible Story Studio*, the series where kids get to write the scripts, finished its second season at the end of October just in time for *The Maximum Dimension*, season two, another kids series, starting in November. Whew! Tag-team producing....the team at Edge Entertainment of Saskatoon is also whistling a happy tune after its successful screening of Michael Anderson's *Summer of the Monkeys* at the Toronto film festival, a limited theatrical release in Canada and the subsequent purchase of the film by Disney for video distribution this Christmas.... Alberta's production schedule is not quite so robust given the circumstances, but *The Jack Bull*, an HBO movie starring John Cusack is due to wrap in mid-November. The film, a western morality tale, was written by Cusack's father Dick, based on the book *Michael Kolhaas* by Heinrich von Kleist. Cusack is also co-executive producer on the project.

Fran Humphreys

The West Coast

The 17th Vancouver International Film Festival—again a success, with attendance reaching 130,000—wrapped on October 11 with the Awards Gala at the Hotel Vancouver. The winner of the Federal Express Award for Most Popular Canadian Film was Vancouver director Sturla Gunnarsson's *Such a Long Journey*, a Canadian-British coproduction that garnered a standing ovation at its Opening Gala premiere. Runner-up was the B.C.-produced *Heart of the Sun*, directed by Francis Damberger, written and coproduced by Vancouver's Kim Hogan. Bruce Sweeney—aiming to shoot his third feature in the spring—added one more accolade to his growing list by copping the Telefilm Canada Award for Best Emerging Western Canadian Feature Film Director for his dark comedy *Dirty*, while Vancouver filmmaker Nathaniel Geary's "film poem," *Keys to Kingdoms*, nabbed the Telefilm Canada Award for Best Emerging Director of a Western Canadian Short or Mid-Length Film (is it just me or are these award names just a tad unwieldy?). Charles Binamé and Monique Proulx shared the Rogers Award for Best Canadian Screenplay for *Le Coeur au poing*, the opening night film of the Canadian Images series, while Mary Lewis's *When Ponds Freeze Over* won the NFB's Best Animated Film honours.... The VIFF's 13th Annual Film and Television Industry Trade Forum featured the kind of high-profile guests that organizers Melanie Friesen (producer) and Frances Bergin Devenyi (associate producer) could only dream about in the past. Robert Towne (legendary screenwriter of *Chinatown*), Conrad Hall (Academy Award-winning cinematographer of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*) and Leon Gast (director of *When We Were Kings*) held court alongside such diverse personalities as writer/director/actor Don McKellar, production designer Jan Roelfs (responsible for many Peter Greenaway movies and twice Oscar-nominated, for *Gattaca* and *Orlando*) and, believe it or not, the Right Honourable Kim Campbell.... New Filmmakers' Day—a day devoted to encouraging and coaching new and emerging local filmmakers—again proved a highlight, especially the afternoon sessions which featured Roelfs, McKellar, director Anne Wheeler, producer Sharon McGowan, editor Reg Harkema, actors Babz Chula, Gabrielle Rose and others all knocking heads about the director's varying relationships with the DOP, editor, production designer and actor. Roelfs—who flew in for the day from New York where he is working on Robert De Niro's new film—stole the show with his charm, vast fund of information and terrific good sportsmanship as he continued to provide helpful information for several hours afterward at the end-of-day reception.

Jack Verme