

FROM SEA TO SEA

THE WEST COAST

The Vancouver film community had a collective fit in late January with the back-to-back announcements emanating first from Revenue Canada and then from the office of Heritage minister Sheila Copps. Revenue Canada's decision to start enforcing an until now benignly neglected provision of the tax code would have seen American actors working in Vancouver (and the rest of Canada) taxed by up to 50 per cent. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to realize that the American-born leads of the many American television shows shot in Vancouver would start demanding that the shows be moved back to the States. Needless to say, the response was swift. Front-page articles in the Vancouver *Sun* decrying the move and radio talk shows flooded with calls foretelling the end of an industry were the order of the day. B.C. Film Commissioner Peter Mitchell was hastily dispatched to Ottawa to talk some sense and—lo and behold!—a stay of execution was granted as the proposal was actually put on hold. But before anybody had time to pop the champagne corks, Copps's advisory committee came forth with its proposed changes to federal film policy, sending industry insiders reeling again. As most *Take One* readers know, the report proposed beefing-up tax credits for Canadian film producers and eliminating them for foreign producers—a prospect that, on paper, looks like a good deal for Canadian film. But, in the words of Ian Waddell, B.C.'s culture minister, the report indicates that "it's clear the federal government has no concept of how the film industry works in B.C." Whether that's true or not, it is a fact that the B.C. industry would be hurt by the move. After all there are the thousands of locals (8,000 is the number currently being reported) whose livelihoods depend on the—predominantly American—films and television shows made locally. And the local feeling is that, with California fighting tooth and nail to make it more attractive to work there again, many producers are looking for reasons to move their shows. The low Canadian dollar notwithstanding, the elimination of tax breaks could be just the thing that sets them to packing their bags.... Anne Wheeler's long-awaited new feature, the lesbian comedy *Better Than Chocolate*, received its world premiere in the Panorama section of the Berlin Film Festival in mid-February. The film is produced by Sharon McGowan, with co-producer and screenplay credits going to Peggy Thompson. They are, of course, the duo responsible for the Genie Award-winner, *The Lotus Eaters*.

Jack Vermeë

THE PRAIRIES

After losing millions of dollars in film productions to other provinces, the Alberta government announced in October new grants for the province's ailing film industry. The money—\$5 million annually for three years—will come from lottery revenues and will be administered by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The new Alberta Film Development Program replaced the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corp. (AMPDC), that the government cut two years ago. Since the province chopped AMPDC, numerous filmmakers have taken millions of dollars of work to other parts of Canada which provide tax incentives and financing. Besides feature films giving the province a wide berth, several television series cancelled, blaming their demise on the cuts. The latter included *Jake & the Kid*, the popular series based on W.O. Mitchell's book, and *North of 60*. Leon Lubin, executive director of the Alberta Motion Pictures Industries Association, says the Alberta film industry is looking forward "with renewed vigor" to the introduction of the government initiative. However, the current trickle of work in the province shows that Alberta is still a long ways away from recovering from the AMPDC cuts. The only feature currently shooting in the province is *Snow Day*, a family-oriented film starring *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Chevy Chase. The film began five weeks of production in Edmonton in mid-February before shifting to Calgary for an end-of-April wrap. The film, produced by Paramount, is about a group of small children in a small town and what happens in one day of their lives when they find themselves snowed in.... No one shmoozes better than the professionals of the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association. The longest-running film and television awards ceremony in Canada will celebrate its 25th year with a Salute to Excellence in April, to be held at Edmonton's Shaw Conference Centre.... As always, Local Heroes, Edmonton's celebration of independent film, attracted some big names to the Northern city. This year the festival, which ran in late February, brought Arthur Hiller. Hiller is best known for such films as the *Man in the Glass Booth*, *Love Story* and *Man of La Mancha*. The former Edmontonian is now chairman of the American Film Institute Conservatory. The other highlight of this year's festival was a salute to Rhombus Media, the producers of such celebrated films as *The Red Violin*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould*. Rhombus founder and producer Niv Fichman attended the festival along with *Red Violin* director François Girard.

Charles Mandel

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