

From Sea to Sea

West Coast

The 18th Vancouver International Film Festival finished on a high note with new records being set for both attendance and revenues. Local and Western Canadian filmmakers were honoured more than ever before by the audiences and juries at the festival. Vancouver director Scott Smith saw his *roller-coaster* take the Federal Express Award for Most Popular Canadian Film, followed closely by Stephen Reynolds's, *The Divine Ryans*. Winnipeg writer/director Terrance Odette was honoured by the Canadian Images jury for *Heater*, which captured both the Rogers Award for Best Western Canadian Screenplay (worth a high-end computer and software package) and the Telefilm Canada Award for Best Emerging Western Canadian Feature Film Director (a \$5,000 prize). Local directors Michelle Ryan and Jessica Salo won the Telefilm Canada Award for Best Emerging Director of a Western Canadian Short (worth \$4,000) for their *Pride...* Kudos go to the Trade Forum for a superb selection of seminars that were the buzz of the festival's middle weekend. The most popular seminar was Next Wave president Peter Broderick's presentation on digital filmmaking, a presentation that had the Luddites quaking in their boots while exciting the hell out of everybody else. Even the fiercely intelligent veteran cinematographer Michael Chapman (*Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*), in town for a Trade Forum seminar, was completely convinced of the inevitability of digital domination. He called Broderick his new "guru" while devoting most of his talk to the sea change that is set to occur and commiserating with the cinematographer purists in the audience.... Production is still humming in and around Vancouver with seven features, six TV movies and mini-series and 14 TV series currently shooting. While many people may be interested in *How to Kill Your Neighbour's Dog*, executive produced by Robert Redford and starring Kenneth Branagh (a fixture on the local late-night hot spot scene), Robin Wright-Penn and Lynn Redgrave, or Brian De Palma's *Mission to Mars* with Gary Sinise, Tim Robbins and Don Cheadle, what has the less Hollywood-centric among us interested is Lynne Stopkewich's long-awaited follow-up to *Kissed*. *Suspicious River* is set for a five-week shoot beginning in mid-November. I ran into Lynne at a local watering hole recently and she was pretty quiet about the project, although she let on that Molly Parker will star and that cinematographer Greg Middleton (whose work on Jeremy Podeswa's *The Five Senses* was one of the few redeeming factors in an otherwise empty exercise) is on board. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

Jack Vermeë



Terrance Odette's *Heater*

Prairies

In November, while most prairie people basked in extended autumn, producer/director Randy Bradshaw, of the Calgary-based film and television production company Bradshaw MacLeod and Associates, needed snow for his *George Fox Christmas Music Special*, a coproduction with Balmur, singer Anne Murray's production company. The east slope of the Rockies locations were confirmed but they lacked the snow and cold essential for local kids to play hockey with Toronto Maple Leaf goalie great Johnny Bower. And George Fox's rendition of "Six White Boomers" with animated kangaroos, needed ice. Particularly eager was piano prodigy Wesley Chu set to accompany Rebecca Jenkins (*Bye, Bye Blues*, *Black Harbour*) in his move from classical music to modern classics. The family special would cap an outstanding year for the three acclaimed partners: Bradshaw—who does more directing than producing—and producers Doug MacLeod and Tom Dent-Cox. MacLeod and Bradshaw started the company in 1981. Following several successful creative collaborations, including those with Bradshaw on *The Ray Bradbury Theatre* and both partners on *North of 60*, Dent-Cox became a business partner. Branching out from their strength in series television, the trio has together and independently added to their credits with *Trial By Fire*, the second *North of 60* movie set for an airdate in the first quarter of 2000; the first one, *In the Blue Ground*, aired in March 1999. *The Sheldon Kennedy Story*, a coproduction with Sarrazin Couture Productions for Baton Broadcasting, chalked up 1.3 million viewers; *Bad Faith*, a feature film for A-Channel and Oasis, based on Ian Adams's novel, has been delivered and ready for a future airdate. Three long, intense shootings days for *Trail By Fire*, in Yellowknife, were offset by encounters with avid fans of the series' very popular characters in Lynx River, the fictional setting for both the TV series and the movies. Fans eagerly told the crew they knew, lived with, or worked with people just like those on the show. MacLeod, like many other Alberta producers, welcomed the creative approach to funding film and television production by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. With renewal of the Alberta industry came another challenge—"too many jobs chasing too few people." With two, one-hour prime-time series ideas that MacLeod pronounced as "correct for the time, the place and will play well as intelligent contemporary entertainment," the company is sussing out ways into long-term series production. At the same time, it hopes to attract seasoned creative and technical people to become Alberta-based and so sustain the revived local industry.

Tim Christison