

Noam Gonick's *Hey, Happy!*

Winnipeg Update

By Dave Barber

For the first time in years, there are some exciting, original independent features on the Winnipeg horizon. Telefilm Canada approved funding for five independent Manitoba features: Kim Todd of Original Pictures will co-produce a film adaptation of Brad Fraser's play *Poor Superman* with Fraser directing; Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love* will be directed by Deepa Mehta (*Earth, Fire*), a Bruce Duggan project in co-production with Tryptych Media of Toronto; Jeff Erbach's (*Under Chad Valley*) feature debut, *The Nature of Nicholas* (which explores childhood sexuality), will be shot in the summer of 2001; Sean Garrity and Brendon Sawatzky's anti-romantic comedy love triangle called *Inertia*; and finally, Buffalo Gal Pictures will co-produce *Max and the Lioness*, to be directed by Rodrigue Jean (*Full Blast*).

For the second year in a row, a Winnipeg film has screened at the Sundance Film Festival. In 2000 it was *Heater*. This year it is *Hey, Happy!*, directed by Noam Gonick, who describes his film as "a sloppy, fun, rave fuckfest for the whole family." It was shot in 16mm Cinemascope in the wastelands of Winnipeg's St. Boniface industrial stockyards. Gonick, who says he was aiming for the look of Italian neo-realism, travelled to Sundance with an entourage that included producer Laura Michalchysyn, ace cinematographer Paul Suderman and several cast and crew members.

deco dawson (a.k.a. Daryl Kinaschuk), one of the sharpest directors to appear on the Winnipeg filmmaking scene in years, is creating his most ambitious works to date. *FILM (dzama)* is a fictional biography of Winnipeg-based artist Marcel Dzama, who has been making a name for himself with cartoon illustrations published in *The New Yorker* and *Saturday Night*. Experimenting with expressionistic theatre sets, multiple camera exposures and complex matte work, deco is attempting to create an experimental biography with a unique visual look. Sharing Guy Maddin's deep love of early cinema and his strong visual sense, deco assisted Maddin with the camera work and editing on *The Heart of the World* from the

Preludes collection [see Short Takes for a review]. Since its sensational debut, *The Heart of the World* has been invited to festivals around the world including New York, Rotterdam, Sweden, Madrid and Australia.

Buffalo Gal Pictures recently moved into larger premises with a bold manifesto by operations manager Ian Handford: "We are the Buffalo Gals, Canada's Most Terrifying Film and Television Production Company. Smoking ciggy butts out in the wicked winter wind, cracking open fresh, crisp packs of multi-hued Xerox paper, chests out and chins up, we lock arms together." Housed in an old warehouse with the National Screen Institute and assorted advertising and computer companies, Buffalo Gal Pictures has made an impressive name for itself with co-productions, such as John Greyson's haunting *Law of Enclosures*, Léa Pool's *Gabrielle Roy*, Colleen Murphy's *Desire* and *The Genius of Lenny Breau*, a documentary about the troubled Winnipeg guitar legend. Phyllis Laing, Buffalo Gal's executive director, says new projects are in the works with Quebec director André Forcier (*La Comtesse de Baton Rouge*), a biography series on classical composers, and Caelum Vatnsdal's *Big City* (about newspaper reporters and takeovers). Vatnsdal just completed *Kino Delirium: The Films of Guy Maddin*. Published by Arbeiter Ring, the book reveals the origins behind the creation of Maddin's early classics such as *Careful* and *Archangel* and includes the screenplay for *The Heart of the World*.

Another Winnipeg company making a strong name for itself is Les Productions Rivard. Executive producer Louis Paquin and cinematographer Charles Lavack are developing a strong base of critical writing and producing skills in the francophone community. Future projects include a documentary about the life of Edouard Beapre, an eight-foot giant weighing 375 pounds from Saskatoon, who performed with Barnum and Bailey in the late 1800s, and an IMAX film about Alexander Mackenzie's Arctic expedition, directed by Stephen Low. Winnipeg Film Group executive director Larry Desrochers has been appointed director of the Manitoba Opera. Desrochers brought a wealth of experience to the Film Group and led the organization through a period of artistic resurgence and financial renewal.

Finally, the City of Winnipeg proved it will make any effort to accommodate a film shoot even if it means changing the prime minister's plans. Last October, film and culture liaison officer Kenny Boyce re-routed Jean Chrétien's motorcade away from Broadway Street so filmmaker Matt Etches could shoot his short film *Dialog*. The project apparently involved some gunfire, making the federal officials nervous. ●