



I N T E R

SUMMER 2007

ACTRA

The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists



A REAL CANADIAN SUCCESS STORY:
CORNER GAS

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Our strike, our confidence, our future

By Richard Hardacre

On the night of February 19, 2007, ACTRA reached terms of settlement of the Independent Production Agreement (IPA) with the associations representing the producers of Canada (CFTPA), as well as those of Quebec (APFTQ). The tentative agreement that evening brought a suspension to the first strike in ACTRA's 64-year history. The agreement that winter night followed about 14 hours of a final, determined push to make the deal and was endorsed in the next two days by ACTRA's Negotiation Committee and the elected executive of the National Council. This undramatic denouement to a very strained negotiation that stretched frustratingly over four months brought a suspension to our first-ever strike that had lasted six weeks. Then, with a historic level of returns, our members ratified with an approval vote of 98.6%.



Chris Culbertson

When the ACTRA members of Nova Scotia realized that the Governor General's address to the legislature had stolen the press from their strike launch, they elected to brave sub-zero temperatures and march to where the cameras were! Member Rosemarie Walton was one of a shivering crew outside Province House announcing to the world that ACTRA was on strike!

Why in heaven's name would we want to strike?

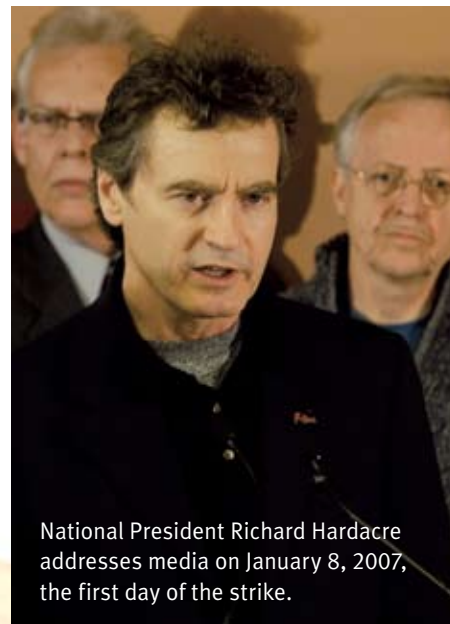
That is a perfectly valid question any number of interested observers might have asked. Further, they could have inquired whether the career path of a self-employed performer was not precarious enough already, what with good jobs challenging to secure, loads of competition, a government that has yet to place a long-term priority on the value of Canadian television and film production and various other obstacles to success. Not to mention other curiosities of our craft, such as capable producers reverting to non-scripted (i.e., no actors need apply) 'lifestyle' programming because it's cheap to produce and, anyway, that's mostly what our nation's imaginative private broadcasters and specialty channels crave to distribute – with thick profit margins – as pabulum to the masses.

So, indeed, "Why in heaven's name would we want to strike?" Well, we didn't want to. We had to. It's that simple. Certainly it was about our right to be properly compensated for the skills of our creative work; about stronger work rules to protect all our members, especially our minors and stunt performers; it was about fair opportunity and access to the audition process for everyone, regardless of physical ability; and it was about inclusion – the inclusion of all – with all the richness available in the diversity of our membership.

Our union was threatened; our industry was put in jeopardy

Our adversaries across the table in many forgettable but sometimes awful hotel meeting rooms told us for months on end that they would challenge us on two definitive points: our actual existence as a union; and massive rollbacks on our rates of pay.

They threatened that we had no right to strike or to negotiate as a union, provincially or nationally – and they hauled us into Ontario's Superior Court over that.



National President Richard Hardacre addresses media on January 8, 2007, the first day of the strike.

Jag Gauthan

Many producers just wanted a deal that would be fair to all – the same kind of deal that ACTRA wanted.

The judge refused to issue the injunctions sought against us and instead referred both parties to a long and costly arbitration process. A lot of money was drained away from the producers' coffers and ACTRA's own national strike reserves on those fruitless legal challenges.

We faced a hyper-aggressive attempt to strip-mine our agreement, including proposals to roll back pay on most productions by 25%, to erode our work rules and to force us to accept grossly concessionary terms on new media. Meanwhile, all our efforts to resolve the strike, including engaging one of Canada's most accomplished mediators sent in to help by the federal Minister of Labour, were held up. The industry looked to be headed for a serious downward spiral in late January and February. The livelihoods of thousands of film workers, performers, fellow guild members and even producers were being put at risk.

Though ACTRA offered an interim agreement that numerous producers signed in order to continue shooting, more than 50,000 Canadians working in, or essential to, Canada's \$4.8 billion film and television industry (CFTPA's *Profile 2007*) were put in substantial jeopardy by people who represent the associations of producers. Many producers just wanted a deal that would be fair to all – the same kind of deal that ACTRA wanted. The fact cannot be ignored that close to 200 producers across the country chose to continue to work with our members, even though we had to choose to strike their associations. These producers broke rank with their negotiators. That fact is irrefutable and it reveals a great deal.

Our digital future

The fair deal we looked for comprehended something bigger than we can clearly define. We needed to achieve certainty about the ownership of rights to our performances as our recorded work migrates into the uncharted galaxy of distribution on new media platforms and, massively, over the internet. We contended that we had to be paid for this 'new' use of the intellectual property created with our performances. Our predecessor agreements already included a structure for various use fees. But we knew this new media world to be a very difficult place to navigate. ACTRA has been steadily working at determining terms for the same kinds of use by our national public broadcaster, the CBC. So, instead, we offered to dedicate all that wrangling to a joint committee to be advised by a mutually-agreed expert. They could work on a structure of proposals for a year. In the meantime we proposed that we could come to terms on everything else... and get back to work without the serious disruption of a strike.

After an anxious month of watching their brothers and sisters in other provinces take up the strike call and after a lengthy provincial conciliation process, the 500 ACTRA members in Nova Scotia finally joined the strike on February 13. The Nova Scotian (and final) leg of the strike began with a launch rally which was capped by a march to Province House.

500 plus Canadian performers along with members from other unions set up an information picket on February 2 at the Toronto office of Canada's producers' association, the CFTPA.

Disappointingly, we faced a wall of solid opposition. The negotiators working for the producers, along with several highly respected labour relations executives from most of the major U.S. studios wanted only the deal that they would define for the internet. It was a deal that meant virtually giving away the use of our work, worldwide, in perpetuity. That brought on the strike that we did not look for, the strike we had to call, the strike that our membership supported.

– continued on next page



Kim Hume



Terry Coolen

Our strike, our confidence, our future – *continued from previous page*

Our team never worked alone

Since October 23, 2006, the very first day of negotiations, many of Canada's leading film and television performers gathered in support of the negotiation committee. Their presence, reinforced by the buttressing of our members at large, gained us a lot of positive media support. The *Trailer Park Boys* – **Robb Wells, Mike Smith and John Paul Tremblay** – *Corner Gas* lead **Eric Peterson, Kenneth Welsh, Alberta Watson, Wendy Crewson, Charmion King, Gordon Pinsent, Tonya Lee Williams, Maury Chaykin, Michael Murphy** and many others were part of ACTRA's 50-member opening day team.

On January 8, 2007, the first day of our strike we held a media conference in Toronto where Eric told the press, "Enough is enough. I've had to take a 50-75% pay cut over the past five years. Actors have been hammered back to scale. And now here we are looking at demands from this trade association, trying to hammer down even those minimums." Eric spoke passionately in support of our strike nation-wide on *Canada AM*. Then, in the media spotlight leading up to her Award of Excellence from ACTRA Toronto, Wendy Crewson never failed to press home ACTRA's demand to be paid for

new media work, insisting that "Professional performers don't work for free. Not on TV. Not on film. And not on the internet."

Countless organizations and performers around the world jumped in to support our strike: our UBCP Branch, that has a separate agreement for British Columbia and the Yukon, stood firmly with us during negotiations and held strong in their own talks. The United Steelworkers, ACTRA's strategic partner in many of our goals, joined us at our demonstration pickets and lent us tremendous moral support throughout. Others who aligned with us included the American Federation of Musicians, the Canadian Media Guild, the Canadian Talent Agents and Managers Association of Canada (TAMAC) the Entertainment Industry Coalition Agency Association (EICAA) and our sisters and brothers of NABET 700 and their parent union the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP). Actors' unions worldwide expressed their solidarity, including AFTRA, Canadian Actors' Equity Association, the Danish Actors' Association, Equity – the British actors' union, the actors' Syndicat de la France, the Japanese actors' union, MEAA (Australia and New Zealand), the Mexican actors' union, the Screen Actors' Guild, Union des Artistes and the International

The producers wanted to exploit our performances without additional compensation on the internet and on all new media platforms, but ACTRA performers refused to give away their work for free.

Federation of Actors (FIA) representing performers in more than 100 countries.

But I must stress that the strongest support of all was from within our own house. Winning our strike could never have been achieved had it not been for the strength and solidarity of the entire membership of ACTRA.

Will our new media deal help our sister unions?

With the Writers Guild of America's contract expiring this October, AFTRA's contract expiring in November and the Director's Guild of America and the Screen Actor's Guild contracts expiring in June 2008, will our 10% wage package and our internet and new media compensation terms set the stage for professional film and television performers all over the world? I have no crystal ball to answer that.

Colin Mochrie speaking to the media on ACTRA's first-ever strike.



Jag Gunde

The producers wanted to exploit our performances without additional compensation on the internet and on all new media platforms, but ACTRA performers refused to give away their work for free. When the producers finally listened, together we devised a fair deal. ACTRA performers will share 3.6% of revenues received from the use of productions on the internet. We are hopeful that our sister unions the world over will continue this demand for their own fair deal. The fact that Canadian performers will be compensated for the use of their work on the internet and in other new media is a major victory for ACTRA. It is a threshold deal for the future.

Respect... and gratitude

As you know from ACTRA's bulletins and media reports since February 19, we achieved a fair deal. Among many of the protections we sought and won we obtained an excellent 10% wage and retirement package over three years and we now look to continue to narrow the gap in compensation between Canadian and American performers on our own sets here in our country. We achieved the dismantling of a serious attack on our legal rights as a union. And we established a set of terms for the use of our work made for or distributed over new media, better work rules (including stronger equal opportunity and anti-harassment rules,

tougher safety language and tougher minors' protections) and clearer language to ensure our strike ability in the future. We agreed to steps to promote independent Canadian production, we harmonized background vouchers nationally and we have terms that allow us to organize the lifestyle/reality genre, bringing these productions into our jurisdiction.

Bluntly speaking, there are some major achievements. The terms are fair for performers and for producers. With the new media section of the IPA, ACTRA and the associations of producers have built a foundation for the future. But it is ACTRA, through our first-ever strike efforts, that has established that new threshold. This has been a very significant achievement.

Our negotiating committee fought a hard-won, selfless battle, and fought it very well indeed. They were **Wendy Anderson** (Saskatchewan), **Tyrone Benskin** (Montreal) and **Ron Lea, Alberta Watson and Ron White** (all of Toronto). Joining us were Alternates **Barry Blake** (Ottawa), **Cary Lawrence** (Montreal), and **Heather Allin, Aidan Devine and Maurice Dean Wint** of Toronto. Always present with their tenacity and clarity were ACTRA Toronto President **Karl Pruner** and my Vice Chair, Past National President **Thor Bishopric**. But along with them it was the entire membership of ACTRA who won this strike. Your bargaining committee is extremely grateful for the overwhelming sup-

port extended to your union – our union.

As just one of a long line of leaders given the trust to serve my fellow performers, I regularly feel humbled by the gigantic tasks at hand. Now I know our reasonable goals can be achieved. I have witnessed the courage of our bargaining committee and I admired the skills of our chief negotiator **Stephen Waddell** and his colleagues: **Raymond Guardia, Brian Topp, Marit Stiles, Eda Zimler, Dan Mackenzie, Patricia McCutcheon** and the quite remarkable **DJ Anderson**.

Our colleague Gordon Pinsent put it so well. A few years ago he said "ACTRA is the house we have built for ourselves." When accepting ACTRA Toronto's Award of Excellence shortly after the strike ended on February 23, Wendy Crewson beamed that we have found our confidence, and that as actors we know just how difficult that can be. Here is what I know – I have come to know the strength, the pride and the confidence of the fine members of this union. For that I owe all my fellow members my complete respect, and my gratitude.

In Solidarity,



Richard Hardacre
National President

ACTRA's negotiating committee along with prominent Canadian performers held a press conference in Toronto on January 8. Eric Peterson (*centre*) addresses the media packed room. (*Left to right:*) Peter MacNeill, Rick Howland, Patrick McKenna, Debra McGrath, Kenneth Welsh, Colin Mochrie, Sheila McCarthy, Dan Lett, United Steelworkers National Director Ken Neumann, ACTRA National Executive Director and Chief Negotiator Stephen Waddell, ACTRA National President Richard Hardacre, Wendy Crewson, ACTRA Toronto President Karl Pruner, Sonja Smits and Lorne Cardinal.



Jag Gundersen

Three hundred and sixty-five days of solidarity and counting...



Howard Storey



Rob Morton



Mercedes Watson

By Howard Storey, UBCP President and Negotiating Committee Member, Rob Morton, Treasurer and Negotiating Committee Chair and Mercedes Watson, CEO and Chief Negotiator

Performers in B.C. stood up and were counted. We endured a year of consistent pressure from the whole industry and we remained true to our vision and the intentions of our membership and fundamentally the needs of all performers, while respecting the industry's need for stability. We worked in concert with the other performer unions in North America to present as united a front as possible and never wavered. Specifically, we aimed for parity with performers in the rest of Canada and generally, we aimed for respect for our union and for the performers' place in the industry. Thanks to the year-long unflinching solidarity of B.C. performers and the enhanced quality of information, expertise and professionalism from our e-board, staff and negotiating team, we secured a deal we proudly recommended to our membership.

Huge thanks and respect are due to the very many members who came and stood proudly and respectfully before the Hollywood studio representatives, demonstrating solidarity with the aims of their union and the needs of performers everywhere. Grateful thanks for the unstinting commitment and courage of our small but intense group who made up our negotiating team, committee and caucus and special thanks to **Thom Tapley** our Director of Operations & Communications, Film, TV & Digital Media.

We refused to accept deep discounts and made respectable gains in terms and conditions of which we can be justly proud but we can be most proud of gaining respect for our members, our union and raising the level and quality of collaboration among performers unions globally. When all others said sit down,

we stood up, strong, united, professional and respectful. It's a new day for our union, a proud day but one that shines light on the fact that as performers and a union, we can only get what we need by being the best that we can be and by doing so together.

Chairing a nine-person negotiating committee and a caucus that swelled to as many as 85 members, the objective was to maintain a consistent, fair and respectful process, while ensuring that the rights of all members were protected. This role was simplified and our goals achieved due to the membership and staff that maintained decorum and professionalism throughout.

During a committee meeting following the presentation of the mediator's recommendations, it was stated that virtually every constituency of the membership had had their issues addressed during bargaining. Some had received terms in the agreement while others had realized the opportunity to speak in agreement or dissent on all issues. We are both proud and to some degree amazed to say that we achieved and maintained unanimity of voice for 365 days. This was our strength, enabled by the support of performers across the country and continent.

So, if negotiations were a journey, then we in B.C. have just returned from a trip of epic status, which began over a year ago in Los Angeles with a call from UBCP for a respectful and responsible agreement and ended in Vancouver with a mediator's list of recommendations. The epilogue to our journey was success – success in spite of all that we faced. We have a deal that is responsible and respectful in many ways. Moreover, we owe our thanks to all of our companions

It's a new day for our Union, a proud day but one that shines light on the fact that as performers and a Union, we can only get what we need by being the best that we can be and by doing so together.

who joined us on this journey well taken.

We continue on our path towards building greater trust with our national organization and remain mindful of the differences which shape our existence in the West. Time allows for change, change brings about growth and we in B.C. have taken our first national step in demonstrating what our new future should look like. We are certain of one thing, it is a future shaped and supported by our membership. ■

A REAL CANADIAN SUCCESS STORY: CORNER GAS

A behind-the-scenes chat with the cast

By Holly Gauthier-Frankel

Whether it is through movies, television, music, or literature, people consume the cultural offerings presented to them on a daily basis. Generally, these consumers like to support artistic endeavors that communicate directly with their own realities and emotional experiences. It is logical to assume then, that when Canadian viewers switch on their televisions, they want to find a program that serves their basic need to relate to, to laugh at, or to somehow feel included in the stories that are being told. It is an unfortunate reality in contemporary Canadian programming that the collective culture that Canadians consume most seems to include inordinate amounts of American imagery and plotlines. Thanks to the CRTC and private broadcasting corporations looking to save money and time, American programming is cheap to buy and extremely easy to distribute, therefore making it readily available for hours of consumption. Though it is a fact of life

that the television culture of our neighbours to the south dominates the airwaves, it becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint and embrace a true national identity when we are busy watching shows like *Las Vegas*,

CSI: Miami, and *24*, **Kiefer Sutherland** notwithstanding.

It is refreshing to know that for four consecutive seasons viewers across Canada have been avidly watching *Corner Gas*, a show where the ensemble of characters embodies those universal emotions, foibles and shortcomings to which we can all relate in some way. The brainchild of Saskatchewan-born comedian **Brent Butt**, *Corner Gas* has dominated as one of the most popular shows on Canadian television since it first aired on CTV in January, 2004.

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(Below, left to right:)
Gabrielle Miller, Brent Butt,
Fred Ewanuick, Eric Peterson,
Janet Wright, Nancy Robertson,
Tara Spencer-Nairn
and Lorne Cardinal.



CORNER GAS

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A behind-the-scenes chat with the cast

Set in the fictional community of Dog River, Saskatchewan, *Corner Gas* focuses on the life of Brent Leroy (played by Butt), the unassuming owner of a pit-stop gas station in the heart of the prairies. The plotlines deal mainly with the daily lives of the inhabitants of the tiny community, including Leroy's parents and friends, various other residents and whoever pops in to have their tank filled on a given day. Butt and some of Canadian television's most notable comedic contributors such as Paul Mather (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*), and Kevin White (*Rick Mercer Report*) teamed up to perfect the light-heartedly humorous tone. Pair this simplicity with a sarcastic edge that is well-suited to a small group of loquacious townsfolk with nothing better to do all day than nose around for the latest juicy tidbit, and you've got yourself a hit. Reminiscent of a long-lived successful American program all about 'nothing' that shall remain nameless, it can be argued that *Corner Gas* maintains its primetime position with audiences of over one million viewers-plus every week because the characters are so vivid and familiar to them, and extremely funny to boot.

A native of Saskatchewan now Toronto-based, **Eric Peterson** plays Oscar Leroy, Brent Butt's cantankerous and volatile father on the show. "Canadians do have a special excitement and ownership of it. The fact that it is Canadian and is *theirs* is something

Lorne Cardinal as "Davis Quinton" and Tara Spencer-Nairn as "Karen Pelly".

they can be proud of... whether they're conscious of it or not, it's fun for our audience to see something they don't have to actually translate into *our* experience... you recognize yourself in some way." With Peterson's trademark greeting, 'Hey, Jackass!', his character not only provides a mischievous aspect into the town's dynamics, but also provides an honest outlook about how his son should run the family business and life in general.

Honesty also permeates Peterson's life off-screen. His staunch support of his union and its members during ACTRA's first-ever strike was indicative of his level of commitment to the support of indigenous production. On behalf of ACTRA, he stood up to the press nation-wide to fight for our rights as performers and as Canadians.

In true Oscar Leroy style, Peterson is not shy about how he feels in terms of the divide between working in Canada and working in the United States. "You know, you constantly hear, 'Oh it's JUST a business.' Well, it isn't JUST a business, it's a cultural business.

And even for the Americans it's a cultural business, so that when you take the cultural aspect of it and say this is a business, then you're into generic art... That's when we haul

down the Canadian flag and raise the American flag and change the Ontario licence plates into New York licence plates, and we become some city in North America that is not in Canada or Mexico!"

Gabrielle Miller plays the earnest café owner Lacey Burrows, a Toronto

transplant who moved to Dog River to take over the local café. Hailing originally from Vancouver, Miller got her start in well-known American shows such as *Frasier* and *The X-Files*. "I have a green card, and I had been focusing on starting to cultivate a career there (in L.A.), not because I didn't want to be in Canada but simply because I had to think about my future and make a living. Now I've been able to stay home and work. Really, since *Corner Gas*, it's been almost exclusively Canadian, which makes me really, really happy because that's what I prefer. I would like to be able to continue to work in Canada because I love it." Miller never expected such an immense response to the show, "It has basically changed the course and plans of my career. It's been such a huge gift because it's enabled me to feel like I can stay in my country, tell our stories, and work with people that I just absolutely love."

The close-knit cast is lucky enough to be working on a project that was spearheaded by dedicated producers Virginia Thompson, David Storey, and Brent Butt. With money provided by the Groundbreaker Benefit Fund, which was a result of BCE Inc.'s purchase of CTV in 2000, the emphasis was placed on developing and producing Canadian priority programming. Even with such a considerable boost from a Canadian network, however, the road to recognition is fraught with the notion that in order



Eric Peterson as "Oscar Leroy" and Janet Wright as "Emma Leroy".



Brett Butt as “Brent Leroy” and Gabrielle Miller as “Lacey Burroughs”.

to succeed as a performer on TV in Canada, an actor will eventually have to make the move down south.

For **Lorne Cardinal**, an ex-rugby player who plays the lovably goofy cop Davis Quinton, the frustrations of becoming a success in the Canadian market can be felt when he travels around the country hosting shows, performing in theatre, and providing mentorship for youth in various charitable organizations. “The majority of comments I get from people are, ‘Wow, AND it’s Canadian, it’s Canadian-made,’ you know? Canadian productions have been given a bad rap over the years... bad production quality due to struggling with low production levels, lack of funds, etc. But we are compared to the Americans – the larger market. People don’t always realize that we have way less money to work with.”

Gabrielle Miller’s experience of meeting and talking to fans of the show has been positive overall, but she has also felt similar pressure. “The positive feedback I get is incredible. People express how much they love to have a Canadian show that they can watch with their families. At the same time, I’ve also have had people say to me, ‘Wow, it’s doing so well maybe you’ll get cast on an American show one day,’ y’know? (laughs).”

On behalf of ACTRA Toronto, Cardinal has lobbied the Ontario government to introduce Status of the Artist legislation. He too is working to protect our rights as performers – to address the unique nature of how artists work in areas such as protection for child performers, career transition and training, income averaging and dignity for older artists.

The community and family-friendly aspects of *Corner Gas* are important to Cardinal, and are reminders that television need not only be used as a source of entertainment, but also as a tool for better communication and functionality on the whole. *Corner Gas* provides an opportunity for a family to sit down, relax, and enjoy an activity together. “One guy said, ‘Thanks for the giggles you’ve given me and my family.’ You know, I get grandparents grateful for the show because they can watch it with their grandkids. We’re crossing generational lines.”

Peterson takes a more pragmatic



“The positive feedback I get is incredible. People express how much they love to have a Canadian show that they can watch with their families.”

approach to the way audiences watch the show. “Audiences have to have a good time watching it. They’re not going to watch it for patriotic or philosophical reasons, they’re going to watch it because it’s television that they like.”

With a fifth season about to begin production, the actors are optimistic and excited. The massive success of *Corner Gas* has proven that a show about Canadians can do well when given the right set of circumstances. Says Peterson, “Canadians doing stuff that interests other Canadians is a straightforward cultural formula that works. Anywhere you export it people will watch it because it’s a work of art that’s been tried and tested by its own audience.”

Miller has lobbied the federal government, on behalf of ACTRA, to invest in more Canadian TV drama. She also spoke out during the annual Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) convention last November in Vancouver on the need for new rules to protect our Canadian airwaves, the need for increased drama TV funding, and proper marketing and scheduling. Demonstrating the success of *Corner Gas* is a perfect example of successful Canadian television programming.

When asked about her extensive lobbying to preserve our Canadian voices on our television screens, she is humble. “It’s really just what I believe and what I’m happy doing. Our voice and our country’s national identity are tied to the arts. It is vitally important for us as Canadians to continue to grow and support what matters to us.”

With such a strong-voiced ensemble of actors promoting our culture to such an extensive audience, it would seem that the solution is simple. The reality is, however, that broadcasters still want to play the big-money game with one another, buying and selling companies to the highest bidder. What is to be done when those same broadcasters end up spending \$688 million in foreign programming in order to win ratings wars while local profits plummet? Since CHUM is on the verge of being bought out by CTV, and a new Groundbreaker Fund of sorts will surely be offered up for producers and creators, the impetus to lobby for more regulated funding might not be foremost on everyone’s mind. Perhaps *Corner Gas* has set more of a precedent for fundraising than anyone imagined: “Hey, listen, I can call anybody a jackass and they love it!” says Peterson. “On the street people ask me to call them a jackass... I could open a business where for five dollars I’d call you a jackass – not a kissing booth, a jackass booth!” Oscar Leroy to the rescue, just the way he would want it! ■



Holly Gauthier-Frankel is an ACTRA Montreal actor specializing in voice work and singing. She has served on Montreal Council for three years and writes a regular column for their branch newsletter *The Grapevine* called ‘It’s MY Damn Union!’

Amazed with Her

SARAH POLLEY'S DIRECTING DEBUT



Julie Christie and
Gordon Pinsent
in *Away from Her*.



Director
Sarah Polley

“There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.”

– RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Story by Chris Owens. Photos by Michael Gibson.

Away from Her marks the feature film debut of **Sarah Polley** as writer/director and it seems destined to do much more than survive. This assured film, filled with silence and subtlety, has already garnered critical praise from the Toronto International Film Festival and the Sundance Festival, and from screenings in Washington, Dallas, L.A., France and Berlin.

Based on *The Bear Came Over the Mountain* by Alice Munro, *Away from Her* tells the story of an adoring husband (**Gordon Pinsent**) who watches his spirited wife (**Julie Christie**) disappear into the unforgiving maze of Alzheimer’s disease. Polley came across the short story when she picked up a copy of the *New Yorker* seven years ago. “I completely fell in love with it. I just thought it was the most interesting and moving love story I’d ever read.”

Though daunted by the idea of adapting Munro, Polley always knew she wanted to write the screenplay herself. “That’s the thing I’m drawn to first and foremost. I always knew I wanted to be a writer in some context and for me, screenwriting is the most interesting part of the process.”

To guide her along, Polley imagined Pinsent as the husband, Grant. “I couldn’t see anybody else playing that part. A lot of writing the film alone in my room was imagining him and that was a lot of the joy of putting it together.”

When Pinsent was approached to play the part, he didn’t hesitate. “I got the screenplay and realized just how much work Sarah had done on it – how much further she had taken it. I’m just amazed with her. Where would you get a 28 year-old girl in Los Angeles that can do this?”

In addition to Christie and Pinsent, the ensemble cast includes **Olympia Dukakis**, **Kristen Thomson**, **Wendy Crewson** and **Michael Murphy**. Between them all they’ve won two Oscars, two BAFTAs, one Golden Globe, two Genies and 10 Gemini Awards. That’s a lot of hardware and experience entrusted to a first-time feature director. Just how did Polley approach the task? “As an actor what I’ve learned is that it doesn’t work when a director comes in with a single approach to dealing with every performer. I think that every actor requires such different things and has such different needs and has such a different process, that it felt like my job to try and ascertain as quickly as possible what that person needed and didn’t need from me and try to provide that.”

Pinsent appreciated the approach. “Sarah had a very special way of working with the actors. ‘Well, that was amazing’ she would say, ‘that was astonishing. Now then, let’s try this as well.’”

– continued on next page

Amazed with Her

– continued from previous page

As the film unfolds, we see Grant trying to grasp what is happening to his 50-year marriage, trying to understand what it all adds up to. “I think it raises more questions than it answers,” offers Polley. “For me what’s interesting about it is focusing on what happens after a lifetime together as opposed to what happens in the first five minutes of a relationship, which is what most films concentrate on, and how memory rules and drives you and informs the people you’ve become in relation to each other.”

Knowing life is unpredictable and that things may not add up as we think they should, the film raises questions about the very nature of our relationships and the necessity to cope with our fears. “It’s believing in great happiness when there is happiness, bliss, as Joseph Campbell has said” suggests Pinsent. “But you can’t just enjoy that guardedly. You just can’t do it. You have to give all to it and be happy to do so but be aware that Nature plays its tricks. Strange things happen.”

Though she grew up on film sets, what really prepared Polley for the task of stepping behind the camera on her first feature was several short films she directed. “I was a bit shell-shocked when I first made my short films to find out how little I knew about the process of making a film and how much I had to yet to learn. So I was glad I didn’t, you know, find that out on the first day of my feature!” Another difference between making the shorts and directing a full-length film? “The endurance – the length of time without sleep is kind of unbelievable.”

Was she ever concerned about how the subject matter might be received by potential audience members? “I was just drawn to it and it really moved me and I felt like it was really worth making the film. I try not to think too much about what reactions will be to things because the truth is you can’t anticipate them anyway and usually they’re the opposite of what you imagine they’ll be, so I tried to concentrate on what I was doing and not on what people might think.”

Having spent the past two years writing, directing and now promoting her film, Polley is busy preparing to step in front of



“I try not to think too much about what reactions will be to things because the truth is you can’t anticipate them and usually they’re the opposite of what you imagine they’ll be, so I tried to concentrate on what I was doing and not on what people might think.”

– SARAH POLLEY

the camera again. “I miss it a lot actually. It’s a strange feeling to be going back into that and exploring that part of my brain again. It just hasn’t been exercised in so long.” She’ll star opposite Jared Leto in *Mr. Nobody*, directed by Belgium’s Jaco van Dormael and she’ll play the daughter of U.S. President John Adams (Paul Giamatti) in a six-part HBO mini-series based on David McCullough’s bestselling biography, and directed by Tom Hooper. She has also been invited to serve as a jury member at this year’s Cannes Film Festival.

Many actors dream of a glamorous life in Hollywood. In 1999, Polley was a fan favorite at the Sundance Film Festival and her starring role in Atom Egoyan’s *The Sweet Hereafter* brought her considerable attention in the United States. Did she ever think of seeking her fortune south of the border? “You know, it never occurred to me. I think I’ve always been really happy here and really attached to Toronto and I think I’ve been very, very lucky that I’ve been able to stay here and work. I know that isn’t the case for everybody so I don’t begrudge anybody any other decision or path they take but for me, it was so much more fulfilling to stay here and work on indigenous projects as well as things elsewhere. I just have never had that desire. It’s never been part of what I’ve dreamt about to go to the States. It’s always been to have a career here.”

There is a school of thought that believes the best way to promote our film and television industry is to play the numbers game and to ‘give them more of what everyone else is giving them.’ To imitate, to copy, to hide our identity behind a familiar mask. The creation of *Away from Her* used the opposite approach. “It was very important for me in this film and I think in all my work to not disguise the fact that it is Canadian. I think we do a lot of that. Just think of the number of auditions most actors go to where they’ve got to make their accent disappear. You know, in so many ways we’re kind of colonized and I feel like when we do get the opportunity to make our own films and we’re lucky enough to do that, it doesn’t make sense to me to make it generic. I don’t



“We must believe that we are marvelous. (We) shouldn’t think in terms of just being a competitive, copycatting opportunity. We must stop thinking in terms of regionalism being a bad thing. Regionalism is as universal as anything as long as you stay with it.”

– GORDON PINSENT



Michael Murphy and Gordon Pinsent in *Away from Her*.

think that you make something universal by making it generic. I think you make it universal by being very specific and authentic to the place you’re representing. For me, I was very, very proud that this film was in the tradition of films that were not disguising their identity. When the film gets shown elsewhere people respond to a film that feels like it’s set in a very specific place. It’s not an obstacle for them. I think as Canadians we’re constantly worried about that and I don’t think it’s based on anything except our own, you know, insecurity.”

Pinsent echoes these thoughts. “We must believe that we are marvelous. This country shouldn’t think in terms of just being a competitive, copycatting opportunity. We can’t do that. We just can’t. We must stop thinking in terms of regionalism being a bad thing. Regionalism is as universal as anything as long as you stay with it.”

Away from Her is rich in both quality and Canadian content. Right now it is enjoying the kind of international reception that most filmmakers only dream about. If we really feel the need to copy something, why don’t we start with that? ■



Chris Owens has appeared in more than 40 television series and movies. He was nominated for a Genie Award for his performance in *The Uncles*. Recent credits

include *The Recruit*, *Rent-A-Goalie*, and the Universal Pictures release, *Breach*. He is the editor of ACTRA Toronto’s *Performers* magazine and lives and plays hockey in Toronto.

Actor-Mothers bringing up babies:

By Ruth Lawrence and Stacy Smith

'It was her first lead role and the first day on set. She woke up nervously excited but definitely ready for work. She had arranged for a fellow actor to take her eight year-old son, Luke, to classes on this special day. Creeping into the shower, she hoped to let him catch a few extra winks, but then heard the bathroom door open followed by the horrendous sounds of him being ill. From the other side of the curtain he croaked, "Mommy, I'm sick," and she was instantly soaked... with panic!'

That was me, actor-mother **Ruth Lawrence**, just few short years ago. I could not cancel, yet my son could not go anywhere in this condition. I'm sure many of you actor parents out there have shared these feelings of gut-wrenching guilt, mixed with professional reputation issues and economic survival instincts. First off, I called his father, a fellow actor who would understand the dilemma. But, he was booked too – he happened to have a day role on the same project. I anxiously called every friend I dared to at that hour. Twenty minutes later, I found Janet, a visual artist who lived close by. She had been incredibly generous to us in the past and, thankfully, was awake and available. I got to work on time, my son was nursed back to health and Janet has remained tops in our books for a long time.

In the last year, a group of us have helped to raise our ACTRA Women's Committee out of its long dormancy. Chronicles of sister actor-mothers have reached us from far and wide so **Stacy Smith** and I decided to write this article together and spread our tales of triumph.

Martha Irving's credits include the CBS MOW, *Candles on Bay Street*, the feature film *Pushing Up Daisies* and she played Mrs. James Cross opposite R.H. Thomson in the CBC miniseries, *October 1970*. She put it best when she told Stacy, "Being a mom puts everything in perspective. Before I had Maddie, I was very self-absorbed about work. But after you have a child and you come home at 6:00 p.m. from a rehearsal and they need you, everything else drops away."

Martha and husband Michael Higgins decided to home-school their daughter, 13 year-old Maddie. Martha felt this was easiest for all of them, "Maddie is disciplined and does her schooling on her own time. So when I am not on set we can work on projects together, or just hang out. It's far less stressful than spending evenings after rehearsals on homework."

As for most parents, the toughest parenting times are in the early years. "Whenever I got a call for an audition,

the first thought was always, 'child care!' If you're not getting paid for the audition, then it's hard to pay for the babysitter. When your kids are young, you really need help from family, friends, and neighbours. My husband, being self-employed, is sometimes available, but the pre-school years were

"Whenever I got a call for an audition, the first thought was always, 'child care!' If you're not getting paid for the audition, then it's hard to pay for the babysitter."

– MARTHA IRVING

Ruth Lawrence and son Luke Lawrence.



Mom's inconvenient "hobby"

definitely the hardest. We're very lucky we have an understanding casting director here in the Maritimes."

Actor **Linda Goranson** and her friends coped with the child care challenge by banding together. "When our kids were young, our actor friends had a sort of babysitting group. If one of us had an audition, we helped each other out,

the kids with you on the job is wonderful... and it is really, really difficult. I have been enormously fortunate to have had great babysitters, including my mother who has been able to travel with me."

Wendy's children have even worked beside her. Jack, now 14, recently joined his mother in Romania on her recent shoot. "He's working as an extra in a big special

Actor-mothers invent ways to cope, so once you get the job, your support team can take on many forms. Wendy also recognizes the acts of kindness from many fine industry professionals over the years. "Maggie's first haircut was in a makeup trailer. Jack's first Oreo was at a craft service table – thank heavens for all those patient crew and cast



June Crewson, Maggie Murphy, Wendy Crewson and Jack Murphy.

"Jack was only three days old when we flew to NY, where I auditioned for The Good Son... 'Get used to it, kid.'"

– WENDY CREWSON

which I think is so cool."

Wendy Crewson is instantly recognizable for her numerous roles in *Sex Traffic*, *24* and *ReGenesis*. When she picked up her ACTRA Award of Excellence at the Toronto awards gala in February of this year, she laughingly referred to her stellar career as, "Mom's inconvenient hobby." While we're all aware that her work is incredibly important both to her and to the industry, Wendy has successfully dealt with her mother-actor dual role. She explains, "The kids have always come along with me, though less so as they've grown older... Jack was only three days old when we flew to N.Y., where I auditioned for *The Good Son*... 'Get used to it, kid.'" Wendy added, "As any working mother will tell you, having

effects scene we're shooting now. We're all bundled in several layers, fake snow flying and the set thick with fog. As I brace for another take, sweat dripping down my back and gagging on a mouthful of paper snow, I look over to see him under his refugee blanket, grinning like a fool. Thank goodness one of us is having fun!"

co-workers who have worked miracles. Thanks to those great grips who run around during their lunch hours playing Super Soaker, to those lovely drivers who have ferried and shuttled my kin, and to those continuity gals who have donated an endless amount of entertaining polaroids. – *continued on page 19*



ACTRA Newfoundland member and National Councillor **Ruth Lawrence** and ACTRA Maritimes member **Stacy Smith** are both active on ACTRA's national Women's Committee. To learn more about ACTRA's Women's Committee, please contact Committee Chair Ruth Lawrence at rlawrence@actra.ca.

UBCP at 'Canada's Sundance'

By Keith Martin Gordey

As film festivals go, Whistler 2006

was on the smallish to medium size: four days, November 30 to December 3, 94 films screened (53 shorts and 41 mid-length to feature films) with a total film attendance of 6,100. But in terms of potential value to the Canadian independent film industry, its impact may prove much greater. Though it couldn't boast the numbers of festivals like Toronto, Sundance or Cannes, that didn't keep Norman Jewison from describing it as Canada's Sundance. If Sundance is the marketplace for American independent film, then perhaps Whistler is becoming the marketplace for Canadian independent film. Looking at the program, where fully 60, almost two thirds, of the films were Canadian (two were Canadian co-pros) you might come to such a conclusion.

The Whistler Film Festival has much to commend it. The setting is magnificent, Whistler at the start of the ski season, with world class accommodation and restaurants and the relaxed atmosphere created by boarders and skiers either excited to be on their way up the hill or tired and rejuvenated as they come down. I was not the only

festival goer plotting to get up on those sunny, white slopes. Something, alas, I just couldn't find time to do. Instead I was busy with the three main activities at the festival: the films; the Filmmaker Forum workshops, Doc Talk, International Sessions, Pitch Fest West, the Keynote Luncheon, and the schmoozing (or networking as some like to call it) at various industry functions.

A crowd of 1,200 flocked to the gala opening film, *Let It Ride!* (world premiere) which later won the Best Mountain Culture Film Award, an indication that the Whistler Film Festival is a product of its mountain resort locale. Almost everything connected to the festival takes place in and around the 'Village' which was designed with walking as the sole mode of transportation. This dynamic has the subtle but curious effect of making the festival quite egalitarian. No one arrives in a limo, they just walk up in their parkas and toques and everyone seems more relaxed, more open and more approachable. As a result, there is an ease of conversation that I suspect helped more than one filmmaker connect with a distributor or financier.

You could always find one or more of us at our Industry Booth at the Filmmaker Forum pointing out to young filmmakers the advantages of hiring experienced union actors.

With that end in mind, UBCP hosted its annual High Performance Cocktail Party, a low-key, invite-only event at the Falcon's Nest, one of the exquisite mountain properties of Whistler Dream Accommodations.

UBCP, the BC Branch of ACTRA, was a Bronze Sponsor of the Festival, but its participation and presence went quite beyond that. You could always find one or more of us at our Industry Booth at the Filmmaker Forum pointing out to young filmmakers the advantages of hiring experienced union actors. And when we weren't up on the hill with our ski team (**William B. Davis, Conchita Campbell, Jason Barbeck and Joely Collins**) at the Celebrity Ski Challenge race we were down in the Village Square with our annual UBCP Snowman Fund Event raising money for the B.C. Heart and Stroke Foundation.

On the industry events side, UBCP and Citytv co-sponsored the Short Script Analysis and Competition where *Oppenheimer Park* by Adam Higgs won the \$5,000 development prize from Citytv and the Cinecity Initiative. UBCP also presented the Actors' Panel hosted by **Ben Ratner** (*Mount Pleasant, Da Vinci's Inquest*) where **Fred Ewanuick** (*Corner Gas, Love and Other Dilemmas, The Delicate Art of Parking*), **Brendan Fletcher** (*R.V., Tideland, Paper Moon Affair, Freddy vs. Jason*), **Patrick Gallagher** (*Sideways, Master and*

UBCP members Brenda Crichlow and Joely Collins at the Celebrity Ski Race.



Andy Dittich/Whistler Film Festival



Rob Morton, UBCP Treasurer and staffer Monika Small personing the UBCP booth at the Whistler Film Festival.

Commander, Severed) and **Nicholas Lea** (*American Venus, Butterfly On A Wheel, Vice, Moving Malcolm*) shared stories from their careers as actors in Canada. Following this UBCP presented a Feature Script Reading from Nicholas Racz's *The Igloo*, a script that came out of the Whistler Film Festival's summer Feature Script development workshop. It was a treat to see how thrilled the writers and producers were when they saw and heard their scripts come to life with the actors' staged 'reading' of them. It brought to mind something that **Walter (Wally) Marsh** (founding member of ACRA, which later became ACTRA) encouraged me to do. He said, "Never forget, every single person on that set is there to do one thing – record the actor's performance." The Borsos Competition awards for Best Actor, **Andrew W. Walker** for *Steel Toes* (B.C. premiere) and Best Actress, **Catherine de Lean** for *The Secret Life of Happy People*, were sponsored by UBCP and presented by **Christine Willes** and **Rob Morton** at the Awards Brunch. ■



Keith Martin Gordey makes his living, such as it is, as an actor in film and television. He serves on the boards of UBCP and PAL Vancouver. A snowboarder, he is a "Grey on a Tray."

Actor-Mothers bringing up babies

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Kudos to the directors who've kindly allowed kids to sit by the monitors offering their valued opinions on scenes, such as, "I think that looked a bit fakey."

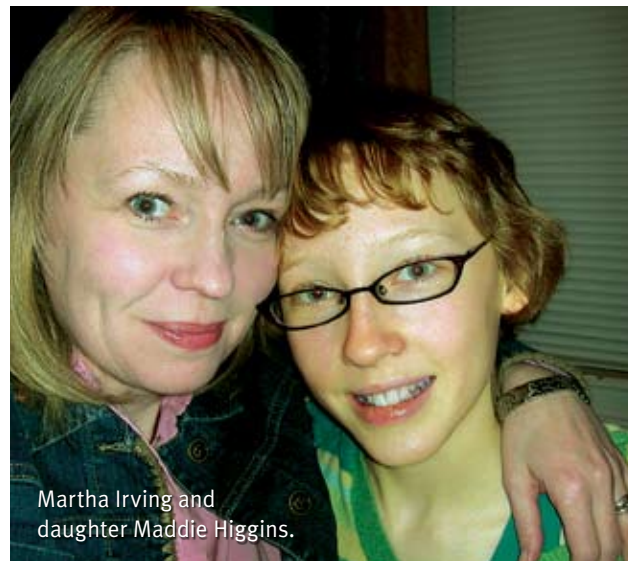
"You could always tell which trailer was mine by the general uproar," Wendy added. "Some kid hit like *Monster Mash* would be playing full blast with my kids shrieking, jumping, and spilling chocolate milk and Cheerios all over the floor. I would barricade myself in the bathroom to change and work on the next scene. Ah, the glamour..."

The alluring beauty of motherhood is easily expressed by Martha. "It is important for your child to see you doing things you love, to see you fulfilled by doing a job that you are truly passionate about. When I was young my father travelled a lot with his bureaucratic job that he did not really enjoy. Eventually he quit and moved on to direct theatre – the change I saw in him was enormous. You have to invest time in yourself by doing what you love to do, and my goal is to pass this on to Maddie."

Whether we're actors or not, we all want what's best for our children. Wendy, who has used her keen sense of humour to guide her through some trying parental moments, wraps up our story beautifully. "Sitting with Maggie one day in a preschool class, the children were all talking about their parents' jobs... lots of stories of doctors,

"It is important for your child to see you doing things you love, to see you fulfilled by doing a job that you are truly passionate about."

– MARTHA IRVING



Martha Irving and daughter Maddie Higgins.

teachers, etc. Maggie sat with a worried look on her sweet face and when her turn came up she sighed and said that her 'Mom pretended to be other kids' moms'. Dear God, I thought, my poor kids will be in therapy for years."

Fear not, sisters, *Mommie Dearest* is not slated for a sequel from anyone in our membership anytime soon. ■

A hand holding a small Canadian flag against a dark red background. The flag is slightly blurred, suggesting movement. The hand is in the lower right foreground, gripping the black flagpole. The background is a solid, deep red color.

CITIZEN CBC

One Canadian's view of the CBC and what it should be

By David Sparrow

I saw the country and was exposed to its regional flavors all in the comfort of my own living room. It was available commercial-free from 'The Rock' in the east to 'The Island' in the west and it spoke Canadian to Canadians. It reflected our values, our concerns and our dreams. Our public broadcaster told *our stories*.

My first memories of the CBC are

in black and white. I grew up in front of a General Electric console television set that my dad put on castors so it could be moved quickly away from the wall to replace a blown tube. Three stations came in clearly, but the one we watched most was the CBC. *Mr. Dressup*, *The Friendly Giant*, *The Pig and Whistle*, *This Hour Has Seven Days*, *The Irish Rovers*, *Tommy Hunter*, *Wayne and Shuster*, *The Forest Rangers*, *Hockey Night in Canada*, *The Beachcombers*... the staples of my childhood. In many ways they moulded my first Canadian identity. I saw the country and was exposed to its regional flavors all in the comfort of my own living room. It was available commercial-free from 'The Rock' in the east to 'The Island' in the west and it spoke Canadian to Canadians. It reflected our values, our concerns and our dreams. Our public broadcaster told our stories.

As the 1960s fast-forwarded to the 21st century, more channels came on the scene, lots of channels, great channels... American channels carrying *The Mod Squad*, *The Streets of San Francisco*, *Cheers* and *Seinfeld*. These were exciting shows and soon I wasn't watching nearly as much CBC. Anyway, the CBC had changed. Now they were running commercials and running some American programming including U.S. sit-coms because they needed to compete. They were cutting down on in-house production because they needed to compete. They even built a brand-new CBC headquarters in downtown Toronto – fancy offices, new studios, and a giant airy atrium. Competitive, huh? I'm not even sure who they needed to compete with, in that they were a public, government-sanctioned, taxpayer-supported network – a Crown Corporation.

As I understand their funding based on published 2003-04 numbers, the CBC (that's Radio, TV, *Newsworld*, CBC World Service, French and English) receives more than \$850 million from you and me every year. They sell another \$280 million worth of advertising time. And between specialty channels and other sources, they bring in another \$225 million. That's \$1.35 billion, and it sounds like a lot, but in the new multi-platform universe and with their vast mandate, the CBC simply can't compete. Of course, being competitive resulted in their loss of the Olympics and their near loss of *Hockey Night in Canada*. And being competitive causes them to acquire/create lots of low-budget Canadian programming, largely sketch comedy... mostly sketch comedy. Okay, yes... but *Da Vinci* and *This is Wonderland* were both cancelled. The point is the CBC cannot be everything for everyone, not unless it is embraced by Canadians and better supported.

We need the CBC. If the CBC were to cease to exist, we would lose our culture to the United States faster than the folks at *CSI* can identify their next body. Recent history teaches that we can't rely on the CRTC to enforce its mandate and we can't rely on private broadcasters to conduct business for any reason other than the almighty dollar. The privates make much of their money by re-broadcasting American TV shows and their news shows are increasingly using clips from American network news to tell international stories. They even buy up American shows that they intend not to air in order to stop other Canadian broadcasters from airing them and then they cry poor when asked to produce an original Canadian drama in primetime. How wasteful.

And, before you say it, Canadians will watch Canadian programming... if it's good. To get good programming, stand-out programming, you've got to make a lot of new programming and then promote the hell out of it, just like the Americans do. It'll take a little money and a lot of faith, but when you're in a battle for your very identity there's going to be a little painful adjustment before the celebration.

It's time for the CBC to begin again to reflect, project and protect Canadian culture, identity and creativity. They don't need to be competitive. They don't need to be profit-driven. They can allow the producers they work with to be profit-driven and they can simply provide the funding, the oversight and the medium.

We've got to keep telling great Canadian stories – funny, heartfelt, dangerous, imaginative Canadian stories. A strong, vibrant CBC is the best place to tell them. THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT PRIVATE BROADCASTERS SHOULD BE LET OFF THE HOOK. No, no, no. They are granted access to Canadian homes under the proviso they produce their share of home-grown drama, news and entertainment and we must not allow our government to allow them to forget it. So let's get excited about what a well-funded, properly structured, fully accountable CBC can be and let the government know that we want it and we're willing to pay for it. ■



Currently on ACTRA National Council, **David Sparrow** has been acting for almost 20 years and is happy to be giving something back to the union that has supported his career so well. A proud Canadian, he has committed to all of ACTRA's major policy campaigns.



Mr. Dressup with Casey and Finnegan in the late 1960s.



Bob Homme as *The Friendly Giant* (1960s).



Wayne & Shuster Special: *Once upon a Giant*, 1988.



The Forest Rangers in the 1960s.



The Beachcombers in the early 1980s.

OUR POLICY INITIATIVES

Get active... or go home

By Richard Hardacre, ACTRA's National President

Revolutionary thinking, usually born late at night

in smokey rooms, lubricated with local wine and beer often is just... well, revolutionary imaginings. Many of us were introduced to the teachings and speeches of William Lyon Mackenzie, Thomas Payne or even Marx (not Groucho, but him too) by our teachers of history. In our teens and early 20s anything was possible, anything else was preferable. The status quo had to be challenged if our world was to change for the better. Some, whether we call them teachers or visionaries, never release their desire for beneficial change. Thank goodness for them.

Achieving any change in the policies of a government is a bit like trying to change the world. It takes revolutionary thinking and long-term action. The upside is that a limited level of transformation just might be possible. For years ACTRA has lobbied our federal legislators and bureaucrats to advance the health of our industry and thereby advance the interests of our members. That has long been one of the goals of our union.

Over the past five years we became more focused and energized in one overall direction. In June of 2002 we convened a National Policy Conference, an exercise that committed ACTRA to focus on two policy fronts: Canadian content on television and in our



Sonja Smits and ACTRA Toronto members confronting then Finance Minister John Manley outside a Liberal fundraiser in April 2003, to protest the \$25 million cut from the Canadian Television Fund (CTF) in Manley's budget.

cinemas, and, clearly related to that, the goal to improve income security for performers. Much of what we have done since, from our lobby work to our collective bargaining has been developed to build on that policy conference decision.

The chronology of our national campaign to build a Canadian industry and to make advancements for the security of income for performers is now long and growing longer. (See timeline below.)

Among the many mileposts along the way, some obvious examples stand out:

- **Paul Gross'** June, 2002 speech at an ACTRA Toronto members' conference led to coverage by Canadian media and a weekend feature in the *Globe and Mail*, and an article by TV columnist John Doyle with the quote: "A country without a healthy diet of continuing, home-grown drama is lacking in the fibre of contemporary storytelling. In every country that has even the vaguest notion of a culture and identity, there is a distinct link between the idea of itself and the fictive

Highlights from ACTRA's Public Policy Campaign for Canadian Drama

JUNE 2002

ACTRA National Policy Conference commits to focus on two policy fronts: Canadian content and income security for performers. ACTRA launches a web-based letter writing campaign on the TV drama issue to MPs across Canada.

OCTOBER 2002

Former CRTC Chair Charles Dalfen asks former CTV Exec Trina McQueen to develop a proposal on how to bring more Canadian drama to our television screens. Dalfen addresses ACTRA Toronto's conference in November on the TV drama issue.

FEBRUARY 2003

Liberal Finance Minister John Manley brings down budget increasing Foreign Service Production Tax Credit, coupled with a \$25 million annual cut to the Canadian Television Fund (CTF). ACTRA news release welcomes PSTC, denounces CTF cut.

APRIL 2003

ACTRA stages information picket outside Liberal fundraiser to pressure John Manley to restore funds to the CTF.

MAY 2003

ACTRA's first big lobby day on Parliament Hill. Four questions

on our issue are directed at then Heritage Minister Sheila Copps during Question Period, and ACTRA performers receive a standing ovation from the House of Commons. ACTRA achieves significant national media coverage.

ACTRA DVD's go to all MPs with a message from Paul Gross: "To suggest that the Canadian television business is in peril is a hilarious understatement. This is a catastrophic collapse. We are in free fall. Every other industrialized nation in the world is moving toward increased domestic production.



Keith Martin Gordey, Jackson Davies, Christine Willes, Donnelly Rhodes, Joy Coghill, Rob Morton and UBCP President Howard Storey spoke out in Vancouver on the crisis of Canadian television drama during the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) convention in November 2006.

ACTRA's news conference in Ottawa in October 2003 urged the federal government to address the crisis in Canadian television drama. (Left to right:) Paul Gross, Rick Mercer and Wendy Crewson.

imagination. A country is simply inauthentic if its stories are not reflected back to itself." (John Doyle, Globe and Mail, July 18, 2002)

- April 2003, 200 ACTRA members along with other cultural workers staged an information picket outside a Liberal fundraiser in Toronto in order to pressure former Finance Minister John Manley to restore funds to the CTF. We sang *O Canada* as Manley arrived. "These cuts are unacceptable," said **Sonja Smits**. "We're here to tell Manley directly, restore the \$25 million cut to the CTF." (Half of the cut was restored by the government two months later.)
- The strong message to protect our culture delivered by ACTRA UBCP members at their press conference in November, 2006, while the big (and rich) private broadcasters held their annual congress in Vancouver.
- Wide national media coverage in the same month of ACTRA members speaking out on the opening day of the CRTC's TV

policy hearings. Our performers drew all the major media out of the hearing room to hear our case for a broadcasting policy that must include Canadian production of scripted stories in network primetime. We left no doubt that we were not going to let up on our campaign for an industry that builds an authentic cultural identity. These are only a few of the obvious mileposts but every step is important because every policy initiative gains ground by keeping our issues alive and moving forward.

The strength of any organization, and certainly any union, depends upon commitment to singleness of purpose – individuals with a common interest united in a common goal. ACTRA succeeded in its bargaining with independent producers this year, and we operate like this in our policy initiatives as well. ACTRA pursues its policy goals – keeping Canadian culture and our identity alive on film and television – right alongside directors, writers, technicians and the very same producers because, despite differences we may – *continued on next page*

Canada alone is moving in the opposite direction – toward oblivion."

JUNE 2003

Clifford Lincoln's Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage report on Canadian broadcasting released. ACTRA gets credit for its work on cultural issues: "Since last year, ACTRA has taken a lead

role in just about every major cultural issue concerning performing arts in Canada." *Playback* editorial, June 21, 2003.

OCTOBER 2003

ACTRA lobbies Parliament Hill, holds a national press conference and meets with MPs throughout the day. ACTRA calls on the federal

government to take action to save dramatic programming.

FEBRUARY 2004

Broadcasters double their profits in 2003 while drama continues to die. ACTRA hits at broadcasters and the CRTC – notes the appalling news of the cancellation of *Blue Murder* and *Cold Squad*.

MARCH 2004

More than 500 ACTRA members respond to letter campaign to Finance Minister calling for restoration of the CTF in the federal Budget. Finance Minister Ralph Goodale announces that the CTF will be restored to \$100 million for the next two years.

– *continued on next page*

Why should we care?

In 1999 there were twelve 13-episode, one-hour Canadian dramas on over-the-air television channels including the CBC. *Why are there so few today?*

OUR POLICY INITIATIVES

– continued from previous page

have, ultimately we all want the same thing – a healthy film and television industry in which we can earn a living for what we love to do – being creative.

Have we been successful? I shudder to think of where we might be if we hadn't spearheaded the Coalition of Canadian Audio-visual Unions (CCAU) with the directors, writers, and technicians. Everyone now knows there is a crisis in Canadian drama because we made them know it. Have we had victories in the skirmishes, and is there success in sight? You bet. As long as we don't abandon our goal or lose our focus.

What does the future look like? What are we doing tomorrow and the next week, the week after that, and for the coming year? Well, we will stay focused on the campaign for homegrown drama – it remains the number one issue. In coming months there will be a decision from the CRTC on broadcasting policy. After that there will be the lengthy process of broadcast licence renewals for CTV and Global. ACTRA and our coalition partners will make formal, concerted interventions to argue for more drama. With our partners, we have become the vanguard in this campaign; other groups are watching, fingers crossed. But we, the performers, have become the strongest catalyst for change.

Before those licence renewals ACTRA will be at the CRTC to intervene in the review of CTV's purchase of CHUM. Our argument is with the alarming trend towards the consolidation of power in media. The issue is about drama; this time to raise the alarm that in this media feeding frenzy there must be no reduced opportunity for homegrown stories. In fact ACTRA will be asking the CRTC to take a second look at the value CTV is putting on the CHUM assets because we think there may be a deliberate undervaluation. If that is so, there would



Courtesy of The Toronto Star

In April 2005, Sarah Polley appeared for ACTRA before the Heritage Committee's hearings on feature film policy. She held up a newspaper movie schedule with U.S. films highlighted in blue to show how U.S. films dominate Canadian screens.

be less money spent on Canadian drama. CTV must offer a benefits package of 10% of the purchase value of CHUM to receive approval of this transaction. We are asking for more. A benefits package is money to be spent to improve the quality and content of Canadian broadcasting. *Corner Gas* was a product of CTV's last benefits package in 2000. But one success does not build a culture on its own. We are telling the CRTC that this time CTV must spend more money to make more successes like *Corner Gas*.

This past winter, the television industry breathed a sigh of relief after last rites were almost given, when Minister Oda finally announced a renewal of the CTF for two years. The CTF provides essential seed money for the development and production of Canadian dramas. But there's no reason to celebrate. There should be an increased level of support in this fund and ACTRA will continue to pursue the government, whatever stripe it may be, to commit more to the CTF.

Highlights from ACTRA's Public Policy Campaign for Canadian Drama

JUNE 2005

At the Banff TV Fest ACTRA and the WGC, DGC and CEP present a report on the drama issue entitled "The need for a Regulatory Safety Net" recommending regulation of Canada's private broadcasters to require spending of 7% of revenues on new Canadian

dramas and the scheduling of them in 'real' primetime. Heritage Minister Liza Frulla lays out a cultural agenda at Banff, including news that the CRTC must review its policies, including the disastrous 1999 Television Policy, during licence renewals of major private broadcasters.

NOVEMBER 2005

ACTRA/USW hold a successful joint lobby, meeting with over 90 cabinet ministers and MPs from all parties on Parliament Hill. Joint messages include proposals for fixing regulations of the CRTC and maintaining existing limits to foreign ownership of media.

DECEMBER 2005

A federal election is called and ACTRA asks political parties to respond to a questionnaire on culture. ACTRA sends all members an election postcard with the message – *Election 2006: Vote for our cultural future*, urging them to contact their local

candidates with ACTRA's election questions. In January 2006 ACTRA holds a star-studded press conference that successfully raises the issue of culture in the press during the federal election.

OCTOBER 2006

ACTRA testifies at the annual

pre-budget hearings at the finance committee in Ottawa. ACTRA asks the committee to increase and renew the CTF as well as increase funding for Telefilm and the CBC. The finance committee recommends many of ACTRA's requests in their December 2006 report.



Jonathan Hayward

Raoul Bhaneja, Arlene Duncan, Tina Keeper, Liberal Member of Parliament for Churchill, Heritage Critic and ACTRA member, and National President Richard Hardacre at the House of Commons. Raoul, Arlene and Richard presented on behalf of ACTRA at the April 2007 CBC TV Hearings in Ottawa.

I met with ACTRA member **Tina Keeper**, MP for Churchill, Manitoba, and Liberal Heritage critic, to brief her on our important issues. I discussed these goals with MP Charlie Angus, Heritage critic for the NDP and crusader for Canadian culture. I have continued to have similar conversations with Mr. Maka Kotto, a poet and member of Union des Artistes, who sits on the Heritage Committee for the Bloc Quebecois. And we have had frequent discussions with Bev Oda, the Minister of Heritage. Along with many of our members, I plan to continue these meetings. We will not let any of our elected representatives be uncertain of ACTRA's goals.

ACTRA also made a formal presentation to the full Heritage Committee in Ottawa in April to tell them it is essential to keep the CBC strong and competitive. ACTRA's branches made similar appeals to the committee in their own cities. We argued that the public broadcaster must have secure, stable and increased funding if it is to develop quality Canadian drama. We want the parliamentarians



Chris Cornish

Artists including actors, writers and dancers staged a demonstration called an "awakening" on Parliament Hill in April 2007 in an effort to persuade Prime Minister Stephen Harper to restore funding for the promotion of Canadian artists abroad. (Left to right:) National Councillor Barry Blake, Ottawa Councillor Rick Kaulbars, Brian Stewart, R.H. Thomson, Ottawa President Thelma Farmer, National President Richard Hardacre, and Paul Whitney.

to recommend that the CBC receive more public money to air more Canadian stories.

Foreign media behemoths don't care about our culture or our identity. Why should they? They're content to make their profits, not only by driving cheaply produced reality programming on to our screens, but by letting stories be told to us by others who know next to nothing of what it takes to make a culture north of the 49th parallel.

Plans are underway for ACTRA to meet with officials of the Heritage Department, the CRTC and Telefilm at the television festival in Banff this June, where I will be joined by Toronto President **Karl Pruner** and UBCP President **Howard Storey**.

Together with them, and many from the ranks of our membership, including some of the most prominent performers in Canada, we continue to lead our union in its energetic campaign to protect our airwaves, to build our culture on our screens and in new media, and to allow Canadian content to be secure from foreign domination. ■

NOVEMBER 2006

ACTRA/UBCP performers hold a media event across the street from the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) convention in Vancouver. The media left the convention to hear ACTRA/UBCP tell them that the Canadian English drama campaign is a national one that will be carried

across Canada to the CRTC policy hearings in December 2006.

ACTRA appears at the opening day of the CRTC TV policy hearings and holds a press scrum outside the hearing room. National exposure is achieved for ACTRA's campaign to restore English-language Canadian drama to our TV screens. The

next week ACTRA testifies before the CRTC and reminds them that Canada's private broadcasters pay the lowest licence fees of any private broadcasters in the developed nations.

FEBRUARY 2007

ACTRA participates in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage followed by a meeting with Liberal

Heritage Critic and ACTRA member Tina Keeper.

MARCH 2007

CRTC's Broadcasting Report confirms that Canadian broadcasters are decreasing their spending on Canadian drama while rapidly filling Canadian airwaves with foreign programming. The CTF funding

is restored for a further two years, but with no increase.

APRIL 2007

ACTRA members present at the CBC mandate review before the Heritage Committee, following the appearance of other branches before the committee as it travelled across the country. ACTRA asserted to the Parliamentarians

of the committee that the CBC's mandate to air home-grown drama must be supported. To achieve this mandate, increased stable funding must be allocated to a properly managed CBC.

For a complete chronology on ACTRA's Public Policy Campaign go to www.actra.ca.

applause



Courtesy of CARAS/Photo Inc.

Kudos to our Juno Award winner Tom Jackson!

Tom Jackson received the 2007 Humanitarian Award on March 31 in Saskatoon for his unwavering support for Canada's hungry and underprivileged. The Canadian Academy of Arts and Sciences' (CARAS) recognized an outstanding Canadian artist who has positively contributed to the social landscape of Canada. Tom lunched his first Huron Carole concert in 1987 to support Canada's food banks, and has continued to touch communities across the nation with the concert tour for 18 years. In addition to initiating many more benefit fundraisers, he has helped raise more than \$9 million for food banks, family service agencies and disaster relief.

Known for his role as Chief Peter Kenidi in the CBC hit *North of 60*, Jackson's TV credits include *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Law & Order* and *The Diviners*. He has recorded 14 albums, written and produced volumes of music including the acclaimed CD *That Side of the Window* which earned him a Juno Award nomination in 1997. Jackson has been recognized with many awards for his humanitarian efforts including the National Aboriginal Achievement Award, named one of Canada's best activists by *Time* magazine, and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2000.

For information on the Juno Awards go to www.junoawards.ca.

Congrats to our 2007 Genie Award winners

On February 13 the Canadian film industry celebrated its finest in Canadian movies. This year's winners include the following ACTRA members:

Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role: **Roy Dupuis** in *The Rocket*.

Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role: **Stephen McHattie** in *The Rocket*.

Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role: **Julie Le Breton** in *The Rocket*.

Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role: **Carrie-Anne Moss** in *Snow Cake*.

For a complete list of winners, please go to www.geminiawards.ca.



Courtesy of The Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television



Aura Pithart, Joy Coghill, Janet Wright and Marie Morton.

Pauline Buck

The Sam Payne Awards honour two outstanding UBCP/ACTRA members

The 24th Annual Sam Payne Awards were presented in Vancouver on February 23. **Janet Wright** won the Sam Payne Lifetime Achievement Award which recognizes a union member's accumulative outstanding body of work in the industry. The versatility of Janet's talent has taken her from drama to comedy, and all the stops in between, including acting in theatre, television and film, and directing in many major theatres across Canada. Currently Janet plays Emma

in *Corner Gas*. **Marie Morton** was presented with The Sam Payne Award for humanity, artistic integrity and encouragement of new talent. For 18 years, Marie was one of the talent agency movers and shakers in Vancouver. Clients included such fledgling actors as **Michael J. Fox**, **Ian Tracey**, and **Aura Pithart**. She re-instated her ACTRA membership and now enjoys working with her former clients on set as a background performer. The Sam Payne Awards were established in 1984.

We share our sadness at the passing of the following colleagues:

DENNY DOHERTY

1940 – 2007

Denny Doherty passed away on January 19, at his home in Mississauga, Ontario. He was 66. The world knew Denny as the dreamy tenor in *The Mamas and The Papas*, one of the greatest vocal groups in the history of popular music. He had the gift – a beautiful voice that cut through to the heart of you.

Denny was a Maritimer and a North End Haligonian to boot. After the rock and roll rollercoaster came to a halt, he returned home and started a new career as an actor on stage, film, radio and television. He stole our hearts as the bootlegger rogue in Paul Ledoux's *North Mountain Breakdown*. Audiences fell out of their seats laughing when he played opposite John Neville in Sean O'Casey's *The End of The Beginning*. He was funny and real and grounded on stage and Halifax embraced him as a hometown hero.

His easy charm and playful spirit made him the perfect host of the childrens' television series, *Theodore Tugboat*, and he developed a huge fan base among children who had no idea The Harbour Master was a rock and roll superstar.

Denny and his wife, Jeanette, and their young family, Emberly and John, arrived in Toronto in the mid-'80s. He appeared on stage frequently (*Fire*, *The Secret Garden*, *Needfire*) while establishing himself as a leading voice actor – his voice credits number in the hundreds and hundreds – but he continued to return 'home' to star in the film and series *Pit Pony*. In 1996 he and long-time friend Paul Ledoux created the one man show, *Dream A Little Dream: the nearly true story of The Mamas and The Papas*. Denny did the show for the next 10 years, including a Toronto production that was nominated for five Dora Mavor Moore Awards, a five-month run Off-Broadway and a held-over run at The Cleveland Playhouse. Denny's last performance was early December in Rockville, Maryland.

Nicola Lipman says, "Denny had great instincts as an actor." And it's true. He didn't train as an actor – or a singer for that matter. He just knew how to do it. And he made us laugh and he made us... melt.

– Ferne Downey



Courtesy of the Michael Ochs Archive.

CHARMION KING

1925 – 2007

My mother, **Charmion King**, was divine in so many ways. Professionally, she shone on stage, TV and film, from her beginnings at Hart House and in London, England in the late '40s early '50s, to being a founding member of the Crest Theatre, to Broadway and lastly Soulpepper.

A lifetime of plays too numerous to mention. Although theatre was her main focus, she will always be remembered for her performances in such productions as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Traders*, the films *Nobody Waved Goodbye* and *Last Night*, and CBC's radio series *Rumours and Boarders* to name a few.

That said, what she was truly known for was her beauty, her grace, her laughter, her huge support of the arts in Canada and her great friendship to so many fortunate to have known her. She had such wonderful generosity expressed in her teaching young actors at George Brown to always lending a helpful hand whenever a friend was in need. It's been since her passing that I have come to learn this even more than I did before. For instance, there were times when she'd get a call to play a role in something, and if she thought she wasn't right for it, she would immediately recommend a fellow actress she thought was better. Not every artist would act so unselfishly, but that was the epitome of her spirit.

For me, I am proud to say, she was not only my mother but she was truly my best friend. Almost every day of my life I was lucky to hear her voice or see her beautiful face. Whenever I needed a shoulder or an ear, she'd be the first to call and would always be there for me no matter what. As anyone who has ever lost someone they cared so deeply for, we know how difficult and painful their absence can be. Knowing this, I would like to say how proud I am of my father. He has been handling such a great loss. It's because of her we try to be strong when remembering her and how she wanted us to live our lives, embracing it, moving forward and not in mourning. We are both grateful for the overwhelming number of truly heartfelt condolences, and, as a result, put together "a tribute to our Charm," since she requested there be no funeral. It was held at the Soulpepper Theatre on April 20, 2007. Also, we want to thank ACTRA for its tremendous support of both Dad and I during these sad times.

Mommy, you might have been the "grand dame" of Canadian theatre, but will always be the shining light in our hearts. We love you and will miss you always.

– Leah Pinsent



SASKATCHEWAN

We are currently in the process of refining

Saskatchewan's Status of the Artist legislation. A panel of MLAs of both the governing NDP and the opposition Saskatchewan Party have conducted hearings on the new legislation that arose out of the Minister's SOA Advisory Committee. Our former council member **Kent Allen** and our Branch Representative **Mike Burns** served on the Minister's Advisory Committee. On the whole, the proposed legislation is laudable, giving artists many of the benefits that accrue to other members of society. The legislative committee examined the most contentious issues within the proposed legislation – the labour provisions. ACTRA's delegation at the legislative committee pointed out the importance of protecting national agreements when creating new provincial labour provisions.

ACTRA Saskatchewan is 40 years old this year! Our council and members will be celebrating this great milestone in the fall.

Ken Thompson, ACTRA's National Director of Public Policy, recommended a solid and detailed intervention on the Status Hearings and was involved in facilitating this essential initiative. ACTRA Toronto's Executive Director **Brian Topp** brilliantly assisted us in preparing for the meetings. We established that our first responsibility was to "do no harm" to the agreements that are already working. The "grandfathering" of our agreement into the legislation can be accomplished by the ministerial designation of our agreement (and others). The legislation could allow the local branches to designate a bargaining agent to act on its behalf. In our case, that would mean that ACTRA Saskatchewan could designate ACTRA National as its bargaining agent. We were pleased with our presentation and look forward to positive action from our government that will hopefully benefit all of our artists.

Other big news... ACTRA Saskatchewan is 40 years old this year! Our council and members will be celebrating this great milestone in the fall.



Alan Bratt
President
ACTRA Saskatchewan

EDMONTON

Change is afoot in Edmonton! We can't believe

that it has already been 6 months since the administration of our branch was transferred to Calgary. By the time our Annual General Meeting occurred at the end of February, it was clear that a page had turned. For the first time in a long time there was a feeling of excitement in the room due to a combination of reasons: our interests continue to be well-served by our local council and our staff based out of the Calgary office (our Branch Representative commutes to Edmonton for council and industry meetings, as well as for on-set stewarding when we have production and some of our councillors commute to Calgary for Calgary council and membership meetings), and we have some spring productions with promising work opportunities for local performers (*Christmas in Wonderland* is an \$8 million feature shooting at West Edmonton Mall, and *War Correspondent: The Clark Todd Story* a made-for-TV movie by local production company ImagiNation Productions).

A new branch council was elected at our AGM: President **Sonia Donaldson**; Vice-President **Ken Perry**; Treasurer **Rebecca Starr**; Secretary **Nicole Wassil**; Councillors are **Brian Copping**, **Larry Langley** and **Jay Smith**; alternates are **Maralyn Ryan** (Past-President) and **Robert Clinton**. **Don Ast** continues his term as National Councillor until January, 2008. We would like to thank Maralyn for her commitment to the presidency, and for staying involved as much as her schedule will permit this year. **Colin MacLean** decided that he would take his leave from council after many years of service to the Edmonton membership, and he will be sorely missed.

We have initiated some projects: we organized a meet-and-greet session for our members with a new local casting director; we sent a request for proposals to our membership with a view to creating a legacy project for our branch; we have a new member Training Course scheduled for May, and are considering other professional development opportunities.

Our biggest project in 2007 will be working with ACTRA Calgary to create a unified Alberta branch. This will involve drafting new by-laws (including what the ACTRA Alberta Branch Council will consist of) and passing them within our respective memberships and holding elections for an ACTRA Alberta Branch Council.

This will certainly be an exciting year for ACTRA Edmonton!



Sonia Donaldson
President
ACTRA Edmonton

CALGARY

Change is also afoot in

Calgary! In the past year our staff has re-assumed the paper administration work for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, helped to close the Edmonton office and is now administering that branch while facilitating the amalgamation of both branches, and waded through the strange world of Alberta labour law (which is unlike any other province in its requirement for a separate mediation and strike vote) in order that ACTRA could be in a legal position to strike in Alberta. They have also coordinated two AGMs and two branch council elections (one in each city).

The production season looks good for Southern Alberta this spring. We have already wrapped four movies of the week: *Holiday in Handcuffs*, *The Secret of the Nutcracker* (Canadian) and *To Serve and Protect* (Canadian) – a true, Albertan story about the RCMP officers who were brutally gunned down in Meyerthorpe, and *Christmas Miracle*. We also wrapped *Fiddle and Drum*, an Alberta Ballet production.

In the past year, we have had more than 200 participants complete our New Member Training Course. These members are better prepared to meet the challenges performers face on set and in their day-to-day activities than performers who have not. If you are a Calgary Apprentice or Full Member and have not taken the course yet, you are sure to learn something new and meet other members in the process.

We look forward to working with our colleagues in Edmonton over the coming year as we become ACTRA Alberta. It is sure to be a challenging and interesting process – another learning experience for us all!



Duval Lang
President
ACTRA Calgary

MONTREAL

We will be hosting the 2007

ACTRA Awards in Montreal on June 9 at Le Medley. And as the newly elected President, I am truly excited to be presenting the Award of Excellence to distinguished member, **Walter Massey**.

The event will begin with an afternoon screening of our 4th Annual ACTRA Montreal Short Film Festival and will continue into the evening with the presentation of a number of awards, including the Audience Choice for Best ACTRA Short and the Community Builder Award, to be presented to **Arden Ryshpan**.

I would like to congratulate all of the members nominated for performance based awards at this year's event.

The nominees for the Outstanding Voice Performance are **Daniel Brochu, Holly Gauthier-Frankel, Bruce Dinsmore, Jane Wheeler** and **Michel Perron**.

Nominated for Outstanding Female Performance are **Miranda Handford, Ellen David, Laurence Leboeuf, Sarah Carlsen** and **Isabelle Blais**.

Nobuya Shimamoto, Nicolas Wright, Stephane Demers, Alain Goulem and **Gian Paolo Venuta** are nominated for Outstanding Male Performance.

And for the first time, we will be presenting an award for Outstanding Stunt Performance. The nominees are



Thomas Liccioni, Stephane Lefebvre, Marcello Bezina, France Raymond and **Patrick Kerton**.

Good luck to you all.

In addition, we will be honouring some eminent members with Life Memberships and acknowledging the seven years of dedication and service to the Branch of **Matt Holland** as Montreal's Past President. I hope to see many of you at the ACTRA Shorts and Awards. Please check our website at www.actramontreal.ca for details.

We hope that our promising summer will continue into a burgeoning fall.



Walter Massey to receive ACTRA Montreal's Award of Excellence.



Don Jordan
President
ACTRA Montreal

On the production front, I am very encouraged by the recent upswing in foreign film and television shoots landing in Montreal and the growth of indigenous projects that we are witnessing. Like many of the branches across the country, we hope that our promising summer will continue into a burgeoning fall.

Be found on ACTRA's F2F!

New fields on Face to Face online By Jani Lauzon



F2F is growing! In the near future

you will notice additional fields in both the ethnic background and disability sections. These new fields will help differentiate “who you are” from “who you feel you can play”. The reason for this is several fold.

In June 2005, ACTRA Toronto launched *Mainstream Now*, a catalogue of actors from ethnically diverse communities and those with disabilities. This initiative built on the success of *Into the Mainstream*, originally published by ACTRA National.

Although the binder format has been a highly popular casting tool, ACTRA Toronto has had numerous requests to establish an electronic format and extend the initiative nationally. Producers and industry professionals requested, and we listened. But why re-invent the wheel? F2F is already an extensive data base program free to members. With the addition of the new fields, F2F will give producers, directors and industry professionals the opportunity to create accurate and specific talent searches not available anywhere else. Options are good, and ACTRA recognizes that any effort to support our membership, in as many ways as possible, will only help to create a strong and inclusive Canadian film industry and more potential work opportunities for all our members.

If you are an ACTRA member and do not have your profile on F2F, we strongly suggest that you take advantage of this amazing promotional tool. Performers access and update their own Face to Face portfolios, with numerous profile options including photos, résumé and audio and video clips. F2F is a high-security, password-protected site where industry users register and are screened for access. And the best news is... it's absolutely FREE! For more information go to www.actra.ca and follow the links to F2F.

If you have already listed your profile on F2F, please watch for these exciting new changes in the near future. After all, the strength of our Canadian industry is only possible if built on the richness of our diversity. ■

Jani Lauzon is a Dora-nominated actor, a three-time Juno nominated singer/songwriter, and the creator of several children's television puppet characters. She won a Gemini Award for her role as Seeka in the series *Wumpa's World*, the first Metis puppeteer to garner the award. Jani co-chairs ACTRA Toronto's Diversity Committee.

Cheers...

Cheers to all of our ACTRA members who stood side-by-side and remained steadfast during our first strike in the 64-year history of this union. Our UBCP branch, which has a separate agreement for British Columbia and the Yukon, stood firmly with us during negotiations and held strong in their own talks. We all stood up for our future rights, we all kept our focus, we all held our ground... together we made history!

Jeers...

Jeers to Jim Shaw of Shaw Communications and Pierre Karl Péladeau of Vidéotron for holding our industry hostage by refusing to pay their monthly instalments to the Canadian Television Fund. The CTF is seed capital for Canadian drama programming. How unpatriotic of these two corporate leaders. Do they care so little about our cultural sovereignty and national identity? Shame on them for their disgraceful behaviour.

COMMERCIAL NEWS

National Commercial Agreement Negotiations

The National Commercial Agreement (NCA) expires on June 30, 2007. Consultation took place with members across the country and ACTRA's NCA Negotiating Committee is meeting to review proposals. Committee Members are: **Richard Hardacre** (Chair), **David Sparrow** (Toronto), **Howard Storey** (BC), **Marium Carvell** (Toronto), **Ian Finlay** (Montreal), and **Doug Murray** (Toronto). Committee Alternates are: **Paul Constable** (Toronto) and **Bruce Dinsmore** (Montreal). Check out ACTRA's website at www.actra.ca for updates!

ACTRA PRS & back end dividends

By Ferne Downey

ACTRA PRS (Performers' Rights

Society) was incorporated in 1983 with a staff of two plus one – the 'plus one' being a part-time bookkeeper. And that worked out nicely for a while – remember the '80s? There weren't substantial royalty or residual collections owing on the back end of projects we shot under the IPA agreements of those years. But that wasn't going to cut it by the mid-'90s – by the '95 IPA we were paying a lot of attention to the back end, and ACTRA PRS grew accordingly. By 1998 the correlation was clear: more claims staff = greater pursuit of claims = greater collection for members. Over the past five years PRS has disbursed over \$35 million to performers representing over 150,000 cheques to performers. I spoke with ACTRA PRS Manager **Chris Kelsey-Epstein**...

Q: What is ACTRA PRS's greatest collection story?

A: *RoboCop: The Series* is a great story on a couple of fronts – \$1.2 million was collected in a single shot – which made the cast members extremely happy – and it was a success for our hard-working staff who aggressively pursued the claim and won.

Q: What's the back story on this show?

A: *RoboCop: The Premiere* (2 episodes) and *RoboCop: The Series* (21 episodes) were produced in Toronto in '93-'94. The use rights acquired were five-year pre-payments in free TV (world) for the premiere, free TV (world) and video (world) for the series. When reporting was received in 2001, we learned that the show was being shown outside those uses acquired – in other media, in other territories and past the time purchased. So, we audited the company in 2003 and made our case legally over a period of time and the good result for the members was a sizeable \$million-plus payout in 2006. It was a "dispute resolution" success under that IPA.

Q: That show was produced prior to the 1995 IPA. In '95 everything changed – actors had grown weary of starring in shows that played all around the world and because of the stacked uses – five years pre-payment in each different medium – it had seemed that five years use could easily

become 25 years use! We sought a back end formula option that rose and fell more with the success of a project, because if you were involved in a huge international success, it was the only hope of earning real money. So the advance formula was negotiated into being – an advance against the Distributors' Gross Revenue (DGR). It was a welcome relief to get out of the producers' net fee world to a gross fee world. What are some examples of good collections utilizing the advance formula?

A: The first season of *La Femme Nikita* shot in Toronto in '96-'97 chose the 75% advance option and by 2000 had already recouped the 75% and by the 2005 reporting period sales had reached 143% of performers' total net fees. Five years of reporting paid out an additional \$1.4 million to performers. This is a show that enjoyed great success and performers shared in that success.

The series *Total Recall* produced in Toronto in 1998 selected the 50% advance option and had recouped the 50% in 2002. Since then the members have shared in \$10.4 million in sales (performers share \$586,000).

Then there is the case of 11 films shot in Montreal by one individual producer between 2002-05. The 50% advance option was chosen, all have recouped and to date performers have shared in \$233,000 (\$4 million in sales). The additional good news is that an anticipated further \$270,000 will be due from the U.K. partnership next year.

Q: What are you most proud of about ACTRA PRS?

A: Members can look forward to ongoing income from their work as long as the work continues to be exploited! Income from royalties and residuals can help performers even out the peaks and valleys of erratic income. For example, the *RoboCop* money happened to be disbursed during the recent IPA Strike.

Q: What is your prognosis about the new media use fees of 3.6% of DGR in the new IPA?

A: We are optimistic. It's the way of the future and we anticipate that tracking could be easier than it has been in other media. I'm going to ask Steve to chime in here (**Stephen Waddell**, ACTRA National Executive Director).



ACTRA PRS Manager Chris Kelsey Epstein and newly appointed ACTRA PRS Director Brad Keenan.

Kim Hume

Brad Keenan appointed director of ACTRA PRS

Brad Keenan recently joined the ACTRA PRS team. With his solid understanding of ACTRA's core mission to protect the rights of Canadian professional performers, he will be responsible for overseeing ACTRA PRS, including the Sound Recording Division. Brad specializes in ensuring that compensation is received for the use of intellectual property rights through licensing of music and name, image and likeness rights. He has worked extensively with the Canadian Recording Industry Association (CRIA), the Audio Visual Licensing Agency (AVLA) and numerous other associations and collectives. Previously, Mr. Keenan spent nine years as Director, Music Licensing & Partnership Marketing at SONY BMG MUSIC (CANADA) INC. in both the Toronto and New York offices.

Thanks, Chris. The great thing about DGR is it is a definable amount and we can enforce this provision of the agreement. It is a participation formula that ensures the performer actually does receive a percentage of the gross – from the first dollar. And there is no limit – as long as the production is distributed, money will be made and performers will share in it.

Q: What is the best procedure to make a PRS claims inquiry?

A: Email inquiries can go to either of the two Senior Claims Officers, **Jessica Paes** (jpaes@actra.ca) or **Susan Moffat** (smoffat@actra.ca). With the rest of the ACTRA PRS staff, they are the keepers of the production archives and proudly uphold performers' rights. ■



Ferne Downey is ACTRA's National Treasurer and ACTRA's representative on the AFBS Board of Governors. She is a passionate defender of performers' rights.



Maria Del Mar on stage with her Outstanding Performance Award.



ACTRA Toronto's Award of Excellence recipient Wendy Crewson and presenter Shirley Douglas.



Outstanding Performance Award Winner Gordon Pinsent, Heritage Minister Bev Oda and Nominee Don McKellar.

Photos: Jag Gauthi

2007 Toronto ACTRA Awards By Gina Kash Dineen

The timing couldn't have been better.

As the elevator doors opened, the music of conversation between friends and colleagues announced the party had begun.

On February 23, ACTRA Toronto members and their guests gathered at The Carlu to celebrate the 15 nominees of the 2007 ACTRA Awards for Outstanding Male and Female Performance and the new, Voice Performance Award, as well as to honour **Wendy Crewson**, recipient of ACTRA Toronto's Award of Excellence.

Jackie Laidlaw, Awards Chair extraordinaire for the past five years and her committee of ACTRA Toronto staff and volunteers, once again pulled off a sensational soiree at Toronto's elegant Carlu. Jackie looked fabulous in her vintage '50s silk cocktail dress along with **Karl Pruner**, ACTRA Toronto President, who positively glowed with the look of a man whose has climbed Mt. Everest and is ready to kiss the next person he sees.

After a judicious cocktail hour (or two), guests were seated in the auditorium where **Amanda Martinez** and her band warmed the crowd with sensual Latin rhythms, including a song from the film *Frida*. **Patrick McKenna** delivered a witty program scripted by veteran **Paul O'Sullivan**.

The three volunteer juries screened more than 200 performances submitted by Toronto ACTRA members representing television series and movies, feature films, short films and MOWs.

- Nominating Jury: **Bayo Akinfemi** (Chair), **Shauna MacDonald**, **Bruce Beaton**, **Louis Mercier** and **Sarah Manninen**.
- Voice Jury: **Linda Kash** (Chair), **Bruce Hunter**, **Shelley Hoffman** and **Cal Dodd**.
- The Final Jury: **Michael Murphy** (Chair), **Lisa Brooke**, **Johnathan Wilson**, **Mike Kirby** and **Liisa Repo-Martell**.

But it was the formidable **Shirley Douglas** who almost stole the show, with her direct and sincere introduction to Wendy Crewson. She spoke with deep admiration, between swigs of bottled water, about Wendy's personal integrity and successful acting career. Making special note of her "must-see" performance in *Better Than Chocolate*, which involved the discovery of a stash of sex toys and subsequent search for batteries.

Wendy was every inch the glamorous star in her gorgeous gown by Canadian designer Pat McDonough, and yet disarmingly human, wearing a pair of readers perched on the end of her nose, as she accepted her award saying, "Somehow through the strike we found our confidence." A committed supporter of Canadian arts and an active member of ACTRA Toronto, she encouraged ACTRA members to lobby and vote for political representatives who will work to support our industry in the future.

Gordon Pinsent was dignified and charming as he graciously acknowledged fellow nominees: **William Hutt**, **Chris Bolton**, **Don McKellar** and **Michael Therriault**, during his acceptance speech for his ACTRA Award for

Outstanding Performance Award for a male actor, given for his performance in *Away from Her* directed by **Sarah Polley**.

Maria Del Mar seemed genuinely surprised by the ACTRA Award for Outstanding Performance by a female actor for her work in *Terminal City* as she gave a heartfelt thank you to her family and friends as well as the other nominees: **Martha Burns**, **Martha Henry**, **Kristen Thomson** and **Deborah Grover**.

The first ever ACTRA Award for Voice Performance was posthumously awarded to well-known voice industry actor **Len Carlson**, who passed away in January, 2006. In her acceptance speech, his daughter Corrina described a man who loved his work and laughed every day. Nominee, **Adrian Truss** (*Jane and the Dragon*) said, "The voice award is much appreciated by all who vie for it," and (he) was glad to see it go to Len. **Tajja Isen**, **Ellen-Ray Hennessy**, and **Ron Rubin** were also nominated for their fine work in *Atomic Betty*, *Di-Gata Defenders* and *Erky Perky* respectively.

After the ceremony, the ever-funky Belazo Brothers, Mike and Terrance, DJ'd the dance floor and kept everyone dancing until the lights came on and it was time to grab a late night bite at Fran's. ■



ACTRA Toronto member **Gina Kash Dineen** has served as the Awards Jury Coordinator for the ACTRA Awards in Toronto for three years.

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