

TELEFILM CANADA COIN BUOYS INDIES

By SID ADILMAN

Toronto, June 16 — Overall, Canadian indie production is buoyant for the first time since the short-lived feature boom expired under its own weight in late 1980. Chief reason for upsurge in production, revived interest from some private investors and unprecedented links between independent producers and foreign broadcaster partners is Telefilm Canada's Broadcast Fund.

Producers now cite serious difficulties in obtaining sufficient license fees from the government-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

Hit by a \$C75,000,000 budget cut, the web is reducing initially promised license fees in presale deals not yet signed via the Broadcast Fund.

So, producers are scrambling to find other revenue sources, and that's delaying some productions which had been on hold over the Winter when the web froze further commitments.

But on the upside, the indies credit the federal agency's two-year-old Broadcast Fund for insisting on the key element that was absent during the feature film boom: guaranteed presale.

"May was the biggest month," says the Fund's deputy director, Bob Linnell. "We had applications worth over \$C38,000,000 that month."

According to the Fund's director, Peter Pearson, who resigned May 31, "We've had an extremely strong 12 months, despite all sorts

of problems within the system. If we continue to go at this pace, we can expect to have a Summer bigger than last Summer, which was just huge."

The Fund invests on condition that Canadian indie producers initiate a project and then have a signed presale deal from a Canadian broadcaster. The system is broadcaster driven and will continue to be so, per Federal Communications Minister Marcel Masse.

Eligible broadcasters are conventional webs and indie stations and, as of last April 1, provincial-owned educational webs. The latter are TVOntario, Radio-Quebec and Access Alberta.

Feevee Frozen Out

Pay-cablers sought to be included, but Masse, as did his political predecessors, refused because pay-cable signals are not "freely and widely available." Pay-cablers may be financial partners but cannot trigger fund investments on their own.

Projects must be for primetime airing in Canada — drama (features involved, to go to tv within two years of production), variety, children's programs and documentaries for a minimum half-hour tv timespot.

For its first 20 months, the Fund could invest a maximum of one-third of any budget, matching the maximum amounts expected separately from Canadian broadcasters and private sources.

Masse rejiggered the rules last April 1 to allow the Fund a maximum 49% investment in the following: Projects with all-Canadian talent and tv pilots with a broadcaster already involved, and a maximum of 10% of its annual budget overall for script and project development.

Also, until March 31, 1986, the Fund will match dollar-for-dollar broadcaster license fees, providing the Fund's overall share in any one project is no more than 49%.

As of last March 31, combined budgets of Fund-backed projects totaled \$C275,209,851. That's a sizeable hike of \$C153,030,886

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Atlantic Stakes Its Claim Via Prod'n, Pickups, Yups

By JAMES GREENBERG

Facing a crowded and competitive independent arena, Atlantic Releasing Corp. is planning a three-pronged attack to secure its position in the marketplace. Game plan calls for an increase not only in the number of films produced annually, but in the quality of the pictures, said president Thomas Coleman.

Founded in 1975, company built its reputation with successful distribution of foreign titles. Among early hits were "Madame Rosa," "Picnic At Hanging Rock" and "Montenegro." But as the majors entered that area with their classics divisions, Coleman said he lost interest. In addition, foreign films have a limited value in ancillary markets, Coleman pointed out.

Shift away from foreign film acquisitions led to the inevitable move into production which was contemplated as early as 1979. In-house production finally materialized in earnest last year with the release of "Valley Girl," "Night Of The Comet," "Roadhouse" and "Alphaville City."

Results were generally successful but Coleman acknowledged that several of the entries failed and chalked it up philosophically as a learning experience. "Roadhouse" was not a concept we should have done and "Night Of The Comet" fell a little short of being a big picture," he said.

Company, however, is bullish on production in a concerted effort to pin down a larger share of the indie boxoffice. Coleman predicted that overall boxoffice figure of \$4 billion would remain constant but with many indie companies being forced out of business, there was the potential for Atlantic to snag a bigger piece of the indie pie.

Scheduled for release in the latter part of 1985 are a combination of

in-house productions and acquisitions reflecting the company's three targets: the pre-youth kiddie market, the mainstream youth audience and the upscale sophisticated crowd.

Atlantic's surprising success with "Smurfs And The Magic Flute" in 1984, which grossed more than \$16,000,000 domestically, signalled the emergence of a new profit center for the film industry and cemented company's commitment to kiddie fare. "We suspected there was a market for this kind of film but 'Smurfs' confirmed it for us," Coleman stated.

Pre-Sold Characters

While he noted that the majors had all originally passed on "Smurfs," there was still a high degree of interest from exhibitors who must rely on Disney's two entries a year for family films. Coleman added that tv exposure for characters used in pre-youth films helps rather than hurts business and that marketing is simplified because it is easy to pinpoint the audience.

Total advertising budget for "Smurfs" was \$1,300,000, aimed primarily at the parents of the tots.

Production-wise, Coleman noted the long turnaround time to complete animated features for the very young, but arriving at Thanksgiving after three years of production will be "The Adventures Of The American Rabbit."

Summer Starters

Other animated projects scheduled for release this year skew a bit older. Due out this Summer is an animated 3-D epic titled "Star-chaser: The Legend Of Orin." Recently acquired by Atlantic with no release date set is "The Adventures Of Mark Twain," the first feature-length pic from "claymator" Will

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