

A Montreal

Greenville

Spring 2005

**Daniel Bissonnette:
bringing production
back to Montreal**

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*Thank you
Micheline Russo*

Are you planning on producing your own short or feature length film?

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ACTRA
Montreal

the Grapevine

Spring 2005

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JOIN THE TEAM

If you're an ACTRA member or apprentice and want to write an article, contribute original cartoons, artwork or photos, we'd love to hear from you! Send us an email at rduniz@actra.ca.

HERE'S AN IDEA

Done reading your Grapevine? Well, why not share with it someone else! Leave your copy of the Grapevine in a public place (coffee shop, movie theatre seat, etc.) and let someone else have look. It's a great way to increase awareness and raise the profile of ACTRA and the acting community in Montreal!

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Future Filmmakers

I was invited to participate in a discussion panel about the future of film production in Quebec at the recent Concordia Film Festival: Art Matters. The panel was part of a tribute to Montreal entrepreneur Mel Hoppenheim, whose vision, 40 years ago, of this city as a hub of local and international film activity led to the construction of several state-of-the-art production facilities and Montreal's current role as a prime destination for world-class films to shoot. Also on the panel were a writer/director, a television producer, a film commissioner and a businessman, Mel's partner, Michel Trudel.

The topics for discussion ranged from video piracy to our favourite recent films, and, while Mel has a bee in his bonnet about how to solve the black-market DVD problem, the rest of the participants generally painted a rather rosy outlook for our industry. But I found myself speaking out about the egregious 1999 CRTC decision on Canadian content rules that has decimated our TV drama numbers, the losing battle our English Canadian films face at our movie theatres, the absence of a star system in the R.O.C., the Liberal Party's lack of vision and support for culture, etc. I couldn't help myself, my mouth was running over, but the questions just kept coming. Questions from film studies students and recent graduates who want to know how to take their first steps in an industry that can be cruel and unforgiving, sometimes to the most talented.

There are no easy answers, obviously, but I was happy to tell one student who wanted to know how he could advance his career even though he hadn't much money, to come see us at ACTRA; that we now have in place a wide-range of low-budget agreements to accommodate even the most impecunious filmmaker. I was thrilled to give that answer, and surprised that I had answers for so many other questions too. I had been reluctant to step up at first, simply because others seem to know their facts and statistics better than I do, and I've never been one for participating in strong debate (although I like to witness it).

The more I talked, the more I realised just how effective ACTRA's lobbying and information campaigns have been. For that's where I got it from: that strong voice, arguing for what's fair and just in Canadian culture. The repetition has paid off; the message has sunk in. Our leaders are widely quoted on a regular basis in Playback, The Globe and Mail, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter and elsewhere. Our high-profile members participate in demonstrations and lobby efforts. ACTRA is increasingly known for caring, promoting and fighting for performers' rights. It is seen in our industry as a strong union that protects its members, their inter-

ests, and jurisdictions. It has had a profound impact on me, on my awareness, my pride, and sense of who I am as a performer. ACTRA has helped me prepare to lend my voice to the advancement of the plight of the artist in this country, and for that I am grateful.

I also owe a nod of gratitude to our Branch Representative, Raymond Guardia, whose own message about the negatives we face in our industry is relentless and tinged with an "Eeyore"-like quality that could give pause to even the most ardent optimist. His gloomy influence has been invaluable in trying to negotiate and make peace with an industry as evanescent as ours.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank, on behalf of our Montreal Branch Council and membership, Assistant Branch Representative, Micheline Russo, for more than thirty-three years of dedicated service to our members. Micheline is retiring this Spring, and I congratulate her on what must be a record for service to this Branch. Friendly, sensitive, affable, intelligent, loyal and warm, Micheline effortlessly exudes these qualities in everything she does. Thank you and good luck, Micheline, you will be missed by all of us at ACTRA Montreal.

In solidarity,

Matt Holland,
Branch President, ACTRA Montreal

Moving the awards



ACTRA Montreal has announced that it will postpone the 2005 ACTRA Awards until the Fall of this year.

Originally scheduled for the Spring of 2005, the ACTRA Montreal Branch Council in conjunction with the Montreal Awards Committee has chosen to delay the Awards presentation until November 5, where it will now become the showcase event in the 2005 Members' Conference.

It was felt by both the Branch Council and the Awards Committee that the decision to hold the ACTRA Awards concurrently with the Annual General Meeting in November would heighten the occasion for the membership in addition to significantly reducing the cost of the event - a notable issue in this time of financial difficulty for the branch.

Returning to Montreal after a 20 year absence, the 2005 ACTRA Awards will celebrate the creative accomplishments of our members, honouring local performers for their hard work and dedication to their craft in English language projects produced in ACTRA's jurisdiction.

This year, four categories have been singled out by ACTRA Montreal in which members may be nominated for an award. They are, Best Performance, Female (in a short, film or television project), Best Performance, Male (in a short, film or television project), Best Voice Performance, Original or Dubbed (in an animated project) and the Award of Excellence, honouring a member for their lifelong contribution to the film and television industry.

ACTRA Montreal looks forward to seeing all of you at the awards cocktail, following the Annual General Meeting on Saturday, November 5, 2005. Look for your invitation in the mail!

A scene from "**Breadmen of Respect**," winner of the 2004 ACTRA Shorts Film Festival.

The world of organized crime can be a scary place for a little man made out of bread...



There's Still Time! Nominate a member

ACTRA Montreal members are being called upon to submit Nominations for Consideration to the Nomination Jury. Owing to the new date of the Awards presentation, the deadline for submitting a Nomination has been extended to June 30, 2005.

The categories are:

Best Performance, Female (in a short, film or television project),

Best Performance, Male (in a short, film or television project),

Best Voice Performance, Original or Dubbed (in an animated project), and the **Award of Excellence**

Full and Apprentice members as well as ACTRA Extras can find submission forms as well as the complete terms and conditions for nominating a fellow member at the ACTRA Montreal office or at www.actramontreal.ca.

3rd Annual ACTRA Shorts Film Festival: 2005

The ACTRA Shorts Film Festival will once again be part of the ACTRA Montreal Members' Conference in November.

Throughout the Spring and Summer, members will have a chance to collaborate as writers, directors, producers and performers on short films which will be shown on the big screen for friends, family and industry guests to enjoy.

Last year, **Robert Higden** was awarded the Best Short prize for his animated "**Breadmen of Respect**". This year, it could be you!

If you are interested in producing an ACTRA Short, contact Randy Duniz at the ACTRA Montreal office.

IT'S MY DAMN UNION!

by Holly Gauthier-Frankel

'Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too.'

John Keats

Hello! Well, it's almost here you guys! Can you feel the warm-ish breezes? Can you hear the birds twittering? Loudly, and right outside your window when you're trying to sleep in? Can you smell all the...er, smells? Because I sure can, and it's making me very excited! I love springtime, mostly because I spend the winter months in a constant state of frozen, disgruntled misery, negotiating with all manner of supernatural beings to try to make it bloody warm again!! If only we could conjure up fabulous new starring roles and ample jobs that way. Hmm...

Anyway, I digress, but what else is new? At least I'm not going to bore you with my usual ramblings about togetherness and community-building, though I WILL say that we should still all be feeling a tingly, happy sensation when we think of our fellow actors and stunt people and performers all striving to rebuild the Montreal 'scene', as it were. Right? Right. I've also decided to start off every column with a little quote from now on, and I know it's cheesy, but too bad! I have to put my B.A. in English Lit to some use, haven't I? Anyway, I chose this Keats quote in keeping with the general spirit of independence that we should all be cultivating in order to keep busy and to feel fulfilled, no matter the circumstances. And also 'cuz it was spring-related. Duh!

In terms of what the coming months hold for members, we will be having another Art of the Audition workshop, so keep your eyes peeled. We held the tax seminar earlier in February, and as always it was quite a success! Thank you to everyone who participated, and thanks again

to Frank, our instructor. Now, I'm sorry I have to say it again, but I am always interested in suggestions for new and exciting (and cheap!) workshops that can be held at the offices. Any input at all is welcome, appreciated, and rare, so come on!! And ladies, the return of the Women's Committee is still on the agenda. The anticipation is killing me, but I just know that many of you will be keen on starting up some sort of forum, especially now that a brand-spanking new nudity clause has been added to the AIP agreement.

And now, unfortunately, on with some rather sobering news. Due to the serious financial issues our branch has been facing for some time, we will be saying goodbye to our lovely Branch Clerk, Carmy Renda. She is great, and always has a beautiful smile for everyone who comes into the office, not to mention stores of information and cheques! In related news, we will also be saying goodbye to the wonderful Micheline Russo who, after 33 years of amazing work as Assistant Branch Representative, will be taking her retirement, not at all because of the financial situation, but because it's simply time for Mai-Tais and Bridge! Just kidding. It's actually vodka and poker. Oh wait, that's me!

Thank you both for always being rays of sunshine in the office, and for all of your hard work. The branch wouldn't have been what it is today without you. And Micheline, thank you for being pregnant at the same time as my Mummy was with me; she always talks about it, and how wonderful it was to have you as a preggie-buddy! We will all miss you very much. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

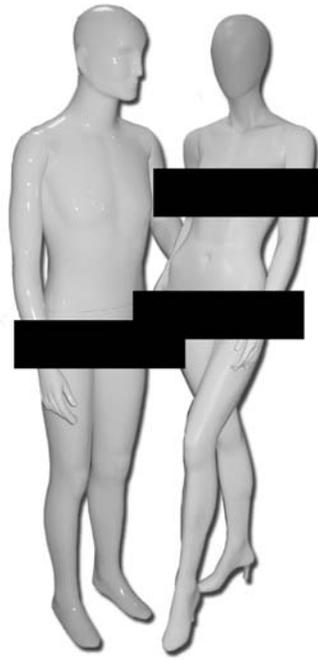


And now, sniffles aside (unless you are allergic to pollen and grass, and springtime is the bane of your existence!), I will leave you to turn your fancies to thoughts of love (Tennyson! Also awesome!), and to the coming months where hopefully we will see not only flowers and plants bloom, but amazingly rich and creative ideas for films and plays and scripts and anything else you can think of! Yikes. I don't know what's gotten into me. Maybe it's those supernatural beings!

But no matter how flaky I get, people, always remember that...

It's YOUR damn union too!!!

Send good questions or nice comments to tappyco@yahoo.ca.



Council approves nudity in the AIP

Following a series of very successful committee meetings in February, the Montreal Branch Council has voted to adopt the proposed "Rules of Engagement for Nudity Under the Montreal AIP (ACTRA Indie Production Agreement)," thereby permitting productions to film nude scenes under the low-budget agreement.

Prior to the "Rules of Engagement," nude scenes were prohibited under the AIP. This was a response to the specific challenges that stem from protecting performers on low-budget projects where finances, staff resources and, in the case of many low-budget producers, experience are all relatively minimal. At the behest of a number of members, the decision to restrict nude scenes from AIP projects was revisited by the ACTRA Montreal Branch Council and handed over to a committee for recommendation.

Using the terms outlined in the Nudity section (A24) of the Independent Production Agreement (IPA) as a foundation, the committee was able to compile a set of conditions which would adequately protect performers in all situations while enabling producers to include nudity in their films; a necessity for marketing and financing a project in some instances.

In addition to the specifics of a contract and nudity rider for a performer involved in nude scene, the "Rules of Engagement" dictates provisions that must be adhered to by the production in pre-production, during auditions, on set and even during the post-production stage of the project.

"I'm confident that the 'Rules of Engagement' will go a long way to encouraging low-budget production here in Montreal while still, first and foremost, protecting performers," said Shannon Joutel, ACTRA Steward and committee member.

ACTRA Montreal would like to thank all of the committee members for their invaluable contribution to the drafting of this document; Eleanor Noble, Lynne Adams, Paula Costain, Howard Rosenstein, National Councillor Tyrone Benskin, Branch Councillor Don Jordan and ACTRA staff Carmela Algeri, Claire Martel and Shannon Joutel.

To receive a copy of the recently approved Montreal Indie regulations governing nudity, please contact Shannon Joutel at ACTRA Montreal.

Are you incorporated?

If you are, please remember that members must provide engagers with proof of their incorporation. If you fail to do so, the payroll company will not issue your cheque. Remember - it's your responsibility!

Changes around the ACTRA office

The ACTRA Montreal branch will be a very different place from now on as two beloved staffers have left the organization.

Assistant Branch Representative **Micheline Russo** - an integral member of this branch - retired from ACTRA in April after contributing 33 years of service to this organization. It will be hard to imagine ACTRA Montreal without Micheline. Her commitment to quality and devotion to the rights of members set the standard for others across the country. We trust that she will bring that same generous support to all of her future endeavours.

Branch Clerk **Carmy Renda** has been processing cheques, greeting people at the front desk and signing up new members for over 8 years. As such, she has been quite literally, the face and voice of ACTRA Montreal. Carmy's departure was an unfortunate consequence of the branch's recent financial difficulties. She will undoubtedly be missed by many of the members and all of us here at the Montreal office.

We would like to thank Micheline and Carmy for all of their hard work and years of dedication and wish them both all of the best.

Pursuant to the departure of both Micheline and Carmy, changes will be made at ACTRA Montreal which will undoubtedly affect the services provided to our members. Most notably, in lieu of a receptionist, calls to the ACTRA Montreal office will now be directed through an automated telephone system.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in this matter.



My dear ACTRA members,

After 33 years of servicing the membership, I have decided to "call it a wrap" and take my retirement from ACTRA. It has been an interesting and impressive journey for me from that June 1st, 1972 day when I entered the office at 1434 St. Catherine Street West, room 418, to begin my employment at ACTRA Montreal - then known as the Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists - representing performers and writers in television, radio and film. The staff totalled two - myself and Virginia Ryshpan, our Branch Representative at the time.

Throughout these years I have seen ACTRA grow and make enormous progress and with the help and hard work of many ACTRA members, elected officials and a dedicated and superb staff across the country, today ACTRA is an organization well-versed, well-known, well-respected and maybe even feared, by various players in our film and television industry.

ACTRA has definitely made its mark and in recent years has been a successful leader in lobbying Government on many important issues. ACTRA has negotiated meaningful Collective Agreements for its membership and has achieved better & improved minimum fees and working conditions in all areas of our jurisdiction. The ACTRA membership has no doubt increased, and producers can now, more than ever, enjoy our wide pool of professional and talented actors in all categories, both on and off screen. The catalogue Face to Face with Talent in the early days proved to be a very important tool for casting agents, directors and producers searching for the right talent to work in their projects. Today, after a major face lift, the catalogue is on-line and is still very much valued and used. With the creation of Performers Rights Society (PRS), ACTRA has been able to go after delinquent producers and secure residual payments for its members. Our relationship with other performer unions, like SAG, UDA and Equity has strengthened over the years through the continued application of our Reciprocal Agreements. We also enjoy good dialogue with non-performer unions like DGC, AQTIS and WGC. Talent Agents work very closely with ACTRA and in recent years have played an important role in protecting our jurisdiction.



A goodbye note for Micheline

The ACTRA Fraternal Benefit Society has done wonders in providing exceptional insurance and retirement benefits over the years and continues to look for new and better coverage for the entire membership to enjoy. And perhaps the most single important improvement for ACTRA has been the computers. Without a doubt, they have changed the quality of all our lives - administratively, we have come a long way from processing our weekly reports on a Munroe adding machine with an accompanying tape. New technology will forever keep ACTRA on the look out to ensure that the provisions of the Collective Agreements reflect these changes.

These years unfortunately, also presented some sad moments with the passing of many members and staff, through illness and tragedy - they will be missed and always remembered.

I would like to say my stay at ACTRA has been an incredible and enjoyable ride. It has been a privilege and a real pleasure for me to represent the membership all these years. In many respects, ACTRA has been my second family and I know of no other place I would have wanted to spend all this time than right here. I thank you for your support and confidence. I feel proud that ACTRA today is a much stronger union and even prouder that I had the opportunity to be part of its many accomplishments, achievements and goals.

It will take some time for me to get used to my new life without ACTRA, but I will be able to spend more time with my (first) family and be able to do many things I enjoy but never had enough time for. I have been told that retirement means adding five days to the two-day weekend - now that doesn't sound bad at all!

In closing, I will not say good-bye but ARRIVEDERCI, as I will expect to see and hear you on television, in commercials and films, etc. and if I am really lucky, I may run into you when I visit the ACTRA office.

I wish you all much success in the future - keep up the good work!

With affection and warmest regards.

Micheline Russo,
Assistant Branch Representative



It's hard to believe that Micheline is retiring. She has been such a fixture around the Montreal ACTRA office that most of the members cannot remember a time when she was not there. Many of them cannot imagine that the time has come when she will not be there in the future...

ACTRA Montreal has been very fortunate over the years to have devoted staff, but none more so than Micheline who has literally spent the majority of her life working to improve things for the members. I have always been struck by her genuine concern for their welfare - she understands how hard things can get for a performer and is determined to make sure that they receive every penny they were owed. It's a matter of principle with her - it doesn't matter how much or little it is, if the collective agreement says they are entitled to it, she has always felt that the performer should have it. It is her attention to detail that has produced literally thousands and thousands of dollars worth of successful claims for performers over the years.

On many occasions when we would talk about a production where a producer was being difficult, Micheline would say "but that's not fair!". Fairness has always been an important quality for Micheline. Being right just for the sake of being right wasn't always the best outcome, as far as Micheline is concerned. She's never minded a good fight - a producer who had a point and is willing to fight for it will gain her respect, but a producer who just doesn't feel like paying what's in the agreement? Well, that's just not fair and not being fair just isn't an acceptable way to behave as far as Micheline is concerned.

Now, her two lovely daughters are grown women. Her youngest, Franka, is in university and her eldest, Tina, is married and has embarked on a successful career as a CA. It's hard to believe that much time has passed - I remember my parents staggering home in the wee hours of the morning from Micheline's wedding, exhausted from dancing and stuffed to the gills from eating. My mother announced that they had had so much fun that should I decide to get married some day, I was going to have the exact same wedding - guest list and all!

But, after so many years of taking care of other people, it's time for Micheline to take some time for herself. She has a garden to attend to (every fall brings bushels of tomatoes she has to take care of) and no one makes better roasted red peppers. No one. There are other activities she has wanted to participate in, but her commitments to ACTRA have made finding the time difficult. Now, she'll have the time to indulge herself a bit, maybe do a little bit of "nothing" for awhile as well.

We will miss her - I will miss her. She is loyal, dedicated, principled and just a little bit mushy. Her feelings are strong and she's not afraid to express them. This is our chance to tell her how we feel about her, and I know I speak on behalf of all of us when I say that we love her and wish her all the best as she sets out on the next phase of her life.

Arden Ryshpan,
former ACTRA Montreal Branch Rep. & Branch President

Montreal is looking for someone to help bring foreign production back to our city.

Daniel Bissonnette is...

the man

It doesn't get any worse than last year.

Over the past few years, Montreal has seen an alarming trend as the balance between local production and foreign production has shifted in the wrong direction - making us increasingly reliant on American films for our survival. But from 2000 to 2003 it was hard to complain as the number of U.S. projects coming to our city increased each year. Then 2004 came and the bottom dropped out. Very little indigenous production and very little foreign production made for one very bad year.

ACTRA Montreal and other concerned partners in the local production scene stepped forward and petitioned government to help solve this problem. The solution? Create an office to promote Quebec - and specifically, Montreal - as a viable shooting location for foreign producers. The job of creating the office is almost done, but for the man who has been picked to run this promotion office, the job is just beginning.

Daniel Bissonnette has spent 19 years working in the area of Economic Development for the City of Montreal, encouraging the development of various industries, from bio-technology to pharmaceutical. In 1999, he got his first taste of the film and television industry when he spearheaded a study by the city on the Animation and Visual Effects trade in Montreal.

When the position to head the new Film Commission office in Montreal opened up, with his expertise in economic development, experience on the fringes of the film and television industry and understanding of the intricacies of municipal politics, Daniel Bissonnette was the man for the job.

I sat down with Mr. Bissonnette to ask a few questions and find out how he plans to put things back on track - returning foreign production to Montreal.

Randy Duniz: *Hello. Well I guess the first thing I should ask is, what do we call the new office?*

Daniel Bissonnette: It doesn't really have a name yet. Of course, it has a legal name. The Quebec Film and Television office. But that doesn't really say what we do. The office will have another name for marketing and promotional purposes when it opens.

RD: *And when would that be?*

DB: We hope to have it open in the next two months. This is the first time an office in Montreal will have the mandate and resources to promote shooting in Quebec. We will have what they have had for several years in Ontario and B.C.

RD: *Which begs the question...what took us so long?*

DB: If you go back ten years to when we started getting foreign production here - not just occasional shoots. That started in 1993. Tax credits helped us be successful from 1993 to 1999 and we had some steady growth. From 2000 to 2003 we grew very fast, with 2003 being our best year for foreign production. So we were successful without really doing much. Everything was good so nobody was interested in sitting down and coming up with a plan to keep it that way. It's unfortunate that it took the rough year we had in 2004 to get people worried.

Now there are over twenty countries around the world competing for the work. Eastern Europe, Australia, New Zealand. Thirty states are trying to move production from California to their state. There's the same amount of films being made and many more players competing for them. We need to be more organized and aggressive. Success blinded us, but 2004 was very difficult and that's brought us together.

with the plan.

RD: *So what was the plan when you got together?*

DB: The first item was to get this organization in place. We'll be opening the office in the next two months and that was a big step. The second item was to get better tax credits in Quebec to address the rising Canadian dollar. On December 30, 2004 we got a raise of 9% from 11% to 20%. That was very important. The next step is to develop a better funding vehicle for films with smaller budgets - someone that says we need \$9 million to make this movie, but we have only \$8.

RD: *And the Quebec government would give them the one million dollars on the condition that they shoot here?*

DB: The fund would be financed by both the private sector and public sector. We're looking at a \$50 million fund split 60% private, 40% public that would invest in a slate of movies that would shoot in Montreal. And we would own equity in these films. South Africa has a similar fund operating that was actually set up by German investors. It's very successful and we can be too.

If you have all three of these things [promotion office, tax credits and investment fund] in place, you're in business. Montreal and Quebec in general will be in a very good position. Even though it's more difficult, we will get our share of foreign production.

RD: *Well what has been the major reason for the decline in foreign production?*

DB: International competition. People talk about a number of reasons. Canadian dollar going up. Canada bashing in the States. [Arnold] Schwarzenegger campaigning. But the main reason is competition. So many people going after the same piece of the pie.

RD: *So what is the key to getting our share?*

DB: Showing the producers Montreal. Promotion is important. Most of the time they don't think about you if you they don't see you. That's why you have to be there. So they know what you have to offer. We have visited L.A. as a group. Brian Baker from AQTIS [technician's union], Stephane Cardin from SODEC [tax credit

office], Martin Fontaine from Mel's [studio] and myself. But this new organization will help us do this on a daily basis. This is general promotion. But we also provide information about specific projects.

We get scripts for potential projects, go through them and produce location books for the studio with pictures from our archive of Montreal locations that could double as the locations they need. We get a script in this morning and we make sure that we FedEx out one of these books tailored to that producer's project by 5 p.m. that afternoon. They see that we have the locations and they know right away that these people in Montreal are organized and ready to do business. Then when they decide that Montreal is the appropriate location for their film they come out here. We prepare for their visit and show them what they need to see. Because most of the time, they don't know what Montreal has to offer. And we want to be proactive - follow projects that don't have a green light yet so that when they do get the green light, we can approach them immediately.

This week, we had someone here scouting locations. An interesting project. He saw our sound stages and he said himself, he had no idea. We can show tons of pictures, but until you're here and you see a stage laid out the size of three football fields, you can't appreciate it. It is crucial to bring as any people here as possible.

The final goal is to get, year in and year out, a decent - and hopefully increasing - number of productions.

RD: *Do American producers not know enough about Montreal?*

DB: The people in the studios that you visit today are not the ones that are there tomorrow. So you have to keep informing them. They always say, 'I heard about Montreal. But I don't really know anything about shooting there.' It's our job to make sure they know everything there is to know about shooting in Montreal and that the information comes from the people in Montreal. Not from Toronto or B.C. because they have their own agenda.

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DB: We're always disappointed when we lose a production to another province. But we respect that there are valid reasons when a production decides to go someplace else. As long as it was an informed decision. We're in it for the long run. So it's important to develop and maintain these relationships on an ongoing basis.

RD: *Is L.A. our only target? What about European countries and promoting co-productions?*

DB: L.A. is obviously the biggest focus, but there are others. New York. We are so close to New York. We need to try and promote ourselves there as well.

The problem with co-productions is that the EU [European Union] has made it very difficult for countries inside the EU to produce co-prods with countries outside of the EU. Canada has the most co-prod treaties in the world, but it has gotten more and more difficult to promote co-prods. It's Telefilm's job to look at this problem and make the necessary changes. If that happens, we can attract European co-productions.

RD: *And what about the local industry? What has been their reaction?*

DB: Our mandate is to serve local production as well as foreign. This includes our own industry development - creating projects that benefit all of our local industry. Training programs for example. If we are working on promoting Montreal and see that we are lacking in a particular field or area of expertise, we can sit down and train people to fill that gap. That will be a big benefit to our promotion efforts, but it will also improve the local industry. The local industry needs to understand that we are there for them too. Not just to bring the Americans in.

RD: *But with regards to bringing the Americans in, can we ever realistically expect to get back to those numbers we saw in 2001, 2002 and 2003?*

DB: Yes. We've done it once or twice. We can do it again. But to make it happen we need to make shooting in Montreal happen year round. Filling the studios in the summer is easy. Warner Brothers will come in and they'll book four months straight. But the truth is, we have five or six "A" technician crews in this city that can serve big American productions. So ten films asking to shoot in Montreal over the summer does us no good. We need to fill in the winter months with movies like 'The Fountain' and 'Lucky Number Slevin' - significant productions. Fill in those slow months and we will have a good year.

RD: *Which leads us to the question on everyone's mind - is 2005 going to be a good year?*

DB: Better than last year. 2003 was a record high. 2004 was a record low. This year - as I said - we've filled in some of those normally slow months. So I would say we are already off to a better start.

RD: *What do you see as being the biggest obstacle in making all of this happen?*

DB: The obstacle is always the same in Quebec. Making sure that everyone works together. Too often, we have a very individualistic mentality in Quebec. There's a tendency to not recognize the value of a partner or even a competitor. We need to collaborate. We need to expect everyone to understand fully that the industry in Montreal is bigger and more important than any one's individual interest. We're partners in this.

I think we are on the right track. This organization has a strong Board with members from many different areas of the Montreal production community. I've seen myself, a substantial change in attitude the last two years that makes me confident we can succeed.

RD: *And what do you expect from these partners? Like ACTRA?*

DB: We expect our partners to fully support this new organization. Financially as well. We need them to be real partners and that's not always easy. If you look at ACTRA for example, you have your own mandate to protect your members and get them work on films. But we expect ACTRA to be reasonable. Your members need to understand that getting a smaller share of the roles is sometimes better than getting nothing at all if the film doesn't come here. It's the same with all of our partners in one way or another. We need to be pragmatic and strike a reasonable balance that works for everyone. We should never lose a single project because we weren't willing to reason with producers.

From what I've seen, ACTRA and AQTIS - most of the time - do a very good job. They are reasonable and make deals that are very good for their members and for the city of Montreal. You are good at adapting and dealing with the complications that inevitably occur on productions. Foreign producers appreciate that. They realize, problems always arise in this business and one thing that U.S. producers are quick to admit is that we're good at solving problems.

Everyone involved in the Montreal film and television industry is hoping that our decline in production is one problem Daniel Bissonnette can help all of us solve.

Randy Duniz

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OSCARS

2005: the

Montreal

Connection



The ratings may have dipped from last year's telecast, but you can be sure more than a few Montreal homes were tuned in to February 27th's Academy Awards as quite a large number of nominated projects featured a local connection this year.

Martin Scorsese may have come up empty handed again, but his film "**The Aviator**" - shot right here in Montreal - managed to nab five statuettes from its eleven nominations, including Best Achievement in Art Direction, Best Achievement in Cinematography, Best Achievement in Costume Design, Best Achievement in Editing and Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role.

"The Aviator" was edged out in the Best Picture Category by Clint Eastwood's "Million Dollar Baby" which, as it turns out, has its own Montreal connection - local actor done well **Jay Baruchel**, starring as all heart, no skill boxer Danger Barch. Not only was Jay featured in Oscar winner Morgan Freeman's nomination clip, he even got a shout-out from Mr. Eastwood in his Best Picture speech.

And finally...produced in conjunction with the **National Film Board**, **Chris Landreth's "Ryan"** took home the Oscar for Best Animated Short Film - documenting the story of Canadian animation pioneer Ryan Larkin, who has since become a panhandler on the streets of Montreal.

"I am here tonight because of the grace and humility of a guy watching from Montreal," Landreth said accepting his award. "Ryan Larkin, I dedicate this award to you."

Congratulations to you all.

ACTRA reaches deal with Ubisoft



UBISOFT™

Organizing

with Gary Saxe

ACTRA is pleased to announce that we have reached an agreement with Ubisoft covering performances on video games. While it took six months of hard and sometimes frustrating negotiations, we were able to achieve a 20% overall increase in rates, retroactive to last summer.

Video game production is a fast growing area of ACTRA's jurisdiction. As the relatively young industry matures and technology advances, the sophistication and expectations of game players also increase. Producers realise that they can no longer use amateur performers to voice characters. Players demand better. (Please see the article on the consequences of hiring a non-union cast.)

Ubisoft is one of the largest producers of video games in the world. While their head office is in France, the Montreal office is a major center for video game production. The local office has created such popular titles as Myst IV, Splinter Cell, Rainbow Six and Prince of Persia.

As a result of this deal, we can look forward to many more work opportunities for ACTRA Members on Ubisoft video games in the future.

2 more commercials brought under jurisdiction

At the end of January we found out about a non-union commercial for a well-known shampoo. In the past, it has taken weeks of hard work to pressure a recalcitrant producer to abide by ACTRA's jurisdiction. This time, the job was accomplished with one sternly worded e-mail.

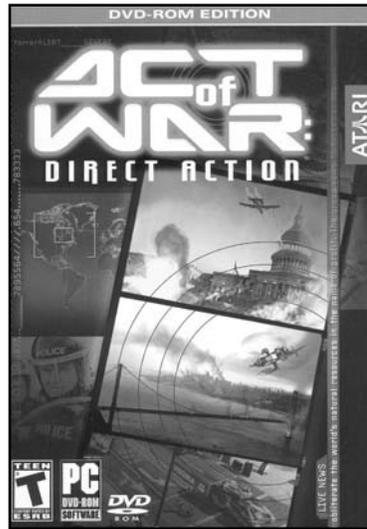
We contacted the ad agency and informed them of their responsibilities under Quebec's Status of the Artist legislation. We let them know that if they do not respect our jurisdiction, we would be forced to pursue the ad agency and the shampoo company under the legislation. They agreed and hired all 15 performers under ACTRA contracts.

In March, we discovered that a chain of US based pharmacies planned on producing three commercials in Montreal for US distribution only. They intended on contracting all performers under Union des Artistes (UDA) contracts, even though the commercial was destined for an English-only market. Ordinarily, English language commercials are produced under ACTRA contracts and French language commercials are produced under UDA contracts.

After two weeks of discussion with increasing pressure on the producer, the spot was ultimately filmed under ACTRA contracts. 49 ACTRA Members were hired in total for the three commercials.



That's what you get for hiring non-union performers



Since May 2004, ACTRA has been in a dispute with Swat Films and the Quebec producer's association (the APFTQ) regarding our jurisdiction over video game production. Swat Films, producing live action and voice segments of a game called "Act of War" for Atari, cast the production with non-Members and refused to use ACTRA contracts or respect our wages and working conditions.

The matter is now headed for arbitration in mid-April. We are asking for a recognition of our jurisdiction and a declaration that all APFTQ members who produce video games and other multimedia projects be bound by the IPA. We are also asking for monetary damages for ACTRA Members who were not considered for the project because SWAT decided to hire a non-union cast.

The video game was released in mid-March. Among the first reviews was the following paragraph from internet game site, IGN.com:

"The tricky thing about using footage like this is making it good. And as Act of War shows, halfway decent production can't save bad acting. Almost every actor used in the film footage of Act of War is sub-par."

Swat Films, Atari and the APFTQ should learn the lesson that Ubisoft has already mastered: You get what you pay for. If you want a good quality production, you need to hire professional performers and pay them appropriately.

Moving this summer?

Don't forget to change your address on file at the ACTRA Montreal office!

From your phone number to your email address, it's important to keep up to date contact information with ACTRA.

Without current contact information, how else are you going to get news about workshops, your dues invoice, newsletters, invitations to the Members' Conference, news flashes and a call from a casting director?

Commercial Callbacks!

Don't forget, if you go in for a callback (or 2nd audition) for a commercial, you're owed money!

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Sylvain G Bissonnette
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Marc Francoeur
Phyllis Gooden
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CBC working on drama

As ACTRA enters its third year in the campaign to save Canadian drama, it appears the CBC, Canada's own broadcaster, may finally be answering the call.

The March release of CBC Television's 2005-2006 CTF drama order shows an increase of more than 30% over the 2004-2005 order, consistent with the broadcaster's plan to "establish CBC Television as the cornerstone of a strategy to address the Canadian drama crisis, and its belief that this can only be done by increasing the volume of high quality Canadian drama available to viewers."

Of particular interest to the Montreal production community are four projects on slate that one would imagine - assuming they get the green light - would find their home here.

Oka, the true story of the Oka Crisis and what transpired on both sides of the barricades and in the corridors of power;

October 1970, an eight-part series set at the height of the Quebec socio-political crisis;

Saint Urbain's Horseman, a miniseries adapted from the novel by Mordecai Richler, tracing the life of Jake Hirsch - from the streets of Montreal to international success as a television director; and

Season two of **The Tournament**, the acclaimed mockumentary series following the fortunes of The Farqueson Funeral Home Warriors and their obsessed parents in the competitive and sometimes absurd world of peewee hockey.



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Finding an edge by Dawn Ford

This last year has been tough for everyone in the industry and actors are no exception. There's not much work out there and we're always wondering what could be done to improve our chances of landing that next role. Over the years, there are many steps I have taken towards self promotion, but one of the most significant steps so far has been the creation of a personal website - www.dawnford.com.

Live Art's Peter Lisi, Paul Lisi and Maria Pacelli are part of a web design team that inspired me to get another edge in this business using the wonderfully creative technology available on the internet. I wanted to find ways of getting my portfolio out there in a more personal and accessible stride and this is it. What a team! They tailored the site according to my personality and desires, from the art gallery to the portfolio and right down to the music that plays while you experience the journey.

I must say that the website is something I am proud of and I am able to invite producers, directors, actors, friends and family to visit. (They can visit as long as they like and we never get tired of each other.) Two weeks ago I was cast right off my website for a commercial (avoiding an audition!) and earned twice what I paid in my initial investment.

I wanted to share this with the membership because as performers, we have to feel more empowered when it comes to our careers. If we don't invest in ourselves, who will? Montreal talent is unique and we should flaunt what we've got. So flaunt what you've got. I dare you!

Let us create a niche in the marketplace for you!

*ACTRA Montreal
would like to extend
our condolences to
the family, friends
and colleagues of
Robin Spry -
producer, writer,
director and leading
Montreal filmmaker.*



ROBIN SPRY
1939 - 2005

ACTRA Montreal

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