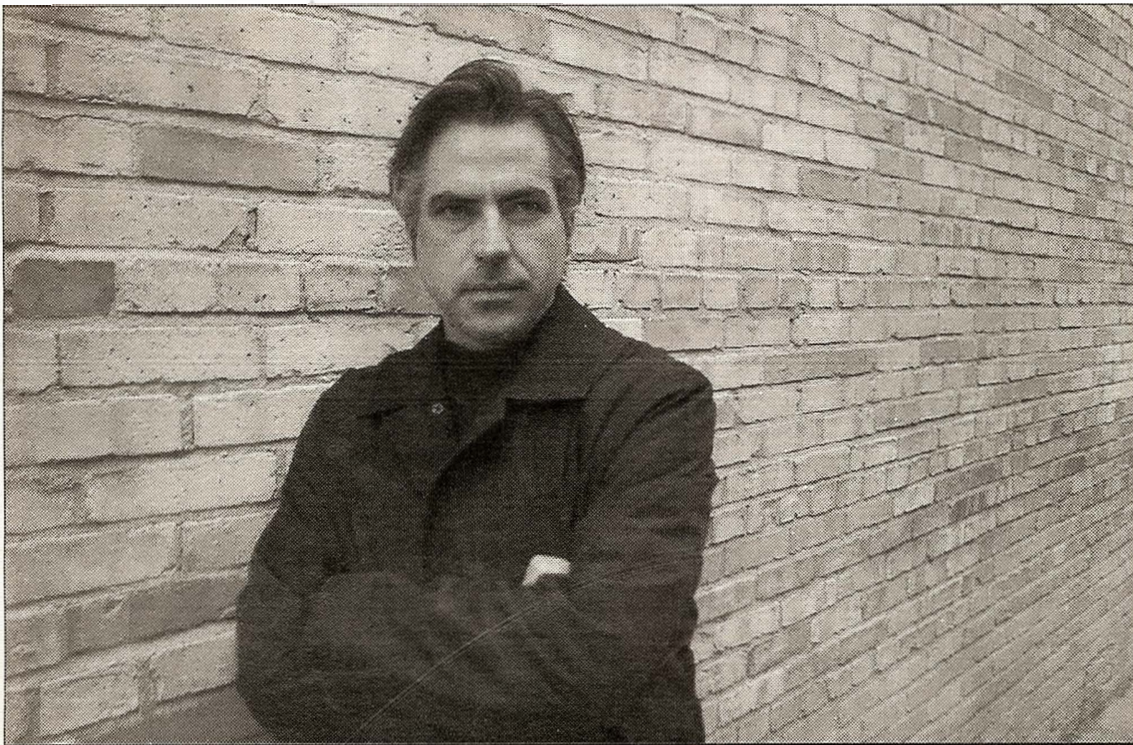


Feb 6 2003 Prairie Dog, Regina

10 years of film SASK-FILM RISING

Commercially and artistically, the Province's film scene is flourishing



CONTROVERSIAL CINEMA Queer City Cinema's Gary Varro. PHOTO: Darrol Hofmeister, sharpshooter photography

by Carrie-May Siggins

The last ten years have seen a boom in film and television in Regina. Regina was not only used as a location for high quality film and television, but as a talent source as well. Minds Eye Picture's *The Unsaid* caused a stir when it was shot here in 2000, then known as *Sins of the Father*. *13 Seconds*, a documentary about Kent State, won Regina-based Partners in Motion an Emmy for best documentary. And behind the scenes, Regina's post-production houses are booming.

In the fall of 2000 Saskatchewan's first festival dedicated to celebrating the accomplishments of women in Canadian film held its first screenings. *Screen Femmes* was started by a student who was interested in doing something for women in film. Professors from the University of Regina and producer Maureen McDonald joined in, and *Screen Femmes* was born.

Christina Ramsey, a professor at the University of Regina's Media Production and Studies, was one of the originators of the event. The festival was meant "to bring the community of women film makers together in Saskatchewan. Not only film makers but also academics and the community." Over three days the festival featured screenings by such innovators as Regina's own Dianne Oullette, and well-known Canadian filmmakers like Dorothy Christian came to speak from across the country. Screen Femmes has given out awards and grants to both aspiring and experienced women working in Regina.

It was another Saskatchewan first when *Queer City Cinema* hit city screens. Launched in 1996, the biannual festival is the first gay and lesbian film and video festival in Saskatchewan. Since then, Regina has been treated to twelve screenings of

almost 90 different films and videos. "I show a lot of work that tries to suggest the idea that identity is not fixed, its fluid," Gary Varro, the festival's organizer says.

In 2000, controversy hit when Varro decided to include a panel discussion on pornography in the gay and lesbian community. The brief screening that accompanied it dealt with the subject matter and had a few questionable porn-like titles. The Saskatchewan Party criticized the Provincial government for "spending tax dollars on porn."

"(The discussion) was meant to be critical, to discuss difficult issues and in no way was it to promote pornography or say its good or bad. It was just to see how the lesbian and gay community embraces or rejects pornography, how it impacts their community and sexuality in general. And the word "pornography" is a loaded word, people

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**The Filmpool congratulates
The Prairie Dog on its 10th anniversary!**

respond strongly to it. But in the end, I think their real problem was just a homophobic response.”

In September of 2002, the Regina soundstage opened its doors. According to the press release, “The 11.9 million, 82,000 square foot facility is a state of the art production and training space that provides Saskatchewan and the film industry with an opportunity to continue to diversify its economy.” Six productions have been shot there so far, including the TV miniseries *Fallen Angels*.

“(The film industry is) here to stay,” says Kevin DeWalt, CEO of Mind’s Eye Pictures. “This industry has been around for 15 years now, and has been struggling with using old beat-up warehouses to shoot projects in. Now that we have the facility I think you’ll see some great things happen.”

Critics worry that because the facility wasn’t built by the private sector, there might not be enough demand to support it. But Saskatchewan’s film, television and post-production business brought in \$239 million worth of productions between 1993 and 2001. Despite this, a recent *Leader Post* editorial suggested that taxpayer money spent on the film industry is one reason people leave the province.

The death of Jean Oser was a blow to the entire community. Gerald Saul remembers him as an inspiration: “He inspired, and educated. He inspired multiple generations of filmmakers here, but most importantly, the filmmakers that came out of the 70’s,” says Saul. “He helped start the Film Pool, SMPFA, and many other organizations. He held courses that people just flocked to, because people wanted to hear him talk. Because when they’d hear him, he loved film so much and respected the filmmakers and respected the people who wanted to make film, and you couldn’t help but love film when you listened to him.” Oser also had flocks of devoted students. “He would teach a class in the evening then go on until midnight, or 2 a.m. He’d keep pulling out more films and keep talking, smoking cigars and whiling the night away. He had these fans that would just hang on his words and debate him and absorb his history and his passion. So I think they saw no other career path. In 1975 it was not realistic to become a filmmaker in Saskatchewan, but they did anyway,

because of him, because he helped shape who they were.”

In grand Oser tradition, young filmmakers have generated much of the excitement on Regina’s film scene over the years. The One-Take Super Eight film festival, started by Alex Rogalski in 2000, brought back that film-school hands-on approach to making art. Twenty filmmakers can drop by the film pool, pick up a camera, and do what they want, as long as it’s three minutes. Local filmmaker robert.daniel.pytlyk was one of the original contributors, and will be organizing the event this year. “The best thing about Alex’s super8 festival, from a film maker’s point of view, is mostly the motivation and initiative to ‘say’ what you want, in the very little time that you have. It’s a true test of filmmaking skill, wit, and/or creativity. For many of the serious film makers, all of whom eat sleep and drink cinema, the festival became a forum to out think yourself, making each film, year after year, better than the previous.”

In May of 1999, pytlyk and a few fellow U of R film students decided that Regina needed a venue for a more experiential aspect of film. Enter the Antechamber. “Because cinema seemed to us to be marginalized as an art form, we wanted to open up a gallery/cinema-ateque that put the same importance on visual art as on film. So we created a space that had equal capacity for both.” The premise for the space, influenced by an essay called “Thoughts from the Antechamber” by Thomas Sherman, was that each room served as an antechamber for the next. “While you were crossing over metaphorically into cinema, you had to be influenced by visual arts and visa versa,” according to pytlyk. Eventually the Antechamber closed its doors, although it lasted a year later than planned, but it is remembered in the community as being a brave, challenging part of Regina’s film scene.

Older institutions kept on rolling over the last decade. The Saskatchewan Film Pool Co-operative celebrated its 25th anniversary last year with talks and retrospective screenings. The Yorkton International Film festival is still the oldest in North America, marking its 52nd anniversary last year.



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