

# THE SECOND WAVE

## Vancouver's New Producers



Clockwise from the top: Kevin Eastwood, Leah Mallen, Cheryl-Lee Fast.

**I**ndependent film is hot in Vancouver. Many new and experienced companies are making films outside of a studio system. Behind the seasoned veterans are the up-and-coming producers that support their mentor companies while developing their own projects. Meet the new wave of producers that are setting the stage for a fresh take on Canadian film and creating tighter ties with the international market.

### VANCOUVER SCENE

Vancouver became famous as an inexpensive backdrop to many U.S. feature films and television series. While these U.S. productions took center stage, many independent production companies blossomed in the background. A hearty group of Canadian producers forged a young industry by building their own companies outside of the Toronto film center.

Flash-forward to 2004 and an exciting new crop of producers is taking Vancouver by storm. This talented group of filmmakers has worked hard to soak up knowledge from their established mentors to produce films on their own terms. Their unique visions promise to shake up the Canadian film industry and bring fresh, new projects to the global film audience.

### KEVIN EASTWOOD

Kevin started his career as the associate producer on *Mile Zero*, the first feature film for director Andrew Currie and Anagram Pictures. He produced a short film with Michelle Bjornson entitled *Dents In The Sky* and line-produced *Light Rapid Transit*, the only Canadian film selected for the 2004 Clermont Ferand Film Festival. Kevin returned to feature films when he co-produced Anagram's second feature, *The Delicate Art of Parking*. The film went on to win the Golden Zenith Award for Best Film at the Montreal World Film Festival. He has since produced two more shorts, *Luv Junket* and

***"I had Canadian Television Fund financing, license pre-sales, and tax credits on a short. This is unheard of for a short now!"***

— Kimberley Wakefield

*Rugged Rich And The Ona Ona.*

Kevin discovered his love for producing while working as an intern with Anagram Pictures. "Prior to that," he said, "I didn't really know what a producer did.

Ironically enough, it seems it's the one skill they don't bother teaching you in film school." Kevin was thrilled to find a new company that gave him access he would never have enjoyed at a larger company. "I was allowed to get very close to the creative process and see how a film gets built from the ground up. I have to say I have been unbelievably lucky to work at a company where the story is paramount and where we don't just churn out a product."

In 2004, Kevin is co-producing Andrew Currie's newest film, *Fido*, a feel-good zombie movie that is a send-up of the boy-and-a-dog genre. Given the sheer size and scope of the production, *Fido* will likely eat up most of his time this year. He is also developing a fea-

ture film called *El Camino*, a TV-series based on *The Delicate Art of Parking*, and two other feature projects.

Kevin's long-term goals are to find projects that he would also want to watch in a movie theatre. He would love to be the producer who comes up with the project that is a big crossover hit and gets the world watching Canadian films. His biggest goal is, however, to be able to stay in Canada and still make movies. Kevin is certainly building that dream by working closely with talent from Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver on his most recent projects.

When it comes to working with writers, Kevin thrills for the joy of the creative process. "It's the genesis of the whole film," he said. "It's the most important step." It's easy for him to let countless hours slip by in the development process. He knows that no one would be working in this business if it weren't for the fact that at some point in their

life someone saw a movie that moved them. "That's why we all go into this business as opposed to advertising or banking, or whatever—it's about the stories."

## CHERYL-LEE FAST

Cheryl-Lee's interest in film began with writing, producing, and acting in Asia. She moved into finance and risk assessment, both of which exposed her to export and the international market. After returning to film, an internship with Global Television gave her a chance to attend the famous Banff television market as an emerging producer. She realized quickly that there was no template to success in this business. When she met Raymond Massey of Massey Productions, the two connected. She secured a producing internship with Raymond and progressively evolved into a producer.

At Massey Productions, Cheryl-Lee works in all aspects of the busi-

ness from developing a script to working with directors, learning the funding options, and securing the financing. Working with one partner has taught her how to build a viable company as opposed to being just a freelance producer. Her key role has given her the opportunity to travel to the international markets where she can keep a pulse on how the industry is changing and what is selling.

In 2004, Cheryl-Lee continues to work with Massey Productions while building her own company, Fast Productions. She has optioned a family feature that is in the final stages of development. She is also working with an acting/writing/comedy team that is doing a U.S. television series, developing ideas with a variety of writers, producing a multi-media project, and working on television series with other established production companies. Cheryl-Lee continues to produce feature films for Massey Productions, while giving Raymond first-

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look on the projects developed under her company.

When it comes to the big picture, Cheryl-Lee believes that financial risk actually goes down when a producer identifies the elements that resonate with an audience. "In my mind," she said, "It is the potential of a pure story with a strong perspective that minimizes risk. When we water down a story by attaching elements for themselves rather than to support the

ment executives, production managers, business affairs and distribution executives for several Vancouver companies including Forefront Entertainment, Insight Film and Video, Producers On Davie Pictures, No Equal, and Crescent Entertainment.

They have produced short films through different funding channels and have several projects including feature films, MOWs, and documentaries in active development

company that attract the highest echelon of creative talent, broadcasters, and financiers in Canada and internationally.

They have begun to establish strong relationships with foreign partners from attending international markets such as the Cannes Film Festival and MIPCOM. This has been a key strategy in developing their projects and company. Foreign partnerships are extremely important in the future of financing their

Television that focuses on the CSIS surveillance of university students throughout Canada in the 60s, 70s and 80s, and *Paul Watson: Eco Pirate*, a Canada/France co-production that follows Paul Watson over the course of a year as he protests seal and whale hunting around the world.

Leah also hopes to finance two feature films, *Year Of The Carnivore*, written by Sook Yin Lee, and *Every Fifth House*, a feature

**"I believe we have a tight and supportive community in Vancouver and I love having a base here from which to make films and television."**

— Leah Mallen

whole, we diminish the message and the underlying action and integrity of the piece." Cheryl-Lee hopes to convince sales agents and casting agents, in particular, to see this perspective. She believes that audiences will respond to honesty whether it be in a genre-based, B-movie or a slick, A-list star production.

In this vein, Cheryl-Lee loves working with writers because they build the foundation of what is created. Writers have personality characteristics that she admires and loves. "If they are talented," she said, "they are anthropologists. They observe people and work toward moving people from the heart." Most of all, she admires the tenacity of writers who can work with the multitude of people giving them feedback. She encourages writers to know as much about producing as possible so that they can place their product with the right people and trust their producer enough to let go.

### **ERIN HASKETT AND LARISA ANDREWS**

Erin Haskett and Larisa Andrews first met in 1997 during the foundation film program at the Vancouver Film School. In 2002, they graduated from the Canadian Film Centre's (CFC) Producer's Lab. They worked in various capacities as develop-

ment executives and funding agencies.

Working with successful mentors such as Rob Merilees, Christine Haebler, Harold Tichenor, Raymond Massey, Cari Green, Harry Sutherland, and the women at Forefront Entertainment has been integral to their professional growth. Erin and Larisa rave that "they have given us great advice, guided us in the right direction, acted as a sounding board when we needed it, answered questions related to funding and the process, and have been incredibly generous in terms of introductions to key players in the industry. We feel we have been learning from the best."

In 2004, they will continue to build their development slate for their company, Creative Engine Productions. Erin and Larisa hope to secure funding for two of their feature films, *Marker* and *Monster Lawns*. They are currently packaging their projects with cast and are raising financing in the spring. The producing team believes they have strong marketable films, but emphasize that you can never be sure in today's uncertain financing climate.

Over the long-term, they plan to produce fresh stories that are commercially viable and appeal to world audiences. Erin and Larisa are focused on building a successful, vertically-integrated production

projects. On the talent side, they work with writers and directors from across the country. While they believe in Vancouver writers, they don't limit their options. "Film really has no boundaries," they said, "and the best stories come from anywhere."

### **LEAH MALLEN**

Leah Mallen began working in the film industry doing publicity and casting work for several independent production companies. Casting soon lent itself very easily to producing. She worked as Matthew O'Connor's assistant at Pacific Motion Pictures, then produced a short film for writer/director, Mark Sawers called *Shoes Off*. The film was accepted at many festivals and won Best Short Film at International Critic's Week during Cannes. Leah completed the CFC Producer's Lab before venturing out on her own. When she met Trish Dolman in Toronto, the two hit it off. Leah pursued working with Trish at Screen Siren Pictures. After two years, Screen Siren Pictures is now a partnership between Leah, Trish, and Stephanie Symns.

Leah is working toward financing and producing three projects in 2004. The projects are *The Score*, a play adaptation for CBC's *Opening Night*, *Campus Spies*, a one-off documentary for History

film that Screen Siren Pictures recently optioned. She plans to attend several international markets to promote their projects, to expand her knowledge base and contacts in the industry, and to finance their projects in many markets. "My goal," she said, "is to continue to seek out good stories by reading scripts constantly and keeping my ear to the ground about who is up-and-coming."

Leah's connection to the Vancouver scene is one of pride and loyalty. She has many talented friends that make films in Vancouver. "I wish to continue to support them and collaborate with them. I also want to keep putting Vancouver on the map as we put quality and evocative films out there that can be viewed by an international audience. I believe we have a tight and supportive community in Vancouver and I love having a base here from which to make films and television."

### **KIMBERLEY WAKEFIELD**

Before becoming a producer, Kimberley worked for six years as an assistant director on series television. She worked at CBC Television for five years then joined an independent production company. In 1997, she was approached to produce the short film, *Karaoke Queen*. Deeply inter-

ested in producing, this gave Kimberley a ticket out of the AD world.

During her first project, she learned very quickly how making television in the Canadian system works. "It was the perfect experience," Kimberley said, "from that point of view. I had Canadian Television Fund financing, license pre-sales, and tax credits on a short. This is unheard of for a short now!" She went on to produce another short, worked at B.C. Film (a provincial funding agency), and was invited to attend the CFC Producer's Lab in 2002. While at the CFC, she also produced two digital shorts *Silenzio!* and *Disappeared*.

Unlike many producers, Kimberley never had an internship with a production company. She continues, however, to have several individuals from whom she seeks producing guidance, including Lodi Butler, Jennifer Moore, Trevor Hodgson, Lynn Booth, Nick Orchard,

John Pozer, Joe Battista, Karen Powell, and Jim Murphy. "There are many people in the community who are accessible and willing to help emerging producers which is what is so wonderful about the Vancouver filmmaking scene," she said.

The graduates from her year at the CFC continue to be a great source of support for her. "I believe many talented writer/directors came out of my year. *Guru Hop*, by writer/director Binky Mendez, is currently my most ambitious feature film project and the strongest relationship that emerged from my CFC experience." Kimberley fell in love with the script which has since piqued the interest of both an East Indian production company and Fred Fuchs. Fuchs is now acting as executive producer on the project which will be a Canada/India co-production. She is also in pre-production on a one-hour documentary called *Rage* for Global Television with executive producer Trevor Hodgson and has secured

some financing for *Mount Pleasant*, a feature screenplay by Ross Weber.

Kimberley intends to be a feature film producer in the long term, but also wants to continue making documentaries. Like most producers in Vancouver, she believes that diversification is the way to stay afloat in this tough producing climate. She hopes to get more involved with the Ontario and Quebec film communities to work with the incredible talent located there. Kimberley also believes that attending international film festivals is a must for forging partnerships outside of Canada. In fact, this year will be her second time attending the American Film Market (AFM).

As Kimberley builds her production company, L'Etranger Productions, she collaborates extensively with writers on the creative side. Creative producing is her favorite part of the process. "I must say that once you have solidified relationships that involve cre-

ative collaboration it is nearly impossible to go back to strictly number crunching." Her goal is to continue to support projects that have the potential to reach international audiences.

## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

The Vancouver independent scene is lucky to boast such a variety of producing talent. Their vision and accessibility make them a writer's greatest asset. Their creativity, determination, and collective sense of humor make them an audience's best friend. These young producers are sure to change the face of Canadian film and bring the vibrant spirit of Vancouver to the world. ■

Kate is a writer/producer based in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. She works locally as a script reader, columnist, story editor, and film juror. Kate currently has three feature films and a television series in development. For the latest news on her career, check out her website: [www.scriptgrrl.com](http://www.scriptgrrl.com).



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