



2004 Banff Tribute and Salute to Canada

Banff Television Festival

Speech delivered by

Charles Bélanger, Chair, Telefilm Canada

Banff, Monday, June 14, 2004



Canada

Honoured guests, colleagues and friends,

Thank you Steve for your kind words.

Indeed, from the creation of the Canadian Broadcast Program Development Fund in 1983, when at that time 85% of all programs aired in primetime on Canadian channels were imported from other countries, to today, as a partner in the Canadian Television Fund, Telefilm Canada has been proud to be part of the evolution of the Canadian television industry.

From riveting dramas and audacious comedies to pioneering children's shows and challenging documentaries, Telefilm has provided funding for more than 3,000 productions over the past 20 years.

And the Banff Television Festival has been right there with us, in particular President Emeritus Pat Ferns, to promote internationally the Canadian industry's big achievements on the small screen.

Among the numerous innovative initiatives, Pat's creation of Banff's market simulation in 1985, which has since been reproduced at dozens of international events, has helped ensure that this festival plays an

important role in the creative and industrial growth of the Canadian television industry.

In fact, we feel so strongly about this that our two newest Board members are Banff alumni: Fil Fraser is the founder of the Banff Television Foundation and was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Festival, and Trina McQueen was also a past Chair and is leading this year's International Jury.

We are therefore privileged at Telefilm to be able to count on the expertise, experience and vision of these two accomplished people.

As its most prominent government sponsor, Telefilm is pleased to take part in Banff's 25th-anniversary celebrations. Over the years, we have had many memorable highlights at the Festival, including the Telefilm-supported mini-series *The Boys of St. Vincent*, from John N. Smith, winning the Grand Prize in 1993, as well as clients such as Rick Mercer, Tantoo Cardinal and Eugene Levy taking home the Sir Peter Ustinov Award for outstanding achievement in comedy.

Taking a look at the bigger picture, both Telefilm Canada and the Banff Television Festival believe that supporting Canadian television, by sharing stories, is vital to reflect the country's rich cultural and historical heritage, as well as to promote understanding and build bridges.

That's why Telefilm Canada works vigorously to support, not just Canadian television, but domestic cinema, new media and music as well. Indeed, by putting our faith in the industry's creativity and commitment, we genuinely believe that we can help deliver high-quality television products of interest to Canadian audiences.

Thanks to recent successful feature films like *The Blue Butterfly*, *Dans une galaxie près de chez vous* and *The Corporation*, Canadian cinema currently holds just over a 5% share of the domestic market, up from 1.7% before the creation of the Canada Feature Film Fund, 2.7% in 2002 and 3.6% in 2003.

Even if the 5% box-office target has not yet been fully reached on the long term, we have made good strides to get there, and this is what I call progress!

On the television side, investing in a diversity of domestic programming to strike a chord with audiences is also one of Telefilm's objectives. In fact, in line with our asymmetrical approach to the country's two linguistic markets, we have made English-language drama our number one priority.

The Canadian Television Fund's recently announced \$96-million commitment to this unique genre demonstrates that our goal is the same as that of Canadian drama producers: the creation of the highest-quality original programming with the potential to connect with the broadest audience possible.

But that's only part of the story.

Telefilm Canada is also dedicated to building the long-term sustainability of the Canadian industry.

On the international front, as we are reinforcing our role in positioning the Canada Brand at international markets – such as MIPTV where we saw a record 82 companies in attendance in 2004 – we work alongside our partners to boost exports of TV products and to forge strong co-

production relations that help the Canadian industry to thrive on the international scene.

We are also keenly enthusiastic about ensuring industry sustainability through the National Training Schools Program and professional development initiatives such as our Spark Plug Program launched in Banff last year, which provides increased support for mid- to advanced-career television producers from culturally diverse and Aboriginal communities.

In fact, through Spark Plug, 14 producers from across the country are here in Banff to benefit from the expertise of broadcasters and industry professionals.

As a former broadcaster and as Chair of Telefilm, I think the time has come for our broadcasting system, public and private, French and English, to decisively make room for cultural diverse-produced programs in our two official languages.

Deliberate and well-conceived initiatives in that direction would do infinitely more for the betterment and the enrichment of our Canadian

social fabric than any heartfelt or touching speech on inclusiveness – although I recognize its importance.

Without a doubt, the Banff Festival helps us achieve our objective of strengthening the Canadian industry by shining a light on Canadian creators of all backgrounds, as well as their works, and also by providing unique networking opportunities such as the Telefilm-supported Cyber Lunches.

And on this note, I would like to congratulate the Banff Television Festival on its silver anniversary, and wish the organizers and their teams all the best for a stable and dynamic future.

Merci.