

JUST WATCH US!

Films showcase Canadian culture abroad

All over the world—in Buenos Aires and Seoul, in Bogotá and Shanghai, in Mexico City, Sydney and Tokyo—Canadian missions and consulates are using film to shake up perceptions about Canada, promote Canadian culture and encourage interest in our country's cultural industries.



A Parliament Hill tour guide with the official portrait of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau from the NFB production *Just Watch Me: Trudeau and the 70s Generation*

In Taiwan, for example, many people still view Canada as a land of mountains, snow and maple trees. To counteract these stereotypes, the Canadian Trade Office in Taipei worked with Canadian and local partners to hold a small-scale festival in February–March 2003 called “Canada Through the Lens: The Landscape You Haven’t Seen.” On the program: newly released features, documentaries and animated films, along with lectures and seminars. It’s an ideal way to highlight Canada as an innovative, cosmopolitan and multicultural society.

Jack Horwitz of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) says that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade “has a history of understanding how to use film for public diplomacy and sometimes how to leverage the intellectual capital in a film into the society that [diplomats are] living in. When people use the arts in that way, it’s really quite extraordinary.”

Over the past year, DFAIT and the NFB have built on their long-standing relationship to create a film library within the Department’s Arts and Cultural Industries Promotion Division. Since January 2002, missions and consulates have been able to borrow copies of NFB productions for screening abroad.

“We have over 70 titles in the library,” says Karen Green, chief contact for the library. “Missions and viewing audiences benefit from this effective, no-cost cultural initiative. We ship the videos in the diplomatic bag, and guidelines stipulate that the missions do not charge for the screenings.”

Using suggestions from Horwitz, the library is constantly adding to its

collection. In 2002 it bought the rights to about 20 new films—part of its effort to respond to growing demand for material in support of the *Semaine de la Francophonie*.

Green adds, “Due to the popularity of many of our films—for example, *Mon oncle Antoine* and *Just Watch Me: Trudeau and the 70s Generation*—we’ve purchased extra copies to accommodate the demand from missions.”

Jack Horwitz has helped the Department send NFB films everywhere from Chicago to Havana, and from Washington to Moscow. In 2001 the embassy in Seoul, South Korea, showed some 87 different films as part of a hugely successful Canada Animation Festival. That same year, the embassy in Austria programmed a retrospective of author Mordecai Richler for Jewish Film Week in Vienna.

“It’s about finding the right tool for the right demographic,” says Horwitz. “We ask them, ‘Who is your audience?’ and ‘What do you want them to take away?’ If you get an audience that’s willing to take a tough film, we can get them a tough film.” ♦

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