

York film graduates make it big as entrepreneurs

Outlaw filmmakers of the North

by Rachel Liebgott

"We always did things a little bit outside of the norm; we were kind of like renegade outlaws," says Peter Gentile, referring to his film student days at York University.

Adds his partner Stuart Clarfield, "We are very patriotic Canadians."

Hence their company name, *Northern Outlaw Productions*. Cre-



ated in 1985, when both were in their third year as York film students, *Northern Outlaw Productions* is today a thriving business. Clarfield and Gentile have been partners for over ten years and are busy developing dramatic TV series, feature films, half-hour documentaries, commercials, and theatrical trailers. A wide-ranging output.

They explain, "You have to do everything to stay alive!"

The outlaw spirit surfaced early on. In their last year in the programme, Clarfield and Gentile's proposed "major" project was given a no-go.



Peter Gentile and Stuart Clarfield are Northern Outlaw Productions, a multi-faceted Toronto film company on its way to becoming a corporation. • photo by Joëlle Medina

film Northern Outlaw Productions
Peter Gentile and Stuart Clarfield,
York Film Programme Graduates

Their proposed \$25,000 budget was considered simply too high for a student-made film. So the renegades retaliated by demanding to make the film or drop out of the programme. They were given December 1st as a deadline to find the cash. Sponsors were hard to come by, but a week before the date, a number of corporate supporters allowed the partners to go forward with their project. The seemingly untenable became a reality.

Welcome to the Parade became

the first Canadian student-made feature film ever. It appeared in the 1986 Montreal Film Festival and Toronto's Festival of Festivals. *Welcome to the Parade* is about upper-middle class drug abuse; it's a story of a youth who pushes the line, and who eventually falls in a downward spiral that culminates in violence.

Currently, the partners are in the process of writing a feature screenplay. Their story editor, Mardik Martin, has worked with Martin Scorsese for over 20 years, and has collaborated on such films as *Raging Bull*, *Mean Streets* and *New York, New York*. As well, Clarfield and Gentile are now creating a high profile sports-related documentary and are in line

to develop a novel as a TV movie. Not only that, they're also the producers of a 13-part television series called *Love Hurts*.

Past projects by this prolific duo are numerous and varied. *Terra Nova* (1991), a documentary developed for the CBC, is a sensitive account of the Canadian-Italian experience with a focus on Phil Esposito. Two short music-documentaries on the lifetime achievements of Oscar Peterson (1991) and Bruce Cockburn (1992) were both directed by Stuart Clarfield. Their company has also produced commercials and trailers (those short glimpses of upcoming movies you see in theatres before the featured film is shown) for several Canadian Film distributors. And Clarfield and Gentile have created commercials and trailers for such films as *Black Robe*, *Perfectly Normal*, *Oh What A Night*, *Prom Night 4*, and *Liar's Edge*.

The men fronting *Northern Outlaw Productions* attribute their success to York's film programme and especially the faculty, as Clarfield emphatically declares.

"We learned it all at York. If it weren't for York we wouldn't have made films. We were taught to write, direct, edit and shoot. When we started we didn't know anything and we went all the way to creating a feature film."

Both partners are profoundly grateful to an excellent faculty. A

continued on page 14

Hits 'n' Bits

AROUND YORK

Words are always flying around on this campus. If not in heated debate in overcrowded classrooms or colorfully scrawled on bathroom walls, then in more "civilized" settings such as poetry readings and art magazine launchings. **The Writers Read Series** is still in full swing. Coordinated by Shirley Katz this year, this weekly (Tuesday night) forum welcomes all writers to read their works (poetry, prose, etc.) within the comfy setting of Vanier's Senior Common Room, to an ever-changing mix of audience—both student and faculty. Contact Vanier's student council for details.

Existere, York's foremost student literary publication, is launching its 2nd issue of this school year tonight (Wednesday) in the Vanier Senior Common Room. Come and hear people read, enjoy live music, punch and crackers and/or submit your poetry, prose and artwork for the next issue (120 Vanier College). And word's out of yet more Vanier-affiliated literary events: **Avancer**, the Undergrad Journal of Canadian Studies (call Steve Holowka, 665-6786 for details), and a style guide for those interested in publishing should come out in the near future.

McLaughlin College is having its first-ever poetry contest, with prizes and everything. Open to all members of the college, excluding faculty and fellows, the contest will include a reading of winners's work and a special prize to be awarded for the best poem dealing with any aspect of public policy. All entries (questions, etc.) should be directed to room 102, MacLaughlin College; the deadline is Dec. 1.

The **Art Gallery of York University** (N145 Ross Bldg.) hosts a solo exhibition of new work by Toronto artist **Tom Dean**, until Dec. 20 (opening tonight, Nov. 11, 6:00-8:00 pm). One of Canada's leading sculptors, Dean employs a variety of different media and exhibition strategies. His latest body of cast bronze and plaster works have been realized as enlarged, autonomous sculptural objects—all created in York University's newly completed Odette Foundry facility, where Dean worked as an Artist-in-Residence.

— Lilac Caña

ART

Martin Heisel majors in Psychology at York but spends an inordinate amount of his enjoyable time painting. In fact, he's having a second showing of his original works at the Hillcrest Community Library (5901 Leslie St.) until Nov. 30. "Art's always been a part of my life," he says, "so it seemed a natural progression to develop it on my own and to share it with people."

Continued on page 13

Simon anything but lost in Yonkers play

by Joshua Marans

When Neil Simon wins his first Pulitzer Prize in drama you have to take notice. After writing audience favourites *Plaza Suite*, *The Goodbye Girl*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, and *Broadway Bound*, *Lost In Yonkers* is quite the accomplishment. This winning play is, however, a vastly different experience from his previous works.

Simon has always been somewhat autobiographical in his pieces. It is no coincidence that we find two wise-cracking brothers in *Yonkers*, Jay and Arty, who are much akin to Simon's earlier creations of Stanley and Eugene Jerome in the *Brighton Beach Trilogy*, and the relationship shared by Simon and his own brother.

Apart from the boys and the war, *Yonkers* isn't *Brighton Beach*. As the play starts, Jay and Arty are being left with their father's family for a year, while he goes off to earn money to pay loan sharks for debts created by his dead wife's hospital bills. The living arrangement isn't easy. Their Grandmother doesn't want the boys in her house. They wouldn't even be able to stay if it weren't for their Aunt Bella's insistence that she and her mother take the boys in.

We instantly fall in love with Bella. Born with Scarlett Fever, Bella didn't talk until she was five. Though Simon offers us much to laugh at with Bella's good-natured blundering, ultimately it is her growth throughout the play, and her struggle for independence from her mother that is the focus of the show. This is probably one of the most challenging characters to play, as Bella is all at once a little girl and a woman.

Mercedes Ruehl, who won an Oscar for *The Fisher King*, took home



Susan Giosa as Bella (centre), convinces her monstrous mother to take in nephews Jay (Taro Alexander) and Arty (Phillip Reese) in Neil Simon's award-winning Yonkers. Left without a resolution, the characters undergo a crisis at every moment of the play.

theatre *Lost In Yonkers*
Mirvish Productions
written by Neil Simon
restaged by Peter Lawrence
The Royal Alexandra Theatre
until Dec. 19

a Tony for her portrayal of Bella in the original Broadway cast. In the Toronto production, Susan Giosa meets the challenge of the part quite well, as she shocks us into realizing our sympathy for her character.

Best known for her rendering of the demon's voice in *The Exorcist*, veteran stage and screen actress Mercedes McCambridge is excellent as the Grandmother. She has worked with such greats as the late Rock Hudson, James Dean, and Elizabeth Taylor. As the matriarch of her family, she has tried to teach her children the pain and strength that she learned growing up in an anti-semitic Germany by hitting them or locking them

in the closet. It is easy enough to want to hate her character by the end of the show, as we realize how her children grew up; one child becomes a gangster, another is so afraid to talk that she can't speak right, and the rest are just plain scared of her. McCambridge's portrayal, however, demands that the audience see the pain in a woman whose credo is to be like steel.

Jay is well portrayed by Taro Alexander in his first major part. Jay grows up onstage, going from almost sixteen to almost seventeen by the show's end; Taro succeeds in bringing this across. As Arty, Phillip Reese shows comedic timing beyond his years, and is a constant source of humour.

It is hard to expose any weak points in this production. While the sound was off for the first scene, the theatre managed to adjust it for the

rest of the performance. Michael Gaston as Eddie, Jay and Arty's father, seemed to be just reciting lines and going through the motions at times.

Perhaps the only really disturbing thing about *Lost In Yonkers* is the ending. So many characters are left without a resolution by the end that we have to wonder what Simon is trying to tell us. As Taro put it, "I like the play a lot because it deals with really serious issues. You know? It's the whole relationship, the whole situation for all the characters is like a life-death situation. I think that that's what makes it so exciting, so kind of fair. That all these characters are going through crises at every moment of the play."

Despite the ending, if you're finding yourself down and out in Toronto, getting lost in *Yonkers* would be a good way to spend an evening.