

Movie Notes: The numbers are in

The Georgia Straight
March 23, 2006
By Pieta Woolley

Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts Olga Ilich announced on March 13 that B.C. film and TV productions in 2005 were up 50 percent over the previous year.

"We haven't seen this level of production since 2003," Ilich told a crowd at a Vancouver Board of Trade luncheon at the Wall Centre.

According to the government's numbers, 39 foreign feature films were made here in 2005, up from 16 in 2004 and 25 in 2003. TV series dropped slightly, from 15 in 2003 to 21 in 2004 and 13 in 2005. But the chair of the B.C. Film Society and the Vancouver International Film Festival, Michael Francis, told the *Straight* that he's less impressed with the short-term boom in foreign production and more impressed with the long-term growth of Canadian products.

"The figures showed that domestic continued its relentless move upward," Francis said. Domestic production grew modestly from 2004 to 2005, by just 1.7 percent. "The service production industry saw a huge jump, but that's just in the past two years. If you look at three years, it's down."

Francis noted that animation has seen the biggest jump of any film sector. In 2003, the industry was worth about \$22 million; in 2005, it reached \$85 million—almost a 300-percent leap in three years. "That's a tribute to the companies and their motivation and the digital-effects tax credit," he said.

Thank goodness for that tax credit, the head of one of Vancouver's biggest studios told the *Straight*. Mark Prior, CEO of Rainmaker Income Fund, a postproduction and visual-effects company, said that early 2005 was sluggish until the B.C. Liberals announced increases to the program. Then the industry boomed.

"It was the feast following the famine," he explained. "This is the new currency of filming in the world."

Since the 1970s, when Canada introduced the world's first film tax credits, several countries and American states have followed suit. Prior said that if Hollywood producers had their preference, they would choose to shoot in Los Angeles. "We need to provide the motivation for them to come here," he said. Prior, though, is not afraid of an international rush to the bottom, with governments competing against each other to offer the cheapest rate.

"There's a limit to what governments will do, and we're probably close to that limit," he said. Rainmaker opened its first international office in London, England, last year.