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June, 26th, 2020 Covid-19 emergency response for the film and television industry
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WHAT CANADIAN CREATORS NEED:

1. Canadian creators need support in 1. Development, 2. Production 3. Promotion and marketing .
Currently there is support mostly for production. Improvements can be made to support 1. Development and 3. Promotion and marketing.

2. We are currently in an unprecedented time. Production has come to a standstill and creators are now working from home, often having lost their source(s) of income and uncertain about when or if their projects will ever resume. If, however, creators are supported throughout this solitary time, there is a unique opportunity to view it as an incubation period for project development. Creators can use this time to develop content to be produced in the next several years, as well as option books and collaborate with multi-disciplinary artists (animators, musicians, writers, consultants, showrunners etc). The current times present an opportunity to make a critical investment into the industry that could stimulate a renaissance of new and exciting creative work. Even once the COVID19 crisis draws to a close, the service industry will take a while to get back up and running, so investment in the development of domestic projects will get tradespeople, studios, talent and equipment houses working immediately on Canadian content while we wait for international service opportunities to come back to Ontario.

Another important outcome of investing in development is that it supports the creation of high quality work that is internationally viable. Traditionally the development stage for Canadian projects is underfunded and often there is not enough time to fully develop productions at the same level as our competitors.

Canadian production companies also need support (especially now), for operational costs to keep us competitive and have the resources to continue growing our industries. We need to be ready for when the industry is open for business again. The needs include resources to staff up, hire consultants and various positions in the development stage to help develop slates of projects. Business development and keeping production companies alive and creating is priority.

3. Some Canadian creators have expressed a keen interest in having their content shared and consumed online through the various streaming platforms and movie channels. However, the challenge has been that streamers typically are not interested in dealing with one-off projects. Like the traditional studios, they prefer to receive content through major agencies or solicited through an aggregator. This makes it next to impossible for Canadian content creators to have their content seen for acquisition consideration. While it is true (especially now) that audiences are at home and watching movies online, there is currently no viable business model for independent films to get on the streamers, and furthermore not enough capacity to promote these titles if/when they do appear online. Perhaps this process can be streamlined through an existing entity (such as Ontario Creates) that could present Canadian projects to the streamers to consider them for acquisition at fair market value. Currently, English Canada is dominated by American content, and since the large networks

and streamers are taking advantage of and being attracted by our tax credits, A- class talent and crew, plus the Canadian dollar, they should also be encouraged (if not mandated) to look at Canadian content as well as Canadian writers, directors, and actors for their productions. Canadians have proven that we produce world class content. Streamers should also be encouraged to invest in domestic production, and engage in co-ventures with Canadian companies.

4. The federal and provincial tax credit backlog continues to be an issue. Sometimes in certain cases, it could take on average 18 months to receive the credit. In the meantime, producers continue to pay interest on borrowed monies against tax credits that make up a portion of their production budgets. The tax credits were originally designed to help grow companies and give producers equity resources to develop and invest in new projects. Somewhere along the way, however, these funds were rolled into production budgets and it has now become standard to use producer fees as well as these tax credits to get projects made. This system needs to be examined. If, in the interim, wait times can be fast-tracked, it will give relief to many producers carrying these debts. Shorter turn around times would certainly help.

5. Media and exposure for Canadian creators is imperative. A creative forum/ series to showcase artists over social media that is presented by Ontario Creates could be a short term solution. This forum could be organized in collaboration with industry guilds, associations, unions, film schools, TIFF (etc) so that it could be promoted on their networks. It should be facilitated by a moderator on a platform that enables viewers to ask questions and interact with featured artists, industry professionals, and industry leaders.

The Canadian media also needs to be empowered and encouraged to feature Canadian artists, especially now! E-talk and Entertainment Tonight, for example, have said to many producers and filmmakers, “we need an American angle to feature this story” OR “our audiences are only interested in American content” This needs to change. Our content is world class and should be showcased. We need to be focused on building star systems, and on telling our collective stories. Also, public relations companies should work together to build a narrative that Canadians will be interested in as they need to be part of the solution. Now more than ever, PR agencies need to be creative in their approaches and think outside the box. We are good enough and do not need to make apologies for it.

6. Distribution in Canada of Canadian films and television has been forced into an already evolving market. The solution is to empower and incentivize producers to be part of the marketing and distribution of their own products. Distributors typically receive funding from Telefilm Canada to market Canadian films, and producers/ creators are often not part of the discussion when developing plans to release these projects. There is also common belief in the industry that Canadian films (in English Canada) are not successful at the box office. Distributors are incentivized to take on Canadian product, but their approach to releasing films is, with some exceptions, a “one size fits all” model. Their goal is to mitigate risk by doing marketing work “in-house”, which at times is compromised, and meeting a minimum requirement for theatrical release (one-week in one or two theatres) with minimum promotion in order to access their funding. This approach is defeatist, and does not encourage creators, artists or the industry to create content that they believe will hold up in the marketplace. Moreover, it puts producers at a financial disadvantage. Distributors need to work alongside creators to develop unique strategies to get their content out to audiences. Partnering with existing organizations, finding corporate sponsors who align with the themes of a film, creating special events where artists can do Q & A’s to create value added experiential events for audiences, as well as incorporating multidisciplinary art forms (live music, dance), are all ways creators can find their audiences. We, as an industry, need to be competitive and acknowledge that audiences around the world are consuming content at home more and more. Therefore, a narrative around how to get content to the audience is and should be a partnership between creator and distributor. In many cases, a distributor is not needed at all. Creators know their own projects best and often will be best

equipped to find their audiences, often creating robust distribution plans of their own. There is a need to encourage the creation of content that will hold up in the marketplace and will ultimately do well once it has found its audience, as well as a need for support to help producers get their projects to market.

7. Exhibitors in Canada have traditionally been dominated by American content. Also there has been a polarization of the content into two categories, large franchise spectacle films and “independent” films. Theatres have been struggling generally to attract audiences. Eventually they should be incentivized to be more open to domestic content, to work with Canadian creators to create content that Canadians will be interested in and to promote that content. If producers and filmmakers develop robust distribution plans, they will give the exhibitors comfort in booking their titles. Audiences ultimately decide what is good content, and what they want to watch. If domestic content is well positioned, developed with audiences in mind, supported to compete, then promoted through the various associations, guilds, unions, organizations, media and PR, and continued strong political leadership, we can grow the domestic market.

8. This set back has given the industry pause to reflect, develop and reform an already incredibly viable industry in Ontario. Collectively we can all work to do our part, and the cultural fabric of Ontario, and Canada, will be better for it in the end. An evolved society is one that invests in the arts and creates art. It reflects cultural themes and ideas back to the audiences that consume and are exposed to it. People like to see themselves and their lives reflected back to them, and in Canada we are uniquely positioned to have an extremely rich and multicultural society that we all celebrate.

9. Investing in local economies to encourage and decentralize the film and television industry outside of major city centres, where studios are full, parking is an issue, and logistics often onerous. The province should repurpose buildings in smaller cities and communities to encourage film and television production, and set up film commission offices and infrastructure to support production needs.

COVID Has Presented Us With A New Opportunity

- This is a time where we face a battle on two fronts: saving lives and saving spirits. I don't mean that in an abstract way - art has evolved throughout human history but its very real necessity has remained the same. It connects us, it brings us together, it brings us comfort, it helps us heal from collective trauma - like we're going through right now. It is a fundamental part of collectively psychologically moving on to remind ourselves that we are connected and that, even if we're more isolated than normal, we are not alone. I would implore the government and my fellow artists to recognize the importance of creating and sharing art right now.

- I have always focused on creating work that explores the human condition intimately, sometimes humorously, and profoundly. I tell stories that don't have borders - they're meant to be felt by people of all different backgrounds. Canada is a uniquely apt place for this kind of creative work - not only is it a richly multicultural country, it also provides grants and financial incentives to its creators.

“The importance of the arts to societies in which they thrive is well documented”- Karen Kain

BIOGRAPHY:

Sergio made his directorial debut with *LOOKING FOR ANGELINA*, a feature film about one of the most sensational murder cases in North American history. *LOOKING FOR ANGELINA* won numerous awards, was showcased at festivals around the world, played to sold-out theatres in fifteen Canadian cities, and ranked amongst the top five in box office revenues for Canadian films at the time. His follow up feature, *THE COLOSSAL FAILURE OF THE MODERN RELATIONSHIP*, starring Enrico Colantoni (*Veronica Mars*) and Krista Bridges (*Heroes Reborn*), was warmly received on the festival circuit, and premiered at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood on Oscar weekend. *COLOSSAL* is currently available on all VOD platforms in the US and Canada.

Currently, Sergio is back in the director's chair with, *THE CUBAN*, starring Oscar winner Louis Gossett Jr. and Oscar nominee Shohreh Aghdashloo, along with Ana Golja (*Degrassi*), Lauren Holly (*Dumb and Dumber*) and Giacomo Gianniotti (*Grey's Anatomy*). *THE CUBAN* tells the story of a young Afghan immigrant named Mina (Golja) who develops an unlikely friendship with Luis, an elderly Cuban musician with dementia (Gossett Jr.). *THE CUBAN* will be released in 2019.

Sergio has directed a number of short films, including *THE FORTUNE COOKIE*, *OVER A SMALL CUP OF COFFEE* and *EN PLEIN AIR*. He executive produced and had a creative role on the animated feature *ARCTIC JUSTICE*, featuring Jeremy Renner, James Franco, Anjelica Huston, Alec Baldwin, John Cleese and Heidi Klum. He is executive producing *LAMBORGHINI*, starring Alec Baldwin and Antonio Banderas and acted as a consulting producer on *TRADING PAINT*, starring John Travolta and Shania Twain. Sergio received his education at York University. He has attended various master classes in directing/acting, including one led by director Robert Altman, and has shadowed both directors and cinematographers over the years, including the legendary Piotr Sabocinski. He has a background in music from The Royal Conservatory of Music.

