

Brightlight Pictures Sets the Stage in Vancouver

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By Samantha Yaffe

Vancouver indie producer Stephen Hegyes has given up his freelance reins and joined forces with prominent service producer and former Shavick Entertainment president Shawn Williamson to launch Brightlight Pictures, Vancouver's newest hybrid production house.

Part service, part indigenous, the new prodco - which is currently housed out of the Shavick offices in Vancouver and will maintain a permanent presence in L.A. where Hegyes spends half his year - is set to develop, finance and produce independent feature film and television projects.

"Independent and service has never really been integrated here before," says Hegyes. "Vancouver typically hasn't had the same level of production companies as Toronto, but we're starting to see more and more."

He attributes the many years of U.S. production activity in Vancouver to the wave of new local talent. "There's even more people from Vancouver showing up at the international markets looking for partners. Ten years ago when I'd go to Cannes, MIP or NATPE, I was really one of the only B.C. producers."

The benefit for Hegyes to, for the first time, tie himself down to one production entity is the ability to have a more constant flow of work.

"While you're producing [for example], you don't have any time to develop or finance. You wind up having maybe done a great job on a film, but have nothing else to move into right after."

The new company, which has a housekeeping deal with full-service producer Shavick, is personally financed by Hegyes and Williamson, who intend to access as much of the Canadian public funding envelopes as possible. "The only way to make Canadian films work is through the Canadian subsidies, but it's difficult to package them other than through L.A.," says Williamson.

Allison Laing, a longtime assistant to Hegyes, is heading up Brightlight's development department.

Meantime, the company kicks off with a healthy development slate, which it plans to expand to eight to 10 features.

Going to camera in November is "Punch", a dark, sexy, feature comedy written and directed by Vancouver's Guy Bennett.

About a father and daughter's emotionally incestuous relationship, the roughly \$1.5-million film was funded by Telefilm Canada's low-budget program and Citytv.

Further down the pipe is "American Venus", Bruce Sweeney's ("Last Wedding") next feature about the struggle that ensues among a group of young actors living together in Vancouver. The \$5-million film is slated to shoot in the city next year.

Looking beyond the West Coast, Mina Shum's next project, "Golden Orchid Society", is a \$6-million to \$8-million Chinese/Canadian coproduction. Potentially a Cantonese-language film, it tells the true story of a group of woman living in Canton at the turn of the century who would work for silk factories and give up 70% of their salaries in order escape arranged marriages. Hegyes is in partnership discussions with Peter Loehr of Imar Films.

"Shit Loves Linda", penned by Canadian Film Centre grad Penny Gay and directed by James Dunnison ("Stuff"), is about a down-on-her-dating-luck woman in her early 50s who ends up on the lam with a mysterious briefcase full of money. Budgeted at \$10 million, the character-driven drama, which Hegyes likens to "Sexy Beast", is being packaged by ICM, with Ralph Zimmerman serving as exec producer.

"Peachland" is a coproduction with Toronto's Triptych Media. Loosely based on the opera "Carmen" and set in Peachland, BC, the feature is being written by Katherine Shlemmer. A director has not been confirmed.

"Alienated" is a 13-part, half-hour, sci-fi comedy series created by Mark Sawers ("Kids in the Hall") about a typical suburban family with typical problems, only they get abducted by aliens on a regular basis.

On the service side, Brightlight is going to camera this fall on the German-financed feature film "Homerroom".

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