

B.C.'s Brightlight scores fest hat trick

By: Ilona Beiks

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Partners Shawn Williamson and Stephen Hegyes of Vancouver-based indie film and TV prodco Brightlight Pictures have scored a hat trick with three world premieres unspooling at this year's festival.

Psych drama *American Venus* (Bruce Sweeney's Rebecca De Mornay vehicle) and *Normal* (Carl Bessai's story about deadly fate) are both in the Contemporary World Cinema section, while director Ernie Barbarash bows with the supernatural thriller *They Wait in Canada First!*

Brightlight is one of the busiest prodcos on Canada's west coast.

Since it hung its shingle in 2001, Brightlight has racked up over 20 productions, and is now in various stages of production, financing or sales on three TV series, five movies and two development deals with two networks.

"We're moving more and more into global financing," says Hegyes. "Right now we're working on copros with Ireland, Australia, Singapore, South Africa, Germany, and developing financing for our own material."

Brightlight is also not averse to the term "service deal."

"Whether it's a \$1-million project or \$60-million, we can do as little or as much as necessary, including development, financing and full production services," he says.

When asked if the TIFF hat trick was part of a strategic plan, Hegyes says: "Timing-wise, it all just shook down at the same time for us to be ready for Toronto."

Nonetheless, Hegyes has a special affinity for the festival.

"I started at Toronto with *Double Happiness* [written and directed by Mina Shum] in 1994," he recalls. "It was a great screening; we went on to pick up distribution around the world. Since then, I always try to start at Toronto; I don't know whether it's being superstitious or practical."

Hegyes will head up the jury for the fest's CFTPA Feature Film Producer's Award, which will hand out \$10,000 to a Canadian feature film producer (with a film in the festival) at the TIFF awards ceremony. Meanwhile, he's at the fest looking for U.S. and foreign distribution deals for his triad.

American Venus stars De Mornay in a psychological thriller about mother-daughter conflict, figure skating and gun addiction, and is written and directed by Sweeney.

"I would do anything with Bruce. He's the driving force; he's the real deal artistically, in all ways," says Hegyes.

Sweeney, too, has done well at TIFF. His feature debut *Live Bait* took home the \$25,000 Toronto-City prize for best Canadian feature film in 1995, and his *Last Wedding*, also produced by Hegyes, was the official opening-night gala in 2001. *American Venus* is distributed in Canada by TVA Films.

Normal, written by Bessai (*Severed*, *Emile*) and Travis McDonald, tells the story of strangers brought together by a deadly car accident and stars Kevin Zegers and Carrie-Anne Moss (*Matrix* trilogy). Produced by Bessai and Andrew Boutilier, Hegyes says, "I have to give credit to Andrew and Carl for this film. Andrew developed this when he was working for us, and we wanted to help him make it happen." So Hegyes and Williamson stepped up as exec producers. The film's Canadian distrib is Mongrel Media.

Bessai also cowrote *They Wait* with Trevor Markwart and Doug Taylor. It's based on the supposedly true and terrifying events of a family's life-threatening experiences during the Hungry Ghost Month festival in Taiwan.

They Wait is helmed by Barbarash, who is no stranger to the thriller genre as he's coproduced many screamers, including *Cube Zero* (2004), *American Psycho* (2000) and its sequel, *American Psycho II: All American Girl* (2002). This particular supernatural thriller stars Jamie King (*Sin City*, *Pearl Harbor*). It will be distributed in Canada by TVA.