

## Indigenous filmmaking set to rise in Canada in 2018 and beyond

'If ever there was a possible time [to make a film] — this is it,' says director Alanis Obomsawin

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Filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin in her office at the National Film Board of Canada in Montreal in 2015. She's currently editing her 51st feature-length project. (Ryan Remiorz/Canadian Press)

Indigenous filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin never thought she would see this in her lifetime.

Fifty years after starting her distinguished career amid major funding roadblocks, the Quebec-raised 85-year-old is elated to see Indigenous filmmaking finally at an "exciting" place heading into 2018, with new initiatives including an Indigenous Screen Office in Canada.

"Any Indigenous person who wants to make a film ... if ever there was a possible time — this is it," the acclaimed Abenaki documentary maker says from Montreal, where she's editing her 51st feature-length project.

"I feel that we're really going someplace where we've never gone before. I know that Canadians are really listening now and want to know the truth."

'Trick or Treaty?' documentary about Treaty 9, to screen under the stars

KEEP CALM+DECOLONIZE Walking is Medicine: A journey toward decolonization with legendary filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin

After decades of misrepresentation and under-representation of Indigenous culture in Canada's screen industry, the community is experiencing a boost.

One of the biggest game-changers is the Indigenous Screen Office, a collaboration between the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, the CBC, the Canada Media Fund, Telefilm Canada, the Canadian Media Producers Association, and the National Film Board of Canada.

Announced in June, the office aims to develop a long-term strategy to help support the development, production and marketing of content in the Canadian Indigenous screen-based industry.

#### Indigenous talent development

"I think that's a huge, huge step forward for Canada and something that's been needed, and something that's been advocated for, for many years," says Jesse Wenthe, Toronto-based Indigenous activist and film critic who recently curated the CBC Arts series "Keep Calm And Decolonize."

"I think the screen office will help facilitate development of Indigenous talent to be able to take on those projects, a development of stories from an Indigenous perspective, and Indigenous-led crews and viewpoints that I think ... has been tough for the industry and the community to always navigate."

Wenthe hopes the office will be similar to Screen Australia's Indigenous department and create projects in an authentic way "that has a deeply involved community and nurtures Indigenous talent to grow as filmmakers to where they're at a really high level of production and skill."

Jesse Wenthe, a Toronto-based Indigenous activist and film critic, hopes the new new Indigenous Screen Office will be similar to Screen Australia's Indigenous department.

"The hope is that we'll get to a point with the screen office where it's Indigenous people who are greenlighting Indigenous-led projects, which currently does not exist and has never existed, at places like Telefilm or the CMF," says Jason Ryle, artistic director of the imagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival.

"We're looking for this work; there's an audience for this work."

Meanwhile, the NFB is working on a three-year plan to "redefine its relationship with Indigenous Peoples."

Announced in June, the plan includes immediately ensuring that 15 per cent of production spending is on Indigenous-directed projects.

NFB launches plan to 'redefine' its relationship with Indigenous Peoples

"It's been a conversation that's been going on for a very long time but now there's actual momentum, and organizations like the film board are making commitments and the conversation is shifting," says Michelle van Beusekom, executive director of programming and production in the NFB's English Program.

The past year also saw a spotlight on Indigenous filmmaking during various celebrations for Canada's 150th birthday, and Telefilm vowed to provide increased support for Indigenous filmmakers.

"It does look very bright," says Ryle.

"We've never been in this position before. The conversations we're having now, even a year ago they were very different; two years ago, they were completely different."

Indian Horse coming in April

One of the biggest drivers of such change has been the recommendations and awareness from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools, say many.

Accessible filmmaking tools like smartphones, and streaming services like Netflix, are also democratizing the system.

Such stories are being told in many different forms — from short films to fiction features and virtual reality — and in a variety of languages and genres.

Among the homegrown Indigenous films on the horizon is Indian Horse, which is based on Richard Wagamese's novel about a residential school survivor. Clint Eastwood is executive producer of the drama, which is full of Indigenous talent and is slated to hit theatres April 13.

Meet 2 of Ottawa's young stars turning heads at TIFF

First look at Indian Horse feature film ahead of TIFF premiere

Angelique's Isle by Michelle Derosier and Marie-Helene Cousineau is based on a novella by James R. Stevens and is set during the copper rush of 1845. It's also expected to be released next year.

And the short Nuuca by Michelle Latimer, about the oil boom in North Dakota, will have its international premiere at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival.

Sladen Peltier stars in Indian Horse, a film version of the Richard Wagamese novel that debuted at the Toronto International Film Festival. (Submitted)

Other Indigenous filmmakers making waves in Canada these days include Marie Clements, Danis Goulet, Lisa Jackson, and Shane Belcourt — to name but a few.

"It's exciting to see all these new opportunities arise and then movies like this that put Native people first," says Ojibway Indian Horse star Ajuawak Kapashesit, who was born in Moose Factory, Ont.

"It gives an opportunity for a native student to walk into a theatre and see somebody that looks like them on the big screen — not just as background, not just as an extra or something, but as an actual, full-fledged character, as a lead character.

"That's something that I think is important for kids to see if they want to potentially go down that road in the future and say, 'Hey, this is something we can actually do.'"

Fantasy and sci-fi

And it's not just traditional community-based, issues-driven stories being created.

Wente says some filmmakers are looking to futuristic and fantasy stories.

"I think you're really seeing a lot of Indigenous futurism ... a lot of post-apocalyptic ideas, a lot of notions around what an Indigenous future would look like," says Wente.

Adds Ryle: "I think that speaks to the real health and vibrancy not just of the industry but I think of Indigenous communities themselves.

"If one can dream an Indigenous future, regardless of what shape that takes, I think that speaks really strongly of where those people are in the present."

Actor Chris Hemsworth and director Taika Waititi were among celebrities pledging support for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe last year. The Indigenous filmmaker from New Zealand directed 2017's Thor: Ragnarok. (Chris Hemsworth/Instagram)

Such visionaries include Jeff Barnaby, who grew up on the Mi'gmaq reserve in Listuguj, Que. He's currently working on Blood Quantum, a zombie movie set outside the isolated reserve of Red Crow.

"His sensibility is entirely contemporary," says Wente. "He's a director as steeped in Indigenous cinema as he is in Blade Runner and George A. Romero.

"I think that very much is the contemporary Indigenous filmmaker, and I think there's lots of folks that could be directing a horror movie in the next 10 years from our community."

Thor: Ragnarok opens strongly with \$121M US at box office

UNRESERVEDIndignerds rising: 'Nerds and geeks were marginalized, just like Indigenous people'

Wente and Ryle also point to Taika Waititi, the Indigenous filmmaker from New Zealand behind the 2017 superhero hit Thor: Ragnarok.

"The success of 'Thor: Ragnarok,' that's been such a profound thing and I think there's a lot of excitement and momentum to see what happens with his career and where he goes to next," says Ryle.

For Obomsawin, all of this is a stark contrast to the start of her career, when she had an "awful" time trying to get funding for documentaries including Mother of Many Children and Incident at Restigouche.

"I think it's easier now," she says. "There's more money available at a lot of the institutions for Indigenous people to do their work, whether it's in film or as an artist, painters, writers.

"It's like a bomb everywhere — it's so exciting."

Article can be found here: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-filmmakers-canada-funding-1.4466278>.

Exhibit: *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*

Location/Phase: Part 3: Toronto

Witness: Jesse Wente

Submitted by: Christa Big Canoe, Commission

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Initials

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