

Young Veteran Appealing To Masses

Calgary director producing film and video projects that satisfy both himself and a broad audience of viewers

By Wes Laventure

Robert Cuffley's youthful appearance belies the fact that this 33-year-old is already a veteran in pulling together film and video projects that not only satisfy his creative interests, but also appeal to a broad audience.

Calgary raised, Cuffley caught the movie bug as a kid, being spellbound by the stories on the big screen. He decided at a young age he would make his own movies. "I'd rather go to a movie than go to a party," Cuffley said.

Cuffley is a living tribute to the adage "start small, think big." He started out as a kid with a Super 8 camera and eventually became involved in making music videos with local bands and later on the national scene.

"A production company in Toronto picked me up after they saw some of my work," Cuffley has worked with such artists as Huevos Rancheros and Veda Hille. He's also made some short films — *Eyes for You* and a one-hour documentary for CBC Television, *Arrivals: A Musical Invasion of Europe*.

Cuffley is proud of his past accomplishments but is impatient

"The day Nicholas Campbell arrived, the snow was up to our belly buttons, no kidding"

when talking about the past. Today, he wants to focus on his biggest project to date, his first feature film — *Turning Paige*.

Who can blame this "new" director for being enthusiastic with a world premiere at the Montreal Film Festival this month, a bona fide Canadian star as the lead (Nicholas Campbell) of *Turning Paige* and a U.S. film distribution deal in the works? The future looks

bright indeed.

If there ever was someone destined to take Canadian filmmaking forward by telling compelling stories, Cuffley is that person. With a background in music videos, Cuffley understands how to get a visual punch, but he is not reduced by imagery. "I try to keep scenes' performances small — organic," he said.

The coupling of strong visuals with a desire to tell human stories is what makes Cuffley stand out from the crowd. He is driven to make a movie that he cares about; and one senses he cares a lot about *Turning Paige*. "It's the first time I've done something that I think completely works."

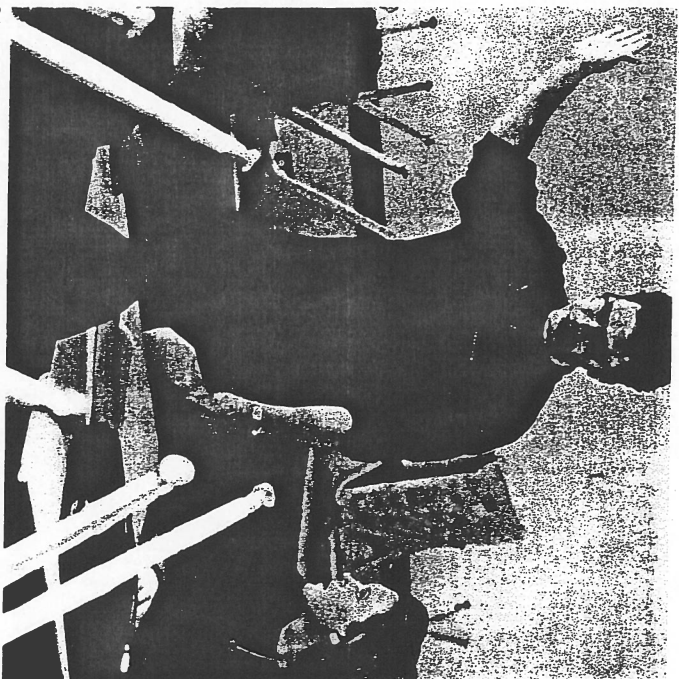
Turning Paige is Cuffley's response to criticism about Canadian film being dull and attracting little interest outside of cinephiles. He put a fine cast together; yes, they're all Canadian, but producer (Carolyn Meckler) worry about paying the bills, shipped everyone down to Montreal in the middle of a snowstorm, and made a movie.

"The day Nicholas Campbell arrived, the snow was up to our belly buttons, I'm not kidding," Cuffley said. "He (Campbell) was great, he never had a trailer or anything, he never complained."

Made on a modest \$1 million dollar budget, *Turning Paige* may well point to the future direction of Canadian movie making — compelling stories told on a human scale with an entire cast and crew who actually are emotionally attached to the project.

Campbell, of *Da Vinci's Inquest* fame, is a bankable Canadian talent and his endorsement of *Turning Paige* is something of a coup for Cuffley. Speaking from the Vancouver set of *Da Vinci*, Nicholas Campbell is enthusiastic about the film and its young director.

"I thought the script was outstanding," Campbell said. "He (Cuffley) was very assured. It's



Robert Cuffley makes his directing debut with *Turning Paige*, a CHAOS/SAE Shepard Park Productions drama.

unusual for someone directing his first feature film."

Campbell, who has yet to see *Turning Paige*, is trying to negotiate a leave from the set of *Da Vinci* to attend the Calgary Film Festival.

"If they let me out of here, I would love to be in Calgary for the screening," Campbell said.

Turning Paige was co-written by Cuffley and Jason Long, a Calgary playwright. It follows the story of a father, Ross Fleming (Campbell) and his two children, Paige

(Katharine Isabelle) and Trevor (Philip Dewilde). On the surface, the Fleming family seems to be happy. Ross has just accepted a promotion and they've moved into a new house, yet something is simmering underneath. The problem seems to be Paige's older brother Trevor. He was inexplicably absent from the family and then just as inexplicably returns. The Fleming family has something they don't want to talk about.

The movie is being shown on the film fest circuit with its Western Canadian premiere at the Calgary Film Festival. After Vancouver Film Festival, people were stopping by to tell me how much they enjoyed it," Cuffley said. "I probably shouldn't say this, but one person said to me, 'Just when you think Canadian film is dead, something like this comes around.'"

Turning Paige is being screened Sep. 28 at 6:30 p.m. at the Globe Cinema. More fest on page 12.

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