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C2 BUSINESS – TRADE TALK



CELLULOID CEILING: With North American women buying 55 per cent of theatre tickets, how come they constitute only four per cent of feature-film directors, 11 per cent of writers and 13 per cent of editors? So asks Synergy Cinema owner-producer **Robyn Wiener**, who is also president of the 22-year-old, 375-member Women in Film & Television Vancouver organization.

The numbers are better for non-theatrical releases, but not much. Only 47 of the 359 pictures screening at this year's Vancouver International Film Festival have female directors, Wiener said. That's 13 per cent.

Speaking recently with WFTV vice-president, Mystique Films principal and multi-production director **Mary Bissell**, Wiener panned affirmative action: "There's not a woman I know professionally who says, 'We should get that job because we're women.'"

They should get it, "because women bring in different points of view ... and add interest," said Bissell, whose *Naked* was a documentary on nude activism. Her *My Big Fat Diet* had 50 members of Alert Bay's aboriginal community revert to traditional foods. And her developing feature film, *Black Stockings*, sounds commercial with its theme of beauty, sexual power and a strangling death based on Sun reporter **Neal Hall's** investigative book.

Meanwhile, an Institute of Film Professionals report has women holding some 90 per cent of screen-union jobs in hairdressing, makeup and production-office duties, against seven per cent in transport and three per cent in lighting. Female cinematographers scarcely exist. Yet half of film-school students are women, said Vancouver Film School graduate Wiener, who teaches budgeting and scheduling in the Entertainment Business Management course there today. "If we are as educated, qualified, capable and frequently as successful as men, why aren't we being hired?" she asked.

Successful? A recent report by Montreal consultant Marilyn Burgess noted British female writers' scripts outperforming male versions at the box office. Commissioning editors seemingly remain unaware of this, Burgess wrote. Among countries where women do get a better shake, a surprising leader is Iran. Sweden has predictably targeted gender equality in film production, but Iran sees 20 new female directors premiere their works annually, and record numbers reportedly attend film schools there. All of the above and more should be debated Oct. 14-16, when the Women In View organization's Sex Money Media symposium debuts at the Segal Graduate School of Business. Soon after, Wiener said, WFTV will launch a program similar to one the Forum for Women Entrepreneurs runs here. It will have established moviebiz professionals mentor women who know they can do it but have yet to overcome obstacles unrelated to their capabilities.

