

## Zombies hit the red carpet tonight

Fido part of Vancouver's best showing at the filmfest since 2001

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TORONTO -- The zombie satire *Fido* opens the Canada First! program at the Toronto Film Festival tonight, but following behind director Andrew Currie and star Carrie-Anne Moss' \$10 million feature are a strong collection of dramas and comedies out of Vancouver.

For Currie, the prime spot at Toronto caps a year and a half of work on the film since finishing principal photography in Kelowna in June 2005.

"I just finished the film a month ago," says Currie. "I got it to a place and screened it for cast and crew, then afterwards I took another nine minutes out. I'm really happy with where it is."



CREDIT: The Province, Handout photo  
Carrie-Anne Moss and a zombified Billy Connolly of *Fido* lead local contingent at North America's biggest film fest.

Which isn't to say there won't be butterflies when the film screens tonight at the Ryerson Theatre. Moss and Sottish comedian Billy Connolly, who plays a domesticated zombie in an alternate 1950s world, will be joined by co-stars Tim Blake Nelson, Henry Czerny and Dylan Baker at the screening.

"They've all seen the film now and everyone seems to love it -- that's always helpful," says Currie. "Of course, you always get jitters before any screening -- I'm sure I'll be vomiting in the toilet bowl. I always love going to friends' screenings because I know I won't be the one feeling that way."

Among his friends at tonight's screening will be fellow Vancouver director Carl Bessai, whose dark downtown eastside drama *Unnatural and Accidental* screens later in the festival.

"It seem like a diverse group," says Bessai. "I'm excited to see *Fido* as a fan. I was really impressed with the guys just pulling together a movie like this, \$10 million, a nice cast. They've really tried to make a big commercial-type movie. It says something good about what we're doing out here."

Bessai says the slate out of Vancouver marks the city's best showing in Toronto since Bruce Sweeney's *Last Wedding* got the opening gala spot in 2001.

"It is a really significant year. This is Andrew's second feature film. His powers are coming on line. It's not just about the money, but the reality is that to

get the audience that we want to sit up and listen, it doesn't hurt to have a little more on the screen, some actors that people might have heard of. What's cool is that these guys did it themselves, it's a real local story," Bessai says.

"The truth is that Toronto and Montreal have consistently been the centre of things in the Canadian industry, and any time something sort of bangs out there from the West Coast it's exciting, it's great."

Bessai's feature is a low-budget adaptation of Marie Clement's stage play about murdered downtown eastside women. It stars Vancouver's Carmen Moore as a native woman looking for her missing mother (Tantoo Cardinal). Callum Keith Rennie plays a character based on the late serial killer Gilbert Paul Jordan.

"It's dark, unrelenting and unforgiving," Bessai admits. "It's not a film that I'm going to get really popular with. But I think we should be making all kinds of movies. What's great about the flight coming out of Vancouver this year is on one end of the spectrum you have Fido, maybe in the middle you have Everything's Gone Green, a very accessible kind of movie, it's funny, people will get it. Then the other end of the spectrum is the dark and grimy film that I made."

Everything's Gone Green, written by Douglas Coupland, directed by Toronto's Paul Fox and produced by B.C.'s Elizabeth Yake, exhibits more of that six degrees of B.C. separation. Fox and Currie attended the Canadian Film Centre in Toronto together, while Yake was the executive producer on Currie's first film, the 2001 drama Mile Zero.

"You can see their offices from here," says Yake, pointing out the window of her own off-Main offices before heading off to the festival.

Yake came to Vancouver from Toronto at the beginning of the decade.

"You look at the B.C. films that are in Toronto this year, it's a good group to be part of," says Yake. Her film stars Toronto's Paulo Costanzo, alongside B.C. talents Steph Song and JR Bourne. They and writer Coupland are in Toronto for their premiere.

"We're peers so it's nice to have that kind of feeling, yet it's a funny business because it's very competitive," says Yake. "In a way, we're all competing with every filmmaker in the world -- for money, for talent."

A newcomer to the competition is first-time director Carolyn Combs, who taught theatre and made documentaries before making the intimate drama Acts of Imagination, from a screenplay by her husband Michael Springate, a drama instructor at Simon Fraser University. The movie stars newcomers Stephanie Hayes and Billy Marchenski as a brother and sister, Ukrainian immigrants getting over a traumatic past in their new Vancouver home. Lyrically shot and with a mature economy to the writing, the movie is heading to Toronto without a distributor, and is the come-from-nowhere surprise in this crowd.

Combs and Springate ran up their own line of credit to do principal photography, and government funding sources didn't kick in until they already had a rough cut.

"Things just fell into place -- we wanted to do it ourselves," says Combs. Getting accepted to Toronto was a surprise.

"I've got butterflies trying to figure out how to navigate the market aspects of it," says Combs, adding that after a year of intense work on her film, she wants to check out some movies herself.

"I hope I have time to see a lot of films there," says Combs. "I haven't watched a lot of movies over the past year -- Toronto will be a feast."

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