

ARTS

Editor: Dave Paulson > Telephone: 250-380-5346 > Email: features@timescolonist.com

MOVIES

Coffee's still on at Diner

Victoria producer inches closer to getting film projects off the ground



MICHAEL D. REID
Behind the Screen
mreid@timescolonist.com

The late, great Mel Torme sprang to mind after I caught up with Beverley Dondale recently.

Specifically, it was memories of his intoxicating rendition of *Pick Yourself Up*, Jerome Kern's peppy paean to perseverance.

"Nothing's impossible I have found/For when my chin is on the ground/I pick myself up/dust myself off/start all over again," went Dorothy Fields's memorable lyrics that Ginger Rogers first sang to Fred Astaire in the 1936 musical *Swing Time*.

Dondale, tenacious to a Tee, has experienced so many ups and downs it could become her theme song.

"Omgawd, here she is again!" laughs the Victoria film producer, well aware of how she's been regarded in some circles after several false starts to her productions of *Prep School* and home-grown labour of love *Hostage Diner*. Now, she's at it again.

Prep School is the dramatic feature written and directed by Jerome E. Scott, a Los Angeles-based actor and filmmaker Dondale met four years ago while working for the Greater Victoria Film Commission.

It focuses on the exploits of a new student struggling to fit in at a prestigious New England prep school.

Dondale partnered with Scott's Illumination Pictures to try and get *Prep School* off the ground here in 2008. They're still trying. She also optioned *Hostage Diner*, his genre piece about hostages who outwit three bank robbers who take them captive in a diner.

Why has neither film gone to camera yet? It's complicated, but setbacks include the economic downturn, location issues, cast availability, limited tax credits in this region and other roadblocks. Still, Dondale is soldiering on. While *Prep School* is being



ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

Victoria producer Beverley Dondale is banking on an American investor and the Internet funding source Kickstarter to help bankroll *Hostage Diner*, about hostages who outwit three bank robbers at a diner.

pushed stateside, Dondale is focusing on *Hostage Diner* now that she's landed an American investor.

While she can't reveal his identity for now, his investment in her \$780,000 film is contingent upon a final \$22,000 being raised privately. Dondale, who with her husband and partner in Alpha Select Production Services have already invested \$150,000, has now turned to Kickstarter, the grassroots online funding platform.

They have until July 15 to meet their goal. If they don't, no money changes hands.

"I chose Kickstarter because I want all or nothing," she said. "Anything less than \$22,000 just isn't enough."

Dondale was inspired by the success of Victoria and Jennifer Westcott, the local siblings who raised \$20,000 — albeit with a

down-to-the-wire international Twitter and Facebook campaign — to get their film *Locked in a Garage Band* rolling.

If Dondale's Kickstarter campaign succeeds, the investors' funding kicks in. And while filming wouldn't start overnight, it would accelerate the process and trigger establishment of a turn-key production office for filmmakers looking to shoot here.

"I've always seen *Hostage Diner* as the fun one to do," Dondale said. "We have a lot of Island talent involved and, for me, it's always been about bringing film here. We want people working."

She has a tentative commitment from a well-known American screen actress who would head a local cast that includes Jonathan Ellis, Stephanie Watkins, Trevor Lerner, Kait Richardson and Allen Agopsowicz.

Cabin 12 is also hosting a no-admission fundraiser July 14 from 6-10 p.m., with perks and prizes in return for investments. Pledging to "share the wealth," Dondale says she'll return a percentage of net profits equal to a partner's investment.

It's such support from local businesses and the film community that has kept her going, Dondale says.

Despite the delays, Dani Trueman, owner-operator of Spoons, has remained onboard. Her funky Douglas Street diner is the film's principal location and would have to be shut down during filming.

"Why not?" Trueman says. "Anything done locally is great, and it adds a little excitement to Victoria."

The Greater Victoria Film Commission has also pledged support. "The high Canadian dollar



HANDOUT

A fundraiser is being held this month to help produce *Hostage Diner*, set to be filmed in Victoria and featuring local talent.

and the CRD's exemption from the distant tax incentive have made it difficult to entice foreign producers," film commissioner Kathleen Gilbert said. "We applaud Beverley for her years of hard work and passion for this project."

Dondale confesses it's been such a long, crazy process, she's "just about gone mad" and been tempted to give up.

"But I'm back on my horse, starting all over again. It's about perseverance, and having people around you can really trust."

They include Scott, director of photography Karl Hermann (*Mad TV*) and industry advisers who have taught her what investors are looking for, from sweet tax incentives to the benefits of having some "name" actors. And she's consulting with Penny Gibbs, a North Saanich-based film industry veteran who "tells me the truth rather than what I want to hear."

Gibbs has agreed to come on board as production manager if she's available.

"Her over-riding vision is admirable," says Gibbs, whose credits include *Charlie St. Cloud*, *Love Happens* and *Unforgiven*. "You have to admire her sticking-to-it-ness. Both of these have been kicking around for awhile but she can still have a positive attitude and a smile while she deals with stuff that would break a lesser person. If she keeps smiling, she'll get it done."

To visit *Hostage Diner*'s Kickstarter page and view a video of Mel Torme singing *Pick Yourself Up*, visit timescolonist.com/life