

B.C. film industry players betting good times won't be Trumped

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A sequel to the hit movie Deadpool will be filmed locally this spring. PHOTO BY ARLEN REDEKOP

B.C.'s film and TV production industry have wrapped what looks to be a record year in 2016, fuelled in large part by global demand for content to fill new online streaming services.

That surge looks to continue in 2017, with the only note of uncertainty being the role of Donald Trump as the new president of the U.S., still the industry's biggest customer.

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“The president-elect ... everybody’s watching to see what might happen,” said Shawn Williamson, president of Vancouver-based [Brightlight Pictures](#). “Our hope is that he ignores Hollywood.”

Film and TV production is worth more than \$2 billion a year in B.C. and employs about 35,000 people.

Williamson said 2016 was “without question” his busiest year ever. That included the second season of the Fox mystery series *Wayward Pines*, the comedy series *Haters Back Off* for Netflix (coming back for a second season in 2017), and the feature film *Colossal*, a paranormal mystery starring Anne Hathaway that hits theatres this April. Still filming for another month after starting in mid-2016 is the NBC sci-fi series *Timeless*.

Williamson said the demand, especially from Netflix, Amazon and other streaming services, looks to continue this year. The one thing a new U.S. administration could do to slow B.C. production is to devalue the U.S. dollar, which would make Canada’s currency more expensive.

Phil Klapwyk, business representative for IATSE local 891, said his 7,000 B.C. members — everyone from set builders to make-up artists — have seen a record year, primarily owing to the TV boom. His members work on the majority of features and TV series made in B.C.

As for 2017, Klapwyk said he is “cautiously optimistic,” noting that Trump has vowed to bring manufacturing jobs back to the U.S. But that rhetoric has been focussed on lost factory jobs.

“It’s not a rust belt in Hollywood right now,” Klapwyk said. “Everybody there who wants to work is working.”

Prem Gill, who heads the provincial government agency [Creative BC](#), was in Los Angeles this week to meet with industry players, where L.A.’s ubiquitous movie billboards were dominated by ones for the Vancouver-filmed sequel *Fifty Shades Darker*, opening in February.

As for Trump, she said, “I think everybody’s cautiously trying not to speculate until we know what we’re dealing with. Right now, it’s business as usual.”

The Lower Mainland has nearly 2.5 million square feet of soundstage space, and more is being built this year to meet increased demand, said Peter Leitch chair of the Motion Picture Production Industry Association of B.C.

“We’re not concerned about long periods of vacancy,” said Leitch, who is also president of North Shore Studios and Marathon Studios.

Numbers aside, B.C. film and TV work is becoming more of a presence on the

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pop-culture radar. B.C. star Ryan Reynolds turned the anti-superhero story *Deadpool* into a surprise global hit last year, and Reynolds and his producers are preparing to film a sequel here this spring.

The U.S. CW network is a prolific B.C. player, with the horror hit *Supernatural* now in its 12th season. Among the network's several other B.C. shows in the new entry *Riverdale*, a subversive reimagining of the old Archie comics. *Riverdale*'s first episode, airing Jan. 26, opens with a body found at the river's edge.

"It's a whole different kind of take," said Alvin Sanders, the president of the Union of B.C. Performers, who has a recurring gig on the show as malt shop owner Pop Tate. "It's not trying to be a comic book."

Sanders said the TV boom has been good for B.C. actors, allowing them to audition for more substantial roles than the ones they're called for in U.S. feature films. "There's more guest roles, and more than just one line here and there."

Riverdale's reinvention of Archie's sunny 1950s setting to a morally-ambiguous present reflects a trend towards more complex TV stories.

Vancouver actor Chelah Horsdal is among the cast of *The Man in the High Castle*, an ambitious series that reimagines 1960s America if Nazi Germany and their Japanese allies had won the Second World War. Horsdal plays a loyal Nazi wife in the Amazon Studios show, which begins filming its third season in Vancouver in May.

She said she and the cast did media interviews for the show in Los Angeles last December, and "it was gently suggested that we for obvious reasons avoid too much of the political conversation with regards to what was going on with Trump."

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