

# THE · G E O R G I A **STRAIGHT**

**movies** FILM FEST 

## TORONTO FEST PACKS A CANADIAN PUNCH

Vancouver-made features will figure prominently in the **Perspective Canada** series at this year's **Toronto International Film Festival**, happening September 5 to 14. *Punch* is a first release for the locally based Brightlight Pictures, led by producing veterans Stephen Hegyes and Shawn Williamson, and it is also a first feature from Vancouver writer-director Guy Bennett, known for his now-ceased cranky column-writing in a local weekly.

This father-daughter drama stars veteran Michael Riley (who played a troubled dad in *Mile Zero*) and the director's own 21-year-old daughter, Sonja Bennett.

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## MOVIE NOTES

Women in Film and Video Vancouver singled out two youngsters for artistic achievement: **Jane McGregor**, starring in both *Flower & Garnet* and the clever short "Bitten", and **Sonja Bennett**, who did scarily good work as a teenage bully in *Punch*.

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## FILM FEST NOTES

### **BENNETT NOT QUITE A REGULAR GUY**

It took veteran wordsmith **Guy Bennett** about 27 drafts to nail the script for his impressive first feature, *Punch*, producer Steve Hegyes revealed at a **New Filmmakers' Day** trade-forum panel on Saturday (September 28) that was devoted to the making of this local film. But the very first version (then titled *The Sunshine Institute*), already contained the core dynamic of what turned into a visceral examination of an overly close father-daughter bond.

**Sonja Bennett**, the director's real-life offspring, plays the belligerent, motherless teen, a role she won not through nepotism but Studio 58 training and screen-test bravado. The filmmaker revealed that the toughest role to cast, of all his "fragile and turbulent" characters, was the topless female boxer. In the end, she was fearlessly played by **Meredith McGeachie**.

The film's gutsy subject matter stems from the bottle-blond filmmaker's own past; dad and daughter developed an unhealthy codependency when she was little, an issue they dealt with quickly. As a screenwriter, however, Bennett enjoyed projecting the problem into the future. "I just love angry teenage girls," he told the crowd, "and I have one in everything I write."

*Punch* plays once more at the film festival on Monday (October 7), and is slated to open commercially on November 8.

• **KEN EISNER AND  
CUNNING WITT**