

MOSES VISION

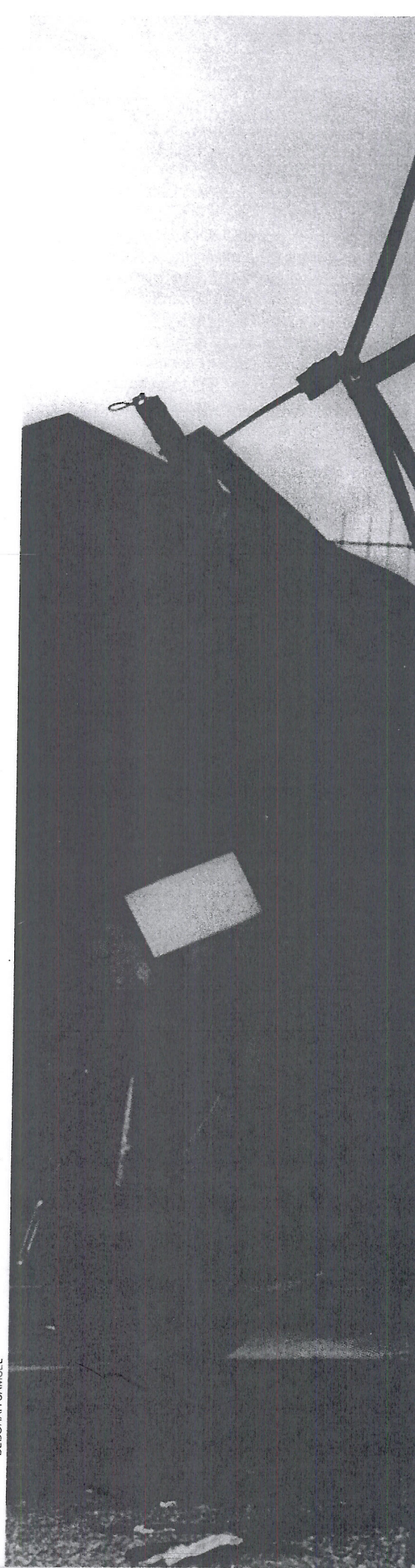
*THOU SHALT
NOT FOLLOW THE
OLD RULES:
CITYTV'S MOSES
ZNAIMER IS
REINVENTING
THE WAY
TELEVISION
IS MADE*



BY DAVID HAYES

LESS THAN HALF AN HOUR BEFORE THE INAUGURAL 6 P.M. *CityPulse* newscast from Citytv's new home at 299 Queen Street West, Stephen Hurlbut is watching a wall of monitors in the basement master control room. The director, a young woman whose face betrays signs of pressure and fatigue, is trying to synchronize a series of complicated shots. "The roles are being redefined here," says Hurlbut, who, with his shoulder-length mane of hair and T-shirt bearing Dick-and-Jane stick figures lying on a beach, would not be confused with the director of news programming at any other TV outlet in the city.

DEBORAH SAMUEL



"There's going to be movement, people walking around the set," he says. "Now the director is really a director. She has to block out the show the way you would a movie."

One monitor displays a long shot of the newsroom, an open plan, with desks and a wire copy machine under a bank of video screens at one end. Editing bays run nearly the length of the newsroom's south wall. (In theory, one day viewers will watch as a reporter runs through the newsroom with a late-breaking story during a newscast, assembles it in an editing bay, and has it on the air complete with breathless commentary before the newscast ends.) Sports is at the other end of the newsroom. In between are the reporters' desks. The predominant colors are *CityPulse* red, black and orange.

Anchorman Gord Martineau appears on a screen. He is standing in the middle of the newsroom dressed in a white shirt and maroon tie. The shot being rehearsed involves a camera following Martineau as he walks toward Colin Vaughan, the *CityPulse* political specialist, and perches a trifle awkwardly on the edge of Vaughan's desk. The technique owes more to variety shows than television news.

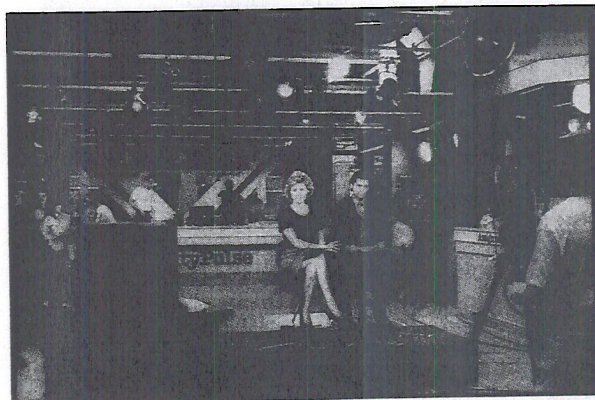
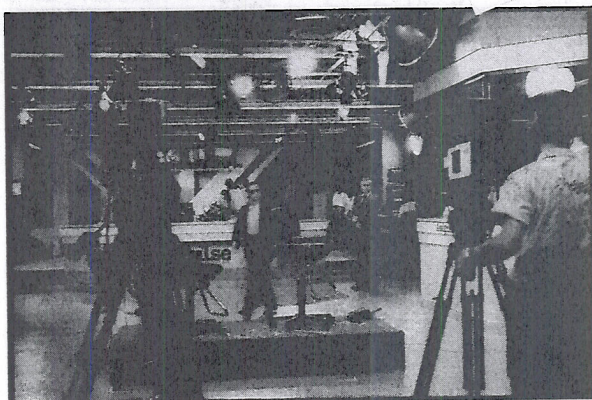
"Is Gord going to wear that white shirt or put on his jacket?" someone asks.

"I think a jacket tonight," answers Hurlbut. "Even though Moses will want it off."

Although *CityPulse*, like most of City's original programming, is characterized by the casual look of its on-camera personalities, tonight, apparently in deference to this debut from fancy new quarters, there are an unusual number of jackets and ties. Hurlbut, now standing in the noisy confusion of the newsroom, watches Martineau practise walking toward the assignment desk, where Glen Cole, the folksy chief assignment editor, presides.

"There'll be no sermon-from-the-mount here," Hurlbut says, referring to the tradition on most news shows of one or more anchorpersons sitting stolidly at a desk. "Gord will go to the reporters, to their desks where they make their phone calls, and he'll ask them to comment on what happened. By positioning the reporter in the story, the viewers become involved instead of being distanced from the reality of events."

Hurlbut pauses. "All of this is stuff Mo-



Leaders of the pack: above, savior Allan Waters with Moses; at top, anchors Gord Martineau and Anne Mroczkowski take their places

ses has been driving at for years. He sets out the parameters, the general principles. We try to make them functional for news."

A few minutes before 6, Moses Znaimer, president of Citytv and executive producer of everything made by City that goes on the air, takes a seat behind Martineau. Although his work habits are genuinely nocturnal, Znaimer also cultivates the sleepy, bruised look of a tomcat arriving home from a midnight ramble. At 45, Znaimer can still play the part he perfected as a youth: the cerebral rebel, the leather-jacketed intellectual equally at home in a poolroom or discuss-

ing Malraux. His appearance is that of a Hollywood gangster, a role he played in Louis Malle's 1982 film *Atlantic City*. Tonight he is wearing a black blazer and slacks set off by a pink tie, pink socks and a *Tamara* wrist watch, an emblem of the theatrical experiment developed in Toronto that Znaimer successfully exported to the United States. The details of Znaimer's

wardrobe are significant: appearances are a central metaphor of Citytv, and Citytv is, to a large extent, a personification of Znaimer.

Up comes the *CityPulse* theme music—the theme from *Rocky*, in keeping with the station's little-guy-against-the-world image. The opening graphics appear on a monitor above Znaimer's head. The boss, watching intently, nods his approval. Then he glances at Martineau, who has donned a charcoal suit jacket. "We gotta work on the suits," Znaimer mutters. "I've never seen so many dark suits. Look at them, they aren't walking-around suits."

Of the three pillars upon which City's programming rests—news, movies, music—it is news that is most closely identified with the station, a reminder that when City began broadcasting in 1972, it promised to address local concerns. This year the station is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary by moving into the former Ryerson Press building—a gothic structure that has been transformed into a high-tech

showpiece—and Znaimer has seized the opportunity to nudge *CityPulse* further toward his conception of "the news as soap opera," with the staff as recurring characters and the streets of Toronto its set.

"Martineau is a carry-over from the old *CityPulse*," Znaimer says. "He's classic."

Znaimer watches admiringly as Martineau glides toward Colin Vaughan and slides smoothly onto the edge of the desk. Vaughan, an urbane, silver-haired journalist who is a former architect and municipal politician, joins Martineau in easy conversation about an upcoming provincial budget.

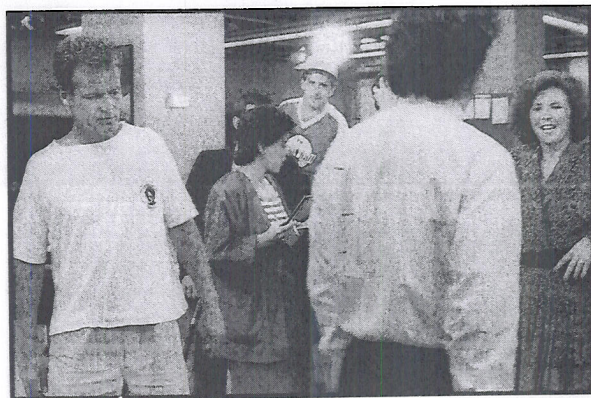
"I hire on-air personalities—that's what I prefer to call them—for their genuineness," Znaimer continues. "I want them to capture the story that's inherent in the pictures, not be an announcer. I cast them, although I know that's a term that is anathema to most journalists. Look at him," he says of Vaughan. "That white hair, that look. Colin is an archetypal personality who lives and breathes politics. I can't fabricate Colin, I can only find him and put him on television."

After the day's top stories have been covered, Martineau introduces entertainment reporter John Burgess, a dapper man given to bow ties and checked suits. Only his video image actually appears in the *CityPulse* newsroom; most entertainment reports that aren't shot on location are done in the production area of *MuchMusic*, the pay-TV music video service, in another part of the building. As soon as Burgess appears on the monitor, there is a riot of activity in the newsroom. Cables are flung aside frantically as a crew rolls a mobile camera down an aisle in preparation for the next shot, less than sixty seconds away.

"Great!" shouts Znaimer impulsively, springing to his feet and clapping.

Later, after joining the *CityPulse* team in a post-show celebration, Znaimer sits at his desk in his hushed, high-ceilinged office on the building's second floor. He is happy because the television station he runs like a cross between the paternal overlord of a profitable family empire—which, in a sense, City has been ever since a profitable family empire called CHUM Ltd. purchased control in 1978—and a philosopher-king with a highly personal multimedia vision, has entered another phase in the evolution of his "living movie." It is part of Znaimer's crusade to manipulate or dismantle what he regards as the pretensions and artifices of traditional television, blurring the line between what is real and what is fiction. Although he coined the phrase "living movie" to describe

City slickers: at bottom, the news team readies for a group portrait; below, vice-president and general manager Dennis Fitz-Gerald



the play *Tamara*, it encompasses his notion of Citytv's programming as "the business of photographing yourself as you go about the business of creating tv."

"You know, the great *sat-is-fact-shun* of City"—Znaimer enunciates each word in a near whisper, occasionally drawing out and stressing each syllable for dramatic effect—"was that it was a remarkably coherent idea from the start, it was of-the-moment. It's great to have been in the grip of *his-tor-i-cal* forces, and then to see the idea played out over time in a coherent and effective way."

The genesis of City can be traced to the late 1960s and an energetic former newspaper reporter named Phyllis Switzer, then publishing a newsletter analyzing the rulings of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC). Her husband, Israel (a.k.a. Sruki), a cable engineer, pointed out that anyone could start up a local television station by using a cheap, low-power trans-

mitter using the weak upper end of the ultrahigh frequency (UHF) spectrum. Since cable companies were obliged to carry all local stations, they would convert a UHF signal to a conventional very-high frequency (VHF) channel.

Switzer teamed up with Jerry Grafstein, a communications lawyer active in the Liberal party, who in turn enlisted Ed Cowan, a public rela-

tions specialist. Finally, Switzer and Grafstein called Moses Znaimer, a former CBC producer who was working as a venture capitalist. It was to be a low-budget operation—\$2.75 million to cover startup and first-year operating costs, approximately one-fifth that of a mainstream broadcaster—with most of the company's equity supplied by twenty-five separate investors representing a cross section of the Toronto community. They included financiers Ben Webster—Znaimer was working for his Helix Investments Ltd.—and Hal Jackman, ad agency executives, property developers, a corporate pension fund, a retired politician and singer Sylvia Tyson.

The programming philosophy promised a "low-key mix of information and entertainment with a local flavor," and multicultural programs. City also planned to use newly developed videotape technology, including half-inch, black-and-white portable camera-and-tape units—known as porta-paks—in mobile

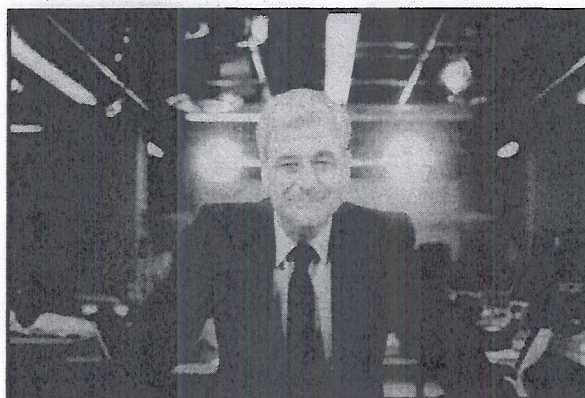
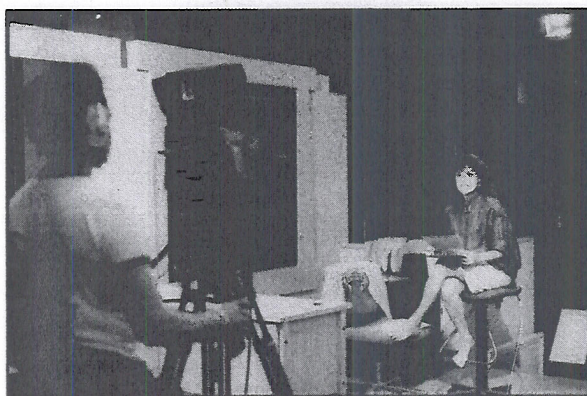
units roaming the city, covering news events. The effect, in the early years, would be revolutionary, cheap and (literally) dirty, not altogether inappropriate for a gritty, street-wise station serving a downtown market that was, for the most part, young, restless and hip. Znaimer, who fitted that template and had emerged as the station's spokesman, made no effort

to gild its image. He told a reporter: "We're going to look somewhat dinky, pretty crud-
dy at first."

By the time the station began broadcasting, in September 1972, the schedule contained the promised information programming. The flagship was *The City Show*, a 2½-hour, weeknight, prime-time news-magazine program. There was also the promised community-access shows. The most notorious was Sunday night's *Free For All*, an unpredictable and chaotic show that attracted clergymen, cab drivers and zither players as well as zealots, cranks and crackpots. Then there was the "counterprogramming": outdated, inexpensive series such as *Batman* and *The Green Hornet*, and B movies purchased by Brian Linehan, who would, by the second season, be conducting celebrity interviews on *CityLights*.

On September 28, 1972, it debuted with *The City Show* at 7:30 p.m. and *Casanova* at 10, a six-part BBC series noted for its bare breasts and buttocks. The same week it launched the *Baby Blue Movie*, scheduled on Fridays at midnight. The one area of programming that wasn't mentioned in City's licence application, and would prove to be one of its greatest sources of revenue and publicity, was soft-core pornography.

Znaimer is standing in a narrow corridor in the old Citytv building at 99 Queen Street East. A camera crew is taping part of a documentary, whose working title is *Goodbye 99*, due to air this month as part of the fifteenth anniversary celebrations. Its premise, devised by City's director of on-air promotion, John Gunn, is to present Znaimer wandering around the building visiting the programming ghosts of the past fifteen years. As the camera rolls for a fourth time, Znaimer ambles into a tiny room that once housed the staff of *The Shulman File*, recalling aloud that he hired the opinionated



Electronic circus: above, technical whiz Joe Spiteri; at top, entertainment reporter Mary Garafalo gets camera-ready

millionaire doctor, Morton Shulman, "partly for his mind but mostly for his mouth." But Znaimer senses the rhythm of his delivery is off and abruptly stops.

"This is destroying my reputation as 'one-take Znaimer,'" he says in mock exasperation.

The documentary is part of City's policy of constantly pushing the station's image. Promotional spots, such as the "Citytv, Everywhere" series taped at different locations around the city, are scheduled and treated as though they are paid advertising. In a number of cases, programs have been devel-

oped within the on-air promotion department, such as the recent *Fashion Television* that is now syndicated in fifteen countries. (*FT* reflects City's ingenuity; it uses existing promotional videos created by manufacturers and designers or helps produce them, then fleshes out the show with mainly uncritical editorial.) Znaimer also uses on-air promotion as a testing ground for his

ideas. For the "Citytv, Everywhere" series, he convinced the producers to allow ambient street sounds to begin each spot, giving viewers the opportunity to identify the location. The voice-over—"Shopping in Kensington Market. . . Citytv, everywhere," for example—trails out over the last few seconds of tape, a technique now used throughout City's programming.

"It is the bellwether production unit," says Znaimer, "the internal propaganda arm for communicating how we work. Its function is not only getting our message out to our viewers, but also playing an instructional role inside the operation."

Image-building is a preoccupation of "post-fragmentation" broadcasting. What is now called the "first wave of fragmentation" occurred when cable TV, by introducing more channels, broke up what had been a mass audience served only by the big networks. A station, by tailoring its programming and image to appeal to one of the smaller fragments—a process called "narrowcasting"—could survive and, if its audience was attractive to advertisers, prosper.

"We were doing what came *nat-ur-lly*," Znaimer says of City's early days. "We didn't know what narrowcasting was, but we had a conviction that we were presenting a certain kind of programming unavailable

elsewhere. We hit onto the fact that the formula was news, movies, music. It was probably the most vivid expression of how modern downtown people were living. It was easy for me to see because that was me."

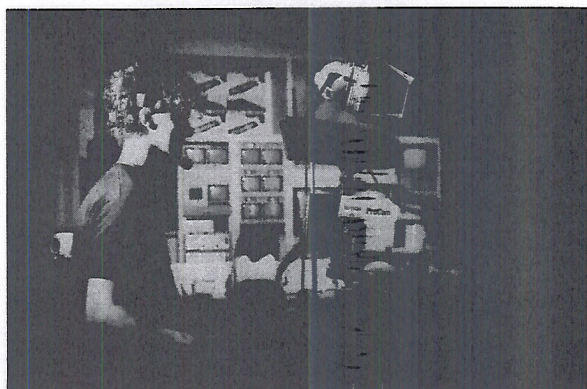
That wasn't the only similarity between the station and the man who represented it. Znaimer saw City as an outsider within a broadcasting industry run according to established commercial principles by men who wore navy-blue suits or matching white belts and shoes. Znaimer saw himself as an outsider as well. In a 1983 article in *The Globe and Mail*, he said, "I'm a single man in a married society, well-to-do in a society that isn't, Jewish in a Gentile society."

Znaimer was born in Tajikistan, a republic of the Soviet Union, in 1942. During the Second World War, his family fled the Holocaust, and after crossing Europe, they immigrated to Canada in 1948 with the help of their only surviving relative in Montreal. Although his father struggled to make a living in the shoe business and his mother worked as a waitress, Znaimer and his younger sister and brother were sent to a rigorous private Hebrew school. Znaimer graduated from McGill University (an honors BA in political science and philosophy) and Harvard (he obtained an MA in Soviet studies).

In 1965 Znaimer joined CBC Radio in Toronto, and was later sent to Ottawa as a television producer, where he made *Revolution Plus Fifty*, a widely praised thirteen-part series on the history of the Russian Revolution. Then he joined CBC's daytime talk show *Take Thirty* to act as a producer and roving adventurer-reporter. Two years later he resigned and accepted a position with Ben Webster's Helix Investments Ltd., where he stayed until City was licensed. It is typical that Znaimer claims Webster offered him the job; Webster distinctly remembers Znaimer asking to join the firm.

Now Znaimer is walking down another hallway in the old City building at 99 Queen East, past several editing bays. "Did I tell you how I got this place?" he asks. Once a chocolate factory, it became The Electric Circus discothèque in the late 1960s. According to Znaimer, the building's owners were speculators who planned to flip it and were happy to rent space to something as

Medium cool: at bottom, MuchMusic's Mike Williams; at left below, programmer Marcia Martin (here with reporter Sandra Neil)



glamorous as a TV station.

"It was a historic deal. A fifteen-year lease, dead in the centre of Toronto for a buck *twen-tee-five* a square foot, with a right of first refusal. In retrospect, I count as one of my big business failures my inability to convince the shareholders to buy it, to pick up a major piece of downtown property. That was a disadvantage to having widespread ownership. Of course, the advantage was that I got to act as if City was my own."

City, you may recall, was originally Phyllis Switzer's "baby," but even her last executive title—vice-president, programming and community relations—failed to describe the profound impact she had on the station. She was, by all accounts, the heart of City, an inspirational, indefatigable worker who provided a warm and generous counterbalance to Znaimer's cerebral and often ruthless leadership. Fred Klinkhammer, who worked at City in various positions (including that of vice-president/general manager) from 1974

to 1982 and is now president and CEO of pay-TV's First Choice, says "She was the consummate cheerleader, and she did a lot of hand holding. Moses could be tragically cruel to a lot of people, particularly women, and she put out a lot of fires for him. She championed Moses as being far more reasonable than he often was."

Switzer, who is now in charge of CTV's contract to provide broadcast services to the world's media at the twenty-fifth Olympic Winter Games in Calgary, says "Moses is brilliant. He just grabbed this idea and ran with it. I was in awe of him and his conceptual ability to see City and its place in the world. He's a genius, but a not-very-happy genius."

When pressed, Switzer agreed to elaborate. "He's had a hard time in life because he has such high expectations. He is all about vision and foresight and perfection. Unfortunately, we're all just human. Yes, he can be cruel. He knows how to manipulate interests, fears, and it works for him.

People keep working harder and harder to try and measure up."

What Switzer describes is a widely held view of Znaimer as a gifted, temperamental, complex man. In talking to City employees, past and present, a great many recall moments in which Znaimer performed acts of touching

Continued on page 80

DANDIES of the PAST

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Moses vision from page 55

generosity or kindness, or encouraged ambitions. But they also recount acts of intolerance and thoughtlessness. Many remember receiving one of "Moses' tablets," memos that could be brutally precise in their criticisms.

"I sure don't miss being there, as I guess you've gathered," says Switzer sadly. "I really don't communicate well with Moses since I left the station. Too bad. We created something quite wonderful."

By the mid-'70s, City was changing. Although revenues were initially higher than anticipated, so were the station's costs. City was purchasing cheap American audience grabbers such as *The Price is Right* and *The Mike Douglas Show*, and running action-and-violence programs and movies. It also shifted its news package out of the heart of prime time. In a 1973 *Maclean's* article, Znaimer had said: "I'm also very conscious of the history of revolutions... and I'm going to do my damndest to survive the transition period that distinguishes Che Guevara from Fidel Castro..."

The real revolution, however, was taking place in the boardroom. The philosophy of altruism and public service had weakened and there were many shareholders who felt City should be adopting a purely commercial formula. By 1976, City had turned its first profit and had increased its reach by placing its transmitter on the CN Tower, but costs were rising steadily and the station was \$2.5-million in debt. Znaimer was quoted as saying that "Being the only station in the country not tied to some larger corporation was an overrated virtue."

In February 1977, the CRTC permitted Montreal-based Multiple Access Ltd., a company controlled by the Bronfman family, to buy forty-five per cent of City's shares, thus relieving the station of its most discontented shareholders. But the Bronfmans were in the process of selling Multiple Access to John Bassett's Baton Broadcasting Inc. Since Baton already owned Toronto's CFTO-TV, and the CRTC was unlikely to approve the sale of a second television station to the same owner in a single market, Znaimer approached Allan Waters, president of CHUM Ltd., which has the most broadcasting stations in Canada. In July 1978, CHUM paid \$13 million for a seventy-per-cent interest in City, retiring the station's nearly \$5 million in accumulated debt. (In 1981, it purchased the remaining thirty per cent from the founders in a complicated stock swap that made them rich.) CHUM invested in mobile television studios and rolled its sophisticated production company HUCHM into the new CHUM-City operation. Salaries and benefit plans improved, although to this day City retains some of its "sweatshop" image; occasional over-

tures to the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians (NABET) have never resulted in a union drive at City. (Some union officials say employees who have approached them don't stay at City for long.) Although CHUM management's presence was felt, Waters left Znaimer in charge, treating him more like a junior partner than an employee.

"My experience," Znaimer says of the arrangement, "is that companies flourish best when gifted administration is at the service of intelligent vision."

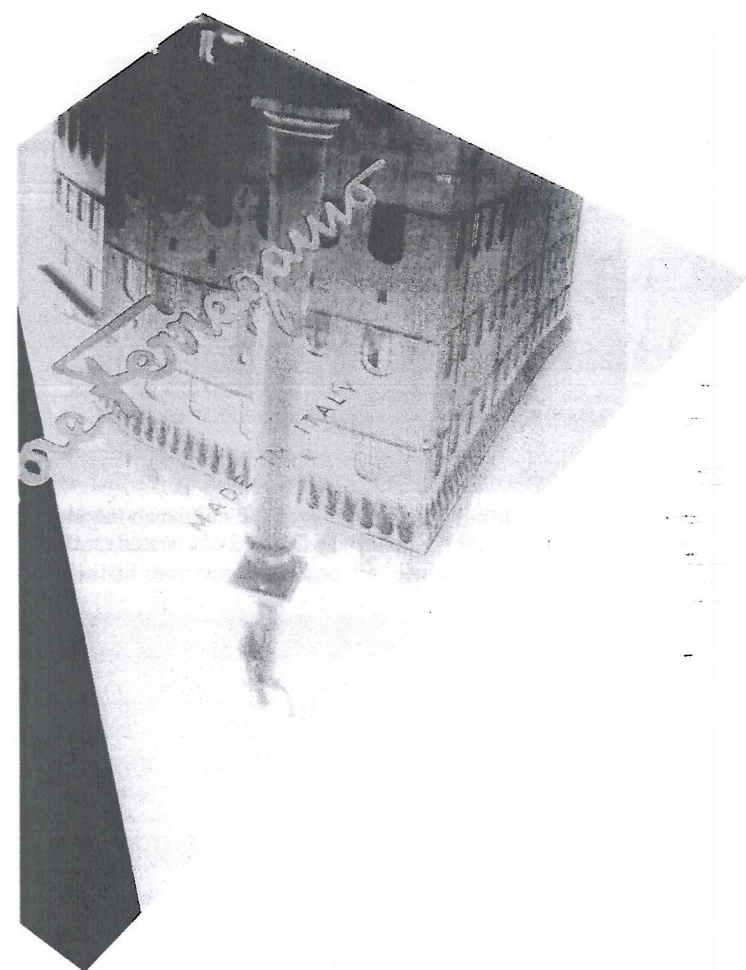
Since the CHUM purchase, City has become solidly established, its identity not unlike that of its president. They have grown older together, put on a little weight without losing their street kid pose. The passage of time has meant that the focus of the station—news, movies, music—has become even more sharply defined.

CHUM AND CITY HAVE GROWN OLDER TOGETHER, WITHOUT LOSING THEIR STREET KID POSE



After producing such shows as *Music City* and *Boogie* during the mid-1970s, City became seriously involved in rock programming following the CHUM takeover, hardly surprising considering CHUM's ownership of rock radio stations. *The NewMusic*, launched in 1978, featured minidocumentaries, interviews with rock stars, and plenty of music videos, a promotional innovation then just beginning to revolutionize the industry. It also served as a training ground for City personalities such as Jeanne Beker, J.D. Roberts and Daniel Richler (who later hosted *The Journal's* arts and entertainment segment). The pay-TV music service, *MuchMusic*, went on the air in September 1984, and last January, Znaimer and his director of music programming, John Martin, organized the World Music Video Awards, a live, three-hour broadcast that reached

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Moses vision continued

millions of viewers in twenty-one countries.

As for movies, Jay Switzer, son of founder Phyllis Switzer, and City's program director, is involved in purchasing a confusing array of rights and subrights from the film industry. He talks of building a "flow" of programs that takes into account the nature of City's audience, which has grown considerably since the CRTC approved a further extension of City's signal into southwestern Ontario last year. Switzer refers to that audience as "urban contemporary," which he defines as anyone, whether they live in Toronto or Ajax, "who feels like they live at Yonge and Bloor." Switzer works in concert with Marcia Martin, director of general and independent production, on original productions such as *I Am A Hotel*, an ambitious musical drama built around the songs of Leonard Cohen; and *Toronto Trilogy*, three half-hour pilots based on the winning teleplays in a City competition.

Someone in either Jay Switzer's or Martin's position, who has been part of Citytv for so long, might logically represent successors to Znaimer. But few see them that way because no one can seriously entertain the idea of City without Znaimer, an impression Znaimer does little to correct. Despite periods when he has been preoccupied with other projects, Znaimer still approves all original production and most of the hiring of personnel, especially on-camera personalities. His judgment is usually considered to be sound, although senior staff at City concede that his eccentricities are indulged. (Mention former twin entertainment reporters Jim and John Coburn, or Ziggy Lorenc, who hosts *MushMusic*, a program of adult soft rock, to other staffers and prepare to watch heads shake and eyes roll.) City would exist without Znaimer, of course, but the long shadow he casts speaks eloquently of the force of his charisma.

"There were many days, many years, when I thought, who cares? This is just a pea-fart operation on Queen Street, not central to anything. It's cute, but so what?"

Znaimer is talking, sotto voce as usual, as he propels his winter car—a leased Saab 9000T that he drives until the weather is mild enough for his vintage Jaguar—west across the Gardiner Expressway. Surprisingly, there is a banana peel on the floor by his feet, a quixotic touch for a man who is so fastidious about his appearance.

"I'll never forget that period before CHUM," he says. "The beneficial aspects of that horrible retrenchment period, when I doubted myself and what I was doing, was that it forced me to focus. I believe that the discipline, the self-purge, was necessary."

Znaimer pulls off a residential street in High Park and drives along a narrow, unpaved driveway to a majestic, turn-of-the-

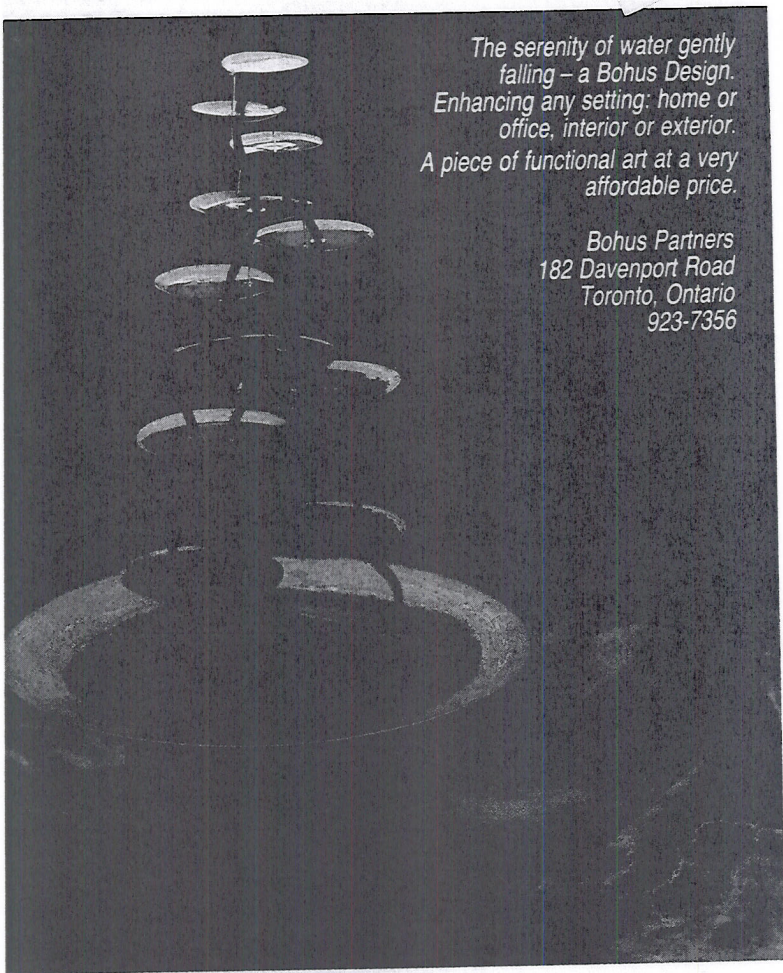
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Moses vision continued

century house on a hill overlooking Grenadier Pond, material evidence of his success. There is a billiard room and a gym with adjacent steam room, state-of-the-art audio and video gear in a living room that has a wall-sized television screen. There is an eclectic mix of art—Charles Pachter paintings, African sculptures—and memorabilia, including a 1950s-era Philco tv set.

After picking up a change of clothes to wear to the Festival of Canadian Fashion opening that night, Znaimer pilots the Saab back downtown. "Can we be half-serious for a second," he says suddenly. "I solicited this attention, in the sense that it's the fifteenth anniversary, and I think the attention is deserved. But having done so, I'm now also partially a victim of the process.

"You passed through my home because I think it's fair and appropriate to my propaganda interests that you see the way a media figure lives. But from my point of view that's not the point, and I'd love for the focus to be on the work, because that's recognition I'm actually seeking. I think that what I'm doing is a new kind of work opening up whole new channels of stuff that hasn't been seen before.

"What am I driving at...?" A pause. "I guess I'm looking for an analysis of what it is I've done and I'm now doing."

Znaimer's achievements are many and varied: the notion of "pocket television"—that independent production units travelling light can create effective drama as well as news programming; the hiring of a great many gifted young people who learned their craft at City and are now scattered throughout the broadcasting industry; the creation of City itself, a station that perfectly anticipated and then reflected the changing character of Canada's major urban centre. After CHUM liberated City from financial uncertainty, Znaimer was free to pursue his dream of becoming a creative producer, a modern incarnation of an old Hollywood tradition. In addition to Citytv and, later, *MuchMusic* productions, Znaimer has branched out in a number of interrelated directions, often with the help of Helix Investments Ltd. and his longtime backer, Ben Webster. These include *Tamara*, the award-winning experimental play that will open in New York this fall, and *Tour of the Universe*, a simulated trip into space that Znaimer and Helix are marketing around the world, with the first franchise being installed in Osaka, Japan. If successful, the returns could be enormous, but Webster points out that only a fool invests in one of Znaimer's ambitious ventures expecting quick profits.

"Most people can see either the details or the larger picture," says Webster, his eyes twinkling. "Moses sees both the forest and the trees, and gets bogged down in both.

D E

You know what I like to say? The only way to survive an investment with Moses is to have medical science on your side."

Znaimer arrives at the new Citytv building in time for an afternoon meeting. The terracotta exterior of the massive, seventy-three-year-old structure is being carefully restored, including the gargoyles and other gothic details. The basement and first two floors of the five-storey building have been extensively renovated to suit Znaimer's vision of a television facility without a conventional television studio, "a building wired to shoot itself." Every office, hallway and lobby, as well as the rooftop, parking lot and sidewalk around the building, can be transformed into a set by plugging cameras and lighting equipment into any one of a network of wired "hydrants." It is designed for what Znaimer calls video *vérité*, and it forms part of a tapestry that includes the interactive concept of *Tour of the Universe*, the "living movie" concept of *Tamara*, and the behind-the-scenes intimacy and reporter-as-participant theories behind *CityPulse*.

Znaimer is particularly involved in the revamped *CityPulse*, news being the station's strongest link to the city and an important source of its identity. A few times a year he chairs impromptu meetings with the senior *CityPulse* staff to discuss ethical and theoretical issues. At one such gathering last spring, he reminded writers that they "aren't being paid by the word," and asked to hear more of "the natural soundtrack," using the "Citytv, Everywhere" promotional spots to illustrate his point. He also asked why random acts of violence and disasters usually become lead stories and are used as "teasers" to preview upcoming reports.

"I was watching [the news] one Saturday," Znaimer explained. "I thought it was a magnificent day, when God was at peace with the world, yet there was a random violent event leading off the show. Why?"

This led to a spirited give-and-take among *CityPulse* veterans and puzzled looks on the faces of younger staffers. It was an oddly Pollyanna-ish challenge, especially since *CityPulse* is not shy in its coverage of traffic accidents, fires and crime. The extent to which Znaimer actually believed what he had said about good and bad news was unclear; certainly he was playing devil's advocate to stir up the news staff and reinforce the principles of City, a process that occurs more formally when City's "news doctor" comes to town.

Jacques de Suze, with the Virginia-based consulting firm McHugh and Hoffman Inc., has been fine-tuning *CityPulse* since its inception. "I was a little shocked, I must admit, that there was so little local news in Toronto," says de Suze. "I would hear six different languages as I walked down the

street but when I tuned in the news on different stations I didn't see that city. The other stations didn't worry about the idiosyncratic elements of Toronto that may have been part of the story."

Although there is no doubt that *CityPulse* reflects the dynamics of this city, everything from the reporters throwing themselves into their stories to the stirring *Rocky* soundtrack also reflects the shaping of *CityPulse* for maximum dramatic effect. Critic Morris Wolfe, in his book *Jolts: The TV Wasteland and the Canadian Oasis*, wrote that Citytv succeeds by "looking as Ameri-

CITYPULSE IS NOT SHY IN ITS COVERAGE OF TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS, FIRE AND CRIME

can as possible. City's hour-long newscasts are the fastest-paced of any I've seen on Canadian television. The station's newscasters are all personalities and the news is clearly show biz. . . ."

Znaimer admits that he has simply applied his own spin to a theory that is widely held among broadcasting critics. "We sing it out in a different voice and tempo from the rest of the guys. I've always said nobody needs another Global or CBC. Style is not a dirty word here. After all, what we do is pretty glamorous. It's the high-energy, *fun-da-mental* business of the age; when people are on the periphery of it they get a rush."

There is a difference, of course, between acknowledging that glamor and exploiting it. Consider two of the most popular criticisms of TV news: that it emphasizes material that is visually dramatic rather than inherently newsworthy, and favors events that are staged rather than spontaneous. That could also define the difference between news and show business, and it is at an intersection between the two that most TV news

programs reside.

The "new" *CityPulse*, for example, frees the anchorpersons from their desks and displays the bustle of a working newsroom to its viewers, techniques that many major U.S. stations and one other Canadian outlet, Halifax's ATV, have tried with varying degrees of success over the past ten years. But if the content of the news is sound, does it matter that some of the walking around and cutting back and forth between reporters and hosts is awkward and forced? One City gimmick that is merely annoying uses a spotlight to illuminate sportscaster Jim McKenny sitting on a stool behind Gord Martineau's shoulder as though the former was about to croon a ballad. But it is more serious when style interferes with the communication of the news. More than once, in an effort to place themselves in the centre of things, reporters have explained their stories while standing beside roaring machinery or in the middle of a noisy crowd, making it hard to hear a word they were saying.

Furthermore, now that City's new building is one big studio, *MuchMusic*, *Fashion Television* and *CityPulse* share the same set as well as City's style of presentation. It is not uncommon to see a *MuchMusic* clip, for example, on a *CityPulse* newscast. Whatever the boundaries between news and show business, they are increasingly difficult to distinguish on Citytv. It is a formula that works for a local news show that is an alternative to several competitors, but would not necessarily work in a larger context. Znaimer sees a national news service available on pay-TV as a logical parallel to City's national music service, although his hopes were dashed by the CRTC last spring when City's application for a television outlet in Ottawa, seen as a necessary base for any Canadian news operation, was rejected. City's greatest asset, it seems, can also work against it. Bill Cameron, a former *CityPulse* anchorman who is now a host-reporter on CBC's *The Journal*, once dismissed City's news coverage as "disco journalism." "I look at it now," Cameron says, "and I think that it's rock 'n' roll journalism. The difference is that I feel bad about disco and I feel good about rock 'n' roll, so my mind's changed to that extent." It would appear that when Znaimer's ambitions go beyond the world of entertainment—music, theatre, high-tech attractions—he meets his stiffest opposition. Mark Starowicz, executive producer of *The Journal* and *Midday*, says about Znaimer: "He's clearly developed a successful style of local coverage, and City appeal to a focussed generational group quite effectively. Moses has taught us that television can be quite inexpensive, but I believe that he's taken that observation and enlarged it so that it applies to all television in general. I think he's essentially wrong. To the extent that Moses Znaimer develops pretensions beyond what City does well is



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Moses vision continued

the extent to which we disagree."

The questions of scope and aspirations inevitably arise when you consider Moses Znaimer. Although he has built a career and assembled a respectable life's work that is based on creative output, you can sense restlessness in him. There are those who wonder whether he'd like to play in even bigger leagues, as his on-again-off-again friend Garth Drabinsky does. Drabinsky, also a self-made man from a Jewish immigrant family that had little money, is chairman, CEO and president of Cineplex Odeon Corp., a \$400-million entertainment complex backed by the American motion picture empire MCA Inc. and the Seagram Bronfman interests in Canada. Does Znaimer yearn for that brass ring?

"Well, until you asked the question, I hadn't actually turned it over in my mind," replies Znaimer. It is nearly 11 o'clock at night and he is sitting erectly at his desk, his office reflected in the large glass panels of half-a-dozen windows.

"I reason that I must admire the resources at his command."

A long pause.

"His machine is certainly bigger than mine right now. But deep down I've got to believe that Garth really wants to be a producer. And one thing that his partners don't let him do is express that. If he's got unfinished business, as many of us do, that's probably it. If I had one objective with City, it was to help create a new kind of television and elevate it to something that can be identified and analyzed, subjected to some criticism."

Znaimer is shooting another segment of City's fifteenth anniversary documentary. The camera rolls as Znaimer steps out of the building's glass doors and, glancing over his shoulder, sees workmen lifting down the Citytv sign. Znaimer takes a long, pensive look and begins to march west along Queen Street. The shot is completed in one take.

"When people ask me," Znaimer says later, "I tell them that I'm not going to miss this place. Too much has happened and I'm beyond that now."

Many of the older City staff and alumni have been unable to walk past—or even think about—the old building without getting teary-eyed. It's not that they don't recognize that 299 Queen Street West is an exciting move into the future of television—according-to-Znaimer, it's just that these past fifteen years that mirrored the growing up of Toronto also mirrored their own growing up. Now Toronto is more like City's fancy new building on Queen West, but it is Znaimer who says television is a soap opera, and some dumb sentimental impulse makes us wonder whether the tear in Znaimer's eye as he bade goodbye to 99 was real. ■



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