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Literary lures

Lover of books develops new media

TORONTO — Book writers have long looked to movie adaptations of their published work to boost retail sales.

Now they have BookShorts, mini-movies loosely based on published work, as an additional promotional tool, according to their creator, Toronto digital media producer Judith Keenan.

“We’re using the multimedia platform to bring the benefits of books to readers,” she says.

Keenan has produced four BookShorts, deliverable on various platforms, from the Internet and TV to bookstore kiosks and DVDs.

One example of this new digital fusion of the visual and the written word is “What Casanova Told Me,” in which film directors Ed Gass-Donnelly and Marco Pecota distilled Canadian writer Susan Swan’s 352-page historical novel about the famed Venetian lover into a six-minute short shot on 16mm film about a modern-day woman entranced by letters written between an ancestor and Casanova himself. The short aired on Bravo!, Canada’s cable arts channel, and accompanied Swan on a recent publicity tour.

Another animated BookShort, video artist Daniel Borins’ “Ice: Beauty, Danger, History,” includes a host of collaged images and is loosely based on Pauline Couture’s 356-page essay on ice as part of nature and everyday life.

Kim McArthur, president of McArthur & Co., the Canadian publisher of “Ice: Beauty, Danger, History,” says she can’t point to a link between Couture’s Book-

Short and its retail sales, but she praises the BookShort as a promotional tool for book publishers.

Keenan’s hope is that BookShorts will work for book publishing as music videos have worked for music labels.

“Music videos allowed a whole other art form to develop by becoming a new carrier for music,” Keenan says. But while Book-

Shorts have mostly screened online, what they lack is TV exposure or their own MTV-like channel.

“I would like to see more consistent airtime for BookShorts, like music videos receive. Hopefully that will come,” McArthur says.

Wary of too close an association with music videos, Keenan insists the BookShort is no publisher-funded commercial but rather entertaining content broadcasters or webcasters can plug into their programming streams.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corp. helped finance

Borins’ “Ice.” And TVOntario licensed the latest BookShort, “A Quiet Courage,” based on a book of the same name by TVOntario on-air host Paula Todd.

Predictably, Canadian broadcasters, book publishers and the federal government have been

the main underwriters for Keenan’s BookShorts, so far.

Creatively, BookShorts differ from feature-length screen adaptations of literary works in that they pare down an artist’s message to its bare bones. Rather than remain faithful to a writer’s work, BookShort directors are instead expected to read a book, set it aside and make a stand-alone film.

“You’re getting rid of even more in a BookShort than a feature film adaptation of a book will,” Keenan says.

Keenan hopes emerging digital media like mobile phones, niche channels and DVDs will help get her mini-movies into the market, and eventually more books into consumers’ hands.

— Etan Vlessing

PEOPLE



Keenan



Tom Sandler

Author Patrick Watson sees his memoir come to life with the help of director Irene Duma.