

# VARIETY

## Film News

Posted: Wed., Sep. 7, 2011, 12:00pm PT

### ***Montreal means business***

**Scout & About: Canada – Production**

By [Iain Blair](#)



'Immortals'



'Source Code'

When Relativity Media began considering production bases for two of its upcoming vfx-driven pictures -- "Immortals," set for a November release, and 2012's "Snow White" -- Montreal seemed like a natural choice.

The center of French-speaking Canada, which many believe combines the best elements of the New World and the Old, has long attracted production from south of the border.

"There were very specific advantages for us going there, as both films are 100% stage work, with heavy effects," says Tucker Tooley, Relativity's president of worldwide production. The pictures were shot at Mel's Cite du Cinema, which claims the rank of Canada's largest production facility.

Those stages, combined with Montreal's numerous vfx houses and support companies, "really lend themselves to that style of shooting," says Tooley.

Similarly, producer Mark Gordon was quick to take "Source Code" to Montreal, even though the recent sci-fi thriller is set in Chicago. "Montreal was easily able to double for all our Chicago exteriors," he says. "We did several days of 2nd unit work in Chicago, but most of the film takes place on a train, which we built, and then we used green screen for all the exterior window shots. It was a great set-up for us."

Like Tooley, Gordon is a big fan of the city's stages ("Source Code" also shot at Mel's). "They're state-of-the-art, and your production offices are right there."

Even with healthy budgets, producers look to cut costs wherever possible. Tooley and Gordon both cite another key reason for shooting in Montreal: the aggressive local tax credits. "It meant our dollars went a lot further," says Gordon.

The credits take the form of cash rebates, consisting of 25% on all expenses, plus a 16% credit from Canada's federal government on labor expenses. There's an additional green-screen and vfx bonus of 20% of labor. All told, combined credits in Montreal can rise to a mind-boggling 44%.

"They're the most competitive in Canada, and one of the most competitive in all North America," says Hans Fraikin, Quebec's film and TV commissioner. "It's one of the reasons why we're so busy, despite the recession. Over the past five years, we've restructured all the fiscal mechanisms and also made great locations easily available."

The result? A booming production hub that is financially and esthetically appealing to Hollywood producers.

"It's a very sophisticated city with great tax breaks that certainly incentivize you to do all your visual effects work there too," Tooley says. The only reason some effects work on Relativity's two films has been farmed out outside Montreal's houses "is that there's only so much of it that you can do at one time," he adds.

According to Fraikin, Montreal has been attracting two main categories of film shoots. The first is big studio features, including Relativity's "Snow White" and an upcoming production from Roland Emmerich. (Earlier, Gordon was producer on Emmerich's "The Day After Tomorrow," which also shot in Montreal.)

The second category, he says, is location-based films.

Shooting in Montreal makes a lot of sense for American productions needing European locations (think Paris, Vienna, London, Moscow), and even American locations (think New York), but which are unable or unwilling for budgetary or scheduling reasons to head across the pond or to the Big Apple.

Montreal recently hosted such varied productions as "The Words," starring Bradley Cooper, Jeremy Irons and Olivia Wilde, where the city doubled for contemporary New York and period Paris; and "Blackbird" and "Warm Bodies," which made extensive use of airport locations ("Not something you can do in most cities," Fraikin points out).

Montreal's experienced crews and infrastructure are two additional factors that attract foreign shoots. Those advantages rest partly on Quebec's annual billion-dollar production slate, a lot of which consists of domestic film and TV.

"It's an industry that's been going on for 60 years," Fraikin says. "In that sense, (Montreal) is like the Silicon Valley of Quebec -- cutting edge and highly experienced."

"They have a very sophisticated crew base, and it's fairly deep, so even if there are other shows in town, you don't run into any crewing problems," says Tooley. Having already shot "Immortals," Relativity found it "very easy to roll that crew onto 'Snow White,' which we're shooting on the same stages."

Both producers say they would shoot again in Montreal, "especially if we had another film that was largely shot on stage and was visual effects-heavy like these two," says Tooley. "The visual effects teams up there are really good, so it would just make a lot of sense."

Adds Gordon, "I've shot there three times in the past eight years, and I'd go back in a shot. The facilities and crews are terrific, Montreal also offers great hotels and restaurants, and there's a good local acting pool. And if you need to bring anyone in, it's very close to New York or Toronto. It just has everything going for it."

Contact the Variety newsroom at [news@variety.com](mailto:news@variety.com)