



Australian Government

SCREEN  
AUSTRALIA

## **Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival and Marketplace Toronto, 30 April – 10 May 2009**

**Mary-Ellen Mullane and Julia Overton  
Investment/Development Managers Documentary**

Investment Managers Mary-Ellen Mullane and Julia Overton attended this event, which comprises a 10-day film festival of screenings and a five-day market, which takes place in the middle of the festival.

The Hot Docs five-day conference began with the International Co-production Day and finished with the NFB Doc Summit. The Australian delegation presented at the International Co-production Day along with delegations from Argentina, the UK, Italy and Ireland. This year the conference offered a range of sessions to assist filmmakers in the current financial climate – *Grow a Creative Business in Turbulent Times* – and ways to adapt to an ever changing market – *Distribution for a New Era!* Wrapped around the conference was the enormously successful Hot Docs Festival, in which over 100,000 people viewed 171 documentaries.

Hot Docs 2009 was host to the very first North American Good Pitch. Good Pitch is a partnership between the Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation and the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program. It is based on the idea that documentary is a powerful tool for creating social change. Good Pitch took place at the end of the Toronto Documentary Forum and presented films focused on human rights issues seeking investment to a range of broadcasters, NGOs, foundations, campaigners, social issue media funders and policy makers.

Hot Docs is now one of the most established events on the international documentary calendar of events. It is a must-do for any documentary filmmaker wanting to work with North American producers and co-production partners. It is also North America's largest documentary festival, conference and market attracting over 2,000 international directors, producers, broadcasters and distributors. It takes place in Toronto every year at the beginning of May. The Festival attracted more than 100 filmmakers and special guests from across Canada and around the world to present their films and take part in special post-screening Q&A sessions with audiences.

## Objectives

Julia and Mary-Ellen attended Hot Docs to:

- gather market intelligence on behalf of Australian documentary producers
- support the Australian filmmakers with films screening in the festival and those attending the market
- promote Australian films to sales agents and international broadcasters
- encourage more co-production and to assist Australian filmmakers to finance their international co-productions
- inform international sales agents and international broadcasters about recent changes to the Australian documentary sector.

Hot Docs and IDFA both use a similar model for their events, combining an opportunity to screen films as well as an industry development program and a sales section. The Pitching Forum always attracts a large and enthusiastic crowd of observers and supporters and this year was no exception.

Hot Docs is a very relaxed marketplace and offers plenty of access to broadcasters and sales agents for filmmakers. The trend this year was noticeably away from series and personal filmmaking. Issues-based documentaries told by inspirational and extraordinary characters were strong – *Inside Hana's Suitcase*, *The Cove*, *Sergio*, *Afghan Star*, *Winnebago Man*. A growing number of 'green' films with environmental themes were presented at the Forum – *SH\*T!*, *Living Downstream* and *Last Days of the Arctic* to mention just a few.

Screen Australia had a strong presence at the festival this year with two extraordinary feature-length documentaries in competition – Emma Franz's *Intangible Asset Number 82* and Safina Uberoi's *A Good Man*. Both films screened to sell-out theatres and both filmmakers had great Q&A sessions after the screenings.

## Toronto Documentary Forum (TDF)

The Toronto Documentary Forum (TDF) celebrated its 10th anniversary. From 160 proposals just 25 pitches were selected. In the spirit of innovation TDF partnered with the Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation and the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program to present Good Pitch at Hot Docs. Good Pitch featured five human rights-themed projects selected from 140 proposals.

The TDF closed its 10th anniversary edition with the announcement of the first ever Canwest-Hot Docs TDF Pitch Prize (CAN\$40,000), awarded to White Pine Pictures for their pitch of *The Team* – the story of a Kenyan soap opera series about a fictional soccer team that aims to bridge deep ethnic divisions by including taboo storylines.

Another first ever closing day announcement was initiated by one of the observers, and this was the audience vote. For a financial contribution any observer could vote for their favourite pitch. Far and away the most popular

pitch was *Town of Runners* from the UK team of Al Morrow and Jerry Rothwell from Met Film Productions. This project follows young athletes from a rural Ethiopian town as they move from school track to Olympic stadium creating a portrait of African youth seen not through the standard lens of poverty but via ambition and hope. It is not only a life-affirming story but also an exemplary pitch for a film to be made on a modest budget.

Projects that were pitched at the Forum had a range of budgets but the majority of projects had high budgets by Australian standards. It was noticeable that although the pitches were supposed to be for projects in development (and they might well have been at the time of original application), many of the applicants were able to offer rough-cut screeners of their projects when requested.

### **Australian representation**

The number of Australians attending Hot Docs this year was down – a combination of the global financial situation and the first days of the Swine flu took their toll. No Australian broadcasters attended. Elizabeth Radshaw, the director of TDF, is determined to rectify this next year.

Michael McMahon (Hot Docs, Primitive Entertainment) hosted drinks for the Australian delegation. It was an intimate event, and we were able to hear all about Michael's project and festival hit *Waterlife* – an essay documentary directed by his brother Kevin McMahon on the place of water in our lives. Michael spends part of each year in Australia and has attended AIDC as part of the Canadian delegation in past years.

We took the opportunity to meet with as many members of the international documentary sector as possible – investors, distributors, producers – as well as attend many screenings (although we didn't manage as many as we would have liked). Some of the hits of the festival included *Burma VJ – Reporting from a Closed Country*, *Rough Aunties*, *The Cove* and *Big River Man*. Many of these documentaries were screened in Australia at the 2009 Sydney Film Festival.

### **International Co-production Day**

Pat Ferns moderated a territory overview which included Italy, Ireland and the UK as well as the emerging territories of South America, in particular Argentina. After the introductory territory overview, Julia Overton, Mitzi Goldman and Mark Atkin shared the stage on an informative panel discussion about current Australian documentary production and finance. There were plenty of questions from producers keen to find ways to work with their Australian counterparts.

### **Doc Lab**

Australian filmmaker Scott Millwood was amongst those selected to participate in the Doc Lab: a creative mentoring program for mid-career documentary filmmakers. His project *The Rights of Nature* was one of 15 films selected from an international shortlist and one of only three outside North America. The Lab runs for five days and concluded with an observer session at the TDF.

## Doc Shop

As always the Doc Shop was a hive of activity. The Doc Shop is Hot Docs' documentary market running concurrently with the Festival and Conference. A fully digital video library, the Doc Shop offers users on demand access to more than 1,000 documentaries, allowing people to browse, select and view films at any one of the 40 on-site computer terminals. This year it contained many Australian documentaries including Janet Merewether's *Maverick Mother* and Rachelle Bakarich's *Christmas Lights* as well as copies of the films screening in the festival in search of sales or a distributor.

## Top Ten Audience Favourite documentaries

1. *The Cove* (d: Louie Psihoyos, USA)
2. *65\_Redroses* (d: Philip Lyall, Nimisha Mukerji, Canada)
3. *Inside Hana's Suitcase* (d: Larry Weinstein, Canada/Czech Republic)
4. *Best Worst Movie* (d: Michael Paul Stephenson, USA)
5. *A Hard Name* (d: Alan Zweig, Canada)
6. *Over the Hills and Far Away* (aka *The Horse Boy*) (d: Michel Orion Scott, USA)
7. *Winnebago Man* (d: Ben Steinbauer, USA)
8. *Burma VJ* (d: Anders Høgsbro Østergaard, Denmark)
9. *Rough Aunties* (d: Kim Longinotto, UK)
10. *Prom Night in Mississippi* (d: Paul Saltzman, Canada)

## 2009 Hot Docs Awards

Best Canadian Feature Documentary – *Invisible City*

Director: Hubert Davis

Producers: Mehernaz Lentin, Gerry Flahive

Executive Producer: Silva Basmajian (NFB)

Special Jury Prize Canadian Feature – *Waterlife*

Director: Kevin McMahon

Producers: Michael McMahon, Kristina McLaughlin, Gerry Flahive

Executive Producers: Mark Achbar, Betsy Carson, Michael McMahon, Silva Basmajian

Best International Feature Documentary – *The One Man Village*

Director/Producer: Simon El Habre

Producers: Jad Abi-Khalil, Irit Neidhardt

Special Jury Prize International Feature – *Cooking History*

Director/Producer: Peter Kerekes

Producers: Georg Misch, Pavel Strnad

Executive Producer: Ralph Wieser

Best Mid-length Documentary – *Rabbit à la Berlin*

Director: Bartek Konopka

Producer: Anna Wydra

Best Short Documentary – *The Delian Mode*

Director/Producer: Kara Blake

Producer: Marie-Josée Saint-Pierre

## Doc Mogul Award

This year Hot Docs honoured Sheila Nevins. Sheila is the Head of HBO Documentary Films and noted for her numerous Emmy, Academy and humanitarian awards. She is responsible for some of the biggest 'hit' documentaries in the past two decades – *Taxi to the Dark Side*, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* and *When the Levees Broke*. Nick Fraser hosted the lunch and spoke about Sheila's remarkable career with warmth and good humour.

## Meetings

**Jan Rofekamp and Diane Holtzberg – Films Transit:** Films Transit is one of the documentary blue-chip sales agents. They had a number of films in the festival including the latest film by Heddy Honigman *El Olvido* and the Rick Minnick film *Forgetting Dad*. They are very interested in continuing relationships with Australia. Films Transit continues to take a small but important group of films to the market, using festival screenings as the springboard for broadcaster sales of films. This allows for the filmmaker to have their film screened at their preferred length whilst delivering the obligatory one-hour version, which is the one that most broadcasters still require. They are generally looking for two types of documentaries. Firstly, the epic feature docs, generally with more cultural rather than social/political subjects. Secondly, they are looking for TV hour-length films focused on strong, edgy, provocative, contemporary subject matter that people must see because of their political or social relevance. Some of these films will have strong current affairs value. Currently their top selling programs are *Addicted to Plastic*, *La Corona* and *Beyond Wise Guys*.

**Janet Pierson – SXSW:** An established North American film festival screening across all genres and definitely a festival to consider entering. As a great number of sales agents and distributors attend, it is a good launching point for the American market.

**Charlotte Engel – Bravo (CTV):** Bravo is looking for projects that have a link to Canada – one-off documentaries and series about the arts (music, dance, theatre, literature, film and the visual arts). They are seeking arts programming that will appeal to a wide audience and can contribute either through a (modest) license fee or as an acquisition.

**Sean Farnell – Director, Hot Docs:** Sean is very keen to continue established relationships with Australia and Australian projects and is impressed with the standard of Australian documentary.

**Anais Clanet – Wide Management:** Based in Paris this distributor takes on 10 new titles per year, and their catalogue contains around 300 documentaries and approximately 400 fiction titles.

**Debra Zimmerman – Women Make Movies:** Debra has a long connection with Australia. Her brief is very straightforward – she represents films made by women about women.

**Hussain Currimbholy – Programmer, Sheffield Film Festival:** Hussain has an awareness of Australian film and filmmakers as many have been programmed at Sheffield. He encourages filmmakers to submit early to this

festival as he can assist filmmakers place their films in a way that will generate the awareness of distributors and sales agents. Sheffield has reduced their program of films to between 30 and 40 and their marketplace component has increased.

**Edmee Millot – Arte France:** Edmee is a new Commissioning Editor who works with Helene Coldefy and Christine Reissen in the Specialist Factual Department. This department has a long established relationship with Australian producers. Over 185 million European viewers have access to Arte. All information regarding strands and lengths is available on their website.

**Hans Robert Eisenhauer – ZDF/Arte:** Hans is well known to Australian filmmakers and is a regular visitor to Australia. He is a very desirable Commissioning Editor because he will take films of all lengths.

**Cynthia Lopez – American Documentary/POV:** This is a leading non-profit media organisation dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary nonfiction stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media.

**Anne Rose – Sundance Channel:** Their original programming department commissions and pre-licenses about seven documentary series (commercial half hours and hours) and approximately eight to 10 documentaries of 60 or 90 minutes per year. Their channel is commercial free and is aimed at “independent-minded viewers seeking something different”.

**Annie Rooney – Roco Films:** Annie takes a very few films each year but she is considered one of the most respected North American sales agents. She takes all territories excluding the US and initially selects on her visceral reaction. Will her buyers respond? Does it have legs? And, most importantly, is the project socially or topically relevant?

**Susanne Guggenberger – Autlook Filmsales:** Autlook Filmsales is a small, well-respected, Vienna-based sales agent representing documentaries for broadcast and theatrical release. They are very interested in looking at Australian projects but it is crucial to bear in mind that they do not take many projects. They select around 25 broadcast documentaries and six documentaries with worldwide theatrical potential per year. They are represented at both drama and documentary festivals and marketplace events and have a reputation for nurturing and establishing long-term relationships with their filmmakers.

**Lilla Hurst – Lillavision:** Lilla represents a number of UK indies in the marketplace, which leaves the filmmakers free to continue working on their own projects whilst she is at the markets for them assisting in the raising of co-production finance and growing cross platform relationships. She has a number of high-profile clients including Phil Craig (Furnace TV), who consistently works with Australian producers, as well as the National Geographic Channel UK, Medialab, Pulse Films, Vice Broadcasting Services and UTA. Lilla provides a working model that allows people to do what they do best.

**Sandra Whipman:** Sandra is a UK independent producer who recently left Channel 4 to set up her own production company and is keen to work with

Australian producers on their own documentary projects. Her slate includes feature docs with hour versions and she is interested in a variety of projects, particularly documentaries which are her particular love.

**Jane Lipmann:** Jane is a South African filmmaker who has experience both as a producer and director. She is looking for ideas of a political nature that will translate internationally.

**Anne Pick:** Anne has been involved with Australia for many years as her family is from South Australia. She has worked on a number of Canadian/Australian co-productions and is on the International Consultative Committee of AIDC. Anne was hugely supportive of the Australian contingent at Hot Docs and is keen to work with and develop projects that can find funding both in Canada and Australia. Anne's experience also extends to working in China. Her slate, like many Canadian producers, covers many genres.

**Jane Schoettle – Toronto Film Festival:** Jane is very keen to see directors and is always looking for new work. Jane is the contact at Toronto who keeps an eye on Australians and their work.

**Thom Powers – Toronto Film Festival:** Thom is the curator of documentary for the Toronto Film Festival. He looks for films that will fit into this festival, particularly ones that have not screened at Hot Docs. His closing deadline is around mid-June – it is strongly recommended that you follow up the sending of any film with an email ("polite persistence," as he calls it). He was very taken with Scott Hicks' film on Phillip Glass and the Lawrence Johnston film *Night*, both of which have screened at the festival. A deciding factor for Thom is he needs films that have a "cinematic presence".

**Charlotte Mickie – E1:** E1 is a leading Canadian entertainment content owner and distributor. They are open to documentary co-productions and have already established relationships in the Australian market. Charlotte came to E1 via Celluloid Dreams and then Maximum. She will work with Australian filmmakers representing their films internationally, both theatrically and then for broadcast. She is working with Michael Wrenn who is her spotter for this part of the world. We also met with Loren Mawhinney and Ben Bishop from E1 Entertainment.

**Sara Bernstein – HBO:** Sara works closely with Sheila Nevins, Head of Documentary at HBO. They are looking for event documentaries with a North American focus. If they do have this focus they need to be character driven but with a topicality that allows them to sit comfortably in their schedule. A recent example of this would be the Janine Hosking film *Gunja Queen*. Other recent acquisitions include *Sergio*, a co-production with BBC Storyville, and *Roman Polanski – Wanted and Desired*.

**Simon Ho – Guangzhou Film Festival:** This festival is held at the beginning of December each year and this year Simon is arranging an International Producer Day as part of the festival. He also envisages having an Australian focus this year. Guangzhou has had a long relationship with Australia and has screened many of our films.

**Tom Quinn and Laird Adamson – Magnolia:** This consistently energetic and enthusiastic duo was in town mainly to pitch at the forum with

Christopher Hitchens – a project which became known as ‘The Hitch Pitch’. It is a project based on the Christopher Hitchens book on the existence, or otherwise, of God and was a hugely popular pitch. They also had three films in the festival including *The Cove*, which was voted Audience Favourite. It is worth noting that not long after the end of the festival this film was picked up by director Luc Besson to be turned into a feature film – not the first, and surely not the last, time this will happen.

**Tabitha Jackson – Channel 4:** Tabitha is keen to get a sense of the producers in Australia. She is aware of the producers who attend markets but also knows that this is not possible for everyone. She is not interested in history programs for her slot, or natural history or biography unless they are told in an unusual form. For example, recent films with which they have been involved include *Burma VJ*, *Afghan Star*, *Terror in Mumbai* and *Chosen*. “Send the auteurs to her,” she says.

**Tom Alexander – Mongrel Media:** A Canadian distributor with 15 years experience who specialise in art house, foreign and independent documentaries and feature films. They release around 40 films per year and over 80 DVD titles. They are very keen to bring the best of the world to Canada.

**Esther Van Messel – First Hand Films:** A distributor with an impeccable eye, First Hand has around 350 hours of content and represents documentaries worldwide across all formats. They will act as facilitators of co-production on the right projects. Current projects include *Burma VJ – Reporting from a Closed Country* and *Brides of Allah*.

**Fabrice Esteve – Docside:** Fabrice continues his working relationship with established players in Australia and is very happy with the relationships he has developed. Fabrice is the consummate producer; he works the room and festivals in general. His knowledge is such that he is constantly enquiring after and aware of current trends.

**Alfons Adetuyi – Inner City Films:** Alfons is a Canadian producer keen to work on series, long form documentary or drama that can work in Canada and Australia. He has series across all genres and is keen to meet people from Australia.

**Carlos Alperin – Galloping Films:** Carlos is an Australian-based sales agent who should be considered as a potential distributor/sales agent by Australian filmmakers. He is an assiduous attendee at international festivals throughout the year and has an impressive catalogue of films from around the world.

**Nick Fraser – BBC Storyville:** Storyville is one of the most respected documentary slots on BBC and Nick has a number of series ideas that he is keen to develop and is looking for projects that will work internationally. Human rights issues are a big theme for him at the moment. Nick is curious about the ways the documentary landscape in Australia is changing.

**Mette Hoffman Meyer – TV2 Denmark:** Mette is a well-respected commissioning editor. One of her latest productions is the new Weijun Chen film *The Biggest Chinese Restaurant in the World*. Mette acquires 110 hours per year for her station – she does not pay a large amount but often this is



the difference between a film going into production or not. If Mette commits then it is likely that contributions would come from other Scandinavian broadcasters such as YLE Finland.

**Jenna Bordeaux – Buzz Taxi Communications:** Buzz Taxi is one of Canada's leading boutique distributors of factual content working both domestically and internationally. They have around 500 hours of content and will represent all rights.

**Julie Goldman – Cactus Three:** Julie and her co-founders, Kryssanne Katsoolis and Caroline Steven, are devoted to the creation of distinctive, high end filmmaking as well as television production and series. Cactus offers a combination of production and co-production experience and they are keen to find projects in the early stages of production they can partner. Their most notable documentaries include *Black Sun*, *Sketches of Frank Gehry* and *Orthodox Stance*. Cactus is also responsible for such hit series as HBO's *Family Bonds* and the Sundance Channel's *Office Tigers*.

**Alan Maher – Irish Film Board:** The Irish Film Board is keen to see more use made of their 'creative co-production fund' for documentary where they might be able to assist in the production of more Australian/Irish-based projects.

**Johanna Samuels:** Johanna's distribution company Nightwood Productions represents a number of high profile productions such as *Air India*. She will pick up documentaries for ROW and will occasionally put up DGs.

**Yong Qiu Xia – Commissioning Editor, CCTV:** Yong Qiu Xia was looking for documentaries with resonance for Chinese viewers. She jumped in on several 'edgy' projects pitched at the Forum.

**Josh Levin – Gallant Films:** The New York-based distributor says that the news from the business side of the film world is decidedly mixed this quarter, and while there are some bright spots, the outlook for documentaries going through traditional distribution pipelines is even bleaker than it has been. Josh works across a number of genres including documentary and is a good contact for any Australian documentary producer wanting to connect with the indie documentary sector in New York.

**John Lindsay – KCET9 & Estuary Pictures:** John is still keen and actively brokering pre-sales in the US and North American territories for Australian filmmakers.

**Pat Ferns – Ferns Productions:** Pat moderated several sessions at Hot Docs as well as discussed the future of co-production between Canada and Australia.

**David Christensen – Executive Producer, National Film Board of Canada:** David met with us in his role as an in-house producer with the Film Board. He is working on a number of projects including an online project about survivors of out of home care institutions. He discussed his working methods, the Board's direction and the place of new media in the changing landscape of broadcast documentary.

**Sandy Mayzell – Vice President, May Street Productions:** Sandy discussed a slate of co-production projects with us. She is a Vancouver-based documentary producer, keen to work with Australians on issues-based documentaries such as women in politics, ecology and international aid.

**David Cormican – Development Executive, Minds Eye Entertainment:** David discussed co-production avenues and he is already working with an Australian filmmaker on a co-production and open to finding other projects in the future.

Catch up meetings were held with representatives from:

- CBC (Michael Alder and Catherine Olsen)
- ITVS (Claire Aguilar)
- SVT Sweden (Axel Arno)
- Knowledge Channel (Rudy Buttignol and Murray Battle)
- Up Front Entertainment (Barbara Barde)
- Chocolate Box Entertainment (Sally Blake)
- TV Ontario (Naomi Boxer, Jane Jancovic)
- Thirteen (Nina Chaudry of Wide Angle)
- Instinct Films (Ina Fichman)
- Canwest (Michael Kot, Sarah-Jane Flynn)
- NHK (Takahiro Hamano)
- AVRO (Marijke Huibregts)
- PBS International (Tom Koch)
- Link TV (Steve Lawrence)
- Markham St Films (Michael McNamara)
- Icarus Films (Jonathan Miller)
- VPRO (Nathalie Windhorst)
- National Film Board of Canada (Tom Perlmutter, Cindy Witten)

In summary, this was a most productive trip in which many new contacts were made and existing relationships re-established for the future benefit of Australian filmmakers. We are seeing a growing trend of international cooperation for documentary filmmakers, commissioning editors and funding bodies, which is predictable in this time of shrinking budgets. It was exciting to see the increased involvement of Asian representatives from the documentary community, whether as festival representatives, broadcasters or filmmakers. The demand for documentaries remains strong.

**Mary-Ellen Mullane and Julia Overton**