



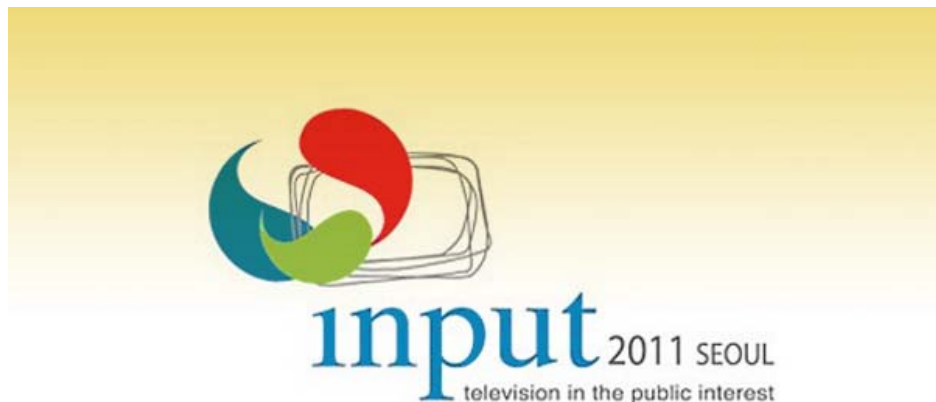
Australian Government

SCREEN
AUSTRALIA

**Hot Docs Canadian International
Documentary Festival, Marketplace &
Forum
Toronto, Canada, 28 April – 8 May 2011**

**INPUT Public Television Event
Seoul, South Korea, 8–12 May 2011**

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Hot Docs

Hot Docs comprises a nine-day film festival of screenings, a five-day market and three-day pitching forum, the latter two events occurring in the middle of the festival.

Hot Docs is now one of the most established events on the international documentary calendar. It is a must-do for any documentary filmmaker looking for international co-production partners and producers. It is also North America's largest documentary festival, conference and market attracting over 2,000 documentary makers, buyers, broadcasters and distributors. It takes place in Toronto every year at the beginning of May.

Australian representation at Hot Docs

The number of Australians attending Hot Docs this year was not large, but those who were there were enthusiastic ambassadors.

Gina Twyble was there in her role as Director of Luminous Documentary Film Festival.

Australia was represented by two films screening in the festival – **Robert Nugent's *Memoirs of a Plague*** – a personal journey into the myth of the locust and a portrait of a war that can never be won – which was selected for screening in International Spectrum, and **Pete Gleeson's** eight-minute short film ***Something to Tell You*** – about a man who, having developed a romantic relationship with a woman online, must now reveal he suffers from a severe physical disability screened in the Shorts Competition. The latter film received an honourable mention with the judges commending “its simple but effective approach to a sensitive and often overlooked topic – that of disability and romance”. Both filmmakers found the experience of being able to present their films, engage directly with audiences and connect with international filmmakers and decision makers in a passionate, creative environment very rewarding. There were over 2,100 submissions this year. They were whittled down to some 230 films so these two filmmakers were in very select company.

Hot Docs Forum

This year there were two Australian documentary projects represented in the **Hot Docs Forum**. Again this is a highly competitive arena. Twenty-six projects were selected from over 200 submissions. These were ***Miss Nikki and the Tiger Girls*** from producer **Jessica Douglas Henry** and writer/director **Juliet Lamont** and ***I Am a Girl*** from producer/writer/director **Rebecca Barry**. Both teams were given generous advice from the moment they were selected at the beginning of March. Weekly Skype calls with **Elizabeth Radshaw** and I ensured that they were both as prepared as they could be. Screen Australia was in a high-profile position being with the teams as they pitched at the Forum. Though nothing can prepare the team for the adrenalin hit that occurs as the actual event takes place.

The experiences of each team were rather different. *Miss Nikki and the Tiger Girls* was fortunate enough to have received funding via the International Call of ITVS, one of the most respected parts of the public television network in the US. It had also received time critical shoot funding from Screen Australia

that had enabled it to produce a very strong sizzle reel as part of the presentation. It was therefore already being viewed with great interest by the 'decision maker' group of commissioning editors and sales agents. By the time *Miss Nikki and the Tiger Girls* was at the table pitching the project already had on board ITVS, Screen Australia and the highly respected sales agent Films Transit. This, combined with a self-assured pitch, ensured that offers were forthcoming. We were able to secure meetings with whoever we needed and people were very candid in their ability, or not, to support the project and at what time they could come in. Of course the project is not over the line yet, with the Australian funding being the hardest to secure.

The other project, *I Am a Girl*, which paints a picture of what it means to be a girl in the 21st century, had a slightly harder road, particularly as it is not such a unique topic. They did, however, come away with strong interest from both representatives of HBO and Al Jazeera. What was fascinating to watch was the way in which both groups of filmmakers learned so much from their time at the event. One of the great difficulties for Australian filmmakers is that they do not get the exposure that so many of their filmmaking colleagues in other parts of the world do to the ideas, the people and the deals that are current.

Projects that were pitched at the Forum had a range of budgets, not as high as in previous years. The most popular pitch was from experienced filmmakers **Victor Buhler** and **Angel Vasquez** with their project ***A Whole Lott More*** about a car assembly plant in Toledo, Ohio, that employs more than 1,200 workers, all with developmental disabilities. With the decline of the car industry Lott is threatened with closure. The company has 12 months to reinvent itself and save the lives of its disabled employees. The film will follow the company during this year and during that time will bring to light how people with disabilities are excluded from the working world – a situation that needs to change. The funding in place to trigger the project into the Forum was foundation and kick-starter funding. Not a broadcaster in sight. Although on pitching five broadcasters, two sales agents and three more foundations pledged their support.

Toronto events and participation

Events at the Hot Docs industry centre are designed to ensure that filmmakers feel part of a community and have access to as many of the key players as possible. There is a co-production day that allows for representation from official and non-official delegations. This year there were official delegations from Italy, Brazil, France, South Africa, the US, the UK, Germany, China, Scandinavia and Canada. Screen Australia and the two forum teams represented Australia. There were also a number of case studies many involving the use of new technology or centred around new funding methodology or transmedia. For example ***The National Parks Project***, a Canadian series comprising vignettes from 13 different Canadian directors shooting on DSLR. There were sessions looking at advances in post-production technology as well as Rendezvous meetings. These allowed the filmmakers to have one-on-one sessions with funders, whether broadcasters, sales agents or funding bodies, in order to discuss possible ways to move their projects forward to fruition. A very useful way to find potential partners.

The funding challenge

While documentaries are capturing the imagination of the public and gaining recognition from the industry like never before, finding the funding for them is becoming increasingly challenging, with broadcasters feeling the force of commercial pressures and public funding becoming harder to secure. The amount of funding for single one-off docs from traditional sources is smaller than it has ever been, the broadcasters don't seem to believe that audiences come to single films any more. Formats or series have taken over all of the spaces that used to be called documentary.

Many people are coming to rely on crowd funding and foundations such as **Cinereach**, **Tribeca** (which has two funds, one sponsored by Gucci and Heineken), **Guggenheim**, **Ford** and of course that perennial favourite, **Sundance**. One project pitched at the Forum this year had funds from 13 different foundations as part of its finance plan. With less money around and less slots on terrestrial television for documentaries, commissioners are also less willing to take risks. People won't invest in things that aren't a certainty. They want to know what's going to happen and obviously part of the beauty of documentaries is that you don't know what is going to happen. It is very hard to get a documentary commissioned from a piece of paper. So it was no surprise to find that there was a focus on exploring alternative sources of financing – from crowd funding to foundation grants to corporate money.

With each organisation only able to put up a small proportion of the budget, one problem can be that they tend to cluster around the same projects to the exclusion of others. There is a bit of a follow-the-leader effect because they are all watching what the others are funding. They are all acknowledging that there is something really exciting and once it is out there they want to see that it gets made so they work together to get it made.

Organisations such as **Impact Partners** are also providing filmmakers with alternative funding in the form of private equity, but only if their films have a 'social cause'. This is frustrating for some in the documentary world who feel that, in particular, documentaries about the arts are being neglected although Tribeca has created a fund particularly for story-driven 'non-issue' films. Having said that it is the people who work in social issue documentaries who have been more motivated to find new sources of funding and new models and this should be an inspiration for those working in other forms of documentary.

In spite of this the demand for, and interest in, documentaries remains strong. The festival continues to sell out sessions and increase the ticket sales each year.

INPUT

INPUT is an international public television screening conference for TV professionals and an international platform to discuss and challenge the boundaries of public television that takes place annually, each time in a different city.

This public broadcast television event is an opportunity to see and ask what colleagues from other cultures are doing, to explore television-making methods and techniques with peers from other countries. I have observed that the value of INPUT lies in the professional and robust debate about the screened programs. Each year about 300 programs from around the world are submitted to the selection coordinator in Berlin by national coordinators from each country. This year 87 of them were selected and grouped into sessions. The shopstewards whose only guidance is to choose programs that reflect outstanding, new and courageous television do this job. The groupings should be roughly 30 per cent drama, 30 per cent documentary and 30 per cent 'other'. The shopstewards bring different perspectives, backgrounds and varied professional TV experiences. Many, but not all, are commissioning editors. Some are independent filmmakers. The success of the conference depends very much on the dynamic the shopstewards bring to the event. If all this sounds somewhat post-modern and anarchic in construction the fact that INPUT was founded in 1977 in Italy should go some way to explain the structure. Australians involved are **Safina Uberoi** as a Shopsteward and **Graeme Isaac** and **Julia Overton** as National Coordinators.

The 87 selected screenings were scheduled into four-hour sessions either by genre or issue in a way that makes them relevant to the audience. They were screened each day simultaneously in three screening rooms. The sessions were moderated by the shopstewards with involvement from a representative of the program itself and, hopefully, the commissioning editor of the relevant program.

Australian projects

This year four projects from Australia were selected to participate in the event. They included ***Goa Hippy Tribe*** (Freehand, represented by **Stephen Boyle**) and ***Immigration Nation: The Secret History of Us*** (Renegade) both from SBS TV who were represented by Head of Marketing **Jacquie Riddell** and Commissioning Editor **John Godfrey**, and ***Dirtgirlworld*** (Mememe Productions, represented by **Cate McQuillen**) and ***My Place*** (Matchbox Pictures, represented by **Penny Chapman**) from ABC. **Kim Dalton**, Director of Television, and **Tim Brooke-Hunt**, Controller of Children's Television (ABC3), represented the ABC. All the projects were well received, and particular emphasis was placed on their transmedia aspects, which in most cases were substantial.

Favourites from overseas

There were a number of standout programs from other countries – ***Radio Karen*** from Denmark, which used finger puppets to animate characters from a local talkback community radio station with delightful results. ***Duts***, a Belgian absurdist comedy driven by a performer with Monsieur Hulot-type

attributes. For drama the standout was ***The Song of Lunch*** starring **Emma Thompson** and **Alan Rickman** in a powerful and visually arresting film that inspired and entertained. It is the dramatisation of a narrative poem made to mark National Poetry Day in the UK and this film could revive interest in the art of poetry as it is so personal, funny, poignant and more. For documentary, ***Blood in the Mobile*** from Denmark which tells of the exploitation of Congolese workers mining for an essential and hard-to-retrieve mineral used in the creation of sim cards. For kids' television the Spanish ***Red Bracelets*** is to be recommended and for sheer light-hearted travel, adventure and entertainment ***Either Broder – On Safari in Germany*** from Germany is a wonderful TV specific program that involves two people travelling across Germany in their special customised colourful Volvo. On their travels they talk to Aryans, vegetarians, fundamentalists, socialists, friends of peace and war profiteers in order to present to the audience a less predictable perspective of Germany.

Special evening sessions

In addition to these screenings, evening sessions are organised by the host broadcasters or by the INPUT Board. This year the special sessions involved two topics: 'Women and Girls, The Role of Public Broadcaster from Content to Impact' and 'Media Leadership Summit – Bringing Public Television to the 21st Century Audience'. **Kim Dalton** was a panellist on both these sessions along with representatives of broadcasters PBS, France 5 and, most poignantly, NHK Japan. Since the tsunami NHK has devoted itself to broadcasting programs that relate directly to survival, both personal and national.

Asian Broadcasting Union

The Asian Broadcasting Union held meetings in Seoul at the same time as the conference in order to increase networking opportunities for broadcasters and producers and there was huge support not only from the two Korean broadcasters KBS and MBC but also the Korea Foundation and the Australia Korea Foundation, of which **Kim Dalton** is a board member.

INPUT 2012 in Australia

Next year INPUT will come to Australia for the first time. It will be held in Sydney, 9–12 May 2012. For this reason Australia hosted the closing drinks of the Seoul event. The Australian Ambassador to Korea, His Excellency **Sam Gerovich**, spoke eloquently at this event about the importance to Australia of hosting INPUT. **Kim Dalton** and **Jacquie Riddell**, representing the host broadcasters for 2012, also made speeches which were short and amusing and to the point. It is anticipated that the event, to be held in Sydney, will attract at least 350 international participants and between 500 and 800 from Australia. It is a very good opportunity to facilitate meetings between members of the local independent production sector and representatives of Australian broadcasters with multiple representatives from both international producers and broadcasters. It is hoped that, through events such as these, increasing numbers of production companies and filmmakers will be able to grow and develop their storytelling and finance-raising skills.

Conclusion

In summary this was a most productive trip in which existing relationships were used for the benefit of Australian filmmakers. We are seeing, as observed above, a growing trend of international cooperation for documentary filmmakers, commissioning editors and funding bodies of diverse sorts, which is predictable at this time of shrinking budgets. It was exciting to see the continued increasing involvement of Asian representatives from the documentary and broadcast community both in Toronto and Seoul. The demand for work remains strong and the way it is being funded is changing.