

Berlinale and European Film Market (EFM)

Berlin, Germany, 9–19 February 2012

Report by Christopher Sharp, Development Executive

The 2012 Berlinale and European Film Market (EFM) was positive both for the Australian filmmakers who attended and for the near future of the Australian film industry in the international marketplace. The impact that films such as *Snowtown*, *Animal Kingdom*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Samson and Delilah* and *Wish You Were Here* have had in recent years (primarily through their recognition at key festivals) is palpable and has led to an increasing interest in Australian cinema as a whole – with perhaps a particular focus on emerging talent – which was clearly evident at this year's market.

This had an impact on the producers that attended EFM as well. Marian Macgowan reported strong interest in her next feature *The Great*, which Bankside Films had committed a sizable minimum guarantee towards. Lisa Shaunessy and Joe Weatherstone closed a deal with Films Boutique for their project *Courage* (which will be the first feature for director Damien Power). And Melanie Coombs, Jannine Barnes, Michael Clarkin, Angela Walsh and Annmaree Bell (among others) each had incredibly busy days at the market pitching their upcoming projects to eager sales companies and distributors.

Meanwhile Karen Radzyner attended Berlin's Co-production Market with her Sonia Whiteman-helmed project, *Rockpool*, which *Variety* reported as one of the four projects with the most traction at the three day market.

Following on from my trip to EFM in 2011, where I was able to introduce the project *These Final Hours* to the American sales company XYZ (who picked it up), I was keen to continue to promote Australian filmmakers and their projects and to match make producers and their projects with companies they may otherwise have difficulty meeting. I had no trouble filling my schedule with worthwhile meetings. I had over 40 meetings in my seven and a half days at EFM, mostly with sales companies. The aim of these meetings was to get a sense of which filmmakers are being tracked out of Australia; to make introductions between sales companies and producers attending the market, as well as those that weren't able to; to promote projects currently in development, as well as emerging writers and directors; to gauge the interest in our upcoming releases; to check in with companies that have recently handled Australian films overseas (particularly to hear first-hand what had worked for them and what hadn't); and to get a sense of what kinds of stories are currently in demand in the international marketplace.

One of the recurring discoveries in these meetings was a resounding desire for more 'elevated genre' projects – films that have their roots in thriller, horror, sc-fi or crime genres but offer audiences something new and original in their telling.

There continues to be strong interest in Australian filmmakers, with directors such as Justin Kurzel, David Michôd, Ariel Kleiman and Kriv Stenders garnering ongoing interest. And on the back of this year's Sundance appearances from Kieran Darcy Smith (*Wish You Were Here*) and Nash Edgerton (*Bear*), both were being tracked by almost every sales company and distributor I met with. There was also buzz and anticipation about Cate Shortland's upcoming feature, *Lore* as well as Tony Krautitz's *Dead Europe*, both of which are anticipated to launch at Cannes. In addition the team behind *The Tunnel*, last year's ultra-low budget horror film that was distributed for free, and recent AACTA-award winning screenwriter Shaun Grant were being watched with keen interest.

There was an ongoing interest in foreign production companies finding ways to take advantage of the Producer Offset, as well as potentially tapping into state and federal funding, by finding projects that can be filmed and co-developed in Australia. The strengthened Australian dollar did not seem to be weighing as heavily on the minds of foreign producers and production companies as it did this time last year, as they saw the immediate benefits of the Offset whilst also, in some cases, feeling there was potential in Australian-located stories if done with an international audience in mind.

A recent example of an ostensibly foreign film that was filmed in Australia is *Iron Sky*, the Finnish/German/Australian co-production, which had its world premiere at Berlinale this year and had New Holland Pictures' Cathy and Mark Overett as two of its producers. The film, which is a comedy about Nazis living on the dark side of the moon preparing to attack the earth, was partly filmed in a studio in Queensland. If its reception in Berlin is any indication, *Iron Sky* has good potential for success – on the opening day of ticket sales, it was the second film to sell out.

The popularity of *Iron Sky* is in large part due to the way in which part of its finance was raised, which was done through crowd funding. Crowd funding was one of the more talked about developments within the international film industry at this year's market. At the EFM Industry Debate on Crowd Funding, held the day before *Iron Sky*'s premiere, its lead producer Tero Kaukomaa discussed the realities of raising finance through crowd funding and the ways in which it helped him generate publicity and interest in the film. In terms of his €10 million budget, crowd funding made up no more than 10 per cent, but the impact that raising €1 million in that way was huge. It provided invaluable momentum to the financing of his movie as it showed investors the size and passion of his audience-in-waiting, although he also warned that in order to keep his audience satisfied and engaged as the film edged towards its Berlin launch and cinema release, he was forced to have a staff of six who maintained his social media campaign. Others on the panel concurred that it is entirely unfeasible for a production to set out to raise a feature film budget entirely through crowd funding and that 10 per cent was about the most a producer should ever hope to rely on.

There were five Australian short films that screened at this year's Berlinale, four of them within Maryanne Redpath's Generations Program and this year, in a continuation of the success that Australian short films have had over the

past three festivals, two of them picked up several key awards. Matthew Moore's *Julian* was awarded the Crystal Bear for Best Short Film in Generations Kplus, with Billie Pleffer's *BINO* winning a Special Mention from the Kplus Children's Jury. *BINO* also won Best Short Film from the German Children's Fund given by the Kplus International Jury. Meanwhile Grant Sclicluna's short film *The Wilding*, funded through Screen Australia's Springboard Program, was nominated for a Teddy Award (Berlin's award ceremony focusing on films with gay and lesbian themes). The fourth film to screen in the Generations program was Alex Murawaski's *Kiss* and the Indigenous film, *Karrabing! Low Tide Turning* screened as part of the Berlinale Shorts Competition.

EFM might be a calmer market when compared to Cannes or AFM, but its importance is of no less significance. If anything, Australian producers will find sales companies and distributors more available to take meetings with them. At this EFM I was able to plant seeds of interest in several projects in the minds of key sales agents and distributors, and was able to act as a conduit for producers in the market to the companies I had meetings with. This ardent interest in Australian film and filmmakers seems set to continue.

Meetings

Hilary Davis (Bankside Films)
 Tanja Meissner (Memento)
 Mike Runagall (Pathe UK)
 Nick Manzi (Pathe UK)
 Jeremy Baxter (Protagonist)
 Carey Fitzgerald (High Point)
 Robin Gutch (Warp Films)
 Aida LiPera (Visit Films)
 Michael Werner (Fortissimo)
 Nate Bolotin (XYZ)
 Matthew Baker (Hanway)
 Matteo Lovadina (Reel Suspects)
 Adam Silver (TLA Releasing)
 Sebastien Chesneau (Rezo)
 Anita Lewton (Imaginox)
 Clay Epstein (The Little Film Company)
 Christina Kubacki & Charlotte Mickie (eOne)
 David Laub (Oscilloscope)
 Jessie Mangum (Goal Post)
 Natja Rosner & Alexandra Burke (LevelK)
 Ian Davies (Initialize Films)

TRAVEL REPORT

Simone Orlandi & Terisina (Rebis Film)
Gabor Greiner & (Films Distribution/Films Boutique)
Elizabeth Dreyer Geay & Meg Thomson (Eccho remakes)
Rita Dagher (Wild Bunch)
Johnathan Shukat (Showcat Productions)
Jim Howell (Park Entertainment)
Vince Holden (Icon UK)
Cathy Overett (New Holland Pictures)
Stephanie Trepanier (Fantasia Fest)
Hana Kosabkova (D Cinema)
Lucie Sichova (Avion Film)
Alexey Layfurov –Moscow Australian Film Festival
Hal Vogel (Daybreak Pictures)
Ross Williams (Feature One Films)
Chris Bessounian – writer/director
Essi Haukkamaa – producer
Vicky Borasio – producer
Marian Macgowan – producer
Sheila Jayadev – producer
Angela Walsh – producer
Bryn Chainey – writer/director
Eva Orner - producer
Melanie Coombs (Optimism)
Emma Biggins (Multi Story Films)