

DOC LAB SHINES DURING IDFA'S FORUM

Binger Doc Lab @ IDFA FORUM

22-24 November 2010 by Binger Reporter Matthew Curlewis

Don't let Amsterdam's façade fool you. While the building surfaces project a kind of 17th century calm, they belie containing hyper 21st century companies transacting globally significant business. So when the 23rd International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) blew in and out of town in the last weeks of November, staging industry events and 263 films in a diverse array of venues, it was actually a kind of 'business as usual' in this refreshingly unusual city.

The FORUM, IDFA's international co-financing market, is one such case in point. "No, that's lo-res, and this one doesn't work. Oh god, I'll just have to give it to them on a stick!" Binger Doc Lab participant Pietra Brett Kelly, in a flurry of native New Zealand woollens, was rifling through a stack of DVDs, dangerously close to her FORUM Central Pitch commencement time. And then she disappeared into the bowels of the 18th century Compagnie Theater, seeking technical assistance.

When Pietra reappeared she was calm, collected and confident – impressive considered she was facing the stuff of reality contestants' nightmares. Seated in a horseshoe arrangement before her was a 'judging' panel of no less than 26 commissioning editors from the world's top television stations and networks, a further 300 industry audience members on four sides, and she had a mere seven minutes to pitch her project and show footage on four large-format suspended screens. Scared of getting called the weakest link? Try exposing your project (in Central Pitch 20 selected out of 150-odd submitted) to eight minutes of make-it or break-it feedback from the likes of the Sundance Channel, Arte, Channel Four, SBS and Al Jazeera, all at once.

Fortunately for Pietra, her slightly chaotic arrival outside had also been a façade – her presentation of ***A Lightning Strike***, about 16 year old Ngaa Rauuira, the first Maori ever to attend Yale University was, as they say, pitch perfect. "I'm not sure whether to compliment the filmmaker or the Binger for bringing your pitch to such a strong level," began the response from Dutch channel VPRO. This editor was referencing Pietra as one of nine international filmmakers the Binger is bringing to Amsterdam four times over 18 months for residential workshops as they develop and produce their projects in the new Doc Lab programme. And the Binger's support was right there at Pietra's elbow during her pitch, in the person of Danish producer and consultant Michael Haslund-Christensen, Pietra's Binger advisor.

Not that Pietra necessarily needed any hand-holding. With 16 years of filmmaking under her belt including 2008's huge international success ***The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins***, she's not wanting for experience, but at the same time feels she had hit a point of stasis. "I needed to step out of my comfort zone," Pietra comments over coffee after her pitch, "and that's when the Binger opportunity miraculously appeared. I'm finding the process

amazing. It's incredibly exposing as individuals, yet at the same time the Binger has managed to curate us perfectly – we are so respectful of each other as filmmakers and simply as people.”

This respect was clearly in the building. Pietra's fellow participants had been cheering and applauding for her at the right moments during her pitch, before variously ducking out to other meetings regarding their own projects. With roughly 400 international film professionals attending the FORUM over its three days, the time to strike was now. Flash drives, laptops, and other new millennial accoutrement safely tucked into bags, the IDFA participants quickly melted into the Amsterdam mix, off to transact their business under the quiet gaze of those 17th century façades.

www.idfa.nl