

APULIA In July, 16 scriptwriters presented their stories to 38 international producers at the end of "Puglia Experience", a traveling screenwriting workshop organized by the Apulia Film Commission. Which stories were most suitable for the market? Cinema & Video International went along to ask the participants

STORIES GO TO THE MARKET



● Carolina Mancini

Some incursions into the dark side of Apulia, a couple of costume movies, a handful of comedies, some of which romantic, possibly set on farms and linked to topics such as protection of the environment, the region and its traditional activities: a huge variety of stories were presented at the fourth edition of **Puglia Experience**, the traveling screenwriting workshop organized by the **Apulia Film Commission**. The three week long location tour, which had an ad hoc structure in order to recreate some of the scenes from the participants' screenplays, ended on July 6th with a meeting between the 16 screenwriters and 38 Italian and international producers. From a quick, first round of opinions, it emerged that the most popular projects were "Man of the House" by **Andamion Murataj** (Silver Bear for the dramatization of "The Forgiveness of Blood" at the Berlinale 2011) and "Beached Whales" by **Serena Brugnolo**. "Man of the House" is a story about the rediscovery of the femininity and maternal side of a 'sworn virgin', i.e. one of those women in rural Albania who take on the role of the head of the family by dressing and behaving like a man. "Beached Whales" is about a girl who, in order to avenge the murder of her brother, is forced to become a 'Mafia boss' and obey the laws of her family after living away from them for many years. Cinema & Video International subsequently contacted the producers and found the situation to be more complex. "Dead End Run" by **Pan Nalin** (the screenwriter on "Samsara"), a love story about a prostitute and a detective involved in the world of immigration and human trafficking and "The Quiet Battalion" by **Tearepa Kahi** (focusing on the stories of Maori soldiers in the New Zealand army during the Second World War), that all the Europeans considered to be too complex and costly, attracted the attention of Australian producer **Rosemary Reid**, of **Courage Films**, as well as India's **Tess Joseph** of **Speaking Tree Pictures** (who also mentioned "Man of the House", "Beached Whales", "Stealing Valentino" by **Matthew Mc Cue** - the story of a girl who, in order to save her father, organizes a burglary in Rodolfo Valentino's estate in

Apulia - and "Life Cycle" by **Kas Graham** - an "on the road" comedy in which the protagonist is cycling around Italy to collect money for a cancer-stricken nephew - saying: "I am keen to bid for the remake rights as an Indian film"). France's **Gallien Chanalet-Quercy** of **Cow Prod** also bucked the trend: "My 'coup de Coeur'?" Taerepa Kahi's one of them, and a project I definitely want to be involved with. And then, I would list "The Pipeline" by **Pierluigi Ferrandini** (a love story about a young idealistic man from Apulia fighting against the building of a gas pipeline), "Beached Whales", "Stealing Valentino", "Spaghetti & Champagne" by **Ascanio Petrini** (another romantic comedy in which father and son struggle to defend their property against corrupt real estate agents), "Life Cycle" and "Cristina & Violetta" by **Chris Bessounian** (the dramatic story of two Roman sisters who escape from their world)". Amongst those though, Pan and Taerepa are probably the only ones I could get involved with, as for the others it is harder to find the possibilities of a co-pro."

Joanna Bence, whose **Curb Denizen Productions** is based in the UK, Russia and Australia, says:

"All of the projects were of a very high standard, with standout projects from Tearapa Kahi, **Ann Marie Di Mambro** (a love story where the trip to Apulia becomes an opportunity for personal growth) and **Andamion Murataj**. **Curb Denizen** is interested in an involvement with the last two. There's not much we can do for Tearapa Kahi: he already has NZ production locked up and really only needs Italian co-production. Yet it is an exceptional project we will assist in any way possible."

"I was impressed by **Angiola Janigro** ("Over the Water, under the Wind", a dramedy set in the 70s in the hippy Salento of traveling stage shows), as well as **Serena Brugnolo** and **Andamion Murataj's** projects", says **Cristiano Bortone** of **Orisa Production**. The last two were also mentioned by **Nicola Serra** of **Palomar**, who says: "Serena Brugnolo did a great research job for this story, which I told her has great potential



The "Puglia Experience", the traveling screenwriting workshop organized by the Apulia Film Commission

for becoming a TV series. "Even though it is "a bit risky to pursue", says **Lorenzo Gangarossa** of **Indiana Productions** "because there are other projects in development at the moment with the same theme, like the one Petraglia is writing for Rai." He continues: "The projects which appeal most to our editorial line are "The Hack Job" by **Leonardo Rizzi** (a comedy about a Hollywood screenwriter in crisis who receives an offer to write the story of a powerful Italian Mafia boss), which could work both on Italian and foreign markets. And "Man of the House" by Andamion Murataj is a possibility. I really enjoyed "Life Cycle" by Kas Graham: it's a typical English comedy, not expensive, with a good potential for emotions. I was also impressed by "Lost/Paradiso" by **Matteo Berdini** (about a narcotics detective who becomes a prostitute and begins to take drugs to avenge her daughter who died of an overdose), but I think it would suit the French or English markets more."

"The Pipeline", "Beached Whales", "Stealing Valentino"; "Spaghetti&Champagne", "Life Cycle", "Cristina & Violetta" are the most interesting titles for **Gabriella Bussmann**, of **Golden Egg Production**. "Cristina & Violetta" is the favorite of Italian producer **Serena Alfieri**, although she says that "it is probably one of the most difficult to make". "I liked a lot of projects, but two of them especially captured my interest: "The Pipeline" and "Angel of Mostar" by **Stacia Raymond** (about a Jewish artist who risks her life to save hundreds of Muslim children during the Bosnia war), and I think a documentary feature would be even better for this project." This is the opinion of **Edward Poremby** from **AMP Polka**, while **Anthony Alleyne** of **Born Wild** says: "I have been in touch with **Selene Favuzzi**. So far her "Primitivo & Hollywood" looks like the project I'm most interested in taking further, but it depends on the next treatment I receive from her."

The producers' feedback is very interesting, not just in order to understand the quality of the projects but also for getting their opinions on the organization of the workshop itself, about the "pitch day" and the networking opportunities offered by an event like this. In fact, many of the producers did not know anything about the Film Commission's system of funding and incentives and had never been to Apulia: "This is the first time I have seen Puglia. I was pleasantly surprised by the variety and beauty of the locations the region has to offer. I have already talked to one of my writers about doing the workshop next year", says **Christoph Thoke** of **Mogador Film**. There were similar comments from **Gabriella Bussmann** "I will even suggest Puglia as a location for shooting a project I'm involved in" and **Marleen Slot** of **Viking Films** "I even stayed a few days longer to discover the area. I will definitely think of Puglia for future projects".

"I was impressed by both the professionalism of the Puglia Experience team and the high quality of the projects selected. I am really interested in getting updates about their development to consider the opportunity of a French coproduction with my company **Mandra Films** and the incentive support of both the Puglia region and the new co-production agreement between France and Italy" adds **Eric Mabillon** of **Mandra Films**.

The writers are guided by a team of screenwriters of the caliber of **Chris Vogler** (the famous author of "The Writer's Journey", every screenwriter's 'Bible'), Australian script/editor and consultant **Clair Dibdin**, and **David McGee** (who won an Oscar for the screenplay of "Life of Pi"), captained by **James Hart** ("Hook", "Bram Stoker's Dracula", "Sahara", "Contact"...): "The standard of the tutors was world class and the participants clearly learned a lot from them," says **Anthony Alleyne** of **Born Wild**. **Magnus Ramsdalen** of **Sweet Films** agrees: "It was easy to understand that the underlying quality of the workshop was fantastic. Where, too often, after a workshop little more than a concept is pitched, we were presented with 16 fully developed storylines".

Henning Kamm of **Detail Film** said it was "simply one of the best pitching forums I have ever attended. The talents and tutors were equally impressive. All the stories had a strong original voice and a high artistic value". "The writers were given great confidence by their experience and a valuable platform for their progress" says **Chris Johnson**, of **CJA**.

Alexander Wadouch of **Chromosom Filmproduktion** adds: "Although the stories were at an early stage of development, the quality was already remarkably high. I would like to follow a few projects (for example "Man of the House") that meet my personal profile and the criteria of my home country's funding institutions."

Tess Joseph had some constructive criticism about the workshop:

"I think it would help to have a little more than a logline before the producers met the writers. A short synopsis would be good. Also one additional day post the pitching sessions could have helped. We listened to 16 scripts and the pitching sessions would leave us with 5-8 minutes to give feedback. I would have liked basic contact info for every participant in the booklet itself."

Kees Kasander of **Cinatura** (Kasander Group) also had some suggestions:

"I think the selection of projects was interesting, but the producers should have been invited first. The selection should then be made and well known to scriptwriters who should then be invited, so the producers could be very clear about directions. The 16 pitches on Saturday were too much for me. First of all, there were too many for one day. Maybe next time it should be over two days. Every time you hear a pitch you need to use your brain seriously: Is this person interesting? Is this project interesting? How much would this project cost? What would be the market? Where do I get the money? Who could be the director? Who to cast? So many thoughts sixteen times in a row, it was overwhelming. However, there were some interesting projects for me, but they all need work. They are "Viva", "Spaghetti & Champagne", "Man of the House", "The Hack Job" and "Beached Whales".

And **Jean-Yves Roubin** of **Frakas** says:

"It was sometimes a pity that some of the authors did not have enough benefit of hindsight after weeks of working with different experts. I'm sure if some of them could have pitched their project 2 or 3 weeks after their feedback from experts they would have been more convincing."