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NATURE vs NURTURE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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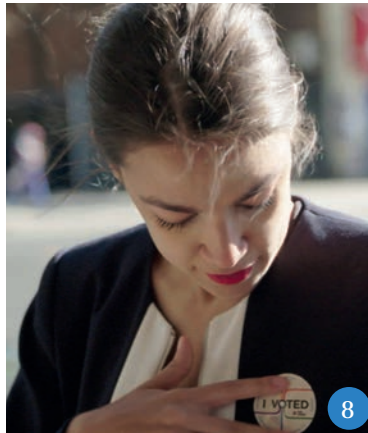
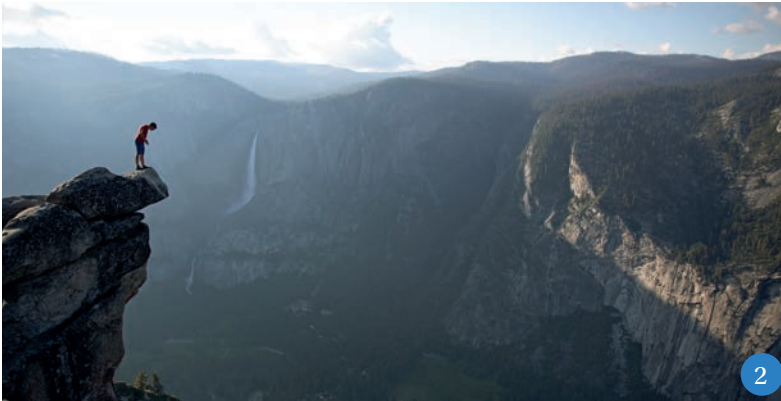
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Old money, new players face off for unscripted

A wealth of shiny digital entrants may well suggest TV is currently a supplier's market, but sustainable business models in unscripted are still lacking, particularly as stalwarts such as Discovery and Nat Geo endure major upheaval. Manori Ravindran reports

“Old money” cable networks and broadcasters and cash-flush digital players converged earlier this year for what is becoming an annual face-off at the Realscreen Summit, with the former staging much public hand-wringing around the embattled US cable landscape while the latter conduct low-key meetings with international producers, with the likes of Jeffrey Katzenberg’s Quibi seducing indie producers with upwards of \$120,000 per-minute budgets for high-end content.

However, it was abundantly clear that a production community increasingly spoils for choice between linear and digital partners is still grappling with shrinking economies as it struggles to recoup back-end revenue and rights.

New players, new models

The number of digital buyers who made the trip to New Orleans was notably greater than in previous years, and included the likes of Facebook unscripted boss Toby Faulkner and Snap unscripted head Seth Goolnik. Amazon Studios also sent an acquisitions exec and business affairs exec to the market for a limited period.

However, the one player that had prodcos buzzing was mobile streamer Quibi, who was represented on the ground by new acquisitions exec Kate Presutti.

Set to launch later this year with AVOD and SVOD tiers, the business is to spend an estimated \$497m on acquired content made at premium levels. While a “super-premium” scripted show could fetch \$125,000 per minute, an unscripted original could receive a budget of \$50,000 per minute.

Elsewhere, producers were also the targets of charm offensives by new AVOD – or ad-supported – entrants Tubi and Pluto TV, which has been newly acquired by Viacom.

Noting that AVOD is the future of linear TV, Tubi chief content officer Adam Lewinson claims that in two years, AVOD and SVOD partners will achieve parity in the market around viewership and highlighted the “strategic advantages for unscripted content living within an ad-supported environment.”

“Trial and error” time for producers

James Joyce, head of development for finance programming-focused prodcos and SVOD Real Vision, points out that producers are desperately trying to figure out “how to play in digital” when the OTT landscape still remains “uncharted”.

“People are doing a lot of trial and error right now

trying to figure it out, and over the next couple of years, OTT will become very well-defined,” he tells TBI.

“There are more platforms than ever and more channels to distribute to, so that gives producers a lot more choice to get their content out to market. It also puts us in the driver’s seat in negotiations, where we can be upfront about the fact that a series can be perfect for PBS but can also be sold into Netflix.”

However, Mathew Gonzalez of Colorado-based Plebian Pictures warns that while there is “a lot of money lying on the table, it is too widely dispersed.”

“Historically, when the market was dominated by linear players and those brands were thriving, you could be a producer working for a few networks because you had your niche and the budgets were strong. But now with all the online buyers, you’re splitting up the pie in so many ways that the money isn’t as good as it was in one place.”

John Ford, GM of US producers’ trade body NPACT, estimates that the value of a typical nonfiction programme during its cable or network run has declined 10-20% – a scenario that has led to some networks mandating around 10-30% reductions in budgets year-on-year; reducing or eliminating budget bumps when renewing series; and placing smaller series orders.

Sam Sniderman, EVP of global production for Blue Ant Media, notes that some of the Canadian business’ roster of prodcos have historically been “very reliant on the US cable industry, and that has hurt.”

“Things are still happening but they’re slower than they used to be. We are trying to shift the business to be able to sell to new players in the market. They buy some of the same shows but their approach is different and has required us to reorganise things a little bit.”

Selling into Netflix and Amazon, says Sniderman, requires a different development process as the platforms are more talent-focused and keen on star directors and EPs than cable networks.

Gonzalez, whose recent credits include Food Network’s *Food Truck Fan Fight* with celeb chef Eddie Jackson, adds that producers increasingly have to do the talent packaging that, traditionally, an agent would do, and spend longer developing these projects.

“The beauty of classic reality TV is that the content is relatively inexpensive, because you’re dealing with real people, so you can go out and make tape cheaply. But as we start to go and engage celebs because they will cut through, it’s costing a lot more money because big-name talent wants a slice of the project.

While the climate may lead some to wonder what ‘premium’ even means if so much content is now made at premium levels, Chris Bonney, CEO of

Nat Geo’s *Free Solo*
(opposite)

“There is plenty of great stuff being developed, conceived and explored in the market, but the concepts are more strongly thought through and tightly focused”

Chris Bonney
Cineflix Rights



Cineflix Rights, says distributors are not necessarily complaining.

“There is plenty of great stuff being developed, conceived and explored in the market, but the concepts are more strongly thought through and tightly focused. That’s been welcome. The demands and trendsetting of the SVOD players has helped to shape the quality.”

However, Bonney notes that the challenges are “even greater” to secure the right business model for financing.

“Because linear broadcasters have slightly tighter purse strings and less per-hour budgets available, it is putting pressure on producers. But for distributors, it is creating opportunity and we are playing a more pivotal role in the financing process at an earlier stage.”

Nat Geo and Discovery’s new normal

Another factor affecting the US unscripted market is the “identity shift” taking place at companies such as Discovery, which marked its Realscreen debut as a merged entity with Scripps; as well as Nat Geo, which forms part of the Disney+ SVOD platform now that the Disney-Fox merger has closed.

“Scripps was a strictly lifestyle brand, and now Discovery is wondering how to add its DNA to those



The Day We Walked On
The Moon (right), *Red Table*
Talk (below)



brands,” explains Plebian’s Gonzalez.

“You have a tremendous churn around where executives end up, and there’s been a lot of shifting. Anytime you have that kind of mix, it’s going to be challenging.”

TBI understands that some channels within Scripps portfolio are now being restructured to focus more on second-run content, with new programming out of the Cooking Channel, for example, coming to a standstill, and commissioning instead coming out of the Food Network – one of Scripps’ more established brands.

Indeed, Nancy Daniels, chief brand officer for Discovery and Factual, jokingly admitted that the flagship brand is “stealing” top shows on smaller channels, with programming such as Travel Channel’s *Expedition Unknown* now getting a second window on the main Discovery channel.

While the added exposure is beneficial, it could mean there is potentially less opportunity to incubate talent on smaller channels and grow a brand, as ratings pressure will be much higher on Discovery.

Also, producers could be left at a disadvantage if programmes continue to be ordered out of the smaller commissioning budgets of Scripps’ networks, only to end up on the main channel.

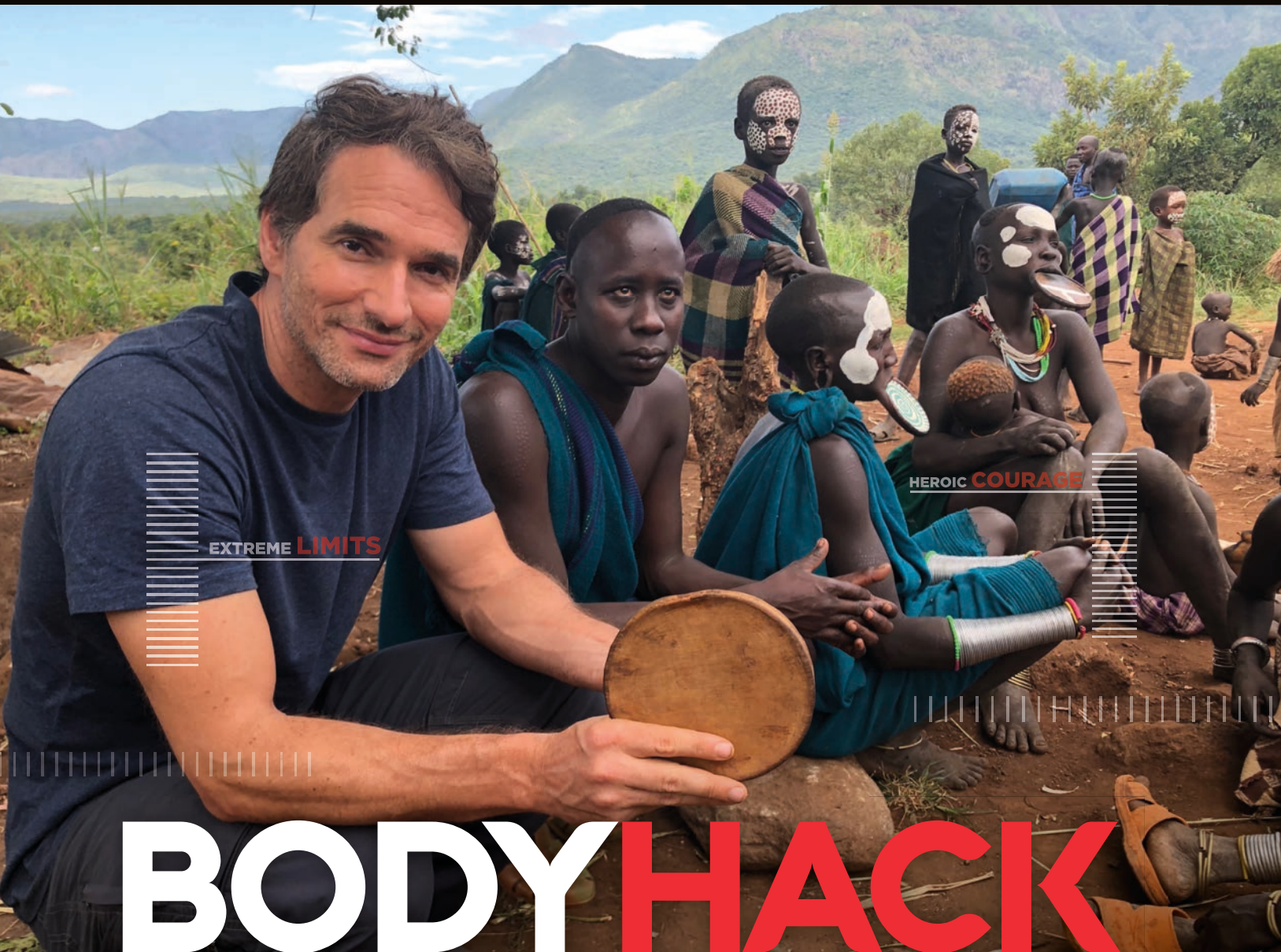
However, restructuring has not necessarily been a bad thing. Cineflix Rights’ Bonney notes that there is a “much more decentralised structure in the acquisitions side of both Nat Geo and Discovery”.

“They are involving the regions much more than they previously would, even if it’s an acquisition made across a whole international territory or globally where available.

“Previously, we might not have sold directly to Nat Geo in Eastern Europe, but we’re now doing that quite regularly. Perhaps that’s opened up some individual opportunities we didn’t have before, because that region might have a particular need that couldn’t be filled because of a centralised strategy.”

TBI understands that Nat Geo has said to producers – many of whom are now pitching the business with family-friendly Disney+ in mind – to wait for more details around how the Disney-Fox merger and their positioning on Disney+ will affect commissioning dollars.

Nat Geo EVP of global unscripted Geoff Daniels tells TBI: “The focus for Disney+ is more in the family-friendly space, but that’s not to be confused with kids or necessarily content for co-viewing. The idea is that we are going to offer something from the Nat Geo perspective that everyone in the family can be passionate about. It’s going to be safe and entertaining.” **TBI**



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Breaking down a world-class documentary

CNN Worldwide's Amy Entelis breaks down how to build a world-class doc like *Three Identical Strangers* and the Oscar-nominated feature *RBG*.

Since launching an originals strategy in 2012, CNN has built a formula for its series and films that has repeatedly produced award-winning non-scripted programming.

This formula, according to Amy Entelis, executive VP for talent and content development at CNN Worldwide, is based on building context for audiences as they encounter increasingly complex political and social moments in history.

This year, CNN surpassed itself by getting both *Three Identical Strangers* and Ruth Bader Ginsburg feature doc *RBG* onto the Oscars shortlist, with *RBG* going on to be an Oscar nominee and the favourite to win before being narrowly beaten by Nat Geo's *Free Solo*.

Here are the elements that made a success, according to Entelis:

Follow the cult of personality

RBG follows the life and career of the second female US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg who has not only built a legacy fighting for gender equality, but also a mass pop culture following that has spawned merchandising from coffee mugs to toy figurines.

It's these types of strong personalities that have driven documentary success over the past few years, according to Entelis.

"I think that docs that highlight inspirational people – people who have changed the world – have been especially successful in the last year," she says. "People are looking for that kind of encouragement."

This focus on individual experiences has been in place



“Docs that highlight inspirational people – people who have changed the world – have been especially successful in the last year”

since CNN's first forays into long-form programming. Entelis says the “special personalities” that front CNN series are one of the key reasons for its success in the programming arena over the past few years.

Individuals leading the pack include stand-up comedian W. Kamau Bell and his *United Shades Of America* series and Lisa Ling with the docuseries *This Is Life With Lisa Ling*, but the focus on big personalities really began with Anthony Bourdain and *Parts Unknown* – CNN's most successful title to date.

“We rely on our hosts to give us a point of view and take on whatever story they are engaged in,” she says. “So our hosts of original series have a little more license to follow their passions, give us a point of view and tell it to us in a special voice.”

CNN tragically lost Bourdain as a key host in June 2018 after the travel documentarian and celebrity chef died by suicide. Entelis says CNN will not look for a direct replacement for the series, but will try and capture its essence across other programming.

“We think it was more or less lightning in a bottle and it would be very hard to go out and try to recreate it,” says Entelis.

“We are just going to keep on looking for and creating beautiful programming that can capture the essence of what *Parts Unknown* meant to our viewers, without looking to make a carbon copy of it.”

Focus on commissions over acquisitions

CNN has an acquisitions and commissioning model for feature documentaries. While the former led to breakthrough films such as the critically acclaimed

SeaWorld doc *Blackfish*, Entelis says the channel has increasingly leaned on commissioning over the past few years.

“The acquisitions model is a little bit riskier because you have to wait for things to show up and bid against a lot of other people who might have deeper pockets,” she says.

“We can’t rely on filling our slate with acquisitions, so we’re relying much more on people bringing us films before they’ve started them, and then we partner with the filmmaker from the beginning or midway.”

RBG arrived at CNN as an idea from co-directors Betsy West and Julie Cohen.

“They walked in the door and said, ‘Would you be interested in *RBG* if we get access to her?’ We immediately said yes,” explains Entelis.

“That’s a great example of a film that starts with a conversation and ends up, three years later, as an amazing film that we’re all incredibly proud of.”

CNN’s commissioning model also allows the channel to land projects at an earlier stage and help develop and elevate ideas with creators.

“We like getting in earlier and earlier with the filmmaker. That way, we can control its destiny and predict which films are ready for CNN, instead of being at the whim of the marketplace as you are with acquisitions,” explains Cohen, noting that each film is financed differently.

At times CNN underwrites entire films, while it actively finds partners for others.

Film festivals are key

While much has been made about Netflix eschewing theatrical releases in recent times, CNN has built a successful window model by attending film festivals and emphasising theatrical releases.



Three Identical Strangers
(above) and *RBG* (below)



The channel’s window strategy for films sees it submit projects to multiple film festivals and eventually launch in theatres. Only at the end of that cycle will the film air on CNN itself.

“This has been our successful strategy for six years and it’s working for us. Many people ask us why we go last, which is kind of counter intuitive. But we feel like the festival and theatrical roll out really increases the visibility of a film and brings a lot of attention to it,” she says.

“By the time it gets to CNN, we feel that many more people have heard of the film and want to see it. And we know that not many people go to see it in theatres, but we feel like there’s still a sizeable audience that remains to see that film on CNN.”

Know your audience

Entelis tells TBI that to stay ahead in a fiercely competitive documentary arena that has increasingly gained the attention of major streamers, knowing your audience is the key to success.

“It’s really about knowing what’s going to work on the CNN platform, who our viewer is, and what our viewer is interested in. If we stay true to that filter, we end up picking good shows,” she says.

“A lot of the shows we’re doing might not work on other platforms, so it’s a balance about knowing what works on your particular platform. In that way, you stay competitive.”

The demographic for CNN’s news audience is 60 years old, but Entelis says that original series and films have brought in new audiences that skew younger than its core audience.

“We’re bringing in a young audience and the key is to make sure that we make programming that the regular CNN viewer would also find appealing and appropriate for what CNN means to them,” explains Entelis. **TBI**

Knocking down Netflix

What drove the record-breaking deal for a feature doc on US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?



Netflix knocked down the house in February, dishing out \$10m for a high-profile film on newly appointed US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, more commonly known as AOC, and revealing a growing drive towards youth-targeting feature docs.

The sale for Rachel Lear’s *Knock Down The House* out of Sundance is the most lucrative doc sale to come out of a festival, doubling Netflix’s own \$5m deal for Bryan Fogel’s Russian doping scandal doc *Icarus* out of the 2017 fest.

The streaming giant aggressively outbid rivals Amazon and Hulu and swooped for worldwide distribution rights, confirming that the premium doc boom – particularly for younger-skewing fare – is far from over.

Netflix’s hot pursuit of the film – which follows four US working-class women, including 29-year-old Ocasio-Cortez, running for Congress – comes on the heels of critical success for its doc *Fyre Festival*, which debuted in January and has already borne a reality show for scene-stealing event producer Andy King, who took “taking one for the team” to the next level.

Fyre Festival – which famously lured social media influencers who paid thousands of dollars for an event that was doomed from the outset – was also the subject of Hulu original *Fyre Fraud*, which dropped days before Netflix’s film.

Adam Hawkins, EVP of US television for Raw TV, producer of the Oscar-shortlisted CNN and Channel 4-backed feature doc *Three Identical Strangers*, says the two films are likely “the most significant documentaries of the last year”, based purely on the youth

demographic they have been able to capture.

“They have changed the landscape almost overnight. They have been hugely successful, they haven’t detracted from each other and they have reached a much younger demographic,” he says.

“As networks and programme-makers, we can cater to that audience. That’s what will stop the doc boom ending – to make things that are smart but which also skew fairly young.

“There has been a tradition of making docs that were wilfully niche or that felt like they weren’t for everyone. And if we can tell those stories in entertaining ways that engage younger people, then we’re in a good way.”

It’s fitting, then, that Netflix would pay millions more for a film featuring the wildly popular Ocasio-Cortez than it did for dramas such as *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil And Vile*, which it bought for \$9m.

“Everyone is documenting. Gen-Z is constantly with their smartphones. I imagine the *Fyre Festival* doc is the first of many to come with access to these worlds that [older demographics] have no visibility of outside of Instagram,” said Rachel Brill, head of unscripted programming for US cable channel Epix.

Richard Klein, head of docs for Plimsoll Productions, adds that the “thirst” for long-form docs is partly borne of a glut of “very, very short-form stuff that is, after a while, relatively uncomplicated, uncomplex and not particularly insightful”.

“[Youth] are often looking for a bigger picture. There is a hunger for that, because I’m not sure young people are getting it when they’re watching *Love Island* or a reality show.” **TBI**



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Factual Hot Picks

The top factual titles heading to MIPTV



Almost Fashionable – A Film About Travis

Distributor: Limonero Films

Producer: Gezellig Pictures in association with Final Cut

Logline: A music critic is invited by one of his least favourite bands to cover their tour in Mexico

What most people may not know about Scottish pop band Travis is that they have a thick skin. How else could any group invite one of their worst critics to join them on tour?

Travis frontman Fran Healy – who wrote many of the band’s hit songs, such as *Why Does It*

Always Rain On Me? and *Sing* – also directed the film.

The Los Angeles-based musician got the doc bug after making a film for the band’s last album and, looking to take a different angle on the rock doc, invited music journalist and Travis sceptic Wyndham Wallace to join them on a tour of Mexico.

“I knew Wyndham didn’t like the band and I thought that was a cool lens to look through, rather than have someone who could be fawning over us,” he says.

What ensues is a film that is as much about music

criticism as it is about the band, involving interviews with several not-so-favourable critics, who speak candidly about the group.

“There are some journalists in the doc who seem to be about music,” explains Healy. “There are others who are about pizzazz and danger. If you’re not Jim Morrison or Amy Winehouse falling out of the local pub, they think it’s boring.

“Sitting for months on end listening to people talking about you – that took its toll,” laughs Healy. “I had to stop for three

weeks. I couldn’t take it. It got me sad.”

The resulting film, however, is a delightful snapshot of the iconic band drawing from around 90 hours of footage from its Britpop years.

The doc, which won the Audience Award at the 2018 Edinburgh International Film Festival, secured distribution recently through fledgling firm Limonero Films, after Healy met “maverick” distributor Pamela Martinez-Martinez at Amsterdam’s IDFA festival. TBI understands the film is close to a UK broadcast sale.

Top
Pick

100 Vaginas

Distributor: TVF International

Producer: Burning Bright Productions

Broadcaster: Channel 4 (UK)

Logline: Women tell frank and powerful stories about the most intimate part of their bodies

Burning Bright's critically acclaimed documentary smashes taboos around women's bodies with frank interviews that yield powerful stories about periods, pubic hair, rape and female genital mutilation, birth, porn and the secrets of the clitoris.

"No subject matter was off-limits," says Will Stapley, head of acquisitions for London-based specialist factual distributor TVF International.

"The producers wanted to try and reflect the truth of women's experiences – either directly through their individual stories or thematically."

Intended to be a film that every woman can relate to in some way, *100 Vaginas* covers universal experiences – some through images that have never before been seen factually on TV.

It sets out to portray a piece of

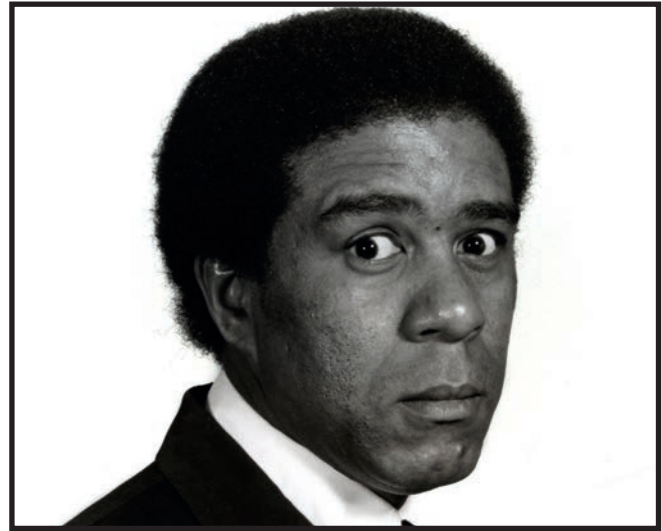
human anatomy that is generally misunderstood, simply because you rarely see accurate visual representations of the vagina.

"It's a groundbreaking doc both visually and editorially, and in the current climate, where there is greater focus on gender and sexual equality and the #MeToo movement, it has come at exactly the right time," says Stapley.

The producers' daring paid off for Channel 4, which drew a consolidated average audience of 1.4m (9.1%), making it the broadcaster's biggest documentary in a 10pm slot since March 2018.

Stapley says initial response to the film domestically has been "fantastic" and has translated to "huge interest" overseas.

"Some countries and broadcasters will be less inclined to accommodate due to stricter censorship laws, which certain VOD players don't have to abide by, but the point of the film is to take people out of their comfort zones, cross borders, break down prejudices and be a film that everyone can take something away from," he says.



I Am Richard Pryor

Distributor: Fremantle

Producer: Network Entertainment

Broadcaster: Paramount Network (US)

Logline: Inside the private life of the late American comic genius

Fresh from its SXSW premiere last month, Jesse James Miller's 90-minute film on Richard Pryor delves into the psyche of the late American genius, detailing his background as the child of a sex worker and pimp and subsequent rise to comic stardom.

Part of Fremantle's acclaimed *I Am...* doc strand, the film features interviews and a rich collection of archival footage and photography, using Pryor's own voice as narrator.

Fremantle's SVP of non-scripted content Angela Neillis says the film includes archive footage from Pryor's stints on *The Ed Sullivan Show* as well as his own programme, in addition to interviews with several famous comedians and filmmakers.

"It's a really interesting archive-interview combination that tells a fascinating story," she says, adding that Pryor's story details a struggle against the odds.

"It's a contemporary, relevant story because it's one of identity and race, particularly when you think about the Black Lives Matter movement," she explains.

"Pryor was very involved in politics because he presented a popular face to the wide mainstream audience, but he had a lot to say about politics and race at the same time."

Fremantle has had initial interest in the film from a number of broadcasters on the back of sales success for *I Am Paul Walker*, on the late *Fast And The Furious* actor.

"Comedy is always more of a niche interest, but with Pryor's Hollywood credentials, it goes beyond the niche," says Neillis.

The distributor is now investing heavily in premium factual and is pursuing "all the classic factual genres head on", looking to bolster its slate with natural history, history and music, including US cable channel Epix's highly anticipated series *Punk*.

The House of Extraordinary People

Distributor: TCB Media Rights

Producer: Hey Sonny Films

Broadcaster: Channel 5 (UK)

Logline: Nine amazing people from all over the world live together for 10 days to challenge the prejudices they encounter daily

Hey Sonny's 3 x 60-minute doc series unites nine characters with physical differences ranging from such rare conditions as polycystic ovary syndrome, which causes one female housemate to grow a full beard, to a mother of three with a disorder that results in non-cancerous growths all over her body, to a man who has undergone extensive cosmetic surgery to resemble his pet parrots.

"Each one of them is genuinely extraordinary, and everyone brings something different to the table," explains Nicola Davey, acquisitions and co-productions exec for TCB, noting that the show is "warm and uplifting" in tone.

"There is laughter, tears,

confrontation and sheer joy. Hey Sonny made the series hoping that viewers will go on a journey with the housemates, and really understand what is at the heart of them and see beyond their

physical differences."

The show also covers serious personal struggles and challenges the public's perceptions of otherness, adds Davey.

"For the first time, the show gives these housemates a platform to talk about their experiences and hopefully creates understanding."

The distributor has so far received interest in both the

finished tape of the programme, as well as format rights.

"We have received interest from the US, Australia and the Netherlands, so our sights are set on closing deals in those territories, but the sales team is also expecting to lock deals across many other European territories," says Davey, noting that there is scope for the show to return to C5 in the future with different housemates.



The Weekly

Distributor: Red Arrow International

Producer: The New York Times, Left/Right

Broadcaster: FX, Hulu (US)

Logline: The first narrative news TV series from The Gray Lady

The New York Times is looking to build on the success of its popular podcast *The Daily* with a 30-part doc series that goes beyond the headlines and into those reporting its stories.

Set to first premiere in June on cable channel FX and immediately thereafter on SVOD platform Hulu, each episode is experienced through *Times* reporters around the world and their subjects.

Alex Fraser, SVP of acquisitions for Red Arrow Studios International, says

current affairs stories in today's headlines will be a "minority" but that all stories will be about topical events.

"This is in-depth coverage that potentially gets access to stories that were previously impossible."

Details around specific episodes are under wraps, but Fraser has seen two stories thus far.

While one is an international story involving US citizens in a "very unusual and unfamiliar land", another is a New York

City story looking at a specific working group. Both are deeply compelling, according to the exec.

"The fact that the current US president sees [*The New York Times*] as enemy number one is something that helps all of us because it has elevated the paper," says Fraser.

"It's why we were happy to be involved in the show, because we knew their brand is so strong now."

The exec assures that the series will differ from Liz Garbus's 2018 doc series for Showtime, *The Fourth Estate*, which examined the publication's first year of reporting the Trump presidency.

"This is not a series about

The New York Times, but rather a show fronted by its journalists who are telling the stories they've been reporting on. There are no scenes of editorial meetings."



Beyond Innovation

Distributor: A Tall Order

Producer: Globalive Media

Broadcaster: Bloomberg Television

Logline: Uncovering the world's new and emerging technologies that change the way we live and do business

Hosted by venture capitalist Anthony Lacavera and tech journalist Michael Bancroft, this 26 x 30-minute series looks to demystify the emerging tech, cutting-edge research and groundbreaking businesses that are transforming the way we live and do business.

The show features David Hanson of Hanson Robotics, the company that made the AI-powered robot Sophia; Karan Wadhera of Snoop Dogg's cannabis investment firm Casa Verde Capital; and NBA star Jeremy Lin, who has backed a smartphone app that uses AI and computer vision to help basketball players train.

"People are naturally captivated as these changes begin to touch every part of their lives, from their businesses to their health and daily routines. We all want to know what's coming next and there's never been a more exciting time to get an in-depth preview," says Bancroft, who also exec produces the show.



He tells TBI that the hosts' backgrounds have allowed them to access an "extensive network" of investors and tap into the business and finance communities.

"These strengths, coupled with an experienced research team, keeps us in sync with a wide range of innovators whose potential impact on the world makes them fascinating guests."

The presenter says his background also "provides a unique lens through which we approach coverage, balancing the insider's perspective on the business side with the objectivity of experienced journalism".

Noting that the team has scored early sales from the in-flight industry, Bancroft adds that the show is a "great fit" for both OTT and broadcast partners seeking premium factual science and tech programming that can be served in either half-hour episodes or bite-sized segments.

Tata – Escobar's Widow

Distributor: Drive

Producer: Telegramme Media

Broadcaster: Club Illico (French-Canada), Discovery (LatAm, Iberia, Italy, Spanish-speaking US)

Logline: Pablo Escobar's wife breaks her silence about life with the world's most famous drug trafficker



The world of Pablo Escobar is well-known to global audiences via Netflix's hit drama *Narcos*, but those closest to him, such as his wife Victoria Eugenia Henao (or Tata), are rarely in the limelight. In this 2 x 60-minute documentary, Henao tells her story with never before seen archive footage.

"I was immediately drawn to the show because we are very aware of the macho environment of Escobar and the cartel, but we don't often see the female stories behind these worlds," Lilla Hurst, co-founder of distributor Drive, tells TBI.

Drive helped shape the treatment and pitched it into international broadcasters, targeting the LatAm and Spanish-speaking territories in particular.

The film presents "very personal" home movie footage of Tata when she was a teenager, as well as the early days of her relationship with Escobar.

"There is a lot of discussion around how implicated she might be around the criminal activity of Escobar and that will be discussed in the doc itself," says Hurst, adding that producers have also secured access to the ex-wives of other cartels.

"You can see how a woman who became part of a cartel by way of marriage at such a young age would then find it incredibly hard to extract herself from that situation. It's a very interesting story, morally, into whether [Tata] was implicit or oblivious."

Drive is pitching the film into OTT services as well as traditional broadcasters, says Hurst, noting that the distributor's recent experience selling anniversary docs on Princess Diana demonstrated that free-to-air channels can also "come up with the goods" when it comes to the right product.

The Green Book: Guide to Freedom

Distributor: Off The Fence

Producer: Impossible Factual

Broadcaster: Smithsonian Channel

Logline: A deep dive into the real-life inspiration behind Oscar-winning feature film *Green Book*

In the 1930s, a black postal worker from Harlem in New York City named Victor Green published *The Negro Motorist Green Book* – a manual that would become part-travel guide and part-survival guide for African-Americans looking to navigate safe passage and also serve as a catalyst for new businesses.

The book is also the touchpoint for the feature film *Green Book*, which stars Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali and won the Best Picture



Oscar in February – a boon for Impossible Factual’s documentary, for which a preview was quickly shipped to Off The Fence’s buyers on the back of awards glory.

Loren Syer-Willoughby, head of acquisitions for the ZDFE-

owned factual distributor, tells TBI that the business, which has represented content from US cable channel Smithsonian exclusively since 2008, knew about the project well in advance.

“Smithsonian are extremely knowledgeable about upcoming

events that could spark interest among their viewers and international audiences,” she says.

“Producing *The Green Book: Guide to Freedom* with Impossible Factual ahead of the release of the now Oscar-winning film was strategically brilliant.”

The exec foresees the film travelling to most of the major territories around the world, particularly given the increased level of attention around the subject matter.

The sales team is targeting major European territories such as Italy, Germany, France, Scandinavia and Spain, where offers have already begun rolling in.

Syer-Willoughby notes that parts of Asia, Africa and Australia will also be looking at the film.

If We Built It Today

Distributor: Sky Vision

Producer: Arcadia Content

Broadcaster: Knowledge Network (Canada)

Logline: Factual series exploring the engineering, design, politics and danger of the world’s greatest architectural achievements and what they would look like today

If Noah’s Ark was built today, what would it look like? How would we go about it, and how much would it cost? These are the questions Arcadia’s innovative new series looks to answer.

Pre-sold to Discovery Science out of the US, the 8 x 60-minute series explores the Pyramids, The Great Wall of China, Venice canals and the Roman Colosseum, to name a few landmarks.

“One of the reasons we were interested in working with Arcadia is because it takes modern engineering

and puts a historical twist on it, and vice-versa,” explains Barnaby Shingleton, director of entertainment and factual at Sky Vision.

An episode centered on the Roman Colosseum discusses how the structure was initially built for a newly installed emperor who wanted to cement his relationship with the people.

“Today if you built it, there would be different motivations, mainly around money,” explains Shingleton, adding that the episode then looks at the building materials of today, how much time it would take and,

most importantly, the cost.

The show is rich in visuals, says the exec, who highlights the graphics used to illustrate how the Colosseum might look like in modern times. Drone footage is also used to go to the locations of buildings themselves, in addition to a number of expert interviews with architects, stonemasons and engineers.

“There isn’t a presenter so it’s very adaptable for different territories with a different voiceover,” says Shingleton. “That’s one of the things that will make it very appealing to the international market.”

The show is expected to sell widely into Europe, Asia and Australia, into either individual channels or a pan-regional broadcaster. **TBI**



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TUESDAY'S CHILD



Viewpoint Dan Reed

Uncovering the story in *Leaving Neverland*

“I had no prior interest in Michael Jackson and still have only a general grasp of his oeuvre. I researched him in order to verify James and Wade’s accounts, but this was never a film ‘about’ Jackson.”

Leaving *Neverland* took nearly three years to make, from the moment I first read the names “Wade Robson” and “James Safechuck” – the two men at the heart of the documentary – to the four-hour epic that is now broadcasting in almost every territory in the world except China, where I’m told a deal is in the works.

It has roiled the press and social media on a scale we never expected, particularly on Twitter. Much of the activity on the platform is repetitive, bulk noise from the Michael Jackson truthers, the Jackson family and their lawyers.

But amongst the threats and insults are a good few sober, thoughtful messages from psychotherapists, child sexual abuse survivors and ordinary people reflecting on the true theme of the documentary: the careful, patient grooming of children and families by a trusted figure who, years or decades later, is seen to have been a sexual predator.

That’s what this has always been about for me: opening people’s eyes to the true face of child sexual abuse, giving people a way to talk about this most misunderstood of all taboos.

I’m not a chronicler of celebrity or music stars. My home territories are terrorism, war and crime – subjects I’ve explored relentlessly over the past 20 years. I had no prior interest in Jackson and still have only a general grasp of his oeuvre. I researched him in order to verify James and Wade’s accounts, but this was never a film “about” Jackson. It focused on the two boys this grown man involved in his life.

So how did the core purpose of the film – and the radical storytelling decisions involved in focusing on just two families – take shape over those three years?

The truth is that documentary making is fraught with risk, but the biggest risk of all is not being able to see what’s right in front of you and, literally not understanding what your story is about. Falling into that trap is a lot easier than you’d think.

I’m often asked about how I approach the producing and directing decisions that go into shaping a documentary. That question always triggers a mild panic in my head. The answers I hear myself giving are annoyingly vague and something like, “It’s an organic process, informed by experience and opportunity...”.

The truth is that in documentary – and this was certainly the case with *Leaving Neverland* – the director sometimes doesn’t know what the film is about until quite late in the edit. The longer you can wait before locking down your storytelling strategy, the greater chance you have that it will be the right one. And so my editor Jules Cornell and I found ourselves drawn into the complex, fractured and tragic world of the Safechucks and Robsons, two families who experienced the same journey into the same fairytale-turned-nightmare.

What we began to realise is that the story of these families’ 20-year encounter with a manipulative sexual predator was told with such brutal honesty and in such unflinching, comprehensive detail that it would hold its own as a ground breaking reference-work on grooming child sexual abuse no matter whether the predator was a priest, a teacher, a family member or... Jackson. And that’s what I’m most proud of: the fact that the predator in this case was one of the most famous figures of the 20th century means that the lessons of *Leaving Neverland* will reach a far wider audience than I could have ever hoped for a four-hour epic on child sexual abuse with nine interviews in it. **TBI**

Dan Reed is the director of Channel 4/HBO documentary *Leaving Neverland*

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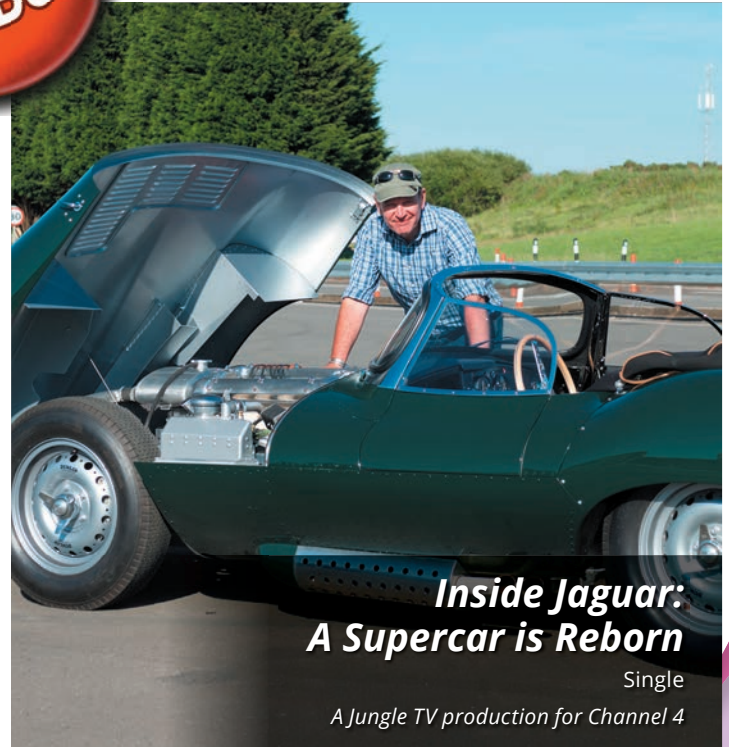
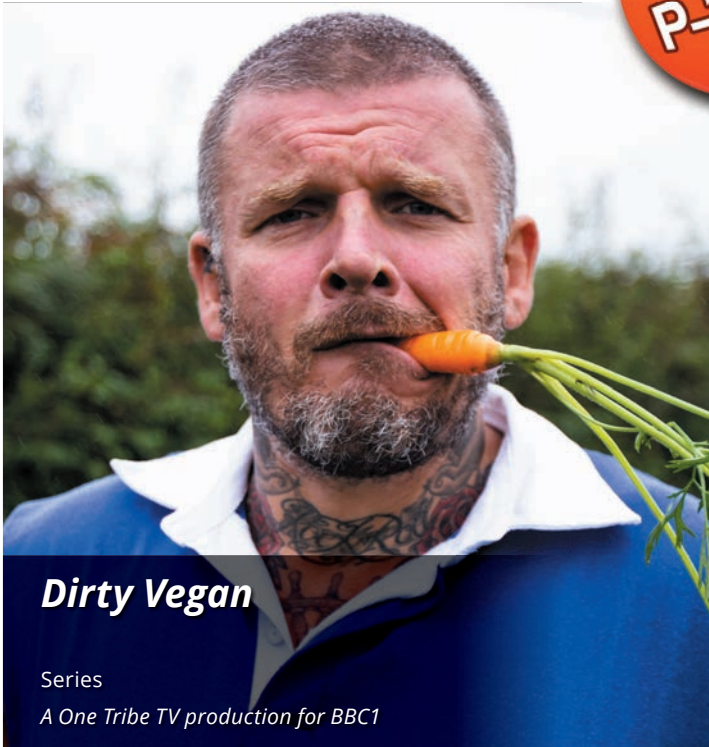
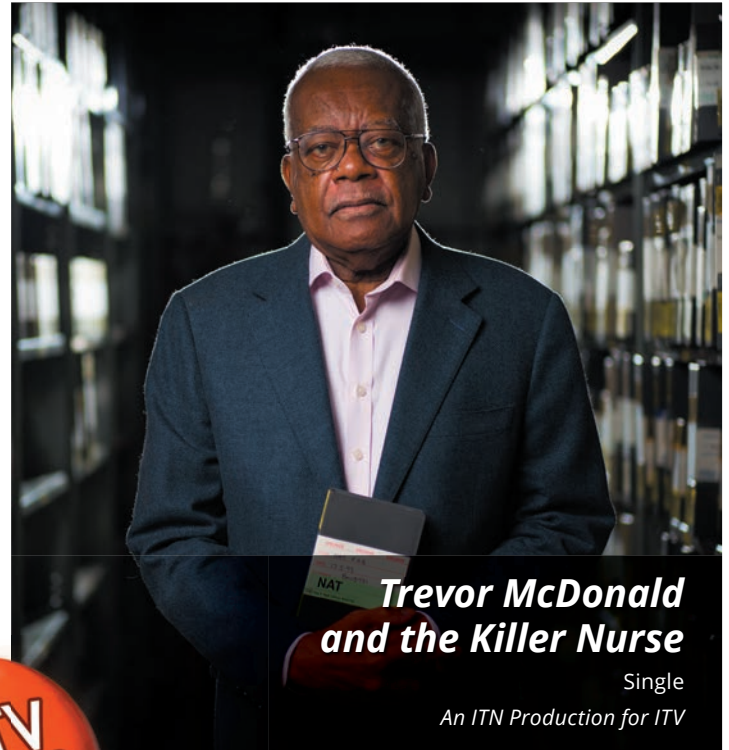
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