

# THE KNOWLEDGE EDGE

2010 FORUM NEWSLETTER

2nd March 2010

*lifeunscripted*

## Pat Ferns: Don't Waste My Time



If you missed Monday's session on pitching for success by Pat Ferns – the godfather of the Pitch Competition – here's the potted guide to making an impression that counts.

Pitching is the distillation of the potential of a story. Ideas need oxygen and pitching provides the idea with an audience – the oxygen for the story to grow.

There are two rules to pitching.

Rule 1: There are no rules. There are as many ways of pitching as there are of telling a story. Get the attention of the audience and communicate your idea to them.

Rule 2: It's not about YOU. It's about you and your audience. Be aware of your audience's needs as well as your own. Are

you pitching to a decision maker, or are you pitching to someone else who will pitch it up the line?

Pat suggested it only takes 90 seconds to say "No" to a project, but quite a lot longer to say yes. Make sure you differentiate yourself and your project – and if it's an old topic make sure you've got a new perspective.

Pat's top six tips for good pitching were:

- Present a unique vision. Have you got exclusive access to the story, to talent, rights of the book ... what is unique about your idea?
- Be brief and clear. What is the film about in one line. Give the pitch a context early to help people understand it. If it's a comedy, say so up front.

- Stress your track record. Celebrate your achievements, or surround yourself with people who have some if you don't.

- Know your audience. Don't pitch a kids' show to a doc channel.

- Listen to the feedback. Learn from what people say.

- Quitting is for losers. Be persistent and follow up with an email or phone call.

- And seventh, be clear on what you want and say so. If you don't ask you won't get. Do you want development money? A creative response? Production funding?

- And eighth ... find out how long it will take to get a decision.

- Shirin Brown

## To Go to the Moon 2



It was extraordinary how things fell into place so easily as we planned our trip – how we were able to extend the initial three day shoot into eight days, how cinematographer Davorin's travel agent wife Vesna found us a bargain airfare deal, and also got us an extra baggage allowance to enable us to take all the camera gear for free, the timing of both long-haul flights overnight to help with sleeping, and so on.

A major point for me was discovering only days before leaving NZ that the Kiwi friend Martin I'd been visiting back in 1989, and with whom I'd lost touch with some years ago but was rumoured to be now living in an other European country, had in fact returned to live in Berlin. As had two other people I wanted to track down for our film!

Then a property speculator friend stunned me with an email: "Clearly the universe wants you to succeed, so go for it!"

We arrived in Berlin the day before to prepare for the twentieth anniversary celebrations on Nov 9, with my ex from a decade earlier taking a week off from her law work in Munich (600 kms away) to join us as a volunteer helper. Having a native speaker with us was a real bonus.

I'd been curious to know how I'd feel when I saw Checkpoint Charlie again – knowing it had changed hugely since I was last there. I'd thought the tube station exit was a couple of blocks away, and so I was completely unprepared for the emotional jolt that hit me when I came out of the underground and found I was right there – I had to grab hold of Davorin's shoulder for a moment for support!

"I know", he said. "I can feel it too." I knew then for sure (as if I'd ever doubted it!) that Davorin, who grew up in communist Croatia and migrated to NZ 16 years ago in the aftermath of the war in his homeland, was an utterly essential component of this movie.

Apart from some hassles with rain, the anniversary shooting went extremely well. We struck gold in many accidental moments that night, and also in the following days – such as when filming at Checkpoint Charlie, where we met and interviewed a veteran US soldier who'd helped escapees from East Berlin in 1964-66.

Over the following days, Davorin convinced me of the need to shoot vast amounts of seemingly superfluous visuals, which actually gave me the time to really "rediscover" Berlin – and this in turn prompted many spontaneous moments, caught in pieces-to-camera.

For Davorin and me, adjusting to our new working relationship involved a few minor "moments", but overall was surprisingly easy. But talk about a steep learning curve! Learning to direct a doco "on-the-job" seemed a vast distance from directing live theatre or running a drama crew as the First Assistant Director. Thank Goodness for Davorin's vast experience, as a doco-maker in his own right, cinematographer and editor. But of one thing I was never in doubt – starting to make this film this was absolutely and utterly the Best Thing in the World I could possibly be doing!

Tomorrow, in the third (and final) edition of The Knowledge for 2010, the rest of the story – to date.

- Tony Forster

## Leanne Pooley: Show me the money



Leanne Pooley, no slouch when it comes to making award-winning documentaries, went back to the beginning of the process – finding the money to fund one – and walked delegates through the techniques that work.

Funding projects is the most exhausting part of film-making and the proposal is the cornerstone of getting the funds.

Leanne reckoned an effective proposal should be a maximum of 4 pages. It should focus on what the film is about, rather than the topic – new film-makers often spend too long talking about the problem ... This film is about P and why this is bad for you ... rather than telling people what the new angle is. A logline can help crystallise your idea.

One should think about whether something is filmable. A story about your grandfather's experience in the war will always be difficult as it is a personal story set in the past. It isn't really possible to write one proposal for all funders. Do the research. Check out their websites and buzzwords and tailor a proposal to suit their funding profile.

A proposal should be clear and well written. All the important details should be on the first page – funders may not read beyond that. Get someone to read it before you send it – both to proofread but also to see if people can understand the project from what you've written.

Try to make the project attractive to the funder – for example broadcasters with rights to big events will probably want content around that, so it's an easier sell.

Leanne promoted the use of trailers in giving the audience a sense of the film. For a New Zealand pitch, she realised that a historical documentary might be a hard sell, so she made a trailer to sell it as an adventure story. She did warn against making a bad trailer though which could work against the project.

Leanne also emphasised the importance of thinking through a multi-platform distribution strategy, saying that listing the festivals you're taking the film to is no longer enough, but distribution and 360 degree were session topics all on their own.

- Shirin Brown

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## A Good Night Out

After a long, hard, busy and stimulating day at the first day of the Forum, invited guests strolled down the hill, drawn by the promise of free alcohol. The Auckland City Council hosted a welcoming ceremony for Documentary Edge, and in particular the Chinese delegation from the Guangzhou Festival (GZDOC) Guangzhou and Auckland have had a "Sister City" relationship for 21 years now, and this was marked in terms of both broader economic relations and the screen industry.

In his introductory speech, the Group Manager of Economic Relations for the Auckland City Council, Gareth Stiven, credited the city connection with at least partial responsibility for NZ being the first country to establish a free trade agreement with China.

In her response to Auckland Mayor John Banks's welcome, GZDOC Managing Director celebrated the film industry connection, Lei Hong, noting the appropriateness of China being the selected focus country for Doc Edge in 2010, given that the Guangzhou's Festival had a focus last year on New Zealand. She also spoke of the Guangzhou screen industry's strong desire to establish more and

stronger relationships with NZ film companies. After welcoming the Chinese Consul General, Madame Liao, Mayor Banks moved from describing the screen industry as a growth area in both cities to his Council's recent initiatives in support of local screen production.

He then went on to promise that the new Auckland 'Super-City' would "promote the film industry aggressively", and make it much easier for international production to come and shoot in Auckland. He concluded with high praise of the local screen world, saying, "We put you on a pedestal, and we salute your talent." Concluding the speeches, Film Auckland's Michael Brook spoke of the pleasure of his two visits to Guangzhou in 2009, acknowledged the support from the Auckland City Council, and made special mention of Dan Shanan and Alex Lee as "two very passionate people". Indeed!

During the post-speech schmoozing, one of our international guests complained (mildly), "I've been here for days, and nobody's offered me a joint yet." Some things you just can't put in the goodie bags.

turned initially to his vastly experienced producer father Bernard for some advice. It was probably inevitable that Bernard would agree/offer to work with Bruce, to both produce and mentor the project, but even that experience wasn't enough to offset some of the controversy that followed.

The first response from eventual exec producer Cliff Curtis was a simple "This project ain't gonna happen". Unlikely though it was, Curtis would be the key to actually letting it happen.

Many Maori object to Pakeha Kiwis treading into their storytelling territory, let alone foreigners who've only spent a short time here. It was freely acknowledged in the Q&A after the screening that there have been difficulties since the film was completed. These have resulted in some further cuts of material that was deemed offensive (to some Maori at least), and that the Giglios were not the only ones still nervous

about how this World Premiere would be received in Aotearoa.

But what emerged through the film was just what is possible when the people involved exhibit not just sincerity and respect but a genuine openness, a true humility, and an honest desire to enter into and learn about a new world.

Bruce and Bernard talked of how a film which took only a month to shoot involved 12 months of intense post-production, which was obvious in the great deal of sometimes quite subtle visual effects, especially in scenes displaying the landscape.

However, there were some in the audience who privately (Kiwis are so shy!) expressed the feeling that the post effects were somewhat overdone. Nevertheless, the film's beauty reflected the beauty of the moko, and if it generated controversy, then all the better.

- Tony Forster

## Sid Bernstein Presents: the rise and fall of a flawed genius



This World Premiere was a work in progress - and to be fair it showed. But despite the film being a little overlong, and with

many sequences somewhat rambling and unfocussed, the audience embraced the film enthusiastically - and with

good reason. Co-director Jason Ressler acknowledged that the film needs tightening, and longs for the time and freedom to do that. But he seemed a little stunned when it was suggested the film (presently 100 minutes) could easily lose 20 minutes!

It was the establishing of Bernstein's early success that could be conveyed in the fraction of the time which would get us much more quickly into the guts of the story. That part drew us in deeply and made us care about this freak - a music business mogul who cared more about the music and its makers than a dollar - and how he and his family of 6 kids all suffered the consequences, both then and now.

But in this raw, sprawling piece were moments of film-making bravery and magic - a highlight being a seven-minute sequence, which I won't spoil for you here by saying any more!

So see it while you can: struggles to find the finance to pay for the necessary performance rights, plus the politics of the flawed rights system in the USA, mean the film might never be seen again - seriously.

Tony Forster, borrowed from NHK Japan and Natural

History NZ also helped with resources and bought into Scott's vision. The film cost about \$56,000 and took 4 years to make. "You need enthusiasm," said Rob. "He [Scott] developed a passion for Kakapo. If you don't have enthusiasm for your subject you're stuffed because there are so many difficulties and closed doors."

Rod identifies the importance of this kind of documentary. "In order to convince people that something is being taken away, you need to let them know that they had it in the first place. The film shows we have this precious bird and there are many people out there who need support" in saving them from extinction.

- Shirin Brown

## Kiri Wai, Inner Skin: beauty is not skin deep



A young French/American returned to NZ to add to the moko he acquired here when visiting at age 17. Writer / director Bruce Giglio offered unintended irony when referring to the number of novices who had worked on various aspects of the film, spoke of "a lot of new blood on this movie".

Bruce, an art department worker,

## Screening Tonight

### A GoodMan - 6.45pm Q&A



Fourteen years ago, Rachel suffered a stroke. It was the day after Rachel and Chris told her parents she was pregnant. Although Rachel was in a coma for many months, the baby survived. Rachel recovered consciousness as a quadriplegic.

Against all medical and family advice, Chris took both the

baby and Rachel home. He went on to marry her and has never left her side. In fact, Rachel and Chris are expecting another child.

But now he faces an even greater challenge. Can a good father and a loving husband really become a successful pimp?

### Google Baby - 6.45pm



Zippi Brand-Frank takes you into a whole new level of contracting out. Welcome to the brave new world of outsourcing birth.

But what of the moral and ethical questions? Who is the parent of a child when the sperm comes from Israel, the egg comes from the United States and the surrogate pregnancy takes place in Gujarat,

India? Google Baby skilfully humanizes the people involved at every step of the pregnancy.

As shocking as it seems, this may be the birth of a movement.

### Journey from Zanskar 8.45pm



Zanskar is considered the last place on earth where traditional Tibetan Buddhist norms and ways of life still exist.

Inspired by the Dalai Lama, two monks select 17 young children aged between five and twelve to be educated at a Buddhist school on the other side of the mountain. To get there, they have to trek on foot across

the Himalayan range, reaching altitudes of 17,000 feet. And the trek is always arduous and often fatal.

Narrated by Richard Gere and helmed by veteran Frederick Marx (producer of the Academy Award winner - Hoop Dreams), this documentary gives an account of their odyssey.

### The Desert of Forbidden Art 8.45pm Q&A



How does art survive in a time of oppression? During Soviet rule, artists who stay true to their vision are imprisoned or executed.

Igor Savitsky daringly rescues 40,000 fellow artists' works and creates a museum in Uzbekistan's desert, far from the watchful eyes of the KGB.

He amasses an eclectic mix of Russian Avant-Garde art.

Described as "one of the most remarkable collections of 20th century Russian art", today these paintings are worth millions. They are a lucrative target for Islamic fundamentalists, corrupt bureaucrats and art profiteers.