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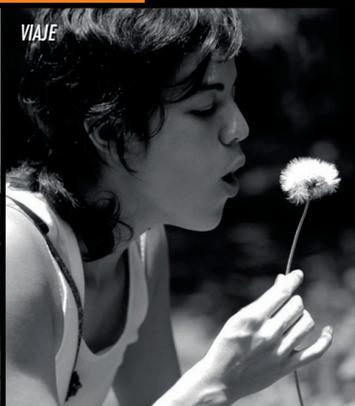
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APHASIA



VIAJE



BLEEDING HEART



HUNGRY HEARTS



BODY TEAM 12



LISTEN



APPLESAUCE



MEADOWLAND



CATWALK

**FILM FEST
FRENZY:**
THE TRIBECA
FILM FESTIVAL
2015

NEW YORK'S FIRST WOMEN OF INDIE FILM

The 2015 TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL — which rolls out smack-bang in the middle of New York City — once again offered up a typically fascinating range of shorts, features, and documentaries... many of them by and about women. BY DANNY PEARY

"The Tribeca Film Festival this year felt like an instant community, with all of us — filmmakers and actors of both sexes, and of different races and nationalities — playing on the same team," recalls actress, Robin Rose Singer, the writer and co-producer of the festival favourite, *Aphasia*, a nifty futuristic short that cautions us about our reliance on technology. "I met so many talented and intelligent artists without giving any thought to how it broke down statistically. Demographics may be useful to marketing people and census takers, but as an artist, my life's work is aimed at discrediting generalisation and stereotyping."

Whereas in years past, women filmmakers were awkwardly in the distinct minority at Tribeca, in 2015, Singer and others were comfortably on equal footing with their male counterparts, and were no longer being singled out because of their gender. This year, the festival was praised because more than a third of its features and shorts were directed by women. Moreover, numerous films made by directors of both sexes were *about* women, providing marvellous roles for both little known and established actresses. Many of their films won awards at the festival or, like *Aphasia* (directed by Luke LoCurcio but starring Singer), were award-worthy.

Camilla Nielsson is from Denmark, but her remarkable *Democrats*, which was selected as Best Documentary Feature, is set in Zimbabwe. It was one of the best films at the festival, even rating above the Best Narrative Feature, *Virgin Mountain*, another Danish gem. Nielsson didn't just record history and the drawing up of a new constitution, but rather participated in it, befriending, comforting, and uniting the two movie-star calibre subjects — one from the right, one from the opposition — who were responsible for creating the new document. "I was sceptical of the idea of

trying to implement a democracy with Robert Mugabe and the Zanu-PF party still in power," Nielsson told FilmInk. "So the title came very early, and I had it with a question mark — *Democrats?*"

Also award-worthy among the political documentaries was *Among The Believers*, Hermal Trivedi (making her feature directorial debut) and Mohammed Naqvi's chilling portrait of Maulana Aziz, an ISIS supporter and Taliban ally. One unforgettable scene shows a group of young boys jammed into a classroom at a Pakistani school, sitting on the floor and reciting and memorising the Koran, in the process of being brainwashed into devoting their lives to jihad.

More anthropological than political was *Uncertain*, for which the Seattle filmmaking partners, Anna Sandilands and Ewan McNicol, shared the New Documentary Director Award. *Uncertain* is a small fishing town on the Louisiana and Texas border where existence is threatened when a weed called salvina expands and sucks the oxygen out of the lake that is its chief source of income. The movie centres on three unusual men who live in this remote location, all fighting their own personal demons. It's a character study in which the visuals are downright creepy. "We were thinking more Biblical than horror," Sandilands told FilmInk. "It's this idea that all these men are in limbo, and good and evil are both present without either of them having the upper hand."

The Best Documentary Short, *Body Team 12*, which is set in Liberia at the time of the Ebola crisis, was directed by a man — first responder/filmmaker, David Darg — but is about an extraordinary heroine. Garmai Sumo was the only female on a team of gallant workers assigned to collect dead bodies for cremation. "Garmai was so dynamic that I asked if I could embed with the team and focus on her in particular," Darg told FilmInk. "I was trying to get to the root

of why she would sacrifice everything to save her country from the epidemic."

Also exceptional was the Best Narrative Short winner, *Listen*, which boasts a female/male directing team, Rungano Nyoni and Hamy Ramezan. A terrified Muslim woman takes her young son to a Copenhagen police station to file a complaint against her abusive husband. The translator assigned to her intentionally misinterprets her words to the police, putting her life in jeopardy. It is tense, heartbreaking, and unforgettable.

Among the narratives, if there were an award given to Most Erotic Feature, the winner would have been Costa Rican director, Paz Fabrega's *Viaje*. After meeting at a party, a young couple venture into the forest to spend three days at the remote biological station where he works alone. Fabrega told FilmInk that her movie is, daringly, an argument for casual sex, explaining that "it's never considered okay to have casual sex. It's something that you do, but you're supposed to feel bad about it. I don't see any real problem with it. It's a form of human interaction that has always existed and is totally natural."

If there had been an award for Most Courageous Narrative Feature, FilmInk would have nominated Reed Morano's *Meadowland*, a brutally downbeat look at a married couple, played by Olivia Wilde and Luke Wilson, whose lives and relationship deteriorate after their young son is abducted. "You get only one chance to make a first film, so I didn't want it to be safe," Morano told FilmInk. "I didn't want people to just laugh a little or feel misty-eyed... I wanted my film to really fuck with them!"

The future of women filmmakers seemed brighter when Sweden's Ninja Thyberg won this year's Student Visionary Award for *Catwalk*: "an effective look," stated the jury, "at peer influence, not peer pressure. A creative explanation of

BRIDGEND

SWORN VIRGIN

GRANDMA

what young people are experiencing as a result of social media threads and trends. Beautifully shot, and cast with a profound message that promotes individuality and vulnerability amongst the girls and parents."

The coveted Nora Ephron Prize for Best Narrative Written Or Directed By A Woman was captured by *Sworn Virgin*, an Albanian-German-Italian-Swiss co-production directed by Laura Bispuri and written by Bispuri and Francesca Manieri. It's about a young woman from a village in North Albania who, following custom, lives as a male and vows to remain a virgin. She begins to understand, however, that a person drawn to doing activities considered characteristic of the opposite sex isn't necessarily transgender. "We are awarding a film that is exquisite in its broadness and its intimacy, with a truly original story that touches on gender identity and oppression in a way that we have rarely seen before," said the jury.

FilmInk predicted that Alba Rohrwacher would edge a strong field (Olivia Wilde in *Meadowland*, Kattia Gonzalez in *Viaje*, Lily Tomlin in *Grandma*, and Jessica Biel in Diane Bell's sisters-bonding thriller, *Bleeding Heart*) and be chosen the festival's Best Actress for her risky performances in *Sworn Virgin*, as the young woman struggling with her identity, and *Hungry Hearts* (co-starring Adam Driver), as a tender but insanely paranoid newlywed who starves herself and her new baby. Stardom beckons. The award, however, went to Hannah Murray for her strong portrayal of a teenage girl in peril in the unsettling *Bridgend*, named after a real-life Welsh town where there have been, mysteriously, 79 suicides since 2007, many by teens. The Tribeca Jury hailed the beguiling British star as "an actress who captures the hopelessness of a lost generation with bravery and guilelessness. This young

actress led us in a descent into a world gone mad as well as a journey into the protagonist's own inner darkness."

The best comedic narrative at the festival was actor-director-writer, Onur Tükel's raunchy, gruesome, and often brilliant black comedy, *Applesauce*, partly because one of the leads is indie star, Jennifer Prediger. Known for wearing glasses in her films – even when underwater in *Apartment Troubles* – she takes them off for her climactic scene. "I had taken off my glasses under the burqa that my character was wearing because I was going to do some running and I didn't want to stomp on them," she told FilmInk. "That made it a little hard for me to see while I was walking down the streets of Brooklyn in a black burqa while carrying a bucket of paint. Gosh, that was a really questionable thing to be doing. People were looking at me, and I felt like I was going to cause some kind of religious uprising."

"It's easy to get lost in the shuffle," states *Aphasia*'s Robin Singer about the situation that indie or veteran typecast actresses find themselves in. "Making my short film as a producer, writer, and actress gave me the chance to say, 'I am a storyteller with a voice and a vision.' I'm not just blonde hair and blue eyes." She then told FilmInk what many actresses and filmmakers whose movies were at The 2015 Tribeca Film Festival were probably thinking: "I figured that the only way that people would take me seriously was if I just did good work."

For more on The Tribeca Film Festival, head to <http://tribecafilm.com/festival>. ■

WHAT'S YOUR BOFA*?

THE TASMANIAN BREATH OF FRESH AIR (BOFA*) FILM FESTIVAL

(Wed 4 - Sunday 8 Nov) is a boutique festival with an international perspective. But BOFA is no ordinary film festival. So the question is: "What's YOUR BOFA?"

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Tasmania is THE place to visit for award winning food and wine. Just ask recent visitor, Rene Redzepi of Denmark's renowned Noma. BOFA screens food-focused films and has curated wine and food tours to tempt you.



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TASMANIAN BREATH OF FRESH AIR (BOFA) FILM FESTIVAL

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