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MAGAZINE

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Toronto Film Festival with a conscience

By Alexia Melocchi

It's official- Award Season is here and Hollywood is coming out roaring with conscious film making and a string of exciting new films and documentaries.

If you are not living or working in Hollywood, you probably have heard of the Cannes Film Festival, Sundance or the Venice Film Festival, which are considered by movie lovers and movie makers alike the right places to showcase the best and most quality films from film makers around the world. Few are familiar with the Toronto Film Festival. This Canadian festival is one of the largest attended in the world, attracting over 480,000 movie lovers annually, and becoming a permanent destination for film culture.

The Festival, that first started in 1976, was mostly focused in art house movies, primarily foreign. Not anymore. In the past decade, it has become a platform for socially conscious film making from all over the world, while concurrently considered an "Award Season" kick off showcase of new movies from all over the world.

I arrived this year, as I do every year, with much anticipation for the movies that would inspire the public in attendance. We all know the glamour side of Hollywood, the clothes, the Red Carpet, the Celebrities, but it is through the hard work and perseverance of some talented and often little known film makers that the moving picture can translate into an almost spiritual experience shedding light on socially conscious issues that are faced by humanity. It is no surprise that the current theme of this year's Festival was the empowerment of women as this became the first Toronto Festival of the #MeToo movement. PETA also had a presence at this year's Festival, as peaceful protesters carried signs and pictures of slaughtered wolves, calling out the Festival for the endangerment for these animals by one of its Sponsors, Grey Goose.

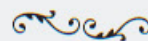


While many lined up to see highly anticipated films such as *A STAR IS BORN*, a remake of the original Chris Christopherson and Barbara Straisand romance, directed by and starring Bradley Cooper, and featuring pop star Lady Gaga in a true movie star in the making performances, there were several more intimate and meaningful movie gems that I had the pleasure of screening and one of these was the visually stunning documentary *AQUARELA*.

Directed by Russia's Victor Kossakovsky, the documentary was a poetic and visual feast about the power and magic of one of Earth's four elements, water. With practically no narrative, we dive, no pun intended, into a series of high definition images of glaciers, icebergs and giant waves as well as rushing waterfalls and incredibly still lakes. The wide angles lenses used literally gives as a full immersion experience accompanied by a state of the art sound system where we experience the raging waves through a tempest as experienced sailors maneuver a yacht, or the angry crash of iceberg cracks from glaciers, or the rainbow making drops that become clouds to then redistribute water back into the eco system. Even though there is no obvious story told here, the right gaps are left to the viewers to see the effects of climate change, while water remains the mutable, infinitely temperamental star and the real protagonist.

Though Hollywood gets at times a bad reputation for being self-absorbed, it was clear in this Festival, not just with this documentary but with several other films I had the pleasure of screening, that creativity and the arts can also be used to create and spread awareness, and this year Nature was front and center.

Before heading back to Los Angeles, I was lucky to be attending the National Geographic Party on top of the rooftop of the Bisha Hotel, a boutique new Hotel in Downtown Toronto, right before sunset, enjoying a magical view of this great city and trying out the newest virtual reality goggles to see clips of *FREE SOLO*, the documentary about Alex Honnond's iconic free-rider ascent, and a celebration of the wonder of humans and nature with extraordinary photography. Just like the journey of a film, wanting to communicate a feeling to its audience, the climb to the top can be exhilarating and inspiring for those who create as well as for those who watch because if you are moved by an image enough to want to talk about it, then Hollywood may have used its power of influence in the right way, after all, and I hope it won't stop.



Alexia Melocchi is an accomplished film producer and worldwide distribution executive and the partner of Beverly Hills based *LITTLE STUDIO FILMS*. Alexia Melocchi has an experience of more than twenty years in Hollywood and has produced 11 award winning movies and 3 documentaries that were shot by emerging film makers that she has personally discovered and mentored. She also acquires on behalf of her international distributor clients films and television shows from all over the world for release in the Middle East, Italy, Greece, Spain, Canada, South America and Germany. She attends all major film festivals in the USA and abroad and has been often invited as an expert panelist on the Film Business for high profile film and television conventions. Alexia is fluent in five languages and is the proud mama to 3 rescue cats. She supports environmental and animal causes, meditates daily, and is an avid reader of spiritual and self helps books.
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