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Broadcast Diary Blog of Framework's time at the Edinburgh International Television Festival 2007

Thursday 23rd August

This coming weekend will be a particularly significant event in the calendar for Framework Television. Yes, MGEITF is one of the major industry events of the year for everyone in TV, but for us, as a new Indie started in January, it's our very first experience of attending a festival to represent our company, and we'll probably be the youngest company there with an average age of 23!

Framework Television, based near Birmingham, has already been kick-started with regional screen agency development funding. We've also built relationships with prominent Executive Producers, directors, and key liaisons within broadcasters such as Stuart Cosgrove, Director of Nations and Regions at Channel 4, who we're working with on a factual slate. We're now honing in on key relationships within broadcasters, and we hope our activities at the festival will help move us forward with this. Having already benefited from mentoring relationships with figures from independents we'd also love to talk to other established Indies to gain advice and inspiration.

As festival 'virgins' we're quite apprehensive and excited. We have all attended conferences, commissioner briefings and networking events before - but the festival forum allows for more extended social networking, workshops, and panel debates - which we hope will give much more of an insight into characters, and allow us to start initiating dialogues. We already know from our experiences so far that relationship building with broadcasters - understanding each other, being on the same 'wavelength', knowing the personal expectations of the individual commissioner in order to meet and exceed them - is the absolute cornerstone from which to progress projects.

I'm also looking forward to experiencing Edinburgh because, compared to other TV festivals, it's as much about the wider debates around the industry as it is about current business. As a regional Indie we are eager to gain a litmus test on the reality of regional positioning and its plights, and will be keen to attend 'The Great Nations and Regions Swindle: Is TV's commitment to regional production a con?'.

With the spotlight particularly on Channel 4 after its extremely controversial 25th year, I'll also be very interested in witnessing the climate around Kevin Lygo, and participating in the debates around 4's remit. Channel 4 and I are the same age - I've watched it evolve and have always been particularly interested in the policy and politics around the channel since it began under Jeremy Isaacs. Whilst at Channel 4's HQ only last week I was leafing through

their 'Thank You' book which retrospectively acknowledges the channel's significant contributors throughout its life - and I came across Darcus Howe's entry which reminisces on the early days and his documentary series The Bandung File with Tariq Ali. I had always seen that series as pertinent in examining the original premise of the channel and its interpretation of what 'minority programming' meant in that era of increasing pluralism, led by Isaacs' acceptance that it would be a channel that everyone would watch sometimes but no one all of the time. The big questions around the table at the festival this weekend will no doubt be centred on how effectively or not the channel is interpreting and fulfilling its remit now, and indeed whether this remit needs redefining. So, I'm looking forward to hearing about Channel 4's plans for the future this weekend.

Aside from the debates, I have to confess that what I'm most looking forward to is something with a title that reassures me of the industry's ability to laugh at itself...Monkey Tennis! This event about the 'secrets' of commissioning, chaired by Camilla Lewis (Head of Factual Features at talkbackTHAMES) will perhaps explore the trials and tribulations of being a 'partridge amongst the pigeons' - pitching away as an Indie as opposed to being 'on the BBC gravy train'! Another personal highlight will be The Peep Show Master class, with the people behind the genius series at Objective Productions.

So, it's going to be an action packed weekend ahead!

Friday 24th August

Framework's festival experience started with a special invite to Channel 4's private opening reception, the 'Soho House Night'. As well as catching up with Stuart Cosgrove, we met people from other young but established Indies who we found very inspiring. It was great to talk with Sarah Tierney who runs Clarity Productions in Glasgow, which has been going for 3 years. We shared experiences of starting up, forging relationships with Channel 4 and the BBC, and defining your unique selling point within a tough market.

Today, after registering we dashed over to the Current TV event of the film festival, to hear about the ethos behind the channel and how it works. Despite listening to Al Gore's extremely intelligent and inspirational speech last year at the EIFF, I had been sceptical about the quality this kind of platform enables, and also the channel's approach to paying for content. We did however watch a great professionally made short film by Nick Angel, Daily Mail Diet, about the dangers of Daily Mail reading! It was very short and low budget but clever, effective, and inspirational - reminding me of the 'Cheat Neutral' film.

Back over in the TV camp I was eager to hear Kevin Lygo's first speech in his new role. Echoing Jeremy Isaacs' original beliefs for Channel 4, he stated that 'bold new difficult programmes' gaining only 900,000 viewers should be seen

positively, that there is scope for testing and failure, and that 'if standards are high it shouldn't matter if audiences are small'. I smiled, but this was actually backed up with good news - Celebrity Big Brother and many other returning series will be axed to make way for new programming. Also of interest to Framework was the announcement that a percentage of commissioning will go to Indies with smaller annual turnovers - seemingly genuine support for new smaller companies within the increasingly prevalent 'Super Indie' climate.

It's been a manic couple of days and the festival so far has exceeded our hopes and expectations about how informative it would. We are looking forward to the next couple of days - but at this rate we will all be shattered by Sunday.

Saturday 25th August

Yesterday's hectic start whilst packed with witty, funny, informative, and very intelligent offerings also gave us a few glimpses into industry tensions and the challenges ahead of us. The 'Great Nations & Regions Debate', whilst not really treading any new ground with the airing of frustrations, did produce passion from Stuart Cosgrove about the importance of relationship building and new talent nurturing, and from Krishan Arora about the BBC's commitments outside London - although he did say that the BBC don't work with 'micro-organisations'! Discussion centred on the struggle to build presence from a regional position, and the wariness about the perceptions around the 'regional' tag. For us at Framework, our regional basis near Birmingham is a proud part of our identity as well as a challenge - we don't see this as incompatible with our aim to emerge on a national level with our programming quality and scale.

My highlight today was the Peep Show Master class, which unveiled some of the creative processes and collaborations at Objective that went behind the genius series. The use of internal monologue voice-over and point-of-view shooting was examined, highlighting how it played on the distance between what people say and what they think. There were playful jibes between the writers and Objective's Chief Exec about this unique style being seen as a 'hump' to put off viewers. I actually think it was a blessing that Peep Show didn't explode and remained slightly under the radar earlier on - it wasn't plastered everywhere and reduced to comedy catch phrases but allowed to grow intelligently, and I'm pleased it's still going strong.

Monkey Tennis, a playful homage to the Partridge and a dig at what can become farcical pitching processes didn't disappoint. Lee Kern's film followed him setting up the fake Indie 'Monkey Tennis' to expose the reality of pitching and commissioning processes, and test just how accessible broadcasters are. Lee managed to get meetings with Channel 4 and ITV, but not the BBC - although in the discussion Elaine Bedell was quick to explain why. Lee's concealed camera meeting with ITV's Duncan Gray was hilarious, pitching such ideas as 'Urban Safari', 'Rolf Harris Draws the News', and 'Celebrity GCSE'. I

have to say that Duncan came off well with his willingness to devote time, give feedback, and remain polite. Both Duncan and Channel 4's Andy Auerbach said they would always take a meeting from a strong email, which is encouraging for us at Framework as a new start-up. So, now we just have to make sure our meetings go better than Alan P's and Lee Kern's!

Sunday 26th August

Today we are pretty tired and are nursing hangovers (and sore feet!) after last night's partying at The George. The place was packed and we made some very interesting contacts, from comedy writers through to music rights experts. It was also fun to see industry 'big wigs' on the dance floor!

Myself and Steven had to make ourselves bright eyed and bushy tailed for our News 24 interview this afternoon with Nick Hyan, who wanted to find out how we've found it here and what we're about. We felt this TV debut went very well although it was very nerve-wracking - the shortest 4 minutes of our lives! Framework Television's Development Researcher Niki also made a stage debut at the TVYP session yesterday, making it down to the last two in a game to test how well the industry understands young people and the way they consume television and new media.

Overall we've experienced an extremely diverse range of events. Peter Fincham delivered as always an extremely articulate and convincing interview, unfortunately but inevitably dogged by issues of audience trust. We felt that Paul Watson articulated his own documentary making methods and their valuable results extremely well, in the face of ironic questioning about ethics and transparency from a Daily Mail reporter. With an 'outsider' perspective, novelist Lionel Shriver delivered a pertinent critique of the media phenomenon she has labelled the 'hyper-narrative' - the creation of satisfying but fictional structures out of significant but disproportionately treated events (such as the death of Diana, and most recently the disappearance of Madeline McCann). Her 'supply and demand' argument that broadcasters don't just give people what they want but that they actually participate in the creation of desire for these 'hyper-narratives' struck a chord with me - especially as she went on to say that conversely they could air documentaries about subjects you don't realise you'll be interested in until you watch them - which resonates with our aim to introduce people to new ideas and subjects with our factual programming.

Jeremy Paxman's MacTaggart Lecture was extremely sharp and insightful - championing the place of Independents (especially in the wake of the Queen editing incident) and also the industry's young people who are often underpaid and under-trained, although it was undeniably fun to see the tables turn when he was put on the spot and dodged direct questions in the Q&A! He also wrapped up the festival with an enjoyable industry University Challenge.

Blogging for Broadcast as the youngest Indie at the festival has been another great aspect to our experience, although writing on the hop is very hectic! We're now off for a final well deserved drink!