

StudentFilmmakers



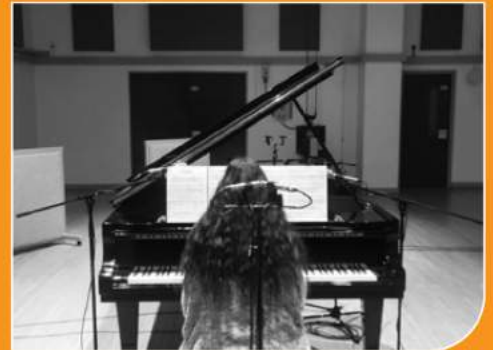
Decisions, Decisions



Organization and Naming
Your Shots



Chasing the Muse



Filmmakers Network Spotlight:
Zina Melekki

KOVID KILLED KINO!

Compel Your Audience to Interact

By Anthony Straeger

Okay, the spelling's wrong, but you get the sense of doom in the words. Over the last year, we have confronted an unprecedented crisis. We are witnessing a major shift in the history of film festivals and filmmaking. COVID-19 has seen the implementation of unprecedented restrictions on the entertainment industry. Surviving the uncertain political and financial situation will not get easier. Of this, we can be sure. We do not know how long the disruption will last and to what extent we will be able to 'go back to normal.' What we do know is that the pandemic will impact the industry for a long time. This means we must be clever, creative and calculating.

Film festivals are a lifeblood for independent filmmakers. They assist in the development and marketing of a filmmaker. They also are a source of inspiration and a means of gaining recognition and acclaim for your work. Many festivals rely on their audience to sustain them. Cinemas had to close their doors and due to the length of the lockdown, many are unlikely to open again.

The disruptions to the festival circuit have dealt a heavy blow to a filmmaker's marketing vitality. So, the options for film festivals are clear – postpone, cancel, or move online. So, you would be right in asking: *Is there any life left in film festivals?*

The answer is YES.

People who run festivals, like our Berlin Sci-fi Filmfest, are in the main

self-funded. No bail-out, no free lunch. They are festivals built on a love of a genre and manned by dedicated people who are not in it for the money.

Moving our cancelled festival films onto the internet was a no-brainer. Most people are practicing social distancing and quarantining. The result of streaming has become the 'staying home entertainment.' So, moving online shouldn't be too difficult... Right? *Wrong!*

Everyone's business is trying to find a virtual solution. The amount of 'stuff' that we're bombarded with online is immense. So, in taking a festival online, there are several factors to consider.

1. The thing is we are never going to be the way it was. *BAD*
2. Movies are becoming more accessible and watchable on a tablet or phone. *GOOD*
3. Competition for your attention is huge. *BAD*
4. People like to consume at their own pace and under their control.

You can't adapt to the live festival-going experience. Seeing the audience reaction is transformative. But what you can do is compel your potential audiences to engage. Screening a bunch of mp4 or mov. files won't cut it.

What filmmakers can do?

1. Brush up on your introduction skills. Directors and crew can make short (under 1 minute) introductions. They are useful for promotional aids



for the festival and give extra interest to the viewer. They work! Make sure you shoot in *landscape*, especially if you shoot on Smartphone. Our audience gave us some great feedback about introductions.

2. Promotional material. Adapt your poster and screen grabs to landscape 16:9. An extra tip: make sure the images are clear and the content easy to make out. Look at the composition hard and ask yourself this question... *'If it ends up a thumbnail or preview image, what can the viewer make out if it is 3cm x 2cm?'*

3. Event Promotion. You are in it. You are part of it. Use every outlet you have to let your friends, team and audiences know about it. If you are submitting your films to online festivals, then you should engage with

the festivals and your audience. *Network and connect* to the greatest degree possible.

4. Meetups and Q&As. Get involved and meet up with other filmmakers. Participate in Q&As, screenings, and virtual watch parties. If a festival is not running a meet-up or virtual meet-up, find out why. We had some well-attended meetings, as well as one where I sat there on my own drinking and whistling to myself! It happens.

The internet may not be the one and only solution for building a community. However, now is your time to max it out. Also, it is necessary to work on building an event that includes both the audiences and filmmakers. This is something we have worked hard on and tried many angles to see how we can entice audiences to want to be part of something with heart, something special. For me, it is also important to be optimistic and help indie filmmakers find homes for their work.

Anthony Straeger's working career of over 30 years has been forged around his hobbies, from scriptwriting and filmmaking to event organizing and project management. Training as an actor has been a significant help with public speaking, moderating and presenting. Since becoming a Director at Berlin Sci-Fi Filmfest in 2017, filmmaking and film festivals are at the heart of Anthony's working life. The main thing he has learned by being a festival director is, "What You Don't Know Will Hurt You!" Thanks to the knowledge he has gained, his submissions success rate increased from 1 in 20 to 1 in 3. He is author of the book, *An Independent Filmmakers Guide to Preparing and Submitting to Film Festivals*.

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