

# Strong competition

By Nick Cunningham

"I'm happy with all the films in Dutch competition this year," points out IDFA doyenne Jannie Langbroek on the eve of this year's event, adding, "but that happens very seldom. These things go like waves in the sea. One year is good and another year may not be so good." Langbroek is co-selector of the section, as well as a member of the Jan Vrijman Fund Board.

The 2011 Dutch competition selection contains fourteen films culled from a pool of around 250 submissions. Two of the selections are also included in the feature-length competition: Ramon Gieling's *About Canto* and Frank Scheffer's *Gozaran - Time Passing*, while Daan Veldhuizen's *Stories from Lakka Beach* also screens in the First Appearance competition. Veldhuizen's film is about the daily life and dreams of five fishermen in a coastal village in Sierra Leone. *About Canto* explores the profound effect Simeon ten Holt's *Canto Ostinato* has had on a number of people. *Gozaran - Time Passing* concerns a modern Iranian composer's ambition to bring avant-garde orchestral music to Iran. "Dutch filmmakers continue to be curious and they are still going out to find these new stories",

Langbroek continues. "But there will be cuts in the subsidy flow. You don't see it now, as these cuts are recent, and the 2011 documentaries were funded two or three years ago, but you will see the effects of these cuts in 2 or 3 years' time. I would hope that Dutch documentary could be a protected species, but the government, that decides on these subsidies, doesn't give a damn." (2011 Netherlands Film Fund documentary funding amounted to €2.8 million - a figure Fund doc chief Niek Koppen expects to drop by 20% in 2013.)

Langbroek doesn't want to isolate any one film for comment from this year's selection - "I am particularly proud of *all* of them" - but she makes an exception for *Justice for Sale* by twins Ilse and Femke van Velzen. The film is the third



part in a series investigating judicial injustice within the Congo. "I really admire the girls," she stressed. "For a few years, they have been producing very interesting documentaries on

very topical subjects from the African continent, and there is always something in their films that amazes me. In this one, there is a female lawyer, who is very well chosen. She makes a very cynical remark that as these trials are paid for by NGOs, they demand to see some measure of success. So now and then punishments are given just to satisfy the requirements of these NGOs - this was one scene that I thought was remarkable." Another film that struck Langbroek was *One Fine Day* by Klaas Bense. "It's six portraits of individuals who are heroes of our time; people who stand up at a certain moment and say 'I don't agree with this'. They are loosely connected individual portraits, but I liked it a lot - it is very well made. When you watch it, you get goose pimples."



## EFA/OSCAR NOMINATIONS

Two of this year's three European Film Awards (EFA) documentary nominations (Prix Arte) have solid IDFA credentials. Leonard Retel Helmrich's *Position Among the Stars* world premiered at IDFA 2010, going on to pick up the festival's top prize. It was subsequently selected for more than 40 international festivals in 2012, winning a slew of awards en route including the World Cinema Special Jury Prize at Sundance, the Special Jury Prize at Sarasota and Best Film prizes at Zagreb and Durban. Victor Kossakovsky's *¡Vivan las antipodas!*, which compares the lives of people living at antipodal points on the globe, received Jan Vrijman Fund support in 2007 and was successfully pitched at IDFA's Forum the same year. The film premiered at Venice 2011.

Asked about the EFA selections, IDFA chief Ally Derks commented: "It's fantastic that both films have been nominated ... but I have to be honest here. I am on the jury!"

On the Oscar front, *Enemies of the People* (Rob Lemkin, Thet Sambath) has made it to the 15-film shortlist for Best Doc Feature ahead of the Academy Awards in February 2012. The film, a personal and poignant investigation into Cambodia's recent past, world premiered at IDFA 2009. In 2010, Lucy Walker's *Waste Land* picked up the IDFA Audience Award. In the film, a photographer finds both artistic inspiration and a sense of social engagement when shooting garbage pickers at the largest landfill site in the world. NC

# I Am A Woman Now

By Geoffrey Macnab

What is a real woman? This question is at the heart of Michiel Van Erp's documentary. Make-up and clothing aren't the answer. Is it hormones? Is it the capacity to bear children? The subjects of *I Am A Woman Now* are transsexuals, all of whom have undergone a sex-change operation with Georges Burou, a gynaecologist based in Casablanca. "My dear, I will make you a lovely little pussy," he told them. A quarter of a century later, how do they feel?

The answers, perhaps predictably, aren't straightforward. The women have now grown old: a prospect few of them considered when they had their operations. Some are experiencing health problems. Some are still obliged to keep their pasts secret. They haven't always managed to sustain long-term relationships. "In love, men like to have sex with you as a transsexual; but they don't want to have a relationship with you," the director notes. Van Erp points out that none of the women featured in his documentary regret their sex change. However, this doesn't mean they're content. The transsexuals have had very varied experiences. One grand, very well-spoken English lady tells the director about her experiences as a young sailor in the British navy, and how

she was thrown out by her mother. Another talks about her glamorous life as a dancer. One German woman remembers how, returning to Dusseldorf after her operation, she discovered the doctors were only interested in the technical side of the surgery. Nobody stopped for a moment to continue the psychological toll it might have. "They all had an urge to tell their story, now that it is still possible," the director reflects on why the women were so keen to share such intimate details of their lives. Most of the women will be at the film's IDFA premiere. No, Van Erp insists, he doesn't have favourites. "It's more one story told by five women. They all have an important part in the movie."



*I Am A Woman Now*, made through Van Erp's production company De Familie, took around two years to finance. Backers include the Dutch Film Fund and the VPRO. Cat & Docs has come on board to handle sales on the film, which already has a strong IDFA connection, having passed through the Forum. "For the first time in my life I was there and I was very impressed," the director recalls of his experiences at IDFA presenting his project to financiers. "I always like to have discussions about my work. I really like it when people ask questions ... but in the end, you have to make the movie you have in your mind. If you try to make a movie and 20 commissioning editors also have to like it, that is very impossible!" Having made a film about transsexuals, the

director is now planning a doc looking at the plight of elderly actors, struggling to keep their careers afloat as their memories fade. I always like to film the struggles of people trying to do the things they really want to do and to be the people they really want to be," he says of a film that has obvious parallels with *I Am A Woman Now*.

IDFA COMPETITION FOR DUTCH DOCUMENTARY  
*I Am A Woman Now*  
Michiel Van Erp

Thu 17/11 10:30 Tuschinski 3 (Press & Industry)  
Sat 19/11 16:30 Munt 11  
Sun 20/11 20:00 Tuschinski 5  
Thu 24/11 20:00 Tuschinski 6