



Marked for Success

Women in Film spearheads programs that enlighten, empower and mentor **up-and-coming** filmmakers and others in **entertainment**

By Denise Abbott

Independent filmmaker Nic Bettauer knows how nerve-racking it can be to get a first feature off the ground. Like many other aspiring directors, she used credit cards to finance her debut, Checkmark Films' "Duck," an urban fable set in Los Angeles in 2009. So, when she heard about Women in Film's Film Finishing Fund, applying to WIF for assistance with postproduction was a no-brainer. "I submitted a rough cut of the first two-thirds of the film, which felt like sending my baby off into a black hole," says Bettauer, who credits the funding with enabling her to complete the project. "It blew my mind that people actually watched it and responded."

While most in the industry are familiar with WIF and its Crystal + Lucy Awards, which honor those who've helped expand the role of women in the entertainment industry (and which are set to take place tonight at the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza hotel), the nonprofit also maintains a number of initiatives designed to help up-and-coming filmmakers like Bettauer who need support, such as mentoring or completion funds.

With 35 chapters and 10,000 members worldwide, WIF nurtures women on their way up by providing numerous types of assistance, from networking and educational programs to scholarships, film-finishing funds and workshops. Different levels of membership, with annual dues ranging from \$35-\$1,000, make the organization accessible to virtually anyone involved in some aspect of entertainment — whether as a film student or studio head.

Since its inception in Los Angeles in 1973, WIF has expanded to include chapters in 16 states. Its global network, Women in Film and Television International, boasts 35 chapters on six continents ranging from developing nations to countries with established industries. Its worldwide membership base is 10,000 strong, 60% of whom are midlevel managers, 25% are high-level executives or professionals and 15% are newcomers or students. Los Angeles alone boasts 2,500 members.

"Back in 1973, nine women had the foresight to realize the need for this organization," says new president CiCi Holloway, a former senior vp of diversity at Paramount. "Fast-forward to 2006, and not only does the need still exist, but it's greater than ever. The entertainment business has grown so dramatically,

"Duck" Covered

Director Nic Bettauer chats with actor Philip Baker Hall on the set of her film, "Duck" from Checkmark Films, which was finished thanks to an endowment provided by Women in Film's Film Finishing Fund.

and in many ways, it's more difficult than ever. The sharing, networking, exposure and access that Women in Film provides truly elevate women within the industry."

Pivotal programs include the Film Finishing Fund (now in its 21st year), which provides financial or in-kind support to filmmakers in order to complete their films; the Women's Film Preservation Fund, which provides grants for historical and archival purposes to restore and preserve films in which women play key creative roles; the Legacy Series, which includes in-depth interviews with outstanding women in front of and behind the camera; public service announcement programs, which produce broadcast spots relating to issues important to women for nonprofit organizations; scholarships, internships and mentorship; on-campus lectures; and regional chapter events such as golf tournaments and monthly networking events.

An alliance formed last year with General Motors has greatly enhanced WIF's visibility — not to mention its financial reserves. The partnership affords GM, the world's largest automaker, an opportunity to influence prevail-

ing attitudes and practices among women. "We want to nurture important relationships that are not necessarily in front of the camera," says Steve Tihanyi, GM's general director of marketing alliances and entertainment. "By helping young filmmakers get into the business, we hope to generate a degree of goodwill that will work to our benefit in the years ahead."

University of Southern California graduate Jen McGowan received a WIF/GM scholarship that she used toward the production of a short film, "Confessions of a Late Bloomer," which was accepted at this year's Festival de Cannes and Tribeca Film Festival. McGowan founded and developed the script, a comedy about a prepubescent 15-year-old boy who is determined to become a man by week's end. With a budget of just \$17,000, she shot on 35mm film at 12 locations throughout Los Angeles over 10 days.

The WIF grant of \$1,000 "made a world of difference when you consider that my budget was just \$17,000," says McGowan, who joined WIF five years ago. "The award also had a tremendous nonfinancial value. Having Women in Film behind me, supporting me as a director, opened doors like you wouldn't believe."

WIF opened doors for Bettauer as well. In addition to providing completion funds, WIF enabled her to present a showcase screening of "Duck" — which tells the story of an orphaned duck (played by the star of Aflac's memorable commercials) who encounters an elderly widower (Philip Baker Hall) and believes the man is his parent — to a discriminating audience at



WIF president
CiCi Holloway

the Directors Guild of America while she was working toward a distribution deal. "It was phenomenal because this is L.A. and you never know who's going to walk through the door. I felt like it gave me credibility," says Bettauer, who has a master's degree from USC's School of Cinema-Television.

Support of a different kind boosted Yasmina Cadiz's career. After submitting "Mama Said," a powerful eight-minute film about the unbreakable spirit of a 9-year-old girl left by her mother, the Chicago native was one of five women selected to receive a WIF/GM grant — awarded to up-and-coming Latina filmmakers — in the spring of 2005. The grant provides a broad-based understanding of the

business of filmmaking through a six-day, full-immersion pass to the biannual Women in Film and Television International Summit, last held in Los Angeles in October.

"Access is far more valuable than money to someone in the beginning stages of a career," says Cadiz, who also enjoyed a three-day pass to the American Film Market. "I acquired such a better understanding of the business side of the equation. Sure, you need the passion and creativity, but unless you understand that filmmaking is a business, you're not going to make it."

"Mama Said" has since screened to critical acclaim at a bevy of film festivals. Cadiz was one of 12 semi-finalists for the ABC/Directors Guild of America Television Directing Fellowship Program and is now a semifinalist for ABC's Talent Development Scholarship-Grant Program. Having recently relocated to Los Angeles, she is developing her first feature, "Twelve Signs," a multilayered story about 12 people whose lives are connected through astrology. "My whole experience with WIF was so extraordinary because it was all about the sharing of information — without ego, jealousy or insecurity."

WIF's award-winning PSA program has launched members and nonprofit organizations into the world of professional commercials. Membership provides the opportunity to work in on-the-spot production, which is mentored by more-experienced members, resulting in nonprofit organizations receiving professional commercials. Approximately four

See **SUCCESS** on page S-18

Numbers Game

Sometimes, it's **one step forward**, **two steps back** for women seeking parity in Hollywood

Katie Couric settles into Dan Rather's chair. Elizabeth Vargas co-anchors ABC News' "World News Tonight." Stacey Snider is co-chairman and CEO of DreamWorks. These are all indications that women are making tremendous strides within the entertainment industry, right? Not so fast, says San Diego State University professor Martha Lauzen, who publishes an annual study on women's contributions to film and television. "It's very easy to be misled by the success stories of a few high-profile women," observes Lauzen, a social scientist who has been tracking female labor trends in show business for the past 10 years. "To make an accurate assessment, you've got to look at the big picture, and the only way to do that is by counting the numbers."

If last year's 250 top domestic-grossing films are any indication, the numbers are fairly stagnant. In 2005, women working in film as directors, writers, executive producers, editors and cinematographers comprised a mere 17% of the Hollywood workforce as a whole — the same as in 1998. "Women make up 52% of the population and 47% of the workforce, so to say they comprise 17% of all key positions in film is not impressive," Lauzen declares.

The number of female directors slid to 7% from a historical high of 11% in 2000. Females accounted for 11% of writers, 16% of editors and 3% of cinematographers. The only gain was in the producing category, where women comprised 26% of all producers and 16% of all executive produc-

ers. "Producing is a natural fit for women as it's a very mothering role and one that requires multitasking," Lauzen says.

The picture brightens, however, when it comes to the small screen. Women comprised 25% of all creators, producers, directors, writers, editors and directors of photography during the 2004-05 season, which represents an increase of two percentage points over last season, as well as a recent historical high. UPN employed a significantly higher percentage of behind-the-scenes women (38%) than any other network, which in turn influenced the number of female characters seen onscreen (52%). "The network achieved numerical parity with the percentage of females in the population," Lauzen says. "This has never happened before."

Not surprisingly, programs boasting at least one woman in a position of power employed higher percentages of behind-the-scenes females and created more powerful women characters. According to Lauzen, that's a logical outcome. "I'm not even saying it's a conscious choice. It's just that we create what we know."

Lauzen feels the media is quick to applaud high-profile cases while ignoring the real story. "Five years ago, women chaired three major studios and headed three guilds, and there was a ton of press about women finally achieving equality in Hollywood. Today, the women are out, and nobody is saying a thing."

— Denise Abbott