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SCREENDAILY

Finland heats up international appeal with first Finnish Film Affair

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Works in progress presented to international buyers and sellers include new films from Honkasalo and Louhimies, plus the animated family sequel *Niko 2*.

Finland is proving its international appeal is growing, as the Nordic country hosted its first industry-oriented Finnish Film Affair last week during the Helsinki International Film Festival.

The inaugural event attracted international guests including sales executives Alexandra Kida from TrustNordisk, Clementine Hugot from WIDE Management, former Beta Cinema executive Andreas Rothbauer, Urban Distribution International's Claire Charles-Gervais, Michael Werner of NonStop Sales, and Afolabi Kuti from the Salt Company, alongside Miira Paasilinna from The Yellow Affair (the only international sales outfit based in Finland). Buyers included Clare Binns from the UK's Picturehouse, Amit Dey from NBCUniversal, Kim Foss from Denmark's Camera Film, and Eva Esseen Arndorff from Sweden's TriArt.

In addition to screenings of Finnish films (including this year's Oscar submission *Purge*), a panel discussion [pictured] about international sales, and a seminar about working closer with Asia, the top draw for international visitors was a presentation of 15 Finnish works in progress at various stages.

They included Eurovision champs documentary *Lordi – the Monsterboy* by Antti Haase; fantasy-adventure *Imageinaerum* by Strobe Harju nad produced by local powerhouse Solar Films; Pirjo Honkasalo's *Concrete Night*, a black-and-white drama shooting now; Aku Louhimies gritty drama *8-Ball*, his follow-up to *Frozen Land* and *Naked Harbour*, comedy *August Fools* by Taru Makela, relationship drama *Open Up To Me* directed by Simo Halinen, and family animation sequel *Niko 2: Little Brother, Big Trouble*.

Other Finnish films in the works include Zaida Bergroth's *Angela*, about two stripper sisters who want to become famous. After *Lapland Odyssey*, director Dome Karukoski is readying *The Racist*, an comedy about the unlikely relationship between a neo-Nazi skinhead and a woman who has a mixed-race son. Klaus Haro is preparing *Never Alone (Nie Allein)*, about a Finnish Jewish man, Abraham Stiller, who acted as a mediator for asylum seekers during WWII. Author Peter Franzen will adapt his own novel *Above Dark Water*, a family drama set in Finnish Lapland in the 1970s. And *Canned Dreams* filmmaker Katja Gauriloff's next documentary will be about her great grandmother, a magical Sami storyteller, who meets a worldly writer. Also, the team behind last year's Oscar submission *Steam of Life* is now making a film about the relationships between mothers and daughters.

Several visitors told Screen they were very impressed some of the Finnish projects on offer, and with the first edition of FFA, adding that they hoped to see the event grow in coming years.

Finland's tech boom means that effects and graphics companies are also busy with film work. Mutant Koala Pictures has developed its innovative 'Motion Novel' technique for the short film *Dr Professor's Thesis of Evil*, currently available on iTunes, and is now working on their first feature film, *Parousia*. Fake Graphics, which worked on Rare Exports, is now working on films including Aleksi Mäkelä's *The Hijack That Went South (aka The Hijacker)*. Trix, which represents US grading experts Company 3 in Scandinavia, the Baltics and Russia, also will grade *Concrete Night* and worked on the six films of the local hit *Vares* films. And of course Troll is the company that got its start with the nearly 1000 visual effects shots in *Iron Sky*. Blind Spot Pictures producer Tero Kaukomaa, who is also a partner in Troll, said: "We are in an interesting track together with Troll, as far as what we can offer from Finland." Troll works across features, TV and commercials.

The Finnish Film Foundation is also in good health – it offers production support of about €23m per year (that's up from only €12m five years ago.) "The aim is to be as diverse as possible," with the projects funded, notes FFF head of production Petri Kemppinen. The whole local industry is lobbying to introduce a tax incentive scheme that would attract foreign producers. Kemppinen said: "there is strong lobbying for it, within years to come it will go through. it takes time." CEO Petra Theman [also pictured] from Favex (Finnish Film & Audiovisual Export) agreed that an incentive was a top priority to drive growth in the Finnish film industry.

It was also a banner year for HIFF, which celebrated its 25th edition and boasted record audiences of 57,500 audiences during its 11-day festival.

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