

Director's advice to new filmmakers: Get busy

Don't wait for funding; start making movies now, Penelope Buitenhuis says

BY MARKE ANDREWS
VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver-based film director Penelope Buitenhuis has advice for any young woman embarking on a career as a filmmaker: Don't sit around talking about it. Make the films.

"With digital media you can make your own films cheaply," says Buitenhuis, whose latest feature, *A Wake*, headlines the two-day Women in Film Festival on Saturday at Vancity Theatre.

"Just like any profession, you need to practise. I would say make [the film] before you expect any return. People tend to wait for funding, and I say just make them, and then you have something to show for yourself and the funding might follow. If you have good ideas and some kind of style, you just start."

No one starts their directing career with features. All directors, Buitenhuis included, start with short films. In fact, she still makes them when she has the chance between features and television episodes.

"I live a pretty crazy life, and I always have crazy stories to tell," says Buitenhuis, who moved back to Vancouver from Toronto two months ago. "Shorts are the quick and easy way to tell them. You don't have to get funding to make them."

Buitenhuis, a Toronto native, attended film school at both the University of B.C. and Simon Fraser University before moving to Germany and France for 10 years.

She spent the first decade of her career making short films, directed her first feature, *Trouble* ("a rock 'n' roll drama"), in 1992, and has made theatrical features, TV movies, documentaries, episodic television and



Director Penelope Buitenhuis's new feature, *A Wake*, screens at the Women in Film Festival at Vancity Theatre this weekend.

the occasional short ever since.

By anyone's standards, she's prolific, making 15 feature-length films in that period, as well as multiple episodes for 15 series, including *Cold Squad* and *Paradise Falls*.

"Producers love me because I can make movies extremely fast and therefore extremely cheap," says Buitenhuis. "I won't say I'm the Roger Corman of Canada, but it has a certain [cachet] when people know they'll get what they want on time and on

budget."

Although Buitenhuis has production companies in Vancouver and Toronto, she rarely has to do the producer's job of hustling distribution and financing, which saps time from making films.

"I'm good at meetings, but I'm not good at financing," says the director, adding she'd like to produce her films.

Much has been made of Kathryn Bigelow's victory last month at the Academy Awards,

the first woman to win the best director prize, for *The Hurt Locker*. Buitenhuis says it's a step in the right direction, but there are plenty more strides to be made.

She says women in Canada account for less than 10 per cent of directors.

"We're still in a huge inequity

right now," she says.

The Women in Film Festival packs a lot into its two days. Saturday's schedule begins at 10 a.m. with a two-hour program of shorts by first-time female directors, followed by a networking lunch, pitch sessions, a second program of short films, a 4 p.m. panel on

At a glance

A WAKE

Directed by: Penelope Buitenhuis

When: Saturday, 7 p.m.

Where: Vancity Theatre, 1181 Seymour St.

WOMEN IN FILM FESTIVAL

When: Sat., 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Sun., 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: Vancity Theatre, 1181 Seymour St.

Tickets: Festival pass costs \$35 for WIF members, \$45 for non-members.

Admission to *A Wake*, the awards ceremony and opening reception is \$25, or \$30 for non-members.

Short-film screenings: \$10, \$12. Tickets available from womenin-film.ca or at the door. Panel sessions are free.

the Year of Women in Movies, a screening of *A Wake* (Buitenhuis will take part in a question-and-answer session after the film) and wrapping up with the opening reception.

There will be three Legacy Awards presented Saturday night, including a \$100,000 in-kind prize from the Creative Women Workshops Association.

Sunday begins with a panel session titled *A Film and Television Industry Market Update: Facing the Hard Facts*, followed by two programs of film shorts.

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