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14°C (javascript:void(0);)



May 22, 2013

Victoria

5-Day Forecast

- Today



8°C / 13°C

Chance of showers

- Thursday



- / 15°C

Chance of showers

- Friday



7°C / 16°C

A mix of sun and cloud

- Saturday



9°C / 14°C

Chance of showers

- Sunday



9°C / 17°C

Chance of showers

[Close \(#\)](#)



HEADLINES:

[Man missing in Mexico facing drug charges in Victoria \(/entertainment/man-missing-in-mexico-facing-drug-charges-in-victoria-1.227694\)](/entertainment/man-missing-in-mexico-facing-drug-charges-in-victoria-1.227694)

All aboard the doc bus

[Michael D. Reid \(/authors?author=Michael D. Reid\)](/authors?author=Michael D. Reid) / Times Colonist

April 15, 2013

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Mandy Leith, director of Victoria's Open Cinema monthly grassroots screening program, is taking her show on the road. Photograph by: HANDOUT

Mandy Leith, director of Victoria's Open Cinema monthly grassroots screening program, is taking her show on the road. Photograph by: HANDOUT

At a time of year when many start planning their flower gardens, Mandy Leith has a less horticultural pursuit in mind. The Victoria filmmaker is planting seeds for development of a cross-Canada cinema network.

After a decade building Open Cinema, the popular monthly grassroots screening program she founded in 2003, the former BBC and National Film Board editor is taking her show on the road.

Get on the Doc Bus, which starts rolling today with an IndieGogo crowd-funding campaign, is a mobile audience development program Leith hopes will engage audiences, filmmakers and other stakeholders when she drives her white 1991 Westfalia VW van across Canada.

"This is a plan that's been brewing for many years," said Leith, who will travel from Victoria to St. John's, N.L., from June through September, "blogging and Instagramming" with home-stretch stops at the Toronto and Vancouver film festivals.

Before Open Cinema got off the ground, Leith made a proposal to the NFB. She suggested a program called Little Red Wagon to promote documentaries to Canadians before the form became so popular, but the timing wasn't right.

Two years ago, Leith revisited the idea. Her plan to buy a school bus and put together a package with a cash prize from Victoria's grant-giving Awesome Sh-t Club was shelved because it was "a tad overambitious," she said.

With the documentary industry at a crossroads — traditional production and distribution models are breaking down, and funding from broadcasters has all but dried up — Leith realized she couldn't afford further delays.

The timing is right to explore how documentaries can best be funded, produced and distributed in the digital age, she said.

"With the broadcast strands dwindling, community screening events are becoming a key way for documentaries to find audiences," said Leith, also a social-media expert and Documentary Organization of Canada board member.

"I always had the vision Open Cinema could become more than this one event. The hybrid event model we developed

this year meant it's a tool that could also be used by similar organizations, not only to [give] local events a broader reach, but to create a network. I want to connect to existing programs across Canada and give away our hybrid model."

Leith was referring to Open Cinema's innovative new engagement model that has since gone viral. It uses livestream and Twitter to plug a virtual worldwide audience into live post-screening open forums held monthly at the Victoria Event Centre. B.C. filmmaker Velcrow Ripper tweeted live after his global revolution documentary Occupy Love was screened, for instance.

The virtual engagement tool will be used again April 24 after Open Cinema's season finale, a screening of the ecological documentary Elemental. Filmmaker Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee will use TweetChat to join writer-activist Briony Penn, the POLIS Water Project's Jesse Baltutis and the Sierra Club's Caitlyn Vernon.

The irony is while documentaries are hotter than ever, popularized by the mainstream appeal of Michael Moore that sparked a blizzard of social-justice films, getting them made and seen has never been more challenging.

"Since the economic downturn, a lot of advertising dollars were pulled out of broadcasting, money that traditionally funded broadcast licences," Leith said. "That money has disappeared and it isn't coming back. It has moved onto social media, and the broadcast world has moved onto reality TV, which under CRTC guidelines, is by description the same thing. It's fact-based, cheaper to make and more sensational to get eyeballs on TV."

There's another reason a nationwide network of community screenings of documentaries is worth building, she says.

"The documentary is a tool for democracy, and I don't think our government is into giving Canadians tools to support democracy. There's an agenda, whether subtly or overtly, targeting docs because they're empowering and enlightening."

While taking the industry's pulse on the road after attending Vancouver's DOXA Documentary Festival in May, Leith will also meet with media organizations, non-profit outreach programs and local businesses. Her experiences will be related on a website with Google maps identifying new programs, and in a two-part feature in POV, the independent film magazine.

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