

DAY 1

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SCREEN

AT TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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Judi Dench

Dench and Cookson on Red alert

BY TOM GRATER

Judi Dench and rising talent Sophie Cookson (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*) will lead *Red Joan* for director Trevor Nunn.

Lindsay Shapiro wrote the script, an adaptation of Jennie Rooney's 2014 novel that itself took its inspiration from the true story of Melita Norwood, a woman unmasked at age 87 as the KGB's longest-serving British spy.

The story follows Dench's Joan, a retired physicist whose tranquil life is interrupted in 2000 by a visit from British secret service MI5. Cookson will play Joan in her younger days as a student at Cambridge University who falls in love with a committed communist and, later, finds her loyalty to her country tested while employed in the UK's secret nuclear programme.

Sales outfit Embankment Films is launching sales on the project this week in Toronto. Trademark Films duo David Parfitt (*Shakespeare In Love*) and Ivan Mactaggart (*Loving Vincent*) are producer and executive producer respectively. Principal photography is scheduled for October with the film shooting on location in the UK.

Tim Haslam, co-founder of Embankment Films, said: "Stories like *Red Joan* can only be based on true events because it's so unimaginable and utterly compelling — tense, emotional, revealing and unexpected."

Embankment has four titles screening at this year's TIFF, include *Submergence* starring Alicia Vikander and James McAvoy and *Breathless* starring Andrew Garfield and Claire Foy.

Bloom sale shifts horizon

BY JEREMY KAY

As the industry descends on Toronto, the evolving nature of agency business in light of WME|IMG's acquisition of a majority stake in Bloom has become an early focal point. A number of people who spoke under condition of anonymity have raised concerns over how the transaction will affect prospects for rival sales agents, as well as WME|IMG's financier and producer clients.

The agency's packaging division WME Global, led by Graham Taylor, helped its client Ken Kao launch Bloom with Alex Walton in

2014. WME Global will now rely on its partners' acumen and reputation to grow Bloom and enable WME Global to hold onto projects rather than siphon them off to a third-party sales agent.

Taylor told *Screen International* last week that he holds all sales agents in the highest regard and has every intention of continuing to service them with appropriate top-tier product. An alternative view posed by those in the space, however, is that the investment in Bloom announced last week will create an environment of haves and have-nots. "If I'm an independent sales

agent, even one with money, I won't expect to get the best packages now," one source said. "The other sales agencies should start to develop material or lock down first-look deals with talent and producers to ensure they get great product too."

The development also raises the prospect of other Hollywood agencies following suit and buying sales companies. A financier client at WME|IMG said the agency had now become their agency and their rival. "It's a smart move by WME," one source said. "They are trying to own the pipeline and others should follow."

Masatoshi Nagase, Naomi Kawase, Juliette Binoche and producer Marianne Slot on the Japan set of *Vision*Kawase, Binoche share *Vision*

BY MELANIE GOODFELLOW

Japanese filmmaker Naomi Kawase has kicked off the shoot of *Vision*, starring Juliette Binoche.

Paris-based production company Slot Machine, which is producing the film alongside Kawase's Kamme Inc, announced the start of shoot

and fresh details on the eve of TIFF. Wild Bunch is handling international sales and Haut et Court pre-bought French rights.

Binoche stars as a journalist in Japan tracking a mysterious herb that appears only once every 997 years. Further plot details remain

under wraps although the producers said Kawase's trademark themes of "nature and the cycle of life" will feature. The cast includes Japan's Masatoshi Nagase. "The moment we met, I wanted to work with Juliette and from that decision all the pieces fit together," said Kawase.

Mongrel slate puts women first

Mongrel International head Caroline Habib and her team will kick off talks on a slate of TIFF selections directed by women. Discovery/Next Wave selection *Ava* marks the feature directorial debut of Sadaf

Foroughi and is based on her childhood in Iran. *Meditation Park*, by Mina Shum, plays in Contemporary World Cinema and stars Cheng Pei Pei as a woman who suspects her husband is having an

affair; *Mongrel* Media distributes in Canada. *High Fantasy* by Jenna Bass follows four friends on a camping trip who wake up to find they have all swapped bodies. "We're looking to prioritise female filmmakers, who are still underrepresented in our industry," said Habib.

Jeremy Kay

Netflix snaps up world for *Been So Long*

BY ANDREAS WISEMAN

Netflix has pre-bought worldwide rights from Film Constellation to London-set musical *Been So Long*, starring Michaela Coel and Arinzé Kene. The multi-million dollar deal is understood to be the largest single acquisition of a UK film by the streaming giant.

Been So Long is a modern-day romance set on the streets of Camden, historically one of London's musical hotbeds (and the former home of Amy Winehouse). Bafta winner Coel, whose UK TV series *Chewing Gum* was a hit for Netflix in the US, plays a single mother who, on a rare night on the town, is charmed by a handsome but troubled stranger (Kene). The supporting cast includes Joe Dempsie (*Game Of Thrones*), George MacKay, Ronke Adekoluejo, Luke Norris and Ashley Thomas.

Directed by Tingie Krishnan and in post-production, the film is produced by Nadine Marsh-Edwards and Amanda Jenks. The project was developed by the BFI, and co-financed by Film4 and the BFI with funding from the National Lottery. Fabien Westerhoff brokered the deal on behalf of Greenacre Film. Netflix snapped up rights after seeing first footage in Cannes.