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REAL INSIGHT INTO GLOBAL PRODUCTION

FOCUS 2021

#8

CRYING OUT FOR CREW

As film and drama production booms, hiring is tougher than ever

LAST CALL FOR INDIE FILM?

Independent features battle for talent, finance – and attention



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NEARLY TWO YEARS SINCE COVID-19 BEGAN SPREADING AROUND THE GLOBE, THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES ARE FINALLY BUSY AGAIN THANKS TO VACCINATION PROGRAMMES AND SAFE SHOOTING PROTOCOLS.

Welcome to the eighth edition of *makers*, the biannual magazine for the global production industry.

Nearly two years since Covid-19 began spreading around the globe, the creative industries are finally busy again thanks to vaccination programmes and safe shooting protocols.

As we report in our Crew Crunch feature on page 136, the big headache for many producers is simply finding enough experienced crew for film, television and commercials shoots given the high levels of demand for new content. Prices are rising for crews, studios and kit as studios, streamers and broadcasters look to restock after the Covid-19 shutdowns.

To provide a truly global perspective, we examine how the post pandemic boom has affected countries such as Croatia and the Dominican Republic in our Bounce Back feature on page 23.

We also look at other ways the pandemic has left its mark on the industry. One prominent casualty seems to be the independent film industry, which has been hard hit by the closure of cinemas and the absence of film festivals. On page 104, we debate the future of indie film.

Looking ahead, we discuss the outlook for festivals and markets in 2022 on page 98. Are they expecting participants to return, or is the future in hybrid?

On page 30, we also weigh up the prospects for international commercials shoots. Encouragingly, overseas ad shoots picked up significantly during 2021 and seem set to grow even more during 2022, although environmental concerns about long haul flights may limit the numbers of people travelling.

Elsewhere, *makers* provides advice for navigating two digital platforms that thrived during the pandemic: TikTok and Zoom. Our feature on the art of Zoom pitching (page 159) acknowledges that the video platform is here to stay, while our TikTok special (page 64) reveals how brands and independent creatives are making money from a platform that recently passed the one billion monthly user mark.

All this and more is rounded out by *makers*' regular reports on some of the world's best countries to film in, weighing up the infrastructure, skills and incentives on offer.

We hope you enjoy this issue. *makers* will be back again in the summer. If you have any feedback, or would like to get in touch, do drop us a line at info@thelocationguide.com

Tim Dams, editor



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Arizona: Grand Ambitions



Arizona has negotiated trailblazing intercultural MoUs with the Navajo Nation and the Mexican state of Sonora. By cooperating with different groups within and beyond the state's geographical borders, it hopes to further build on its long tradition of film and media production.

Arizona – also fondly termed America's Backlot – is a hotspot for filmmaking. Over 5,000 films and TV shows have been filmed in Arizona since 1913. High-profile film, TV and commercials producers often turn to its large spaces, bringing their projects to the state in search of its distinct looks and warm weather.

The state is no stranger to big projects. Film Tucson recently facilitated two days of production on the upcoming feature film *The Fabelmans*. Directed and co-written by Steven Spielberg, the film is a semi-autobiographical take on Spielberg's childhood as an aspiring filmmaker in Scottsdale during the 1950s and 1960s. The film is scheduled to hit theatres in 2022.

Away from the big screen, over the last few years Arizona has hosted a range of new media projects. In 2020, the livestreamed event *David Blaine: Accession* saw the illusionist and endurance artist float 250,000 ft in the air using helium balloons. In mid-July 2021, Film Tucson assisted a dazzling commercial for Fireball Whisky involving 300 drones launched from the parking lot of a local

mountain park. The project created a light show which could be seen for miles around, culminating in a festive dance party at a nearby event space. Back in February 2021, Food Network's *Best Baker in America* filmed all of season four at the JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass Resort & Spa. Reality shows were asking production services companies such as Film Tucson during the pandemic to buy out entire hotel properties, attempting to create protective bubbles for their cast and crew members.

Arizona has a progressive, outward-facing mentality when it comes to international co-productions. Officials from Arizona and the Mexican state of Sonora signed a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding to keep working together to grow film and media production in their neighbouring regions. The two states aim to promote a 300-mile zone stretching from Phoenix to Hermosillo, and from the New Mexico state line to the Sea of Cortez. "So you have major cities. You have pristine beaches. You have deserts. You have volcanoes. You have mountains," states Matthew Earl Jones, director of the film and digital media programme at the Arizona Commerce Authority. "Basically, there is no filming





WE ARE GRATEFUL TO PRESIDENT NEZ AND THE NAVAJO NATION FOR THEIR PARTNERSHIP, FOR GRACIOUSLY ALLOWING FILMMAKERS TO CREATE ON NAVAJO LAND, AND FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO INCREASE WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NAVAJO NATION AND STATE-WIDE.

destination that you couldn't find within this zone." Luis Gonzalez, who works for Sonora's tourism office, co-signed the agreement with Jones, declaring that the concept would allow the region to compete with any film destination in the world.

This is not the only film-related MoU that Arizona has negotiated in recent years. In August 2021, the Navajo Nation and the Arizona Commerce Authority signed a special partnership deal, committing to promote the Navajo Nation as a major international film and media destination. "We are grateful to President Nez and the Navajo Nation for their partnership, for graciously allowing filmmakers to create on Navajo land, and for their commitment to increase workforce opportunities in the Navajo Nation and state-wide," announced Sandra Watson, president and CEO of the Arizona Commerce Authority. The deal was signed by Watson and Navajo Nation president Jonathan Nez. "We look forward to developing a new and structured film and media opportunity for our Navajo Nation, including our fellow Arizonians," said Edsel Pete, programme manager at Navajo Nation TV & Film. "It is a great endeavour to develop a thriving film and media industry that will provide economic, workforce, and training opportunities."

Classic American traditions are also accommodated in the state. Corporations seeking Western looks are frequently drawn to different parts of Arizona in the early stages of the year in order to finalise their spring and summer rollouts. Projects have been arranged recently for the Sundance Catalogue, Marlboro Cigarettes, Buckle Fashion, and the popular Country music act Midland. In a similar manner, Tennessee-born singer and songwriter Mitchell Tenpenny shot the music video for the 2021 song *Bucket List* across the state, using Arizona's vivid imagery to capture an appropriate aesthetic for his Country-pop hit.

The state's affinity with the Wild West in part stems from its rich filmmaking heritage. Old Tucson is the old movie studio and theme park adjacent to the Tucson Mountains and close to Saguaro National Park. The studio was constructed in 1939 for the film *Arizona*, developing into a key site for the production of classic Western film and television. Projects based at Old Tucson include: *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, *Rio Bravo* and *El Dorado*, as well as the popular series *Little House on the Prairie*. The historic space was closed on 8 September 2020 for an indefinite period by landowners Pima County as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Pima County remains responsible for the site, and they have invited ideas from future operators and leaseholders about what the area could become.

One of the Arizona's most prolific movie stars is the Grand Canyon. Carved by the Colorado River, the steep canyon is 277 miles long and 18 miles at its widest. This gargantuan geological feature has appeared in classic Western movies, as well as *Ghost Adventures*, *How To Be Single*, *Into the Wild*, and *Thelma and Louise*.

Of course, the colossal rocky chasm is not the only stunning visual feature to star in a high-end production. Michael Bay's sci-fi action-adventure *Transformers: The Last Knight* was shot at Luke Airforce Base. Robert Conway's horror film *The Covenant* was filmed in Gila County's Globe region and *Bad Santa 2* and *Maximum Ride* were both shot in the state capital, Phoenix. Havasupai Falls and Red Rock State Park were explored by Beyoncé in 2019, when the singer filmed the official video for her song *Spirit*. The project was part of Disney's *The Lion King* soundtrack, and Beyoncé's video generated nearly 70 million views on YouTube.

The state has hosted superstars such as Beyoncé for numerous high-profile projects, yet the grassroots spirit of filmmaking remains a major component of the local Arizonian film culture. The Arizona International Film Festival (AIFF) is the oldest festival of its kind in the state, offering a platform for independent filmmakers to showcase their work. The 30th edition of the event is scheduled for 2022 and will take place in the city of Tucson, spread across the Mercado Annex, Hotel Congress and The Screening Room. This year, the AIFF is set to include special online panels covering topics such as distribution, documentary filmmaking, behind-the-scenes filmmaking, and screenwriting. The Phoenix Film Festival is a similarly important celebration of independent filmmaking based in Arizona. Established in 2000 by three local filmmakers who sought to gain exposure in their hometown, the event has since expanded from a three-day exhibition of talent to an eleven-day festival featuring over 300 films. Filmmaking seminars, workshops and parties are all on offer in one location: the Harkins Scottsdale 101 theatre.

To stay connected with the industry during Covid-19 lockdowns, Film Tucson (in collaboration with A Street Productions) created Tucson Talks, an online series aimed at engaging virtually with industry insiders. The most recent guest was *Watchmen*, *The Good Place* and *Master of None* writer Cord Jefferson, who happens to be a former resident of Tucson. These informal interviews with writers, producers, and directors give Film Tucson direct access to Hollywood in a relaxed setting while, at the same time, providing the local film community with information and career advice. Filmmaking – after all – is in Arizona's blood.



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58