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15 Takeaways from Conecta Fiction

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JUNE 26, 2017 | 07:21AM PT

COURTESY OF CONECTA FICTION

Inaugural TV event proves a massive and much-needed networking hit with execs

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, [Spain](#) — A higgledy-piggledy maze of cobbled streets, granite-stoned convents and white veranda towns houses, Santiago seems suspended in time. Over June 20-23, it bore witness at [Conecta Fiction](#), an inaugural TV forum, to a revolution: That of

scripted TV and nascent Latin America-Europe co-production. The two-and-a-half days were so packed with events as to make nigh impossible much on-site reporting. Following, in retrospect, 15 takeaways from the first-ever Conecta Fiction meet.

1. LATIN AMERICA-EUROPE TV CO-PRODUCTION: AN IMPERIOUS NECESSITY

A boutique Latin America-Europe drama TV co-production forum, Conecta Forum brought together a swathe of high-caliber Latin America channel, broadcaster and fiction TV heads with producers and counterparts in Spain, plus a choice presence of largely French commissioning editors and producers from the rest of Europe. Many, maybe most, had never met. Nearly all sang the virtues, and necessity of international TV co-production. "A few years ago there were no international co-productions, now there are more and more. Co-production will be the future of the TV business," predicted Takis Candilis, head of scripted at France's Banijay Group, and one of Europe's most-seasoned fiction heads. Reason, said Candilis: Broadcasters' TV ad revenues are stagnating so TV networks need to share costs and risks of more ambitious TV fiction as they seek to make drama series which stand out from the clutter and stand up to competition from deeper-pocketed global players.

2. NETFLIX, THE GREAT GAME-CHANGER,

"Netflix kicked our ass," said one Latin American channel exec. Commissioning its own series, often in co-production, Latin America is fighting back. Also, acquiring Spanish drama series, "Netflix opened a breach in Latin America, showing that Spanish fiction and talent could play well there," said Josep Cister, executive director of the Lagardere-owned Spain-based Boomerang TV, citing Netflix's acquisition of Boomerang's own "The Time In Between," and "Gran Hotel" and "Velvet," both from Bambu Producciones. "Spanish fiction had a large audience on our platform, even before we launched in Spain," Juan Mayne, Netflix head of acquisitions for Southern Europe, said at Conecta Fiction. Mayne's presence at the event, where he was quite possibly the most-courted of all execs for one-to-one business meetings, did nothing to dampen buzz at Conecta Fiction that Netflix is now targeting Spain, along with France, Germany and Italy, to drive up its subscriber base in Europe.

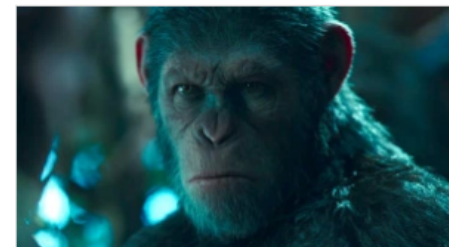
3. OUTSCALING THE OPPOSITION: 'CATHEDRAL OF THE SEA'

Beta's Jan Mojto blew away an industry audience at a Variety TV Summit at April's Series Mania, as at the MipDrama Screenings, with "Babylon Berlin," a spectacular noir thriller take on Weimar Germany night-life decadence and rising extremism. In a market of global competition, one way to stand apart in the clutter is to deliver drama of a scale not seen before, at least in domestic markets.



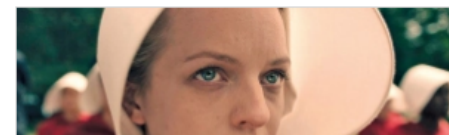
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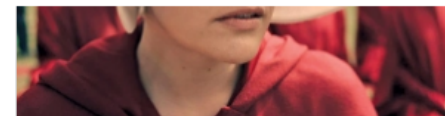
Movistar + may do that with “La Peste.” Atresmedia Group, Diagonal TV, Catalonia’s TVC and Netflix are looking to achieve this with “Cathedral of the Sea,” an adaptation of monumental best-selling novel set in 14th century Barcelona against the background of the construction of Santa Maria del Mar. The presentation of the eight-part series, with a sneak-peek of footage, proved one of Conecta Fiction’s biggest highlights. A huge production effort – the cathedral in the series ended up having to be rebuilt in Cáceres, in Spain’s Extremadura – has already become one of its marketing hooks. “We wanted an event series in the line of ‘The Time In Between.’ ‘Cathedral of the Sea’ is one of the most important titles in recent Spanish literature,” Nacho Manubens, Atresmedia deputy head of fiction, said at the panel presentation at Conecta Fiction, noting that Atresmedia’s aim was to produce a series of this scale every “one-to-two years” “to stand out and attract attention.” If “Cathedral of the Sea” travels well, it opens a future where Spanish broadcasters can make shows for both their own domestic channels, recouping costs, and for international markets, he added. According to Albert Sagalés, Diagonal TV director of development, the novel has sold six million copies, just over two million of these in Spain. The series is the most expensive Diagonal TV has ever made, he added. Given the relevance of the novel and the high level of interest in Latin America for these [kinds of] Spanish series, Netflix’s decision to board “Cathedral of the Sea” was “a no brainer,” said Netflix’s Juan Mayne.

4.THE DEAL: ARGENTINA LINKS TO GALICIA FOR CO-DEVELOPMENT ACCORD

Marking Conecta Fiction’s banner deal, Argentina’s Instituto de Cine y las Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA), its powerful film-TV state-sector agency, and Galicia’s Xunta government inked at Conecta Fiction a memorandum of understanding to create a bilateral fund to co-develop, with an eye to co-producing, feature films – live action, animation and documentaries – and TV series. A joint committee will establish specific terms for financing, application criteria and deadlines. Projects will be judged according to their screenplay, budget and international potential, INCAA president Ralph Haiek said at Conecta Fiction, presenting Argentina’s TV state support system. Aimed at encouraging an inter-exchange of key talent and crews, the fund drinks from common cultural links. Fueled by massive immigration, the biggest Galician city in the world is Buenos Aires. The number of projects approved every year has still to be announced. The agreement, in line with INCAA bilateral film/TV fund pacts with Italy and Canada, does, however, look set to ensure a number of Argentina-Galicia TV co-productions moving towards production in the future.

5.WORLD PREMIERES: ‘THE COCKFIGHTER’

“Heat” meets Netflix pickup “El Marginal,” at least in its opening stretches, “The Cockfighter” world premiered in an opening double episode at Conecta Fiction. Marking a TV series comeback for New Argentine Cinema pioneer Bruno Stagnaro (“Pizza, Birra, Faso,”) who teams with Sebastian Ortega, showrunner on “El Marginal” on this 10-episode co-production between Ortega’s Underground, Telefe, TNT and Cablevision, “The Cockfighter” settles down into a humor-laced adventure thriller



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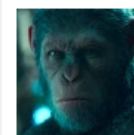
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as a man searches for his brother in a marginalized Buenos Aires demi-monde. Taking a plucky fighting cock to local fights, he ends up falling in with the local mob, which could be his making. Turner's TNT scored with offbeat German mobster drama thriller "4 Blocks" which won lead actor Kida Khodr Ramadan a best actor plaudit at Series Mania. It could well do so again with this slice of near-surreal social life in Argentina.

6. OTHER DEALS

Other deals went down, or were announced or were at least hinted at Conecta Fiction. Boomerang and Argentina's Underground Producciones revealed they are teaming on "El Extranjero," "North by Northwest" meets Rafael Nadal as a famous Spanish tennis player goes on the lam in a hostile Buenos Aires, falsely accused of murder. Leonel Vieira's Stopline is linking with Agallas in Spain on "Oro Negro." In Conecta Fiction prizes, Spanish pubcaster Radio Television Española (RTVE) committed to bankroll development on two series: "Amargura Street" (pictured) from Galicia's Ficción Producciones and the Cuban Radio-Television Institute, as well as Spain's "Mothers in Trouble." Movistar +, the pay TV arm of giant telco Telefonica, committed €50,000 (\$56,000) to the development of "Love in Times of Tinder," produced by Puerto Rico's Belle Films and Galicia's O Camiño Films.

7. OPENING ANOTHER DOOR FOR HOLLYWOOD'S STUDIOS

Over 2004-10, two-to-four U.S. series – often "C.S.I." iterations – figured in Spain's top 10 most-watched dramas of the year. From 2011, only three shows – including "The Pillars of the Earth" and ABC's "Resurrection" – made those Top 10 lists, Jose Huertas, director general of Spanish TV consultancy company GECA, announced at Conecta Fiction. Co-production or buying broadcasters building co-production networks, as in the case of Viacom's acquisition of Telefe, offers studios one way back into primetime and new SVOD exposure via novel windowing, or both. A pioneering studio producer in Latin America, Fox's strategy a decade back was to produce for the whole region, owning 100% of a series, Jorge Stamadianos, SVP development, Fox Networks Group, told a round table audience at Conecta Fiction. "Competition has obliged FNG to make higher-risk, higher-quality product, with higher production values; very significant cable TV penetration has allowed us to focus more on local markets," he added. Two results: Nicolas Araña's Conquista action-thriller "Sitiados," co-produced with Chilean free-to-air broadcaster TVN; and, co-produced with America Movil's VOD platform ClaroVideo, Gustavo Loza's "Run, Coyote, Run." "Targeting Mexico 100%," said Stamadianos, the rambunctious Gringo-Mexican buddy comedy, which comes in at immigration from a novel angle, saw its opening episode screened at Conecta Fiction.

Highly active in Argentina, as Mexico, Turner Latin America's TNT co-produced both of Conecta Fiction's gala screenings: "The Cockfighter," which will screen on TNT, TV network Telefe and pay TV giant Cablevision, and "La Fragilidad de los Cuerpos." "Before, a show was associated with a channel, now a channel's associated with a show: that's a paradigm change," Marcelo Tamburri,



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Turner Latin America VP, said at Conecta Fiction.

Co-production is a "strategic necessity," added Guillermo Borensztein, international business director at Argentina's Telefe, acquired by Viacom last November, citing co-development deals with Keshet Intl., Warner Bros. FremantleMedia and Sony. "It allows us to reduce costs, share risk, create something we couldn't do on our own and tap into global revenues on series we own," he continued, screening a promo reel of "The Return of Lucas," co-produced with Peru's America TV, a reappeared child thriller sold over 100% of Latin America, and a time-slot winner wherever it has bowed. Borensztein said at Conecta Fiction that Telefe was initiating "next projects in Peru and one in Ecuador."

8. THERE'S NOT ONE CO-PRODUCTION MODEL

"If you start to produce using production moulds, you'll have a problem: the third time round, people notice the mould, not the story," said Maria Cervera, head of international at Madrid-based Plano a Plano. If Conecta Fiction rammed home anything, it is that every territory, indeed every company, has its own co-production needs. There's no one-size-fits-all solution. "Europe's been changing in the last five years. In Spain, international co-production, with Latin America, for instance, is a theme which is just being raised," said Olivier Bibas, co-head of Lagardere-owned Atlantique Productions ("Borgia," "Midnight Sun") in Paris. International co-production is still "about learning, an evolving process," said Alexandre Piel, deputy head of fiction at Arte France, which has co-produced historical fantasy-thriller "Occupied," and "Ride Upon the Storm," Adam Price's follow-up to "Borgen," and is now co-producing "Hierro" with Atlantique and Spain's Portocabo and Movistar +. Arte France plans two international series every year, Piel added.

9.CO-PRODUCER INTIMACY: MEDIAPRO, YLE ON 'PARADISE'

Though there's no one co-production model, certain practices may prove invaluable. On one Conecta Fiction panel, "Homeland" producer Ran Tellem and Laura Fernandez Espeso at Spain-based Mediapro ("The Young Pope") and Jarmo Lampela, at Finnish pubcaster YLE, lifted the lid on the creative process behind "Paradise," an upcoming Costa del Sol noir thriller. YLE has already drawn attention backing "Bordertown," an edgier and classily turned-out Nordic Noir series picked up for world sales by Federation Ent. For "Paradise," Tellem, Lampela, director David Trancoso and screenwriter Matti Laine, a "Bordertown" scribe, went on a workation to Fuengirola, a resort on the Costa del Sol and home to 15,000 Finns, where "Paraiso" is set. Visiting a Finnish supermarket, newspaper and school, the four started by telling their own stories: "Why we are here and making TV, what interests us in life, what we are afraid of, what we would like to offer," Tellem recalled, presenting flip pictures of the trip. They went on share a lot of information, conduct interviews, such as with the head of local police about crime in the Finnish community, and to start telling one another stories. Two in particular proved particularly powerful: That of an aging couple whose

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husband begins to suffer dementia and can't remember who he is; another, from an Israeli rock song, about "a terrible memory which people try to push away, but the affected can never forget," Tellem said. The four separated for four hours to write four different lines. They came away from Fuengirola with the main plot, subplot and two main characters. One lesson for Tellem of the Fuengirola experience is the importance of intimacy: "When you have spent time together telling stories and editing other people's way of thinking and how they feel, you are free to make mistakes, and begin sharing ideas more than competing with the best idea." The result is better stories, Tellem said, when questioned about what languages "Fuengirola" will shoot in (answer: Finnish, Spanish, English). For Tellem, it is good stories which decide whether co-productions find audiences, not questions of language.

10. ARGENTINA: CONECTA FICTION GUEST COUNTRY

The independent TV production sector in Argentina, Conecta Fiction's guest country, is often intimately connected to a U.S. ecosystem. A six-time Intl. Emmy nominee from 2009, Anima Studios, for instance, eventually won with "Francis, the Jesuit," a docu-fiction series also produced by the History Channel Latin America, America Movil's ClaroVideo, and DirecTV and Telemundo in the US. "According to Roxi," a maternity comedy from La Maldita, started off as a web series, becoming a multimedia phenom that was acquired by Netflix. Produced by Storylab, "Stockholm" was the first Argentine series to bow on Netflix. Argentine producers at Conecta Fiction ran a broad gamut. Doc producer Mulata Films, for example, brings a sense of entertainment to shows reconstructing Latin American lineage dinosaurs ("Creating Prehistorical Beasts"), or catching a philosopher on the lam, pursued by characters embodying absurdist philosophical theory (the three time Intl. Emmy-nominated "Truth Lies,"). Launched in 2003 by Lucas Rainelli and Agustin Sacanell, Kapow, a regular producer for MTV among other partners, in contrast creates branded content, lifestyle, magazine and talent contest shows. But the newest producers at Conecta Fiction were, maybe not coincidentally, high-end drama producers, such as Storylab which produced "Stockholm," and The Magic Eye, overseen by Juan Parodi. Launched last year by Telefilm, one of Latin America's biggest independent film-TV companies, to produce high-end TV series. The Magic Eye went into production this month on its first series, "Sandro of America," co-produced by Telefe.

11. 'LA FRAGILIDAD DE LOS CUERPOS': THE WINDOWING REVOLUTION

Co-production is flowering in Latin America off the back of another TV revolution: Windowing. One case to point: "La Fragilidad de los Cuerpos," another Conecta Fiction gala screening. Produced by Adrian Suar's Pol-Ka, with TNT and Cablevision, Argentina's main cable operator, "La Fragilidad de los Cuerpos" bowed June 7 in Argentina on Canal 13, owned by the Clarin Group's Artear, then was made available in its totality of eight episodes on Cablevision Flow, the Clarin cabler's on-demand system, before screening on TNT, which has all rights for Latin America, Manuel Marti, Pol-ka director of international production, commented at Conecta Fiction. Facilitating co-production, the

multi-platform windowing is as pioneering move.

12.'INES OF MY SOUL': AN ALTERNATIVE TAKE ON THE CONQUEST

One of the most talked-up projects at Conecta Fiction was "Ines of My Soul," written by Eduardo Sacheri ("The Secret in Their Eyes"), a passion project of Chilean broadcaster Chilevision, owned by Time Warner's Turner Broadcasting System, and produced by Promocine ("Sitiados"), one of Chile's most prominent TV production houses headed by Nicolas Araña, who will direct. Adapting Isabel Allende's same-titled epic novel, and based on true-events, it portrays the remarkable Inés de Suarez, the only woman Conquistador and "the first modern woman," Araña said at Conecta Fiction. Suarez co-founded Santiago de Chile, set up schools and hospitals, adopted a Mapuche. But when the Mapuches surrounded her home in Santiago de Chile, threatening to raise it to the ground, she played a determining and utterly brutal role in its defense, at least ordering – if not carrying out – the decapitation of seven Mapuche chieftains. In the figure of Ines de Suarez, its makers have a chance to sum up in a less sanitized narrative the contradictions of the Conquest, including its clash of brutal civilizations on both sides of the Atlantic, rather than presenting it as the work of band of gold-crazed throat-cutting adventurers. As Araña pointed out at Conecta Fiction, there was no gold in Chile,;and the Mapuches pushed back the Spanish in a war which lasted some 260 years.

13.WOMEN RULED, O.K?.

As Isabel Allende complained, Suarez was largely written out of history. Women are now, however, making a comeback. Conecta Fiction was largely inspired by two: Dolores Meijomin, audiovisual policy co-ordinator at Galicia's Cultural Industry Agency (AGADIC) and Spain-based sales agent Geraldine Gonard, Conecta Fiction director, whose contact and industry knowledge help explain the high caliber of Latin American and French executives present at the event. Women won all three Conecta Fiction prizes, whether Annabelle Mullena and Amelia del Mar, screenwriters of "Love in Times of Tinder," Mamen Quintas, at Galicia's Ficción Producciones, producer of "Amargura Street," and Olga Salvador, its co-screenwriter, or "Mothers in Trouble" scribes Maribel Vitar and Cristina Pons. Six of Conecta Fiction's 10 international projects portray women battling for freedom or empowerment to determine their destiny.

14.FEUDALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Set up at Colombia's Dynamo, the Colombian producer of "Narcos," the 17th century-set "Penumbra" turns on a brilliant young woman astronomist who adopts the identity of a Jesuit priest. She ends up in a Caribbean hell-hole port settlement, using the same empiricism she employs in her studies to fight a battle of wits with a serial killer. Written by Pablo Barrera, making over his own novel. "Penumbra" is billed as a woman Sherlock Holmes in the America of the Discovery," Barrera

said at Conecta Fiction. But it hides larger complexity, he added. The heroine is also fleeing from the Inquisition in a Europe where the Counter Reformation is taking hold. In "Ines of My Soul," Ines de Suarez dreams with lover Pedro Valdivia, the Spanish conquerer of Chile who earlier took part in the sacking of Rome, of "founding a new world far from the gaze of the Spanish empire," Acuña said in Galicia. "Cathedral of the Sea" turns on the efforts of a man, the son of a renegade surf, struggling to construct his own life, against the background of Barcelona's port laborers, struggling to construct their own cathedral. As high-end fiction in Spain and Latin America takes on the region's own past as seen from the present, it inevitably is drawn to stories of individuals struggling to free themselves from the trammels of feudalism and its collateral. Ironically, series set in modern times, now often lifts the lid on the modern malaise, discontents, greed and employee suffering created by the very system, capitalism, which finally put pay to the vestiges of the Middle Ages. Storylab's "Crack" and Laniak's "Strange Fishing Sundays," two Conecta Fiction projects, are just two examples; as was Canal Plus/SVT's "Midnight Sun," maybe the highest-profile of Nordic Noirs last year.

15.HBO LATIN AMERICA: A BIGGER DISTRIBUTION PUNCH

For 13 years, ever since in 2004 it bowed its first original production, Argentina's "Epitafios," HBO Latin America has set the gold standard for Latin America's premium TV drama released on a pan-regional basis. Since then, it has raised drama production volume and diversified, launching talk show "Chumel con Chumel Torres." Now it's seeking a wider distribution punch. Bowing June 25 on HBO and HBO Go in Latin America, missing daughter drama thriller "El Jardin de Bronce," produced with Argentina's Pol-Ka, will be made available on HBO Nordic (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland) and HBO España (Spain, Andorra) from June 26 and HBO Latino (U.S.) from June 30. That marks HBO Latin America's biggest-ever, near 50 country and near-simultaneous rollout. "It's important to maximize the international marketing and having the same language in Spain eases technical processes [for next-day release]," Roberto Rios, HBO Latin America corporate VP, original production, said at a Conecta Fiction masterclass focus on HBO Latin America. There he also sneak peeked a promo from HBO Latin America's other new series in 2017, Brazil's "The Secret Life of Couples," a 10-part drama with a thriller edge co-created by and starring Bruna Lombardi. It turns on a Tantrist sexologist handed a flash-drive by a patient who is then assassinated, embroiling her in an attempted cover-up of high-level political corruption. "This is a series about how people relate to one another, the various levels of influence, in a world where everybody has a secret," Rios said. With HBO Latin America series now extending to four seasons – think "Sr. Avila" – a new franchise launch is quite an event, which merits a large marketing impact.

AND A CONCLUSIUN.....

The timing of the inaugural Conecta Fiction could hardly have been better, taking place as Latin America, from Televisa and Globo downwards, and Spain, via Movistar + are in the throes of an

ongoing TV drama series production revolution in their respective territories. Attended by some 400 participants, the massive exercise in Trans-Atlantic networking was bold but necessary and unanimously applauded. "It's clearly the best event in the last few years, allowing me to cross with people I'd otherwise have taken months to get to in a matter of two days," said TNT's Tamburri. "Conecta Fiction had a very strong turnout of companies from Latin America and Europe," Telefe's Borensztein agreed. "The industry has to back this event in particular. It's fresh air, allowing another kind of meeting, and absolutely complementary to already established trade fairs.," he added. Bringing low fi sci-fi "Strange Fishing Days" to Conecta Fiction, Basque producer Eduardo Carneros also agreed: Conecta Fiction was "marvelous, necessary and has a large and long future. Being selected with a project was like winning the lottery, meaning I had meetings with many of the biggest and best producers and broadcasters in Latin America and Europe." A leap in the dark just a few months back, Conecta Fiction should now become an industry fixture.

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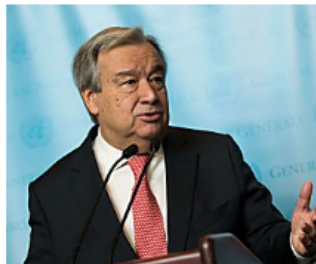
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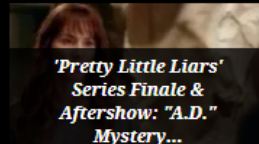
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