



Hot Docs '13: Debra Zimmerman on being a Doc Mogul



7 days ago by [Kelly Anderson](#)



Ahead of receiving the Hot Docs Mogul award later today (April 30), Debra Zimmerman (pictured) talks to *realscreen* about the honor and how her company, Women Make Movies, is represented at the Canadian festival.

For Debra Zimmerman, who has been the executive director of the New York-based Women Make Movies since 1983, being honored with the Hot Docs Mogul award – which in prior years has gone to the likes of Participant Media’s Diane Weyermann, IDFA’s Ally Derks, HBO’s Sheila Nevins and the BBC’s Nick Fraser – is a little overwhelming.

“I was totally thrilled when they told me, and a little surprised,” she says. “I’m just so honored to be in the company of people who I admire and respect as much as the other Doc Moguls.

“One of the things that I find so wonderful about the doc community is that its s
It really feels like this incredible honor because it’s from people I know so well ar
much.”

The Doc Mogul award, which goes to someone who has contributed to the vitality of the doc industry, is going to Zimmerman for her work with Women Make Movies, which focuses on films made by or about women. The company – which [celebrated its 40th anniversary](#) last year – distributes documentaries, as well as supporting them through its Production Assistance Program.

“Over the years we’ve distributed upwards of 1,000 films from filmmakers from all over the world and each year our Production Assistance Program raises about \$3 million to help get their films made,” she says. “We’re really proud that in the last eight years we’ve had a film that was nominated or won in the documentary categories at the Academy Awards. In general, we’re really proud of the filmmakers whose work we support.”

In his [announcement naming Zimmerman](#) as this year’s Doc Mogul, Hot Docs executive director Chris McDonald praised “Debra’s passion, energy and leadership,” which he said “have had a remarkable impact on the world of film.”

“During her tenure, Women Make Movies has helped hundreds of female filmmakers create

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and distribute game-changing, award-winning and mind-blowing films,” he added.

While her work and the company are frequently recognized, winning awards from the New York Women in Film and Television and the Sarasota Film Festival last year, Zimmerman is determined to keep the spotlight on the women behind the cameras and in front of them.

“We did a little study and looked at the amount of money being given to American documentary filmmakers, and we found that men making films about men got the most amount of money, women making films about women were getting the least amount of money, and – surprisingly – women making films about men were getting more money than men making films about women.”



At Hot Docs, Women Make Movies films that are screening include the Canadian premiere of Kim Longinotto’s new film *Salma* (pictured above), as well as seven films from the Production Assistance Program: *After Tiller* by Martha Shane and Lana Wilson, *Gideon’s Army* by Dawn Porter, *Here One Day* by Kathy Leichter, *Lucky* by Laura Checkoway, *Mercy Mercy: A Portrait of True Adoption* by Katrine Riis Kjaer, *The Defector: Escape from North Korea* by Ann Shin, and *Who is Dayani Cristal?* by Marc Silver.

“We recently expanded our Production Assistance Program to include international filmmakers, so we’re really happy that *Mercy Mercy*, which is a Danish film, and *The Defector*, which is Canadian, are showing,” Zimmerman said.

Debra Zimmerman will be honored at the 2013 Doc Mogul Award Luncheon today (April 30)

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