

Pitched at MIFF

Back in person at the Melbourne International Film Festival, the Books at MIFF event once again gave publishers and literary agents the opportunity to pitch books with screen potential.

After in-person events at the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) were cancelled in 2020 and 2021, MIFF 2022 is a welcome return to in-person film-watching, as well as to events like Books at MIFF (BaM), which took place on Thursday, 4 August, giving publishers and literary agents the chance to pitch those titles they think will translate well to screen via meetings with film industry representatives.

‘It was great,’ agent **Jacinta Di Mase** told *Books+Publishing*. ‘We had some excellent meetings and it was good to be back in person again.’ The producers responded very positively to our titles and requested PDFs and more information for our follow up.’

The BaM sessions were mostly one-on-one meetings like di Mase’s, but a handful of titles were selected by the organisers’ BaM reading panel to be pitched on-stage to multiple film industry representatives at a special live pitching event. Chosen from over 130 submissions were crime fiction title *The Torrent* (Dinuka McKenzie, HarperCollins); novel *The Hemsworth Effect* (James Weir, S&S); nonfiction titles *Hip Hop & Hymns* (Mawunyo Gbogbo, PRH), *August in Kabul* (Andrew Quilty, MUP) and *The Criminal Class, Memoir of a Prison Teacher* (Paul A Macnamara, Big Sky); forthcoming YA novel *Unnecessary Drama* (Nina Kenwood, Text), and middle-grade fiction *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five* (Carla Fitzgerald, UQP).

The latter was selected and pitched by investment and development manager at Screen Australia and former head of Australian production at Roadshow Films **Seph McKenna** who worked with UQP to develop her approach. ‘Being a middle-grade book, we had more scope for some fun and joviality,’ said UQP rights and contract manager Hayley Tomlinson. ‘Seph did an amazing job of capturing the cheeky tone of the book but also brought light to the tender side of it. I might be biased, but I certainly thought she’d have been the winner if there was one!’

The Criminal Class, Memoir of a Prison Teacher was pitched by head of development at Screen Australia **Louise Gough** alongside head of Big Sky marketing and development Sharon Evans, while *The Torrent* was pitched by Alex Adsett alongside producer **Bridget Callow-Wright** from Jungle Pictures. ‘I think it went really well, and there was lots of interest in *The Torrent*, alongside my other big crime titles,’ said Adsett, who also pitched crime thriller *Wild Dogs* by Michael Trant (Bantam), and *The Liars* by Petronella McGovern (A&U), among other titles.

Sam Griffin, head of unscripted at Tilt Media + Entertainment pitched Quilty’s eye-witness account of the US army’s last days in Afghanistan in 2021 on behalf of Melbourne University Publishing, alongside Malcolm Neil, CEO of MNCD Digital, who said Griffin ‘delivered a high-energy well-crafted presentation that was pitch perfect’. After exploring possible shapes for a documentary in the follow-up questions, Neil said he ‘fielded very strong interest’ from a number of parties with scheduled discussions already in place. Text publisher Michael Heyward took to the stage with film producer **Helen Leake** to pitch *Unnecessary Drama*, which has [recently sold to Flatiron Books in the US](#). ‘The measure of the day will be in the quality of the follow-up interest from the various producers that we met with, but it was great to be able to pitch books in person again,’ said Heyward, adding that the Text team ‘had great conversations about a number of titles, in particular *Unnecessary Drama*, *Paper Cage* by Tom Baragwanath, *When You Were Gone* by Vikki Wakefield and *Childhood* by Shannon Burns’.

Of course, book-to-film adaptations come about in many ways and di Mase reported having to make a last-minute change, removing one title from her pitch list when it came under consideration elsewhere prior to the BaM event. ‘We weren’t able to pitch it at BaM, although it was still in our catalogue. We withdrew it from BaM and put another title in its place.’

The hastily removed title, Jane Caro’s first novel for adults, *The Mother*, (A&U) was [picked up for adaptation by actors Bryan Brown and Rachel Ward](#) via their company New Town Films. Released in March 2022 and selling more than 30,000 copies to date, the book is set to be adapted into a ‘compelling film’, said di Mase.

Other titles that might wind up on our screens after publishers report pitching them at BaM included the ‘Welcome To’ series by Yumi Stynes & Melissa Kang (Hardie Grant)—*Welcome to Your Period*, *Welcome to Consent*, *Welcome to Your Boobs* and new title *Welcome to Sex*, which Zeitgeist Media’s Benythyn Oldfield said ‘could be an educational narrative nonfiction or animation’; and *Grace Notes* (Karen Comer, Hachette) ‘a YA love story for fans of indie coming-of-age stories like *Book Smart* and *Lady Bird*’, according to Hachette rights and contracts manager Emma Dorph.

Also pitched for young adults was *When Only One* (Meg Gatland-Veness, Pantera), which rights manager Katy McEwen said ‘would make a poignant and important YA series which doesn’t shy away from big topics such as relationships, assault, family trauma, alcoholism, mental health and grief—and especially their place in a small rural setting’, suggesting the title might make for ‘a contemporary version’ of *Looking for Alibrandi*, *Dawson’s Creek* and *Puberty Blues*.

In nonfiction, *The Girl in the Green Dress* (Jeni Haynes & George Blair-West, Hachette) is the story of Haynes, who sought justice for the horrific abuse she suffered at the hands of her father in a history-making trial, during which a selection of her 2500 alternate personalities were able to testify.

And in fiction, *The Very Last List of Vivian Walker* (Megan Albany, Hachette) is pitched as ‘a hilarious, heartfelt and extremely relatable dark comedy for fans of *A Simple Favour* and *Harold and Maude*’, while domestic noir drama *One of Us* (Kylie Kaden, Pantera) ‘would make a perfect series, with the “closed room” setting of a luxurious gated community—complete with CCTV showing that no one external visited the estate on the night of the murder,’ says McEwen. ‘There are hints of *Big Little Lies* as the stories of the two families build to an explosive climax, incorporating a great cast of supporting characters.’