

PLAYBACK

The Messenger's reverse migration

After opening on more than 40 screens in the U.S., the wildlife doc is making its way north, beginning an 11-city Canadian theatrical run today in Toronto.

By Jordan Pinto February 26, 2016



Coming Soon, an ongoing editorial feature from Playback, highlights the distribution strategies for soon-to-be-released Canadian films. Here, we speak to producer Joanne Jackson of SongbirdSOS Productions about the distribution strategy for *The Messenger*.

The film: *The Messenger* is a film about the importance of the imperiled songbird, and what it will mean to mankind, on both a global and human level, if they die out. Filmed over the course of 15 months (or two spring migrations on the ornithologist's calendar), the Canada/France treaty coproduction was shot across three continents, with filming taking place in Holland, France, Germany, Cost Rica, Turkey, as well as the U.S. and Canada.

Production/distribution credits: The documentary, directed by Su Rynard (Kardia), is produced by SongbirdSOS Productions and France's Films à Cinq. Writers Sally Blake and Rynard produce the film alongside Joanne Jackson, Martin de la Fouchardière and Diane Woods. SongbirdSOS is self-distributing the doc in Canada, while Kino Lorber is distributing in the U.S.

Theatrical: With U.S. distribution in more than 40 U.S. markets already under its belt since December, the film opens Friday in Toronto, ON (Carlton Cinema) with a week-long run, before opening in Cobourg, ON (The Loft), Calgary, AB (Globe Cinema), Regina, SK (RPL- Theatre), Waterloo, ON (Princess Cinema)

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Uxbridge, ON (The Roxy), Saskatoon, SK (Broadway), Ottawa, ON (ByTowne Cinema), Victoria B.C. (The Vic Theatre), Edmonton, AB (The Metro/Garneau) and Montreal, QB (Cinema du Park) throughout March and April. The Canadian theatres were booked through, which also works with Canadian theatres. There will also be a series of post-screening Q&A sessions featuring the filmmakers, as well experts from the project's outreach partners Cornell Lab of Ornithology in the U.S and Bird Studies Canada.

The momentum generated by the film's 2015 festival screenings (at Reykjavik and Bergen in Iceland and Norway, respectively, and Vancouver International Film Festival) meant that it made more sense to release the film in the U.S. first, said Jackson. "There is a window of time in late fall, early December where there seems to be opportunities for docs to get exposure in the U.S. trades and newspapers," she said.

Through its website, SongbirdSOS has also set up a "Book a Screening" function, where visitors can request a screening in a theatre close to them. The project has received more than 100 screening requests so far, with the producers currently trying to raise sponsorship dollars to help support the coordination and marketing expenses for a community screening tour, organized in partnership with Bird Studies Canada.

Marketing: The film is being promoted through First Weekend Club, which is also participating in the post-screening Q&As. There are no TV or radio ad buys, though director Su Rynard has done some TV publicity (appearing on Global's The Morning Show to discuss the doc).

Additional windows: In addition to screenings facilitated by the TIFF Film Circuit and the Hot Docs Showcase tours [when?], the film will also get its DVD, Blu-ray and VOD release in Canada in fall 2016. SongbirdSOS will be self-distributing the DVD, while the other platforms have not yet been finalized. CBC's Documentary channel English language broadcast rights, while Canal D holds the French rights. Canal D will be airing the doc in May. The CBC's broadcast dates have not yet been confirmed.

Target audience: Jackson said that after the doc premiered with three sold-out screenings at Hot Docs in 2015, the filmmakers gained a lot of intel on how general audiences would respond to the film. Realizing that the film appealed to a wider demographic than simply an eco-doc crowd, the target audience for the film is now split between environmentalists, bird-enthusiasts and general fans of documentary film.

Budget/financing: The budget for the film was approximately \$1 million, with producers spending three years on piecing together the vast financing puzzle. The project was funded through the OMDC Film Fund, CBC, ARTE, Canal D and the Rogers Documentary Fund, Canada Media Fund, CNC, Telefilm International Co-production office, Rogers Telefund, Procirep-Angoa and the Documentary Organization of Canada. The Messenger also had development support from the NFB, DJ Woods Productions and the CFC/NFB Feature Documentary Program, as well as distribution advances from Kino Lorber and international sales agents ZED.

Read more: <http://playbackonline.ca/2016/02/26/the-messengers-reverse-migration/#ixzz41Nt1ISxV>