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Producing with Passion: Making Films That Change the World. Edited by Dorothy Fadiman and Tony Levelle

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Review

Producing with Passion: Making Films That Change the World. Edited by Dorothy Fadiman and Tony Levelle. Studio City, CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2008, 259p. (soft-cover, \$22.95) ISBN 9781932907445.

The traps that documentarians routinely fall into in the process of making their films have achieved legendary status. Stereotypical images of filmmakers involve a figure staring into the glow of a computer screen, editing through the night and into the early hours of the morning. The amount of money, time and research that go into making a documentary is often underestimated by those new to the industry and sometimes even by those who have decades of experience. In *Producing with Passion*, Dorothy Fadiman reflects on her lifelong career as a documentary filmmaker and brings forth a wealth of knowledge, resources and tips for the aspiring career documentarian.

Fadiman is an accomplished documentary filmmaker, and several of her films are still in circulation decades after their first release. Her accomplishments, and the mistakes she made along the way, add color and texture to the book as she describes the do's and don'ts of every step of filmmaking, from conception to distribution and beyond. Fadiman offers clear, direct and practical insight into how she has found ways to overcome the most common obstacles during the filmmaking process.

Fadiman's book is not necessarily one that should be read from cover to cover, although an inexperienced filmmaker would probably be wise to do so. The book is laid out in a very consistent format that corresponds with the production process, with unambiguous chapter titles such as "Attracting Funding." Key points are listed at the beginning and end of every chapter to inform the reader about the main points in the text. Each chapter is further broken down with several subheadings that correspond with the key points. If a reader is only looking for information on contracts with a production team, for example, it would be a simple matter to locate an appropriate chapter and even subsection. This makes it easy for readers to skip around in the text and quickly find the information that is most pertinent to them. Some topics in the book overlap, and when they do Fadiman includes references to the corresponding chapter.

The central theme in Fadiman's book, as evidenced by her title, is how to continue producing films without losing the drive or motivation to finish them. There are many stories about filmmakers who never finish their films, never get around to distributing their finished products, or were burnt out or physically ill as a result of the tough hours and sheer amount of work. Documentary filmmaking seems to be a "love it or leave it" industry, but Fadiman maintains that it doesn't have to be. She recommends several strategies for easing the pressure when things get tough, including admitting your limitations, finding a core group to support you and taking breaks from the project to have time for yourself. Fadiman believes that these techniques will keep the filmmakers more grounded and focused as well as pre-

venting them from straining personal and professional relationships during times of extreme stress.

Fadiman allows her personal experience to inform the pointers she gives. Several subsections contain specific examples from documentaries she has worked on and how other filmmakers should learn from her experiences. These include information from elementary directions on how to tape interviews successfully to how to negotiate written agreements and clarify roles on the production team. She addresses several common and potentially dangerous mistakes that documentarians make, including overworking the production team, dipping into personal monies for funding, and signing distribution contracts without consulting a lawyer. If any of these issues arise during the filmmaking process, the consequences for the filmmaker and the film can prove disastrous, and the warnings Fadiman provides make that abundantly clear.

Much of the advice given in the book addresses how to head off common obstacles and issues before they have a chance to arise. Problems occur if a filmmaker does not properly anticipate issues such as complications with compensation or does not leave room in the budget for circumstances that are beyond the filmmaker's control, such as a canceled flight or a shipping error. Fadiman is a strong proponent for preparing for as many eventualities as possible, citing open and honest communication with members of the production team from the outset as a key factor in this preparation. She also encourages new filmmakers to seek the advice of more experienced filmmakers in the industry.

Along with the practical advice and how-to's, Fadiman's book is supplemented with images from her own documentaries, as well as a plethora of references to outside sources. While she gives a disappointingly brief description of lighting, she includes a recommendation for a book that goes into much greater depth. She includes references to books, websites, databases, movies and nonprofit organizations, citing the title, creator and year. Often the references are set apart from the text after they are mentioned in her writing, making them easy to relocate at a later date. This tactic, while it may be frustrating to those who are searching for a more comprehensive or in-depth book on the technical side of documentary filmmaking, makes Fadiman's book an excellent springboard to find other sources for more information or perspectives without having to sift through libraries of books on the art of filmmaking.

Because Fadiman's book is grounded in her experiences as a documentary filmmaker, it has a few limitations. As she states, each documentary filmmaker eventually develops a style that they become known for. Fadiman specializes in creating documentaries that rely heavily on interviews with individuals to inform various viewpoints within the story. This unfortunately means that her readers do not have great insight to other options or techniques for creating documentaries. Once again, this is where outside sources can play a role. Secondly, since Fadiman's experiences are what flesh out the book with examples of things done right or gone wrong, there is some repetition of stories. For example, a situation that is referenced as a problem in the production team chapter might be brought up and described again in the section about editing, albeit in a different context. This reaffirms that the book might be better for picking and choosing sections to read rather than reading the entire book.

Finally, a lot of Fadiman's advice depends on intuition and the gut feelings of the filmmaker, especially in her descriptions of vision and post-production editing. Inexperienced filmmakers might not yet have developed that sense of how things are supposed to fit together. Thus the book would have benefited with a more general list of do's and don'ts with regard to, for example, editing, regardless of the filmmaker's style. While this information can be learned from other sources, it makes Fadiman's book a little less comprehensive.

Inexperienced filmmakers, let alone documentarians, would find that *Producing with Passion* provides a lot of very useful insights, resources and tips and the opportunity to learn from Fadiman's wealth of experiences. Although the methods for developing the subject and vision of a documentary described in the first few chapters seem a bit more subjective and harder to grasp, the logistical tips and pointers she provides in the pre-to-post production and distribution chapters are very clearly and concisely stated, and list many eventualities that someone new to the industry might not ever think of.

Fadiman's book is not difficult to understand, and is already broken down for the reader who prefers to tap directly into the areas where they have questions. Fadiman's practical guidelines and clear writing provide the reader with warnings of filmmakers' biggest mistakes as well as the insight into how Fadiman has managed to achieve so many successes. Most importantly, Fadiman encourages filmmakers not to lose their focus or vision as they strive to breathe life into their films and the issues they are trying to create awareness for. Armed with *Producing with Passion*, a new filmmaker will be able to circumvent some of the biggest mistakes and obstacles and will hopefully be able to find a balance during the journey that is documentary filmmaking.

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