The AIIC Bureau is pleased to announce that filming will soon begin on a television documentary about conference interpreting – a first for our profession.

AIIC has been in regular touch with the filmmakers, David Bernet and Christian Beetz, since July 2002. Over this period they have fine-tuned a project called "The Whisperers", which seeks to uncover the essential qualities that conference interpreters seem to possess and to portray the day-to-day working life of interpreters by approaching the subject from various angles.

Over 56 minutes four generations of interpreters will show how the profession has evolved in all its diversity, describe the challenges facing it, and illustrate why it is – despite its public invisibility – at the very heart of international communication.

Filming will depend to some extent on breaking news in the coming months. Bureau would therefore ask members to cooperate with any requests from the producers. Filming will take place between June and December 2003.

The documentary is being funded, amongst others, by AIIC, Filmstiftung North Rhine-Westphalia and Arte/WDR and is scheduled for broadcast as part of an evening of themed programming in 2004. The Swiss channel TSR has confirmed a purchase option and discussions are underway between the producers (Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion) and the Russian station RTV, producers in France, Austria, Spain, Finland, Belgium, Canada, Latvia and Estonia, as well as with distributors in Germany and Canada.

There will be three language versions: French (Les Porte-Voix), German (Die Flüsterer) and English (The Whisperers).

The Bureau welcomes this collaborative project, which is particularly appropriate in the year when we celebrate our 50th anniversary. We wish the producers and the featured interpreters every success in this unique undertaking.

AIIC Bureau

A Word From the Producers

GEBRUEDER BEETZ FILMPRODUKTION is pleased to announce the filming of:

Die flüsterer / Les porte-voix / The whisperers
By David Bernet and Christian Beetz

A documentary about a hidden yet omnipresent profession, THE WHISPERERS describes the origins of conference interpreting in the aftermath of WWII and conveys the pulse of an unusually complex lifestyle.

Time: 56 minutes (80 minutes in cinema version)

They stand in the shadow of the powerful. You can spot them on the news because they appear to be much too close to the VIPs as they drop words in their ear. They are the interpreters. They have been around since time immemorial, ever since different languages and cultures came into contact.

The discretion that goes with the job makes interpreters very inconspicuous. But behind a curtain of professional neutrality, one discovers a cast of fascinating characters dedicated to their art with the utmost passion. Interpreters are highly intelligent and versatile individuals capable of intense concentration and conversant with a wide range of subjects. Above all, they have the gift of gab. They are language experts who have devoted their nomadic lives to learning and to international understanding.

Several thousand conference interpreters around the globe master the techniques of simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. They represent the elite among a multitude of interpreters who apply their skills in many different areas of human endeavour, be it for government agencies, the diplomatic service, NGOs, trade unions or associations, multinational corporations, courts of law, hospitals or just mundane business.

The Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals maked the birth of simultaneous interpretation. The proliferation of multilateral contacts in politics and trade after WWII led to a heavy demand for interpreters and brought about the democratisation of international communications. The best interpreters were sometimes booked years in advance, worked all around the world and earned a lot of money. Yet the elitist origin of this profession stands in stark contrast to its present-day public image: in our information age, little now sets them apart from other support staff.

The Whisperers shows some of the most remarkable representatives of this profession, as they recall the past and give a human face to the role languages play in the modern world. Some of them recall their work at the Nuremberg Trials while others lead us into today’s international courts of justice. Some act as personal interpreters to statesmen on missions around the world, rushing from one country to another and one conference to the next, while others simply wait at home for the next job offer to come in. Together they compose a cast of characters that lend colour to our documentary.

Present background

Some 2600 conference interpreters active worldwide are members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters – AIIC. The Association will celebrate its 50th anniversary in the autumn of 2003.

Storyline

The Whisperers works like a camera that has gone out of its normal focus. In the film we experience the life and work of four protagonists. They represent the different generations and different categories of work within the profession. We are taken to the very heart of international communications and witness the total concentration of interpreters as they process spoken information and tackle new topics in venues throughout the world.
The film finely illustrates linguistic communication that breaks through political, economic and cultural barriers. It simultaneously depicts how professional interpreters handle the psychological stress inherent in their work and how they organise their personal and professional lives. The viewer is carried along by the charm, quick wits and internationalism of its protagonists, whose world we discover with a sense of curiosity and fun.

Production details

The film is being produced by gebrüder beetz filmproduktion in co-production with WDR/ARTE (Cologne). Shooting is due to start in June 2003. Broadcast is scheduled in summer 2004 as part of an ARTE Thema programme on multilingualism.

Title: Die Flüsterer/ les porte-voix/ The Whisperers
Format: DVC Pro 50, DV Cam
Languages: German, French, English +
Authors: David Bernet & Christian Beetz
Producer: gebrüder beetz filmproduktion, Berlin

gebrüder beetz filmproduktion is an international film and television production company based in Berlin (Germany) and San Francisco (USA). The company's main focus is the production of premium feature documentaries with an international appeal.

The company was founded in 2000 by Reinhardt Beetz and Christian Beetz with the production of “EINSTUERZENDE NEUBAUTEN: listen with pain” (ZDF/ARTE) and “MVRDV – die Utopie des Pragmatismus” (ZDF/ARTE).

Recommended citation format: