


Global Women Lead the Way


Our world has changed tremendously since our last Intl. Women's Impact Report a year ago: The COVID-19 pandemic shut down business around the globe, productions included, and accelerated the shift toward streamed entertainment. The women on this list span continents, based in countries from Kenya to South Korea. During the challenging past year, they have created zombie TV series, Grammy-nominated music and provocative films. On the business side, they have grown their companies and navigated job changes, many of them working from home for the duration. We at *Variety* salute them, and their accomplishments, in honor of International Women's Day on March 8.

Profiles by Jem Aswad, Leo Barraclough, Shalini Dore, Patrick Frater, Anna Marie de la Fuente, Diane Garrett, Paula Hendrickson, John Hopewell, Elsa Keslassy, Addie Morfoot, Lise Pedersen, Jenelle Riley, Malina Saval, Mark Schilling, Mark Sutherland, Nick Vivarelli, Christopher Vourlias  ALUMNI ENTRY



Juliana Algañaraz


Brazil | CEO, Endemol Shine Brazil

 It's been a banner year for Endemol Shine Brazil despite the pandemic, which forced a six-week hiatus. "We restarted in May, and worked on 17 productions last year with strict protocols in place; no one was laid off," says Algañaraz, who adds that the company's revenue has grown 265% since she took over as CEO in 2016. Credit goes to her business strategy, which has allowed for traditional broadcast shows to air across multiple platforms, and the introduction of brand licensing across several shows, still quite a novelty in Latin America. She'll be overseeing more than 30 productions this year and that will likely include documentaries, bio series and scripted shows for the first time.



Fatma Hassan Alremaihi

Qatar | CEO, Doha Film Institute

 Under Alremaihi's guidance, the DFI continues to grow as a key Arab cinema incubator and give voice to female filmmakers from the region, who account for roughly 48% of its supported projects to date. According to a recent Sorbonne University study, 41% of DFI-supported films that screened at major global film festivals were directed by women, a higher percentage than those from any other major funding entity. "We just focus on talent and storytelling, which has enabled us to support a lot of female filmmakers," says Alremaihi, who joined the institute at its inception in 2009.



Natascha Augustin

Germany | Senior creative director, A&R, Warner Chappell Germany

 Warner Chappell Music was the top publisher in Germany for the third year running in 2020 with a 33.64% market share — thanks in no small part to Augustin, who has made WCM the go-to publisher for the country's burgeoning "Deutsch Rap" hip-hop scene. This has produced stellar numbers — rapper Capital Bra is the most streamed artist in Germany of all time — but, Augustin notes, has also "reshaped culture to better reflect the diversity of our country." Next stop? The world. "There's increasing global demand for the distinct sound of our rap producers," she says. "I'll be concentrating on establishing Germany as a hub for high-quality rap/EDM productions with international potential."



Maria Bakalova


Bulgaria | Actor

 On the rise in her native Bulgaria, thanks to films including "Transgression" and "The Father," Bakalova broke through in America with "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm." Now she's snagged SAG and Golden Globe noms and is set to star in Judd Apatow's next film. "I've always been a workaholic and it's really interesting and exciting where life will take me next," she says, calling independent films and big studio entertainment projects "massively important to our mental health." She's in the early stages of developing some projects as a producer. "I am still naive enough to dedicate the message of my art to the goal of making the world a better place."



Natasha Baldwin

U.K. | EVP, head of Decca Publishing, Universal Music Group

 Since launching it in 2017, Baldwin has established Decca as "specialists in the space between core classical and core pop publishing." Determined to "disrupt, diversify and democratize classical and score music," she has found room for experimentation, via pioneering collaborations between composers and mainstream chart talent. Meanwhile, sync placements have soared, and Max Richter passed 2 billion streams — proof, Baldwin says, of classical's untapped potential beyond its old "elitist culture." "Today, in a streaming world with an always-on culture, creative authority is displayed by composers being connected and adaptive and this has encouraged larger, more diverse fanbases," she says. "The future for the next generation of composers is getting brighter."



Mimi Bartels

Nigeria | Head of production, FilmOne

 Having grappled with sexism rising through the ranks in Nigeria's corporate world, Bartels found a more nurturing environment at distribution and production giant FilmOne Entertainment. "They never saw gender," she says of her current company. "It was always about, 'Can you do the role?'" As head of production, Bartels kept cameras rolling in 2020, overseeing the production of seven films, even as the Nigerian industry struggled to cope with the coronavirus pandemic. Looking ahead to a year in which she aims to release a new film each month, she credits her team with constantly pushing her to new heights. "They really inspire me to be better."




(The Women of) Amazon Studios

Javiera Balmaceda

U.S.-Chile | Head of originals, Spanish-speaking Latin America

Georgia Brown

U.K. | Head of originals, Europe 

Malu Miranda,

Brazil | Head of originals, Brazil

Erika North

U.S. | Head of Asia-Pacific originals

Aparna Purohit

India | Head of India originals



All the leaders for Amazon Studios' international productions are female, and they are ramping up local fare around the globe. When the pandemic hit, Amazon Prime's Brazilian service was only 6 months old. But Miranda's team managed to shoot a few shows. "It's been a tough year, but our growth has been super positive," she says. Locally made shows have proven to be popular with Amazon Prime subscribers in Mexico and Chile, so far, and Chilean-born Balmaceda expects the same for Argentina. "What we've noticed is, our customers really want to see themselves reflected and see their stories," she says. North, formerly based in Singapore for Netflix, moved to Amazon's L.A. offices a year ago and has been building Prime's slate for Asia and Australia there. "What we try to do is to localize programming as much as we can to each of those markets," says North. And Brown has been hiring staffers from home, while also tending to an 8-month-old and 3-year-old "in this melting pot of madness." See feature on p. 44 for more.

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— JAVIERA
BALMACEA



Rola Bauer

Germany | President, intl. television prods., MGM

Bauer found a new perch last year, joining MGM Intl. Television Prods. following her exit from StudioCanalTV and Tandem Prods., where she developed the "The Man Who Fell to Earth" (starring Chiwetel Ejiofor) for Paramount Plus. "The Reunion," an English-language adaptation of a French novel, is one of her first MGM projects. "Our audiences worldwide are asking for emotional stories and the best talent to bring them to life — as well as strong female characters and diverse stories that break cultural and political boundaries," Bauer says. "Fulfilling these needs is a perfect domain and fertile ground for our female voices and skills to shine."



Caroline Benjo

France | Co-founder, Haut et Court

The pandemic didn't stop Benjo or Haut et Court, which delivered "Gagarine," a highlight of Cannes 2020, and two French-Israeli series, the supernatural crime drama "Possessions" for Canal Plus and HBO Max, and thriller "No Man's Land" for Hulu and Arte, both of which premiered in November. She believes the pandemic has accelerated a shift that would have taken a few more years to happen without it. "On the upside, it's forcing us to reinvent ourselves," she recently told *Variety*. "On the downside, many won't survive the process."



Susanne Bier

Denmark | Director-producer

Bier exec produced and directed all six episodes of HBO's "The Undoing," a stylish whodunnit starring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Grant that went on to score four Golden Globe noms, including for limited series. Next up for the Emmy- and Oscar-winner, who delivered a massive Netflix audience for "Bird Box" in late 2018, is Showtime's anthology series "The First Lady," which she will direct and exec produce. Projects have to be "unbearably difficult in order for me to want to climb the mountain," she says. "My biggest fear is becoming comfortable. That is in the family with lazy, predictable and convenient. I don't want to ever get there."



Blackpink

South Korea | Recording artists

While K-pop titans Blackpink made a splash in 2019, the past year has seen them cement their superstardom — in a lockdown year, without touring. The quartet — who have appeared on songs with Lady Gaga, Cardi B, Selena Gomez and others — dropped a debut full-length album in October. It topped the iTunes chart in 57 territories; the companion documentary ("Light Up the Sky") arrived shortly thereafter, and the artists played a global pay-per-view concert in January. Their popularity knows no borders: Their video for "How You Like That" garnered 86.3 million views in 24 hours on YouTube when it debuted in June, setting a record.



Cate Blanchett

U.K.-Australia | Actor-producer

London-based Blanchett had a busy year before and behind the cameras, starring in and producing "Mrs. America," an FX on Hulu limited series that racked up 10 Emmy nominations (including for her performance as conservative leader Phyllis Schlafly) and won one for Uzo Aduba's performance; co-created and starred in the Australian series "Stateless," which won a raft of trophies in her native country; headed the jury at the Venice Film Festival; and executive produced "Apples," Greece's Oscar submission. Beyond that, her London-based prodco Dirty Pictures entered first-look deals with FX for TV and with New Republic for film, with a first deal signed with directing duo Bert & Bertie for "Queen Bitch and the High Horse." Blanchett describes her stint at Venice "a ray of sun during a break in the COVID cloud" and is looking forward to Dirty Films' upcoming project with "Apples" director Christos Nikou — his English-language feature debut "Finger-nails." "The conversations I've had over the last 12 months have been some of the most raw, engaged and exciting that I've ever had. If even half of the projects we've been talking about get made, I'll be over the moon," says Blanchett.



(The Women of) "Bridgerton"

Adjoa Andoh, Nicola Coughlan, Phoebe Dynevor, Golda Rosheuvel

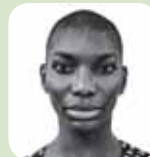
U.K.-Ireland | Actors

Shondaland's first scripted series for Netflix broke internal viewership records following its Christmas debut — per the streamer, 82 million households viewed "Bridgerton" its first month — and earned a SAG ensemble nom in addition to several NAACP Image Awards nominations.

The global response has been gratifying and a bit mind boggling for its leading ladies: Coughlan, a veteran of "Derry Girls," had already gotten recognition for that Northern Ireland-set series, but somehow persuaded herself that no one would watch "Bridgerton," a lavish Regency romance wherein she plays seemingly shy Penelope Featherington, a teen revealed to be gossip writer Lady Whistledown by the end of the season. The biggest challenge for her: Wrapping her mind around the thought that her character would betray a friend to protect her own romantic interest. "It's funny playing the most low-status person in the room, and also the most high-status person in the room," says Coughlan, pointing out that her character, at 17, was still learning the power she wielded as Lady Whistledown. "It's just this fascinating dichotomy."

For Rosheuvel, the bored and imperious Queen Charlotte, the biggest challenges related to costuming: those elaborate wigs and frocks. "They're pretty intense works of art, which I was very happy to wear," Rosheuvel says, alluding to the weight of those wigs. Her character wasn't in Julia Quinn's novels, which gave her more freedom in her performance. "The fun part was to be able to play, play, play," she says. Dynevor, meanwhile, found it challenging to master all the skills expected of a marriage-minded young woman of her status in the early 1800s. Not to mention the steamy love scenes with co-star Regé-Jean Page. "There were lots of boxes to check off," she says about portraying her sheltered character's first time in the sack.

And Andoh, chuffed to have received an Image Award for her performance, relishes Lady Danbury's strength and ability to travel in both high society and the artistic demimonde. "I love her gusto, that lust for life," she says. More gossip drama is on the way: Season 2 is in pre-production. —Diane Garrett



Michaela Coel

U.K. | Creator-actor, "I May Destroy You"

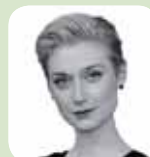
Coel turned a harrowing experience — drugged sexual assault — into an award-winning TV series that she wrote, directed, produced and starred in as a fictionalized version of herself. Coel, who previously created "Chewing Gum" for British TV, turned down a hefty Netflix paycheck to retain a stake in "I May Destroy You," opting instead for BBC backing. The HBO co-production has won a Gotham Award for breakthrough series as well as an Indie Spirit trophy for ensemble cast in a new scripted series. "We know how to look out," Coel told *New York* magazine. "We've been doing that. Don't forget: Also look in."



Vanessa Craft

Canada | Director of content partnerships, TikTok Canada

Craft has no doubt why so many people have turned to TikTok during the COVID-19 pandemic. "It's an incredibly powerful driver of connection, which we need more than ever, and a place for communities to uplift each other," she says. Craft's own expertise in connection led her from Elle Canada, where she was the global brand's first Black editor-in-chief, to the massively popular video-sharing platform last year. As in her previous role, Craft — who also works with the Weeknd's Black House incubator program and on the board of anti-racism body the Black Academy — finds herself "shining a spotlight on trendsetters and innovators." Her mission? "To help anyone be their authentic selves."



Elizabeth Debicki


U.K.-Australia | Actor-producer

Now based in London, Australia-raised Debicki had a busy 2020 with "Tenet" and "The Burnt Orange Heresy," and will take over the role of Princess Diana in Season 5 of "The Crown." "After so much absence and distance, I am looking forward to being NEAR PEOPLE! And creating work with total gratitude for the ability to be able to collaborate again." She adds that she is also producing for the first time. "Being connected to material from the very beginning of its evolution is new to me and a challenge that I find deeply rewarding already."



Lucy Dickins

U.K. | Co-Head, music, WME

 Dickins comes from a British music-biz dynasty (her grandfather founded the New Musical Express, her father formed the agency ITB, her brother manages Adele), who became co-head of WME's music group within a year of joining the agency. WME has focused on non-touring opportunities and new signings, the latter including Shakira and Charlie Puth; Dua Lipa's ticketed livestreaming concert "Studio 2054" drew an audience of more than 5 million. "We discovered a hidden silver lining during this time, which was how much everyone has leaned in and showed support across all our departments."



Nadia Dresti


Switzerland | Intl. adviser, Locarno Film Festival

 When the Locarno Film Festival was vacillating last year following the abrupt departure of then-artistic director Lili Hinstin, whom did they call? Dresti, the woman who built the prominent Swiss event's formidable industry side. Now that it is back on track, Dresti, known as Locarno's "Grand Dame," has transitioned from being interim artistic director to international adviser. Her new buzzwords are "resilience and solidarity," she says. "The global industry has to hang tough and rebuild." Dresti's role model is Beki Probst, who created Berlin's European Film Market from scratch. "Every time we talk, I learn something," she says.



Pauline Duarte


France | Director, head of Epic Records France

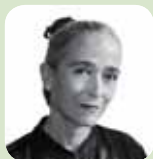
 Duarte smashed a glass ceiling when chosen to head up Epic's French launch last year, becoming the first female exec to run a rap label in the country. "I have faith in meritocracy, and I'm really proud that being both the child of immigrants and from a diverse background can nevertheless lead to a successful position in the industry," she says. In her first few months at the Sony subsidiary, she's already recruited a diverse staff and powered breakthroughs for rappers Ronisia, Gazo and Frenetik. "My ultimate ambition is to make Epic the No. 1 label in France."



Daisy Edgar-Jones


U.K. | Actor

 Golden Globe-nommed for her breakthrough performance in Hulu's "Normal People," Edgar-Jones portrayed Marianne, a smart yet vulnerable Irish teen attracted to a popular boy, with exquisite intensity. Her biggest challenge: Embodying a character that readers had imagined while consuming Sally Rooney's bestselling novel. "You want to do it justice and nail enough aspects of the character that they can forgive the differences you might bring," she says. "I also really wanted to make sure I got the Irish accent right." Coming up: "Where the Crawdads Sing," with Reese Witherspoon as producer.



Delphine Ernotte-Cunci

France | President, France Télévisions

 The sole female president of a French TV network was recently reelected for a second five-year term with a mandate to increase significantly the representation of women and visible minorities. In 2020, she signed a gender parity pledge with the org 50/50 Future to increase the proportion of female directors. During the pandemic, France Télévisions successfully jointly launched the streaming service Salto with TF1 and M6, and saw its ratings skyrocket with the latest season of "Call My Agent!" and the daily talk show "C à vous," which continued filming during the lockdown.



Laura Fernández Espeso


Spain | CEO, the Mediapro Studio

 Raising Spain's glass ceiling, Fernández Espeso was appointed CEO of the Mediapro Studio last July, having helped power one of the most robust growth narratives in recent European TV. Boarding its first high-end series, "The Young Pope," in the middle of the previous decade, TMS now produces with every single studio streamer, while driving into overseas co-productions, such as on "The Head," where it retained IP and handled own distribution. It's not done yet. TMS will hike international expansion this year, "thanks to the worldwide repercussion of our productions and the relevant projects we have underway in the U.S., Latin America and the U.K."



Gina Gardini

Italy | Producer and partner, Cattleya

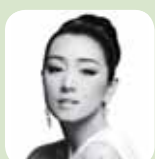
 At Italy's Cattleya, where she has "this undefined role, which has sort of been defined as showrunner," Gardini has single-handedly shepherded milestone series such as "Gomorrah" and "ZeroZeroZero," becoming a testament to the power of women in Italian showbiz. The native New Yorker joined Italy's Cattleya, which is part of ITV Studios, in 2005 after running Miramax Europe. "I had the good fortune of starting my career in Italy at a company that is very progressive in terms of the number of women in the workforce in important roles," she says about Cattleya.



Bibiane Godfroid


Belgium-France | CEO, Newen

 Godfroid heads French distribution and production company Newen, which has been able to film more than 15 series since the pandemic began. "When France emerged from lockdown, we were the first to resume shooting with daily shows 'Plus Belle La Vie' and 'Demain Nous Appartient,'" she says. Subsidiary Blue Spirit, which is behind the Oscar-nominated "My Life as a Zucchini," is "working with U.S. studios like Marvel and Warner — these are great achievements in such a challenging year," says Godfroid, whose plans for 2021 include boosting talent recruitment for the freshly created Newen France.



Gong Li

China | Actor

 Li has had a busy year with two films out despite the pandemic. Live-action "Mulan," in which she starred, streamed on Disney Plus and grossed \$70 million worldwide. Meanwhile she portrayed China's Olympics volleyball coach Li Peng in Li's biopic, "Leap." China sent that film to the Oscars as its entry for international film. "The most important criterion when I choose a script is that I do not want to play a role I've played before," Gong says. "It has to be a role [that] has to be fresh to me. I don't want to repeat what I've acted before. No repeat, that is my principle."



THE GLOBAL INDUSTRY HAS TO HANG TOUGH AND REBUILD."
—NADIA DRESTI



Agnieszka Holland


Poland | Director

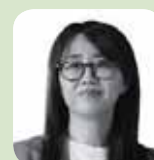
 Along with mounting an Oscar campaign in 2020 for "Charlatan," the Czech Republic's shortlisted international feature film submission, the acclaimed Polish director became the first female president of the European Film Academy. But she considers her biggest accomplishment last year was simply slowing down. "This nomad's life... sometimes distracts me too much from myself," she says. Marching on the frontlines of Polish protests against a strict new anti-abortion law also buoyed her: Though accustomed to shattering glass ceilings, she says Polish women are "much more aggressive in pursuing their rights" than ever before. "It is a real voice."



Kawase Naomi

Japan | Writer-director

 A frequent invitee to Cannes, starting with her 1997 Camera d'Or winner "Suzaku" and most recently with her 2020 family drama "True Mothers," Kawase has long been an outsider in the Japanese film industry. From her base in her native Nara Prefecture, she has made docs and dramas with an autobiographical slant that have won more awards and acclaim abroad than at home. "True Mothers," however, was selected as Japan's nominee for the international feature film Oscar. Her current project: directing the official documentary for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics.



Kim Eun-hee

South Korea | Writer

 Having created Netflix hit series "Kingdom," into which she folded two hot genres — historical drama and zombie action thriller — Kim is scripting "Ashin of the North," a special episode that is both a "sidequel" and the back story of one of the characters she created. Kim's agenda this year also includes "Mount Jiri" for tvN and China's iQiyi. Aware of the rapid evolution of what is possible in Korean scripted TV, Kim says she also wants to grow old feistily. "I am energized whenever I see ['Minari'] star Yuh-jung Youn. She is still walking an unrivaled path. It is admirable to see someone challenge and expand their boundaries regardless of age."



Dua Lipa

U.K. | Recording artist

To say the least British-Albanian singer Dua Lipa's success over the past year beat the odds: Her long-awaited sophomore album, "Future Nostalgia," is a disco-esque party album that arrived late last March, when almost no one was going to discos or felt much like partying. Yet it was one of the smash successes of the year, with several singles from it racking up hundreds of millions of streams on Spotify alone, and one, the triple-platinum "Don't Start Now," surpassing 1.25 billion. Already a superstar in Europe and her native U.K., the album is rapidly making her one in the U.S.: The two-time Grammy winner is up for six more at the 2021 awards.



Tiina Lekk

Estonia | Director, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival

Lekk would have been forgiven for having low expectations when she entered the Estonian film industry in the 1970s. "A Soviet woman could become a successful milkmaid and tractor operator, maybe a mid-level manager," she says. "But the closer to the top, the less it was likely for a woman to succeed." Today she is the only woman at the helm of an A-category festival, shepherding the acclaimed Baltic fest through a challenging pandemic year. As she spearheads efforts to broaden the festival's digital footprint for future editions, Lekk says last year's success is proof that "anything is possible."



Aissa Maiga

France | Writer-director-actor-activist

"2020 was a year of construction," says Maiga, who kicked off the year with a brave and political speech at the Cesar Awards, and just completed her long-gestated documentary "Regard Noir," adapted from the book she co-wrote, "My Profession Is Not Black," about the racism that Black actors and filmmakers face in France. In her doc, Maiga and co-director Isabelle Simeoni explored anti-Black racism on a broader scale, concluding "that we all need inspiring leaders who will open people's eyes and make society more inclusive at every level. Next up: the documentary 'Marcher sur l'eau.'



Mehret Mandefro

Ethiopia-U.S. | Producer

A dual national with a Harvard medical degree, Mandefro recently exec produced the "American Masters" doc "How It Feels to Be Free?" with Alicia Keys as well as "Yegna," Ethiopia's first televised teen drama for Kana Television. After she produced Sundance prize-winner "Difret," she set up a base in her native country and has been working to make creative industries a government priority there. "Until filmmakers have real opportunities in their local markets, they just can't grow," she tells *Variety*. Mandefro leads by example on set, where a culture of tolerance and respect prevails. "That's how real change happens."



Anna Marsh

France | Studiocanal CEO

Appointed CEO in December 2019, Marsh has been leading the Vivendi-owned film/TV production and distribution group through the pandemic with panache. Studiocanal released several films, such as "Saint Maud" in the U.K. and "30 Days Left" in France; with "What's Love Got to Do With It," starring Lily James, and Liam Neeson's "Retribution" in the works. Despite cinema closures, she considers the company's hybrid profile a strength, confident the company will keep thriving by "sticking to its DNA — a well-balanced mix of stars-driven action movies, quality family entertainment and big French comedies."



Jennifer Mullin

U.K. | Global CEO, Fremantle

Six months into the pandemic, 90% of Fremantle's global shows were back in production, thanks to Mullin's leadership in developing COVID-safe protocols. "Neighbours," its Australian soap, and "American Idol" were both able to adjust quickly following a short shutdown, with the last season of "Idol" pivoting midseason to in-home performances. "I'm very proud of our global teams — 2020 was the year that our business was more connected than ever — as creators, producers, and as people," Mullin says. Demand for content surged, especially true stories and tales about triumphing over adversity, and Fremantle met it.



Sophia Loren

Italy | Actress

Loren burst out of semi-retirement to play Madame Rosa, a former prostitute and Holocaust survivor, in "The Life Ahead," directed by her son, Edoardo Ponti, for Netflix. For her tour de force performance, Loren channeled her mother's "fighting spirit," which also served as inspiration throughout her iconic career. "She had incredible strength and raised two children without a husband at the tail end of World War II with such resourcefulness, love and determination," Loren says. "But at the same time, she was quite weak when it came to allowing her love for my father [who didn't return the feeling] to rule her. He never married her, ended up spending his life with another woman and she never stopped pining for him, no matter how dismissive he was of her." The octogenarian, who in 1962 became the first performer to win an acting Oscar for a foreign-language film ("Two Women") and has credits dating back to the 1950s, promised herself she "would never let anyone or anything define me but myself." — Nick Vivarelli



(The Women of) Netflix

Eleonora "Tinny" Andreatta

Italy | VP, Italian originals

Dorothy Ghattuba

Kenya | Africa original series manager

Minyoung Kim

South Korea-Singapore | VP content, South Korea, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand

Kelly Luegenbiehl

Netherlands-U.K. | VP, global franchises



Netflix continued to add to its exec arsenal last year, luring former RAI Drama head Andreatta to the service, where she will draw upon her experiences shepherding global hits such as "My Brilliant Friend." "Great stories can come from anywhere and be loved by everyone," Andreatta says. "This is why we want to work with talented storytellers — both established and new voices — everywhere in the world and bring their visions to our international audience."

Kim delivered another season of period zombie drama "Kingdom" last year, and recently launched the movie "Space Sweepers," gaining new territories to oversee along the way. "We believe and have seen that when you tell a local story that is authentic, it resonates globally," says Kim. "It's not about making a story for everyone; it's about making the story true to the local community you are portraying and that story gets discovered by the audience globally." Luegenbiehl now oversees global franchises for the streamer and will move to London, where she will be further developing properties including "The Witcher." Last year, Ghattuba launched "Queen Sono," the first original out of Africa, along with series including "Blood & Water." "I am proud of the fact that Netflix has allowed me to create opportunities to showcase the breadth of Africa's storytelling potential," she says.

For more on their work this past year, please see p. 44.



Deepika Padukone

India | Actor-producer

Bollywood star Padukone produced and starred in "Chhapaak," a social drama about the survivor of an acid attack that was released early last year. It was a changeup following from the 2018 period blockbuster "Padmaavat," in which she plays Queen Padmavati. "I am someone who just goes with my gut," Padukone says. "Fortunately, I've never had to make decisions based on the budget of a film or for various other reasons. It also depends on where I am emotionally in my life. A lot of my choices are dictated by that." She is currently filming two untitled projects and working on her philanthropy Live Love Laugh.



Donatella Palermo

Italy | Producer

A former comic-book artist and projectionist, Palermo produced Roberta Torre's Mafia musical "To Die for Tano" and has been shepherding bold prize-winning projects ever since. Among them, the Taviani brothers' "Caesar Must Die," Valentina Pedicini's "Faith," Gianfranco Rosi's "Fire at Sea" and his Oscar-short-listed doc, "Notturmo," a film that was easy to finance but "scary to make," Palermo says, since Rosi had a close scrape with being kidnapped by ISIS. Italy's Oscar selection debuted at Venice, where it was named best Italian film, and has been picking up noms on the awards circuit, several of them for cinematography.



WE BELIEVE AND HAVE SEEN THAT WHEN YOU TELL A LOCAL STORY THAT IS AUTHENTIC, IT RESONATES GLOBALLY. — MINYOUNG KIM



Samantha Perahia

U.K. | Head of production U.K., British Film Commission

Pre-pandemic Perahia already faced significant challenges, including mitigating the impact of and allaying producers' concerns about Brexit. After COVID-19 halted shoots in March, the BFC established production guidance — in consultation with industry and government — that was published in June and enabled shoots to restart safely. It remains the arbiter of COVID guidelines. "All of a sudden it got really, really busy because this was a completely brand-new thing," she says. In addition, the BFC has been overseeing the growth of stage space in the U.K., a go-to destination for Hollywood, helping make the production sector more inclusive and diverse and boosting sustainability.



(The Women of) "Promising Young Woman"

Emerald Fennell Writer-director

Carey Mulligan Actor
U.K.

Fennell's candy-colored cautionary tale about date rape struck a nerve with its Sundance debut last year, and eventually arrived in U.S. theaters around Christmas, its original release postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The writer-director and Mulligan, who plays a woman that dropped out of med school to care for a shattered friend, have received Golden Globe and Indie Spirits noms for their work; the movie also received a Globe nom for best drama. "I want to be constantly surprising the audience," Mulligan previously told *Variety*. Fennell, who made her directorial debut with "Promising Young Woman," portrayed Camilla Bowles on "The Crown" and served as showrunner for the second season of "Killing Eve." "I have always been quite interested in morality tales," Fennell told *Variety*. "It's ultimately, for me, a film about forgiveness, but people only get forgiveness if they admit wrongdoing."



Mariette Rissenbeek

Germany | Executive director, Berlin Intl. Film Festival

After successfully staging their first Berlinale in February 2020, Rissenbeek and artistic director Carlo Chatrjian repeatedly had to adjust their plans for the next edition. "It is impossible to really plan as the situation changes regularly and you have to start all over again. We had to be flexible and inventive," she says. They settled on a two-part format: a virtual industry event in March, and a physical festival event in June. She also had to find additional financial support as fewer tickets will be sold this year; the German culture ministry has upped its support to meet the shortfall.



Sarah Spear

U.K. | CEO, Curtis Brown

As CEO of powerhouse U.K. lit and talent agency Curtis Brown, Spear navigated pandemic production shutdowns and the integration of agency Markham, Froggatt & Irwin; acquired in October, the agency brought clients including Chiwetel Ejiofor, Charlotte Gainsbourg and Ruth Negga to a roster already boasting Robert Pattinson, Dev Patel and Florence Pugh. When productions shut down, Curtis Brown's main objective was "survival and to keep jobs intact," Spear says. "It's been very difficult for many of our clients. But communication is key with clients," she says. And, she says, the agency "bounced back" in the latter half of the year.



Emily Stillman

U.K. | Senior VP, Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden

The COVID-19 shutdown and subsequent restart posed a scheduling challenge for Stillman, with three major TV shows and five tentpole movies shooting at Leavesden. She has also pushed to improve diversity and inclusion. "Knowing the struggles of getting into the film industry and staying in it, I really wanted to do something to break down the barriers into the industry," she says. This has been done with scholarships and a mentoring program, while flexible, on-site childcare at Leavesden is proving "a real gamechanger" in retaining women in the industry.



Jane Turton

U.K. | CEO, All3Media

Turton oversees a network of more than 40 production and distribution companies at All3Media, so safely resuming production was a big priority amid COVID-19. Despite the challenges, All3Media's U.S. companies delivered 40% more episodes in 2020, the 239 episodes including installments of "Undercover Boss" and "Worst Cooks in America." "Having women in business playing a lead role in debate, decision-making, strategic planning, operational execution and so on delivers diversity of thought," Turton says. "That has to be healthy in driving performance over time."



Joana Vicente

Canada | Executive director and co-head, Toronto Intl. Film Festival

Vicente and her team at the Toronto Intl. Film Festival started thinking about contingency plans early in the pandemic and managed to stick to their planned dates with virtual events and screenings. Instead of 300-plus fest lineup, 97 shorts and features including "Nomadland" and "One Night in Miami" screened. Vicente, who joined TIFF in 2018, says there's a silver lining to the pandemic pivot. "Being a hybrid festival is going to be part of our DNA," says Vicente, noting that COVID-19 forced them to think about the festival of the future. "I think that the uncertainty really drives innovation, and that's exciting."



(The Women of) "Unorthodox"

Shira Haas Actor **Maria Schrader** Director **Anna Winger** EP
Israel-Germany

Neither the "Unorthodox" cast nor crew could have bet on audiences gravitating toward a story, told in part in Yiddish and Hebrew, about a pregnant Chassidic bride in Brooklyn who flees the Satmar sect to begin life anew in Berlin. But that's exactly what happened. The Netflix limited series, which stars Haas of "Shtisel" fame, has entranced both critics and viewers, earning two Golden Globe nominations (for lead actress and limited series), and an Emmy win for director Maria Schrader.

"This character is probably the most complex one that I've ever played," says Haas of her protagonist, Esther Shapiro. "She has so many conflicts within. She's very, very brave, but she's also very vulnerable."

Based on Deborah Feldman's memoir, the series takes some creative liberties, changing Esther from an aspiring writer to a musician who auditions for a spot at a prestigious Berlin music academy. The switch, says exec producer Winger, evolved organically.

"It's about a young woman finding her voice and so we also thought that it made a lot of sense metaphorically," Winger says.

When COVID-19 hit, the creative team resigned itself to the fact that "Unorthodox" would be "this small little project below the radar." Then Netflix came onboard and that all changed.



"I think we all had a sense of what kind of universal story this might be," Schrader says. "We knew the series touched upon so many fundamental issues that might resonate within other communities — and not just those that are part of the ultra-Orthodox world." — *Malina Saval*

“IT IS REALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO PLAN AS A SITUATION CHANGES REGULARLY AND YOU HAVE TO START ALL OVER AGAIN. WE HAD TO BE FLEXIBLE AND INVENTIVE.”
— MARIETTE RISSENBECK



Washio Kayo

Japan-U.S. | Head of U.S. office, international co-production and acquisition, Wowow

  In charge of international co-production and acquisition for Wowow, the Japanese equivalent of HBO, Washio has headed the L.A. office since 2011, doing so from her native land during the pandemic. In the past year, Washio has launched a theatrical distribution business and closed an all-rights distribution deal for "Tokyo Vice," a scripted series executive-produced by Michael Mann now in production. "I believe 'Tokyo Vice' will be an event series that audiences in Japan, and throughout the world will absolutely love," she says. "I've had my eyes on the material for quite some time so it's equally a passion project for me, as much as a commercial play."



Manuela Wurm


Germany | Head of global editorial music strategy, Spotify

 Music curation is a serious business for Wurm. Last year, she swiftly adapted to the pandemic by launching Spotify's "At Home" hub, and she also oversees the Global Curation Groups program that helps keep the worldwide market-leader ahead of the pack. "It's a huge responsibility and great privilege," she says. "We facilitate the sacred connection between artists and fans with our mission statement in mind — enabling creators to live off their art." She helps Spotify reach more of those creators than ever, with editorial strategies "tailor-made" for its ever-expanding list of international launches. "Our goal is to drive music culture by driving discovery and supporting diversity," she says.



(The Trans Women of) "Veneno"

Jedet, Lola Rodriguez, Daniela Santiago and Isabel Torres
Spain | Actors

 HBO Max's "Veneno," the groundbreaking Spanish series about pioneering transgender artist and media personality Cristina Ortiz, aka La Veneno, has been a life-changing experience for its core cast. Produced by Spain's Atresmedia, the award-winning eight-part series has become a Spanish social and cultural phenomenon that has reverberated around the world, creating new opportunities for the trans stars.

Jedet, who plays the young Joselito/Cristina Ortiz, has been working on a musical career, ad campaigns and other projects she can't reveal yet. Santiago, who portrays La Veneno in her full adult splendor, has revived her modeling career, signing with Trend Model Management and recently working on a Roberto Cavalli ad campaign. "I've achieved my dream to become an actress, and have a series, a film, more ad campaigns and a biography coming up," she says. Torres, who plays Ortiz in her later years, sees "Veneno" as the culmination of many years of hard work, including as the host of top-rated radio show, "La Ventolera."


"I have had the great opportunity to be a part of a series that has built bridges towards our group, made us more visible and broken-down barriers," says Rodriguez about her TV debut as biographer Valeria Vegas. "On the personal front, I have learned to value and respect myself like never before and that, for me, has been one of my greatest achievements." — Anna Marie de la Fuente

Up Next



Emma Corrin



U.K. | Actor

 The British newcomer dazzled as Lady Diana Spencer in Season 4 of "The Crown," showing her tremulous beauty, mental struggles and iron will as she welcomed the royal spotlight and soon chafed at its strictures. She won a Golden Globe for lead actress and received a SAG female actor and an ensemble nom for the role, which followed a recurring turn in Warner Bros./Epix series "Pennyworth." Next up: a role opposite Harry Styles in "My Policeman" for Amazon Studios.



Hikari


Japan-U.S. | Director-producer

  Osaka native Hikari (née Miyazaki Mitsuyo) won a shelf-full of awards for "37 Seconds," a Japanese-language drama about a disabled woman's struggle for independence and personal growth, including the new director prize at the 2020 Asian Film Awards. The director and producer, who has been working in Los Angeles, has since signed to direct the YA novel adaptation "Eleanor & Park" for Plan B and the Working Title dramedy "Lost for Words."



Gbemisola Ikumelo

U.K. | Actor-writer-producer


 The multi-talent is writing and appearing in the upcoming Amazon series adaptation of "A League of Their Own" and will also be showrunner on "Brain in Gear," an adaptation of the 2020 BAFTA-

winning short she created and starred in about a woman dealing with the voices in her head. "I was on a train en route to pitch a couple of ideas I had to BBC comedy, and as I sat talking to myself, telling myself not to screw this up, I realized that I should probably also tell a story of this moment, too," she says. So inspired, she "went into that meeting and ended up pitching that very idea!"



Nev Sultan


Israel | Actor

 The breakout star of Apple TV Plus's "Tehran" learned Krav Maga and Farsi to play the role of Tamar Rabinyan, a Mossad agent completing an espionage mission in Iran, acting for the first time in English. Born in Jerusalem, Sultan began auditioning in earnest after finishing her army service, and has credits including the Israeli series "Eilat." Next up: "The Traitor," created by Ron Leshem, whose Israeli "Euphoria" served as the basis for the HBO version.



Nomcebo Zikode

South Africa | Recording artist

 Zikode spent 15 years as a backup singer in the South African music industry, all but giving up hopes of stardom. Then she got a call from the DJ and producer Master KG to record the vocals for his new single, "Jerusalem." Her uplifting vocals would spend 2020 circling the globe, as the track — and its accompanying dance challenge — became a worldwide phenomenon, and one of the few bright spots in a year marked by the pandemic.

“

OUR GOAL IS TO DRIVE MUSIC CULTURE BY DRIVING DISCOVERY AND SUPPORTING DIVERSITY.”
— MANUELA WURM