Jensen and Bauer: why going it alone is no longer an option

TODAY sees two of the most respected names in drama — Nordic Entertainment (NENT) Group president and CEO Anders Jensen and StudioCanal TV managing director Rola Bauer — take to the Debussy stage to talk about pushing boundaries and forging new commercial partnerships in the era of ‘peak TV’. NENT Group and StudioCanal TV have four original series in the pipeline, Shadowplay, and are currently collaborating on Svensk Studios’ The Lawyer and SAM Productions’ Pros And Cons. Both series are among the most successful on NENT Group’s premium Nordic streaming service Viaplay — and both are notable for their “stand-out quality, novel approach, interesting characters and ability to expand into new seasons”, Jensen said, speaking to MIPTV News ahead of his keynote and on-stage conversation with Bauer. “It’s that classic combination of a great script, great production quality and great actors.”

For Bauer, StudioCanal TV’s relationship with NENT Group epitomises the theme of Anders’ keynote, which he described as “staying unique by working together”.

“In order to push boundaries, we need to work better together, create better together and show greater respect for each other’s vision and cultural differences,” Bauer added. Pros And Cons, which centres on an ostensibly normal couple who are actually notorious con artists, is also an example of the lighter, brighter drama coming out of the Nordic region. “We’re calling it Nordic Light,” Bauer said. “The series' humour, plus the fact that it’s about people wanting to redeem themselves, is very appealing to audiences in today’s crazy world.”

That craziness extends to the rate of technological change, Jensen added — a theme he will also explore in today’s keynote: “Streaming is everything today. If you don’t engage in streaming, you’re going to have a big problem in the future. In fact, if you haven’t already engaged in streaming, you’ve already got a big problem. It’s totally changed the rules of engagement and you can’t fight it.”

He uses an ice-hockey metaphor to reinforce his point: “You need to play where the puck’s going. And the puck is moving very, very quickly at the moment, leading to great opportunities but also great challenges. So forget about the past — the future is here and that future is about forming new partnerships. Nobody can do it alone anymore.”

OTF and ZDFE sign doc legend Kohler

WHEN the news broke in January that veteran Dutch factual producer-distributor OTF was becoming a 100% subsidiary of Germany’s ZDF Enterprises (ZDFE), it was like hearing that two old friends were getting together in middle age. One, principled and creative, the other, establishment and well-funded. This would be mutual support in the face of their noisy new neighbours, the Amazon-Netflxes.

But when Ellen Windemuth, founder of Off the Fence (OTF), and Ralf Ruckauer, president of ZDFE, took to the stage at MIPDoc to discuss their plans, they had some breaking news. Industry legend Walter Kohler of Terra Mater Factual Studios was joining the party.

Kohler’s documentary The Ivory Game tackled the ivory trade, and his new film Sea Of Shadows looks at how the vaquita, the world’s smallest whale, is being driven to extinction by the Mexican and Chinese mafias. Terra Mater’s 250-strong catalogue will be distributed by OTF.

Windemuth is something of an innovator herself. OTF partners with brands to bring new money into the business, allowing her to make projects such as Colombian documentary Magia Salvaje, PBS-backed Gorongosa Park, and Europe’s New Wild, made with the group Rewilding Europe. Her latest doc, My Octopus Teacher, is about a filmmaker befriended by an octopus. “This partnership allows us to self-commission more shows to avoid the commissioning delays we had been facing from broadcasters,” Windemuth said. “Also, we can now launch Waterbear Network, our interactive VOD platform that allows viewers to watch documentaries and then interact with eco-activists, campaigns and sustainable travel partners. It allows us to make every film a call-to-action.”

This is a way to reach the coveted younger audience, but also to make change. “We are about more than just television,” Kohler said. “The kids want to act. And if we can help that with our films, we want to do that.”