

'The Forecaster': IDFA Review

1:40 PM PST 12/18/2014 by Neil Young

 0
  11
  0
  0
  0
  Email
  Print
 Comments (1)



Courtesy of International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam

The Bottom Line

Absorbing immersion in a world of low dealings and high finance

Venue

IDFA, Amsterdam, November 29

Director

Marcus Vetter

Controversial economist Martin Armstrong is the focus of Marcus Vetter's German documentary, world-premiering in competition at the Dutch festival

Miscarriage-of-justice documentaries are a dime a dozen these days, but few can boast the global sweep or geopolitical context of **Marcus Vetter's** English-language German production *The Forecaster*. An unambiguously partisan profile of controversial economics whiz **Martin Armstrong** — who spent a decade in jail on technicalities relating to fraud charges — it plays like a slickly elaborate sketch for a future Hollywood retelling in the *Wolf of Wall Street* mold.

World-premiering in the main competition at IDFA, the blandly titled but discussion-provoking and decidedly topical glimpse into the arcane mysteries of high finance should pick up its share of festival play and TV exposure. The latter format will of course cramp one of the picture's strong suits, namely **Georg Zengerling's** wide-screen cinematography, which consistently adds color and excitement to what could easily have been a dry affair.

Hopping locations from Bangkok — where we first meet Armstrong in amusing consultation with a fortune-teller ("You are not lucky with politicians ... soldiers ... police") — to New York, Australia and beyond, Vetter and co-director **Karin Steinberger** craft an accessible and palatable package, which is careful to remain on the right side of comprehensibility. Indeed, a recurring refrain is that Armstrong's computer-generated models for predicting economic cycles — involving the mathematical principles of pi — are so complex and advanced that only Armstrong himself is capable of grasping their byzantine intricacies.

Vetter proceeds on the basis that Armstrong — whose methods pinpoint exact days on which key markets will peak or hit rock-bottom — is every inch as brilliant and accurate as his supporters enthusiastically attest. But as **Alfred Hitchcock** pointed out on two separate occasions, there are perils of being a "man who knows too much." The film posits that Armstrong's incarceration was a consequence of his reluctance to divulge his secrets to the U.S. government, elements of which were interested in the way economic fluctuations corresponded with outbreaks of civil unrest and war.

The web spins even wider, intriguingly encompassing turbulent upheavals in Russia at the end of the 1990s, the unheralded rise to power of **Vladimir Putin**, the mysterious death of a billionaire financier and the shadowy machinations of nefarious institutional and corporate forces ("the banks controlled pretty much the government" Armstrong asserts). Our pugnacious-looking but personable hero's status as innocent, wronged victim is increasingly emphasized — and, while dramatized re-creations are mercifully resisted, charcoal drawings of prison travails amp up the pathos, with the near-incessant "assistance" of **Sven Kaiser**'s thrillerish score.

The talking-head chorus of disapproval, which includes Armstrong's tough-cookie, nonagenarian mother **Ida**, is monotonous but cumulatively persuasive, even if a more balanced and objective treatment of the subject would likely have yielded more satisfying results. As it is, *The Forecaster* ends up playing like a kind of 'For Your Consideration' video-package aimed at the Nobel Prize committee ("I really feel that the world needs his financial mind"). However, the possibility that this benign megabrain might work to ameliorate or even eliminate the dire worldwide impacts of boom-and-bust cycles — rather than seeking to profit from them — never seems to have entered into anyone's equations.

Production companies: Filmperspektive, Eikon, TV Plus

Director/Screenwriter/Editor: Marcus Vetter

Co-director: Karin Steinberger

Producers: Marcus Vetter, Ulli Pfau, Michael Heiks

Cinematographer: Georg Zengerling

Composer: Sven Kaiser

Sales: Filmperspektive, Stuttgart

No Rating, 102 minutes