



A Wake is a story about a theatre troupe that gathers to mourn its dead director. — SUBMITTED PHOTO

Buitenhuis makes rounds with *A Wake*

For Vancouver director Penelope Buitenhuis, the film festival experience is both a sharing and learning experience.

"For me, any festival you can get your film into is great because it offers the collective audience experience," said the Vancouver filmmaker, whose film *A Wake* is the highlighted feature at this year's Women in Film Festival.

As for the learning part, well, that comes from networking opportunities.

"It's good for women to see women who are working," said Buitenhuis. "It's about the drive and the energy. It's encouraging to see other women who have made it. It is really confidence building."

Speaking of confidence building, Buitenhuis' *A Wake* was recently chosen as the festival favourite at the Female Eye Festival in Toronto.

The acclaimed drama is the story of members of theatre troupe who come together for a private wake for the group's infamous (Nicholas Campbell) and promiscuous director. The damaged thespians gather at the home of the widow for what turns out to be a weekend of reverence, rivalries, revelations and, of course, regrets.

"There are a lot of shared experiences, but still everyone's perspective is different," said Buitenhuis about the people who have come to mourn the director.

What is interesting is the film, shot on location in Cambridge, Ont., is a fully improvised project based on a story by Buitenhuis and Krista Sutton, who is also one of the film's stars.

"The funders were scared of it," said Buitenhuis, laughing about the plan to use only a very detailed script with no dialogue. "They didn't know what to expect."

Buitenhuis, on the other hand, did know what to expect. A previous three-year stint as director on the improvised Global TV show *Train 48* offered a great, confident foundation.

"I am very comfortable with improv," said Buitenhuis. "We did quite a lot of auditions with improv. You can see pretty quickly who is comfortable."

"It's artists who can listen and share and who have real experiences they can draw on," added Buitenhuis about the cast that includes, Martha Burns, Raul Bhaneja, Sarain Boyal, Tara Nicodemo and Kristopher Turner.

— Dana Gee