

PRODUCTION UPDATE

BY MARY GLUCKSMAN

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elly Anderson's *Shift* tells the story of a lonely married woman who finds intimacy in a phone relationship with a telemarketer who turns out to be a convict working for a few dollars a day. *Shift* starts when Melanie, an airport coffee shop waitress in her late twenties, arrives home after a particularly disheartening day still simmering from a morning conflict with her unemployed husband. A telemarketing phone call provides distraction, but Melanie soon notices that Louis, the man on the other end, is veering into more flirtatious territory.

"It's about two people struggling against alienation who make an unexpected connection over the phone but are thwarted by their

circumstances," says Anderson. Set in the contemporary south, the one-hour drama, an ITVS production, also explores the growing trend towards corporations contracting with prisons for cheap labor. "You can call up TWA or AT&T and get an inmate on the phone and not even know it," says Anderson. Newcomer Alethea Allen plays Melanie, Christopher Meloni ("Oz") is Louis, and Eric Thal (A Stranger Among Us) and Marla Sucharetza (The Autumn Heart) are Melanie's husband and best friend.

Anderson, 34, studied Modern Culture and Media at Brown University and has been making documentaries in New York for the last ten years; *Shift* constitutes her first foray into fiction. She's best known for *Out at Work*, a Sundance '97 American Spectrum entry which HBO programmed last year after commissioning additional material to replace one of the film's three storylines.

Anderson's other films include "Signal to Noise," a three-part public TV series about Americans' relationship with television which she co-produced, and *Looking for a Space*, about lesbians and gay men in Cuba. Also an instructor of documentary production and editing at New York's Hunter College, she says *Shift*'s story was "kicking around" in her head when she read one of colleague Tal McThenia's feature scripts and they decided to collaborate. The filmmakers raised \$300,000 in financing from ITVS' 1997 American Stories narrative initiative.

The 16mm color *Shift* was shot over three weeks last May; the filmmakers needed a southern locale with an airport and a prison and chose Winston-Salem, North Carolina. "We liked the feel of the landscape," says Anderson. PBS has U.S. broadcast rights; all others are available. At press time Anderson was starting a round of festival applications and expects to complete the circuit before *Shift* airs.

Cast: Alethea Allen, Christopher Meloni, Eric Thal, Avery Glymph, Marla Sucharetza, Matthew Bradshaw. Crew: Producers, Kelly Anderson, Jill Footlick; Executive Producer, Tami Gold; Screenwriter, Tal McThenia; Director, Anderson; Cinematographer, Keith Smith; Production Design, John Paino; Editors, Kate Sanford, Alisa Lepselter. Contact: Kelly Anderson, AndersonGold Films, 151 First Avenue, Suite 210, New York, NY 10003. Tel/Fax: (212) 982-7222.