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Telluride Film Review: 'Tales of the Grim Sleeper'

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AUGUST 30, 2014 | 12:00AM PT Nick Broomfield delivers a grim, eye-opening account of alleged

serial killer Lonnie Franklin Jr.

The Los Angeles Police Department's famed motto, "to protect and to serve," has rarely

sounded as hollow as it does during Nick Broomfield's "Tales of the Grim Sleeper," an eye-

Chief Film Critic @foundasonfilm

Scott Foundas

opening account of alleged serial killer Lonnie Franklin Jr., accused of murdering 10 women (and possibly many more) in South Central L.A. between 1985 and his arrest in 2010. This is familiar turf for Broomfield, whose credits include two celebrated docus about Aileen Wuornos. But as its pluralistic title suggests, "Tales" is less a portrait of Franklin himself than a panoramic survey of the sociological forces that aided and abetted his killing spree. What emerges, finally, is an urgent distress call from one of America's many, predominately black inner cities cast adrift by decades of municipal neglect and institutional racism. While the gruesome subject matter will make this tough going for some auds, the film should enjoy extensive fest and arthouse play following its Telluride and Toronto premieres. Broomfield's sharpest, most substantial work in at least a decade, following two little-seen dramatic

features ("Ghosts" and "Battle For Haditha") and the lively but skin-deep Sarah Palin expose "You

Betcha!," "Tales of the Grim Sleeper" finds the veteran documaker doing what he has always done best: barging in where he's not wanted and using his semi-affected persona of the bumbling, fishout-of-water Brit to disarm people who otherwise wouldn't give him the time of day. Here, that means traversing the streets of South Central in a highly conspicuous black Mercedes and stopping to bend the ear of Franklin's friends, former neighbors and collateral victims. In this, Broomfield receives an invaluable assist from one Pamela Brooks, a self-proclaimed former "crack whore" and neighborhood fixture, now four years clean and sober, who quickly segues from mere interview subject to de facto <u>production manager</u>, riding shotgun with the <u>crew</u> (whom she refers to as her "friends from England") and opening doors for them at every turn. It's rare for Broomfield to be upstaged during one of his own films, but Brooks does so early and often, and she carries herself with a joyful self-empowerment that leavens the otherwise bleak atmosphere. As first exposed by investigative reporter Christine Pelisek in a 2008 L.A. Weekly cover story, the LAPD was aware by the late 1980s that a serial killer was systematically preying on prostitutes and

withheld from the public for more than 20 years, when the Grim Sleeper began killing again after an apparent 14-year hiatus. In the course of his own investigation, Broomfield initially turns up a few genial neighborhood regulars who remember Franklin as a good friend, a loving father to his son Christopher, a highly skilled car thief, and an all-around swell guy who seemed incapable of such violent behavior. But it doesn't take long for another, more sinister picture to form. Several of Broomfield's interview subjects call him back to get a few more things about Franklin off their respective chests, the odd incident or two that seemed harmless enough at the time, but which, in hindsight, carry graver implications. Details like the .25 caliber pistol Franklin would brazenly brandish (as if, one friend

recalls, he wanted to be caught), and his hobby of taking photographs of women in kinky poses —

which, upon Franklin's arrest, yielded nearly 200 images of unknown women appearing to be dead

the city's own, Brooks herself manages to track down several of the women in question during the

or asleep, all of them considered possible additional victims. In a more effective bit of sleuthing than

other transient women whom he would kill either by strangulation or by shooting them at close

eyewitness sketch provided by Enietra Washington, the killer's only known survivor — were

range with a .25 caliber handgun. But these and other key details about the case — including an

"Tales of the Grim Sleeper" doesn't entertain many doubts about the guilt of Franklin (who, as of this writing, is still awaiting trial), and it isn't a procedural about how he was finally caught. Rather, what interests Broomfield most is how Franklin could have hidden in plain sight for so long, and how South Central's long history of poverty, drug abuse and police neglect all made very fertile ground for his crimes. It's an incendiary film, but never a sensationalistic one, typified by Broomfield's sensitive, sobering interviews with the parents of Grim Sleeper victims and community activists like Margaret Prescod, founder of the Black Coalition Fighting Back Serial Murders, who question how differently the authorities — and the media — would have responded to a serial killer targeting white Beverly Hills housewives.

Telluride Film Review: 'Tales of the Grim Sleeper' Reviewed at Submarine Entertainment, New York, Aug. 22, 2014. (In Telluride Film Festival; Toronto Film Festival

requests for interviews. But both appear in footage from a televised news conference from the day

Unsurprisingly, the LAPD and former L.A. mayor Antonio Villaraigosa declined Broomfield's

of Franklin's arrest, in which the mayor praises the police for the exhaustive two decades of

investigating that led to his capture — a triumph of public relations over public service.

—TIFF Docs; New York Film Festival.) Running time: **105 MIN.**

Submarine Entertainment, New York.) Produced by Marc Hoeferlin. Executive producers, Celia Taylor, Charles Finch, Shani Hinton. Crew

Production

course of the film.

Scott Salinas; supervising sound editor/re-recording mixer, Mark Rozett; associate producers, Erin Li, Sophia Loukaides. With

Seymour Amster, Pamela Brooks, Nick Broomfield, Christopher Franklin, Nana Gyamfi, Laverne Peters, Margaret

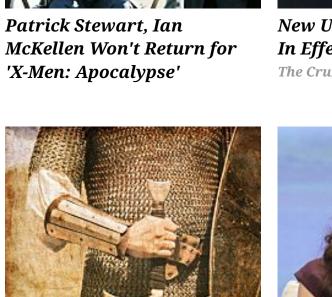
Directed by Nick Broomfield. Camera (color, HD), Barney Broomfield; editors, Joe Bini, Marc Hoeferlin; music, H.

(Documentary — U.S.-U.K.) A Lafayette Film presentation of a South Central Films production. (International sales:

FILED UNDER: Los Angeles Police Department, New York Film Festival, Nick Broomfield, Telluride Film Festival, Toronto Film Festival

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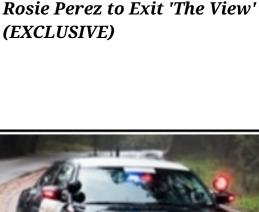
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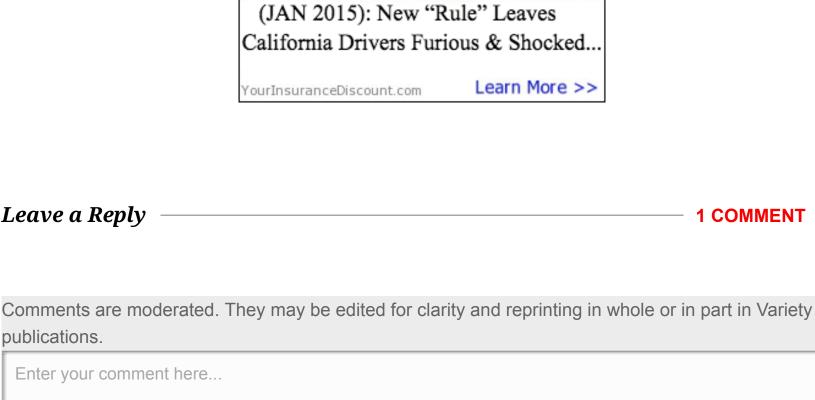
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Nice review Scott. I look forward to seeing it.

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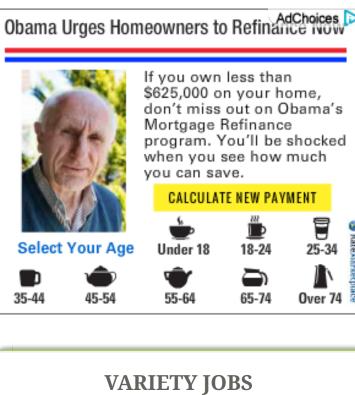
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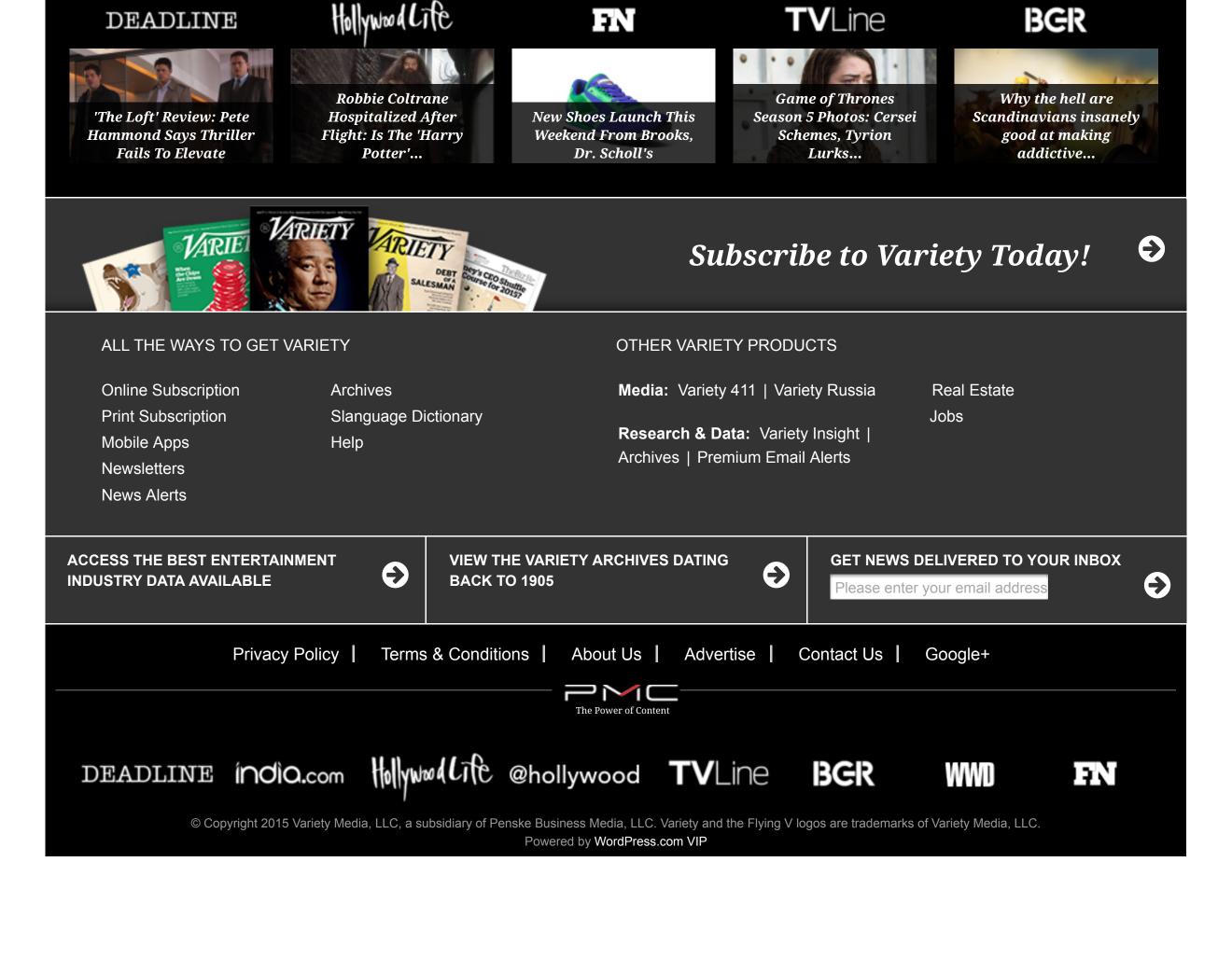
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