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On the loss of one of audio documentary's most committed advocates: remembering Leslie Rosin

Sven Preger, Neue Zürcher Zeitung

Abstract

At that moment, I think Leslie was not only really happy, but even proud. It is Tuesday evening, 18 May 2021, and we are sitting together on a table in front of the stage in a studio at the German broadcaster, WDR. Not in front of the table, not next to the table, but on the table. Our legs are dangling and we let them dangle. Because we are really exhausted. The whole team is. We have just finished the last live event on stage and we've actually made it. Four days of the International Feature Conference in Cologne. Sven Preger remembers colleague, friend, and award-winning documentary maker, Leslie Rosin.

Keywords

radio, podcast, Germany, documentary features, IFC, Europe

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Of course, Leslie would have loved to greet her IFC community face-to-face, but instead she has held the whole conference remotely due to Covid19. And now we are sitting on this table, and Leslie is smiling broadly and contentedly – and she is also a little exhausted. And she looks over at me and says just these few words:

“We really did a good job there.”

That was a sentence that Leslie didn't utter often. Anyone who worked with Leslie knew that the features, stories and podcasts were often good, very good in fact. Because Leslie did a lot of tweaking from the first idea to the final fade. There were always little things (sometimes even bigger ones) that somehow still needed to be improved. And Leslie not only had an ear for it, but also almost endless energy to try things out and make them better.

I've been lucky enough to work intensively with her on various projects over the past ten years: major serials, workshops and the IFC. We first came together after the huge international success of *Serial* in 2014, after which we produced WDR's first major podcast serial, *The Hitchhiker* (2016 & 2019).

I can still remember when my co-author Stephan and I sent the first version of the script to Leslie (probably around 150 pages in total, after all, they were scripts for a five-part serial) and Leslie came into the room for the first manuscript meeting with the edited scripts under her arm. She smiled broadly at us (which gave us hope!) and then with that smile said one of those typical Leslie sentences: "Great, there's still a lot to do!" She just loved tweaking manuscripts, making them better, trying them out.

The list of prizes she has won as an editor is very long: it includes the Prix Europa, the German Radio Prize, the German Social Prize and many, many more. Although she was delighted with the awards and recognition, she was

driven by something else: she loved radio features, documentaries, podcasts and storytelling. She loved inventing new forms, exploring possibilities, giving new and young authors a platform – that was her world. Her commitment to the International Editorial Board at *RadioDoc Review* also bears witness to this. If you visited her WDR office, the piles of paper sometimes gave you an idea of how many projects she managed. But she always found time to discuss new ideas.

I think the IFC was very close to her heart and certainly one of the professional highlights every year: Working in the EBU feature group to prepare the IFC programme, travelling to the locations (the IFC takes place in a different city every year), like Vienna, Prague or Stockholm – and of course meeting her colleagues, her community. That was her thing.

On this Tuesday evening in May 2021, Leslie and a colleague gave me a bottle of the whiskey liqueur, chocolate Baileys, as a thank you. It was a running gag between us because I very occasionally take a shot of it in my coffee. That's what I'm imagining now. Coffee in the spring sunshine and talking shop with you, Leslie. The IFC is now called the Audio Storytelling Festival and will take place in Rome in 2024 – without you. You will be sorely missed.

Leslie Rosin died on 20 March 2024. She turned 55 a few days earlier.

Author details

Sven Preger is an audio documentary maker, head of Podcasts at *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and a colleague and friend of Leslie Rosin.

About Leslie Rosin

Leslie Rosin's award-winning audio documentary work ranges from investigative journalism to cultural topics, creative and fictional productions over several decades. She was a longstanding member of the editorial board of *RadioDoc Review*.

You can hear Leslie interviewed for the BBC's *Shortcuts*:

<https://soundcloud.com/fallingtreeproductions/s16-short-cuts-the-other-side-66>

and listen to *The Hitchhiker* in German with English subtitles here:

<https://www1.wdr.de/radio/wdr5/sendungen/tiefenblick/the-hitchhiker-documentary-series-100.html>