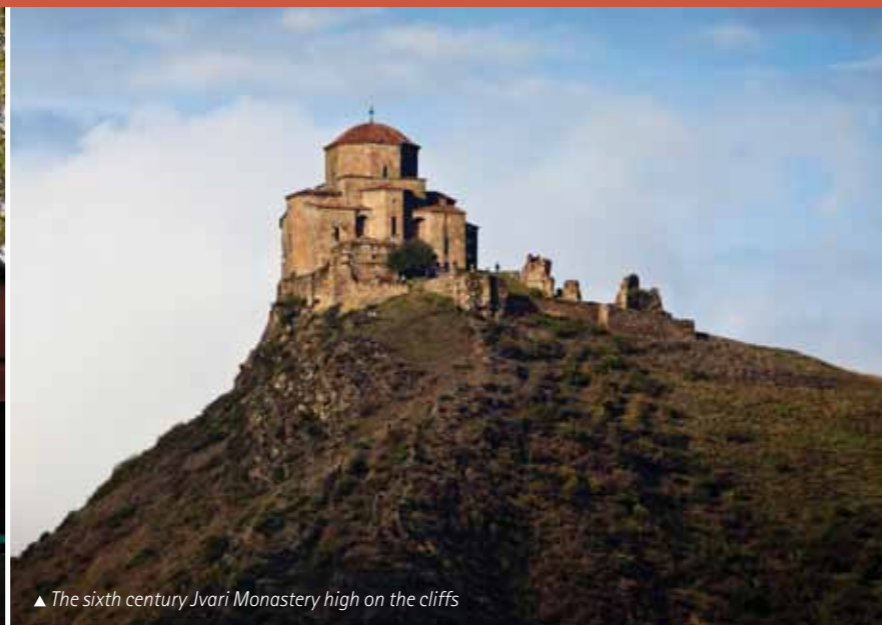




▲ Traditional Georgian balconied house in old Tbilisi



▲ The sixth century Jvari Monastery high on the cliffs



## John Henshall reports back from a trip to the Georgian capital Tbilisi where he was pleased to represent the Guild at the Second Golden Eye International Festival of Cameramen

It is fair to say that without cameramen, television would still be called... well, radio.

Cameramen are the eyes of everyone who watches television, the craftsmen who create and capture the pictures which convey the emotions

Republic of Georgia to create a festival devoted to recognising the unique eye – the Golden Eye – of some of the best cameramen in the world in 2009.

In its second year, the Golden Eye International Festival of Cameramen

### The Golden Eye International Festival of Cameramen is an inspired event which deserves to go from strength to strength

which make television pictures the most compelling form of photography in the world.

And yet cameramen are not very good at telling the world what a great job they do. They are shy about boasting about their work. They have never said very much about their contribution, perhaps because historically the crew system in the major broadcast organisations ensured that no individual stood out. Apart from the GTC Awards, there has been very little recognition for the outstanding work of the television cameraman.

It is perhaps surprising therefore that it took the former Soviet

invited the Guild of Television Cameramen to send a representative to the festival in Tbilisi, Georgia. Our chairman, Graeme McAlpine, being busy working on the Commonwealth Games in India, asked me if I would represent the Guild.

#### Not just a jolly!

Of course I was keen to go. Two or three days liggering in a country I had never been to, on the cusp of Europe and Asia, sounded very exciting. But it was not to be like that at all. I was needed for two weeks, to be spent in a darkened room viewing over 70 entries. No fast forwarding at these awards: every entry was to be viewed in its entirety. Intensive work. But the jury members were to be looked after, with hotel, meals and transport all provided.

I was met at Tbilisi airport, in the middle of the night, by the Festival Director, Zurab Khutsishvili, and taken direct to the festival's venue and small hotel, the modern Merab Berdzenishvili International Culture Center ([www.art-muza.ge](http://www.art-muza.ge)). We started the judging later that same day.

▼ GTC Tbilisi style - the Georgian Trade Center



▼ The jury at work



▲ The festival's venue, the modern 'Muza' Merab Berdzenishvili International Culture Center

The international jury was made up of six people: Otar Luitanishvili (Chairman), a film director and professor at Shota Rustaveli University of Theatre and Cinema in Georgia; Marja Sonneveld, a camera operator, documentary maker and former professor of Visual Arts at the Dutch Film and TV Academy (NFTVA) in

for the organising company, Indent, to finance their studies while at university. Another young Indent employee, Giorgi Karselashvili, worked as technical manager.

Indent is the major Georgian supplier of broadcast systems, representing companies such as Canon, Fujinon, Harris, JVC, Panasonic,

### The awards presentation ceremony was a vibrant event... I could hardly believe the media interest, counting no less than ten camera units from various television stations

Amsterdam, Netherlands; Arsen Arakelyan, a film director from Armenia; Elkhan Djaparov, a film director from Azerbaijan; Georgi 'Kakha' Kakhabrishvili, a television director and rector at the Television and Radio Institute in Georgia and myself, John Henshall, as co-vice chairman of the GTC.

The daily viewing and judging was organised by four outstanding young Georgians: Levan Katsadze, the project manager of IFIT (International Foundation for Innovative Technologies); communications manager Elene Kokreidze and festival press secretary Guantsa Barabadze. All of them speak superb English and are brilliant organisers. They are all students of international law who also work

Sony, Telex and Vitec, all of which support the festival and gave well-attended open presentations in the days preceding the awards event itself.

#### Truly international

Festival entries came from Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brazil, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, Spain, Ukraine and the USA. Sadly, there were no entries from the UK, perhaps because little has been known here about this festival. No matter how long the running time, each was viewed in its entirety. The entries ranged from short commercials and student films to long drama and documentary productions. Thankfully, the standard was generally extremely high, so the jury was never bored.

# The Golden Eye of Georgia - celebrating the art and craft of the cameraman



▼ Some of the many crews covering the event



▲ Peter Brugman of the Netherlands, winner for 'Best Original Shot', is interviewed for television as he treads the first grapes of the 2010 vintage in Tbilisi



▼ Grand Prize winner Mkrtych Malkhasyan

### Cameramen are not very good at telling the world what a great job they do... they are shy about boasting about their work

Voting was done in secret, the results being collated by our team of organisers. When it came to the shortlist of winners I was amazed to discover that the jury, brought together from so many nations, had been in complete accord. The only aspect the jury found difficult was understanding the chosen categories, such as 'Best Angle', 'Best Portrait' and 'Best Sketch', and we recommended revising the categories for 2011.

decided to shoot a documentary about her village and her dream.

By an amazing coincidence, just as we are feeling sympathy for the hapless inhabitants of Glod, Sacha Baron Cohen and his Twentieth Century Fox crew turn up and lampoon the unwitting non-English speaking residents as idiots and sexual deviants for the movie *Borat*. When the villagers realise what has happened, a big-talking American lawyer arrives to talk them into a lawsuit against Twentieth Century Fox.

#### Winning camerawork

The winner of the 'Best Original Shot' was Peter Brugman of the Netherlands, for his haunting photography on *Winter Silence* – much of it shot in available moonlight in the Swiss Alps.

The 'Best Movie Cameraman Work' award went to Georgian cameraman Giorgi Beridze for *Three Houses*, a story of the meeting of the wife and mistress of a Georgian general in the Red Army, after he had died in the arms of the mistress in her apartment. Set in post-war Soviet Georgia, the production was photographed in beautiful rich monochrome.

At the presentation ceremony, I was asked to announce the 'Best Television Cameraman Work' award which went to Dutch cameraman Erik Van Empli for the documentary *Carmen Meets Borat*. This production is an absolute must-see.

While on holiday in Romania the director, Mercedes Stalenhoef, had a chance meeting with a feisty young woman who, watching a Spanish soap opera on satellite TV, had a dream of escaping from her humdrum life in the dismal village of Glod – which in Romanian appropriately means 'mud'. Intrigued by Carmen, Stalenhoef

This is a masterpiece of documentary photography, evolving seamlessly into a completely different story as the drama unfolds, never missing an important line or any of the action and beautifully portraying the counterpoint of humour and pathos. In fact I found it funnier than the *Borat* feature film itself.

The Grand Prize was won by Mkrtych Malkhasyan from Armenia for his outstanding photography on the drama/documentary *Nora*, directed by the BAFTA award-winning British director David Hinton, who worked on *The South Bank Show* for ten years. *Nora* tells the true story of a Zimbabwean-born dancer, Nora Chipaumire, born in Zimbabwe in 1965 and now living in the US, taking her on a journey back through her youth in a poetic mixture of dance and performance. It was exquisitely photographed on location in southern Africa with, Mkrtych Malkhasyan told me, a crew of no fewer than 25.

The awards presentation ceremony was a vibrant event held on the evening of Saturday 23 October 2010. I could hardly believe the media interest, counting no less than ten

camera units from various television stations. Because of the unique Georgian script I can't say which companies I was interviewed by – apart from one radio reporter who identified herself as being from the BBC Russian Service.

It will not be long before this small former Soviet country is 'discovered' by the package tourist trade. I have never received such a warm welcome anywhere as that from my Georgian hosts. It seems incredible that one of the world's greatest tyrants, Joseph Stalin, was born here. Some of the world's earliest wine was made in Georgia and they have not lost the taste for it, often producing delicious homemade vintages for incredible dinners presided over by the traditional 'Tamada' or toastmaster.

We did earn one day off during the two weeks, when we were taken sightseeing around Tbilisi. Georgia is magical with some of the world's earliest Christian churches, dating from the sixth century. It was one of the first countries to be converted to Christianity and most of the people are still devoutly Christian. One of the shots I wish I'd dared capture was that of 20 people sitting at the back of a bus, all crossing themselves three times with three fingers of their

right hand arranged in the form of a triangle as we passed a church. On Sunday, many marriages were being blessed in candlelight in the historic churches – a wonderful sight.

In old Tbilisi the apartments and houses with protruding upper balconies have Escher-like criss-crossing external staircases and gas pipes. Hopefully they will be preserved.

The Golden Eye International Festival of Cameramen is an inspired event which deserves to go from strength to strength. Hopefully there will be some UK winners at next year's festival. Of course, that's entirely up to you.



▼ Escher-like criss-crossing staircases in old Tbilisi



▲ Zurab Gegenava (director of 'Indent'), Zurab Khutsishvili (festival director), Giorgi Jajanidze (festival coordinator), Elene Kokhraidze (communication manager), Levan Katsadze (International Fund of Innovative Technologies)

#### Fact File

Contact GTC co-vice chairman John Henshall on: john.henshall.07@gtc.org.uk Details and a full list of the Golden Eye Festival 2010 winners can be found at: www.goldeneye.ge



## Why join the GTC?

GTC membership will give you:



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- two issues of the highly regarded magazine Zerb
- four issues a year of the informative members' newsletter GTC In Focus
- expert opinion and advice from the GTC Internet Forum
- prestigious annual awards celebrating the best television camerawork
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▼ Traditional Georgian dress worn by wedding party



▲ Wedding by candlelight in Sveti-Tskhoveli Cathedral, Mtskheta. Note the man on his cellphone behind the bridesmaid!