



CONDUCTIVITY

Trailer

vimeo.com/302877016

p/w: C0nduct1v1ty2018

20 mins - Rough cut

vimeo.com/302877713

p/w: C0nduct1v1tyR0ugh

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Documentary film, feature length and 52 min cutdown

4th version of manuscript, 26th November 2018

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LOGLINE

Sibelius Academy in Finland is the training ground for the future superstar conductors. What does it take to lead an orchestra and who's got what it takes?

SYNOPSIS

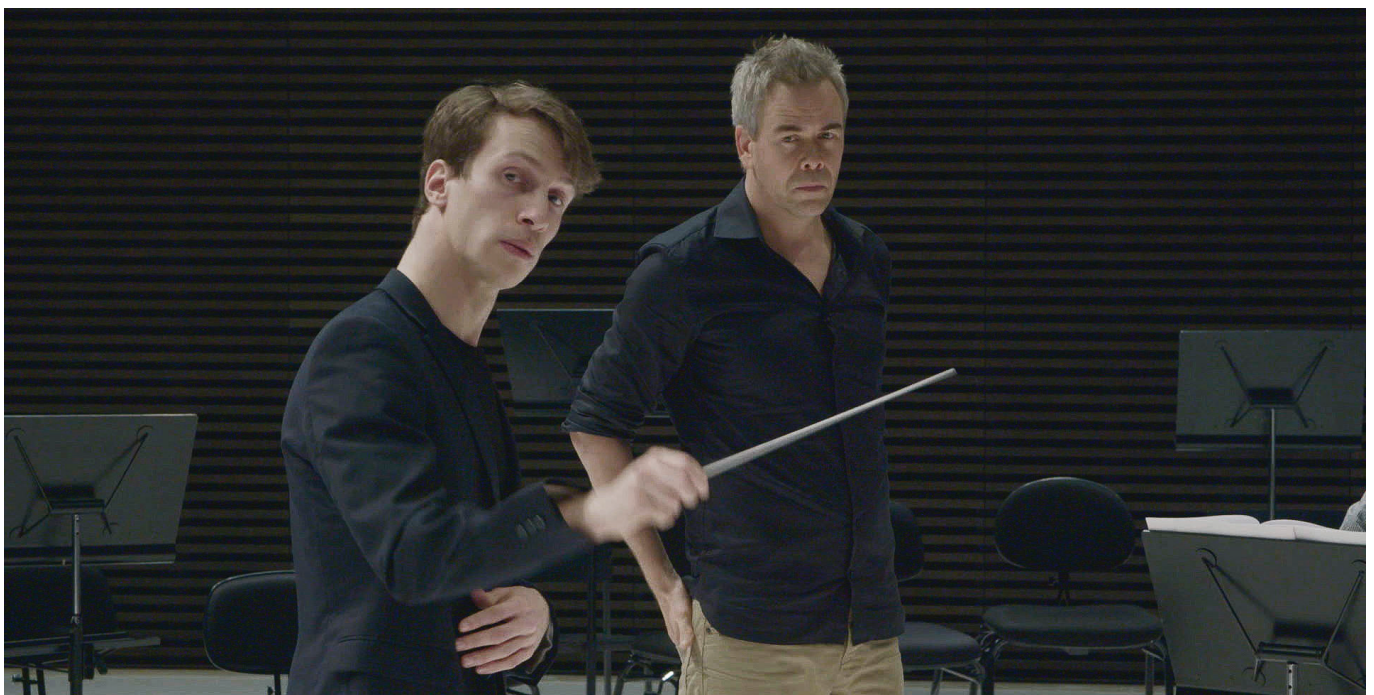
Conductivity is a film about creative leadership and growing to become a leader. The three main characters are **I-Han Fu** from Taiwan, **Emilia Hoving** from Finland and **James Kahane** from France. They study orchestral conduction in the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland.

We follow their journey from being a student to world class artist during three years. It's a rocky road, where tension, social fears and elements out of their control can create insurmountable obstacles.

Our French student James is focused on networking and getting to know people in the industry. During his studies at the Academy he becomes more and more confident, to the point that he gets in trouble for his arrogant style. However, most of the time this feature works in his favour. He is a bit of an opportunist and knows it himself.

Our Finnish student Emilia decided to study conducting because she wanted to work with people. But now she has understood, that the work of a conductor is in many ways very lonely. As the leader you are not a member of the group in the same way as the others.

Our Taiwanese student I-han admits that he needs to work on his social skills. He fears talking to people that he doesn't know. He hates going to parties and he is struggling to remember people's names. His shyness seems quite comical until we learn that he is actually very shortsighted and almost colour blind. He has troubles to identify people from a distance and to read their facial expressions. Suddenly we see his shyness in a new light.



Sibelius Academy is one of Europe's largest music colleges, and its orchestral conduction class is world-famous. The class is an especially coveted place of study because here students have an opportunity to rehearse conducting a live orchestra every week, which is highly unusual in music colleges around the world. There are only two music schools in the world with this system, the Juilliard School in New York and Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. Studying on the conductor class in Helsinki has this far been free for all students regardless of origin.

The students are guided on their study path by completely different conductors: The supportive and warm professor **Atso Almila**, as well as Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor **Hannu Lintu**, an admired visiting professor forging an international career, We'll also meet a visiting lecturer, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's Chief Conductor **Susanna Mälkki**.

The film addresses the theme of leadership by looking at communication: What creates authority? What sort of characteristics make a person a leader? Can leadership be learned or is it something you're born with? Can one decide to be a leader or is it for others to decide? What kind of meaning can a look or its absence convey?

The film's characters reflect on leadership in the interviews as well as in conversations with each other and loved ones. Orchestras are made up of strong personas whose respect is earned – how does that happen? A good leader is strong without being gruff, friendly without being weak, humble without being fearful. Leadership means bringing out your own vision and making it real so it is conveyed to the world around you. Conductor training, in essence, is leadership training.

KEY PERSONS

James Salomon Kahane is a 22-year-old student, the son of a cultured Parisian family. He has four younger siblings, and his father is a politician. Despite his young age, James is sophisticated and classically educated, but he has inner struggles with insecurity. In the beginning of the film, James's insecurity is exposed in that he caves into mannerisms and over-performing – qualities far from a natural leader. James hides behind an adopted role and does not want to look like a young student. "Fake it until you make it" appears to be James's survival tactics under heavy pressure. And by the end of the film, James actually makes it.



I-Han Fu is a 26-year-old percussionist from Taiwan who gets a place in the Sibelius Academy conductor class and moves to Helsinki. The ambitious young musician has studied classical Eastern music which has many confluences with classical Western music. He also studied in the Conservatory of Amsterdam for three years before moving to Helsinki. In Helsinki he is further immersed in the world of music and is slowly being reborn as a conductor who can exert enthusiasm to an orchestra despite his shyness. He would like to make a career in Europe which in his opinion is a fascinating continent with many odd and amusing cultural habits. I-Han's challenge is to develop from a skilled and humble performer to an artist and thus advance towards natural, artistic leadership. His poor eyesight is an additional concrete challenge.



Emilia Hoving is a 23-year-old pianist from Helsinki. Emilia is socially accomplished and easily wins the orchestra's sympathies. She still has a lot to learn about conductor technique, but she has inherent leadership qualities. She leads a busy student life and works part-time in a cafe. The future looks stressful, and at weak moments Emilia is afraid she might crush under pressures. She has lots of good friends and a close relationship with her mother, also a musician. Emilia seems to pull strength from close relationships. She talks about how to feel comfortable as a leader, because one should then be able to take distance from those one is leading. Emilia is about to embark on a mostly-male profession in which she will have to work harder to be accepted as a woman. Only a five percent of the world's conductors are women.

Professor Atso Almila is a charismatic teacher whose pedagogy is based on both sharp criticism as well as gentle encouragement and silly jokes. Atso represents the value system of the 70s and is always on the side of the small man even though his life belongs in the inner circle of high culture. Atso's supportive style is a conscientious choice; his aim is to persuade the young out of their shell, make them feel liberated and to dare to question the authorities.

Visiting professor, **Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor Hannu Lintu** is a colourful teacher. He does not mince his words in the conductor class rehearsals, which puts the students and orchestra in a state of awe and fear of him. The students really value Hannu's impulsive, demanding and even racy style as he is very precise. Hannu's ascending career both in Finland and other countries gives him credibility among the students. Hannu is also a well-known media personality in Finland whose opinions are closely followed by the Finnish media. Media work is nowadays an integral part of conductors' image, and Hannu masters this with his own impulsive style.

We'll also meet a visiting lecturer, **Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's Chief Conductor Susanna Mälkki**. In the second part of the film we'll be able to see her work with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra as James gets a position as Susanna's assistant. Susanna's authority is based on dialogue which seems quite different compared with Hannu Lintu's style.



Professor Atso Almila commenting on a rehearsal by conductor students.



THE STYLE OF THE FILM

The film is largely made of traditional observation based on the characters' communication. A reference would be *Être et avoir* (Nicolas Philibert, 2002) that follows the life of small children and their teachers in a French village school over a year.

The verbal feedback received by the students is at least as important as the orchestral rehearsals. It helps us better understand what went well in the rehearsal and what didn't go quite so well. We'll also follow events with our characters outside of college. We consider important events such as I-Han, Emilia and James mirroring their thoughts with a loved one, e.g. I-Han via Skype with his mother or Emilia with a close friend. We'll also hear the students' internal voice that will give deeper understanding of their moods.

Along with the tracking material, we are experimenting with a line of a few built, performative scenes. This is when we step away from reality and delve into a world of internal visions. We'll create a visual metaphor for how it feels to conduct a symphony orchestra. For instance Emilia, who compares orchestra conducting to finding a common breath. These performative scenes will be filmed as the last thing in January 2019, when we are a little further in the edit.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

We have now filmed the three protagonists for more than two years. In this story I-han is the underdog who we feel for. He is from another culture, very shy and has a serious sight impairment which means he is up for a huge challenge. As a musician though, he is a true virtuoso and his hearing is exceptional. This might save him. James on the other hand becomes a rebel who proclaims that he fundamentally disagrees with the main professor about what the role of a conductor is. He is now considering to drop out of the Academy and jumpstart his professional career. He recently founded an orchestra of his own in Helsinki. Emilia needs to figure out how she can become a leader in this male dominated world.



Looking at the material, I get the feeling that there is something mystical about the work of conductors. In a way it is a technical performance, but on the other hand, a perfect technique will not help if there is no emotion and sensitivity. A conductor is like a dancer whose movements are the result of rigorous training but whose performance crumbles if it lacks the sense of fast living in the moment and danger. It combines personality, technical skills, physical properties, corporeality, communication. You have to be your genuine self. It requires good self-knowledge and at the same time self-confidence and humbleness. Or is it about a built role of a grand maestro that one has to learn?

The classical symphonic music represents old-time civilisation, European heritage and value system. It is like a wormhole to a common or shared landscape of the soul. As Beethoven and Mozart plays in the Helsinki Music Centre rehearsal hall, the surrounding world feels far away. Conductors are artists who in a way see themselves as the earthly representatives of great composers. The conductor is only one link in the long chain of traditions, but on the other hand, his or her interpretation of the piece here and now is the point of the performance or work of art. Watching a conductor work makes me consider the question, what is an artist? Our main characters are in a situation in which they have to become good leaders to be able to realise themselves as artists. Can any school teach this? Maybe not, but in Sibelius Academy they have at least an orchestra with which they can try their wings.

Through the film I will be studying the structures of power and hierarchy in the world of classical music. However, I think that the fundamentals encountered here apply also to other places where people interact with each other: what sort of hidden attitudes have we got about leadership, who is good enough to be a leader, what sort of skills or characteristics can make a leader?

When stepping on the podium, the conductor is put under a magnifying glass both by the orchestra and the audience behind them. Atso Almila, Hannu Lintu and Susanna Mälkki are each very different role models. Hannu Lintu is a tough leader, and by scarce eye contact he electrifies the atmosphere and fills the people around him with awe. Atso Almila has a softer approach whose encouraging style is meant to bring out the students' strengths. Visiting lecturer Susanna Mälkki, on the other hand, represents a different, conversational leadership.

At the beginning of the film the viewer will be thinking about the work of a conductor in rather concrete terms: what will the conductor do if the orchestra does not act the way he or she wants? Who are the young hopes that become conductors, and what drives them ahead? I hope that after seeing the film viewers will be reflecting on the different ways of leadership, the skills and characteristics that may make a leader and how people's hierarchies work. In this case, we learn that it's not the most talented musician who is the most successful conductor. James's key to success seems to be that he is very good at projecting the image of being successful. And this says something about how leadership can be built today.

THE FILM'S TIMELINE

THE FIRST THIRD:

Introduction of the characters, the location, the leadership theme. Emilia has technical difficulties, James's insecurity makes the orchestra play wrong, and I-Han struggles with eye contact.

Example scenes:

I-Han arrives at Sibelius Academy with his suitcases and gets a key to the school from the information desk. He is taken on a introduction tour around in the Music Centre. He settles in a student flat in a Helsinki suburb. In the first lesson I-Han conducts Mozart's concerto for Horn and gets positive feedback from main professor Atso Almila: *"Just some minor technical things but you listen really well."* I-han is relieved and confident.

James is introduced as a student who asks I-Han for advice on the use of the baton. He is not very sure of himself and we start thinking that confidence might be a problem for him. In a voice-over James explains that he wanted to study conducting in the Sibelius Academy because it's the most prestigious school for conductors in Europe. He did not even apply to any other school because he was determined to study here.

In a class titled Ergonomics, the students are training breathing techniques, body control, and discussing the role of a conductor. James questions the teacher by saying that there are different requirements for conductors in different countries.

James' technique is put under a magnifying glass by visiting professor Hannu Lintu. *"Now you're killing flies!"* James tries not lose his nerve in this pressure.

In the music centre café professor Atso Almila is talking about the students with his assistant Juhani Poutanen. Juhani is worried about the students, especially James for not being charismatic enough. *"They should go to a rock concert to learn how to be strong and vulnerable at the same time."*

Emilia is tired because work in the cafe is time-consuming and she ends up studying scores late in the evenings. She is agonising about the conductor technique. She feels that as soon as she is able to solve one problem, another one arises.

The first third ends with a scene in which Susanna Mälkki makes an appearance as a visiting lecturer. The students conduct La MÉR by Claude Debussy. I-Han, James and Emilia make mistakes that are discussed using video recordings. The whole class laughs when watching James in the video making a lasso movement with the baton. Emilia is completely lost in the music and feels embarrassed when Susanna points out her mistakes. I-han is doing well but Susanna points out that he is not communicating with his eyes.

From this we cut to I-han reflecting (in V.O.) on his poor eyesight. He explains he used to play badminton but that he would sometimes play by listening as he could not see the white ball against a white background. In the end he could not continue playing when his eyes got even worse. We understand his shyness as we realise that he has real troubles to identify people and their facial expression.

THE SECOND THIRD:

Development and complication. James' confidence grows exponentially. I-Han embarks on a quest to get to know the people around him and tries to become more open. Emilia is invited to perform in Sweden and starts to think about the loneliness of a conductor.

Example scenes:

Professor Atso Almila has a beer with his assistant in the nearby bar and reflects on the type of leadership he himself teaches: "One must be careful not to create monsters".

Emilia decides to leave the cafe job to be able to concentrate on her studies. She confides in a friend about wanting to change the scenery, go for an exchange and think about her future as a conductor there.

I-Han's exceptionally good hearing does not go unnoticed: he gets a position as an assistant of FRSO's Chief Conductor Hannu Lintu. His task is to sit in on the Orchestra's rehearsals and act as Hannu's "extra ears", in other words help him find out how the orchestra sounds in the auditorium. I-Han admires Hannu greatly and wants to make an impression on him. I-Han is conscientious and humble, but tries to get make conversation with the musicians in the orchestra.

I-Han wanders in art exhibitions in Helsinki and reflects on his previous life: "Before I did not enjoy life, I was always practicing for twelve hours per day or even more. Some of my colleagues chose to enjoy life in the university. And I don't know if I made the right choice. Maybe I would have given up music already? Nowadays, I try to talk to people more. To talk and drink; coffee or beer or whatever. I can spend three hours just having lunch. Because I need to know the people."

At the same time, James works as Susanna Mälkki's assistant, but his job is quite different. James takes it as an empowering experience that helps him build his self-confidence.



Chief Conductor Hannu Lintu conducting a Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra rehearsal. Conductor students make notes in the darkness of the auditorium.

James conducts a grand Brahms concert arranged by the French Institute. It's his bachelor diploma concert. In the back stage room together with piano soloist Thomas Puissochet he is preparing for the show by nervously adding more and more perfume. In this moment they are just young musicians trying to feel confident. After the concert they are being congratulated but Thomas is upset by the mistakes that happened during the concert. James concludes that nobody in the audience notice the mistakes so they are not important.

The whole conducting class is electrified when one other Finnish student in their class is called to replace the American conductor James Gaffigan for a big concert with the FRSO. James feels that Finnish students are give more opportunities than students from other countries and decides not to go to the concert. I-Han, Emilia and the others in the class gather in the back stage room to congratulate the class mate after the concert. Emilia and I-Han feel a bit shy watching their class mate writing autographs.

Emilia is invited to conduct a Christmas concert in the city of Sundsvall, northern Sweden. She is excited about the prospect of her international debut and hopes this might be a good start for her career. She has heard that the job market for conductors in Sweden is quite open for female conductors, and she thinks she might like the Swedish atmosphere.

It's now I-Han's turn to be scrutinised by prof. Hannu Lintu. "Be more open! Look at them!" are Lintu's advice to I-Han in front of the Academy's orchestra.



THE LAST THIRD:

The winner takes it all? James gets into conflict with main professor and decides to take a year off studies and tries to jumpstart his professional career. I-Han opens up about his eye problems. He needs to decide if he should stay in Europe or not when he graduates. Emilia's concert in Sweden gives her new thoughts on what she wants to do as a conductor.

Example scenes:

James has decided that he wants to be less conscious of what he looks like when he is conducting and therefore will be watching the rehearsal videos less. He participates in a masterclass with the Helsinki Philharmonics and becomes infuriated when professor Almila interrupts his conducting. The orchestra ends up taking Almila's side and advising James to listen to his professor's advices. In a voice over James explains that he now fundamentally disagrees with Almila's idea of what a conductor does and that he therefore needs to "kill the father".

Emilia arrives in Sweden with high hopes. She is nervous about what the first impression the orchestra will have of her. She is very nervous in the beginning of the rehearsal. (To be filmed 30.11)

James is approached by an Austrian agent for classical music. They meet in Helsinki and make an agreement. James is overjoyed by the prospect of what this agent might do for his career.

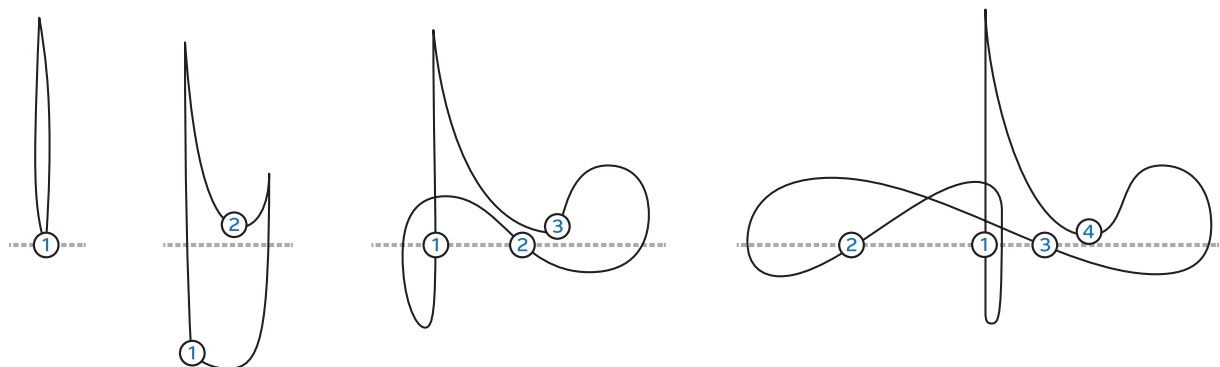
Emilia's concert is a bit surreal. There is a human-sized teddy bear on stage and a lot of Christmas decorations. We follow her feelings back stage after the concert. (To be filmed 2.12)

I-Han decides to be more open about his eye problems. He goes to the optician's and finds a nice pair of glasses. He also tries on some crazy ones and has a little bit of fun with the thought of becoming the Elton John of classical music. (TBC).

Emilia is back in class after her concert in Sweden. She talks about what kind of a first impression she wants to give in the future and whether it is necessary to practise aloofness to become a good conductor. (TBC)

I-Han travels to his home country Taiwan to participate in a competition for conductors. He performs Sibelius' Finlandia for a big taiwanese audience. It's a great performance and I-han is approached by Taiwanese talent scouts. He is divided; should he continue with his dream of having a career in Europe or should he move back to Taiwan? (TBC)

James is performing with the orchestra he founded together with musicians he became friends with at the Academy; The Helsinki Chamber Orchestra. The next morning he is reading the concert reviews. It's nice review talking about the great confidence of Chief Conductor James Kahane (TBC).



Conducting patterns

TEAM

Tuffi Films is a production company established in Helsinki, Finland in 2010. The company is formed of two producers and three writer-directors. The company develops projects with a wide range of genres from contemporary drama to comedy, as well as versatile creative documentaries. Tuffi's films have enjoyed international success at the Academy Awards, and at festivals such as Sundance, Berlinale, Locarno, Visions du Reel and Clermont-Ferrand. Tuffi Films produces quality films and series on contemporary topics with a human touch, made to stand the test of time.

Selected filmography:

2018 *Stupid Young Heart* (feature film, Dir. Selma Vilhunen) Official selection in Toronto International Film Festival.

2017 *Hobbyhorse Revolution* (documentary feature, Dir. Selma Vilhunen) Winner of the national film award 'Jussi' for the best documentary, Audience Award at Cinekid, Tampere Film Festival: Risto Jarva Main Prize and National Competition - films over 30 minutes - Grand Prix Main Prize

2012 *The Date* (short fiction, Dir. Jenni Toivoniemi) Winner of the Short Film Jury Award, Sundance Film Festival 2013, Special mention at Berlinale Generation, Best Nordic fiction at Minimalen, Best Short Film at Nordic Lights Film Festival

Anna-Karin Grönroos has since 2003 worked as a screenwriter and director of documentaries and factual tv-series. Her latest film *Letters Home* won main prize at the National Short Film competition Kettupäivät in 2017. Her first one-hour documentary *Ecopolis China* premiered in the Mid-Length competition at IDFA in 2013. The film was awarded with a Finnish state prize for cinema and for best political documentary at Aegan Docs 2014. Presently, Anna-Karin directs independent documentaries, and is studying for her MA in documentary film at ELO Film School Finland.

Producer **Venla Hellstedt** studied literature and film in London and gained an MSc in Social Anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science. In UK, she worked in a number of documentary, drama and news productions for BBC, ITV and the Discovery Channel. Venla returned to work in her native Helsinki in 2009, after nearly 14 years in the UK, and has since worked as a Producer of many award-winning Finnish films and international co-productions. Two of the films that she produced have received the national film award 'Jussi' for the best documentary. In 2012, the documentary film *Dance of Outlaws* was awarded at Locarno IFF. In 2018, her first feature film production, *Stupid Young Heart* premiered in Toronto IFF. She has taken part in several international film professionals' courses, such as EAVE Producers' Workshop and Crossing Borders, and is a partner of Tuffi Films.

MetFilm Sales is a new agency specializing in sales of high-end single documentaries and series. MetFilm Sales slate includes Sundance 2018 titles *Bisbee '17*, *The Oslo Diaries*, and a Sundance award-winner *Our New President*, as well as the acclaimed Tribeca '18 documentary *The Feeling Of Being Watched*. MetFilm Sales is run by Vesna Cudic, who joined MetFilm from Dogwoof, where she headed their international sales arm since its inception in 2011 until 2017. At MetFilm, Vesna now works closely with the filmmakers helping them finance their films through pre-sales. MetFilm Sales' production slate includes *Last Breath*, *Escape From San Quentin*, *Leftover Women*, and *Misha's Story*.

Cinetic Media is a New York-based film and media company that provides entertainment clients with advisory services in every aspect of development and operations related to motion pictures, including management, finance, advisory and sales services. Recent sales titles include *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail*, *City of Ghosts*, *Jim & Andy*, *Last Men in Aleppo*, *Pope Francis – A Man of His Word*, *RBG*, and *Strong Island*.



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