CINEEUROPE 2024
UNIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: PICTUREHOUSE CINEMAS' CLARE BINNS

BY REBECCA PAHLE

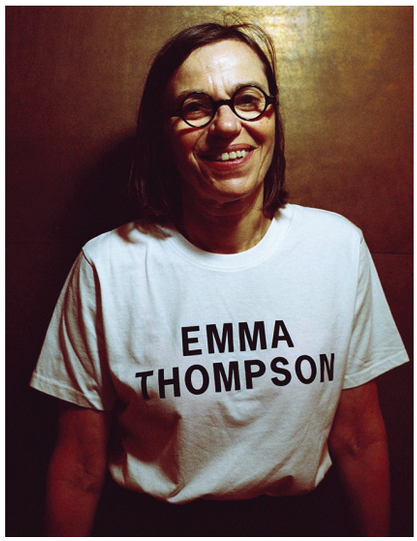
Clare Binns has contributed immeasurably to the culture of film in the U.K. As the managing director of Picturehouse Cinemas—a chain of neighborhood theaters owned by exhibition giant Cineworld—as well as its distribution arm, Picturehouse Entertainment, Binns and the rest of the Picturehouse family have introduced audiences to thought-provoking titles—like *Anatomy of a Fall,* which Picturehouse Entertainment distributed in the U.K. — in a comfortable, community-oriented cinema environment.

For her service to the European cinema industry, Binns will receive the UNIC's Achievement Award at this year's CineEurope. "We are absolutely delighted to honor Clare at CineEurope 2024," said Phil Clapp, president of UNIC. "The award recognizes her incredible passion for the big screen, her outstanding career, and her key role in developing not just the U.K. cinema sector, but an influence that goes far beyond the boundaries of her home nation. Clare's contribution to cinema programming and audience development have been widely recognized, and her leadership continues to shape the industry."

In advance of this year's CineEurope, Binns took the time to speak with BOXOFFICE PRO about her thoughts on the state of the film industry today.

Between the pandemic and the strikes, it's been a rough few years, but we're finally getting back to a more robust film schedule. Can you talk a bit about the importance of midrange titles as part of a well-rounded film slate?

Blockbusters are one thing, and small art house films are another. But there are absolutely those midrange films that cinemas need, and audiences do also. If you look at the way a director gets a career now—take the example of Rose Glass, who started off with a small arthouse film, [2019's] *Saint Maud,* and now has made a bigger film, *Love Lies Bleeding,* which fits into that middle band. It's a way for directors to grow. It's a way for audiences to grow. It's a way for cinemas to have enough films and [to ensure] that there's something for everyone.



CLARE BINNS

There's been a real loss of those midrange films, but I believe they're coming back. The writers' and directors' strikes obviously had an impact on that. A lot of those films that were canceled or delayed will be coming through in 2025. I believe we do need those films. Those films are out there.

"You can have as great an experience watching a film with 10 people at noon on a Tuesday afternoon as you can on the opening night of a big film that is completely sold out. It's more that you're sharing a space."

There was some concern after the pandemic arose that moviegoers would get used to watching midbudget movies on streaming. I think everyone's kind of realized that's not the case, that most movies that go directly to streaming platforms struggle to find long-term cultural relevance.

Cinema has been through so much transition, from silents to sound, TV coming in, DVD coming in, digital coming in. It's been a constantly changing environment. What everybody knows is, people will always want to gather together to see films, to see theater, to see music. It's not the same [when you're at] home. Being at home is very nice, but it's a different experience. I'm feeling very positive about the future of cinema.

When you look at the big Hollywood directors working today, they've always, by

bop_24_june_cineeurope_9.indd 42 27/05/2024 23:58:14

and large, come up by making small and midrange films. And directors make films to be seen in the cinema. That's where they want their films to be shown.

Those early, reputation-making films you see from directors are so important, but they're more difficult to market. The world of cinema marketing is going through such a change now, with severe downsizing of print publications and the rising importance of social media. How do you approach marketing some of those tougher titles?

[Picturehouse has] a film distribution arm, and we have our cinemas. And we have our marketing team [that works with] both. There's much more cross-pollination with the marketing. We work very closely with distributors on smaller films. We have to find ways to reach our audiences directly, which we do. Of course, it would be great if we had huge budgets [to market] smaller films. But people are finding their information very differently than they did 10 or 15 years ago. Digital is just another way of being able to reach audiences.

What we're finding more and more is that repertory is becoming quite important because there are people who are in their 20s who have not seen a lot of the classic films in cinemas. There are audiences who want to see a Martin Scorsese film like *Taxi Driver* [in the cinema]—or just a film they may have only ever seen on Netflix or Amazon. They actually want to come and see [it on] the big screen, and [that's why] we are showing probably more repertory films than we've ever shown. Younger people want to see [older] films in cinemas, so we're making them available. You have to market them. You have to make sure that people know those films are out there, but there's a huge appetite for cinema among younger people.

It's refreshing. There's been all this hand-wringing about younger generations and getting them into cinemas, and it turns out they just want good movies.

Which has always been the case. That hasn't changed. You show good movies. You show them in a comfortable environment, on a nice, big screen. You can have as great an experience watching a film with 10 people at noon on a Tuesday afternoon as you can on the opening night of a big film that is completely sold out. It's more that you're sharing a space. The lights have gone down, you've turned your phone off, you're concentrating on the film. There may be only a few of you in there. But it is a shared experience like no other.



Hirokazu Kore-eda's ***Monster***

"Of course, it would be great if we had huge budgets [to market] smaller films. But people are finding their information very differently than they did 10 or 15 years ago. Digital is just another way of being able to reach audiences."

What have you found effective in marketing smaller films so that customers will take a chance on them, even if they don't look like the typical sort of thing they'd go see?

At Picturehouse we have a strand called Discover, and we also have our Film Club [membership program]. The Film Club is [set at] an affordable price, as is Discover. In Discover, we preview smaller films, and in Film Club it could be a classic [film] or [a current release]. What I'm very proud of at Picturehouse is that we have our audience's trust. When they come to a Discover film, [they know] we will have programmed something that—I mean, they may not say, "It's the best film I've ever seen."

But they'll come away saying, "That was worth watching."

It was worth seeing. And maybe they will say it's the best film they've ever seen. We curate our cinemas. [We don't just program] the biggest films out that week. It's a mixture of all sorts of things so that our audiences will feel that we are doing a job for them, that we are saying, "These are the films that we think will entertain you, that will challenge you, that will inform you." We've been doing that for a very long time, and it's absolutely [what defines us] as a group of cinemas. Every cinema is slightly different in terms of what it's playing and when it's playing it, because we try to tailor [our programming] for the audience that comes to our sites.

The films we bought at Picturehouse Entertainment last year in Cannes were *Anatomy of a Fall,* which turned out to be a huge success, and *The Taste of Things* with Juliette Binoche. We bought [Hirokazu] Kore-eda's *Monster.* And [Stéphanie Di Giusto's historical drama]

bop_24_june_cineeurope_9.indd 43 27/05/2024 23:58:16



Stéphanie Di Giusto's ***Rosalie***

Rosalie, which [opened in the U.K. on June 7]. We've always made sure to have a very diverse, interesting range of films that audiences will be keen to see.

I know you started in the film industry young, working as an usher. Do you remember the first film you saw in a cinema?

Not really. I know that there were films that had a big impact on me. *West Side Story* had a big impact on me. *The Red Shoes* had a big impact on me. The thing about when I first started working at a cinema—it was at the Ritzy in Brixton—is that we were mainly showing repertory cinema. We showed between 10 and 14 different films a week, and I would catch as many of them as I possibly could. Tarkovsky, Herzog, Wenders. And all those amazing American directors, like John Waters [with] Divine. That was my film education, being able to see all those amazing films. It's what I've always wanted our cinemas to do. If [people] want to see great films that are being made now or have been made in the past, [give them] an opportunity to see them.

How do you approach films once they're in their follow-up weeks? Some movies, they come out and they just don't hit with audiences and that's it. But with others, you know they just need a bit of time to find their audience.

It's looking at the numbers. What digital has allowed us to do is to be very flexible. A film like [Ryûsuke] Hamaguchi's *Evil Does Not Exist,* which is a tiny little film—if you pick the right shows each week, there's an audience for it. When it was 35mm, it was much more difficult, but now you can slot things in and keep things going. *Anatomy of a Fall* played at [Picturehouse Central in London] for 26 weeks. All the people who work at Picturehouse say, "Okay, this [film] does particularly well with this audience. We can play it at 9 p.m. on a Tuesday and it will get 30 or 40 people in. And that's worth it." You're much more able to keep films on [longer], which we do. We're very much about letting films breathe and not just taking them off if they're working, and [finding a way to] thread them through all the other films.

"We're very much about letting films breathe and not just taking them off if they're working, and [finding a way to] thread them through all the other films."

All the programmers at Picturehouse are very adept at [putting a slate] together like a jigsaw puzzle. *Poor Things* [had a long run during Oscar season]—people kept that going for ages. Or even the Bob Marley film *[Bob Marley: One Love]*. Some cinemas had odd shows here and there for weeks and weeks and weeks. Audiences do seek them out. Particularly for the smaller films, people don't rush out and see them, so you have to find a way to thread them through so people can still find them when they want to.

You play a bit of everything at Picturehouse—first run, big-budget actioners, the festival hits, the smaller indie films. Would you say there's a typical Picturehouse audience?

It depends on the film. I would say the audience that we probably don't have is the 15- to 20-year-olds. But then we have the older audiences. But, again, we've seen that older audience get younger. After the pandemic, the older audience was quite reluctant to come out again. They were much more nervous. Then our audience got younger, and our audience has continued to get younger. And now, the older audience has come back again!

The people who come to us just like the Picturehouse experience. They like to be in a building that's showing *Furiosa* and also *Hit Man,* the Richard Linklater film. They can get a lovely cup of coffee and have a nice piece of cake and some mochi ice cream. Pizza, if they want it. Wine. People love the fact that they get really good beer and wine with us, and they can take it [into the auditorium] and enjoy the film with a nice glass of merlot.

What are some of the films coming up that you're excited about?

I'm looking forward to *A Quiet Place: Day One* and *MaXXXine.* The Yorgos Lanthimos film *Kinds of Kindness.* Our own film, *Rosalie,* which we're releasing. We're releasing the [Nuri Bilge] Ceylan film About Dry Grasses, which we bought at Cannes last year. It's an amazing film. And then there's *The Bikeriders, Deadpool & Wolverine,* and *Sasquatch Sunset.* There's lots and lots to look forward to.

bop_24_june_cineeurope_9.indd 44 27/05/2024 23:58:17