



## **TOO MUCH: A SEASON OF MELODRAMA**

### **Sprint Feedback**

Tuesday 15 April, 11am - 3pm

Cinema 3, Watershed, Bristol

*Attendees: 45 (in-person), 35 (online during presentations)*

**Introductions to the Season / Processes / Talks from season guests**

### **[WATCH THE RECORDING OF THE PRESENTATIONS](#)**

- [Presentation slides from Ruby McGuigan, BFI season lead](#)
- [Presentation slides from Park Circus](#)

Ruby McGuigan who is leading on this season for BFI outlined plans for BFI Southbank's programme which will focus on Women's Pictures over the past 100 years. 'Too Much' celebrates the visual excess and dramatic potency of a form of cinema which champions decadence over 'good taste'. The primary focus is classic Hollywood and the Women's Picture, reframing the position of women during this time and acknowledging areas where they held influence: star power and mass appeal.

Whilst the word "melodrama" might not resonate with younger generations, this is an area of cinema ripe for rediscovery given today's focus on emotional openness as well as a love of trashy conflict (such as reality TV and soaps)

Ti Singh (CrossFAN Programme Producer) is working with Ruby, the CrossFAN Programme group (which includes representatives from each region and nation and some independents) to develop the FAN cultural brief and guidelines for the season.

The wider UK cross-FAN season is still being shaped and the titles below are indicative. The focus is likely to be on overlooked classics of world cinema, alongside forgotten gems of Hollywood inviting audiences to embrace a cathartic, shared outpouring of emotion.

In terms of what might be considered a melodrama in the context of this season, Ruby gave the following guidance:

- Stories built on heightened emotion
- Expressive use of music, production design, lighting and performance

- Plots led by feelings over logic, drama focused on relationships
- 

There were a number of questions raised about other potential genre crossovers, such as musicals, and it was felt that as long as the films focussed on the 'high stakes, low realism' and expressive and excessive aspects of melodrama such as *Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, they would potentially fit in with the aspirations of the season.

(See Ruby's slides for other programming prompts) Others like *Sunset Boulevard (1950)* might not however although it does have melodramatic elements.

Films could range from the silent era all the way through to contemporary teen films such as those based on Nicholas Sparks novels to bring in younger audiences.

- Suggested directors incl: Douglas Sirk, Max Ophuls, Frank Borzage, Vincente Minnelli, Nicholas Ray, George Cukor, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Mikio Naruse, King Vidor, Joseph von Sternberg, Kenji Mizoguchi, John M Stahl and Edmund Goulding Pedro Almodovar, Todd Haynes, Wong Kar Wai, Ann Hui, Jane Campion, Kenneth Lonergan, Francois Ozon, Christian Petzold, Stanley Kwan, Lars Von Trier, Ang Lee, Guy Maddin, Zhang Yimou, Arturo Ripstein, Lee Chang Dong, James Gray, Fatih Akin
- Among the key titles (which will be clarified at a later day) include *Johnny Guitar*, *The Housemaid* and a 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-release of *All That Heaven Allows* (see Park Circus slides). *Olivia* (1951) was also a title that has the potential to play well across FAN.
- To capitalise and engage with the press, it was decided that there would be some key UK wide moments potentially around the release of *The Housemaid* (date TBC) and the release of *All That Heaven Allows* (TBC). Some of the wraparound ideas that came up at the sprint and region specific connections also have the potential to create interest in regional press.

Other discussions points included:

- On the whole, those present at the sprint seems to prefer a broader selection of titles on offer. However, we also need to be mindful that Menu applicants might not have been in the room and there will be a need to strike a balance.
- The need for talent to front the season as this was lacking with Art of Action; Almodovar and Carol Morley were mentioned but there's also an appetite from FAN for other influencers that might have the potential to connect with younger generations.
- There is an appetite for a listings website that wasn't location-based. Perhaps a simple list that could be hosted on BFI-FAN.org.uk to show the breadth of the season - the Escape website was mentioned as a reference.

- BFI are keen on a shorter season run of six weeks from late Oct to end in mid-December but to also avoid LFF. However, a number of sprint participants, primarily non-theatrical sites and festivals with specific dates were keen on a longer window – Sept to Feb. In previous seasons we have always been open to more flexibility around non-theatrical bookings inc January. February is likely to prove a challenge with reporting. There might be scope for some preview activity in Sept, but it would need to create a buzz for the season as per last year’s Fighting Spirit Festival launch. It’s also worth noting that FAN members can apply for other support to put on screenings outside of those dates.
- There’s an appetite for social media assets (incl new Instagram 4:5 size) building on the brand assets for Art of Action that were used extensively (particularly the stamp.)
- There were mixed views on whether or not the season should include family-friendly films, not something that is being considered for BFI Southbank given much of the films considered are dealing with quite grown-up topics and are concerned about the risk of the season trying to overextend itself. Some participants however thought there could be some interesting kids/teen films in the mix
- It’s important to consider access as part of the FAN offer, particularly with titles that are likely to be booked at multiple sites
- There needs to be consideration for non-theatrical venues which is something that is being looked into with Cinema For All and Filmbank
- CrossFAN activity needs to have buy in from FAN members, ideally not overlap with the menu offer and there needs to be a recognition that touring programmes might play better if there are a limited nb of venues involved in locations with clear audience development potential and that more resources should be dedicated to localised comms and outreach.

### **Ideas Workshop (Waterside 3)**

In the workshop, attendees fed back on the suggested thematic strands: LOVE, FAMILY, OBSESSION, SCANDAL and REBELLION

- **LOVE:** love conquers all (except when it doesn't). Films embracing the inherent romance of melodrama: surrendering to love across barriers of time, space and convention.  
*Sample titles:* ROUGE (Hong Kong, 1988), PANDORA AND THE FLYING DUTCHMAN (UK, 1951), THE CRANES ARE FLYING (USSR, 1957)
  - It was felt there was potential to engage younger audiences by making comparisons to reality TV and more contemporary films (for example, “If you love X, you’ll love Y”)
  - There was also focus on LGBTQIA love (OLIVIA was mentioned)

- There was a feeling that 'love out of control' could easily crossover with OBSESSION. Ruby flagged that the Love strand focusses on positive love stories or stories where we are rooting for the couple to stay together vs Obsession which focusses on more destructive relationships where we hope that protagonists involved should part ways/are bad for each other.
- Other titles mentioned included recent Mexican restorations such as *Victimas del Pecado* starring Ninón Sevilla.
- Telenovelas were also mentioned as an important cultural reference, particularly in the Latin American context
- **OBSESSION:** love's twisted evil twin. When emotion overwhelms and destroys: controlling men, co-dependency and destruction from infatuation.  
*Sample titles:* EL (Mexico, 1953), THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT (Germany, 1972), THE SEVENTH VEIL (UK, 1945)
  - There were discussions about whether 'erotic thrillers' such as *Fatal Attraction* and *Single White Female* could fit in the scope of the season as well as more contemporary titles focusing on professional jealousy like *Misery* and *Black Swan*.
  - Despite the recent Powell and Pressburger season, it was also felt that *Black Narcissus* and *Gone To Earth* would be suitable titles.
  - Other titles suggested included *Gaslight* and a family friendly option in the form of *101 Dalmatians*.
  - **Prolific French filmmaker and producer (Jeanne Dielman) Paul Vecchiali** (1930-2023) who was a master of melodrama whose love for 1930s melodrama resulted in a monumental *Encineclopedia*. His films tackle themes such as sexuality, homosexuality or the taboos of the post-war France; and include the recently restored *Rosa la rose, fille publique* (Radiance) premiering at Cinema Rediscovered.
- **FAMILY:** no one gets under our skin like family. Stories exploring motherhood and sacrifice, the family unit as both support system and a cage, and generational trauma.  
*Sample titles:* STELLA DALLAS (US, 1937), SILENCES OF THE PALACE (Tunisia, 1994), VOLVER (Spain, 2006)
  - There was discussion over whether 'Family' titles should be ones you should be able to watch with your family (such as *Freaky Friday* and *The Parent Trap*) or ones that focus on the tumultuous relationships between family members such as *Steel Magnolias*, *Kramer Vs Kramer*, *All That Heaven Allows*, *Mustang*,

Shoplifters, Magnolia, Mystic Pizza etc. It was decided that Ladybird was too chill in its conflict!

- K-Dramas were also mentioned with the possibility of engaging K-pop talent
- Also wrap-around content in the form of 'flash mobs' doing over the top Am-Dramatics were suggested!
- There were also questions about the inclusion of this strand in the FAN offer given it crosses over with many of the other strands.

- **SCANDAL:** the opinion of others can make or break us. Fallen women and victims of expectation, social pressure and patriarchy.

*Sample titles:* MADAME X (US, 1966), LOLA MONTES (Germany, 1955), THE LIFE OF OHARU (Japan, 1952)

- Discussion focused on societal walls and norms and films that challenged them. These included:
  - Big LGBTQI moments
  - Sexuality on screen
  - Films that were banned / a counterpoint to Gen-Z and their conservatism towards sex and violence on screen
  - Japanese cinema and the societal sense of shame
  - Pre-code films

○

- **REBELLION (aka DEFIANCE):** we exist in a society, but we don't have to like it. Women who forge their own path, battle towards independence or seek revenge - regardless of the consequences.

*Sample titles:* JOHNNY GUITAR (US, 1954), THE NIGHTINGALE'S PRAYER (Egypt, 1959), NOW VOYAGER (US, 1942)

- It was felt Defiance might be a better title but again some of the titles could potentially fit in Love or Scandal.
- There was a focus on British titles such as kitchen sink dramas as well as 'rebellion through existence' such as LGBTQ and counter-culture films like Polyester
- There was also talk of regional rebellion such as Welsh titles like Proud Valley and How Green Is My Valley (perhaps including Welsh choirs)
- Historical melodramas were also discussion such as the epic romances of Cleopatra and other 'Queens of Dramas' (which of course could inspire drag parodies/lip syncs)
- Other titles mentioned included Seventh Heaven, Far From Heaven and Raise The Red Lantern

There's some concern that there is quite a bit of overlap across strands and scope for streamlining this for the FAN offer.

There were also discussions about whether the word Melodrama should be included at all in the title and ensuring the tagline spoke to audiences not familiar with the word eg Big Screen, Big Emotions.

After feedback on the strands, there was also discussion on potential cross-FAN moments, season champions and talent as well as suggestions for wrap-around content.

### **Cross-FAN activity**

- Regional based ideas included the worlds of Daphne du Maurier with films like Rebecca filmed on the coast (other ideas included Bronte country and doing Brief Encounter in a train station – which has been done before as part of previous season “Love”)
- There was also a lot of ideas for N. Ireland including the films of Brian Desmond Hurst and titles like The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne and Hush Bye Baby
- History of certain UK studios that specialised in melodramatic films during the 40s and 50s
- There was also the discussion about regional soap stars and reality TV which could potentially work as part of a wider film offering
- Key anniversaries mentioned included the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Showgirls and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of All About Eve. Also 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jane Austine

### **Wrap-around activity**

- Queens & Scenes – inviting Drag Queens to recreate famous scenes from well know melodramas
- Involving amateur dramatics, choirs and even opera due to its melodramatic nature
- Audience generated content – eg Before and after (full make-up / teary faces), gasps, etc...
- Social media moments/questions such as ‘What Makes You Cry?’ / “What Makes You Angry?” / Etc
- Bingo cards for screenings of films to make them more fun – excessive drinking, death, murder, etc and also signpost to other films
- Online quiz to make recommendations, particularly as many of the titles mentioned are discoveries
- Dress-up
- Live music accompaniments (given the word melodrama derives from Greek "song" or "music" and French drame ("drama")).
- Flash mobs of Mariachi bands
- Prompt cards for post-screening discussions

### **Season champions/talent**

- It was felt that a season champions could help draw attention to the season but would need to have a genuine connection with this type of cinema, for example Carol Morley. Other reality show personalities were mentioned such as Claudia Winkleman but would need to know how she feels about Melodramas; needs research.
- Names such as Almodovar, Terence Stamp and Julie Christie were also mentioned as some of the last living 'big names'
- The child star of Mandy (1952) (Mandy Miller) lives in Weston Super Mare and was also an expert on The Antiques Roadshow and could be a potential guest at screenings
- Other names included Mike Wozniack, Pauline Quirk, Christina Newland, Pamela Hutchinson were all mentioned, but also behind the scenes talent such as Costumers and Historical Curators such as Keith Lodwick (Exeter)
- Other ideas included the Mayor of Cherbourg... as it's twinned with Poole

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Based on the conversations and suggestions from the workshop, Ti Singh and Ruby McGuigan will work up a season Creative Brief and Funding Guidelines in consultation with the CrossFAN Programming Group and subject to approval by the Audience Fund team at BFI, with the hope to send them out by mid-May
  - The creative brief will be clear about what programming will be defined as melodrama and be viable for funding
  - A long list of key menu titles (including AD/HoH info and theatrical/non-theatrical licence holders) will be shared along with the Creative Brief and Funding Guidelines
  - The season guidelines will also be finalised once the Creative Brief is written.