

Hannah McGill Director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival speaks!

What does Hannah look for in a film that may open or close the Festival?

Hannah McGill: It's a combination of factors and a degree of instinct! It is very important for both events that it's a film that we all believe in, and one that has a degree of anticipation attached to it so that the audience and press are excited. It's often a film that is in a slightly more conventional register than some of the Festival, as the Opening and Closing Galas are for broad audiences, not just hardcore film geeks; also they're celebratory occasions so very testing or extreme content isn't necessarily appropriate (even though we welcome it elsewhere!). For opening, it's nice where possible to have a Scottish or Edinburgh connection, as with *Hallam Foe* in '07 or *The Illusionist* this year – though that isn't a requirement. And both nights it's important that the director and/or other talent from the film can be around to walk the red carpet.

How does one get a film into the festival?

HM: We have an open submissions process from October through to March, through which anyone can send us a film, in exchange for a small fee. Those submissions are all viewed by at least one of the programming team, usually more, and discussed between us. We also view films year-round either at other festivals or by arrangement with filmmakers, sales agents and distributors. We are always interested to hear of films that are being made that might suit the Festival, whatever their scale of production, and there are staff in the office all year to respond to queries.

Will there be an opportunity to review the films screened by the EIFF by entering a competition this year again?

HM: That competition was arranged by sponsors and it isn't being repeated this particular year I'm afraid. There will, however, be the opportunity for web members to post comments and reviews of films on the website. Keep an eye on our e-bulletins for details of other exciting competitions.

I guess my question has to be why leave it so late to issue the programme and then launch ticket sales? From a purely personal point of view I get married on 5th June and then will be away on honeymoon – returning by the start of the festival – so this gives me very very little time to get my own list sorted out and tickets bought.

HM: Congratulations on your wedding! We do appreciate that this is a much later cut-off and will inconvenience some people. The decision was taken to allow us more time to make the programme as strong as it can be. Previously we locked off and announced the programme and opened the box office unusually early for a film festival – this change does bring us into line with most other events of our sort. While our earlier schedule did give the audience more time to plan, it also resulted in us having to lose a lot of films, because so many sales and release decisions are made around and as a result of Cannes. For ease of booking tickets will be available to buy online and in-person at the Filmhouse from noon on 3 June.

Will the mystery film be back?

We always leave the option of a surprise film so it may be reinstated if the right film comes along.

Huge congratulations on the success of last years fest. I particularly loved Moon and Fish Tank. Given the brilliant success of so many EIFF films from the 2009 event, does that give you more access and bargaining power to get some films or people along to this and future year's fests that you might not have been able?

HM: Thank you for your kind words. We had a great year last year and yes, any success stories do help us out the following year. So keep telling all your friends! Moon and Fish Tank were internationally lauded, but we're also thrilled with

slow-burners like *Let The Right One In*, which is still winning awards after we held its UK premiere in 2008; small ones like the documentary *No Greater Love*, which we world-premiered last year and which was just released to excellent reviews; and unexpected breakouts like the wonderful Irish animation *The Secret of Kells*, which got an Oscar nomination.

The film business is hard to predict and control, and you can never get every single film you want just because of release patterns and talent availability. But we have strong support from the industry and the audience, and a strong international brand, so we present a good case when we're negotiating. Filmmakers who've had a great time here are also brilliant ambassadors.

Can you tell me whether EIFF is likely to consider returning to the Edinburgh Festival calendar in August?

HM: I'm sorry that you're in this situation. I do understand the challenge that our June dates pose to people from elsewhere who want to attend EIFF as well as August events. Unfortunately in August Edinburgh certainly was and remains stretched for facilities and resources – in terms of, for instance, hotel space, physical space in the city and coverage space in the arts press. It was very difficult for us to accommodate our guests and to be reactive or imaginative in terms of venue space and entertainment.

EIFF simply had no room to grow in August, and was losing out on local attendees who were having to choose between events – as well as Edinburgh people who leave the city in August. In August we were also in a very dead month for the European film industry; and we were inconveniently close to the London Film Festival. As our audience is strongly local, and the film industry is our professional context, these factors were strong arguments for change.

While it was not an easy decision, and certain loyal audience members like yourself unfortunately lost out, in fact our attendance and press profile have risen since the move, so it is unlikely we will be changing back any time soon. However, we do have plans to work more with the other Edinburgh

Festivals on film elements in their programmes; and our partner cinema Filmhouse is open for business with special seasons during that period. I hope that you can still get a film fix whilst in Edinburgh in August. Or perhaps you could alternate between June and August...?