



**Wales Documentary Support Network
Transcript
Episode 4 - Claire Vaughan**

Introduction

(Intro music starts – cinema film reel whirring, and countdown beeps)

Hello and welcome to the *Wales Documentary Support Network*, a podcast that celebrates non-fiction filmmaking. In each episode, our guest will share their tips on how to make award-winning documentaries.

I'm your host Angela Clarke, and this series is a Screen Alliance Wales & Wheesht Films Partnership, made with the support of the BFI Doc Society Fund.

My guest today is Claire Vaughan, Cinema Programme Manager at Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff. Since her appointment to the role in 2018, Claire has been responsible for curating Chapter's eclectic array of both art house and mainstream films.

An avid film fan with an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things cinema related, Claire has been a champion of documentary talent, not just on her home turf but across the UK.

We discuss the ever-growing presence of feature docs in cinema and online, the ins and outs of self-distribution, and the importance of great marketing.

I hope you enjoy listening... (music ends)

Angela Clarke - Hey Claire, how are you?

Claire Vaughan - Hello Angela, how are you doing today?

Angela Clarke - I'm good. Well thank you so much for coming on to share your intel with us. Working at Chapter, you're at the epicentre of indie films in Wales. You're surrounded by audiences daily and therefore it seems likely you'll have a huge wealth of first-hand knowledge, not just in terms of what audiences enjoy and how they respond to films, but also what kind of films perform well, and that's what we want to explore on this podcast. But before we get rolling, I thought it might be useful if you could explain in a little detail what a film programming job involves. What happens in Claire-land in a day? *(laughing)*

Claire Vaughan – Well, I mean the thing about programming is it can be different, every day can be different. This week, we've got two festivals on which isn't usual, we don't normally have that many things going on in terms of events in one week. Usually, there is a lot of running around, looking after people. Part of the job involves making sure the filmmakers and the artists or whoever we're working with, as well as the audience's, in fact the audience is the most important thing, but making sure that everybody is happy.

So that's a microcosm of what happens. You're constantly thinking about the audience. You're constantly thinking about what people want to see, what's going to be enjoyable what are people going to pay for, all those things really. So, a typical day involves looking at what films are popping up on the slate. So, as you may know, films get made, then the films go to festivals, they do well (or they don't!), or whatever. After that process is finished, we wait! We wait patiently for the films to get picked up and then as soon as they've got a date, you get that in the planner and you can start putting together the programme.

But this is when the job gets tricky because what you've got to do is you've got to juggle all the films that you want to play. I mean it's a curator role, that's what a programming role is really and therefore you might have lots and lots of films out in one week. I mean some weeks there's a whole list of around 10 or so films out and you think all of those would be great to have and my audiences would enjoy all those films. And if you've got 15 screens and you're a multiplex, that's no problem, you can get all the films on that you want with no issue.

But the smaller number of screens you have, the trickier it becomes. We've only got 2 screens and so it's just about juggling things around, and so you're working all the time and you've got to get your head around what do people want to see, what are people talking about, what are people excited about? But it's also that risk, it's like what do people not know yet that they might want to see and that's when things like film history and film knowledge come into play.

It's about keeping your ear to the ground always with what's playing at festivals, and what is self-releasing as well which is a huge discussion, especially with placing documentaries. So you've got to constantly be aware of what's going on and then once you've got those things in place, it's just about making a decision, which is sometimes the hardest bit. *(laughing)* What am I going to stamp in black? It's deciding this is what I'm having, and then it's getting

them on screen, working with my projection team and the front of house team to make sure everybody has a nice experience. It's a real 360-degree role, which is something I really like. When I was at university, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a writer, I wanted to travel, I wanted to watch films, I wanted to make films, all the things! And it's interesting that I landed in this job where I have to do lots of things at the same time but it suits brain in that way. *(laughs)*

Angela Clarke - For those that at work either in documentary filmmaking and or that watch documentary films, they're probably aware that the landscape in terms of the amount of feature docs that are scheduled for cinematic release over the last 10 to 15 years has changed hugely. I saw a survey commissioned back in 2019 by Sheffield Docfest, the results of which were published in 2020. I think the document was called *Keeping It Real - Towards a Documentary Film Policy for UK* and I believe you took part in that survey, didn't you?

Claire Vaughan - Yeh there was a bit of consultation work with programmers, and they were asking what our experiences were, and so it was an interesting thing to be a part of. We were talking to people in different areas, which again, is something that should happen more, and we should all be talking to each other more. Because I think when we are all siloed off, and people don't understand what each other's experiences are, then we can't work together efficiently, I think. So yeah, the report is really fascinating. It's a good snapshot of what's going on.

Angela Clarke - So in the report it said in 2001 there were only 4 documentaries given cinematic release in the UK...

Claire Vaughan – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - You forget that because obviously the doc landscape is much more mainstream nowadays than it was, certainly when I was starting out. And then it said by 2018 there were 110 feature docs released. And I was just thinking look how much that's grown! And then they had a list of the highest grossing documentary films in 2003 *Touching the Void*, Kevin McDonald, then Morgan Spurlock - *Super Size Me* was in 2004. Then *Fahrenheit 9/11* was also in same year and then *March of the Penguins*. Then by 2007 you've got 36 docs released. And I just thought, what was your recollection of that shift in terms of docs coming in, can you remember that moment when they started to become more prevalent?

Claire Vaughan – Yeah, I mean it's interesting because in a lot of ways, it was when I started really working professionally in film. When I left university, I was doing talks and discussion things in a freelance capacity for Chapter and other places. We'd pick a film a week, at one point, and look at them and I'd also try to bring in different movements in film at that time. I can't with exactly remember which film in particular we looked up, it might have been *Searching For Sugar Man*, we did look at one film around then and we also talked about music documentaries.

So as a filmgoer really that sort of rise was when I started noticing things. And it is interesting to think about because the movement of documentary has been fascinating. If

you go to film school or if you are interested in film history, the first film, ***The Arrival of a Train*** by the Lumiere Brothers that was a documentary and that's what docs were, *documenting life* and so the history of documentary is interesting in that way.

Obviously, in the 60s and 70s the Maysles Brothers and other people like that or Pennebaker, there was this whole movement that really shone a light on things, and it feels like, certainly over the last 10 years, it's kind of shifted back to that. In the 80s, from my understanding, obviously (*laughs*) I wasn't really going into the cinema a lot on my own in the 80s, but there were these music documentaries and bits and bobs like that which were coming out, but generally people's experience of documentary was on TV.

And so that's where people thought docs landed and that's where it was. But, there were a few kinds of experiences that people would want to have in the cinema and so I think that's how some of those things kind of came in, in that way. With things like ***Stop Making Sense*** people wanted to see those films in the cinema and they would often get some sort of screening, but people didn't think about them that way. But then I remember really clearly, I think ***Capturing The Friedmans*** might be the first documentary I remember going to see on purpose, if that makes sense, and thinking this story sounds great, I really want to know what the secret is. Like what is the ending you know?

Angela Clarke – Yeah.

Claire Vaughan - And I think that selling films in that way, and selling documentaries in that way, that's just what brings an audience in, there needs to be a hook and so it's interesting to see how that changed. I mean in the 90s there were a few things. I mean ***Roger and Me*** and things like that were sort of just on the cusp of the 90s that was giving off vibes of this is a bit of a moment, but they felt like anomalies. And things like ***Paris is Burning***, I remember hearing about this film and thinking this sounds interesting, but I just never got to see it until I lived in the States and then I saw it there on a video shelf and rented it out. But there were these films that legendary I think before and so not to be that person but it was the internet that did it. (*laughs*) I think you can really see when people started embracing the internet, especially in the UK, these stories that were just getting a little bit more viral and so people were like I've heard about this film from somewhere else.

Whereas before, the traditional way was obviously getting things into festivals and then you would hear about these films, and they'd get put on the slate so the gate keeping of films started to decline a little bit with the sort of the internet age. I mean you see it all the time, in a slightly irritating way a film will play a festival in America or Venice and then I'll get an email from a customer asking when are you getting this film? And it's literally just had its premier (*laughing*) so it's probably not going to be for a year maybe! So there used to be such a sort of specific way of working, or way of bringing films into people's lives.

But with documentaries, I think it's really interesting because if you think about the change that's happened with how we're reacting to the audiences, and audience demanding to see their stories on screen and saying very clearly no, no, no, we want to be represented, I'm not seeing myself, or asking how do I see myself and the most direct way to do that is to make a film about yourself. And so I mean ***Capturing The Friedmans*** isn't particularly a good

example of that, *but*, it was a film made by somebody in his community and he heard about this story and therefore it was his little community story and so I mean that's the kind of where it sort of started for me, certainly noticing documentaries.

But again, there is a wider audience, I mean obviously we've got the Michael Moore's, where we've got that sort of political filmmaking. And then you had a million people marching for the end of the war in Iraq and you would see a lot of documentaries about that too. It's because people were seeking out this information, people were suddenly a bit more aware of what was going on around them, thanks to the internet. And they were like we need to find a way to find out more information about this and obviously documentary can be incredibly immediate.

You don't have to work out scheduling conflicts with actors or it's not like we've got to wait for this person to be ready before we can start making that film or jumping through all these different sorts of hoops. I mean documentary is very underfunded, but it is something that you can make quickly in a sense, and you can get it on a screen and so that's my theory. Obviously, there's a lot of academic study on this. But if you just look at the audience, always just look at audience patterns, because I mean people have making quality documentaries for over 100 years and so it's not necessarily about the quality, but it's about the stories and what people want to see. So, if people aren't seeing their stories, they're going to be looking for those stories and looking for ways of finding out how to tell those stories.

Angela Clarke - Yeah and I think that's a good summary of where things are and how things have evolved. The whole landscape of filmmaking has obviously changed quite considerably, and people have more means at their fingertips. Cameras have got cheaper; platforms have got easier to put things on. There's not as many gatekeepers as there were, the doors are open, albeit that's not to say that there aren't still issues within the industry and not everybody's given equal opportunities.

But the world has changed slightly in terms of how people engage and make things and who has the power to control what stories get told and get distributed. But I think it's back to that key thing about what the audiences want and so I suppose the first thing I want to ask you then is what do Chapter audiences want from a documentary film? What do they look for?

Claire Vaughan - Well I mean it's interesting because, if you're talking specifically about Welsh audiences, one of the biggest hits we've had over the last year of any type has been Lindsey Walker's *The Welshman*. Which is very unusual, it's 45 minutes long, it was self-released. It was a lockdown project, her own work but it was not a very well-funded project because she funded itself. If people haven't seen *The Welshmen* It's incredibly interesting. The story behind it is interesting as well. Her partners father had a story to tell so she thought okay, I'll film him, we're all in lockdown, I will just film him telling his story and it was very simple you know, setting up a camera, on a face, and just letting him tell the story and then they will have something that the family can keep. You know you're a filmmaker you can just you can do this easy enough!

But his story was so fascinating, and I won't ruin it for people who haven't seen it, but he was involved in some sort of direct action, political direct action in the 60s when he was a younger man. And it just captured a moment for Wales because during the lockdown especially, people have been thinking a lot more about Welsh independence and Welsh history in the 20th century and where we want to go, what sort of place we want to be, and the confidence about Welsh culture is growing. And so that film, I brought it to Chapter only because Lindsay emailed me cold and said I've got this film, I don't really know what to do with it, would you like screen it? And I watched it, and I was like yes please, this is fantastic.

The first event we did was when we had restrictions and so it was massively oversubscribed. I could have sold it 12 times over but we didn't know that at the time as it was very difficult to do any sort of events and so I've brought it back for a run twice since then and it's been playing well. I also found this short animation to go with it, to make the running time a bit longer and recorded a remote Q&A with Lindsay as well to give the audience a bigger experience. Because seeing a 45-minute film it's very unusual to pay money for that but the audiences have been coming back and back and back to see it, so it does come back to that thing we're talk about, about seeing yourself on screen. It's like this is a story that hadn't been told before that was relevant to Welsh, to local Welsh audiences and they wanted to see it and they have come out to see it and like I said, I'll probably be bringing it bring it back for years. But in a sort of a wider sense, it's just finding stories that are interesting.

Also, something that's a bit of a thriller in a way, always does really well. I mean a film like Bart Layton's *The Impostor* is a good example of that. *Three Identical Strangers*, again there is a Welsh producer on that and it's all about what's the big secret like *Capturing The Friedmans*. It's that combination of this is an interesting idea, what's going on here type of thing. But then you've got films like *Free Solo* which was also a huge success, very much like *Touching The Void* was where it's stunning to look at so it's this rare thing where it offers two things, incredible photographic scenes and beautiful scenery but there's also a bit of a thriller in there as well. I mean essentially, what a documentary audience wants to see is the same as any audience, it's those experiences, they want to feel that they've sort of lived somewhere else for a bit in their head.

Unfortunately, it's not something you can just teach very easily, like go and find the most amazing landscapes, or find the most amazing story and make it personal to the audience. *(laughing)* It's not something you can replicate very easily, especially without much funding, but there are ways of doing it. There are ways of making something that is relevant to an audience and can get a large audience in and that's what Chapter's audience wants to see, they want to see the films that feel relevant to them.

Angela Clarke - I mean Lindsey's film was beautiful, it's beautifully shot and as you say, it's a great story but also it felt like there was a Zeitgeist moment with that as well. Because as you say post-Brexit, lockdown had happened, Independence in Scotland and Wales and those conversations and questions around is it viable, and what's going on and so it seemed to kind of fit nicely into those bigger conversations in that respect. But I think until you had mentioned to me that it was a self-distributed film, to be honest, I'm not sure I would have thought that a filmmaker could have done that with you, that they could have directly

reached out. So, if somebody had a film, what are the criteria you that you're looking for in terms of things like duration? How would that process go from a filmmaker's point of view?

Claire Vaughan - There's not an easy answer, and I mean programmers around the UK hearing me will say (*laughing*) what are you telling people, don't tell people to email us cold! (*laughing*) We get a lot of emails every day, there's a lot to deal with every day and so it was a stroke of luck I think as well. We were sort of just emerging from lockdown and Lyndsey had emailed me this film during a lockdown and I saw it there, and I wasn't having that many emails at the time so that was it. It was a very straightforward thing. She sent me an email with a link to the documentary and I watched it, and I loved it, but self-release is very unusual.

I mean like I said, the whole thing about *The Welshman* is unusual. But again, it's still one of the biggest films we had last year. It's hard to think about how to get your self-releases out there. It's being persistent. It's like everything else in this industry. There are films that people have sent to me, you know, they've sent me one email, and I've not seen it because I've been busy. Then they've maybe sent me one maybe another two emails and I'm like okay, sorry this is interesting!

Now, you know I'm not saying send 12 emails to someone, I would say probably 4 is the limit if somebody hasn't got back to you. They might be busy, but if somebody hasn't got back to your fourth email then leave it for a bit. You've got to think about being everything to your film, unfortunately, especially if you're self-releasing. You've got to be the marketing person. You've got to arrange the press kit. You've got to be the PR person for it. You've got to think technically about how it's going to be delivered. All these things really, which is incredibly hard for filmmakers. I mean that's why I mean I try to encourage all the students I know to try and think about all those things as early as you can and try to get a bit of a grounding if you're not a huge expert in marketing or things like that it's fine but try and have a bit of a sense of it.

If you're going to be a filmmaker, try to have a bit of technical sense as well. I mean dealing with festivals like I say sometimes people think I'm just going to send you something and it doesn't work and so you know sometimes there's a lot of handholding in that respect with filmmakers. We play DCP's, and we play some 35 mm as well but, generally it's the DCP's Digital Cinema Package and that's standard across the UK. Yet the number of filmmakers who don't understand what that is, or they think that because they've sent you a digital version of their film, that's a DCP and it's not. I mean it's not too much of a headache for our team, we've got an experienced production team who can make DCP's but, some don't. So, if you're approaching a cinema and you've just got a file then you're potentially causing them a headache so that's going to be another barrier for you.

So that's what I mean about trying to know a little bit about everything because the more knowledge you have then at least you can start having those conversations. It's also listening, that's the biggest thing. The worst thing is having a conversation with somebody who thinks they know what they're doing, and they don't, and they're not listening to you. It doesn't foster good relationships and it's not very helpful because as I say if you're self-releasing, especially, there are so many barriers to playing the film. You know there's a film

Top Gun for example, we are playing because I've just been working with a couple of festivals, and I know the audience isn't going to be huge for those festivals so at least I can make some money with **Top Gun** for a bit because everybody knows about **Top Gun**. Everybody knows it's out. It's on billboards everywhere. You can't pull up social media without seeing a video for it or something so everybody knows about **Top Gun**. I could play **Top Gun** and somebody will come along.

If I play a documentary that nobody's heard of, I am telling everybody to come and see that personally, I'm telling everybody to come see it. I'm telling everybody on social media. We must do a lot of work in-house to try and promote these films. You have a lot of barriers to get through to find your audience and to get your film known about so like I say you just need to try and make that job as easy as possible, especially if you're trying to self-release.

Angela Clarke - Yeah well that's the thing isn't it but just knowing the fact the opportunity potentially lies there and being able to tap into that is great for Welsh filmmakers. Because I suppose that's everyone's dream, isn't it? There is something slightly special about sitting in a cinema with an audience and hearing people respond to your film, which you don't get it when you put it out via a streamer or online or on telly.

Claire Vaughan - And just to also say I mean now we're starting to come out of the pandemic, there have been some studies as well about the streamers and interacting with the audience as well and how audiences see films as being proper if they've had some sort of cinema release. Even if it had a small cinema release or a one-day release it's still seen as a proper film that they want to seek out on those streaming platforms. If it goes direct to streaming, it's a bit like the old direct to video, it's going to be harder to reach new audiences. It could be harder for them to think about your film being a real film that happened so's even if you can just get a local cinema to show your film. It's had a cinema release and it qualifies for festivals that way as well. So, it's something that filmmakers shouldn't just forget about and just assume that's an old-fashioned thing I'm just going to get my film on Netflix it'll be fine. Work with your local cinemas as much as you can because we can promote your films in all sorts of ways.

Angela Clarke - Exactly and that's the thing, especially in the doc market where money is scarce and tight. And if you're trying to do something yourself like Lindsey did then every little bit of help you can get along the way is surely a welcome. In terms of programming for Chapter, how has the phenomenon of docs impacted what you programme? Talk us through what your kind of what your doc programme schedule would be?

Claire Vaughan - I mean with a programming in general, you need to keep things varied for an audience. For example, in any given week, you don't want the schedule to be too heavy. There was one week recently where I moved a film down a week because there's was nothing on but depressing films, depressing challenging films for our audiences (*laughs*). You must keep things varied. You must have some light in shade. And so, it will depend on that, and documentaries are the same. I try as much as I can not to have two documentaries showing in one week and because that can be difficult for the audience, because then they must start making choices.

If somebody's going to see one film a week, you want to be like these are your choices and so it really depends on the climate in terms of what's being released at the time but generally we show at least two a month I would say, at the very least we have two docs a month and often more than that. In any given month it can be like that and then obviously there are seasonal things when it comes to Christmas, there's not many Christmas documentaries so it tends to be just the usual stuff that we have on. *(laughs)*

Generally, it's that type of landscape we try to keep, so there's a drama, there's something lighter and there's a documentary or there's a bigger budget film or a crossover film something like that. That's how I'd like a weekly programme to be if I could. Lots of little things, something a bit arty that's how I would like it to be, like one doc a week and actually I can do that. There's enough out there that I can do that now. And when it comes to festivals, so in the last few years we've been streaming stuff from Sheffield Docfest, so there's a live events element sometimes too with them.

We screen the films at the same time as the Q&A's live from Sheffield Docfest or pre-recorded Q&A's and we do the (LFF) London film Festival too. They've started to do docs a little bit more now as well, and even Sundance London, you know recently had three films that they delivered to us and one of them was a documentary. I think more festivals, bigger festivals that have the budget to do that kind of outreach work like Glasgow Film Festival as well, they are recognizing documentaries as being big hits that audiences want to see and so when they do these linkups with festivals around the country, they tend to be a bit like that in the same way I do my programme. There will be a range of different things to choose from.

And then with our in-house festivals it tends to be almost thematic, so we have things like Watch Africa, and a Japanese Animation Festival though it tends not to have many documentaries, so it really depends on what the festival is doing but certainly most festivals in-house do have documentaries as a part of that. I think it really shows the journey documentaries have come on now they're seen as those big audience hits and so it tends to be documentary is now very much embedded as part of my work and I would love to host a documentary festival. I think the field is getting stronger and stronger and that we could have a whole weekend or a week that's just all documentaries showing, I could happily do that.

Some things I have also done in the past is have sort of seasons so we a *Summer of Music* in 2021 because we couldn't really go to festivals easily or certainly, we couldn't go to gigs really at the time and so we had *Summer of Soul* which is obviously one of the best documentaries of all time maybe, it is absolutely astounding. And so that was out that summer and I was going to do sort of music films in general, not necessarily just documentaries, but everything I wanted to show was a documentary. So sometimes when you're planning things like that it will just naturally lead you in a way to bring a load of documentaries back in.

Angela Clarke – Yeah, so that was one of the other questions I was going to ask you. Have you noticed a pattern in terms of subject matters? Now, obviously we know that music docs are usually a good, what we call bankable film subject as it were because you're already

tapping into an audience that exists out there who are fans of that music. What other subjects I guess aside from music would you say have been popular over the last ten years in Chapter?

Claire Vaughan - I mean political films tend to well, depending obviously on what their political viewpoint is. Interestingly, just before the pandemic *Postcards from the 48%* was a documentary that was very partisan in its way, and at that point was still trying to stop Brexit. Again, that was a self-release but there was a huge audience turnout for that. And then Errol Morris and films like that where they'll have a specific viewpoint work well too but it really depends. Like I said earlier if a film has amazing landscapes like, *The Velvet Queen* recently released from Modern Films about the snow leopard, people went see that because it's looks stunning on screen. Those are the kind of things that do well, but really it goes in waves to be quite honest.

The way I see it happening is there'll be this slew of music documentaries and we work with Doc and Roll who specialize in making music documentaries and so that's kind of a perennial in a way. But then sometimes, like elsewhere in the industry everyone will be trying to make films about one subject and that will be the thing that people want to see. But looking over the last ten years especially it is interesting how the big hitters, the ones that have been popular both commercially and critically popular have been films that have been giving voices to people who haven't had voices before things like that.

So, you know you've got *13th* from Ava DuVerney obviously that went on to Netflix but amount of people that were asking for that really showed lots of people wanted to hear about this. *I Am Not Your Negro* that was also a huge hit and that was the same year. It was interesting how waves of these films come along. And we've got Jeanie Finlay's *Seahorse*, and suddenly there are a lot of trans documentaries now which is great because that's a subject people are more interested in now. There's always been trans people but now people are thinking I better start thinking about this a bit more, or I better find examples of seeing these people on screen so I can judge for myself a bit more about what's going on. And that's essentially what's happening and every time we have a big movement of films about war, or films about genocide etc, really people are seeking out information in a sense.

Angela Clarke - Yeah, and I think as well, especially with maybe something like trans filmmaking, sometimes when those when those kinds of topics are discussed in the media things get heated or lost as are the semantics and subtleties of things so you can understand why people want to take a slightly deeper dive into something that feels like it's being told from that person's perspective rather than being told by somebody from outside that world.

Do you know off the top of your head what's been the top 5 films that you've shown over the last 5 to 10 years at Chapter?

Claire Vaughan - Yeah I mean *Free Solo* was huge and I must admit I kind of dropped the ball a little bit with that. I didn't have it on release because it was Christmas time and I thought this is okay, it's going to be a good documentary but there's no great rush I'll be fine, and it was huge. Again, that was a documentary I brought back repeatedly because people wanted to see it. Every time I screened it there were more people all the time that

wanted to see it. I think I had it on in early January the following year a month or so later and we had it in Cinema Two initially then it had to be moved to Cinema One which is bigger. So, **Free Solo** shouldn't have really been a surprise but it was a surprise how many people wanted to see it so that was probably our most successful documentary.

Obviously, the pandemic has made things a bit skewed so it's difficult to say exactly which films that were released that could have been huge hits but **Free Solo** was huge and **The Welshman** was massive for us. But then there are lots of films over the last couple of years that I would have loved to have done. It's hard to say what would have been popular but you know films like **Apollo Eleven** is a really interesting thing to think about how that movement in the last few years and has really taken off. This idea of having archive footage and reimagining it has really grown. I mean Peter Jackson, we didn't play this, but **Thou Shall Not Grow Old** I mean the reason I didn't book it is because it didn't sound very interesting to be quite honest. This notion of colorizing and upgrading footage from WW1 I was thinking yeh this is fine but it was a busy time at that point, and I was like I'm not sure an audience is really going to go for it but that was very financially successful around the UK.

And **Apollo Eleven** also did very well and again a lot of it was footage that hadn't been seen before. But again, it was just somebody taking a new eye over it and again, there's a Welsh film called **Queerama** which was a big dive into the UK archive of LGBTQ people on screen that was also very successful when we had it on here and so actually looking at those three films, **The Welshmen**, **Apollo Eleven** and **Free Solo**, that's really interesting and it tells a bit of a story about what people want to see. Now, if you look at the last 30 years or so, you could see movements in documentary film quite clearly and so certainly for the last 6 or 7 years it's been spilling off in all these different directions which is only good for audiences because there's more interesting things out there.

So, looking at archive film is important. Landscape documentaries if you want to think about it that way as well. And I'd say the thrillers and people seeing diverse representation on screen. There are lots of different things that people want to think about now and so having different perspectives is key for the audience. Audiences want to see new things; they want to see things that they haven't seen before and just seeing those peaks when docs have done that incredibly well does tell a bit of a story about what people are interested in.

Angela Clarke - And I think as well again, you can understand **Free Solo** in terms of at that moment in time, when things were starting to change, there's something visually appealing, because people weren't able to go out and see things so that means you can still go and see something different. Also with **Apollo 13**, I guess the space race was continuing in terms of all the global billionaires trying to get in on the act and so I suppose as you say there's still zeitgeist things going on.

What do you notice when audiences are leaving your cinemas? What kind of things do you think they love watching in terms of films? I always think that's the key isn't it, to me, if you're trying to work out what makes a good film...

Claire Vaughan – I mean I always sort of say that a film is made of moments. As much as we go in and we want to be told a story, but it's the fact that you remember those little

moments, those wow moments, especially with documentary. Whether it's like in **Capturing The Friedmans** where it's like oh my goodness, that's a wow moment, I can't believe this happened. You know that part of the storytelling, that's a wow moment. And then you've got things like looking at those huge vistas on screen when you have beautifully photographed films. That's a wow moment. So that's the things people talk about. It's those, I can't believe that happened film moments or just the way that made me feel.

And that's the thing about being in the cinema as opposed to watching things on TV it's a different experience. Cinema is communal and we're all having individual experiences but all together. We're all having a collective experience in the cinema and so people just get excited to be able to talk about that moment with each other. And when people come out they are discussing did you see that, what did you think of that thing when that happened etc? They are questioning did you have the same experience as me, you know and that's what audiences want.

And it's interesting because we were talking earlier about how documentary used to be thought of as just something that happened on TV and you had series like Michael Apter's **Up**. Every time it was on it created this huge talking point, or sort of a moment and I'm very much trying to get more TV work in cinemas in a sense because people still just want to have that experience together. Especially these days when there's just so much to see, there are so many channels, and so many ways of watching things at home but when you're in a cinema you are all having an experience together and that's what people want. Making a documentary that gives people those moments, that's what people want from cinema, it doesn't matter whether it was made for TV. People just want to have a moment that takes them completely out of their own experience.

Angela Clarke - Is there's still a place for slightly more niche stories within spaces like Chapter? I suppose in terms of your role as you say, we all must make money! How do you juggle those films that you think it's really great, but do you ever think I just don't know if I will attract a wide enough audience? Does that ever kind of prohibit you screening things or does that impact your decision?

Claire Vaughan – Yes. It does happen all the time. I mean this just job is always about juggling risk. But the way I think about it, is it's just like the music scene. When the Sex Pistols played to something like 11 people in Manchester, those 11 people all went off to start a band. You must think about that with audiences too. You must take risks with audiences. You must bring in films that might not have a huge audience impact. Obviously, you must balance it out too. That's why I have to screen something like **Top Gun** - also it's a very good action film, but I have to screen something like that to make sure I can make enough money as well.

You are constantly balancing things, but I still think it's so important to take those risks. You have to take those risks, and if you're a programmer that is not taking risks, you're not doing a very good job because it's about audience development and that is our whole reason for being as programmers and curators. You're developing audiences and if you just give the audiences **Top Gun** all the time, as we're seeing with a lot of commercial cinemas, people are going to get bored. They're going to be like well what's the point in going out because

that's all I ever get at the cinema. You need to have variation. You need to think there was a nice moment in that one film I saw so I'm going to remember that moment and I'm going to go and see something that reminds me of that moment.

Marketing is also hugely important to getting an audience. I've seen films that are wonderful films and deserved a bigger audience but haven't had it because there hasn't been the marketing spend behind it. So that will always be the common denominator with everything. You can have a film that's doing incredibly well at the box office like there's a certain Dino film now which is hugely successful at the box office despite terrible reviews and chaotic filmmaking and so in a sense if you can get enough marketing support behind a film you can sell any story.

In terms of programmers, it's up to us to try and encourage audiences, try, and develop that trust with audiences. Let's say there are people that come along on a Wednesday to Chapter. They'll come on Wednesdays and that's the thing that they do and so they trust that whatever I have on Wednesday will be good and just building up that relationship with audiences is important.

I'm going to give you something that's easy and then you're going to know what **Top Gun** or something like that is, but also come and see this other thing that you might not have heard of that's a small documentary. I might just have 4 people in that night and obviously that's heart breaking when you see those numbers, but those 4 people now know that film is good. Those 4 people had a really great experience and they're going to come back because they had a really good experience. It's all important. The 120 people that came to **Top Gun** versus the 4 people that came to see something else, they're all important people coming into the cinema.

Angela Clarke - Also those 4 people might, if they have loved that film, Tweet or do whatever else on social media and tell other people about it...

Claire Vaughan – Totally...

Angela Clarke - And that helps the word spread. There are two things I want to ask you. I'll park one now about developing audiences but the other thing I was thinking with regards to documentaries, because money is tight and if you've been lucky enough to get a marketing budget then it does help things hugely. Now I know you're not supposed to judge a book by its cover, but I would be lying if I said that some film posters catch your eye, and some don't. Do you think there is still merit in saying a great poster or a great trailer etc can make or break a film?

Claire Vaughan – 100 %. Absolutely. I mean we were talking earlier about **Three Identical Strangers** and it's like that. **Three Identical Strangers** had a picture of three men who look the same on a poster and immediately you think that is an interesting title and poster. Because that's the first thing an audience does, so now whatever the story is, I want to know what *that* story is so now I'm going to read a little bit more into that.

But then again, if you've got something which is more of a vague title but has a beautiful poster, you're still drawn in, because that's your hook. So, if you've got this this gorgeous

image, you're going to think what is that? That's why I say to students try and find out a little bit about everything. For example, if you have an amazing graphic designer who creates you a psychedelic poster that looks incredible - ***Everything Everywhere All At Once*** is a great example. People were seeing that poster or seeing that image online, now obviously it's not a documentary, but people were like this is a crazy poster! What's this about? And you know the title ***Everything Everywhere All At Once***, what's that? You know apart from Michelle Yeoh, the cast wasn't really that well known and so you know what are you going to sell it on?

And with documentaries, sometimes you can have a subject that you don't quite know how to sum it up? I mean there is the famous example of ***Harlem County USA***. That's not a particularly interesting title. But we know it's an incredible documentary and it's a wonderful piece of filmmaking and it's intriguing. It makes you think what is that, is it a place etc? You must tackle that head on and explore these things, and having a good title is key, and I think finding some way of summing up the film too.

I mean I would say a basic way for filmmakers to spread the word is to get an IMBD login and make sure you have all the information on there that you can. Have some nice stills on there, have a succinct sentence, but then the longer bit underneath, because you want to give your audience and programmers these little ways in, so that they are thinking what is that? I'm a bit more interested in now I've read more.

The number of films that I dismiss, sometimes wrongly, just because I have a very quick look and I can't see anything about it, or I think I'm not going to read all of that, or I can't work out what this is etc. I'll park that for another time but then I might not go back to it and so a couple of times I've sort of missed out you know, usually at festivals, I've missed out on interesting films because okay maybe at times I'm also being a little bit lazy maybe but certainly I'm often very, very busy like a lot of programmers are, so we just need little hooks all the way in and the audience works the same.

Angela Clarke - And you're right actually about ***Everything Everywhere All At Once*** because I loved the poster and then I saw the trailer and thought it looked bonkers and I really loved it. But I probably wouldn't have gone to see that in the first instance, had it not been marketed the way that it was.

But I suppose one of the other things I was thinking about with documentary in terms of obviously when you've got fiction, you've got a director's name or but you know people will go to the cinema for a particular director etc. Obviously there will be directors within documentary like Michael Moore or Nick Broomfield or people that have done the authored docs whom audiences might be more familiar with. But maybe when people don't feature it in their documentaries as much, do you still use that as a bar to judge? You've alluded to Jeanie Finley's ***Seahorse*** before and obviously Jeannie is a prolific documentary filmmaker in the UK. Do you keep an eye for names in docs as well when they come up?

Claire Vaughan – Absolutely. Yeah it works in a very similar way to narrative film in the sense that you look at cast in a way. Who is that film about? Does anybody know about them, so is that's going to be a draw? Director is the second thing that I look for, and that

people notice. I mean Jeanie's films; we've got a long relationship with Jeanie in Chapter. We've shown all her films and she's a fantastic filmmaker. So, if Jeanie has a film out, or one that she's working on, then I'd be hoping to screen it in any in any case. I mean there's also filmmakers that some people might even have a problematic relationship with, but people are still interested in him, so we will still screen his films. But yeah, that's the thing about knowledge and watching as much as you can because you do develop your own little relationship with filmmakers

I mean Bart Layton is a really interesting example because I saw *The Imposter* and I loved it and I was like wow this is interesting; I've not seeing anything like this before. And then he did *American Animals* which is kind of like a drama doc and it's just interesting, and makes you think what they can do next. That's the thing it works the same way with all directors, all filmmakers to be honest. Even like DOP's or people that are doing amazing sound work, there will be little stars. You'll see something in a film and you're like that was really interesting I'm going to look out for whatever that person does next and so that can come up within any field.

Or someone like Werner Herzog he came from a sort of a narrative film background really but *Grizzly Man* was a huge hit and so I mean although he hadn't made documentaries before, people are always excited about the next one he's going to do. It doesn't matter whether it's a narrative film or a documentary, it works in a very similar way. You're looking at cast, you look at directors, you're looking at themes and then if you know your audience well enough to know something would be a little bit of a leap for them or what they'll be comfortable with or that's a bit of a risk, or that's a huge risk etc so there's all these different things you think about.

Angela Clarke - And then in terms of Jeanie's films, the things that I've always loved about hers is that she's always made a big effort in terms of the act of screening, the moment that the film is shown. Making that a bit of an event in and of itself as well. Do you think audiences respond well to that and is that what keeps her popular because she always seems to have a good following in that respect....?

Claire Vaughan - Yeah, absolutely and I mean that's our job, it's to help create that relationship between audience and filmmakers. It really helps if the filmmaker is there in person. If the audience can create a personal relationship where they feel like I saw that person talk about their film and I really enjoyed that film. It'll be about the film for sure yes, but then sometimes people come and support things just because they really like the person. Jeanie's a good example of that because like you say she does a lot of work, but she always makes sure that she does Q&A's and other things like that. And yes, it's a lot of work, it's hard work as a filmmaker to sell your film in that way.

It's uncomfortable for a lot of people to be put in the position of doing live Q&A sessions and some people don't always know how to talk about their work. That's a skill that you really need to develop, especially being able to talk about it in a way that is personable and relates you to an audience. And I would say just do as much practice of that as you can as a filmmaker because it's important for an audience to feel like this is for me. This is my experience. I relate to this film in all kinds of ways and there are people who ask me every

time Jeanie's got a film out. When is it coming out because we're sort of friends, and they think about it in that way, because they've met Jeannie several times at Chapter and they're like oh yeah, our friend Jeanie. And it's really important to create that relationship because then people are going to see your film then no matter what subjects it's about and so there are little wins you can make and so I would say that was a huge win.

Angela Clarke - Yeah, and I think that's a good point as well. Out of interest, is it easier to get documentary filmmakers to come and do Q&A sessions?

Claire Vaughan - Yeah, it is slightly easier in a way. I think maybe because it's a lot more hands-on by necessity with documentary makers, they've been in the subject all the way along, whereas narrative filmmakers, obviously they do sell their films, but they tend to be kind of already prepping the next project as soon as they've wrapped the first one, which obviously documentary filmmakers do as well. But because the funding is maybe so scarce in docs, they know it's so much more important to sell their films. So, we get more people, more filmmakers who want to come and sell their films in that way or who will talk about their films in that way.

But also, it's about impact. There's a hugely important aspect of documentary film marketing which is about reaching your audience in that way. So, as with everything else, is there an audience type that this film is about? Reaching those first of all just helps start spreading the words to a wider audience. For example, there'll be a film that was about Welsh music and so certainly the people who went to those gigs and experienced that they're into the film. So that's an easy win. That's the audience you're after. Or for example Ken Loach when he did the *Spirit of 45* documentary, he got in touch with us because he had people who were in his documentary who lived up the road. And they said you want to go down and screen it in Chapter and so we had a lovely Q&A.

There's often all these different links that you'll find with documentary filmmakers that they'll know your audience better than you sometimes. *Until The Light Takes Us* was a good example of this. It's about black metal in Norway. And I go to gigs, sort of Doom Sledge Gigs I enjoy a bit of that sometimes but I'm not quite that far into the genre though. I'd kind of heard some of these names before but they weren't massively in my head, but we had an email from the director Audrey who was like we've been contacted already by loads of people who want to see this film Cardiff and we were like okay, that's interesting because that hardly ever happens.

Obviously, as I said, there'll be films that are released at a festival and people are like, especially when it's a huge filmmaker, when are you getting this film in? But for a film that is a small documentary to already have an audience you're thinking okay I'd better lean into this. So, when we screened it, it was a huge hit, from sort of 2008 and it was a year or so later it reached us because they thought it was just a small documentary that they were going to show locally and then it kind of went wider and wider and yet it was it was sold out most nights when we played it in the original run.

And it was so bizarre, I had no idea that audience was in Cardiff. But there was a huge Black Metal audience in Cardiff and people were traveling down to come and see it because we

were one of the only places, in fact I think we were the only place in Wales that screened it. So, people were traveling far and wide to see the documentary. And often, if you've worked enough with your audience right at the start, which again as a documentary maker I would urge you to do, because that will help sell you a film. But also, it's part of your research. Like whom is this film for? Why are you making this film, who might be interested in this film? All those ideas should be within your thinking at the start anyway. But if you know your audience well enough, you can sort of start saying well you know I've got an audience ready for you, I can kind of guarantee an audience.

Even if you have one night and you've got 40 people there, that might be all the people in Cardiff which is a big city, but it might be all the people in Cardiff that might want to see it. But that's okay because you had a successful screening where all those people had a really great time and then they start telling other people to go and see it and so even if it does end up streaming or something like that, you've got a made-up audience. So, it always comes down to thinking about the audience, but like I say sometimes these audiences are built in and you don't know that they're there yet and so sometimes when they come to you it's interesting.

Angela Clarke - One of the other things I wanted to ask you, just before we wrap up was if you've made a film yourself or had a tiny amount of funding, have you got any advice that you could give doc filmmakers with regards to what they should look for in Sales Agents or Distributors? Could you talk us through maybe if there's any advice that you could offer in terms of from a cinema point of view when somebody comes to you with a film through a sales agent or a distributor, what are the best practices that you're looking for then I suppose?

Claire Vaughan - Well I think to be honest, if you're not thinking about the end result for your film at the very start when you first have your idea then I think you're doing yourself a disservice. I think you need to build that in to when you're first developing your film. I don't know how well that's thought of in the industry in terms of funders. I think it goes a little bit backwards if you think about it. I've made a thing now I need to know where to sell it. I think that's not helpful for you. You need to be thinking about it, like I said, with the audience from *Until The Night Takes Us*. They knew the audience were they when they were making it at the start, so they started working with that audience immediately and that makes you a much better proposition for festivals and for distributors.

Everybody needs money and so if you can say I already know that there's people who want to see this film, baked in, that there is a decent sized audience and there could be a bigger one if I give it to you, that makes your film far more sellable at that point. I would just make sure you think about the audience in the beginning, and that you frame it in that way, and you frame that into your research and development of the project right at the very start, like who are the market you're going to sell it for, at that point you are offering a more successful endpoint for the distributors.

But then, we can we look at sort of various scenarios. You can take your film to festivals for example. There are certain festivals that will work and some that won't. Obviously if you're a Queer filmmaker, film festivals like Iris and Flair in the UK and good examples. There are

also more local festivals as well. I wouldn't say well I didn't get into my big festival therefore I'm a failure. Absolutely not. Just try all kinds of different festivals. You know there will be local festivals that you can get your film into and so you'll be able to look at all of these different ways, and so in terms of film festivals that's obviously hugely helpful because if you get the right eyes on your film early enough and you think about critics and things like that...

There are film festivals that critics always go to, but then there are specialized critics. Obviously, there are not a lot of horror documentaries (*laughs*) but if you think of the horror audience. There is a huge horror audience and critical base in Wales and so if you can get the films seen by those people, those films will sell better because they'll be talking to other people about it, and they'll be selling it for you etc. And then you might get the bigger critics who have a bigger audience base to see your film. Again, if you get your film into a festival, you are getting it seen by critics and programmers at that point so that's a huge win.

If you don't get your film into those bigger festivals, then just try to get somebody to review it to be honest. Because as a programmer, you know you can't go to everything, certainly not, you just can't go to all festivals. So, if you are sent the film, you're like where are the reviews on this? As a programmer you might be looking at theme and if you're an unknown filmmaker, or emerging filmmaker then you might be looking at themes and who the audience is. So, the first thing you do is look for reviews. You might send us a lovely marketing pack and obviously that's an important thing for you to be thinking of. But I would think well this looked good maybe before I get sent a copy of the film (and obviously ideally always send a copy of the film to programmers as well).

But if I don't have time to watch it, I'm just going to have a quick look at reviews and see if I can find 2 or 3 reviews and sometimes I have booked films before where they have just had 2 reviews and that's all the people that have seen it, but if both those reviews are glowing then I'll take the time and I'll sit and watch the documentary. But if I see two reviews and they say this is awful, then it just goes to the bottom with my pile, so it is just about making that process easier. And then in terms of distribution, obviously Dogwoof are hugely important. They do have a marketing budget but also, it's like everything else, I take their stuff almost sight unseen because I know it's going to be good quality. And they're going to have a marketing budget. So, whatever they're going to have, I trust it and there are other distributors who again I know their work, I know that they have a general sense of what sort of audience they're looking for.

Modern Films have done some great documentaries and they specialize in women filmmakers often and foreign language films and some interesting documentaries. So again, it's a mark of quality. There are certain distributors who I will just trust, just in the same way that they trust me. The ideal scenario, you'll get Disney who have got a huge platform and a huge social media platform, and they'll get your film possibly in the cinema and because Disney now has Fox they've got National Geographic, they do have more people on staff who have specialized in documentary. Disney have emerged now as a bit of a player in that way, and it just means that more people will see your film. But you know, you'd have to be sort of Peter Jackson level really to get your film funded by Disney, I think. But like I say, just start out small and trust people, find people in the industry who you trust and work with exhibition because they know their audience. Your local cinemas speak to their audience

day in day out and they know what they want to see, so start finding ways of just getting a sense of what the audience wants to see because that'll sell your film.

And like with short docs obviously everybody starts with short films and makes shorter films. There might be a way for cinema to show your short films and then you can use that as a steppingstone to make longer films or just keep working in short docs. But you need to not just look at the top of the ladder, you need to look at the whole way through the industry you can break from network from at any point.

Angela Clarke - Yeah, so nothing ventured nothing gained then isn't it. There is no harm in putting yourself out there. I suppose I was thinking one silly question to wrap up, if you were on your desert island and you had your DVD player and there was only one feature doc that you could take that you wanted to watch repeatedly from any period where what would it be?

Claire Vaughan - Oh that's a really hard question. Oh that's incredibly hard. I would probably say Sandy Tan's *Shirkers* I do love *Shirkers*. I just found it fascinating. I've watched that so many times, it's on Netflix, so you can go home and watch it if you want. It's just beautiful filmmaking and it's kind of a film within a film, if you haven't seen it. She made a film back when she was a teenager, and it was a big deal that there was a film made in Singapore by teenagers and it was good quality, but it got buried by her mentor who was a professor that was working with her at the time and so she sort of moved away and she was like what happens to that film. She goes back and talks to a friend, and they reflect on that experience and it's quite dark in places but its languid too. It's beautifully shot. It's about friendship and there's a bit of a secret in there. All kinds of wonderful little secrets. So I would I take *Shirkers*.

Angela Clarke - I've not seen that one and I quite like a bit of dark, so I'm going to scoop out then that sounds great. What's Chapters Twitter called again?

Claire Vaughan - Chapter Tweets is Chapters Facebook and our Twitter account. But yeah, there's some great treats coming up, and we do try to give you some nice things to see.

Angela Clarke - Well I look forward to seeing more this year then. Listen thank you so much for your time. It's always a pleasure speaking to you, and you know so much as well. And I'm going to try and get some sort of like film quiz starting with you because I reckon we could be cleaning up. You could probably be funding films just from what you'd win alone in film quizzes!

Claire Vaughan - Yeah, a whole funding stream that we haven't tapped into.

Angela Clarke - I was going to say never mind Indigogo, we can just clean up by doing quizzes, I'm going to set up a website for you. *(laughing)* Okay, thank you so much then and take care.

Claire Vaughan – Dioch yn fawr.

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