

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK

English for Life in the UK

Season 2 - Episode 18 - Film and Cinema in the UK

March 2021

Mark Hello, and welcome to the podcast **English for Life in the UK**. This podcast is intended to help people to improve their English and at the same time learn more about life in this country. Today we're going to talk about **cinema and film in the UK**. And I'm delighted to say that we're joined today by Dave, and Dave is the Film Programmer at the Square Chapel, in Halifax. I'm going to ask Dave, first of all, to say a little bit about: what does that mean? what is the Square Chapel and what is your job?

Dave Hello, thanks for inviting me today to be on the podcast. So I'm the Film Programmer at Square Chapel Arts Centre, which basically means I get to decide what we screen and when we screen it. I get to pick the films and then show them to everyone, so it's a bit like me being in charge of¹ the remote control² in Square Chapel, all the time.

Mark And what is the Square Chapel, Dave? For people who don't know it.

Dave Yeah - so, we are an Arts Centre. Which means we show theatre, cinema, comedy, lectures, We also have a cafe and bar, as well, so people can eat and drink with us, before watching shows, so it's a really fun vibrant place, where people can just come and be entertained, really.

Mark And also, I am joined by John - John - how are you today?

John I am very well, thank you, Mark. Spring has sprung³, in Halifax. The sunshine is shining through the windows so, yeah, I'm very well.

Mark And I think you're quite interested in film, aren't you, John?

John I am - I'm actually a member at the Square Chapel, where Dave works, so that's somewhere, that pre-Covid, I used to go along quite a lot and used to watch one or two films a week there, quite often.

¹ in charge of = being the boss of - having the responsibility for - having power of decision on ...

² remote control = the wireless instrument panel/key pad used to alter settings on TVs and other equipment such as toys and drones.

³ sprung = "arrived"

Mark Well, I feel as if I used to go to see films at the cinema quite often, but it feels like, for a long time, I've watched nearly everything via TV. But I guess we'll talk a bit about that, as we go along. So, Dave - just start us off, with a little bit of history, about film in the UK.

Dave So really, film and cinema came about through photographs. So obviously, first, in the 19th century, people started taking photographs and then they worked out a way to turn that into a moving picture. So there would be a silent film - people will know of people like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton - who did comedies in silent film. And then they found a way to put sound into film, so they would record the sound on to a record - like a piece of vinyl - and then match up the picture, with the sound. I think they first did that around 1900, in Paris, I think was the first place to do it.

So, when that happened, everyone said that cinema wasn't going to be around any more - people found it too scary, having picture and sound at the same time. There was a very famous film of a train going towards the screen: and when that first happened, everyone screamed, because they thought a train was going to actually leap out and flatten them all.

(3 Minutes:28 seconds)

But then sound came along and everyone started watching musicals. So everyone watched things like "Singing in the Rain" - song and dance - and then, like you've just touched on, at the start, then everything changes again, so we started to have 3D⁴ and 3D came into cinema so people would wear their glasses and see things like "Avatar", and things like that, in 3D.

Now we're in a different realm. Now it's all about "streaming": so Netflix, and Amazon and things like that. But cinema will always be around - everyone will always want to share the experience of seeing either a scary film or a funny film, together - in an auditorium, a bit like John does, coming to Square Chapel.

Mark I guess as well, there was a big change in the middle of all that, between black-and-white and colour - that was a significant move as well, was it?

Dave Yes - of course - yeah - Colour! - So, first ... Sometimes they started by hand painting the film. So in silent films, they used to use colour to tell you whether it was night-time or day-time, depending what colour they painted the negative in. And then eventually, they found a way for it to be colour, like we see everyday. They even did a bit of "technicolor", where it was enhanced and a bit brighter. But, yeah - we still get lots of good black-and-white films as well, nowadays - a lot of directors like to still play with black-and-white, as well.

Mark You get to choose which films come on. How does a film go from being produced, to actually finding its way to the big screen, as such?

⁴ 3D = 3 Dimensional technique of recording and screening film, which requires viewers to use coloured spectacles to enhance the experience of depth, on the screen.

Dave Yeah - good question. There's a statistic that says that 1% of films that are ever made get screened, in the cinema. So that means that 99% of films that are ever made, never get screened in a cinema. So it's very competitive - there's about 30 films a week that I can pick from - that come out, on a week-by-week basis. So, there's some films - they're financed by studios - so Disney, Warner Brothers - things like Marvel, Action Films. The company, like Disney or Warner Brothers, will pay to make that film and it will cost them millions and millions of pounds. But for most films, they're made by a **director** and maybe have a small amount of funding behind it. So, for those films, they have to go to a market place - a bit like you'd sell fruit at the market - all the films have to go to market. So they go to places like Cannes, in France - which everyone will have heard of Cannes. Berlin, in Germany, is another big festival; Rotterdam is another big one. And they'll go to those places, and then you will have people called **distributors** so these are the people who then go and buy the films, for a country. A distributor might buy a film like "The Personal History of David Copperfield" and then they'll buy the right to show it in the UK. And, then, eventually, further down the line ⁵, those distributors will come to me and say "would you like to screen the films that we've brought?" and that's where we come in.

(6:54)

John I've found that really interesting - I'd like to ask you, when you talk about all these hundreds of films, and you obviously curate⁶ the films that are shown at the Square Chapel: how do you decide? How do yourself and the management at the film theatre, which films will be successful and which films you'd like to show in Halifax?

Dave We do audience responses,⁷ for every film, which means that we know quite a lot about the people that come and see films with us. So then when someone [film distributors] comes to me and say "we've got this great horror film that you might like", I can then look at the films that our audiences have seen before, and decide whether that is something that is similar. So, a lot of it is based on that, but also, we have a lot of ... I spend a lot of time walking around the bar at Square Chapel - asking people, seeing what they think of the films. And, a lot of the time, customers will come to me and say - "are you going to show this film?" And if enough people say that to me, then I go and find it and screen it.

Mark Would I be right in thinking, that to some extent, you would be not necessarily [be] going for what would be called the "big block buster films" - the ones, you know, that are going to get large audiences anyway; that you might go for ones that are slightly less well-known. Is there an element in which you're deliberately trying to diversify the range of films that are available to people?

⁵ further down the line = another way of saying this might be "later in the procedure"; it may come from a reference to a production line where there are many steps to manufacture something?

⁶ curate = in this usage, "select" or choose; normally used in the context of exhibitions where "curators" decide on the content and structure of the exhibition.

⁷ audience responses = audiences might be asked to complete surveys and questionnaires about films they have just seen, as they leave the theatre.

Dave Yeah - absolutely! We have two types of cinema in the UK. We have the "multiplex"⁸ which are places like Vue and Cineworld. Lots of people might have been to Vue in Halifax. They show the big, crash-y, bang-y, films⁹ - so, the ones that spend a lot of money blowing up cars or buildings or have lots of "action people" in them, like 'The Rock'¹⁰. They don't really suit us too well and actually, their screens are much bigger than ours. So, if I want to watch "Star Wars" - I generally go to a multiplex to watch "Star Wars", because it is a lot bigger. Whereas for us: we're an independent cinema so - for independent cinemas - we show a lot more 'world cinema' - so a lot more films from around the world - lots of documentaries and lots of the smaller films that maybe went to Cannes and then got sold through Cannes - so yeah - less crash-y, bang-y, films and more dramas and films from around the world.

Mark It is quite a good time of the year for us to be doing this, because this is, what they often call, the "awards season" and certainly we've got both the Oscars and the BAFTAs¹¹ coming up, so let's just talk a little bit about them. John - I think you've done a little bit of research about the Oscars. Tell us about the Oscars.

(9:52)

John A little bit - as you say, it's what's known we're coming into "Oscar Season". As you mentioned, there are the BAFTAs - which is, kind of - Dave might correct me - but I think that's broadly the British equivalent of the Oscars. It is the British Academy of Film, Television and the Arts. Is that right? They would give awards to American films and to international films but I think it tends to be skewed a little bit more towards British-produced films, and it also covers television which, the Oscars don't, currently, cover television. The Oscars is specifically really for films. To give them their full name, it's known as the Academy Awards, as these are awards that are given out, on behalf of the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences, to give it its full name. They got the Oscars tag¹² - there was a lady who was involved in setting up the Academy Awards - in 1930, called Margaret Herrick - she was one of the secretaries on the Board. Our listeners will have seen the Oscar statue - it's quite a tall chap with a bald head, and she remarked it looked like her Uncle Oscar - so he must have been a tall chap with a bald head - and the name just stuck, ever since.

⁸ multiplex = buildings that have more than one screen and one theatre space, or auditorium, so are effectively several cinemas in one building

⁹ 'crash-y bang-y' are made up, invented adjectives referring, in a slightly negative way to films with lots of action- there are lots of crashes and bangs

¹⁰ The Rock = the name by which a current American actor is known, a famous former wrestler

¹¹ BAFTAs = this is an abbreviation of the title and so would formally be shown in capital letters, as here, but increasingly, abbreviations become known as words in their own right, "acronyms", and may appear in lower case letters.

¹² tag = alternative name; nick-name; popularised label.

So as I said, they were set up in 1930, right in the midst of a difficult time in America - in the middle of the Depression¹³. They were set up by a gentleman called Louis B Mayer who was part of, famously, the MGM - I'm sure whenever you've watched films, throughout the time in the cinemas, you'll have seen the famous MGM opening credits, with the big roaring lion at the beginning. So he was one of the guys who set up MGM, to promote his films, and to promote films in general, in quite a difficult time in the film industry. One of the reasons I were [was] reading about Louis Mayer, and his particular set up, [they] were having problems with the Unions¹⁴. The Unions were organising and they were kind of doing this to promote this idea about how the system should be run. And to give it an air of ...kind of authority, he set up this, kind of, very grand, awards ceremony, and it's continued throughout the years. One of the highlights of - not just the motion picture calendar - but also, it's very, very popular on television - it draws huge television viewers, not just in America, but throughout the world: people watching, tuning in to see if the film they liked has won, or the actor or actress that they've supported, has won the award. They award in, I think, at the moment, 23 categories: obviously, the most famous ones are best picture, best actor, best actress, but they also award Oscars for perhaps more technical areas of film: best music, best score, **cinematography** and things like that.

(12:53)

One of the very important things about the Oscars is that if you win an Oscar, even if you're just nominated for an Oscar, it can be a tremendous spring board to much more success, and much higher ticket sales and revenues, for that film. I think a very, very good example of that occurring, and we saw it in Halifax, the film last year that won - a film called "Parasite". Now that was a film that traditionally would have probably been shown in the Square Chapel - it was a South Korean film, but having won the Oscar - it actually went on to be shown at the Vue, in Halifax, so it reached a much wider audience. So it is something that people within the film picture industry, are very invested in.

The awards themselves are voted on by, I think, it's a 6000 member-committee and these are **actors, actresses, producers, directors** - people drawn from throughout the world of cinema. So it's not something that the public vote on - it is a vote that's taken from people from within the industry. Have you got any tips for this year's Oscars, Dave, for any of the nominations, that you can give us?

Dave Well - my favourite film that's been nominated this year is called "Sound of Metal". which is a film about a drummer in a band who loses his hearing and he has to cope with the emotional impact of starting to lose his hearing. So, it's a British actor called Riz Ahmed, who's been nominated as best actor in the Oscars, this year, so that's a big tip. Also, there is Anthony Hopkins who's been nominated for a film called "The Father",

¹³ Depression = the 1930s were a period of economic hardship, when a lot of people were unemployed, in both America and elsewhere.

¹⁴ Unions = Trade Unions - organisations of workers concerned to protect workers' rights and conditions of employment

which is about dementia. But really, the big film, I think, people are talking about this year, is "Mank" which is on Netflix, which is a black-and-white film about Orson Welles¹⁵.

(14:49)

It's a bit different than usual because a lot of films weren't released, because of Covid, so they've all been put back. So, it means that it's a lot of the films that would usually be shown at Square Chapel that have had a bit of an opportunity to be in these big awards events this year.

John We might see a few surprises thrown up this year, then, perhaps, due to the lack of some of the big budget films that have been kept back from release.

Dave Absolutely, there will be a lot of British films, as well, I think, this year. A lot of people nominated - like Carey Mulligan¹⁶, as well. So, there's going to be a lot of British winners this year.

There is actually an Oscar winner in Halifax. The sound editor of "Bohemian Rhapsody" - from a few years ago - is from Halifax.

Mark I happened to have watched "Bohemian Rhapsody", this week, on Netflix. I've never seen it before. I thought it was OK, not brilliant, but OK.
Tell me, about ... - Dave - as an insider - what's your view of Netflix? Do you see it as a threat? is it an opportunity, for different types of films? - how do you view the kind of, Netflix and streaming?

(16:00)

Dave So, Netflix and cinemas had a bit of a rocky relationship, at the start. Netflix didn't let cinemas show any of their films. They wanted people to sign up to Netflix instead. But now, Netflix has started letting cinemas show their films. So, at Square Chapel, we've shown "The Irishman", when that came out, and we had loads of people come and watch that, so although it was on Netflix, we screened it at the cinema as well, and loads of people came and watched it. So I think streaming services like Netflix and Amazon are really good for cinema. I think it will really help us in the long run, to make more people passionate about films.

Mark So, we thought we'd talk a little bit about different film *genres*¹⁷. So - we use that word to mean films of a particular style or type. We thought it would be good for people learning English just to get some vocabulary around that. You'll probably be familiar with quite a lot of it, but Dave - tell us: what would you say are the main *genres* - the main categories - that we might use, when we're describing films?

¹⁵ Orson Welles = famous American actor and film director, a dominant figure in the film industry, from 1930s - 1960s period

¹⁶ Carey Mulligan - a British actress

¹⁷ *genres* = in the past, it was a convention to italicise foreign language words when used in English; *genre(s)* has been taken from the French; but eventually, such words are so commonly adopted, the foreign origin is overlooked or forgotten.

Dave Yes - the main genre we have at Square Chapel is "drama" - so drama will be something that is about history or about relationships - so if you think about films like "The Darkest Hour" which was about Winston Churchill, in the Second World War - they always do really well with us, at Square Chapel. So "drama" is very much the main one.

You also have "horror" - so horror is anything that is really scary - that gets you on the edge of your seat. There was a great film that came out last year called "Host" - which was completely filmed on Zoom - which was about a Zoom meeting that went wrong - a seance that ... where lots of ghosts came out.

You've then got "children's film" - so ... or sometimes they call it a "family film" because you take the family to it - otherwise, it's known as "children's film" - so something for everyone. If you think of something like "Toy Story" - that's obviously a film that has lasted years and years.

There's then "documentary" which is not a fiction film - it's non-fiction - so it's about following real people, watching real events. There is a great film called "Free Solo" - about a man who climbed up El Capitan¹⁸, without any ropes.

We've then got "comedy" - comedy is something that makes you laugh. My favourite comedy is "Zoolander".

And the last one I wanted to mention was "Musicals". So, they're your big song-and-dance films. A big recent one was "La La Land" - great fun - a musical puts a smile on everyone's faces.

So lots of different genres of film.

Mark Where would you put the sort of 'superhero' films that seem to be a big thing at the moment?

Dave Yeah! I forgot "Action" films - that's because we don't screen any at Square Chapel, so I always forget about them.

But - yeah - action films are very much your crash-y, bang-y comic book big action films, where lots of stuff happens ... The Rock is always in an action film - so anything The Rock is in, is an action film.

(19:24)

Mark Perhaps finish by saying a little bit about the importance of cinema in the British economy. Because, actually, lots of those films are actually made in this country, aren't they? And we have quite an expertise, as I understand it, in some of the modern techniques that are used in film.

Dave Yeah - lots of big studios around the country. We're very fortunate in Yorkshire, because we have "Screen Yorkshire", and they invest a lot of money in making films in Yorkshire. So Yorkshire is a great place to live, if you want to work in the film industry. There's also some big places in London and Cardiff now as well. I think it is the biggest studio complex, in the world, I think, in Cardiff - so huge to the UK economy, both in

¹⁸ El Capitan = a location, a sheer rock face, in Yosemite National Park, in America

making films but then the money that people spend in going to the cinema too - it's tens of millions of pounds per week, hundreds of millions pounds a year - so yeah, really important.

Mark And some of the biggest series of films that there have been, in the last few years, have been made in this country. The "Harry Potter" films being, perhaps, one of the most famous of those - and which must have brought huge amounts of money in various different ways into this country. Not least, because, of course, it's based on books that are also written by a Scottish author.

Dave Yeah - and they're currently filming the new Batman film with Robert Pattinson, in this country, so all of the Batman films as well are filmed in this country. So - we're the best at making films in the world, in this country.

John Ireland - as well, has a very big film industry, as well, hasn't it? There's a lot of the films I think where they want to perhaps recreate a medieval, non-urban, landscape - they'll go to Ireland, where there's a lot of countryside.

Dave Were things like Game of Thrones filmed in Ireland?

John It's in Antrim, in Northern Ireland - yes - true - I'd forgot [forgotten] about that.

Mark We've talked quite a lot about film in this country, and to some extent, in America, because of the Oscars, but, of course, cinema is world-wide. What would you say about the current state of world cinema, Dave?

Dave I think we're in a really great place at the moment. Because - John mentioned "Parasite", winning best picture at the Oscars, last year. Bong Joon Ho, who was the South Korean director of that film, said that: "when people can get over the two-centimetre-high obstacle that is subtitles, a whole new world will come to them". And it's so true.

(22:06)

There's a film this year nominated for the Oscars called "Minari" which, again, is about a South Korean family that come[s] to ...go to America, to be farmers, as part of the "American dream". And there's lots of films that we've had at Square Chapel before - we've shown a lot of Pakistani films, for the community in Halifax, and we're working on some Iranian films, for the community in Halifax, as well, which we're definitely still going to do, when we re-open again. So it's really important that we show films from all over the world, so that people can see what life is like around the world, really. America and the UK make most of the films, because they have lots of money to do it, but a lot of the best films come from everywhere else.

Mark Say a little bit about the future of the Square Chapel, because this must have been a challenging time, I would imagine, during Covid - and when do you hope to re-open and what are the immediate plans?

Dave Yes - so we're really looking forward to reopening again. It has been a very rocky time¹⁹ over the last year but we're looking forward to getting going again. Cinemas are allowed to re-open again from 17th May, if everything goes as planned, so we are hoping to open in the next few months, hopefully. We're really ready to get started again - so this summer, we'll definitely be open again - for lots of films ... films and fun at Square Chapel.

Mark That's brilliant - thanks very much, Dave.

(Music) (23:43)

Mark **Language Support**

Today, I'm just going to go over some of the vocabulary related to film, some of which was used in this episode, but some of it wasn't, but which you may come across. So let's start with the basics.

We used the word '**film**' and '**cinema**' - the other word that's often used is "**movies**" - that's a more American word. Technically, the '**cinema**' is the building where a film is shown, but actually, the word '**cinema**' is used to mean the whole industry, the whole process. The same is true of '**film**': the film, technically, is the actual individual film that is shown, but also we can use 'film' to mean the industry as a whole. So **cinema** and **film** and **movies** can be used to describe the whole of this area of work, this whole industry, this whole art form.

Of course, you can use the word '**film**' as a verb so "**to film**", whereas you can't "to cinema" and you can't "to movies" - you can "**make movies**", you can "**go to a cinema**" but you can actually "**film a movie**".

So, some of the other terms:

I don't think in this episode we actually used the word "**director**" but the director of a film is probably the most important individual person: they have the overall vision for what the film is going to look like and they guide or direct the actors and the technical crew to make sure that the film happens.

Then there is the "**cinematographer**". This is the person who actually does the filming. Well, in the past, they used to be the person literally behind the camera - who did the filming with the camera. These days, they're now, more often, the person who directs a number of people who will be doing some filming with the camera, but increasingly, a lot of creating of digital images, a lot of the use of computers - but the cinematographer puts together the images that go to make up the film.

Then there is the "**editor**". The editor is the person who works with what has been created by the cinematographers and then selects and sequences - puts in order - the images and the sound, to make the final version of the film.

And then there is the "**screenplay**", which is the written version of the film - it includes the words that the actors will say, but it also will include directions of various kinds and the descriptions of the scenes, in some cases, and the person who produces the screenplay is called the "**screen writer**".

¹⁹ a rocky time means a difficult time

The "**producer**" is the person who plans and coordinates the whole of the film and, in some cases, is the person who secures the funding - gets the finances - to make sure that the film can actually be produced and then be released.

And finally, of course, we've got of course the **actors** - I hope that's fairly obvious - but just to make clear - sometimes the word "**actor**" is used, generically, to mean all actors: male or female. Sometimes "**actor**" will refer to male and "**actress**" will be used to refer to the female; so in the Oscars and the BAFTA award ceremonies, you get "best actor" and "best actress" awards.

That's it for this week - I hope you've found that useful. If you want to find out about the transcript and how to contact us through our website, stay listening for those details. Otherwise, we'll see you again soon.

(Music) (28:52)

You can find the transcript - that's the written version of this episode - on our website:

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

And that's where you can also find links to all the other episodes, and the transcripts, so you can listen and read along at the same time. That's also where you can find out how to donate, to help our work. We are a charity, supporting particularly, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants but also, all those in need in our local area and we would welcome your support, if you felt able to give it. If you follow on the website, the links to "**Get Involved**" and "**Donate**".

We also have an email address - that's **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**

And we would love to hear from you - your thoughts on our podcast and ideas for the future.

We also have a Twitter account : **@EsoISaint**

and there is additional material on that site.

I'll spell out all those addresses:

So, the website: w-w-w-.-s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x.org.uk

So that's the website.

The email is: **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**

And that's "English for" spelt: f-o-r

And finally, the Twitter account: is : @ [at] [capital E] E-s-o-l- [capital S] -S-a-l-n-t

(Music) (31:32) Ends