

CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL AND PRESSBURGER

Creative brief for BFI Film Audience Network

CREATIVE BRIEF



The Red Shoes (1948)

‘It’s Heaven, isn’t it?’

A Matter of Life and Death (1946)

Dive into the cinematic universe of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger whose creative partnership in the 1940s created some of the most stylistically ambitious, thematically rich, subversive, and sensual British films ever made.

Conceived by the BFI and delivered in partnership with FAN, **Cinema Unbound** is the greatest celebration yet of this extraordinary duo of filmmakers.

‘Powell and Pressburger created films that changed the possibilities of what cinema could be. Way ahead of their time, it’s no surprise that their startling, subversive, headily romantic worlds resonate so deeply with contemporary audiences and creatives. Back on the big screen – exactly where they belong – these are films that take your breath away.’

Robin Baker

BFI National Archive Head Curator

Their rich body of work is not only worthy of celebration, but it has also inspired generations of filmmakers from Martin Scorsese, Wes Anderson, Bong Joon-Ho, and Joanna Hogg to Spike Lee, Derek Jarman, Greta Gerwig, Dario Argento, and Damien Chazelle. Beyond the world of cinema their aesthetic and vision has bled into wider culture, influencing creative voices from Kate Bush and Matthew Bourne to The Simpsons and Manolo Blahnik – allowing for many more entry points into their work.

The films co-created by The Archers, as they styled themselves, are identified as quintessentially British (Hungarian born Pressburger's writing captures essential national types) – yet their films speak challengingly about Britain's relationship with the wider world and its place within it. Their work is infused with subversive ideas, iconic imagery, and coded queer characters at a time when that was far from the norm, shaping a British radical cinema style distinct from the dominant trend of social realism & melodrama.

The ambition with this season is to reconnect UK wide audiences (including the next generation of cinema goers and storytellers) to the radical nature and visual ambition of that style. Powell & Pressburger's maverick approach represents a cinematic ambition and template for independent filmmaking, a testament to the power of cinema both as an artform and as a form of social and cultural activism.

Project Aims

- Re-position P&P as amongst the most inspiring film artists Britain has ever produced.
- Change understanding and perceptions of their work as connected to contemporary film and popular culture.
- Engage new – especially younger and underserved – audiences across the UK.
- Transform access to the work of P&P and the BFI's collections across the UK.

Period of activity

The bulk of the season takes place this Autumn (16 Oct – 31 Dec 2023) at BFI Southbank and across FAN. Note that the menu will be available to book until the end of Feb 2024.

AUDIENCE OUTREACH



The Tales of Hoffmann (1951)

‘Why do you want to dance? Why do you want to live?’

The Red Shoes (1948)

Powell and Pressburger not only transformed British cinema, but the vast, subversive, and seductive creative universes they created have gone on to influence the world of cinema and bled into wider popular culture – allowing for numerous entry points into their work for audiences in line with BFI’s Screen Culture 2033 priorities.

Public Engagement

Backed by a UK wide Press and Marketing campaign and a central listing platform, the season will have a broad audience appeal.

Audience development and wraparound activity should be an integral part of any proposal, making the collective film-watching experience unique and memorable and offering routes into and a deeper engagement with Powell & Pressburger’ body of work. Big screen experiences are the priority for this programme, but in-person projects involving some online and hybrid events will be considered where this represents a valuable opportunity for audience development. This could also include immersive and interactive technological elements.

Beyond this, priority will be given to projects which effectively respond to one or more of the following focus areas which reflect the [BFI Screen Culture 2033 strategy](#).

Creating opportunities for young audiences

Engaging young audiences in the work of Powell & Pressburger is a key priority so we encourage activities targeting 16-25 demographics as well as children and their families. This might include young curators/ influencers schemes, marketing campaigns and ticketing initiatives. Collaborations with Into Film and BFI Academy+ are encouraged but note that our support is focussed on public facing activity.

Tackling barriers to access and inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that the breadth of communities can enjoy a range of film where they live. Particular attention will be paid to projects that address social, economic, and geographical barriers for audiences in new and meaningful ways such as activity that prioritises outreach with community engagement at their heart. This might also include (but is not limited to): sliding scales and discounted tickets; pay what you can afford schemes; relaxed screenings for audiences with autism; dementia-friendly screenings; accessible screenings for d/Deaf and HoH audiences.

Here are some specific audience groups you might want to consider as part of your activity:

- Young politically engaged/socially active audiences.
- Younger film fans/cinephiles and filmmakers/creatives interested in developing a career in film.
- Students/Post-graduates (those studying philosophy, art, design, fashion, film, dance, etc...)
- Those facing socio-economic and geographic barriers to engagement (such as lower income families and rural communities)
- International communities/ those interested in global issues.
- Young girls and Women
- LGBTQ+ communities
- Those affected by and interested in Trauma-and Stressor-Related Disorders

CONTEXT, THEMATIC PROMPTS, AND INDICATIVE TITLES



Black Narcissus (1947)

'This is the universe. Big, isn't it?'

A Matter of Life and Death (1946)

2023 sees major anniversaries of the cinematic classics *The Red Shoes* and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (as well as 35th anniversary of the death of Hungarian born Pressburger) and is the perfect opportunity for UK audiences to discover (and rediscover) their films on the big screen as well as exploring their influence on more contemporary filmmakers.

You can expect an extensive UK wide PR and marketing campaign, various BFI Distribution re-releases, a major retrospective of their work and exhibition at BFI Southbank, two new books in partnership with Bloomsbury, *The Cinema of Powell and Pressburger* and a BFI Film Classic examining *The Red Shoes* and more.

We are offering pots of up to £15,000 to enable FAN members to organise programmes and events responding to this ground-breaking season and to our creative brief; whether that's screening films from a set menu, developing bespoke local activity or even activity beyond your region.

Here's what's on the Menu

From 1943 to 1948, Powell and Pressburger made several masterpieces, which we believe would make an appropriate introduction for newcomers to their work as a duo but also give a sense of the breadth of their work, ranging from thrillers, pastorals, metaphysical explorations, back-stage drama, ballet films, operas to war films.

In their 18 years of creative partnership beginning in 1939, Powell and Pressburger created a formidable body of films set in different parts of the UK and working across genres from the stunningly photographed Scottish Hebrides set romantic comedy *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945) and the celebration of life, love and internationalism *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) to the sexually charged *Black Narcissus* (1947) and their glorious Technicolor feast *The Red Shoes* (1948), also cinema's quintessential backstage drama.

Go bespoke and dive deeper into P&P's back catalogue

Bold, subversive, and iconoclastic, challenging and changing the visual language of film, their passionate collaborative artistic vision spans 24 films together between 1939 and 1972 in addition to solo works such as *Peeping Tom*.

New BFI restorations include: *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945), and *Bluebeard's Castle* (1963.)

There will also be some lesser-known titles available in theatrical and non-theatrical formats for those that wish to dive a little deeper into Powell's back-catalogue such as:

- *The Edge of the World* (1937, 74mins + *Return to the Edge of the World* (1979, 25mins) – available from BFI
- *Bluebeard's Castle* (1963) + *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1955, 13mins) – available from BFI
- One of our *Aircraft is Missing* (1942) – available from Filmbankmedia
- *Contraband* (1940) – available from Filmbankmedia

We also recommend you contact Filmbankmedia about other non-theatrical titles that are available to book through their catalogues as part of this programme.

Your Hub can provide you with a longer list of titles that are available in UK distribution.

Explore P&P's influence on more contemporary films and culture

Powell and Pressburger's work is a vital part of the fabric of world cinema history, and a continued inspiration to filmmakers worldwide from Martin Scorsese, Wes Anderson, Bong Joon-Ho, and Joanna Hogg to Spike Lee, Derek Jarman, Greta Gerwig, Dario Argento and Damien Chazelle. Beyond the world of cinema their aesthetic and vision has bled into wider culture, influencing creative voices from Kate Bush to *The Simpsons* and Manolo Blahnik – allowing for numerous entry points into their work for audiences and for exhibitors. [See a list of contextual titles here.](#)

These range from *Orlando* to *Wings of Desire*, *Suspiria* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

'It took me less than a millisecond to connect to their otherworldly visions; all of their films had an impact on me.'

Joanna Hogg

([Life in Film: Joanna Hogg, Frieze](#))

'I could talk for hours, days, years about the films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger,' said **Martin Scorsese**, who recalled being taken by his father to see *The Red Shoes* at the age of 10.

([The Guardian, 2014](#))

Thematic Prompts

For those of you developing more bespoke and/or Cross FAN programmes, it's worth noting the themes we hope to explore with the FAN wide programme.

Themes:

- Fantasy & Spectacle: the iconic imagery and the power of cinema as an artform.
- Influence on British and international cinema and popular culture
- Landscape, location and sense of place in the UK
- Influence on women filmmakers and creatives
- Jewish exile and contribution to British cinema in the 1930s and 40s
- P&P go to War: European solidarity and internationalism
- Girls and women on screen
- Ballet & Opera
- The very Queer Universe of P&P
- Obsessives and Outsiders
- Decolonising *Black Narcissus*
- Cinema as a collaborative practice – see their [artistic manifesto](#)

Key words:

Provocative, Passionate, Perverse, Sensual, Subversive, Romantic, Transgressive, Uncompromising, Collaborative.

Regional/national specificities

We are interested in FAN activity that reflects the geographic spread of their work and their collaborators. P&P's films also were set in different parts of the UK and often filmed on location including Scotland, the South West, the South East, Wales and London creating opportunities for place specific activity (for example, *I Know Where I'm Going!* and *The Edge of the World* (Scotland); *A Canterbury Tale*, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* and *Black Narcissus* (South East), *Contraband* (London), *Small Back Room* and *A Matter of Life And Death* (Devon) and *Gone To Earth* (Midlands/Welsh border).

They also collaborated with behind-the-scenes and onscreen talent from across the UK; for example, Cinematographer Jack Cardiff born in Great Yarmouth; Moira Shearer, the star of *The Red Shoes* was born in Dunfermline; *Black Narcissus* star Deborah Kerr was born in Glasgow, and educated in Bristol; Roger Livesey (*A Matter of Life and Death*, *Colonel Blimp*) was born in Barry, Wales and London born sketch artist Ivor William Gilmour Beddoes.

You can find a full list of UK-wide locations used in Powell and Pressburger's films [here](#).

Potential guest speakers/influencers

You may well already have local guests/influencers in mind for your activity or other ideas for wraparound activity involving some of the themes in the film, but here are a few suggestions of film guests.

BFI National Archive Head Curator Robin Baker will be fronting the BFI Southbank programme and be available for some in-person events in the regions and nations as will some of the co-curators involved in the season.

Author Pamela Hutchinson, whose new book *The Red Shoes* and those involved in the upcoming *The Cinema of Powell & Pressburger Anthology* which will be both released by Bloomsbury Publishing in October to tie in with the season may also be available for some public engagement.

It's worth noting that there are also many region based subject matter speakers such as **Andrew Moor** (co-editor of *Michael Powell: International Perspectives*) based in Manchester, London-based Professor **Ian Christie** who has long been the academic voice of the work being done on the films of Powell & Pressburger (also involved in the upcoming *The Cinema of Powell & Pressburger Anthology*), **Amber Butchart** (based in Kent and expert on fashion of the period), filmmaker **Nasheed Qamar Faruqi** based in Cambridge, South West Silents' **Mark Fuller**, Exeter based **James Downs** (*Anton Walbrook: A Life of Masks and Mirrors*) and Birmingham based **Alexandra Harris** (*The Cinema of Powell & Pressburger Anthology*.)

GET INVOLVED



I Know Where I'm Going! (1945)

We are offering up to £15,000 to enable FAN members to organise programmes and events responding to this ground-breaking season and to our creative brief:

Three ways you can access support

1) MENU

Access up to £500 (£125 per film) for programme enhancement, wraparound activity and audience development when you book one or more of the four key titles:

- a. *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946)
- b. *Black Narcissus* (1947)
- c. *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945) – re-released theatrically on 20 October
- d. *The Red Shoes* (1948) – re-released theatrically on 8 December

The application process is very simple. You will be asked to list which films you would like to screen and top-line information on how you will spend the budget to enhance your activity – e.g. Marketing costs and Wraparound activity such as guest speaker. Please note this funding is not to cover minimum guarantees.

To book the titles (available on DCP and non-theatrical formats – AD/DS files will be made available). For more information, contact the BFI team:

bookings.films@bfi.org.uk

- Terms: 35%/mg £100 per film + any transport and/or download costs
- Preview requests will be considered.

2) BESPOKE

Receive up to £15,000 (average awards likely to be circa £5,000 based on previous activity) to develop a more bespoke season of films within the parameters of the Creative Brief diving deeper into their filmography and/or exploring the influence of P&P on more contemporary titles such as *Orlando*, *The Souvenir*, *Soul* and *La La Land*. There is also scope for place site-specific, immersive and 'event cinema' projects activity involving P&P titles.

3) CROSS-FAN

Programme/Marketing/Outreach activity with the potential to scale up or tour across the UK and/or projects involving multiple site-specific events across the UK.

Meeting the Creative Brief

Your application must fit within our Creative Brief and demonstrate added value to the UK-wide season. Here are some examples of how you might want to approach this, but we are also open to other ideas you come up with:

- Come up with ambitious programme/ audience development initiatives and marketing hooks to offer audiences exciting routes into the worlds of P&P.
- Broaden and deepen audiences' understanding of the directors' works, their subtly radical nature and how they reflected the world around them and filmmakers of today.
- Spotlight elements of their work and/or more contemporary works that have been influenced by them that have the potential to connect with new, underserved, and underrepresented audiences with programming.
- Involve young creatives in the development and delivery of wraparound activity that has the potential to resonate with their peers.

- Programming that supports and promotes lesser-known works that otherwise wouldn't get shown, including archives, forgotten films, and underexposed viewpoints.
- Tapping into an appetite for collective viewing of work and discussion, which could include immersive and interactive technologies elements.

Be part of a UK-wide Press & Marketing campaign

This FAN-wide 'moment' is an opportunity for audiences across the UK to immerse themselves in a connected programme backed by a BFI-led Press & Marketing campaign. Participating exhibitors will also access marketing assets (social media, poster artwork, etc.) primarily focussed on the Menu titles but also adaptable for other bespoke activity. It's worth thinking about how your activity could add value to this campaign (for example, specific regional angles of your activity or guest speakers/ co-curators/influencers that have the potential to generate interest.)

All participating FAN exhibitors will be invited to provide top-line information about their events which will enable BFI to amplify events (through social media, listings, and press releases). Regional highlights will also be included in the BFI's UK wide Press releases.

In addition to the activity being supported via BFI FAN, the BFI will also be delivering a range of activities in person, in print and online which will help raise the profile of the season.

What is the timeline?

- Call opens: Mon 15 May 2023
- Deadline for Bespoke, Cross FAN Proposals (and Menu Expressions of Interest to be included in initial listings announcement) – Fri 30 June 17:00
- Decisions made: 24 July 2023
- After the deadline, the call for Menu applications will be kept open on a rolling basis until Mon 16 Oct 2023.
- BFI Full Programme announcement: early Sep
- Period of Activity: Mon 16 Oct – 31 Dec 2023 (except for the Menu which can be booked until 29 Feb 2024.)

Please refer to the guidelines for more detail.

THANK YOU

A Matter of Life and Death (1946)

