

NEWS

International buyers praise return of London Screenings

BY GEOFFREY MACNAB | 24 JUNE 2022



SOURCE: PATRICK REDMOND
'AISHA'

International buyers have given a generally positive response to this week's three-day London Screenings event held at Picturehouse Central from June 21-23, organised by Film London.

"It was very good to catch-up after Cannes to get a broader picture of what is coming from the UK," said Anna Lindstrom, acquisitions manager at Stockholm-based Lucky Dogs.

Lindstrom confirmed she had made one acquisition during the event for a film which she had been discussing in Cannes.

UK titles that have been generating buzz include Frank Berry's Irish asylum drama *Aisha*, starring Letitia Wright and Josh O'Connor, that premiered at Tribeca and is sold by Cornerstone; Mark Cousins' upcoming new feature doc *My Name Is Alfred Hitchcock*, sold by Dogwoof, and Bankside's drama *The Rebel And The Seahorse*, starring Rebel Wilson.

Romantic comedy *The Swearing Jar*, co-starring Kathleen Turner and sold by Metro International Entertainment, Mark Jenkin's Cannes title *Enys Men* by Mark Jenkin, sold by Protagonist, and sci-fi thriller *Deus*, sold by Darkland Distribution, also had admirers.

"Films have been of good quality but we didn't acquire anything as we're not looking for finished product at the moment," said Tobias Seiffert, head of international acquisitions & co-productions at Berlin-based Tobis Films. "London Screenings is a fixture in my schedule and always a fantastic event to catch up on films we didn't see in Cannes and a chance to meet sales agents with more time."

On the pre-sales front, Film Seekers reported strong buyer interest in feel-good drama *Pizza With Love*, starring Colin Morgan and Rosabell Laurenti Sellers.

Also generating some pre-sale interest was Silver Mountain's *The Guinness Girl*, the screen adaptation of Maria McAteer's play. Set in the 1970s in Newcastle, this is an autobiographical story about the first black world champion Irish dancer. It will be directed by Len Collin.

However, some buyers balked at the prices being asked by sales companies. "There are still some sales companies who think there was never a pandemic hearing the asking prices," said Jean Heijl, president of Amsterdam-based J&J Films.

Meetings or movies

Most attendees welcomed BFI's Coming Soon showcase, presented by Mia Bays, director of the BFI Film Fund. Robert Morgan's horror picture *Stopmotion*, produced by Blue Light and sold by Wild Bunch International, seem to particularly pique buyers' curiosity.

Some questioned the balance between screenings and meetings. "If you have meetings, you can't see any movies," said J&J's Heijl, suggested dedicating a day to meetings, and two days to screenings.

A national rail and London Underground strike on Tuesday did not affect most international buyers, who had arrived on Monday in London, but the number of UK buyers in screenings that day was reportedly down.

Some UK sales agents booked into hotels to make sure they could reach the event. Others "battled in," according to Helena Mackenzie, head of inward investment and business development at Film London.

Distributors in town for the Screenings included M2 Films from Poland, Twelve Oaks Pictures and Inopia from Spain; Teodora and Blue Swan from Italy, X Verleih from Germany J&J Films and One2See Movies from the Netherlands, and Renaissance Media and Cineplex from Canada. Beirut-based Phoenicia Pictures was one of the few buyers in attendance from the Middle East. There was a healthy attendance in spite of the fact that the event coincided with a similar German screenings event being held in Munich.

Given another rail strike on Thursday, some of the buyers heading to the airports faced difficult journeys but organisers arranged car pools to share the cost of taxi trips.

UK sales companies said the Screenings were very helpful as a post-Cannes event.

"I spent three days being able to have proper conversations with distributors from 20+ territories and we are adding to our Cannes sales," said Nicole Mackey, head of sales at Hanway Films.

Anna Krupnova, co-managing director of London-based sales outfit, Reason8 said the right people were in town with whom to continue pre-sales on new UK title *The Ripper's Ghost*, directed by David Creed.



SOURCE: REASON8
ANNA KRUPNOVA

"There hopefully will be business to complete because all the conversations took place with predominately decision makers, which is what we always try to achieve," she said.

Bankside screened two films: *The Almond And The Sea-Horse* and senior tennis documentary, *Silver Servers* "It was very positive," said Bankside managing director Stephen Kelliher. "We had excellent turn outs to both films."

The organisation of the London Screenings was universally praised and can be summed up by Caroline Couret-Delègue, managing director at UK sales outfit Film Seekers.

"We were thrilled so many buyers came back to attend the event and the positivity was palpable," she said. "The team at Film London outdid themselves this year with a fantastic oh-so-British garden party last night in the Inner Temple. An amazing historical venue and a fantastic reception."