

CHRISTIAN BRÄUER: “WE MISS PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS AND SHARED EXPERIENCES”

By Michael Rosser

Christian Bräuer is president of the board of the CICAE (International Confederation of Arthouse Cinemas), a non-profit association aiming at promoting cultural diversity in cinemas and festivals. CICAE brings together more than 4,000 screens via 11 national and regional structures, 40 independent cinemas as single members, and 22 festivals in 49 countries.

Bräuer is also the CEO of the Yorck Cinema Group, consisting of 11 cinemas and an open-air cinema in Berlin. He is president of the German Arthouse Association AG Kino – Gilde and represents the interests of cinemas on the executive board of the German Film Board FFA; he is also on their board for European and international projects.

How do you see cinemas and streaming platforms serving audiences in future?

Streaming is ever-present right now, yet I am very optimistic about the future of cinema. The cultural venue of a movie theatre is a simultaneous experience in a shared, analogue space. And even though we can stream films or video chat with friends, we all feel how deeply we miss personal encounters and shared experiences right now.

The demand and feedback from our audiences post-lockdown has clearly proven that they don't think of streaming as a replacement for the moviegoing experience. I think, for cinemas, one important shift is that much more planning and booking is happening online and in advance, so an increased digital presence will be more important than ever. Cinemas also remain of outstanding importance for the film industry and film cultural diversity.

Do you think cinemas and platforms can find better ways to work together, or at least coexist?

I do think both can and already do coexist well. We have heard a lot of noise regarding the strategy of a single global SVOD platform over the past few years, but, in general, platforms know the value of a theatrical release. A well-prepared theatrical release leads to films performing well across all subsequent distribution channels, whether it's streaming, television or something else.

The role of cinema as a curator and brand will become crucial as the content overflow online leads more and more to the feeling of 'analysis paralysis' – the feeling of scrolling through your feed. This is a great opportunity for cinemas in our challenging metier, which is increasingly dominated by global giants.

What do you think the industry tends to get wrong about how we think about audiences today?

Seeing young audiences as a lost cause for cinema because they are on their phones a lot. There is an entire generation growing up on TikTok, a platform that demands proper writing, editing and directing skills from its creators. It's actually not that difficult getting them excited for the art of cinema and I see many innovative approaches to young audience development. But in general, we don't have enough films and programmes to keep them engaged on a regular basis.



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Do you think the pandemic will have a long-term impact on audience behaviour?

I think most trends that feel like changes from the pandemic would have happened anyway, but have only been accelerated due to the pandemic. A lively neighbourhood with diverse cultural venues will certainly increase in peoples' appreciation. Once all of this is over, people will not only be excited to finally go out again, they will expect an especially great experience when going to the cinema that is worth their time and money, from a great film to great service. That's not a new trend, by far, but I think people will be much more unforgiving when they feel disappointed.

What excites you about the future of film distribution and exhibition?

There is a new generation of digital film enthusiasts. Seeing how fandoms are formed on platforms like Letterboxd around films like PARASITE, SYSTEM CRASHER, THE FAVOURITE, PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE or CALL ME BY YOUR NAME is thrilling and proof that cinema is alive and kicking. The seventh art form offers so many incredible artistic and technical possibilities for telling stories.

People love stories that are told with talent and sensitivity – and with the unique and maximal impact from the theatrical experience. It is hard to forget what a global sensation PARASITE was and the shared effort of festivals, distributors and cinemas played such a crucial road for that. I'm excited to see what comes next.