



classic MOVINGpunk vibrant

From Page to Screen, Bridport's Film Festival promises eclectic viewing once again. Curator **Rebecca Lenkiewicz** talks to **Fergus Byrne**



Talking with Rebecca Lenkiewicz about the films she has chosen for this year's *From Page To Screen* Film Festival, there is little doubt that her vast experience as an actor, playwright, screenwriter and now director, has contributed to a wide-ranging and eclectic choice of films.

She highlights the Werner Herzog film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* which was first released in 1974. The film is based on the true story of a youth who appeared out of nowhere in West Germany in 1828. He had lived the first seventeen years of his life in chains in a tiny cellar with only a toy horse to play with. The only human contact he had up until his release was a mysterious man wearing a black overcoat and top hat who fed him.

Rebecca recalls seeing the film when she was about 13. She would watch Herzog films on video with her father and mentions *Fitzcarraldo* and *Aguirre* but says 'Kaspar hit me the most'. She loved the philosophy of the film describing it as 'about human kindness and cruelty and the randomness of life.' The actor who plays Kaspar, Bruno Schleinstein, a busker with no previous acting experience received wide praise for his performance. Rebecca remembers being struck by both the film and the actor 'It's very beautiful visually and a remarkable portrait of an extraordinary man, Kaspar, who was real. And the actor who plays him had a fascinating history of isolation and ostracism from society too.'

This year's festival mix introduces viewers to an glorious selection of individuals that might be seen as mavericks, eccentrics, bohemians and in some cases perhaps, misfits. Rebecca admits she is attracted to 'stories about outsiders.' Which is why Joan of Arc appealed too. She describes it as 'the seismic bravery

and otherness of a teenage girl. It's just incredible, and the film itself is so startling.' She is looking forward to the live music accompaniment which will be provided by local musicians Andrew Goldberg and Ricky Romain.

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Rebecca will also introduce *Disobedience* directed by Sebastian Lelie for which she co-wrote the screenplay. From an original story by author Naomi Alderman, Rebecca got involved when Rachel Weisz decided to produce the film. In a BBC interview Rebecca described how the process of bringing characters to the screen can sometimes be collaborative. Speaking of the characters in *Disobedience* she said that in adapting you almost have to feel that you are "birthing" these people too. She explained "Naomi's birthed them and then we take them on a journey and see where they go".

However, although the relationship between producers, directors and screenwriters can be collaborative, it can also be detached. 'Writing screenplays is fascinating but complex' she says. 'If it's an adaptation you already have a relationship with the book and perhaps with the author. Then there's a relationship with the producer and the director. But primarily your interaction is with the script and these characters. And that interaction becomes incredibly emotional and you have a deep connection to it.' But there is also a feeling of being bereft. 'Then it can be quite painful when you've finished the script and you



deliver it. People imagine that's a relief and it is but it's also usually a farewell and that can feel quite hard. Sometimes I co write with the directors so there is more of a notion of how the film will be, but when there is scant contact with the director after delivery it can feel very strange.'

This, she says is one of the reasons she is drawn to directing. She has recently completed her directorial debut, a film of her adaptation of Deborah Levy's novel *Hot Milk*.

Another film that features two apparently misfit individuals on a fictionalised road trip is *Typist, Artist, Pirate, King* about artist Audrey Amiss and her psychiatric nurse. Amiss is played by Monica Dolan (*Mr Bates Vs The Post Office*), and her psychiatric nurse is played by Kelly Macdonald (*Trainspotting, No Country for Old Men, Operation Mincemeat*). A talented artist in her youth, Amiss was beset with mental health problems and instead of pursuing her artistic journey became a short-hand typist working for the civil service. Up to her death in 2013, she had dozens of admissions to psychiatric wards. She was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and paranoid schizophrenia. In a wonderful and touching narrative Amiss and her psychiatric nurse travel north reconnecting with key individuals and moments from Amiss's past, while Macdonald's life also slowly unravels.

This year is the 15th anniversary of *From Page To Screen*. It is the only festival to focus on adaptations and was established as a big screen companion to Bridport Arts Centre's international literary 'Bridport Prize', which is drawing its own fiftieth year to a close.

Rebecca's introduction to *From Page to Screen* was last year when she came as a guest of Festival curator Sir Christopher Hampton. She talked about the film

She Said. It is the true story of how two New York Times journalists uncovered the Harvey Weinstein 'Me Too' scandal. Rebecca wrote the screenplay as the book was unfolding. She explained how that particular experience changed her attitude to journalism. 'Writing, *She Said*, my respect for true journalism went sky high' recalls Rebecca. 'My admiration of Jodi Kantor and Megan Tovey and all the reporters at the New York Times was immense.'

Writing the screenplay while the book was being drafted gave her a perspective not often afforded to a screenplay writer. 'They were all so thorough and there was absolute due diligence with every person and story. It was really an art form.' She loved meeting them and described the research on that film as 'profound', meeting survivors of Weinstein who she said were 'so deeply impressive.' Rebecca believes 'the effects of sexual assault are for life on the victim and it's imperative that governments and police recognise that and support victims of sexual violence.' Her work on *She Said* was nominated as the BAFTAs best adapted screenplay and Golden Globe Critics' Choice Award.

Speakers at this year's event will include acclaimed actors Francesca Annis and Christopher Eccleston as well as writers and directors Christopher Hampton and Simon Chambers.

There will also be the latest award-winning films at Bridport Arts Centre and the Electric Cinema, as well as installations and exhibitions at BAC's Allsop Gallery and at Clocktower Records.

As Rebecca so succinctly put it, this year's From Page to Screen Festival is going to be "Fantastic. Classic. Moving. Punk. Vibrant!"

For a complete line up and ticket details visit <https://www.bridport-arts.com/jpts/>

