

Janice Forsyth: Now, until recently, subtitles and film and television were restricted to foreign language presentations, but now, well, I think a lot of us expect them as an option, thanks to streaming services like Netflix, Apple TV, BBC iPlayer, which offer so many shows fully captioned or subtitles. It's great for world cinema and allows viewers to broaden their horizons from their living room but, apart from that, should we be captioning and subtitling everything anyway for reasons of inclusivity and have audiences become more adept at watching and reading at the same time? Well, here to help us explore how things are changing are two film buffs. In our Edinburgh studio, Afternoon Show regular and Italian cinema expert Pasquale Iannone. Ciao, Pasquale.

Pasquale Iannone: Ciao, Janice. Come va?

Janice: No bad.

Pasquale: No bad! "I'm alright."

Janice: Alright, son! And with me in Glasgow is Megan Mitchell, producer with independent film exhibitor Matchbox Cineclub. She's also co-founder - I love this - of the first film festivals anywhere in the world dedicated to Keanu Reeves... and Nicolas Cage. Megan, welcome.

Megan Mitchell: Thank you for having me on.

Janice: Great to have you here. So, tell us about Matchbox Cineclub. It's such a brilliant title. What does it do?

Megan: So we are basically, as you said, independent film exhibitors which means, really simply, that we screen films across the UK, even though we're based predominantly in Glasgow. We screen everything, as you said, from classic Keanu Reeves and some cagey Cage all the way through to experimental Japanese cinema, world cinema and everything in between. We're really interested in cult films and cult audiences.

Janice: Wow, that's interesting. Park Circus films did something like that you know, years ago, it was like Park Circus, they were based in Park Circus, they're based in Glasgow, and became huge as distributors. Have they been a kind of shining example to you of what can be done?

Megan: Yeah, and actually we're really good pals with Park Circus. They've supplied quite a few of our titles, particularly some of the harder to get things. They're a really good resource for us and any exhibitors across the UK, actually.

Janice: That's great. All power to you. So, what about this, then, this phenomenon? I think many of us who do watch and maybe binge on box sets on the various streaming services, um... Well, I mean, let's get out of the way the whole idea of actually sometimes it's not to do with needing them because it's a foreign language. For me, and sometimes other people, I mean, going way back to something like *The Wire*, I was so pleased when I discovered that there was a subtitling... there was access to subtitling so I could really understand the brilliant dialogue. Do you,

Megan, see that there's been a big increase in this, in proper, fully captioned, subtitled films?

Megan: Absolutely and I think that younger generations particularly are now expecting that subtitles are on cinema we're seeing it across not just streaming platforms, particularly Netflix and MUBI, who are captioning 100% of their content, or subtitling 100% of their content but particularly on social media and, you know, with the use of phones, we've got captioned content on video content there because no-one's, you know, turning off their music or putting on their earphones to listen to something when they're out and about, so I think with the increase of that, that's leaking through into cinema and what audiences are expecting and I think, as you rightly said, access is a massive part of that as well, that there's this crossover with people who, you know, aren't particularly deaf or, you know, recognising themselves as such but finding subtitles massively helpful in understanding what's happening on-screen.

Janice: Yeah. Yeah. It is fascinating, isn't it, Pasquale...

Pasquale: Yeah.

Janice: Because, obviously, you know, with Italian cinema, it's no problem for you and presumably other languages as well, but it is terrific to have that option, but, for a long time, people, some people, would be a bit squeamish, "Oh, you know, "it's a pain in the neck to have to read the subtitles as well." Do you see a sea change now?

Pasquale: Yeah, I think so. I mean, there's this idea that, you know, all non-English-language films are somehow art cinema, they're art house films, they're inaccessible, they're complex, they're...they're cryptic, etc, and we know, obviously, that that's not the case. I mean, granted, there are some of those titles but I mean there's a huge variety of films of all different types of genres on all the streaming platforms, really. I mean, I was looking through Netflix, and there's some incredible films. There's an Indonesian action movie, *The Raid*, *The Raid 1 & 2*, incredible film, and of course it's all, kind of, in Indonesian and it is not an arthouse film, the way we would think of it. And it's this whole idea of subtitles versus dubbing, 'cause over here, obviously, we're not really used to dubbing, as a culture, and it feels weird, I think, whereas some other cultures in Europe dubbing is very much the norm and... But, I think, yeah, I mean, it's this idea of having the original.

Janice: Yeah.

Pasquale: And if it's... If you have to have subtitles, then fine. I mean, there are actually some directors who say, "No, no, I've spent ages composing this image, "I don't want text on it."

Janice: Yes.

Pasquale: There are very few of those.

Janice: I think most directors would surely prefer that than dubbing. I mean, I'm old enough to remember when we used to have foreign language export/import, or

whatever it is, telly after school, so there would be Robinson Crusoe and Belle and Sebastian and it was it was all the dubbing but it was hilarious, because... Certainly, my brother and I just used to spend our time impersonating the very bad English-accented foreign voices. It was very, very funny. What about, Megan, mainstream cinemas? How many mainstream cinemas are regularly screening captioned or subtitled films?

Megan: I mean, I actually took a look at us this morning before I came in, because usually we're sitting in the mid-teens for subtitled screenings in multiplexes across Glasgow for a whole week. This week, it's took a massive upswing because of *Star Wars*. There are 26 subtitled screenings across Glasgow this week. That's a choice of six films including one screening of *Frozen 2*. However, if you do not require subtitles or aren't looking for something that's subtitled, you can go to Glasgow's biggest multiplex today and see 60 screenings across 12 films, so I think there's a massive, still a massive gap in terms of film screening exhibition access. In Glasgow, we're seeing a massive increase in terms of independent exhibitors actually taking up the mantle of access and doing 100% or trying to achieve increased captions so earlier this year, Matchbox actually took the choice to dedicate 100% of our programming to captioning so that all of the films we screen, regardless of whether they're English or foreign language have captions and subtitles so that anyone can come along and enjoy the films.

Janice: Is that an expensive business to do?

Megan: Funnily enough, my colleague at Matchbox, Sean Welsh, he is a professional subtitler, so he subtitles and captions for MUBI and freelance so we can do it in-house but we've also seen an increase in funding, so that other organisations can reach out to us or other subtitlers and get that. We're seeing that, on the production side, in terms of distributors for films, they're still not supplying or producing subtitles so it means that even if people are wanting to screen their films accessibly, they just can't.

Janice: Yeah. It's interesting this, isn't it, Pasquale? I mean, also 'cause, you know, subtitled films you can totally imagine as an education resource for language students.

Pasquale: Totally, yeah, and it's an incredibly useful tool, as is music, of course, but, I mean, especially with film and it's something that, you know, when I was at school, when I were a lad, you know, going back to the mid to late '90s, I mean, you didn't have that. I mean, you didn't have the... You had the old... You still had old VHS and DVD was coming in, but it was nowhere near this amount of accessibility that you have now and so a tool, like this language learning in Netflix, is superb. I mean, it just allows viewers to watch foreign language shows with subtitles both in the original language and the English and you can pause it to really kind of absorb what they've just seen. Obviously, there's some series and TV programmes that are better suited for this kind of thing. I mean, I was thinking... I was thinking of some series that are given some flack for their sound, the way that actors mumble, the way that actors... apparently, the Director General of the BBC said, "Muttering is something we should have a look at."

[Laughter]

Pasquale: Back in 2013!

Janice: I love that. So W1A, isn't it? Yeah! But there was an audibility project apparently in 2009, involving a 20,000 panel of viewers and listeners so this idea of sound and being able to catch every single thing but sometimes you don't actually need to catch every single thing. It does really depend on the film, on the TV show. And how much is relayed through dialogue, and how much is relayed through the visual side.

Janice: Yeah. I've been thinking a lot about that recently because, Megan, I've been, you know, I was lucky enough to go to a BAFTA screening of *The Irishman*, so I saw it on the big screen. It wasn't that big a screen, but it was a big screen And I was really glad I was able to do that. However, I have to admit, during it... I mean, I loved it, I really, really enjoyed it, but during it I was thinking, "Oh, I can't quite catch what he said there," and I was imagining that moment where I could pause and get the subtitles up. And I was just personifying exactly what Pasquale's talking about. It was like, "Wait a minute, enjoy this master at work, "look at these visuals, just take in the whole thing, "maybe later..." Fortunately, it's on Netflix, so I can look at the subtitles, but it's interesting about how it maybe affects our experience of just sinking into the film.

Megan: Yeah, but I think in terms of the availability of the subtitles and captions, particularly when you do go to the cinema you might be able to sink into the film a wee bit easier if subtitles aren't on the screen, but if someone needs subtitles, they can't view the film.

Janice: That's it.

Pasquale: Yeah. I think there's a really interesting conversation around that, particularly with art house cinemas and the idea that they are maybe a wee bit hesitant to put captions on their English language content, even though they screen predominantly foreign language, but they're not hesitant to put out their wheelchair ramp.

Janice: Yes.

Megan: And it's that type of same access that they're providing, so I think that there's a larger conversation around why we want subtitles on films, and it's because of the idea that more people can go see these films and enjoy them.

Janice: Don't you think, Pasquale, that because there's been a sea change in people like me enjoying, for the small screen anyway, the ability, to do with the mumbling or whatever, to be able to, you know, actually see, read what they're saying, don't you think, because of that, there should be less hesitancy amongst arthouse cinemas or wherever to roll out the subtitles and the captions for English language films?

Pasquale: Yeah, I mean, I do think so. I mean, obviously it's something that happens a lot in other countries but obviously it's very different over here, so maybe

there's less of this pressure, perhaps, to put it on these screens, but it's definitely something that happens in Italy in France, where you have cinemas playing all the big hitters, all the big films in dubbed versions, but also with, in original versions as well.

Janice: Yeah. Certainly, thinking about what you're doing with Matchbox Cinema Club [sic], is there a lot of... I mean, do you go for a lot of foreign language films or is that not what your main thrust is when you're thinking of programming?

Megan: So, our main, core programme is about films you can't see anywhere else, so that's predominantly archive and world cinema, so foreign language. We also have our tent pole, larger weekend festivals, that are a wee bit more mainstream films, but they're all captioned as well. And, for us, a lot of that is that we're able to produce those captions in-house but we're also, you know, able to bring in people - you can see *Con Air*, maybe on Netflix, but you can't see it, you know, captioned on the big screen elsewhere.

Janice: Yeah. Just finally, what you were saying there, Pasquale, you were talking about a brilliant Indonesian action film.

Pasquale: Yeah.

Janice: That's the thing, there's such a richness out there and I'm as guilty as anybody else of not exploring, you know, the rest of the world's cinema 'cause there's so much else to catch up with and somebody like Mark Cousins always makes me feel guilty 'cause he plunges into it all the time, but there's so much brilliant film-making going on, right around the globe. Yeah, and actually, talk about Mark Cousins, I mean, Moviedrome was a real formative moment for me in terms of film education, that great series back in the '90s and with Mark Cousins and Alex Cox, but, yeah, I mean, just one look at Netflix, and I was just having a look at the international titles that they have and on their front page, the lead page is *The Pianist*, the Roman Polanski film.

Janice: Yeah.

Pasquale: But I was just looking at some others that they've got. They've got this terrific film called *The Guilty*, which is a film, a Danish film. One actor, just one actor in the film, so a bit like that film *Locke*, with Tom Hardy.

Janice: Yeah.

Pasquale: This is about an emergency police dispatcher who takes a call from a kidnapped woman. Very, very spare locations. Very, very suspenseful 90 minutes, less than 90 minutes and you're done. And it's a terrific film!

Janice: I'm writing it down. *Guilty*. Thank you very much indeed. Do you know what? We've talked so much, I can only play a little bit of the final song now, but I thought that was fascinating. Thank you very much indeed, Pasquale Iannone and Megan Mitchell. Cheers.

Megan: Thank you.

Pasquale: Thank you.

Janice: And, Megan, yeah, Cage-a-rama 2020 taking place from the 3rd to 5th of January at the CCA in Glasgow, for all your Nicolas Cage needs, hosted by Megan and her team. Thank you very much indeed.