



Edinburgh's cutting edge

Underlining its emphasis on discovery, the Edinburgh International Film Festival (June 16-27) brings new UK and international work to the attention of distributors and audiences. **Matt Mueller** reports

Celebrating its third year firmly ensconced in the month of June, following its flight from Edinburgh's August festival overcrowding, the 64th Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) is more than ever a festival of discovery and a showcase for new UK film-making talent.

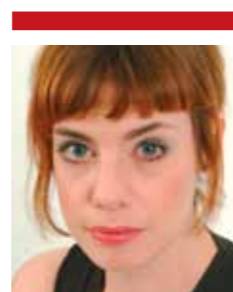
"Discovery is something we've always emphasised," says EIFF artistic director Hannah McGill, who has intensified her efforts to programme more first and second-time film-makers and more world and international premieres at the festival, which runs June 16-27. In light of current buyer circumspection, it is a natural progression for Edinburgh to offer a platform for niche titles and maverick talent rather than chase higher-profile titles with UK distribution plans already mapped out.

"We find we're working less with distributors and more directly with producers and sales agents," says McGill, who has been at the helm since 2007. "The more we can draw some of those niche films to the attention of UK distributors, the better."

Edinburgh still plays a crucial role in

the calendar for the smaller UK distributors such as Vertigo, Metrodome, Soda Pictures and Artificial Eye. "Edinburgh is a festival we've always supported," says Zak Brilliant, VP of distribution and publicity for Icon Film Distribution. "It's unique. It's more intimate than London, and it's about the films and the film-makers. It almost feels like Sundance of old." This year, Icon will hold the world premiere of Karl Golden's *Pelican Blood*, following previous rewarding EIFF launches for *Man On Wire* and *Once*.

While McGill admires how receptive the festival's audiences are to discovering new, challenging film-makers, she is also aware that red-carpet glamour is a prerequisite for any major festival. Two years ago, Keira Knightley and Sienna Miller whipped up headlines at *The Edge Of Love* gala, and this year EIFF will play host to the glitzy international premiere of Disney/Pixar's *Toy Story 3*, a month ahead of its UK release. "Disney and EIFF have a great relationship," says Charlotte Tudor, vice-president, publicity, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures UK. "The festival has proved a successful UK launch for well-



'We've got a really good line-up of uncompromising independent films that don't necessarily have an eye on commercialism'

Hannah McGill, EIFF

loved Pixar films such as *Ratatouille* and *Wall•E*, and Disney/Pixar film-makers have a great time attending."

Other Gala titles at this year's EIFF include Aaron Schneider's *Get Low*, starring Bill Murray and Robert Duvall, Pascal Chaumeil's *Heartbreaker*, Bart Freundlich's *The Rebound* and Floria Sigismondi's *The Runaways*.

McGill mentions US independents, animation and documentary as strands in which audiences will find particularly rewarding discoveries this year, including titles such as Rona Mark's *The Crab*, documentaries *Out Of The Ashes* and *Girl With Black Balloons*, and a new film from the Quay brothers. This year's retrospective section, *After the Wave*, will highlight forgotten British films from 1967-79.

At press time, EIFF had 22 world premieres and 12 international premieres lined up. The majority of world premieres are British but there are also titles from Canada, the US and Peru.

Leading the charge for the UK is *Cherry Tree Lane*, the third film from Paul Andrew Williams, who made a splash at EIFF 2006 with his debut, *Lon-*

THE STORY WORKS

SCREENWRITING

Financed by Skillsset and Scottish Screen and run by story editor Kate Leys with the EIFF and producers Amanda Posey and Finola Dwyer, The Story Works is a year-long initiative to help 10 UK screenwriters rise to the next level.

It kicks off with a five-day residential scheme at the festival (June 14-18), with closed story discussions and masterclasses run by experienced international screenwriters, as well as other film-making talent. Selected writers this year include David Farr (*Hanna*), Olivia Hetreed (*Girl With A Pearl Earring*) and Nathan Parker (*Moon*). Hannah McGill sees The Story Works as a potential EIFF flagship.



Paul Andrew Williams' *Cherry Tree Lane* is a world premiere at EIFF



Sylvain Chomet's *The Illusionist* will open the festival

don To Brighton. An urban thriller, the film will be released in the UK by Metrodome, with sales handled by The Salt Company. Other UK world premieres include debut features from actor-comedian Ben Miller (*Huge*) and Bafta-winning short director Hattie Dalton, whose *Third Star* will close the festival (see p15). Also screening is Ashley Horner's art-industry satire *Brilliantlove*, which premiered at Tribeca this year and Gareth Edwards' debut, *Monsters*, set in a post-alien invasion world, which premiered at South By Southwest.

British independent new wave

McGill is particularly excited about a new wave of UK independent films, produced outside the traditional funding structures. "We're seeing that British film-makers are more and more following the US model of doing it genuinely independently, raising the finance with an entrepreneurial spirit rather than relying on state funding," says McGill. "We've found some exciting titles that I hope go on to have a festival life after us."

Besides *Toy Story 3*, the festival opens with another animation, Sylvain Chomet's Edinburgh-set *The Illusionist*, which will be the inaugural premiere at the city's spectacular Festival Theatre. Though the film world premiered at this year's Berlinale, Chomet's connection to

Edinburgh (he moved to the city following *The Triplets Of Belleville*'s enthusiastic reception at EIFF 2003, and made *The Illusionist* there) made it an easy choice for the organisers. "We had to have it," says McGill. "I've never seen a film that makes Scotland look so amazing."

Due to its place in the festival calendar, Edinburgh cannot help being reactive to Cannes, though McGill does not see the French festival as an obstacle. "As a summer festival, I'm always reacting more to Sundance and Berlin," she insists. Last year, McGill gave Cannes premiere *Antichrist* a last-minute EIFF slot after it secured UK distribution, and is open to doing so again with another buzz title from the Croisette.

Though not an official market, distributors and sales agents attend EIFF in numbers. Last year saw buyers from India, Austria, Germany, Portugal and France, as well as IFC, Magnolia and European powerhouses MK2, Celluloid Dreams and Wild Bunch. Three years ago the festival introduced a buffet dinner to foster an informal networking zone for film-makers and sales agents. This year, EIFF is also liaising with the film export event London UK Film Focus to identify and support film-makers with titles at both events. Both sides hope it will lead to a long-term partnership.

In the wake of Ginnie Atkinson's

'Edinburgh's unique. It's all about the films and the film-makers. It almost feels like Sundance of old'

Zak Brilliant, Icon Film Distribution

FEATURES SCOTLAND

PRODUCER DEVELOPMENT

Backed by the Scottish government and Scottish Screen, EIFF's producer development initiative — formerly known as the Expo Fund, now renamed Features Scotland — has altered its format this year. Previously, the scheme brought US talent agents to Edinburgh for workshops and networking events with Scottish producers. Now the plan is to showcase Scottish talent at other international festivals, with Edinburgh as the starting point for the 10-month scheme which will also take in Toronto, London and Berlin. At this year's EIFF, the local producers selected will bring a feature-length project to develop during the process, and take part in masterclasses, networking events and more. Inaugural participants are Wendy Griffin, Carolynne Sinclair Kidd, Micky MacPherson, Suzanne Reid, Andy Green and Rhianna Andrews.

departure as EIFF's long-serving managing director earlier this year, an interim COO has been appointed. With the Edinburgh Filmhouse (where Atkinson was CEO) merging with the festival under the label Centre for the Moving Image, the new organisation will have an overall chief executive, to be appointed in the near future, leaving the festival structure in a state of flux. "We'll be looking at how we restructure once the CEO comes on board," says McGill.

One challenge the festival will need to face head on for 2011 is that the UK Film Council's three-year \$2.8m (£1.9m) grant to assist the move to June comes to an end this year. "We always knew it was for three years and we always knew it was going to be hard to replace that level of investment," says McGill. "We're confident we can maintain the festival but there are going to have to be hard choices made, as there are in every industry in the world right now."

Now settled in its early summer slot, EIFF seems to have a stronger sense of purpose and distinctiveness than it did even a couple of years ago. "We've got a really good line-up of uncompromising independent films that don't necessarily have an eye on commercialism," says McGill. "I think festivals can now trail-blaze for these films, rather than waiting to see what the distributors pick up." **E**