

The discovery channel

The Edinburgh International Film Festival has a reputation for breaking new talent. **Matt Mueller** explores the importance of the event as a launch pad, and profiles selected titles world premiering at this year's edition

“Most of my British section this year is world premieres,” says Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) artistic director Hannah McGill. “That gives the audience the chance to discover and vote with their feet. Festivals are in more of a position now to influence distribution, rather than the other way around.”

Edinburgh's role and reputation for breaking new talent from UK shores and beyond has seen the festival serve as a crucial launch pad for many a talented young film-maker. Stuart Hazeldine, writer-director of last year's festival discovery *Exam*, says it was always his hope to launch at EIFF. “When your entire cast, crew and financing are British and you're low budget, you instantly think of Edinburgh,” he says. “New talent breaks through there and we wanted to be a part of that.”

The steam his debut picked up in Edinburgh led to *Exam*'s UK distribution deal and a Bafta nomination for outstanding British debut. “It's only a good launch pad if you're noticed, and fortunately we were,” adds Hazeldine.

Likewise, director Lindy Heymann finished her debut, *Kicks*, at the end of 2008 but was swayed by McGill's enthusiasm following an early screening to keep the film back for the 2009 festival. “When you're a small British film without a distributor, it feels nerve-racking holding on that long,” says Heymann. “But it made perfect sense because Edinburgh is the launch pad for independent British movies.”

With the festival's focus on discovery, McGill and her team do not have to look far to find new talent. This year, she has been excited to see a new breed of independent UK film-maker take a lead from the entrepreneurial US indie scene. Believing it is EIFF's role to give these voices the opportunity to be heard, McGill programmes with diversity and passion in mind.



Hattie Dalton's *Third Star* is the closing night film

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Stuart Hazeldine, writer-director

“I'm very interested in new film-makers who have done things with ambition and passion, like Hattie Dalton with *Third Star*,” says McGill. “That was a script everyone had read and loved but what I love about her film is that it's not the most glitzy production but it's smart, it contains beautiful performances and Hattie made the film she wanted to make.”

The festival's leading accolade for new talent is its Michael Powell award for best new British feature film. Last year it went to Duncan Jones' *Moon*, with previous winners including Shane Meadows' *Somers Town* and Anton Corbijn's *Control*. EIFF also dishes out its Skillset new directors award for first- and second-time film-makers, with last year's winner — director Cary Fukunaga for his debut *Sin Nombre* — returning to the UK this year to shoot a new version of *Jane Eyre* starring Mia

Wasikowska. “We already have 40 contenders for this year's new directors award,” says McGill. “The number goes up every year.”

There is also the best new international feature award, which was established last year to attract more world and international premieres.

And, of course, there is Trailblazers, which was set up in 2007 as EIFF's flagship talent showcase and selects 25 individuals from across the UK film-making spectrum and UK film schools to highlight as emerging talent.

The class of 2009 included *Fish Tank* actress Katie Jarvis, while original Trailblazer Eduard Grau, who studied at the London Film School, was hired as cinematographer on *A Single Man* as a result of his EIFF showreel. Grau will be returning to the festival this year to share his experiences with the class of 2010. **E**

SELECTED UK WORLD PREMIERES AT EDINBURGH

Third Star

Closing night gala

Four childhood friends — one with terminal cancer — take a camping trip on the Welsh coast. “It's a beautiful and funny film, with a terrific script,” says McGill. “Hattie's a talented director.” A Western Edge Pictures production in association with Matador Pictures, Cinema One and the Film Agency for Wales, *Third Star* was shot on Super-16 over four weeks last summer on a third of its original budget with a cast that includes Benedict Cumberbatch and JJ Feild. “It was ambitious but we just jumped in, feeling, ‘We'll get there somehow,’” says Dalton, who had just completed post when she discovered *Third Star* had been chosen as the closing night gala. She won a Bafta for her 2004 short, *The Banker*.

International sales Independent Film Company

www.independentfilmcompany.com



Pelican Blood

British gala

An Ecosse Films production, McGill calls *Pelican Blood* “a beautiful piece of work about odd subject matters — birdwatching and suicide.” The film features a powerful performance from rising British star Harry Treadaway as Nikko, an obsessive birdwatcher trying to get over a break-up with a girl he met on a suicide website. “Edinburgh's always been a great festival to discover new films, particularly British ones, so it's an ideal place for us to launch *Pelican Blood*,” says director Karl Golden. “It's a bold and passionate film with a wild energy about it and audiences at

SoulBoy

British gala

Edinburgh always have an appetite for something new, something different. It's a good fit.”

UK dist/international sales Icon Group

www.iconmovies.co.uk



Jackboots On Whitehall

British gala

An A-list UK voice cast — Ewan McGregor, Rosamund Pike, Alan Cumming, Tom Wilkinson — was assembled for this politicised, satirical puppet animation offering a bizarre, alternative take on the Second World War. “A very strange film but it's great — lots and lots of fun,” says McGill, who tracked *Jackboots* throughout its lengthy production process. Sibling writer-directors Edward and Rory McHenry make their film-making debut with *Jackboots*. “The Scottish aspect to the story makes Edinburgh a perfect place to make a debut,” says Rory McHenry.

International sales Media 8 Entertainment

www.media8ent.com



One of the more straight-up commercial offerings at this year's EIFF, *SoulBoy* is a coming-of-age drama set in the 1970s underground

Northern Soul scene. With a hot young British cast made up of Martin Compston, Felicity Jones, Alfie Allen and Nichola Burley, assembled by Irish director Shimmy Marcus, *SoulBoy* is a good old-fashioned British crowd-pleaser and was produced by Ipso Facto Films, with funding support from Northern Film and Media, Media + and the Irish Film Board. “I like that there are still films being made in this feelgood way, with passion and determination on small budgets,” says McGill.

UK dist Soda Pictures

International sales Moviehouse Entertainment

www.moviehouseent.com



Huge

British gala

The directorial debut of acclaimed British actor-comedian Ben Miller (*The Armstrong & Miller Show*) is a blackly comic drama about a feuding double act trying to make it in the cut-throat world of stand-up comedy. With a cast that includes Noel Clarke and Thandie Newton, and big-name comedians Frank Skinner and Eddie Izzard in cameos as themselves, *Huge* was first performed as a play at the Edinburgh Fringe, and features a screenplay by Jez Butterworth. “Edinburgh changed my life once, back when I was a spotty student hoping to become a comedian,” says Miller. “Now I'm a spotty middle-aged man hoping to become a director, and I'm hoping it'll work its yeasty magic once again.”

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A Spanking In Paradise

Under The Radar

A Spanking In Paradise's writer-director Wayne Thallon is an author of true-crime books (*Cut-throat: The Vicious World Of Rod McLean — Mercenary, Gunrunner And International Drug Baron*). Shot over three weeks in January, his micro-budget black comedy is about a notorious Edinburgh crime lord and his wide-eyed nephew. McGill describes it as “funny, bold and raw at the edges but with a toughness and originality that's really cool. It just shows there are grassroots people out there making films for no money who we have a chance to expose to an audience.”

Contact Running Productions
enquiries@runningproductions.co.uk

Other UK world premieres at Edinburgh

- *Cherry Tree Lane*
Dir Paul Andrew Williams
- *The Kid*
Dir Nick Moran
- *Out Of The Ashes*
Dirs Lucy Martens, Timothy Albone
- *Road To Las Vegas*
Dir Jason Massot
- *Honeymooner*
Dir Col Spector
- *Superhero Me*
Dir Steve Sale
- *Ollie Kepler's Expanding Purple World*
Dir Viv Fongenie
- *Donkeys*
Dir Morag McKinnon
- *CrimeFighters*
Dir Miles Watts