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BIZ + BUZZ

Europe's Fests Plug Into Circuit

Late summer offers a crowded calendar for cinephiles ready to get back on the sprocket opera stage

By NICK VIVARELLI

As Europe's summer film festivals restart after taking a year of COVID-prompted pause — the notable exception being Venice — the Cannes Film Festival shift into July has caused an August overload. But the disruption hasn't dampened enthusiasm on the circuit.

With no shortage of movies to launch and vaccinated local audiences keen to get back in front of a big screen, artistic directors of Europe's other prominent summer shindigs such as Locarno, Karlovy Vary, Sarajevo and Haugesund are gearing up for watershed editions — and looking to last year's Venice for reassurance.

"I am trying to be confident without sounding naive," says Locarno Film Festival artistic director Giona A. Nazzaro. "But

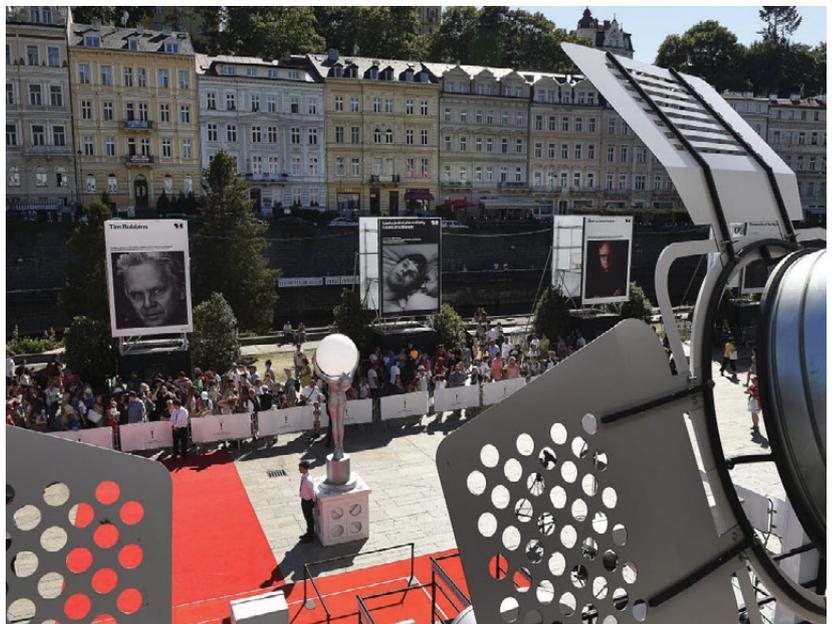
I think that it's absolutely possible to obtain a good result, like the one that [Venice chief] Alberto Barbera obtained last year: It's totally doable."

Barbera, who pulled off last year's feat — although with fewer Lido launches than usual — is confident that "from the upcoming edition of Cannes, and then Locarno and Venice," the situation "will get closer to normal," he said at a recent IDM Alto Adige Film Fund panel.

His take is that film industry folks can't wait to get back on the festival circuit.

"We've been talking with all our partners, sales agents and production companies. And all of them are very willing and eager to come back to festivals, not just Venice," Barbera said.

As for the disturbance caused



The Karlovy Vary Festival (top) and Sarajevo fest have shifted dates due to COVID and other forces.

by Cannes shifting into its current July 6-17 slot, though it has wreaked havoc, nobody is holding it against fest topper Thierry Fremaux.

"It's not Cannes; it's the pandemic, obviously," says Nazzaro. "For us the fact that Cannes is happening is wonderful news because another year without Cannes would have been a major problem for the entire industry. Cannes brings life back into the industry." He has been in touch with Fremaux, who has answered all his "questions and concerns."

"What would have happened to the industry if Cannes had been cancelled one more time?" wonders Eric Lagesse, who runs prominent Paris-based distribution and sales outfit Pyramide Distribution. Cannes "obviously" could not be held in May, due to a new surge in coronavirus cases, he points out. Like many other European industry execs, Lagesse thinks Cannes didn't have a choice, though he "can understand that it's probably a problem for a festival like Locarno that is squeezed between Cannes and Venice," he says.

Locarno's Piazza Grande won't be filled to capacity this year, but will host 5,000 film fans.

Karlovy Vary Intl. Film Festival artistic director Karel Och, who moved his event's dates from their customary early July slot to Aug. 20-28, says the change was not dictated by an overlap with Cannes.

"We were made to understand by local authorities that if we postponed the festival for seven weeks we would have more than 1 million newly vaccinated people compared to early July," he says.

That was the clincher. Fest executive director Krystof Mucha adds that, given that the COVID-19 infections rate in the Czech Republic is now rapidly improving, prospects are that by opening night the fest's screening venues are likely to be allowed to operate at full capacity.

Sarajevo Film Festival head of industry Jovan Marjanovic is hoping current 30% occupancy restrictions on cinemas in the Bosnian capital will ease up in time for the event's upcoming Aug. 13-20 edition for which he knows he's "not going to get 1,500 film professionals to come to Sarajevo as we normally do."

"I think filmmakers will travel

with their films to introduce them and meet the audience. I think that will come back quickly," he says. What will take more time to restart are the industry-related activities. So Sarajevo execs are going to focus on getting international directors to come with their films as well as regional talents, and will be catering on site to the regional professionals (from former Yugoslavia and the wider Balkans area) "who really consider us their meeting point," while offering their online market platform to the rest of Europe and the world.

Och underlines that in this post-pandemic context the priority is "taking care of the local audience," whereas due to travel restrictions "the international aspect, by definition, is limited."

But Och is also very keen for films to screen at Karlovy Vary with talents in tow.

"This is a special year to show how much we care for the films and the filmmakers, and to really enable them to return in front of the audience," he says. He vows that he will have films from all over the world for which many

helpers, including at least one from the U.S., have said they are willing to make the trek. In a spirit of collaboration, Karlovy Vary is coordinating joint travel arrangements for invited directors with the Jerusalem Film Festival, whose dates overlap this year.

As Nazzaro puts it, the key thing is "that we are telling the global industry and cinephiles that Locarno is alive and kicking. Maybe more alive than ever. Of course we have to give the festival back to the local audience, which in Locarno has always been extremely warm and supportive."

There is also lots of enthusiasm building up about going back to physical fest rituals that for Locarno means screening films on the Piazza Grande, Europe's largest open-air venue in terms of both capacity (it seats 8,000) and screen size.

"We've just had this wonderful news from the federal government that we can re-open the Piazza Grande to an audience of 5,000 people," says Nazzaro. "Just a few weeks ago this would have been unthinkable." 🍷



Get in Gear

Europe's top festivals set the stage for film fans and virtual biz buzz

By Nick Vivarelli

How are Europe's top post-Cannes, pre-Venice summer film fests coping with the COVID-19 coda for their August editions? Snapshot below:

Locarno

Aug. 4-14

The upcoming 74th edition of the prominent Swiss lakeside fest dedicated to global indie cinema will mark the debut of Italian film critic Giona A. Nazzaro as artistic director. Nazzaro is upbeat about submissions they've received. "The films we have secured are very interesting and will provide some indications of the direction in which I want to steer the festival," he says. Nazzaro adds that he has embarked on "a more audience-friendly" course that will see "the industry be a key player in the scheme of all things Locarno." That said, high on his priorities is the need "to give the festival back to the local audience," comprising thousands of young Swiss film buffs that in Locarno have "always been extremely warm and supportive." Festgoers will be able to enjoy the unique experience of Locarno's open-air screenings on the 8,000-seat Piazza Grande, the largest outdoor venue in Europe, which has been approved by Swiss health authorities for a 5,000 spectator capacity.

COVID-19 safety measures for entry into Switzerland include a negative PCR test as well as proof of vaccination. Locarno's customarily very well-attended industry side has "planned all kinds of [digital] activities in order not to cut out those who will not be able to reach us physically," he adds.



The Sarajevo Film Festival gears up for audiences and fun.

PRE-CANNES-SCREENINGS 2021



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Meanwhile, though Locarno will suffer from Europe's overcrowded summer festival calendar as COVID-19 restrictions begin to ease, the number of accreditations they've reached so far "is extremely promising and, given the time-frame, way higher than we had predicted," says Nazzaro, who is looking forward to launching some under-the-radar directors and putting them "on the global map for the years to come."

Sarajevo

Aug. 13-20

Southeastern Europe's top shindig is making the most of its role as a catalyst to kickstart the local industry's post-COVID restart. Never idle, the fest is among the producers of Bosnian director Danis Tanović's new drama "Ten in Half," set in a pandemic-stricken Sarajevo. It wrapped in June "with no contagions" on set, which is a "good sign" says the fest's head of industry Jovan Marjanovic.

Marjanovic says the number of submissions to the fest is up but, as always, "I hope to get some great titles for our sidebar sections from this year's Cannes," even though this will mean "a bit of last-minute confirmations."

For Sarajevo's CineLink Industry Days and co-production mart, which is the leading platform for projects from the region, "it will be a smaller edition on site," he says, "but of course we will maximize the use of online technologies to reach more people."

Bosnia has already opened borders to foreign visitors with a negative PCR test and/or a COVID

passport, so there is "no need for special invites," says Marjanovic. "What we are hoping to do is make it such that people can come easily with minimal hassle."

He points out that proximity to Istanbul's airport is a plus, since it's "been open to international flights all along" and tourists are already starting to flock back to Sarajevo.

While borders are open, cinemas in Sarajevo are still operating at 30% seating capacity due to COVID constraints, but the fest is confident this restriction will be lifted, at least in part, by mid-August.

Karlovy Vary

Aug. 20-28

The Czech Republic's Karlovy Vary Intl. Film Festival, which is the leading movie event in Central and Eastern Europe, has shifted its dates from July to late August to give local audiences more time to get vaccinated and to benefit from eased venue capacity limitations due to COVID-19.

"The moment we announced we were happening physically we got a lot of excitement and many directors are saying they are willing to come," says artistic director Karel Och, who vows they will "have films from all over the world."

"The situation is changing very fast," add Och, who notes that as far as travel goes, "Cannes will be very important for us in terms of seeing what the situation will be for talents and also for international industry people," though of course there will also be a strong

GrandHotel Pupp is the heart of the Karlovy Vary festival.



presence of local film productions.

As for travel, festival executive director Kryštof Mucha says people from all E.U. member and partner countries people who are vaccinated or have a PCR test with a three- to five-day window will be able to enter the country. What's still unclear are regulations for people traveling from the U.S., Australia and Asia, but Mucha notes that protocols will be nailed down by the end of July.

Meanwhile, their strategy to lure as many international attendees as possible is "to tell people that we don't just want them to come and work," says Och. "We want them to come and relax."

Norwegian Intl. Film Festival

Aug. 21-27

Held in the coastal town of Haugesund, the Norwegian event — which also hosts the New Nordic Films market — is gearing up for a fully in-person fest with a hybrid industry component that "will be

a more limited and more exclusive market with less [on-site] participants, because we know that a lot of countries can't travel yet," says New Nordic film director Gyda Velvin Myklebus, who notes that last year's online edition of the mart "worked really well."

The festival, which caters to a largely local audience, will instead be "almost normal," she adds, since there are no travel restrictions within Norway and seat capacity in theaters will be "sufficient enough" both for the fest itself and also to hold a fully physical edition of Norway's Amanda Awards, among the most prestigious film awards in the Nordics, televised live as usual.

Though Europe's August festival calendar will be even more crowded this year, the Haugesund market chief doesn't think the Cannes shift into July will impact them much "because we are very regional and those [film executives] who want to collaborate with the Nordics will want to find their way to Haugesund anyway." 🎬

PRE-CANNES-SCREENINGS 2021



UPCOMING

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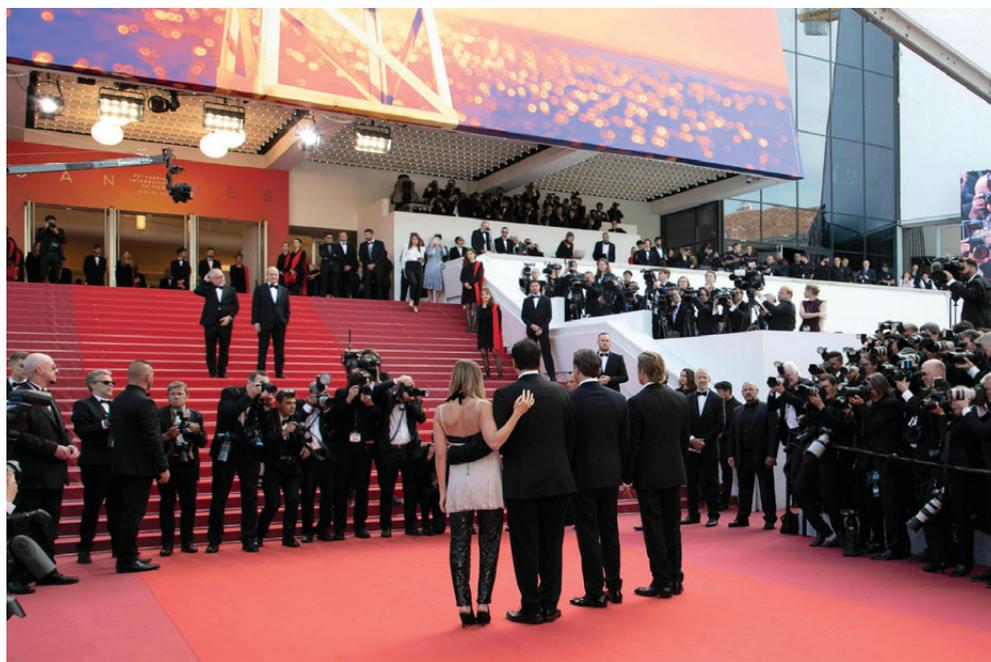
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Business Almost as Usual

Restaurants, hotels and other fest-related establishments prep for visitors but still face a down year

By Ben Croll



To a recent arrival, strolling down the Croisette for the first time since May 2019, it could seem like nothing ever happened.

Save for the Carlton, which is under renovation until 2023, all the hotels will be up and running, as will the restaurants and bars. The beaches will be busy, the sun at full strength and the nightlife in full swing. One might daydream about what it was like for the past 16 months.

"It was a catastrophe," says Max Rothman, an American transplant who has run the Cannes Concierge rental service for two decades. "Economically speaking, I think Cannes was the hardest hit city in the country."

The numbers indeed are staggering. After Paris, Cannes remains

the country's largest host of expos and shows, the second-largest recipient of business travel.

Only without any significant industrial base, the tourism market alone accounts for 50% of the city's GDP. How else do you account for the 500 restaurants in a city with less than 75,000 inhabitants?

And then there's the Cannes Film Festival, an economic supercharge, a rising tide that lifts all yachts. Leave aside the bars and restaurants and consider the dry cleaners, makeup artists, drivers and printers that benefit from the two-week bonanza that brings 2,300 jobs and just under €200 million (\$242 million) to the city.

Now imagine a year without all that.

"Everybody mentioned their favorite post-apocalyptic movie," says Rothman. "For me, it was 'The Omega Man.' All you saw were barren streets."

Locked down from March until May 2020 and then once more from October until earlier this month, local hoteliers and restaurant owners managed to squeak by last summer thanks to domestic tourists and some from neighboring countries. Those relying on the event-based economy weren't so lucky.

Rothman, who rents 75-100 central apartments to industry pros coming for the festival and other trade shows, including *Variety* staff, says he lost "somewhere between 99[%] and 100%" of his annual revenue in 2020

and doesn't hold out hope for a better 2021.

"This year is shot," he says. "We're six months in, and already the MipTV show was cancelled, the [Cannes] Lions got cancelled, and the Mipim show in September is not going to pick up the slack."

"I'm a pretty optimistic guy but I'm cautious," he adds. "I'm not expecting the gates to open wide and for people to just resume as they had done before."

A slower festival won't turn the matter around. A combination of travel restrictions, irregular vaccine rollouts and general travel skittishness will give the Cannes Film Festival a much smaller footprint this year. So far, the festival has received 20,000 accreditation requests — down 50% from previous years — while the *Marché de Film* is expected to host 40% of its usual delegates.

That being said, some caution against comparisons between this and any prior festival edition.

"We can't compare 2019 to 2021," says Christine Welter, president of Cannes' Hoteliers Union. "Between the two we had to live through 2020. We're still living through something we've never experienced before."

Like Rothman, business owners in the hotel union received direct assistance from the French state, which offered monthly indemnities based on the business' mean 2019 income, divided by 12 and with a cap at \$12,000. On top of that, the national government offered partial furloughs to hospitality workers unable to work for 12 of the past 16 months.

As local businesses cut costs

The Cannes Film Festival's gala screenings draw thousands of journalists, who rent rooms, and spend money at restaurants during the event, driving the local economy.

to a bare minimum, the municipal authorities also did their part; since March 2020 the city of Cannes has injected \$18 million in aid, mostly by way organizing buy-local campaigns and delivery services, setting up social, legal and psychological resources for those affected by the crisis and by waiving just under \$3.6 million in rent exemptions.

Whereas in previous years, the film festival accounted for 20% of local hotels' annual turnover, the July edition should promise a smaller if nevertheless significant return.

In terms of reservation rates, the city's 120 hotels — all of which will be open, the Carlton notwithstanding — are as of now at 50% capacity for the first week of the festival. That number notches to 60% for those on the Croisette during week two, and 30% for those hotels farther from the main drag.

Thanks to government employment insurance, the city's 120

hotels kept their staff, and will return fully operational by early July, charging standard summer rates during the festival period instead of the higher ones usually levied in May.

But for the industry to thrive, it will need a steady turnover well after the summer season.

"Our biggest hope it to hold out," says Welter. "If we can't operate throughout the rest of the year, that's the end. This time last year, we were quite optimistic, and then the borders closed again at the end of August and we had to close with them. Today, we're going to try to make it work, but if we have to close back again in the fall, we'll be closing for good."

In order to prevent as much, the city and its myriad local businesses can only stand to benefit from a film festival that goes off without a hitch.

On the health front, the city has invested \$121,000 in safety certifications, along with wastewater



Bong Joon Ho, right, and his "Parasite" star Kang-Ho Song at Cannes in 2019.

analysis for rapid contamination feedback and rapid testing centers in and around the Palais.

The regional vaccination campaigns also reason for optimism. In the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, where Cannes is located, vaccination rates slightly outpace the national average; by the time the festival nears, a notch below 50% of the population will have received at least one dose.

The city of Cannes is taking an even more aggressive approach; on June 15 it opened eligibility to all residents over the age of 12.

"If the past year has taught us anything, it's that COVID makes any kind of prediction extremely difficult," says Alain Lahouti, president of Cannes' Restaurant Union. "We can just say that there's been a concerted effort on the part of the city, festival, hotels, storeowners and restaurants to make this festival a success."

Employees at Cannes' 500 dining establishments weathered the storm with furlough benefits, while owners received a similar direct government indemnity.

Lahouti tells *Variety* that his union has requested an extension

of these "indispensable life preservers" at least until September, or until locals get back on their feet.

For now, they're looking to staff up. Though the establishments remained, a substantial number of staff left the industry and sometimes even left town, so the local employment market is now seeing a swath of food service hires.

"We're in the eye of the storm right now, so it's too soon to say the rate of new employment, but clearly there's been a sharp rise," Lahouti says.

Still under capacity restrictions, which limit indoor spaces to 50% and force an 11 p.m. closing, Cannes' dining rooms and terraces will be allowed to fill to the brim once the last lockdown rules lift on June 30.

As the festival comes around the following week, the union head has but one wish.

"It will be a real pleasure to hear American accents coming from our terraces again," he says. "Cannes is open, and everyone is welcome, so it will give me great joy to hear those voices again." 

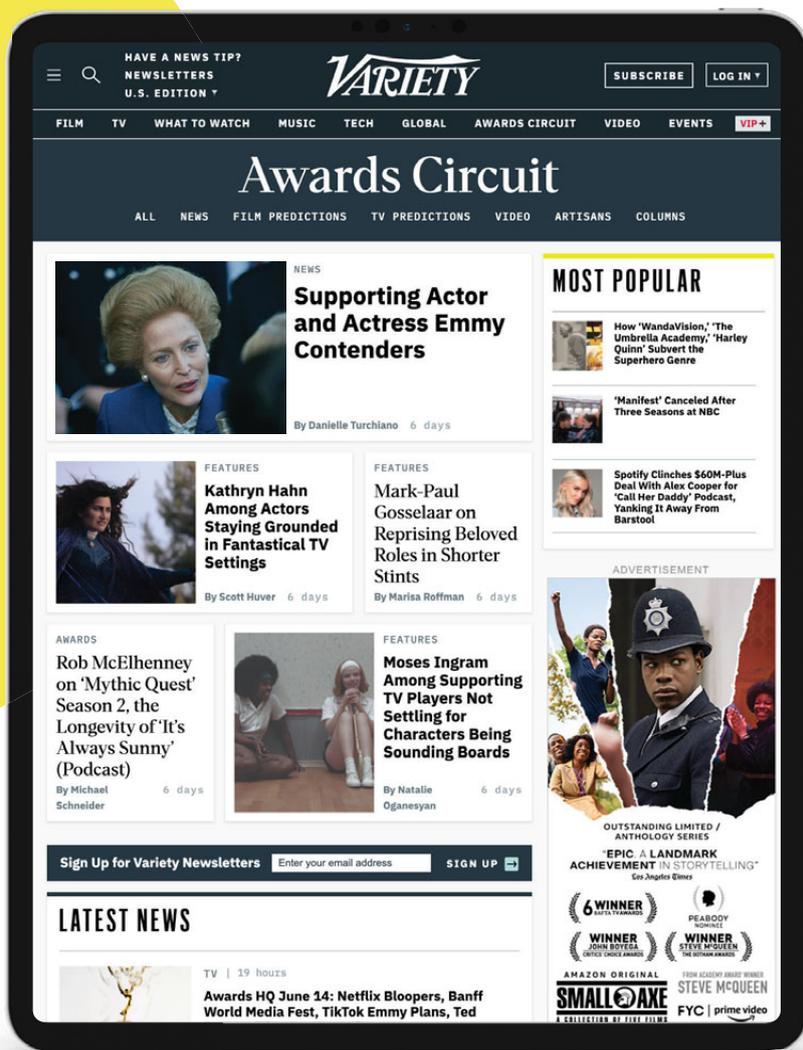


The 2019 Cannes jury brings some glam and support staff, another source of income for local businesses.

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Indie Adaptation

The Cannes Market tests post-COVID business models as mavens look forward • *By Leo Barraclough*



→ Embankment will be selling "Emily," about "Wuthering Heights" author Emily Brontë, at the Cannes Marche.

Michael Wharley/Embankment

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For most of those involved in the film pre-sales business, the virtual Pre-Cannes Screenings, running June 21-25, is the main event, with the in-person Cannes festival and market in July almost a sideshow. The mood of those approaching this month's bazaar is mostly upbeat, but with a note of sober caution.

"I would say that [the independent film business] is back on track in a way that is almost boring, in how — but for a few quirks of things like travel — it would be hard to distinguish it from many of the years prior. It's a very adaptable business by nature because producers, financiers, sales agents and distributors in this space are used to being entrepreneurial and flexible and quick to react. And that's just the nature of the

business," Benjamin Kramer, co-head, CAA Media Finance, says.

In the territories where movie theaters have reopened, the box office numbers are "encouraging," says HanWay Films' managing director Gabrielle Stewart. The tastes of cinemagoers have, however, shifted during the pandemic. Buyers will likely go for something high-concept and distinctive, or genre or feel-good movies, Alison Thompson, co-president of Cornerstone, says. "People want to be cheered up. People want to be entertained. I think perhaps one of the tough genres at the moment is drama, even drama with significant names attached." Even with top talent attached, such as dramas like Cornerstone's "Aisha" — toplining "Black Panther's" Letitia Wright and "The Crown's"

Josh O'Connor — are likely to be "execution dependent"; in other words, buyers will wait to see the finished film.

"The ideal film is one that we feel will have a broad appeal to different kinds of companies," Thompson says, giving an example from a prior market: "The Fantastic Flitcrofts," starring Mark Rylance is now more or less sold out, with a Hollywood studio circling the U.S. rights.

One issue for distributors is the backlog of films waiting to be released, which may deter buyers from picking up completed films. "I've looked at some lovely finished film that I just wouldn't want to take on," Stewart says.

Thompson notes that among distributors, "some have managed to weather the storm better

than others." Among those to have coped best are "those who have libraries that they've been able to exploit during the pandemic. Some of them have done very well actually, because of the increased demand for content."

Some distributors, in the U.S. and U.K. in particular, have pivoted to a new release model with the streaming window running alongside or after a short theatrical window, and that is working well. But, she adds: "there's no question that others are having a tough time of it."

Stewart asserts, "The future of independent film is all about curation." The key is to distinguish theatrical films from the mass of content on the platforms. "I do think the public appreciates the difference," she says. The

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Buyers may wait to see the finished "Aisha," from Cornerstone, even with top talent such as Leticia Wright, top, and Josh O'Connor, before making a deal.

exhibitors also need to deliver a “fantastic experience” for the cinemagoer, she adds. HanWay is selling psychological horror film “A Banquet,” starring Sienna Guillory (“Resident Evil”), in the Cannes Market.

From Embankment’s perspective, the independent film business appears to be in good health. “We can tell this by the fact that the films are getting financed very quickly, and that crews are basically booked up everywhere,” one of the firm’s partners Hugo Grumbar says.

Embankment’s Cannes slate includes “Emily,” starring BAFTA nominee Emma Mackey (“Sex Education”), which recently wrapped production in Yorkshire, and tells the origin story of “Wuthering Heights” author Emily Brontë.

Tim Haslam, Embankment’s other partner, adds that there remain issues with insurance for production, and that precautions to fend off COVID risks have added around 10% to budgets. This is problematic in an “economic world of transition, which isn’t allowing increased budgets in independent feature films,” he says.

The production backlog and the rise in the number of series ordered by the streamers is also creating difficulties in securing access to talent, both in front of and behind the camera. “I know that everyone’s grappling with



that as we try and confirm our slate for Cannes,” Stewart says.

However, the growth in the number of streaming outlets is lifting the business. “It’s brilliant,” Haslam says. “More platforms, more outlets, more programming needed.”

FilmNation CEO Glen Basner also welcomes the influence of the streamers on the market.

“Because they’re buying so many different types of movies, they’re allowing for a greater volume of movies to exist, and exist profitably for content creators,” Basner says. “They’re also impacting what will make sense going forward for people making

↑
HanWay’s “A Banquet” was picked up by IFC Midnight.

that decision whether to go to the movie theaters, or if it’s something they’d prefer to watch at home. And that creative distinction of what is theatrical going forward is something that we pay a lot of attention to.”

The power of the streamers is having an inflationary effect on independent films, Stewart says, citing the example of a period films that HanWay is representing.

“The producers feel they want to make it for a substantial budget because they want to compete with some of the production values we’ve seen in popular series paid for by Netflix,” Stewart says. “The audience is sophisticated, and they want high production values, and they want an experience.”

Most sales agents intend to go back to an in-person operation when it is safe, with most seeing AFM in November being the earliest opportunity to do that. “There’s nothing quite like discussing a film and its story in the room with the person,” Grumbar says.

Kramer adds: “I think people will want to get back to in-person because it is a social business and a relationship business, and nothing replaces the in-person experience. I for one am eager to go back to seeing people because a lot of the folks are more than

[business] relationships, they have become friends.”

Diversification has softened the blow of the pandemic for many independent players, with, for example, film producers moving into series, and distributors going into production.

“It’s pretty tough to just stick in your single lane. It’s much more sensible to have several strands of business,” says Thompson. Many sales companies, like Cornerstone, have already moved into film production, and are now segueing into series creation too.

Basner says that while diversification is a boon for companies that shouldn’t be taken to mean there’s a problem with the film business. “Actually our film business is a growing business. Even during the pandemic, where there was a break in making movies, we’re involved in just as many movies as we always have.”

He adds: “And we think the future of the next three to five years for feature films is really bright in terms of the volume of our business, but also our ability to really help support and back bold filmmakers, like Sean Baker [“Red Rocket”] or Lena Dunham [“Sharp Stick”] this past year, where we made films with them during the pandemic. And that to me is really incredibly exciting.”

“

Because they’re buying so many different types of movies, they’re allowing for a greater volume of movie to exist, and exist profitably for content creators.” — Glen Basner

Open Market in the Virtual World

Before the Cannes Festival fills the Croisette, dealmakers unveil buzz titles for sale

Aisha

Director: Frank Berry

Key cast: Letitia Wright, Josh O'Connor

Producers: Tristan Orpen Lynch, Aoife O'Sullivan, Donna Eperon, Sam Bisbee
Film follows the experiences of a young Nigerian woman as she seeks international protection in Ireland.

Worldwide sales: Cornerstone

Assailant

Director: Tom Paton

Producers: Philippe Martinez, Alan Latham

Key cast: Poppy Delevingne, Chad Michael Collins, Casper Van Dien, Jeff Fahey

Producers: Lee Beasley, Karinne

Behr, Alastair Burlingham

A couple going through marriage counseling decide to head to the Caribbean on a sailing holiday to heal wounds find themselves relentlessly chased by the adversary, hellbent on killing them.

Worldwide sales: MSR Media Intl.

The Atlantic City Story

Director: Henry Butash

Producers: Henry Butash, Javier Gonzalez, Christian Sosa

Key cast: Jessica Hecht, Mike Faist, Gary Wilmes

An unhappily married woman runs away from home and goes to Atlantic City, where she meets a young gambler and develops an unlikely friendship with him

Sales: Grandave Intl.

Ballywater

Director: Prasanna Puwanarajah

Producers: James Bierman, Nik Bower

Cast: Seána Kerslake, Patrick Kielty

Bittersweet drama set in Northern Ireland.

Sales: Bankside Films

Book of Love

Director: Analeine Cal Y Mayor

Producers: Michael Knowles, Naysun Alae-Carew, Allan Niblo, Nick Spicer, Maxime Cottray, Richard Alan Reid, XYZ Films, Sky

Key cast: Sam Claflin, Veronica Echgui

An uptight English writer is

invited to Mexico to promote his new book and soon discovers his Spanish translator has rewritten his dull book as an erotic novel.

Sales: XYZ Films (worldwide minus U.K. & Ireland, Germany, Italy)

Boxing Day

Director: Aml Ameen

Producers: Matthew G. Zamias, Damian Jones, Aml Ameen, Dominique Telson, Joy Gharoro-Akpojotor

Cast: Aml Ameen, Aja Naomi King
Romcom follows Melvin, a British author living in the U.S. who returns home to London for Christmas to introduce his American fiancée to his family.

Sales: Rocket Science

Brian and Charles

Director: Jim Archer

Producers: Rupert Majendie.

Cast: David Earl, Chris Hayward, Louise Brealey, Jamie Michie, Nina Sosanya

A man in the grip of depression builds a robot to stave off loneliness.

Sales: Bankside Films

Brother

Director: Guillem Morales

Producers: Danny Davids, Colin Bates, Neil Canton, Samson Day
Michael Morrow isn't like the rest of his savage, twisted family who are forever planning their next moment of bloodlust. Captive to misplaced loyalties, Michael is aware of the monster he has become, but breaking free from his past won't be easy.

Sales: WestEnd

The Good Neighbor

Director: Stephan Rick

Key cast: Jonathan Rhys Meyers,

↓
"The Path," from Global Screen, is a period drama about a father and son fleeing Nazis.





"Princess" follows a family torn apart by addiction and its fight for survival.



Luke Kleintank
Remake of German thriller "Unter Nachbarn," also directed by Rick, follows new neighbors David and Robert, who find themselves bonded by a hit-and-run accident.
Sales: Highland Film Group (international); CAA (domestic)

He Went That Way

Director: Jeffrey Darling
Cast: Jacob Eloridi, Zachary Quinto
Producers: Marc Benardout, James Harris, Mark Lane, Hugh Broder, Jeremy Kotin, Phil Hunt
Set in 1964, the film is based on the true story of a road trip, the strange bonding and unique deal-making between a serial-killer in the midst of a spree, an animal handler down on his luck and Zippy the TV chimpanzee.
Worldwide Sales: Mister Smith Entertainment

May December

Director: Todd Haynes
Producers: Jessica Elbaum, Will Ferrell, Pamela Koffler, Natalie Portman, Sophie Mas, Christine Vachon
Key cast: Julianne Moore, Natalie Portman
A Hollywood actress travels to the coast of Maine to study the real-life woman, who was the subject of a tabloid scandal two decades prior for marrying a man 23 years her junior, in a film although the family dynamic begins to unravel under an outsider's lens.
Sales: Rocket Science (international); UTA Independent Film Group and CAA Media Finance (domestic)

The Maestro

Director: Roland Joffé

Producers: Gilles Thompson, Richard Lechartier, Radosława Bardes, Izabela Igel, Raoul Bova
Key cast: Laëtitia Eido, Thomas Kretschmann
Drama inspired by the real story of Italian composer and conductor Francesco Lotoro.
Sales: The Exchange

Muscle

Director: F. Gary Gray
Key cast: Vin Diesel
Producers: Reginald Hudlin, Byron Phillips, Vin Diesel, Samantha Vincent
Film's plot is under wraps.
Intl. Sales: Eros STX International

The Path

Director: Tobias Wiemann
Producers: Eyrie Entertainment, Warner Bros. Film Prods. Germany
Key cast: Julius Weckauf, Nonna Cardona, Volker Bruch, Anna Maria Mühe
Producers: On the run from the Nazis, Rolf and his father travel through the Pyrenees with a young local girl helping them but when the father is arrested halfway, the two kids and Rolf's dog Adi have to escape on their own.
Sales: Global Screen

Princess

Director: Peter Luisi
Producers: Spotlight Media Prods.
Key cast: Matthias Habich, Johanna Bantzer, Fabian Krüger, Anne Haug, Lia Hahne
Drama in which a man would do anything for his niece, but after he unwittingly hurts her, he is cut off from the family and now, years later, he must rescue her from a Ukrainian prison.
Sales: Global Screen

The Real Charlie Chaplin

Directors: Peter Middleton, James Spinney
Producers: Ben Limberg, John Battsek, Mike Brett, Steve Jamieson, Jo-Jo Ellison
Doc about the iconic screen comic.
Sales: Altitude Film Sales

Refuge

Director: Renny Harlin
Producers: Yariv Lerner, Rob Van Norden, Gary Lucchesi, Michael McKay, Lori McCreary, Renny Harlin
Key cast: Jason Flemyng, Raza Jaffrey
A U.S. military veteran returns home changed and dangerous after a tour of duty in Afghanistan where he suffered an attack by a mysterious force.
Worldwide sales: Voltage Pictures

She Came to Me

Director: Rebecca Miller
Producers: Christine Vachon, Pamela Koffler, Rebecca Miller, Damon Cardasis
Key cast: Anne Hathaway, Tahar Rahim, Marisa Tomei, Joanna Kulig, Matthew Broderick
An omnibus drama about love.
Int'l sales: Protagonist Pictures

The Son

Director: Florian Zeller
Key cast: Hugh Jackman, Laura Dern
Producers: Iain Canning, Emile Sherman, Joanna Laurie, Christophe Spadone, Florian Zeller
Peter's busy life with a new partner and their baby is thrown into disarray when his ex-wife Kate turns up with their teenage son, Nicholas.

Sales: Embankment (international); Cross City Films and CAA Media Finance (U.S.)

True Things

Director: Harry Wootliff
Producers: Tristan Goligher, Ruth Wilson, Ben Jackson, Jude Law
Cast: Ruth Wilson, Tom Burke
An adaptation of Deborah Kay Davies' book "True Things About Me" follows Kate, whose chance sexual encounter with a charismatic stranger awakens her.
Sales: The Bureau Sales

Untitled Pau Gasol Docuseries

Director: Oriol Bosch
Producers: PG Prods., RTG Features and THINK450
Key cast: Pau Gasol
Series chronicles Gasol, the two-time NBA champion with the Los Angeles Lakers and six-time NBA All-Star, as he winds down his professional career.
Sales: RTG Features (worldwide minus Spain)
Peter's busy life with a new partner and their baby is thrown into disarray when his ex-wife Kate turns up with their teenage son, Nicholas.
Sales: Embankment and Cross City Films (international); Cross City Films and CAA Media Finance (U.S.)

The Tank

Director: Scott Walker
Producers: Matthew Metcalfe, Scott Walker
Key cast: TBD
On the Oregon coast in 1978, a couple inherit an abandoned property but unknowingly unleash a long dormant creature, fiercely protective of its environment.
Worldwide sales: Cornerstone

Disruption's Gotta Wait

Have TV and film rights trading platforms grown up during the pandemic?

By Tim Dams

COVID-19 lockdowns have provided the perfect backdrop for companies seeking to reinvent the world of content distribution.

With international travel restricted and physical markets on hold for over a year, digital platforms that help TV and film sellers to connect with buyers around the world have come into focus as never before.

Prior to the pandemic, platforms such as RightsTrade, Vuulr, Allrites, ProgramBuyer and Mena. TV sought to disrupt long-established ways of doing business in the distribution market — promising to dramatically cut the cost, time and complexity of buying and selling content.

Adoption was gradual, to say the least — no platform had managed to significantly disrupt traditional ways of working. Distribution, after all, has long been a highly relationship-driven business centered around regular get-togethers at international markets such as Mipcom, L.A. Screenings and NATPE.

Reflecting the challenges facing digital distribution platforms, a number of early entrants had fallen by the wayside amid difficulty in persuading major sellers to sign up and a lower than expected number of deals.

Many within distribution remain skeptical. “They all keep telling us they’re essential... I’m not so sure,” says one veteran distributor.

However, online distribution platforms report that business has picked up significantly as a result of the pandemic.

“The past year has been really busy for us,” says RightsTrade CEO Bill Lischak. “Companies wanting to license content have looked to digital applications to continue their business.”

Vuulr co-founder Ian McKee says his company has grown faster

than anticipated since launching in January 2020. Buyers and sellers have been “forced by circumstances” to try digital distribution platforms much sooner than they might have done, he says. “Bigger organizations, which might have been slower to come on board, became ready to talk to us earlier than we expected.”

The market also has a new entrant. Exeest, billed as a 24/7 global entertainment marketplace for film and television content, launched in April with program libraries from distributors such as Caracol, Keshet, Propagate and Telemundo.

Many of the companies operating in this market have different business models. As the market has grown in the past year, all have sought to differentiate themselves through new offerings for clients.

Launched back in 2015, Los Angeles based RightsTrade, for example, charges sellers a fee to list their content on its platform. The subscription fee depends on the amount of content listed. Lischak describes RightsTrade as a platform where buyers can home in on available content for their territory without having to contact multiple distribution companies. Distributors listing their content on RightsTrade include Lionsgate, Legendary, Gaumont, Protagonist, Arlight and Miramax.

It has recently upgraded its screening platform for buyers, and launched a video conferencing tool that allows buyers and sellers to virtually meet and to easily share video content in one place.

RightsTrade has also partnered with key markets as they have launched virtual editions over the past year. RightsTrade was selected to provide the technological backbone for last year’s FilmMart in Hong Kong and NATPE

Budapest Intl. RightsTrade also partnered with the AFM for its 2020 online-only market.

Lischak thinks digital marketplaces will only play an increased role in distribution. For a start, he reckons that the “new wave of executives” is more prepared to embrace digital platforms.

There is a place for markets-, meetings- and relationship-based business deals, but not everyone can afford to travel to markets, he says. Many of them are likely to become hybrid physical/digital events in the future. Also, many of the new streaming platforms that are looking for niche content don’t have pre-existing industry relationships.

“They might come out of the technology world, and it’s difficult for them to ramp up and find the level of content they need quickly to populate their platforms,” says Lischak.

RightsTrade has more than 31,000 registered users who can finalize agreements for programming on the site. Looking ahead, Lischak says RightsTrade ultimately intends to build out delivery and payment functionality

as well. “Once we institute those, we’ll probably implement a small transaction fee,” he says. “We’re thinking in the 1%-2% range, so it’s not too painful for anyone.”

Singapore-based Vuulr’s business model is different. Sellers don’t have to pay a listing fee but are charged 10% of each deal. Vuulr claims 7,500 sellers from 160 countries, and 6,000 buyers from 150 countries. “Vuulr has aggregated into one place one of the largest, most global and diverse catalogs,” McKee says.

Since January 2020 the platform has generated 1,700 licensing deals so far, he says. U.S. sellers lead the way, accounting for over 50% of deals, followed by the U.K., Netherlands, Nigeria, Canada, Singapore, Australia, India and Israel. U.S. buyers are also responsible for most acquisitions, again more than 50%, followed by Singapore, India, Australia, Russia, Nigeria and the U.K.

Vuulr also offers a screening-room function for buyers. It has recently launched a white label service too, powering business-to-business distribution portals for firms such as Bridgestone Media Group, the National Film Board of Canada, Insight TV and the Paris Intl. Film Festival.

One issue for platforms such as Vuulr, which generate revenues from transactions, is that buyers can be happy to browse the site, but will sometimes go directly to the distributor to buy the program.

McKee says he doesn’t see much evidence of “leakage,” the industry term for those who window shop and transact off-platform.

“If you’re a buyer, using our



→ Recent dramas such as Jessica Chastain-starrer “Miss Sloan” can be found on digital rights platforms.

“

We're able to match great niche content, whether it's horror, science fiction or travel shows, with buyers that are looking for it." — Ian McKee



← Popular genre pics, such as "Taken 2" with Liam Neeson, sell well on digital rights platforms.

platform is free. You can't be cheaper than free," he says. Vuulr is convenient too, McKee argues. "The reality is that if you find a good piece of content from, say, a Turkish, Argentinian or Belgian company, good luck to you to find a website, the telephone number, or the right person to speak to. It turns out it is really hard to buy. Whereas on our platform, when you submit an offer we do everything behind the scenes to get that offer in front of the right person."

McKee also makes the point that distribution marketplaces including Vuulr can effectively sell a wide variety of content to buyers around the world. Drama is its biggest-selling genre, with a 16% share, followed by comedy (8%), shorts (7%), documentary and thriller/suspense (6%) through to crime, children's, horror, historical and lifestyle. As such, Vuulr breaks the 80/20 rule of selling that dictates 80% of sales comes from 20% of content.

"That's a function of low bandwidth, manual face-to-face selling," he says. SVOD and AVOD, he argues, can super serve niche viewing habits at scale. "We're

able to match great niche content, whether it's horror, science fiction or travel shows, with the buyers that are looking for it."

By contrast, U.K.-based ProgramBuyer bills itself as a non-transactional marketing site, promoting content from worldwide distributors to its database of more than 4,500 buyers.

Launched by co-founders Roz Parker and Edwina Thring, former colleagues at National Geographic Television Intl., ProgramBuyer hosts more than 120,000 hours of content from more than 160 global distributors.

Sellers pay a monthly listing fee according to the number of hours marketed on the site. This gives a distributor its own page on the ProgramBuyer site, ensures placements in its daily mail shots, home page banners and social-media campaigns. Parker bills ProgramBuyer as a department store for buyers to be able to search and screen full-length screeners on a single site.

"When they find programming they are interested in, they go back to the distributor to negotiate and conclude the deal face to face."

Parker says the site has a detailed genre tree that buyers can use to search using specific criteria. Exclusive to ProgramBuyer is the PB Alerts function, which allows buyers to receive notifications for specific types of programming as soon as that content is added to a distributor's own website. Recently launched is a dedicated page for producers, enabling them to promote co-production opportunities to its audience of registered commissioning editors.

Meanwhile, Exeest is also a non-transactional service. The new company is co-founded by former CFO global IT at NBCUniversal Shabbir Aqeel Danish, filmmaker and tech entrepreneur Matteo Petrelli and Wall Street executive Anthony Costanzo. Exeest's advisory board includes former Condé Nast president and CEO Bob Sauerberg and former HBO tech exec VP and chief digital officer Diane Tryneski and ex-Turner exec Lauren Hurvitz.

Exeest chief commercial officer John Pollack is quick to stress that distribution is a relationship-based business. As such, he says Exeest is not a platform that aims to replace industry connections or that wants to consign trade markets to the scrapheap.

Instead, Pollack bills Exeest as a "sales tool to create connections to enhance the sales process, to help sales executives to do their jobs a little bit better by creating opportunities that hadn't been there before."

Sellers are charged a fee to list content on Exeest. Then buyers can browse the site; if they find a title they like, they can follow up directly with the seller off platform to agree the deal.

For buyers, the advantage is that they can quickly look for and screen content from multiple distributors in one place without having to navigate multiple sites or remember a raft of different access passwords. Buyers can search by genre, windows, rights, territories, while Exeest's A.I.-powered recommendation engine learns buyers' preferences to provide insights and title recommendations specific.

Pollack says Exeest has sought to differentiate itself through technology, noting that the site

is intuitive to use and echoes the look and feel of a streaming service such as Netflix. As the company has only just launched, Exeest has sought to offer a curated list of premium content rather than promising to feature the largest number of titles in the market.

"We've not gone out and said we want everybody's content, and we want 100,000 titles on the platform. For me, logging into a platform and seeing that much content doesn't work — it makes the buying, and the selling process, very difficult."

Singapore-based Allrites says its mission is to "democratize content and maximize the revenue potential for content beyond what is possible by traditional content distribution methods."

Founder and CEO Riaz Mehta says Allrites' initial focus was the Asian market, but it has become more global with clients ranging from new Bangladeshi OTT platforms to sellers such as Australia's Flame Distribution, Columbia's Caracol Television, Sony and NBC.

Sellers often use Allrites to sell programming to buyers outside the main Western markets that they have well covered, says Mehta, whether in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Sellers can list content for free, with Allrites taking a transaction fee of around 10%. To differentiate itself from rivals, Mehta says Allrites assists with content curation and also offers sports content.

Coming up, Mehta says the platform is soon to launch an initiative to differentiate Allrites still further. Without going into specifics, Mehta says: "We are introducing disruptive layers that are very data driven, based on audience behaviors and that also provide very flexible licencing terms to our partners as well, which none of the other marketplaces is doing today."

The timing is "absolutely right" for online marketplaces to disrupt the distribution business, given COVID-19 and fewer people travelling to physical markets, he says.

"However, I believe that the marketplaces that survive and thrive will be the ones that actually create real disruption beyond just taking a traditional licencing model and placing it on to any ecommerce platform, and that truly understand the challenges faced by buyers and sellers." 📌

China B.O. in High Gear

Despite venue consolidation, industryites hit Cannes on wave of successes

By Rebecca Davis



Despite an unprecedentedly difficult year, the Chinese film industry has come roaring back. In August, China became the first country in the world to achieve “full box office recovery,” according to the U.K.-based industry analytics firm Gower Street.

Remarkably, Chinese box office data as of mid-June is tracking 1.18% ahead of the same point in time in 2020, and is running just 1% below the average box office of the three pre-pandemic years (2017-19), Gower Street notes. China achieved this despite cinemas operating at 75% capacity and a dearth of Hollywood content. No other market has even come close to reaching its pre-COVID scale. The U.S. is still 85% behind its pre-pandemic numbers.

In 2020, the Chinese market was bolstered by militantly patriotic films including “My People, My Homeland,” “The Sacrifice” and “The Eight Hundred,” which became the highest-grossing film in the world last year thanks to its \$460 million local box office.

So far in 2021, the country’s

box-office recovery has been driven by record-high sales over February’s Chinese New Year, April’s Tomb-Sweeping and the May 1 Labor Day holidays, driven by crowd-pleasers such as “Detective Chinatown 3,” “Hi, Mom,” “Sister,” and Zhang Yimou’s “Cliff Walkers.”

The Lunar New Year brought in 7.82 billion renminbi (\$1.22 billion) in seven days, a 33% increase over 2019. The April festival weekend marked a new holiday record of \$128 million, while the most competitive Labor Day weekend of all time raked in unprecedented sales of \$265 million.

It hasn’t all been smooth sailing, however, especially for theater-owning concerns. Thousands of exhibitors were pushed to the brink due to six months of cinema closures, catalyzing consolidation in the sector, as demand fell due to stay-at-home orders pushing viewers away from theatrical and towards new digital content consumption habits.

Although more than 95% of Chinese cinemas were back in operation by last September,

box-office receipts for the past four months of 2020 were down 24.82%, 23.43%, 47.62%, and 7.72%, respectively, year-on-year. The total annual box office of \$3.13 billion marked a decline of 68.2% year-on-year.

COVID-19 has backlogged Hollywood releases and created potential gaps in the supply of new local content due to production delays and financing troubles. Currently, exhibitors face the challenge of keeping numbers up despite an uneven and unpredictable pipeline of films. It doesn’t help their bottom line that concessions remain banned, either.

“Some cinemas are definitely doing good business, but most are still not yet back to 2019 levels,” Zhang Jia, a cinema manager in Shenzhen, told a local financial outlet. “The box office now mainly relies on domestic films, and the supply of imported films has not returned to normal. If it could, our annual box office would be more secure.”

Even before the pandemic, China’s theater industry had become a bubble heading toward an eventual burst.

The main problem is that the country’s screen count has grown at a faster rate than its box office, Tsinghua University economics researcher Liu Deliang told the local press.

Furthermore, the number of total attendances is stagnating, meaning that the average box office generated per screen has fallen, dropping from \$211,000 in 2018 to \$133,000 in 2019.

Financial reports show that in the first three quarters of 2020, China’s nine leading cinema companies incurred net losses that cumulatively tallied to more than \$703 million.

Thousands of theaters nationwide had numerous consecutive days with sales of just a few hundred yuan a day (\$15-\$150) — hardly enough to cover rent, water, electricity and labor costs, let alone budget gaps left by months of closures.

Particularly for small and mid-sized cinemas in lower-tier cities, many of which had already been

struggling before the pandemic, half a year of COVID-19 closures was too much to bear.

At least 1,000 cinemas exited the market in 2020, Huaxi Securities analyst Zhao Lin estimated to state broadcaster CCTV in December. They either shuttered or were acquired by larger chains better able to withstand risks.

“We predict that in 2021, excess supply will continue to be cleared out,” he says.

High-flying industry newcomer Tahoe Cinemas was one notable smaller movie chain operator clobbered by COVID-19. It shuttered its 23 locations nationwide in mid-December so abruptly that customers were unable to refund their tickets. It still remains unclear if the theaters will ever reopen.

Tahoe Cinemas is a subsidiary of Tahoe Group, which deals primarily in real estate. The conglomerate entered the exhibition industry at its peak period of growth in 2016 and 2017. In Tahoe Cinemas’ first year in 2017, it was ranked 322nd nationally by box office earnings. By 2018, it had jumped to 120th place, and by 2019, 57th.

Mired in a debt crisis since 2018, Tahoe Group had to suspend cinema operations as box-office earnings fell last year to the point at which the company was unable to cover its costs.

The formerly Hong Kong-listed, Hong Kong-headquartered SMI Holdings, once one of the largest theater operators in China, ran into similar problems. It rapidly grew its network of cinemas from just three in 2009 to 83 in 2013 and 365 by the end of 2017, but also ran into debt troubles in 2018 and was suspended from trading. Unable to bounce back from pandemic losses, it was finally delisted in December.

“Although there is still room in the market to develop new cinemas in certain regions or cities, many new cinema companies have not rationally judged their market footholds,” film investor Zhou Xiang told the Beijing Business Daily.

The exit of smaller exhibitors has created new space and opportunities for larger ones, which

←
“Hi Mom” electrified China’s box office this year, especially during holiday periods.

are expanding and snapping up greater market share.

Wanda Group exemplifies this trend. In May, the Wanda Cinemas owner exited the U.S. exhibition business by dumping essentially all of its remaining stake in AMC Theaters, stating that it was following a new development strategy of “focusing on the local [Chinese] market.”

And so it has. Despite huge losses in the first three quarters of 2020, Wanda Cinemas raised an industry record fixed-rate sum of \$458 million in November through the private issuance of 196 million shares, \$312 million of which is earmarked for new theater projects.

In 2020, it closed 20 of its mainland cinemas with “poor operating efficiency” but opened at least 64 others and signed on 310 additional franchisees. With the success of its film “Detective Chinatown 3,” Wanda Cinemas actually notched a more profitable in the first quarter than it did pre-pandemic in 2019. It built 12 additional cinemas in the first

quarter, and plans to build 60-70 total this year.

“The pace of Wanda’s cinema expansion hasn’t actually changed due to the pandemic,” Pan Helin, head of the digital economy institute at Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, told the China Business News. “[The firm] has judged that the pandemic’s impact will be short term, making it a good choice to keep opening theaters due to lower rents and costs during the pandemic period. It’s a long-term strategy.”

Wanda’s competitors have also continued their building sprees. Hengdian Entertainment built 29 theaters with 186 screens last year, and this year has plans for 60 new venues. Omnijoi Media built 30 cinemas with 131 screens last year, and opened nine cinemas with 41 screens in the first quarter, a portion of its 2021 year-end goal of 27 new venues. Guangzhou Jinyi Media opened 11 new venues last year.

Gower Street currently predicts that China’s 2021 box office

total could hit \$8 billion, which would likely make it the global No. 1 by a large margin. The consultancy estimates that the North American box office will come in at around \$5.2 billion this year.

“That extraordinary Chinese New Year February period has almost certainly given China too strong a head start on 2021 for the [North American] domestic market to compete this year,” though future years may be up for grabs, says the firm’s director of theatrical insights Robert Mitchell.

In the near future, the biggest rival to Chinese theater companies may not be America but online streaming and other digital entertainment forms.

Gaming, live-streaming and short video all fiercely compete with films for Chinese consumers’ attention, particularly among Gen Z consumers with no qualms about viewing content solely via smartphone.

The pandemic tilted the balance of power away from Chinese cinemas and toward streaming in

likely permanent ways. Most notably, the typical 30-day theatrical release window has already started to shrink.

The shift began last January, when major Chinese New Year blockbuster “Lost in Russia” cancelled its theatrical release altogether in favor of premiering online for free via Bytedance. The social-media giant paid \$91 million for the privilege, generating fervent opposition from film executives.

When cinemas initially reopened last summer, two smaller titles hit streaming after just seven days in theaters. Two higher grossing December releases, “Soul Snatcher” and “Bath Buddies,” also went online after just 16 days and 20 days, respectively.

To compete, Chinese cinemas will have to increasingly shift from a retail mindset to a service mindset, dropping past common money-saving practices like lowering projection brightness in favor of offering premium experiences. 17

↓
“Detective Chinatown 3” was another lucrative crowd-pleaser that drove the China box office to new highs.

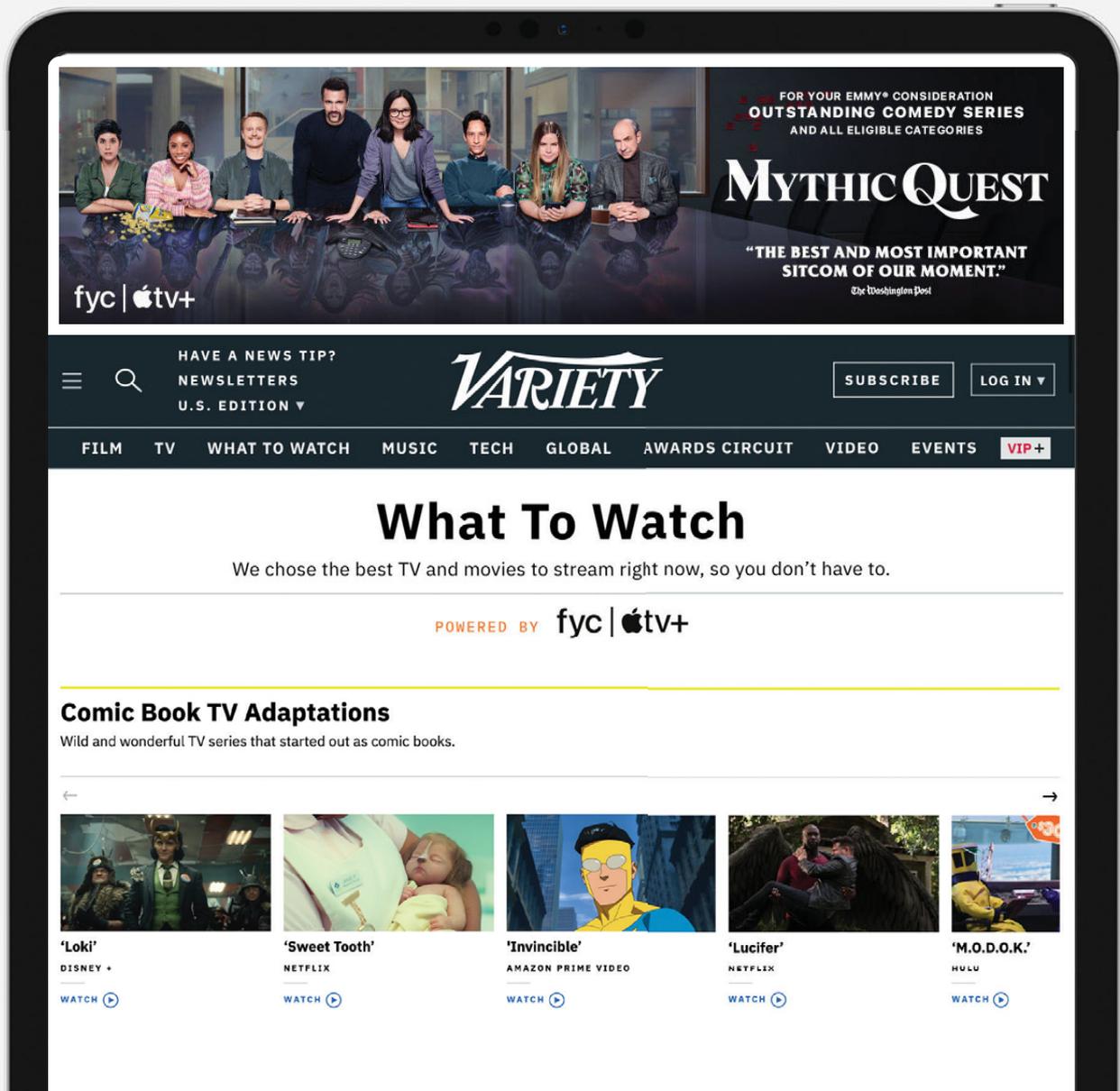


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Castille Landon

'We really had to be as careful as humanly possible.'

By Carole Horst



Multiphenate Castille Landon added writing and directing to her resume after she couldn't find "roles that I loved and I was getting cast in a bunch of indie things that never got the financ-

ing altogether. It's hard enough trying to get cast in something, but then when it falls through, it's heartbreaking," she says. She wrote and directed family drama "Apple of My Eye," starring Amy

Smart and Lionsgate thriller "Fear of Rain," starring Katherine Heigl. She directed "After Ever Happy" and "After We Fell," part of the "After" franchise series, based on the YA bestsellers. Voltage is selling the films at Cannes. "After We Fell" will be released worldwide Sept. 3. "I feel like I lucked into finding something I was even more passionate about," she says.

● **What drew you to these films?**

Initially what drew me to the piece — and I think kind of what draws me to any piece — is a compelling female protagonist or central character. I think that's always the drawing force for me in anything. But I also really love this franchise in particular because I'm drawn to the kind of messiness of the story.

● **In what way?**

I think it feels really real and relevant and I think we're so exposed to this concept of a fairy tale romance that when you get into the real world, you find that's not at all how things are. And so I think "After" really showcases an authentic romance and all of its beauty and all of its ugliness at the same time, and that is much more interesting than something that's just polished — at least to me.

● **Did you listen to the series' fans?**

I think that is really helpful. I mean, I think those things aren't necessarily exclusive because it is a minefield, the fans are very particular and it's really interesting. They kind of love to, um,

pick it apart. So you have these like factions of fans, right? So ultimately you kind of, I think it's, it's a matter of finding out what perspective the fans have on the material, what scenes they like, or don't like, what they like about them and trying to bring the essence of the book, but, um, you know, ultimately you kind of have to use your own discretion.

● **What was it like shooting under COVID safety protocols, after moving from Atlanta to Bulgaria?**

It was wild. I've never experienced anything like that where we really had to be as careful as humanly possible.

And you do have to rework scenes creatively so that our actors were never around people too much. For me, I'm really grateful that we did end up shooting it in kind of a remote pocket of the world because we all ended up staying in the hotel together, so we built a rapport with each other off-set that then translated on-set. And I think that really did help the onset relationships because between me and the actors, as well as the actors with each other because I felt more isolated from the rest of my crew than I ever have before. It's just a different dynamic.

● **What's next?**

I have an MMA love story that I'm working on that I'm supposed to be shooting at the beginning of next year — it's kind of like a female take on "Creed." I'm working on some other projects in the "After" universe and I'll keep that vague. 🎬

Aiming for a 'Zingy' Comeback

Cannes has a History of Splashy Revivals

By TIM GRAY



← Vanessa Redgrave (center) accepts the lead actress award for "Isadora" from Claudia Cardinale and Yves Montand at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival, which bounced back gloriously after the 1968 edition was cut short due to protests.

This year's Cannes (July 6-17) is rebuilding after a devastating year, but it's not the first time the festival has faced this challenge. And if 1969 was any example, Cannes organizers should be optimistic.

On May 28, 1969, *Variety* ran the headline: "Cannes in Zingy Comeback." The story by Gene Moskowitz said the 22nd festival's rebound was "magnificent" after the early closing of the 1968 event. That earlier fest, scheduled to run

two weeks, was shut down at the halfway mark in an act of solidarity with France's striking students and workers, and to protest the firing of Henri Langlois as head of the Cinematheque Francaise. The fest screened only a fraction of the 28 films in the official selection and some wondered if this was the end of Cannes forever.

But of course the festival returned in glory. In 1969, *Variety* reported that the reborn Cannes

"was almost too much of a good thing. There were too many films, too many parties."

One reason for the film glut was the debut of the Directors Fortnight, a sidebar organized by the French Directors Guild as a response to some complaints of 1968. The inaugural Directors' Fortnight had an overwhelming 68 entries, including films by then-up-and-comers Bernardo Bertolucci, Bob Rafelson (the

Monkees' "Head"), Susan Sontag and Andre Techine, plus vets who were going in a new direction, including Robert Bresson, Roger Corman (the LSD-themed "The Trip"), Louis Malle (the docu "Calcutta") and Nagisa Oshima.

In summing up the festival, Moskowitz wrote, "Cannes created weariness by its sheer marathon quantity, but never boredom. And business appeared good too."

He also cited the impressive roster of prizes given by the fest jury, which was headed by Luchino Visconti. The Palme d'Or winner was Lindsay Anderson's "If," a now-classic look at revolution in a British boarding school. The Grand Prix went to Bo Widerberg's "Adalen 31," Costa Gavras' "Z" was the unanimous choice for the jury prize, Dennis Hopper's "Easy Rider" was a fest fave and won for best first work, and the acting honors were given to Jean-Louis Trintignant for "Z" and Vanessa Redgrave for Karel Reisz's "Isadora," a biopic about the game-changing American dancer (a film that is overdue for a rediscovery in the 21st century).

"This was a good vintage year for unusual films," *Variety* concluded, and official entries also included works by Sidney Lumet, Eric Rohmer, Volker Schlöndorff, Andrzej Wajda and Ronald Neame ("The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie"). Among films out of competition were "That Cold Day in the Park," directed by a pre-"MASH" Robert Altman, and "Sweet Charity," Bob Fosse's big-screen directing debut. 🍷

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