

IF YOU'RE ADAPTABLE, FLEXIBLE, AND ABLE TO WITHSTAND ANYTHING – THIS IS A GREAT TIME TO BE A PRODUCER!

Variety Cinema Militans Lecture – Christine Vachon

25th September 2010 by Binger Reporter Matthew Curlewis

Christine Vachon, flown in by Binger to spend twenty-four hours in Amsterdam with the Dutch Producers of Company!, had an additional commitment – the annual Variety lecture at the Holland Film Meeting in Utrecht. With upwards of 60 films to her credit made during the past 16 years within her company Killer Films, Vachon has a few hard-earned lessons to share with anyone interested in film industry success over the long haul.

“I think you always have to maintain optimism to be a producer,” she tells Variety interviewer Leo Barraclough during the lecture. “Every time you think you’ve finally learned how the financing and distribution system works, it gets taken away. Adaptability is key, and you have to be willing to see that as a positive.”

Additionally, television has improved in leaps and bounds. “Kids now grow up watching shows using the language of cinema; stories with challenging structures, or anti-heroes in lead roles, or a story where the hero dies in the end. I grew up watching *The Brady Bunch!*”

Vachon believes that no matter the medium, there will always be a market for storytellers with authentic, singular visions. “*Boardwalk Empire*, Martin Scorsese’s tv series just premiered on HBO. And with director Todd Haynes we’re making *Mildred Pierce* – a 5.5 hour HBO movie that will show in one hour segments. These opportunities didn’t used to be there for directors – to explore characters and stories using longer formats. And ten years ago there’s no way an actress the calibre of Kate Winslet would have signed on right away, the way she did to this project. That’s a sign of how the dependence on making theatrical releases has shifted – we’re busy with a whole bunch of new projects, in all sorts of formats.”

That activity, Vachon is clear to point out however, will remain within the field of *producing* films. “I’m too busy to take on distributing as well,” she remarks. “Sure new media is intriguing, but we’re still trying to find out, will those 10,000 Facebook followers actually translate into bums on seats? How should we best use new media? Is it about identifying audience? About reaching audience? I don’t have those answers, but of course I’m interested in all of it.”

While fielding a question from one of the fifty-odd bums on seats before her, Vachon reveals that on top of *Boys Don’t Cry*’s mere \$2.5 mill production budget, \$10 mill was spent on the film’s Oscar® marketing budget. And her response to the few gasps in the audience? “But Miramax obviously found that a very worthwhile spend. They certainly weren’t doing it just for the gold statue!”

Fresh from this year's upbeat Toronto Film Festival where buyers were actually spending again, Vachon lists a number of reasons to be excited about the present state of the film industry. "Sure those ten big, product-hungry buyers aren't there anymore, but now there's a much bigger range of smaller players – it's all about how you choose to look at it. And stories are changing, stories are being made to match the new kinds of media that are available. That's invigorating."

An annual festival highlight, the fixed theme of the lecture, 'the position and viability of cinema in the present age', is lifted from 'Cinema Militans', an essay on the nature of film penned by Dutch film theoretician and critic Menno ter Braak in 1926.

Previous lecturers include Power to the Pixel's Liz Rosenthal, Peter Greenaway, Tom Tykwer, George Sluizer and the late Alan J. Pakula.

Presented by Variety and Holland Film Meeting, with the support of Binger Filmlab.