




**Locarno Film Festival
StepIn**

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STEPIN 2019: What Are We Afraid Of?

On Thursday August 8th, an international group of 40+ prominent executives chosen among various profiles for their experience in different branches of the film industry, assembled for the Locarno Festival' seventh edition of StepIn to share ideas and strategies concerning the most pressing issues they are facing.

The event took place from 11.30 AM to 6 PM and was divided in 3 parts.

The following is a report of what's been discussed.

VARIETY


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INTRODUCTORY SPEECH

In a book called “FILMISH” by Edward Ross, a smart essay on cinema illustrated like a graphic novel, the author says at one point: “This is the ultimate contradiction of cinema. It's a medium BORN of technology, AFRAID of technology and evolving towards the future BECAUSE OF technology.”

I find this contradiction extremely fascinating and timely. Our industry is torn between visionaries and catastrophists: people who are excited and people who are terrified by what the future has in store for us. And this is why for the 2019 edition of StepIn we chose the title: “What Are We Afraid Of?”. Because today we want to address some of the main “fears” haunting our industry.

Perhaps the biggest one is whether independent cinema will continue to be relevant in the future, both as an art form and as entertainment.

To answer this concern, we put together a great line-up of film professionals, starting from the three remarkable keynote speakers of this opening session.

The first guest has been a preeminent force in the film industry for over 20 years, bringing to the big screen films like LA VIE EN ROSE, PAN’S LABYRINTH, MONSTER, THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST, MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING, Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN, BRIGHT STAR, MANCHÉSTER BY THE SEA, THE HANDMAIDEN, THE SALESMAN and COLD WAR. **BOB BERNEY** ran theatrical distribution at companies such as NEWMARKET, PICTUREHOUSE, APPARITION and FILMDISTRICT, and, most recently, he was Head of Marketing & Distribution at AMAZON STUDIOS. In short, Bob is the perfect name to help us assess how platforms have changed the theatrical landscape, both in production and distribution.

Going in alphabetical order, our second guest is **RITA DAGHER**, founder of SENORITA FILMS. Known for her bold choices and great taste, and respected for her uncompromising independent vision, Rita has worked with directors such as KEVIN MACDONALD, BARBET SCHROEDER, JAMES MARSH and MICHAEL MOORE. Rita can bring us the point of view of independent producers, in a period of massive changes for films under every aspect: format, financing and exploitation.

Our third keynote speaker is **MAREN OLSON**, Agent in the MEDIA FINANCE DEPARTMENT at CAA, one of the leading entertainment and sports agencies in the world. She recently worked on films like I, TONYA and VOX LUX, and specializes in packaging, financing, and sales. I’m particularly glad that she’s here with us today because I really wanted to open StepIn to a category that is absolutely essential in our industry: the talent agencies. They are the ultimate gatekeepers, and as such they are at once feared and revered, but there’s no doubt that they represent the best opportunity to get a film made.

With the help of our three guests, we’ll try to debunk some of the common misconceptions about our industry, and - who knows - perhaps we’ll discover that the future is brighter than it seems. I wish you all a wonderful StepIn!

Marcello Paolillo
StepIn Project Manager



PART I - OPENING KEYNOTE

Open to all Press, Professional and Industry accredited

Moderated by Variety correspondent Nick Vivarelli, during the opening keynote three remarkable film executives offered their point of view on the state of the industry.

As streaming giants continue to upend the global film business scenario it's getting tougher for indie cinema to survive, both as an art form and as entertainment. But smart new strategies are being devised to mount productions that stay true to the indie ethos, and the thrill of theatrical isn't gone yet.

In broad terms those were the main takeaways from the Locarno fest's unique StepIn think tank where the overall theme was "What Are We Afraid Of?" and 40-plus mostly European indie players convened to share experiences and exchange thoughts for practical solutions to navigate the onslaught of streaming platforms and the digital era at large.

"Agility" emerged as the keyword during the opening session when French producer Rita Dagher, one of the three keynote speakers, recounted how she packaged Jean-Stephane Sauvaire-directed "A Prayer Before Dawn," which she described as a mix of: "French director, English material, and American money," packaged by CAA thanks to James Shamus.

A novelty this year was the attention dedicated to the role talent agencies can play, particularly the U.S. ones at the moment, in bringing more offbeat projects, albeit ones with commercial prospects, to the screen. Especially the big screen.

CAA agent Maren Olson, also a keynote speaker, said she is increasingly looking at projects with a European component due to the resulting built-in soft money that can be combined with U.S. equity.

"What we are trying to do is create relationships globally that can add to more agility for the filmmaking community," she said. This can help keep a "creative system afloat where each individual filmmaker and filmmaking team can tell the story they want to tell, with resources to get it made and places for it to be exhibited," Olson noted.

On the crucial subject of exhibition, Amazon Studios' former head of distribution Bob Berney, who was the third keynote, pointed out that whereas just two years ago movie deals had a "very strong theatrical commitment, when you're either buying rights or investing," this is "turning into a much more grey, open-ended area now."

But the market is still in flux and indies can try to use talent leverage to shape it. Olson revealed that she's had instances where directors have said that theatrical is an important enough point for them that they will take less money to go theatrical. "And so Netflix has had to react to that," she noted. "It goes back to the power of the creators and the power of the creatives," she said.

Keynote Speakers:



BOB BERNEY
Marketing and Distribution Executive

Bob Berney has been a preeminent force in the film world for more than two decades, bringing a multitude of smart, challenging and entertaining films to the screen.

Most recently, Berney was Head of Marketing & Distribution at Amazon Studios (2015-19) where he oversaw the theatrical distribution and awards marketing campaigns for a vast array of critically acclaimed and filmmaker driven titles, ranging from documentaries (GLEASON, CITY OF GHOSTS), foreign language films (THE HANDMAIDEN, THE SALESMAN, COLD WAR) and box office successes such as LOVE & FRIENDSHIP, MANCHESTER BY THE SEA and THE BIG SICK.

Prior to joining Amazon Studios, he founded and operated some of the most successful independent film distribution companies of the last 15 years: FilmDistrict, (INSIDIOUS, SOUL SURFER, DRIVE); Apparition (BRIGHT STAR, THE YOUNG VICTORIA); Picturehouse (LA VIE EN ROSE, PAN'S LABYRINTH, A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION, METALLICA THRU THE NEVER); Newmarket Films (THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST, MONSTER, WHALE RIDER) and IFC Films (MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING , Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN).



RITA DAGHER
SENIORITA FILMS | CEO & Producer

Rita Dagher is the founder of Seniorita Films, and producer of feature films, TV series and documentaries. The company's goal is to strike an international chord through innovation and bold choices, at once engaging with contemporary global issues and preserving an independent vision.

Films Rita produced include: "A Prayer Before Dawn" by Jean-Stephane Sauvaire (Official selection Cannes 2017), "Soy Nero" by Rafi Pitts (Berlinale 2016), "My Enemy's Enemy" directed by Oscar winner Kevin MacDonal; "Terror's Advocate" directed by Barbet Schroeder; "Pa-ra-da" directed by Marco Pontecorvo.

Previously, she was Executive Producer of Chris Morris's "Four Lions" and "Shadow Dancer" directed by Oscar winner James Marsh (Best Documentary Feature for "Man on Wire" - 2009). She was also Associate Producer of "Fahrenheit 9/11" directed by Michael Moore.



MAREN OLSON
CAA | Agent in the Media Finance Department

Maren Olson is an Agent in the Media Finance department at leading entertainment and sports agency Creative Artists Agency (CAA). Olson works in the Los Angeles office and specializes in packaging, financing, and selling films, including I, TONYA, LATE NIGHT, VOX LUX, HIGH LIFE, AT ETERNITY'S GATE, DUMPLIN', LUCE, BREAKING NEWS IN YUBA COUNTY, and 355.

Olson joined CAA in 2015 from Traction Media, an independent film production company, where she served as President and oversaw the creative development, packaging, production, financing, and sales of films on the Traction Media slate, including SHORT TERM 12, which won both the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at SXSW, and THE WANNABE, starring Academy Award-winner Patricia Arquette.

Olson graduated from University of Southern California with a degree in Film and Television Production.

Keynote Moderator:

NICK VIVARELLI

Variety | Italy and Middle East correspondent

Born in Florence to an American mother and an Italian father, Nick Vivarelli has spent plenty of time in both countries. After studying comparative literature at New York University, he dabbled as a literary translator and art gallery organizer before venturing into journalism and film. Since then, he has worked for several media outlets, including The Associated Press and Newsweek. A regular on the international festival circuit, he is currently Italy and Middle East correspondent for Variety. He is also the author of "Slalom," a Tuscany-set thriller published by Manni Editori in Italy and co-director of the documentary "Life As a B-Movie: Piero Vivarelli."

PART II - ROUND-TABLES SESSION

StepIn Participants Only

After the opening keynote, the participants were divided in 4 thematic round-tables, each one with a moderator and a notetaker, to discuss specific issues related to the main topic of the event:

TABLE 1: The Shape of Independent Cinema: Facing Changes in Formats and Financing

Moderator: Jean des Forêts (Petit Film)

Notetaker: Joyce Pierpoline (Pierpoline Films)

TABLE 2: The Box-Office Puzzle: Is The Theatrical Experience Struggling or Thriving?

Moderator: Laura Houlgatte (International Union of Cinemas)

Notetaker: Allison Gardner (Glasgow Film Theatre)

TABLE 3: European Film Promotion: Strategies and Ideas on How to Promote Foreign Language Films Worldwide

Moderator: Susan Wendt (TrustNordisk)

Notetaker: Mathias Noschis (Alphapanda)

TABLE 4: The Role Of Talent Agencies: The Ultimate Gatekeepers

Moderator: Vanessa Henneman (Henneman Agency)

Notetaker: Datta Dave (Tulsea)

PART III – WRAP-UP SESSION

Open to all Press, Professional and Industry accredited

During this conclusive session, moderated by Variety correspondent Nick Vivarelli, all participants gathered together once again, as the four notetakers from the previous session presented a brief summary of what's been discussed during the round-tables, and offered their conclusions.

TABLE 1: The Shape of Independent Cinema: Facing Changes in Formats and Financing

Producer Joyce Pierpoline, the notetaker for the Table 1 on “The Shape of Independent Cinema: Facing Changes in Formats and Financing,” underlined that the discussion centered around the topic: Are the streamers an important part of indie filming?

The conclusion, in short, is that they are undeniably part of the eco system and Netflix in particular is dictating new rules in distribution and production. The increased production of both films and series due to the arrival of Netflix in several European countries has raised budgets in general and reduced available resources and talent for films.

They are also drying up the talent pool making it more difficult to find writers and directors and also crew for producers making indie films that are based on a more traditional financing model and distribution model.

The goal for any producer is to achieve a balance between traditional theatrical or broadcast models and the streaming giants, so that an indie producer can survive financially.

In the indie sphere Europe remains an auteur-driven market where theatrical is very important to the filmmakers. They still want the traditional theatrical release, particularly in France.

In Germany directors are more willing to go directly to streaming.

But getting theatrical distribution, even a limited one, is still the best way for a director to become established. And festivals are an essential part of the system also because that is where the streamers find talent.

A key consideration is that producers need to respect the way audiences are watching content. And the best way to reach the largest international audience is through streaming.

In theatrical the day-and-date model is an effective way to reach a wider audience.

In the streamers sphere there is hope that with more players on the horizon, Disney, Apple, etc, more competition will bring more flexibility and give the producers more leverage in the marketplace.

Hopefully it will also provide more accountability on the part of the streamers.

Producers need to survive through producing independent content both with the traditional model of financing and with the streamers. But they do need the streamers to survive.

From a creative standpoint the downside of the streamers is that by and large in Europe they tend to go for bland, not very good quality content. They don't really finance development. Instead they rely on national funds and soft money to develop projects. Which is not fair.

National funds in Europe in particular need to work together to require streamers to invest a percentage of their revenue into local production.

TABLE 2: The Box-Office Puzzle: Is The Theatrical Experience Struggling or Thriving?

Alison Gardner, chief programmer of the Glasgow Film Theatre, and co-director of the Glasgow Film Festival, who was the notetaker of Table 2, said that when it came to getting audiences into movie theaters there were 3 main themes to their discussion: Social Media; Curation; and Community. Participants started out by noting the importance of local movies, in keeping the theatrical experience buoyant, especially comedies although they don't travel internationally.

Other points of discussions where:

- Ways of getting people off their couches and into movie theatres were discussed, ranging from multiplexes in Estonia that are programming arthouse titles, breaking down barriers between highbrow and mainstream cinema, to the importance of film literacy and working with schools to attain the same goal;
- The importance of exhibitors sharing intel on what works with the rest of the value chain;
- The importance of social media in marketing and also enhancing the communal movie going experience;
- The introduction of the subscription model applied to exhibition chains as a marketing strategy;
- The rise of alternative content as a way to draw more audiences to movies as well;
- The curation of movies as event releases;
- It was noted that too many films are made in Europe, 1746 in 2017.

TABLE 3: European Film Promotion: Strategies and Ideas on How to Promote Foreign Language Films Worldwide

Mathias Noschis, head of Berlin-based social media agency for the film industry Alphapanda, was the notetaker for Table 3.



He pointed out first and foremost that when it comes to marketing a movie offline is dead.

Within social media tools for distributors and exhibitors to reach audiences Twitter is not really relevant anymore, just FB and IG. Of course there are different ways to be present on SM but there's one particularly needed, and it's brand recognition

Distributors and exhibitors need to build brands, and an effort should be made to make "European Film" a brand. Examples of this type of branding: "20 top EU films in Toronto," the "Tales of Europe" initiative in the U.S.

Knowing the audience is key. Related to that: the issue of dubbing vs not dubbing.

Two key topics that were thrashed out:

1) Whose job is it to implement the promotion?

Are Exhibitors real curators or supermarkets that put stuff on their shelves?

Being a distributor of indie movies is getting harder and harder. You need to hit 10K admissions just to recoup your dubbing costs in territories, like Italy, where dubbing is mandatory. The role of sales agents in promotion is evolving. Producers are constantly cutting the marketing budget.

2) Let's get practical

European Film Promotion wants to implement a scheme for sales agents to do digital asset packages. What are the solutions / suggestions for such a scheme?_Money for the sales agent to create such a package? (For "Nymphomaniac" yes, but does it make sense for a smaller Serbian arthouse drama?)

In an ideal world, there should be a marketplace for promotional assets that can be licensed to smaller distributors.

Question: Will the US distributor really be interested in a package created by a little European social media agency?

TABLE 4: The Role Of Talent Agencies: The Ultimate Gatekeepers

Datta Dave, a partner at Tulsea, a media and content management company that represents India's leading writers, was the notetaker at Table 4 on Talent Agencies.

His first observation was that talent agents feel like "door openers" rather than gatekeepers.

Talent: first and foremost

Dave noted that talent is the most essential building block and that there is currently an overall talent crunch - nobody is available.

So there is a need to be strategic and advisory for talent more than ever before.



Agents need to find ways to be more effective overall by sharing information. Co-representation can lead to more opportunities for talent. Ensuring that agencies have shared/aligned incentives, and that everyone's on the same page (agents and managers) is important.

Agents must do what's best for talent, even if that means saying no at times.

Enabling the ecosystem

Producers - are they talent or not? Some agencies now are also repping producers, financiers, etc. Because of the varied role of a producer, and the challenges he has to face, some agents are helping them navigate.

There's not a one size fits all: talent agencies constantly create different business models, leveraging equity (sometimes international) and soft money, to expand the market.

Sales agents work with talent agents for packaging and talent, especially as their role evolves more towards financing and producing.

Closing thoughts/next steps.

The general feeling was that the 4 roundtables cross-pollinated. Producers, agents, and sales agents – found extremely valuable to share perspective and ideas.

TABLE 1

**The Shape of Independent Cinema:
Facing Changes in Formats and Financing**

Moderator	Notetaker		
<p>Jean des Forêts</p> <p><i>Petit Film</i> CEO & Producer</p> <p>France</p>	<p>Joyce Pierpoline</p> <p><i>Pierpoline Films</i> Founder & Producer</p> <p>USA / France</p>	<p>Bob Berney</p> <p>Marketing and Distribution Executive</p> <p>USA</p>	<p>Matthias Bürcher</p> <p><i>Federal Office of Culture</i> PICS / Minority Co-Productions</p> <p>Switzerland</p>
<p>Rita Dagher</p> <p><i>Senorita Films</i> CEO & Producer</p> <p>France</p>	<p>Jonas Dornbach</p> <p><i>Komplizen Film GMBH</i> Managing Director & Producer</p> <p>Germany</p>	<p>Carlo Dusi</p> <p><i>Red Arrow Studios International</i> EVP Commercial Strategy, Scripted</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>Matthijs Wouter Knol</p> <p><i>European Film Market</i> Director</p> <p>Germany</p>
<p>Arfi Lamba</p> <p><i>Bombay Berlin</i> CEO & Producer</p> <p>India</p>	<p>Corinna Marschall</p> <p><i>Mediadesk</i> Managing Director</p> <p>Switzerland</p>	<p>Roberto Olla</p> <p><i>Eurimages</i> Executive Director</p> <p>France</p>	

TABLE 2

**The Box-Office Puzzle:
Is The Theatrical Experience Struggling or Thriving?**

Moderator	Notetaker		
<p>Laura Houlgatte</p> <p><i>UNIC - International Union of Cinemas</i> CEO</p> <p>Belgium</p>	<p>Allison Gardner</p> <p><i>Glasgow Film Theater</i> Programme Director and Festival Co-Director</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>Andrea Ciria</p> <p><i>Fil Rouge Media</i> General Manager</p> <p>Italy</p>	<p>Giovanna Fulvi</p> <p><i>Toronto Film Festival Rome Film Festival Macao Film Festival</i> Programmer</p> <p>Canada / Italy / China</p>
<p>Eve Gabereau</p> <p><i>Modern Films</i> Managing Director</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>Mattia Giannone</p> <p><i>Cinélux</i> Programming & Communication</p> <p>Switzerland</p>	<p>Michael Graf</p> <p><i>Bankside</i> Acquisitions Manager</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>Hermelinde Grondard</p> <p><i>Cinema Galeries</i> Project Manager</p> <p>Belgium</p>
<p>Tiina Lökk</p> <p><i>Tallin Black Nights Film Festival</i> Festival Director</p> <p>Estonia</p>	<p>Elisa Rosi</p> <p><i>Lichtblick Kino</i> Cinema Manager</p> <p>Germany</p>	<p>Jela Skerlak</p> <p><i>Federal Office of Culture</i> Head of Distribution and Diversity</p> <p>Switzerland</p>	

TABLE 3

**European Film Promotion
Strategies and Ideas on How to Promote Foreign Language Films Worldwide**

Moderator	Notetaker		
<p>Susan Wendt</p> <p><i>TrustNordisk</i> Managing Director</p> <p>Denmark</p>	<p>Mathias Noschis</p> <p><i>Alphapanda</i> Film Marketing Strategist</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>Simone Baumann</p> <p><i>German Films</i> Managing Director</p> <p>Germany</p>	<p>Andreas Bühlmann</p> <p><i>Swiss Films</i> Consultant Film & First Feature</p> <p>Switzerland</p>
<p>Margherita Chiti</p> <p><i>Teodora Film</i> Head of Acquisitions & TV Sales</p> <p>Italy</p>	<p>Susanne Davis</p> <p><i>European Film Promotion</i> Film Sales Support</p> <p>Germany</p>	<p>Thania Dimitrakopoulou</p> <p><i>Match Factory</i> Head of Sales</p> <p>Germany</p>	<p>Sonja Heinen</p> <p><i>European Film Promotion</i> Managing Director</p> <p>Germany</p>
<p>John Nein</p> <p><i>Sundance Film Festival</i> Senior Programmer</p> <p>USA</p>	<p>Tom Ooms</p> <p><i>LAB111</i> Programmer</p> <p>The Netherlands</p>	<p>Vincent Quek</p> <p><i>Anticipate Pictures</i> CEO</p> <p>Singapore</p>	<p>Thorsten Ritter</p> <p><i>Beta Cinema</i> EVP Acquisitions, Sales and Marketing</p> <p>Germany</p>
<p>Tito Rodríguez</p> <p><i>ICAA - Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales</i> Deputy Director of Marketing</p> <p>Spain</p>	<p>Miroljub Vučković</p> <p><i>Film Center Serbia</i> Head of Int'l Relations & Promotion</p> <p>Serbia</p>	<p>Ryan Werner</p> <p><i>Cinetic Media</i> Senior Executive</p> <p>USA</p>	

TABLE 4

**The Role Of Talent Agencies:
The Ultimate Gatekeepers**

Moderator	Notetaker		
<p>Vanessa Henneman</p> <p><i>Henneman Agency</i> CEO & Talent Agent</p> <p>Netherland</p>	<p>Datta Dave</p> <p><i>Tulsea</i> Co-Founder & CEO</p> <p>India</p>	<p>Carole Baraton</p> <p><i>Charades</i> Co-Founder</p> <p>France</p>	<p>Diane Ferrandez</p> <p><i>Rocket Science</i> International Sales</p> <p>UK</p>
<p>Mike Goodridge</p> <p><i>International Film Festival Macao</i> Artistic Director</p> <p>China / UK</p>	<p>Christopher Granier-Deferre</p> <p><i>Poisson Rouge Pictures</i> Producer</p> <p>UK</p>	<p>Rose Kuo</p> <p><i>Festworks</i> President</p> <p>USA</p>	<p>Laura Munsterhjelm</p> <p><i>Actors in Scandinavia</i> Talent Agent</p> <p>Finland</p>
<p>Sigrid Narjes</p> <p><i>Above the Line</i> Talent Agent</p> <p>Germany</p>	<p>Maren Olson</p> <p>CAA Agent in the Media Finance Department</p> <p>USA</p>		



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