Scalarama Scotland 2020 | Roundtable 21st June | Minutes

Moderator: Megan Mitchell

Attendees: Anthony Andrews, Aaron Guthrie, Alison Smith, Amanda Rodgers, Annabel Grundy, Cathy Brennan, Claire Vaughan, Clare Reddington, Emma Dove, Helen Wright, Jamie Dunn, Jay Platt, John Pooley, Lisa Nesbitt, Maria Suarez-Alvarez, Michael Pierce, Midnight Memphis, Natasha Orlando Kappler, Ross Wilcock, Sam May, Sambrooke Scott, Sarah Nisbet, Serena Scateni, Shona Thomson, Sean Welsh, Tanatsei Gambura, Toki Alison, Umulkhayr Mohamed

1. **Welcome + Update on Scalarama 2020 plans**
   Megan Mitchell (Matchbox Cineclub/Scalarama Glasgow) welcomed everyone to the session, including guest speakers Anothony Andrews (We Are Parable), Umulkhayr Mohamed (Freelance), Clare Reddington (Watershed) and Toki Alsion (Inclusive Cinema), and introduced Scalarama for those new to these sessions. Megan explained that unfortunately, Samar Ziadat from Dardishi couldn't be with us today but passed on information about the festival and Dardishi's upcoming online screening of *Naila and the Uprising (2017) on the 25th at 2 pm.*

   Megan acknowledged the intensity of the past month, especially for our Black colleagues, and passed on some information about the Film & TV Charities online support and 24-hour helpline, encouraging people to reach out if they feel overwhelmed.

   For this month's exhibitors, news/info update Megan shared Jemma Desai's This Work Isn't For Us, encouraging white exhibitors to examine their own practices and complacencies when it comes to race in the creative sector, especially in Scotland where there is a predominantly white film exhibition sector.

2. **We Are Parable**
   Anthony Andrews presented on the work London based We Are Parable, are an award-winning film exhibition company, have been doing with Black audiences. Anthony highlighted that their goal is to offer experience around film that celebrate Black culture, championing film that features and are made by Black people. Focusing on authentic and fun experiences Anthony pointed out that when hosting events at certain venues audiences had asked if there is a dress code, showing an anxiety that certain spaces aren't for Black audiences. We Are Parable have been breaking down these anxieties and working with organisations, such as the BFI, to bring Black stories to the big screens and engaging experiences to Black audiences. They hosted the 'People's Premiere' of Black Panther with Marvel at BFI Southbank, creating an afrofuturistic kingdom in the venue. And for their Black Comedy Legends season they toured a pop-up barbershop inspired by Desmond's, alongside screenings of classics comedies, including Friday, Boomerang and Coming To America.

   Anthony explained that creating a memorable and authentic event around a film engages audiences and helps create an environment where audiences feel represented. Anthony also championed collaborating with organisations or groups who are already working with Black or ethnic minority audiences, to ensure authenticity and sincerity around the events.

3. **Umulkhayr Mohamed**
   Umulkhayr Mohamed, a freelance consultant, writer and curator with an interest in creating space for herself and others to challenge narratives that support the narrow societal view of normality, presented on issues of how our own racial background informs our work and the issues which arise if the majority are white. Um began by outlining that her thinking has been informed by the moment in time, and the frustration around conversations but she has been heartened that systemic oppression has become a focus. Um championed holding people to account for how they benefit from their privilege.

Um outlined a number of ways in which whiteness informs the work we do, beginning with programming. Programming allows us to look back at film history and use this as a chance to explore films that have been historically ignored due to race, to dig to find these films and filmmakers. Finding the time and resources to choose to prioritise these films. Um points out that there is a category called 'Black Cinema' but not 'White Cinema', and that this othering upholds the belief whiteness is neutral and everything else isn't. Um encourages people to look at how whiteness is presenting in films your programming if they're majority white cast and production.

In regards to community engagement Um explained that if predominately white staff organisations want to be a welcoming space they have to find sustainably way to build trust, allowing people to feel respected and welcomed. Um also points out that these discussions should also examine why communities questioned in the first place if they would be respected or welcomed, and to not ask for benefit of the doubt but to understand the issues around why people of colour wouldn't want to engage with you.

Um asked if people feel they and they're organisations reflect professionalism and that most people would say yes because it is seen as a good thing. However, Um highlighted that as a Black women professionalism exists to create a set of rule and boundaries that in practices have been created with only a certain group in mind, and people who fall out of that certain group have to leave parts of their authentic selves at the door and hold themselves to a higher standard. Um stated that professionalism is rooted in white supremacy and that people of colour should be trusted instead of asked for examples.

Um explained that hiring diverse people is the first step, not the last in developing inclusive organisations and that often freelancers are a more diverse group, as they have chosen to remain outwith organisations as they are oppressive. This is the form of being detrimental to mental health alongside limited career progression due to being overlooked.

For organisations to check if they're on the right path they must understand what accountability looks like, and that you shouldn't feel good when you're addressing your own privilege, sitting with that feeling is important.

4. **Watershed**
   [Watershed](...)'s CEO Clare Reddington discussed their [commitments to developing diversity](...) within their organisation, outlined in a public statement in solidarity with the Black Lives Matters movement, which were developed pre-lockdown with their inter-departmental inclusion group.

   Clare echoes Um point on accountability and taking ownership of mistakes, and noted that Bristol is a place where independent spirit is highly valued but inequality of opportunity had gone unchecked, with the leadership of culture not represent the city's demographic. Clare explained that Watershed has a long-established history with developing diversity and has a sustained commitment to continue this.

   Watershed are taking active steps to address the diversifying staff, spreading this across the whole organisation and not just within the executive team, building inclusion as an explicit part of how every team understand their success. Clare notes that like many independent cinemas Watershed is suffering due to COVID19, with hiring currently paused, but notes that this offers time to think about accountability and how to put mechanisms in place to ensure diverse and inclusive staffing across the organisation in future.

   Clare explained that Watershe'd statement takes an intersectional view of inclusion across programming, audiences and team, and that they wanted to publish this publicly to ensure their own accountability for outlined progress. Clare also explains that one thing they've learned is that it's important to have realistic

timescales in place for change, although Clare is always quick to act but to build the trust that Um mentioned we need to make tangible commitments that have been thought through, that don't just scratch the surface t or have unintended negative consequences. Co-designing with the community to want to reach is essential,

Clare quoted Zahra Ash-Harper, previously Watershed's Inclusion Producer, saying that slow, loving inclusion, that allows time for healing and trust-building to understand the context of where change is needed, and notes that Watershed must consider wider unconnected systems of oppression.

Claire also highlighted that a mistake white led organisations make is looking to be inclusive in their own practice whilst neglecting to give time and resource to organisations founded and led by Black organisations and that it is essential to ensure they have a seat at the table. The hard work and emotional toll which addressing these barriers take on Black and ethnic minority colleagues are important to understand, and Clare outlined the need for mental and emotional support, as well as support for dealing with conflict, needed for this to all take place.

5. **Inclusive Cinema**
Toki Alison joined to share some resources of Film Hub Wale's Inclusive Cinema around reaching Black and ethnic minority audiences and their new Black Lives Matter resource. All resources can be found on their website, and if anyone had any additional resources they think should be added to the website please do get in touch with Toki.

6. **Open Discussion**
Megan moderated a short Q&A with speakers, with contributions for those attending the sessions.

Megan asked Anthony about the research into audience confidence in returning to cinemas that We Are Parable are undertaking for the BFI. Anthony explained that as Black audiences are more likely to die for COVID19 that this research is important to understanding how Black audiences will feel going back into cinemas. Initial findings that been that information is key to ensuring audiences know what to expect and have confidence in venues. The survey is still open and can be found here.

Megan asked Um if there is fatigue or frustration for Black and ethnic minority colleagues in having to continually have conversations around diversity. Um explained that it's not fatigue around the topic but more about white colleagues asking questions they could explore for themselves, and people relying on Black and ethnic minority colleagues to have these conversations without understanding that this may be the first time that as a white person they're discussing this but for their Black colleagues it's continuous. Um also points out that often people of colour have to moderate their tone and how they discuss topics of race and oppression, but with the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, Um is hopeful that this won't be the case for much longer and that conversations can be blunter, in a way that is safe for those Black and ethnic minority people speaking.

Helen Wright asked how can we be held accountable by funders when it comes to undertaking active measures. Clare answered by asking how can we hold funders to account, as there are issues with parental funder structures and that an ecological structure to gold people top account, removing the linearity of funders at the top. Anthony says as an exhibitor that peers feel there can only be one Black exhibitor who has access to funding, which can only change if funders become transparent. Funders need to make it clear that funding is to attract diverse audiences, not just for one exhibitor to get funding to address all the issues. Um adds that it starts with demands transparency from funders, and ensuring information is widely available and people are able to challenge funding decisions.

Sean Welsh asked if people had thoughts on smaller organisations can collaborate to reach wider

audiences that maybe aren't representative of the organisations make-up. Anthony said that collaboration is key, and cites recent examples of streaming services having Black Live Matter categories made up of films predominantly about Black trauma when there are stories of Black joy and creativity, of a wider array of lived experiences as well. And collaborating with organizations that work with communities means you're not assuming the stories you think should be told. Clare also says that collaboration is always where you can share skills and resources across networks.

Joe asked if your experience as a Black person or a person of colour should always have to inform your programming. Um said that who we are as people informs our programming and there's a richness to that, but the issue is when people of colour are expected to only be interested in films related to them. Anthony said that he thinks it's almost impossible to separate out your background from your programming, and agrees with Um that Black people are often expected to only programme Black films. Anthony says that he really wants to do an Edgar Wright Icecream Trilogy event, and be able to celebrate the whole spectrum of what interests him as a film fan.

Megan wrapped up by asking some moments of cinematic joy from the speakers. Toki said that managed to get an audience who hasn't been to the cinema for a long time, especially older audiences, is a highlight. Clare said that the Musical season which forefronted the experience, with a flash mob Signing In The Rain dance. Um said that watching Isle of Dogs with her colleague at Chapter was a special memory.

Anthony's joyous moment was also about the Musical season, with their The Art Of The Black Visual Album events, one of which they had a live Prince tribute play with Purple Rain with people dancing in the aisle to Prince all night. Anthony's second joyful moment was at their screening for Blue Story, during a scene of playfulness and comedy, he looked around the room to see an audience of Black people really enjoying and experience the film.

7. Next meeting date + outline
Scalarama Scotland's next session will be on the 19th of July, and will focus on accessibility for events both online and in venues.