

BFI Governor Election 2011

Candidates' biographies and statements



DONNA ANTON

MARK COSGROVE

SYLVIA HARVEY

PETER KOSMINSKY

Candidates are listed in alphabetical order

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DONNA ANTON

Biography

Donna Anton was born in Chicago in 1958. A dual US-Greek citizen, she has lived in Hayle, Cornwall, since 2004. She has a degree in Byzantine history, worked for many years in the incentive-travel industry, and in 2001 earned an MBA in international management at the Arthur D. Little School of Management at Boston College.

A life-long film enthusiast, Donna had precocious taste in films as a child, inexplicably drawn (when left to her own devices) to British fare like *The L-Shaped Room* and *Georgy Girl* on late-night television.

Since settling in the UK, Donna has served as general secretary and treasurer of the Penwith Film Society (Penzance), chaired the board of trustees of the British Federation of Film Societies (2008-10), during which time she helped to edit *The BFFS Community Cinema Sourcebook*, and has directed the Cornwall Film Festival since 2009.

When not catching first-run films at the cinema, Donna managed to earn a private pilot's licence with instrument rating, a professional chef's diploma and a Grade 8 certificate in piano. She is an inveterate writer of letters to editors.

Donna's outlook is aligned with Woody Allen's: 'Eighty percent of success is showing up.'

Supporting Statement

“ As a membership organisation the BFI has always had member representation at the governance level. Now, as the BFI becomes the lead body for film in the UK, the opportunity is all the greater for film lovers and film consumers across the country, in both metropolitan and rural areas, to influence the overall strategic direction of film in the UK.

However, it appears there could be a very real danger of the Member Governor role disappearing unless the Membership becomes actively involved and is able to communicate the direction it wishes the BFI to take. This is something that should not be allowed to happen.

As a Member Governor I would see my main role as representing the Members (the life force) of the BFI around the UK to ensure the BFI remains a vibrant organisation that delivers to the whole of the UK public. As a BFI member and/or S&S subscriber for three years based in Cornwall, I am particularly aware of the limitations of access to cinema in rural areas – whether it is areas remote from cities or areas remote from London.

It is vital that members and potential members are encouraged to make their voice heard. This could be achieved by an e-forum or open Board meetings around the UK – not just London – to ensure transparency. The BFI continues to stand for excellence in film culture and continues as a national organisation. From the perspective of someone who grew up in a country with no equivalent organisation, who has now rooted themselves in UK culture, this would be a real advance and put the BFI in the vanguard.

I am determined to continue the direct representation of BFI Members to the BFI Board as I appreciate and value the importance of the wider perspective. I am a member of Penwith Film Society, I was elected to the BFFS Board, and as Chair of BFFS for two years I understand and respect the importance of an active membership. In short, I want to avoid the BFI becoming another extension of a Government department.

Of great concern to me is ensuring that grass-roots film lovers have local access to the best in cinema and television offered by the BFI, and in particular, I believe the BFI could be doing more to develop informal film education for adult learners on accessible and pleasurable levels.

Needless to say, active representation requires hard work to be effective and to genuinely represent real people, but I would try to make myself available to members to express their concerns and ideas.

In enacting all BFI Governor duties I would seek to ensure that the BFI is sustained by members for members.”

MARK COSGROVE

Biography

Mark Cosgrove has worked in independent cultural film exhibition for over twenty years. Before that he studied Film and Television at Glasgow University and graduated in Film from Bulmershe College, Reading. Since 1994 he has been Cinemas Director at Watershed in Bristol. He has curated seasons on amongst other subjects J. Lee Thompson, New European Cinema and Bernard Herrmann and published supporting material online www.watershed.co.uk/dshed/dangerous-ground-cinema-bernard-herrmann.

Over recent years he has worked with musicians on a series of live music performances to silent film ranging from improvisation to the films of Jeff Kean to Adrian Utley's (Portishead) and Will Gregory's (Goldfrapp) new score to *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. He is regularly invited to contribute to debates on issues relating to exhibition. In the near future he will be speaking at New Forms of Cinema Exhibition conference at University of East Anglia and Film Exhibition in Europe: Stakes, Challenges and Perspectives at Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris.

Mark has done jury duty on numerous film festivals including the Europa Label at Venice. He picked up the European Entrepreneur Cinema of the year award 2010 from Europa Cinemas. He produces monthly film podcasts www.watershed.co.uk/whatson/podcast/ and twitters @msc45.

Supporting Statement

“ The new evolving digital landscape we find ourselves in affords us exciting opportunities to engage audiences in a richer dialogue about film and moving image culture. Venues like Watershed are opening up their digital channels to have a dialogue with audiences. Critically, these tools also allow new approaches to engaging young audiences. At Watershed we have just renewed a three year partnership with an inner-city Bristol school exploring collaborative educational practices. This has involved everything from the watching of films, the making of films, the publishing of content and citizen journalism. The school has seen a quantitative and qualitative growth in take up of GCSE media and A level film. We need to use the panoply of digital tools to support the next generation of active and critical consumers and makers of film and media.

I have over 20 years experience of working in, running and programming independent cinemas. First, as Film Programmer at a single screen cinema at Plymouth Arts Centre then as Education Officer at Cornerhouse in Manchester and currently as Programme Director at Watershed in Bristol. I care passionately about film and moving image – its past, present and future. I know what it means to engage and develop audiences for the diversity of world film culture and the richness of film history. It's a long-term proposition and it's what I have been spending my professional life doing.

A key element to developing audiences and to developing the range and depth of film and television material available for them is through partnerships. Whether it has been developing the Encounters Short Film Festival, Afrika Eye festival, silent films with new live music or touring a Claire Denis retrospective, for me, these have been achieved through working in creative collaboration with locally based individuals or partner cultural organisations across the country.

The BFI is an indispensable champion of film and television culture and custodian of our film heritage. It is going through an exciting and demanding period of change with renewed and enlarged responsibilities in this new digital landscape. I feel very much that there is a moment here where the BFI can re-imagine and re-energise its national role and reconnect with partners and audiences in the nations and regions. I want to bring my passion, expertise and skills to the role of member governor to support this unique organisation through this period of its evolution.”

SYLVIA HARVEY

Biography

Sylvia Harvey studied art history at the University of Edinburgh, subsequently studying film for three years at the University of California, Los Angeles. She returned to Britain to work in higher education most recently in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. She served on the BFI Production Board in the early 1980s and worked subsequently to establish a city council-backed media development fund, the four-screen Showroom cinema and the Sheffield International Documentary Festival.

An active member of the Independent Film-makers Association, she later advised the Arts Council and served on the Boards of Yorkshire Arts, Sheffield Hallam University and the Voice of the Listener Trust. She has published widely on the subjects of film history and theory, broadcasting policy and regulation and presented the case for out-of-London production centres together with calculations on the regional value of the BBC licence fee in a monograph about the regions, the nations and the BBC.

Sylvia is a member of the Royal Television Society, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and currently a Visiting Professor at the University of Leeds and a Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics. She lives in Sheffield.

Supporting Statement

“ The BFI was founded in 1933 and established a strong international reputation with excellent archive and library collections. Although it emerged as one of the most distinguished film organisations in the world, it has had to reinvent itself on several occasions. Now is such a time, with great opportunities and a few risks.

Over the years the Institute has taken on a number of challenges – the start of modest production funding in the 1950s, the development of a network of regional film theatres from the 1960s, the creation of an education department that helped to develop audiences and to establish film studies in schools and universities. Forward-looking directors gave the Institute long-term stability and protection through the adoption of charitable status and the award of a Royal Charter in 1983.

Now, new challenges arise – especially in the area of production – as a consequence of the Government’s recent decision to close down the ten-year old Film Council and to allocate most of its duties to the BFI. This new duty to production must be carefully and imaginatively combined with the Institute’s longstanding cultural and educational remit, with its determination to bring the best of world cinema to audiences across the UK, and with its expertise in archiving and exhibition. Most importantly the Institute’s mission to encourage our national conversation about film must be consolidated and extended.

There are weaknesses that need to be addressed. Since the days of the BFI’s Regional Department it was clear that the claim to be a British Film Institute and not a London Film Institute needed to be demonstrated in practice. The development of new online services makes this a little easier. But the costs of new development will be considerable and a long-term vision for expansion is vital. Effort needs to be invested in finding and listening to the voices of those partners and providers who already make things happen throughout the UK in production, education, exhibition and archiving.

The promise of additional Lottery monies after the Olympics is welcome, along with the existing system of tax relief for production; and the ‘cultural test’ for British film appears to be bedded in. But it remains difficult for independent producers to attract finance, while inward investment – though an important part of the mix – means a continuing flow of profits abroad. Hope may be at hand and digital technologies are already providing some answers for both producers and exhibitors, chipping away at the costs of production and of distribution.

I have experience of Board membership in a variety of similar Trusts and organisations working in the fields of production, education, exhibition, arts and policy making, with annual turnovers ranging from £60,000 to £120 million. If elected I would relish the opportunity of working on behalf of audiences and producers to ensure that the BFI makes effective use of public and private resources – building a vigorous national film culture and developing facilities and opportunities throughout the UK. ”

PETER KOSMINSKY

Biography

Peter Kosminsky joined the BBC as General Trainee in 1980, working as an assistant producer on *Nationwide*, *Breakfast Time* and *Newsnight*. Moved to Yorkshire Television in 1985 as a Producer/Director on *First Tuesday*. Documentaries included *The Falklands War – The Untold Story* and *Afghansti* as well as the two-part drama *Shoot To Kill* about the Stalker affair.

Since 1995, He has worked as a freelance drama director. TV Dramas include *No Child of Mine* by Guy Hibbert, (BAFTA Best Single Drama), *Warriors* by Leigh Jackson, (BAFTA Best Drama Serial) and *The Project*.

Programmes as a writer/director: *The Government Inspector*, (the David Kelly drama – BAFTAs for Best Single Drama, Best Actor (Mark Rylance) and Best Writer), *Britz* – a two-part drama about being second generation Muslim in Britain today, (BAFTA for Best Drama Serial) and *The Promise*, a four-part drama about Israel/Palestine.

He has directed two feature films for Hollywood studios: *Wuthering Heights* for Paramount, starring Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche, and *White Oleander* for Warner Bros, starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Renée Zellweger. Currently working on a feature script for Film4.

Fellow, Royal Television Society.

BAFTA Alan Clarke Award

for Outstanding Creative Contribution to TV.

BAFTA TV Committee (2003–2007); Directors-UK Board (2007–2010).

Supporting Statement

“ The BFI can be and is a fabulous organisation. For years it has done its best to guard our national film heritage against the rapacious attentions of various cash-strapped governments. Now, with the incorporation of the Film Council – to whom so many of us owe so much – it is to take on a vastly increased commissioning role. We have been instructed to put all our film eggs in one slightly ill-prepared basket and one can already sense the carrion crows circling.

The organisation needs a strong and determined board to fight off the ‘death by a thousand cuts’ that always threatens at a time of government cutbacks. If lucky enough to be elected, I would do everything in my power to protect the BFI from outside interference and from the erosion of its education and commissioning budgets. As a governor, I would hope to bring a practising filmmaker’s voice to board deliberations. I would argue for a commissioning strategy that supports an individualistic voice. At its best, contemporary filmmaking can provide the grit in the oyster of our society, ask the awkward questions, raise a few creative hackles. With studio cinema offering an almost unbroken diet of fantasy and computer-enhanced escapism, I hope the BFI can remain a brave little island of eclecticism, challenging and enlivening our society rather than administering yet another Mogadon. I would also argue for a commissioning approach that strives to enhance and protect our working terms and conditions. I have seen too many young people seeking a start in our industry trying to live on little more than love of the medium and I’d like to do something to counter that, if I possibly can.

I’m proud to have been a member of the British Film Institute for almost all of my 30 years in Film and TV and, throughout that period, I have simply taken what I needed from the organisation. I’ve watched films at the NFT, proudly received BFI awards for my film work, given talks as part of the Institute’s Education Programme and, most recently and most wonderfully, been honoured with a retrospective season of my films (scheduled for this coming December on the South Bank). It feels like the moment to try to offer something back to an organisation on which we all rely and which is facing a challenging future. As a confirmed non-South-East-of-England resident, I’m putting myself forward for election as a governor in that category.”

The views expressed in this booklet are those of the individual candidates, not necessarily those of the British Film Institute or its Board of Governors.

The British Film Institute (BFI) is registered in England as a charity, number 287780, whose registered address is 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN.

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