

BBC Learning English

Talk about English

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About this script

Please note that this is not a word for word transcript of the programme as broadcast. In the recording process changes may have been made which will not be reflected here.

Callum: Hello, I'm Callum Robertson

Jackie: I'm Jackie Dalton

Callum: And this is Talk about English, live from London. In the programme today we're continuing with our topic of film.

Jackie: We'll be looking at the experience of going to the cinema

ANDREA

It's very grand in here with gold and cream walls and red velvet carpets. And I'm really looking forward to enjoying a night at the movies.

Callum: We'll be talking more about how to discuss and give your personal opinions about movies with film critic Peter Bradshaw

PETER

What is important is good writing, that's what I'd say to anybody who wants to be a movie critic or any kind of newspaper journalist.

Jackie: And we'll also be taking a sneak preview of some of the films at this year's London Film Festival.

Callum: All that and more in today's Talk about English.

Our guest today is Gareth Rees. You may know Gareth as the current voice of our Ask about English section, answering your questions on the English language. But Gareth is also a film maker. Hello Gareth

(Brief introductions – how long teaching – how long making films)

Callum: Thanks. Well we'll be hearing more from Gareth throughout the programme and as well as talking about films we hope we can get him to answer some questions about the English language as well.

Now Jackie, when was the last time you went to the cinema?

(All discuss last cinema visit – kind of cinema – experience and film seen. How experience has changed over the years)

Callum: Well despite the trend towards multiplexes there are still some unique cinemas out there. Here's our colleague Andrea Rose. What is the fact she gives about this Cinema called 'The Electric'.

ANDREA

I'm inside London's - and the UK's - oldest cinema, The Electric, in the West of London. It's very grand in here with gold and cream walls and red velvet carpets. And I'm really looking forward to enjoying a night at the movies.

Callum: The Electric is the oldest cinema in the UK.

Jackie: Over the past few years, more and more multiplex cinemas have been built. But the Electric is a bit different. Listen to Andrea talking about why.

ANDREA

I can see why this is one of the places to watch a film in London. I'm stretched out on one of their double sofas and ready to watch the film.

Callum: Andrea is planning on spending her evening at the cinema watching a film on a double sofa. She says that this is one of the most special places to see a film in London. She does this by emphasising the word 'the'.

'This is one of the places to watch a film in London.'

Jackie: Without the emphasis on the word 'the', it would sound like this.

'This is one of the places to watch a film in London.'

Callum: The stress changes the entire meaning, from being one of the most important places to being just one of many cinemas where you can watch a film. It's an effective method of making a point.

Jackie: Andrea describes the history of the building. There are two words which might be helpful to understand here. One is 'auditorium'. That's the part of the room where people sit. The other is 'music hall', which is a type of theatre with live music and performers popular in the early 1900s.

Now here's a question for you: Why was the auditorium originally designed as a music hall auditorium?

ANDREA

Apparently the Electric cinema was constructed in 1910 by architect Gerald Seymour Valentin. As there was no established cinema 'model' in the UK he designed the auditorium as a music hall.

Jackie: The architect Gerald Seymour Valentin designed the auditorium as a music hall because before this there hadn't been a cinema in the UK. There was no 'established model' – no other cinema to copy.

Sadly, the building was never finished. So what's happened since?

ANDREA

It's recently been renovated to become a unique cinematic experience. It is the only place in London where you can spend a night watching a movie on a comfy leather sofa while sipping a cocktail or a glass of champagne.

Callum: The cinema has been 'renovated' – repaired and improved – in the last few years and now it's thought of as a unique cinematic experience. That means it's a very special experience. 'Unique'.

When you watch your film, you can lie on a comfortable leather sofa and drink cocktails. Comfortable leather sofas and cocktails! Certainly a unique way to watch a film!

Jackie: On the website this week we've been asking you to tell us about the cinema-going experience in your country. Gareth, I think you've picked out a few comments haven't you?

GARETH AND SOME COMMENTS

Callum: Thanks Gareth, we'll have some more comments a little later. As well as sending in comments on the site you can also send us your phone number and talk to us on the programme, this is what this visitor to the site did

PHONE CONVERSATION – RINO FROM BELGIUM

Callum: That was Rino from Belgium.

Jackie: If you would like to talk to us on the programme then send your phone number and a message to talkaboutenglish@bbc.co.uk

Callum: You're listening to Talk about English, live from London. I'm Callum Robertson and with me are Jackie Dalton and teacher and filmmaker Gareth Rees.

Jackie: It's time now to remind you about the competition that we are running at the moment. We want you to send us a review of a film you have seen.

Callum: The review can be written, audio or video but should not be longer than 400 words. You can send it to us a talkaboutenglish@bbc.co.uk that's talkaboutenglish@bbc.co.uk

Jackie: You can find full details on the website

Callum: Gareth, do you take much notice of reviews before going to see films?

(Gareth answers)

Callum: In last week's programme we talked to Vincent Dowd who reviews films for the radio, for the World Service. To get another perspective on the art of the reviewer this week I spoke on the phone to Peter Bradshaw who writes for one of Britain's national daily newspapers. I first asked him to describe his job and if reviews in his paper can effect the box-office of films – the box-office is the place where you buy tickets but it's also used to talk about the number of people who go to see a film or the amount of money a film makes. Do his paper's review make a difference to the box office? Here's Peter Bradshaw.

PETER BRADSHAW

My job is film critic for the Guardian newspaper in the UK and what that means is that every week, every Friday in the paper I write a complete review column stretching over two pages which I write about the main film of the week and then a slightly shorter review of the kind of second film of the week and then a round up selection of shorter capsule style reviews of the rest of the week's releases

Now the Guardian newspaper is obviously a very well respected publication are you aware that the things that you write might have an influence on the number of people who go or don't go to see a movie? Do you think film reviewers and critics have that kind of power and authority?

I think they have less and less of that kind of authority to be honest. I think there are more and more film reviewers in the world and with the explosion of blogging in the internet has kind of created a new democratised army of citizen journalists, citizen reviewers on the internet. So I think the actual kind of old-fashioned power of one single reviewer has become diluted.

Having said that I think that realistically, yes, a paper like the Guardian or the Independent of the London magazine Time Out does have an important role to play in shaping what people are going to go and see for the more rarified films, movies like foreign movies, arthouse movies, subtitled movies, they are films which, yes, the Guardian does make a difference at the box office but for the big Hollywood movies I really don't think it matters what I say in terms of who actually goes to see it. I don't think it matters what I say for the huge films

Callum: So he thinks that the reviews in his paper don't have an impact on the box-office of big Hollywood movies, but they do for smaller films

(All discuss those comments – reference to internet – Gareth how internet is useful or otherwise)

Callum: I next asked Peter how many films he sees in a month.

PETER BRADSHAW

In one month I would see about 30 films perhaps a little less than that, something like that. *And can you actually enjoy the film as a cinema-goer when you're reviewing them as part of your job?*

Yea, everybody asks this but yes, I think I can. I think you have to approach it as a marathon runner and not as a sprinter, if you see what I mean, but yes, I like to think that I can enjoy a movie, and I think if it's a good movie you enjoy watching it. Sometimes it's unfortunate if you see a really good film at the end of a long day, that's why I think films that have press screenings scheduled at the end of the afternoon sometimes they get kind of a raw deal. But I think a good movie will always win out and I think a good critic will always instinctively respond to a good movie.

One will you sometimes see more than one film in a day?

Yes, oh, yes. The way in which a national press critic works is usually to work all day on Monday and Tuesday, seeing three films a day, sometimes four films and then the rest of the week is given over to writing and various administration tasks. But yes it is very usual to see three films in one day.

So when you've seen on a Monday and a Tuesday, maybe you've seen 5 or 6 films, when you come to write your reviews are you able to remember what it was you liked or didn't like about those films?

Yes, yes, you do remember. It's kind of a learned skill but yes, yes, I do remember. I do remember very easily. Usually the good things you remember kind of slammed into the back of your head from the get-go but it's also a learned technical skill, a journalistic skill I would say in cultivating a memory for the sorts of things you need to write up.

(All comment – most number of films we've seen)

Callum: So 30 films a month, 3 or 4 a day sometimes, I wanted to know if Peter still went to the movies when he wasn't working. He certainly does, what reason does he give?

PETER BRADSHAW

Do you ever go to the cinema as an individual, for your own entertainment?

Incredible as it may seem, yes, yes, and the real reason is my partner forces me to. And I don't need much forcing because usually if it's a film I like I don't at all mind seeing it a second time. If it's a good film that I like I have no problems with seeing it a second time. And she would be extremely annoyed with me if my job meant that she never got to go to the movies any more. Yea, yea we do, we go out to the cinema but perhaps not as much as we used to.

Callum: He still goes to movies in his free time because his partner forces him, but he his happy to see good movies again – his arm doesn't have to be twisted too much. Now thinking about our competition, we do have some tips on the competition page but I asked Peter for advice on what to put into a review.

PETER BRADSHAW

Try to absorb into it an indication of what the plot is, a description of what the movie is about. I think in ordinary journalism terms the reader has to, you can't assume the reader knows all that much, you have to give them a flavour of what it's about. You have to give them a generic sense of what it's about. Then once you've sort of done that then you can move on to what you think it's about and how well you think it does its job.

What do you think makes a goof review?

A good review is one which is well-written, which is honest and this is going to sound obvious or even paradoxical but it is a review which is a review. By which I mean a review which expresses an opinion so I think a good review has to offer a bold opinion, it has to upset the applecart, sometimes, not all the time, it doesn't have to be a Mr Angry routine, but, and I think it has to be entertaining and funny because I think critics have to realise that they are journalists as well as everything else they are in the business of offering an entertaining read to their customers and to their readers.

(All comment briefly – plot, and opinion but with a bit of style)

Callum: Giving opinion, interesting, you can't sit on the fence – I saw World Trade Center, thought it was an OK film but in his review in the Guardian he totally tore it apart – he hated it. It was a very entertaining review to read but I disagree with some of it – I told Peter this

PETER BRADSHAW

It's one of the great conversations that everybody has about criticism is the idea of subjective versus objective, you know "I enjoyed it but I don't agree with you" sort of thing. All critics would accede to the proposition that you know it's just my subjective opinion, there's no right or wrong, that's true but all critics also have a kind of crazy voice at the back of their heads saying "That's rubbish! There is right, there is right and wrong and I'm right." A sort of fanatical kind of "Yes, sure, sure we've all got our opinions but my one is the best one, my one is right and you're wrong." And I think that's the kind of opinionated lunacy that kind of triggers the more readable of the critics, the people who really believe in what they are writing.

Callum: So the strong opinions of critics are often what make them readable and entertaining even if you disagree!

I asked Peter for any other advice for reviewers. What does he say is the most important thing and how do you achieve that?

PETER BRADSHAW

What counts is good writing, what counts is refining your judgement and learning how to be a good writer. Reading other people who are good writers, rereading them, understanding what it is that makes them a good writer. The passion, the wit, the flair, the joie de vivre in their writing. That's what's important and cultivating your own voice as a writer.

Callum: The most important thing, good writing and you can get that by reading other writers, reading them again and thinking about what makes them good. He also

says at the end to 'cultivate your own voice', Gareth what does he mean by that, cultivating your own voice?

Gareth: (Replies – finding your own style, your own individual way of expressing yourself)

Callum: Well that was just about the end of my conversation with Guardian Film Critic Peter Bradshaw. Before letting him go though I had a few more questions. What's his favourite film and what film would he recommend for this week?

PETER BRADSHAW

I guess listening to you and the job you do you are a film lover, you like the art of the cinema and the experience of going to the movies.

That is certainly true.

Do you think you have the best job in the world? You get paid to go and see movies.

I totally think I do, I couldn't believe it when the Guardian rang me up and asked me to do it, I just thought this is a wind-up

Do you have a favourite film of all time?

You know my mind always goes totally blank when people ask me that. I would say probably a kind of very obvious film like Singing in the Rain, I love. And Tarkovsky's Andrei Rublyov, still has some wonderful scenes in it. For sheer personal love I think it is Robert Hamer's Kind Hearts and Coronets, the classic English comedy.

That's a lovely film, and film of the week for this week?

In my humble opinion, as they say, that is The Departed, the new movie by Martin Scorsese, which I think is a cracking return to form for him.

Super, Peter thank you very much for giving us your time this morning.

Not at all, thank you.

Callum: An exclusive there, the recommendation of the Guardian film critic before it's published in the paper!

Callum: This is Talk about English live from London. I'm Callum Robertson.

Jackie: I'm Jackie Dalton

Callum: And also with us is guest Gareth Rees.

Jackie: Our current Talk about English topic is films and film lovers in London are in for a treat at the end of October and beginning of November.

Callum: Yes, it's nearly time for the The Times BFI 50th London Film Festival.

Jackie: In the two weeks of the festival there will be showings of 181 Features and 131 short films alongside live events, masterclasses and screen talks.

Callum: There will be 4 World Premieres, 32 European and 123 UK premieres. The film that opens the festival on 18th October is 'The Last King of Scotland' which stars American actor Forest Whittaker as Idi Amin, the former leader of Uganda.

Jackie: The film is based on events during the time of Amin's period in power as seen through the eyes of his fictional personal doctor, Scotsman Nicolas Garrigan.

Here's a taster from The Last King of Scotland.

LAST KING TRAILOR

(PLEASE NOTE THAT FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS THE FILM TRAILERS ARE NOT AVAILABLE IN THE DOWNLOAD VERSION OF THE PROGRAMME)

Callum: That was part of a trailer for the Film the Last King of Scotland which will be opening the London Film Festival. Unfortunately you wouldn't have heard it

if you are listening to the download version of this programme. For rights reasons I'm afraid we can't make these film clips part of the download.

Jackie: The Times 50th BFI London Film Festival is a truly international festival. It's not really a festival to market big Hollywood movies.

Callum: Sandra Hebron is the artistic director of the festival. In an interview for the World Service she talked about the international nature of the festival, which countries does she mention?

SANDRA HEBRON

One of the best things the festival can do is to say that there is originality and creativity to be found literally around the globe. I think one of the things that I would say about this year is that we are still seeing really amazing work being produced from Latin America. I think Argentina continues to be really strong, we have the new film by Pablo Trapero, we have Adrian Caetano's new film, something like 7 or 8 really strong new films from Argentina. Mexico too is emerging as very much one of the leading Latin American cinemas. I think that east Asia continues to be very strong. We're very happy obviously to have Still Life, Jia Zhangke's Venice winning film. But there are films from Japan, Korea. Actually two or three films from the Philippines this year too which is a really a sort of new thing that we're seeing. So a very kind of, very diverse spread of work from really a huge range of countries.

Jackie: She mentioned Argentina, Mexico, Japan, Korea and the Philippines.

Callum: One of the films she mentioned was the latest film by Argentinean director Pablo Trapero, Born and Bred, a film about a happy family whose lives are apparently shattered when they are involved in a car crash.

BORN AND BRED TRAILOR

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Jackie: That was the teaser trailer from Pablo Traperó's film Born and Bred.

Callum: Unlike other film festivals such as Cannes and Venice the London Film Festival is not really a competition. There are no big prizes for best film and so on. We asked Sandra Hebron artistic director of the festival whether that was an advantage or disadvantage for the festival.

SANDRA HEBRON

I don't think it's a problem at all. I think quite the opposite. I think not being competitive means that we can pull together a much stronger programme than we would be able to were we competitive. Because what competitive festivals have to do is they have to be driven by finding World Premieres, whereas we have to be driven by finding the best films that we can irrespective of whether or not they've screened elsewhere. That's a huge advantage and you know means we can have a very high quality programme.

Jackie: Sandra sees the lack of competition to be an advantage for London. They don't have to look for new films, just good films.

Callum: The Times BFI 50th London Film Festival runs from the 18th October to the 2nd November. Here's another trailer from one of the films being shown in the festival. It's the US v John Lennon, a documentary about John Lennon's life in the United States when he became an anti-war activist and how the US government reacted to that.

US v JOHN LENNON TRAILOR

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Callum: Gareth, do you like the London Film Festival – will you be going along to catch some movies or masterclasses?

GARETH REPLIES

COMMENTS

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