



Image: Hallam Foe.

Film 4

25 years of

Interview with
Peter Carlton, Senior
Commissioning Executive



Image: This is England.

Film4 is undeniably a pioneer in British filmmaking, with projects such as *Trainspotting* (1995), *Touching the Void* (2003), *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) and *Last King of Scotland* (2006) and under its belt. As a broadcaster, they are always looking for new ways to showcase British talent. This year, Film4 is supporting the influential role that British music is playing in cinema, by using music in a big way in their new films: *This is England*, *Hallam Foe*, *Brothers of the Head* and *Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten*.

Peter Carlton, Senior Commissioning Executive, is on the forefront of the developments at Film4. He says, "Film4 has almost come full circle, in that it started out as Channel 4 being set up to be the different voice in broadcasting." Not only was it different, but also urgent, with an individual vision that the films began to feel that they could be somewhere else other than just on TV.



Image: This is England.



Image: Joe Stummer: the Future is Unwritten.

In its 25-year history, Film4 has experienced massive growth, making films that were too big for TV. "In a funny way it almost became a victim of its own success; it seemed logical to set it up as something bigger, to give it more money, and to allow it to distribute and sell its own films. In many ways that was a very successful operation: Film4, the separate company, a sort of 'mini-Miramax Studio,' was actually doing very well, it produced some films that didn't work, but it also produced *East is East*, *Sexy Beast*, and films that fit in with the lineage of films that were a sign-of-the-times." However, four years ago Film4 made some strategic changes, returning back to its roots, with films that pushed the boundaries. "We don't necessarily have to get the biggest audience, but we want to be the most talked about, by producing films that resonate with contemporary reality in a forward-looking, rather than a backward-looking way."

Film4 is also playing a pivotal role in the success of the British music industry. The link is obvious, but to experience films that support musicians such as Gravenhurst and Clayhill makes Film4 a pioneer of contemporary culture. British music has taken a leap forward with the surge of Myspace: "We wanted the low-budget end of our work to unfold like the music industry. We thought we should be making films in the same way those records were made. They're for a core audience, because the people making them are from that core audience, and there's a relationship. There are parallels between the industries, and of course with broadband and downloads, we're almost getting to the point where you can self-distribute quite realistically. There's a similarity of attitude that will take you a long way, and when we decided to set up and support a low-budget digital studio, essentially making low-budget filmmaking

less piecemeal, that we got together the Film Council and WarpX (offshoot of Warp Records). There's a complete similarity of mindset, and they "get it" because that's exactly how they started.

One of the places where British culture is most popular and edgy is music. "It's no coincidence in working with Warp that music plays a major part in our films, so when we did *Dead Man's Shoes*, the soundtrack was massively important, and was being thought of while the film was shot. The same thing with *This Is England*; set in 1983, it was going to be Trojan, it was going to be those anthems, and it was going to be exploring their emotional pull."

Hallam Foe, out this month directed by David Mackenzie, is a dark and twisted romantic comedy shot on the rooftops of Edinburgh. "Like Shane Meadows, David Mackenzie absolutely felt it had to have the authentic British soundtrack. David lives in Glasgow and he knows Franz Ferdinand,

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after speaking with Domino and discovering a shared aesthetic, the entire soundtrack came to feature Domino's artists."

More people are turning to filmmaking as an outlet for creative expression. In today's technological climate, it's feasible to have an editing suite at home, so what are the types of films that Peter wants to make? "If it feels like you've seen it before, it's not for Film4. I think cinema can be about pure spectacle, which is great, but we don't have the bucks for that. We're the cinema of the head and the heart, so in a way, I think we're almost making romantic movies for the smart generation. We all feel quite bewildered in the world in different ways. I'm always looking for films that are exploring those ageless emotions, but that are modern in that they are honest about the way the world is. The films that don't interest me are the by-and-large, coming-of-age on a council estate or break-ups, and middle-age marriages in Hampstead, because in themselves I think they're fairly well worn social documents."

With 3 BAFTA wins and a Best Actor Oscar for *The Last King of Scotland*, Film4 is at the foreground of melding a new type of film, not the Hollywood spectacle, but rather films that make you feel something and cause a reaction. It's this type of ingenuity and urgency that makes the difference.

Cherie Federico