



PREMIERE SCENE

Alex
Winter

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ALEX WINTER

FEATURE INTERVIEW

his knowledge so candidly, I learned such a lot in such a lot from our conversation and I'm sure you will too.

Thank you very much for your time because I know you are busy in post-production.

Of course. Yeah we're finishing up a doc right now, we have been working on for the last year, so it's getting there.

Fantastic! And of course we're looking forward to welcoming you to the UK, you're gonna be on home soil in April because you're coming to the Prince Charles Cinema?

Finally, yeah I've been clawing my way back to the UK since before COVID started, so I'm very happy that I can finally get back.

And connect with the fans! I was gonna say there's a series of films that you've made and been involved with, starting off with *Bill & Ted*. They're such adorable characters aren't they? There's an idealism and

sincerity that we've seen through the whole series of films. But watching both you and Keanu (Reeves), because you've worked together for such a long time there must be such a trust between you, which must be such a joy, because you're unencumbered to just have fun?

Yeah that's true, we weren't exactly sure how that was going to manifest itself on this third movie because we spend a lot of time together as friends, but we're obviously not the characters. So we did find ourselves in the first week pleasantly surprised by how easy it was (laughs), not the performance, the performance wasn't easy, but just the experience of being back in a playground together, that part was easy.

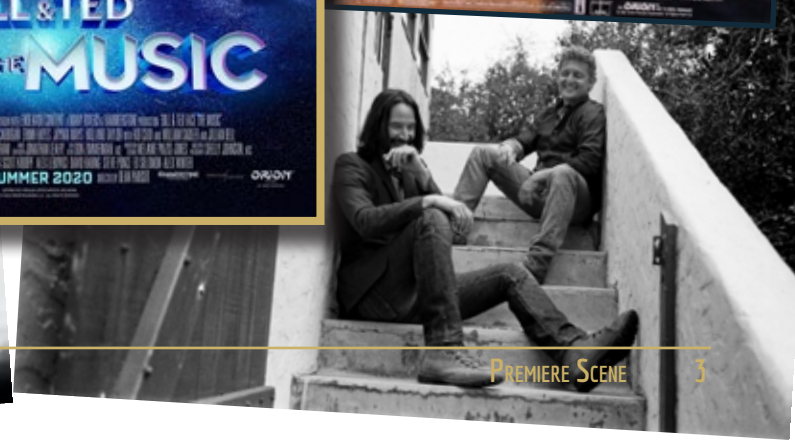
***Freaked* is another film that's going to be screening. What was interesting about watching this film is how clever it is to use comedy as a vehicle to raise awareness for important issues? There's a line of dialogue in the film along the lines of, 'when man**

FACING DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

April, 2022 sees the Prince Charles Cinema welcome VIP guest Alex Winter. Known for his work in many iconic movies including the Bill & Ted trilogy and The Lost Boys, he is also a prolific documentary filmmaker. London born, Winter will appear for a number of film introductions and live Q&As. Films screening including Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure, Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey, Bill & Ted Face the Music, Freaked, Fever, The Lost Boys, Death Wish 3 and Zappa.

As the producer of the documentary *CLEANIN' UP THE TOWN: Remembering*

Ghostbusters I have followed Winter's filmmaking career with interest and admiration. He has been on my wish list of interviewees for some years and so I plucked up the courage to invite him to talk with me about his career and application to his craft. One of the many things I have learned is that patience is a virtue and all good things that come to those that wait. So ahead of these public appearances the universe answered my prayers as we sat down over Zoom for a one to one interview, and it was worth the wait. Without doubt a seasoned pro, smart and articulate, what an honour it was for someone of Winter's calibre to talk and share





interferes with the natural order,' which I thought was very clever, I wondered if you cast your mind back to when you were making it?

Yeah, our primary objective with that film was to make something very irreverent. Our influences were as much Warner Bros. cartoons and Mad Magazine and the alternative comics and art scene of the '60s and '70s, as it was anything else. But we also used it as an opportunity to poke at certain power structures and the status quo. And it was an early '90s movie, we had come out of the '80s and the '80s were a very hyper-corporatized period in art in the US, the UK and a lot of places, it was the age of MTV, and so the film was a bit of a reaction to that too.

And you worked with the great Steve Johnson with the make-up effects there as well?

We worked with everybody, we worked with Steve who was brilliant and Tony Gardner and Bill Corso and Screaming Mad George. I mean it was a massive, massive project in terms of physical effects and we had three distinct; usually a movie only has one, we that three

distinct physical effects companies working at once on that, there was like an army base camp. So we were very lucky and we learned a lot because these guys were masters.

They really are, I had the joy of meeting Steve; we made a documentary *CLEANIN' UP THE TOWN: Remembering Ghostbusters* about the making of *Ghostbusters* which Steve worked on, he's quite unique (laughs).

(Laughs) yeah he's a character and a half, yeah.

***Fever* is another film that is going to be screening at the Prince Charles, which you wrote and directed, very much a thriller and mystery, and I wondered if part of the subtext for you was an exploration in to mental health?**

I think it was a period of my 20s where a lot of people around me were having a really hard time. And I think it was an exploration of committing to living a certain kind of life in a hyper-capitalist society at that time and the consequences of that on a lot of people. I think if you were in your 20s today, if I was in my 20s today, I could probably make a very similar film today, given what's going on in the world today, and how difficult it is to live a life of self-actualisation and a culture that is so



aggressively difficult. And this was my look at that, at that time. I mean it gives way to mental health issues but wasn't specifically about mental health issues as much as about those challenges. Funnily enough I look at *Zappa* as a very similar movie about a very similar issue in a way, or similar mind set. What interested me about Zappa was how committed he was to making art and living a certain type of life, be it a completely different generation because he came up in the '60s and '70s. And just the incredible toll that took on him and the people around him personally, that was probably my primary motive for making that documentary.

I was also going to ask you about *Zappa* because that is also screening, and I believe it's just been released on Blu-ray in the

UK. What I took from *Zappa* is it's such an intimate documentary, respectful and a tribute to him. And it makes me think we are in such a privileged position as documentary filmmakers, was it paramount to you to be respectful to the Zappa legacy?

Yeah, I think it was, not to be disrespectful, it probably wasn't paramount, but it was a priority. When I pitched the story to Gale I actually said to her, I mean with huge respect, because I had enormous respect for Gale Zappa, she was an incredible human being, who is no longer here. But I said to her that I really needed to be unshackled from them in a way, and allowed to just tell a story that was honest and blunt and wasn't a family business dynasty narrative. And without that freedom it really wouldn't be worth

"IT REALLY JUST BEGINS WITH A REALLY GOOD STORY AND ONE YOU'RE WILLING TO FIGHT TO TELL, BECAUSE IT WILL BE A FIGHT."

doing, because it would end up being like a two hour commercial for the Zappa record business. And she was very cool about that and so the editor Mike Nichols and I just dug into telling the best story we could. But I wasn't cavalier about it, I definitely held them in mind and also held Zappa in mind. I sort of felt his spiritual presence over my shoulder and while we were saying somethings about him that were critical, it wasn't a white wash. I didn't want to drag him through the mud and didn't want to drag the family through the mud.

Zappa was a prolific archivist, which gave you the luxury of telling his story through his words which makes the film feel incredibly intimate?

Yeah and there were many surprises making the movie, I'd say that one of the biggest, pleasant surprises when we got into the archive was how much media there was of Zappa talking, either on camera or on audio. And that was unexpected, almost all the stuff had never been heard before. But to your point it was very intimate and why that was great for me was because the film I wanted to make was a personal, intimate examination of this guy who to most people was so opaque, and wore a mask and was very much a showman who always had a kind of persona. And most of the documentaries that have been made about Zappa in the past, actually all of them really I would say, never got behind the mask, it was always this very aloof persona. Very

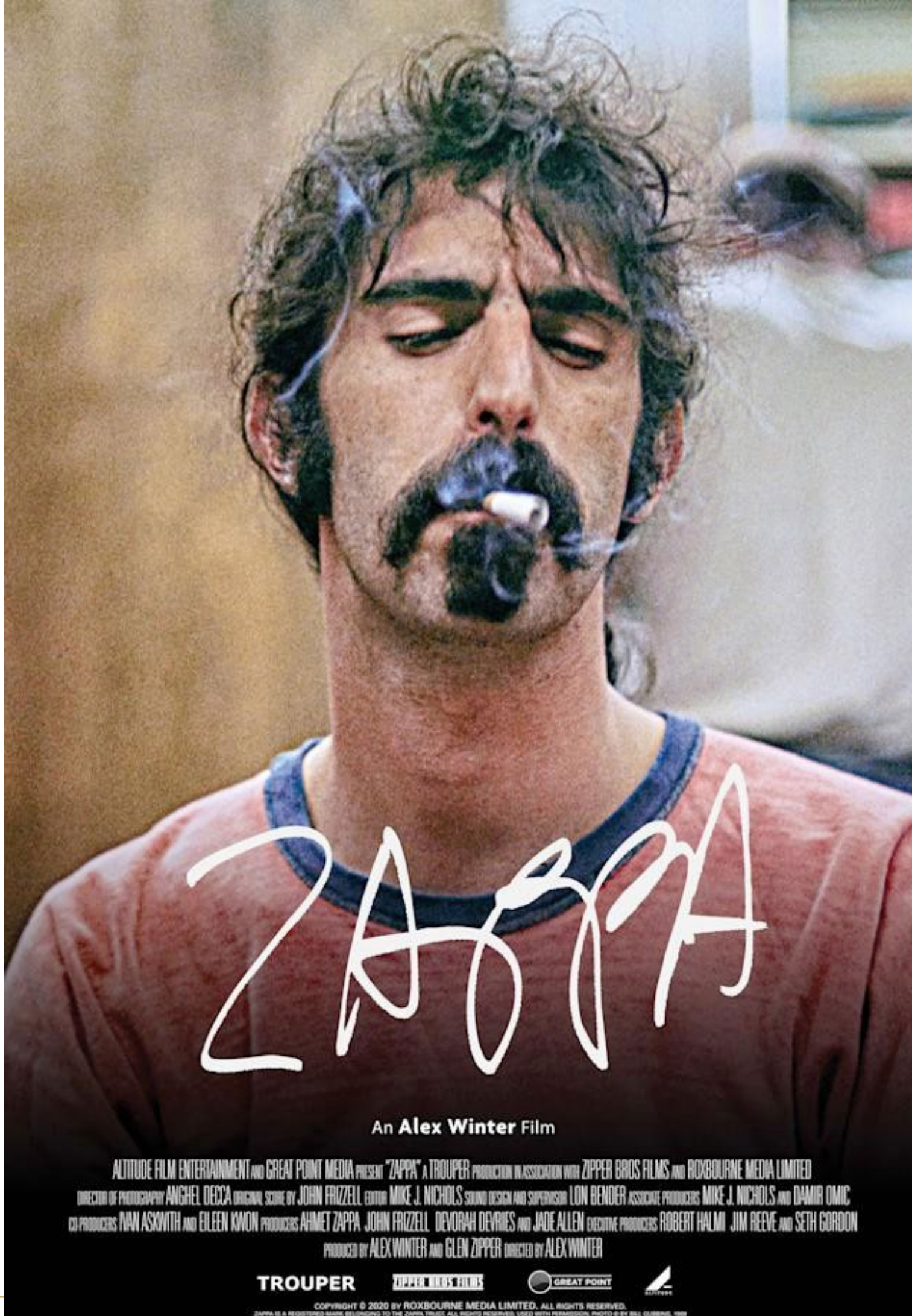
entertaining, very articulate, but very aloof and distanced. And I really wanted to penetrate that, and figure out who he actually was without the mask on, and all that media got us there.

As artistic people it's not always easy and he's unapologetic about who he is, you have to accept him for who he is or don't have him at all, and I found that rather refreshing.

Me too, and I think that is one of the things about Zappa that drew me to him as a person, regardless of his art to be honest with you but, I also knew being an artist myself and coming from a family of artists, I also knew, which is not revelatory that is a bit of a mask to, right? Like there's a self-protective mechanism moving through the world as a creative person, where you're just like, 'I don't care, and whatever.' That thick exterior can often mask a very thin skin. And I was interested at getting at that, I was interested at getting at his insecurities and his depression and some of the challenges that he was facing personally. And thankfully we were able to, thankfully Zappa was an honest enough human being that there was media there that spoke to his insecurities.

And for you as an actor you study the human condition, so how important is it for you to infuse the human interest stories into your documentary filmmaking?

Yeah I think that the reason I started making docs, because I had a straight narrative background and I studied film and writing primarily, was my interest in human beings. And documentaries are, not all of them are, but most of them are about people and about the greys of people that's why they are so compelling, I think. And that's what makes them different from the narrative form, and whatever form narrative takes it is a type of construct, and part of its allure is it's somewhat distanced from the actual muck and truth of human life that is not quantifiable. And that's why I like docs, I don't make legacy docs, I wouldn't be as drawn to a doc like that about Zappa if all I wanted to say about Zappa was how great he was. To me I was drawn to his imperfections and to the shades of grey, to the paradox, to the things that didn't make sense. Things that made me angry, you know people would say, 'Some of Zappa's songs make me angry.' And I would say, 'Yes, me too.' Like, I'm not a blanket evangelical fan, I like some of his music, I don't like some of his music, I love some of his lyrics, I very much don't like some of his other. It's like, he's a human being; he's a 360 degree thing. And that's very much why I make documentaries. I'm making a technology doc again right now and I've made several of those, and to me those docs are always about people. They're not about code and they're



not about abstract ideas, they're about these very human people at the centre of those stories.

I come from a technology background, I'm a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE).

Oh great, you'll like our new doc then I think (laughs).

Oh yeah (laughs)! And I know how my knowledge of technology has helped me within every aspect of filmmaking career. And I wondered how technology has helped you in all aspects of filmmaking because it has made filmmaking so much more accessible hasn't it?

Yeah I have been fascinated about that from the beginning. I got into technology in the '80s and I started working with it pretty significantly by the early '90s with visual effects and things like that, and the early days of CGI. And I was very big in the internet communities that were coming up online, pre-web BBS and IRC and all that stuff and all that chat, news net groups that were evolving at that time. And so as a filmmaker I was very much caught up in the shift from analogue to digital. You know I'd gone to film school, we'd cut on Moviolas, with actual film going through sprockets. We shot on film, I was a photo minor so I was developing film and chemicals, it was all very hands on, and almost immediately coming out of film everything was moving into the digital space, first with editorial, and after that with the actual film capturing process itself, that all went to video and then to chip very quickly. So my first documentary was about Napster and I got very close to the two guys who created Napster while they were working on Napster, towards the tail end of the company. And to me that was really a story about two guys who were at the forefront of a revolution. Found themselves unwittingly as the front end of a revolution and were executed summarily as a result of being the first people through the door, and that's essentially what that film's about. So these are issues that are very important to me that I have tracked throughout my career. And the documentary I'm making now is the tail end of that story which is about YouTube and Google. It's all about what happens when you get all the way to what we saw coming with Napster, which was that platforms that should be the front media and frankly community front end for the entire planet, and what does that mean; especially when they're owned and controlled by titanic, monopolised corporations.

So that's the story we're telling right now (laughs).

(Laughs) That's not an easy read?

No and it's not light either (laughs).

It's often easier to make documentaries but harder to finance, I know for Zappa you did a Kickstarter as we did. Can you give any other documentary filmmakers advice about how we can be more resourceful in financing our films?

Well there are essentially two ways to go, well there's three ways to go. You either pick up the camera and start shooting on your own and make the thing and go get finishing funds and distribution, which is a very, very good way to do it. It's just not a job, right? It's not gonna pay you anything, unless you're on the other end, you make a good enough deal that you can pocket some of that money or you can build a fee in to what you're selling, but that is often not the case. Or you can do a crowdfunding campaign which is very hard and not often successful. It kind of ran its course in a way that process, I'm not sure. There's certain really fantastic organisations like Seed&Spark that are more directly geared towards artists and are very equitable. And then there's the route of going and getting the money before

you start, which is what I do. I mean I have a production company, we all get paid, there's an underlying profit that needs to occur to both keep the company going and my staff going and me going. So I don't pick up a camera and go shoot, I will come up with an idea and go out into the world with buyers and independent financiers and sell it and then we don't start until we have all the money. And that has worked very well for us because we live in the golden age of docs and there's a lot of buyers out there nowadays. But there are many ways to skin the cat and any number of them work, it really just begins with a really good story and one you're willing to fight to tell, because it will be a fight. It doesn't matter if you have Netflix or HBO as your buyer, it's still gonna be a fight.

We were very idealistic, we were self-financing for the first eight years then we did a Kickstarter which has been a blessing and a curse, ours was successful, but yours was incredibly successful! You're often dealing with people who don't understand the filmmaking process and how long films can make, so you spend a lot of your time doing customer service.

Yep, you sure do and that's for life to (laughs) that doesn't go away at any point to, yeah.

I'm not sure it would be something I would do again.

I honestly usually tell doc filmmakers not to do it. Making a movie is very hard, running essentially a giant online store is also very hard, so you're doing both. And most doc filmmakers, if they are making docs they probably have a day job, right? So they have a job and a life which is probably pretty consuming, then they are making a film which is extremely consuming, and then they are running an online store and managing a finance operation, which is equally consuming and there's just not enough room in the pie for all of that. So it's a very, very, very challenging thing to do and I usually tell people not to do it.

I've noticed as well when I've looked at your

back catalogue of work, you've produced documentaries concurrently, so you have several different projects running at the same time, is that done by design so you're always busy?

Yeah that's why I do it, I mean things take time and I like to be developing other projects, that's why I have a company developing other projects while I am working on a film because by the time that film is done I usually know what I want to do next and I can get rid of the chaff and keep the wheat. But we don't spread ourselves too thin, I mean we are a small company and focusing on one piece of a project at a time when I'm shooting, but we are developing multiple projects as we go and keeping an eye on other things and other things will come up. 📺

ALEX WINTER'S FORTHCOMING DOCUMENTARY,
THE YOUTUBE EFFECT
DETAILS OF DISTRIBUTION ARE YET TO BE ANNOUNCED



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With special thanks to Tiffany Malloy



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EDITOR & FOUNDER

CLAIRE BUENO IS A FILM JOURNALIST, PRESENTER AND INTERVIEWER, HAVING MODERATED BAFTA AND APPLE STORE Q&As AND HOSTED COMIC CON PANEL TALKS.

SHE HAS INTERVIEWED HIGH CALIBRE ARTISTES SUCH AS TOM CRUISE, GEORGE CLOONEY, SIR ANTHONY HOPKINS, SIGOURNEY WEAVER, NICOLE KIDMAN, EMILY BLUNT, SAMUEL L JACKSON, JAMES CAMERON AND ANDY SERKIS.

CLAIRE IS THE PRODUCER OF THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED FEATURE DOCUMENTARY CLEANIN' UP THE TOWN: REMEMBERING GHOSTBUSTERS.

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