

# Big Screen Celebration

Curating this year's *From Page to Screen* film Festival, Bridport's **Chris Chibnall** talks to **Fergus Byrne** about this year's event.

There is a particular kind of magic that happens when the lights go down in a packed theatre. It's a feeling Chris Chibnall knows well. The man behind *Broadchurch*, *Doctor Who*, and Netflix's latest Agatha Christie romp, *Seven Dials*, might spend his days crafting worlds for the small screen, running shows and writing novels, but his heart beats for the big screen. As curator of the 2026 *From Page to Screen* film festival in Bridport, he's not just planning a schedule; he's throwing a party.

'I want the festival to feel like a party,' he tells me, his enthusiasm bright as the excitement in his eyes. 'I want it to feel like there is a party of film taking place over four or five days, with a really wide variety of films. We've got comedies, we've got sci-fi, we've got horror. People can bring in their drinks. It's going to be really informal, and we're going to have a lot of fun.'

For Chris, this isn't just about movies; it's about that childhood wonder we all remember. 'Films are the point at which you're first exposed to screen storytelling on a large scale,' he says. 'As a kid, there is a magic about film storytelling.' He recalls that 'mind blown' sensation of a first cinema trip—a feeling he insists shouldn't fade with age. He calls it the 'Proustian rush of sitting in the dark for a couple of hours having a communal, collective experience that is entirely surprising, and marks you for life.'

He also hopes the festival will be an inclusive and celebratory event, where people can lose themselves in the magic of cinema. 'Every film is going to have some sort of introduction, even if we're just talking about the context of the film.'

Chris plans to include a selection of films that have left an unforgettable mark on cinema history. Some of these films he describes as 'big screen



bangers’: movies that are not only entertaining but also transformative. ‘There are a number of really extraordinary films that are seminal films that I would want to see on a big screen, that I felt people had forgotten are based on books and texts,’ he explains. ‘Some of the biggest films you’ve ever thought of are, surprisingly, based on texts you probably don’t even know about.’

One of the highlights of the festival is Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Chris describes it as ‘one of the greatest, biggest swings in cinema history. It’s vast in scale, but it’s hugely entertaining and slightly mysterious. It needs the audience to complete it. Everybody’s experience of it will be different. You come out of the cinema slightly changed, a slightly different person to how you went in.’ He says it is a film that is ‘all about image and sound and the collision and the dissonance between the two’, taking you on an ‘incredible journey’.

Another standout is Buster Keaton’s *The General*, which Chris describes as ‘essentially the first Hollywood comedy blockbuster.’ He explains, ‘It is the source material. If you watch *The General* and then you watch Spielberg films or action-adventure films of the 80s, 90s, and 2000s, it all links back to *The General* and Buster Keaton. To see it on the big screen is very rare, and we’re also going to have live accompaniment to make it a real event.’

Comedy lovers will be thrilled to see *Airplane!* on the lineup, a film Chris describes as ‘the greatest comedy of all time.’ He explains, ‘It has 271 jokes across an 80-something minute running time, so it’s about three jokes a minute. You don’t often get the chance to see it in an audience, and I think comedies with an audience are transformative. It’s also one of the all-time great comedies.’

Another highlight screening is the Julie Christie version of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, a film with special significance for the Bridport community. Based on Thomas Hardy’s classic novel and shot in Dorset, the film celebrates the region’s rich literary and cinematic heritage. ‘The idea of screening *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which is obviously filmed around here, on a big screen, is exciting. It’s the 60th anniversary of it being filmed. It is a lavish, big-screen extravaganza,’ Chris says. ‘The magic of seeing that in Bridport gives me goosebumps.’

Chris hopes to engage the local community by inviting those who participated in making the film or have connections to it to share their stories and memories. ‘If anybody knows anyone who was

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involved in the making of the film, or has relatives or has pictures, we’re going to put out a call,’ he says. ‘It was made by people around here and across the Southwest.’

Beyond the popcorn, Chris also wants to pull back the curtain on the craft itself. He speaks passionately about the hundreds of people—the editors, the sound designers, the art directors—who make the magic happen. ‘Every time the shot changes, everything within the frame has been art-directed by someone,’ he says. ‘The colour of the fabric, the sound design, the editing—everything is transformable by the choices that are made.’

A key part of this year’s festival will be its focus on that craft of filmmaking. Through filmmaker sessions, attendees will have the chance to meet industry professionals and learn about different aspects of film production. ‘These things are not just formed objects that sit there in the culture,’ Chris explains. ‘They are made by human beings. Come and talk to human beings, and if you’re interested in film as an art form, or if you want to work in the industry—especially young people—you can come and meet people, talk to them, and seek their advice.’

At its core, *From Page to Screen* celebrates storytelling and the transformative power of cinema, and Chris Chibnall believes that films can change how we see the world and ourselves. ‘Stories are vehicles by which you can experience other worlds,’ he says. ‘Experience other people’s lives, experience other people’s points of view, and build empathy. And definitely, the world has a bit of an empathy shortage at the moment.’

Chris says that films allow us to share that empathy, ‘whether that’s through laughter or spaceships or Thomas Hardy. You want people to have an incredible journey, and the craft of that is extraordinary.’

*From Page to Screen runs from Wednesday 22 - Sun 26 April. The full programme will be announced on Thursday 12 March. Booking opens on Thursday 12 March for Bridport Arts Centre supporters and on Saturday 14 March for general public. Visit: <https://www.bridport-arts.com/jfpts/> or in person at Bridport Tourist Information Centre, telephone 01308 424204.*

