

Welcome by Dame Pippa Harris DBE, Deputy Chair of BAFTA and keynote speech by BAFTA-winning director Susanna White.

Pippa Harris: It's great to see so many people here, people from the press, our industry colleagues and also a lot of people on our talent initiatives, our Breakthrough Brits and BAFTA scholars and BAFTA crew. We're here tonight to celebrate the most amazing group of women, and as you saw from that showreel, there is such an abundance of talent in this room. I'm slightly overwhelmed by it all. When I started in the industry back in the 1990s, I know extraordinary to believe, a lot of works gone on, I was often the only woman on set. If there were other women they tended to be in the production office, or possibly in the make-up or costume department. I never saw a woman cinematographer or sound recordist and I only worked with one woman director and that was the wonderful and much missed Antonia Bird. For too long it's been seen as a risky decision to hire a woman director. I've lost count of the number of times that people have said to me that a particular woman is difficult or tricky when the exact same behaviour in a male director is viewed as forthright or rigorous. Talent and ability should be judged on vision and work delivered and not on gender. Looking at the statistics for the past year, a mind numbing 92% of television drama was directed by men. That must and will change, and we in this room and as an industry as a whole can make this happen. We can shift perceptions about what a DP or a vision mixer looks like.

Our directors this year have been introduced and showcased to some of the very best talent in the film and TV business. They have been given advice and guidance and we are going to continue our support, so that hopefully their careers can progress at the rate dictated by their talent and not their gender. One of the most recent speakers that the directors had the pleasure of spending the evening with was SJ Clarkson, who has just been announced as the first female director to helm a *Star*

Trek film. It is our hope that in the future this news will not make the headlines, it will just be the norm.

This building 195 Piccadilly has been a platform for some of the very best practitioners in the industry and next year we start a major renovation project so that we can continue in our mission which is to support, nurture and showcase our industries. We have ambitious plans to double the amount of charitable work we do, targeting in particular young people and those from under-represented groups in the industry. We are busy fundraising and what nobody has actually told you yet is that Mariayah's already locked the doors and unless you hand me a cheque you're not leaving. Seriously I really hope that all of you will think about supporting this because it's a ground-breaking project.

Following the success of our first BAFTA Elevate scheme, we are now open for applications for BAFTA Elevate 2018 and this year we are looking for writers from under-represented groups. Please look at the supporting talent page on the BAFTA website and the link mentioned in your programme for more information. Do suggest this initiative to any writers you know that you think might be eligible. Now that's enough from me, let's hear from the directors themselves about what this scheme has meant to them. Thank you.

[Showreel plays]

Mariayah Kaderbhai: Can you please put your hands together for a BAFTA Award-winning director Susanna White.

[Applause]

Susanna White: Thank you. What an inspiring group of women and what a fabulous scheme. Thank you to BAFTA for asking me to give this keynote speech. It's such an important subject that I think people feel it's out there and being dealt with but it's not actually thoroughly being dealt with at all and we all need to look hard at why not.

So I was asked to speak tonight on the subject of women and film. I turned the subject around in my head, and thought shall I talk about the work of female directors I admire – Jane Campion, Kathryn Bigelow, Greta Gerwig - what marks them out, what defines them, what inspired them what inspires me about them? But in considering their work I kept returning to the much bigger question of why there aren't more of those names to conjure with - why in this time of Time's Up, when everyone says female filmmakers are having their moment, in 2017 only 14% of feature films around the world were directed by women and as Pippa said the statistics in television are even worse.

Nearly 90 years ago, at the University of Cambridge, Virginia Woolf was asked to speak on the subject of women and fiction. At first she too wondered whether she should give a discourse on the work of successful women in her field - George Eliot, Jane Austen or Charlotte Bronte. Instead she began to consider a character she gave life to - Shakespeare's sister - and asked the question why was that sister silent, why is it the canon of her brother we study and not her own. In considering it, Virginia Woolf decided that it came down to a very practical issue - that what women needed to be creative was £500 a year and a room of one's own.

My argument tonight, in tracking my own career and drawing wider conclusions from it, will be that there are similar very practical issues preventing us going to the movie theatre to watch the work of, say for the sake of argument Quentin Tarantino's sister. Just as Virginia Woolf's fictional heroine was excluded from entry to the libraries of university colleges by virtue of her sex, so I will describe how thousands of talented young women have been excluded from careers as film and television directors every year simply because they are not men. I am one of a very small group of lucky ones, in many ways my career's an exception to this rule, in other ways an example of it. So let's

start by looking at a clip of something that inspired me.

[CLIP: Moon landing 1969]

That's one of my first memories of the power of the small screen. In 1969 my family gathered round our television set in the suburbs of south London to watch the transmission of Neil Armstrong landing on the moon. That small box made me feel anything was possible - it had the ability to transport our family, as a group, to other places, other planets. The moon that I looked out of my window at at night, suddenly became a practical surface to be explored. Partly the joy was that of shared experience, partly the practical wonder of how that signal was transmitted from the moon to my television at home.

Later that year the Petts Wood Brownie pack went on an outing to BBC Television Centre to watch the children's programme *Crackerjack* being made. While my friends were eager to get up on stage to win prizes, I was glued to my seat, transfixed. A red light came on on a camera which skated across the shiny floor - on the monitor above me was a two shot of Leslie Crowther and Peter Glaze. The image changed to another one - Leslie Crowther turned his head and suddenly he was in close-up from a different camera, the red light went on on that. As the second camera went live I went live with the realisation of how these images came about - there was a very concrete aspect to the magic that could be taught and acquired. My life after that moment became a practicable journey to learn and practice those skills.

Fast forward about ten years. I'm at university reading English. Television seemed to be going through a sea change - I remember the excitement when Jeremy Isaacs came to speak to students about the newly formed Channel Four - there was a big buzz because we had the possibility of four television channels as potential employers rather than the three we had grown up with. I remember in an interview

for a Fulbright Scholarship discussing the viability of cable television in the UK - a multi-channel environment seemed like a far-off world. Student filmmaking led me from Oxford to the MFA program at UCLA. As well as the practical filmmaking skills I learnt at UCLA perhaps the greatest gift my time in California gave me was a sense of possibility - that good ideas were a precious commodity and we were in a place that hatched them - any one of us could take those ideas out into the world and have a voice.

I hit my first buffer coming back to England in the mid 1980s. An interview in room 101 at the BBC. Four men in suits on the panel interviewing applicants for the BBC production trainee scheme and a female secretary taking notes. What made me think I could be a director? I listed the number of films I had made since the age of eight and the Fulbright Scholarship to UCLA. Why on earth should that qualify me I remember being asked - why didn't I stay home and work on my local paper?

At the time I saw those questions just as a test of my powers of argument - after all lots of people wanted those coveted positions - it was notoriously hard whether you were a man or a woman - I put my failure down to my interview technique and to sheer numbers of people wanting to do it. But I was crushed to get not just a rejection from that interview but from the many jobs I applied for over the next year. I had soon acquired a file of rejection letters nearly two inches thick. The excitement I felt at UCLA was met by door after door being shut in my face. I wished I were back in California. Looking back now I see my personal rejection as symptomatic of a much larger pattern and twenty years later the situation is shockingly no better.

In the study commissioned by Directors UK published in 2016, 'Cut Out of the Picture', it was shown that in the ten year period up to 2014 50% of all film students in the UK and 49.4% of new entrants in the film industry were women and yet nearly 90% of those

who made it through to directing a feature film were men. Unlike other careers like science or engineering the shortage of female directors we currently see is clearly not caused by a lack of aspiration. The depressing finding of the report was a systemic bias against women at every key stage of their careers.

The report showed women were under-represented in all the major routes to directing - in film crews the ratio of women represented was less than 10% in the key creative roles of camera and editing, compared with an astonishing 80% in the non-pathway roles people saw as appropriate for women - hair and make-up and costume (I can't think of a single example of anyone going from those departments into directing a film). Women did relatively well as third assistant directors and second assistant directors (around thirty per cent) but moving to the key role of first assistant director (a common route to directing) the number dwindled to 15%.

When women did manage to break through into directing, a marked funnel effect set in. 27% of short films were directed by women but only 14% of full length television drama. If women successfully became directors they struggled to progress to larger budgets (16% of women on low-budget films compared to just over 3% on high-budget films). In 2018 British films are still six times more likely to be directed by a man than by a woman. The pattern has been pretty much the same in the USA. It's the experience of most of the women here tonight picked for the Elevate programme have had through their careers so far.

I now realise that was what was going on for me in the late 1980s - my personal situation was representative of a much larger whole. How did I get round that? Having discovered the thing that made me feel more alive than anything else on earth and that completely matched my skill set there was no way I was going to give up. I met up with some old friends from university who had just got sponsorship from Lloyds Bank to

run a national screenwriting competition and became involved in running that. It meant reading lots of scripts and workshopping them with industry professionals in a summer school. In my spare time I kept making short films and music videos unpaid with whatever money I could raise, I tried getting any entry level position that was advertised or unadvertised. I kept coming up with film and television ideas, which I knew were the commodity the industry constantly needed to renew. Finally that tactic won through. Four years after leaving UCLA I got a letter from Eddie Mirzoeff, the programme editor of *Forty Minutes* at the BBC who was to go on to be Chairman of BAFTA. Like many artists over the years, my career has been totally dependent on patrons and Eddie was one of those remarkable people with a nose for talent and a disregard for the system. He didn't mind whether good ideas came from men or women, he discovered and nurtured Molly Dineen and Lucy Blakstad and to my eternal gratitude he took a punt on me.

Under Eddie's patronage I made my first film for television, a documentary about the clash of cultures between the residents of Appleby in Cumbria and the gypsies who held their annual horse fair in the town. Eddie gave me an anthropologist to work with, Melissa Llewellyn Davies, and a talented young cameraman, Richard Ranken. With that film behind me I was launched as a freelance director - from there I moved to Channel Four to direct *Volvo City*, a portrait of the community of hasidic jews in Stamford Hill, followed by *Readers Wives*. For the next few years I moved between the channels making films on subjects ranging from a year in the life of the Victoria and Albert Museum to arts films working with writers like Blake Morrison and Ben Okri.

However I was still trying to pursue my original dream - to direct drama and ideally a feature film. Twice I applied to the BBC drama directors course - a brilliant six week course taught by established drama

directors. Again another interview with men in suits. This time the question that surprised me the first time it came up but not the second was "What makes you think you can control a hundred people?" I turned it around and asked them what made them think I couldn't? I wonder now if they asked that same question to the men they interviewed. Two more rejection letters. Again my personal disappointment and sense of failure I now realise was part of a systemic problem.

Women tend to do much better as directors of factual programmes than television drama, albeit with some level of gender bias - plenty of women are hired for programmes on body image, food and family, while far fewer for science and technology. Factual crews are a maximum of two or three people (even fewer now where many factual directors self-shoot) whereas drama crews are often nearer 100. For an industry that one thinks of as being progressive it is actually incredibly risk averse. When budgets and responsibility get bigger people tend to hire people who look like the successful ones who went before. Women might get in under the radar in factual programming with a patron like Eddie, but in drama a lot more boxes need to be ticked. The Directors UK report broke it down into precise statistics: while a healthy 29% of children's factual programmes in British television were directed by women only 9% got to direct children's television drama.

Undeterred I kept knocking on doors. I finally got to direct a cinema short for Film Four's *Short and Curlies*, based on a short story by Blake Morrison. My family were worried - I was eight months pregnant with twins at the time but I wasn't going to miss the opportunity to get a film into production. Finally, having given birth to two beautiful girls, I got a place on the BBC drama directors course. From there I directed two episodes of *Holby City* and once I had proved to the world that I could control 100 people in the form of the *Holby City* crews, more opportunities opened up. I was given

the chance to direct the comedy series *Teachers* and from *Teachers* I moved on to direct a new drama series about the dot com boom - *Attachments*.

For many women there is another blockage in the funnel moving from staple shows like *Holby* to high end authored programming. My route through this was the extraordinary producer Tony Garnett. Diversity has always been the nature of Tony's game - an outsider himself, from a working class family in Birmingham, very different from many of the standard privately educated producers of the day, he actively promoted people who might struggle to penetrate the world of the broadcasters through conventional routes.

With Tony's help and with that of Jane Root, the then controller of BBC2, who circumvented the drama establishment by giving me money from a factual budget, I made my first single film, a period drama about the life and loves of Philip Larkin, *Love Again*, starring Hugh Bonneville, Eileen Atkins and Tara Fitzgerald. Made for £200,000 it was transmitted on BBC2, I'm glad to say to critical acclaim in 2003.

I was still trying to make a film for the cinema but in the meantime another opportunity came my way. Nigel Stafford-Clarke was producing an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* for the BBC. *Bleak House* was a huge critical success and a big boost to the BBC in the run up to charter renewal. It put the wonderful BAFTA award on my shelf and won a host of other awards internationally. The lead director on the series, Justin Chadwick, was deservedly snapped up by Hollywood, with a range of studio projects on offer. For me life carried on pretty much as normal. Feature films remained elusive but I continued to find work in television. By now I had young twins and like all directors faced the issue of childcare. I was offered the job directing the BBC adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. The offer came on the Friday with the suggestion that I should move to Derbyshire for four months on the Monday. I am eternally grateful to

my incredibly supportive husband that somehow our family rode that wave and I did it.

It sometimes comes up as an argument that the shortage of female directors is down to the fact that women reject the unsocial hours associated with being a director in favour of staying home with their children. While the freelance industry is undoubtedly challenging for both men and women and some women may make that choice, I would argue that the proportion of women who actively elect not to direct drama is actually relatively small. Let's go back to those numbers - 50% of women graduate film school wanting to direct and only 3% of big budget feature films are directed by women. In jobs in the industry which aren't traditionally male preserves, such as hair and make-up and costume design, over 80% of heads of department are women. Those people often work much longer hours than the director - they are the first to arrive in the morning, often putting actors through complicated prosthetics and wigs, and the last to leave in the evening. The director can leave when wrap is called but hair and make-up and costume stay behind removing the make-up from all the actors for the day and preparing for the morning. If the issue were solely about an unwillingness to work long hours it is hard to explain this disproportion.

Surprisingly perhaps, I can truthfully say that I have never encountered any overt sexism in my career. When women get the opportunity to direct crews are generally hugely supportive and comment surprisingly often for 2018 on how good it is to have a woman in charge. I don't think anyone ever consciously denied me an opportunity to direct because I was a woman. The truth is much more subtle and for that reason much more insidious. In a freelance industry where everyone's success depends on ratings for their last piece of work people tend not to take risks. They either, understandably, hire someone with a proven track record in that area or, if they are looking for the bright new face of directing, tend to hire someone who

looks like people who have gone before and has done well. Whether executives or directors we are all as good as the last thing we did.

It was in 2007 after directing *Generation Kill* that personally I realised the full extent of the problem. Lots of people ask me how that job came about. What happened is that the scripts were sent to my agent, for another of her clients, Kevin McDonald. Kevin wasn't available and Natasha thought an opportunity to work with David Simon (best known for *The Wire*) might appeal to me. Again David is one of those truly remarkable people my career has been dependent on, who is blind to sex and race when it comes to hiring directors. David, having a long track record in hiring female directors had no issue with hiring me. In fact, having once been compared to Dickens, he was delighted that a director of *Bleak House* should direct his mini-series on the US invasion of Iraq. It was when other people started to comment that I realised the problem. How remarkable, producers and journalists said, that a woman had directed this material. How unremarkable, I realised were all those times that men had directed *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility* - no one chose to comment when 13 productions of *Jane Eyre* were directed by men. None of the crew on *Generation Kill* had any issue with the fact that I was a woman, nor did the ensemble cast of 35 men. The series had 11 Emmy nominations including best director. Finally, twenty three years after leaving UCLA I got my first feature film - for Universal Studios - "From the director of *Generation Kill*: *NANNY MCPHEE AND THE BIG BANG*".

I'm not knocking it in any way. It was an incredible opportunity for anyone given to me by Debra Hayward, Lindsay Doran and Working Title - a thirty million dollar studio film with huge movie stars: Emma Thompson, Maggie Smith, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Rhys Ifans, Ralph Fiennes, Ewan McGregor, Asa Butterfield. In many ways my dream had come true. I pinched myself walking through the gates of the studios - it was incredible to

working with that cast in that place. It just wasn't what one might have expected to be offered after *Generation Kill*. Or maybe it was in terms of how it fits with the statistics. When women do reach the top of the pyramid it is far more likely that their big budget film will be a children's or family film than anything else. Take Philippa Lowthorpe, one of our most distinguished, multi-award winning television directors and a similar sort of age to me. When she got her first feature film it was *Swallows and Amazons*, and no one could have done a better job of it. Just think about the implications of that for a moment. What if someone had said to George Eliot "We have enormous faith in your talent and we'd like to commission a novel from you. The only thing is it needs to be a children's book". I have no doubt George Eliot would have written a children's classic but we wouldn't have had *Middlemarch*. I know of at least one person on the Elevate programme who has had an entire career in children's drama who has a lot of powerful adult things to say and I would urge any of you in this room in a position to hire her to think very seriously about that.

In 2016 I directed my first feature thriller - John le Carre's *Our Kind of Traitor* with Ewan McGregor, Stellan Skarsgaard and Naomie Harris. The odds against someone like me directing something like that are crazier than anything else I've done - only 3% of high budget feature thrillers are made by women.

Does any of this actually matter? As long as television and film gets made why should we care about the personal wellbeing of a group of women? You might be feeling at this point that this lecture is a bit of a moan. I actually feel incredibly privileged to have had the opportunity to spend my life doing something I absolutely love in the company of some of the best writers, actors and crews in the world. But does it matter? Yes it does. Firstly because our culture is a lot less rich because of it - potentially we're missing out on a lot of talent. We will never know what Shakespeare's sister could have written, just

as we will never know what films could have been made by the sisters of Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Scorsese, or Quentin Tarantino. We know that the daughter of Francis Ford Coppola has produced some pretty remarkable work but imagine the English novel without Jane Austen, without the Brontes, without George Eliot, without Virginia Woolf. By the law of averages, world cinema has to be depriving itself of that sort of talent. We just don't know what we've missed out on on the big and small screen from the sensibilities of thousands of women who've been overlooked.

In the New York Times Gloria Steinem wrote a piece about the difference between what women want in films and what men want. She defined a "chick flick" as one with more dialogue than car chases, more relationships than special effects, and whose suspense comes from how people live than how they get killed". She went on to write "As long as men are taken seriously when they write about the female half of the world - and women are not taken seriously when writing about ourselves, much less about men and public affairs - the list of Great Authors will be more about power than talent, more about opinion than experience." She goes on to define how the problem is linked in to the fact that adjectives are mostly required of the less powerful. "Thus there are 'novelists' and 'female novelists', 'African-American doctors' but not 'European-American doctors', 'gay soldiers but not 'heterosexual soldiers'" and by extension film directors and "female film directors".

It doesn't stop there. Hiring female directors has a huge knock on effect both on the industry and in society at large. Women tend to hire more women - female directors often means work for female cinematographers, more female editors and more female assistant directors. And women are often interested in telling strong female stories that often aren't heard.

In films with a female director or writer women comprise 45% of protagonists, 48% of major characters and 42% of speaking characters. Flip that to films with a male director and writer and women account for just 20% of protagonists, 33% of major characters and 32% of all speaking characters.

The screens we watch mirror our society back at us. Employing female directors means a fairer representation of the world we live in - if women make up just over 50% of our population doesn't it make sense that a reasonable amount of screen time should involve stories about that group of people. The Geena Davies institute showed that only 3% of lawyers and judges on screen were portrayed as women, 5% of doctors and 6% of politicians. Is that the society we really want and the society we hope our children will aspire to be a part of?

The screens we watch have a direct impact on our lives. The year after the release of *The Hunger Games* saw a huge increase in the number of girls taking up archery. In a survey of the American archery association 7 out of 10 girls said they had been inspired to take up archery as a direct result of the portrayal of Katniss in the films. By extension what if popular film showed strong young women entering into meaningful roles in public life with voices that were heard?

Film projects a world of possibility. As directors we work on the script as well as casting both speaking roles and extras. As the director you make a choice of what a board member looks like, what the head of a school looks like, who plays an engineer or an architect. By having more female directors we can create a virtuous circle of inspiration for society as we'd like it to be.

This argument isn't just about men and women, it is about diversity as a whole - about creating a fairer and more healthy society where all different types of voices are heard. Monitoring the freelance culture is an essential step forward in an industry that isn't governed by normal HR practices -

that is why in 2018 opportunities are so far from equal in our industry. This goes beyond equity between men and women - it should take in diversity across the board.

To conclude, both in the UK and in the US we have missed out as a society from a lot of potential talent not being given opportunities. I wish the solution were as simple as Virginia Woolf's one, £500 and a room of one's own. Making a film requires a lot more people and resources than writing a novel and, to change the situation for directors, systemic reform is needed to move from a vicious circle to a virtuous one. We need better monitoring of the freelance workforce, more diverse voices in the community of critics, and diversity in people invited to join our bodies who vote on recognizing talent.

In the last two years, we've seen some genuinely positive steps - the awards success of *Ladybird*, the commercial success of *Wonder Woman* and Rachel Morrison the first female cinematographer in the history of cinema nominated for an Oscar. I'm thrilled to see that a great supporter of this programme, SJ Clarkson is going to direct the next *Star Trek* (a prime example of what I've been talking about as one of our most outstanding television directors who took years to get a feature film). Female showrunners like Ava DuVernay are hiring female directors to helm their shows I've just come from the Tribeca film festival where they made a decision to programme 46% of the films by female directors. Initiatives by the broadcasters, the BFI's 50% target and BAFTA's Elevate scheme are just what we need to be doing. But we absolutely must not be complacent. Elevate has done a fantastic job in promoting a remarkable group of women but as their individual stories show the odds have been thoroughly stacked against them until now. There are a lot of powerful decision makers in this room. What we need now is for you to support this incredible bunch of talented women and give them the chance to put their visions on screen. Please know just how real this

struggle is and set about being agents of change. Only then will we be on the path to a fairer society where female voices are heard at the volume of male ones and where screens around the world project the sort of world we want to live in. Thank you

[Applause]