

BFI FILM AUDIENCE NETWORK



THE  
NATIONAL  
LOTTERY®

# TOO MUCH

## MELODRAMA ON FILM

**BFI FAN AND THE BFI PRESENT A UK WIDE  
SEASON OF CINEMATIC MELODRAMA**

**OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2025**

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Delivered in partnership with the BFI, FAN is proud to unveil the new UK-wide season – *Too Much: Melodrama on Film* – where audiences are invited to follow their emotions and get swept away by the big screen experience.

This document is intended to share our vision and creative ideas for the season, helping to inspire you to bring Too Much to your cinema screen and your audiences. If you are interested in taking part in this UK wide season, please also read the **Funding Guidelines** that sit alongside this brief.

# OVERVIEW

*Too Much* celebrates the visual excess and dramatic potency of a form of cinema which champions emotional intensity over propriety and ‘good taste’. With roots in the exaggerated performance and expressive staging of the silent era, the melodramatic mode evolved to incorporate a wealth of genres and stories. United by their emotion driven plots, vivid visual language and self-conscious audience manipulation, these films are designed to make you break down in tears, cause a scene, fall in love, *feel something*.

Tracing the form from the “woman’s pictures” of classic Hollywood to the heightened plotlines of the Spanish and Mexican cinema and the restrained tragedy of Kenji Mizoguchi or Mikio Naruse, the season will encourage audiences embrace their most tempestuous passions and repressed desires, being swept away by the escapism of the big screen experience.

Defining melodrama is notoriously difficult – its trademarks (emotive music, dramatic plots and expressive performance) are the bread and butter of cinema. To be included in the season, films must meet the following criteria:

- Heightened emotions and pathos: on screen, and/or deliberately induced in the audience.
- Some combination of amplified performance, visuals, score and plot used to achieve this.
- Personal relationships at the heart of the emotional conflict portrayed.

Melodrama in film has long been associated with women – the rare storytelling mode concerned with their inner lives and everyday struggles. ‘Women’s pictures’ employed melodrama to express longing, rage and desire in characters facing motherhood, infidelity, sexual abuse and scandal. *Too Much* will celebrate the female stars of melodrama who have drawn audiences to the cinema in their millions, and films exploring women’s experiences are encouraged.

Much of the emotional maelstrom of melodrama lives under the surface of its characters’ restrained exterior, expressed through costume design, lighting and colour, and bold symbolism, not to mention the glitz and glamour of musical sequences and Technicolour. Also encouraged in the season is a celebration of the filmmaking and craft techniques used to portray emotion and social commentary.

# PROJECT AIMS

- 1.** Introduce audiences to overlooked classics of world cinema, alongside forgotten gems of Hollywood, inviting audiences to cast aside their cynicism and embrace emotion
- 2.** Tap into a contemporary perspective on the importance and foregrounding of emotions, as an entry point to cinema and visual storytelling
- 3.** Explore the social commentary at the heart of melodrama, using its accessibility to open a door into complexity and provocation
- 4.** Promote exploration of how the lives of women and marginalised communities have been portrayed, and received by audiences, throughout the history of cinema
- 5.** Connect with new, underserved, and underrepresented audiences



# MEETING THE CREATIVE BRIEF

*The Housemaid* (South Korea, 1960)

**All activity supported by FAN should fit into one of the three season strands detailed below.**

## **Love and Obsession**

Love is our biggest emotion, and the heart of cinema. It motivates us, destroys us, and makes us behave in completely irrational ways. Melodrama is full of stories about star crossed lovers, romantic betrayals and tragic separations.

You may want to focus on romance in film and television whether it comes with a happy ending or not. Think *Wuthering Heights* (USA, 1939), *Romeo + Juliet* (USA, 1996), *Moulin Rouge!* (USA, 2001), *An Affair to Remember* (USA, 1957), or *In The Mood For Love* (Hong Kong, 2000).

The other side of the coin is a darker, destructive emotion: obsession. A feeling that drives us to take leave of our senses, to forgo all other interests in favour of self-destruction or harm. These are stories of infatuation driving us to insanity, controlling behaviours and jealous rages.

Films featured in this strand should have plots driven by romantic love, infatuation and sexual obsession. Films that would not be suitable include romantic comedies, erotic thrillers, period dramas not made in the melodramatic mode and love stories which prioritise realism.

***BFI Distribution will also be doing a UK wide re-release of *The Housemaid* (South Korea, 1960) in November 2025.***

## **Key Titles**

- ***Floating Clouds* (Japan, 1955)**
- ***Brief Encounter* (UK, 1945)**
- ***Letter From an Unknown Woman* (USA, 1948)**
- ***The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (Germany, 1972)**

***Other suggested suitable titles:*** *El* (Mexico, 1953), *The Seventh Veil* (UK, 1945), *Leave Her to Heaven* (USA, 1945), *Senso* (Italy, 1954), *Rebecca* (UK, 1940), *Black Swan* (USA, 2010), *Black Narcissus* (UK, 1947), *Gone To Earth* (UK, 1950) and *Gaslight* (USA, 1944).

**For booking information, please refer to the Title Listing Document**

## Defiance and Scandal

Melodrama is famous for its moralistic storylines, simultaneously admonishing social constraints of class, gender and race whilst punishing its characters for defying them. Our pathos as audiences stems from watching characters we adore face endless challenges, injustices and bad fortune; leaving no tear duct dry or heart string un-tugged.

The opinion of others can make or break us: the nosey neighbours judging a 1950s housewife, the snooty disapproving parents of a love interest, the employers who will only accept the 'right sort'.

For women in melodrama, straying outside of strict social norms and expectations often results in a fall from grace. Cinema is full of fallen women whose fates have broken audience's hearts for decades: Kinuyo Tanaka in *The Life of Oharu* (Japan, 1952), Anna Magnani in *Mamma Roma* (Italy, 1962), Lana Turner in *Madame X* (USA, 1966).

Exhibitors may want to explore this trope, or the wider use of social and moral commentary in melodrama.

We are also celebrating the women who find ways to defy their oppressors, seek self-empowerment, or find a way to live a life of their own choosing. Think Bette Davis in *Now, Voyager* (USA, 1942), Joan Crawford in almost anything, Whoopi Goldberg in *The Color Purple* or Holly Hunter in *The Piano* (New Zealand, 1993).

Films featured in this strand should champion women who choose their own path, or those that empathise with the 'fallen women' who find themselves ostracised. Not included are films primarily categorised as action or thrillers, 'strong female characters' who have not faced hardship or do not demonstrate strong emotion.

## Key Titles

- ***Mamma Roma* (Italy, 1962)**
- ***Victims of Sin* (Mexico 1951)**
- ***The Eternal Breasts* (Japan, 1955)**
- ***Far From Heaven* (USA, 2002)**

### ***Other suggested suitable titles:***

*The Nightingale's Prayer* (Egypt, 1959), *Now Voyager* (USA, 1942), *Seventh Heaven* (USA, 1937), *Proud Valley* (UK, 1940), *How Green Is My Valley* (UK, 1941), *Within Our Gates* (USA, 1920), LGBTQ and counter-culture films like *Polyester* (USA, 1981) and *Raise The Red Lantern* (China, 1991)

**For booking information, please refer to the Title Listing Document**



## Family Matters

Almost synonymous with melodrama is the ‘family melodrama’, the subcategory which came to define cinema’s take on the melodramatic tradition. Family and domestic drama lie at the heart of melodrama – our relatives drive us insane, fill us with joy and break our hearts with ease.

The domestic melodramas of the 1950s, from the likes of Douglas Sirk, Vincente Minnelli and George Stevens, deal with class, generational conflict and gender disparity. Irony and sincerity are doled out in equal measure, the constraints of a white picket fence providing a microcosm for all society’s ills. Domestic dramas drawing from the conflict inherent to family dynamics appear throughout world cinema, from Yasujiro Ozu to Ritwik Ghatak, Luchino Visconti to Emilio Fernández; each reflecting their cultural norms in a format familiar to us all.

Films featured in this programme should focus on the family unit, both supporting and restrictive, and the interpersonal relationships between family members.

### Key Titles

- *Stella Dallas* (USA, 1937)
- *Volver* (Spain, 2006)
- *The Silences of the Palace* (Tunisia, 1994)
- *Imitation of Life* (USA, 1934)

#### **Other suggested suitable titles:**

*Written on the Wind* (USA, 1956), *Giant* (USA, 1956), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (USA, 1958), *Spring in a Small Town* (China, 1948) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (USA, 1942).

**For booking information, please refer to the Title Listing Document**

*Park Circus will also be doing a UK-wide release of **All That Heaven Allows** (USA, 1955) in October 2025.*

**More information to follow regarding the release**



# BE PART OF A UK-WIDE PRESS & MARKETING CAMPAIGN

This FAN-wide 'moment' is an opportunity for audiences across the nations and regions to immerse themselves in a connected programme backed by a UK wide Press & Marketing campaign.

With visual artistry at its heart, Melodrama is very accessible, so there's huge potential in line with **BFI's Screen Culture 2033** priorities and tackling under-representation be that on our screens, or among audiences.

In addition to the activity being supported via BFI FAN, BFI will also be delivering a range of activities in person at BFI Southbank, the IMAX and online (BFI Player, Sight & Sound) which will raise the profile of this UK wide season.

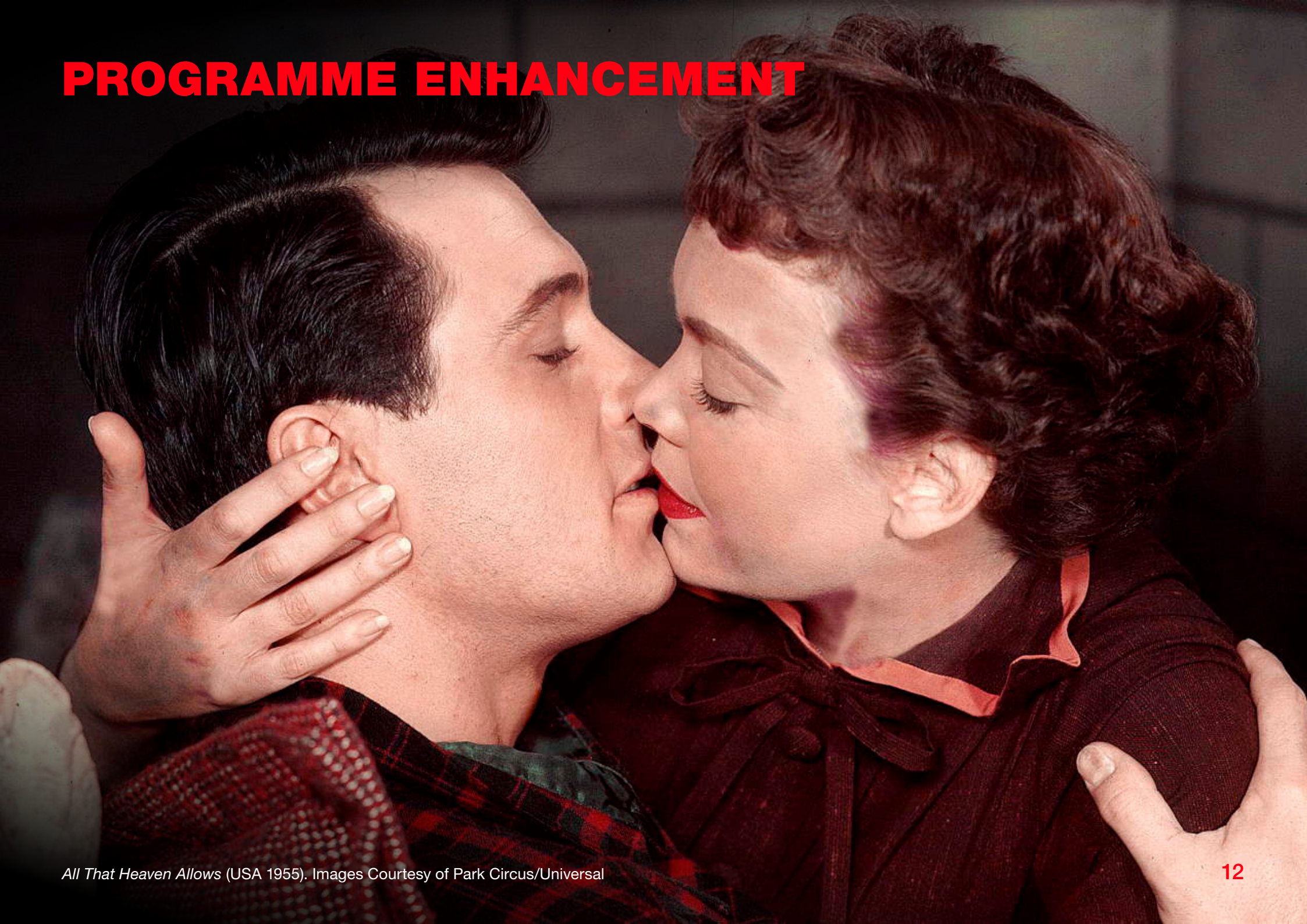
# POTENTIAL PARTNERS, GUEST SPEAKERS AND SEASON CHAMPIONS

You may well already have local guests/ influencers in mind for your activity but be sure to reach out to your local Film Hub for contacts that they might have worked with in the past and/or have relationships with. You can also contact Film Hub SW for suggestions.

If you are interested in discussions, panels or talks, we have begun **a list of academics and speakers from across the UK** who have written or have expertise on the subject of melodrama. For more information or to suggest other speakers, please get in touch with Ti Singh, Producer (Cross-FAN Programme) at Film Hub South West.



# PROGRAMME ENHANCEMENT



*All That Heaven Allows* (USA 1955). Images Courtesy of Park Circus/Universal

Audience development and additional activity should be an integral part of any proposal, making the collective big screen experience unique and memorable and/or offering routes into and a deeper engagement with this celebration of melodrama.

To help inspire you, here are some prompts and ideas for activity you could include in your programme:

- Queens & Scenes: inviting Drag Queens and LGBTQI groups to recreate famous scenes from well known melodramas
- Involving amateur dramatics, choirs and even opera due to their melodramatic nature to enhance screenings or provide marketing moments
- Audience generated content – e.g. Before and after (full make-up / teary faces), gasps
- Market films to younger audiences with contemporary equivalents such as ‘If you love Heartbreaker, you’ll love (insert suitable title)!’
- Social media moments/questions such as ‘What Makes You Cry?’ / ‘What Makes You Angry?’ / Etc
- Bingo cards for screenings of films to make them more fun – excessive drinking, death, murder, etc and to also signpost to other films
- Online quiz to make recommendations, particularly as many of the titles mentioned are discoveries
- Live music accompaniments (given the word melodrama derives from Greek ‘song’ or ‘music’ and French drame (‘drama’).



Some prompts for thematic curation or discussion events could include:

- **Queer melodrama:** why have classic ‘women’s pictures’ connected so strongly with queer audiences and filmmakers? What can we learn from the queer filmmakers who have furthered the form since the classic era, including Fassbinder, Waters, and Almodovar?
- **Race and melodrama:** how have marginalised communities used melodrama as a form of expression, and in contrast, how have white filmmakers exploited the suffering of others for emotional impact? What does this mean in 2025?
- **Class and gender roles:** how have domestic and family melodramas critiqued social conventions and limitations, and what are some more radical interpretations of seemingly safe, populist dramas?
- **Film theory and reclamation:** melodrama has gone through various cycles of derision and acclaim with critics and audiences. How have academics reinterpreted these films over the decades, how have they applied theoretical frameworks, and what is the key to their longevity and reinvention?
- **Filmmaking craft:** how have filmmakers used lighting, costume, production design and editing to amplify emotion on screen? Who are the unsung heroes of melodramatic filmmaking?

**We hope you feel inspired to join us in 2025 for *Too Much* – an immersion into the cinematic pleasures of melodrama on screen. For more information on how you can take part and what support is available, please refer to the [\*\*Funding Guidelines\*\*](#).**

*With special thanks to Ruby McGuigan,  
BFI Programme Development Manager*