



WOKING FILM CLUB

The Main Feature

Season 44 – Issue 2 – Screening 26 September 2024

Barbie

US, 2023, 114 min, cert 12

Director	Greta Gerwig
Writer	Greta Gerwig, Noah Baumbach
Cinematography	Rodrigo Prieto
Music	Mark Ronson, Andrew Wyatt
Production design	Sarah Greenwood

Cast

Margot Robbie	Stereotypical Barbie
Ryan Gosling	Beach Ken
Kate McKinnon	Weird Barbie
Simu Liu	Ken
Michael Cera	Allan
America Ferrera	Gloria
Ariana Greenblatt	Sasha
Rhea Perlman	Ruth
Will Ferrell	Mattel CEO
Rob Brydon	Sugar Daddy Ken
Helen Mirren	Narrator



Back in the 1950s, Ruth Handler had an insight from observing her daughter: girls enjoyed giving their dolls adult roles. She and her husband, Elliot, were co-founders of the toy company Mattel; in 1956, on a trip to Europe with their children Barbara and Kenneth, Handler came across Bilt Lilli, an adult-figured doll from Germany which gave physical form to her idea. She took examples back to the US and, after a redesign, Barbie (named after her daughter Barbara) was born in 1959 selling 350,000 units in the first year. By 2006, over a billion Barbies had been sold, and Mattel claims three are sold every second today.

Barbie is not to be confused with Sindy, a British version designed by Pedigree Dolls and Toys in 1963 and later the subject of a copyright infringement action by Mattel. And for boys, Hasbro introduced GI Joe in 1964 which was launched in Britain in 1966 by Palitoy as Action Man. All of which goes to show Ruth Handler's original insight was sound.

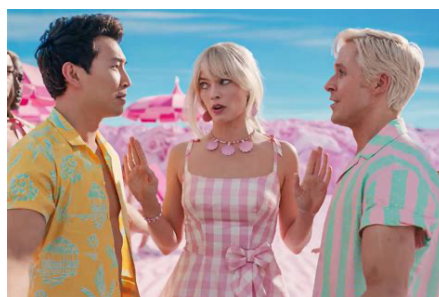
In 1961 Mattel introduced Ken (the name inspired by Handler's son) as Barbie's counterpart. Over the years, Barbie has taken on a number of careers (Mattel reckons around two hundred). Ken has had a mere forty. Barbie has three sisters (Skipper, Stacie and Chelsea) and a best friend Midge who is married to Ken's best friend Al(l)an. The Midge doll caused controversy in 2003 by appearing in a pregnant version.



So much for the backstory. Tonight's film *Barbie* is partially set in Barbienland which is populated with a confusing eleven Barbies and an equally confusing six Kens. The principal Barbie ('Stereotypical Barbie') is played by Margot Robbie and the principal Ken ('Beach Ken') by Ryan Gosling. Initially, all is well in Barbienland, but Stereotypical Barbie becomes concerned when she notices she does not feel as content as she used to, and consults Weird Barbie (Kate McKinnon) who says the only way to resolve the problem is for Stereotypical Barbie to go the Real World (actually Venice Beach, California). Beach Ken decides to join Barbie on her journey by hiding in her car and it is when he discovers the patriarchy in the Real World that trouble starts to brew. We are introduced to the senior managers in Mattel (Will Ferrell is the CEO), to the ghost of Ruth Handler (Rhea Perlman), and to a Mattel employee Gloria (America Ferrera) and her sassy daughter Sasha (Ariana Greenblatt).

The film is directed by Greta Gerwig, and co-written by Gerwig and her partner Noah Baumbach. Interviewed in Rolling Stone magazine, Gerwig was asked about Barbie's journey through the film: 'I hope two things made that journey feel surprising but inevitable. I started from this idea of Barbienland, this place with no death, no aging, no decay, no pain, no shame. We know the story. We've heard this story. This is an old story. It's in a lot of religious literature. What happens to that person? They have to leave. And they have to confront all the things that were shielded from them in this place.' She was asked about the feminism in the film: 'I think of the film as humanist above anything else. How Barbie operates in Barbienland is she's entirely continuous with her environment. Even the houses have no walls, because you never need to hide because there's nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed of. And suddenly finding yourself in the real world and wishing you could hide, that's the essence of being human. But when we were actually shooting on Venice Beach, with Margot and Ryan in neon rollerblading outfits, it was fascinating because it was actually happening in front of us. People would go by Ryan, high-five him, and say, "Awesome, Ryan, you look great!" And they wouldn't actually say anything to Margot. They'd just look at her. It was just surreal. In that moment, she did feel self-conscious. And as the director, I wanted to protect her. But I also knew that the scene we were shooting had to be the scene where she felt exposed. And she was exposed, both as a celebrity and as a lady.' The Mattel employee Gloria and the ghost of Ruth Handler help Barbie through the crisis.

Barbie was released in July 2023 simultaneously with *Oppenheimer* (hence the weekend was called Barbenheimer), and soundly beat *Oppenheimer* at the box office. The critics were kind overall. The Guardian said 'It's entertaining and amiable, but with a softcore pulling of punches: lightly ironised, celebratory nostalgia for a toy that still exists right now.' The Daily Record commented '[Gerwig] and partner Noah Baumbach have penned a very clever script that packs in humour, sadness, satire and a powerful feminist message.'; and the BBC added: 'It's funny, it's bright and uplifting, and I think has a lot to say about the modern world – both in terms of feminism and gender equality. Ryan Gosling really goes all-out.' But at the Oscars *Oppenheimer* received 13 nominations and seven awards whilst *Barbie* received eight nominations and one award (best song: 'What Was I Made For' which I doubt you will be whistling on the way home).



Mattel co-produced the film so approved of the script and treatment though there are some references to Mattel's mis-steps (including a blink-and-you've-missed-it cameo by Rob Bryden as Sugar-Daddy Ken – yes, really) and a certain amount of self-deprecation. But on the whole, it is probably best to think of the film as an extended commercial for Mattel's products – sales of Barbie rose 16% in the quarter following the release of the film.

Michael Hipkins



We thank Red Eye for subsidising the cost of printing these notes. Red Eye Print, Unit 2D, Lansbury Estate, 102 Lower Guildford Road, Knaphill, GU21 2EP Tel: 01483 772111

Children's films

BBC news reported recently (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cxeegg023m0o>) that, at the Bafta awards, children's and family films are to get their own dedicated category. According to the story: 'The prize is open to any genre of film that Bafta says has a "specific inter-generational appeal to children, young people and adults". Films with a certificate rating of U, PG or 12A will be eligible.

'It is the first new film category to be introduced by Bafta for five years, and will be awarded for the first time in 2025. Films can be nominated in more than one category - for example *Inside Out 2*, which recently became the highest-grossing animated film of all time, could receive a nomination for best animation and best children's film.

'Other contenders in the new category could include the highly-anticipated *Paddington in Peru*, which will be released in November, and *Despicable Me 4*. According to *Deadline*, similar family-focused awards will be added to Bafta's TV awards in the near future.'

All of which started me thinking about films aimed at young cinema goers. My impression is that the majority of these are animations. An analysis of first 20 IMDB top 100 movies for kids shows that only 20% are live action. The cynic in me reckons that computer-generated animations are likely to be cheaper to produce than live action films.

Cinemas used to have regular Saturday morning shows for youngsters. If you want a brief wallow in nostalgia take a look at Saturday Morning Pictures 1940's, 50's and 60's (<https://www.1900s.org.uk/1940s50s-sat-m-pics.htm>) where you can marvel at the lyrics of the Saturday clubs of the cinema chains – ABC, Gaumont British, Rank, Regal and Century – which the patrons sang as part of the show.

The Children's Film Foundation was set up with the support of Lord Rank in 1951. Its remit was to make films specifically for children to be screened at Saturday morning matinees and used in schools.

The Foundation was supported by the British Film Industry and an annual grant from the Eady Levy on the sale of cinema tickets - proposed by Harold Wilson when President of the Board of Trade in 1949. In 1950 the Foundation received 5% of the total fund and continued to be well funded from this source. This enabled the Foundation to make five or six low budget films a year.

These films were very successful and inspired a whole generation of new cinema-goers. They also gave an opportunity for a number of child actors, who later became stars, to begin their careers. These included Francesca Annis, Michael Crawford and Dennis Waterman.

The title I recall most clearly is *Runaway Railway* (1965) in which a group of children manage to foil an attempted mail train robbery, with similarities to the Great Train Robbery of 1963. Like many of the films, the cast is a mixture of well-known adults (Jon Pertwee, Sydney Tafler (playing the villain, naturally), Ronnie Barker, Graham Stark and Hugh Lloyd) and youngsters. The youthful star of *Runaway Railway* is John Moulder-Brown, who went on to play the lead opposite Jane Asher in the cult classic *Deep End* (1970) directed by Jerzy Skolimowski. The Monthly Film Bulletin wrote about *Runaway Railway*: 'The



opportunities afforded by railway trains for high speed and plenty of action are splendidly exploited. In its combination of farcical comedy and railway adventure, this is second only to *Oh Mr Porter!*, and cannot fail to delight children' but then went on sniffily about use of the wrong railway rolling stock adding this was surprising 'in view of the fact that a child audience is well known to be critical, and likely to be well-informed about railways.'

Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 2 October 2024
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

However, with audiences falling and the Eady Levy abolished in 1985, the Foundation found itself without its major source of income and decided that it had to cease production and utilise its funds for script development. It was felt at this time that television was more important and viable than film and it was then that the name of the company was changed to The Children's Film and Television Foundation.

Although the Foundation believed it was doing valuable work in television, it felt that there was a lack of concentration on culturally relevant films made for British children and their parents and therefore in 1996, when the lottery film franchises were advertised, the Foundation decided to bid for a niche children's franchise. This bid, although well and warmly received, was not successful. But the CFTF together with the UK Film Council and the BBC set up a new £300,000 a year script development fund for 'family friendly' features.

Eager to see some of the products of the Children's Film Foundation? The British Film Institute has produced five 'bumper boxes' on CD, each with nine CFF films to enjoy. If I have convinced you of the merits of *Runaway Railway*, take a look at box 3.

Michael Hipkins

Sources - <https://www.cftf.org.uk/about.html>; <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/sep/09/childrens-film-foundation>

Comments and reactions to: **The Great Escaper**

No of reaction slips received = 25

Average score = 8.00

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	1	2	6	6	7	3

A movie that manipulates your emotions!

Some nice touches

Great film. Enjoyed it! Thank you

Excellent performances and a great start to the season

A fitting farewell to Glenda Jackson – both well-acted

Brilliant acting, excellent acting and story

An excellent film to start the new season with. I kept thinking of my father who got married and a few days later went off to the D-Day landing

Very moving and extremely interesting

What a wonderful and thoughtful film

An excellent choice

Very enjoyable evening – many thanks

A powerful anti-war film

Very thought-provoking. And a great 'short'

Position	Film	Average score
1	The Great Escaper	8.00

Forthcoming attraction: 10 October 2024 – **Winners**



Winners emerges as a refined love letter to cinema. Radio Times

Story-wise it's a slip of a thing, but it gains considerable appeal from its young, non-professional cast. Observer

It shows how, despite your backgrounds and circumstances, you should never let go of the wonder, joy and escapism that the silver screen can hold and its power to transport us somewhere else. Film Inquiry

I liked the free-spirited innocence here, and the film has something of British classics such as Local Hero or Whisky Galore. Guardian