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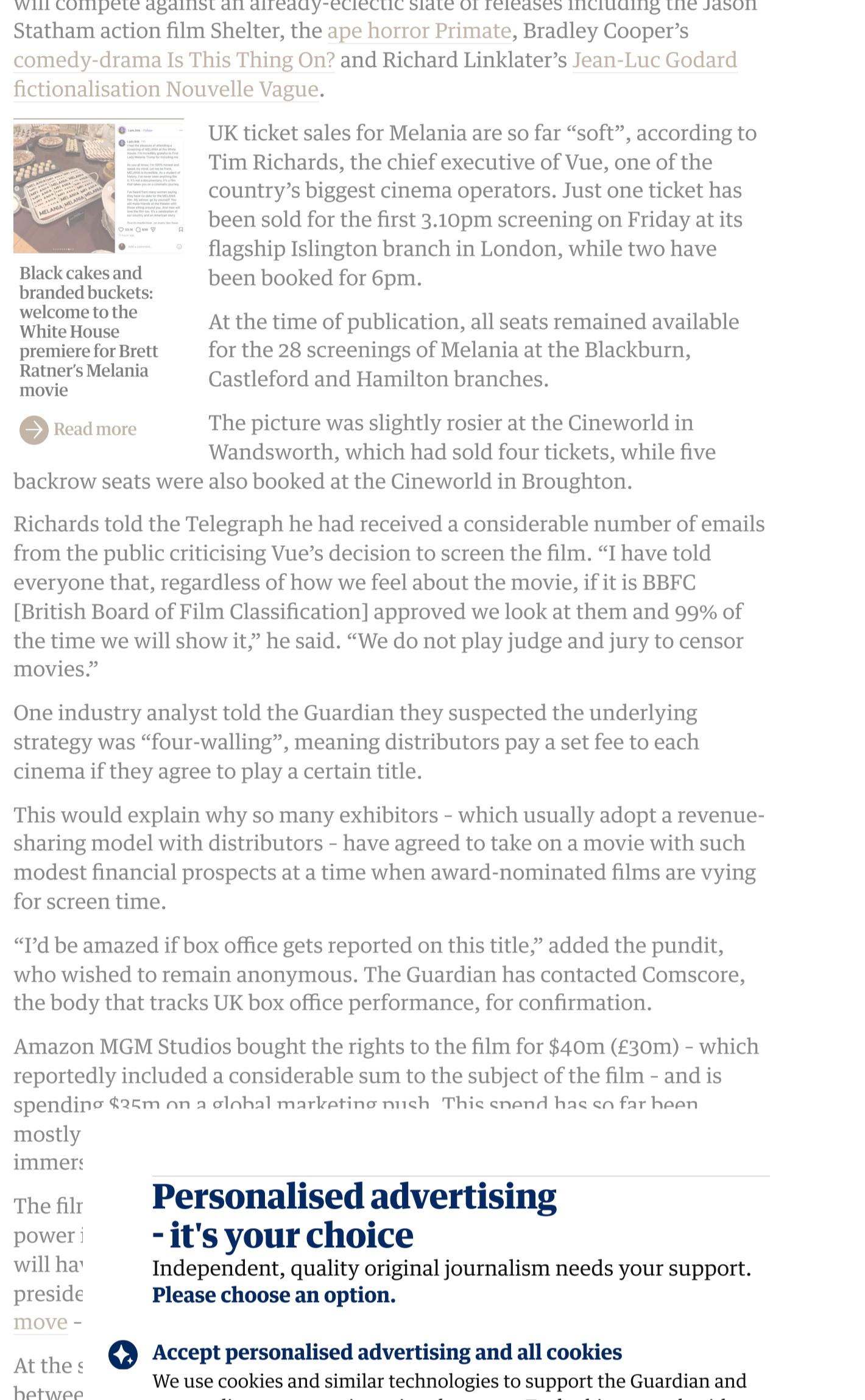
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Melania documentary struggles in UK cinemas as Vue admits sales are 'soft'

Only one ticket sold for premiere of film about US first lady at Vue's flagship London branch as insiders question launch strategy



 The Melania documentary will be released in more than 100 cinemas in the UK. Photograph: Jeenah Moon/Reuters

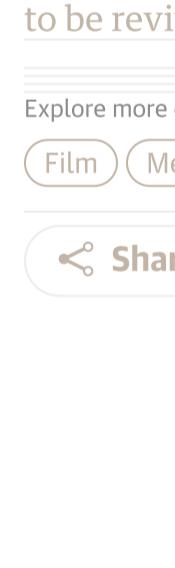
Catherine Shoard *Film editor*

Mon 26 Jan 2026 20.30 CET

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As film exhibitor strategies go, counter-programming is one of the most reliable. It worked for *The Dark Knight* and *Mamma Mia!*, released in the US on the same day in 2008, as well as for *Dunkirk* and *Girls Trip* in 2017. In 2023, *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* leveraged the tactic to the tune of \$2.5bn in combined box office takings.

This week we could see another example as Amazon releases its authorised documentary about Melania Trump in more than 100 UK cinemas. There it will compete against an already-eclectic slate of releases including the Jason Statham action film *Shelter*, the ape horror *Primate*, Bradley Cooper's comedy-drama *Is This Thing On?* and Richard Linklater's *Jean-Luc Godard* fictionalisation *Nouvelle Vague*.

 UK ticket sales for Melania are so far "soft", according to Tim Richards, the chief executive of Vue, one of the country's biggest cinema operators. Just one ticket has been sold for the first 3.10pm screening on Friday at its flagship Islington branch in London, while two have been booked for 6pm.

At the time of publication, all seats remained available for the 28 screenings of Melania at the Blackburn, Castleford and Hamilton branches.

The picture was slightly rosier at the Cineworld in Wandsworth, which had sold four tickets, while five

backrow seats were also booked at the Cineworld in Broughton.

Richards told the Telegraph he had received a considerable number of emails from the public criticising Vue's decision to screen the film. "I have told everyone that, regardless of how we feel about the movie, if it is BBFC [British Board of Film Classification] approved we look at them and 99% of the time we will show it," he said. "We do not play judge and jury to censor movies."

One industry analyst told the Guardian they suspected the underlying strategy was "four-walling", meaning distributors pay a set fee to each cinema if they agree to play a certain title.

This would explain why so many exhibitors - which usually adopt a revenue-sharing model with distributors - have agreed to take on a movie with such modest financial prospects at a time when award-nominated films are vying for screen time.

"I'd be amazed if box office gets reported on this title," added the pundit, who wished to remain anonymous. The Guardian has contacted Comscore, the body that tracks UK box office performance, for confirmation.

Amazon MGM Studios bought the rights to the film for \$40m (£30m) - which reportedly included a considerable sum to the subject of the film - and is spending \$25m on a global marketing push. This spend has so far been

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On Monday, Donald Trump posted photos from the White House event on Instagram and Truth Social, adding that the film is "a MUST WATCH" and that tickets are "selling out, FAST!"

The first lady is an executive producer of the documentary, and her level of involvement and editorial control was stressed earlier this week by the president's agent and senior adviser Marc Beckman.

"She was involved in the production, the post-production, all of the ad campaign, the trailer," he told One America News. "And when I say involved, I mean she's not just approving. She built that trailer. She created the cliffhanger, she selected the music. Same thing with the ad campaign that we're seeing worldwide now in almost 30 countries."

The film is Brett Ratner's first project since he faced multiple accusations of sexual misconduct in 2017. The director denied all the allegations and no charges were brought.

Ratner is best known for the *Rush Hour* franchise, a fourth instalment of which was greenlit by Paramount, after Trump called for the series to be revived.

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