



NEWSLETTER 6

♪ Happy films, keep talking happy films, talk about films you'd like to watch! ♪

South Pacific was a happy film, wasn't it? Would we/should we have screened it at the Phoenix? We and you have been much vexed by the "grimness" of some of the films we have shown recently, although we have accepted that this is not a new phenomenon. We'd like to share with you some thoughts arising from a range of comments that we received on voting slips through the Autumn season.

Our Film Programme: Quality or Balance – Your Views, Please!

In the last few weeks of the Autumn term, we were intrigued to read a few statements along the lines of 'Can we have some more cheerful films, please?' or 'We seem to be showing films which are a bit too similar in terms of tone or content'. As chair of the Film Selection group, these issues are something that I am acutely aware of. Indeed when we were finalising the line-up last summer for this year's films, I remember saying to everyone that we did not seem to have as much light relief that we would like. So, the question arises, are you happy with the balance of our programme or, if not, what would you like us to do about it, bearing in mind the market we have to select from?

For example, every year at film suggestion time, some people usually ask for 'more comedies, please' and, as always, we scour the world trying to find some that are half decent. However, in the world we live in, it is much more difficult to make comedies that are intelligent than it is to make challenging films that are serious and sometimes downbeat. The career of Lasse Hallström, the Swedish director, is perhaps instructive, here. In 1985, he made **My Life as a Dog** in Sweden and in Swedish, which, when we showed it, proved to be one of the funniest and heart-warming films that most of us could remember - without being in the slightest bit unrealistic or lacking in toughness. Perhaps **Les Intouchables** would be a more recent comparison, though that is arguably even funnier and even more heart-warming. Anyway, a planned sequel to **Dog** was never made and Lasse Hallström went off to Hollywood, where he has been making middle of the road pictures ever since - many of them not unforgettable, with the exception of films like **Cider House Rules**. He has mostly been making solid, but not, according to the critics at any rate, particularly great movies. For example, the Rotten Tomatoes website says of **The Shipping News**, based on the prize winning novel by Annie Proulx, "though solidly made and acted, it is rather heavy-handed and dull, especially given the nature of its protagonist," the average score of 130 reviews being 5.8 out of 10. The rom.com/drama **Salmon Fishing in the Yemen**, based on Paul Torday's very successful novel, scores rather better at 67% positive rating - but Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* gave it 2 stars out of five, saying we had seen it all before, and criticising one of the leading actors (the splendid Kristin Scott Thomas) for "much lip-pursing and eye-rolling, but nothing funny or believable in the script for her to say." More recently, **The Hundred-Foot Journey** had Helen Mirren leading a 'French' fight-back against an interloping Indian restaurant in the Midi-Pyrénées. Rotten Tomatoes concludes that while worth watching, it "travels predictable ground already covered by countless feel-good dramedies." The US film critic Kenneth Turan said the film was entertaining, while criticizing the predictability of the story and "wish[ing] that the film had more of the messy juices of life flowing through its veins." So, not much in the way of general endorsement for any of his American work, albeit that it is workmanlike, mainstream and yes, often enjoyable.

So, my point is 1) there are very few really good comedies around to choose from, and 2) there are some films that would be enjoyable enough, and which we could programme for The Phoenix, but they would be unchallenging, and duplicate what is on offer at Harbour Lights and The Multiplexes. Now we do bust a gut to try to get something lighter and more life enhancing for the beginning of our seasons, for Christmas and for the summer term programme - the audience choice vote, for example. However, would you want more than that - that is regardless of the issue of 'quality' (however on earth we try to define that!)? Now, we do try to spread out the more challenging fare across the year, but do not always manage to achieve that. For example, **Leviathan** followed by **Salt of the Earth**, **The President** and **Stations of the Cross** is a tough sequence, but there are all sorts of things that dictate the order in which we show our films. As it happens, I 'enjoyed' all of them, but they are probably all what we in the selection committee call our 'marmite' movies, ones that some of you will absolutely love and rave about and some of you will hate. In choosing them, we are often guided by the opinions of those who have already seen them - (for example, John (on the door) has usually managed to track down and see most of what we show and gives us an idea as to its tone, content and quality). I for one don't usually find the 'marmite' ones too downbeat or lacking in 'entertainment'. **Stations of the Cross**, for me, was not just technically well-made, superbly acted and script-wise well observed, but it was so intellectually engrossing that it was exhilarating rather than depressing. But, some of you may well want to disagree!

So, now it is over to you for comment. We normally aim to choose the best of world cinema for our programme. But, should we pay less attention to 'quality' and more to the question of balance to the programme, even if ensuring the latter means that we show 'lesser' pictures? There are lighter films around, but would you want more of the middle of the road French films (e.g. **Love is the Perfect Crime** – 5.9 out of 10 on IMDb) that you may have forgotten all about by the time next week's film comes around? Does it matter if we duplicate, say, Harbour Lights' programme a bit more than we do? Would you like an extra audience vote gap in the Spring term for **The Lady in the Van** type film? (N.b. this movie might well make our Summer audience vote choice this year anyway!) Does this run the danger of Euro mish-mash like that of **Suite Française**? On the other hand, we don't want to become too earnest or too grim in trying to show 'the best'. Whatever, you think, please let us know.

Please also bear in mind: a) **Pride** was not the end of the light relief/feelgood films. Don't forget we do have **Dark Horse** and **Me and Earl and the Dying Girl** among others to look forward to; b) we also will need your input for the 2016/17 programme selection. If there are any half decent new or forthcoming films that fit into the 'cheerful' category, then make sure you tell us; c) we are in partnership with Union Films who will probably pick things in their plentiful programme that we may miss.

In conclusion, there is probably no perfect answer and we will probably continue to agonise about it in future. As the great Samuel Beckett once wrote, admittedly himself not the most sanguine of artists, "Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better." Hmmm, 'Play it again, Sam' or not?
Stephen

Meanwhile, maybe some of UF's Spring term programme may tempt you ...

Date	Day	Time	Film	Date	Day	Time	Film
12/1/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Big Hero 6	18/2/2016	Thursday	19:00	Deadpool
17/1/2016	Sunday	20:00	Inside Out	19/2/2016	Friday	tbc	Deadpool
19/1/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Interstellar	20/2/2016	Saturday	tbc	Deadpool
24/1/2016	Sunday	17:00	The Intern	21/2/2016	Sunday	17:00	tba
24/1/2016	Sunday	20:00	The Martian	21/2/2016	Sunday	20:00	Deadpool
26/1/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Legend	22/2/2016	Monday	tbc	Deadpool
28/1/2016	Thursday	19:00	Lilo and Stitch	23/2/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Deadpool
31/1/2016	Sunday	17:00	Sufragette	24/2/2016	Wednesday	22:30	Deadpool
31/1/2016	Sunday	20:00	Spectre	25/2/2016	Thursday	19:00	Deadpool
2/2/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Sicario	26/2/2016	Friday	tbc	Deadpool
4/2/2016	Thursday	19:00	tba	28/2/2016	Sunday	17:00	In The Heart of the Sea
7/2/2016	Sunday	17:00	Star Wars	28/2/2016	Sunday	20:00	Black Mass
7/2/2016	Sunday	20:00	Star Wars	1/3/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Bridge of Spies
9/2/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Steve Jobs	3/3/2016	Thursday	19:00	tba
10/2/2016	Wednesday	0:01	Deadpool	6/3/2016	Sunday	17:00	Joy
11/2/2016	Thursday	18:00	Deadpool	6/3/2016	Sunday	20:00	The Hateful Eight
12/2/2016	Friday	22:30	Deadpool	8/3/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Creed
13/2/2016	Saturday	tbc	Deadpool	10/3/2016	Thursday	19:00	Toy Story
14/2/2016	Sunday	17:00	tba	12/3/2016	Saturday	12:00	Studio Ghibli
14/2/2016	Sunday	20:00	Deadpool	13/3/2016	Sunday	17:00	The Good Dinosaur
15/2/2016	Monday	tbc	Deadpool	13/3/2016	Sunday	20:00	The Revenant
16/2/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Deadpool	15/3/2016	Tuesday	19:00	Zoolander 2
17/2/2016	Wednesday	22:30	Deadpool	17/3/2016	Thursday	19:00	tba

