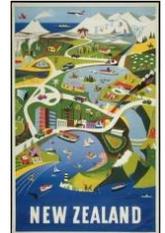




NEWZLETTER 7

Letter from New Zealand

Of late there haven't been many truly New Zealand films in The Phoenix programme. So what has happened? This was the question in my mind as I travelled that beautiful country in November and December.



Though it is a big country straddling two islands, North and South, it only has a population of 4.6 million, 1.5 million of which is concentrated around Auckland in North Island. Wellington, at the south end of the North Island is the official capital. Outside of this, the country has many towns scattered across the habitable land, most of only a few thousand population. We know that this isn't a good basis for attracting cinema audiences. Even the major towns struggle to support one multiplex. The best-known directors are Peter Jackson (see below) and Jane Campion, whose **Bright Star** screened at the Phoenix in 2010, and starred Kerry Fox, who stands alongside Russell Crowe in the pantheon of internationally famous actors from the country. There is a significant Maori presence in the film industry, that appears to have little or no influence abroad. Much heated debate has been heard recently in New Zealand and beyond over the latest Disney animation **Moana**, which is accused of mis-appropriating the myth of the legendary princess from New Zealand Maori culture.



But I found that New Zealand shares an important cinematic heritage with the UK. The small picture houses built in the early 20th Century, many in Art Deco style, have been respected and survive. Often these are run by trusts and are fully supported by the local community, and they would be regarded as promoting 'art house' programmes. An example of this (pictured) is a newly-constructed community cinema in Arrowtown a former gold-mining town near Queenstown (South Island). Delightfully named the Dorothy Browns, this boutique film theatre, clad in characteristic 'corrugated iron', has been touted by movie-goers as the best in New Zealand. Their website explains the cinema is named after a certain Dorothy Brown who was "a well-known turn-of-the-century photographer who lived with a Chinese man from the local gold mining community. And maybe she ran an opium den"! I didn't notice any such activity when I passed by; the movie showing at the time was **I, Daniel Blake**.

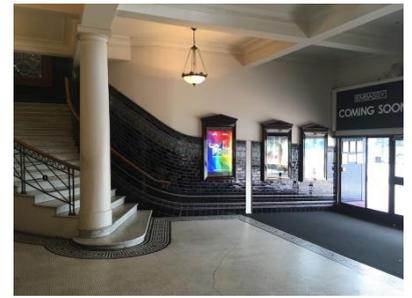


The 'elephant in the room' is, of course, Weta Workshop & Digital - founded by Peter Jackson, Richard Taylor, and Jamie Selkirk, three New Zealanders whose names should be familiar to any fans of the **Lord of the Rings** and **The Hobbit** films. Weta Workshop & Digital has grown into the most significant special effects (real and CGI) industry outside Hollywood. New Zealand is hugely proud of the company and its success. It occupies lots of industrial units, some purpose built, in the suburb of Miramar, on a peninsular south of Wellington. When I visited, its presence was announced by an assemblage of white letters on the guarding hill somewhat like those on the Hollywood hills!





At the end of Courtney Place in Wellington is the Embassy (pictured), an Art Deco cinema whose restoration was heavily promoted by Sir Peter Jackson. As a matter of pride, he insists on all his premières being there. Thousands turn up, causing stand-still as Hollywood advances up the very long red carpet to be received within Wellington's own Embassy cinema; homage to New Zealand's newest, significant export industry.



Further along Courtney Place was a fenced-off shopping mall and car park, just two of the fortunately few casualties of the recent earthquake felt in Wellington. Nevertheless, my trip to Wellington from Christchurch had to take a significant detour as both the coastal Highway 1 and the rail link were cut and the town of Kaikora cut off. It will take years to re-engineer the routes.



You cannot avoid the *Lord of the Rings* heritage industry even if you try to, which I did. Even on the way to the Tongariro Alpine Crossing tramp the shuttle bus director introduced the active volcano ahead as 'Mt Doom'. The 2,291 m. peak's proper name is Mt. Ngauruhoe, which means "throwing hot stones", and it was digitally altered by Weta Workshop & Digital for the **LOtR** movies; the real thing is pictured here photographed from one of my stopping-off points on the walk (south of Lake Taupo, North Island).



Near the end of my stay I visited the "Vic", a locally restored Art Deco cinema in Devonport (near Auckland), which was showing **Dancer**. We might be showing this at the Phoenix as a result of my preview. It, like some other films on release in New Zealand (e.g. **The Founder**), was released in that country well in advance of its appearance here in the UK. Presently the Victoria has locally-filmed **Pork Pie, The Eagle Huntress** and **Jackie** in their programme; tickets include a \$1 levy for further Vic improvements, notably better sound insulation between the main auditorium and the cosy 'studio' where I saw **Dancer**.

Adrian



An update summary of your comments from some of our recent screenings

Taxi Tehran

Deceptively simple, but with a powerful message. Brilliant ending.

A clever piece of film-making in the most restricted circumstances: the sordid realism of "cultural confinement".

Brave, telling, but a bit boring.

He always had such a lovely smile.

Interesting idea, but very painfully presented.

Att: 174 70.8%



The Lady In The Van

Wonderful performance from Maggie Smith, and hugely enjoyable.

Tender and funny.

An amusing story about a homeless lady. How many would be as tolerant as Mr. Bennett?.

Too obvious, too sentimental and too pleased with itself.

Att: 99 88.4%

I, Daniel Blake

An outstanding film, should be required viewing for every member of the government. Moving, eloquent, bravo Ken Loach.

This is not fiction, it's a tragedy that plays out every day.

A searing indictment of the way we treat those in need.

Are we in 2017, or still at **Cathy Come Home**?

Bloody brilliant!
Att: 197 95.2%



Ah Donald Trump, dontcha just love him? Well, no actually, a lot of us aren't too keen, but there were clearly many US citizens who voted yes in spite of what appear to be some pretty troubling issues raised by both Trump and his opponent Hilary Clinton. And then, back on June 23rd, there was the small matter of the Brexit vote! As we have seen, a dilemma was posed for all of us, on both sides of the chasm, with many not fully understanding the implications one way or another. Is there that confusion when you come to vote on the Phoenix film each week? How do you vote on a film like **I, Daniel Blake, The Act of Killing, or Amy**? On the hard work of a diligent and imaginatively creative director? Or how effectively s/he conveys a sensitive or "difficult" storyline? Or both? Of course at the Phoenix, we deal in "film" and whether the medium has been successful, trying also to take the subject matter/story into account. "Vote on your reaction to how well the makers of the film achieved success in portraying the storyline." Does that help?