



NEWSLETTER C-1

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Where has the time gone? A covid-19 update from The Phoenix

In those distant days BC, you may recall that we did not publish any Newsletters during the 2019-2020 season. Of course the dreadful pandemic called Covid-19 has taken its toll across the nation and beyond, and we very much hope that you have all been able to stay healthy and well, and free from the virus itself. You will be aware that the **Phoenix**, like all other cultural venues, had to close its doors just before Easter, and we ended our season of film screenings prematurely once confinement had begun. Our Facebook page has been quiet, although Members who have given us their email address will have received a MailChimp mailing (with a light-hearted film quiz) back in April. By the way, if you want the answers to the quiz, they can now be found on our website. Now, confinement regulations are being eased slowly, although at the time of writing this Newsletter, cultural venues including cinemas are still awaiting the all-clear from the government to resume screenings. Harbour Lights suggests it will be reopening by July 31st at the earliest, though with constraints to conform to the covid-19 regulations, although we should point out that The Phoenix does not operate in the same way as commercial venues. We are looking at the guidance and evaluating the implications for an independent film society like ours showing films in rented, multi-use premises, where building access and mode of operation is primarily determined by the University and the SUSU.

So, whilst we have not given you anything to read other than our Weekly Film Notes this past year, we are nevertheless working to develop our presence in readiness for a future resumption of activities. We are looking forward positively in our planning, and as soon as we have any clear idea about our return to our Wednesday slots, we will inform you, our Members, what those plans are as soon as we can. We must necessarily work in close liaison with the University, and in particular with SUSU and Union Films; with the latter two organisations we are in frequent consultation to establish how things are going forward with regard to public events. One thing is certain, we will not be re-starting until we are sure that it is safe to do so for our Members and for the UF volunteer staffing, but **we will be back**. So, urging you to hang on to your 2019-2020 Membership card if you still have it (although, do not worry if you cannot find it, we do have records of all Members in our database), be assured that we will liaise with Members regarding our 'lost' summer season as part of our re-start plans in due course - meanwhile please bear patiently with us. Amongst other things, we are thinking about our future publicity processes, in particular looking at how we might use social media platforms to promote The Phoenix. In the meantime, to make up for the lack of Newsletters since October, we have decided to send out a Newsletter in these challenging times with a few notes about the **Phoenix** which we hope may be of interest.

With an awareness that we often ask for new support from amongst our Members in the running of the Phoenix, we have decided it would be helpful if we gave an outline of the roles each member of the Phoenix Council has, so that you know a little about what we do to ensure our Wednesdays run without a hitch (well almost!). Later in this Newsletter, Stephen offers his thoughts on how he has been spending some of his home confinement cinema days. But first, to start things off, Adrian has written a few lines about his multifarious roles behind the Phoenix scenes.

Lifting the lid on how Phoenix films get shown each week

Amongst other things, our Newsletters have concentrated on the films we show rather than "how" they get shown. So in the next few editions we thought it was time to explain a bit about how **The Phoenix**, which is made up of its

Council and you, its Members, make it all happen. Our first look is at how we organise getting the funds to do it all - our Membership system. In many ways, this is the bit that most affects you, of course!



Phoenix Memberships: The Phoenix is a charity and each year the Council members must make a judgement as to what funds are required to keep it a going concern. The Report and Accounts presented each year at the AGM in November provide the basis from which we make some forecasts with regard to what would be the appropriate level for membership fees.

For some years we have carried out an experiment in the Summer and make our 'Early Early Bird' offer to existing Members. The success of this gives us an indication as to whether we're going to be okay for the following year, and we are very pleased to say that you, our Members, have never failed us. Despite not knowing what you're going to get in the following year's programme, you have always responded so positively and loyally, and given us financial confidence to continue.

Adrian is (still) our membership secretary. Over the past 20 years or so he's honed the procedures that follow after folk apply for annual membership. We used to send membership cards out in response to summer payment but we stopped doing that as rather too many people lost them! This efficiency meant we could issue all the membership cards in the one big mailing when our new season brochures are sent out. All the monies received are carefully logged and banked so that the Treasurer can record the income easily. The membership database is updated in response to the details on the application forms, including email addresses where given – these are then added to our MailChimp list of Members to enable our communications with you. Since a full membership card can be worth nearly £100, Adrian found a way of making them look nearly as good a bank card but without the expensive machinery. The advantage of early applications is that the cards can be made with the owner's name indelibly included. It does require someone with some handiwork skills, but it only happens once a year. One of Adrian's hobbies is graphics design so he is in his element with this aspect of his Phoenix contributions. Indeed, the now-ageing **Phoenix** logo is his design!

At this stage the Committee then decides what the 'Early Bird' and standard membership prices and deadlines should be since this has to go in the new leaflet on the web and paper application forms. The membership database is trimmed to ensure we meet our data protection policy i.e. not keeping non-members data for more than three years.

And that database is then used to produce the labels for the brochure mailing. When the leaflets are ready there are some careful logistics involved in incorporating the membership cards for those that have paid. Adrian has been grateful for one or two helpers in getting this right as the full mailing is quite a big job (nearly 400 envelopes) that has to be completed early enough for those members to receive their card and brochure in good time for the start of the new season. An extra couple of brochures are also included so that members can give a copy to friends etc. in the hope that they might also wish to become Phoenix members.

Adrian then has to respond to the further applications that trickle in by post. New Members will expect their membership card before the season starts! Because of Members' loyalty in the summer, this isn't too onerous as it only represents about 30 more Members of the typical 185-200 full memberships we usually achieve.

You will have seen Adrian with his membership kit for the late applicants at the first few films of the season. This is when we pick up quite a few subscribers for our special student membership offer - Adrian and Graham usually attend the student "bunfight" during Freshers' Week shouting our cinematic wares to the new students alongside the Union Films stall. Then, after a few weeks, applications go dormant. Adrian's job is done until the next summer...



The Book Keeper

The Phoenix can't get films to show unless the distributors are kept happy. That means paying them promptly. Indeed, we pride ourselves in paying all our suppliers very promptly - well within 30 days of receipt of invoice. With The Phoenix, the Book Keeper does a little bit more than just record financial transactions and reconcile them with the bank account. Payments are executed (now electronic) against receipt of the proper paperwork and invoices raised. The funds used to make the payments come from membership receipts and Box Office receipts from Members and SUSU

students. The largest contribution is from full Members and most of it is kept in a separate account with a specialist charity cash fund manager. So the Book Keeper needs to do cash management as well to ensure there are sufficient ready funds available to meet the costs and meet them promptly. So the Book Keeper has a lot of authority, but the Treasurer's oversight is ever-present, ensuring that what is done meets the Charity Commission (and thus Members') expectations.

Adrian has been our Book Keeper for many years. He used to sign the cheques to the distributors when the invoices arrived in the post. No more. They arrive by email and are settled, with minimal paperwork and postal charges, using Faster Payments online. All the paperwork is transaction serial-numbered and sent on to the Treasurer every week or so for subsequent checking.

Adrian's time at the University taught him 'best practice' regarding dealing with income and expenditure. The procedures he put in place very much follow those the University use. Indeed, our Financial Year was set to match that of the University (and of SUSU) as it reflects our seasonal cycle as well as their's. Nevertheless, the work of the Book Keeper is pretty continuous through the year. Even when we're not showing films, the invoices still roll in and need to be paid promptly to keep The Phoenix's reputation as a 'prompt payer' in trim. Thereby, we keep getting the films from the Distributors.

It is worth noting that several members of the Council wear various organisational hats within their role as part of the aforementioned "management", and there will be more on Adrian's roles in a future Newsletter as well as a description of what other Council Members do to help run the Phoenix.

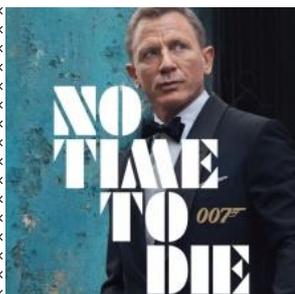
What's on the Box tonight then?

With no cinemas open since confinement began, you may have struggled to see anything decent on the film front. Television channels have offered a lot of what may be "comfort" films to try to ease the stress that the current situation has caused for many, with just the odd worthwhile title slipping out, often on BBC4, Film4, or Talking Pictures, and all too often late at night! Film directors and actors have necessarily had to stop work on projects, and distributors have therefore seen the supply chain dry up, although somehow



Talking Pictures
TV

Netflix seems to be working savagely at cornering everything available in the movie market. However, the time will come when films will return, from blockbusters such as the new Bond movie **No Time to Die**, distribution of which is now pencilled in for mid-November, to the independent world cinema releases so beloved of organisations like the Phoenix. Nevertheless, Phoenix Council members have certainly been watching films from across the board on the small screen, and here is a short article from Stephen explaining his approach to watching movies during this cinematically barren period.



Christine and I have stuck to the routine of watching a film every Wednesday evening at 8pm. We find having a routine gives structure to the week during lockdown, when one day can blur into another if you are not too careful. Rather than go to the pub with Wendy and Terry afterwards (yes, remember those days when this was an option?), we connect via zoom to talk about the film we have jointly chosen to watch. And sometimes we have all even managed to see all of it - not always easy when 2 of the 4 are busy trying to make working from home as effective as possible! And I, of course, am always busy with my studies!

Selection has been a challenge, bearing in mind the nature of the (free) film offerings on TV these days. And of course, none of us would even consider using Netflix, which is against our religion (see below)! Sometimes we have gone for an early film by a well-known director ... with somewhat mixed results. Stanley Kubrick's first film shown on the Talking

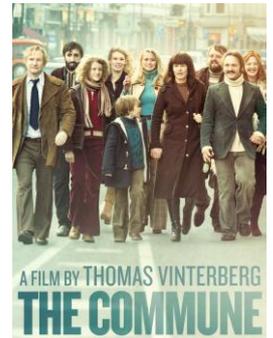


Pictures channel (**Fear and Desire**, 1953) was terrible, so pretentious that it was quite understandable why he had tried to suppress it. Sometimes we have picked a Phoenix film that one of us had missed and which the others did not mind seeing again. So, **Timbuktu** (2014) was re-visited, all about a jihadi takeover in northern Mali and the subsequent imposition of a ridiculous (per)version of sharia law. It was much darker than I remembered

with the appalling conclusion of the stoning to death of a victimised couple, but some of its memorable images have stayed with me. On other occasions, we have deliberately gone for something a lot lighter, and for a film that the Phoenix has not shown - **Sunshine on Leith** (2013) for example. I must say I thought the singing in it really seemed to work, in the sense that as a musical it did not seem too artificial a format. Characters had reason to burst into song at various points. I just wish (from a musical entertainment point of view) that they had



perhaps stuck to the original band for the sound track (The Proclaimers), although I guess the director would say that democratizing the music was the whole point. Edinburgh as a setting was wonderful, though. On other weeks, we have considered films that the Phoenix did not show and perhaps should have done - the wonderful picture directed by Thomas Vinterberg, **The Commune** (2016), for example. So much Danish TV and cinema that makes it over here is outstanding - and this one has the award-winning Trine Dyrholm, who featured in the series, **The Legacy**, which made it to Channel 4 a few years back. Lastly, we have also dabbled in re-watching some of the classics e.g. **Citizen Kane** (1941). It was striking to find that at least 3 of the 4 of us afterwards felt that this much fêted film has perhaps been somewhat over-rated. Why did a feature that has been so revered, often held as the best film of all time, seem so melodramatic, shouty, and creaky, and why did it leave us so cold? Rosebud? So what! And as for Orson Welles's make-up, well ... Perhaps part of the problem was you. That it is to say the lack of you. Yes, we miss you, the audience, to watch the films together with. It is not just a matter of the big screen, but of a communal occasion when we can tell from the rustlings, laughs, or coughs, whether something is communicating or not. Maybe **Citizen Kane** is a lot better than our recent experience of it was, if it can be seen where it was designed to be seen, in the cinema with a live audience. I am not joking about Netflix. If outfits like that, combined with the implications of coronavirus, do turn out to have long-term implications for the viability of live cinema, then we will all be much the poorer. And don't start me on the demise of the Nuffield Theatre! We must try to protect what is of value in our cultural heritage. That means The Phoenix MUST, CAN, and WILL be back. (Fingers crossed that some of the pubs will be too).



Meanwhile, we will all have to make do with second best. All the streaming, video clips, etc. that galleries, theatres and others are putting out is a help (do sign up to the council e-mail alerts if you have not already done so for all the local goings on). So is the sometimes frustrating experience of watching a film on TV. If you want to know what films are on Freeview, then apart from the *Radio Times* etc., you can check a website like the excellent nextfilm.uk. Paying to stream from the Picturehouse website or from Curzon is also an option worth considering (among others) and it may help to keep them going until they can get their product into cinemas again. Which brings me to: what have you been watching? What have you most enjoyed recently? Have you been able to share it with others, friends and family? Depending on how much longer social distancing constraints the live cinema experience, would you want to share your thoughts with other Phoenix members and is this Newsletter one way of doing that? What else can we do to help share the film-watching experience? Please do let us know – write to us via our email address.



Stephen

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