

Report to 2018-19 AGM

Dear Members

The committee is pleased to present its report for the season 2018-19 which finished in May. The report is divided into sections: an overall summary, chairman's remarks, secretary's comments and treasurer's statement, trustees' review and community involvement. Statistical outcomes for last season and the annual accounts are appended.

Overall summary

Last season continued the recent positive trend, with total attendances above 4,000 and an average theatre occupancy per screening of 68%. Around 40% of members were at each film. Guest numbers fell in comparison with previous seasons. The most popular film (on attendance) was *Happy End*, which drew 214 (though it was almost the least well enjoyed by the audience.) The most highly rated film was *Faces/Places* closely followed by *The Breadwinner* and *C'est La Vie*. Full details are available in the statistical table attached to this report.

Membership numbers were stabilised by the introduction of half-year subscriptions, which were available for the period from January 2019. The committee kept membership fees the same as in the previous two seasons, but this has not proved to be sustainable as costs have risen. Membership income was supplemented by sponsorship and guest ticket sales but, as noted above, the number of guests fell, thus reducing income from that source. The committee is keeping the financial position under review as membership numbers for the current season are over 10% below what they were at this point last year. A full statement of the Society's financial position is appended.

The Society looked to broaden its reach into Lincoln's cultural life with a week-long celebration of the role of women in film, to coincide with the centenary of women's suffrage, and to members with a summer season. Both events were funded independently of the Society's core income.

Chairman's remarks

It was fitting that we marked the Society's 65th season and our achievements over time with a series of events aimed at celebrating cinema, affirming the bond we have with our audience and trying to reach a new generation of film goers, as well as our normal programme.

The screening of *The Draughtsman's Contract* in October, together with a very enjoyable lunch at The Refectory, was a welcome reminder of the social aspect that used to characterise post-film Friday evenings in the bar (which has now returned to some extent). The summer season showed it's possible to organise and run successfully a short programme of themed screenings at a time when going to the cinema drops down the priority list for many. In addition, it was pleasing to strengthen the partnership we have with The Venue (and form a new one with Mansions of the Future), by helping mark the centenary of women's suffrage through the Born a Rebel project.

However, we should see these events in the context of the overall declining interest nationally in non-mainstream and foreign language cinema. The challenge of attracting new audiences is not uniquely ours - it's one of the core objectives of the BFI's current 5 year plan. Analysis of audience attendance patterns carried out by data expert Stephen Follows shows the film genres that different age groups prefer. 15-24 year olds (less than 20% of the UK population) make up 30% of attendances and like sci-fi, horror, crime and action films. Over 45s (almost half the population and the Society's typical audience) watch fewer films by comparison (only 20%) and prefer romantic films, drama, some action and crime. Can we use this information and if so, how? At the moment, we programme what we consider to be the best films available to us, regardless of genre, and a survey of members showed no material appetite for reform to the types of films selected for screening. We know members would like more comedies (they tell us this - frequently!) but these aren't readily available. We would say we provide a programme packed with drama but sometimes - especially if there is violence and bad language - it's not to everyone's taste.

In spite of our achievements, however, this season membership numbers have noticeably fallen, which is likely to impact our ability to run a 26-film programme in the future. The committee needs to address this.

Options include:

- Reducing the number of films shown
- Increasing the membership fee
- Reform film programming policy
- Use our charitable status to support other organisations with dedicated screenings
- Change membership model

Preserving our position by cutting the programme or increasing the membership fee both come with risks. Chasing audiences and members by programming more popular fare would, in my view be counter-productive. I think our achievements are the result of being consistent about our values and by using all available means to make people - especially those new to the city - aware of us. This still seems to work: several new members joining us this season have found the programme or heard about us from friends and are delighted that Lincoln can offer something they would be pleased to find in bigger cities.

Forming partnerships and supporting other events (eg Mansions of the Future, the Chamber Music and Book Festivals), hasn't produced any noticeable impact. The half-season membership offer worked last year and seems worth repeating but is the membership model we use the best way to operate? Some societies take a different approach to membership, charging a nominal amount to join and a ticket price on entry. Is this something to think about?

I am wary of "pay as you go"; it moves us onto a more commercial footing, with risk of serious income shortfalls, as well as changing our cost structure. It would also mean increased administration. While the current position may not be a permanent one, it does raise questions about the way the Society should operate in the future. Over the coming year, the committee will want to hear from members about how they would like us to respond.

I'd like to conclude by thanking everyone on the committee for their efforts over the past 12 months, The Venue for the extraordinarily good support they give us and you, our members and guests, for making Friday nights something to look forward to.

Richard Hall (Chairman)

Secretary's comments

Initially the focus was on the recruitment of members, given that new data protection rules meant existing members needed to complete an application form to give consent for use of their personal details. The Society took this opportunity to issue everyone with a new membership card and 338 people signed up for full membership. To mark the 65th anniversary season a half-year membership was made available in January and a further 19 people joined.

LFS undertook a membership survey in January, with assistance in construction and analysis by a marketing professional at no cost to the Society. The full analysis and results are on the website, and the committee acted immediately to address matters identified including:

- Ensuring the start time is close to/at 7:30
- Instigate some membership choice of films within the season (choice of classic)
- Piloting a summer season separate from the main season

A short four film summer season was arranged for June/July resulting in 96 "season tickets" being sold, and 61 individual guest attendees, giving an average audience of 79 per film.

Further changes include enhancements of the sponsorship package and marketing, which have resulted in a 20% increase in sponsorship income for the current season.

LFS was shortlisted for an award in three categories in the 2019 Cinema For All Awards, resulting in commendation and distinction certificates for Best Film Programme, Best Single Event (Born a Rebel) and Outstanding Individual Contribution (Helen Hancocks).

Sue Firth and Tony Butcher (Joint Secretaries)

Treasurer's report

Our finalised accounts for the 2018-19 season show that we achieved a small surplus of £128 for the year, as our income was closely in line with our expenditure for the period. This compares to a healthier surplus of £1669 achieved in the previous financial year. Our costs were roughly in line with 2017-18, but we saw a reduction in income in both membership subscriptions (full and temporary) and sponsorships. We anticipate a similar position this season which will necessitate the Committee considering ways of increasing our public profile with the aim of increasing membership numbers and revenue streams. It is also likely that costs may begin to rise for both film and theatre hire over the next couple of seasons which we'll need to monitor closely.

We also wish to make a proposal to the membership regarding our banking situation. For many years we have banked with RBS, with a traditional cheque-book based account for settling bills. Many of our film suppliers are requesting payments by BACS, which is onerous at present since we have no online banking facility. The Committee have explored the possibility of moving to another bank which could offer online access for both payments and statements, whilst still maintaining the requirement for payments to be dual-authorised by two members of the Committee. This matter and the proposal will be discussed in more detail at the AGM.

John Rossington (Treasurer)

Trustees' report

As part of the society's charitable aims to promote film to the wider community, we again supported the Lincolnshire school's film making project (Cinema Cents Ans de Jeunesse - CCAJ) by helping to facilitate the annual screening at the Venue in July. The event gives the participating schools the opportunity to share their final film with parents, friends and other children on a large screen in a 'proper' cinema space.

CCAJ is an international program of film education involving children aged from 6 to 19 from all over the world, which involves the study of film from all eras and genres, and the making of their own films to a theme set each year. As well as most European countries, the scheme, based in Paris, involves children from Japan, India, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Cuba.

The society's patron, Jim Broadbent is an enthusiastic supporter of the scheme and attends the screening at the Venue when he can. We will make members aware of the date of the event next July in the hope that they will be able to share in the enthusiasm of our Lincolnshire children for film and film making.

Ivor Davey (Trustee)

Community involvement

During the 2018/19 season the Society:

- Liaised with The Venue and Mansion for the Future in curating a season of five films, supporting talks and a children's workshop under the umbrella of *Born a Rebel* celebrating 100 years of women's suffrage
- Continued to liaise with cultural partners Indie-Lincs Festival and CCAJ.