

Officers' Reports for Lincoln Film Society 2019 -2020

Chairman's Report

The last nine months have probably been the most depressing in the entire 67 years of the Society's existence. Since it became clear that Covid meant the suspension of the programme in March, much of the time has been spent wondering when, or even if, a resumption of our programme will be possible.

It's no simple decision. We depend on a number of factors beyond our immediate control: the re-opening of The Venue in a way that guarantees the safety of our audience, access to a big enough slate of quality films from which we can form a programme, whether or not enough people will be willing to rejoin and even whether the membership model that has served us so well for so long remains appropriate.

Since things ground to a halt, the officers of the Society have been discussing what we need to do to ensure that a return - if and when it happens - is possible. We need to make some assumptions but, in the circumstances, they seem pretty reasonable ones on which to base our thinking.

Firstly, we have to believe that some - maybe many - members decide not to return. We think this for various reasons. People will have got out of the habit of Friday night film-going and may have found other things to do. The lure of streamed services may prove too strong. Then there is the issue of theatre safety and whether, if the virus is still present and the risk of circulation is there, our more elderly members will want to be spending two hours or so in an enclosed space.

Secondly, we need to consider what kind of programme will be possible if membership does drop significantly. Our operational model has always proved excellent value for money but is very dependent on our being able to attract around 320 members or more to afford a 26-film programme. A substantial drop in numbers would mean we'd have to scale back the programme quite a bit.

Thirdly, we have to think of the costs. A typical Friday evening cost about £400 for film and theatre hire. If those costs increase, then it is highly likely that an increase in subscription fees will be needed, especially if membership declines. This may be inevitable so we need to think about whether that's right, how much of an increase would be needed without putting people off, whether a fully paid up membership scheme is appropriate any longer and what alternatives there may be.

Finally there is the small matter of The Venue itself. A discussion with their management in early September, when it looked as though they might return in November, revealed they would be limiting their audience size to around 70 people. As our average attendance was twice that, it's obvious we have to find a way around that since no-one will want to spend money joining a society where the chance of watching a film is no better than 50%.

The officers have therefore decided to use the period to next March to investigate the best options for a return. We have set up two working groups of committee members to look into the issue. We will retain the default option - full membership and a substantial season - if we can. We know it works and we'd be able to reactivate it fairly smoothly. If we need an alternative, we must be ready with details, so we are talking to other film societies and organisations such as Cinema for All and the Independent Cinema Office to get their advice on what we might do.

By March we intend to have options which reflect the circumstances in which we find ourselves. These will be discussed by the full committee before we put the options before an extraordinary general meeting of members to hear your views. Our hope is that by April, when we would normally begin the planning for a season, we will have secured a plan and be ready to return in September 2021.

It remains for me to thank the committee for their work during the cancelled season, to members for their support since things were put on hold and The Venue. We will keep you informed of developments over the coming months.

Richard Hall (Chair)

Treasurer's Report

The Society's financial position has improved due to a surplus of income over expenditure of £3,010 in the period ending 31st May 2020. The reason for this is exceptional and due, of course, to the necessity of curtailing the film season early. The six unscreened films would carry an estimated cost of £2,400 (screening costs being around £400 per film including theatre hire, film screening licence and printing of film notes). We also made some other savings in the period in areas such as film viewing research, since no industry preview sessions took place (to which we usually send a small delegation). We still hope to be able to fulfil our obligation to screen the six missing films, or an alternative mini-programme, and therefore most of this surplus is earmarked for that purpose at no extra cost to returning members.

John Rossington (Treasurer)

Secretary's Report

For the second season running the Society opted to sell half season memberships, which boosted the initial membership numbers from 293 to 311. The early finish to the season and the inability to run the 2020-21 season due to Covid-19 has meant that no membership recruitment took place in 2020. As already mentioned by the Chair, the Society is looking at alternative types of membership scheme to address the possibility of a sharp fall in membership numbers.

The average attendance for the 20 films shown in the season was 154 and the average approval rating was 75%.

A revamped sponsorship package resulted in the amount raised from our sponsors increasing by 86%. We would like to thank all those who contributed.

Sue Firth & Tony Butcher (Joint Secretaries)