Films We **Love**

Screen Machine brings the world to you

An Experiment in Programming

Introduction

Here at Regional Screen Scotland we've undertaken an experiment in programming, and we'd like to share the results with our audiences and the wider screen community.

The Screen Machine aims to be, first and foremost, the 'multiplex of the Highlands and Islands', bringing to small and remote communities those major new feature films which are getting a lot of media attention. But, as a publicly funded organisation, we also have a core remit to give our audiences the opportunities to see a wide and diverse range of films, to promote Scottish films and films with a strong link to Scotland. Please visit www.screenmachine.co.uk to see our Programming Manifesto.

We also aim to use the unique circumstances of the Screen Machine service to undertake experiments and learn lessons that might be helpful to the wider community cinema sector that we work with. That is, if it can be made to work on the Screen Machine, with all the operational challenges involved, then perhaps it can also work for a more conventional 'static' cinema too!

Our 2017 audience survey demonstrated that a significant proportion of our audience would like to see a wider range of films. This has been reinforced by our most recent audience survey, undertaken in October 2018, where, when asked about barriers to attending the Screen Machine, the option 'nothing I want to see' was selected by 25% of more than 1,000 respondents. Over the past two years the Screen Machine programme has in fact become much more varied and diverse, thanks in part to being able to store a large number of films digitally at any one time. But there's clearly scope to do more.

The RSS team therefore worked together to devise Films We Love as a new banner under which to promote a

range of different film experiences. For this first, pilot season we focused on a selection of foreign language films chosen by the six members of the RSS team, and these screened on six locations as follows:

Wadjda	30 August	Tarbert, Isle of Harris
The Lesson (Urok),	4 September	Liniclate, Isle of Benbecula
Monsieur Hulot's Holiday	16 September	Port Ellen, Isle of Islay
Cleo from 5 to 7	23 September	Brodick, Isle of Arran
Things to Come,	30 September	Lochgilphead
A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night	11 October	Fort William

Marketing and Publicity

Simprin Studio was contracted to create and design the Films We Love logo, with the tag line: Screen Machine brings to world to you. This was used across bespoke posters that were designed for each screening and sent to the locations alongside the regular programme posters.

In addition to the posters:

- A newsletter was sent to the whole Screen Machine mailing list (6,046 subscribers): it was opened 5,043 times, links were clicked 442 times, with the highest no. of clicks for *Things to Come*, *Cleo from 5 to 7* and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*.
- Personal emails were sent to each of the ushers on the screening locations to give more background about the initiative and the films.
- Screen Machine Instagram was used to promote the screenings, using quotes attributed to the SM team and striking images. Instagram followers increased from 170 to 236.
- Facebook events were created for each screening. Between 7-10 days before the event, there were paid promotions focused on profiles with relevant interests (e.g. French cinema, independent cinema) within a 10-20 mile radius of the screenings.
- All of the September screenings were part of Scalarama, and were featured in the Scalarama Scotland brochure, which was distributed to the Highlands and central belt venues.
- Scalarama created a Scalarama Highlands and Islands Facebook page, which was made a co-host of the 4 screenings, and promoted to their 132 followers.

Evaluation

A survey was sent to those who had booked tickets online for each film, with 18 total responses out of 32 recipients – a 56% success rate. The key results were:

- The average film rating out of five stars was 3.8
- 100% of responders had seen foreign language films previously
- 100% of responders wanted to see more Films We Love screenings on the Screen Machine.

Audience quotes about the season:

"While the opportunity for a fairly regular dip into current cinema is appreciated, living off the beaten track, I'd welcome access to the occasional non-mainstream screening, too."

"blockbusters are ok but also boring. It's good to watch films that challenge and surprise."

The highest average film was *Wadjda* (4.5), followed closely by *Things to Come* (4.25) and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (4.25).

About *Wadjda*, one survey response was: *"An engaging story, exploring issues of gender and culture in a conservative religious society. Good to have a more diverse range of independent, foreign language films on show."*

Ticket buying patterns

We had 120 total admissions for this first Films We Love season. They break down as follows:

Wadjda	20
The Lesson	21
Monsieur Hulot's Holiday	4
Cleo from 5 to 7	25
Things to Come	39
A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night	11

Our target was to achieve an average of 20 ticket sales per screening (based on the past average attendances for when we had screened titles such as *Mustang* and *The Olive Tree*), and we achieved exactly that figure, but that average is skewed by the very low attendance for *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*, and three of the six titles were in fact above that average.

Of the 120 admissions, 72 were advance online bookings, and from these there are some key findings:

- For 16 of the bookers, this was their first visit to the Screen Machine – that's 22% of those who booked using the service for the first time.
- 10 or 13% of bookers had not visited the Screen Machine before and combined their booking with tickets for other films such as *The Children Act* and *BlacKkKlansman*.
- *Cleo from 5 to 7* brought in the highest number of totally new admissions with 40% of the booking audience having not attended before.
- The majority of online bookings came from people who had been to the Screen Machine before, indicating that they are part of a general audience that attends a broad programme, for example, an audience member for *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* had previously seen *Incredibles 2, Moon Dogs, Star Wars, Thor: Ragnorok, Dunkirk* and *La La Land*.

Cost

The costs to RSS of this season included the screenings fees, ranging from £81 - £165; a designer fee for posters and branding; poster printing costs, and Facebook event promotions. In addition, it was estimated that 34.5 hours of staff time was spent on the planning and administration of the screenings.

Outcomes

We have seen that further diversifying the programme has brought in new audiences to the Screen Machine. Some foreign language titles had higher attendances than others, with those in the French language producing better results in numbers than those in Arabic, Persian and Bulgarian. In particular, the highest attendance, for *Things to Come* was the title with the most recognisable star actor, Isabelle Huppert, which in general reflects the findings of previous SM audience survey that told us star power is what draws people to choose a film.

That 100% of survey responders had seen a foreign language film before AND want to see more Films We Love screenings tells us that Films We Love is fulfilling a desire among audiences to see 'specialist' film.

We have also seen that older titles do not always bring in the same level of audiences, with *Monsieur Hulot* being the least attended screening. That *Cleo from 5 to 7* hit its target and brought in a significant number of new admissions, is perhaps reflective of the heightened interest in Agnés Varda at present, and her visibility due to new releases of six of her other films and a new documentary. In future, we might select classics that have a similar level of contemporary relevance.

Early on in announcing Films We Love we had requests to bring the screenings to Tobermory, Gairloch, and elsewhere, which aligns with the finding that audiences want to see a more diverse programme across the circuit.

What We've Learned

There is clearly an audience out there that wants to see interesting foreign language films, and, just as with our core programme, it would seem that they are most interested in films which have had some recent media attention, rather than in well known classics. From the evidence we have, it's hard to say if we encouraged anyone to experience a subtitled film for the first time, but it is clear that we had:

- a number of audience members attending the Screen Machine for the first time
- a number of audience members who only attend the Screen Machine for more adventurous titles such as these
- A number of audience members who enjoy both mainstream and foreign language movies.

We can therefore tentatively pass on some lessons to other community-based cinemas:

- While there are audiences who appear to enjoy a wide range of films, promoting foreign language and other 'arthouse' titles is more likely to attract additional and possibly new audience (and therefore reaching further into your community) than it will encourage a core audience to be more adventurous. That finding is, interestingly, entirely consistent with the research on Event Cinema—that these 'live' and 'encore' screenings mostly attract a different, possibly new audience.
- Using a range of free or low cost social media platforms to promote such activities will raise your profile online, over and above any resulting ticket sales.
- To do this kind of promotion takes a lot of effort. Films We Love was organised and delivered by an experienced professional team who know our audiences well. Voluntary groups, in particular, will need a lot of expert support, and additional resources to achieve anything similar.
- While the audience results met our target, that target was deliberately low. Our current success with box office income from popular films, coupled with our public funding, allows us to underwrite the cost of promotion, and also the reduced box office income from what we would have earned by screening a more popular title. For other cinemas and film groups, it will be important to both fund the promotion, and underwrite potential losses.

What we'll do next

Now that we've established the Films We Love brand, we want to use it to promote other genres of film in the Screen Machine, and in the first quarter of 2019 our focus will be on recent Scottish or Scotland-linked documentaries. Future seasons may focus on British independent films and on cult movies. Meanwhile, we'll aim to include recent foreign language films more regularly in our main Screen Machine programme. We'll continue to monitor the outcomes of each Films We Love season and share the results with our community cinema colleagues. So you'll be hearing more about our experiment in programming as it develops.

Feedback

Tell us what you think of Films We Love, or ask us for more information. E-mail us at info@regionalscreenscotland.org.

Stills
Page 1 - Cleo from 5 to 7
Page 2 - Wadjda (top), A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night (bottom)
page 3 - l to r - The Lesson, Monsieur Hulot's Holiday, Things to Come

Screen Machine
Scotland's Mobile Cinema Taigh-dhealbh Siubhlach na h-Alba
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