

CINEMA FOR ALL STARTER PACK SCOTTISH EDITION 2014

CINEMA FOR ALL

CASE STUDY #1: WEST SIDE CINEMA

INCEPTION

In 2012, Orkney resident Mark Jenkins was tasked with looking into developing a film festival for locals, with support from Orkney Islands Council and Visit Orkney. General feedback that Mark received over the next year was that there wasn't really a local appetite for a temporary film event - without a local core audience and local support, any film festival would struggle to survive and ultimately fail. As a response, Mark decided to develop a permanent community cinema as a way of building that local audience and creating an appetite for film across Orkney.



Stromness Town Hall, a converted church, had recently undergone a major refurbishment and so was judged to be the perfect venue. An enthusiastic committee of 10 people came together under the name of [West Side Cinema](#) (a reference to West Side Story) with the constitutional aims of enabling and encouraging access to a broad range of film experience in Orkney and to promote understanding and creative discourse in Orkney in relation to film, on a not for profit basis. A now slighter smaller committee work together to facilitate all aspects of West Side Cinema's programme.

AUDIENCE

Initially, the organisers of West Side Cinema hoped to create a space in which audience members could freely discuss their thoughts on a film and inspire each other, but it was believed this would be difficult to do in the usual cinema set up. While traditional tiered seating may offer a comfortable viewing experience, West Side found it to be restrictive when it came to the social side of cinema. With this in mind, the committee settled on a cabaret style, round table, candle-lit set up - creating an intimate environment which encourages interaction between audience members and allows easy exchange and conversation once the film ends. Where possible, tables are also dressed with objects that have a link to the film. For instance, the tables for *Berberian Sound Studio* were each decorated with a different object used by a foley artist to create a sound. Sushi samples were made to accompany a screening of *Jiro Dreams Of Sushi*, but the amount of other sushi brought in by the audience resulted in a shared feast. The organisers have found that the sharing of food and drink encourages communication between audience members, and helps create a convivial atmosphere. Feedback from informal conversations between audience members plays an important part in planning for future programmes and other events. These are supplemented by the use of West Side's 'ping-pong-o-meter' – an audience reaction system in which audience members are invited to put a ping-pong ball into one of five baskets, depending on how strongly they liked or disliked the film they have seen. This simple act encourages further discussion (and sometimes argument!) on the night and gives an instant impression of how particular screenings have been received.

PUBLICITY

A bold and vibrant logo was designed and is used on all print and online publicity. It is projected onto the cinema screen before and after the trailers, and is accompanied by a jingle, which helps to instil a sense of ownership in the audience – this is their cinema. Posters appear each fortnight in a wide range of venues, and are put together by a designer who provides support on a voluntary basis.

To celebrate a year of operation, and to promote the autumn/winter programme, a 'best of' West Side Cinema trailer was made to remind the audience how far the cinema has come in such a short time.

A free to use [WordPress website](#) was created, showing upcoming films, links to film festivals and previously screened short films. A [Facebook page](#) was also created to deliver more instant and up to date news. Screenings are also regularly mentioned on the daily BBC Radio Orkney 'What's On' feature. West Side Cinema recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Ian Sellar film *Venus Peter*, which was filmed on location in Orkney. The screening was widely publicised in the weeks leading up to the event - a half page article appeared in The Orcadian, and an interview with director Ian Sellar featured on Radio Orkney.

PROGRAMME

When programming, West Side Cinema try to offer alternative content to the mainstream Phoenix Cinema, the Phoenix Fringe (both 17 miles away), the Screen in the Square (30 miles away) and the Gable End Theatre in Hoy (another island) and where possible offer complimentary content. During the autumn/winter season films are programmed fortnightly, dropping to monthly screenings during May to September when many other events and festivals take place in Orkney. During these spring/summer months, an effort is made to programme in collaboration with local festivals and events.

Short films are shown with every feature film. These are largely sourced from the video hosting website Vimeo, which allows the organisers to contact directors directly for permission to screen, which is generally granted free-of-charge in recognition of the group's not-for-profit aims. The short film supporting programme has become an integral part of the cinema, and has even been occasionally extended into whole evening programmes of only shorts, which prove to be very popular.

THE FUTURE

West Side Cinema is constantly looking for ways to extend and improve what is offered to audiences in Orkney. Their commitment to education is influencing much of their future activities, including offering eight participants a free two day screenwriting workshop run by director Ian Sellar. Their plans for the future include making more connections with local film societies, hosting an archaeological film weekend, looking into hosting a film equipment loan system, holding a short film competition and, now that Orkney residents have a real appetite for film, looking back at that film festival idea that started it all.