

# Manchester Film Weekender's Post-Lockdown Test Screening

Manchester Film Weekender is currently running a Nordic Film Season, which started on Sunday 6 September. In order to ensure that it was safe to welcome back their audience, they ran a test screening on 2 September, 2020. We spoke to John Grieve, founder and organiser of the Manchester Film Weekender, and long serving member of Manchester and Salford Film Society, about their experience.

## Planning the test screening...

'The test screening is necessary to see real people in the theatre other than a paper exercise of what might work. At the theatre, we will have sufficient quantities of hand sanitiser, soap, antibacterial wipes, antibacterial sprays and paper towels. In addition, should any member of the audience require them, we will have available masks and nitrile gloves.

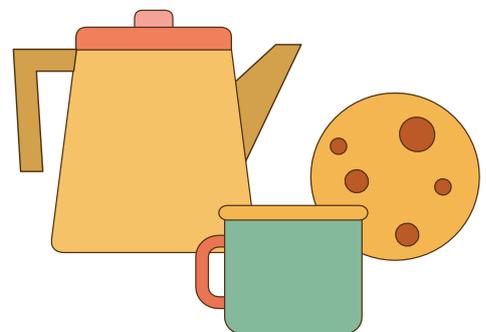
Seating will be two seats apart with an empty row between. The maximum audience size will be 36 and could be less depending on the mix of couples and singles. Bookings can only be done online and there is a requirement to provide a mobile number for track & trace lists, which will be disposed of after 21 days.

Break-even audience is around 30, but because previous film seasons and weekends have been successful there is some money in the Manchester Film Weekender account and we will be able to complete the season with fewer than 30 people at film viewings. Should any screening be cancelled, a full refund will be paid.

I hope that with the seating plan, hygiene measures, pre-booking, track and trace and automatic refunds, all this will give our audience the confidence to book some tickets. If anyone has already booked and paid and wishes to cancel, we will refund immediately.'

## **To summarise our steps:**

- Online booking only
- Audience limited to a maximum of 36
- Safe seating, two seats apart on alternate rows
- Hygiene supplies and gloves available
- Automatic refund for cancellation
- Track and trace (mobile phone) information is kept for 21 days



## After the test screening...

John said: 'I'm very pleased to tell you that the test screening exceeded my expectations. The audience were wonderful – they arrived early, sat in the seats they were asked to, and wore face coverings.

Entry was by ticket only and to minimise contact at the box office the audience put their tickets in a box on the staircase, which reduced crowding at the box office. They then went to the auditorium where they were allocated a seat.

Following visits to two cinemas recently, I tweaked my seating arrangements slightly. The audience is now separated by two seats either side and two seats front and rear. Previously the whole front row and rear were empty, but that was impractical, so I changed it.

Part of the change was driven by the need for the audience to wear face-coverings, and when I explained the reason for the change the audience were comfortable with the new seating arrangements. I'm sure that when the lights went down and the film started, they were totally unaware of seating restrictions.

I'm really pleased with the result of the test; it means that we can be confident that things will work. There was a plus, I have had a booking for five films from a lady who came with a friend, who had already booked for the whole season.

A good result all round and everybody liked the film.'

*Words: John Grieve*