

“Sshhh...” Film Festival Report

FILM2009

Professional Practice: Film Festivals

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Introduction

On Friday the fourth of October of 2019 the module “Professional Practice: Film Festivals” was initiated, the students were given a run-through of the goals of the module and how it would operate. It was then established that from that day on the group would meet in the Phoenix Cinema for a more theoretical centered Lecture followed by a workshop where we would work together in the eventual development of a local film festival. On that first day the strands of the module were clearly laid out, on one side the study of the film festival phenomena and on the flip side a practical appliance of this knowledge in a real event. Deadlines of the development were stipulated from the very start which would aim to facilitate time management in the module:

- The Festival Theme and Title – 29 November 2019
- The Start of the social media campaign – Early January 2020
- Film titles booked and events planned – 7 February 2020
- Phoenix brochure for the first print – First Week of February 2020
- Festival Brochure designed and printed – Mid-February 2020
- Brochure Distribution – Third week of February 2020

With these goals in mind the group would work together and week by week meet to discuss the progress while also having lectures from experienced people in the industry. After analyzing some of the festivals done in previous years on the same module, a task was assigned which made the students research about a specific festival and present it in order to learn the practices and perhaps use it as inspiration.

1. Plotting a First Draft

After a few weeks of studying multiple subjects such as marketing, the organizing of a festival, how to choose and book the films, the module then progressed to separate itself into groups in order to plot a festival idea and pitch it for the whole class. My group consisted of me, Pedro Vasconcelos, Tim Warburton, Connor Hawkins, Aidan Yau, Ryan Webster and Rebecca Ions. The team started to brainstorm ideas of themes for the festival during the workshop and amongst many others we started to develop two different ideas further. One of the initial ideas was of creating a festival that would document important and unforgettable films from each decade of film history. It would serve as a tribute to film itself and present itself as a trip through the evolution of techniques and storytelling. However we eventually had to dismiss this idea due to the fact that since we had limited slots of films in the festival we would likely not go through all the decades which would defeat the purpose of our idea, however we decided to implement many of our ideas from this theme into the one we ended up presenting.

We followed the idea of honoring cinema and showcasing the best it has to offer but from a different perspective, by screening the films that served as the big breakthroughs for certain actors or directors, not necessarily their best work but their first big hits that would then open new doors of opportunities. We spent weeks debating what were the best movies to include and how to do it, we created an online chat to facilitate our talks and we met on the library’s private room to prepare our pitch and follow through with some ideas we had. In the end we were able to fill most of the festival’s usual events with the following:

➤ Double Bill: Orson Welles – *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *A Touch of Evil* (1958)

We thought it would be interesting to curate a double bill with a director-actor and showcase both their breakthrough as a director and the one as an actor, in the end Orson Welles was the perfect selection for this event, as he is a critical personality in the history of cinema. We also considered Paddy Considine and Jodie Foster but not doing Welles in our festival was unthinkable.

➤ Cinema Bizarre: Christopher Nolan – *Memento* (2000)

A lot of different ideas came when considering the film for this category, from the *Chungking Express* (1994) to *Submarine* (2010) and even *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), however we decided *Memento* (2000) could be a great choice since the director, Christopher Nolan was planning to release a new film later in 2020 and it would fit with the bizarre theme due to the way it executes its storytelling in a non-linear way.

➤ School Event: *Wallace and Gromit: A Grand Day Out* (Nick Park, 1990), *The Wrong Trousers* (Park, 1993), *A Close Shave* (Park, 1996)

We wanted to showcase something innovating to the younger audience and by showing them the older and perhaps less known to them Wallace and Gromit shorts' we would provide a refreshing and amazing experience. Furthermore, we had the idea to do a Stop Motion with the audience which would not be too hard to do. We even ended up calling the official number of Nick Parks company to know of the rights to showcase these shorts and they were very optimistic with the situation.

➤ Family Favourite: *The Incredibles* (Brad Bird, 2004)

For this event we wanted to provide entertainment that would relate to the family while allowing us to do something different and exciting for the younger audience. The group then decided that by doing showcasing this film it would fit in the theme as the breakthrough for Brad Bird and would allow us to get masks to give to the younger audience before the screening.

➤ Essential Cinema: *Airplane!* (David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, Jerry Zucker, 1980)

We decided this film would be great to include in essential cinema due to it being a sleeper hit and it being an easy watch.

➤ Other Options

We considered a multitude of other films including *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959) or even *Y tu Mamá También* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001) which would help in case we were unable to proceed with any film in other categories.

2. Decision Making

On the 6th of December all the groups presented their ideas and plans to the module leaders and the other teams, it was inspiring to see so many projects that were so well developed. Most of these groups had chosen a very specific theme, which is great in pinpointing an audience and organising the events, and generally planned for a variety of both screenings and other events that would interest a lot of film enthusiasts.

Having each group organise a separate festival to this point also helped in combining the best ideas for the eventual winner of the theme, therefore, despite only one of the groups winning, the festival would end up being an amalgamation of the ideas presented by everyone. After the presentations a system of voting was introduced where everyone would rank their favourite themes and by adding the points a winner would be awarded.

On the 13th of the same month the results were presented, the “Sshhh...” festival won, this theme consisted of everything related with mysteries, secrets and silence, despite not being my personal favourite it was indeed a theme that had a lot to offer. Following the choice of subject, the class was divided into groups once again but this time to take on a specific event of the festival which they would plan and carry it to the end. My group ended up being similar to my initial team save for a few changes, and we chose the mystery film event as we had some great ideas that could be very promising for a mystery event in a festival about secrets. The group consisted of me, Pedro Vasconcelos, Tim Warburton, Connor Hawkins, Aidan Yau, Rebecca Ions, and Jessica Marshall who joined after a couple weeks.

These decisions were only the first step into plotting the festival, so once we were all together the next week every group started plotting their event.

3. Organising the Secrets

Our group started to develop a variety of interactive events that could happen after our film and make it a more interesting experience. After a few weeks of consideration, we came down to a pretty solid plan that would not only attract more people but would provide those interested an original immersive experience.

To start, we narrowed down our list of possible films:

- ❖ *Memento* (2000) – Christopher Nolan [As one of the most underrated Nolan films and since the director was planning on releasing a new feature on the summer of the same year it would be a great opportunity to visit this piece. Along with this the film deals with missing memories and an unsolved murder which fits perfectly in the festival’s theme.]
- ❖ *Klute* (1971) – Alan J. Pakula [Being a sleeper hit during the 70’s and having its plot revolving around a mystery disappearance we thought the film would provide a different and decent experience to the Mystery Film audience.]
- ❖ *Notorious* (1946) – Alfred Hitchcock [Showcasing one of Hitchcock’s earliest films was an obvious choice, especially for film enthusiast we believed that this film would provide an original experience since the majority of people have not watched it in the cinema. Furthermore, it delves into the secrets of the nation which is a subject many find interesting and appealing while still in theme with the festival.]

Having to decide between our options was not easy, but an idea that struck us as a perfect marketing strategy while also being an original event was that of screening whichever movie, we decided on film rather than digitally. This way we could advertise the event as being a “45mm Mystery Film” which would indubitably attract a wider audience. After presenting this idea to our tutors who approved it, we discussed it with the staff member from Phoenix who is in charge of booking the films for screening, we gave him our list of films and told him that we were heavily leaning towards a film screening so he would check which ones were available for that type of event. Unfortunately, we were later informed that none of the films we had chosen were available to be booked in film so we would have to decide which one to screen and do it in DCP (Digital Cinema Format).

Despite being upset by this outcome the group was hopeful as we had decided to band together and organise an extra event to occur after the screening, which would invite the viewers to enter the world of secrets and mystery. We chose to go with *Memento* due to its mass appeal as well as the opportunity that it gave up making a detective type immersive experience.

Rebecca was the one who lead the organisation of this project while receiving input from everyone in the group. The game would consist of a murder, through a profile of suspects and clues that would be given to the players they would analyse a board of polaroid's, which would be in theme with the film, that depicted places the suspects had been the day of the crime, by putting all the evidence together the players would be able to figure out who was the murderer. The idea seemed to be a bit elaborate but we were dedicated, especially Becca, who went as far as crafting the profile pages for each of the victims which we then all analysed and tried to use to craft this mystery.

The idea developed and we decided that by dividing the participants into group we could separate them and make them rely on teamwork to figure out the mystery which would work even better and perhaps make it easier to solve. The most important step at this point was to book a room, we asked Cassie to see if any room would be available for us to hold the event, however no proper room was available so we had to make the decision to drop this event and move forward with something different. We decided to organise a raffle that would happen before the screening where three winners would be awarded and they would have to choose between 3 secret prizes of around the same value.

Simultaneously, the organisation of our festival as a whole was moving forward, the tagline was chosen to be "We all have secrets", a look for the logos and brochures was being developed by a professional and certain members of our teams entered other roles parallel to those they had within our team dynamic. Tim and Jessica joined the Quiz Team to make questions for the event and Jessica also became the social media representative of our group, helping with the Twitter, Instagram and Facebook pages.

4. The Final Plan

The festival would be held from the 14th of march to the 22nd, the date was coming closer and there were still some choices to be made as well as some planning to be made. Around a month prior to the festival we were visited by a graphic designer who presented us multiple ideas for the brochure and the overall look of the festival, personally I was a big advocate for the style that included blacked out text and a high contrast of colour as I believed it delivered striking imagery that caught the attention of the viewer as well as being a pleasing poster. I expressed my thoughts on this look and debated the reason why it should be the chosen look for the festival, it was therefore a fortunate outcome that this was indeed the style we ended up choosing, and it even felt more gratifying when some colleagues came to me thanking me for defending that look as it was also their favourite. After a few adjustments to the style that were reviewed by everyone and a debate of colour that ended up having the poster showcase a bright pink in contrast with the black and white we had a unique image for the festival.

The planning was a hard job for every group but after a lot of planning and re-planning a final plan for the festival was stipulated:

- Saturday 14th March – *The Conversation* @ 6pm with Introduction by DMU Film Lecturer Ian Hunter
- Monday 16th March – *Mulholland Drive* @ 8.15pm with a themed exhibition afterwards and Hollywood cocktails.

- Wednesday 18th March – Film Quiz @ 8.30pm
- Friday 20th March – Pop Up Event: *A Quiet Place* @ 6.45pm at the Guildhall with a ghost talk afterwards
- Friday 20th March – Mystery Film (*Memento*) @ 8.15pm with a raffle happening before the screening
- Saturday 21st March – *Atlantis The Lost Empire* @ 11am with crafts, face-painting and activities before and after the film for the younger audience.
- Saturday 21st March – Double Bill: *Clue & Knives Out* @ 6.30pm/8.30pm
- Sunday 22nd March – *The Death of Stalin* @ 12pm part of Phoenix's Lazy Sunday Offer and with a real-life comedic re-enactment of the funeral of Stalin

5. The Mystery Agenda

The Mystery Film group had to organise the team for the event therefore we separated roles for the day so that everything would go according to plan, I would be checking the tickets and giving the raffle tickets at the entry while there would be three other people Rebecca, Tim and Aidan people directing people to their seats, Connor on the other hand was going to present the raffle winners so he would be up in the stage. In the end we would return to the same places to receive the forms back and then would all clean the cinema room.

6. Final Conclusions

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 situation the festival only had one event occur however according to the pre-sale of tickets the Mystery Film was the one with most sales, which might be a reflection of the already established fan-base of the event that happens every month however it would have been interesting to know how many of these people were actually new to this slot. Overall, I believe the event would have brought a younger audience than the Phoenix usually receives while still accommodating that same demographic.

Despite not having been able to carry the event through the module was a great experience at the work behind the organisation of an event of this scope. I do believe it was a positive experience all around.

Bibliography:

- Module Lessons and Blackboard files.

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