



NEWSREEL

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ANTHONY MINGHELLA TO DO THE HONOURS AT 2006 FSoY

The 2006 60th-anniversary Film Society of the Year Awards will be presented by Anthony Minghella, Chair of *bfi*, writer, director and noted Isle-of-Wight. The FSoY awards will take place on Saturday 11th March in NFT1, and promise to



be a festival of film society excellence. All the normal categories will be represented, and there will be additional awards to long-serving societies, to celebrate the enduring role that film societies have played in the film culture of the nation.

BFFS LAUNCHES NEW AWARD SCHEME FOR STUDENT FILM SOCIETY ACTIVISTS

As a result of the very productive student film society seminar held at the 2005 Autumn National Viewing Sessions, BFFS has produced, refined and ratified a scheme by which student activists in the film society movement can be recognised for their contribution to the student community.

The scheme, which will take immediate effect, requires student film societies to nominate activists who qualify for one of three levels of award, Silver, Gold or Platinum. For the Silver Award, a candidate will have to have made a significant contribution to the student community. It is awarded to anyone who has served in a recognised active film society role for a minimum of one year. Nominations must be agreed by a vote of the full film society committee, and communicated to BFFS by a letter of nomination from the chair (or secretary, if the chair is the nominee) detailing the achievement.

For the Gold Award, a candidate must have made an extraordinary contribution to the student com-

munity. It is awarded to anyone who has served for two complete years in any recognised active film society role (or in more than one role over two years). Again, nominations must be agreed by a vote of the full film society committee, and communicated to BFFS by a letter of nomination from the chair or secretary detailing the achievement.

The Platinum award requires an even higher level of contribution: it is awarded for outstanding enterprise in service of the student community, to anyone who has shown leadership or extraordinary initiative in creating or re-establishing a film society within a student community.

For all levels of award, candidates are normally nominated from within a specified film society by a letter of nomination detailing the achievement, but each entry does require endorsement from the relevant officer of the student union to which the film society is attached.

The scheme works like this: any society that wants to nominate someone

for an award does so by letter and entry form before the relevant deadline. This year (2006) entries must be with BFFS by Thursday April 13th. Blank entry forms can be obtained from BFFS by email: the form gives us information we need, and must be countersigned by a relevant student union official to provide evidence that applying societies actually exist and are in good standing. The accompanying letter should explain why a named individual qualifies for a particular level of award by detailing their achievements and service, including dates. Each nomination requires a separate entry.

The adjudication panel will be drawn from serving BFFS Management Committee members or their nominees. BFFS will judge all entries on their merits, and will guarantee that the whole process will be completed by the end of May, so successful candidates should receive their certificate before they leave at the end of term.

BFFS ROLLS OUT NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

All things considered, BFFS has not been slow to react to the rapidly-changing circumstances in which it operates. Given the scarcity of actual money, the fact that only two people in the organisation get paid for what they do, and the scale of the challenges the organisation faces, it's a minor miracle that any objective assessment of its position today would admit that yes, big changes are needed, but yes, they're on the way.

Symptomatic of this is the way that BFFS has boldly elected to spend scarce reserves on bringing in professional support from the International Fundraising Consultancy, in the form of Small NGO consultant Nic Fenton. Since the middle of 2005 Nic has been leading a wholesale review of BFFS organisation and operations resulting in the formulation of a new 3-year strategic plan, which has just been given ManCom's seal of approval. The plan

has now to be re-interpreted as a work plan which details what everybody has to actually do over the next 3 years, and that job get under way (at the time of writing) in a couple of days, when the Executive Committee meets on Feb 11th.

What will emerge from this process? Well, the aim is to rebuild BFFS so that we do what we do well, but more, and better, while extending our range to serve the whole community cinema movement. Essentially, we're going to try and make good on the motto BFFS adopted a while ago, *Cinema for All*. Expect to see more member benefits, more modes of membership, more types of members and associates, and a more focused organisation that is positioned to steer well clear of the kind of funding crisis that has bogged it down for the last 3 years or so. Expect more – and more imaginative – approaches to giving BFFS a firm economic base, leading to

a greater independence, and freedom to respond to the needs of all community groups that want to determine their own access to film.

The route to this will necessarily include delivering on all aspects of the strategic plan. So you should see – and yes, you should complain if you don't – new regional organisations starting up where currently none exist, increasing support for the existing regions, and a range of new services and opportunities for individual societies. You should see a full and updated range of BFFS publications, increased support for new societies and for societies in difficulties, a much higher profile for the film society movement in the press and in the film industry, and much-improved access to the kind of films we know you like to show. There's a mighty wind a'blowin'...

BFFS FOLLOWS UP ON COMPLAINTS ABOUT FILMBANK

Following the article on BFFS members' dissatisfactions with Filmbank's service to film societies which we aired in our last issue, we have received copies of a number of complaints which have been made by societies scattered throughout the country. The subjects of the complaints have ranged from the lack of knowledge of staff, to mis-billing, to the non-delivery of contracted films, to the offering of VHS tapes instead of DVDs. This last one seems to cause particular irritation, since it is a well-known fact that film societies have moved on to the DVD format specifically to enhance the viewing experience of their members.

Now that UKFC are specifically funding the Independent Cinema office to resolve problems between film societies and distributors, BFFS has argued that the problems caused by the quality of Filmbank's service are the most pressing issue to be addressed under the new arrangement, by a long way. ICO Director Catharine Des Forges has accepted that the issues need to be addressed as soon as possible, and has undertaken to meet with Filmbank senior management to start the process. A BFFS representative will be at this meeting to ensure that members' issues are raised and their interests fully represented..

It remains to be seen how responsive Filmbank will be to this approach.

EMERITUS PROFESSOR MAURICE BERESFORD

The recent death of Emeritus Professor Maurice Beresford merited – and received – lengthy obituaries in all the leading newspapers. They rightly judged him to be the most influential economic historian of the last half-century, both in medieval and in modern urban history. His most famous book, *The Lost Villages of England*, rewrote the generally-accepted analysis of medieval life. Elected to the British Academy, he was awarded several honorary degrees, and his lectures to students and the general public were both entertaining and erudite.

Scholarship was, however, only part of his life. He served on the then National Consumer Council, the Parole Board, and other public bodies, and in his private life he loved music – especially opera – literature, good food – and film. He served as Chair of what was then the Federation of Film Societies, in the time of the redoubtable Margaret Hancock. As one of his students, I first heard Peter Grimes at his home. Maurice kept in touch with his students, and it was in one of his letters from the USA that he insisted I see a seminal film then showing in New York.

Characteristically, this was the only subject of the letter. The film's title? – *Mean Streets*! Only last year, Maurice appeared on Radio 4 about a notional *Oxford Book of Dedications*, a correspondence which had run in *The Times*. He was as witty as ever at 84...

Peter Davison

CALL UP THE GROUPS!

A round-up of news from the BFFS regional groups edited by BFFS SW regional organiser Brian Clay

The BFFS currently has five active Groups covering Scotland, Wales and three English regions – Yorkshire, North West and South West. The Groups are made up of volunteers, with experience of film societies and non-profit exhibition, who band together to provide mutual support and to assist in the setting-up of new venues. These start-ups are very much on the increase and potentially will be greatly helped by the recent award of eleven projection kits from the UKFC's Digital Fund.

At the same time, UKFC have reduced the direct funding that the BFFS had available for the Groups to make use of these kits, and expand into regions at present dormant. BFFS is now actively seeking alternative funding in a determined effort to ensure the vital work of these groups is supported and expanded.

This section of *NewsReel* is a shameless promotion of the good work that is happening out there with new societies and group events and initiatives such as block booking schemes. If there is not a group near you and you would like to help reviving one for your region, get in touch with Chris Hill at the Swansea Office right away!

SOUTH-WEST

The UKFC's digital kit is being put to good use in the South West with trial screenings and regular shows. Organisers of the latest trial run at Thornbury, just north of Bristol, hope to resurrect the Film Society, which hung up its spools over 15 years ago, and they were rewarded by an audience of over 100 for *House of the Flying Daggers*. The DVD was hired through the Group's block booking scheme which distributes ten titles around the region at an attractive discount: this season thirty Societies, new and old, have signed on to 150 screenings of titles from *Sideways* to *Downfall*. Many of the selected titles were previewed at the Group's Regional Viewings the lat-



Barbara Ray (far left) and members of the Thornbury Film Club committee at the Armstrong Hall launch. Chris Baker (third from right) showed the film on the SW Group's new projector.

est of which was staged at Exeter University back in November with over 90 delegates attending from 22 Societies. Six new releases were shown on DVD and on 35mm with *The Night of Truth* and *Bombon El Perro* amongst the most popular. The next Viewing is planned for Sunday 23 April in Dorchester and the programme is likely to include possible titles for next season's block bookings.

Other news from South West Societies

Swindon Film Society are using new digital kit bought with their UKFC grant to provide outreach shows in Highworth a small town to their north. The mini-season includes *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *The Station Agent*. They are also using the flexibility of DVD projection to stage a supplementary programme in Swindon itself featuring more challenging titles such as *Pather Panchali* and *Red Lights*.

Another successful start-up in Brompton Regis on Exmoor. After initial help from neighbouring South Molton FS using the SW Group's kit, the village now has its own equipment thanks to local Council and Awards-for-All grants and fund-raising events.

Organiser Marion Lindsey-Noble says: 'Without the SW Group's support equipment and the ever-helpful Phil Norman (South Molton), we couldn't have achieved what we have in such a short time'.

More details on the Group's website - www.bffssouthwest.org.uk.

YORKSHIRE GROUP

Film Societies in Yorkshire are also enjoying the current boom in membership and admissions with the Regional Group playing an important role in this success. Richard Fort reports that this year's Block Booking Scheme has been the best ever, with 24 film titles attracting 232 bookings from 29 societies from Yorkshire and neighbouring regions without their own block booking arrangements. This success is due in no small part to all the hard work and effort by Tony Davison whose phone bill must be astronomical.

The annual December residential weekend in Scarborough was also successful, being fully booked. The general theme, 'Pacific Tigers' comprising films from the 'Pacific Rim', proved very appealing and included a higher proportion of new films than usual

YORKSHIRE REGIONAL VIEWING SESSIONS

April 1st/2nd at Hebden Bridge

The Yorkshire Group invites all film society members from around the UK to our *free* regional viewing session in the delightful town of Hebden Bridge. This will be based in the Picture House cinema for all 35mm presentations and the Little Theatre for all DVD ones. Both venues are most comfortable. As we intend to use this event to help select next year's block-booking titles, the film selection will depend on the programme of the ICO viewing sessions in London on 11-12 March and the availability of the latest prints in 35mm. Further details can be obtained from Richard Fort (01535 653471) or Tony Davison (01723 361661).

although there were plenty of classics including some early Ozu films which were particularly well received.

Individual societies have also been expanding their activities: Halifax have organised guest speakers for several of their films, Ilkley participated in the Ilkley Autumn Arts Festival where *Ladies in Lavender* had a record attendance and Scarborough held their Third Silent Film Festival with an exciting programme of classic silent features supported by shorts from the Yorkshire Film Archive.

A number of new societies are currently being encouraged including Driffield, Beverley and Maltby.

Future plans for this year include a Yorkshire Viewing Weekend at Hebden Bridge on 1/ 2 April and another December weekend at Cober Hill, Scarborough.

WELSH GROUP

The mainstay of the Welsh Region's activities since the 1950's has been its two annual viewing sessions – one in the autumn and the other in the spring. These have been designed to complement the national events and have proved to be very popular with those who would prefer a more personal event. The next viewing session will be held on May 13 in Pontardawe; details from Carol Phillips on 01600 780 263.

In recent times, the group has been helping to found new societies with trial screenings along with detailed

advice. In the past year alone, new societies have been launched in this way in Chepstow, Rhayader, Hay-on-Wye and Crickhowell.

The group has also been of help to Welsh film-makers by providing a platform for these films to be seen. It has also been a base for film societies, new and established, to get technical information.

The region prides itself on being able to reflect needs specific to the region. At the moment the group are embarking on the task of being a base for short films and they are also in detailed discussion about the new Welsh screen agency which is to be called Ffilm.

SCOTTISH GROUP

The big news from north of the border has been the completion of the *Cinema for All* DVD providing an exciting view of the Film Society experience in all its forms. As reported in the last NewsReel, the 17-minute film made for BFFS Scotland by Ian Rintoul was previewed at the Sheffield viewing sessions. Fifty copies of the final version have been funded by ManCom for distribution to anyone interested in bringing cinema for their local community. Negotiations are under way for the film to be streamed on a website hosted by the Scottish Rural Cinema Project.

The group is using one of its new digital kits to tour around 10 to 20 Highland and Island venues in the

spring in association with HiArts. Like the other groups, they are very active in helping new venues with advice including, currently, Port Moke in Fife and a community cinema in Leith. Another new society in Largs had their first film in January.

Following the success of their Autumn Viewing at the Bridge of Allen, the next event will be 'Cinema for All – BFFS Spring Festival' at the Glasgow Film Theatre on Sunday 7th May.

NORTH WEST

One of the biggest events in the region has been this month's Keswick Film Festival now in its seventh year. This year's programme featured thirty new and recently-released films from Cumbria, Britain and around the world, all packed into four breathless days of screenings at The Theatre By The Lake, The Alhambra Cinema and Rheged. In addition, the Festival included personal appearances by film directors and a special Guerrilla Film-Makers' Masterclass for aspirant directors.

A number of North West societies now take part in a regular film review slot on Radio Merseyside each Thursday evening, usually around 6.15pm, with presenter Linda McDermott. Films reviewed so far have included *Citizen Kane*, *Chinatown* and *Sons of the Desert*. Radio Merseyside can be found by visiting 95.8FM or on DAB Digital Radio.



BACKCHAT BY NITPICKER

As all SAD-sufferers will know, the long haul of perpetual grey skies is nearly over, and it's time to look forward to increasingly-frequent periods of sunshine, and a consequent lifting of the heart. So too with BFFS: after a difficult winter, it's time to take stock, and look for the positives.

First, it's goodbye, for the present, to BFFS viewing sessions as we have known them. The ANVS in Sheffield was the last of the old line, organised and run by BFFS for and on behalf of its members. In future, national viewing sessions will be operated by the Independent Cinema Office (ICO), as a result of a controversial UKFC decision to divert funding for these from BFFS to the ICO.

ICO have been involved in programming recent BFFS viewing sessions, so delegates should notice no reduction in the quality of the films on offer, but they will notice a distinct difference in the style of the event. BFFS will be represented, of course, so please make sure you touch base with us if you go.

Where's the positive in this, you will be asking. Well for one thing, the ICO are a professional organisation with a long track record of putting on successful viewing sessions for independent cinema. For another, they are consulting closely with BFFS about the event (held on March 11-12 at the NFT), to make sure that it is, as far as possible, what you would want it to be. And then again, we are confident that if those delegates who attend raise any issues with us, we will be able to bring them up with ICO, and get things changed.

Of course, the event will also host the 60th Anniversary Film Society of the Year Awards. This year the awards will be made by Anthony Minghella, and it's fitting that on such a historic anniversary, the presiding dignitary should hold one of the most important posts in the cinema arts establishment – Chair of the British Film Institute. Sixty years is a long time for any voluntary organisation to operate, and we are

right to celebrate the tenacity of the film society movement for sustaining its representative organisation in this way. But to truly look on the bright side, we'd need to be able to say, hand on heart, that we were geared up for the next sixty years. How true would that be?

Well, it's here that there is much to be glad of. The current funding agreement with UKFC, under which BFFS had its funding halved, has been a big blow to the organisation, and has created enormous difficulties. But as a result, BFFS has had to reorganise on a much more professional basis. We have brought in a specialist consultant from the International Fundraising Consultancy to help us in this, and the outcome is likely to be an organisation with much greater diversity of funding sources, and a much better-planned and monitored delivery of services both to the film society community, and to the broader community cinema movement. It won't happen overnight, and 2006 is going to be a difficult year in which we'll all be stretched, but the signs are already there that change for the better is on its way.

One of the most positive signs, of course, is that BFFS has weathered the storm of a huge cut in funding by responding rationally and calmly, while doing its very best to ensure that it maintains the level of services that its members expect and deserve. So give a private round of applause to all the activists that are working hard, at national and regional level, almost all of them on a voluntary basis, to ensure that this happens. Part of the reorganisation process we are working on is a professionalisation of support, through funded posts, to take the pressure off such volunteers. But in the meantime, they're the lifeblood of the organisation. And they're not going away.

An even more positive sign, at least from where I stand, is the undiminished ambition of BFFS. In a situation where as significant a funder as UKFC seems not to fully value or understand BFFS, you might expect the activists at

the centre to be worn down and down-hearted. You might expect their expectations of themselves and of each other to be progressively more limited. You might expect battle fatigue to be setting in.

The truth could hardly be more different. The more obstacles that are put in our way, the more a clear conviction emerges from community cinema - the film societies and arts centres and local film festivals all over the country - that communities have a right to determine their own access to film culture. They want, and will work for, the means to achieve this. And they need support. Responding to this has become a major reason for carrying the BFFS reorganisation through to completion.

Part of our response will address a common tendency to refer to the film society movement as the 'non-theatric sector'. This bit of outdated jargon relates exclusively to the way that prints of films are charged for, and its use doesn't really help anyone, as it does not reflect the way that many film societies actually screen films. It comes from historical usage and practice, and it beds us in the past rather than moving us into the future.

So you'll see us asserting instead that actually, we operate within the community cinema sector, as opposed to the commercial cinema sector. The former groups together social enterprises that show films primarily for the benefit of communities, and the latter covers commercial enterprises that show films primarily for the benefit of owners or shareholders. While there may be compelling mutual interest in having more films seen by more people - whatever aspect of culture, community or profit is the motive - we need to be very clear why we're doing what we're doing.

It does sometimes seem that UKFC's interests reside primarily in the commercial, and that they may be neglecting the fact that audiences are more than just paying customers - that watching film (unlike reading a book) is a social experience. Reminding them of such facts is part of what we're about.