

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF FILM SOCIETIES

ACOFS BULLETIN

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REPORT ON AGM & CONFERENCE MARCH/APRIL 2007

This year's conference was held in Sydney over the weekend of March 30th–April 1st. Hosted once again in the excellent facilities of the WEA, the event was attended by representatives from all Federations except Tasmania. The highlight of the weekend was the long discussion held with the representatives from the National Film and Video Lending Service and the Australian Film Commission.

Topics carried over from previous years included an update to the CD *THE 16MM MANUAL* by Michael Lines-Kelly. This has now been presented to the Technical staff at the NFSA and their suggestions have been incorporated. A new CD is now available from Michael. Also Michael presented his paper on 16mm Projectionist Competencies.

A new survey of societies, membership and attendances at screenings will be undertaken. This is most important as it gives ACOFS much more negotiating power if we can quote the actual number of 'bums on seats' during a calendar year.

A new initiative, after much discussion, is that ACOFS will investigate obtaining the *non-theatrical* screening rights to an overseas title not otherwise available in Australia. This would be for DVD rights only, and would be difficult to negotiate, but if any title proves to be a popular choice amongst all societies we are prepared to give it a go.

We were very pleased to have a presentation from Gayle Lake who is manager of the Regional Digital Screen Network, a new initiative of the AFC. Funded by the Federal Government, this involves a group of eight cinemas from around Australia that have been fitted out with 'state of the art' digital projection equipment. Of course, the number of films able to take advantage of this new technology is limited, but these eight cinemas (listed elsewhere) give monthly screenings, screenings to schools and mini weekend festivals. Mainly Australian features are being screened and one of the objectives is to try and assess the demographic differences in the reaction of the audiences in the different regions. We should get involved.

A significant portion of the conference was taken up by discussions with and about the NFVLS. A delegation of three, David Boden, Graham Shirley and John Brady spent all of Saturday afternoon talking to us and then the delegates on the Sunday, discussed the ramifications of what had been said. David told us about the changes and highlights of the past year at the NFSA and then enlarged on the curatorial structure which has been put in place since he last spoke to us. He then spoke about the implications of this structure on the lending collection from the NFVLS.

The major points here are that **the collection is still owned by the National Library of Australia**. The title NFVLS is to be dropped and the collection will amalgamate with the NFSA collection. Both collections will share the same data base and will be under the control of the Senior Curator of the Moving Image (Graham Shirley). The issues to be addressed are 1) the physical status of the collection, 2) the cultural status of the collection and 3) the status of the general studies portion of the collection. In the discussion following we pointed out our concern with the reduced level of acquisitions and the lack of funds for administration of the collection. We also emphasized our concerns about the

quality of many of the prints, and suggested several methods of addressing this problem. Another point of contention is that licenses (for non theatrical screenings) are not being renewed, but we were assured that all titles (over 400) due for renewal in the next 18 months would, in fact, be renewed. Finally we were given a breakdown of usage of the collection. Although the overall usage is still going down, the film society component is holding up and so we now have a bigger stake in keeping the collection alive as a viable means of support for our screenings. The discussion was lively, informed and generally focused on the real issues and we are grateful to David, Graham and John for being so frank with us.

Sunday saw a continued discussion amongst the delegates about the matters raised the previous day. We see that the major issue is the ownership of the collection and resolved that if no progress is visible by the end of May, we will write a strong letter to the National Library asking why ownership cannot be transferred. We will follow this up with a letter to Paolo Cherchi Usai quoting from the reply received from the NLA. These letters will point out the high level of interest and usage by the film society movement and requesting that the ownership be transferred immediately and the collection be funded in such a manner that it can return to its pre-eminence amongst the worlds collections. If no progress follows from these efforts we will then need to start writing to the minister and our local politicians both Coalition and Labor. Certainly we need to be doing this in the run up to the next Federal election.

We also have requested to be kept informed as to the progress of amalgamation of the two collections and the method to be used to highlight those titles licensed for film society use. We also feel that a body of volunteers could be set up in order to review print quality.

An immediate initiative is that ACOFS will set up a *YAHOO! Group Forum* for the exchange of information on print quality. Any member of a film society is eligible to join this forum (see below for details). Finally we resolved to explore the possibility of a financial partnership with the NFSA in order to purchase non-theatrical rights to titles required by Film Societies.

We also had a written report from the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) which told us about the closure of the facilities at Park Rd, South Melbourne and the relocation of the collections. On the positive side Patricia Stokes, Collections Manager announced that there is now an acquisitions budget, and new titles will be shortly added to the collection. These titles will be purchased in DVD format and will be available for film society screenings. Acquisitions will focus on Australian titles. Also, ACMI are still working on their capacity to service film societies around Australia from their collection, but no time frame has been set for this. I hope to have more information on the matters raised by this report before the publication of this Bulletin.

John Turner
May 2007

Further discussion with Paolo Cherchi Usai, Graham Shirley and Meg Labrum (Chief Curator) has brought out the following facts.

Agreement has been reached in principal to hand over the ownership of the Collection to the NFSA (we thought this had happened previously), but the National Library of Australia requires a year in which to work out the complete transfer process.

Twelve months is the finalisation date but it being achieved depends on the NLA's rate of progress.

The complete Film Study Collection will be signed over plus a small number of titles from the General Collection and there is no discussion as to what will happen to the balance of the General Collection.

All license renewals are being funded at this stage but discussions are under way to decide the long term future of license renewals.

I now intend to write to Jan Fullerton (Director-General) at the NLA and ask if the process can be speeded up from their point of view. Depending on the answer I receive, I think the next step will be to write to the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

We may at this point need film societies to write to their local members and get pressure brought to bear on the Department.

If we do not become proactive in this matter discussions will drag on for ever and the Collection will continue to decline, will not be added to and borrowings will deteriorate until the lending service will for all intents and purposes, cease. At the very best we would have to negotiate with the rights holder for every screening and pay whatever is demanded.

Discussions with Gael McIndoe and Patricia Stokes reveals that the situation at ACMI is better in that there is an acquisitions budget, as reported above. Their DVD titles however, will initially be available only within Victoria. Only the French and Chinese Embassy titles are available outside of Victoria. This problem is being addressed and will eventually be solved, but the good news for Victorians is that new titles on DVD for public screenings should be available by September. Also non-commercial screening rights are being investigated for some of the titles already owned by ACMI.

John Turner
June 2007

NEW TITLES ON 16MM

AMALGAMATED MOVIES have acquired the rights to 175 16mm titles from Sony Releasing (Columbia Tristar). There are some real gems in this collection.

For a list of what is available and hire rates contact:

AMALGAMATED MOVIES
Non Theatrical Film distribution
PO Box 401, Charters Towers, QLD 4820.
Managers, Steven and Debra Snell.

Their on-line catalogue is at <http://www.amalgamatedmovies.com/catalogue.php>

REGIONAL DIGITAL SCREEN NETWORK

EIGHT venues across Australia have been upgraded with state of the art Digital equipment:

- **FORUM 6 - WAGGA (NSW)**
- **ROSEPOINT - SINGLETON (NSW)**
- **KATHERINE CINEMAS 3 - KATHERINE (N.T.)**
- **BIG SCREEN - HERVEY BAY (QLD)**
- **CINEMA AUGUSTA - PORT AUGUSTA (S.A.)**
- **CMAX - DEVONPORT (TASMANIA)**
- **REGENT - YARRAM (VIC)**
- **ORANA CINEMA - ALBANY (W.A.)**

Film societies in these areas should contact the managers of these independent cinemas and enquire as to their availability for film society screenings (CMAX Devonport is already used by the local film society.)

State federations should make the attempt to get a film society started where the operators are sympathetic. Start with a weekend festival.

ACOFs will keep in contact with the AFC and monitor future developments.

DIGITAL CINEMA

Are you struggling to get to grips with new technology and all its implications? A good way to start would be to read the latest issue of the NFSA Journal.

David Watson examines the state of digital cinema with the aim of giving the reader an insight into the potentially dramatic transformation which awaits cinemagoers. **He looks particularly at the current position in Australia.** He then looks in detail at the NFSA's position in this new world. This is an excellent series of articles even if David does not see the possibilities for Film Societies. **Every Film Society with one eye on the future should get a copy. It's FREE, just contact journal@nfsa.afc.gov.au or write to NFSA, GPO Box 2002, Canberra, ACT, 2601**

EXCHANGING FILM PRINT CONDITION INFORMATION

At the recent ACOFS annual meeting held in Sydney concern was expressed as to how to exchange information on the condition of prints from the National Collection. An idea was floated to establish a Web based forum to meet such a need. Such a forum can also be an information exchange on other matters pertaining to film societies.

To that end a group [called Oz Movie Buffs] has been established. This is a Yahoo! Group which is a free service that allows groups of people to be brought together via a web site and email group. It is conveniently connects people who have a common interest.

Film society members can join this group in three ways:

1. Be sent an invitation by e-mail.
2. Visit the group web site at <http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/ozmoviebuffs/> and click the "Join this Group!" button.
3. Send blank e-mail to OzMovieBuffs-subscribe@yahogroups.com.au (this will reply with a verification link for you to follow up).

If you are a member of an affiliated film society you are invited to join by either the second or third method above. At some point you will be prompted to verify your membership by stating the society to which you belong and give a contact e-mail address of your society secretary or other official contact.