

Save the David Lean Cinema Campaign CIC

Chair's report for the AGM for 2019-20 and 2020-21

The past two years have been very challenging for the David Lean Cinema, but with the backing of our volunteers and supporters, we were able to remain trading and eventually reopen.

When set against the bereavements and hardships experienced by so many over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, the DLC's story is of little importance – but, as cinema has been a comfort to many over this time, I will at least tell it briefly.

The autumn of 2019 and winter of 2019/20 saw good audience numbers, including almost 1,200 ticket sales for February 2020. Notable successes included Downton Abbey with seven screenings, Little Women and David Copperfield, both with five screenings. In the period before the pandemic, we did a lot to reach people outside our traditional (still much-valued!) audience, including spoken word performances prior to films such as Us, and dementia-friendly screenings. We continued our run of Babes in Arms screenings, and screenings in association with annual events such as Black History Month, Women's History Month, LGBT History Month and the Holocaust Memorial Day. We welcomed young filmmakers from the BRIT School for Q&A events, amongst other welcome guests.

Our records show strong advance sales for late March 2020 films including the Academy Award winning Parasite, but - faced with an unprecedented situation - we took the decision on 16th March to cancel our remaining screenings, and began the process of refunding ticketholders. When the furlough scheme became available, we used this to keep our staff employed. Our financial prudence in previous years gave us the resources to withstand the residual losses and avoid the fate of some other independent cinemas.

We kept in contact with Town Hall staff, and in the summer of 2020 it seemed that we had reasonable hopes of reopening in autumn. The resurgence of the virus, and eventual further lockdowns, put paid to this. Instead, we investigated online screenings, and made these available from the autumn onwards, with the determined and resourceful support of our staff in the hours they were able to work under furlough terms. Many smaller distributors offered online titles, including some fine movies that would not have been able to get a physical release in the crowded UK market. While their sales were modest compared with the DLC's usual numbers, it did provide some income and kept us practiced in offering films.

The cinema sector gradually reopened from spring 2021 onwards. For public health reasons, our landlords at Croydon Council were cautious about distancing within the building, and we worked diligently and sensitively to make our case, complete risk assessments and respond to the feedback we received. Our eventual reopening, in October 2021, falls outside the scope of this AGM – but the great efforts made by my colleagues on the SDLCC Committee to make reopening a possibility do not, and I wish to pay tribute to their resolve, patience and ingenuity, as well as their friendship and team spirit.

The SDLCC suffered a great loss in the summer of 2021, when our long-serving Secretary John Ingman passed away. Always self-effacing, John might not appreciate a fulsome eulogy, but I must say that he was deeply liked and respected and a wise counsel, with a wonderfully dry wit and a love of classic cinema amongst other art forms. In the two decades since his early retirement from the Civil Service, John threw himself into Croydon's public life, filling key roles in the church, judiciary and neighbourhood organisations as well as the SDLCC. A memorial service at St Matthew's Church,

Park Hill, was attended by many from the Cinema and these other organisations, and his family were heartened by the tributes paid to him.

Finally, I wish to thank Stephen Furley, who was our Chief Projectionist until moving on during the lockdown period. Stephen's knowledge and dedication were vital in enabling the reopening of the David Lean Cinema in 2014, and he made a lasting and valuable contribution in the several years after that as well – we wish him well for the future.

With best wishes, and thanks for your continued support,

Philip Howard

Chairman, Save the David Lean Cinema CIC