

Save the David Lean Cinema Campaign CIC

Chair's report for the AGM for 2021-22

This year's report covers the period from April 2021 to March 2022.

We began the year in lockdown, continuing our Watch At Home programme. The range of films available gradually diminished, although *The Father* was a superb late offering. Over this period, the efforts of David Lavelli, our external relations and publicity manager, were more valuable than ever, ensuring that our supporters learned about these screenings and also other ways to enjoy quality cinema at home.

Other cinemas 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. When they agreed to remove the two-metre distancing requirement, in September, we were ready to implement our plans to reopen, ably publicised by David and our social media team.

After a year and a half, reopening required a formidable effort from those directly involved in the running of the cinema. My thanks go to all our returning volunteers, at the Box Office, behind the Arts Bar counter, stewarding, and in the projection box – as well as the handy team and those who create and distribute our publicity every month. The greatest credit goes to Roger Dowling for retraining the projection team and, most of all, Heather Hardie, for not only retraining our dozens of volunteers in their usual duties but also devising and implementing the Covid-safe protocols that were needed as one-metre distancing continued.

Reopening forced us to put on large numbers of screenings, with the maximum capacity of the cinema more than halved. I devised a somewhat elaborate schedule that enabled us to show each film three times to a range of audiences, but was a headache for those rostering our volunteers! While we sold over 100 tickets for both *Nomadland* and *The Last Bus* before the end of November, the resurgence of the Covid pandemic at the end of 2021 meant that we reintroduced distancing at all screenings for a time and audience numbers were understandably low, with no more than 20 tickets sold at any screening in the four weeks after 7th December. The first glimmers of a resurgence came with *After Love*, for which Joanna Scanlan kindly honoured her Q&A commitment despite our reduced capacity. In February, century sales were achieved by *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* and *Parallel Mothers*, and in March – with some undistanced screenings – *Belfast*. Other highlights included more of the superb foreign language titles that have always enlivened the David Lean programme – my favourites this year being *Petite Maman*, *Belle*, and of course the future Academy Award winner *Drive My Car*.

Nurturing new talent is important to us as well – while our BRIT School screenings are temporarily paused while they overcome a couple of challenges, we hope that these can recommence soon. We have resumed our monthly Babes in Arms screenings, and are hopeful that we will later be able to resume dementia-friendly screenings.

Despite the constraints imposed by Covid closure and recovery, we were still able to honour calendar landmarks – highlights including Black History Month, for which we screened *Summer Of Soul* – one of the greatest and most enjoyable documentaries I've ever seen – and Holocaust Memorial Day with the remarkable *Getting Away With Murder(s)*.

Making a brief detour from the 2021/22 year to the present day, our biggest success since reopening will be *Are They Hostile?*, the documentary on Croydon punk that will have its third capacity

screening this week. Huge credit goes to our past Chairman and stalwart volunteer Adrian Winchester, who has not only liaised with the producers and secured guest speakers for all three screenings, but also overseen- the delivery of ample stocks of the Cronx Brewery's *Are They Hostile?* beer, which has put an even bigger smile on our customers' faces - and generated bumper profits for the Arts Bar.

The David Lean Cinema has always been an ongoing collaboration between its audience members – both regular and irregular – our volunteers, and the organising committee. As I am coming to the end of my time as Chair – although I'll still contribute to the programme each month - I'd like to thank everyone who plays a part in that collaboration. A cinema without an audience is pointless, and this cinema at least can't run for a day without its volunteers, nor for more than a few days without the people on the committee.

As our AGM for 2019-20 and 2020-21 was only held six months ago, I took the opportunity then to pay tribute to our late colleague John Ingman, who was the committee and Campaign Secretary for many years. John passed away in the summer of 2021, having left the David Lean and many other Croydon institutions in a better place than when he found them, and is still greatly missed.

Everyone who has served on the committee over the eight or so years that I have been Chair deserves your appreciation for what they have given to the Cinema, and I want to thank them personally for their company, comradeship and good humour over some trying times – there has hardly ever been a cross word!

In particular though, I would like to record our heartfelt thanks to Margaret Siudek, who has been our Treasurer since the Campaign was formed in 2011. As well as keeping the cash banked week after week, the financial returns sent to the distributors month after month, and the accounts lodged year after year, Margaret's stewardship was instrumental in the Campaign building up a healthy bank balance over the course of the six years from our 2014 reopening onwards. "You never know when we might have to use it," she would say – and without that surplus, as the David Lean was too small to qualify for cultural support payments, we might not be here now. So, many, many thanks to Margaret – wishing you a very happy and well-earned retirement.

With best wishes, and thanks for your continued support,

Philip Howard

Chairman, Save the David Lean Cinema CIC