

We're kind of getting older!

2021 may be the year when we have begun to master some of the challenges posed by Covid-19, although those challenges, still around us 24/7, evidently continue to be seriously exacerbated by the problems stemming from that other little GB difficulty of recent years, the critical Brexit vote all those five years ago.

But in terms of birthdays, this year is a key one for The Phoenix. On December 9th 1931 the then Southampton Film Society screened **Berlin - Die Sinfonie der Großstadt (Berlin: Symphony of a Great City)** (Walter Ruttmann, 1927 Ger), the first screening by the new group in the city. This means that in a few weeks' time, anniversaried on the day after our final film of the Autumn term, we will be 90 years old.

The original meeting proposing the formation of Southampton Film Society was held at Price's Restaurant on Wednesday 14th October, 1931 (i.e. linking to the day after our first Autumn term presentation), but with administration of the new society's affairs to be sorted out and regulated, the first actual showing of the new film theatre group was on Wednesday 9th December, 1931 at the Central Hall. Curiously, that restaurant later became the site of the 1937 Classic Cinema on the east side of Above Bar Street, a cinema showing mainstream movies in the main auditorium, and "adult films" in the Tatler Cinema screen within the premises – needless to say the SFT presentations would have been far removed from such content!



Of course, this was not the **Phoenix** however, although we are the proud inheritors of the SFT's lineage. The society ran consistently through the years, the WW2 period excepted, with several features that are still retained (a brochure, usually in black and white for a long time until colour became more widely available, Weekly Film Notes were introduced, as was a formal introduction before the film, including at one time Neil Taylor's memorable closing words each week as he reminded us that "the bar is open after the film"! Times became pretty difficult for the society in the 1970s with several changes of venue necessary, and various difficulties at the time across society in general (this was the period of the general hardships of that decade). Things came to a head in 1978 when a crisis meeting was called to try to keep things going, and to find a suitable new venue. That meeting, held high up in the old Mountbatten Building (since demolished to make way for the construction of Solent University) involved a number of us who had been fighting hard to keep SFT film screenings, city council members, and the late Mike Fuller, then representing the Arts Council. Mike's input proved key to the survival of the organisation as several of the Council Members of the old society formed and carried on as the new Southampton Film Theatre. This was created as a new charity on 11th August 1978 and the **Phoenix** became our new trading name, appropriately rising from the ashes of an almost defunct film society previously. So, somewhat miraculously, the **Best of World Cinema** (our strapline adopted much more recently) would see out the century via the new Phoenix presentations, and as you know, it has continued through to the covid-ravaged early 2020s. Now, it will emerge scathed but not beaten on October 13th with the widescreen showing of Chloé Zhao's **Nomadland**, starring Frances McDormand. We are one of the first places in the U.K. to form a film society, after London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Leicester and films have been shown continuously except for the war years until today; however, the **Phoenix** as named has only existed since that November 1978 Mountbatten meeting. And incidentally, some of you may remember that **Berlin: Symphony of a Great City** was screened for a second time by us on our 70th birthday back in 2001, though we have no record of the audience vote that evening.

Covid-19 notice

Please be aware that we will be doing everything required to ensure the safety of everyone at our screenings, from you as our audience Members, through the UF volunteers back with us, to the SUSU staff on reception. Needless to say, if you are feeling unwell during one of our screenings, please contact a member of the Council, a UF volunteer or a member of the SUSU staff as soon as you can. If you have been diagnosed with Covid-19, please do not attend the screenings. We will try to ensure good social distancing is possible in the Cinema, and in any case we would urge you to try to respect those SD arrangements in all parts of the SUSU building. Whilst masks are not mandatory, we want for all of us to be safe and mask wearing is very much appreciated. For future reference, when filling out your voting and comments slip at the end of the film, it will be helpful if you can bring your own pen or pencil to do so. With our combined efforts on our Wednesday evening screenings, respecting the wishes of all present, we hope you will enjoy the season as much as ever you did in those distant pre-Covid days. Finally, do remember to bring your Membership card to all our screenings.

www.thephoenix.org.uk

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