

FOREST ROW FILM SOCIETY

**SUBMISSION FOR THE BFFS FILM SOCIETY OF THE YEAR AWARDS:
BEST FILM PROGRAMMING**

7 AUGUST 2011

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1 INTRODUCTION

Forest Row Film Society is now a very successful society, having been awarded Film Society of the Year in 2009. Our 2010-11 programme was the biggest ever, including 43 film events, plus film-making workshops.

The programming has very consciously been targeted at as wide a cross section of the community as possible, a new initiative this year being a comedy film festival. We have also delighted in including films that would appeal to our audience but which they may not have heard of, especially those that have not had a UK release.

The programming continues to include films selected by other groups in the village, and included one world premiere and a UK premiere.

2 FILM PROGRAMMING

2.1 Films in Forest Row



Forest Row has an unusual demographic for a Sussex village, including over 15 per cent who were not born in the UK. This international community has been the core audience for our screenings over the last 30 years, and has informed our programming strategy.

Consequently, historically, Forest Row Film Society has focussed its programme on world cinema, but we also target new audiences in the village, and continue to increase the number of films on offer.

Our film programming strategy for the 2010-11 season has been to:

- Develop the existing audience for world cinema by showing strong, recent films, together with some great works from previous decades;
- Work with other groups in the village to develop other programming strands;
- Deliver a new film festival weekend, specifically targeting an audience that does not usually come to our films.

In the 2010-11 season we have screened 43 film events, of which ten were part of the film festival, making it the biggest season for us by far. Importantly, 13 of the films were screenings for other organisations and groups in the village, mostly Transition Forest Row. This has been a huge growth; there were only ten films in the 2005-6 programme and we have been gradually extending our activities since.

This well illustrates the approach we have taken:

- Introduce young audiences to classic silent comedy;
- Include high quality recent world cinema that did not get screened within about 20 miles;
- Include films with a spiritual or musical dimension for the more ethereal part of the village;
- Include some slightly more mainstream films, but with a strong moral or spiritual theme;
- Include film from parts of the world that are less well-known to a rural audience.

Finally, since we now work with other groups in the village, most notably Transition Forest Row, we now position the programme, especially the printed one as “**Films in Forest Row**”, to embrace the breadth of the programming, to signify that these aren’t just Forest Row Film Society events and to reduce the implicit elitism in the “Film Society” name.

2.2 Audience input

For the last season we used the website, Facebook, email and informal chats to elicit suggestions for our programming. Though we can't ever show all of them, some certainly do make it into the lists, and the conversation provides us with some context for the sort of films our audience and potential audience might want to see, as well as giving us an opportunity to explain a little about sourcing and licensing films (an important aspect of film education), and also simply as a means of audience engagement.

The two main forums were via the website:

1. Main body of the season: <http://forestrowfilmsociety.org/news/2009/10/suggest-a-film/>
2. Comedy Film Festival: <http://forestrowfilmsociety.org/news/2010/04/film-festival-2011/>

The latter had well over a hundred films suggested and have us much to chew over. The suggestions often gave us ideas for directors or countries we had not considered, too.

2.3 Transition Forest Row

A significant portion of the programme of Films in Forest Row were programmed by Transition Forest Row (TFR), an independent group in the village working towards a future that is not predicated on cheap oil. These screenings are TFR events, and the films are selected by TFR, though FRFS also contribute to the long list.

TFR's web site also includes a space for collecting film suggestions, which is very active, even if it is primarily a dialogue between two people (!): <http://transitionforestrow.org/forum/topics/films-1>

2.4 The delivered programme

This season, the core Forest Row Film Society films mostly included titles made in the last five years. However, the programme also included the following features:

- Classics (eg *Ordet*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*)
- Transition Forest Row-programmed films (in *italic* below)
- Some special events (in **bold** below and detailed further later in the document)
- Films not released in the UK (many from TFR, but also *Wrong Rosary*, a Turkish film only screened at the London Turkish Film Festival, and which we sourced from a visit to Rotterdam FF)

Films in 2010-11 season

Film title	Director	Release date
The Band's Visit	Eran Kolirin	2007
<i>Water</i>		
When You're Strange: A Film About the Doors	Tom DiCillo	2009
Seven Chances	Buster Keaton	1925
Local Shorts		
<i>Growing Food Locally</i>	<i>Tor Bridges</i>	<i>2010</i>
William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet	Baz Luhrmann	1996
Milk	Gus van Sant	2009

<i>Dirt</i>	<i>Bill Benenson/Gene Rosow</i>	2010
Ordet	Carl Dreyer	1955
Treeless Mountain	So Yong Kim	2009
<i>Vanishing of the Bees</i>	<i>George Langworthy/Maryam Henein</i>	2009
Wrong Rosary	Mahmut Fazil Coskun	2009
<i>South of the Border</i>	<i>Oliver Stone</i>	2010
A Common Thread	Eléonore Faucher	2004
It's a Wonderful Life	Frank Capra	1946
Letter from an Unknown Woman	Max Ophüls	1948
The Class	Laurent Cantet	2008
The White Ribbon	Michael Haneke	2009
<i>Films on ways of living</i>		
Not One Less	Zhang Yimou	2000
Mother	Joon-ho Bong	2010
<i>Bamako</i>	<i>Abderrahmane Sissako</i>	2006
Still Walking	Hirokazu Koreeda	2009
<i>La Vie Moderne</i>	<i>Raymond Depardon</i>	2009
Comedy Film Festival		
The Return	Andre Zvyagintsev	2004
<i>Into Eternity</i>	<i>Michael Madsen</i>	2010
Seraphine	Martin Provost	2009
<i>A Road Not Taken</i>	<i>Christina Hemauer/Roman Keller</i>	2010
The Secret in their Eyes	Juan José Campanella	2009
Calendar Girls	Nigel Cole	2009

Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farms event

<i>Countdown to Zero</i>	<i>Lucy Walker</i>	2010
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2.4.1 Shorts

We have also tried to include a few shorts with the main feature. This has only been partially successful since it takes so much work to find good ones and arrange an affordable licence. Two have been included this year:

- *Lullaby* (Kevin Markwick 2007): <http://www.lullabythemovie.co.uk/>
- *A Bike Ride* (Bernard Attal, 2010): <http://www.abikeridethefilm.com/>

The first was especially popular with our audience, and was made by the proprietor of Uckfield Picture House, our best local independent cinema. *A Bike Ride* featured in the LIFF, and we picked it up from the director afterwards.

2.5 Special Events and other noteworthy films

2.5.1 Forest Row Festival

The film society has been heavily involved in the Forest Row Festival since it began six years ago. Consequently, the festival has always had a strong film component. Taking place in the first week in October, the festival was from the beginning conceived as a very local event, with all performances and events managed by and including people in the village. Since it is a village with a large number of professionals who work in the arts, as well as some very wonderful amateurs, this has enabled us to sample some remarkable performances.

The 2010 festival comprised:

- Late night screening of *When You're Strange*
- Buster Keaton's *Seven Chances*, with live music by Olivier-award-winning composer Terry Davies
- A short programme of films made by local film-makers, mostly about people and places near Forest Row. The programme included
 - *Poppy Futures* by Nikki Williams/Edmund Saunders [about the airman's grave in Ashdown Forest]
 - Tor Bridges' *A Hundred Years of Food* [interview with a centenarian from Forest Row about how food has changed in her lifetime], *A Life of Bees* [film about the Natural Beekeeping Trust], and *Nutley Hall* [film about the local residential centre for adults with learning difficulties, many of the residents of which came along to the film].

2.5.2 Transition Forest Row

TFR always find interesting and less well known films to include. The highlight was the **world premiere** of *Growing Food Locally*, a film made by Tor Bridges and commissioned by TFR. Programmed as part of Local Food Week, it was funded by Grassroots Grants at Sussex Community Foundation, the film looks at local food production around our village and reflects on how other communities can learn from what is happening here. The film is now available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zclmqdVI_I

Other noteworthy TFR films were:

- *Dirt!* and *A Road Not Taken*: Not commercially released in the UK
- *Films on ways of living*: A small collection of films illustrating alternative living arrangements, including *The Turning Point* [Lisa Mead/Alex Page (2009), film about the Findhorn community in Scotland], and *The Land on Which we Stand* [Rebecca Payne (2007), documentary about a permaculture community in Devon, and identified from the RAI film festival]

- *Countdown to Zero*: UK premiere simultaneously with 65 other venues, with live streamed Q&A from London, one of the questions of which was tweeted from Forest Row

2.5.3 Comedy Film Festival

The idea for a film festival was expressed at the AGM at the end of the 2009-10 season, and it quickly focussed on comedy as a theme because it:

- Would enable FRFS to counter the notion that all we show are miserable foreign films
- Would add greater range and diversity to our programming

The festival has been a one-off, yet also served an additional purpose, namely to develop more volunteer involvement with FRFS. The organising committee included several people who were not on the main FRFS committee (though some now are), and provided us all with a great opportunity for a regular and fun get-together.

The first ever film festival in Forest Row was a great success on so many levels. Not only did it inspire the best publicity campaign the film society has ever undertaken, and attracted a new audience who have not been to our films before, but the workshops, exhibition and special film events were undoubted triumphs. In addition, there was fantastic weather (so who wanted to be watching films?), and there was a buzz throughout the village with so much happening over the weekend (not just the festival).

Full details of the festival can be seen at <http://forestrowfilmfestival.org/>

The final film programme comprised:

Forest Row Comedy Film Festival

Film title	Director	Release date
The Concert	Radu Mihaileanu	2010
The Big Lebowski	Joel Cohen	1998
Nanny McPhee	Kirk Jones	2006
The General	Buster Keaton	1926
Cluny Brown	Ernst Lubitsch	1946
Mamma Mia	Phyllida Lloyd	2008
Silents, please		
Waking Ned	Kirk Jones	1998
Shakespeare in Love	John Madden	1998
Shaun of the Dead	Edgar Wright	2004

Noteworthy film events in the festival included:

- Silent film programmes with live music. The second silents programme comprised:
 - Buster Keaton: *Cops*
 - Chaplin: *The Immigrant* and *The Rink*

- Dress-up, sing-along *Mamma Mia*
- Special introductions:
 - Composer Stephen Warbeck introduced *Shakespeare in Love*, for which he won an Oscar
 - Comedian Phil Kay introduced *Sean of the Dead*, which included a voicemail message from Kate Ashfield

2.5.3.1 Pictures



Figure 1: Terry Davies playing for *The General*



Figure 2: Phil Kay with Kate Ashfield on the phone



Figure 3: Stephen Warbeck

2.5.3.2 Audience reactions

The festival also was the first occasion for us to get audience reaction scores; after each film all members of the audience were encouraged to offer their rating of the film (from Very Poor to Excellent), which then translated to a score for each film. Unsurprisingly, the silent films with live music and the singalong *Mamma Mia* were the biggest hits, and *The Big Lebowski* was the film that most divided the audience. The high scores that so many of the films were awarded is testament to how much fun we all had.

Film	Score
Silents, please	98
The General	97
The Concert	96
Shakespeare in Love	96
Mamma Mia	93
Nanny McPhee	87
Waking Ned	86
Cluny Brown	83
Shaun of the Dead	79
The Big Lebowski	75

2.5.4 Other events

2.5.4.1 Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farms Film Night

There are two community-owned biodynamic farms within the village. As part of the Connecting Communities through Food and Farming project, Tablehurst & Plaw Hatch Farms hosted a film evening on Saturday 18 June which we supported and delivered for them.

The programme included three films looking at food production and community involvement with an introduction by Professor Neil Ravenscroft, University of Brighton, Principal Investigator on the Connected Communities project.

Including a second screening of *Growing Food Locally*, the Transition Forest Row documentary about the amazing food sources in our area, this special event for Tablehurst Farm included a number of other food-related films in advance of the Tablehurst Open Day on Sunday 19 June.

The Films:

1. Transition Forest Row - Growing Food Locally
2. Spitalfields City Farm - The Goat and the Gherkin (Nandor Otvos)
3. Young Women's Peer Health Project - Lik:t Allotment [Manchester]

We were very pleased that representatives and interviewees from all of the films were present.

2.5.4.2 Forest Row Women's Institute

The WI in the village was recently revived and has been incredibly active. Towards the end of the season they approached us about putting on a screening of *Calendar Girls*, which we were very happy to help with.