

# Widescreen weekend



## Digital Cinerama ... D150 ... Cinemascope 55 ... Ultra Panavision and a whole lot more!

Mark Trompeteler at Bradford's Widescreen Weekend

**T**he 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Widescreen Weekend was held from 19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March at the National Museum of Media, in Bradford.

One hundred and five delegates travelled from all over the world to the Pictureville Cinema, based in the museum, for this annual event that celebrates and showcases all aspects of wide-screen cinema. Attendees had travelled from as far away as Australia and New Zealand, China, America and Canada, as well as from many countries both in Eastern and Western Europe, the Scandinavian countries and of course many parts of the UK and Ireland. The annual event has for many years been co-programmed by Bill Lawrence and Thomas Hauerslev. This year the contribution of Duncan McGregor, the museum's Projection Team Manager to the weekend's programming and organisation, alongside Bill's and Thomas', was far more evident than before, not least in his and the museum's securing sponsorship for quite a number of the screenings.



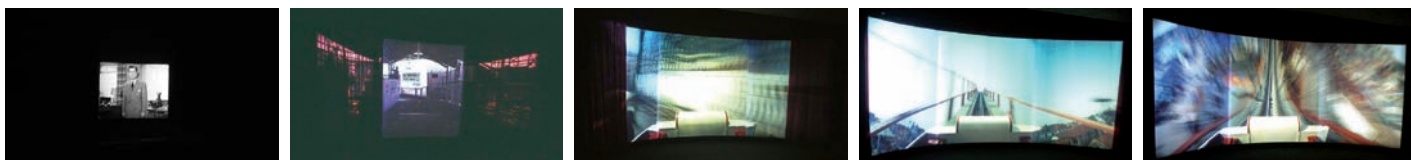
### Cinerama Memories

The Pictureville Cinema is the last remaining cinema in the world that regularly programmes the screening of Cinerama films in the original three strip / three projector process onto a deeply curved screen. This fact draws many Cinerama enthusiasts to the Widescreen Weekend each year, despite the extreme scarcity of

Cinerama three strip prints to screen, and the repeated showing of the museum's prints of "This is Cinerama" and "How The West Was Won". This year was no exception with the screening of "This Is Cinerama" again early on in the weekend.

One of the most important and memorable moments in the history of film projection is "the Cinerama reveal" (pictured below) at the beginning of this film, when the curtains pull back from the small standard academy aspect ratio black and white screen image to slowly reveal the giant colour widescreen aspect ratio of the Cinerama image and also herald its fabulous accompanying magnetic track sound. Even after all these years seeing this at Bradford for the first, or a repeated time, is still a thrilling moment.

Dave Strohmaier and Randy Gitsch from Los Angeles are amongst the world's leading experts, chroniclers and documentary film makers on Cinerama and its place in cinema history. They attended this year for the fourth time. As before, they brought with them prints and important up-to-date information on Cinerama preservations and developments. Something





Dave Strohmaier and Randy Gitsch

that drew a lot of interest was their bringing of a 4K digital file of the restored version of "How The West Was Won" from Los Angeles. In his introduction to the screening through a 2K digital projector of HTWWW onto the big curved Cinerama screen, Dave told delegates that the film did not need extensive restoration as the original camera negatives had in fact only ever been used seven times. The restoration and production of digital files involved acquiring and manipulating a total of 80 terabytes of digital information, the production of a restored digital master, the recent release on DVD and Blu-ray and the archiving of a 16:9 High Definition master for possible future HDTV broadcasting. I was surprised at how good the 2K projected image on the large curved screen was, though its resolution and sharpness in no way compared to the image quality that you see on screen with the museum's three strip print. Again, as with many digital versions the process photography and back projection sequences ( the river raft sequence) transfer particularly poorly to digital files, they almost exaggerate the poor quality of the back projection. It was refreshing however to see the pristine cleanliness of the image on the screen and the almost complete elimination of the join lines. This would be an advantage considered and enjoyed by many modern viewers. The digital file also had very good sound quality compared to the original magnetic sound.

Dave also introduced attendees to a screening of an 18 minute segment of Cinerama's "Russian Adventure", another of their travelogues, which involved Bing Crosby, not least in the narration. Dave had found the three strip prints decaying in a Los Angeles apartment block. They looked in surprisingly good condition projected, though largely faded to entirely magenta. (Picture top right). Dave and Randy also announced that they had just started a project that should see the release of "This Is Cinerama" and "Windjammer" on DVD in the next year or two.

### Restoration Splendour

My own personal favourite component of the widescreen weekend is the opportunity to see recently restored films in very recent prints in

70mm. and other widescreen formats, projected up onto a good sized large screen, and heard through an excellent sound system. The widescreen weekend has yet to disappoint me in this respect. This year three classic musicals were a significant part of the programme. The only two films ever shot in Fox's Cinescope 55 process were featured – "The King and I" and "Carousel".

To maintain the wider aspect ratio of Cinescope 55 on the Pictureville's 'scope screen the films were projected with small black bars at the top and bottom of the screen. Both the prints shown were 35mm. reduction prints shown on the flat screen with 6 track Dolby Digital sound.

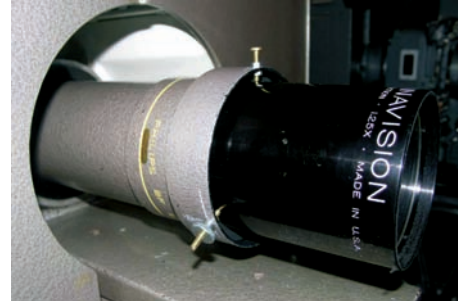
On the Saturday night additional local Bradford cinemagoers booked every available remaining seat for a showing of a glorious 70mm. restored recently made print of "West Side Story" on the curved screen with a 5.1 DTS soundtrack. (It was originally shot in 65mm.) The original 6 magnetic track still has some restoration work to be completed.

It was wonderful to see these three musicals represented through gloriously restored recent prints. The prints were pristine, it was difficult to spot a mark on them, with their rich saturated colours and sharpness they displayed their superb quality particularly in close ups. It was wonderful to see a packed cinema on a Saturday night for a great screening of "West Side Story", with an accompanying blowing of handkerchiefs and dabbing of moist eyes at the end.

Other restorations featured during the weekend were a new 70mm. print of "The Bible: In the Beginning" shot in Dimension 150 and projected onto the curved screen with DTS Special Venue 6 track Todd-AO layout sound. The print was particularly dark at the beginning of the film. Also a new 70mm. Ultra-Panavision print of "Khartoum" was projected onto the curved screen with 6 track DTS sound. The amount of "squeeze" in the print necessitated the projection team adding an additional anamorphic lens to the projector. Dion Hanson had carefully drilled and tapped the lens mounting, fitting 4mm set screws in tapped holes, and then he optically centred the anamorphic before the show. (picture above right).

A particularly interesting restoration was a screening of a new 70mm. print of a former three camera / three projector / multi screen "expo" film, "This Is New Zealand".

Produced by the National Film Unit of New Zealand for the world expo in 1970 in Japan, it was a basic multi screen presentation designed to showcase New Zealand to the world at a time when the UK was becoming more interest-



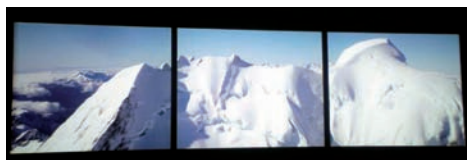
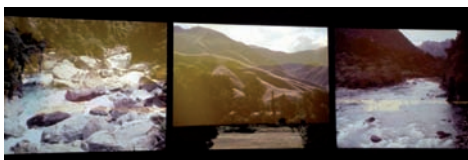
ed in Europe, the commonwealth was becoming less potent and New Zealand was having to find its more independent world voice.

This excellent restoration of the original film based three screen presentation was introduced by Bob Jessop of the quaintly named New Zealand Film Buffs Association. The magnificent short film presentation admirably demonstrated the sheer power of these audio visual non speech based multi screen presentations. It particularly showcases the power of combining great images with great classical music - as aerial shots of beautiful New Zealand mountains and landscapes were combined with the stirring music of Sibelius's Intermezzo from the Karelia Suite. The film presentation (thumbnail pictures below) was a great success at Expo 70 and was seen extensively in New Zealand in the immediate ensuing years, the Sibelius music being used for the opening night of New Zealand Television One in 1975.

### Vintage Nostalgia

Every year the weekend features the screening of vintage prints often dating back to around the original release of the film, or one of its revivals or re-releases. Whilst these often appear to be quite clean prints and enjoyable in terms of clarity, contrast and content they frequently have suffered so much colour fading that only the magenta dye remains in the print. Again this year a number of otherwise excellent vintage prints were screened in "magentavision".

A Richard Burton theme in the programme was evident and the films included "Taming of the Shrew" in a 70mm. blow up print on the flat screen with 6 track magnetic stereo sound, "Where Eagles Dare" in a 70mm. blow up print with 6 track magnetic stereo and "Becket" in another 70mm. blow up print on the flat







Left to right- Top: Projection Team Manager Duncan McGregor, the hefty D150 Super Curvulon lens, and a view of the well equipped box. Bottom: Jennifer Hall, Film Team Assistant and Duncan pictured during a screen change. Thomas Haverslev interrogates Major von Hapen (Derren Nesbitt) about the geography of Dusseldorf!

screen with 6 track magnetic stereo sound.

A truly outstanding vintage print was one shown on the Monday of the long weekend. A vintage print of the 1985 Michael Cimino film "Year of the Dragon" with this year's best actor Oscar nominee Mickey Rourke in the lead role, was the best 70 mm. blow up print I have ever seen. Projected onto the flat screen with 6 track magnetic Dolby stereo it had all its colour intact. The print was of superb quality with amazingly sharp images, so much so that at first I thought it was also originally shot in 70mm.. This must say something for the quality of the original camera lenses and the quality of the laboratory blow up.

### Speakers Galore

As always the weekend featured a variety of speakers and platform contributions. A number of films were introduced by Wolfram Hanne- mann, whose excellent in depth and contextual introductions I thought, without wishing to appear too critical of past introductions, were a significant step up from the introductions to films I had heard in previous years.

Projection team manager Duncan McGregor also introduced a number of screenings, as did Bill Lawrence. Tony Earnshaw, artistic director of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Bradford International Film Festival, of which the 14<sup>th</sup> Widescreen Weekend was a component part, gave an appreciation of the film career of the actor Richard Burton under the title "Richard Burton: Lion of the Welsh".

Randy Gitsch gave a brief history of widescreen short films which included the screening of two 70 mm. prints of short films, NASA's "A Bridge to Space" and also the Anglo-French film "Concord".

Dion Hanson gave a brief illustrated talk on the recent complete refurbishment of the Picture-ville's projection box and Darren Briggs of Arts Alliance gave an illustrated talk on the current national and international scene as regards the growing introduction of digital projectors. The Friday night screening of "Where Eagles Dare" was preceded with an on stage interview with the actor Derren Nesbitt by Tony Earnshaw. Derren Nesbitt played the scene stealing role of SS Major von Hapen in the film, who famously questions Mary Ure in the film about the geography of Düsseldorf in an attempt to find out whether or not she is a double agent. Derren Nesbitt at times had the audience in stitches of laughter as he reminisced about his memories of the shoot and other very amusing memories and anecdotes of his acting career.

### Lasting Impressions

There are few occasions now where you can see a superb 70 mm. print of a film like "West Side Story" in a packed cinema on a Saturday night.

I travelled this year to the weekend with a close friend of mine, Charlie Wills, who attended for the very first time and was happy to pay the whole weekend fee just to see a showing of "How The West Was Won" on the big curved screen (even if it was in 2K digital). Clearly there was the attraction of quite closely approximating the experience of when he first saw the film in Cinerama as a young lad.

On coming out of the screening he found it difficult to talk for about ten to fifteen minutes (and it wasn't anything to do with digital). Like the fabulous atmosphere of the Saturday night, it is obvious that many of the attendees of

the weekend are there to rekindle very fond and lasting impressions of the personal great cinema experiences they remember. However, it's good to notice a slight increase in much younger faces at the weekend this year – presumably having some new cinema experiences for the first time.

If you haven't had the chance to attend a wide- screen weekend before and you love cinema then do consider going, it should provide you with a good few lasting impressions, be they new or old. Even after a mere third visit, I can still thoroughly recommend it.

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Related Websites:

[www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk](http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk)

[www.in70mm.com](http://www.in70mm.com)

[www.cineramaadventure.com](http://www.cineramaadventure.com)

[www.cinemaretro.com](http://www.cinemaretro.com)

