

THE MAGIC OF LARGE FORMAT CINEMA

*Mark Trompeteler reports
on another memorable
Widescreen Weekend*

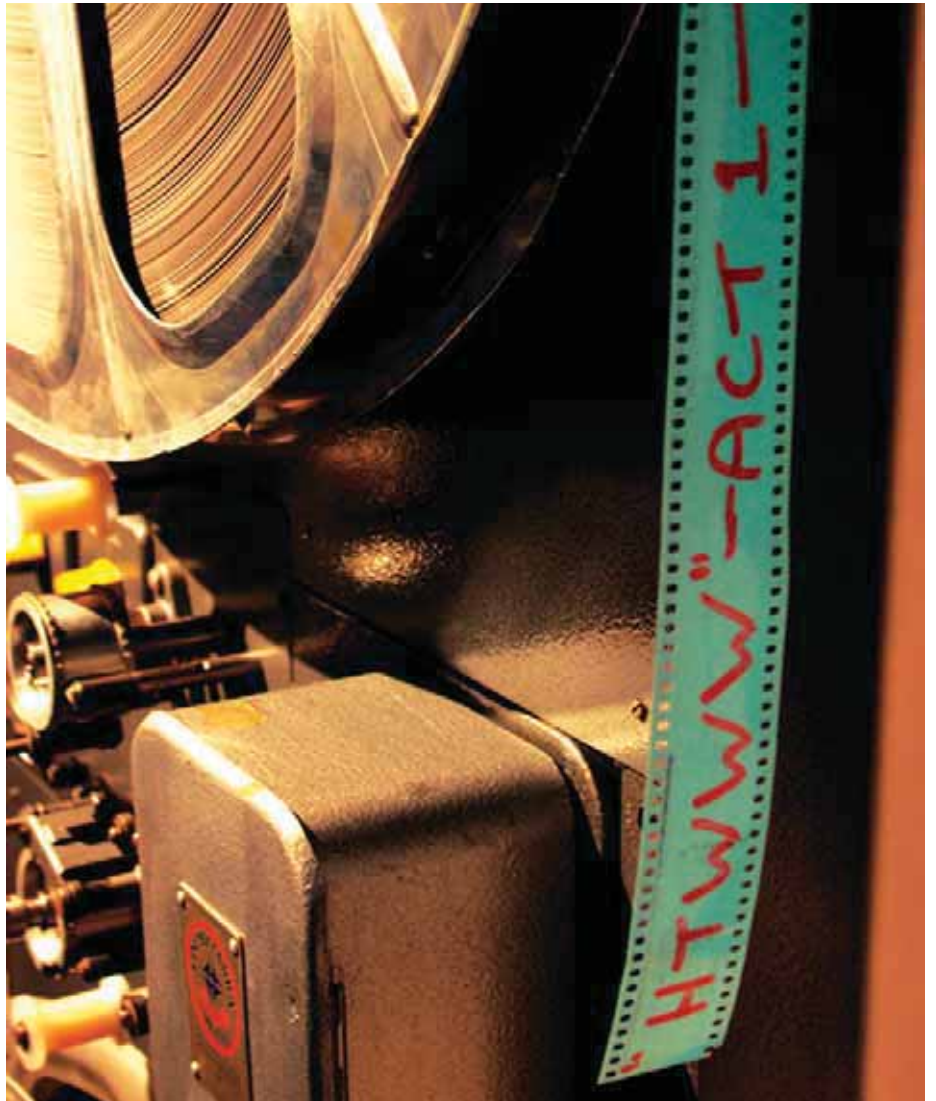
The UK National Media Museum's (NMM) annual Widescreen Weekend (WSW) event in Bradford is an important international event in the area of cinema exhibition, technology and popular culture.

The 2015 event, one of the most successful and best attended, nearly did not happen. The museum had announced in 2014 that it would not hold any of its regular film festivals in 2015 as it was undertaking a review of them. Given the time that this particular event had spent over the years building up an international audience that attend from all over the world — and the real concern that if it broke the pattern by not holding the event for a year, it would start losing that audience — BKSTS, like others, made representations to the museum to review its decision.

The suspicion too, of WSW regulars for many years, has been that this event has the potential to be one of the more financially viable, or even potentially profitable, of the various festivals that the NMM holds. Many cinema exhibition professionals and enthusiasts were delighted to hear the news, early last year, that the museum had secured funding from the BFI and other sources and the WSW 2015 would be held in October. The event consisted of a programme of older classic large-format films, a few more contemporary ones, a screening again of short films by emerging talent, and a great line up of speakers.

A STYLISH START

The weekend got off to a great start with a reception in the Kodak Gallery. After formal welcome speeches delivered from the lectern in the Pictureville cinema, a stylish widescreen weekend clip compilation brilliantly cut to music was screened. Edited by Tom Perkin this was a repeat of the effective “curtain raiser” start to the weekend we had the previous year.



▲ The sound spool for *How The West Was Won*

The opening night film was the musical *Oklahoma* which was part of the weekend's celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Todd-AO process. What was presented was a recent restoration on a 4K DCP projected at 30fps. The steadiness and crispness of image on-screen coupled with the beauty of those amazing vibrant colours that often form the palette of classic Hollywood musicals, together with the ability to show delicate colour, made it an exquisite presentation. A classic Hollywood film originated on celluloid and presented in pristine 4K makes for an effective amalgam of film and digital technologies. That combination may be coming into favour with some current film makers, such as in Sam Mendes *Spectre* and in J.J. Abrams *Star Wars - The Force Awakens*.

The following morning featured an impressive WSW item. Christopher Nolan is another contemporary film maker not shy of exploring the possibilities of

originating on film and exhibition in digital or film. His *Interstellar* was re-scheduled for a prompt 09:45 “lift off” from a 70mm print in 2:20 and DTS sound. The contrast of a contemporary large format film such as this against *Oklahoma* the previous night was an inspired piece of programming. It was made particularly exciting by the arrival of Paul Franklin immediately after the screening to talk about his work on the visual effects of *Interstellar*.

Double VFX Academy Award winner Franklin (*Inception*, *Interstellar*) gave an enjoyable, informative and beautifully illustrated talk about his VFX work on the film. Starting by reminding us in amusing ways of the difference between special effects and visual effects, he talked us through some of the challenges, joys and satisfactions of the VFX work he oversees and gave us a real insight into his craft. ➤



“THE SHEER VARIETY OF ITEMS AT THE WIDESCREEN WEEKEND CONTINUED WITH A 5PM SCREENING IN SMELL-O-VISION”

▲ The projection box at the Pictureville cinema

➤ After lunch, I was on stage introducing a shortlist chosen from 65 entries we had received this year for the “BKSTS/NMM Student Widescreen Film of the Year” competition — the second year that BKSTS and NMM had run this competition. Following on from a double Academy Award winner, and with another Oscar winner, Douglas Trumbull, in the international audience, and hot on the heels of *Interstellar*, there was absolutely no pressure on the students’ work or those students present in the audience! Their films looked good on the big screen and audience members including Douglas Trumbull, who spoke to the students after the screening, commented on the high quality of the short widescreen films. The overall winner was *Maya* winning a camera from Black Magic Design.

AND SMELL-O-VISION, TOO

The sheer variety of items continued with a 5pm screening in Smell-O-Vision. A team prepared the auditorium for the Smell-O-Vision presentation. This consisted of a number of small portable boxed fans at the

front under the screen that at certain points in the film would blow aromas into the auditorium. There were also a large number of duplicate numbered push down spray phials of liquid scents distributed on all the seats across the auditorium and a set of numbered cue cards for two assistants to use either side of the screen. By today’s standards, not exactly the most engaging of thrillers, *Holiday in Spain* aka *Scents of Mystery* was originally designed and released under the *Scents* title to be the next cinematic experience to excite audiences. However it seemed to have been a disappointment and was re-edited and then released under a de-odorised *Holiday* title, exploiting its travelogue aspects, for Cinerama theatres.

As part of Dave Strohmaier’s work in the restoration of the Cinerama back catalogue he had recently restored this film. It was both a 55th anniversary screening and a world premiere for this restoration. Both Dave and Saskia Wilson-Brown, Director of the Institute of Art & Olfaction, introduced the film. As the film screened, some actors interacted with the film at certain points and at other set points in the film the front fans blew aromas into the audience. At other times when numbered cards were



▲ Duncan McGregor welcomes the delegates

held up, if you had that number phial, you held it up above your head, depressed the spray button and sprayed the scent to yourself and your immediate neighbours. Audience members were also equipped with paper fans to distribute aromas and cleanse the nostrils in between scents. I was number 7 (sherry) which, whilst useful during the film when a runaway cask of the fortified wine split open, did not impress my companions later in the hotel bar. I offered to treat them all to a glass of sherry as a nightcap. As I reached into my pocket for what they thought was my wallet, they were less impressed when I produced my phial with a flourish and sprayed the scent of sherry above our heads. That part of the bar definitely became a sherry area for a while. Comments of audience colleagues near me about the screening were mixed — one particular point was that the cue points should be carefully considered to run a little before the scent is required. There is a definite possibility of scent synchronisation issues with Smell-O-Vision. If a number was to be held up at the exact moment the sherry cask splits open then, by the time the spray is made and the scent hits the nostrils,



▲ Film director Douglas Trumbull with the young



▲ A little out of the ordinary: Smell-o-Vision

the shots in the film have moved on. Equally, there is a definite case for Surround Scent — audience members towards the front of the auditorium could pick up the scents from the front fans whilst those in the middle and at the back received little or no scent from these. As well as Surround Scent should Dolby also be working on Scent Reduction? A fascinating and memorable piece of cinema history.

GROWING A NEW AUDIENCE

Other classic screenings during the weekend included *Fiddler on the Roof* (2K DCP), *A Bridge Too Far* (70mm 2:20), *Gigi* (35mm 2.35:1) and *The Magnificent Seven* (35mm 2.35:1). Dr. Pasquale Iannone from the University of Edinburgh gave an interesting talk on the aesthetics of widescreen composition. The exceptional nature of the museum, and the Pictureville cinema, as a film destination, was exploited by a three-strip Cinerama screening on the Saturday night of *How The West Was Won* (HTWWW). It was extremely pleasing to see how many of the screenings were full or nearly full houses when local members of the public come in to occupy seats not



filmmakers Tom Cullingham and Veemsen Lama

purchased by the delegates — notably so for the screening of HTWWW — perhaps boosted by a recent preceding showing on British TV. A student I spoke to the day before said he had noticed the word Cinerama on a poster in the museum and told me he had read about the process in cinema history books. He was amazed that the following day the museum was screening a film in three strip — he had no idea any facility was capable of doing so.

Dave Strohmaier and Randy Gitsch introduced their recent digital restoration of *The Best of Cinerama* which was presented from a 2K DCP in Smilebox on the curved screen to a large audience, again many members of the public joined the delegates. After one screening on the curved screen, I overheard a patron ask a question of one of the weekend team. She said that whilst she had enjoyed the screening of the restored film on the deeply curved, louvered screen, she was a little surprised that in the restoration process they had not got rid of the faint vertical scratches that ran all the way through the film and across its width — newcomers attending this year's various events had the chance to learn about lines and louvered screens and other aspects of large format and widescreen cinema. Of the 3,331 attendees, 64 per cent were non-delegate pass holders, 46 per cent were at their first WSW and 42 per cent of attendees were under the age of 45, 23 per cent being female and 10 per cent aged 16-24.

A CELEBRATED DIRECTOR'S INPUT

Another major contribution to the success of the weekend was the introduction of a keynote address. Film director Douglas Trumbull came both to give that address and introduce a screening of *2001* in 70mm on the curve, something that particularly pleased delegates. He also introduced a screening of his film *Silent Running*. He was the ideal person to give an address entitled "The State of the Cinema". His expertise and reputation on both the engineering and technology side of cinema and exhibition, and the technology of cinematography and the creative production side as a filmmaker, made him a relevant observer to deliver such an address. His speech was detailed and richly illustrated, taking the audience through the beginnings of basic cinema technology and its various stages of development to what he believes cinema is capable of in the immediate future. He led us through his argument towards the benefits and possibilities of a kind of communal virtual reality experience that can be created by using bright projection, 4K, 3D and a high frame-rate of 120fps.

After his address, he demonstrated his thesis by showing us his recent short film *UFOTOG*. While the luminance levels of the projection set-up did not do his 3D film full

DEVELOPING A SUPERB FESTIVAL

The contribution of Bill Lawrence in developing the WSW event over the years, then Thomas Hauerlev, and now Duncan McGregor in further developing it and ensuring its continuation in 2015, cannot be underestimated. There has been an impact caused by public expenditure cutbacks, restructuring, reductions in staffing and outsourcing of functions to commercial companies in major national institutions such as The Science Museum Group, of which NMM is a part, the British Film Institute, and other major cultural institutions within the UK. As I saw the amount of work being done in such a stringent financial climate to provide a fabulous weekend, I couldn't help think that if it wasn't for the superhuman efforts of Duncan McGregor, curator of this weekend, it would not have happened or achieved the success it did. Duncan was again assisted by dedicated Picturehouse projectionists and employees, museum colleagues, contributors and volunteers and this year's guest curator, the ever-popular and authoritative Sir Christopher Frayling. Congratulations to the Museum, the Picturehouse Group and the teams within both organisations, but especially to Duncan McGregor for delivering such a great weekend.

justice and the subject of his film tended to be a little dark, what he showed was impressive. I was stunned by the clarity and realism that the 120fps rate added to the visual experience. The clarity of the image and the absence of any image artefacts made me lose any consciousness of the fact that I was looking at an image on a screen — it appeared to me as if the actor was looking directly at me through an open window. The lighting, lens and composition all augmented the effect. The effect on a screen that would totally fill my field of vision would be remarkable. Douglas Trumbull's short demonstration film of his MAGI process was a real insight into what cinema technology and creativity could be capable of.

After the *2001* screening, Trumbull returned on stage as part of a question and answer session. It went on past midnight, with his own photos and sketches projected as a backdrop. An audience discussing *2001*, VFX and film-making with Douglas Trumbull after a 70mm screening on the curve of the film — do film festival experiences get any better? **CT**