

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

BFI/RANK PROGRAMMING EXPERIMENT: April - June 1982

1. Background

In mid-1981 officers of the BFI Programming Unit approached Rank Leisure Services to discuss ways of bringing a wider range of films to towns without any BFI-sponsored provision. From these general discussions with Rank Theatres Controller, Stan Fishman, a plan emerged to programme series of 'one-day' screenings at a number of selected Odeons. Four towns were chosen for the initial experiment: Cheltenham, Exeter, Guildford and Colchester. (Interestingly, all of these but Cheltenham had short-lived Regional Film Theatres.)

The films to be shown were selected as examples of relatively popular current 'art cinema', with the addition of two recent BFI 35mm productions: RADIO ON and BROTHERS AND SISTERS. The three other distributors involved were invited to relax their normal minimum guarantees and accept terms of 25%; while Rank in turn waived their house-figure requirements. In effect, the BFI acted as broker between independent distribution and the Rank circuit. Unavoidable publicity costs were split 50:50 between Rank and the Programming Unit and the experiment was set to run from 29 April on six consecutive Thursdays, under the title 'Six of the Best'. Local film societies were alerted via the BFFS and Sir Richard Attenborough kindly contributed a promotional radio interview.

2. Results

Full results from all the cinemas are given on a separate sheet and should be treated as confidential. Rank Leisure's overall verdict was that they ranged from average to distinctly better than average for the cinemas in question. The very high figures for DON GIOVANNI and CITY OF WOMEN were not as surprising as those for TREE OF THE WOODEN CLOGS and STALKER at Cheltenham. Equally

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BROTHERS AND SISTERS was not expected to do particularly well, on the basis of past experience, but RADIO ON proved to have considerable potential. The notably low figures from all cinemas on 3 June are almost certainly due to adverse (good) weather conditions. Local press coverage of the experiment was most encouraging, with reviewers giving editorial coverage to individual films and to the scheme as a whole. Rank personnel attended a BFI Press Conference on 3 June to announce the success and continuation of the scheme.

3. Prospects

By week four, Rank and the Programming Unit had agreed that the experiment was a success and should be extended. Rather than continue into the summer, it was decided to mount an extended programme for up to ten weeks in the autumn at a larger number of cinemas. Additional situations are currently being considered. There are also plans to introduce a wider range of films into the 'pool': English and American classics and 'cult' films, European films from other countries and controversial titles are all under consideration. But the aim will be to maintain the commercial as well as the cultural viability of the scheme and to look for ways in which it could become a permanent feature of the British distribution/exhibition system.

As the Monopolies Commission Films Inquiry reaches its conclusion, it may be that this modest experiment, based on the principle of enlightened self-interest, points towards long-term ways of improving the circulation of specialised films. And it may also be that the Distribution Division's unique experience of striking a balance between commerce and culture in programming can sustain a major development parallel to its existing direct booking operations.

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9 June 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

RANK PROGRAMMING EXPERIMENT

Odeon Colchester

29 April	CITY OF WOMEN	£193 (99 admissions)
6 May	SEMAINE DE VACANCES	£141 (67 ")
13 May	DON GIOVANNI	£214 (121 ")
20 May	RADIO ON	£97 (51 ")
27 May	TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS	£119 (62 ")
3 June	BROTHERS AND SISTERS	£46 (33 ")

Odeon Cheltenham

29 April	PROVIDENCE	£136 (63 admissions)
6 May	TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS	£197 (98 ")
13 May	AVIATOR'S WIFE	£194 (94 ")
20 May	STALKER	£225 (109 ")
27 May	BELLE DE JOUR	£171 (87 ")
3 June	LOULOU	£119 (60 ")

Odeon Exeter

29 April	DON GIOVANNI	£321 (156 admissions)
6 May	RADIO ON	£165 (75 ")
13 May	CITY OF WOMEN	£246 (115 ")
20 May	BROTHERS AND SISTERS	£37 (18 ")
27 May	SEMAINE DE VACANCES	£98 (46 ")
3 June	TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS	£128 (64 ")

Odeon Guildford

29 April	AVIATOR'S WIFE	£125 (60 admissions)
6 May	STALKER	£86 (41 ")
13 May	PROVIDENCE	£155 (77 ")
20 May	LOULOU	£111 (52 ")
27 May	TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS	£271 (135 ")
3 June	BELLE DE JOUR	£115 (65 ")