Scotland’s oldest cinema celebrates in style

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The anniversary will be marked with an afternoon of free entertainment in the style of the venue’s 1912 variety programmes, followed by an evening screening of a winning film in an audience poll.

The afternoon will include screenings of comedy film shorts with live musical accompaniment by the Gladstone’s Bag quartet, usherettes in original 1912 costume, along with performances from the local Barony Players and the Bo’ness Amateur Operatic Society.

The latter group featured in the Hippodrome’s line-up in nearly 100 years ago, when a local paper offered the enthusiastic review: “justifying their existence as public caterers of unquestionable repute, and as a means of raising the general standard of musical and dramatic culture locally.”

The celebrations continue into Sunday evening when the Hippodrome screens the classic Ealing Studios comedy ‘The Ladykillers’ - directed by Alexander Mackendrick, born in 1912 when the Hippodrome first opened. The night will also include the premiere of a new trailer for Hippodrome 100 made by young people at Forth Valley College studying video and sound production as part of their BA Media and Communications and HND courses.

The Hippodrome’s creator Louis Dickson was a local man, a far-sighted entrepreneur and impresario, who engaged the visionary but largely overlooked architect Matthew Steele to realise his dream of building Scotland’s first “picture palace”. The resulting building is Steele’s masterpiece, with a completely round auditorium “as if the reels, sprockets, cogs, guide-wheels and guides of a film projector have been laid on edge and translated into architectural form.”

Dickson continued to be at the forefront of the cinematograph industry, experimenting with early experiments in synchronised sound (involving a rather elaborate system of shellac discs and a gramophone with a clock attachment, described by Mr Dickson himself as “more trouble than it was worth”) . . . successfully progressing from the silent era to become “the home of perfect talkies”.

Councillor Adrian Mahoney, the Convener of Leisure, Tourism and Community at Falkirk Council, said: “The Hippodrome was launched in 1912, just as early movie production was shifting to a pretty place called ‘Hollywood’. This wonderful, pre-art deco building became the place to go to see the latest epics and blockbusters, alongside home-grown films made by Hippodrome creator Louis Dickson.

Sadly, like many small cinemas, the Hippodrome suffered a decline in the early 1970s. It stopped showing movies in 1975 - and closed its doors (we thought for good) in the 1980s . . . after a spell as a bingo hall. Some thought this wonderful building would face eventual demolition. However, the local community, working with Falkirk Council and the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust, had the vision to restore and re-open it. In 2009, after a £2 million project, the Hippodrome got back into the movie business.

"The re-launch, as a busy, working cinema, has been a great success. Audiences have grown each year, and there’s been a real boost for surrounding businesses.

“Thanks to a sensitive refurbishment programme – and the addition of new equipment and better seating - this wonderful little building now offers all the glamour of an old-fashioned movie theatre, but with all the comfort (and

technology) of a 21st century cinema. It’s a fantastic asset to the area.”

He added: “It's amazing to think that a building conceived 100 years ago, at the dawn of movie making, is still fit for purpose today. In fact, for some of our patrons - myself included - it's their favourite cinema.”

The Hippodrome is leased from the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) by Falkirk Council. An SHBT spokesperson said: “SHBT is proud that it has been able to save such an important building within the town of Bo’ness, giving it new and sustained life through Falkirk Council’s use as a cinema and are delighted to able to celebrate its 100th birthday with the community of Bo’ness.”

The Hippodrome was restored with the help of a number of funders, including Falkirk Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: “This gem of a cinema brings as much joy to those that step through its doors today as it did 100 years ago. It has sparked a new interest in the town’s heritage instilling pride and confidence in the community. With celebrations set to continue over the year, many more people will have the chance to delight in all that the Hippodrome has to offer.”

Falkirk Community Trust, which runs the Hippodrome on behalf of Falkirk Council, has announced Hippodrome 100, supported by The National Lottery through Creative Scotland, Regional Screen Scotland and the Bo’ness Townscape Heritage Initiative.

This is a year-long programme of workshops, public art interventions, screenings in unusual places, touring exhibitions and events inspired by the Hippodrome and its place in the nation’s cinema-going heritage.

Venu Dhupa, Director of Creative Development at Creative Scotland, said: “It’s fantastic to see the Hippodrome maintaining and enhancing its original features from the classic age of cinema to the modern changes of the present day, allowing the venue to continue providing quality cinematic experiences for its audience.”

Ian Scott, the chair of Falkirk Community Trust, added: “Hippodrome 100 Events, such as the birthday celebrations on March 11th, and the terrific Festival of Silent Cinema (March 16th-18th, 2012), which will feature a line-up of both great films and world-class musicians and performers, are sure to be a delight for everyone who attends. It is a real pleasure to see this amazing place thriving and doing what it was built to do a century ago.”

Falkirk Community Trust has invited film fans to sign up to receive updates by joining its mailing list and following "@FalkirkCultural” on Twitter.

Councillor Mahoney, added: “We hope local people - and those from further afield - will enjoy the series of special events and screenings to mark the Hippodrome’s 100th anniversary. And we hope that film fans will continue to come to the Hippodrome for many years to come. Here's to the next century."

Notes to editors

Full information on Hippodrome 100 is available at www.falkirkcommunitytrust.org/hippodrome100

Sunday 11th March events:
Hippodrome 100 Birthday Celebration 14:00 and again at 15:15 (tickets free but pre-booking recommended).
Hippodrome 100 People’s Choice screening of ‘The Ladykillers (U) (1955) 19:30 Tickets £5.55 (£4.25 conc).

Tickets are on sale for the above events and for the full Hippodrome March – 7 June season from the Steeple Box Office, High Street, Falkirk FK1 1NW. Alternatively you can contact the Hippodrome Box Office on 01324 506 850.

Hippodrome 100 is funded by Falkirk Council, Falkirk Community Trust, Creative Scotland and Bo'ness Townscape Heritage Initiative.

The Hippodrome, Scotland's first purpose built picture palace, is run by Falkirk Community Trust, a new charitable company set up by Falkirk Council to deliver culture, library, recreation and sport services on its behalf. Falkirk Community Trust is a charity registered in Scotland, No: SC042403, Suite 1A, Falkirk Stadium, 4 Stadium Way, Falkirk FK2 9EE. Information on the year-round cinema programme at the Hippodrome is available at www.falkirkcommunitytrust.org.

Creative Scotland is the national development agency for the arts, screen and creative industries. Our vision is that Scotland will be recognised as one of the world's most creative nations – one that attracts, develops and retains talent, where the arts and the creative industries are supported and celebrated and their economic contribution fully captured; a nation where the arts and creativity play a central part in the lives, education and well-being of our population

Year of Creative Scotland 2012: The Year of Creative Scotland began on January 1, 2012 and is a chance to showcase, celebrate and promote Scotland's cultural and creative strengths on a world stage. Through a dynamic and exciting year-long programme of activity celebrating our world-class events, festivals, culture and heritage, the year puts Scotland's culture and creativity in the international spotlight with a focus on cultural tourism and developing the events industry and creative sector in Scotland. More information about the programme can be found at: www.visitscotland.com/creative

Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) – 'Conserving the Past, Building the Future', www.shbt.org.uk

Regional Screen Scotland is the development agency for cinema-going opportunities in smaller, less well-provided communities throughout Scotland. For more information please visit Regional Screen Scotland Website

Further Information

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