
HIRSCHFELD BIOGRAPH

The Hirschfeld Biograph is one of the success stories of the National Gay Federation and the Hirschfeld Gay Community Centre. It is now in its sixth year of presenting International films and films that would be of special interest to the gay community.

In 1979 a small group of gay activists convened a meeting in North Great Georges Street with approximately 25 persons whom they considered had something to offer, should a club for gay persons be opened. The gay community had at this time been without a premises for nine months due to the closure of I.G.R.M. in Parnell Square.

It was felt that the new premises should be more than just a weekend disco. It would be a meeting place that was welcoming, that had warmth and would be open seven days a week, being always available to its members. It would have meetings, social functions, full involvement of the members but it would also have something special that no other voluntary gay club in Europe had, a cinema. Here, at last, was a function all gay persons, regardless of age, could attend without having the feeling of being left out of things or being in a 'cruisy atmosphere' they felt uncomfortable with. The Hirschfeld Biograph was born.

A season of 6 films with a fee of £3 for all 6 was arranged. It was poorly supported. It was suggested to the committee of N.G.F. that the films should be shown free to the members, thus creating good P.R. and also giving something to those people who had no interest in Discos or politics.

It was around this time that I heard of the Federation of Irish Film Societies. I approached the then administrator, Michael Dwyer, with a view to sharing in the films that came in for the other film societies. With the help of F.I.F.S. an international film season was launched.

The Hirschfeld Biograph was being organised on a very tight budget. Michael Dwyer came up with the idea that the Biograph be made an honorary member of the F.I.F.S. thus setting aside the affiliation fee which in our case should have been around £500. In return I was to be on call to repair any films that got damaged while doing the rounds of the film societies as well as being advisor to the film societies regarding new equipment or presentation problems. Currently the N.G.F. is saved a sum of approximately £800 by being an honorary member.

Once a year the Federation holds an annual film viewing session, hosted by one of the member societies. Representatives from most of the societies are present, totaling anything up to 200 persons. A full weekend of viewing the possible films that will be available for booking the following season takes place. I am responsible for the projection of the films on these weekends and as a result of same, those attending have come to know me and what I represent. I have on such occasions been asked all about N.G.F. and gay people generally, and to date at least four people have 'come out' as a result of the information given. It has become a great P.R. exercise. Great credit is due to the Federation of Irish Film Societies for the success that the Biograph shares in. A lot of credit is also due to Hirschfeld Enterprises for their co-operation and support in the purchasing of the necessary equipment needed to give as professional a presentation as possible.

The Hirschfeld Biograph is a source of entertainment. It does not dabble in politics. It never will. I strive to obtain the best of the International films and as many Gay films that are available. Not all films are released in 16mm which explains why certain films I'm asked for by the members never turn up. To date 110 films have been shown, each having two performances while some had four. There have been many Irish Premiers but the emphasis has been on quality

of product more than anything else.

There were also a few milestones in the life of the Biograph. A few years ago during Gay Pride Week I brought over from London Vito Russo, who was a renowned expert on Gays on Film. He was about to publish his book, 'The Celluloid Closet' and his illustrated lecture was based on this subject. He gave two presentations on the same evening to packed houses. It was a great success. More recently, was the presentation of Terence Davies's Trilogy of films, *Children, Madonna and Child, Death and Transfiguration*. This was organised with the marvellous help and co-operation of the British Film Institute. Terence flew into Dublin for the presentation and participated in an open forum debate on each of the two evenings. N.G.F. and Terence got excellent Press coverage from the event as well as overfull houses for each of the four performances.

Continuing along these lines I'm proud to announce that an extra event has been organised for Tuesday 11th December at 8pm. I will be presenting Donald Taylor Black's film *At the Cinema Palace-Liam O'Leary*. This will be followed by an illustrated talk on the cinema in Ireland by Liam O'Leary. I'm very grateful to Liam for agreeing to give the talk.

Each season starts at the beginning of October and continues fortnightly until Gay Pride Week in June. Each May sees the start of the planning for the next season's films. The films are collected on a Friday, checked over the weekend for damage, presented on the Monday and returned on the Tuesday. The Biograph is prepared for the presentation from 2pm on the day of showing. It is a never ending process. It takes many weeks to prepare each of the two leaflets that are produced. It is a full time job but an enjoyable one.

One strives for better all the time. There is always some aspect that can be improved upon e.g. a bigger cinema, tiered seating, better ventilation. I'm sure that when monies are available

all might happen in due course.

Recently the membership rates of N.G.F. were reduced making it £5 for wage earners and £3 for Students and unwaged. Considering that this entitles you to attend all the films free, where else would you get such value? The current budget is £1,700 for each season of 21 films which is nothing compared with what it should be.

The Hirschfeld Biograph is run as a private members cinema and as such we must be strict, insisting that all who attend are members. Apart from the cinema, there are many other benefits available to you by being members such as reduced rates to the discos. A good strong and supportive membership is also a good foundation for a sound organisation to be built upon. It is all voluntary. It is all for YOU. Long may it all last. Long may we always enjoy it.

JOHNNY

YOUTH GROUP

This January sees the start of International Youth Year. In response to this, the National Gay Federation Youth Group plays host to the 1985 Gay Youth Conference, which will be held July '85. Venue and format have as yet to be decided. We are optimistic that the majority of funding will be covered by a grant from the European Youth Foundation. The remainder of costs will hopefully be raised by a series of fund-raising discos in the Hirschfeld Centre.

A Youth Counselling Service and Discussion Group will be established at the outset of 1985. In addition to our Sunday meetings, members will be able to have the chance to join our swimming and horse-riding activities.

The Youth Group meets every Sunday 3.30-6.30 pm and people under 25 are welcome to come along.