

All Saints Cinemas rolls into 20th year of film fun

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

All Saints Cinema is housed in the second oldest standing train depot in Florida. Built in 1858, the freight station welcomed passengers intermittently until the early 2000s. That's when train and film enthusiast John Fraser envisioned something else for the space. As president and co-founder of the Tallahassee Film Society, he is looking forward to celebrating the society's 20th anniversary this May at what has become an iconic independent film venue.

"Freight trains come by and blow their horn to cross Railroad Avenue," describes Fraser. "We simply raise the volume until the train is gone. Most people are smiling and no one has ever complained. It's all part of the charm of being down here."

Fraser's love of film dates back to growing up and watching movies at the Loew's Riviera in Miami. He would bike often to see the latest films. Drawn to the comedy and drama genres, his favorites include "Matewan," a 1987 historical drama about the history of West Virginian coal miners and "Airplane" the 1980s hit comedy.

"Sometimes you step back from the film while you're watching it and wonder what went into it," says Fraser. "I'm always appreciative of good dialogue, but as I've gotten older I enjoy cinematography even more and I can appreciate what goes into the scenes and settings."

The film society originally grew out of Fraser's living room. Every six weeks, a small group would meet to take turns picking and watching films. After fifty films, Fraser and co-founder Dan Wester approached the Florida State film school and Eastern Federal Theaters about showing movies in various venues around the city.

The group incorporated as a non-profit in 1999. Fraser approached Amtrak and Leon County in 2004, and the All Saints Cinema on Railroad Avenue was born. Their first film showing was "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill," which follows a group of wild parrots that made their home in San Francisco and never left. A parallel could be drawn between the society finding a home at All Saints Cinema.

"We nested, and people continue to flock down here to see our films," laughs Fraser, poking fun at the comparison.

The cinema draws 8,000 people annually and provides a platform for local, national and international independent filmmakers. They average 100 titles a year with one main film every weekend. For the 20th Anniversary celebration, Fraser has lined up the four best grossing and most enjoyed films that the society has shown in the space.

On Wednesday, May 8, the celebration kicked off with "Coastlines," directed by local filmmaker Victor Nunez and filmed in north Florida. Next up is "Walking the Camino," which follows travelers along the 500-mile European trail that takes nearly forty days to com-



Fraser



The All Saints Cinema celebrates its 20th anniversary in May. JOHN FRASER

If you go

What: 20th Anniversary of the Tallahassee Film Society

When: 7 p.m. on Wednesdays. May 15, 22, 29

Where: All Saints Cinema, 918 Railroad Ave.

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information please call 850-386-4404 or visit <https://www.tallahasseefilms.com/>.

plete. "Camino" also featured locals who spoke after the film about their own experiences on the trail.

Fraser loves having these supplementary events frame a film showing as part of the society's greater mission. Twice they've partnered with the FSU College of Music and shown a documentary called "Note by Note: The Making of Steinway L1037."

"It's about the making of a Steinway piano from harvesting the wood in the forest to the concert floor," says Fraser. "Afterwards Dr. Heidi Williams played on a Steinway in the auditorium for the audience. I love when we can enhance the films with speakers or performances."

Fraser is glad that the society's evolution now supports academic internships for students and continues

to provide a venue for speakers and organizations to share ideas. He often receives notes with membership dues thanking the society for showing films that wouldn't otherwise be seen.

"It's more than just selling tickets," says Fraser. "I think there's a satisfaction that people are enjoying your film and I find that rewarding."

"RBG" will follow up "Camino" on May 22. Fraser says the documentary was the best-attended film ever shown at the cinema, with nearly 25 sold out showings in over four months. "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill" will close out the celebration on May 29 given its history as All Saints Cinema's first film, and its status as a Tallahassee favorite.

Admission is free for all showings and will include cake from one of four local sponsors—Lind Akhavein, Food Glorious Food, Kool Beanz and Tasty Pastry Bakery. Fraser is grateful for the community's overwhelming support of the cinema, and the longevity of the film society given its humble beginnings.

"It was basically a dream out of a living room," says Fraser. "I would be real happy if we continued to grow and get more enhanced programming. We want to have another 20 years."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).