

Stanley Kubrick's 2001 - A Space Odyssey

The legend lives on.

Dion Hanson reports

The legend lives on

This of course is the ideal year to release Stanley Kubrick's 1968 epic space adventure. However, there are many reasons why this re-release was much awaited, besides the date. There is the interest in the man himself particularly after his untimely death, there are movie goers who have never seen true 70mm and there is the small expanding group of people who appreciate good quality presentations. Audiences have been watching '2001' for many years but have only been seeing a poor quality image on television screens or well-worn 35mm and 70mm prints in the cinema.

The film was shot using the single lens Cinerama system. As you are aware, Cinerama was originally a cumbersome three-strip 35mm system having separate stereophonic sound on full coat 35mm magnetic film. This of course made shooting and projecting the film a technical nightmare. Consequently Cinerama

developed a single projector system using 70mm film (remember this was not available when Cinerama was first developed), and employing a special lens for the deep curve. I do not want to go into the pros and cons of 3-strip verses single strip Cinerama here. That is a subject for another article.

The film was originally released through MGM but Turner Classics later purchased the rights. Following



'Artistic' shot of the auditorium and screen in Berlin

various sales and mergers, the rights of '2001 A Space Odyssey' and many other cinematic classics passed to Warner Bros. Although Warner's have several 35mm copies with digital tracks there was not a good 70mm copy available. One thing that Kubrick hated was the thought that many of his films would be projected in poor quality cinemas with a scratched copy. This led to an obsession of his in getting theatres checked out at film festivals and premiers prior to screening one of his movies. However, this practice is not to be frowned on, as many directors quite rightly have a similar concern.

Highest quality

Warners decided that if they were to strike a new 70mm it should be of a quality that Kubrick would have accepted. It was decided that as the 65mm negative was still intact no restoration was required as no 'long lost' scenes were to be added (who dares add or remove scenes from a Kubrick film?). The negative was cleaned and then, before the 70mm copy could be struck, the type of sound track had to be decided on, 6-Track magnetic or DTS Digital? A quick poll was taken and it was discovered that there are many dormant magnetic theatres but very few DTS theatres, and most DTS theatres were old magnetic ones. Consequently, it was decided to go with 6-track magnetic but to encode it Dolby SR to give the ultimate in analogue sound, using the original track

configuration of five full range screen channels and one surround channel.

The copy had to be struck in America as there is now no laboratory in Europe capable of processing and striping 70mm film, due to environmental considerations. CFS are in fact the only laboratory in America who invested in the cleaning plant required to filter the hazardous vapours given off when striping 70mm.

Berlin 2001

The first booking for the film was at the Berlin Film Festival, which was including in its programme a retrospective of Stanley Kubrick in which several of his films were to be screened. Also included in the Festival was a new documentary shot by his family, including many rare glimpses into his life using family photographs and home movies. The documentary sounds long, at nearly three hours, but having watched it several times now, I still find it absorbing. Every film he has made is covered in it and there is a particularly interesting section about '2001' about how some of the shots were achieved, along with an interview with Doug Trumbull his special effects director.

The documentary was in itself a technical breakthrough, in that the sound track was Dolby E encoded and the festival screening was to be one of the first public performance for the system from a Digi-Beta tape. Dolby E was developed as a broadcast format which allows six channels of digital audio to be compressed into two channels for transmission. In the theatre, the two tracks, which are on the digital tracks of the cassette, are fed into a Dolby E decoder (kindly loaned by Dolby Labs), and the subsequent six channels of digital audio are converted to analogue and fed into the theatre's CP200 Dolby cinema processor. The picture was projected 16x9 using a standard Barco DLP projector, giving excellent quality on their screen.

The documentary is now part of a boxed set on DVD of all Kubrick's films, available from Warner Home Video, and well worth the investment for those who want to see perfect copies of his films and to get an insight into the man through the eyes of his family and friends, rather than the press.

£35,000 for one copy

The 70mm copy of the film arrived in ten reels, including all the play-in and play-out music, along with the intermission title. In other words, a complete print with no splices. The cost is rumoured to have been £35,000 for this one copy. Because of this investment, Warners decided that wherever the print played the theatre would be checked out beforehand for both sound and picture. This was in respect of Kubrick's family who wished to ensure that the projection would be as perfect as possible.

Berlin live

The theatre in Berlin is a 'live' theatre used to show films basically only for the festival period. This in no way limits its technical capabilities for film presentation. The projectors are Kinoton's new FP75 dual-purpose projectors with a water-cooled electronic intermittent, reverse scan analogue and Dolby Digital readers built in. For those who remember the old DP75 and all its drawbacks (plastic pad rollers etc) will be pleased to learn that this projector is a dream, and the picture quality on the screen is outstanding. Not as romantic as the DP70 but now at last a worthy successor.

Through the night....

One of the Kinoton engineers worked through the night to physically realign the chassis in both xenon lamp houses to attain the required 16 foot lamberts, whilst I replaced a faulty six-track magnetic head on number two machine. Again thanks to him for locating some damping resistors for the heads. We were then ready for a rehearsal which went extremely well save for

a bad hiss on the inner channels; this was traced to a faulty relay which switches the logic on the Cat280s for inner left and right. The relay was subsequently shorted out. The space scenes, because of the Dolby SR, were now totally silent, something that would not have been possible for its Cinerama release - we all remember the 'hiss' from magnetic films, before Dolby arrived.

The two screenings went perfectly, thanks to the professionalism of the projection team, who timed the changeovers to perfection. Both houses were full to capacity with a very appreciative audience.

To the UK and France

After this success the copy was to be shipped to the UK for screening at the Curzon Mayfair for a short season.



FP75E in the projection room at Berlin

A second copy had been struck for screening in France; this was an original version with French Subtitles, the venue being the Grande Ecran in Paris.

After our success in Berlin I felt that Paris would be quite simple, particularly since I was familiar with the theatre. This screening was to be on a single projector and a platter, unlike Berlin, which required change-overs. The sound aligned fine, but the light output was a struggle due to the large screen.

First rehearsal

After the line up we all sat down to the rehearsal. All went well up to the first splice between parts one and two, where there was a break in sound for about one second. It may not sound much but in fact it is quite disturbing, and this occurred on every splice. The cause of this was that when the print was made the laboratory had not put the sound overlap on the incoming reel. On 35mm the overlap is on the outgoing reel since the sound is in front of the picture, but for 70mm it is behind the picture, since the magnetic heads are on top of the projector. If you are taking change-overs there is not a problem, it is only when you put it onto a platter that there is a problem. Since the film was made prior to platters being developed, no one thought that there would be no overlaps.

and both copies had to be returned to the States to have the missing sections added. As you can imagine, this had to be done quite quickly as the opening dates at both venues were fast approaching. However, true to form, both copies arrived in time, although at the eleventh hour.

The Italian job

There was also a print specially struck for Italy - this was to be a dubbed Italian version but still with Dolby SR. The theatre showing this was the Arcadia Meltzo near Milan. For those not familiar with this venue, it is privately owned by the Fumagalli family who are all film fanatics and have built this complex, which is the ultimate in customer comfort and technical specifications.

The film opened concurrently with two theatres in Rome, both showing 35mm copies.



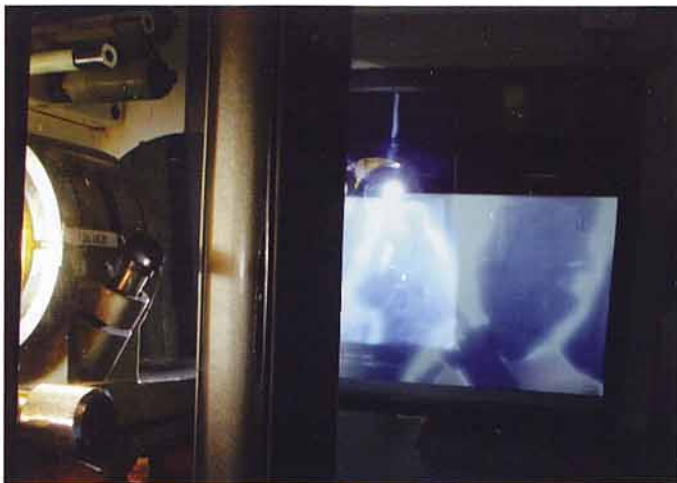
Auditorium and screen, Melzo, Italy

If this problem was on the French print then it must also be on the English print; a quick check confirmed this,

After the run Meltzo had taken more than the two theatres in Rome put together - who says the public will not go out of their way to see



Running the 70mm copy onto the platter



DP70 at the Irish Film Centre Dublin



Running from the platter in Dublin

70mm? They will for a good copy, good presentation, and a good theatre. One evening they had the Kubrick documentary (in English) followed by the film, the programme lasting over 5 hours. The programme was a sell out for several weeks in advance, and not one person left before the end, which was well after midnight.

Bradford Widescreen

Back in the UK the film was to have a special one-off screening at the Widescreen Weekend in Bradford, prior to its opening in London. The Pictureville is, as I am sure you are aware, a Cinerama theatre, and this meant that the film would be screened exactly as it was meant to be. Those that attended that screening will I am sure agree that it was 'the ultimate trip'.

500 shows on

The film has now played at eight venues with around 500 passes. There are a few

marks visible to the trained eye but the print is standing up remarkable well. One reason for this is that not only have I been to check out the theatre for sound, light and equipment, but that Richard Hühndorf from Warner has rehearsed the print with the theatre to ensure the play-in music, intermission etc are all perfectly timed. We both feel that when the theatre staff see the results of our labours and our keenness to have perfect presentation, it rubs off and ceases to be just another show.

What were the things that had to be done in the various theatres to achieve this? Obviously I cannot be specific but here are just a few, and not in any particular order.

- Increased the light output from 4 foot lamberts to the international standard
- changed lenses to get focus
- moved projectors forward to get the correct aspect ratio through the port hole
- fitted head resistors to get a



Victoria 8 projector
Cambridge Arts



Aligning the CP200 at
Cambridge

flat response

- removed 35mm rollers
- cleared hums and, finally
- fitted SR in all the venues (except Glasgow who were already equipped).

We won't mention the heartache caused when Securicor lost reel one for a time!

Was it worth it?

Did all the effort pay off? Well many of the theatres want to book the film for a second time and two theatres are installing 70mm specifically to play the film. If you want a treat try and catch it when it is your area. There is still time to see it in 2001.

Dion Hanson FBKS
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