

Showcomotion 2004: children's and young people's film festival—Part 2

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This is the conclusion of a two-part review. Part 1 was posted August 16.

The Showcomotion film festival, screened in Sheffield, England, is the largest event of its kind in Britain. The annual festival presents a diverse range of films and shorts produced for (and also by) young people, many of which would not otherwise be screened in the UK. Priority is given to films representing the lives of children from around the world and addressing issues considered pertinent to younger audiences. Conceived of as a response to the mediocre diet of big-budget animation and saccharine children's films, Showcomotion has helped promote a more diverse mix of material for younger audiences.

The sixth Showcomotion boasted a wide range of drama, comic adventure, animation and short stories.

About A Girl: This amusing, and ultimately tragic tale follows a 13-year-old girl who we initially hear singing the song *I'm Not That Innocent*, by Britney Spears. She proceeds, at breakneck pace, to tell us all manner of things about her life (her separated parents, finding money for food, music, etc.).

Winner of a BAFTA Best Short award in 2002, *About A Girl* is a shocking slice of teenage life. Ashley Thewlis, who plays the young girl, gives a fine performance.

L: The story of a little boy called Jacob, who is a shoemaker's son. An evil witch requires a pure-hearted boy as the final ingredient in her sinister plans, so she decides to lure Jacob to her castle. When Jacob refuses to cooperate, she casts a spell that turns him into a hunch-backed dwarf. When he finally escapes and returns to his town, seven years have passed (though for him no time has passed at all), his father has died of a broken heart and his mother refuses to recognise him, accusing him of mocking the memory of her dead son. Jacob is chased away by the indignant townsfolk.

Jacob returns to the castle where he saves the life of a goose who turns out to be Princess Greta, a victim of the evil witch, and the two join forces to get back to their families and stop the witch's plans.

Based on the classic fairy tales by Wilhelm Hauff, *Little Longnose* is the first theatrically released animated feature produced in Russia in nearly 40 years. As in the best of fairy tales, *Little Longnose* manages a fine balance between humour and fear.

Although the animation lacks originality, *Little Longnose* is skilfully made but overlong.

A series of animated shorts for younger viewers called *Short and Sweet* was screened at this year's Showcomotion. The selection, which in total ran for over an hour, came from many different countries and included old favourites as well as some new and rare treats. The films are in English or without dialogue and are suitable

for the youngest of film fans.

Cracking Contraptions: Nick Parks' famous duo, Wallace and Gromit, make another appearance at the festival this year.

In five mini-adventures (*Autochef*, *Snowmanotron*, *Turbodiner*, *525 Crackervac* and *Tellyscope*) the accident-prone Wallace shows his talent for making inventive but usually destructive household devices, while his dog, Gromit, sensibly clears up the mess. Good fun.

A Slippery Tale: A frog idling downstream on a lily pad sees what he thinks is a lady frog (but is actually part of a woman's slipper) and falls in love. In his pursuit of his love, the frog is hunted by a stork.

This is a hilarious tale and thoroughly enjoyable.

Loulou: It's summertime in Rabbitland. While Tom the rabbit is enjoying himself on the beach, Loulou, a young wolf cub, finds himself all alone in the world. He befriends the rabbits, but there are big bad wolves about.

By far the longest of the shorts and the most original, *Loulou* is based on a French novel and takes an offbeat foray into territory long considered off limits for young animation, such as death, sadistic cruelty and references to psychedelic drug culture.

Loulou is one of those animations that genuinely works on two levels. Whereas the young children will enjoy the young wolf cub's adventure, adult viewers will notice the strangely thuggish quality of the bad wolves and the bohemian lifestyle of the rabbit girls. The humour is doubly layered as well.

A short poll conducted amongst one audience found this short to be a favourite amongst both young and old.

Ben Nevis' Nap: Ben Nevis, the lizard, is trying to take a nap but is disturbed by Mrs. Been, the busy bee. A very short but effective tale showing the interconnectedness of all creatures.

Gary's Fall: Gary (voiced by comic Lenny Henry) is a show-off polar bear who lives with his family of polar bears in a zoo in the Midlands. One day he learns the hard way what happens when the water is drained from the enclosure and you fall in! Extremely funny.

Circuit Marine: A cat, a goldfish, a parrot and a pirate try their best to survive on the stormy seas aboard a pirates' ship. Clever use of chequered shapes in the animation, which complements its wacky pace.

The Beezes And The Cherries: Three flightless birds try to get to the ripe cherries on a tall tree. Tedious, repetitive and boring.

T tells the story of two infant tigers, Sangha and Koumal, who are separated after their father is killed. Koumal is sold to a circus, where he performs humiliating tricks to earn his keep. Sangha becomes the pampered pet of the son of a French government official. The tigers finally escape from captivity and head back into the jungle, where they have to face one last struggle before they can once again live

free.

T was one of three feature length films at the festival destined for general release.

Set in French Colonial Indonesia, the film falls down in its attempt to inject an ambivalence into the attitude of the central human character, the adventurer and writer, Aidan McRory (Guy Pearce). McRory loots temples, and for a price hunts tigers. He is most well known back home as the writer of adventure books for boys.

McRory begins to display an excessive amount of affection for the two brother cubs and this leads him later to a bit of a personal crisis. The film could have done without this over-sentimentalism.

G (5+) celebrated the talent of young people from across the region who have been working with Gorilla Cinema from Sheffield. Almost all the works screened were made this year and some received their UK premiere at the festival.

Spacechines: Based on pupils' poems about aliens and machines, this animated poetry video meets up with musical-eared aliens and flying spaceships. Made by students of Holt House Primary School, they used various materials including Lego pieces and plasticine.

Where Does The Music Go When You Can't Hear It?: A search for the journey of sound—a group of pupils from Springfield Primary together with their sign language interpreter Aeolian are searching for sound.

The titled question asked (it was interesting to see the slightly uncomfortable responses of some of the grown-ups, compared with the snappy replies of the children) led to many different speculations (into space; into your heart/stomach; turns into colours; into your memory; goes round the world) which in turn led to a fascinating discussion amongst the children on “how does sound travel?”

Balby Dance: A documentary focusing on the choreography developed by students of Balby Primary School in collaboration with a regional Dance Theatre group, showed the children performing and discussing their own dance.

The children were encouraged to develop their own dance and later talked about how the experience had helped them make friends with children that they might not have normally even talked to.

The teaching staff related how the dancing had improved the children's self-confidence, communication, cooperation as well as balance and concentration.

G (8+) displayed the work of schoolchildren up to the age of 14, and included documentary and drama.

Crossing The Tiger: One day at school when the teacher was ill ... three children leave their class to perform a dare and find themselves travelling between worlds. A strange wooden sculpture is a portal into five separate worlds. After a series of scary but exciting adventures, the children return to their world ... or do they? An interesting tale.

William Blake: Inspiration & Illustration: An exhibition of William Blake's paintings and prints, on loan from Tate Britain, provided the stimulus for art workshops with 14-15 year-olds at four Sheffield Schools. This documentary centres on the pupils and teachers from Walthef School and artist Lyn Hodnett.

This fascinating little documentary opens with some school children talking candidly about the prints they had produced inspired by the work of Blake, but which they have clearly connected to themes in their own lives. A boy standing beside a print named “Man facing the Storm” describes its significance as a statement on racism. Another student shows his print “Live by the gun die by the gun” and explains it is a comment on street violence.

In groups the children talk about the effect the art project has had on

them. One boy says that it has opened him up to all different arts and has made being at school more bearable. A girl described the feeling of pride that many students have for their own work, when they realised people were interested in them.

Hodnett worked with the children on different print techniques and said much “powerful work” had come out of it. She also discussed with the children the significance of Blake's ideas—of good, evil, right, wrong, and got them to talk about issues they felt were important.

ARTyTECTURE: Brinsworth Comprehensive School in Rotherham is creating an artists' studio. The documentary followed “Team Spirit,” a group of students at the school, as they develop the project. The video includes original music, footage and animation sequences created by the students.

This short film includes a number of absorbing scenes, in which the students talk about their hopes for the future of the project, as well as about their own futures.

The artist in residence, Rob Fairley, offers some interesting observations on the work. He says: “What's needed is a space of educational freedom from the educational establishment.” He insists on the importance of having an adult who is prepared to take any problems that come up in the curriculum and find some other way to teach it. He explains how fine art can aid an understanding in subjects like mathematics. Engrossed in the art, “youngsters don't know they're learning.”

The art work inspires the children and broadens their creativity.

Also worth seeing are the following few films that were screened at this year's festival.

F, adapted from the award-winning novel by Nicky Singer, tells the story of Robert Nobel who dreams at night of flying to escape his troubled world of school bullies and his parents' divorce. *Magnifico*, inspired partly by Saint Exupery's *Little Prince*, is about a nine-year-old boy whose family lives in a poor part of town where life is a constant struggle to make ends meet. *One Love; a Jamaican Romeo And Juliet*, is set against the backdrop of the country's musical heritage.

Showcomotion continues to reveal new and inventive material in all mediums, as well as the great stores of young talent that are still unfortunately largely untapped.

Concluded



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