

FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL FILM & SOUND ARCHIVE

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 2001

Dear member,

This is our first newsletter-- unglamorous and unpretentious in style as we are yet to formalise our stationery and newsletter format. Unglamorous or not, I would like to welcome everyone to the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive, and thank you for your willingness to be part of the work that we propose to undertake to support the Archive.

I enclose two documents. The first is a draft charter for the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive, outlining our aims and objectives in broad terms. The second is a discussion paper on our perception of the Archive's role in the film and sound communities, and in the community at large. We would welcome feedback on anything raised in these documents.

Why has the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive been formed?

The Friends was initially formed in response to concerns about the National Film and Sound Archive name change and its Sydney office relocation to Fox Studios.

We believe the Friends can play a strong, clear role as lobbyist on behalf of the Archive to government and industry, and also on behalf of the film and sound communities to the Archive itself.

We are very pleased to report that since the Friends began the Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Peter McGauran, has decided to restore the word 'archive' to the formal name of the organisation. The official name of the institution is now the National Screen and Sound Archive, although an abbreviated form of this formal name has wide currency.

We stress that the Friends is totally independent of the Archive, although we have been given a small grant by the Archive to put us on our feet.

Why is the word 'archive' important?

There will be more discussion of this question in future newsletters but, as a start, the word 'archive':

- describes the function of the institution
- distinguishes it from a commercial film lab, library, collection or any other commercial organisation
- links the institution with its proud past as the nation's film and sound archive
- links the institution with the philosophies and standard working practices of film and sound archives internationally

We believe that it is a fundamental principle for the Friends to encourage the widest possible use of the word 'archive' in the film and sound communities, in the media, and in popular usage.

Committee structure

The Friends needs volunteers interested in forming a national committee and state working parties to further our goals. If you are interested in joining the committee or a working party, please let us know.

Disclaimer

Since the formation of the Friends, one of the founding members, Andrew Pike, has been appointed to the Archive's Council. The views expressed in this newsletter are indicative of Andrew Pike's personal views, and in no way represent any official position of the Council or the Archive.

FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE

DRAFT CHARTER

The Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive shall be a non-profit organisation with a paid membership base. Any funds raised shall be dedicated to the objectives of the Friends.

Objectives

- To seek ongoing public assessment and affirmation of the core responsibilities and functions of the Archive and, to that end, ensure the word 'archive' is always used in the formal name of the institution
- To promote the optimum flow of information and ideas between the National Film and Sound Archive, the film and sound communities and the community at large
- To promote principles of best practice in archival preservation and public access programs
- To promote principles of academic and professional excellence in work using or based on archival resources
- To encourage public awareness of the Archive's work and its resources
- To promote and assist the Archive in its proactive engagement with the current film and sound communities and the community at large
- To promote creative initiatives involving archival resources
- To promote and support the international work of the Archive
- To stimulate and assist in the creation of, and support the work of, a professional association of film and sound archivists in Australia and in the South East Asia and Pacific regions
- To build a broad base of members who will organise, support and participate in forums, conferences, screenings, lectures and special events to promote Friends objectives
- To raise, or assist in raising, funds to support specific Archive programs

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FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE, INC

A NEW ROLE FOR THE ARCHIVE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

DISCUSSION PAPER

1. This discussion paper proposes a re-definition of the goals and functions of the National Film and Sound Archive based on several assumptions:
 - (a) that there is no official mandate from the Government that would prevent the Archive undertaking the goals and functions outlined below;
 - (b) that there is a long-standing void in the Australian film community caused by:
 - (i) the scarcity of national organisations focussing on film culture and academic excellence (as opposed to film production and industry development);
 - (ii) the scaling down of the AFC's involvement in the promotion of Australian film culture internationally;
 - (iii) the absence of a local equivalent of the British National Film Theatre, despite partial efforts to this end by such bodies as the former National Film theatre of Australia, the Australian Film Institute and the Museum of Contemporary Arts;
 - (c) that the National film and Sound Archive is the most appropriate body to fill this void on a continuing, professional basis;
 - (d) that the Archive should be a pro-active film body that helps to shape the heritage that it is preserving;
 - (e) that since the mid-80s, the Archive has been progressively establishing its staffing, funding, housing and operating procedures in a highly professional manner; it is now time for the Archive's resources to be applied to the community at large in an expansive and creative way for the benefit of all Australians, not solely in making the collections accessible, but in helping to stimulate the evolution of an innovative and healthy film community in the future.

PRE-REQUISITES

2. The Archive needs a substantial mandate or "mission statement" to give a clear focus to the re-definition of goals and functions outlined below. This mission statement needs to be validated at the highest possible level in the government to give authority to the Archive.
3. The Archive needs to be established as a Statutory Authority to give it formal existence and to be assured of its long-term independence, security and accountability.

NEW DIRECTIONS

4. The Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive believe that the senior levels of the Archive's staffing structure need to be reviewed and re-structured to create a new Division within the Archive: a Division of Public Programmes.
5. The new Division may incorporate the work currently being done in the fields of education and marketing. However, under the direction of an appropriate senior manager, and with only a small number of additional staff, the Division would be able to take the Archive in entirely new directions and create a new role for the Archive in the community at large – a role that is currently not being played by any other organisation. The new functions would be unique to the Archive yet fill a profound gap in the Australian film scene.
6. Through a new programme of public activities, we envisage the Archive engaging directly and pro-actively in the film community to promote Australian cinema, both new and old, and to stimulate the development of a healthy film culture both within the industry and for the general public as well.
7. It is fundamental to the Friends' beliefs that the Archive should be engaging pro-actively in contemporary film culture. A sample of some of the activities that we believe the Archive could and should be undertaking are:
 - (a) touring programmes of thematically curated Australian films to around Australia and to international film festivals, e.g. the films of Peter Weir, Australian women filmmakers, Australian animation, etc. These would come accompanied by a press book, an academic monograph, as well as normal publicity materials. Such programmes would provide an important cultural service within Australia and would be a valuable cultural export. (Possible venues: London NFT, Berlin Film Forum, Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. as well as major festivals and through Australian embassies). These programmes should cover contemporary cinema as well as the distant past.

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- (b) comment and debate: the Archive needs to be the organisation that stimulates and leads public discussion on all major issues involving cinema. For example, the Archive should have a range of public forums to stimulate and consolidate debate both within the industry and also for the benefit of the general public. The subjects for the forums should not be exclusively academic but should engage with topical issues of the day, e.g., the attempted banning of ROMANCE, the independent producers initiatives, the effect of the Fox Studios on the resources available for independent producers, etc. One such public forum could be through a newspaper or magazine published frequently, perhaps by email.
 - (c) publications: at present, there are very few, if any, outlets for serious writers about film. A regular newspaper or magazine could serve part of this function, but also publication of monographs on the past, the present and the future of the industry, on aesthetic issues, theory, technical issues etc.
 - (d) celebration of contemporary cinema: the Archive should host premieres of new work, organise "meet the film-maker" screenings, present retrospectives of the work of directors/writers/actors involved in new films, etc. No new Australian feature or major documentary should be released without the Archive doing something to mark the moment.
 - (e) celebration of industry achievements: the Archive should be the focal point for functions to celebrate the contributions of important individuals to film culture. This service could be extended in many ways, for example, through lecture series, an obituary bank, research fellowships, "hall of fame" events, etc.
 - (f) encouragement of new talent: the Archive should support new talent in the industry by sponsoring awards, providing fellowships, providing a showcase for new work (whether short films, animation, documentaries or features).
 - (g) encouragement of the exchange of ideas within the film community: specialist conferences, cross-disciplinary conferences, workshops, small group meetings, round-tables, social functions. Opportunities rarely exist for filmmakers to meet other filmmakers let alone meet people working in other areas of the film industry. The industry is fragmented into separate conferences for producers, directors, writers, exhibitors, video retailers, etc, and cross-communication between these separate fields is minimal. The Archive could provide meeting rooms for small groups of industry professionals, could pro-actively call meetings and host them, etc. The Archive can arrange small group meetings for visiting film people so that they can meet their peers in Australia. Master-classes could be sponsored with visitors; etc.
 - (h) Encouragement of research and academic excellence: the Archive should be at the cutting edge in both technical and historical and cultural studies, through workshops, fellowships, publications, lectures etc.
8. These are a sampling of ideas of what the Archive could be doing. A public programme could be developed through public consultation, and perhaps through a national conference on what the public would like their Archive to be: there will be no shortage of ideas. However, fundamental to all of these ideas is the notion that the Archive is the appropriate body to take a position of dynamic leadership in the film community, both to serve that community, to document and record it, and also to shape and develop it and give it direction and cohesion. It is our belief that these qualities are missing partly because of the diversity of interests pursued by the various film bodies dependent on government finance. Without necessarily spending a lot of additional money, the Archive could serve in an invaluable role in bringing the disparate elements of the industry together in a way that will be healthy and beneficial for the entire community.
 9. The important first step is to develop a new philosophy for the Archive that will take it beyond preservation and associated services. Such a philosophy is necessary not only to encourage the general public to perceive the Archive in a new light, but also to underpin the work of the staff of the Archive itself, to encourage them to adopt a new perception of their potential role in Australian film culture.
 10. Regional and global role for the Archive: The Archive also has an important pro-active role to play in the global archiving network, especially in the Asian region where the leadership of the Australian Archive is crucial to development. Involvement in the region is important for Australia's image as a nation in South-East Asia, as well as enriching for the staff and services offered within Australia.
 11. Note: This Discussion Paper focuses mainly on film, but similar arguments can be made to apply to television, radio, sound recordings and new technologies.

Comment on this Discussion Paper is welcomed.

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