

REPORT

The Bands Newsreel was undertaken for many reasons, those of pertinence here being:

- (i) to 'field-test' recent developments in Super 8mm single-system (sound on film). The Panel has not funded a project based on this system which has obvious financial attractions.
 - (ii) production within a locality about a part of that locality (community of musicians) for distribution and exhibition primarily in that locality.
 - (iii) for a Panel member to have the experience of working through SWA in a way similar to other applicants and to feed-back to the Panel. Bluntly to test the Panel's theories (such as the notion of integrated production) as well as the practice it encourages.
- (i) See Appendix C.
- (ii) "Integrate community/into locality": reference has been made in the programme notes (Appendix B) to the similar problems faced by musicians and film-makers - that the production and consumption of music and film (as defined by grant-supportive activities) is a social process particularly when it is centred on a localised geographical and interest community as distinct from the alienated practices of industrial music and film production, tied as they are to a mass consensus, maximum financial return motivating factor. The notion of highlighting local music, musicians and film-makers within a context of essentially international stars, industrialised music and famous directors was more than likely subsumed by the mass of 'dominant' music film and of course, the expectations of the audience. Though the film deliberately attempts tangentially to create opposing relationships between picture and sound, the audience seemed more conscious of wishing that their (local) bands looked like the 'real' product, the musicians that they had more apparent charisma, more visual style, better "sounding" sound, whilst apparently paying scant regard to the meaning of their production even in regard to the other bands or one another. Very few bands, if any, were concerned with either the context their production adopted alongside other cultural phenomena, (except in the rhetorical inflexion of some of their lyrics) or even in the co-operative organisation of equipment, gigs or transport - the bands were either managed by a third party or not, and in either, competition and the 'big break' were the operative criteria. (I raise these points not so much in criticism but to place "independently" produced music in relation to "independently" produced film.) The audience the film addressed was present in large numbers at the ambitious and well organised Bristol Arts Centre event. Apart from the technical problems accompanying the screening there were shortcomings in the placing of the film into the months season. Although the film sought to redress the imbalance which favoured nostalgia and famous musicians/hypsters,

pre-publicity and any highlighting favouring local product was almost invisible - there was also confusion surrounding dates and times of screenings. The most successful and useful screening took place shortly before the run at one of the music venues featured in the film.

Subsequently distribution of the film has been hampered by:

- (a) the damaged soundtrack (see section (iii)).
- (b) the unavailability of the high-power lamp projector which together with
- (c) limited sound reproduction found on 'normal' 8mm projectors, circumvents adequate exhibition standards of projection reproduction.

We both felt that if these problems/have been alleviated, there would have been considerable interest amongst audiences (if not the bands), in music and possibly community centres.

- (iii) ".....We'll just cobble some words together to make the Panel happy....." the film-maker/Panel Interface: (Ref: Appendix A and South West Film Directory). There has not been much theoretical work done on the relationships between (sequentially)

- (a) "the idea" (or the nexus of the motivatory event);
- (b) its description through the medium of the written word (the 'treatment') and its transmission (the Application), here being combined with other information concerned with budgets, past experience, distribution plans, etc.;
- (c) the production, which translates (a) and (b) through the complex interaction of people, machines and materials, an experience few of the Applicants have experienced, let alone organised.

It is assumed that Panel members have some experience or knowledge of these procedures and that the following comments will fill gaps vis a vis the kind of practice(s) pursued using as an example the Bands Newsreel.

- (a) "the idea": arose in response to the creation of a screening space and a specific context, (rather than, as is often thought to be the case, an inspired vision). The similarity with the commercial response compares in that a specific moment in time was being referred to (Newsreel) and differs in that an unfamiliar format (through formal film strategies), and the subject (various 'youth' bands active in Bristol Oct/Nov 1980), would appeal only to a small audience grouping. Working rapidly with economical materials suggested a viable means of making such an intervention.
- (b) the "treatment"/Application: those familiar with use of words, prior experience and foreknowledge of production, the dynamics of committee work, bookkeeping and other various levels of experience related to "independent" production have a severe advantage over those who do not. To a greater or lesser extent the Panel in its

procedures alleviates some of these disadvantages, [the Bristol Bands application ~~was a disadvantage~~ had an advantage in these respects.] However, budgeting is a problem for every film-maker and the Panel needs to devise another system for coping with it effectively to prevent a project being disadvantaged or even aborted. Appendix D indicates a relation between a (reasonably experienced) budget estimate for this production and actual cost. Broadly speaking the cost of materials was 100% over the estimate (though the film went ^{40%} ~~80%~~ over its estimated running time) and the time/wages went at least 100% over estimate, (or more since it is difficult to disengage until a production is complete). Traditional contingencies in strictly industrial terms are inappropriate with activity which is defined by the vicissitudes of its process (or as the cynics might observe, the vicissitudes of its protagonists), the process being, fundamentally, that encompassed under Film Production (Exhibition, Distribution) policy in the South West Film Directory.

- (c) the production of the Production is referred to under Appendix C and indicates that the Super 8mm system is not deployed as a viable tool often enough by enough film-makers. The shortcomings concerning the particular film lab. used, we are sure, were anomalous and anyway led us on to try for better all-round quality by transferring to video U-matic using a new London telecine facility. This in terms of the project was remarkably successful with regard to picture/sound quality and editing/dubbing procedures and, given the poor level of insertion of the film into the season, could have been the most appropriate way of exhibiting the film on video.

The funding mechanisms are not designed to respond quickly/^{enough} to 'spontaneous' (some might say opportunist) projects such as this and it is fortunate that a timely tax-rebate met the bills until the SWA cheque was received eight weeks after the Panel had recommended support. The film-makers who were grant-aided were both surprised and intrigued by the absence of any other contact from their benefactors. It was assumed that such was the level of confidence, though in passing it may be useful to observe that two or three people working on a production which has a deadline to meet and a pretty clear idea of what is being made, are less likely to come up with problems which invariably arise in projects where such conditions are inverted i.e. in extremis; large groups working on "open-ended" projects which have no deadline to meet.

Grubbly
question:
Amis know → Hopefully these ~~final~~ comments will highlight the gaps that must be closed in order that future applications recommended by the Panel and funded by South West Arts will be supported to an extent that will lift them away from the danger of remaining intermediate didactic exercises undertaken for the benefit of all the participants, which in conveniently ignoring the audience, deploy resources in an explainable rather than strategically useful way.

APPENDIX A.

THE BRISTOL BANDS NEWSREEL - 1980

The impetus for this project arises from two directions; the organisation by the Bristol Arts Centre of a season of films and exhibitions around the musical tradition of Rock'n'roll, and the desire by the film-makers, Mike Gifford and Mike Leggett to extend and explore the medium of single-system super8mm, (sound-on-film).

The film is primarily concerned with placing the music and youth culture of Bristol into a context with which it does not normally associate - an art gallery and reportary cinema. Of those attending the screenings many will not be aware of the indigenous product - some who are aware of the bands and their music would be attending essentially to listen to marketed music and gaze at marketed stars. Few would be aware of the range of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ representations possible of the musicians themselves in relation to the music they produce. Couched another way and going against the cinema convention particularly when it comes to music films, this film will not establish a visual and sound relationship which always complements or explains. Though the soundtrack will consist entirely of music made by Bristol bands, what appears on the picture track will place that into different relationships, music as production, music as consumption etc....

Whilst not pretending to be a film advancing our understanding of the systems of representation, the film will challenge that seamless surface within a different context and within the spirit of the newsreel tradition - responding spontaneously to events over an eight week period prior to the Arts Centre season and through juxtaposition with the other events help give a perspective on the tradition of contemporary popular music. Though the Arts Centre are obtaining an arc projector for super8mm and arrangements are being made to amplify the sound to the level normally expected by the fanz at this event, such a film is likely to find other outlets in the city and amongst that culture to which the film refers.

Budget Estimate

For a film in Super 8mm single-system projected at 24 fps
with a running time of 15-20 minutes, (8 X 50ft rolls = 400ft).
Cutting ratio 3.5 : 1.

Materials;

24 rolls Ektachrome SM 7244 @ £3.90 per roll	94.00
" " " " @ £2.87 " "	69.00
Projection roll print and sound transfer @ £0.14 per foot	
Maximum of	56.00

Equipment; Loaned and owned.

Remuneration;

at rate of £25.00 per day;	
Mike Gifford; production and band liason; 7 days	175.00
Mike Leggett; camera	3 days 75.00
Film editor.	1 day 25.00

Rounded up	<u>£494.00</u>
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APPENDIX B.

THE BRISTOL BANDS NEWSREEL 1980

Super 8mm; colour; 30 minutes; magnetic sound

By Mike Gifford and Mike Leggett

Distributed by Bristol Film-makers Co-op

Produced with financial help from South West Arts

The film, shot this year during September and October in no way attempts to be a 'balanced' or 'representative' documentary 'about' the bands in Bristol, (who are seen and heard in the movie, are the ones who happened to be active during the filming period.

The bands who are heard in order on the Newsreel soundtrack are:

TVI's in concert at Cawardines

Talisman in rehearsal and live at The Green Room

Blurt on record in Revolver and live at Trinity

Art Objects on record

Various Artists in concert at Cheltenham College of Education.

Glaxo Babies on record

Black Ro. on record at the Corn Exchange

Shoes for Industry in rehearsal and on record.

Slow Twitch Fibres on record

Apartment on record

The film-makers in responding to the Arts Centre plans to run a season around the idea of Rock 'n Roll had to work fairly quickly to get something out in time - hence the title - but not without having pre-determined that the picture had to make a contribution to the soundtrack in the same way as individual musicians in each of the groups contributed to the overall collective enterprise in producing music. What the film-makers examine with film is the various ways in which music and musicians can be represented visually in relation to the music that they make, whether at a gig, in rehearsal, on a record or on the soundtrack of a film. We were not seeking to synthesise some promotional material for the bands to use in some market-place squabble but to support them through an examination of their music (and words) as being more relevant and more important to our cultural environment than music (and films) conveyed and sold to us from afar via radio and tv. Locally generated music and locally generated films cannot be valued simply in terms of how much profit they make or how many people listen/look.

The Newsreel was, as the beginning of the film announces, shot using a super 8mm single-system. The once-called amateur gauge of 8mm has over recent years had massive improvement work carried out utilising particularly, developments in micro-electronics; not only does this mean the control a photographer has over the picture-making process is much increased but the technical picture-making process is much increased but the technical specifications of the sound-recording system, (via a magnetic stripe on the edge of the picture filmstrip), is equal to that of high quality cassette recorder. There are certain disadvantages using such a system particularly at the editing and print-making stages - these are physical processes which, for the moment, defy further improvement. However, the Arts Centre has borrowed a high-power projector to maintain quality to the standard that is acceptable in a full-size cinema and against all of this must be reckoned overall material costs of production. A total of 90 minutes of shot film together with processing and the subsequent making of the projection print came to around £300. To have made the same film on 16mm, (which only 20 years ago was reckoned to be the 'amateur' gauge), would have cost three times as much at over a £1,000; this is without taking into account the immense portability and rapidity of use of the 8mm system, a far cry from the earliest sound newsreels only 50 years back when several truckloads of equipment and personnel were required to document one single event.

This is not to imply that simply having the equipment is all that is required to be able to start working with film. The medium of film like the medium of music only become mediums of communication when trial and practice have been combined with thought and audacity. And working with film, like making music, does not really mean very much until it's exposed to an audience; its making, like its reception, as has always been assumed in music, is a social process. Organisations like the Bristol Film-makers Co-op are examining and experiencing, as local bands have for years, the various ways and various degrees by which a localised participating 'audience' can experience film-making as a process of cultural and entertainment activity rather than being lulled into believing it a task only for professionals, whether film directors or musical virtuosos.

APPENDIX C

"To some too early; too little 'til now"

- (i) Super 8mm single-system sound: to highlight what we found out could be summarised
 - (a) The great portability, reliability and "ease of use" of the camera/sound feed/film cartridge ensemble was impressive. The sound recording system (on two different Braun Nizo) for the range of sounds encountered, was most impressive.
 - (b) The SM film stock did not justify its extra cost (though 24 hour processing was useful) although results in low light were impressive.
 - (c) Rushes were transferred onto video U-matic to reduce handling of film at editing stage (which included laying sound over picture) and considerably eased the normal physical editing process using electronic editing-suite techniques.
 - (d) Physical editing to match the soundtrack on cassette off video was hampered without a track-reader.
 - (e) SWA Super 8 projector was in bad state of adjustment for sound transfer onto stripe.
 - (f) Laboratory service (Sonovision Ltd.) had been untidy, if prompt, in processing rushes. They offered a rapid duplication service to produce a mag stripe show copy. However not only was this late but the first show copy was appallingly bad, picture and sound. Consequently the master was projected at the Arts Centre as the second copy arrived even later. It was of good picture quality but only just acceptable sound quality. This was complicated by the fact that the master sound stripe had been partially erased either by the lab. themselves or the Arts Centre projector or in the mail.
 - (g) The xenon arc projector specially borrowed from the BFI was in a poor state of adjustment but proved to give excellent film projection quality to the extent that shortcomings with the Nizo lenses were apparent (probably due to poor adjustment). Linking sound with the theatre system proved unsatisfactory.

Conclusions

Whilst being wholly satisfied in the early stages of the technical process, editing, lab. and theatre back-up for maintaining sound quality was very disappointing. In a film about music, high sound quality has to be maintained through each of the stages. The "test" was severe and probably would not have been so apparent with speech for instance.

APPENDIX D

Item	Stock SM	Stock K40	Process SM & print	Phone, Postage, Travel, Misc.	Video Transfer	Materials Total	Days	Wages	Print Duration
Estimate £	94	-	125	-	-	219	11	275	15-20
Actual £	125	55	185	50	55	470	25+	625	30

Total

Received £494

Actual £1,095

N.B. If the production had been undertaken in 16mm then Materials Total would have amounted to £1,000. The sync sound equipment would have had to be hired at say £150 per week for the 8 week period plus cost of sound transfer, track laying, dubbing etc. Transport and other expenses would have been correspondingly higher as well as the total time expended.