

Same movie theatre, new alternative content



By Leigh Andrews

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The early bird catches the worm - and so, the early adopter of live cinema captures an immersed audience, explains Lola Gallant, Brand Manager of Cinema Nouveau/SK Select...

A few weeks ago, I wrote about how [event cinema](#) is bringing global theatre to local screens. In it, David Sabel, director of broadcast and digital as well as executive producer of National Theatre Live at the National Theatre of Great Britain, explained how this new form of 'live theatre on a screen' came about. This week we go local, as Gallant tells us about Cinema Nouveau's experience in screening alternative content in its movie theatres across the country.



Lola Gallant

Remind us what event cinema is all about.

Gallant: Event cinema or live/alternative content is the exhibition of one-off live events in cinema, usually performed and filmed in front of a live audience in a theatre. The cameras are angled in such a way that the cinema audience is assured of the best seats in the house, including close-ups, in a big-screen environment. There are also usually one or two interval breaks, as one would have at a theatre performance, which adds to the 'live theatre' experience.

The events include 'live' opera, concerts and various theatre and ballet productions. In some territories, they are even screening the grand finales of popular TV shows on the big screen.

Event cinema can be direct live access or recorded content. Currently, Cinema Nouveau does not screen any content live: this is not possible with productions from The Met Opera for its Live in HD series, for example, due to the time difference between South Africa and New York. However, we do ensure we screen the productions as soon as possible after the live performance date.

Sounds good. How did it get started/come about globally?

Gallant: There was an opportunity to vary the content in cinema, and to develop a new cinema-going audience. The Metropolitan Opera in New York pioneered the live screening of opera in 2006 and its productions are currently screened in 2,000 cinemas across the world. The National Theatre Live performances launched in June 2009, with the release of *Phedre*, starring Helen Mirren. Cinema Nouveau screened this shortly after the UK did, to packed cinemas.

What did it take for SA to latch onto the concept of live cinema?

Gallant: Cinema Nouveau was an early adopter of this concept and began screening The Met operas on its cinema screens just a year after The Met's initial launch. This 'alternative' category continues to perform well, with encouraging growth both in content availability and local audiences, who appreciate the opportunity to watch international talent and lavish productions on their local cinema screen - and at a very affordable price. In fact, the majority of theatre and opera productions are screened to full cinema houses, with extra screens being added in some instances to accommodate the demand for tickets.



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As an example, the recent screening of The Old Vic's *The Crucible*, directed by South African-born Yael Farber, played to sold-out theatres. Cinema Nouveau was able to add more shows in specific regions to cope with this demand.

Ster-Kinekor Theatres' migration from motion picture film to digital cinema in all its cinemas towards the end of 2013 also simplified the screening of alternative content. The flexibility of digital projection allows us to add additional shows and to schedule these events in larger auditoriums to accommodate the demand.

■ **Tell us more about of Cinema Nouveau's involvement with SA's event cinema.**

Gallant: Cinema Nouveau led the way in South Africa with its involvement in event cinema. We started screening opera as early as 2007 and have continued to expand the different genres of productions available to cinema audiences. These include fascinating documentaries, such as 'Exhibition on Screen', which brings art exhibitions from galleries around the world to cinema. The first 'season' was such a success that we are now showing Season II, which includes a brilliant new film about one of the world's favourite artists, Vincent Van Gogh from the Amsterdam Van Gogh Museum (released locally on 18 April), in addition to the opera, theatre and more recently, ballet.

Cinema Nouveau brought ballet back to our screens, with the launch of The Royal Ballet's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* from 28 March to 2 April, which will be followed by four other classical ballet productions over the next few months, including *Swan Lake* from 2 May.

The migration to digital cinema has allowed us to experiment more with alternative content and given us access to more content.

■ **Makes sense. What's the local reaction been to event cinema?**

Gallant: We have developed a very strong and loyal following amongst fans of the arts, and this audience continues to grow.

The local reaction has been extremely positive, as we continue to offer lovers of the arts easy access to productions that they could only watch if they travelled to New York or London. It is quite common now for these screenings to be sold out and, when that happens, we are able to open additional screens.

Event cinema in South Africa allows local audiences access to international theatre and operas that feature incredible talent from highly acclaimed actors, performers, musicians, producers and directors.

Big name casts that feature in upcoming productions, especially in theatre, prove to be very successful. Both *The Audience* and *Phedre*, starring the multi-awarded Dame Helen Mirren, were extremely popular abroad and here in South Africa. In forthcoming productions from National Theatre Live, cinema audiences will be treated to performances by 12 *Years a Slave* actor Chiwetel Ejiofor in *Everyman*, and Benedict Cumberbatch in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

All in all, a wonderful new form of entertainment. Visit the [Cinema Nouveau website](#) to make a booking.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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