

SHORT FILM COMPILEDATIONS

ECFA survey on short film compilations in European theatres

LABAN THE LITTLE GHOST, SPOT & SPLODGE, TOOTLETUBS & JYRO, LITTLE ANNA & THE TALL UNCLE... Short film compilations have been touring in European cinemas and festivals, serving the needs of the very youngest pre-school audience. Ivan Lo Guidice, for ECFA, coordinated a small survey on the pro's and con's of presenting such compilations to this unique audience. Thanks to the cooperation of the ECFA members - film institutes, distributors, festivals and cultural organizations - we gained a better understanding of the situation in various European countries.



Little Anna & the tall uncle

Thanks to their main characteristics such as length and storyline, shorts seem to be a product that suits toddlers, their expectations and needs. Even if shorts are commercially less appealing than features, most of the big international film festivals include in their program a special section of short films.

Our goal is to understand more about the potential of series of short films, compiled together for the youngest audience and their likelihood to be distributed in multiplexes and theatres.

Basic question

First we needed an answer to the basic question: have you already organised screenings of short film compilations for children in cinemas? We are talking about a minimum of three shorts and total length of the program between 40 and 75 minutes. In case of film festivals we were interested in the screenings organised beyond those included in the festival program. Approximately 62% of the interviewees organise screenings of short film compilations while 38% do not.

Motivation and cooperation

The idea to show short film compilations to pre-school children originated in Scandinavia. Swedish distributor Folkets Bio was a pioneer. Rose-Marie Strand, Head of the Children Films Department at Folkets Bio said "together with the Swedish Film Institute, 20 years ago, we made three compilations about Pingu, the popular television penguin. We knew children would love it, but were in doubt about the parents. With 25,000 viewers per compilation we proved the concept could work. I currently program kindergarten screenings in 24 multiplexes.

Small cinemas often work out a concept with additional workshops or interventions by local cultural partners, such as museums. Thus a movement was created that wants to offer children more than just a movie".

Other companies in other countries followed the Swedish example. The Norwegian Film Institute has set an example that might become common practice: "Acting as distributors we offered to exhibitors two compilations free of charge. Cinemas welcomed our initiative, small children love short films," says Stig Andresen.

We wondered whether the main reason was the urge of the organising company/festival or rather the demand from the community. Both factors are crucial. In all interviews we found a strong motivation to search for quality and offer this opportunity to children. Unfortunately, motivation is not always enough. Petra Slatinšek, Young Audience & Film Education at Kinodvor (Slovenia) stated "We need short film compilations for our children's programme but very often they are nowhere to be found in regular distribution".

A close cooperation among social factors – festivals, film institutes, schools, art centres, cultural partners, etc. - plays a key role in the success or failure of the distribution of short films. Tanja Miličić, Festival Producer at Pula Film Festival added "We are often asked by kindergartens and primary schools to provide them with compilations of shorts. So we create special events for schools and organisations". A good example of cooperation happens in Antwerp. The staff of the European Youth Film Festival Flanders compiles the best shorts screened in the festival and those compilations are being screened at the Antwerp Art Centre throughout the year.

Admissions and expectations

Most of our interviewees confirmed that generally the feedback from the audience is positive: 75% gave a positive feedback and only 25% was not satisfied with the compilations. The audience comes with correct expectations. At the same time, it is not possible to specify an average amount of admissions per screening, as it not only depends on the reputation of the films, but also on the location, the infrastructure, the capacity of the screening rooms, the weather and generally on the cultural background of the potential audience. However, compilations can be successful and sometimes their results are comparable to those of feature films. Felix Vanginderhuysen, Jokino Distribution state "We launched over the years six compilation programs and all together we received 30,000 to 40,000 admissions". The Norwegian Film Institute reports "97 screenings and 1786 visitors in 2012". Kinodvor noticed that "admissions are more or less the same as with children's features".



Spot & Splodge

With such positive reactions, it is no surprise that such projects will happen more often, 78% of the interviewees launched more compilations after the first trial screening and only 22% aborted the concept. Kinodvor screens compilations at least once per year and Jokino is currently preparing the 7th and 8th program.

So far we have talked about positive experiences, but we should not omit that in some cases the attempt to screen short film compilations was a fiasco and the audience was not enthusiastic. In Italy, Fantarca tried to create such event but "people didn't choose this kind of compilation and admissions were not good". Similarly, the Irish Film Institute had "good feedback but admissions were not". Antonia Grimaldi, Deputy Artistic Director at Giffoni Film Festival added "Some years ago we gave it a try but were asked for lots of money by producers. In Italy short films are not broadcasted on TV and the audience is not used to see them". A poor cooperation among the actors involved and the reluctance of the audience toward a type of product they are not used to, are at the basis of this failure. Our analysis brought up that 29% of the audience was skeptical, but 71% welcomed this kind of initiative without hesitation.

Are audience and exhibitors skeptical?

The public is only one side of the coin, but what about the exhibitors? Are they willing to introduce shorts in their schedule? 80% of the exhibitors welcomed compilations and only 20% were reluctant to screen them.

An example of efficient technique comes from Kinodvor. Petra Slatinšek: "We decided to promote short film compilations as if they were feature films; one title, one poster image, etc. and the public accepted it better than when we stressed it was a compilation of shorts". Jokino dealt with skeptical exhibitors but managed to convince them. Felix Vanginderhuysen said "We suggested they would screen the compilation twice in order to fill up one whole slot. This way they avoided an empty gap in their screening schedule". Rose-Marie Strand added "In one slot, the audience is passing twice through the candy lane, buying popcorn, so the exhibitors are satisfied". All in all, this seems to be a perfect win-win situation.

The digital revolution is yet another element. Nikolai Schulz, Head of Programming at Buster International Film Festival commented "I do believe exhibitors find it much easier now everything is digital and we can offer them a complete compilation on one DCP".

Laban the little ghost



Common thread

The core of each compilation is the selection of the shorts and the way they are connected with each other. Mostly there is a common thread creating a continuum. Only a few interviewees said that they do not follow any criteria apart from choosing films they like.

Often used as common thread are: same main character (Laban, Spot & Splodge, Tootletubs & Jyro,...), same country of origin (a fil rouge commonly used in France, for instance LES CONTES DE LA MERE POULE (Iran), LES ANIMAUX FOUS FOUS FOUS (Latvia), Slavic tales in L'OGRE DE LA TAIGA,...), and of course the same age group.

Les animaux fous fous fous



Straight to the quality

Tanja Miličić, Producer of the Pula Film Festival noted that “small children admire the dynamics of shorts. This is a great chance to introduce them to different film traditions, techniques and characters”. Children are also not the only ones to benefit from it. Iris Verhoeven, Director at the European Youth Film Festival Flanders feels that “short film compilations can be a talent showcase for young/new directors and producers”.

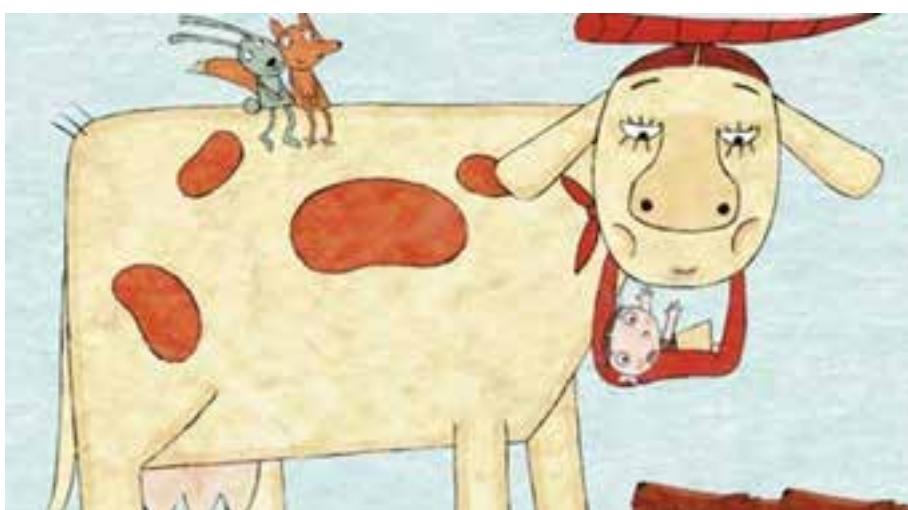
Short films perfectly suit the needs of the youngest audience due to their length and to some main characteristics, such as repetition, simple storyline and a blurry border between reality and fantasy.

- Children love repetition, they do not get bored when watching the same movie more than once. On the contrary, the power to know what is yet to come is for children an irresistible source of fun because they develop a sort of ‘psychological power’ over stories.

- Toddlers respond to every input they get from a movie and need time to interpret it.

- Toddlers do not have a clear perception of the border between reality and fantasy, and only when they are 4 or 6 years old they evolve from ‘magical’ to ‘logical’ thinking and realise that not everything on the screen is real. For all these reasons, shorts for small children should have a slow pace, not too much text and a simple timeline.

Stig Andresen said “Short films for children have their place, they just need funding to find their way to the cinemas. When cinemas wanted to screen Norwegian shorts for children, there were few distributors to be found so the Institute had to take its responsibility”. A cooperation with schools is probably one of the most efficient ways. Nikolai Schulz found that “since our main audience group is school classes we are lucky enough that some teachers prefer short films, as they are easier to work with afterwards in class”.



L'ogre de la Taiga

Shorter screening, cheaper ticket?

Can short film compilations offer “value for money”? Should tickets cost less since, usually, short film compilations are shorter than features? On this point the opinion of the interviewees differs: 57% is in favour of a reduced fare, 43% says full price is reasonable. In Germany Bundesverband Jugend und Film “hands out free tickets or charges a small fee”, the Irish Film Institute and the Pula Film Festival both work with reduced prices. Kinodvor gives a reductions when the programme is less than 40 minutes. This is what Jokino experienced in Belgium “at first most of the exhibitors made a reduced price, but later applied full fare and, according to them, the audience did not complain”.

This decision depends upon the exhibitor. Can you measure the value of a screenings according to its length or the number of shorts included in a compilation? Shorts are different from features, they use other techniques and directors communicate with the audience in a different way. Michael Harbauer, Director of the Schlingel International Film Festival added “we suppose that people who are interested in short film compilations are well aware of their worthiness”.



Tootletubs & Jyro

Conclusions & advice

- An efficient cooperation with schools and cultural organisations can guarantee an audience for the screenings.
- Due to their characteristics short films represent a tool for teachers who want to use the input later in class.
- A way to promote compilations is to create a bigger event alongside the screening. A workshop or conference has the power to involve the audience directly, to create a positive atmosphere, to build up a good reputation and to provide a service to the whole community, not only to children.
- Involve the multiplexes! They guarantee good admissions and small cinemas tend to follow in their footsteps when they are aware of the positive results.
- National film institutes can promote national productions and facilitate those exhibitors who are willing to screen compilations.

Reasons to present short film compilations to children:

- The demand for quality films is something all countries seem to have in common.
- The opportunity to offer new directors and producers a platform to showcase their talents.
- The fact that the latest digital technologies make the screening of compilations easier than ever.

In generally the audience enjoys short film compilations, the feedback is usually positive and most of the time after a first edition, organisers decide to go on with more similar projects. One of the advantages for exhibitors is that, as screenings are shorter than with feature films, they can screen the same program twice. In this way, people can pick their most convenient moment and exhibitors can sell popcorn and candy twice in one slot. Ticket prices and numbers of admissions cannot be generalised due to a relevant discrepancy in the answers received.

Most compilations have a common thread and can be interpreted as diverse chapters of the same story and therefore be promoted as features, with one poster image, one title, etc.

ECFA would like to thank the members that made this survey possible: Bundesverband Jugend und Film (Germany), Buster Copenhagen International Film Festival for Children & Youth (Denmark), European Youth Film Festival Flanders (Belgium), Giffoni Film Festival (Italy), Il Nuovo Fantarca (Italy), Irish Film Institute (Ireland), Jokino Distributie (Belgium), Kinodvor Cinema (Slovenia), Norwegian Film Institute (Norway), Oulu International Children's & Youth Film Festival (Finland), Pula Film Festival (Croatia), Schlingel International Film Festival for Children & Young Audience (Germany) and Universal Kids Film Festival (Turkey).