

"70mm is Back by Popular Demand - 50 Years Of Todd-AO"

A report by Thomas Hauerslev
on the Todd-AO 70mm Festival at the Schauburg Cinerama, Karlsruhe, Germany 7 - 9 October 2005

The 50th anniversary of the Todd-AO process was celebrated in October 2005 at the Schauburg cinema in Karlsruhe in Germany. For some time I had corresponded with the manager of the Schauburg, Mr. Herbert Born, mainly adding his 70mm programme to *in70mm.com*'s list of screenings. In April 2005 he proposed this celebration of Todd-AO and 70mm, and I of course agreed to support it as well as I could. We have 35mm - which is good. Then we have digital - which is also quite good. And then we have 70mm. And Todd-AO is a testament to the superiority of the 70mm technology. And Herbert Born wished to show off the quality of 70mm during one weekend.

I was asked to do my lecture on "The Early Days Of Todd-AO", which I had premiered during the Bradford Widescreen Weekend, to add some historical perspective to the German event, and I eagerly looked forward to meeting Herbert Born, to see his cinema and once again spend a weekend with 70mm films.

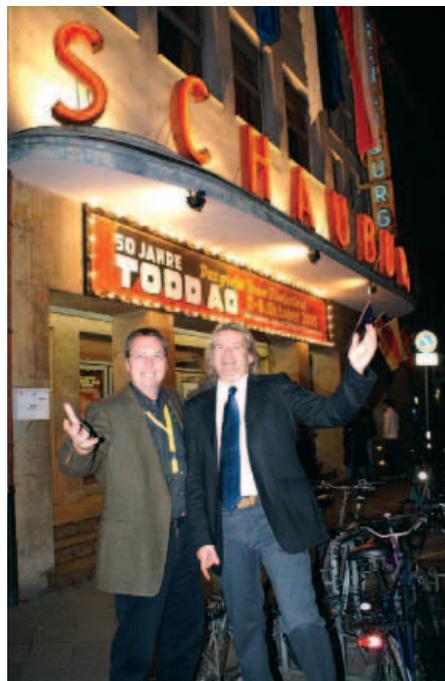
Little did I know how overwhelmed I would become to see 70mm films at the Schauburg. The weekend turned out to be the most "perfect show in Todd-AO" I had ever seen. Almost hyper realistic to see the clarity, sharpness and colour of the 70mm images nearly jumping towards you from the wide curved screen.

I was close to tears looking at the brand new 70mm print of "Hello, Dolly!" - as I felt, seeing movies like this, was the true essence of cinema - of going to the movies. This is what movies are supposed to look like. Contemporary movies and cinema pale compared to the Schauburg and 70mm.

In this article I try to pass on some of my experience from Karlsruhe and give you an idea of the events. It takes the form of a 'mission report' about the cinema, audience and films.

Karlsruhe and The Schauburg

Herbert Born met me at Stuttgart airport, after my flight from Copenhagen, and drove me to Karlsruhe, where my hotel was just a 5 minute walk from the cinema. On the way to the cinema I called in to meet Wolfram and Volker Hannemann, two friends from Bradford weekends. Wolfram owns the on-line shop "Laser Hotline", and I bought the recent DVD of Wim Wenders "Im Lauf der Zeit", a three hour odyssey of a cinema technician. The Schauburg is situated just off the city centre, and is dominated by a marble front and red letters spelling SCHAUBURG in red neon on top of the entrance. A large vertical sign also spells "Schauburg", in blue neon. A bit rusty, it signals a long history of movie exhibition and the need for some repair.



Herbert Born (right) and myself in front of the Schauburg.

For this weekend, the whole front of the house was decorated with large banners and flags from many European countries symbolizing the international character of the weekend. A special hand painted bill board also revealed the nature of the weekend - the celebration of the 50th



anniversary of Todd-AO aka. "The Largest 70mm Film Festival". The Schauburg plays all kinds of movies, has special programs for children, shows foreign films in original languages and specializes in frequent 70mm performances.

The main foyer is dominated by movie posters, marble floors, three ticket counters, a long bar and the smell of popcorn. The inner foyer is much more 1960s style. Dark, stylish with a bar to the right and access to the Schauburg cinema to the left. A large grand staircase, often used as setting for music videos and wedding pictures, leads upstairs to the old balcony. Except for a single framed "Psycho" poster, there are no posters in the inner foyer which is painted in gold. The upstairs foyer is also painted in gold. The Schauburg dates back more than 100 years. It originally was a variety theatre, but in 1906, it became a permanent cinema. Most of the Schauburg was destroyed during World War II but it was eventually reopened with a new foyer and entrance. Today the Schauburg has 3 screens. "The Schauburg" (screen #1) „Cinema“ (screen 2, 148 seats, located on the balcony of the original cinema) and "Bambi" (screen 3, 61 seats).

In the early 1960s, 70mm Cinerama was installed and the projection room was moved to the ground floor. The benefit from this move is of course to have a nearly level projection angle to avoid keystone distortion on the huge curved single-sheet Cinerama screen which covers the entire end of the cinema and goes from floor to ceiling and wall to wall. The screen is 16 meters wide (along



The Schauburg dressed up for Todd-AO 70mm

the curve), 6.3 meters high, the curve is 3.2 meters deep, and the screen is removable to reveal the theatre stage behind it. Considering the age and history of the Schauburg, the cinema looks very modern, with its black linoleum floor and comfortable red seats. Everything is draped in "Cinerama Red" curtains and the lighting comes from classic chandeliers. The cinema seats 420 people on 18 rows, and three rows closest to the screen have been removed to make room for live appearances.

Projection

The centrepiece of the projection equipment is a pair of Philips DP75 70mm projectors, a Kinoton ST270 platter system and a Dolby CP200 sound processor. The sound system can run



If only screens could talk. From Jupiter to Paris by space ship and airplane, all singing and talking in 6-track stereo.

both Dolby Digital and Digital Theatre Systems DTS format.

For the 70mm weekend, a new lamp house with a 5000 watt xenon bulb had been installed on machine 2.

Since most of the 70mm films were to be shown in DTS, DTS in London had sent over a spare processor. Throughout the weekend, Vincent Koch and Markus Vetter, the projectionists were on duty all the time, and they did an outstanding job, always showing the films in perfect focus across the screen.

The projection room itself was not particularly large but everything seemed to be in perfect order. With lots of 70mm print transportation cases stored almost

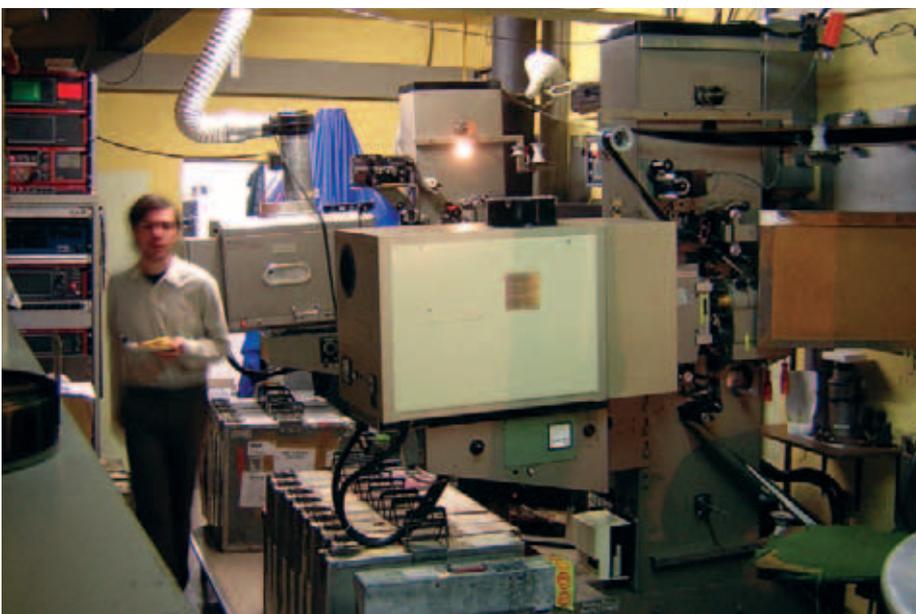


Close up of 70mm film with magnetic sound – brown oxide strips on edge of film.

everywhere, there was limited space for moving around and having visitors, but the projectionists welcomed all guests who wanted to have a look around.

Friday 7 October 2005

Inside the foyer I met Herbert and he gave me the weekend pass giving access to all the films and events and showed me the weekend souvenir program book and flyer, two colorful publications promoting the Todd-AO and 70mm history. An original poster had also been produced in celebration (and to promote) the Todd-AO 70mm weekend. Herbert had had Grant Lobban's article "In The Splendour of 70mm" translated into German and I had contributed to the souvenir book with my own 2002 Walter Sigmund interview. The book will become a valuable Todd-AO souvenir on any enthusiasts bookshelf.



Projection room with two Philips DP75 projectors. Note 70mm transportation boxes under lamp house.

I watched only the beginning of "Patton", the first film of the weekend, as I had seen it in 2002 in Bradford. Herbert introduced the weekend by welcoming the guests and thanking the sponsors, especially 20th Century Fox. I later settled down to enjoy both "The Agony and the Ecstasy" and "Hello, Dolly!"

Many people attending the annual Widescreen Weekend in Bradford had found their way to Karlsruhe. And with good reason, a lot of the Germans enjoyed having this kind of 70mm fest in their own back yard. The audience was of course dominated by a mainly German audience, but people from England, France, Portugal, Holland, Denmark and Sweden made it a truly international event. Around 80 people turned up for "The Agony and the Ecstasy" - not at all bad according to Herbert Born. The colors were fabulous and unbelievably sharp. The red and blue colors were amazing. I could hear the projectors running ever so quietly in the background. Somehow the sound of the projector "smells" like cinema. Of course noise like that shouldn't be there, but on the other hand, it proves it's a physical thing running through the machine. One of Herbert's points of the weekend was to show off just how good 70mm films look despite the 50 year old technology. Digital projection may be very good, but 70mm still has the advantage and will probably continue to be superior to digital for several decades still to come.

Before each performance the Schauburg still uses a "Gong", with three notes of sound to denote the beginning of the performance - a nice reminder of the magic of cinema.

Once you have seen Rex Harrison as Professor Higgins in "My Fair Lady" it is impossible to accept him as any other person in other films like "Agony". "What is Higgins doing in ancient Rome"? Several among the audience agreed on this. Something is just not working.

The next show was "Hello, Dolly!". A film I had particularly looked forward to seeing, since I missed it in Bradford earlier this year. Herbert introduced the film in German and gave the microphone to me to read a statement from Walter Sigmund specifically written two days earlier for the weekend on behalf of Henry Cole, Brian O'Brien Jr. and him self. A sort of Todd-AO epilogue. Then the film began and I was again stunned by the clarity of the images. It was so unreal to see "Hello, Dolly!" in perfect colour. The past 20 years I've been used to see this film in faded prints and never



Herbert Born and the 70mm film poster exhibition

expected to see it as it was meant to be seen. It was larger than life, the purest form of musical, so sharp, no grain, great colours, wonderful 6-track stereo - simply the grandest experience. The real show in Todd-AO. My goose bumps had goose bumps seeing every thread in Walter Matthau's tweed costumes. As Herbert expressed it "Nice and sharp images - almost like a window on the world". And how right he was. The audience also seemed to enjoy the film and gave it warm applause at the end.

After "Dolly" the Schauburg hosted a reception with free beer by sponsor HOEPFNER Bräu and at the same time celebrated the opening of a Todd-AO / 70mm film poster exhibition. There were 6 large boards with a collection of movie posters and lobby cards from the famous 70mm films of the 1960s, an era long gone by, admired by the audiences while enjoying the beer. Unfortunately the display had been removed by Saturday morning when I went for a second look.



Projectionist Mr. Marcus Vetter checking 70mm print

Saturday 8 October 2005

I rushed off to the Schauburg to see the beginning of "Ryan's Daughter". Always a fan of David Lean I would have liked to see it, but decided to leave it and also leave "Doctor Dolittle" and instead do some sightseeing in Karlsruhe. I returned to the Schauburg for the performance of "Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines" late in the afternoon. I've always enjoyed the title song and also had the pleasure of interviewing the director, Mr. Ken Annakin in Bradford in 2000. The new 70mm print had great sound, colors and incredible sharpness to it. I missed it in Bradford in 2005. The audience was in very good mode and laughed a lot. Especially, as the majority were Germans, it was fun to hear them laugh at Gert Fröbe and his "There is nothing a German officer cannot do" and how they did everything by the book "Number 1 - sit down". Just hilarious. The film received huge applause at the end. At this point I felt this was the best 70mm performance I had ever seen. The combination of the Schauburg's wide curved screen, a funny film, the new print, ultra sharp projection and good sound. This was how 70mm is supposed to look like. Well done Schauburg!!!

The last show Saturday was a gala performance of "My Fair Lady" in German. Herbert introduced the film by wishing everyone "eine schönes abend". The fact it was in German would probably scare a lot of people away, but I find it interesting to see a well known film dubbed into a foreign language. I didn't understand a word of it but it amazed me how close the German voice of Rex Harrison was to the original. I was told the actress who dubbed Audrey Hepburn has a "thick" Berlin accent which is VERY far from Eliza's London accent. It was also fun to hear the audience laugh, without understanding why. The print was faded and was presented in 70mm with 6-track magnetic stereo. For some reason Super Panavision 70 didn't look as sharp as Todd-AO did. Perhaps sharpness is compromised when the prints fade? At least it certainly looked as if the Todd-AO lenses were much sharper.

Sunday 9 October 2005

I looked forward to giving my lecture about Todd-AO and was curious about how many would show up for it - I had re-edited the Bradford version down to just under 30 minutes. I quickly went to the Schauburg to set up the lecture, microphone, light, slides and laser pointer with Herbert. I read it more slowly than at my previous performance in Bradford. Very early on Herbert wanted



"When the Lion Roared" in 70mm you were in for something special

to translate it into German and hand out earphones but that proved to be too costly. Fortunately, he decided Todd-AO 70mm history was adequately covered in the festival program in both German and English. It all worked fine and from what I understood, the lecture was well received. At least I got a huge applause. Following the lecture several short films were shown to demonstrate the superiority of 70mm film. Olivier Brunet's "Fanny's Wedding" (MCS-70 Superpanorama) looked absolutely stunning as did Morten Skallerud's "A Year Along The Abandoned Road" (Super Panavision 70) which is always an audience pleaser. Herbert introduced "Fanny's Wedding" and I introduced "Abandoned Road" by explaining the technique behind nature animation. Then followed a long line of 70mm trailers and rare clips, including: "Stuyvesant" 65mm film cigarette commercial and a MGM 6-track test film (with clips from "Doctor Zhivago"). 70mm trailers from: "Far and Away", "Cliffhanger", "Hot Shots: Part Deux", "Rising Sun", "Body of Evidence", "Lorenzo's Oil", "Batman", "Ben Hur", "2001", clip from the "Ben Hur" chariot race and a faded clip from "The Agony and the Ecstasy" and finally, a French "Lawrence of Arabia" trailer. "Grand Prix" was represented with a 16mm documentary titled: "Challenge of Champions" / "La Course des Champions" blown up to 70mm. A faded 70mm print of the classic Technirama film "Shellarama" concluded the morning and it seemed to please the audience

once again with its naïve view of the roaring gasoline consuming 1960s.

During the summer Herbert had asked me which 70mm films I hadn't seen yet. One of them was "Airport" and Herbert kindly scheduled it Sunday afternoon - what a nice gesture. The print was a faded German print with mono dialogue and stereo sound. I was told the film didn't open in 70mm until late into the release and therefore the German mono dub was used on the 70mm prints. I didn't understand a word of the dialogue, but had great fun seeing it. "Airport" was one of the first disaster movies and was almost as funny as the spoofs "Flying High/Airplane I+II". The images were sharp, and again showed off Todd-AO at its very best.

My last film this "Magnificent" weekend was "The Sound of Music" which is very often booed at by critics as a piece of horse manure. The reviewers obviously haven't seen it in Todd-AO! To me it is one of the funniest and most enjoyable musicals ever made. With Christopher Plummer in his best musical role as Captain Georg von Trapp (despite the fact his singing voice was dubbed). The dialogue is funny, the songs are classics and Ted McCord's solid 65mm photography is fantastic. The whole cast of characters is superb especially Richard Haydn as Max Detweiler, Ben Wright as Herr Zeller and of course Eleanor Parker as the Baroness. Not forgetting of course Julie Andrews and the children. Very well cast. It is also the most successful 65mm

film ever made, according to Variety, and 2005 marks the 40th anniversary of the film. I've seen it countless times and wouldn't miss this opportunity to see it again. I was told the Schauburg's presentation was the German premiere of the full version of the film. "The Sound of Music" never played well in Germany because the Germans already had their own films about the Trap Family Singers. "The Sound of Music" was shortened in Germany and ended with the wedding scene (making some of the the storyline pointless). The whole finale was cut from the German release prints. I've encouraged some of the German Schauburg guests to write the story about "The Sound of Music" release in Germany.

The final film of the festival was the classic 70mm Cinerama film "2001: A Space Odyssey" in a new 70mm Dolby 6-track magnetic print. I didn't see it except the beginning. I have seen it so many times by now, and unlike "The Sound of Music" I had no problems not seeing it on the curved 70mm screen. I returned to Copenhagen the next day, full of 70mm-happiness from the German eye-orgasm.

It was a unique event to see so many Todd-AO films. 2005 has indeed been a good year for the Todd-AO film legacy with Bradford in March and now Karlsruhe in October. Oddly enough, no one in the USA has organized a similar celebration, despite the American origin of the process. On the other hand, many of the films takes place in Europe, so you might be able to say Todd-AO is equally European.

I was interested to learn that the event brought in lots of letters and feedback from those who had attended - everyone thought that it was a great occasion. The citizens of Karlsruhe are lucky to have the unique Schauburg cinema. Most of these cinemas are long gone everywhere. Take good care of it - citizens of Karlsruhe.



Herbert Born with his latest toy – the new projection lens for 70mm

Technical details from Herbert Born

We sold around 1000 tickets during the three day festival, including weekend passes, a great success and in the high region of my estimates. With the help of sponsors, we arranged a budget which allowed us to printing posters, banners, flyers, advertising etc. Of course we had made a major investment in the technical aspects. We bought a 70mm time code reader, DTS-Special venue processor board for upgrading to 6-discrete channels, we did a complete refurbishment of the DP-75 including new parts for the film gates, new sprocket reels, new cross shaft and new muff coupling, which gave us a rock steady 70mm picture. This work was done by large format specialist Norbert Thäder of KINOTON, Germany, which also supplied us with a new 5000W lamphouse and mirrors to provide the best light for the curve. New TECCON magnetic reader heads were installed and we bought a new lens to fit the screen. The lens is the SCHNEIDER Super-70-Cinelux 1:2,0 MC (of 7 element construction) with a focal length of 75mm.

For the magnetic sound we use a modified DOLBY MPU-1 preamplifier, the modification was done by Gunter Oehme, our sound engineer, who did all the necessary measurements and installation work and adjusted the speakers to have the best possible sound. Further we used DOLBY CP-200 and DTS-6D, and the speakers and amplifiers were from the "d&b audio" F-series.

Vincent Koch and Markus Vetter are our projectionists. Vincent Koch did all the preparation work including examining and preparing the prints, timing the curtains etc. He and Markus Vetter made an exact cue sheet for the projection schedule of each film, which looks very professional. Both are young but very enthusiastic guys, when it comes to 70mm, and they did a great job.

Herbert Born's career

Herbert Born (born in the same year as CinemaScope!), worked as a part-time projectionist whilst still at school and later began to work at the German office of CINEMA INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION where he soon became Dubbing Manager of CIC, later UIP. In 1983 he formed his own movie production company, and later did screenplays for TV serials and shows. In 2000 he returned to his roots, to become Manager of 3 cinemas in Frankfurt, and then in 2003 became manager of the CINEPLEX in Frankfurt, an 8 screen multiplex, where he introduced 70mm. In 2005 he took over the SCHAUBURG in

Karlsruhe 'at his own risk' and says that he looks forward to what the future will bring!

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