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Movie-going in New Zealand, 1950-1980

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Abstract

While historical film audience research has flourished internationally since the 1980s, New Zealand's historical movie-going audiences have largely been ignored. This thesis seeks to increase our understanding of this once phenomenally popular pastime by investigating the movie-going habits of New Zealanders during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Using a multi-methodological approach, I draw on 600 survey responses, official statistics and reports, and archival material to ascertain changes in movie attendance and preference over these three decades, and the reasons for those changes. The examination of film exhibition and its practices is key to the investigation.

These decades were ones of significant societal change, not least because of the introduction of television in the 1960s, which saw a rapid decrease in the number of movie-goers and led to a change in movie-going culture from 'going to the pictures' to 'going to a picture'. Movie-going ceased to be a habit for many New Zealanders and instead became more of an event, assisted by a change in Hollywood production from hundreds of movies a year, to a few 'blockbuster' event-status films. The 1960s also saw a continuation of the high marriage and birth rates of the 1950s, and television fitted this period of domesticity. Hollywood increasingly focused on making films for young adult audiences, which further assisted in reducing audience sizes in New Zealand as some of the more popular genres with audiences here, such as the Broadway-inspired musical, were no longer being made. Another potential audience, children, were also neglected as films became increasing 'adult' in content, and were censored accordingly. Exhibitors were required to work hard to source appropriate material for children, many of who, given the late arrival of television here, and the even longer wait for transmission at child-friendly viewing times, still relied on the movies for entertainment. A further barrier to retaining audiences was the ever-increasing cost of admission tickets. By the end of the 1970s, these factors had coalesced to see New Zealand audiences at an all-time low, and the cinema business in New Zealand facing a most uncertain future.

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To the 600 people around New Zealand, and some overseas, who filled out my questionnaire on movie-going in New Zealand between 1950 and 1980, I give you a heartfelt thank you. That so many people took the time to answer my questions, and to forward the survey on to others, is both humbling and gratifying. Without you, the thesis would be considerably the poorer.

A special thanks to David Lascelles of Wellington and Val Page of Palmerston North, who not only gave me access to their invaluable Exhibitors' Record Books, but welcomed me into their homes and shared their knowledge and recollections of the cinema industry. Thanks also to Gavin List of Timaru who allowed me to borrow his Record Books.

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This thesis is dedicated to my father, Trevor Knuckey, who passed away part way through its completion. Dad, you have been, and always will be, with me.

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Introduction

This thesis examines the movie-going habits of New Zealanders during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, a period of profound change in both New Zealand society and in the film industry itself. This examination is shaped around two central research questions:

1. To what extent, and why, did the frequency of movie-going change during these decades?
2. What types of movies were most popular with New Zealanders and to what extent, and why, did these change during those decades?

My interest in this topic arose out of earlier research into the movie-going culture of residents of Palmerston North between World War One and Two,¹ an era in which New Zealanders attended the cinema in large numbers and frequently. Just as they did internationally, movies² became an important part of popular culture in New Zealand, with admission figures per head of population in the 1930s and 1940s among the highest in the world,³ leading Gordon Mirams, *New Zealand Listener* film critic, to make his much-quoted comment that 'only tea-drinking is a more popular form of diversion with us than picture-going'.⁴

The Second World War saw a further increase in movie-going in New Zealand, with attendances reaching a record high of 23.4 visits per person in 1943-4.⁵ Audience numbers

¹ Pauline Knuckey, 'A Global Province? The Development of a Movie Culture in a Small Provincial City 1919-1945', MA Thesis, Massey University, 2012.

² I predominantly use the term 'movies' throughout the thesis, although 'films' and 'pictures' are also used. For the purpose of this study they can be used interchangeably although I acknowledge that, as Penelope Hill commented, your 'choice of word reaches out tentatively towards the definition of [your] attitude': 'Film' is neutral; 'movies' ought to be fun; 'the pictures' means a double-feature and a choc-ice; 'motion picture' is American and assertive, suggesting an Academy Awards ceremony or a graduate thesis on 'the medium'. Penelope Houston, *The Contemporary Cinema*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963, p. 11. Author David Hill summed up the New Zealand 'attitude', commenting they were never called movies as that was seen as 'a flashy Yank term', with the preferred term being 'the pictures, pronounced as in earthenware'. *NZ Herald*, October 15, 2003, p. A19. Two of my female survey respondents, Shirley, born 1935, and Dorothy, born 1930, commented that nobody 'back then' referred to 'movies', with the expression instead being that you were 'going to the pictures' or 'the flicks'. Both said the terms 'movies' or 'cinema' came in to use at a much later date. Author and film-maker Peter Wells illustrates the connectivity between the terms: 'Pictures. We used to call them the pictures. There's something so literal about this term, yet so full of awe – a sense of being dwarfed by image. Images that move. The movies. [...] We also used to call the pictures the flicks. Flickering. A kinetic energy [...].' Peter Wells, *On Going to the Movies*, Wellington, N.Z.: Four Winds Press, 2005, p. 10. While 'the flicks' has gone out of usage, referring to the pictures, the movies, or going to see a film are expressions that are commonly used and understood, and it is these terms I will use throughout this study.

³ New Zealanders attended the movies 19.1 times per head of population per year in 1939-40 and 19.3 in 1940-1. In 1940 the British went 21.3 times a year per head of population and Americans 33. *NZOYB*, 1955, p. 1061 for the NZ figures and 1948, p. 363 for the British and American figures.

⁴ Gordon Mirams, *Speaking Candidly: Films and People in New Zealand*, Hamilton: Paul's Book Arcade, 1945, p. 5.

⁵ *NZOYB*, 1948, p. 364.

in the United States also peaked in 1943-4.⁶ There was a modest decline in the rate of attendances in New Zealand in the remainder of the 1940s, with 19.3 visits per person per year in 1949-50, back to the levels seen in the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁷

Levels of attendance per person per annum decreased during the 1950s but they were still a healthy 16.6 visits per person per year in 1958-9.⁸ Thereafter they declined dramatically so that by 1974-5 the figure was 5.1. By 1980-1 this had further decreased to 3.87 visits per head of population.⁹ The thesis will seek to explain this pattern. A number of other countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, followed roughly the same trajectory, albeit with somewhat different timing. Audience numbers in the United States began their significant decline from the middle of the 1940s, with weekly attendance falling from 82 to 73 million between 1946 and 1947 and down to 49 million by 1951. As David Thomson noted, 30 million movie-goers a week disappeared over a five-year period.¹⁰ By 1969, American audiences numbered 18 million per week but the following decade saw numbers increase to 22 million.¹¹ In Britain audiences peaked in 1946 with yearly admissions at 1,635 million. The immediate post-war years saw numbers drop, but the decline accelerated in the late 1950s with audience numbers halving between 1955 (1,182 million) and 1960 (501 million). By 1970 audiences were at 193 million and by the end of the decade they had fallen to 96 million.¹² Movie attendance in Europe also fell dramatically in most countries from the late 1950s. In France attendances fell from 411 million in 1957 to 290 million in 1963, and in Germany over two thirds of the cinema-going audience disappeared between 1956 (817 million admissions) and 1966 (257 million).¹³

A number of explanations have been advanced overseas and in New Zealand to account for this downward trend, with the emphasis originally on the negative impact of television. This has broadened, however, to include factors such as the impact of suburbanisation as people left the centre of cities and their concentration of cinemas, societal changes that saw an increase in numbers of young people marrying and starting a family, and an increased focus on leisure time and what to do with it. Increased prosperity and increased car ownership

⁶ Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, London: Wallflower Press, 2003, p. 378.

⁷ *NZOYB*, 1955, p. 1061.

⁸ *NZOYB*, 1960, p. 1160. Statistics were not kept in 1959-60.

⁹ *NZOYB*, 1976, p. 341; *NZOYB*, 1983, p. 257. No statistics were gathered between 1975 and 1980.

¹⁰ David Thomson, *The Big Screen: The Story of the Movies*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2012, p. 249.

¹¹ Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, pp. 378-9.

¹² Stuart Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain since 1896*, Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2007, pp. 92-3, and James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds.), *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, p. 372.

¹³ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 239.

have also been argued to have had a negative impact on cinema audiences, as people chose to spend their money on other pursuits and had the means to travel to fulfil them. These factors will be assessed in their New Zealand context in the thesis. The focus for audience decline has been primarily on extrinsic factors, but some commentators have raised questions about the films themselves. Were there intrinsic factors that turned audiences away? The extent to which both intrinsic and extrinsic factors succeed in explaining developments in New Zealand will be investigated.

In addressing the issue of what types of films tended to be popular with New Zealanders and to what extent and why they might have changed, the second of my research questions enters an area of this country's cinema history that remains largely unrecorded. 'Types of films' will be considered in relation to their genre and country of origin. James Chapman outlined the usefulness of genre for the film industry as a form of 'product standardisation and differentiation' in that each genre film is similar to others of the same 'type', while each film genre is different to others.¹⁴ Thomas Schatz underlined the importance of the genre to the movie industry, particularly in the early years of this study, by pointing out that in 1950 approximately 90% of Hollywood productions 'fell into some pre-established classification.'¹⁵ Given the degree of readily available identifiers, or what Sarah Berry has called 'culturally familiar rubric',¹⁶ inherent in each genre, and the importance of genre to my survey respondents who ranked it as the most influencing factor in their film selection, this form of categorisation is one method I used to determine cinematic preferences.

Regarding a film's country of origin, New Zealand audiences were between two major centres of cinematic production. On the one hand, there was the substantial American film industry, 'Hollywood', which was dominant internationally, and on the other hand there was that of the United Kingdom, which was officially supported in New Zealand until the 1970s by 'quotas' that had been implemented in 1928 to support Britain's languishing film industry.¹⁷ By specifically asking contemporary movie-goers if they preferred British or

¹⁴ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 159.

¹⁵ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981, p. 6.

¹⁶ Sarah Berry, 'Genre', in Toby Miller (ed.), *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 207-222, p. 207.

¹⁷ The New Zealand Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, was introduced by the conservative Reform government, under Joseph Gordon Coates, and came into effect in January 1929. It introduced the same quota as Britain's Act had done: 7.5% of a distributor's movies had to be quota films in 1929, and that increased to 20% by 1939. Exhibitors had to show 5% of quota films in 1930 which increased to 20% by 1939. However, a number of provisions to the Act gave exhibitors, who were generally against the quota system, ways of avoiding it. See the Act, Part IV, 27, 1-4, and Part IV, 29, 2. The quota schedule never really succeeded and was 'quietly' dropped in 1976. Geoff Lealand, *A Foreign Egg in our Nest? American Popular Culture in New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: Victoria University Press, 1988, p. 92.

American films, and by supporting that data with an analysis of the most popular films of the period, I will determine the extent to which New Zealanders preferred one over the other. The degree of popularity of films from 'other' countries will also be assessed.

In developing answers to these questions, the three principal resources I used were archives, a survey, and official publications. For the three decades of this study there were only two major exhibition companies in New Zealand: Kerridge-Odeon and Amalgamated Theatres, both of whom were owned, or partly owned, by overseas companies. In 1946 Robert Kerridge sold 50% of the shares in his company, Union Investments, to the British cinema conglomerate, J. Arthur Rank Odeon Holdings, and Kerridge-Odeon was formed. In 1954, heavily in debt to Twentieth Century Fox for film rental and CinemaScope installation, Amalgamated sold 25% of the company to Fox, adding to the 50% already acquired in 1936 when Amalgamated had sold the company a half-share in a bid to ensure a continual supply of film. Amalgamated sold the remaining quarter interest to Fox in the 1960s. Kerridge-Odeon were by far the larger company, controlling 70% of the exhibition industry, with 130 theatres, two distribution companies, a film equipment, and a confectionary company. Amalgamated had 68 theatres.¹⁸ Having access to the archives of the largest of this duopoly provided invaluable information on many facets of the cinema industry during these years, including, but not limited to, correspondence from senior management to theatre managers on upcoming films, marketing suggestions, queries regarding their theatre management, and issues facing the cinema industry. Kerridge's particularly hands-on management style (one of his theatre managers commented that 'nothing was too infinitesimal for him to be concerned about')¹⁹ resulted in detailed accounts of his company's operations being recorded and retained. A limited number of registers from the 1950s, which recorded the films shown at all Kerridge-Odeon theatres and their corresponding takings or attendance figures, proved especially valuable, given that such data was highly confidential and commercially sensitive. An example of one of these records is seen in Figure 1, illustrating the films shown at Ashburton and Auckland in the first week of December 1950. These tell us how long films remained at individual theatres and how much revenue was made. Both

¹⁸ David Lascelles, 'The Companies Behind the Picture Business', in Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre, 1925-1970*, Auckland, N.Z.: Godwit, 2008, pp. 9-13 and Geoffrey B. Churchman (editor-in-chief), *Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: IPL Books, 1997, p. 22.

¹⁹ Tony Goodliffe and Terry Snow, *Stars in My Eyes: 40 Years of New Zealand Show Business*, Auckland, N.Z.: HarperCollins, 1996, p. 28.

of these are important factors in determining not only what films were particularly popular, but also in demonstrating the exhibition practices of those theatres.

PROGRAMME (Title)	Week's Net Takings	Average To Date This Year	Average T.E. 21-2-50	Comparative Week Last Year	Programme Same Week Last Year
2. Whisky Galore	289	254	255	162	
Devil's Doorway 1st	954	1229	1302	1538	Wake of Red Witch
The Lie 2nd	522	880	957	655	Bride of Vengeance
After Midnight 1st	729	1040	880	519	Take One False Step
Dear Mr. Prohack 2nd	803	816	838	940	My Brother Jonathan
2. Undertow 2nd	193	225	243	161	
2. Fortunes Capt Blood	191	186	186	175	
2. Conspirator	145	197	192	218	
2. Sands of Iwo Jima	153	149	144	115	
Nancy Goes to Rio	192	223	217	153	
1. Red Danke/Texas Rangers	120	132	153	126	
3. Louise	75	69	54	65	

Figure 1: Takings summary for Ashburton and Auckland Theatres, December 1950.²⁰

Because of the commercial sensitivity of financial figures, communication of these was sent to head office by telegram in code, as seen in Figure 2, which gives the takings for Wellington's Majestic's screening of *A Hard Day's Night* (1964).²¹ The recipient of the telegram has written out the code, AUTHORISED, with its corresponding figures, 1234567890, written below, to aid him in his interpretation of the revenue made.

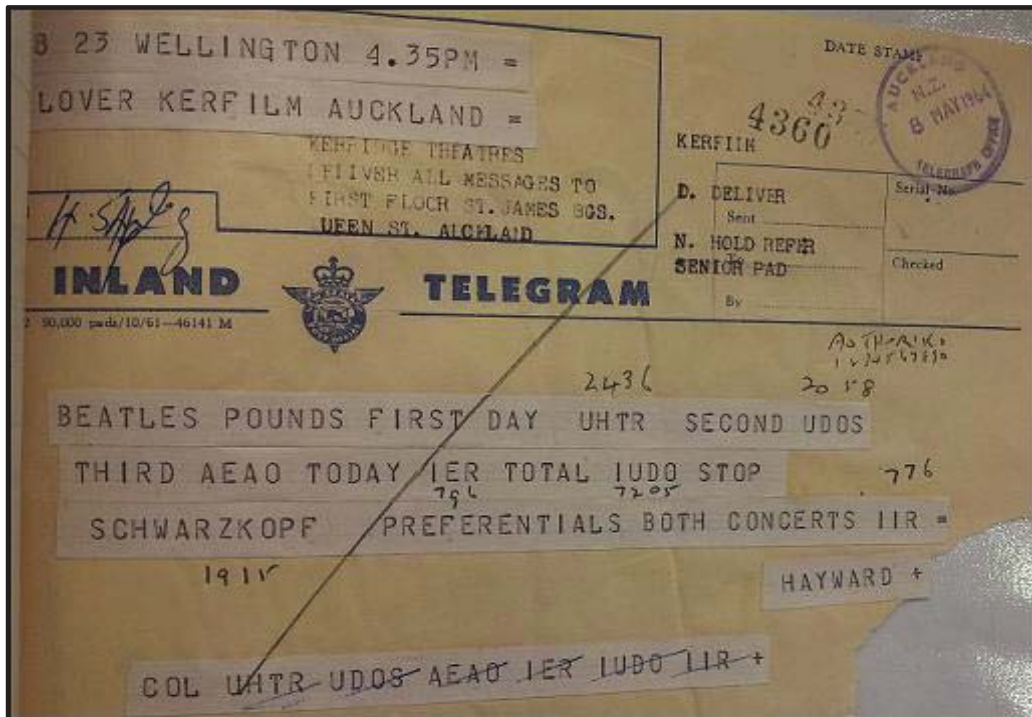


Figure 2: Telegram showing code used for communicating revenue.

²⁰ Takings Summaries 2/49-3/53, Box 253, MS 98/89, Kerridge-Odeon (KO) Archives, Auckland War Memorial Museum (AWMM).

²¹ Telegram from Norman Hayward, Manager of Majestic Theatre, Wellington, to Mr. Glover, May 8, 1964, Box 126, File 456, MS 98/89, KO Archives, AWMM.

Amalgamated Theatres used a similar concept for their code, using LONQUICKSA to represent numbers 0 through to 9, with the additional use of 'E' to indicate repetition of the previous number.²²

These two examples provide an indication of the invaluable documents found in these archives, most of which have not been used in research before. While there were gaps in the consistency of the recording of data, or perhaps in its retention, which resulted in incomplete data for the years of my study, as Robert James commented, 'we must cut our cloth according to the resources at our disposal'.²³ Overall, the Kerridge-Odeon records are a vital resource in the examination of our movie-going culture up until the 1970s. Unfortunately, corresponding records for Amalgamated Theatres do not appear to have been retained to the same degree. Information on Amalgamated and independent theatres has come in a piecemeal fashion from sources including the Hocken Collections, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, and private collections.

Exhibitors' Record Books were a vital primary resource in this study, useful predominantly for determining what films were particularly popular with film-goers. A number of these are in public archives, but many are held in the private collection of David Lascelles, a one-time cinema employee and now film and television researcher, who generously allowed me access to it. Valmond (Val) Page of Palmerston North and Gavin List of Timaru, both of whom were long-time employees in the cinema industry during the period covered by this thesis, also kindly allowed me access to their personal records. The record books, with an example seen in Figure 3, were used by theatre staff, usually projectionists, to record what films were shown for every day of operation, whether it was an American (recorded as 'Foreign') or 'Commonwealth' film,²⁴ the dates of screening, the number of times the film was screened (or sometimes how long it screened for), which company distributed the film, its registration number and in many cases its length. An analysis of this material indicates, among other factors, the popularity of a film, with the general rule of thumb being the more popular a film was, the longer it ran for. Because the typical number of copies of a film distributed throughout the country was small, there was very limited opportunity for a theatre to retain a film that was particularly popular. However, those in the cinema business during this period have said there was no limit to the number of times a film could be screened in one

²² For example, 1109 was coded as OELA. Exhibitors' Record Book, State Theatre, Timaru, Gavin List collection.

²³ Robert James, 'Popular Film-going in Britain in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46:271, 2011, p. 287.

²⁴ Official statistics used 'British' as the category up until 1962 when it was changed to 'Commonwealth'. However, some theatres were using 'Commonwealth' in the 1950s.

day, so if it was popular, extra screenings could be scheduled. Furthermore, the distribution office could be contacted and the film booked for a return screening, once its initial schedule had been completed. In some cases extra copies of a popular film would be purchased to add to the circuit. Analysing the number of times a movie was shown in any one day, the number of days it ran for, and if it was brought back as a 're-run', therefore gives a strong indication of what films were particularly popular. While there were considerable differences in the quality of entries in these record books, including their tidiness, legibility, and fullness of information, they provide invaluable and immediate data of what was screened, where it screened, and for how long. Advertisements in newspapers provided supplementary information to the record books.

Registered No. of Film	TITLE OF FILM	Commonwealth "Quota" or Foreign "Quota" film.	Dates Exhibited	Total No. of Times Exhibited	REMARKS
6	BEN HUR	FOREIGN	18.12.68 - 23.1.69	4 weeks	M.G.M.
KA 3	LOVE OF IVY	FOREIGN	24.1.69 - 26.3.69	9 weeks	AMALG
Y 7	WHERE EAGLES DARE	Commonwealth	21.3.69 - 12.6.69	11 weeks	M.G.M.
F 7	CUSTER OF THE WEST	"	13.6.69 - 3.7.69	3 weeks	AMALG

Figure 3: Exhibitors' Record Book, Cinerama Theatre, Wellington.²⁵

Official statistics and other information on movie attendance and the cinema industry are found in the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)* and the *New Zealand Official Yearbooks (NZOYB)*. Along with the *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (NZPD)*, these official publications also provided much useful material on the introduction of television into New Zealand, which, with its rapid uptake and staggered regional implementation, made it possible to determine the extent to which the decline in cinema-going coincided with television's arrival nationally and regionally. Details of the films examined by the Censor were obtained from the *New Zealand Gazette* when this information ceased being reported in the *NZOYB* and *AJHRs* in the mid-1970s.

A primary focus of my research is the direct engagement with those whose movie attendance (or lack of it) helped create New Zealand's cinema-going culture from 1950-1980. This was done via a survey asking participants a number of questions related to their movie-going experiences and preferences. As other authors on audience studies have done, I recognised that it is impossible at this distance to construct a statistically rigorous survey and it is not a scientifically selected sample. However, where a significant proportion of respondents

²⁵ Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

answered in a particular way or had similar recollections, it does suggest that those preferences, opinions or feelings may have been widespread in New Zealand. I believe that capturing the recollections of a substantial number of respondents has considerable value as an indicator of tastes and trends. In referring to comments made by survey respondents, I deliberately elect to use direct quotations, as, like Roger Horrocks, I believe that these provide a much more nuanced account than the use of paraphrasing, 'because of what they reveal about personalities, contexts and contemporary discourse'.²⁶

There is relatively little research on historical audiences that has as its primary methodology an engagement with movie-audience members via a questionnaire, given, depending on the period being researched, the difficulty in finding participants. However, this methodology has been used to a limited extent and I looked at surveys/questionnaires used by Jackie Stacey, an early advocate of audience-based film research,²⁷ and in Ian Huffer's²⁸ and Brigid Cherry's²⁹ doctoral theses.

Jackie Stacey's research on women's interest in female movie stars in the 1940s and 1950s utilised a questionnaire to supplement the Mass Observation Archive of letters written by women to *Picturegoer* magazine in the 1940s and 1950s.³⁰ The letters themselves provided the inspiration for her research, with 40% of their content related to film stars, and with the majority written by women. Stacey's primary interest was in finding out, not only the favourite female Hollywood star(s) of her participants, but also why they were favoured and what it was about them that appealed to the individual. I used Stacey's questionnaire as a starting point for my own and utilised the same focused approach in asking survey participants what they specifically liked about going to the movies.

Ian Huffer's and Brigid Cherry's doctoral work utilised questionnaires to engage with their respective research participants. Huffer carried out star-based audience research, examining the enjoyment viewers obtained from Sylvester Stallone's films. He obtained his data from

²⁶ Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye, A Biography*, Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 3, cited in Simon Sigley, 'Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929-1972', PhD Thesis, Auckland University, 2003, p. 18. I also elect to use unedited quotes from correspondence to and from those in the industry, for the same reason.

²⁷ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, London: Routledge, 1994.

²⁸ Ian Huffer, 'Shadowboxing: Sylvester Stallone and British Film Audiences', PhD Thesis, University of Sussex, 2005.

²⁹ Brigid Cherry, 'The Female Horror Film Audience: Viewing Pleasures and Fan Practices', PhD Thesis, University of Stirling, 1999.

³⁰ Mass Observation (MO) was an independent social research organisation from 1937 to the early 1950s. Their archives were gathered and housed at the University of Sussex, as part of the Library's Special Collections. Since 1981 the MO survey project was reactivated and material has been collected ever since. <http://www.massobs.org.uk/> retrieved October 20, 2017. For analysis and compilation of movie-going data see Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds.), *Mass Observation at the Movies*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.

a questionnaire filled out by Stallone fans in which he asked for details of the level of their engagement with and commitment towards the actor and his movies. Huffer's research relied solely on his participants' responses, with his qualitative questionnaire asking detailed and probing questions of his respondents as it was designed to 'elicit the kind of in-depth responses on which reception research rests'.³¹ He noted the importance of being open to the 'unexpected' when carrying out audience research and to ensure respondents had the opportunity (and space) to describe the 'specificity of their engagement' with the subject being investigated. It followed that researchers had to remain open to 'being surprised' to what their respondents revealed to them.³² With this in mind, I designed my questionnaire with prompts and options that illustrated to respondents there were no predetermined paradigms I was working toward.³³

Brigid Cherry's contemporary study analysed women and their engagement with horror movies.³⁴ Cherry argued strongly in favour of audience research, stating her questions on female spectatorship could not be answered by textual analysis or by theoretical models of reception and that a profile of female horror film fans could only be developed through an audience study of 'real viewers'. Cherry took a multi-pronged approach in her engagement with her audience, also connecting with them via focus groups and written communication. To avoid 'questionnaire fatigue', Cherry chose to insert her qualitative questions at relevant points throughout her questionnaire rather than adding them on to the end where they could also give the impression they were less important,³⁵ a tactic I used in my survey.

Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings used a questionnaire as part of their research into filmgoing in Nottingham, England, but while their research used interviews with and questionnaires from audience members, its primary methodology was the use of archival material to reveal the consumption choices of their Nottingham audiences.³⁶ As such, their questionnaire was less extensive than any of the above researchers, and given its focus on 'cultural geographies' and spatial concepts, the questions had a stronger focus on the 'place' of film consumption than did either my study, or those of Stacey, Huffer or Cherry.

³¹ Huffer, 'Shadowboxing', p. 31.

³² Ibid., pp. 30-1.

³³ For example, opportunity for 'Comments' and 'Other' options were provided with the quantitative questions to enable respondents to provide their own answer, if it is was not included in the check-box lists.

³⁴ Cherry, 'The Female Horror Film Audience', 1999.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁶ Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, London: British Film Industry, 2003.

By examining the questions these researchers asked of their respondents, in the context of their research questions and any other methodologies they used, I formulated my own questionnaire using a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. To that end, these are the questionnaires that most informed my own.

Having compiled the questionnaire, I tested it on a small sample group and made slight alterations in response to their feedback. It was then ready to be distributed and this was done primarily via the internet. It was circulated widely throughout New Zealand, and to New Zealanders overseas, through a range of avenues including online news site stuff.co.nz, newspapers, service groups such as Lions, Rotary, and Probus, fellow Massey University staff, professional groups (including those in the film industry), archivists, librarians, and genealogists, with people contacted via social media, personal contacts, distribution lists, and general word-of-mouth. The breadth of the distribution was aided by a snowballing effect as people passed the survey on to contacts they thought would be interested. To be eligible, respondents needed to have gone to the pictures in New Zealand at some period between 1950 and 1980. Respondents had the option to complete the survey in its digital format on line, or to request a hard copy be sent out. In all, 600 responses were received, 560 of those online and 40 in hard copy. The age of respondents ranged from 41 (born in 1973) to 90 (born in 1924). Survey Monkey software was used to construct the survey and collate data from the quantitative closed questions. It also provided the ability to group collected data according to individual questions, including respondents' gender, the decade they were born in, and the decade they went to the movies most frequently.

Research participants were asked a range of questions, including but not limited to, what they found attractive (or not) about going to the movies, how often they went, who they went with, what factors were taken into account when considering going to the movies, and whether there were barriers to their attendance. A range of 'taste-preference' questions determined which genres were most popular and which were not, and participants were asked to name their favourite film(s) of this period. The questionnaire can be found at Appendix 1.

Using this multi-faceted approach consisting primarily of archival resources, official statistics and reports, and the qualitative and quantitative data obtained from survey respondents who were going to the movies in some or all of the years of this study, enabled me to carry

out a detailed analysis of movie-going in New Zealand for the years 1950-1980 and to reach some conclusions about the change in pattern of movie-attendance and film preferences over those years, and the reasons for the change.

The thesis follows the chronological framework provided by the three decades under investigation. While it is acknowledged that history does not naturally fit into a neat decade by decade format, for this particular study the decades offer a natural schematic. The 1950s provide a base point with their period of relative cinematic stability and status quo, when movie-going was still a frequent pastime and the industry was still in relative good health. The 1960s is the 'crisis' decade for cinema as television began transmission and its uptake resulted in a dramatic decrease in audience numbers. The 1970s covers the industry's period of readjustment as the decline in audience numbers reaches its lowest point. The changing fortunes of the cinema industry and any variations in patterns of movie-going and tastes can therefore be analysed over the three decades and some conclusions drawn as to the reasons for any changes.

Literature Review

Movie-audience Research

The study of movie audiences is not, understandably, a new interest, given that movie audiences have been in existence since 1896. Adolph Zukor, founder of Paramount Pictures, commented that his first experience in watching audiences was in a small peep-show arcade where he 'stood about observing the interest of the customers' and he had continued to do it ever since.¹

Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld was one of the earliest proponents of scientific research into audiences, arguing that 'refined tools' were necessary for the 'modern trend' of market research.² These tools included moving away from the collection of basic data, such as the 'number of radios owned [and] the brand of soap used', to asking how people felt about the goods or services they were purchasing, what features were especially important to them, and what motivated them to spend their money the way they did.³ In outlining some of the main methods, findings and problems with movie audience research, Lazarsfeld commented that knowing the primary characteristics of an audience, that is its demographic composition, should not 'blind us to the need' to investigate audiences further, suggesting that 'the relation between audience behaviour and the daily routine of life' was an area that had not been adequately researched.⁴ How the 'daily routine of life' interconnects with audience habits and behaviours is investigated in my study, through an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative responses from my research participants to questions such as who they went to the movies with, how often they went and what their motivators were in deciding to attend the movies.

The 1940s saw the development and adoption of 'systematic, empirical methods' for studying audiences with George Gallup establishing the Audience Research Institute (ARI) for the Radio-Keith-Orpheum studio⁵ and Leo A. Handel setting up the Motion Picture Bureau

¹ Adolph Zukor, with Dale Kramer, *The Public is Never Wrong: The Autobiography of Adolph Zukor*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1953, p. 37.

² Paul F. Lazarsfeld, 'The Use of Detailed Interviews in Market Research', *The Journal of Marketing*, 2:1, July 1937, pp. 3-8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, 'Audience Research in the Movie Field', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 254, November 1947, pp. 160-168, p. 164.

⁵ Susan Ohmer, 'The Science of Pleasure: George Gallup and Audience Research in Hollywood', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, London: British Film Institute, 1999, pp. 61-80. Gallup found that the Hollywood audience was younger, more male and poorer than the industry had presumed, p. 70.

for Metro-Goldwyn Mayer in 1942.⁶ Gallup's work focused primarily on recording and analysing audience demographics to provide the studios with data on the make-up of their audiences, with ARI conducting thousands of surveys for more than a dozen studios and independent producers.⁷ The motion picture industry, once criticised as knowing less about itself than any other major industry in the United States, was clearly attempting to rectify this.⁸

Continuing the earlier focus of Lazarsfeld, sociologist Eliot Freidson continued to move audience research away from a preoccupation with demographics by looking at the spectator's 'social situation of contact', arguing that as movies were a form of mass communication, which was a social process, a 'mere study of the relation of content to the demographic attributes of an audience - i.e. age, sex, education, socio-economic status - does not adequately grapple with the problem of explaining why the spectator responds as he does'.⁹ To do this, Freidson argued for the need to study the 'responses of the spectator in terms of the organised social life in which he participates, for the act of attending to mass communications is an integrated part of that organised social life'.¹⁰ Whether directly influenced by Freidson or not, finding out who people went to the movies with, a part of their 'organised social life', became a standard part of audience research, and was one of the questions I asked my survey respondents.

British sociologist, Jacob (J.P.) Mayer used 'motion-picture autobiographies' in his study of films and the 'pattern of life',¹¹ by inviting participants to write to film magazine, *Picturegoer*, describing the history of their interest in films. Mayer chose an autobiographical methodology because he believed it was one of the best methods to obtain the 'experiences and self-interpretation of the individual'. Given the importance of the cinema 'to the lives of our contemporary masses', its impact, Mayer argued, 'must be interpreted through the medium of the individual film-goer. Only through him [...] can the social function of the

⁶ Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research*, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1950. Handel's research found that male and female attended in equal amounts, young people went more often than older, and the more educated and well-off, the more you attended.

⁷ Ohmer, 'The Science of Pleasure', p. 62.

⁸ Robert W. Chambers, 'Need for Statistical Research', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 254, November, 1947, pp. 169-172, p. 169.

⁹ Eliot Freidson, 'The Relation of the Social Situation of Contact to the Media in Mass Communication', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 17:2, Summer, 1953, pp. 230-238, p. 238.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹¹ Jacob-Peter Mayer was born in Germany but 'fled' to England in 1936 and became a British citizen in 1948. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J-P_Mayer retrieved March 3, 2017. J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences: Sociological Studies*, London: Dennis Dobson, 1948.

cinema be adequately described.¹² Mayer published his responses unedited and they provide a detailed and fascinating insight into the social, cultural and economic environments that impacted, not just on people's movie-going activities, but on their broader 'spheres of human activity'.¹³ Despite the intervening decades between Mayer's research and mine, the similarity in responses between the two cohorts is noticeable, with participants sharing not just details of their movie-experiences but more personal aspects of their lives too, including their familial finances, sibling relationships, and early dating experiences.

There followed a period with little audience research, with film studies focused instead on the textual analysis of film: investigating the meanings found within the film itself became more important than investigating who was watching it. Thomas Austin commented that the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s saw the reading of film texts 'institutionalised' as the primary academic activity in film scholarship.¹⁴ According to Austin, it was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that audience research became more visible, with this same period seeing audiences' social experiences acknowledged in the star and genre studies that were emerging.¹⁵ Important to this period is the work of Stuart Hall (1973), who conceptualised audience reception in a model of Encoding/Decoding meanings. Hall believed that while 'preferred' meanings were 'encoded' into a text, how it was 'decoded', or understood, was socially determined rather than predetermined through the text.¹⁶ According to Austin, Hall's theory recognised the power of the text while avoiding textual determinism and it initiated a 'boom' in research into media audiences from the late 1970s.¹⁷ A key figure in

¹² Mayer, *British Cinemas*, pp. 14-15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Thomas Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 15. Two examples are Richard Dyer, *Stars*, London: British Film Institute, 1998, and Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres, Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.

¹⁶ Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18. A number of works focused on the background to and methods of audience research, including: Bruce A. Austin, *The Film Audience: An International Bibliography of Research*, Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1983, which is a compilation of an annotated bibliography of international film audience research through until the early 1980s. Austin followed this with an editorial role in four volumes of *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics, and Law*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1985, which published articles on research in three non-traditional aspects of film: the film audience, motion picture economics and legal concerns. Garth Jowett's chapter in v.1 of this series looks at movie audience research, 'Giving Them What They Want: Movie Audience Research Before 1950', in Bruce A. Austin (ed.), *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics, and Law*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1985, pp. 19-35. Robert C. Allen's and Douglas Gomery's 'classic' text looks at the variety of methods and breadth of approaches that can be used in film history research, to enable film history to 'be more profitably read and conducted', *Film History Theory and Practice*, New York: Knopf, 1985, p. iii. Other works examining movie audiences and the background to that once 'non-traditional aspect of film' include Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby's *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences*, London: British Film Institute, 1999, pp. 1-20, and Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen (eds.), *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, Exeter, U.K.: University of Exeter Press, 2007. Philippe Meers and Daniel Biltreyest provide a brief but useful overview that places film audience studies within the broader field of media research in 'Film Audiences in Perspective: The Social Practices of Cinema-Going', in Helena Bilandzic, Geoffroy Patriarche, and Paul J. Traudt (eds.), *The Social Use of Media: Cultural and Social Scientific Perspectives on Audience Research*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2012, pp. 123-140. Jo Smith provides a basic overview on some of the different approaches to film

this period, which saw audience research shift ‘from interpretation to consumption’¹⁸ was David Morley, who believed it was necessary ‘to consider the context of viewing as much as the object of viewing.’¹⁹

From the 1980s an increasing number of studies placed audiences back at the centre of cinema history, moving away from the focus on film texts. This refocusing of film history engages perspectives from a range of different disciplines, including history, geography, sociology, economics, cultural studies, and film and media studies. This ‘new’ history can, in part, be seen as a return to some of the principles of early movie audience research, as evidenced in the sociological studies by Lazarsfeld and Freidson with their focus on the part movies played in the everyday life of movie-goers. This broad range of disciplines brings with it a wider range of resources and methodologies than were used in early audience research, including, but not limited to, exhibitors’ records, rate-books, town-planning information, business directories, court reports, union publications, and spatial mapping, resulting in a ‘greater level of methodological sophistication’, with the variety of disciplines and resources combining to assist in this ‘expanding research agenda of film history’.²⁰ The often serendipitous nature of locating some of these resources has led to the suggestion that the new film historian is ‘comparable to an archaeologist who unearths new sources and materials’.²¹

Janet Staiger was an early advocate of moving away from textual readings in film history, stating that ‘looking just at celluloid texts will no longer do’.²² Staiger argued that contextual factors are at the centre of understanding audiences and film as they incorporated social inter-relationships and perceptions of the self in relation to the environment the film was being seen in.²³ She objected to the idea of a ‘master narrative’, such as class, being used to explain film consumption, believing that individuals have multiple identities which one ‘narrative’ cannot do justice to.²⁴ Staiger echoed Freidson’s belief in the importance of the

studies, within a New Zealand cinema framework, in ‘Situating cinema in/from Aotearoa/New Zealand’, in Luke Goode and Nabeel Zuberi (eds.), *Media Studies in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: Pearson, 2004, pp. 89-104.

¹⁸ Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, London: British Film Institute, 2003, p. 3.

¹⁹ David Morley, *Television, Audiences, and Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 157-8.

²⁰ James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper, *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²² Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Film: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.

²³ Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

‘social setting of reception’,²⁵ and argued it was the ‘actual circumstances of exhibition [...] and the pleasures sought by people in their attendance at the movies’ that was at the heart of audience studies.²⁶ By asking my survey respondents what they enjoyed about going to the movies, and their favourite genres and films, I uncovered some of the ‘pleasures’ sought, and experienced, by New Zealand audience members throughout this time period.

Focusing specifically on the social setting of reception is the primary aim of a number of audience studies. Charles Ambler’s research on popular films and their reception in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) focused on the 1940s and 1950s and he used the popularity of the Western as a case-study.²⁷ Ambler was a critic of both film research that emphasised the film-as-text, believing it dismissed the audience as irrelevant, and the lack of research investigating the global impact of popular films, which he argued resulted in a gap in film



Figure 4. Western iconography in New Zealand child’s ‘dressing up’, 1965.

reception studies from a racial, ethnic, national, class, generational and gender perspective.²⁸ Ambler used audience behaviour to demonstrate the ‘rapid and pervasive penetration of mythic Hollywood screen imagery into even remote corners of the [British] Empire’.²⁹ In introducing Ambler’s work in their edited collection *Hollywood Abroad*, Richard Maltby related his own, Scottish, childhood and his attraction to the Western, and included photographs of both himself, and of Melvyn Stokes, as children dressed up as cowboys.³⁰ Such photographs are an instantly recognisable and powerful illustration of the transcendence of this iconic Americanism to the ‘remote corners’ of not only Central Africa but to New Zealand too, where family albums hold similar images, as seen in Figure 4.³¹ The Western featured as a consistently popular movie genre in New Zealand for a

²⁵ Freidson, ‘The Relation of the Social Situation of Contact’, p. 230.

²⁶ Staiger, *Perverse Spectators*, p. 31.

²⁷ Charles Ambler, ‘Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia’, *The American Historical Review*, 106:1, 2001, pp. 81-105. A slightly altered version of this article was published in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, London: British Film Institute, 2004, pp. 133-157.

²⁸ Ambler, ‘Popular Films and Colonial Audiences’, p. 84.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁰ Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, London: British Film Institute, 2004, p. 3.

³¹ Robert Knuckey, aged 5.

number of decades and this is seen in both my earlier research³² and in this study. Just as Ambler's young movie-goers mimicked the actions of their Hollywood screen heroes in their everyday play, so too did young New Zealand movie-goers.

Matthew Jones believed the lack of documentary evidence of British responses to 1950s science fiction films made an audience study impossible in his research on 1950s British responses to American science fiction movies.³³ He instead used a 'contextually-activated' approach to reception by drawing on archival sources, newsreels, newspapers, and magazines to explore some of the different contexts in which 1950s science fiction cinema was received in Britain. His study is an example of the employment of a broader array of tools through which audience response can be determined. My study incorporates both contemporary audience commentary and use of 'contextually-activated' resources, which I believe will give a more nuanced understanding of movie-going and audience reception.

Looking at the earlier decades of the 1930s and 1940s, Sue Harper³⁴ and Robert James³⁵ carried out class-based audience research, using theatre exhibitors' records and Miners' Institute records respectively. Harper's study used the ledger of the Regent Theatre in Portsmouth, England, which recorded what film was screened, whether it was British or American, and the attendance figures at each session, thereby providing firm evidence as to what was popular or not.³⁶ Harper found that those who frequented Portsmouth's Regent, a cinema preferred by the more well-off members of the community, had strong viewing preferences, although her use of the word 'hatred' appears somewhat overstated.³⁷

This audience allayed its anxieties about its place in the world by going to see films which would confirm its own attitudes on culture and sexual probity. Its tastes indicate a liking for the exotic, but a hatred for the vulgar; a liking for minor naughtiness, but a hatred of promiscuity; a liking for the contemporary, but a chariness about extreme modernity; a liking for stylish, balanced display, and a hatred for cheap films.³⁸

³² Knuckey, 'A Global Province?', p. 95.

³³ Matthew William Jones, 'The British Reception of 1950s Science Fiction Cinema', PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2011.

³⁴ Sue Harper, 'A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s: Admissions Figures at the Regent Theatre, Portsmouth, UK', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 24:4, 2004, pp. 565-587 and 'Fragmentation and Crisis: 1940s Admissions Figures at the Regent Cinema, Portsmouth, UK', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 26:3, 2006, pp. 361-394.

³⁵ Robert James, 'A Very Profitable Enterprise': South Wales Miners' Institute Cinemas in the 1930s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 27:1, 2007, pp. 27-61.

³⁶ Harper used the following categories: 'Runaway hit' for over 25,000 attendees per week; 'Major success' 19,000/week; 'Medium success' 15,000/week; 'Run-of-the-mill' 10,000/week 'Total flop' under 10,000/week.

³⁷ 'Hated' is used in spoken or written communication (a survey respondent of mine wrote that she 'hated violence in films'), but its use in the analysis of exhibitors' record books seems out of place. 'Strongly disliked' or 'avoided' would seem more appropriate.

³⁸ Harper, 'A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s', p. 577.

Illustrating the sometimes serendipitous nature of research, or the analogy between the new film historian and an archaeologist who ‘unearths’ new sources,³⁹ Harper noted her access to the Portsmouth Regent’s records came from seeing the ledger ‘nestled in a ‘Seaside Holidays’ display case’ in the Portsmouth Museum, ‘half hidden beneath a child’s bucket and spade and covered with sand’.⁴⁰ To her knowledge, there is not another source of audience figures as extensive or detailed as the one she discovered.

Robert James believed that the majority of studies into movie-going and film popularity still focused on the mass of the cinema-going public without delving into taste-preferences between the classes, which was an issue for him because he agreed with Jeffrey Richards’s argument that, although the movies appealed to everyone, they were far from a classless leisure activity.⁴¹ His study of miners’ movie attendance in South Wales examined data from the one remaining ledger of the Cwmllynfell Miners’ Welfare Hall from the end of March 1937 until the end of December 1939. Because the Miners’ Committee selected their own movies, James was able to come to some conclusions about their taste-preferences by analysing the types of movies shown. He believed that in contrast to much of the perceived historiographical understanding on the role of cinema in South Wales mining communities, the films booked for exhibition were ‘far from purely “escapist” fare [with] many films demanding a high level of cultural competence from the audience’.⁴² A drawback to James’s study is the relatively brief run of records he had access to (the three years are interspersed with intermittent breaks) but they are useful, nonetheless, in permitting the drawing of some conclusions about the cultural tastes of their audience. His persistence with them as a tool to determine audience-preference indicates both the scarcity of such documentation and its value.

Annette Kuhn interviewed audience-goers of the 1930s, and, along with ‘the historian’s traditional source materials’, contemporary records, and analysis of selected 1930s films, determined the significance and influence the cinema held for 1930s audiences.⁴³ A significant finding to emerge from oral history research into cinema-going, according to Kuhn, was the extent to which memories of cinema have revolved far more around the social

³⁹ Chapman, Glancy and Harper, *The New Film History*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Harper, ‘A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s’, p. 565.

⁴¹ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939*, London: Routledge, 1984, p. 17, quoted in Robert James, ‘Popular Film-going in Britain in the Early 1930s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46:2, pp. 271-287, 2011, p. 272.

⁴² James, ‘A Very Profitable Enterprise’, p. 44.

⁴³ Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2002, p. 7.

act of cinema-going than around the films they saw. Kuhn also suggested that the degree of repetition of themes and key phrases from contemporary movie-goers indicated a 'collective imagination' was at play, with individual engagements also able to be interpreted as 'collective, cultural memory'.⁴⁴ Both of Kuhn's findings were strongly evident in my study, with respondents articulating a heavy emphasis on the importance of the social situation of their cinema-going and with a strong recurrence of certain themes and phrases from respondents across all three decades.

Margaret O'Brien and Allen Eyles investigated movie-going in South London between 1920 and 1960 by interviewing 26 people who had worked in the industry or attended the movies during those years. As well as providing factual detail that added to the 'historical record', O'Brien and Eyles believed their gathered recollections expressed a sense of the 'atmosphere, feelings and textures' of movie-going with their detailed descriptions of audiences of rowdy, boisterous children, of opulent theatres that felt like 'sitting in a big garden', and continuous programmes that led to the expression, 'this is where we came in', being a part of one's childhood.⁴⁵ Their recollections, along with those from Kuhn's interviews, illustrate how vividly memories of cinema-going could remain with an individual, even decades later, particularly when recalling childhood and young adulthood.⁴⁶ This was also evident in the detailed recollections of many of my survey respondents.

Three recent collections of new film histories provide an interesting variety of case studies, both from the breadth of resources used and their examination of audiences from countries other than Britain and America, which was where early audience research focused.⁴⁷ While the collections continue the conceptual and methodological focus of new cinema history, the editors of one of the collections, Karina Aveyard and Albert Moran, warn against abandoning film-texts completely, arguing that 'In our enthusiasm for the rich new perspectives' that have emerged with the advent of new cinema history, 'the role of the film as an integrated part of the viewing experience has become somewhat obscured.'⁴⁸ This point is emphasised by Clara Pafort-Overduin, who commented that 'Much as we should avoid a too film-centric

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 85, 217.

⁴⁵ Margaret O'Brien and Allen Eyles (eds.), *Enter the Dream-House: Memories of Cinemas in South London from the Twenties to the Sixties*, London: British Film Institute, 1993, pp. 7, 74, 77.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁷ Karina Aveyard and Albert Moran (eds.), *Watching Films: New Perspectives on Movie-going, Exhibition and Reception*, Bristol: Intellect, 2013; Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (eds.), *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011; Chapman, Glancy and Harper, *The New Film History*.

⁴⁸ Aveyard and Moran, *Watching Films*, p. 5.

approach, we should also not fall into the trap that the film is not important at all'.⁴⁹ In our desire to embrace the 'new' we can sometimes become overzealous in discarding the 'old'. The film itself is an important part of my research, with questionnaire participants asked to name their favourite film(s) and this, coupled with analysis from exhibition records and attendance schedules, will provide important data on the individual films that were most popular with New Zealand movie-goers during this period.

Impacts on Movie-attendance

Television has traditionally been blamed for the decline in movie-attendance internationally, but this is now widely considered too simplistic an explanation. James Chapman argued there was no direct correlation between the two, using France as an example of significant movie-attendance decline and a slow uptake of television ownership, and noting that British audiences began to decline significantly from 1946, before the widespread ownership of television.⁵⁰ John Belton commented that American attendance dropped to 60 million in 1950, at a time when television was still very much in its infancy,⁵¹ and Robert Sklar pointed out that 'the new medium did not become generally available until after the drop in motion picture attendance had already begun'.⁵² Douglas Gomery refuted the claim that the arrival of television was the primary reason for declining audiences, arguing it was the post-war phenomena of suburbanisation that shifted 'more and more families away from the downtown location of the movie palaces'.⁵³ For Thomas Cripps it was both the expansion of suburbia and the advent of television, the 'twin imps of narcissism', that brought about movie-attendance decline.⁵⁴ A number of commentators point to the 1948 Paramount decree as a reason for audience decline,⁵⁵ and to this Bruce Austin added the 1952 Supreme Court ruling. The decree forced major movie producers to relinquish their theatres, which were situated primarily in well populated centres, and the ruling stated movies were covered by the First Amendment Protection of freedom of speech, thereby dismissing 'the censorious

⁴⁹ Clara Pafort-Overduin, 'Watching Popular Films in the Netherlands, 1934-36', in Aveyard and Moran, *Watching Films*, pp. 331-349, p. 334.

⁵⁰ James Chapman, *Cinemas of the World: Film and Society from 1895 to the Present*, London: Reaktion, 2003, p. 239.

⁵¹ John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, Boston: McGraw, 2005, pp. 304-5. David Thompson, *The Big Screen: The Story of the Movies*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012, p. 251, puts television ownership at 9% of the American population in 1950.

⁵² Robert Sklar, 'The Lost Audience': 1950s Spectatorship and Historical Reception Studies', in Stokes and Maltby, *Identifying Hollywood's Audience's*, p. 81.

⁵³ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, pp. 85, 87.

⁵⁴ Thomas Cripps, *Hollywood's High Noon: Moviemaking and Society Before Television*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 207.

⁵⁵ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 126; Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 131; Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994, pp. 374-5.

cloud' that had been a part of movie-making since their inception. As a result, producers became less inclined to make family films precisely at the time that families were booming.⁵⁶ Robert Sklar, Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, John Belton, James Chapman, and Paul Rotha all referred to post-war affluence that saw an increase in the purchase of cars, homes, and home appliances, which they maintained contributed to reduced movie-attendance by providing alternative leisure options. The increased consumerism brought about a new phenomenon of leisure-time that focused on a healthy family life outside of city centres, where families played outside and television provided their indoor recreational needs.⁵⁷ Mike Walsh argued that while television did have an impact on movie-attendance, in Australia as elsewhere, 'a more fine-grained time scale' was required to adequately analyse that impact. Walsh added that in Australia entertainment taxes and the introduction of parking metres also negatively impacted on the cinema-going audience.⁵⁸ Mark Jancovich et al., included an increase in ticket prices as a reason for declining audiences in their study of movie-going in Nottingham, England.⁵⁹

The arrival of television in New Zealand was treated with great caution by many in the industry at the time, given that contemporary reports from overseas indicated a direct causal link between the implementation of television and a drop in cinema attendees. The New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association (NZMPEA) regarded the introduction of television as 'detrimental to our national economy' because of its impact on movie attendance.⁶⁰ This was the same view expressed by W.B. (Bill) Sutch for the Department of Industries and Commerce in July 1959. Sutch said that overseas experience showed that wherever television was introduced, cinema attendance fell significantly enough to result in the closure of cinemas, with this being a permanent state of affairs, not a temporary one.⁶¹ So, before television had even come to New Zealand, there was fear of its impact on audiences. Geoff Lealand believed the arrival of television in New Zealand had a greater impact on movie-going than it did in the United States, which saw average attendances fall

⁵⁶ Bruce A. Austin, *Immediate Seating: A Look at Movie Audiences*, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co, 1989, pp. 37-8.

⁵⁷ Robert Sklar, 'The Lost Audience', p. 81; Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, pp. 304-309; Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*, London: Spring Books, 1967, p. 721; Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, pp. 239-241.

⁵⁸ Mike Walsh, "Calamity Howling": The Advent of Television and Australian Cinema Exhibition', in Aveyard and Moran, *Watching Films*, p. 124.

⁵⁹ Jancovich et al., *The Place of the Audience*, p. 134.

⁶⁰ Patrick Day, *Voice and Vision: A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000, p. 25.

⁶¹ W.B. Sutch, *The Economics of Television in New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: Department of Industries and Commerce, July 1959.

by 28%, compared with New Zealand's 73% decrease,⁶² and Simon Sigley described television as having had a 'devastating effect on the cinema business'.⁶³

Echoing international studies, while Wayne Brittenden believed television assisted in movie attendance decline in New Zealand, he also included increased affluence as a reason, commenting that 'relatively sophisticated inner-city pubs and restaurants, 10 o'clock closing [the extension of public bar open hours from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m., which was introduced in October 1967], and the advent of night trots in the suburbs', forced many theatres to close.⁶⁴ Tony Froude also believed that 10 o'clock closing had a profound effect on audiences, with some theatre chains believing its impact was bigger than the arrival of television.⁶⁵ A government report also attributed 'increasing public interest in other forms of entertainment', including television, as reasons for the closure of theatres in small towns and suburbs.⁶⁶ Bronwyn Dalley includes 'high-class restaurants' as being part of the attraction of the 'bright lights, big city' offered by urban areas, along with increasing numbers of shopping malls and 'a varied nightlife, bars, [and] dance venues'.⁶⁷

The degree to which these factors impacted on movie-going in New Zealand will be examined by using official statistics and reports, quantitative and qualitative comments from survey respondents, and correspondence from those in the cinema industry.

Film Preferences

Explanations for cinema audience decline have traditionally focused on external factors, as we have seen, leading Sklar to point out that what had been 'largely missing' was a focus on intrinsic causes, such as whether movies changed in style or genre, and whether audiences, or their tastes, changed.⁶⁸ Contemporary commentators were signalling changes were taking place, with film critic Manny Farber commenting in 1952 that 'movies aren't movies any more', referring to the increase in 'gimmicks' that moved film away from what he believed was its basic function of entertaining through the telling of a story, to films that

⁶² In the US the average number of attendances per person per annum was 16.4 in 1953-4. This had dropped 28% by 1962-3 to 11.8. NZ attendances dropped 73% between 1962-3 and 1972-3. Geoff Lealand, *A Foreign Egg in Our Nest?: American Popular Culture in New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: Victoria University, 1988, p. 86.

⁶³ Simon Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol: Intellect, 2013, p. 182.

⁶⁴ Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre, 1925-1970*, Auckland, N.Z.: Godwit, 2008, p. 143.

⁶⁵ Tony Froude, *Big Screens in the Valley: Cinemas and Movie Halls in the Hutt Valley, 1906-2002*, Paraparaumu N.Z.: Spectro Print, 2002, p. 7.

⁶⁶ *AJHR*, 1965, H. 22, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Bronwyn Dalley, 'The Golden Weather, 1949-1965', in *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: 2005, pp. 306-335, p. 325.

⁶⁸ Sklar, 'The Lost Audience', p. 81.

required the audience to 'interpret' what was happening.⁶⁹ At the same time Gilbert Seldes,⁷⁰ and the Riesmans⁷¹ were debating the changing nature of films and audiences.

Taking up Sklar's challenge, I propose to investigate the degree to which the types of films screened by cinemas in New Zealand changed during this period and how this might have both reflected and produced shifts in the constitution of the audience. This analysis will be integrated with consideration of extrinsic factors such as the social setting of audiences and wider developments such as the move to television.

In considering what films and types of films were popular during particular periods, genre studies can be useful, as it has been argued that the production of a film is ultimately connected to audience preference.⁷² The prominence of the western in Hollywood production has been used as an example, with westerns a reliable box-office 'earner' for a period of 60 years or so.⁷³ Genres have also been said to develop in response to the social and cultural conditions of the time of production.⁷⁴ Given this, a brief overview of genres that were particularly popular at this time in the United Kingdom and the United States, where most of the films watched in New Zealand came from, will provide an indication of what was popular for those overseas audiences. As one of the aims of this research is to investigate what films were popular with New Zealand audiences, the degree of transportability of those genres to New Zealand audiences can then be examined. This is of particular interest, given New Zealand audiences were watching films that were not only made for an audience other than their own, but made in response to a genre preference, and/or as part of a social and cultural environment that may also have not been in keeping with their own.

⁶⁹ This interpretation was required because of the director's manipulation of the audience through camera angles and other techniques. Manny Farber, *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1998, pp. 71-83. Farber's 'gimmicks', what he called the Gimp, referred to the director's manipulation of the audience through his use of the camera, script and other devices.

⁷⁰ Gilbert Seldes, *The Great Audience*, New York: Viking, 1950. Seldes argued that because movies were being made for youth, more mature audience members had stopped going to them.

⁷¹ David Riesman and Evelyn T. Riesman, 'Movies and Audiences', *American Quarterly*, 4:3, Autumn 1952, pp. 195-202, argued that films were too mature and older audiences did not understand them.

⁷² Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 159; Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 25. Sarah Berry disagrees with this suggestion, saying it assumes a democratic system which gives the individual viewer financial power to 'vote' in what should be produced, which does not fit with the model of the highly monopolised film industry. Sarah Berry, 'Genre', in Toby Miller (ed.), *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 207-222, p. 215.

⁷³ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 159.

⁷⁴ Robert Sklar, *Film: An International History of the Medium*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993, pp. 302-321; Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 161; Tom Ryall, 'Genre and Hollywood', in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide To Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 327-341, p. 329.

Hollywood's response to the 'troubled times' facing the cinema industry has been described as business-as-usual, which meant that musicals, westerns, and comedies dominated the studios' production strategies for most of the 1950s.⁷⁵ Both the western and the musical used production values of spectacle and extravagance to showcase what cinema could provide that television could not. It has also been suggested that the western had the added benefit, for those afraid of speaking out on social concerns in this period of 'political repression', of providing the opportunity to raise concerns within the safer structure of a conventional narrative.⁷⁶ The western continued its successful run throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, with it being suggested that its long-ranging success was due in part to its flexibility, as it moved from traditional, to revisionist, to contemporary styles, depending on the prevailing social and cultural environment.⁷⁷

The musical, arguably one of American cultures 'most widely loved yet least understood or appreciated genres',⁷⁸ faded during the later 1950s.⁷⁹ The genre shifted away from Broadway-style song-and-dance routines, toward films showcasing popular pop and rock stars such as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and Bill Haley and the Comets. The mega success of the surprise hit, *The Sound of Music* (1965), in the mid-1960s, led studios into further expensive musicals, which, almost inevitably given that film's phenomenal success, failed to perform as well.⁸⁰ The 1970s saw 'music-themed' films achieve large audiences as producers capitalised on the popularity of rock and pop music by producing rock-documentaries, rock-operas, and a notable hit of the decade, the musical *Grease* (1978).

The comedy genre has long been a staple favourite of audiences, dating back to cinema's early days and the considerable popularity of Charlie Chaplin. In Britain, low-budget comedy series made their name, beginning in the 1950s with the *Doctor* and *Carry On* series particularly popular. Institutions such as the civil service, hospitals, education facilities and the navy, were all used as backdrops for comedy, with Sarah Street suggesting the films portrayed fears about state power and a mistrust of bureaucracy, with the institutions

⁷⁵ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, pp. 132-3.

⁷⁶ Sklar, *Film*, p. 315.

⁷⁷ John Sanders, *The Film Genre Book*, Leighton Buzzard, U.K.: Auteur, 2009, p. 13; Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 161-171; Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp.133-142; Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, pp. 45-80.

⁷⁸ Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, p. 186.

⁷⁹ Due to producer Minnelli's interest turning to melodrama, Gene Kelly's diversification into dramatic roles, and Fred Astaire's age catching up with him (he was 51 in 1950) according to Sklar, *Film*, p. 357.

⁸⁰ Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (eds.), *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 8-36, p. 14.

serving as microcosms of British Society.⁸¹ Other strands of British comedy relied upon ‘a Britain of shop keepers, friendly spivs, jolly coppers, incompetent but honest bureaucrats, kind-hearted squires, contented old-age pensioners and a variety of eccentrics’.⁸² Comedy is said to have been the most successful British genre in the international marketplace, in the 1950s.⁸³ The *Doctor* and *Carry On* series continued through into the 1960s and 1970s and carrying on ‘the zany, absurdist tradition of British comedy’ were the *Monty Python* films from the mid-1970s.⁸⁴ In the United States, immensely popular actors Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin kept comedy at the forefront of audiences, along with director Billy Wilder with hits such as *Some Like it Hot* (1959).

The 1950s were particularly notable for the popularity of big-budget, lavish, historical epics, produced by Hollywood as a way of reasserting itself and reminding audiences of the kind of show it could produce.⁸⁵ John Sanders suggested that the ‘blurred moral boundaries and atrocities’ of the Second World War had left people shaken and ensured that biblical tales of the ‘straightforward moral message of good and bad’ both ‘reassured and comforted’ audiences, as well as entertaining them.⁸⁶ While the post-war cycle of historical spectacles continued throughout the 1960s, by the end of that decade they came to a close, due in part to overproduction, over-investment, increasingly higher costs yet reducing profits, and changes to the audience demographic.⁸⁷

A major genre throughout the 1950s, and one particularly important for British production and audiences, was the war film. With the war over and the Allied forces victorious, the war film provided a degree of ‘certainty and comfort (knowledge of what the outcome will be).’ Furthermore, it evoked notions of national pride, identity, democracy, freedom and brotherhood.⁸⁸ Films dealing with war and empire were not just popular with audiences, with *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), earning David Lean

⁸¹ Sarah Street, *British National Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 64, cited in Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre, and The ‘New Look’*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 56.

⁸² Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book*, London: British Film Institute, 1997, p. 200.

⁸³ Sklar, *Film*, p. 326.

⁸⁴ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 283. *Doctor in Trouble* (1970) was the last film of that series, and *Carry On Columbus* (1992) was the last of the *Carry On* series.

⁸⁵ The success of some of these films, *Quo Vadis?* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *Ben Hur* (1959), have been credited with creating the idea that an individual film could become a major box-office phenomenon. Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 139.

⁸⁶ Sanders, *The Film Genre Book*, p. 411. Steve Neale also draws attention to this link between the popularity of biblical epics and the post-war era. Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, p. 89.

⁸⁷ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, pp. 91-2.

⁸⁸ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 274; Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*, New York: Henry Holt, 2000, p. 59.

praise from critics and Academy Awards for best director and best picture for both films.⁸⁹ However, war films fell in popularity with British audiences by the end of the 1960s, with the suggestion that the British 'stiff-upper-lip' style that was predominant in this genre had become unfashionable.⁹⁰ It has been suggested that in the United States the Cold War assisted in the demise in popularity of the World War Two war film, when its realignment of allies and enemies brought about changes in the depiction of Japanese and Germans.⁹¹

Another popular genre in the 1950s was the historical drama, a feature of British production in this period, which was often used to dramatise 'national identity, empire, monarchy, personal heroism, and consensus',⁹² many of the same themes as the war film. Along with films that served to portray real historical periods, this genre also included the 'costume drama' which used historical settings, costumes, and sets, but were more often fictional.

In line with the theme of 'troubled times', the 'family melodrama' was a significant genre, focusing on issues such as the breakdown in relationships between parents and their children, and the changing values from one generation to another, with *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) one example. The genre was closely linked to the 'woman's film', with its portrayal of single working women, or childless couples, and the tragic melodrama, which centred on the male protagonist. These different types of melodrama portrayed, to some degree, aspects of generational conflict, domestic disharmony, loss of paternal authority, and class conflict, in keeping with contemporary social issues.⁹³

The 1960s saw an increase in the popularity of action adventure films, assisted by the *James Bond* spy series, a particular hit with its exotic locations and glamorous film-sets, and this popularity followed the films into the 1970s. Disaster films made a strong appearance in the early 1970s, and the phenomenal success of action thriller *Jaws* (1975), has been credited with beginning the modern model of the blockbuster.⁹⁴ While science fiction had been around since George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), it became a 'rising genre' of the 1950s, propelled by the post-World War Two interest in space travel and concern over

⁸⁹ With British cinema production continually overshadowed by that of Hollywood, David Lean's style was described as 'Mid-Atlantic' cinema (midway between London and Hollywood). Sklar, p. 442.

⁹⁰ Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book*, London: British Film Institute, 1997, pp. 259-260.

⁹¹ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, p. 131.

⁹² Landy, *British Genres*, p. 53.

⁹³ Sklar, *Film*, p. 361; Landy, *British Genres*, provides separate chapters on The Woman's Film, Tragic, and Family melodramas.

⁹⁴ Ethan Alter, *Film Firsts: The 25 Movies that Created Contemporary American Cinema*, Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2014, pp. 1-10; Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 15-44, pp. 24-26.

nuclear power,⁹⁵ with the genre also said to accurately assess ‘the fears and desires of Cold War America.’⁹⁶ It reached its peak popularity in these decades with *Star Wars* in 1977. Horror was often closely associated with science fiction and the 1950s have been called a period notable for the many ‘sci-fi/horror hybrids’ produced, along with the emergence of the ‘Hammer Horrors’, a gothic form of horror, produced by London company, Hammer Film Reproductions. These films were strong through into the 1970s.

Further to these general genre studies, a relatively small number of international studies have analysed what films, and types of films, were popular with historical audiences, with 1930s Britain being a period of particular research interest.⁹⁷ John Sedgwick’s study found there were distinctive differences between what city audiences liked to watch compared with audiences in the provinces.⁹⁸ This was also noted in Richard Maltby’s study of audiences in the United States for the same period, with one exhibitor stating that small communities like his did not want ‘smutty dialogue and nasty suggestions, illicit love scenes and the like. [...] Wherever I go I meet up with the complaint that nasty pictures are driving people away from the theatres. It is quite evident that pictures are being made with an eye singly to city patronage.’⁹⁹ Another study of American audience preference in the mid-1930s analysed financial figures and film commentary in the industry trade magazine *Variety*, which was believed to offer a ‘rich source of information for reception studies centred on the tastes and interest of local audiences’. The analysis found that preferences between cities and regions could vary considerably, with, for example, Greta Garbo considered a ‘Scandinavian luminary’ in Minneapolis, with *The Painted Veil* (1934) a hit, whereas in Birmingham (Alabama) the same picture failed at the box-office because ‘Garbo doesn’t mean anything here and this film means less’.¹⁰⁰ Similar evidence of differing taste-preferences on a regional basis is discovered and discussed in my study, from analysis of exhibitors’ record books and correspondence from theatre managers.

⁹⁵ Sklar, *Film*, p. 357-361.

⁹⁶ Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction*, London: Berg, 2011, p. 73.

⁹⁷ Robert James points to Andrew Davies’ ‘landmark’ *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester 1900-1939*, Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992, as being responsible for British historians ‘keen to stress the significance of class in structuring popular leisure patterns’, in ‘Popular Film-Going’, p. 271. In the 1990s, the Economic and Social Research Council in Britain funded a ‘Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain’ study, with the aim of ‘situating cinema-going and fan behaviour in this period within their broader social and cultural contexts’. Annette Kuhn, ‘Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19:4, 1999, pp. 531-543, p. 531.

⁹⁸ John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures*, Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2000.

⁹⁹ Richard Maltby, ‘Sticks, Hicks and Flaps: Classical Hollywood’s Generic Conception of its Audiences’, in Stokes and Maltby, *Hollywood Abroad*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁰ *Variety*, December 11, 1934, p. 11; and *Variety*, December 18, 1934, p. 11, in Mark Glancy and John Sedgwick, ‘Cinemagoing in the United States in the mid-1930s: A Study Based on the *Variety* Dataset’, cited in Maltby et al., *Going to the Movies*, p. 159.

In examining British film culture in the 1970s, Sue Harper and Justin Smith mentioned the 'dearth' of evidence on British film tastes for the 1970s, saying it makes a comprehensive study of the period difficult to achieve. Claire Monk has called this period 'British cinema's most fraught and historiographically challenging as well as underinvestigated decade'.¹⁰¹ A component of Harper and Smith's study looked at audiences and reception and analysed exhibitor records from Southampton and Portsmouth. They drew some tentative conclusions about regional taste-preferences, and used yearly box-office statistics to determine the types of films British audiences were enjoying throughout this decade.¹⁰² These will be compared with findings from my research for the same period.

Discovering what types of films were popular was an aim of a 1973 survey of American audiences, which found that comedy was the most popular genre with both sexes, with women liking romance, drama and musicals, and men westerns, drama and suspense. The least liked genre by both sexes was horror. Women also least preferred war, science fiction and westerns, while men least preferred musicals, romance and animated features. These gender preferences were in line with those found by Handel in his 1940s research,¹⁰³ and the preferences of New Zealand men and women will be compared with these findings.

Noel Brown examined the 'family film', a type of film he argued attained global popularity because it crossed barriers of age, gender, race, culture and taste by aiming to please as many, and offend as few, people as possible.¹⁰⁴ However, Brown argued that between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s, the family film 'came to be perceived as a relic of a bygone age', which he attributed primarily to the development of television and the emergence of the teenage consumer.¹⁰⁵ This assertion will be examined within a New Zealand context in my thesis.

While there are a number of studies that provide an overview of genres and their trajectories of popularity and decline, the number of studies that specifically ask audiences what types of movies they prefer are limited. These studies show there is some interest in finding out

¹⁰¹ Claire Monk, 'British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 34:2, 2014, pp. 311-315, p. 315.

¹⁰² Sue Harper and Justin T. Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 208.

¹⁰³ Peter Kramer, 'A Powerful Cinema-going Force? Hollywood and Female Audiences Since the 1960s', in Stokes and Maltby, *Hollywood Abroad*, p. 95; Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience*, pp. 118-127.

¹⁰⁴ Noel Brown, 'Hollywood, the Family Audience and the Family Film, 1930-2010', PhD Thesis, Newcastle University, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 151.

historical movie preferences, but that interest is piecemeal. This thesis will add to that developing body of knowledge.

New Zealand Contexts and Audience Studies

James Chapman included New Zealand among those countries whose cinema culture he believed had been 'the last to attract academic attention and consequently to find their place in the histories of film'.¹⁰⁶ Since Chapman's comment there have been a number of studies carried out on aspects of New Zealand's movie culture.¹⁰⁷ While most recent New Zealand studies do not focus on cinema audiences, a small number have done so.

Simon Sigley's research focused on the development of an 'art film' culture in New Zealand and he illustrated the growth in acceptance of mainstream audiences to 'foreign' films, films that had once been the almost exclusive domain of film societies and film festivals. While my research is on the 'larger' tradition of mainstream cinema-going, many of my survey respondents mentioned their interest in and love of 'foreign films', and their comments, along with those of the exhibitors screening those films, are included. These indicate that not only did the occasional art film 'cross over' into mainstream cinema, but that there was a growing audience in this period for more challenging films.¹⁰⁸

Barbara Brookes's study on the New Zealand-made film *Broken Barrier* (1952)¹⁰⁹ included commentary on the generally favourable response from local audiences to the film, which she positioned within the genre of 'social problem' film-making, in this case inter-racial marriage, which was popular internationally from the end of the 1940s and throughout the

¹⁰⁶ The other countries are Canada, Australia, and Ireland. Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 402.

¹⁰⁷ These include Bridget Conor's MA thesis 'Hollywood, Wellywood or the Backwoods? A Political Economy of the New Zealand Film Industry' which examined the New Zealand film industry and the perception that amidst the 'hype and rhetoric' of the considerable success of the Peter Jackson *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003), the industry has more autonomy and independence internationally. Auckland University of Technology, 2004, p. v; American film author Kristin Thompson investigates the impact of *The Lord of the Rings* phenomenon in *The Frodo Franchise: How The Lord of the Rings became a Hollywood Blockbuster and put New Zealand on the Map*, North Shore, N.Z.: Penguin Books, 2007; Argelia Erandi Muñoz Larroa in his doctoral thesis, 'Sustainability in the Film Industry: External and Internal Dynamics Shaping the Wellington Film District', examined the sustainability of the Wellington film industry against the disparity of official statistics that say the industry has grown substantially in the decade since *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and perceptions from other sources such as academic and media research and those in the industry, that see production in Wellington (and New Zealand) as struggling. Victoria University of Wellington, 2015. These studies are set against the backdrop of the strength and influence of Hollywood and its global reach, which saw Jackson's success quickly leading to Wellington being dubbed 'Wellywood'. Ian Huffer examined film exhibition at 'Wellywood's Cinemas', finding that while Wellington film exhibition practices 'privilege transnational corporations and Hollywood cinema', the environment is a positive one for non-Hollywood films. 'Wellywood's Cinemas': Theatrical film exhibition in 'post-industrial' Wellington', *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 5:3, 2012, pp. 251-264.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Sigley, 'Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929-1972', PhD Thesis, University of Auckland, 2003 and *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Brookes, 'Which Barrier Was Broken? *Broken Barrier* and New Zealand Cinema in the 1950s', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 44:2, 2010, pp. 121-137. *Broken Barrier* is a New Zealand-made film about the romantic relationship between a Maori woman and a Pakeha man, written and directed by John O'Shea and released in 1952.

1950s.¹¹⁰ Three United States films of this genre had performed well overseas and were also well-received by local audiences.¹¹¹ Charlotte Greenhalgh's study investigated the important place of movies, and movie theatres, in the romantic lives of young New Zealand audiences in the 1920s and 1930s,¹¹² while my study of movie culture in the small provincial city of Palmerston North included an examination of local movie audiences,¹¹³ but both of these studies are outside the time period of this research. This was also the case with the earlier research by Nerida Elliot, which examined film culture in Auckland from 1909-1939.¹¹⁴ Wayne Brittenden's book on New Zealand's 'heyday' of the picture theatre extends through until 1970, covering two of the decades of my study. Brittenden provided accounts of exhibition practices, the histories of many of the theatres throughout the country, personalities of those in the industry, and anecdotes from industry contemporaries (his father was a theatre manager) of the more entertaining stories of audience behaviours and practices over those years. It provided a useful reference tool, particularly for aspects of the history of theatre buildings.¹¹⁵ A number of recent regional and individual studies have illustrated the changing fortunes of many of New Zealand's movie theatres.¹¹⁶

Gary Whitcher investigated New Zealanders' responses to American culture, focusing on film, music, and comics, in the middle years of the twentieth century, and he questioned the traditional narrative that American culture was seen as 'low' and therefore inferior, while British culture was 'high' and superior.¹¹⁷ Two older works on the impact of American popular culture on New Zealand, with specific chapters on film, provided a balanced view of that impact, particularly at a time when the political relationship between the two countries

¹¹⁰ For more on this 'genre' see Neale, pp. 112-118.

¹¹¹ Brookes, 'Which Barrier Was Broken?', pp. 121, 123. The films were *Pinky*, *Home of the Brave*, and *Lost Boundaries* which were all released in 1949.

¹¹² Charlotte Greenhalgh, 'Bush Cinderella's: Young New Zealanders and Romance at the Movies, 1919-1939', *New Journal of History*, 44:1, 2010, pp. 1-21.

¹¹³ To determine popularity of films, I analysed daily newspapers' cinema advertising, over five sample years, to ascertain the most screened, and arguably, the most popular film genres for movie-goers from 1919-1945. Knuckey, 'A Global Province?'

¹¹⁴ Nerida Elliot, 'Anzac, Hollywood and Home: Cinemas and Film-Going in Auckland 1909-1939', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1989.

¹¹⁵ Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus*, pp. 110-119.

¹¹⁶ These include Tony Froude's 3 publications, *Where to go on Saturday Night: Wellington Cinemas and Movie Halls, 1896-2000*, Paraparaumu, N.Z.: T. Froude, 2000; *Big Screens in the Valley, Reel Entertainment: Cinemas and Movie Halls in the Twentieth Century Tawa to Tokomaru*, Paraparaumu N.Z.: Spectro Print, 2002; Michael Fowler and David Turnbull, *The Reel Story: A History of Napier and Hastings Cinema 1896-1996*, Napier, N.Z.: Michael Fowler, 2008; Karen Christian (ed.), *The Eltham Town Hall: Memories of a Community Treasure*, Stratford, N.Z.: Stratford Press & Printing, 2003; Howard McNaughton, *The Theatre Royal Christchurch: An Illustrated History*, Christchurch, N.Z.: Clerestory Press, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Gary F. Whitcher, 'More than America': Some New Zealand Responses to American Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century, PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2011.

was strained.¹¹⁸ Geoff Lealand argued that 'a doctrinaire rejection of American popular culture is ill-considered and naïve'.¹¹⁹

A recent collection of film studies provided a range of case studies from around the globe, including two chapters on aspects of contemporary New Zealand cinema culture.¹²⁰ Lealand's chapter argued that while there is an abundance of information on what films are popular in New Zealand, and elsewhere, most of the history of movie-going in New Zealand depends on 'scraps of information' from box-office data, memoirs and biography, histories of film exhibition and distribution, and some academic scholarship. He believed it was still difficult for those in the industry to 'know' their audiences, with audience construction generally 'a mix of past experiences, current box-office performance of similar films, and a large dash of hope.'¹²¹

These studies show there has been an increased interest in studying aspects of film and the film industry in the years since Chapman's comment and, subsequently, that film and cinema-going in New Zealand *is* considered a topic worthy of academic attention. The majority of studies do not, however, focus specifically on New Zealanders 'going-to-the-movies', resulting in New Zealand research showing a 'prevailing neglect of the role of the audience in a discipline dominated by explorations of the text, and to a lesser extent, the political economy of production and distribution'.¹²² My study endeavours to rectify this by ascertaining the influences, motivators, preferences, and barriers that encouraged or restrained individual's movie-going in the decades from 1950 through until 1980. The role of film exhibition will also be examined. In this way I hope to redress the claim that 'knowledge is scarce' about the audiences of a country where film 'has long been - and remains - a primary entertainment activity'.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Due in part to New Zealand's strong anti-nuclear stance which saw New Zealand refuse entry to an American naval vessel on the grounds it could be nuclear powered. Malcolm McKinnon (ed.), *The American Connection: Essays from The Stout Centre Conference*, Wellington, N.Z.: Allen & Unwin, 1988.

¹¹⁹ Lealand, *A Foreign Egg in our Nest?*, p. 112.

¹²⁰ Ian Huffer's chapter focused on cinemas in Wellington and looked at the relationship between class and culture within New Zealand. While Huffer did not undertake a study of the audiences of these theatres, he stressed this aspect formed 'an essential area' for further research to determine how any appeals to social distinction were met. 'A Popcorn-free Zone': Distinctions in Independent Film Exhibition in Wellington, New Zealand', in Aveyard and Moran, *Watching Films*, pp. 279- 294, pp. 282-3.

¹²¹ Geoff Lealand, 'A Nation of Film-goers: Audiences, Exhibition and Distribution in New Zealand', in Aveyard and Moran, *Watching Films*, pp. 141-155, pp. 143-4.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Chapter One: The 1950s

The 1950s have been described as part of a period of ‘conservatism and stability’ in New Zealand.¹ It was understandable that with the worry and uncertainty of the war years behind them, many New Zealanders were eager for domestic, national, and international stability. Young adults were keen to ‘settle down’, as evidenced by the high marriage and birth rate statistics for the decade, and economic prosperity ensured employment rates were high. Movie-going continued to be an important aspect of social life in a period where recreational options remained limited. This section looks at the popularity of movie-going in this decade, including audience composition, what films were most popular and why, what people most enjoyed about going to the movies and what barriers there were to movie-attendance. The chapter will provide a point of reference against which the similarities, differences and changing patterns of the following two decades can be compared and analysed.

How Popular Were the Movies in New Zealand in the 1950s?

Attendance

World War Two, and the years immediately following it, saw movie-attendance peak both in New Zealand and internationally. In other developed countries attendance fell dramatically throughout the 1950s. In Britain audiences had been falling since the 1946 high of 1,635 million but the decline accelerated in the late 1950s, with yearly audience numbers at 1,101 million in 1956 but down to 501 million in 1960.² American audiences peaked at an average of 84 million per week during the latter war years, but dropped to 55 million per week in 1950, and were down to 18 million per week in 1959.³ In contrast New Zealand’s total admissions increased throughout the 1950s and attendance figures were still a healthy 16.6 per person per annum at the end of the decade, as seen in Table 1.1.

Year	Theatres #	Admissions (000)	Average Ticket Price (d.)	Yearly admissions per head of mean population
1949-50	600	36,353	18.4	19.3
1951-2	589	36,342	20.7	18.6
1953-4	582	37,368	23.6	18.1
1956-7	578	37,596	28.6	17.1
1958-9	547	38,208	30.5	16.6

Table 1.1: General cinema statistics, 1950-1959.⁴

¹ Bronwyn Dalley, ‘The Golden Weather, 1949-1965’, in *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: 2005, pp. 306-335, p. 307.

² Stuart Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain since 1896*, Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2007, pp. 92-3.

³ Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, London: Wallflower Press, 2003, p. 378.

⁴ NZOYB, 1960, p. 1160. Year runs from April 1 to March 31.

New Zealand ranked consistently highly as a movie-going country in the 1950s, according to United Nations statistics. In 1950, with 19.3 admissions per head of population, New Zealand was the third highest movie-going country, behind the United Kingdom with its significantly higher 28 admissions and the United States with 23. By 1954 the gap between New Zealand's and the United Kingdom's attendance per head of population had narrowed slightly, while New Zealanders were going to the movies more frequently than Americans. By the end of the decade New Zealanders were going to the movies more frequently than both their British and American counterparts, as presented in Table 1.2.

Year	New Zealand	United Kingdom	United States
1949-50	19.3	28	23
1953-4	18.1	25	16.4
1956-7	17.1	17.8	14
1958-9	16.6	14.5	12.5

Table 1.2: Admissions per head of population.⁵

Theatres

The number of movie theatres in New Zealand fell throughout the decade, as seen in Table 1.1, although the significant decrease (almost 50%) was in the number of itinerant exhibitors, those who travelled a circuit of small towns and villages in rural areas, showing films in halls, schools or other available buildings. In comparison, permanent picture theatres had reduced by only 13, or 2.5%, by the end of the decade, as shown in Table 1.3. In the United States, the number of permanent theatres had fallen by 22%,⁶ and in the United Kingdom by 25%,⁷ over the same period. The number of New Zealand movie theatres operating six days a week increased marginally (by 2%) in the second half of the decade, while those operating on fewer than six days a week decreased slightly (by 5%).

Theatre Screenings	1949-50	1953-4	1956-7	1958-9
Screening 6 days per week	202	195	206	206
Screening odd days per week	315	328	332	298
Total of Permanent Theatres	517	523	538	504
Circuit – itinerant exhibitors	83	59	40	43

Table 1.3: Theatre days of operation.⁸

The size of theatres remained fairly steady over the course of the decade, as presented in Table 1.4. While the table shows an increase in the number of theatres seating under 200, a notable decrease (15%) took place between 1956-7 and 1958-9. This is possibly due to a

⁵ NZ statistics from *NZOYB*, 1962, p. 391. US and UK statistics from UNESCO 1952 and 1956 Basic Facts and Figures in *NZOYB* 1955, p. 1061 and 1957, p. 1142. US and UK 1958 figures from *United Nations Statistical Yearbook* in *NZOYB* 1960, p. 1160.

⁶ Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 378. This figure excludes drive-in theatres.

⁷ <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-british-film-industry-1980-10.pdf>, retrieved October 28, 2015.

⁸ *NZOYB* 1957, p. 1140; 1960, p. 1158.

rationalisation by theatre owners as a result of the ‘Black Budget’ of June 26, 1958, which, among other factors, saw taxes increase on petrol, and other goods.

Theatre seating capacity	1949-50	1953-4	1956-7	1958-9	Change over decade
Under 200	83	91	105	89	Increase of 7 %
200-499	216	220	215	206	Decrease of 5%
500-999	175	170	179	170	Decrease of 3%
1,000-1,499	32	32	29	28	Decrease of 12.5%
1,500+	11	10	10	11	No change

Table 1.4: Theatre seating capacity.⁹

While the number of licences granted to itinerant exhibitors reduced significantly over this period, the number of licences granted to permanent theatre exhibitors in 1959 was almost identical to that of 1950, as seen in Table 1.5.

Year	Exhibitors	Itinerants
1950	582	35
1951	602	28
1952	581	27
1953	570	25
1954	570	25
1955	577	17
1956	580	15
1957	581	15
1958	577	17
1959	585	14

Table 1.5: Number of licences granted.¹⁰

These figures indicate the relative stability in the number of permanent movie theatres in the 1950s. This is also reflected in Wayne Brittenden’s study, which records the closing of only one centrally-sited theatre in each of the four main centres.¹¹ The extent to which new theatres were built and existing ones refurbished has always been a strong indicator as to the popularity of movie-going. The beginning of the decade saw a slow start to the building of new theatres, following years of inactivity due to building controls, high building costs,

⁹ NZOYB 1957, p. 1140; 1960, p. 1158. Year runs from April 1 to March 31.

¹⁰ AJHR, 1952, H. 22, p. 22; 1953, H. 22, p. 30; 1955, H. 22, p. 23; 1956, H. 22, p. 28; 1957, H. 22, p. 29; 1958, H. 22, p. 31; 1959, H. 22, p. 36. Up until 1954 these statistics were taken from January to September 30 of the previous year, so 1954 reported on 1953. (AJHR, 1954, H. 22, p. 30). From 1955 statistics are taken as ‘issued during the year’, so the actual figures for 1954 are missing. For continuity, AJHRs reporting used the ‘previous years figures’, hence the repetition of the 1953 statistics.

¹¹ In central Auckland Amalgamated’s Roxy, a continuous double-feature theatre, closed in 1956; in central Wellington, the ‘quality’ Time theatre in upper Cuba Street closed ‘in the lamentably early year of 1951’. In Christchurch, Kerridge-Odeon’s Embassy, (previously the Grand), arguably the city’s roughest theatre due to audience disturbances that saw the screen regularly pelted with food, closed in 1959 and was demolished the following year. The St. James theatre in Dunedin, originally called the Princess and opened in the early 1850s, had its last screening on August 23, 1951 with the popular British film *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949). Used primarily for vaudeville until 1930, it switched to movie exhibition and when Kerridge-Odeon took ownership in 1946 it became their ‘action house’, the somewhat euphemistic name given to theatres that showed ‘B-grade’, and older films, often with an emphasis on children’s matinees. Brittenden cites this ‘poor product’ as a contributing factor to the theatre’s downfall, along with its ‘unfavourable High Street location and relatively high overheads’. Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre, 1925-1970*, Auckland, N.Z.: Godwit, 2008, pp. 147, 177, 119, 196, 203.

and fluctuating audience numbers. By 1954, one new theatre had been built, with a further three under construction. Plans for two new theatres had been approved, with two more in the planning process. It was reported that most of the new buildings were replacements for existing theatres that were no longer able to serve the needs of the community.¹² A year later three theatres of medium to large size were completed at Tokoroa, Paraparaumu Beach and Hawera, with two smaller theatres opening at Manutuke (Gisborne region) and Tokaanu (Taupo region).¹³ One questionnaire respondent remembered the new theatre in Hawera, as she went there every week with her siblings. She recalled, 'We had the new Regent open then and it was a lovely place to go. The ceiling twinkled and it had a lovely curtain that draped and went up and down.'¹⁴ Another respondent recalled their experiences of the new theatre.

The Grand (the bug house) which sometime in the late fifties was replaced with the Kerridge-Odeon theatre The Regent. The first film to show there was "White Christmas" with Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong, (funny, I can't remember the female star? Maybe Deborah Kerr or Mitzy Gaynor). Anyway I was lucky enough to be seated in the front row. A full house [...] I actually worked at the new Regent theatre (very flash and sophisticated) in the "The Nibble Nook". White coats and all.¹⁵

Two new theatres were under construction in 1956, one of them a Kerridge-Odeon theatre at Waimate.¹⁶ The 'lag' in building compared with the previous two years was attributed to 'abnormally high building costs, [and] shortage of capital available for an investment in an industry which does not offer quick returns, and over which there hangs the threat of severe competition from television'.¹⁷

The first new picture theatre to be built in Auckland in 21 years was Kerridge's Odeon Theatre, at the end of 1957. Publicity director, P.W. Maddock described in great detail this 'very latest in luxury cinemas', with the following paragraph only one of the seven he required to do justice to it.

The first public building to be fully air-conditioned, the first intimate theatre – specially built on the lines of the 'art theatres' overseas – to operate in the Dominion and the first New Zealand theatre to be constructed within an existing building. The Odeon and the St. James' foyers merge on to Queen Street giving a total vestibule frontage of over

¹² *AJHR*, 1954, H. 22, p. 30.

¹³ *AJHR*, 1955, H. 22, p. 23.

¹⁴ Female, born 1942.

¹⁵ Ralphe, born 1945. The female actresses in *White Christmas* (1954) were Rosemary Clooney and Vera Ellen.

¹⁶ Memo from Publicity Department to Theatre Managers, March 11, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWM.

¹⁷ *AJHR*, 1956, H. 22, p. 28.

50 feet. A stairway consisting of folded steel leads down to the theatre and special illumination gives a lighting effect through the carpeted stairs. The wall which patrons see as they descend the stairs is an eye catcher, more than 160,000 small tiles of many colours have been arranged to form a mosaic mural.¹⁸

Also at the end of 1957, Kerridge-Odeon opened their new Regent in Mount Maunganui to cater for the population increase in 'this fast-growing area'. The 'spectacular gala opening' was followed with a screening of the popular war film *Battle of the River Plate* (1956).¹⁹ Population growth also accounted for the building of a new theatre in the 'populous and rapidly expanding city suburb of Spreydon' [Christchurch], between 1958 and 1959, with another new theatre replacing its old counterpart in Greymouth.²⁰ Robert Kerridge invited the Prime Minister, Walter Nash, to open the Regent at Naenae on June 6, 1958, preceding a screening of another popular war drama, *Carve Her Name with Pride* (1958). The theatre seems to have met the approval of all who attended the opening function, with indications being that 'the general picturegoer would take great personal pride in this first-class theatre of their own', with its 'spaciousness and quiet elegance and its acoustical perfection and general amenities for patrons which reaches a new high level in personal comfort'.²¹ These comments, about Kerridge-Odeon theatres written by Kerridge-Odeon staff, indicate they had a different perspective on theatres being built in the 1950s than Tony Kellaway, who commented that 'Although theatres continued to be built in the fifties, most lack any sense of occasion (with the possible exception of the "bubbled" Embassy Wanganui 1950) and the decade mainly consisted of architectural vandalism of conversion into sterile odeons and cineramas.'²²

The building of theatres in 'fast-growing areas' indicates that while overseas commentators have suggested that post-war suburbanisation had a role in the decline of audiences overseas,²³ in New Zealand evidence shows that theatres followed people to the suburbs.²⁴ Wayne Brittenden's inventory of New Zealand theatres in 1953 lists 43 theatres in Auckland's

¹⁸ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, December 23, 1957, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁹ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, January 13, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁰ *AJHR*, 1959, H. 22, p. 31.

²¹ Memo from Percy L. Curtis, Director of Publicity and Advertising, June 16, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²² Tony Kellaway, 'I Remember When it was a Picture theatre', *New Zealand Architect*, 4, 1984, pp. 30-34, p. 33.

²³ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, pp. 85, 87; Thomas Cripps, *Hollywood's High Noon: Moviemaking and Society Before Television*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 207.

²⁴ For more on New Zealand's suburban development see Mark Derby, 'Suburbs - New suburbs, 1950s-1970s', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/suburbs/page-5>, retrieved March 24, 2017.

suburbs alone, supplementing the 13 in the inner-city. Wellington had 14 suburban theatres, Christchurch had eight and Dunedin four.²⁵

Drive-in Theatres

A feature of the cinema industry in New Zealand in the latter half of the 1950s was the interest in and debate over drive-in theatres. The Cinematograph Films Amendment Act (1956) allowed the licensing of such theatres, resulting in a 'period of feverish activity' of applications, particularly from areas in and around the main centres of Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch, with the larger provincial centres of Hamilton, Napier, and Whangarei also featuring.²⁶ Regulations introduced in June 1957 outlined application requirements and these included the need to publicly notify open-air theatre applications so that anyone who felt potentially negatively impacted could object. There was no such requirement for the building of standard movie theatres, although it was thought to be 'a matter for serious consideration' that such a provision be extended to them. A second requirement stated that the licensee of a drive-in theatre was prohibited from screening any feature film that had not already been screened in a first-release theatre in the area.²⁷

The threat of drive-in theatres deferred plans for the building of new 'conventional' theatres in 1957-8, although the government decision in March 1958 to postpone licensing of drive-ins was expected to revive building projects. The Government's decision was made in light of the 'serious economic situation facing the country', with it being felt 'prudent to re-examine the whole question of the present need and justification for establishing drive-in theatres'. All 16 applications lodged for drive-in theatres, which had all received objections from existing exhibitors, were suspended, waiting further direction from the Government.²⁸

At the close of the decade the movie industry was still strong, with 19 applications for new theatre licences submitted, 16 of which were for the use of existing buildings, but 'several' being for the building of new theatres. This was seen as a 'surprising development in view of the gloomy prognostications' that had been circulating about the industry, with reports from overseas, and the United Kingdom and Australia in particular, indicating a 'very serious' situation, with every sign that the movie industry would 'deteriorate further'.²⁹ It was

²⁵ Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus*, pp. 286-296.

²⁶ *AJHR*, 1958, H 22, p. 25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *AJHR*, 1959, H 22 pp. 31-32.

believed that New Zealand's still healthy situation at the end of the 1950s was due to its 'not yet having to face the catastrophic decreases of patronage which have forced wholesale closings of cinemas in those countries where television is operating.'³⁰ People were still attending in strong enough numbers for the particularly record-conscious Kerridge-Odeon circuit to declare in-house, in March 1958, that business was 'booming' and it 'was amazing the way the figures rolled in over the weekend'.³¹

Overall, when compared with the United Kingdom, the post-war construction of theatres in New Zealand was favourable, with London's first theatre built since the end of the war not opening until September 1955. In November 1955, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reported that there were only three new cinemas under construction in London at that time. In comparison, the Department of Internal Affairs commented that New Zealand was doing better.³²

Despite the 'very serious' position of the British movie industry, Lord Rank, of the British Rank Organisation, commented in his Annual Report of 1956-7, 'I am in no way despondent as to the future of cinema'. Including Rank's comment in a Memo to his theatre managers, Robert Kerridge added, 'We in New Zealand who have not been subjected to the impact of television and other major diversionary factors can enthusiastically endorse his optimism'. Kerridge added, 'We are partners in a worldwide Organisation of diverse activities and imposing financial strength. While the Report deals specifically with details of the Motion Picture Industry in Great Britain, the achievements of the year are a source of gratification and inspiration to each one of us.'³³

In Australia too, Clyde Waterman, the General Manager of the Hoyts circuit and the Head of the South Australian Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association, downplayed the threat of television by commenting that theatres were still being built in the United States. He believed the situation was a 'rosy' one, where the increase in leisure time meant that cinema and television could happily co-exist. Waterman's optimism was not universally shared, however, and many Australian exhibitors were convinced the arrival of television would see

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³¹ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager to Theatre Managers, March 17, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³² *AJHR*, 1956, H. 22, p. 29.

³³ Memo from R.J. Kerridge to Theatre Managers, January 7, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

their livelihoods come to an end,³⁴ a view shared by a number of those in the industry in New Zealand.

That New Zealanders continued not only to go to the cinema, but continued to go on a regular basis is illustrated by responses to my survey, as seen in Table 1.6. Of the 195 movie-goers who said they went to the cinema most frequently in some or all of the years in the 1950s, 47% were going every week. Combined with those who were going two or three times a week, indications are that almost 60% of this cohort were going to the cinema at least once a week. One respondent was going to the cinema most nights of the week and as often as four times a day on Saturday, because they were accompanying a film critic. Only six percent of this group were attending the cinema less than once a month. Earlier United States research by the Motion Picture Research Bureau considered the term ‘movie-goer’ to refer to those who attended the cinema at least once a month, while Audience Research Incorporated referred to a movie-goer as someone who attended the cinema once every three weeks or more.³⁵

Frequency	Those going most often in 1950s %
Two or three times a week	9.5
Once a week	47
Twice a month	23
Once a month	12
Less than once a month	6
Other	2.5

Table 1.6: Survey respondents’ frequency of attendance.

An indication of the perceived importance of the cinema is seen in the inclusion of the picture theatre as an ‘index service’ in a ‘geographical stocktake’ of New Zealand cities and towns carried out after the 1951 census. The presence of a cinema was included with banks, chain stores, hospitals, post-primary schools, and newspapers as ‘indexes’, representing ‘commercial, professional and social services’ that were commonly found in well-served communities. While the information about the provision of cinemas in smaller centres was ‘unsatisfactory’, the study did find that of the six services, the cinema was ‘probably the most widely distributed’ and showed the ‘strongest correlation between the size of a town and the number or quality of the institutions in question’.³⁶ The six services were used in a similar

³⁴ Mike Walsh, ‘Calamity Howling’: The Advent of Television and Australian Cinema Exhibition’, *Watching Films: New Perspectives on Movie-going, Exhibition and Reception*, (eds.), Karina Aveyard and Albert Moran, Bristol: Intellect, 2013, pp. 121-139, p. 126.

³⁵ Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research*, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1950, pp. 93-4.

³⁶ J.S. Duncan, ‘New Zealand Towns as Service Centres’, *New Zealand Geographer*, 11:2, October 1955, pp. 119-138.

study of England and Wales in the 1940s and were often used in conjunction with other services in comparable surveys in the United States.³⁷

Despite the threat and uncertainty posed by the impending arrival of television,³⁸ the decade's admission statistics, the number of permanent exhibitors' licences granted, and the continuing strength in the number of permanent theatres all indicate that at the end of the decade movie exhibition in New Zealand was still in a healthy position.

The 1950s Audience

Contemporary movie audience discourse in the United States tended to emphasise the high proportion of young people in movie audiences, and the degree to which Hollywood focused on producing movies to suit this audience. Paul Lazarsfeld noted the film industry's emphasis on 'the tastes of younger people',³⁹ while Gilbert Seldes proclaimed that, 'the movies live on in children from the ages of ten to nineteen, who go steadily and frequently and almost automatically to the pictures'. He added that from the 'ages of twenty to twenty-five, people still go, but less often [and] after thirty, the audience begins to vanish from the movie houses'.⁴⁰ A generation later David Considine commented on box-office receipts which continued 'to testify to the high concentration of young people in film audiences', with their corresponding strength at the box-office, functioning 'as a powerful force operating on the cinematic product [they] consume'.⁴¹

'Everybody went to the pictures'

According to both those going to the cinema and those working in the industry in the 1950s, audiences in New Zealand were made up of a broad cross-section of the public, and while the young did attend the pictures, they were not the primary audience. David Lascelles commented that audiences in Wellington conformed to an 'unwritten rule' whereby

On Saturday night men would take their wives along to the pictures, where in the full lighting offered by the theatre before the film started, they would read *The Sports Post* [on sale every Saturday evening at 6pm],

³⁷ A.E. Smailes, 'The Urban Hierarchy in England and Wales', *Geography*, 29:2, June 1944, pp. 41-51, cited in J.S. Duncan, 'New Zealand Towns as Service Centres', *New Zealand Geographer*, 11:2, October 1955, pp. 119-138; John E. Brush, 'The Hierarchy of Central Places in Southwestern Wisconsin', *Geographic Review*, 43:3, July 1953, pp. 380-402.

³⁸ Regular, as opposed to experimental, broadcasting began in Auckland on June 1, 1960.

³⁹ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, 'Audience Research in the Movie Field', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 254, November 1947, p. 163.

⁴⁰ Gilbert Seldes, *The Great Audience*, New York: Viking, 1950, p. 12.

⁴¹ David M. Considine, *The Cinema of Adolescence*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1985, p. 3.

and during the interval they'd have their smoke outside and come back with an ice-cream or chocolates for their wife.⁴²

Valmond (Val) Page, who worked at various theatres in Palmerston North, also remembers *The Sports Post* featuring in Saturday night movie-going, as by the time interval arrived at an 8pm screening, the *Post* would have travelled up from Wellington and would be on sale outside the theatres, to the delight of the male audience members.⁴³ Page and Lascelles both emphasised that during this period 'everybody' went to the movies, with Friday and Saturday nights regularly seeing full theatres, and patrons often having to be turned away. This is reinforced by comments from questionnaire respondents, who recalled, in general terms, the popularity of the movies in their hometown. A resident in Taihape at this time remembered that 'the movies were very popular on a Saturday night',⁴⁴ while a female respondent, who regularly went to the movies with her mother, recalled that 'In the 50's one always had to book to get a seat at the Wellington city movies on a Saturday night.'⁴⁵ A Christchurch movie-goer recalled that most theatres were in the Square and that 'Sometimes they were sold out and we had to quickly decide on another and hope we could get in as there were often large queues'.⁴⁶ A contemporary Gisborne resident said, 'going to the movies was what you did in Gisborne during the 1950s',⁴⁷ while Graham Johnston, from Whanganui, said that 'movie going was a big event back then, and you had to book your seat or miss out'.⁴⁸ These comments come from a wide geographical area, and relate to both urban and provincial theatres, indicating the general popularity of cinema-going across the country.

The variety of audience composition can be seen at the Regent in Palmerston North, with examples of three targeted audiences. Val Page recalled regular 'shoppers' sessions at 5pm which catered for women with children. Mothers would collect their children from school, do their shopping, and go along to the 5pm session. Page said, 'the movie didn't get out until 7pm, but that was OK, they planned for it'. Part of this planning involved ensuring an evening meal had been prepared for their husband at home.⁴⁹ In another instance, the Regent's Manager, Percy Chase, wrote to Kerridge-Odeon's General Manager, Trevor Townsend,

⁴² David Lascelles, interview May 19, 2014.

⁴³ Val Page, interview July 1, 2014.

⁴⁴ Female, born 1933.

⁴⁵ Female, born 1942.

⁴⁶ Kelvin, born 1941.

⁴⁷ Male, born 1943.

⁴⁸ Graham Johnston, born 1947.

⁴⁹ Val Page, interview July 1, 2014.

outlining his plans to screen extra sessions, one being ‘an after school matinee at 4pm for the *3 Ring Circus* (1954)’. He added, ‘I will do likewise with the *Dam Busters* (1956), and will most likely run an 11am session for Farmers [sic].’⁵⁰ Not only were audiences made up of all ages, but theatre managers knew their audiences, and adapted screenings, wherever possible, to suit them.

A breakdown of survey respondents’ frequency of movie attendance, according to gender, shows that frequency of attendance of ‘once a week’, ‘twice a month’, and ‘once a month’ are similar for both genders. This corresponds with the findings of an American study by Leo Handel that found male and female patrons attended the movies ‘regularly’ at the same rate, with regularly defined as once a month or more.⁵¹ However, there is a notable difference between those survey respondents who went very frequently, with almost double the number of men going more than once a week than women, and those who went very infrequently, with more than three times the number of women than men attending less than once a month. This is in line with the results of a 1941 New York study published by Handel that found there was a greater proportion of men in the ‘very high frequency of attendance’ category.’⁵²

Frequency of movie-going	Female (%)	Male (%)
Two or three times a week	8	15
Once a week	44	40
Twice a month	23	28
Once a month	13	13
Less than once a month	10	3
Other	2	1

Table 1.7: Frequency of survey respondents’ attendance according to gender.

Children

Children were an easily identifiable and particularly enthusiastic audience. Kerridge-Odeon, Amalgamated, and independent theatres all ran matinee screenings and established movie-going clubs for them, offering a range of enticements such as free sweets and ice-cream, and birthday cake on a child’s birthday. Kerridge-Odeon had launched the Young New Zealanders’ Club in the late 1940s, based on Robert Kerridge’s philosophy of ‘Win the children and you’ve won the town’.⁵³ Kerridge believed in the importance of encouraging

⁵⁰ Memo from Percy Chase, Regent Theatre Manager, Palmerston North, to Trevor Townsend, October 12, 1955, Box 4, File 13, Palmerston North Regent, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁵¹ Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience*, p. 99.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵³ David Lascelles, ‘The Young New Zealanders’ Club for Boys and Girls’, *New Zealand Memories*, Dec/Jan 2003, pp. 4-10, p. 6.

habitual movie-attendance at a young age, and in 1957 initiated Special Children's Sessions to be run throughout his theatres, in what he called both 'an experiment of the utmost significance' and 'our important national project'.⁵⁴ He stated that

The 'once-monthly' concept is designed to appeal specially to the thousands of parents who do not customarily permit their children to attend normal cinema screenings. [...] Often our motives are misunderstood and suspect[ed] of being pecuniary; and that idea must be dispelled. Actually to interpolate this series of screenings in our normal programming, involves disruption, inconvenience and expense; but this we are perfectly willing to incur, if we are providing a community service and fulfilling a community need.⁵⁵

Behind 'providing a community service and fulfilling a community need' was, of course, a 'pecuniary motivation'. The aims of the scheme were outlined by the Publicity Director to theatre managers: 'We are telling thousands of New Zealanders how mindful we are of the children, our patrons of tomorrow, encouraging them to become constant picture-goers, by presenting to them the most wholesome programmes available'.⁵⁶ Particular effort went into the promotion and implementation of this initiative, and Kerridge was not impressed with a mistake made by one manager.

SPECIAL CHILDRENS SESSIONS Throughout New Zealand, managers have co-operated in this project with commendable enthusiasm and forethought. Attendances have been gratifying and parents fully appreciative. The press and community agencies realise this is a bona fide attempt to provide the most suitable entertainment for children in a congenial atmosphere, with all suitable amenities for the comfort and the wellbeing of the young. [...] It was distressing to have an incident, in one town, which raised considerable criticism and which could easily nullify the goodwill and understanding engendered by this project. Through thoughtlessness, a manager screened the trailers for two restricted certificate films, at his special monthly matinee – the trailers were manifestly unsuitable – terrifying the young children and resulted in a series of complaints from parents and the Film Censor. [...] Parents need assurance that their little ones will be properly looked after – our publicity should emphasis the personal care, attention and supervision, at these children's sessions.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Letters from R.J. Kerridge to Theatre Managers, May 9 and May 22, 1957, respectively. Box 19, File 29, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁵⁵ Letter from R.J. Kerridge to Theatre Managers, May 9, 1957, Box 19, File 29, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁵⁶ Memo P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, May 27, 1957, Box 19, File 29, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁵⁷ Memo from R.J. Kerridge to Theatre Managers, July 16, 1957, Box 19, File 29, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

The programme was intended for children aged from three years through to fourteen, illustrating the very young age that children were attending the cinema.⁵⁸ The inaugural session at the State in Auckland on Saturday 4 May was described as a 'howling success' with '1200 IMPORTANT LITTLE PEOPLE' in attendance.⁵⁹ Kerridge also reinstated the celebration of children's birthdays, which had lapsed, as 'the children love the personal recognition' and, most importantly, 'it can really build business'.⁶⁰ The films for the Special Children's Matinees were screened at theatres on a rostered basis, and were sent to the designated 52 theatres throughout the country according to a predetermined schedule. Liaison with 'Parent-Teacher Associations and Women's organisations' contributed to the success of the programme, which was 'most enthusiastically received by many sections of the community' and achieved audience sizes that were 'most gratifying'.⁶¹

Competitions and gimmicks to attract audiences, and children in particular, had always been popular with theatre managers,⁶² and the Kerridge-Odeon circuit made full use of every marketing opportunity. Successful campaigns were regularly communicated to other theatre managers, 'so that all may benefit',⁶³ with one example being the promotion of *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates* (1956), and the featurette *Men in Space* (date not known), by Keith Gill, Manager of Dannevirke's Regent. Gill announced that the first 12 children to appear at the ticket office for the Saturday matinee wearing either a Davy Crockett hat or a space helmet would receive free entry. Gill was 'very surprised when he realised how many children in Dannevirke possessed Davy Crockett hats or space helmets and he had no difficulty in disposing of the 12 free passes'.⁶⁴ Of most importance to the theatre, of course, was that 'as a result of this stunt, the Regent played to a packed matinee'.⁶⁵ Amalgamated theatres carried out similar competitions and children's events.

For most children it seems that it did not matter much what was showing and they needed no special enticement to go to the movies. The excitement generated by the combination

⁵⁸ Advertisement to be placed in *New Zealand Herald*, May 1, 1957. 'Information to Theatre Managers' from R.J. Kerridge, May 9, 1957, Box 19, File 29, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁵⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, May 9, 1957, p. 24.

⁶⁰ Confidential Memo to Theatre Managers from R.J. Kerridge, July 16, 1957, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁶¹ Letter from Victoria Theatre Manager, Devonport, to T.S. Townsend, August 12, 1957, Box 39, File 141, Auckland Theatres, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁶² Pauline Knuckey, 'A Global Province? The Development of a Movie Culture in a Small Provincial City 1919-1945', MA Thesis, Massey University, 2012, pp. 17-21.

⁶³ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers June 10, 1957, p. 4, Box 19, File 69, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁶⁴ See Geoff Lealand's 'Bodgies and Widgies and Rabbits: New Zealand in the 1950s', *New Zealand Memories*, Issue 122, Oct/Nov, 2016, pp. 32-35, for more on Davy Crockett hats in New Zealand.

⁶⁵ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, January 12, 1958, p. 4, Box 19, File 69, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

of the film(s) themselves, the company of their friends or family members, and their ice-cream and sweets, was more than enough to get them along to their local theatre. 'We went to whatever was on' was a frequent comment from questionnaire respondents. In explaining what he particularly liked about movie-going as a child, one respondent simply said, 'everything'.⁶⁶

Children who particularly liked the 'serials', the weekly chapter of an unfolding story which was usually a western or an action adventure story, found themselves happily caught up in the serials' deliberate ploy to encourage regular weekly habit-forming attendance. One woman recollected that, 'Along with my brother and cousins we four used to cycle 6 miles to the cinema in Cambridge for the Saturday matinee - we had to see the next episode of the serial',⁶⁷ while another woman recalled that, 'As the eldest of three children, I had the responsibility of looking after my two younger brothers who always wanted to go because of the serials which were on each week'.⁶⁸ Alex McLean said, 'In the 50s going to the local theatre every Saturday afternoon was the big thing for kids. Mixed with all kids in the community and no adults!'⁶⁹ Margaret said that, 'Going to the cinema was a regular Saturday morning occupation for children in Foxton'.⁷⁰ The serial, what Annette Kuhn dubbed the 'Cliffhanger' providing 'cliffhanger memories',⁷¹ was also much-loved by children in the United Kingdom and the United States.

That the cinemas were seen as a safe place for children to attend without adult supervision was mentioned by a number of respondents. Tina recalled that

As children in the 1950s we had tremendous freedom to go out alone or in groups or with siblings to the movies, usually on a Saturday afternoon. In my family there was no censoring of movies or reading matter, and it was good for me, particularly, as I was able to make my own choices and find out what I didn't want, as much as what I did.⁷²

Older siblings were frequently called upon for 'babysitting' duty, as Barbara Branch recalled

I used to take my younger sister and brother to the pictures in Petone - supervising them by myself and I would have been about 9-10yrs old at the time. (My siblings were 3 and 6 years younger than me.) Things were

⁶⁶ David, born 1944.

⁶⁷ Kay, born 1936.

⁶⁸ Female, born 1941.

⁶⁹ Alec McLean, born 1950.

⁷⁰ Margaret Gauden-Ing, born 1944.

⁷¹ Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2002, pp. 38-65.

⁷² Tina, born 1944.

perceived as safe back then. I am sure that I did not let my own children do that and certainly not my grandchildren now either.⁷³

That the cinema was seen as a safe place for children to attend alone is also evident, with one woman commenting, 'My parents were going through a difficult marriage and often sent me to the cinema to get me out of the house and out of their hair! But I didn't need inducing to go. I loved the pictures!'⁷⁴ Doug recounted, 'My parents would often join friends for drinks on a Saturday afternoon (days of 6 o'clock closing) and so I was usually dropped at the 5 p.m. movies and collected afterwards.'⁷⁵

For many children the anticipation of ice-cream or sweets was a major highlight. One recalled that, 'Children's sessions usually on a Saturday afternoon were eagerly looked forward to. To go with your mates armed with entry money, money for an ice-cream, sweets, or a coke, whatever took your fancy.'⁷⁶ Movie treats were mentioned again by another respondent who said, 'It was entertaining and mind expanding, and fun to have Jaffas! Yes someone always dropped them so they ran down the floor and all giggled as there was no carpet. FUN.'⁷⁷ Marilyn said she liked 'to sit up the back and drop Jaffas and spy on lovers kissing!'⁷⁸ Many children remembered exactly how much it cost to get into the movie and how much they had left for confectionery. One recalled that, 'We went with ninepence in our pocket, sixpence to get in and threepence for an ice-cream. The rich kids paid ninepence and went upstairs and threw lollies down on us below. Some kids rolled Jaffas down under the seats.'⁷⁹ Another child saved his extra threepence for a different purpose, 'Would often see a 2 p.m. session movie for 6 pence and after that went to another continuously running movie for 3 pence'.⁸⁰ Gloria recounted that, 'In the late fifties, I was a child so enjoyed Saturday afternoon movies - had a shilling: 9p to get in and 3p to spend!'⁸¹

Misbehaving and acting out childish pranks was common in the 1950s, as it had been in earlier decades. Playing-up appears to have been particularly the domain of young boys, with one respondent recalling the escapades he and his friends got up to at the Hawera theatres.

⁷³ Barbara Branch, born 1947.

⁷⁴ Ann, born 1942.

⁷⁵ Doug, born 1951.

⁷⁶ Sheryn, born 1945.

⁷⁷ Wilma Brady, born 1940.

⁷⁸ Marilyn McIntyre, born 1952.

⁷⁹ Mark, born 1942.

⁸⁰ Kelvin, born 1941.

⁸¹ Gloria, born 1949.

We used to wait till the movie started then sneak into the orchestra pit and wait for a quiet bit in the film, then bash the piano keys in a big roll, then scarper (at both the Grand and Opera House). Another was to go up behind the screen and run across, leaving a silhouette on the screen. Big trouble! We were influenced to go to the movies because firstly there was not much else to do (until sport took over my life) but the main reason was because we had so much fun socially, the content was a factor, but not a major one. I suppose the less gripping the movie, the more fun we had, and we had plenty of fun.⁸²

Another young boy at the time said, 'We took moths in match boxes and let them loose to flutter up around the projector light.'⁸³

Not all children enjoyed the chaos and cacophony of these Saturday matinees, with one respondent recalling being 'sent' to the local movie theatre on a Saturday morning, with enough money for entry to the children's session and an ice-cream or sweets. The deliberate use of the word 'sent' indicated the trip to the cinema was not the young boy's choice, and gave the outing a suggestion of punishment.

The session consisted of a series of serials – mainly westerns – Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy etc. There was no control over children's behaviour – the noise was deafening, a lot of food was thrown around, kids were fighting and running all over the place. After a few weeks I gave up and took to going fishing along the wharves.⁸⁴

Another respondent recalled that the films were 'mainly cowboy and Indian, or war movies or Esther Williams and Howard Keel and some underwater swimming!'⁸⁵ Esther Williams was a box-office favourite during this time, the ex-Olympic swimmer's career having moved to the big screen. One woman remembered that 'every girl was entranced by Esther Williams with her choreographed 'water ballet'. She probably couldn't act to save herself, but she was so wholesome!'⁸⁶ Another ex-Olympic swimming star who was a hit with children was Johnny Weissmuller, who starred as Tarzan and Jungle Jim. Cartoonist Murray Ball described his appeal.

Johnny Weissmuller was quite ugly and inarticulate but we kids thought nothing of that. There wasn't a kid among us who would have accepted fat eyelids and speech that consisted of monosyllabic grunts (in fact most of us bore these handicaps, or something worse already) in exchange for

⁸² Ralphe, born 1945.

⁸³ Mark, born 1942.

⁸⁴ Male, born 1941.

⁸⁵ Female, born 1942.

⁸⁶ Shirley, born 1935.

the ability to ride elephants swing through the trees on great, long ropes. [...] For several happy years I was Tarzan – swinging through the trees.⁸⁷

Sometimes children saw films that were not particularly suitable. One movie-goer recalled seeing *Rear Window* (1954) as a child, 'I was only about 8 when we saw it; I was terrified at the time and had nightmares for months'.⁸⁸ Andrea Mackenzie remembered seeing *The Ten Commandments* (1959) with her father, saying that it 'frightened me and I screamed and ran out of the Theatre. Dad had to come out and bring me back. Moses's mother was caught under a big pyramid stone – it was very scary'.⁸⁹ Another survey respondent recalled, 'My mother took us to a Charlie Chaplin movie when I was about 10 - when they tied someone to the railway track as a train approached I was terrified and could not understand how people could laugh.'⁹⁰

A Family Affair

A number of survey respondents mentioned the role their parents played in their movie-attendance and others said that their movie-attendance was with all of their family, illustrating both the diversity of audience composition, with 'everybody' attending the movies, and the important role the family played in this pastime.

Andrea, who lived fifteen miles outside of Palmerston North, said she went to the movies 'with my Dad most Friday nights and we had fish and chips on the way home'.⁹¹ Another respondent commented that while she usually went to the movies with a group of friends, she also went occasionally with her father, saying, 'that was good too; I didn't have too many opportunities to have him to myself'.⁹² A woman who was born in the 1930s and who usually went to the movies with her boyfriend, also particularly enjoyed going with her mother, 'I liked to take my Mum on pay night if there was a movie suitable to both of us'. In commenting on what she especially liked about going to the movies, she said 'It was a social highlight of the week for my Mum and we so enjoyed each other's company. Talked about it all the way home and usually had a good laugh.'⁹³ Margaret recalled 'my dad taking me to see the Marx brothers, which he obviously enjoyed. I found them frightening!',⁹⁴ and

⁸⁷ Murray Ball, *Tarzan, Gene Kelly and Me: A Sort of Fictional Biography*, Gisborne, N.Z.; Diogenes Designs, 2001, pp. 35-6.

⁸⁸ Female, born 1947.

⁸⁹ Andrea Mackenzie, born 1947.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth, born 1947.

⁹¹ Andrea Mackenzie, born 1947.

⁹² Cushla, born 1939.

⁹³ Female, born 1937.

⁹⁴ Margaret, born 1941.

Lynnette Hoggard recalled her father being 'a real Jerry Lewis fan' and taking his children along to Lewis's films.⁹⁵ Another woman, who went to the movies in Wellington with her mother every Saturday night, recalled that the movies they saw cannot have been classified as she 'did not remember their being anything about "for mature audiences only"'.⁹⁶

Survey respondent Tina went to the movies with her mother on most Saturdays.

When I was very young, what we saw was usually influenced by what my mother wanted to see. Which meant musicals, romantic period dramas, ballet movies ("The Red Shoes" [1948] was a standout) and biographies of musical celebrities like Glenn Miller or Cole Porter, naturally with lots of their music. Luckily for her, I loved them too.⁹⁷

It appears that parents frequently made the decision on what movies the family would attend, with Kelvin recalling, 'I first started to go to the films with my mother from a very early age, on a Friday at a 5 pm session. I felt very important going out late at night. My mother picked the movie and I can still remember the films but not their names.'⁹⁸ A female movie-goer who went to the cinema very frequently as a child said that her family always went to the movies together, with their parents choosing what to see, but 'we always looked forward to seeing our friends there, and we kids sat together in the front'.⁹⁹ John Neal recalled that movie-going involved his whole family, with the children also getting a choice in what they went to see; 'Generally movie selection was a family affair as we'd sit around the table to go through the monthly movie calendar to select what we'd like to see. That said, the strongest influence in our household was what Dad wanted to see - mostly Westerns and war movies.'¹⁰⁰

Other recollections about family movie-attendance include those of Janet who went to the Opera House, Mayfair or State theatres in New Plymouth, saying that 'As a family, we went to the movies every week mostly on a Friday night and in those days you had to book seats'.¹⁰¹ Mike usually went to the movies with a friend, but would also go, 'If my parents were going as a family to the movies.'¹⁰² Chris recalled going to Wellington theatres, 'We

⁹⁵ Lynnette Hoggard, born 1952.

⁹⁶ Female, born 1942. Films had been subject to censorship from 1916 with the passing of the Cinematograph-Film Censorship Act, and in the 1920s recommended classifications were introduced with 'U' indicating suitability for general (universal) viewing and 'A' as suitable for adults. Films could be restricted to particular audiences but age restrictions were rarely used until new regulations came into practice in December 1956, which could be the distinction this movie-goer is referring to.

⁹⁷ Tina, born 1944.

⁹⁸ Kelvin, born 1941.

⁹⁹ Female, born 1950.

¹⁰⁰ John Neal, born 1942.

¹⁰¹ Janet, born 1948.

¹⁰² Mike, born 1940.

often went as a family during the school holidays or a 5:00 pm showing on a Friday night.’¹⁰³ Rod indicated that movie-going for him was definitely a family affair, as he either went with his siblings to a Saturday matinee, or with his parents on a Saturday evening.¹⁰⁴ Phil recalled that, ‘In the early years, my family would go to just about any movie showing at the local cinema [...] On a Saturday night, our family went to the local cinema very often. The cinema was always full & films must have been important for most people.’¹⁰⁵ A couple of cinema-goers recalled that as young boys they often went to the movies with grandparents, with Daryl Finderup recalling his grandfather’s favourite theatre was the Paramount in Wellington.¹⁰⁶

Tom Stempel was surprised to find in his study of historical American audiences how much American movie-going was ‘connected with family’,¹⁰⁷ and Jacob Mayer’s study of British cinema-goers in the 1940s also emphasised the frequency of family movie-going.¹⁰⁸ While neither studies quantify their findings, both include many recollections from children and young people on the extent of their movie-going with their siblings and parents. According to my survey respondents, a quarter of those who were most usually going to the pictures in the 1950s went with a member of their family, as seen in Table 1.8.

Who You Usually Went to the Movies With:	%
Alone	8
With a friend	21.5
With your girl/boyfriend or wife/husband	27
With a group	13
With parent(s) or caregiver	12
With your siblings	12
With your children	.5
Mix of the above	6

Table 1.8: Who survey respondents went to the movies with.

Young People

The 1950s is recognised as witnessing the emergence of the ‘teenager’, marking a clear distinction between children and adults, which previously had seen young people ‘still lodged under the thumb of the adult world.’¹⁰⁹ The formation of this demographic influenced, and was influenced by, the development of popular culture. The musical phenomenon of ‘rock

¹⁰³ Chris, born 1948.

¹⁰⁴ Rod Titcombe, born 1944.

¹⁰⁵ Phil, born 1949.

¹⁰⁶ Daryl Finderup, born 1941.

¹⁰⁷ Tom Stempel, *American Audiences on Movies and Moviegoing*, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001, pp. xiv, 1-14.

¹⁰⁸ J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences: Sociological Studies*, London: Dennis Dobson, 1948.

¹⁰⁹ Redmer Yska, *All Shook Up: The Flash Bodge and the Rise of the New Zealand Teenager in the Fifties*, Auckland, N.Z.: Penguin, 1993, p. 31.

and roll' arrived in the mid-1950s and was quickly disseminated through films. Members of the older generation often felt the music, and the dancing that accompanied it, was uncouth, too sexually suggestive, and a bad influence on young people. A tendency of this new demographic was the desire to 'hang out' in groups, talking, swearing, smoking, and 'making out' in public.

The picture theatre provided an ideal place for 'hanging out'. Survey respondents commented on this and for some young people it was the opportunity to engage in 'flirting' with members of the opposite sex.

I went to the movies once a week on a Saturday afternoon because the 'naughty boys' who were in what was called a "borstal" or "Detention Centre" went to the movies at that time and myself and my sister went to the movies so we could see them and have a chat with them.¹¹⁰

Enjoyed being with my sister and friends and having fun with the boys.¹¹¹

Going to the movies during this time was fun as it was a meeting place for my friends and we had some great times.¹¹²

In teenage years the social aspect of going to the movies was important.¹¹³

The term 'juvenile delinquent' was frequently used to describe any poor behaviour by young people, and it was used prolifically by politicians and the media, overseas and in New Zealand, to describe a 'serious modern problem'.¹¹⁴ In the United States, J. Edgar Hoover routinely attacked the movies, implying that the juvenile delinquency of the 1950s was akin to the gangster problem of the 1930s, in terms of societal threat.¹¹⁵ In New Zealand too, there was great concern over this 'societal threat', and Queen's Counsel Oswald Mazengarb was appointed by the government to chair the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents. His report, published in September 1954, blamed the 'perceived promiscuity of the nation's youth on the absence from home of working mothers, the easy availability of contraceptives, young women who enticed men into having sex [...] and lack of parental supervision'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Kathy, born in 1946.

¹¹¹ Janet, born in 1947.

¹¹² Janet, born in 1947.

¹¹³ Mark, born 1939.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988, p. 75.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/the-mazengarb-report-on-juvenile-moral-delinquency-is-released> retrieved June 8, 2013.

Youth-orientated films started to appear toward the middle of the decade, with one of the first, *The Wild One* (1953), starring Marlon Brando, seriously challenging 'the Establishment'. The film's 'anti-establishment, [and] poor-misunderstood-kid stance, served the double function of attracting adolescents while appalling adults'.¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, the film's ban in New Zealand until 1977¹¹⁸ denies us the opportunity of investigating its impact on audiences here in the 1950s. In the United Kingdom, where film censorship is reputed to have been among the toughest in Europe, *The Wild One* was banned twice in 1955 and again in 1959, including a heavily recut version provided by Columbia's London office.¹¹⁹ The film did not screen in the United Kingdom until 1968.¹²⁰ Marlon Brando made a significant impact on a number of movie-goers here, with another of his films, *On the Waterfront* (1954), described by a survey respondent as 'the most powerful movie I saw as a young person [...] and I was just besotted with the young Brando'.¹²¹

The subsequent 'juvenile delinquent' films *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), were perceived in the United States to be even more of a threat to conservative values and morals. In New Zealand advertising for *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) included the conclusion to Mazengarb's report on delinquency, with the headline 'How much of today's delinquency is caused by parents?', which appealed to the film's young audience.¹²² *Blackboard Jungle* was the favourite film of high-school students in the United States in 1956 and James Dean, the star of *Rebel Without a Cause*, was their favourite actor.¹²³ A particular concern was the youthful aspect of the protagonists and the extremely poor relationship these adolescents had with their family and their schools. However, *Rebel Without a Cause* managed to avoid the strict censorship handed out to *The Wild One* in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Writing a letter to the New Zealand censorship board, Arthur Watkins, of the British Board of Film Censorship, wrote that 'rather to our surprise, and also relief, the film received universal praise from the critics in this country, and it is enjoying a great success'.¹²⁴ New Zealand Censor, Gordon Mirams, disliked the film, calling it 'one of the most undesirable films in the series on juvenile delinquency he had yet to deal with,' and the film's distributors had to argue for its exhibition. They were granted approval

¹¹⁷ Considine, *The Cinema of Adolescence*, p. 183.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/DDA/Pages/Screens/DDA/DecisionSearchResultsPage.aspx> retrieved March 31, 2017.

¹¹⁹ Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel, *Youth Culture in Global Cinema*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 16-17.

¹²⁰ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047677/releaseinfo?ref=tt_ov_inf+, retrieved August 26, 2015.

¹²¹ Female, born 1936.

¹²² *Truth*, 22 May, 1956, no page given, in Yska, *All Shook Up*, p. 123.

¹²³ 'Attendance', *Motion Picture Herald*, March 17, 1956, p. 9 cited in Doherty, p.75.

¹²⁴ Watkins to Mirams, February 1956, BBFC File *Rebel Without a Cause*, cited in Shary and Seibel, *Youth Culture*, p. 23.

but only after the removal of ‘the sound and action of springing the flick knives, the sequence where Jim tries to throttle his Dad, and the scenes of James Dean and Natalie Wood petting and open-mouth kissing’.¹²⁵ One survey respondent recalled seeing *Rebel Without a Cause* more than once and that ‘James Dean was a hero then!’¹²⁶ Another fan said, ‘James Dean was reputed to be anti-establishment which made him more attractive’.¹²⁷

Blackboard Jungle had a ‘quiet run’ in New Zealand, with no evidence of significant controversy.¹²⁸ Amalgamated had the screening rights but Kerridge-Odeon announced in July 1957 that they had reached an agreement whereby it could be screened in 39 of their ‘flat rate’, smaller theatres, thereby considerably extending its audience.¹²⁹ Three questionnaire respondents mentioned *Blackboard Jungle* as one of their favourite films, with one commenting its ‘Shock – Horror’ reputation made it irresistible.¹³⁰ These films were part of the growing number of movies depicting ‘new and more controversial themes’ which emerged in the 1950s.¹³¹

One producer who quickly latched on to the market for younger people was Sam Katzman, who led the rest of the industry into the ‘earnest exploitation of the teenage moviegoer’.¹³² His *Rock Around the Clock* (1956) has been described as the ‘first hugely successful film marketed to teenagers to the point of exclusion of their elders’, with its success showing that teenager audiences could sustain a box-office hit.¹³³ Audience behaviour deteriorated at a Saturday night screening of *Rock Around the Clock* at Wellington’s Regent Theatre, with reports that fighting broke out among 20 or so youths of about 15 or 16 years old. When the manager attempted to break up the fighting, he was pulled over a theatre seat and kicked in the face.¹³⁴ The fracas was explained to Kerridge-Odeon’s General Manager, Trevor Townsend, by Wellington’s Majestic manager, Norman Howard.

Further to our telephone conversation last night, I enclose the article from last night’s *Evening Post* [...]. The *Post*, throughout the season of this film, has been anticipating something of the sort [...]. After the film finished on Saturday night some twenty teenagers commenced to

¹²⁵ Yska, *All Shook Up*, p. 123.

¹²⁶ Ian Lawson, born 1942.

¹²⁷ Male, born 1937.

¹²⁸ Yska, *All Shook Up*, p. 125.

¹²⁹ Memo to Theatre Managers from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, 15 July 1957, p.3, Box 19, File 69, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹³⁰ Male, born 1937.

¹³¹ Lee C. Garrison, ‘The Needs of Motion Picture Audiences’, in *California Management Review*, v. XV, n. 2, Winter 1972, pp. 144-152, pp. 145-146.

¹³² Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 66.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹³⁴ *Evening Post*, November 12, 1956, p. 12. The incident occurred on Saturday 10 November, 1956.

“Rock and Roll” down the front stalls and ended up on the stage. In an effort to control the bother and at the same time protect the screen and furnishings, Mr Barrett attempted to get them off the stage and was attacked and kicked by one of the youths and received a bruise to his forehead [...]. The youths then ran out the Cuba Street exit and round to the front where they broke a plate glass door.

Howard concluded, ‘As usual there were no Police in evidence and nobody in the audience offered to give any assistance, the whole bother having to be handled by the manager and the caretaker’.¹³⁵ That the *Evening Post* had anticipated bad behaviour is in line with the concern felt by many adults that ‘rock-and-roll’ music would lead to delinquent behaviour by young people. Also experiencing the bad behaviour of young people at the cinema was contemporary author Michael Joseph, who described his trip to the cinema, as an adult, during the school holidays.

I was carried along on a surging tide of adolescents, Pakeha and Maori, who punched one another, made strange hooting sounds, slurped ice-cream and (when of opposite sexes) slapped one another’s bottoms. It had all the macabre gaiety of a Borstal picnic.¹³⁶

By the end of the 1950s, Doherty claims that Hollywood had become a ‘devoted suitor’ to the youth market, following its period of reluctant ‘courtship’ in the earlier part of the 1950s, eventually realising that ‘when in need of a reliable audience, no end of the motion picture business – production, distribution, or exhibition – trusted anyone over thirty’.¹³⁷

In contrast to his counterparts in the United States, Nicholas Pronay claimed in Britain it was the 14 to 24 year-old age group who ‘abandoned the cinema first, for rock and roll, motorbikes, cafes and snogging in front of the telly’, with the rest of the population following suit in the 1960s and 1970s.¹³⁸ Evidence in New Zealand, particularly from my survey respondents, suggests this was not the case here. Some young people went to the movies for the express purpose of seeing the dancing and hearing the music, as ‘we were really into rock and roll then’,¹³⁹ particularly as some theatre managers hosted rock ‘n’ roll exhibitions and dances after the screening of rock ‘n’ roll films. Rather than stay at home to ‘snog’, survey respondents clearly indicate the role the cinema played in making this a viable

¹³⁵ Memo from Norman Howard, Majestic Theatre Manager, Wellington, to Trevor Townsend, November 13, 1956, Box 15, File 49, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹³⁶ M.K. Joseph, ‘Movies for the Children’, *Here and Now*, Auckland, N.Z.: Pelorus Press, No. 3, November 1950, p. 28.

¹³⁷ Doherty, pp. 231-233.

¹³⁸ Nicholas Pronay, ‘British Film Sources for the Cold War: The Disappearance of the Cinema-going Public’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1993, 13:1, pp. 7-17, p. 14.

¹³⁹ Bruce, born 1938.

activity, as evidenced by the frequent references to 'the back row' of the theatre as one of the 'attractions' of movie-going.

The Attraction of the Movies

Survey respondents were asked what attracted them to the movies and, while some respondents replied briefly, singling out two or three of their favourite aspects of movie-going, others gave detailed 'thick descriptions' that provide very personal accounts of what was clearly an all-encompassing experience.

The romance of it, sitting in the dark. Not knowing what to expect. Being in a crowd of other kids all sucking on lollies or ice-creams. Being taken to another world, much more exciting than my own rather mundane one. I would live in that fantasy land until the next movie! The whole weekly ritual, of walking to the local theatre, queuing up, buying the ticket and ice-cream. And then coming back outside into the light of the real world. Seeing and learning about other lives, countries and attitudes, though these could be rather selective for the time, as I later found out.¹⁴⁰

Going to the movies was an outing, looked on with Excitement as a child, an adult experience and socialising as a teenager, (also a place you could meet with your boyfriend and have a cuddle and kiss in the back row). As an adult it was a time to sit and enjoy having time off from the realities of life. Children's sessions, usually on a Saturday afternoon, were eagerly looked forward to. To go with your mates armed with entry money, money for an ice-cream, sweets, or a coke, whatever took your fancy. It was usually a noisy session as boos and cheers for all the movie characters was the order of the day.¹⁴¹

The "occasion" of it. Dressing up for an evening movie with a boyfriend or later, my husband. The stories, particularly movies adapted from books. Identifying with the stars, and wallowing in their glamour. The way I'd feel afterwards -- elated, wanting to sing and dance (if it was a musical) or thinking about it, if it was particularly poignant or a "message" drama. I liked the touristy backgrounds of movies set in exotic places.¹⁴²

The atmosphere - being a going out occasion; going with the girls or a boyfriend; wearing best clothes, standing for God Save the King/Queen, buying an ice-cream at halftime. As a young adult going to a coffee bar afterwards and discussing the movie.¹⁴³

While for many survey respondents 'everything' about going to the movies was attractive, some key 'attractions' are evident through their repetition.

¹⁴⁰ Waveney, born 1950.

¹⁴¹ Sheryn, born 1945.

¹⁴² Tina, born 1944.

¹⁴³ Rosalie, born 1941.

Entertainment

Martin Quigley, editor of *Motion Picture Herald*, wrote that the 'deliberately expressed policy of the entertainment film [...] is to entertain',¹⁴⁴ and James Chapman argued that cinema was 'first and foremost a medium of entertainment'.¹⁴⁵ Richard Dyer commented that the term entertainment was not one 'much thought about' as 'we all share a common-sense notion of what entertainment is',¹⁴⁶ and this is illustrated by the number of survey respondents (20%) who used the word with little embellishment, saying it was one of the things they most enjoyed about going to the movies. Others included 'entertainment' along with other factors, such as 'the entertainment and the escapism',¹⁴⁷ 'Entertainment - seeing what was going on beyond my local environment. Learning about other cultures. Taking my girlfriend to the movies',¹⁴⁸ and 'being entertained and feeling grown up going out in the evenings'.¹⁴⁹

Escapism

One of the primary reasons for going to the movies, and one that provided a significant amount of enjoyment, was the escape they provided from 'everyday life'. This has been well-documented from cinema's earliest years.¹⁵⁰ Its importance was evident for New Zealand movie-goers in the 1950s, with comments from respondents indicating it was not just the enjoyment of 'escaping' into the world on screen, but escaping from their own world.¹⁵¹

A break from the outside world.¹⁵²

You can suspend your life and enter a fantasy world for a short while.¹⁵³

A night out, we worked hard at the hospital so it was a good break and a chance to forget the hard times.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁴ Martin Quigley, 'The Function of the Motion Picture', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2:1, Special Supplement: Public Opinion in a Democracy, January 1938, pp. 47-49, p. 47.

¹⁴⁵ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 420.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, London; Routledge, 2002, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁷ Male, born 1946.

¹⁴⁸ Brian, born 1940.

¹⁴⁹ Annette, born 1939.

¹⁵⁰ Margaret O'Brien and Allen Eyles (eds.), *Enter the Dream-House*, London: British Film Institute, 1993; J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences: Sociological Studies*, London: Dennis Dobson, 1948; Jackie Stacey, 'Hollywood Cinema – The Great Escape', in *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 80-125; Knuckey, 'A Global Province?', pp. 105-120.

¹⁵¹ Other comments include, Anne, born 1933, 'Escape entertainment'; Doug, born 1951, 'To be transported to a fantasy world'; John Neal, born 1942, 'Being taken into another world'; Mervyn, born 1941, 'Escape from reality'; Andrea Mackenzie, born 1947, 'Fantasy, dreaming'; Female, born 1942, 'Time of escapism'; Geoff Gregory, 'Escapism - being taken out of one's self'; Bill, born 1942, 'Immersing myself in another world'; Ian Cumming, 'Going to a magic world of a mixture of make believe and reality'; Sandra, born 1951, 'The picture theatre is such a fond part of my child hood, the fantasy world it enabled us to enter was a priceless memory';

¹⁵² Female, born 1928.

¹⁵³ Barbara Branch, born 1947.

¹⁵⁴ Paula Wood, born 1929.

The experience of entering 'another world' away from a very ordered and predictable life.¹⁵⁵

1950s - post-rugby, 3pence, front row, enjoying cowboys and indians, tarzan, the marx bros, an escape, a time-out from a busy home life.¹⁵⁶

Losing oneself in a world of fantasy, make-believe.¹⁵⁷

Experience outside normal life.¹⁵⁸

Getting out of the house.¹⁵⁹

Ann gave a particularly detailed picture of how, and why, the movies were so important to her as a child.

The movies for me meant escape and safety and being taken out of an extremely dysfunctional family life for a couple of hours or so. I loved the fun and music and above all, the dancing in the musicals, and that they usually had a happy ending. (Very important to me as a young child.) I loved the colour and the costumes too. Everything in other words that was completely different from my own life. [...] When I was very young, it was always escape and colour and music and dance that appealed to me. As I got older, into my teenage years, I wanted escape still, but I also wanted to see good acting and a good script.¹⁶⁰

For some, escapism was not just an escape into a fantasy world, but into the lives of other people and cultures, where they could experience a life different from their own. One respondent described it as

Escapism, but realism too: Thanks to the experiences we got attending movies we were made aware of the world and the way life was led. As there was no TV news, the newsreel which preceded the main movie in those days was often the only way we knew what was happening outside our own little world.¹⁶¹

Other comments in this vein include the appeal of, 'Seeing what was going on beyond my local environment. Learning about other cultures',¹⁶² and 'the sense of learning/participating in history'.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, one respondent referred to enjoying the 'false world of movies but suddenly re-entering the real world afterwards'.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁵ Female, born 1947.

¹⁵⁶ Male, born 1950.

¹⁵⁷ Male, born 1941.

¹⁵⁸ Graeme Lyon, born 1943.

¹⁵⁹ David, born 1947.

¹⁶⁰ Ann, born 1942.

¹⁶¹ Dorothy, born 1930.

¹⁶² Brian, born 1940.

¹⁶³ Lew, born 1942.

¹⁶⁴ Male, born 1937.

The escapism came for some in the opportunity a trip to the cinema provided for getting dressed up. One commented that, 'In those days picture theatres were still very often quite opulent buildings with grand staircases and plush carpets. Most patrons got dressed up to attend and treated it as a special outing.'¹⁶⁵ Another said, 'It was an occasion on a Friday or Saturday night [and] people got dressed up'.¹⁶⁶

The repetition of phrases centred on 'escaping' are in direct opposition to the premise put forward by contemporary writer, Paul Rotha, that 'Hollywood's dream-world of make-believe which lulled audiences into escapism in the twenties and thirties was way out of tune with the hard realities of post-war life'.¹⁶⁷

The importance of 'escape' and the opportunity to be 'transported into another world' seemed a concept New Zealand film reviewers sometimes found difficult to comprehend. They continued to look for 'artistic merit' or 'cultural enlightenment', forgetting, as renowned American film critic Pauline Kael pointed out, 'There is so much talk now about the art of the film that we may be in danger of forgetting that most of the movies we enjoy are not works of art'.¹⁶⁸ Writer Isobel Andrews commented 'I can see no evidence of artistic integrity emerging out of that huge, sprawling, formless mass which is the movie industry at the present moment'.¹⁶⁹ Andrews may have sought artistic integrity, but in general the film audience did not.

Socialising

The movies clearly provided a social occasion for many, particularly given the small percentage of people who went to the movies alone, as seen in Table 1.8, and the attraction for youth of spending time with their peers. Many of those attending the movies during the 1950s said that one of the things they most enjoyed was being in the company of their friends.

It was a very common method of meeting up with friends for a night out.¹⁷⁰

It was a safe place to meet friends and enjoy being independent.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Male, born 1930.

¹⁶⁶ Male, born 1942.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*, London: Spring Books, 1967, p. 33.

¹⁶⁸ Pauline Kael, 'Trash, Art, and the Movies,' in Phillip Lopate (ed.), *American Movie Critics: An Anthology from the Silents Until Now*, New York: Library of America, 2006, p. 339.

¹⁶⁹ Isobel Andrews, 'An Irreverent View of Film Criticism', *Here and Now*, Auckland, N.Z.: Pelorus Press, No. 6, March 1951, pp. 37-8.

¹⁷⁰ Ian Lawson, born 1942.

¹⁷¹ Barbara Cameron, born 1946.

Social event and gave topics for discussion.¹⁷²

The companionship was a great part of going to the movies.¹⁷³

Time with girlfriend or mates.¹⁷⁴

It was the social event of the Air Force station.¹⁷⁵

The feeling of being united as an audience and 'sharing' the experience with others was a key element, as evidenced by comments like, 'The people all around sharing the same experience',¹⁷⁶ 'great being part of a full theatre of people enjoying themselves',¹⁷⁷ 'having a shared experience with my family that we would talk about afterwards',¹⁷⁸ and 'after the screening having something to share with friends'.¹⁷⁹ Social contact could be extended from the picture theatre to another social location with the film providing a focal point for conversation. Val Page recalled that in Palmerston North people would gather in a coffee shop after a screening and talk about the movie they had just seen, and he often joined them to hear what they had to say.¹⁸⁰ Pauline Kael recognised the kindred spirit evoked by the cinema when she commented, 'The romance of movies is not just in those stories and those people on the screen, but in the adolescent dream of meeting others who feel as you do about what you've seen.'¹⁸¹

This feeling of belonging to something bigger than oneself, whether as a couple, a family member, or as part of a group of friends, illustrates the importance of the picture theatre as a social space. The feeling of being connected to others and the sense of belonging to a wider community through the shared cultural consumption of movie-going was a key element in its popularity. As David Morley said, 'Rather than selling individual films, cinema is best understood as having sold a [...] certain type of socialised experience'.¹⁸²

Romance

The pairing of romance and the movie-theatre is not a new one, although Charlotte Greenhalgh believes that while 'the movie theatre has received considerable attention in

¹⁷² Dale Hendry, born 1938.

¹⁷³ Mike, born 1938.

¹⁷⁴ Philip Andrews, born 1938.

¹⁷⁵ Paula Wood, born 1929.

¹⁷⁶ Geoff, born 1926.

¹⁷⁷ Janet, born 1948.

¹⁷⁸ Female, born 1947.

¹⁷⁹ Garry, born 1933.

¹⁸⁰ Val Page, interview July 1, 2014.

¹⁸¹ Kael, *Trash, Art, and the Movies*, p. 339.

¹⁸² David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 157-8.

New Zealand literature, its role as a site of courtship, romance and sex has not been explored in depth'.¹⁸³ Many questionnaire respondents said one of the things they especially liked about going to the movies was the opportunity it gave them to further their 'courtship'.

My girlfriend and I enjoyed the back row at the Ngaio Town Hall on movie nights.¹⁸⁴

These were my courting/early marriage days and there were little other social activities.¹⁸⁵

The movies played an important part in teenage courtship.¹⁸⁶

We'd have a kiss and cuddle in the back row.¹⁸⁷

Young courting couples would go to fewer dances and prefer the quiet smooch in the privacy of the picture-theatre (at the back, upstairs).¹⁸⁸

When I was old enough to have boyfriends we would go to the Saturday matinee and cuddle.¹⁸⁹

Movies were very much a social outing and it was often what people did on a first date.¹⁹⁰

The cinema was where you could take your girlfriend, or maybe the means of impressing a new girlfriend.¹⁹¹

These examples indicate a clear link between 'dating' and going-to-the-movies, and this is reinforced by those who went to the movies most frequently in the 1950s usually going with their boy or girl friend or their husband or wife (27% of respondents as seen in Table 1.8).¹⁹² Responses from those who were born in the 1920s and 1930s, who were young or relatively young adults in the 1950s, indicate they also went to the movies more frequently with their 'romantic partner' than with anyone else, as presented in Table 1.9.

¹⁸³ Charlotte Greenhalgh, 'Bush Cinderellas: Young New Zealanders and Romance at the Movies, 1919-1939', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 44:1, 2010, pp. 1-21, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Peter, born 1934.

¹⁸⁵ Graham Perry, born 1930.

¹⁸⁶ Male, born 1930s.

¹⁸⁷ Female, no birth year given.

¹⁸⁸ Shirley, born 1935.

¹⁸⁹ Andrea Mackenzie, born 1947.

¹⁹⁰ Maureen, born 1935.

¹⁹¹ Garry, born 1933.

¹⁹² Other comments include: 'Somewhere to go out with boyfriend', Janet, born 1937; 'Take my girlfriend to the movies on a Saturday night', Brian, born 1940; 'Sex was romance, rather than the 'out there more explicit' stuff that is around now', Barbara Branch, born 1947; 'As we grew up the movies related to meeting girls', Ralphie, born 1945; 'Being out with my girlfriend/later, wife', Don, born 1933.

Born in:	1920s	1930s
Who you USUALLY went to movies with:	%	%
Alone	14	10
With a friend	14	27
With your girl/boyfriend or wife/husband	57	41
With a group	0	8
With parent(s) or caregiver	7	1
With your siblings	0	4
With your children	7	1
Other ¹⁹³	0	8

Table 1.9: Born in 1920s and 1930s: Who survey respondents went to the movies with.

The number of comments from male respondents on the role a trip to the cinema played in their courtship indicates that romance was not the domain of women alone. The reminiscences from both sexes of movie-goers reinforce Greenhalgh's statement that 'Couples certainly sought pleasure at the movies, where young men and women had fun and revealed their hearts in courtship played out beneath the silver screen'.¹⁹⁴

An over-riding factor for young people going to the movies during this period was that the cinema was seen as socially acceptable and safe. Furthermore, it was a place that parents generally thought was suitable for their offspring to attend unsupervised. Cushla, who went to the movies most frequently between 1953 and 1959, with a group of friends, commented, 'It was an opportunity to go out with friends without having to explain to my parents where I was going and why. The movies were OK'.¹⁹⁵

Barriers to Movie Attendance

Of those respondents who indicated they went to the pictures most often in the 1950s and who answered the question on barriers to attendance, almost 80% recalled factors that prevented them from attending as often as they would have liked. There was a marked degree of repetition in the reasons given, irrespective of gender, and across respondents' different geographical locations, suggesting a strong social and cultural commonality. The responses have been grouped into major themes.

¹⁹³ Responses included in 'Other' were comments such as 'I went with a mix of all of the above'.

¹⁹⁴ Greenhalgh, 'Bush Cinderellas', p. 4.

¹⁹⁵ Cushla, born 1939.

Cost

One survey respondent commented that, 'Not much would stop us from our outings to the flicks. We didn't have much money but always had enough for the excitement of movies',¹⁹⁶ and another said 'maybe cost was the only factor [that prevented us from going to the movies], but that was rarely the case'.¹⁹⁷ However, the cost of going to the movies was easily the biggest barrier to attending the movies in the 1950s for those of my survey who were going to the movies most frequently in this decade. Of the 111 respondents who cited barriers to attendance, 48, or 43%, specifically mentioned shortage of money.

Could not afford to go often.¹⁹⁸

Parents were not well off so going to 'the pictures' was seen as a treat that had to be budgeted for.¹⁹⁹

Lack of money as we were not well off.²⁰⁰

Not enough spare cash.²⁰¹

Shortage of pocket money as a teenager in the 50s.²⁰²

We had to have enough money – ninepence.²⁰³

Mainly the costs factor as my parents were working class people with 13 children to raise [...] they cannot afford to send us to the movies in bulk.²⁰⁴

Occasionally lack of money was paired with another barrier to attendance, such as 'lack of transport, and also financial reasons',²⁰⁵ 'the price and also in those days sometimes the movies were booked out',²⁰⁶ 'lack of Money and parental permission',²⁰⁷ and 'depended on weather and finance'.²⁰⁸

The price of movie tickets rose considerably throughout the decade, from the average price of 18.4 pence in 1950, to 30.5 pence in 1959, a 66% increase. Admission charges had begun their increase early in the decade, with the Price Tribunal's decision in October 1951 to approve increases in all theatres. This saw a 12.5% increase in the average admission cost from 1950 to 1952, a trend which was to continue throughout the decade.

¹⁹⁶ Dorothy, born 1930.

¹⁹⁷ Alec McLean, born 1950.

¹⁹⁸ Female respondent, born in 1941.

¹⁹⁹ Rosalie, born 1941.

²⁰⁰ Barbara Branch, born 1947.

²⁰¹ Dr Neil Clayton, born 1942.

²⁰² Brian, born 1940.

²⁰³ Female, born 1942.

²⁰⁴ Harry Komene, born 1941.

²⁰⁵ Pamela, born 1937.

²⁰⁶ Patricia, born 1943.

²⁰⁷ David, born 1944.

²⁰⁸ Wilma Brady, born 1940.

Year	Average Ticket Price (d.)	% Yearly Increase
1950	18.4	
1952	20.7	12.5
1954	23.6	14
1957	28.6	21
1959	30.5	7

Table 1.10: Price of admission, 1950s.

In comparison, wages for both adult males and adult females went up by 56% in the decade, as shown in Table 1.11, indicating the real price of going to the movies went up.

Year	Adult Male		Adult Female		Average Ticket Price (d.)	% Increase	Nominal Weekly Average Wage ²⁰⁹	% Increase
	s.	d.	s.	d.				
1950	158	6	106	0	18.4		151	
1951	180	3	119	1			171	13
1952	189	5	124	3	20.7	12.5	180	5
1953	201	11	134	8			192	7
1954	217	7	144	8	23.6	14	206	7
1955	225	3	150	4			214	4
1956	229	7	152	9			218	2
1957	240	4	160	0	28.6	21	228	5
1958	242	11	163	1			230	1
1959	247	4	165	9	30.5	7	234	2

Table 1.11: Average ticket price compared with average nominal weekly wage.²¹⁰

Transport and/or Distance from Theatre

A lack of public and private transport had an impact for some on their ability to attend the movies, accounting for 15% of the barriers to attendance for those going most frequently to the movies in the 1950s. John Belton has argued that increased car ownership in the United States was one of the causes for audience decline, as increased mobility provided access to a greater range of leisure options, with new car sales going from 69,500 in 1945 to 7.9 million in 1955.²¹¹ In New Zealand too, car ownership increased in this period, with the number of licensed cars more than doubling from 233,812 in 1950 to 480,381 in 1959, equating to one car for every 4.8 New Zealanders.²¹² However, there is no evidence that increased car ownership here meant people were less likely to go to the picture theatre. Owning a car, or having access to one, often enabled one to get to the picture theatre rather than away from

²⁰⁹ Figures are for adult employees. Nominal Weekly Wage Rates Index, *Wages and Earnings, 1979-1983, Part B*, Wellington, N.Z.: Department of Statistics, November 1984, p. 13.

²¹⁰ *Report on Prices, Wages, and Labour Statistics for the Year 1961*, Wellington, N.Z.: Department of Statistics, 1962, p. 8.

²¹¹ John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005, p. 307.

²¹² NZOYB 1955, p. 367; 1960, pp. 412-413.

it. Occasionally the regular trip into town for supplies was combined with a trip to the theatre, which was the case for Bill, whose family lived '20 miles out' and who 'went to town most Friday nights and often went to the movies as well'.²¹³ Transport difficulties for both rural and urban dwellers were cited as a barrier to movie attendance.

Living in the country, lack of public transport and also private transport.²¹⁴

Had to be local to avoid transport costs.²¹⁵

As a child, I lived on a farm and rarely went to the cinema. At university there was much greater opportunity.²¹⁶

Distance to movie theatre [...] I lived in NZ back country for several years so movies were not within easy driving distance, e.g. D'Urville Island.²¹⁷

Being a child (and living in a rural location), the frequency was determined entirely by the availability of my parents.²¹⁸

Transport - there was not good public transport so you needed to arrange to get there and back.²¹⁹

We lived some distance from any cinema and we didn't have a car. So we relied heavily on public transport which restricted when and where we could go to the movies.²²⁰

We had to be able to get there on foot - no car.²²¹

Lack of readily available transport.²²²

Movie-going wasn't a strong part of our lives. We lived some 15 kms from the nearest theatre, and though I remember going to the movies in Invercargill (60kms away) and Riverton it wasn't a common occurrence.²²³

Marriage and Family

A recurrent factor given by questionnaire respondents for not being able to attend the movies as often as they would have liked was that they married and started a family in the 1950s. New Zealand's birth rate in the post-war period was high, with the number of registered births, 55,676 in 1955, the highest then recorded in New Zealand's history.²²⁴ The lack of time, and no doubt energy, brought on by caring for a young family, as well as the

²¹³ Bill, born 1942.

²¹⁴ Female, born 1935.

²¹⁵ Jeanette, born 1940.

²¹⁶ Female, born in 1941.

²¹⁷ Annie, born 1939.

²¹⁸ Female, born 1947.

²¹⁹ Marene Frost, born 1944.

²²⁰ Chris, born 1948.

²²¹ Female, born 1942.

²²² Ian Lawson, born 1942.

²²³ Carolyn Deverson, born 1949.

²²⁴ NZOYB, 1956, p. 35.

associated difficulty in finding baby-sitters and the increased pressure on family finances, all combined to make movie-going more difficult and less of a priority for those with a family.

Having young children and no babysitter curbs your movie attendance somewhat!²²⁵

Once we had a child we were not able to go to the movies very often. Having babysitters was still not a common practice and we had no extended family living in our town. Sometimes friends minded the children.²²⁶

My children were young, born 1955 and 1956 so going to the cinema was more difficult.²²⁷

Caring for small family [was a barrier to attendance].²²⁸

I had a young family and it was not easy to get a baby sitter. I just did not go to the pictures.²²⁹

Phase of my life during which I had children, no time, no money.²³⁰

Some comments suggest that it was marriage itself that 'slowed down' movie attendance.

I got married in the 50's which did slow things down. Had children mid 50's.²³¹

I was married by then so didn't go out that much anyway.²³²

Went slightly less after marriage 1955.²³³

These comments suggest that for some, 'going out' was what you did when you were young or single. Once you were married, you 'stayed home'.

Parental Control

Survey respondents were asked whether their parents tried to control what movies they saw as a child, and if their answer was yes, they were asked whether their parents were successful. From the 1920s through until the 1950s, approximately half of the parents of survey respondents tried to control what their children were watching at the picture theatre, with between 75 and 86% of those parents successful, as shown in Table 1.12.

²²⁵ Female, born 1942.

²²⁶ Joan, born 1932.

²²⁷ Jenny, born 1926.

²²⁸ Pamela, born 1937.

²²⁹ Female, born 1928.

²³⁰ Female, no birth year given.

²³¹ Joan, born 1929.

²³² Jocelyn, born 1942.

²³³ Arthur, born 1933.

Born In	Parents tried to control what you saw as a child (%)	Parents were successful in controlling what you saw as a child (%)
1920s	58	75
1930s	49	80
1940s	58	86
1950s	52	78

Table 1.12: Parental control.

Comments from survey respondents show the influence their parents had on their movie viewing.

As a young teen I was not allowed to go to any movies that were thrillers or horror movies even if my friends were allowed to go.²³⁴

My mother actively discouraged me going to movies so never saw a movie until I was a teenager & could save pocket money for an occasional treat.²³⁵

Not being allowed to go to the movies was used as a punishment for being naughty.²³⁶

When young I had no say in the movies we went to as a family. We went to all the latest Hollywood movies that came out. It was a family outing mostly on a Friday night. My brother who was 3 years older than me, soon opted out of family movies and went with his friends. I can remember my Father going and pulling my brother out of a midnight session at the movies as he'd been told not to go. Parents would vet the movies before we went and only suitable family movies were allowed. Some movies did have adult themes but the content went over my head as a child. I remember thinking about a movie some years after we had gone to it and wondered at the time why everyone was laughing. I understood later that it was about sex.²³⁷

One respondent said that her parents did not need to control what she saw, as she was already restricted by there being only one picture theatre in her town. This and the need to bike five miles to get there were strong enough to limit what she saw without parental control.²³⁸

Sickness

A further barrier to film attendance, according to both my questionnaire respondents and Kerridge-Odeon management, was the incidence of sickness throughout this decade, and in particular the polio and influenza outbreaks.

²³⁴ Barbara Branch, born 1947.

²³⁵ Fiona, born 1941.

²³⁶ Margaret Gauden-Ing, born 1944.

²³⁷ Janet, born 1948.

²³⁸ Margaret, born 1941.

The 'inclement weather' was coupled with 'the prevalence of sickness', as having affected patronage in August 1952.²³⁹ Later in the decade, sickness was still providing a problem for the Kerridge-Odeon circuit.

This perhaps is one of the most trying weeks that the Company has ever had from a sickness point of view. Not for many years can we remember such a great number of cases of influenza throughout the country and Auckland has at the present time hundreds of victims, and reports from other situations indicate the same position. Even today in our office there are a great many empty seats, as a great majority of the staff are sufferers. It follows therefore that business should also be affected and receipts are down on last week.²⁴⁰

Polio presented problems for cinema theatres and cinema-goers in the early part of the decade. Val Page recalled that during the polio outbreaks theatres either closed, or limited the number of screenings, and children were seated separately.²⁴¹ One respondent contracted polio in 1948 when she was eight years old and 'was laid low for many years'. She particularly enjoyed going to the movies as it provided 'a time being normal with my male cousins to look after me', adding that her 'parents were happy for my cousins to escort me'.²⁴² Another contemporary movie-goer recalled the polio outbreaks from both 1948 and the early 1950s, saying 'they closed cinemas and swimming pools'.²⁴³ Polio affected another child of this time and given his confinement, watching movies was a highlight of his week.

I had a period of 5 years confined to bed. During this time a friend of my fathers would bring a projector to my bedroom and we would have a number of cartoons and a full length movie once a week. This would be the most serious movie watching of my entire life.²⁴⁴

That sickness could cause an impact on movie-attendance is very much a part of this era where modern scientific health care was still developing and it was not until 1958 that hospital treatment, pharmaceuticals, and laboratory diagnostic services was fully funded by central government and available to all.²⁴⁵

²³⁹ Confidential letter from Robert Kerridge to Theatre Managers, August 27, 1952, Box 215, File 616, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁴⁰ Memo from P. W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers August 19, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁴¹ Val Page, interview July 1, 2014.

²⁴² Raylee, born 1940.

²⁴³ Shirley, born 1935.

²⁴⁴ Male, born 1937.

²⁴⁵ <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/research-papers/document/00PLSocRP09031/new-zealand-health-system-reforms> retrieved January 28, 2017.

Other Leisure Options

An increase in the number of leisure opportunities that lured people away from the cinema to other activities has been argued to have caused a decrease in audiences, both internationally and in New Zealand.²⁴⁶ There is little evidence of this in New Zealand in the 1950s, according to the many survey respondents who repeatedly said ‘there was nothing else to do’ but go to the movies. Some respondents mentioned playing, doing chores (lawn mowing was a frequent means of earning pocket money), homework, reading, playing sports, and listening to the radio as activities that were carried out in their spare time. One said ‘There’s a limit to how many books one can read’,²⁴⁷ with another saying ‘When I was young it [movies] was just about the only thing that was available for us to do apart from go to the beach which we could not do without adult supervision’.²⁴⁸ The movies provided an attractive alternative to fairly mundane activities or ‘nothing to do.’ For older people, going to dances was mentioned frequently as an enjoyable pastime, with this appearing to be the primary form of competition to cinemas. Like the movies, dances provided a safe and suitable place for young people, with one respondent providing an insight into the mores of young ‘courting’ couples.

A social quirk around our young days was that we all went to ‘the dances’ where we were ‘out there – eyeing the scene’ and once paired with a real boy-friend or fiancé that form of social relaxation was not such a ‘must’ anymore and going to the pictures was much more a thing that couples would do.²⁴⁹

Georgina White’s study into dancing in New Zealand found that many people met their life partner at the local dance, which was reinforced by one of her interviewees, Nola Brown, who said that ‘almost every girl I knew met her future husband at a one and sixpenny hop’.²⁵⁰

Theatre managers were quick to tell their senior management of any local activities that could be used to explain lower-than-expected audience sizes. Correspondence between Kerridge-Odeon Head Office in Auckland and managers throughout the country indicates that Robert Kerridge and his Office Manager, Trevor Townsend, kept a very close eye on business and routinely asked theatre managers to explain a wide range of issues, from

²⁴⁶ Robert Sklar, ‘The Lost Audience’: 1950s Spectatorship and Historical Reception Studies’, in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Identifying Hollywood’s Audience’s: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, London: British Film Institute, 1999, pp. 81-92, p. 81; Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, pp. 304-309; Rotha, *The Film Till Now*, p. 721; Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, pp. 239-241; Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus*, p. 143; Tony Froude, *Big Screens in the Valley: Cinemas and Movie Halls in the Hutt Valley, 1906-2002*, Paraparaumu N.Z.: Spectro Print, 2002, p. 7.

²⁴⁷ Diana, born 1935.

²⁴⁸ Barbara Branch, born 1947.

²⁴⁹ Shirley, born 1935.

²⁵⁰ Georgina White, *Light Fantastic: Dance Floor Courtship in New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: Harper Collins, 2007, pp. 8, 147.

expenditure, to a film's performance, through to competing local leisure opportunities. Replying to Townsend, Percy Chase, Palmerston North's Regent Manager, explained that 'on checking back', the relatively poor performance of 'the outstanding film', *On The Waterfront* (1954), could be explained by the Opera House's opening week show of *Peter Pan*, which played during the same week to 'capacity houses'.²⁵¹

'Counter-attractions', along with poor weather, were blamed for poorer-than-usual returns for Kerridge-Odeon in January 1958, according to the circuit's publicity manager. The counter-attraction was the Auckland 'Birthday' Show (Auckland Anniversary Day), which attracted 20-30,000 visitors per day, with the fireworks finale on the Saturday night attracting an estimated 50,000 people.²⁵²

A change in screening policy at the Regent in Taihape affected audience numbers, according to manager Michael (Mick) Nicol. An analysis of the exhibitors' record book entries from January 1950 through until February 1953 indicates that locals were avid movie-goers. There were two movie theatres in Taihape at this time, and records show that at the Regent a new title was shown every second or third day to meet the public demand for a change in film. This high rotation policy was necessary at theatres in smaller towns because after a few days most people will have seen what was screening. Nicol outlined his frustrations associated with a change in the theatre's screening schedule, brought about by Head Office, which resulted in a four-day season, with only two films screening a week, rather than three.

With 4-day screenings we have allowed Dances to start up each Saturday night, before it was a well-known fact that Taihape was a graveyard for Dances. Travelling shows and the Drama Group now make Saturday their night, whereas a few years ago it was always mid-week. The Drama Group have stated that four day shows [film screenings] were the best thing that could have happened to the Drama Group.²⁵³

The routine change of film in this period of exhibition has been described in the United States as 'a critical element in the construction of the social habit of attendance, ensuring that any individual movie was likely to be part of a movie theatre audience's experience of cinema for

²⁵¹ Letter from Percy Chase, Regent Theatre Manager, Palmerston North, to Mr. Townsend, June 23, 1955, Box 4 File 13, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. For further information see *Manawatū Standard*, September 30, 2017, p. 16.

²⁵² Memos from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager, to Theatre Managers, January 28, 1958, and February 10, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁵³ Letter from Michael Nicol, Manager Regent and Majestic Theatres, Taihape, to Trevor Townsend, September 15, 1956, Box 14, File 47, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

three days or less'.²⁵⁴ This focus on ensuring the habit of movie-going was emphasised by Nicol:

To make patrons more picture conscious, it would be better if they missed one or two good attractions, and then Saturday night would become a ritual, instead of putting off seeing the show from one night to another, and meantime asking friends' opinions and perhaps being put off the show altogether.²⁵⁵

As Ian Jarvie commented, 'movies were (and are) a perishable commodity [...] ordinary moviegoers rarely want to see the same movie repeatedly, thus there was (and is) a demand for new product'.²⁵⁶ This factor should not be exaggerated, however. While new product was undoubtedly enjoyed, many in New Zealand were quite happy to attend films more than once, with 43% of respondents who went to the movies most frequently in this decade saying they saw the same film at a cinema more than once.

Weather

The weather was used frequently throughout the decade by Kerridge-Odeon exhibitors and senior management as a reason for poor admissions. A small number of questionnaire respondents mentioned the weather preventing their attending the movies as often as they would have liked. However, three respondents mentioned that poor weather encouraged them to go to the movies, as it meant the cancellation of their Saturday sports.

Between 1950-1963 I went to the movies in Westport a lot because at that age the movies were exciting, [and] there was little else to do, especially when sport was cancelled because of wet weather.²⁵⁷

Another said the movie theatre was a 'good place to go as a group', if it was wet.²⁵⁸

The manager of the Majestic in Taihape blamed bad weather for the poor turnout to *The Seven Little Foys* (1955), which, given it starred the ever-popular Bob Hope, had been expected to do reasonably well. Replying to a query from Head Office, Michael Nicol said

The particular night you quote, *The Seven Little Foys*, it snowed heavily that night, and many roads were blocked. It was a miserable night, I myself would have left seeing the picture to one of the other three nights.

²⁵⁴ Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (eds.), *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, p. 7.

²⁵⁵ Letter from Michael Nicol, Manager Regent and Majestic Theatres, Taihape, to T.S. Townsend, September 15, 1956, Box 14, File 47, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁵⁶ Ian Jarvie, 'The Social Experience of Movies', in Sari Thomas (ed.), *Film/Culture: Explorations of Cinema in its Social Context*, Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1982, pp. 247-268, p. 249.

²⁵⁷ John, born 1943.

²⁵⁸ Patricia, born 1943.

Today is another miserable day, the snow was heavy on the ground this morning.²⁵⁹

In March 1957, the Kerridge-Odeon Publicity Director reported that, 'this was a week of mixed weather – in some parts of the country it was fine, and some had severe storms. As a result, although this week was better than the corresponding period last year, it was not quite as spectacular as some weeks we have had recently'.²⁶⁰ In August 1957, bad weather again affected audience numbers, 'The figures for this week are somewhat disappointing, but allowances must be made for the severe wintery conditions which have been experienced, particularly for the southern part of the North Island and the South Island'.²⁶¹ Popular British comedy, *Doctor At Large* (1957), had been well promoted to 'people from the country areas' at the Whakatane Summer Show, but flooding interfered with the opening night and 'prevented many people from coming into town, as the approaches were blocked by the roads being under water and of course most of the surrounding farm lands were completely inundated'.²⁶² Cold weather occasionally meant adaptations to usual practices by theatre managers, as seen with this communication from the manager of the Regent in Thames, Ian Clews, to Kerridge-Odeon Headquarters in 1951.

During this quarter we have endeavoured to exploit on a larger scale the main or best films of each month. However as the weather has been very cold we have also cut back our advertising costs where possible and concentrated on advertising the fact that the Regent was heated by modern equipment. This seemed to pay off.²⁶³

'Extremely hot weather' was given as part of the reason for lower-than-usual returns in Auckland in January 1958.²⁶⁴ A week later it was reported that 'New Zealand has certainly suffered a heatwave this week and the result has been to give us a smaller gross week than for the same period this year'.²⁶⁵ The heatwave continued into March, with another report

²⁵⁹ Letter from Michael Nicol, Regent and Majestic Theatre Manager, Taihape, to Trevor Townsend, September 15, 1956, Box 14, File 47, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶⁰ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager, to Theatre Managers, March 11, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶¹ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager, to Theatre Managers, August 5, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶² Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager, to Theatre Managers, March 10, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶³ Report from Ian S. Clews, Thames Theatre Manager, to Kerridge-Odeon Headquarters, September 27, 1951, Box 7, File 21, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶⁴ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager, to Theatre Managers, January 28, 1958 and February 10, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶⁵ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager, to Theatre Managers, February 3, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

stating the hot weather resulted in business showing a fall against the same period last year, although the fact that it was 'income tax time' was an added reason for attendance fall off.²⁶⁶

While a number of movie-goers of the 1950s gave reasons that prevented them from attending the movies as often as they would have liked, movie-going generally retained its popularity across the decade. The regularity of attendance by movie-goers, the new theatres, the sustained number of permanent theatres and the number of exhibitor licences issued yearly throughout the decade all provide evidence that during the 1950s the movies continued to be a very popular pastime for New Zealanders.

What Films Were Popular and Why?

The 1950s saw the end of Hollywood's Classic Period, often referred to as 'The Golden' or 'Studio' Era and generally seen as being from the advent of sound through to the end of World War Two. This period had seen movie attendances and film production in the United States at their height, with Robert Ray arguing it produced 'the single most important body of films in the history of cinema, the one that set the terms by which all movies, made before or after, would be seen'.²⁶⁷ The demise was occasioned by a number of factors, including the Paramount anti-trust ruling (1948) which separated studios from their guaranteed markets, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigation into communism within the Hollywood industry which began in 1947, and the inaccessibility of Hollywood's European markets due to import tariffs (1947-1950).²⁶⁸ The impact of these measures was considerable, and according to Ray, resulted in a conservative approach to movie-making throughout the 1950s, with the fear of being labelled 'un-American' resulting in the production of 'bland, politically neutral movies [...] where it was impossible to be too cautious'. Ray believed this resulted in an emphasis on 'safe genres' such as the musical and the biblical epic and the production of the 'presold' picture, films based on successful novels, plays, and historical events or legends.²⁶⁹

The genre of a film was the most important factor for those of my survey respondents who made a conscious decision on which film to see. As seen in Table 1.13, 95 respondents (50%)

²⁶⁶ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Manager, to Theatre Managers, March 10, 1958, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶⁷ Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema. 1930-1980*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 26.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-129.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132. Between 1945-1956 the top 20 US films included 23 based on novels, 11 from plays, 13 from legends.

of the 189 of this cohort who answered this question said they ‘often’ used the genre of a film as a deciding factor on choosing what film to see. Only three percent said genre was never a factor in their decision-making. Who the actors and actresses were, ‘the stars’, was the next most important determinant, with 26% saying they ‘often’ used this factor in deciding what film to see.

Reason for Choice of Film	Total Often and Sometimes responses (#)	Often Responses (#)	Sometimes Responses (#)	Never Responses (#)
The genre	123	95	28	5
Who the actor and actresses were	107	49	58	11
Word-of-mouth	100	44	56	12
Time suited when you could go	96	53	43	17
Your friends were seeing it	94	34	60	20
Because of the picture theatre	76	31	45	34
Your parents allowed it	58	34	24	54
Because of its reviews	56	20	36	50
Who the director was	32	7	25	71

Table 1.13: Factors determining choice of film.

This information, along with ascertaining what films were screened and for how long, comments made by those in the industry, and by survey respondents, reveal a number of patterns in New Zealanders’ film preferences throughout this decade.

Musicals – ‘Ah, the wonderful musicals of the 50s!’²⁷⁰

This ‘safe’ genre was prolifically produced and extremely popular with audiences, particularly in the first half of the decade. Attendance schedules for all Kerridge-Odeon cinemas are available for the first three years of the decade, and an analysis of these reveals that the most popular film in this period was *The Great Caruso* (1951), a musical based loosely on the life of Italian tenor, Enrico Caruso, played by Mario Lanza. Lanza was a singing phenomenon, described by one contemporary movie-goer as being ‘wildly popular’ with a ‘huge tenor voice’,²⁷¹ and by another as ‘the singer responsible for introducing many people to the world of opera’.²⁷² Even the self-acknowledged musically illiterate *New Zealand Listener* reviewer, Jno, recognised Lanza had ‘a really good voice’, along with a ‘pleasant presence and any amount of self-confidence’.²⁷³ *The Great Caruso* was not only popular in New Zealand, but was also the most popular film in Britain in 1951,²⁷⁴ and, according to Jeff Rense, was the top

²⁷⁰ Diana, born in 1935.

²⁷¹ Shirley, born 1935.

²⁷² Diana, born 1935.

²⁷³ Jno was the pseudonym for John Maconie. *New Zealand Listener*, May 26, 1950, p. 21. Jno saw *That Midnight Kiss* (1949) at the St. James in Wellington, where it screened for three weeks in May 1950, in direct competition with *The Secrets of Life* (see table above).

²⁷⁴ John Howard Reid, *Top-grossing Pictures at the British Box-Office*, Wyong, Australia: Reid’s Film Index, 1977, p. 24.

grossing film world-wide in that year.²⁷⁵ Kerridge-Odeon's top box-office hits for this period are presented in Table 1.14.

Title of Film	Net Takings (£)	Country of Origin	Year Released	Genre(s)
<i>The Great Caruso</i>	48403	US	1951	Musical
<i>The Secrets of Life</i>	39789	US	1950	Exploitation
<i>Annie Get Your Gun</i>	37736	US	1951	Musical
<i>Royal Journey</i>	34016	UK	1950	Documentary
<i>Show Boat</i>	30364	US	1951	Musical
<i>Father of the Bride</i>	28863	US	1950	Comedy
<i>Here Comes the Groom</i>	26331	US	1951	Comedy/Musical
<i>King Solomon's Mines</i>	26127	US	1950	Adventure
<i>Laughter in Paradise</i>	26094	UK	1951	Comedy
<i>Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair</i>	23820	US	1952	Comedy

Table 1.14: Kerridge-Odeon's top ten films, 1950-1952.²⁷⁶

Annie Get Your Gun (1951), the third most popular film over these three years, opened in Auckland's St. James Theatre during Christmas week of 1950, netting a very healthy £2,278 for the week, and becoming the top netting Kerridge-Odeon film of 1951.²⁷⁷ The *New Zealand Listener* reviewer, P.J.W, summed up the film's appeal by saying 'few more appropriate holiday entertainments could be imagined – from the viewpoint of relaxation and enjoyment – than the story of Annie'.²⁷⁸ The third popular musical and the fifth most popular film for Kerridge-Odeon in this period was *Show Boat* (1951), which was also the third biggest box-office hit in the United States in 1951. In New Zealand it had the distinction of attracting the biggest weekly audience to a single theatre over these three years, with the exception of *The Secrets of Life* (1950), netting £3,472 at the St. James in Auckland for the week beginning January 4, 1952.

The popularity of the musical is seen not only in attendance figures and financial records, but also in survey respondents' preferences. One hundred and seventy-two respondents who went to the movies most often in some or all of the years in the 1950s answered the question about their favourite genre(s). Musicals were most preferred by 30 people, 24 women and 6 men, making it the second favourite of 14 genres (drama was the favourite with 34 nominations). When the rankings of respondents' six favourite genres were tallied, the musical retained its second position, as it received strong support across all six placings.

²⁷⁵ http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0487292/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm, retrieved June 15, 2015.

²⁷⁶ Takings Summaries, Box 253, 2/49-3/53, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁷⁷ *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950) netted £35,458 for Kerridge-Odeon in 1951.

²⁷⁸ *New Zealand Listener*, December 22, 1950, p. 20.

When broken down by gender, the musical rated as the favourite genre for women, while men rated it their fifth favourite.

Further reinforcing the musical's popularity were the substantial number of respondents' qualitative comments. One said 'I liked anything with Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, plus the extravaganza musicals like the *Ziegfeld Follies* (1945), *Singing in the Rain*, [and] Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy musicals'. A male respondent commented that his favourite movie was *Carmen Jones* (1954), which he saw a number of times, travelling all over Auckland with friends to see it at different theatres.²⁷⁹ Another said he particularly enjoyed *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954) because 'it kindled my musical interest', which stayed with him throughout his life.²⁸⁰ Mary explained her preference for musicals by saying that 'films exposed me to music, ideas and worlds outside my own'.²⁸¹ *The King and I* (1956) was a particular favourite of one respondent, who saw it nine times at the theatre and said she 'loved every moment of the film and especially the Shall We Dance scene', which was not only a visual spectacle but held a hint of romance too.²⁸² Another said

I adored all musicals anything that had dance or music in it. I loved all the films of Fred Astaire, Vera Ellen, Gene Kelly, Marge & Gower Champion. I particularly enjoyed, *The Bandwagon*, *White Christmas*, *Show Boat*, *An American in Paris*, *Funny Face*, *Lili*, *Hans Christian Anderson*, *Daddy Longlegs*, *The Red Shoes*. I also adored *The Wizard of Oz* which I saw a number of times.²⁸³

While musicals were also very popular in the United States and Britain, the following table indicates a greater preference amongst Kerridge-Odeon audiences over their movie-going counterparts overseas. Kerridge-Odeon audiences placed 16 musicals in the annual top ten for these years, compared with 11 for the United States and seven for the United Kingdom. As attendance figures for Kerridge-Odeon audiences for the whole decade do not exist, the comparison is limited to the years for which records have been kept. The number in brackets is the film's placement in box-office charts for that respective year.

²⁷⁹ Male, born 1928.

²⁸⁰ Male, born 1938.

²⁸¹ Mary, born 1937.

²⁸² Female, born 1943.

²⁸³ Ann, born 1942.

Year	New Zealand (Kerridge-Odeon cinemas)	Britain	United States
1950	<i>That Midnight Kiss</i> (7 th) <i>Neptune's Daughter</i> (8 th) <i>Take Me Out to the Ballgame</i> (9 th)	<i>Annie Get Your Gun</i> (3 rd) <i>Jolson Sings Again</i> (7 th)	<i>Annie Get Your Gun</i> (2 nd) <i>Wabash Avenue</i> (6 th) <i>At War with the Army</i> (9 th) <i>My Blue Heaven</i> (10)
1951	<i>Annie Get Your Gun</i> (1 st) <i>The Great Caruso</i> (4 th) <i>Fancy Pants</i> (8 th) <i>The Lemon Drop Kid</i> (10 th)	<i>The Great Caruso</i> (1 st) <i>The Toast of New Orleans</i> (8 th)	<i>Show Boat</i> (2 nd) <i>An American in Paris</i> (6 th)
1952	<i>Show Boat</i> (2 nd) <i>The Great Caruso</i> (3 th) <i>Here Comes the Groom</i> (4 th) <i>My Favourite Spy</i> (7 th) <i>An American in Paris</i> (8 th) <i>Happy Go Lovely</i> (9 th)		<i>Singin' In The Rain</i> (5 th) <i>Sailor Beware</i> (6 th) <i>Moulin Rouge</i> (7 th) <i>Hans Christian Andersen</i> (8 th)
1953	<i>Lili</i> (3 rd) <i>Road to Bali</i> (6 th) <i>Million Dollar Mermaid</i> (7 th)	<i>Road to Bali</i> (1 st) <i>Because You're Mine</i> (5 th) <i>Moulin Rouge</i> (7 th)	<i>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</i> (6 th)

Table 1.15: Comparison of popularity of musicals, 1950-1953.²⁸⁴

In the mid-1950s a revolutionary style of music appeared and was quickly captured on screen. 'Rock and Roll' was a world-wide cultural phenomenon and its presence was first felt cinematically with *Rock Around the Clock*, also known as *Rock and Roll* (1956), starring Bill Haley and the Comets, a film that in New Zealand had patrons dancing in the aisles. Knowing of the 'riots' when the film was shown in the United Kingdom, Robert Kerridge had been cautious about screening the film locally, and censor Gordon Mirams 'showed his grumpiness with the international spread of rock'n'roll' by deleting most of the 'exaggerated hip movements' of dancers in a rock'n'roll newsreel and removing the by-line 'Elvis, the Double-jointed Pelvis' from Elvis films.²⁸⁵ Their reticence was not matched by movie-goers. According to *The Evening Post*, the 40,000 people who saw *Rock Around the Clock* at the Regent in Wellington 'broke the record for a four-week run'.²⁸⁶ The film also did extremely well in the provinces, where it set an opening Saturday night record at the Regent in Wairoa, taking more money than other previous hits such as *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), *Broken Barrier* (1952), and *A Queen is Crowned* (1953), and giving the Regent its best non-holiday week takings ever.²⁸⁷ Box-office records continued to be broken with the film

²⁸⁴ Some of the titles are musical comedies - in this study they are categorised as musicals and are not included in the comedy section. British references are from Reid, *Top Grossing Pictures*. Depending on criteria used, results can vary across different commentators. E.g. *Annie Get Your Gun* was ranked #1 in Britain in 1950 according to a survey by the Motion Picture Herald's poll of 4,510 exhibitors. *The Daily Film Renter*, Thursday 28 December 1950, p. 3. American references are from <http://returntothe50s.weebly.com/all-time-movie-box-office-hits---1950s-decade.html> retrieved March 18. 2015.

²⁸⁵ Yska, *All Shook Up*, p. 109.

²⁸⁶ *Evening Post*, 12 November 1956, p. 12.

²⁸⁷ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, February 18, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

attracting audiences that had to be 'really packed in' at the Regent in Pahiataua and achieving the 'biggest week yet' in the 'beautiful new theatre', the Embassy in Thames.²⁸⁸ Its success at the Cosy in Featherston in March 1957, where it achieved a 50 percent increase in takings over the norm, earned it the accolade 'Columbia's little box-office phenomenon'.²⁸⁹ One survey respondent recalled 'dancing home down the middle of the street when we saw the first rock and roll film...I think that it might have been Bill Haley and the Comets.'²⁹⁰

The second Bill Haley film, *Don't Knock the Rock* (1956) broke records in Auckland at the Majestic in its opening week in May 1957, and was described by Theatre Manager Roy Benjamin as 'sensational'. Hundreds of movie-goers were turned away because the 1,615 seat theatre was full. The Bill Haley Fan Club, initiated by the theatre, got off to a solid start with 250 members enrolling in the first week.²⁹¹ The film also did 'sensational business' at the St. James in Wellington, with its first Friday and Saturday night takings better than those received from *Rock Around the Clock*.²⁹²

At the centre of the 'storm of controversy created by rock and roll' was Elvis Presley²⁹³ whose music, good looks and dance moves turned him into a 'demigod'.²⁹⁴ His popularity was not just with the younger generation, as Kerridge-Odeon management discovered.

With Elvis Presley on the cover of the May issue [of their magazine *Cinema*], figures this month have surpassed any previous totals. We were a little diffident about using the "Presley" still, thinking his popularity would be confined to the "rock'n'roll" enthusiasts, but from results to date he is excellent news value, and sales are more than satisfactory even in the theatres screening "class" films.²⁹⁵

The arrival of this new cultural phenomenon was recalled enthusiastically by a number of survey respondents who specifically mentioned Elvis Presley, rock-and-roll music and/or

²⁸⁸ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, February 25, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁸⁹ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, March 11, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁹⁰ Female, born 1942.

²⁹¹ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, May 13, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁹² Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, March 16, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. Theatre managers had been forewarned by Maddock of the potential for this film to outsell *Rock Around the Clock*, as a 'News Flash from Overseas' had shared the fact that *Don't Knock the Rock* had done very well at the Victory Theatre in Sydney, the West in Adelaide, and the Royal in Perth, where it had out-grossed *Rock Around the Clock*. Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, February 11, 1957, Box 19, File 69, Circulars 4/56-8/57.

²⁹³ Ray, *A Certain Tendency*, p. 163.

²⁹⁴ Yska, *All Shook Up*, p. 128.

²⁹⁵ Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, May 20, 1957, Box 19, File 69, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

dancing as their highlights of this period. One survey respondent said the only movies she saw more than once at the theatre were 'Rock n Roll' movies - I loved the dance music'.²⁹⁶

Comedy

Comedy was the most consistently popular genre with Kerridge-Odeon audiences throughout the 1950s. A number of series were particular drawcards, especially *Ma and Pa Kettle*, which ran for ten films from 1947 through until 1957. Their films were continually in circulation throughout the country in the 1950s, with up to six different titles being screened in theatres at any one time. *Ma and Pa Kettle Go To Town* (1950) was the fifth most popular film for the Kerridge-Odeon circuit in 1950, *Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm* (1951) the seventh most popular in 1951, and *Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair* (1953) the sixth most popular in 1953.

The prolific output of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, whose first film was released in 1940 to be followed by a further 24 in that decade alone, ensured their particular style of comedy was seen in a new film at least yearly through until 1956, with the release of their final film as a duo, *Dance with Me, Henry*. As with *The Kettles*, Abbott and Costello films were continually rescreened throughout the country, irrespective of the age of the film, and they were particularly popular over the Christmas summer holidays as entertaining holiday fare for children and their parents.²⁹⁷

Another popular duo was Dennis O'Connor and Francis, his talking mule. Their first film, *Francis the Talking Mule*, was released in 1950, and a new film followed every year until *Francis in the Haunted House* (1956).²⁹⁸ The naïve 'G.I.' and his talking mule delighted New Zealand audiences, particularly in the early part of the decade. In 1952, the combination of *Francis Goes to the Races* (1951) and *Francis Goes to West Point* (1952), which were both screened throughout the country, resulted in a net profit of £28,547 for the Kerridge-Odeon

²⁹⁶ Female, born 1942.

²⁹⁷ In the last three weeks of 1952 *Abbott and Costello in Hollywood* (1945) played at Auckland's Majestic and Playhouse Theatres and the Time Theatre in Wellington, *Abbott and Costello Meet the Killer, Boris Karloff* (1949), screened at the Majestic in Rotorua, *Comin' Round the Mountain* (1951) screened at His Majesty's in Blenheim and the Tauranga Town Hall, and *Lost in Alaska* (1952), screened at the New Plymouth Opera House, Timaru's Majestic, the Cosy in Hastings, the Embassy in Hamilton and Whanganui's Majestic. In December 1953 *Abbott and Costello Lost in Alaska* (1952), *Meet Captain Kidd* (1952), *Go to Mars* (1953), *Comin' Round the Mountain* (1951), *Join the Foreign Legion* (1950) and *Lost in a Harem* (1944) all screened throughout the country and December 1955 saw screenings of *Abbott and Costello Meet the Keystone Cops* (1955), *Meet Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1953), *Go to Mars* (1953), and *Meet the Mummy* (1955). Takings Summaries, Box 253, 2/49-3/53, 4/53-3/54, 4/55-3/56, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁹⁸ This film was without Dennis O'Connor and with a different voice for Francis and was not well received, resulting in the demise of the series.

circuit. The combined total of both of those films made the duo the fourth most popular screening for the circuit of that year.²⁹⁹

Aside from the popularity of series, with their recognisable stars and comic styles, stand-alone comedy features were also popular, as seen with four comedy titles in the top ten films for the first three years of the decade (see Table 1.14). British and New Zealand audiences had a similar partiality for comedy, with both countries placing seven comedies in their top ten over the four-year period, and sharing a liking for three of the same films, *Father of the Bride* (1950), *Son of Paleface* (1952), and *Laughter in Paradise* (1951). American audiences also enjoyed *Father of the Bride* and *Son of Paleface*, both of which were placed in that country's top ten films for 1950 and 1952 respectively, showing that the humour in these two films was appreciated by audiences in all three countries.³⁰⁰ New Zealanders, on the other hand, were the only audience to show a significant preference for the *Ma and Pa Kettle* films, with three titles featuring in the top ten three years in a row. The top ten comedies in Kerridge-Odeon theatres, Britain and the United States for the first four years of the decade are listed in Table 1.16.

Year	New Zealand (Kerridge-Odeon cinemas)	Britain	United States
1950	<i>Whisky Galore</i> (4 th) <i>Ma and Pa Kettle Go to Town</i> (5 th)	<i>The Happiest Days of Your Life</i> (2 nd) <i>Father of the Bride</i> (10 th)	<i>Cheaper by the Dozen</i> (4 th) <i>Father of the Bride</i> (7 th)
1951	<i>Father of the Bride</i> (2 nd) <i>Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm</i> (7 th)	<i>Laughter in Paradise</i> (3 rd) <i>Worm's Eye View</i> (4 th) <i>Soldiers Three</i> (10 th)	<i>Father's Little Dividend</i> (10 th)
1952	<i>Laughter in Paradise</i> (5 th) <i>Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair</i> (6 th)	<i>Son of Paleface</i> (3 rd)	<i>Sailor Beware</i> (6 th) <i>Son of Paleface</i> (9 th)
1953	<i>Son of Paleface</i> (5 th)	<i>Genevieve</i> (3 rd)	<i>How to Marry a Millionaire</i> (4 th)

Table 1.16: Comparison of popularity of comedies, 1950-1953.³⁰¹

Many other comedies were screened to appreciative audiences, including the re-release of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), which attracted an audience of 170,160 between May 1955 and March 1956. The film also did well in Britain, with *Sight and Sound* magazine describing its return as a 'great revival'.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ *The Royal Journey* was the most popular film in 1952, followed by *Show Boat* and *The Great Caruso*. *Francis Goes to West Point* alone, achieved a net profit of £19,991. Takings Summaries, Box 253, 2/49-3/53, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁰⁰ Derek Elley, (ed.), *The Chronicle of the Movies: A Year-by-Year History of the Talking Pictures*, London: Reed International, 1991, pp. 157, 164, 171.

³⁰¹ British references are from Reid, *Top Grossing Pictures*, pp. 157, 164, 171.

³⁰² *Sight and Sound*, 24:3, January-March 1955, London: British Film Institute, p. 115.

The latter half of the 1950s shows comedy series still amongst box-office successes, with the finale of the *Ma and Pa Kettle* 'saga', *Doctor at Large* (1957), and the *Carry On* series getting underway. *Abbott and Costello* and the *Francis* films continued to screen, but with no new releases produced, they no longer featured in box-office placings. The success of *Doctor at Large* in the United Kingdom had been well-publicised to Kerridge-Odeon theatre managers months ahead of its arrival in New Zealand.³⁰³

The popularity of comedy is evident from the quantitative data found in exhibitors' record books for this period, which is reinforced by both qualitative and quantitative data from survey respondents. Comedy was the fourth favourite individual genre for those who attended the cinema most frequently in some or all of the years of the 1950s. When the top six genres of each individual respondent were tallied, comedy was the favourite genre overall due to its strong placing in both men and women's top six preferences. Comedy was the favourite genre for men, when their top six genres were collated, while women ranked it second behind musicals.

War

While New Zealand audiences undoubtedly enjoyed the light-hearted fare of comedies and musicals, war films, particularly those based on World War Two, became especially popular in the middle of the decade. Throughout the war itself, the newsreel, which was screened at all sessions, was of great importance to audiences, enabling them to keep up with events at the front line. Comments from contemporary movie-goers emphasise this.

Thanks to the experiences we got attending movies, we were made aware of the world and the way life was led. As there was no TV news etc. the newsreel [...] was often the only way we knew what was happening outside our own little world.³⁰⁴

David Thomson writes of how closely allied film and war were, where the cinema, both 'the place and its community, was as important as air-raid shelters'.³⁰⁵

Although the mid-1950s saw an increased interest in war films by movie-goers, they were popular with New Zealand audiences before then. American films *Command Decision* (1948), with Clark Gable and Walter Pidgeon; *Fighter Squadron* (1948), debuting Rock Hudson in a

³⁰³ The film was said to have 'hit the "Jack Pot"' at the Leicester Square Theatre, London and the box-office receipts during the first four days of its run took in more money than any other Rank film at that theatre in four years. Memo from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, June 4, 1957, Box 19, File 69, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁰⁴ Dorothy, born in 1930s.

³⁰⁵ David Thomson, *The Big Screen: The Story of the Movies*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012, p. 198.

minor role; and *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), starring John Wayne, had all circulated throughout the country to good audiences. The British war story *The Cruel Sea* (1953) had done particularly well, ranking as the second most popular film for both New Zealand and British audiences for the year of its release. Audiences from both countries also enjoyed *The Malta Story* (1953), which had a strong opening season in New Zealand in December 1953, going on to sell 180,550 tickets over the summer of 1953/1954, making it the second most popular film for that period.³⁰⁶ It also featured in Britain's top ten in 1953.³⁰⁷

In the middle of the decade, Kerridge-Odeon audiences had all but replaced the musical at the top with a preference for war films, with three featuring in the top ten box-office success of 1955-6 and only a single musical. The British film *The Purple Plain* (1954) and the American *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1954) had done very well in theatres, but they were only a prelude to the huge box-office hit of *The Dam Busters* (1955), a British film which opened in New Zealand in October 1955 and sold 502,622 tickets in six months. As with many of the war films before it, *The Dam Busters* included actual World War Two footage and was billed as a 'factual and deeply moving tribute to the courage of youth'. Newspaper advertisements appealed to the patriotic with by-lines such as, 'YOU'LL BE VERY, VERY PROUD THAT NEW ZEALAND PILOTS FLEW WITH "THE DAM BUSTERS"'.³⁰⁸ *The Dam Busters* attracted one of the largest audiences ever at the St. James in Auckland, with 26,031 seeing it in the week ending 3 November 1955.³⁰⁹ Despite its considerable popularity, it did not attract the biggest weekly crowd to a single theatre. That distinction was achieved by the Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis comedy, *3 Ring Circus* (1954), also at Auckland's St. James, which attracted an audience of 29,741 for the week ending 25 August 1955, providing a further illustration of New Zealanders' love of comedy.

The following table shows the top ten films shown by the Kerridge-Odeon circuit for the 1955-6 year, illustrating the increased number of war films and a corresponding decrease in musicals.

³⁰⁶ Summer in this instance is the months from December 1, 1953 until March 31, 1954. Figures from Takings Summaries, Box 253, 2/49-3/53, 4/53-3/54, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁰⁷ Reid, *Top Grossing Pictures*, and Elley, *The Chronicle of the Movies*, p. 179.

³⁰⁸ *The (Manawatū) Times*, Monday October 17, 1955, p. 1.

³⁰⁹ Attendance Schedules, Box 253, 3/54-3/56, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Placing	Title	Seats sold	Country of Origin	Genre(s)
1	<i>The Dam Busters</i> (1955)	502622	UK	War
2	<i>Doctor at Sea</i> (1955)	403486	UK	Comedy
3	<i>Rear Window</i> (1954)	303733	US	Mystery/Thriller
4	<i>3 Ring Circus</i> (1954)	281375	US	Comedy
5	<i>The Country Girl</i> (1954)	259235	US	Musical
6	<i>The Purple Plain</i> (1954)	226058	UK	War
7	<i>The Bridges at Toko-Ri</i> (1954)	225362	UK/US	War/Romance
8	<i>On the Waterfront</i> (1954)	192530	US	Drama
9	<i>Living it Up</i> (1954)	181771	US	Comedy
10	<i>Abbott and Costello</i> (various)	172994	US	Comedy

Table 1.17: Kerridge-Odeon's top ten films, according to seats sold, 1955-6.³¹⁰

The popularity of the war film with local audiences continued throughout the rest of the decade with *Reach for the Sky* (UK 1956), *The Battle of the River Plate* (UK 1956) and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (UK/US 1957) all requiring extra screenings to meet public demand.³¹¹

War films were not just popular in New Zealand, with British-produced war films the most popular genre in Britain throughout the 1950s,³¹² and the genre also performing extremely well at the box-office in the United States.³¹³ The jointly American and British produced *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was the number one film in both America and Britain in 1958,³¹⁴ the top film for *The Film Weekly's* 1958 annual Top Best Pictures poll,³¹⁵ and Britain's biggest international hit of the decade.³¹⁶

British commentator John Gillett, in reviewing *The Battle of the River Plate*, asked why British producers reverted so often to World War Two for inspiration, and why those films appeared to satisfy a need in their audiences, given it was ten years since the war's end.³¹⁷ Gillett

³¹⁰ Financial year is from April 1, 1955-March 31, 1956.

³¹¹ At the Regent Theatre, Hastings, where films usually screened 6 or 7 times, *Reach for the Sky* was shown 33 times over a fortnight in February 1957. Also at the Hastings Regent, *The Battle of the River Plate* had its New Zealand premiere on New Year's Eve of 1956, before coming back for a season of 32 screenings between April 18 and May 2, 1957 and *The Bridge over the River Kwai* was shown 27 times in August of 1958.³¹¹ At the Nelson Majestic Theatre, where films generally screened between two and five times, *Reach for the Sky* was shown 20 times between 12 and 21 February in 1957, and *A Town Like Alice* (1956) and *The Battle of the River Plate* also screened 20 times in March of the same year. The popularity of these three films throughout New Zealand was immense, resulting in their being referred to as 'Rank's Big Three' by the Kerridge-Odeon Head office. Hastings and Nelson Exhibitors' Record Books, David Lascelles collection.

³¹² <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1147086/> retrieved 10 July 2015 and John Gillett, *The Battle of River Plate* review, *Sight and Sound*, 26:3, Winter 1956-57, p. 152. *The Dam Busters* was the biggest box-office hit in Britain in 1955, as well as in New Zealand. *Reach for the Sky* was the #1 British hit in 1956 and *The Battle of the River Plate* was #3 in 1957. Reid, *Top-grossing Pictures*, p. 28.

³¹³ Elley, *The Chronicle of the Movies*, pp. 198 and 207 respectively.

³¹⁴ *Battle Cry* (1955), *Strategic Air Command* (1955), *To Hell and Back* (1955) and *The Sea Chase* (1955) were at 3rd, 8th, 9th and 10th places respectively in America's Top Ten films for 1955. Elley, *The Chronicle of the Movies*. Finler estimates *Battle Cry* made US\$8.1 million, with the other three films all making US\$6million each. Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 358.

³¹⁵ Elley, *The Chronicle of the Movies*, p. 212.

³¹⁶ *The Film Weekly*, 96:1688, April 1, 1959, p. 1.

³¹⁷ <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1147086/> retrieved July 10, 2015.

³¹⁸ John Gillett, 'The Battle of the River Plate', *Sight and Sound*, 26:3, Winter 1956-7, p. 152.

wondered if contemporary audiences looked back on the war, 'almost nostalgically, as a time when personal allegiances were firm and clear-cut, unsullied by the doubts and fears of an uneasy peace'.³¹⁸ It is possible that the heightened interest audiences showed toward war films was directly related to the passage of time, allowing them the space in which to absorb and come to terms with what Vincent Porter describes as the 'sober realism' that 'war brings death as well as victory'.³¹⁹ This is reinforced by a questionnaire respondent who commented that she had particularly enjoyed going to the movies at this time, to see 'the post-war war films, as they gave us the back story of what happened to our people [the soldiers]'. This respondent, who was born in 1935 and was therefore a young woman in the mid-1950s, ranked war films as her fourth favourite genre and she included *The Dam Busters* (1955) as one of her favourite movies from this decade. Another contemporary female movie-goer explained the popularity of the war film quite simply, saying they 'were part of the scene'.³²⁰ A reviewer for the *New Zealand Listener* was less than impressed with the number of war films available, commenting in his review for *Dunkirk* (1958) in 1959, that 'nothing in my filmgoing depresses me more than the way British films seek to recapture, week after weary week, the real or imagined finest hours of the war which ended 13 years ago'.³²¹ Given the high attendances at war films, he was out of sync with the majority of moviegoers.

War films were the eighth favourite individual genre, for those cinema-goers in my survey who went to the cinema most frequently in the 1950s. They were seventh after the rankings of the top six genres were combined. Unsurprisingly, men preferred war stories more than women, with the former placing them as their fourth favourite genre when their top six genres were collated, and women placing them at eighth.

Western

The 1950s was a healthy period in the production of western films, with 1950 seeing production particularly high, as seen in Table 1.18.³²²

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ Vincent Porter, 'The Robert Clark Account: Films released in Britain by Associated British Pictures, British Lion, MGM, and Warner Bros., 1946-1957', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 20:4, 2000, pp. 469-511, p. 479.

³²⁰ Margaret Gauden-Ing, born 1944.

³²¹ F.A.J., *New Zealand Listener*, January 30, 1959, p. 7.

³²² Edward Buscombe (ed.), *The BFI Companion to the Western*, London: BFI Publishing, 1988, p. 427.

Year	Total # Features	Total # Westerns	Westerns as %
1950	383	130	34
1951	391	109	28
1952	324	108	33
1953	344	92	27
1954	253	69	27
1955	254	68	27
1956	272	83	31
1957	300	70	23
1958	241	54	22
1959	187	39	21

Table 1.18: Westerns as a proportion of all feature films produced by the U.S.³²³

While the western failed to feature in any of the New Zealand top box-office hits in any of the years throughout the decade, it was nonetheless a very popular genre. Results from my survey found that the single favourite genre for those men who went to the cinema most frequently in the 1950s was the western, with 20 out of 75 respondents citing it as their favourite (27%). In comparison, only five women from a group of 96 ranked the western as their favourite genre, resulting in its sixth placing. When individuals' top six genres were tallied, the western dropped to second place for men, just below the favourite, comedy. Women placed westerns as their fourth most popular genre, equal with romance.

When film-goers of this decade were asked to name their favourite films of this decade, titles of western films numbered only 11 out of a total of 160 different titles given (7%). Five people specifically mentioned John Wayne, the actor inextricably linked to the western genre. Given the number of western films being produced at this time, and the genre's solid rating with audiences, it might be expected that more individual film titles would be among the favourites. The fact that they are not could be partly explained by the prevalence of westerns in children's movie-going experiences. Memories of children's Saturday matinees are frequently recalled by questionnaire respondents, but it is not the titles of individual films that are remembered. What is, and often recalled in considerable detail, is the experience of watching the film, the names of the cinematic 'heroes', and the general themes of the films. This is illustrated by a number of responses from questionnaire participants. Pamela O'Neill, a regular movie-goer in Masterton when she was young, said that serials were a favourite: 'I loved going and would become quite engrossed in the movie which was usually a western. The theatre would roar with the shouting of the kids when the "goodies and baddies" were

³²³ Buscombe, *The BFI Companion to the Western*, p. 427.

fighting it out, or when the hero rushed out to save someone.’³²⁴ Mark, a regular movie-goer at the Palace in Blenheim during the 1950s, loved Westerns as a child and they remained his favourite genre into adulthood. He particularly enjoyed the atmosphere of the theatre, with the ‘cheering, shouting, foot-stamping, [and] whistling when the cowboys were on the trail of the Indians, or the goodies were on the trail of the baddies’. The experience had a life outside the theatre too, as Mark recalled especially enjoying ‘Coming home and being the hero in our play for the next week. Making bows and arrows, swords, rope swings, [and] guns.’ Graham, who attended Whanganui cinemas as a child in the 1950s, also said that one of the things he most liked about going to the movies was ‘dressing up the next day as a cowboy’ and ‘getting lost in the fantasy worlds of movie plots’.³²⁵ Alec McLean, who frequented the Johnsonville theatre as a child, recalled that ‘we would spend days afterwards replaying scenes from the last western or war film’,³²⁶ and Allan Horwell said that he and his brother were regular moviegoers as children and after the picture, ‘fired by knights in armour or westerns, we headed home to don our swords or six guns. [...] we played Cowboys and Indians until dinnertime’.³²⁷

This characteristic of the child carrying the film home in his imagination and transforming it into play, is identical to the children in Charles Ambler’s Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) study in the 1950s. Ambler recounts ‘groups of African boys, dressed in home-made paper “chaps” and cowboy hats, and carrying crudely carved wooded pistols’, as a ‘ubiquitous presence running through streets and alleys in endless games of cowboys and Indians’.³²⁸ Given the substantial differences in culture and language between the two continents, the replication in children’s play across these considerable geographic distances illustrates Ambler’s argument that the western, with its ‘mythic Hollywood screen imagery’, was able to reach into even the most ‘remote corners of the Empire’.³²⁹

Matinee sessions for children were invariably noisy, and cartoonist Murray Ball suggested a possible explanation for this, in his typically humorous style. As a child, Ball loved cowboys and in particular, Gene Autry and Hopalong Cassidy. Much as Ball admired Autry’s ‘remarkable ability to beat up a gang of half a dozen unshaved thugs without so much as

³²⁴ Pamela O’Neill, born 1937.

³²⁵ Graham Johnston, born 1947.

³²⁶ Alec McLean, born 1950.

³²⁷ Allan Horwell, ‘New Brighton Childhood’, *New Zealand Memories*, Issue 73, August/September 2008, pp. 12-13, p. 12.

³²⁸ Charles Ambler, ‘Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia’, in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, London: British Film Institute, 2004, pp. 133-157, p. 133.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

tilting his white sombrero', his 'one little niggle' with his hero was Autry's compulsion to stop whatever he was doing and burst into song. These musical interludes, Ball claimed, 'had a devastating effect on the kids in the front rows. At his first note all hell broke loose. There would be showers of Jaffas, a fusillade of popped potato crisp bags, and kids would yell, whistle, and punch their neighbours until he stopped.'³³⁰

The mayhem of the audience appeared to reflect the mayhem on screen. Violence was a typical motif of the western, and it was a type of violence that was generally accepted. New Zealand's film censor, Gordon Mirams carried out a study of films during the first quarter of 1950. He discovered numerous violent acts in feature films, with the most frequent being murder, and the genre most likely to include murder being the Western. Mirams found there were a total of 168 murders and attempted murders in 47 films, with 73 of those found in just 17 Westerns, an average of more than four per Western.³³¹ Given the popularity of the Western and the inherent acceptance of a core western motif of 'the good guys killing the bad guys', murder was viewed by the film producers, the censors and the public alike as being socially acceptable. Mirams went further by suggesting that the crime was seen as 'respectable', particularly in comparison with sex-related 'crimes', such as prostitution or abortion, which were not acceptable to either the public or the censor.³³² This notion of the 'respectability' of the western was emphasised by Richard Ford in an early British study of the impact of films on children.³³³ Nevertheless, it was reported that in New Zealand in 1953, 66% of Westerns that came into the country were subject to cutting by the censor to enable their receiving a 'U' (Universal exhibition) certificate, with 20% of Westerns still either 'too adult in theme or too realistic in treatment to be toned down sufficiently' to be screened to children.³³⁴ A female survey respondent, Mary, illustrated how impressionable children could be.

My first film I was allowed to go to when I was 9 was Jesse James, which was on each week after school and it was a Western. I was fascinated more that he was killed, hanged or shot, and got up to be in the next film. At that age I really believed the whole scenario.

³³⁰ Ball, *Tarzan, Gene Kelly and Me*, p. 30.

³³¹ Gordon Mirams, 'Drop That Gun!', *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television*, 6:1, Autumn, 1951, pp. 1-19, p. 7.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³³³ Ford stated that the shooting and killing in a Western film was entirely moral in its motive, with there being 'no evidence to suggest that the use of guns and the destruction of the villain by quick and apparently painless methods has any harmful effect' on children. Richard Ford, *Children in the Cinema*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939, p. 114.

³³⁴ *AJHR*, 1953, H 22, p. 25.

Violence was not the only aspect of the western accepted by contemporary audiences, with one woman recalling 'My mother liked horses so we often went to westerns which we all loved, but now, viewed with my adult eyes, were awfully racist and sexist'.³³⁵ Such concerns were not evident in the 1950s. Overall, the western was a favourite with both audiences and exhibitors throughout this decade.

Epic

The 1950s saw the resurgence of big-budget, large, lavish productions, often filmed on location rather than on studio lots, as American movie companies sought to offer a point of difference from what was being screened on television. While the early 1950s saw the introduction of the term "blockbuster" and an increased use of the term 'epic' to 'mark, describe and sell them',³³⁶ these large-scale productions were not new to the 1950s, with DeMille's original *The Ten Commandments* (1923),³³⁷ *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925), and *Noah's Ark* (1929) examples from the 1920s. The 1950s 'epics' used new technologies such as 3-D and colour to re-capture movie-goers' interest and to encourage them into picture theatres.

One of the first of these new big-budget epics was *Quo Vadis* (1951), the number one box-office hit in America in 1951, the fourth most popular film in Britain in 1952 and the fourth for the Kerridge-Odeon circuit in New Zealand in 1953.³³⁸ Its advertising by-line of 'Three Years in the Making! Thousands in the Cast! Filmed in Rome!' illustrated the production values typical of epics.³³⁹ Another best-seller of this genre was *The Robe* (1953), a biblical drama and the first Cinemascope film, which was the number one box-office hit in the United States in 1953 and in Britain in 1954.³⁴⁰ The film also did very well in New Zealand, the first country to see the film after its New York release, where its opening night at Auckland's Civic was beset with problems.³⁴¹ It was the second most popular film of the decade for

³³⁵ Female, born 1943.

³³⁶ Steve Neal, 'Hollywood Blockbusters: Historical dimensions', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 47-60, 48-51.

³³⁷ Some of the remains of the movie set built in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes on the central California coast continue to be uncovered by archaeologists, who are restoring their discoveries with help from the original silent movie. Samir S. Patel, 'Hollywood Exodus', *Archaeology*, January/February 2015, p. 18.

³³⁸ The top 10 films for America are from <http://returntothe50s.weebly.com/all-time-movie-box-office-hits---1950s-decade.html>, retrieved March 18, 2015. The British figures are from Reid, *Top-Grossing Pictures*, p. 27.

³³⁹ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0043949/taglines?ref=tt_str_y_tg, retrieved July 8, 2015.

³⁴⁰ The United States figure from Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 358. The British figure from Reid, *Top-Grossing Pictures*, p. 27 and Elley, *The Chronicle of the Movies*, p. 185.

³⁴¹ Problems included strong winds ruining the floral arrangements in the foyer, the 8pm Friday night start time saw Queen Street packed with shoppers and the 'plain curious' watching the dignitaries arrive, which made it difficult for cinema-goers to enter the theatre, the film started before the wife of the Governor General, Lady Norrie, was seated, a poor choice of opening cartoon, and the 'gold curtains' refusing to part for the film's start are all recounted humorously by Michael Moodabe, in *Peanuts and Pictures: The Life and Times of M.J. Moodabe*, Auckland, N.Z.: Michael Moodabe, 2000, p. 32-34.

Amalgamated's Octagon Theatre, in Dunedin, screening for 68 sessions between February 12 and March 18, 1954.³⁴²

Another notable big budget, big production epic to do particularly well in the 1950s was *The Ten Commandments* (1956). It achieved the second highest attendance record for the decade at Wellington's Embassy where it screened 136 times between April 2 and June 17, 1959.³⁴³ It was also a hit in the United States, where it was the number one film in 1957, and in the United Kingdom it was in the top ten films of 1958.³⁴⁴ The British Film Institute ranked *The Ten Commandments* twenty-first in their list of the 100 most popular films of all time in Britain.³⁴⁵ The film was a favourite of five respondents who went to the movies most frequently in this decade, and a favourite of 13 respondents overall. The genre was consistently placed in the middle rankings, with females showing a slight preference over men, placing it as their fifth most popular individual genre, compared with men ranking it seventh.

The Exploitation Film: *The Secrets of Life*

The discovery that *The Secrets of Life* screened in New Zealand theatres, and the huge attendances it attracted in 1950, making it the most popular film for Kerridge-Odeon of that year, is significant to New Zealand's cinema-going history, given the film's genre. *The Secrets of Life* was a 'sex-hygiene' film and one of the sex-education films that were part of a wider genre of exploitation films. Because their subject matter was prohibited by censorship, they existed 'in the shadow of Hollywood' and consisted of 'nudists, high-flying hop heads, brazen strippers, vicious vice lords, and high school girls who found themselves "in trouble"'.³⁴⁶ The film first screened in the United States as *Mom and Dad* (1945), taking in US\$8 million from 20 million moviegoers by 1949, and grossing over US\$80 million worldwide by the end of 1956, making it the most successful of the sex-hygiene films.³⁴⁷ The change in the film's title was a standard exploitation practice, as these films were often renamed more than once over a period of years and in different regions.³⁴⁸ Australians saw the film under the title *The Secrets of Life*, while it was renamed *The Family Story* in Britain.

³⁴² Exhibitors' Record Book, Octagon Theatre, Dunedin, File A6-225-A1, Hocken Archives and Manuscripts Collections. The most screened film was *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* with 71 sessions in April/May 1959.

³⁴³ The highest attendance record was achieved by the adventure story, *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956), with 170 screenings between June 25 and October 1 in 1958.

³⁴⁴ Neither Reid nor Elley have given it a specific ranking within their top ten lists of 1958.

³⁴⁵ Ryan Gilbey (ed.), *The Ultimate Film: The UK's 100 Most Popular Films*, London: British Film Institute, 2005, pp. 329-30.

³⁴⁶ Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 2.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

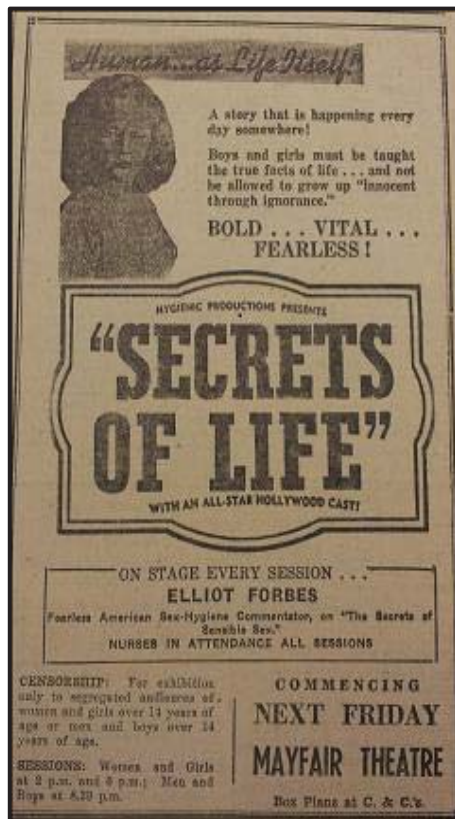


Figure 1.1: Advertisement in *Manawatu Times*, July 19, 1950, p. 9.

The screening of *The Secrets of Life* saw unprecedented audience interest in New Zealand. Its net takings of £39,789 were significantly higher than the next most popular Kerridge-Odeon-screened film for the same year, the 1948 British drama *No Room at the Inn*, which netted £23,460. Even the top hit of 1951, the phenomenally popular 1950 musical *Annie Get Your Gun*, could not match its audience levels, netting £37,736.³⁴⁹ The net takings for *The Secrets of Life* are even more significant given the film was restricted to screening at one venue at a time, with the larger centres holding screenings for a number of weeks, and exhibition in the provincial cities and towns generally lasting a week. Overall, the film ran for seven months, from May 4 through until December 14, 1950, and covered 29 centres throughout New Zealand.

The film was accompanied by 'Elliot Forbes', the 'Famous American Commentator', lecturing on 'The Secrets of Sensible Sex' and the 'true facts of life...that every boy and girl must know', as illustrated in a large advertisement for the film in Figure 1.1. Forbes had been a part of the touring exhibition of *Mom and Dad* in the United States, but the 'sex expert' was in fact a persona utilised as part of the show. Elliot Forbes was a fictitious name given to the accompanying lecturer, whose role was to initiate discussion and answer questions during the film's interval. Given the multiple screenings of the film in the United States, there were up to 25 'Elliot Forbes' on different stages at any one time.³⁵⁰ Accompanying the film in New Zealand were two 'Elliot Forbes', with the second being used to rest the first, rather than to facilitate simultaneous screenings.³⁵¹ Along with the commentator, a further point of difference were the nurses on duty at every screening, their purpose being to assist those audience members whose sensitivities were overwhelmed by the graphic depictions on the screen. Wellington theatre manager, Andy Jamieson, met his future wife at a screening, in

³⁴⁹ Takings Summaries, Box 253, 2/49-3/53, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁵⁰ Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, p. 128.

³⁵¹ David Lascelles, interview June 17, 2015.

her role as a nurse employed to assist in case anyone fainted during the film.³⁵² In the United States these 'nurses' were often ordinary women dressed as nurses, with their primary duty being to 'run the aisles' and assist in the selling of booklets that accompanied screenings.³⁵³

Further evidence of the graphic and 'sensitive' content of the film is seen in the 'Special Censorship' decree to hold separate sessions for male and female audiences, a practice almost unheard of in New Zealand. While one American reviewer called the film a 'rather innocent morality play',³⁵⁴ a contemporary *Times* reviewer said the film 'blends scenes of childbirth, a Caesarean operation and the ravages of venereal disease into a tear-squeezing fable about a high-school girl who "got into trouble" because her parents kept her in ignorance'.³⁵⁵ Given that the blending of educational, documentary-style footage into a standard feature film was usual practice for exploitation films, it would appear that the film was somewhat more than a 'rather innocent morality play'. Gordon Mirams claimed that society's taboo on 'sex matters', combined with its tolerance of violence in movies, resulted in the 'stark act of ending life being treated as infinitely more suitable for public consideration than any reference to the act of beginning it'.³⁵⁶ New Zealanders' overwhelming interest in *The Secrets of Life* indicated that audiences were in fact more than ready to embrace the 'taboo' subject of sex, with the packed sessions indicating parents took the opportunity to provide their teenagers with 'the facts of life' in a safe, if somewhat public and crowded, environment. It could also have been that the hype advertising the sexually provocative nature of the film, 'had the effect of drawing people [...] into the cinemas to see how shocking the pictures really were'.³⁵⁷

Two sessions were provided for women and girls every day, while only one, the later 8:30pm screening, was reserved for men and boys. This bias clearly indicated that matters of 'sex hygiene', pregnancy (and/or its prevention) and childbirth were seen as 'women's work' and part of their domestic responsibilities. The combination of the subject matter, the segregation of the audience, the commentator, and the attendance of nurses were, in essence, 'special effects' that provided theatre managers with a greater opportunity to flaunt the 'showmanship' aspect of the evening's 'entertainment' than was usual. Indeed, the term

³⁵² Fred Jones' 'Capital Diary', *The Dominion Post*, February 1967, no date and page number, MA 2771, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives.

³⁵³ Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, p. 129.

³⁵⁴ Hans J. Wollstein, <http://www.nytimes.com/movies/movie/33064/Mom-and-Dad/overview> retrieved July 7, 2015.

³⁵⁵ 'Something for the Soul', *Times*, 18 April, 53:16, 1949, p. 102.

³⁵⁶ Gordon Mirams, 'Drop That Gun!', *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television*, 6:1, Autumn, 1951, pp. 1-19, pp. 9-10.

³⁵⁷ Gordon Gow, *Hollywood in the Fifties*, New York: A.S. Barnes, 1971, p. 10.

'exploitation film' reflects the use of a variety of promotional techniques to attract audiences to a film that had neither identifiable stars nor a recognised conventional genre. As Eric Schaefer commented, 'A kind of carnivalesque ballyhoo became integral to their success'.³⁵⁸

A photo of the crowds outside the Wellington Embassy at a screening of the film appeared in the *Evening Post*, captioned by a letter to the editor from 'E.H., of Lyall Bay'.

Dear Sir, May I as the father of two boys and a girl offer my congratulations to yourself and your organisation for putting on a show that could only be of untold benefit to both sexes, regardless of age. It is a great pity that our mode of living does not allow for the production and showing of more films of a similar nature. All of my family have seen and thought 'Secrets of Life' a picture which should be seen by all.³⁵⁹

Although the words 'Original of the letter can be inspected at the Embassy Theatre' appeared beneath the photo, it is possible that this 'letter' was in fact another marketing strategy. Testimonials from physicians, health officials, clergy, educators, and parents were a standard part of publicity campaigns, but only some of these references were real.³⁶⁰ The *Evening Post* added, 'One of Hundreds of Letters Received Commending this Vital Motion Picture'. Exhibition of *The Secrets of Life* in New Zealand finished, rather neatly, ten days before Christmas, leaving cinema-goers with the festive season and summer holiday period free for more 'holiday appropriate' fare, such as *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950).

Royal Documentaries

The intense interest New Zealanders showed in the activities of the Royal family, particularly the future Queen, ensured that the exhibition of films about them had particularly large audiences. The film of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, *A Queen is Crowned*, was seen by audiences totalling 668,387 in New Zealand, making it the stand-out film for that year, with audiences significantly greater than the second-placed 1952 British war drama *The Cruel Sea*, which attracted 350,924 viewers.³⁶¹ Correspondence from Robert Kerridge to his theatre managers in October 1952, emphasised the planning undertaken by the Rank organisation to ensure their distributors received copies of the film as quickly as possible after the actual event, in the highest quality colour available at the time, and that they

³⁵⁸ Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, p. 3.

³⁵⁹ *Evening Post*, May 9, 1950, p. 3.

³⁶⁰ Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, p. 116.

³⁶¹ Kerridge-Odeon replaced its recordings of Net Takings with Attendance Schedules (number of seats sold) from the beginning of the new financial year, April 1953.

received as many copies as were required to satisfy their audiences. Kerridge included the 'cable' from Rank in his regular Memo to his theatre managers.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS ARE BEING MADE TO RELEASE THE CORONATION FILM THROUGHOUT THE WORLD IN A MATTER OF DAYS AFTER THE EVENT STOP FOR THIS PURPOSE HUNDREDS OF PRINTS WILL BE REQUIRED INVOLVING AN IMMENSE PRODUCTION PLAN IN THE TECHNICOLOR PLANT AND MOST CAREFUL ORGANISATION BY OUR OWN OFFICES AT HOME AND OVERSEAS STOP TO MEET THE WORLDWIDE INTEREST IN THIS FILM THE MOST RAPID DISTRIBUTION ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE REQUIRED [...] I BELIEVE THIS WILL BE A UNIQUE FILM RECORD OF A MOST MEMORABLE EVENT IN OUR COUNTRIES [sic] HISTORY.³⁶²

Kerridge added his own enthusiastic overtures to ensure his exhibitors were fully cognisant of the box-office opportunities:

Every newspaper in the country will want this story. We know what THE ROYAL TOUR OF CANADA did for us at the box office; but I doubt if any of us can imagine what this news will mean in terms of box office revenue. The film is surely destined to give us a box office "peak" at a level beyond our wildest imagination.³⁶³

A Queen is Crowned first screened in New Zealand in the second week of June, simultaneously showing at four Auckland Theatres, the Majestic (13,366 tickets sold for the week), the Regent (22,050), St. James (21,515), and the State (3,701, shared with *Ivanhoe* (1952), which also screened for part of that week). In the same week it drew crowds in Christchurch at the Regent (20,806), the Tivoli (12,968) and the Plaza (5,903). The Majestic in Wellington achieved the biggest single theatre weekly attendance figure with 22,266 patrons, while the Embassy attracted 16,233 and the Paramount 2,763, in the same week.³⁶⁴ The particularly strong attendance in Wellington was no doubt aided by Kerridge's arrangement with the Education Department, which made it compulsory for all school children in Wellington to see the film. School teachers received free admission, while the cost per child was a shilling.³⁶⁵ *A Queen is Crowned* therefore attracted an audience of around 140,000 in a single week, a stunning achievement given that most films did not achieve those figures after many months of exhibition. The second week of screening saw exhibition extended to a further ten theatres.³⁶⁶

³⁶² 'Cable just received from London', included in letter from R.J. Kerridge to Theatre Managers, October 22, 1952, Box 216, File 618, Circulars 12/48-11/52, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁶³ Letter from R.J. Kerridge to Theatre Managers, October 22, 1952, Box 216, File 618, Circulars 12/48-11/52, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁶⁴ Attendance Schedules, 4/53-3/54, Box 253, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁶⁵ David Lascelles, interview June 17, 2015.

³⁶⁶ 3 theatres in both Dunedin and Hamilton, 2 in Invercargill (achieved a combined audience of 27,061 in 1 week which is significant given Invercargill's population at the time was 27,200), and 2 theatres in Palmerston North. *New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association (Inc.), Exhibitors' Diary 1953*, Box 329, p. 9, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

While not providing quite the same exceptional interest as a one-off coronation event, coverage of royal tours were also of significant interest to New Zealanders. The top screening film for the Kerridge-Odeon circuit in 1952, with net takings of £34,016 for the year, was *The Royal Journey*, which captured the 1951 tour of Canada by Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip. Over the summer of 1953-1954,³⁶⁷ *The Royal New Zealand Journey*, also known as *A Queen's Royal Tour* (1954), was the most popular film, attracting audiences of 310,348. Given the film began its exhibition in the second week of February (final production and distribution could only happen once the tour finished on 30 January), its total audience numbers were achieved over only seven weeks of the four-month summer period. Filming of the Royal family's activities were not limited to special events, as newsreels covered all functions attended by members of the Royal Family. Such was their popularity that Mirams claimed they 'appear[ed] more often in newsreels than all other celebrities combined'.³⁶⁸

The Appeal of the Local: *Broken Barrier*, Australian Films, and Sporting Events

Another significant feature of this era was the interest New Zealand cinema-goers had for films that were close to home. New Zealand-made feature films were rare during this period, so the arrival of *Broken Barrier* (1952) was a noteworthy event. The film opened in Gisborne and Wellington in the second week of July, 1952, and a memo from the Kerridge-Odeon Assistant Director of Publicity, Alan Cooper, to Theatre Managers on August 25, outlined the film's popularity.

A worthy successor to the record breaking "Royal Journey" is New Zealand's own film "Broken Barrier" which has started off in a terrific way, smashing box office records wherever it has been shown. Performance figures are Wellington: it ran for three excellent weeks, Gisborne: it broke the theatre record, Rotorua: gave the best season to date, Wairoa: it grossed 264% of the average and Auckland: it grossed 157% of the average in the first week. Yes "Broken Barrier" is a surefire money spinner.³⁶⁹

The film's advertising emphasised its local nature; 'The Film That Belongs to You, About You, About Your Country...New Zealand's Own Film...You will recognise *Broken Barrier* for it belongs to you' was a typical advertising campaign.³⁷⁰ Its local setting gave it considerable novelty value, surrounded as it was by the 349 American and 72 British feature films that

³⁶⁷ From December 1, 1953 until March 30, 1954.

³⁶⁸ Gordon Mirams, 'What's in a Newsreel', *New Zealand Listener*, August 11, 1950, p. 9.

³⁶⁹ Letter from Alan A. Cooper, Assistant Director of Publicity, to Theatre Managers, August 25, 1952, Box 216, File 618, Circulars 12/48-11/52, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁷⁰ Advertising Campaign – *Broken Barrier*, from Assistant Director of Publicity, Mr. Alan A. Cooper, to Theatre Managers, August 25, 1952, Box 216, File 618, Circulars 12/48-11/52, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

came into New Zealand in 1952.³⁷¹ This also entailed some risk³⁷² and Amalgamated had turned down the opportunity to exhibit it, a significant factor considering they were generally known to ‘screen everything’. Instead, Kerridge-Odeon bought two prints of the film, one to circulate around the North Island and one for the South Island, but it did well enough for a third copy to be purchased.³⁷³

While the film certainly had a distinctive New Zealand theme and flavour, Barbara Brookes commented that its origins stemmed from the ‘genre of “social problem” film-making dominating Hollywood in the late 1940s’.³⁷⁴ Three American films ‘combating anti-Negro prejudice’, *Pinky*, *Lost Boundaries*, and *Home of the Brave*, all released in America in 1949, had screened in New Zealand in 1950 and had been ‘favourably received’.³⁷⁵

The travelogue *New Zealand in Colour* (1952), made by the National Film Unit to attract tourists, was such a success at its screening in Wellington that Robert Kerridge signed the film for exhibition at all his theatres. With ‘ticket registers ringing to such a record-breaking tune’ the film was said to be rivalling the



Figure 1.2: The programme of short travelogues combined to make *New Zealand in Colour*.

³⁷¹ AJHR, H 22, p. 20.

³⁷² Part of the film’s ‘risk’ element was its theme of miscegenation, according to director, John O’Shea, who said that some people considered it a ‘dirty movie’. John O’Shea, *Don’t Let it Get You: Memories-Documents*, Wellington, N.Z.: Victoria University Press, 1999, p. 42.

³⁷³ David Lascelles, interview May 19, 2014.

³⁷⁴ Barbara Brookes, ‘Which Barrier Was Broken?: *Broken Barrier* and New Zealand Cinema in the 1950s’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 44:2, 2010, pp. 121-137, p. 121.

³⁷⁵ John O’Shea in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Wellington Film Society Inc., December 1, 1949, p. 1, cited in Brookes, p. 123. *Pinky* screened at Amalgamated’s Octagon in Dunedin from June 9-22, 1950, for 36 screenings, 1 of only 6 films shown by the Octagon that year for more than its standard 18 sessions. Amalgamated Theatre Exhibitors’ Record Book, Octagon Theatre, Dunedin, File A6-225-A1, Hocken Collections Archives and Manuscripts.

circuit's top film of 1952, the Canadian Royal tour. Its success caught the New Zealand cinema industry by surprise:

“New Zealand in Color” [sic] is just one of those things that happen in this business to contradict all precedent. [...] Here is a series of short films, grouped together to make a complete evening's entertainment, and proving a boxoffice [sic] magnet defying all established rules of show business.³⁷⁶

The film was distributed to Great Britain, Canada, the United States, India, Japan, Argentina, France, South Africa, Belgium, Holland, Malaya, and Australia, to be screened at clubs, societies, and schools, and on US television.³⁷⁷ Its success locally, however, illustrated the considerable interest New Zealanders had in furthering their own knowledge of their country, and in seeing its beauty on the big screen.

Audiences were also drawn to feature films linked with Australia. One of the most popular films of 1950 was the Australian *Sons of Mathew* (1950), known in Britain and the United States as *The Rugged O'Riordans*, chronicling the lives of five pioneering brothers in the Australian bush. Another film to do especially well later in the decade was the adaptation of Neville Shute's popular novel, *A Town Like Alice* (1956). Being a British-made film, featuring a town in Australia (Alice referred to Alice Springs) and set against the backdrop of World War Two, this film covered a number of the features favoured by New Zealand audiences.

Sporting events such as rugby tests and one-off sporting fixtures like the 1950 British Empire Games were shown at cinemas in the pre-television era and were well patronised. Coverage of the Games, hosted by New Zealand at Eden Park between 4 and 11 February, was screened in cinemas from the first week of March through until June, and was the eleventh most popular film on the Kerridge-Odeon circuit in 1950.³⁷⁸ A film recording the 1953-4 All Black tour of Britain, Ireland, France and North America, *The All Blacks on Tour*, was screened throughout New Zealand in 1954 to enthusiastic audiences. At the Embassy Theatre in Wellington, where films were usually given a season of 11 or 13 screenings in a week, *The Tour* was shown 31 times from April 1-7. For 11 of those sessions, it shared the billing with the 1951 British mystery *Cloudburst*, as a double feature.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ Percy L. Curtis, 'NZ travel pic hits boxoffice [sic] jackpot', *The Film Weekly*, September 11, 1952, no page number recorded, 'NZ in Colour Ephemera', MS MZ2013, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives.

³⁷⁷ *The Evening Post*, August 13, 1952, no page number, MS MZ2013, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives.

³⁷⁸ Attendance schedules, Box 253, 2/49-3/53, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁷⁹ Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

One of my survey respondents clearly remembered sporting features screening at her local theatre, in the rugby-enthusiast town of Eltham.

Rugby tests were looked forward to, usually weeks after the overseas tour matches took place. The full match would be shown. The local Rugby Club would post the information ahead, and most of the town's rugby club supporters would turn up. Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games footage would become a major film feature occupying the whole programme.

Also remembered were the 'shorts' shown at the beginning of the regular features, which 'would give a regular round-up of sport pieces' along with 'footage of tragedies and wars, items of Royal occasions, military ceremonies, and overseas disasters'.³⁸⁰ This and other survey respondents' recollections indicate that the 'shorts' operated very much as television does today, albeit with the former showing news that was no longer 'new' by the time it was screened. Nonetheless, the newsreels provided important visual aids to the information that had come before, via radio and newspapers.

Drama

Drama films ranked as the favourite 'first-choice' genre for those who responded to my survey and went to the movies most frequently in the 1950s, with 34 ranking it their top (22 women and 12 men). When respondents' top six genres were collated, drama was the third favourite genre for females, and was fifth-equal with the musical for male respondents.

The second most popular Kerridge-Odeon film in 1950, behind *The Secrets of Life*, was *No Room at the Inn* (1949), a sobering British drama about the mental and physical abuse of evacuee children during World War Two. The film's subject matter is in glaring contrast to the light-hearted musicals and comedies of most films in Kerridge-Odeon's top ten for 1950, suggesting that the 'stark realism' that Mark Harris claimed audiences 'craved' after World War Two had some place in New Zealand audiences' preferences.³⁸¹

The uber-classic *Gone with the Wind* (1939) was regularly re-released and was always a popular drawcard in New Zealand in the 1950s. Its appeal was universal, with the British Film Institute declaring it Britain's most popular film ever,³⁸² David Pirie ranking it as the 'All-time

³⁸⁰ Shirley, born 1935.

³⁸¹ Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War*, New York: Penguin, 2014, p. 440.

³⁸² Ryan Gilbey (ed.), *The Ultimate Film: The UK's 100 Most Popular Films*, London: BFI, 2005.

Box Office Hit',³⁸³ and New Zealanders placing it at thirteenth in their top 100 films.³⁸⁴ Survey respondent Ann said of the film

I saw it twice, once as a teenager and then later as an adult and enjoyed it as much both times. I have also read the book so often my paperback fell apart and I had to buy a hard copy. It taught me so much about the Civil War and life at the time.³⁸⁵

The appeal of *Gone with the Wind* was not limited to female viewers, with a male respondent commenting

I liked the lead actors, it had so many cameos with great actors taking these parts. The direction was very accurate and generally on a grand scale. I have seen it five times. One viewing was to see the make-up on Vivien Leigh.³⁸⁶

One of the biggest hits of the early part of the decade was *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), which not only did extraordinary business in New Zealand, but was the box-office hit in both the United Kingdom and the United States for 1952. While it is hard to give *The Greatest Show on Earth* an exact ranking in Kerridge-Odeon's top ten for that year, given that Kerridge-Odeon changed its audience statistical gathering methodology in 1953 when the film was screened, its net take of £40,130 for the first three months of the year, and the 125,792 seats sold from April until December, clearly shows the film did very well in New Zealand.

Another drama popular in New Zealand, as well as in the United States and the United Kingdom, was *Giant* (1956), starring James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson. Dean had been propelled into stardom with the combination of his acting talent, the controversial subject matter of his second film *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), and his untimely death at the age of 24 in September 1955 from a car accident. The film was screened in New Zealand at Kerridge-Odeon theatres and advanced notification of its popularity in the United States was shared with their theatre managers.

"GIANT", Warner Bros' 3¹/₄ hour "block buster", has shattered many records in the United States and looks likely to be Warner's biggest grosser for many years. It headed the National box office survey in "Variety" five weeks in a row.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ David Pirie (ed.), *Anatomy of the Movies*, London: Windward, 1981, p. 205.

³⁸⁴ <http://www.flicks.co.nz/blog/news/100-greatest-movies-ever-nz/>, retrieved 11 August, 2015.

³⁸⁵ Anne, born in the 1940s.

³⁸⁶ Mike, born 1940.

³⁸⁷ Memo from Tony Alison, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, January 21, 1957, Box 19, File 69, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

The film's popularity in New Zealand resulted in a Memo from the Exhibition Manager, V.J. Clouston, to those theatre managers who had not yet screened it, asking that they add a matinee to their screening schedules.

To those who have yet to play the picture, we respectfully point out that in "GIANT", you have one of the record breakers of all time, and to enable your town to get full benefit of screenings, it is necessary to run daily Matinees. The film is a big one, but you can work in an afternoon session as well as the evening session. We have noticed in some situations that just normal sessions for the theatre have been held, but we do know, with the interest "GIANT" has caused, that your Patrons will go for daily Matinees.³⁸⁸

Preferential early bookings were used by Whangarei Plaza manager, John Hart, with great success for *Giant*, as 'within the first few days of the advertisement appearing in the paper, 164 letters had been received requesting over 400 seats'.³⁸⁹ The film was a favourite of eight survey respondents.

'Foreign' Films

The 1950s saw more 'foreign', neither American nor British, films become available for the general public and this was noted by many of my survey respondents. These films were already being shown in New Zealand by the growing number of film societies that had first emerged in the 1930s.³⁹⁰ Local film-maker, Bruce Morrison, recalled that 'foreign films, as they were called, only came out in one theatre, the State Theatre in Dunedin [...] You couldn't see them anywhere else',³⁹¹ and Simon Sigley noted the support the screening of foreign films received from Amalgamated Theatres.³⁹² Kerridge-Odeon exhibitors' records indicate that foreign films were also being screened in their theatres in the 1950s. The Department of Internal Affairs noted in 1955 that New Zealand cinema had taken on an 'international aspect' more pronounced than at any time since silent movies, when language was no barrier. Ninety-five feature films from countries other than the United

³⁸⁸ Memo from V.J. Clouston, Exhibition Manager, to Theatre Managers, March 26, 1958, Box 29, File 106, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁸⁹ Memo from V.J. Clouston, Exhibition Manager, to Theatre Managers, February 24, 1958, Box 29, File 106, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. At Nelson's Majestic Theatre where films usually screened for less than 5 days and a season of more than 10 screenings was most unusual, *Giant* screened 17 times from 22-28 November, 1957. At the Regent Theatre in Hastings, *Giant* saw the New Year in with 25 screenings from 31 Dec-9 Jan 1958, at a theatre where the usual season was for 6 or 7 screenings. Exhibitors' Record Books, David Lascelles collection.

³⁹⁰ The aim of film societies was to 'enable members to study the film as an art form, and [to] help by the screening of select programmes to cultivate film appreciation', with this being done by screening films 'not available to the general public'. 'Film Society', *The Civic Centre*, May 3, 1951, p. 11. Palmerston North, N.Z.: Simon Printing, 1951. Bagnall Collection, Massey University Library. For a detailed account of the development of film societies in New Zealand see Simon Sigley's 'Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929-1972', PhD Thesis, University of Auckland, 2003, and *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013.

³⁹¹ Bruce Morrison interviewed by Simon Sigley, June 1999, in Simon Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013, p. 182.

³⁹² Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture*, pp. 179- 186.

States or the United Kingdom came into New Zealand in 1954, compared with 60 in 1953 and 12 in 1950. While many of these films were intended for non-commercial audiences, an increasing number 'found their way into our ordinary commercial theatres'.³⁹³

The burgeoning interest in films from 'foreign' countries, and for subject matter other than the typical commercial feature film, resulted in Australasia's first International Documentary Film Festival being held as part of the Canterbury Centennial celebrations in October 1950. Seventy-five films screened from 16-28 October, at Amalgamated's Civic in Christchurch, with 20 countries invited to take part.³⁹⁴

Foreign films were not always well received. The manager of the State in Symonds Street, Auckland, explained to Robert Kerridge that audience numbers were down because foreign films were being screened.

The general policy which operates in this theatre does not lend itself to steady business [...]. For the twelve weeks ending June 23 1955, it will be noted that a continental policy has been operating whereas for the same period last year those films were not being shown. The continental films do not have a strong appeal for the average New Zealander and the majority of these shows are more or less deficient in real entertainment value [...]. Running mostly a continental policy these films are unsuitable for the children.³⁹⁵

The reply from Robert Kerridge was uncompromising.

It is realised that the policy of the State does tend to fluctuate in business; but the high calibre of Continental films booked to this theatre should ensure a progressively developing audience. We are fulfilling our responsibilities in bringing to the public the cinematic masterpieces of Continental Studios and with enthusiastic promotion the potential should definitely improve. The product scheduled for the future should give you excellent opportunity to enhance public appreciation of Continental material.³⁹⁶

A number of foreign films were mentioned by survey respondents as highlights for them. The French film *La Ronde* (1950) is one example and when it was paired with the French short film *The Red Balloon* (1958, *Le Ballon Rouge*) it did particularly well, with its re-run 'even

³⁹³ *AJHR*, 1955, H. 22, p. 20.

³⁹⁴ 'Festival of Films', *New Zealand Listener*, September 29, 1950 pp. 8-9. The idea for the festival came from the Festivals of Documentary films that had been held in Edinburgh during 1947, 1948 and 1949.

³⁹⁵ Letter from W. Grey, State Theatre Manager, Auckland, to R.J. Kerridge, August 13, 1955, Box 39, File 141, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁹⁶ Letter from R.J. Kerridge to W. Grey, State Theatre Manager, Auckland, August 16, 1955, Box 39, File 141, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

bigger and better business than in its first marvellous round'.³⁹⁷ *The Red Balloon* was so popular with audiences that its season included hourly screenings between 10am and 4pm at the Auckland Regent, Wellington Princess and the Plaza in Christchurch, doing 'magnificent business.'³⁹⁸

One survey respondent's perception of foreign films was that they 'were always subtitled and shown in small cinemas to small audiences [...] Foreign films were art films and often with radical ideas'.³⁹⁹ A female respondent who had spent the 1950s in both London, where there were lots of 'Art Cinemas', and Wellington, said 'Foreign films were important to me then, particularly French'. She particularly enjoyed *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945) and *Orphée* (1950).⁴⁰⁰ Mike enjoyed 'European movies' in Auckland and Wellington and he remembers *Boule de suif* (1945, French), *Rashômon* (1950, Japanese), *M. Hulot's Holiday* or *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953, French), and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959, French/Japanese) from the 1950s.⁴⁰¹ Bryon went to many of the theatres in Wellington and would 'sit through continental black and white films if I wanted to see what it was like to see films without stars that we knew. These films were spine tingling reality films that had an effect on you when it was over.' While Bryon does not give specific film titles, his description of 'continental reality films' will almost certainly be referring to the neo-realist films that emerged after World War Two. Arguably the most famous of these was *The Bicycle Thief* (original title *Ladri di Bicicletta*), the 1948 Italian film, which portrayed the hardship of post-war life in Italy, and which screened in New Zealand theatres in the 1950s.⁴⁰²

Survey respondent Robin Reynolds said that from age 25 he 'liked anything directed by Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, [and] Vittorio de Sica' and he 'enjoyed foreign films, especially French, Italian, and Scandinavian'. The specific titles he remembered enjoying from this decade were *La Strada* (1954, Italian), and *And God Created Woman* (1956, *Et Dieu...créa la femme*). Robin believed these films had not lost any of their allure or relevance today.

Early Federico Fellini colour films retain their extravagant flamboyance and lose nothing by today's standard. Many early black and white dramatic films stand up, maybe better against modern-day films. Early

³⁹⁷ Letter from Tony Alison, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, March 25, 1957, Box 19, File 69, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁹⁸ Letter from P.W. Maddock, Publicity Director, to Theatre Managers, December 23, 1957, Box 29, File 106, Circulars 12/57-7/58, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁹⁹ Female, born 1937.

⁴⁰⁰ Female, born 1928.

⁴⁰¹ Mike, born 1938.

⁴⁰² Bryon, born 1939.

French farce and some French dramatic films are as good to watch today as they were then.⁴⁰³

These examples clearly show there was a discerning audience for more than the mainstream Hollywood and British fare.

British or American?

The high number of American films watched in New Zealand and the impact of American culture on New Zealanders has been well documented,⁴⁰⁴ including Gordon Mirams comment that ‘most of the celluloid eggs that arrive in this country were laid in Hollywood [...] and Hollywood does not produce them to suit us’.⁴⁰⁵ The pre-imminence of American films throughout the 1950s is clear, particularly in the first half of the decade, as seen in Table 1.19. The decline in American films stems from the impact of television in the United States as studios’ product was fed to their local television market, reducing what was available for export. The increase in feature films from the United Kingdom is attributed to the ‘importation of a number of productions outside the two-year quota’. There was also an increase in the number of ‘shorts’ from the United Kingdom. China, followed by Russia, accounted for the highest number of films from ‘Other’ countries.⁴⁰⁶

Year	Total # Films	% from US	% from UK	% from Europe	% from ‘Other’
1950	409	78	18	3	1
1951	383	80	15	5	0
1952	420	76	16	5	3
1953	417	71	17	8	4
1954	404	69	16	10	5
1955	492	57	24	12	7
1956	497	56	19	16	9
1957	538	48	24	10	18
1958	604	57	18	7	21
1959	633	51	23	5	21

Table 1.19: Origin of 35mm feature films seen by the Censor, 1950s.⁴⁰⁷

An analysis of figures from exhibitors’ record books reinforces the predominance of American films in New Zealand theatres at this time. Records for the Kerridge-Odeon Regent in Hastings, from January 1952 through until December 1959, record 640 films screened over the eight-year period, with the number of American films outweighing the number of British

⁴⁰³ Robin Reynolds, born 1935.

⁴⁰⁴ Geoff Lealand, *A Foreign Egg in our Nest: American Popular Culture in New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: Victoria University, 1988; Knuckey, ‘A Global Province?’; Sigley, ‘Film Culture’; Roger Horrocks, ‘Hollywood’, in Malcolm McKinnon (ed.), *The American Connection: Essays from The Stout Centre Conference*, Wellington, N.Z.: Allen & Unwin, 1988, pp. 66-78.

⁴⁰⁵ Gordon Mirams, *Speaking Candidly: Films and People in New Zealand*, Hamilton: Paul’s Book Arcade, 1945, p. 14.

⁴⁰⁶ *AJHR*, 1955, H. 22, p. 20.

⁴⁰⁷ As submitted to the Film Censor, *AJHR*, 1955, H. 22, p. 25; 1957, H. 22, p. 27; 1958, H. 22, p. 21; 1959, H. 22, p. 34.

films by 60 to 40%. However, analysis of the screening exceptions, those films that were shown more often than others because of their greater popularity, has British films outnumbering American films by a significant 67 to 33%. This suggests a strong audience preference for movies that came from Britain rather than Hollywood, and that the alleged domination of American culture in New Zealand was being met with a strong degree of resistance by those frequenting the Regent Theatre in Hastings. To a lesser degree, but still following the same pattern, are statistics from the State in Petone, which screened 969 films between 1950 and 1959.⁴⁰⁸ Of those films 662, or 68%, were from America, with 306, or 32%, from Britain, as illustrated in Table 1.20. One New Zealand film was screened.⁴⁰⁹

Year	# US Films	# UK Films	% of US	% of UK
1950	69	29	70	30
1951	77	25	75	24
1952	75	33	69	31
1953	68	32	68	32
1954	44	16	73	27
1955	48	53	47	53
1956	64	27	70	30
1957	67	28	71	29
1958	84	21	80	20
1959	66	42	61	39

Table 1.20: State Theatre, Petone: Exhibition of US and UK films.

Of those 969 films, only 12 were exhibited more than 10 times, with five of those British productions, as seen in Table 1.21. That almost 50% were from the United Kingdom again illustrates the popularity of British film over American.

Title	Origin of Film	Screening Dates	Screenings #	Genre
<i>The Greatest Show on Earth</i>	US	13-19 Mar 1953	10	Family drama
<i>A Queen is Crowned</i>	UK	3-9 July 1953	15	Documentary
<i>Royal NZ Tour/Royal Symphony</i>	UK	5-11 Mar 1954	11	Documentary
<i>The Dam Busters</i>	UK	23-29 Dec 1955	11	War
<i>The Living Desert</i>	US	15-21 June 1956	12	Documentary
<i>Rock Around the Clock</i>	US	21-27 Dec 1956	11	Musical
<i>Geordie</i>	UK	28 Dec-3 Jan 1957	12	Comedy
<i>The Battle of the River Plate</i>	UK	17-23 May 1957	10	War
<i>Friendly Persuasion</i>	US	24-30 Jan 1958	10	Drama
<i>Witness for the Prosecution</i>	US	29 Aug-4 Sept 1958	10	Mystery
<i>Sayonara</i>	US	26-31 Sept 1958	10	Drama
<i>The Bridge on the River Kwai</i>	UK/US	23-29 Jan 1959	11	War

Table 1.21: State Theatre, Petone: Most screened films of 1950s.

⁴⁰⁸ Records from 25 June to 19 Nov 1954 are missing.

⁴⁰⁹ *Journey for Three*, a promotional documentary, screened as part of a double feature on February 27-28 and March 1, 1951. Further information can be found at: <http://www.nzonscreen.com/title/journey-for-three-1950> retrieved October 5, 2014. Records from Exhibitors' Record Books, Petone State Theatre, David Lascelles collection.

The popularity of British films was not so evident at all theatres. The Regent in Palmerston North screened 226 films between January 1, 1950 and August 10, 1953. Of those, 117 were American (78%), and 49 were from Britain (22%). Of the 14 films shown for an extended season, ten (71%) were American, with 4 (29%) from Britain, suggesting preference was more closely proportionate in this instance.⁴¹⁰

The percentage of American films shown at Amalgamated's Octagon in Dunedin is considerably higher than those shown at Kerridge-Odeon theatres, reflecting the latter's part ownership by British company, the Rank Organisation. The number of British films being screened at the Octagon, as seen in Table 1.22, indicate it was not even meeting the quota that stipulated that 20% of films screened had to be British quota films.⁴¹¹ Of the 19 films that received extra screenings between 1950 and 1955, only 1 was from Britain, and that was the 1954 Royal Tour of the Commonwealth, which screened 43 times during June and July of that year.⁴¹²

Year	# US Films	# UK Films	% US Films	% UK Films
1950	44	2	96	4
1951	43	1	98	2
1952	45	2	96	4
1953	37	2	95	5
1954	30	4	88	12
1955	35	3	95	5

Table 1.22: Octagon Theatre, Dunedin: Exhibition of US and UK films.

When asked whether they preferred British or American films, or whether it did not matter, 36% of questionnaire respondents who were going to the cinema most frequently in the 1950s said they preferred British films. Some patrons explained why they preferred these films, or gave specifics as to what genre of British films they particularly liked, with 'British romance', 'English drama', 'English war', 'Ealing Comedies' and 'those bawdy British comedies' all receiving special mentions. One woman said that British films had credibility, while American films were often 'over the top', and Pamela O'Neill, who did not mind whether movies were British or American, felt that British films were 'always more down to earth'. Geoff, who was born in the 1920s and was a regular attendee of the Rialto in Newmarket, Auckland during this period, commented that 'Films from other places than the U.S., including NZ, were making their mark'. His tastes in films changed during this period

⁴¹⁰ Exhibitors' Record Books, Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, Val Page collection.

⁴¹¹ The Cinematograph Films Act 1928.

⁴¹² Exhibitors' Record Books, Octagon Theatre, Dunedin, File AG-225-A1, 1950-1961, Hocken Archives and Manuscripts Collections.

as he came to realise that ‘Hollywood films were not the only source of good entertainment’. British and foreign films were ‘just as good if not better, with a different perspective’. Only a very small number of movie patrons preferred American films to British (four percent). Arthur, who was born in 1933 and frequented the Regent and Majestic in Gisborne at this time, did not mind whether the film he saw was British or American, but he felt compelled to comment

I must not leave without mentioning the incredible Walt Disney who probably did more to promote good over evil, laudable living values and sheer joy amongst child and adult alike over decades, that somewhere [in his questionnaire responses] his influence has not been properly acknowledged.

A female movie-goer said what she most enjoyed about going to the movies was ‘Escaping in my imagination to a more exciting life of America, music and romance’,⁴¹³ while another respondent, who had no preference as to the origin of the films she saw, said that she remembered the American movies in the earlier years, then ‘British films took over’. She said, ‘American films were mainly about the great ‘stars’. British films were more gritty – either very dramatic or very funny.’⁴¹⁴

While British films clearly had their fans, the majority of cinema-goers for this period (60%) did not care whether the film they were going to see originated from the United Kingdom or the United States. The experiences of many are neatly summarised by one respondent.

We went to the movies as kids on Saturday mornings or Saturday afternoons – this was a ritual, it was what we did. As teenagers it didn’t matter what was on, on Friday or Saturday night we went to the pictures. We tended to like the picture, or not – it didn’t matter, it was what we did.

Star Power

After genre, the second most important factor in choosing which film to see was who the ‘stars’ were. This was seen particularly in the western, where film titles could not always be recalled by respondents, but popular actors and characters of the genre, such as John Wayne, Roy Rogers and his horse Trigger, Gene Autry, and the Lone Ranger, could. Some respondents incorporated their favourite actor/actress into their answer about their favourite films, with responses like, ‘anything with Doris Day’ or ‘Deanna Durbin movies’. Often the reply was truncated to the name of the actor or actress alone, such as ‘Audrey

⁴¹³ Female, born 1942.

⁴¹⁴ Female, born 1937.

Hepburn'. A number of respondents listed their favourite 'stars' instead of their favourite films, with one commenting that 'the professionalism of the players was always uppermost, Bogart, Sinatra, Tracy, Grant and Garland, Day, Katherine Hepburn were often unforgettable'.⁴¹⁵ Dorothy said that their favourite movies were those 'with our favourite stars such as Humphrey Bogart, Betty Grable, Joan Crawford, Doris Day, Ingrid Bergman, Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier, Laurel and Hardy, John Wayne, Deanna Durbin, Betty Davis and so on'.⁴¹⁶ Another respondent apologised for not remembering the names of films, because he was more interested in the actors. Diana, who attended the King George or Prince Edward theatres in Lower Hutt, commented that in this era, 'Filmstars were looked up to and were mostly well-behaved – as far as the general public knew! Apart from the "bounders" and "scoundrels" who were probably stage managed anyway. Marilyn Monroe? Who really knows. I miss those films.'⁴¹⁷

It was not uncommon for male survey respondents to list only females as their favourite actors and for women to name only male actors, often including a comment indicating they were appraising more than their acting ability. Peter recalled some of what he found attractive about going to the movies in this period.

They were the days of great epics like "Ben Hur", musicals you could sing to (Rogers and Hammerstein, Kern etc.) and wonderful actors and actresses like June Allyson, Shirley Jones, Judy Garland, Doris Day and on and on. We boys were in love with all of them.⁴¹⁸

Dorothy said 'We had our favourite stars, especially male hunks. Anything with Gregory Peck, John Wayne, Dean Martin, Leslie Howard, Clark Gable, David Niven, I went by the actors I liked rather than what the film was'.⁴¹⁹ Arthur said he had his favourite actors and actresses and if they were in a film, he would go and see it. His favourites were 'John Wayne, Spencer Tracy, William Holden, Errol Flynn, so many more - and Audrey Hepburn, Cyd Charisse, Ingrid Bergman, Doris Day and so on'.⁴²⁰ Another respondent liked 'anything with Elvis Presley. He was quite attractive when young'.⁴²¹

The importance of the actors and actresses, the 'stars', to New Zealand movie-goers in selecting which film to see, corresponds with Leo Handel's American research in the 1940s

⁴¹⁵ Arthur, born in 1933.

⁴¹⁶ Dorothy, born 1930.

⁴¹⁷ Diana, born 1935.

⁴¹⁸ Peter, born 1934.

⁴¹⁹ Shirley, born 1935.

⁴²⁰ Arthur, born 1933.

⁴²¹ Dorothy, born 1930.

that found that movie goers were primarily interested with the cast and story.⁴²² Edward Buscombe's observation that 'stars and genre were [...] mutually reinforcing,'⁴²³ also supports this premise and can be seen in responses from questionnaire respondents who were unconsciously replying in this 'mutually reinforcing' manner by replying, 'I liked any Elvis Presley musical', or 'John Wayne westerns'.

Conclusion

Evidence from official statistics, qualitative and quantitative data from survey respondents, correspondence from senior management and exhibitors in New Zealand's largest cinema chain, and recollections from those who worked in the industry during this decade, all indicate that movie-going was a particularly popular pastime in New Zealand throughout the 1950s. Of those questionnaire respondents for whom the 1950s were their most frequent period of attendance, almost 60% were going at least once a week, with only six percent attending less than once a month. Attendance per person per year dropped slightly over the course of the decade, but the number of permanent theatres and licensed exhibitors scarcely changed.

The maxim that 'everybody' went to the movies appears to be well-founded, with evidence suggesting that audiences were made up of a broad cross-section of the population. Children went with friends, siblings, parents and members from their wider family; couples went while 'courting' and some continued to go when married; parents went together and as a family with their children; and young people went with their friends or their 'romantic partner'. While many went to the movies as part of a habit, irrespective of what was showing, when a film was specifically selected the key influencer in deciding what to see was the film's genre, with the actors and actresses, the 'stars', the second most significant factor.

While 'everybody' was going to the movies, this period did see the emergence of a 'youth' market, particularly from the middle of the decade with the arrival of rock'n'roll, which soon found its way on to film. The 'art cinema' and foreign film movements also developed with audiences showing an increased interest in films from countries other than the United States and the United Kingdom, and with these films screening in public theatres, as well as within

⁴²² Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience*, p. 75. Handel thought Selznick and Hitchcock were the only two directors movie-goers would be aware of.

⁴²³ Edward Buscombe, 'Walsh and Warner Brothers', in P. Hardy (ed.), *Raoul Walsh*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival and British Film Institute, 1974, pp. 50-61, p. 59, cited in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 328.

film societies and at newly evolving film festivals. Both of these developments were the beginnings of greater audience segmentation.

One of the greatest attractions in going to the movies, according to contemporary movie-goers, was the desire to 'escape into another world'. The glamour and gorgeousness of Hollywood film stars, both male and female, the opportunity to have 'a good laugh' or to get caught up in the escapism of a lavish musical were attractions enjoyed by movie-goers who wished to temporarily step out of their world and into another. Comedies and musicals were particularly popular with New Zealand audiences throughout the decade, emphasising the attraction of light, pleasurable, diverting entertainment. Audiences appeared to have a greater preference for musicals than either their American or British counterparts.

There was, however, also a strong interest in war films, particularly in the second half of the decade, when British war films were especially prolific. The popularity of these films suggests that movie-goers were prepared to engage with more serious subject matter, particularly given the passing of years since World War Two. The considerable popularity of the documentary-style *The Secrets of Life*, the screening of any Royal Family footage, sporting events, particularly All Black tests, and the newsreels that were shown before the main feature(s), all serve to illustrate that the attraction of going to the movies was not just about the need for escapism. The public relied on the cinema to keep them informed and to provide visual images to supplement the information they obtained from the radio and newspapers, as they sought to keep abreast of what was happening 'outside our own little world.'

The majority of films coming into New Zealand at this time were from the United States, and their 'apparent attractiveness', particularly to young people, resulted in some quarters labelling them as a 'seductive threat from abroad'.⁴²⁴ Despite this, only a small percent (4) of survey respondents who were going to the movies most frequently in the 1950s said they preferred American films, with 60% saying they had no preference for either British or American films. However, the high percentage of British films that were 'exceptionally' popular relative to the number of British films shown, the predominance of British rather than American war films reaching box-office highs here, and the intense interest in the

⁴²⁴ Roger Openshaw, "The Glare of Broadway": Some New Zealand Reactions to the Perceived Americanisation of Youth', *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 10:1, 1991, pp. 48-61, p. 48.

activities of the Royal Family, all illustrate that the attraction felt by New Zealanders for British culture was significant.

While movie-going was a frequent pastime for many and audience numbers were strong, there were some barriers that prevented attendance as often as some movie-goers would have liked, according to survey respondents. Foremost of these was the cost of a ticket, with prices rising somewhat more than the corresponding increase in wages. Lack of transport and/or distance from a movie theatre also created problems for some, and some of those who married and started a family during this period found it difficult to find the time, energy and money to attend the cinema. Parental control was a negative influence on movie attendance for some children and teenagers, while poor health, inclement weather and other leisure activities, although limited, also provided barriers to attendance for a small number of people.

Overall, however, the movie industry was in a sound position at the end of the decade. As many survey respondents said, going to the pictures 'was what we did'.

Chapter Two: The 1960s

The 1960s were significant in the history of movie-going in New Zealand due primarily to the arrival of television and its impact on movie attendance. This decade also saw early marriage and childbearing reach their peak, and with the age of marriage younger than it had ever been,¹ the new form of entertainment perfectly complemented this.

This section will examine the up-take of television and its impact on movie attendance, while also examining what films were popular with those who were still going to the movies, what was most enjoyed about a trip to the cinema, and what barriers to attendance existed.

How Popular Were the Movies in New Zealand in the 1960s?

New Zealanders were avid cinema-goers at the beginning of the decade as seen in Table 2.1. The decade started with 'considerable activity in the field of theatre licensing' recorded by the Department of Internal Affairs.² Ten new licences were issued in 1960, with all of them for the use of existing buildings as cinemas. Six new theatres were opened during the year, most of them either replacing existing theatres that had become rundown, or extending existing services where increased admissions had resulted in the need for an additional theatre in the locality. Two of the new licences were to serve areas that had not previously had a theatre.³

Year	Theatres #	Admissions (000)	Average Ticket Price (c)	Yearly admissions per head of mean population
1958-9	547	38,208	25.4	16.6
1960-1	545	40,632	26.6	17.0
1962-3	491	37,584	27.0	15.0
1964-5	397	26,026	31.4	10.0
1966-7	312	19,606	39.7	7.3
1968-9	227	14,308	46.2	5.2

Table 2.1: General cinema statistics, 1960-1969.⁴

Robert Kerridge was most enthusiastic about the new decade, as seen in his communication to his theatre managers in June 1960:

Is the Interest in the Cinema Waning?
I do wish you chaps could be in the office on Friday afternoons as there is a real air of expectancy round the place as the weekly figures from all of the theatres come to hand. The 1959/60 results were the highest in

¹ By 1961, half of all women were married by the time they were 22. *NZOYB*, 2000, p. 98.

² *AJHR*, 1960, H. 22, p. 45.

³ *AJHR*, 1960, H. 22, p. 44.

⁴ *NZOYB*, 1970, p. 367. Statistics run from 1 April – 31 March.

the Company's history and many of us considered, especially in the knowledge that TV was at hand, that this year might represent the peak year. For this reason it is thrilling to be able to tell you that the number of persons admitted to the Company's theatres for the three months from 1 April until 30 June [1960] is approximately one million in excess of the number admitted for the same period during the previous year. Outstanding films, good showmanship and sustained public interest in our Industry are the contributing factors to his result.⁵

In 1961 theatre-licensing continued 'at the same high level' as in 1960, with ten new licences granted and four new theatres opening.⁶ Alluding to the arrival of television, the Department of Internal Affairs noted there appeared to be no 'trend towards closure of theatres due to adverse trading conditions or to the effects of competition from other quarters'.⁷ A year later the Department reported that although there were 'reports of reduced attendances at some Auckland suburban theatres, it is still much to [sic] early to draw any definite conclusions' as to the impact of television.⁸ In that year, 1962, 21 new exhibitors' licences were granted, with two being for new theatres and 19 being for conversions of existing buildings into picture theatres.⁹

However, 1962 also saw 15 exhibitors' licences surrendered or cancelled, with most being for small-town or suburban theatres.¹⁰ This pattern continued, with 1963 seeing most of the 49 cancelled or surrendered exhibitors' licences being in 'small and comparatively isolated situations'. No new permanent licences were granted.¹¹ Theatres continued to close throughout the decade, despite the Government's decision, in 1964, to decentralise cinema admission prices and to abolish the amusement tax on seats up to 3s 6d, which, it was claimed, provided 'some relief'.¹² The number of small theatres, those able to seat fewer than 200, had decreased by a significant 82% by the end of the decade. Large theatres, those able to seat more than 1,000, which were generally located in larger towns and cities, had a higher rate of survival, although their numbers were also decreasing, as illustrated in Table 2.2. A study of Nottingham cinemas by Jancovich et al., also found that amongst the

⁵ Robert Kerridge, 'Contact', In-house communication to staff, July 1960, Issue 5, p. 3, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁶ *AJHR*, 1961, H. 22, p. 25.

⁷ *AJHR*, 1961, H. 22, p. 25.

⁸ *AJHR*, 1962, H. 22, p. 33.

⁹ *AJHR*, 1962, H. 22, p. 33.

¹⁰ *AJHR*, 1962, H. 22, p. 33.

¹¹ *AJHR*, 1963, H. 22, p. 50. 1 temporary exhibitors' licence was granted in Porirua.

¹² *AJHR*, 1964, H. 22, p. 42.

considerable decline of theatres in that city in the 1950s and 1960s, larger theatres did better than smaller theatres.¹³

Theatre seating capacity	1960-1	1962-3	1964-5	1966-7	1968-9	Change
Under 200	92	70	42	27	17	Decrease of 82%
200-499	206	170	144	103	67	Decrease of 67%
500-999	179	184	157	140	115	Decrease of 36%
1,000 and over	34	34	30	26	24	Decrease of 29%
Circuits	34	33	24	16	4	Decrease of 88%
TOTAL	545	491	397	312	227	

Table 2.2: Theatre seating capacity.¹⁴

Against the trend of closures, however, licences were granted in 1965 for two new theatres to be built.¹⁵ In 1966 Kerridge-Odeon opened the Westend as a first-release theatre in Auckland, next door to the St. James and the Odeon, and a new cinema opened in Rotorua, with both ‘constructed on modern lines with all modern amenities’.¹⁶ In 1968 it was noted that ‘from time to time screenings are revived in localities where they had been discontinued’,¹⁷ and a licence was granted for the building of a new cinema at Manurewa in 1969.¹⁸

These were anomalies, however, and by 1969 the number of movie theatres operating in New Zealand had decreased dramatically. Whereas the reduction in the number of theatres in the 1950s was seen primarily amongst itinerant exhibitors, this decrease was across all categories, as shown in Table 2.3. New Zealand’s 58% decrease in the number of theatres across the decade is considerably more than the corresponding 22% decrease in the United States,¹⁹ and higher than the 48% in the United Kingdom.²⁰

Theatre Screenings	1960-1	1962-3	1964-5	1966-7	1968-9
Screening 6 days per week	217	204	176	163	130
Screening odd days per week	294	254	197	133	93
Circuit – itinerant exhibitors	34	33	24	16	4
TOTAL	545	491	397	312	227

Table 2.3: Theatre days of operation.²¹

¹³ Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, London: British Film Institute, 2003, p. 132.

¹⁴ NZOYB, 1966, p. 370; 1971, p. 367.

¹⁵ AJHR, 1965, H. 22, p. 44. In Queen Street, Auckland and Milford, on Auckland’s North Shore.

¹⁶ AJHR, 1967, H. 22, p. 46.

¹⁷ AJHR, 1968, H. 22, p. 45. The Westend was next door to the St. James and Odeon theatres.

¹⁸ AJHR, 1969, H. 22, p. 50.

¹⁹ Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, London: Wallflower Press, 2003, p. 378. This figure excludes drive-in theatres.

²⁰ Linda Wood, ‘The British Film Industry’, Information Guide No. 1, London: BFI, 1980, p. 2, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-british-film-industry-1980-10.pdf>, retrieved October 38, 2015.

²¹ NZOYB, 1966, p. 370; 1971, p. 367.

In line with the reduction in theatres, exhibitors' licences also fell significantly, halving by the end of the decade, as shown in Table 2.4.

Year	Exhibitors	Itinerants	Notes
1960	581	10	
1961	565	10	
1962	582	9	
1963	558		Incl. 1 temporary and 6 itinerant
1964	512	Not recorded	
1965	479	Not recorded	
1966	402	Not recorded	
1967	348	Not recorded	
1968	324	Not recorded	
1969	285	Not recorded	

Table 2.4: Number of licences granted.²²

Despite the significant downturn in movie-going indicated by these statistics, New Zealand's ranking as a movie-going country decreased only slightly throughout the decade, as seen in Table 2.5. Its sixth-place ranking in 1967, out of the 18 countries reported on by the United Nations, indicated that while New Zealanders were going to the movies less often, they were still going at a greater rate than many of their counterparts in other developed countries. However, the decline in attendance was most dramatic in New Zealand, going from double the attendance of the United Kingdom in 1960 to only marginally higher by the end of the decade, and from 44% higher than the United States to almost the same rate.

	New Zealand ²³	United Kingdom	United States	NZ ranking
1960-1	17	8.7	11.8	4 th ²⁴
1962-3	15	7.4	11.5	
1964-5	10	6.3		
1965		6	11.6	5 th ²⁵
1966-7	7.3	5	7	6 th ²⁶
1968		4		
1968-9 ²⁷	5.2			

Table 2.5: Admissions per head of population.

The decline in audience numbers is reflected in the replies of those 230 survey respondents who indicated their most frequent period of movie-attendance was in some, or all, of the years of the 1960s. The most significant change of pattern in attendance between the 1950s

²² 1960 and 1961 from *AJHR*, 1961, H. 22, p. 28; 1962 and 1963 from *AJHR* 1963 H. 22, p. 50; 1964 and 1965 from *AJHR* 1965 H. 22, p. 44; 1966 and 1967 from *AJHR* 1967, H. 22, p. 41; 1968 and 1969 from *AJHR* 1969, H. 22, p. 50.

²³ The New Zealand year is 1 April until 31 March.

²⁴ Behind Australia 21 (1960); Israel 18.5 (1961-2) and Russia 17.7 (1961), *NZOYB*, 1965, p. 383. Figures from *United Nations Statistical Yearbook*.

²⁵ Behind Israel 22 (1965-6); Russia 18.6; Spain 13.8; USA 11.6, *NZOYB*, 1968, p. 384. Figures from *United Nations Statistical Yearbook*.

²⁶ Behind Israel 22 (1966); Russia 19 (1967); Spain 12 (1967); Italy 11 (1967), *NZOYB*, 1970, p. 371. Figures from *United Nations Statistical Yearbook*.

²⁷ Statistics for the latter years of the decade are unavailable for countries other than New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

and the 1960s is the decrease in the number of people attending the movies once a week, as shown in Table 2.6. This decrease is met with a corresponding increase in the number of those who attended less than once a month. The pattern of attendance according to gender is similar to that of the previous decade, with male and female attendance in the ‘once a week’, ‘twice a month’ and ‘once a month’ categories much the same. Males still went ‘two or three times a week’ at almost double the rate of females, although the gap between those who went less than once a month lessened, with females double the rate of males in this category, compared with three times more than males in the 1950s. By the end of the decade, New Zealanders were going to the movies 5.2 times per head of population, down from 17 at the beginning of the decade, a decrease of almost 70%.

Frequency of Cinema Attendance	Those going most often in 1960s %	Those going most often in 1950s %
Two or three times a week	8	9.5
Once a week	37	47
Twice a month	23	23
Once a month	14	12
Less than once a month	17	6
Other	1	2.5

Table 2.6: Survey respondents’ frequency of attendance.

Television

In Britain, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had led the way with the world’s first public service in 1936 and the United States followed three years later.²⁸ Australia had its first stations operating by 1956.²⁹ By comparison, New Zealand, despite its reputation as an ‘early and rapid adopter of communication technologies’ was an ‘international laggard with respect to television.’³⁰ Its late implementation was not due, however, to a disinterest in the new medium, but to concerns about its implementation.

The Minister of Broadcasting, Ronald Algie, reported in 1955 that the slow progress was deliberate as the Government ‘was far from satisfied that it would be wise to enter into any firm commitment ... [given] there were many problems still to be clarified and the high cost of establishing and operating a television system would inevitably divert funds from more

²⁸ <http://tvnz.co.nz/content/823802> retrieved September 17, 2013. Chapman claims it was not until ‘the early 1950s that television had established itself as a mass medium to rival the cinema’. James Chapman, *Cinemas of the World: Film and Society from 1895 to the Present*, London: Reaktion Books, 2003, p. 125. In 1953, Roger Manvell stated that tv was operating in 10 countries, with ‘preparations for its initiation are being made in about ten others’. Roger Manvell, ‘A Head Start in Television’, *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, 7:3, Spring, 1953, pp. 246-252, p. 248.

²⁹ Mike Walsh, ‘Calamity Howling’: The Advent of Television and Australian Cinema Exhibition’, in *Watching Films: New Perspectives on Movie-going, Exhibition and Reception*, Karina Aveyard and Albert Moran (eds.), Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013, pp. 121-139, p. 124.

³⁰ Patrick Day, *Vision and Voice: A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand*, Auckland N.Z.: Auckland University Press 1994, p. 12.

essential activities'.³¹ Algie had earlier stated that the Broadcasting Corporation was keeping a close eye on the implementation of television overseas, as New Zealand 'wanted to have the benefits of other countries. We are getting that benefit, and nothing that is taking place abroad is passing unnoticed by our engineers here in Wellington.'³² Uncertainties about television included the technological hurdles that had to be overcome, and strong lobbying from the movie-picture industry meant it was not until November 1959 that the Prime Minister, Walter Nash, gave the go-ahead for public television screening in New Zealand.

The Kerridge-Odeon Corporation had long been aware of the likely impact of television on the financial viability of their business. General Manager, Trevor Townsend, wrote in December 1959:

It would be to our advantage if television were introduced in a controlled fashion territorially [...] the gradual extension of its coverage spread over a period of years, would do something to cushion the otherwise severe economic effects on all sections of industry and to allow the adjustment of our way of life to this new and powerful medium'.³³

Also concerned about the wider economic implications of television's implementation was William (Bill) Sutch, who reported that in addition to the £4,482,651 revenue generated by cinema admissions in 1956-7, 'the other incidental expenses such as transport and refreshment would probably amount to a further two to three million pounds at least. When television becomes widespread, a large percentage of this expenditure will no longer be incurred.'³⁴

Television's ability to significantly alter not just recreational habits, but home life, was mentioned by other commentators. British film author, Roger Manvell, believed that going to the movies 'will become more and more of an occasional event in the pattern of social activity; it will occupy at most only a very few hours a week. But television will become (has already become for millions of people) a continuous domestic source of entertainment and information.'³⁵ As we saw earlier, responses from my survey participants indicate those going to the movies most often in the 1960s went less often on a weekly basis than did those who went to the movies most frequently in the 1950s, indicating that local movie-goers were

³¹ NZPD, August 5, 1955, p. 1526.

³² NZPD, July 27, 1955, p. 1214.

³³ Letter from T.S. Townsend to Sir Arthur Harper, December 23, 1959, Box 329, Introduction of TV 1957-1959, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁴ W.B. Sutch, *The Economics of Television in New Zealand*, Wellington: Department of Industries and Commerce, July 1959, p. 19. Address to the Economic Society of Australia and New Zealand, (Christchurch Branch, 28 July 1959).

³⁵ Roger Manvell, 'A Head Start in Television', *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, 7:3, Spring, 1953, pp. 246-252, p. 252.

following the same patterns their counterparts overseas had done with the arrival of television.

Auckland's Channel 2, which had initially begun as an experimental television station in 1959, started regular programme service on June 1, 1960, with one weekly two-hour transmission, on Wednesday night, from 7:30 till 9:30pm. It started with *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955 UK) in episode form. Of the seven items shown, three were serials, with television producing and programming following the long-popular format of children's cinema.³⁶ Seven-day-a-week screening began on January 1, 1961. Transmission to the rest of the country was piecemeal, with Christchurch's beginning on June 1, 1961. This was followed by Wellington on July 1, with Dunedin a full twelve months later on July 31, 1962. As at March 31, 1965, the four stations were broadcasting seven nights a week with a total of 50 hours.³⁷

As early as 1961, the Broadcasting Service declared that New Zealand had been 'brought still nearer to other countries' by television. It cited the Queen's Christmas message that was screened on television for the first time in New Zealand at 7pm on Christmas Day, and coverage of the Royal tour of India and Pakistan.³⁸ Roger Manvell had similarly cited screening of royal events as an example of a primary strength of television, its ability to produce 'a well-observed telecast of an exciting public event'.³⁹ That the Broadcasting Service noted the Queen's message and other royal activities ahead of other world events highlights the central place Britain continued to hold in this country's sense of its own identity at that time, and the considerable interest many New Zealanders had in the royal family.

'A spectacular growth in the number of television sets licensed' was noted in 1963⁴⁰ and the Broadcasting Corporation stated in its 1964 Annual Report that 'one of the most pressing factors in the expansion of television' was the 'obvious public desire to obtain service at the earliest possible date'.⁴¹ The attraction of watching television was attributed to the fact that

³⁶ *New Zealand Listener*, May 27, 1960, p. 33. The other serials were *The Halls of Ivy* (1954-5 UK/US) and *The Four Just Men* (1959 UK). Michael Paris mentions the economic attractiveness of serial production for television as actors, props, and sets could be used more than once. Michael Paris (ed.), *Repicturing the Second World War: Representations in Film and Television*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 7.

³⁷ *NZOYB*, 1965, p. 369.

³⁸ *AJHR*, 1961, F. 3, p. 3. Other news items that brought New Zealand 'nearer to other countries' were the broadcasting of the unrest in the Congo, the tension in South Korea, and the hijacking of the Portuguese cruise ship, the *Santa Maria*.

³⁹ Roger Manvell, 'The Place of the Film in the Age of Television', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 103:4941 (December 24) 1954, pp. 75-88, p. 81.

⁴⁰ *AJHR*, 1963, F 3, p. 16.

⁴¹ *AJHR*, 1964, F. 3, p. 4.

it was 'easier and a lot cheaper than going out and, for many, the brand new TV set in the lounge was a great indicator of prosperity and status'.⁴² The following table illustrates the rapid growth in television licence ownership as television reception was extended throughout the country. In 1967 the Broadcasting Corporation reported that the number of licences represented an 'approximate saturation of 71% of all New Zealand households'.⁴³

Year	Auckland TV 1 June 1960	Wellington TV 1 July 1961	Christchurch TV 1 June 1961	Dunedin TV 31 July 1962	Other Centres	Total
1960-1	4,808	4,808
1961-2	14,302	4,041	4,784	4	212	23,343
1962-3	40,921	15,048	15,374	3,649	6,847	81,839
1963-4	68,052	28,401	26,552	9,877	34,862	167,744
1964-5	100,078	43,149	42,460	19,194	109,039	313,920
1965-6	121,353	55,094	54,958	25,879	177,593	434,877
1966-7	139,293	62,838	64,933	35,258	221,566	529,888
1967-8	146,240	67,409	72,343	38,414	251,541	575,947
1968-9	152,599	71,217	75,983	40,292	267,724	607,815

Table 2.7: Television licences, 1960s.⁴⁴

The average yearly attendance per person at cinemas in the four main centres in the 1960s, along with the date of the arrival of television to that region, are shown in Table 2.8. The decline in audience numbers is apparent, with a continued decline as television transmission was extended throughout the country. As one commentator described it, the arrival of television brought with it the 'delicious dilemma' of whether to stay at home for one's entertainment, or whether to go out.⁴⁵ Attendances declined more rapidly than had been forecast by Bill Sutch in 1959, when he predicted that the economic effect of television 'is not likely to be immediate and probably would not be very marked until after television has been in full operation for three or four years'.⁴⁶

Year	Auckland TV 1 June 1960	Wellington TV 1 July 1961	Christchurch TV 1 June 1961	Dunedin TV 31 July 1962
	Av attend/person	Av attend/person	Av attend/person	Av attend/person
1958-9	21.3	21.7	16.7	16.2
1960-1	20.4	21.2	17.1	17.1
1962-3	15.4	17.8	13.9	15.2
1964-5	10.1	11.5	8.2	9.2
1966-7	8.5	8.6	8.0	7.5
1968-9	6.4	6.5	6.1	5.6

Table 2.8: Cinema attendance at four largest cities, 1958-1969.⁴⁷

⁴² Geoffrey B. Churchman, (editor-in-chief), *Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: IPL Books, 1997, p. 29.

⁴³ *AJHR*, 1967, F. 3, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *NZOYB*, 1970, p. 362.

⁴⁵ Francine Stock, *In Glorious Technicolor: A Century of Film and How It Has Shaped Us*, London: Chatto & Windus, 2011, p. 141.

⁴⁶ Sutch, *Economics of Television*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ *NZOYB*, 1960, p. 1162; 1961, p. 393; 1962, p. 393; 1963, p. 400; 1964, p. 391; 1965, p. 381; 1966, p. 372; 1969, p. 385; 1971, p. 369.

An analysis of the impact of television on movie-going in areas outside of the main centres also indicates a direct causal link between the arrival of television and the decline in going to the cinema. I will use coastal Taranaki as a case-study to illustrate the uptake of television in a rural area, geographically distant from both of the North Island’s two main transmitting centres in Auckland and Wellington, and topographically problematic, with interference in reception from Mount Taranaki and the Pouaki and Kaitaki Ranges.

Through the significant work undertaken by locals who formed the Okato Translator Society in western Taranaki, television was brought to the region in 1964. The Society canvassed local residents for life membership of £5.00 with an offer of a full refund if reception was not possible in their area. Two hundred people joined, easily raising the £300 required to install a translator to receive WNTV-1, between Tataraimaka, just north of Okato, and Warea in the south.⁴⁸ By November 1964 the translator, which ran on a car battery which required charging every third day, started transmission to Okato and the Coast, and the increase in the number of licences purchased in the 1964-5 year, as seen in Table 2.9, shows an immediate interest by locals in obtaining television. Roby Wallace, who ran the weekly film screenings at Okato’s Hempton Hall and the Pungerahu Hall, further down the coast, recalled that his planned screening of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) came into direct competition with this first wave of television transmission to the area. The average weekly attendance for the two years Wallace had the licence was 150, but he expected a crowd of 200 for the ever-popular *Gone with the Wind*. Unfortunately for his business, the Okato transmitter went live two days before his planned screening, and his hoped-for ‘crowd’ of 200 numbered only three, such was the interest in, and immediate impact of, television. Wallace said he continued showing films at Okato and Pungerahu for five or six weeks after the arrival of television, but he was forced to cease screenings, as the interest in films ‘went dead’.⁴⁹

Year	Av Yearly Attendance Per Person (Taranaki) ⁵⁰	Year (Calendar)	Number of Television Licences (NP) ⁵¹
1960-1	15.9	1962	
1962-3	16.1	1963	174
1964-5	12.1	1964	2,371
		1965	7,448
		1966	13,137
1966-7	6.9	1967	17,060
1968-9	4.7	1968	

Table 2.9: TV licences and movie attendance statistics for New Plymouth/Taranaki, 1960-1969.

⁴⁸ ‘Fifty Years Ago’, *Taranaki Daily News*, 13 September, 2014, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Roby Wallace, telephone conversation, June 20, 2016.

⁵⁰ NZOYB, 1962, p. 392; 1964, p. 390; 1967, p. 372; 1969, p. 384; 1971, p. 368.

⁵¹ *AJHR*, 1964, F. 3, p. 6; 1965, F. 3, p. 10; 1966, F. 3, p. 10; 1967, F.3, p. 10. Statistics not collected after 1967.

Improved picture and sound quality for all coastal viewers came in March 1966 when the Okato translator received signals from the newly commissioned Wharite translator in the Manawatū and power output increased to 1000Kw. The 76% increase in the number of television licences purchased between 1965 and 1966 again reflects the keen interest in accessing television, as its transmission coverage continued to extend, and its quality to improve. In August 1968, the NZBC's translator was commissioned at Pukeiti, at the foothills of Mount Taranaki, south of New Plymouth, and its transmission covered the entire coastal region of Taranaki. On August 28, 1968, at 10am, the Okato translator closed transmission, after providing the coastal area of Taranaki with television four years before the NZBC was able to do so.⁵² The considerable effort made by amateur engineers in installing transmission, and the rapid adoption of television, illustrate how keenly sought after television was, particularly in this relatively isolated part of the country.

Cinema-going was a habit for many prior to the arrival of television, with many survey respondents saying quite simply, 'it was what we did'. Television changed that, and as David Thomson said, reiterating Manvell's early comments, watching television became the habit, while choosing to go to the cinema became a specific activity.⁵³ As one survey respondent summarised, 'TV was for general viewing - cinema was a treat with the film specially selected'.⁵⁴

Kerridge-Odeon management were well aware that movie-goers were changing their habits due to television. Their in-house staff newsletter, *Contact*, stressed that every effort be made to promote films, as television would cause movie-goers to be more selective.

With the approach of TV we are entering a new era – our public will become more selective. We must become more qualitative in our selling – subject matter can no longer be presented with a headline, a wad of copy and a still. We must remember that one "angle" is no longer sufficient to excite the public, because there is no longer one audience. There are many audiences and along with the "common denominator sell" we should carefully cover all the facets of a picture.⁵⁵

A further example of Kerridge-Odeon management's concern regarding the arrival of television was seen in their immediate contacting their theatre managers in Wellington's

⁵² In December 1968 the Okato Translator Society wound up and the NZBC brought the translator with plans to use it in the back country of Nelson. 'Translator Society' ephemera, pp. 51-53. Author's own, courtesy of Ray Rook, Okato.

⁵³ David Thomson, *The Big Screen: The Story of the Movies*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012, p. 257.

⁵⁴ Anne Marie, born 1959.

⁵⁵ 'Contact', In-house communication to staff, July 1960, Issue 5, p. 19, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

neighbouring districts of Otaki, Palmerston North, Whanganui, Dannevirke, Pahiatua, Carterton, Masterton, Nelson, and Blenheim, when Wellington began transmitting television in July 1961. Trevor Townsend commented that while Head Office expected them to be beyond the effective range of the Wellington T.V station, they wanted to know

- a) The quality and clarity of reception by local viewers – also whether the transmissions are received regularly or whether blackouts are occurring, and if so, how frequently.
- b) Public reaction to the T.V programmes, and if possible and indication whether interest is spreading.

If the transmissions are in fact being received locally we would appreciate information.⁵⁶

In an effort to increase attendance at movies, the circulation manager of Kerridge-Odeon's promotional magazine, *Playdate*, wrote to their cinematic opposition, Independent Theatres, urging their managers to sell the magazine at their theatres, in a united bid to combat the competition from television.

Having regard to the development of Television and the introduction of repeater stations, the more widespread this advance publicity, the better for all members of the Motion Picture Industry [...] in the light of conditions facing the Industry today, every avenue should be exploited to foster the interest of people [in going to the cinema].⁵⁷

Writing to his theatre managers in December 1964, Robert Kerridge acknowledged the difficulties that television posed, although he remained resolutely optimistic.

The past twelve months have been challenging yet stimulating. Television has made rapid advances in areas of service and sales of sets. This has inevitably had a diversionary effect on cinema attendance; but it has also clearly demonstrated the remarkable resilience and potentialities of the Motion Picture Industry. There have been changes in the pattern of film-going – the Industry itself must be rationalised to become aligned to the changed conditions; but I am more than ever confident in the future of the cinema. This optimism is substantiated by global trends. The cordial new tone that is happily evident in the world press - - the notable achievement in film production - - the reports of an upswing in attendances overseas; and the growing public awareness of the essentiality of the motion picture, as the most significant medium of mass entertainment. These are dynamic days for all of us engaged in this fascinating business - - [...] - - utilising all our resources of experience and showmanship, to relate

⁵⁶ Letter from Trevor Townsend to Theatre Managers, July 17, 1961, 'Television', Box 100, File 364, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁵⁷ Letter from Mr. R.W. McSkimming to Independent Theatre Managers, November 22, 1962, 'Television', Box 100, File 364, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

our publicity, presentation and service, to the challenging circumstances of today.⁵⁸

Theatre managers were very aware that television threatened their ability to get people into their theatres. John Hart, from the Regent in Christchurch, supported introducing advanced bookings to Sunday screenings because, 'in these difficult times everything and anything that will assist even a slight increase in business must be implemented'.⁵⁹ Rob Williams, from the Majestic in Timaru, stressed the importance of advertising. Regarding the content of *Playdate* magazine, he asked, 'What do I see when I open the poster that I am supposed to [use to] sell these magazines? [...] A great big advert for T.V. It is about time that we let our imaginations run riot and get an attractive poster that tells the public the magazine is about 90" [sic] films.'⁶⁰

The overall responses of the 199 survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in some or all of the years of the 1960s, and who answered the question on the impact of television to their movie-going, show that just over 43% said that their cinema-going was impacted on, to some degree, by the arrival of television, as seen in Table 2.10.

How did television affect your movie-going?	%	#
It had no impact, I went as often as I had always done	56.78	113
I went less often	37.69	75
It changed the sort of movie I went to see	2.51	5
I stopped going to the movies	2.01	4
I went at a different time or on a different day	1.01	2

Table 2.10: Impact of television on movie-going (for those going most frequently in the 1960s).

The majority of the 57% of survey respondents who said the arrival of television had no impact on their movie-going were younger people. This is borne out by the data provided by respondents according to the decade they were born, irrespective of when they most attended the pictures, which shows a direct correlation between age and reduced attendance due to television. Seventy percent of survey respondents born in the 1920s and 56% born in the 1930s said that television impacted on their movie-going, compared with only 17.5% of those born in the 1950s, and 2% of those born in the 1960s, as seen in the following table.

⁵⁸ Letter from Robert Kerridge to Theatre Managers, December 16, 1964, Box 122, File 440, Circulars, 10/62-12/64, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁵⁹ Letter from John Hart, to T.S. Townsend, February 8, 1964, Box 123, File 444, 2/64-12/64, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁶⁰ Letter from R.P. Williams, Majestic Theatre Manager, Timaru, to Bob Kerridge, 20 February, 1964, Playdate Follow-up Correspondence 1964, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

How did television affect your movie-going?	Born 1920s (%)	Born 1930s (%)	Born 1940s (%)	Born 1950s (%)
It had no impact, I went as often as I had always done	30	31	50.5	75.5
I went less often	70	56	41	17.5
It changed the sort of movie I went to see	0	6	5	3
I stopped going to the movies	0	6	2.5	2
I went at a different time or a different day	0	1	1	2

Table 2.11: Impact of television on movie-going, according to age.

Survey respondents who said television did reduce their cinema-going provided a variety of reasons for this.

Most people went less frequently. Rather than using the cinema as a regular evening outing we chose those [films] we particularly wished to see.⁶¹

Television did have an impact as it was a new phenomenon and there were programmes suitable for children and for adults.⁶²

Initially the novelty of television, became very appealing for easily accessible viewing [had a young family].⁶³

Watched movies etc. on tv, bad and all as it was. i.e. bw [black and white].⁶⁴

There was American programmes on TV so we didn't need to go to the movies.⁶⁵

We were never frequent movie goers but we went less once we had television.⁶⁶

TV did affect my family and friends movie going habits. They went less often, much easier to stay at home and watch the TV especially in the cold weather. If you didn't own a TV you went round to a friend's place and watched their one. It then turned into a social evening.⁶⁷

The social importance of television was also mentioned by Ray and Helen of Okato, who recalled they used to travel 20 kilometres to visit friends in Rahotu who had better television reception, so that they could watch *The High Chaparral* (1967) together.⁶⁸ Geoff Lealand commented on the early days of television being 'akin to the communal film-going experience', as he recalled 'sitting on a footpath with a group of kids, outside a shop that

⁶¹ Male, born 1930.

⁶² Pamela O'Neill, born 1937.

⁶³ Anne, born 1944.

⁶⁴ Male, born 1941.

⁶⁵ Brenda, born 1952.

⁶⁶ Charlie, born 1952.

⁶⁷ Sheryn, born 1945.

⁶⁸ Ray and Helen Rook, interview June 25, 2014.

was featuring a television set, or going around to a neighbour's house for group viewing of *Bonanza* [1959] or *The Untouchables* [1959].⁶⁹ Lealand recalled the first time he saw television was on the counter of a piecart outside Wellington's Railway Station.⁶⁹ Watching television was not necessarily a 'retreat into one's domestic home life', as it could also be an important community activity, that brought people together under the one roof, or space, just as the cinema did. The prevalence of this social aspect of television viewing was also found in Scottish⁷⁰ and West German⁷¹ studies, where it was noted that the novelty of television meant that in its early days friends and neighbours would be invited over to watch. The West German study found that between television's earliest years, 1954-1961, viewing was predominantly a communal affair, where neighbourly contact actually intensified with 'television pioneers' swamped with visiting 'crowds of friends, family, colleagues and neighbours'. Another social aspect of television is described by survey respondent Lesley, who said 'I remember at primary school that if you didn't have TV you were left out of much of the conversation, so it was almost compulsory to watch if you wanted to be part of what was going on'.⁷² Another respondent said that they only got a television when it became apparent that their children were missing out on interactions with their friends, because what was showing on television was a popular topic of conversation.⁷³

Some survey respondents recalled television did not have an effect on their movie-going, particularly in its early years due to its limited hours of transmission, or the quality of the product, and it was only once television improved its access and quality that it drew them away from the cinema.⁷⁴

TV didn't affect my movie-going at the beginning, however as time went on and TV started showing movies, everyone went to the movies much less.⁷⁵

There was no TV reception in the Queenstown area until the late 1960s.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Geoff Lealand's comments are from my questionnaire.

⁷⁰ Jancovich et al., *Place of the Audience*, p. 161.

⁷¹ Christina von Hodenberg, 'Square-eyed Farmers and Gloomy Ethnographers: The Advent of Television in the West German Village', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51:4, 2016, pp. 839-865, pp. 849.

⁷² Lesley, born 1953.

⁷³ Female, born 1938.

⁷⁴ Further comments included: Ian Stewart, 'Movies were big events. As kids we had to always make our own entertainment - e.g. only 1 channel meant that if you didn't like what was on you had to find something else to do. We played more outside even spending hours of boredom trying to think of what we could do. Even when TV2 started you still had to watch what Mum and dad wanted - usually TV1. Movies were much more of a contrast to the normal boring lives we lived'; Jeanette, born 1940, 'My parents had always gone to the movies on a Monday night and that continued for a few years until TV hours had increased past the two hours a day it started with'; Male, born 1951, '[Television had] Not too much [effect] as TV was B&W whereas movies were colour. The wide screen in the movie theatre also had more appeal'; Phil, born 1949, 'When TV first began, it wasn't on very often. As the years went by we would have gone to the movies less often, as TV got more attractive.'

⁷⁵ Patricia, born 1942.

⁷⁶ Dr Neil Clayton, born 1942.

The quality [of TV] was poor and the programmes I recall were of limited interest to me. If you wanted to see a good epic/drama/adventure you still had to go to the movies. TV had a lot of sanitised Andy Williams type shows and fairly turgid local material until the likes of McPhail and Gadsby, Billy T. James and so on got it going.⁷⁷

TV only made the more full length professional movies more attractive.⁷⁸

If I remember rightly, TV started at 6pm in the evening so this didn't affect me or my brothers going to the movies.⁷⁹

I had come back from the UK around 1963 when my family got tv and the NZ programmes seemed much less interesting to my London favourites featuring people like John Cleese and David Frost.⁸⁰

What was on TV was not what was on at the movies, so they seemed like two different activities, offering different products, if you like.⁸¹

TV was so much lower quality than the movies, so watching TV didn't compare at all to the magic of movies on the big screen.⁸²

Movies were really very different to television programmes then. I know that I did get to see a lot of 'old' movies that my mother talked about, on Sunday afternoons - they used to show a movie starting at about 2pm each week, so we would have the Sunday (roast) dinner cleaned up by then and all sat down to watch.⁸³

For some, the arrival of television had little impact on their movie-going, because their television viewing was restricted by their parents, as was the case with Paula who said, 'We weren't allowed to watch much television. None during the week and very little at the weekend so it didn't make a difference to our movie-going.'⁸⁴

Theatre Closures

While the uptake of television, with its resulting reduction in audience numbers, led to the closure of theatres, a compounding reason for such closures was the poor condition of many theatres that had had little in the way of modernisation or maintenance since the advent of 'the talkies'. Those theatres now needed considerable work, often at significant cost.

⁷⁷ Alistair Watts, born 1955.

⁷⁸ Female, born 1944.

⁷⁹ Female, born 1958.

⁸⁰ Cleone, born 1937.

⁸¹ Female, born 1943.

⁸² Catherine McCartin, born 1961.

⁸³ Lesley Courtney, born 1954.

⁸⁴ Paula, born 1959.

At the end of the 1950s there were 61 cinemas in Auckland, but by 1974 only 30 were still in operation. Those theatres outside of the central Queen Street area, but still in central Auckland, were among the first to close, followed by the suburban cinemas, which were also more affected than the first-release central city theatres.⁸⁵ Table 2.12 illustrates the greater decline of audiences at Kerridge-Odeon's smaller theatres in Auckland, particularly those in the suburbs, in comparison to their flag-ship theatre, the St. James.⁸⁶ The Odeon theatre was the exception, but its good fortune was directly related to its situation next door to the St. James, with both theatres sharing a foyer onto Queen Street. Furthermore, having opened in 1957, it was new and innovative, being the first theatre in New Zealand to have a small indoor garden surrounding a coffee lounge and the first public building to be air-conditioned. That the Odeon screened the best films for longer seasons and its relatively small, intimate style also made it popular.⁸⁷ Other smaller Auckland theatres suffered a considerable decrease in admissions, coinciding directly with the arrival of television.⁸⁸ The decline of suburban theatres before their larger inner city counterparts was also a trend found in the Nottingham study of Jancovich et al, where 38 out of the city's 72 theatres closed between 1950 and 1968. The majority of the theatres that closed were suburban theatres, of which only four remained open after 1968.⁸⁹

Name of Auckland Theatre	% Decrease in admission receipts from 1960 to 1964
Britannia	26
Cameo	37
Odeon	8
Playhouse	38*
St. James	6
Tatler	24
Victoria	24

* From 1961-1964

Table 2.12: Decrease in admission receipts for some Auckland Theatres, early 1960s.

Both major cinema chains had central Auckland theatres close in the early 1960s. Kerridge-Odeon's State, on Symonds Street, had its final screening on 30 March 1960.⁹⁰ It was sold to the Chinese community for their Community Centre and was also known as the Oriental

⁸⁵ Bruce W. Hayward and Selwyn P. Hayward, *Cinemas of Auckland 1896-1979*, Auckland, N.Z.: Lodestar, 1979, p. 36.

⁸⁶ Kerridge-Odeon Corporation Ltd. Journal, Box 315, File K7, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁸⁷ Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre, 1925-1970*, Auckland, N.Z.: Godwit, 2008, pp. 158-9.

⁸⁸ Data from Kerridge-Odeon Corporation Ltd. Journal, File K7, Box 315, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁸⁹ Jancovich et al., *Place of the Audience*, p. 132.

⁹⁰ Memo from Mr Townsend to Mr Forrest, March 17, 1960, Head Office Memos January 1960-June 1960, Box 63, File 214, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. The theatre had been Robert Kerridge's first Auckland theatre, which he purchased off Haywards in 1931. Originally the Lyric, it had been billed as Auckland's premier picture palace, boasting capacity crowds of 1,400 during the silent era. After its closure, Kerridge-Odeon sold it to the Chinese community, with the covenant it was not to be used for the public screening of films for ten years.

Ballroom, for the dances that were held every Friday and Saturday night.⁹¹ Amalgamated's Tivoli on Karangahape Road, which had originally opened in 1915 as the Alhambra⁹², closed in 1963 and was sublet as a dance hall.⁹³ Dancing had long been a much loved leisure activity but the popularity of 'the twist' that emerged at the beginning of the decade was 'phenomenal', with national dance competitions and lunchtime dances evidence of the demand created by the latest craze.⁹⁴ This phenomenon was also seen in Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, where redundant cinemas were also transformed into dance halls.⁹⁵

Kerridge-Odeon's Auckland Majestic theatre, which had opened in 1925, also closed in the early part of the decade. At one time the Majestic had been the country's largest theatre, with one-third of the seats doubles, or 'honeymoon seats', which allowed two people to sit together. It was the first of Kerridge-Odeon's theatres to have a Nibble Nook.⁹⁶ However, by the 1950s the theatre had become run down and 'for want of a proper inner-city flea-pit', became Kerridge-Odeon's Auckland 'action house'. During one of the May 1953 screenings of *House of Wax* (1953), a piece of plaster fell from the ceiling onto patrons' laps.⁹⁷ The theatre limped on and was closed and demolished in 1961 to make way for the Kerridge-Odeon shopping complex and offices, described to staff as 'symbolic of the dynamic development and diversification of Kerridge-Odeon'. The new Odeon theatre above the shopping complex was presented as 'a graphic expression of Sir Robert's faith in the Motion Picture Industry'.⁹⁸ Telegrams to Robert Kerridge on the opening congratulated him on his 'magnificent foresight and courage' and his 'vision for what you have done for Queen Street'.⁹⁹

Further down Queen Street, in the 'increasingly unfashionable' area near the wharves, was Amalgamated's double-feature Oxford Theatre, which by the 1960s had degenerated into a flea-pit, operating under the strapline, 'House of Unusual Entertainment'.¹⁰⁰ The theatre closed in 1967, screening *The Reluctant Nudist* (1964) and *Sexy World by Night* (1961), and

⁹¹ Hayward and Hayward, *Cinemas of Auckland*, p. 9 and <http://chinesecommunity.org.nz/site/topics/show/379-auckland-chinese-hall-incorporated-1960> retrieved March 21, 2016.

⁹² For detail of the proposed Alhambra Theatre, see *Auckland Star*, v. XLIV, issue 220, 15 September, 1913, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19130915.2.68> retrieved August 5, 2017.

⁹³ Auckland Scrapbook August 1963-December 1963, p. 18, Record 100590, Auckland City Libraries.

⁹⁴ Georgina White, *Light Fantastic: Dance Floor Courtship in New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: Harper Collins, 2007, pp. 177-8.

⁹⁵ Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book*, London: British Film Institute, 1997, p. 222.

⁹⁶ Seated 1,000 in the grand circle, 700 in the royal circle, and 240 in the stalls. Brittenden, pp. 103, 151.

⁹⁷ Dianne Haworth, *Father and Son: The Bob Kerridge Story*, Auckland, N.Z.: HarperCollins, 2004, p. 55 and Attendance Schedules Box 253, 4/53-3/54, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁹⁸ Letter from Associate General Manager N.J. Glover to Theatre Managers, March 15, 1965, Circulars 1 January to 31 December 1965, Box 133, File 480, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁹⁹ Telegrams from Hugh Wright and the Hanson Family respectively, July 15, 1964, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁰⁰ Brittenden, *Celluloid Circus*, p. 116.

live Strip-a-Rama shows took over.¹⁰¹ Also closing in 1967 was Kerridge-Odeon’s second-run Playhouse Theatre, which was purchased by Auckland Trust and developed into a smaller live-theatre venue, the Mercury.¹⁰²

In Christchurch the considerable debate over the future of the Plaza theatre resulted directly from the downturn in cinema attendance due to television’s implementation in that city. The Plaza, one of the very few theatres Kerridge-Odeon did not own outright, had been struggling ‘for a considerable length of time’, according to Trevor Townsend in his submission against the licence application for the theatre by Lang Masters, ‘despite every effort made by us to increase revenue, and to reduce costs’. In March 1963 Kerridge-Odeon unsuccessfully requested a rent review from the building’s owners, Square Freeholds Ltd. This and the ‘substantial trading losses incurred’ led Kerridge-Odeon to exercise their right of termination of the lease. Given that legislation stipulated that the granting of a licence would not cause undue hardship to holders of current licences, Townsend argued that the granting of the Plaza licence to Masters would have a considerable negative effect on existing theatres, given that ‘all theatres in Christchurch operated by this Company, are screening to significantly lower attendances than in earlier years, and the percentage of utilization of seats for the year ended 31st March 1963 was only 30%’.¹⁰³ Townsend blamed television for this, referring not just to the decline in audiences, as outlined in the following table, but to the ‘limited supply of suitable films, due to the effect of television on production’.¹⁰⁴

Theatre	Seating Capacity	# Screenings/week	Decrease in attendance from previous 12 months ¹⁰⁵
Avon	943	23	39,589
Majestic	1,399	15	58,437
Odeon	692	12-15	10,635
Regent	1,571	15-20	46,875
Tivoli	748	16	15,127
State	822	15	
Cinerama	601	12	
Carlton	825	15	
Savoy	1,237	15	

Table 2.13: Christchurch Cinemas, 1963.

Townsend shared confidential financial information regarding the Tivoli, shown in Table 2.14, which clearly illustrates its financial difficulties. The 17% drop in revenue from 1961 to 1962

¹⁰¹ Brittenden, *Celluloid Circus*, p. 117.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁰³ Submission from T.S. Townsend to Cinematograph Films Licensing Authority, November 21, 1963, File Plaza (ChCh) Licence Appeal, Box 330, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Figures provided from Townsend are for Kerridge-Odeon theatres. Decrease from year ending March 31, 1962 to year ending March 31, 1963.

can be linked directly to television transmission getting underway in June 1961. Townsend told the Licencing Authority to look at the ‘proof’ of economic unviability given that Kerridge-Odeon had surrendered their own licence for the Plaza due to that theatre’s economic hardship.¹⁰⁶ The Licensing Authority found against Masters.

Year	Box Office (£)	Surplus/Deficit (£)
1961	27,360	6,612 surplus
1962	22,805	1,741 surplus
1963	20,882	2,121 deficit

Table 2.14: Tivoli theatre financials, 1961-1963.

These closures illustrate the change in fortune of some of the country’s once-proud theatres, and indicate the changing direction in movie-going throughout the country.¹⁰⁷

Combating Declining Audiences

The cinema industry worked hard to develop policies and attractions to encourage people into their theatres. One strategy was to push for screenings on the one movie-free day of the week, Sunday, hoping that the traditional day of rest would attract those looking for something to do, and perhaps capture an audience unable to attend during the week.

Sunday Screenings

In the early 1940s, American servicemen thought New Zealand was ‘slow’ because public bars and picture theatres were closed on Sundays.¹⁰⁸ A visiting Czechoslovakian journalist was perturbed in 1960 by the ‘shop shut’ mentality of New Zealanders that ‘ruins Sundays when absolutely everything is closed [...] and the only “entertainment” is offered by the churches’.¹⁰⁹

New Zealanders also remarked on the activity-less Sundays. A Palmerston North newspaper in 1961 described Sundays as ‘bleak’ and believed ‘It is on the entertainment side that most

¹⁰⁶ The Plaza closed on November 2, 1963, and the licence surrendered and sent to the Licencing Authority on November 15, 1963. Letter to Russell McVeagh & Co., Solicitors, from T.S. Townsend, February 20, 1964, File Plaza (ChCh) Licence Appeal, Box 330, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁰⁷ A number of studies have been done on the history of theatres in New Zealand, including Tony Froude, *Where to go on Saturday Night: Wellington Cinemas and Movie Halls, 1896-2000*, Paraparaumu, N.Z.: T. Froude, 2000; Tony Froude, *Big Screens in the Valley: Cinemas and Movie Halls in the Hutt Valley 1906-2002*, Paraparaumu, N.Z.: Spectro Print, 2002; Tony Froude, *Reel Entertainment: Cinemas and Movie Halls in the Twentieth Century Tawa to Tokomaru*, Paraparaumu N.Z.: Spectro Print, 2002; Michael Fowler and David Turnbull, *The Reel Story: A History of Napier and Hastings Cinema 1896-1996*, Napier, N.Z.: Michael Fowler, 2008; Robert Jackson, *Christchurch Cinemas*, Wellington, N.Z.: New Zealand Film Archive, 1986; Bradley Knewstubb, *Cinemas: Dunedin and Districts 1897-1974*, Dunedin, N.Z.: Knewstubb Theatres, 1974; Gordon Ingham, *Everyone’s Gone to the Movies: The Sixty Cinemas of Auckland...And Some Others’*, Auckland, N.Z.: Gordon Ingham, 1973; David Lascelles, *Eighty Turbulent Years: The Paramount Theatre, Wellington, 1917-1997*, Wellington, N.Z.: Millwood Press, 1997. Brittenden, *Celluloid Circus*.

¹⁰⁸ *New Zealand Listener*, April 2, 1942, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ ‘New Zealand Through Czech Eyes’, *New Zealand Listener*, August 5, 1960, p. 3.

can be done' to improve them as the arrival of the "coffee shop" craze' had already provided 'more colour and interest'. Sure that the New Zealand Sunday would eventually be 'livened up', the editor believed this would not happen 'at the expense of the Churches'.¹¹⁰ When regular Sunday screenings became more widespread in the early 1960s, one stipulation was that screenings would not start before 8:15pm, 'so as not to interfere with any church service'.¹¹¹ This restriction was in practice at some United Kingdom theatres, which had encountered opposition to Sunday screenings in the 1930s 'because of fears by some pious locals that earlier opening would imperil the spiritual well-being of the populace'.¹¹² In the United States, picture theatres had been open on Sundays from the earliest days of cinema, and legislation to close them, part of the 'Blue Laws' that restricted all Sunday trading, was passed on a 'state-by-state and city-by-city basis'.¹¹³

In New Zealand, Sunday screenings generally required the approval of the theatre's local body, with the following conditions to be met:

- a) That the films screened be specially selected films of general classification
- b) That no screening commence before 8:15pm
- c) That all work should be voluntary [i.e. staff cannot be made to work on a Sunday]
- d) That the special rates of pay applicable to Sunday screenings should be paid.¹¹⁴

Sunday screenings were adopted piecemeal throughout the country, dependent on theatre managers gaining Council approval. In Whangarei approval was given for a six-month trial in May 1960.¹¹⁵ In Palmerston North, Sunday screening was agreed to in February 1961, on a three-month trial basis, with screenings to alternate between Amalgamated's State Theatre and Kerridge-Odeon's Regent Theatre. One Councillor suggested that Sunday screenings could help combat 'delinquency' as it was often caused by 'lack of suitable entertainment'. It was also thought that Sunday screenings could increase church-going, as people might attend an evening service and go to the cinema afterwards. Profit made from Sunday attendances did not go to the theatre but, as in the case in Hastings, went into a staff fund,¹¹⁶ or to charity. The following week, a local newspaper stressed that Sunday night screenings would in no way 'lead to any commercialisation of the Sabbath'. It claimed that Sunday

¹¹⁰ *The [Manawatū] Times*, February 22, 1961, p. 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, February 28, 1961, p. 6.

¹¹² Sue Harper, 'A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s: Admissions Figures at the Regent Cinema, Portsmouth, UK', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 24:4, 2004, p. 568.

¹¹³ Gary D. Rhodes, *The Perils of Moviegoing in America, 1896-1950*, New York: Continuum, 2012, p. 159.

¹¹⁴ Letter from R. W. McSkimming to selected Theatre Managers, December 20, 1962, Box 100, File 364, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Mr. Townsend to Miss Kennedy, May 3, 1960, Box 63, File 214, Head Office Memos January 1960-June 1960, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹¹⁶ *The [Manawatū] Times*, February 28, 1961, p. 6.

screenings had proved a 'useful community service in other parts of New Zealand, and should fill a long-felt need in Palmerston North where increasing numbers of people walk the streets on Sunday night for want of something to occupy them'.¹¹⁷ The first Sunday screening in Palmerston North was at Amalgamated's State Theatre on March 5, 1961, starting at the obligatory 8:15pm, with doors opened at 7:45pm, and showing *Green Fire* (1954), starring Stewart Granger and Grace Kelly. Kerridge-Odeon's Regent screened *The Sea Chase* (1955), an American war film starring the ever-popular John Wayne, on the following Sunday.

At Timaru's Majestic, Sunday screenings were intermittent. From the middle of the decade, they were generally fortnightly, but were sometimes extended out to every third or fourth week. The most popular Sunday screening, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), attracted an audience of 680 and ticket sales of £138 from its single session on Sunday April 24, 1966. This, however, was an exception, with Sunday screenings usually attracting an audience of around 300.¹¹⁸ They were always older films, usually with greatly reduced film hireage fees, thereby reducing the running costs of the theatre. This policy was questioned by the manager of the Majestic in Wellington.

Since TV started to screen features on Sunday afternoons, our Sunday afternoon business has dropped down, and the last three Sundays have been 54, 69 and 76 [£] respectively. I think some consideration should be given to improving the Sunday product. Some of the stuff is very old and cannot be very far from the vintage of the TV films, as, for example, *Caribbean Gold* [1952] at the PLAZA on Sunday, and accordingly if we are to maintain our Sunday business against the opposition of TV should we not give consideration to screening current programmes?¹¹⁹

Evidence from subsequent record books indicate the suggestion was not taken up.

By the middle of the decade, the viability of Sunday screenings at some locations was questioned by Kerridge-Odeon's senior management. The Manager of the Regent in the rural town of Pahiatua was reminded that the average revenue received from his Sunday sessions, for 10 weeks between February to April in 1964, was £16 per Sunday, which 'is nominal'.¹²⁰ The manager was keen to retain the sessions, however, replying that the wages bill for the theatre was no more than it was when the theatre was open six nights a week, as he had

¹¹⁷ *The [Manawatū] Times*, March 1, 1961, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Timaru Majestic Theatre, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Norman Howard, Majestic Theatre Manager, Wellington, to Trevor Townsend, May 26, 1964, Box 126, File 456, Majestic Theatre Outwards Correspondence, MS 98/89, KO Archives, AWMM.

¹²⁰ Letter from T.S. Townsend to Regent Theatre Manager, Pahiatua, May 14, 1964, Box 133, File 480 Circulars 1/65-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

taken over the theatre caretaker's duties when the man left 12 months earlier. He also pointed out that the patrons who attended Sunday screenings were 'in the main ones we rarely see on any other day of the week, and should it be decided to eliminate this session I do not think that it would to any great extent improve the figures for any other day of the week'. He conceded that 'the chances of improving our Sunday figures are I think at the moment fairly remote with winter here and the rapid coverage of tv that is taking place in this area'. Furthermore, while movie-goers from near-by Eketahuna and Woodville 'have always been helpful to our business,' there had been little support from those towns for Sunday screenings.¹²¹

The cost of holding a Sunday session at the Regent Theatre in Te Aroha was £12.18.0, and with the average weekly take over the preceding 20 weeks at £18.1.0, the theatre was making a very low return per session. Manager Ray O'Connor also noted that attendance had dropped 'considerably over the last two winter months', although he had done everything possible to promote the Sunday screenings, including having the Master of Ceremonies at the local Saturday night dance 'announce the feature, starting time etc., at least twice during the evening'.¹²² The Regent in Dannevirke had good news, however, with their Council approving Sunday screenings for a further 12 months 'without bickering'.¹²³ Because Sunday screenings meant extra work for theatre managers, not least because of the extension of their working week to seven days, they could have been forgiven for being unenthusiastic about them. However, they appear to have been very keen to keep their theatres open for as many days as possible. That two managers mentioned winter weather as a deterrent to attendance indicates that leaving home in cold or wet weather to sit in a potentially poorly heated theatre had limited appeal.

Diversification

Another strategy to deal with the decline in audience numbers was the development by Kerridge-Odeon of non-movie related leisure activities. Aware of the increasing time and money available for leisure, along with the threat from television, Robert Kerridge expanded his business vision, and expected his theatre managers to embrace and promote the organisation's new leisure options.

¹²¹ Letter from Manager of Regent Theatre, Pahiatua, to T.S. Townsend, May 25, 1964, Box 133, File 480 Circulars 1/65-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹²² Letter from Ray O'Connor, Manager of Regent Theatre, Te Aroha, to Mr Townsend, June 15, 1964, Box 133, File 480, Circulars 1/65-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹²³ Letter from Regent Theatre Manager, Dannevirke, to T.S. Townsend, August 25, 1964, Box 123, File 444, 2/64-12/64, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Before public screening of television arrived, but after the Government's announcement that broadcasting would commence, Kerridge contacted Kenneth Winckles from the Rank Organisation in London, enquiring about the conversion of their Regal cinema in Golders Green, London, into the company's first bowling alley, the Regal Bowl, which was to open on March 16, 1960. Winckles informed Kerridge that the cost of conversion, including furnishings but excluding bowling equipment, was £65,000 and that this included twenty bowling lanes, seating for 100 spectators with standing room for many more, a restaurant and a licensed club. The operating hours were from 10am through until midnight, seven days a week.¹²⁴ Kerridge's response was that he was 'somewhat apprehensive of the possibilities of this type of operation being successful' in New Zealand, primarily because of 'our very limited and decentralised population'. He added, 'There would be no possibility of our obtaining a liquor licence', so income from patronage of a restaurant and licensed club would not be raised by any equivalent venture in New Zealand. Kerridge asked, however, to be kept informed regarding the London venture, saying 'we will not in the meantime eliminate the possibility of our entering into this activity'.¹²⁵

Despite the challenging time for the industry, Robert Kerridge's staff Christmas message in 1964 was positive. He claimed the preceding twelve months had 'clearly demonstrated the remarkable resilience and potentialities of the Motion Picture Industry', and he highlighted the developments of the shopping complex at 246 Queen Street, Auckland, and the Pakatoa Island and White Heron Lodge ventures.

New enterprises, primarily related to leisure-time activity, will be the keynote of our continuing policies of progress and diversification. These are all KERRIDGE-ODEON undertakings; and you personally, can be of great practical assistance in creating a national climate of awareness and enthusiasm for our new projects. Both in cinema and in the many ancillary activities of Kerridge-Odeon, 1965 opens up an exciting vista of fresh opportunity.¹²⁶

A few months later, staff were informed that

With the opening of the Design Centre next month, 246 will be operating at complete occupancy. The success of this unique undertaking has

¹²⁴ Letter from Kenneth Winkles of Rank Organisation, London, to Robert Kerridge, March 16, 1960, Box 63, File 214, Head Office Memos January 1960-June 1960, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹²⁵ Letter from Robert Kerridge to Kenneth Winkles of Rank Organisation, London, March 24, 1960, Box 63, File 214, Head Office Memos January 1960-June 1960, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹²⁶ Letter from Robert Kerridge to Staff, December 16, 1964, Circulars, 10/62-12/64, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

exceeded all expectations. 246 has not only been enthusiastically accepted by Aucklanders but is a “highlight” for all visitors to the city.¹²⁷

The company’s White Heron Lodge was described as an ‘instantaneous and unqualified success’, with its Four Canoes Restaurant becoming ‘Auckland’s social rendezvous’. The Pakatoa Island development was almost completed and the island was looking ‘simply magnificent’ and ready to introduce ‘a completely new concept of vacation enjoyment’. Added to these successes, the Waiheke Island hydrofoil, *Manu-Wai*, New Zealand’s first hydrofoil, had ‘captured the imagination of the public, giving tremendous impact to tourism on the Hauraki Gulf [and] heralding exciting new developments in tourism’.¹²⁸ Mindful of the lucrative children’s market school principals and teachers were informed of the ‘Cruises for Schools’ campaign being run by Kerridge-Odeon Tourist Services, advising them of a four-month programme aimed at ‘showing classes of children many places of historical interest on both the Waitemata Harbour and the Hauraki Gulf’.¹²⁹ This cost six shillings per child, although the three teachers required to accompany the 70 children per trip would be free of charge.

A further indication of the company’s diversification was the increased involvement with international touring bands and shows.¹³⁰ The company also promoted and toured local acts, although those were not always well received.¹³¹ Cinemas were often used to stage these touring acts and bookings became more frequent in this decade, as seen at the Regent in Palmerston North, where only one stage act was recorded between 1950 and 1953, compared with 13 between 1960 and 1963.¹³² Correspondence to theatre managers saw an increase in information and advice about touring performers, where once it had focused almost exclusively on films.

¹²⁷ Letter from N.J. Glover to Theatre Managers, March 15, 1965, Box 133, File 480 Circulars 1/65-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹²⁸ Letter from N.J. Glover to Theatre Managers, March 15, 1965, Box 133, File 480 Circulars 1/65-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. Kerridge and his leisure developments featured in a *Time* (New York) article ‘Sooner than Apopo’, *Time*, 85:12, March 19, 1965, p. 112. The article stated there was little reason to come to New Zealand but ‘no one in New Zealand is working harder to make matters easier for tourists than Sir Robert Kerridge [... who] is conducting a one-man campaign to make New Zealand realize this potential’.

¹²⁹ Letter from Ross Armstrong, June 17, 1965, Box 133, File 480 Circulars 1/65-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹³⁰ 1964 shows included the Beatles, Vienna Boys Choir, and Bill Haley and the Comets. 1965 included Cilla Black and the Clancy Brothers. Further information in Box 327, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹³¹ Mrs Archer, a resident of Palmerston North, wrote to Robert Kerridge complaining about his company touring the musical show, *C’mon* (*C’mon* was a local tv show featuring singers and ‘go-go’ dances which screened from 1967-9). Believing that Kerridge-Odeon ‘stood for quality entertainment’, Mrs Archer claimed *C’mon* was ‘detested by parents and better teenagers’ and ‘appeals only to dreamers’. Stating that every country except NZ was trying to get rid of those ‘dreamers and the trouble they cause’, Mrs Archer recalled seeing *Ben Hur* in a ‘tin hall in Wairoa’, and while the hall ‘may not have been much, the film was good’. Surely, she added, ‘after all those years of quality entertainment you can’t promote tin-hall artists’. June 26, 1967, Box 150, File 553, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹³² These included British pop sensations of the time, Helen Shapiro and Adam Faith, who both performed in October 1962 and the much-loved Vera Lynn, in 1963. Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, Exhibitors’ Record Books, Val Page Collection.

While Kerridge continued to declare he was ‘more than ever confident in the future of the cinema’ and that ‘Ours was the excitement of participating in the renaissance of the Industry’,¹³³ he was clearly ‘hedging his bets’ with the company’s diversification into other leisure activities in line with developments in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

The 1960s Audience

The 1960s saw greater audience segmentation, largely due to the considerable increase in the number of films certified for adult-only viewing and the corresponding decrease in the number available for children, but also due to the strengthening of a distinctive teenage identity. Audiences were being shaped, demographically and from a taste-preference perspective, by the films that were being produced, with an overseas commentator claiming that the films of this period were ‘more varied, diverse, and socially critical’ than previously.¹³⁴ To understand this change, according to Douglas Kellner, ‘one needs insight into the complex interaction of film, the production system, and more general social discourses and social struggles that were taking place.’¹³⁵

One societal change in the United States at this time was the weakening of the tight moral codes that had dictated ‘good behaviour’, which in the film industry had been governed by the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (The Hays Code) since the 1930s. The Code came from the Hollywood studios themselves, which preferred self-regulation, and operated until 1967.¹³⁶ The following table illustrates the considerable decline throughout the decade of the percentage of films available for General Exhibition, and the significant increase in the number given a restricted rating. Both of these factors impacted on audience composition.

¹³³ Letter from Robert Kerridge to staff, December 16, 1964, Circulars, 10/62-12/64, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹³⁴ Douglas Kellner, ‘Hollywood Film and Society’, in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pps. 354-362, p. 359.

¹³⁵ Ibid. Kellner refers to his work with Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Hollywood Film*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988.

¹³⁶ Prior to this The Code had begun to weaken in the 1940s when the previously prohibited topics of rape and miscegenation were allowed in *Johnny Belinda* (1948) and *Pinky* (1949), respectively. Both films did well in the US and NZ. The Code continued to be tested throughout the 1950s as films showed they could be popular with audiences without having the Code’s approval. Otto Preminger’s *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), a drug-themed plot starring Frank Sinatra and Kim Novak, and Billy Wilder’s *Some Like it Hot* (1959), cross-dressing comedy with Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, were both released without the Code’s seal of approval and were both very popular.

Year	General %	"S" Cert %	"Y" Cert %	"A" Cert %	Ratings R %	R13 #	R16 #	R18 #	R21 #
1960	52	2	18	17	11				
1961	44		21	23	12				
1962	39	2	21	27	11	6	47	3	
1963	40	1	22	25	12	5	39	5	2
1964	40	1	22	22	15	1	56	2	
1965	39	1	23	22	16	2	59	3	
1966	41	1	20	24	14	11	30	9	
1967	36	1	24	26	13	3	21	14	
1968	40		19	27	14	4	29	13	
1969	28	1	21	26	24	6	54	17	

Certificates: "S" - particularly suitable for children; "Y" - General exhibition but particularly suitable for youth; "A" - General exhibition but particularly suitable for adults; "R" restricted to age group. The 1965 total of 101% is as recorded in *AJHR*, H. 22, p. 46.

Table 2.15: Classification of feature films in New Zealand, 1960s.

The Adult Audience

The reduced number of films produced in the United States, due in part to a focus on quality over quantity as a point of difference over television, led American distributors to look off-shore for product. This resulted in an increase in the number of 'foreign' movies imported into the United States, and in turn, New Zealand, due to our distribution arrangements with American companies. Statistics for the number of foreign films that came into New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s are outlined in the following table.

Year 1950s	# Foreign Films - NZ	Year 1960s	# Foreign Films - NZ
1950	14	1960	169
1951	19	1961	160
1952	31	1962	204
1953	45	1963	174
1954	60	1964	167
1955	95	1965	213
1956	127	1966	172
1957	151	1967	125
1958	165	1968	147
1959	167	1969	151
TOTAL	874	TOTAL	1,682

Table 2.16: Number of 'foreign' feature films (35mm) imported into New Zealand, 1950-1969.¹³⁷

Given that foreign films were often destined for 'mature' audiences, this added to the proliferation of adult content, further intensifying the segmentation of movie audiences. These films also had an impact on censorship over the decade, with the incidence of violence

¹³⁷ Figures are for total number of feature films that come into New Zealand from countries other than the United States, the United Kingdom/Commonwealth (Commonwealth was a new category from 1962 which replaced the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries, including New Zealand). These figures will be different from those recorded by the Censor, as he did not see all films. From *AJHRs* for the corresponding years.

requiring cutting almost quadrupling in films from ‘Other Countries’, in comparison with films from the United States, where it reduced. The excision of sexual content remained relatively stable in films from the Commonwealth and the United States, but dropped considerably in films from other countries. The censor noted in 1964 that, while the number of excisions made on grounds of violence decreased in comparison with 1963, excisions on the grounds of sex included ‘a considerable number of cuts of scenes involving violence to and assaults upon women’. Also included were ‘cuts for sexual deviations including homosexuality and incest, and for abortion, carnal knowledge of minors, and the use of aphrodisiacs’.¹³⁸ While it was reported in 1960 that the increase in horror, compared to the previous year, resulted from an increase in the number of films showing scenes of ‘blood, vivisection, vampirism, bestiality, sadism, torture, and terror, at length, in detail, and usually in colour’,¹³⁹ by 1963 it was noted that ‘In general there appears to be a trend away from horror themes and a tendency towards greater realism, particularly in films dealing with social problems of this age’.¹⁴⁰

The comparison between 1960 and 1969 in the number and reasons for film excision by the Censor are shown in the following two tables. The primary differences are the increase in incidence of violence in films from Other Countries, the decrease in horror in films from all countries, and the decrease in the incidence of sexual material from Other Countries. The ‘United Kingdom’ category changed to ‘Commonwealth’ in 1962.

Origin of Film	Reason for Excision				TOTAL CUTS
	Violence #	Sex #	Horror #	Other #	
United Kingdom	46	43	26	17	132
United States	279	78	42	19	418
Other Countries	35	38	2	4	79
TOTAL:	360	159	70	40	629

Table 2.17: Analysis of feature film (35mm) excisions 1960.¹⁴¹

Origin of Film	Reason for Excision				TOTAL CUTS
	Violence #	Sex #	Horror #	Other #	
Commonwealth	46	32	2	11	91
United States	202	73	0	33	308
Other Countries	132	15	0	7	154
TOTAL:	380	120	2	51	553

Table 2.18: Analysis of feature film (35mm) excisions 1969.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *AJHR*, 1964, H. 22, p. 45.

¹³⁹ *AJHR*, 1960, H. 22, p. 49.

¹⁴⁰ *AJHR*, 1963, H. 22, p. 52.

¹⁴¹ *AJHR*, 1960, H. 22, p. 49.

¹⁴² *AJHR*, 1969, H. 22, p. 54.

With greater use being made of restricted ratings, the number of films banned by the film censor, Doug McIntosh, greatly reduced from 1966, as seen in Table 2.19.¹⁴³ McIntosh had been criticised for his overuse of cutting and rejecting films ‘of serious intent’, giving films a restricted certificate as well as cutting scenes from them, and cutting films rather than giving them a restricted certificate.¹⁴⁴ This ‘highly idiosyncratic’ approach was due to his being required ‘to stretch and twist the *old* rules governing censorship to cope with the *new* era in films’, according to Peter Munz, the Associate Professor of History at Victoria University, who argued for film censorship to be ‘brought up to date’ with the ‘new type of film-making’.¹⁴⁵ It was noted in 1967, that ‘Five years ago a film like *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966) would have had little chance of being seen on New Zealand screens. Now it is passed without cuts, if with a restricted certificate’, leading to the suggestion that McIntosh had taken notice of the criticism and had ‘moved with the times’.¹⁴⁶

Year	# of Films “Rejected”(banned)	Year	# of Films “Rejected”(banned)
1960	14	1965	16
1961	13	1966	8
1962	30	1967	3
1963	12	1968	4
1964	10	1969	3

Table 2.19: Number of feature films banned in New Zealand, 1960s.¹⁴⁷

Cinema advertisements became bolder and more provocative in line with this new ‘acceptance’ of films of a sexual nature and they often highlighted a film’s controversy. The Lido in New Brighton, Christchurch, had an almost gleeful tone when it advertised the R16 rated white slave-trade thriller, *Girls Disappear (Des Femmes Disparaissent)* (1959), with ‘PLUS! A BANNED FILM! That Blasts the Vice-Racket Wide Open’, which was screened as a double-feature with the nudist documentary, *Naked as Nature Intended* (1961).¹⁴⁸ The melodramatic advertising, along with the films’ content, ensured box-office success, with the following Monday’s newspaper giving

AN APOLOGY To all those hundreds of people who were unable to gain admission to see our fantastic double-feature [...] This programme has proved so popular that the season has been extended to next Thursday – nightly at 7:45pm. And special Lunch Hour sessions 12 and 1 o’clock of the Nudist film on Wednesday.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ McIntosh took over from Gordon Mirams as Film Censor in 1959 and continued in the role through until 1976.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Christoffel, *Censored: A Short History of Censorship in New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1989, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Munz, ‘Films and the Censor’, *New Zealand Listener*, July 1, 1966, p. 7. Munz’s italics.

¹⁴⁶ Quote from *Waikato Times* editorial, July 1, 1967, in Christoffel, *Censored*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ *AJHRs*: 1960, H. 22, p. 46; 1961, H. 22, p. 28; 1962, H. 22, p. 35; 1963, H. 22, p. 53; 1964, H. 22, p. 46; 1965, H. 22, p. 47; 1966, H. 22, p. 50; 1967, H. 22, p. 50; 1968, H. 22, p. 49; 1969, H. 22, p. 54.

¹⁴⁸ *The [Christchurch] Press*, November 27, 1965, p. 47.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, November 29, 1965, p.25.

To ensure maximum sensationalism, the following day's advertisement saw the addition of the words 'In Pulsating Eastmancolor' added to the *Naked as Nature Intended* segment of the advertisement, and 'Banned by the French Government' added to the advertisement of *Girls Disappear*.¹⁵⁰

Another film to capitalise on its 'sensational' adult content, as during its first release in New Zealand in 1950, was the sex 'education' film *Secrets of Life* (1945), which screened at the Savoy Theatre in Christchurch, in November, 1965. The film's advertisement claimed that 'CROWDS – CROWDS Applauded at Every Session', with the film being 'The World's Most Amazing Attraction', having been 'seen and praised by 175,000,000 people in 27 countries!' Exhibition was segregated, as in the 1950s, but on those occasions males went to different sessions, whereas these screenings saw men and boys in the stalls, and women and girls in the circle. The newspaper advertisement ended with, 'WARNING, DON'T GET MARRIED UNTIL YOU HAVE SEEN "SECRETS OF LIFE!"',¹⁵¹ illustrating not only the strong moral code still in evidence, that sex was not to take place until marriage, but also some naiveté considering that approximately 10% of births were 'illegitimate'.¹⁵² Appropriately, Michael Moodabe commented that 'Truth in advertising did not necessarily hold sway. One grabbed the public's attention and stopped at nothing short of illegality to entice customers into the cinemas'.¹⁵³

The only other film shown to gender-segregated audiences in New Zealand was *Ulysses* (1967), with the censor's decision to leave the film uncut, but to separate the audience according to gender, leading to 'international headlines and mirth'.¹⁵⁴ In Wellington sessions were not just split by different screening times, but by theatre, with males seeing the film at the St. James and women seeing it at the Regent. Three female survey respondents recalled the film, with one saying the requirement for segregated audiences

¹⁵⁰ *The [Christchurch] Press*, November 30, 1965, p. 31. Other examples include the advertisement for *Splendour in the Grass* (1961), an R16 film starring Warren Beatty and Natalie Wood. The Palmerston North Regent claimed it was 'The most Controversial film ever to come to the screen', adding 'No matter how old you are you will remember when suddenly kissing isn't a kid's game anymore. Suddenly it is wide eyed, scary and very dangerous.' *The [Manawatū] Times*, November 3, 1962, p. 15. Brigitte Bardot's R16 *A Woman Like Satan (La Femme et la Pantin)* (1959) was advertised as 'She was a special kind of hell ... Men went to her when they sinned ... IN HER HANDS MEN WERE LIKE PUPPETS ... The Married Men ... The Brutal Men ... The Innocent Youths ... And When She Pulled The Strings They Could Move Only in One Direction – Down!' *The [Manawatū] Times*, December 10, 1962, p. 11.

¹⁵¹ *The [Christchurch] Press*, November 27, 1965, p. 47.

¹⁵² Bronwyn Dalley, 'The Golden Weather, 1949-1965', in Bronwyn Dalley and Gavin McLean (eds.), *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: 2005, pp. 306-335, p. 308.

¹⁵³ Michael Moodabe, *Peanuts and Pictures: The Life and Times of M.J. Moodabe*, Auckland, N.Z.; Michael Moodabe, 2000, p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ *The Dominion Post*, August 10, 2015, p. 15.

resulted in high attendances and she remembers 'emerging from the film to see many bemused faces - it was a challenging film.'¹⁵⁵

Children

Children have always been regarded as an important cinema audience, internationally as well as in New Zealand. Many children started attending the cinema early and continued going regularly for many years. Given this period had 'a population blow-out of under-16s', resulting in children comprising a third of the population in 1961,¹⁵⁶ this meant a large number of potential movie-goers.

Theatre managers and child advocates were therefore concerned when Robert Kerridge decided early in 1960 that the special programme of children's matinees that had been running for three years was to end in May. Kerridge explained that the Children's Film Foundation in London had suspended production 12 months earlier and the supply of new films had ended, making it 'impossible to sustain the special significance of the series'. The National Council of Women of New Zealand were among those parties particularly disappointed, saying 'This information has greatly perturbed our Council as we feel the films produced especially for children filled a very much needed want in the community in that they provided clean and wholesome entertainment for our children.'¹⁵⁷

Because of the cessation of children's films from London, and the increasing number of films given censorship certificates deeming them unsuitable for children, finding cinematic fare for children became a significant issue for theatre managers in the 1960s. Alan Shepherd, of the Mayfair Theatre in Napier, commented in May 1960, that 'for three Saturdays out of four, I have films with an (A) certificate'. While noting that the films 'were good, and I wish to keep them', Shepherd requested 'something else for the Saturday matinees'. He explained that the first film, *Last Train from Gun Hill* (1959), would 'probably be OK [for children] as it is a western'. On Saturday June 18, however, the scheduled film was *Yesterday's Enemy* (1959), which Shepherd imagined would be 'a bit brutal for children', given it was a World War Two drama, and the following Saturday the scheduled film, *Al Capone* (1959), was 'also a film that parents won't wish their children to see'. Shepherd asked that, 'something be arranged for

¹⁵⁵ Gloria, born 1949.

¹⁵⁶ Dalley, p. 309.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from National Council of Women of New Zealand to R.J. Kerridge, July 5, 1960, Box 68, File 230, Miscellaneous Inwards, July – August 1960, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

the children on these Saturdays'.¹⁵⁸ Concern was also expressed by Merv Kisby, from the Regent in Pahiataua, who commented that while *Bachelor of Hearts* (1958) was technically suitable for children to watch, it was not really a good drawcard for them, given that it was a romantic comedy about college romance. He suggested holding over the Friday-night films that were suitable, and screening them at the Saturday matinee, thus saving on freight for a new film. He mentioned the upcoming *War Drums* (1957) as one such possibility, given it was a western, and suggested another upcoming film, *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* (1959), could also be held over for the matinee.¹⁵⁹

The manager of the Oamaru Opera House, Ron Horsburgh, creatively developed his own programme of appropriate fare for his young audiences.

Sometimes of late when I have thought my Saturday film not entirely suitable for young children, I have made up suitable programmes of shorts which have been on hand at both Theatres and replaced the feature with same, and parents and children alike have appreciated this move. Now that the C.F.F. programmes have ceased I do hope it is in order for me to do this type of thing [...] my matinee attendance has increased since this move was made to provide entertainment really suitable for children in the 4 to 14 age group.¹⁶⁰

Horsburgh was told that this practice was 'quite in order, although a little unorthodox'.¹⁶¹ Despite the tight control Kerridge and his senior management exercised over theatre managers, they were unlikely to oppose a practice that resulted in better box-office results for no extra financial outlay.

Providing theatres with child-appropriate material continued to be a problem, particularly as children were amongst the last to turn away from the movies, helped in part by television in New Zealand being very slow to accommodate children's viewing needs. In 1965 it was noted that, 'An important advance has been made during the year in the field of children's programmes. Each station now produces two half-hour children's programmes per week: one for local use and the other for all-station use.'¹⁶² This programming was scarcely

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Alan Shepherd, Mayfair Theatre Manager, Napier, to T.S. Townsend, May 12, 1960, Box 101, File 366, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Merv Kisby, Regent Theatre Manager, Pahiataua, to T.S. Townsend, March 3, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Ron Horsburgh, Opera House Manager, Oamaru, to T. S. Townsend, May 16, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶¹ Letter from T. S. Townsend to Ron Horsburgh, Opera House Manager, Oamaru, May 19, 1963, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶² *AJHR*, 1965, F. 3, p. 9.

extensive and a number of survey respondents who were children in the 1960s said they still went to the movies because of the limited fare available to them on television.

In 1965, Kerridge-Odeon theatre managers were informed that two Rank-produced serials containing six episodes each, *Five Had a Mystery to Solve* and *Valley of the Kings*, had arrived. However, as there was only one print of each episode, managers were told it would be 12 months before it would have circulated to all theatres. They were informed, however, that the company still had the original of these serials, which had first circulated for screening between 1958 and 1961, which now meant 'there must be a new audience for them'. Managers who wished to re-screen those titles were asked to contact the Booking Manager, and as these titles could be distributed immediately 'they could be a fill in until you receive the newer films from Rank'.¹⁶³

To assist in bridging the gap in children's screening material, any film suitable for entertaining or educating young people was deployed. An example was the New Zealand-produced short feature on the Antarctic, *140 Days Under the World* (1964), which was a 1965 Academy Award nominee for Best Documentary, Short Subjects. It was described as one that 'could well be exploited as an educational programme for school parties'. That approach 'drew considerable success' during its Auckland season and the film 'carried the endorsement of the Education Board'.¹⁶⁴ Schools were also targeted for attendance at appropriate film festival screenings, as seen with *Madame Butterfly* (1954) and *Oliver Twist* (1948) at the Regent Theatre in Greymouth.¹⁶⁵ Tony Goodliffe, manager of the King George Theatre in Lower Hutt, recalled the headmaster of Hutt Valley Boys' High School asking him to screen *Richard III* (1955) as it was in the school curriculum. Goodliffe said he secured the film and screened it to 1000 pupils at a shilling a head, which was 'a worthy return in those days'.¹⁶⁶

Kevin Heffernan has suggested that the precise films being screened at a theatre's Saturday matinee were often of secondary importance, as the main purpose of the matinee 'was for children to leave the house and get out from the watchful eyes of their parents for a few hours' and for parents to 'enjoy a few hours of quiet around the house while children shared

¹⁶³ Memo to All Theatres from M.C. Jarvis, Booking Manager, no date, 1965, Box 133, File 480, Circulars 1/65-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶⁴ Letter from A.J. Goodliffe to Theatre Managers, no date, circa October 1965, Box 133, File 480, Circulars 1/1-31/12 1965, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from R.P. Williams, St. James Theatre Manager, Greymouth, to T.S. Townsend, June 3, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶⁶ Tony Goodliffe and Terry Snow, *Stars in My Eyes: 40 Years in New Zealand Show Business*, Auckland, N.Z.: HarperCollins, 1996, p. 17.

an afternoon of scares, snacks, and laughter' with their peer-group.¹⁶⁷ A number of survey respondents acknowledge their parents used the cinema as a baby-sitting service, with Juliet McGuik commenting that her movie-going was invariably in the school holidays, where her mother or father would 'drop my brother and I off at the cinema and collect us after. [...] The movies were really a babysitter for us.'¹⁶⁸ Other survey respondents said it did not really matter what was being screened, as they went to the matinees regardless. However, evidence suggests that what was screened was important to exhibitors, at least, many of whom worked hard to ensure child-appropriate films were shown.

School Holidays

The school holidays were an opportunity for cinemas to 'catch the additional revenue which occurs at this time of year'.¹⁶⁹ Theatre managers liaised with their distribution departments to ensure they had the best possible children's film line-up. Films such as *The Big Circus* (1959) were a sure hit with children and were popular with families with their mix of drama, excitement and adventure set against the backdrop of the circus. Of *The Big Circus*, one reviewer said, 'it's everything that a great circus movie should be. Lions on the loose, tents burning and mysterious killers lurking around'.¹⁷⁰ The film broke records at Hawera for Friday and Saturday matinees, while the Saturday session made 'easily the record for any previous matinee in Hawera'.¹⁷¹ Mr Smyth, from the Mayfair in New Plymouth, commented that *The Big Circus* performed 'exceptionally well' at his theatre,¹⁷² while Harry Kennedy was pleased that the film was shifted from mid-week to the weekend at his Majestic in Timaru, as 'our patrons will welcome a good circus film', which apparently appealed to adults too.¹⁷³ At the Regent in Hamilton, *The Big Circus* did particularly well over its seven-day season during the January school holidays making a 'giant' £1,341,¹⁷⁴ and it was anticipated that the 'certain juvenile appeal' of Frank Sinatra's *A Hole in the Head* (1959), would also 'help school holiday trade'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ Kevin Heffernan, *Ghoul, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953-1969*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, p. 212.

¹⁶⁸ Juliet McGuik, born 1963.

¹⁶⁹ 'Showman's Round Table', Newsletter to Theatre Managers, December 1964, 10/62-12/64, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷⁰ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052626/reviews?ref=tt_urv retrieved May 10, 2016.

¹⁷¹ Letter from J. H. Horton, Regent and Opera House Manager, Hawera, to T.S. Townsend, March 17, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷² Letter from F. R. Smyth, Mayfair Theatre Manager, New Plymouth, to T.S. Townsend, March 2, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷³ Letter from Harry Kennedy, Majestic Theatre Manager, Timaru, to T.S. Townsend, May 11, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from A.G. Goodliffe, Regent Theatre Manager, Hamilton, to T.S. Townsend, February 18, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from A.G. Goodliffe, Regent Theatre Manager, Hamilton, to T.S. Townsend, April 9, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

At Whanganui's Regent, the adventure story *North West Frontier* (1959) was regarded as 'Splendid holiday booking', and it was thought that 'the school holidays should help a lot' with the screening of British comedy, *Sally's Irish Rogue* (1958).¹⁷⁶ The double feature of the John Wayne and Dean Martin western, *Rio Bravo* (1959), and Norman Wisdom in an unnamed film, was also thought 'to do well for the holidays'.¹⁷⁷ Joe Horton, the manager of the Hawera Opera House, reported that the comedy *Paris Playboys* (1954), *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure* (1959), *Francis in the Haunted House* (1956) and *The Kettles on Old McDonald's Farm* (1957) all received 'excellent' patronage from younger audiences during the January holiday period.¹⁷⁸

Theatre managers continued to strive to overcome the paucity of children's material and to cope with the often contradictory messages from their senior managers. On the one hand, they were cautioned to take extreme care in providing films appropriate for children, yet they were also told that due to the shortage of children's film it was necessary to book more 'Y' certificate films, films more suitable for those thirteen years and over. Managers were reminded that 'Films carrying 'G', 'Y', and 'A' Censorship Certificates were all approved for General Exhibition', and they were encouraged to use 'the full censorship classification, and not depend solely on the symbol'. In other words, rather than just indicating a film had a 'Y' certificate, managers were told to include the words 'Approved for General Exhibition', to show that children were legally allowed to attend.¹⁷⁹ The dilemma exhibitors consequently found themselves, and their frustration with the lack of suitable product, resulted in continual communication with their booking offices. The shortage of films suitable for child and family viewing supports Noel Brown's assertion that production of family films had been replaced by Hollywood's focus on producing films with more adult content to attract young adults into the theatre.¹⁸⁰

Youth

In an analysis of 1960s box-office receipts in the United States, *Variety* magazine found that youth had the dominant influence. They headlined this, 'B.O. Dictatorship by Youth', and an

¹⁷⁶ Letter from Regent Theatre Manager, Whanganui, to Head Office, March 12, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Regent Theatre Manager, Whanganui, to Head Office, July 22, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷⁸ Letter from Joe Norton, Manager of Opera House, Hawera, to T.S. Townsend, February 22, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from T. S. Townsend to Theatre Managers, January 18, 1963, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁸⁰ Noel Brown, 'Hollywood, the family audience and the family film, 1930-2010', PhD Thesis, Newcastle University, 2010, pp. 10, 151.

opening paragraph claimed Cole Porter's song, *Anything Goes*, 'might well have been the theme song of the Sexational Sixties'.¹⁸¹ This was followed by a United Nations report that stated

The American motion picture industry now caters primarily to the under-twenty-fives, the boys and girls who leave their parents to watch old films on television at home [...]. What they see on the screen, what the industry now tries to put on the screen, is what it thinks reflects the attitudes of this new generation.¹⁸²

In 1968 a Motion Picture Association of America audience research survey similarly indicated that teenagers still went to the movies while their elders stayed at home. The 16-24 age group made up 48% of current box-office admissions; 54% of that group were 'frequent moviegoers', which rose to 78% when only the 16-20 year olds were taken into account. The survey concluded that 'being young and single is the overriding demographic pre-condition for being a frequent and enthusiastic movie-goer'.¹⁸³

New Zealand historian Bronwyn Labrum argued that as elsewhere in the West the development of a 'new' audience comprised of young people, which had begun in the latter half of the 1950s, strengthened in the 1960s, with the period seeing a 'visible teenage world' emerge.¹⁸⁴ The baby-boom generation were reaching maturation and developing their own tastes, particularly in music and fashion, and were attaining an 'active consumer status', which enabled them to participate in the growing consumerism of this period.¹⁸⁵ The affluence of youth was the subject of correspondence early in the decade between Wyndham-Jones of the Auckland Publishing Company, and Robert Kerridge. Referring to extracts from the *London Financial Times*, Wyndham-Jones reported that 'between now [1960] and 1969 the number of teenagers in Britain will increase by at least 20%. The adults' pre-war monopoly of spending has been broken and cannot return.'¹⁸⁶ Further correspondence included up-to-date data from the London Press Exchange research team, which reinforced the importance of the youth market, and 'emphatically underlines the power and the wealth of the new-rich teenage group'. The data cited the average male teenager as spending eleven shillings a week on cigarettes and the average female teenager

¹⁸¹ Abel Green, 'B.O. Dictatorship by Youth', *Variety*, January 7, 1970, pp. 1 and 38.

¹⁸² Peter Hopkinson, *The Role of Film in Development*, Paris: UNESCO, 1971, p. 19, cited in David M. Considine, *The Cinema of Adolescence*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1985, p. 3.

¹⁸³ "'Pix must broaden market'", *Variety*, March 20, 1968, pp. 1, 78.

¹⁸⁴ Bronwyn Labrum, *Real Modern: Everyday New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s*, Wellington, N.Z.: Te Papa Press, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁸⁵ Labrum, *Real Modern*, and Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 15-44, p. 20.

¹⁸⁶ Letter from J.G.W. Wyndham-Jones, Auckland Publishing Company, February 26, 1960, Box 64, File 216, Circulars to 30 June 1960, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

three shillings, with the latter spending six shillings and sixpence out of every pound on clothes.¹⁸⁷ Clothing was of particular importance to one of my male survey respondents, who said that the sixties changed the way he dressed, and he admitted, 'I was a bit of a Teddy-Boy.'¹⁸⁸ More importantly for the cinema industry, these British teenagers were said to spend 'some £55 million a year on cinemas, theatres and discs [records] and form 30% of the average cinema audiences'. Wyndham-Jones commented, 'No wonder it is "Hooray for the Teenagers" where once it was something far less complimentary. We may not like their rock 'n' roll, but manufacturers are getting to like their big roll of spending money.'¹⁸⁹

The publishers of the cinema advertising magazine, *Playdate*, obtained statistics of the number of teenagers in New Zealand, and compared these with the number of *Playdate* sales, on a regional basis. The aim was to increase sales in areas that had a low ratio of magazine sales. That they compiled and analysed these statistics, and then targeted theatre managers in the areas of low sales, shows their acknowledgment of the importance of this cohort to cinema attendance and their determination to reach them. Distributors and exhibitors used whatever hook they could to attract the younger audience, as seen when Amalgamated Theatres publicity department stressed to theatre managers to strongly advertise Sandra Dee's role in *Take Her, She's Mine* (1963), as her casting had 'a very big teenage appeal'. Combined with James Stewart's 'good adult appeal', this pairing made the film 'an ideal property', according to the Publicity Manager.¹⁹⁰

Competitions, complimentary vouchers and free gifts had long been used to attract children and women to the theatre, but now they were used to attract teenagers, particularly female teenagers. Shampoo and cosmetic give-a-ways were frequently used by *Playdate* magazine, and the 'PLAYDATE CUTEX BIKINI GIRL CONTEST' was aimed specifically at teenage females over the December/January holiday period.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Letter from J.G.W. Wyndam-Jones of Auckland Publishing Company on Teenage Spending, March 24, 1960, Box 64, File 216, Circulars to 30 June 1960, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Gough, born 1943.

¹⁸⁹ Letter from J.G.W. Wyndam-Jones of Auckland Publishing Company on Teenage Spending, 24 March 1960, Box 64, File 216, Circulars to 30 June 1960, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

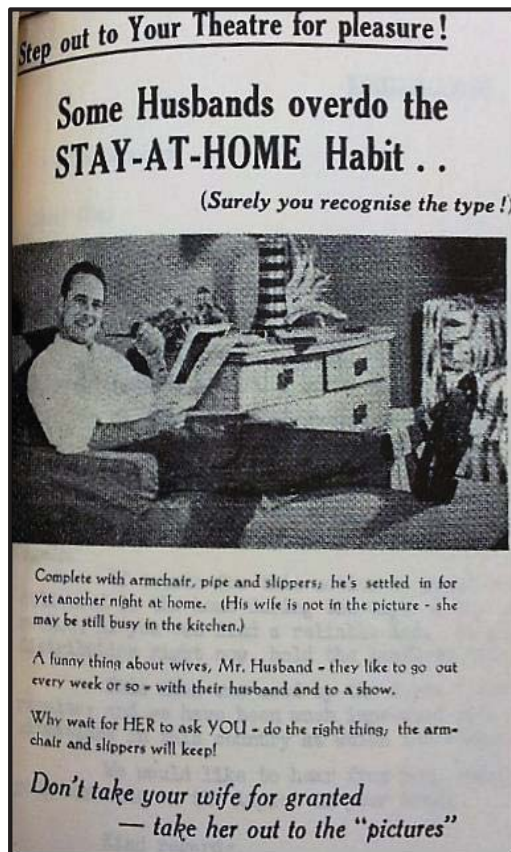
¹⁹⁰ Letter from Amalgamated Theatres Publicity Manager to Theatre Managers, November 27, 1963, MA 0562, Box 0982.002, Box 2 of 3, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives.

¹⁹¹ Memo from A.J. Goodliffe, Circulation Manager, to Theatre Managers, October 15, 1965, Circulars January 1965 – December 1965, Box 133, File 480, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Women

Given that the 1960s continued the ‘profoundly gendered’¹⁹² ideology of women in their role as wives and home-makers, women continued to be viewed as a separate segment of the movie-going audience in advertisements and marketing campaigns. One campaign used by the Kerridge-Odeon circuit, previously used by the Hoyts Chain in Australia with ‘excellent results’, was called ‘Stay-at-Home’, and was aimed at the housewife whose husband overdid the ‘stay-at-home habit’. It aimed to ‘sow the idea of an outing to the theatre in the lady’s mind – she may well leave the leaflet about as a pointed suggestion for her husband. If they come – who knows – they may acquire the habit and come again.’

The leaflet included a photo of a husband at home after his day’s work, with his feet resting



comfortably on an ottoman, his slippers on, and a pipe in one hand and newspaper in the other. The caption ‘Don’t take your wife for granted – take her out to the “pictures”’ was written in large type along the bottom of the leaflet.¹⁹³

The Manager of the Regent Theatre in Pahiatua, Mervyn Kisby, reported that the campaign was very successful there, as ‘At least five husbands have come up to me and told me that they wouldn’t be here if it hadn’t been for those b---- leaflets of yours. It would take another 400 if we are to cover the rest of the town, and if there are enough available it would be to our definite advantage to distribute them.’¹⁹⁴

Figure 2.1: Kerridge-Odeon advertising campaign, March 1960.

¹⁹² Labrum, *Real Modern*, p. 12.

¹⁹³ Letter from T.S. Townsend to Theatre Managers, March 25, 1960, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁹⁴ Letter from Manager of Regent Theatre, Pahiatua, to Mr Townsend, ‘Re: May bookings’, 14 April 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

The 'stay-at-home' husband, tired after his busy day at work away from the comforts of home, had been depicted in a cartoon in an American woman's magazine almost a decade earlier. In the American cartoon, a male figure walks home in the wind and snow, imagining a quiet night indoors, with his feet up and a pipe to hand, watching a boxing match on television, with his back to his wife, who is reading the newspaper. As he imagines this scene, in Figure 2.2, we see his wife in the kitchen getting dinner ready, imagining a night at the movies, watching a romantic film with her husband.¹⁹⁵ In the New Zealand advertisement, the wife is not shown in the picture, but is substituted with the words, in brackets to emphasis her side-lined position, '(His wife is not in the picture – she may be still busy in the kitchen).'¹⁹⁶ The women in both countries are depicted as having spent the day at home, most probably on their own, and with the homecoming of their husbands, are eager to leave the house. This supports Lynn Spigel's comment that 'one of the prevailing historical descriptions of the



Figure 2.2: *Better Homes and Gardens*, (U.S.) November 1951, p. 218.

ideology which accompanied [the] move to suburbia' was the 'generalised sense of isolationism' it brought.¹⁹⁷ Men, on the other hand, having spent their day in the public domain, wanted the comfort and domesticity the home provided.

This also reinforces David Morley's point that different members of the family can view, and use, their home in quite different ways. For men, the domestic sphere can be a place of

¹⁹⁵ *Better Home and Gardens*, 29, November 1951, p. 218, cited in Lynn Spigel, 'Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948-1955', *Camera Obscura*, 16, January 1988, pp. 9-46, p. 21.

¹⁹⁶ Leaflet attached to letter from T.S. Townsend to Theatre Managers, March 25, 1960, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁹⁷ Lynn Spigel, 'Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948-1955', *Camera Obscura*, 16, January 1988, pp. 9-46, p. 13.

leisure where 'staying in' is a form of relaxation. For women it can be a place of work, so going out can be a way of entering a sphere of leisure.¹⁹⁸ This was seen in responses from survey respondents, particularly females, who said one of the attractions of movie-going was to 'escape' from the house.

Further examples of advertising that specifically targeted women, particularly in their role as homemakers and housewives, are seen in promotional ideas shared by theatre managers. One example was for the American comedy, starring Frank Sinatra, *A Hole in the Head* (1959).

Personal letters to housewives is a good suggestion for this film. In this letter tell them that this film presents a wonderful form of escapism from the everyday drudgery of the kitchen. For them also is the added attraction of young Eddie Hodges, who features prominently throughout the film.¹⁹⁹

The film *That Kind of Woman* (1959), starring Sophia Loren and Tab Hunter, described as one of the hottest teen idols of the 1950s,²⁰⁰ was said to have 'the very best kind of title'.

It's a godsend of a label for shop window displays – "Whatever kind of woman you are you deserve the sheerest nylons" – "Every kind of woman appreciates the service and quality that Bloggs alone can offer". Yet again you could run some sort of competition with theatre seats as prizes, asking writers to write their ideas on what kind of woman they are, or even by selecting a member of the Royal Family or a prominent local woman, they could write an article, giving their views on that particular person.²⁰¹

Being asked to write an article for a competition in the hope of securing a movie pass illustrated the importance of movies to women, and the lengths they would go to secure a free cinema ticket. It also illustrates that men in the movie industry perceived that women not only would make the effort to write an article, but also had the time to do so. Despite the proliferation of household appliances available to New Zealanders in this decade, there is no evidence many women had 'time on their hands' in the 1960s,²⁰² and Dalley comments that the range of electric devices 'probably just freed them up for other tasks.'²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ David Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*, London: Comedia, 1986.

¹⁹⁹ Information from Publicity Department to Theatre Managers, March 9, 1960, Circulars to 30 June 1960, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁰⁰ http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002147/?ref=tt_ov_st_sm retrieved April 22, 2016.

²⁰¹ Information from Publicity Department to Theatre Managers, Date not given, circa March 1960, Circulars to 30 June 1960, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁰² Barbara Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016, p. 331.

²⁰³ Bronwyn Dalley, 'The Golden Weather, 1949-1965', in Bronwyn Dalley and Gavin McLean (eds.), *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: Hodder Moe, 2005, pp. 306-335, p. 312.

Regional Idiosyncrasies

Gender and age were not the only forms of audience segmentation, as theatre managers indicated there were regional preferences too, with audiences in some areas liking or disliking certain genres or particular actors. These regional idiosyncrasies suggest that regions in New Zealand occasionally had filmic quirks and preferences that indicate one film did not always fit all.

Quite a 'different' audience frequented the St James Theatre in Gore, according to manager, Geo Bush, who reported that 'we slipped badly' with the screening of *The Kid* (1921) and *Once Upon a Time* (1944) as a Friday night double-feature. *The Kid* featured the perennial favourite Charlie Chaplin, but was particularly old. Bush commented that while *Once Upon a Time* was an 'excellent film of its type', the 'type' being a fantasy story about a dancing caterpillar, it was not at all suitable for what Bush called his 'Friday Nighters' who 'are of a type, an action type'. Instead, Bush requested a Western for an upcoming Friday double-feature, as 'Freezing workers and country folk comprise a large percentage of my audience [...] Westerns are always popular with these people.'²⁰⁴ Films with a Scottish theme were also 'well-received' in Gore, unsurprisingly given the area's strong Scottish settlement,²⁰⁵ as seen in the popularity of two British comedies, *Geordie* (1955) and *The Bridal Path* (1959).²⁰⁶ In looking at his March 1960 line-up, Bush commented that he was happy with the schedule, with the possible exception of *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), a family fantasy, which was paired with *Rally 'Round the Flag Boys!* (1958). He hoped the latter comedy, starring Paul Newman, Joan Collins, and Joanne Woodward, would be popular enough to 'offset any shortcomings' in *Sinbad*, given the 'freezing workers and country folk' were not partial to fantasy stories. Bush showed his frustration with the Regent's audience by reporting to head office that 'People here are so fickle, in spite of the really top line films we are presenting we have only to show one poor one and 'The evil lives after us but the good is interred [sic] with our bones'.' This comment was heartily endorsed with 'Hear! Hear!' by Head Office's Trevor Townsend.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Letter from Geo Bush, St. James Theatre Manager, Gore, to T.S. Townsend, February 20, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁰⁵ <http://www.gorenz.com/visit/heritage/> retrieved October 14, 2016.

²⁰⁶ Letter from Geo Bush, St. James Theatre Manager, Gore, to T.S. Townsend, March 7, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Geo Bush, St. James Theatre Manager, Gore, to T.S. Townsend, February 20, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Robert (Bob) Williams also believed that West Coast audiences were 'different' from other audiences. Commenting on his schedule of upcoming films, Williams found it 'quite satisfactory', with the exception of *Wild is the Wind* (1957), an English/Italian film that was nominated for three Academy Awards, and starred the popular actor Anthony Quinn. Williams had seen the film in Christchurch and did not think it would be 'A WEST COAST one.' While not stating his reasons, Williams obviously believed the morally ambiguous plot of an American rancher taking his dead wife's sister as his second wife, with this unsuccessful marriage resulting in the disenchanted new wife having an affair with one of her husband's staff, was not one that would appeal to West Coast residents. Williams conceded that as the Regent only had the film for two days, they would 'do what we can to promote it'.²⁰⁸

Blackball residents' movie-going habits particularly frustrated Williams, who reported that the introduction of double-features at the Miners' Hall had been very disappointing.

We are doing [making] less now than with the single feature. At first I went into the fact of the poor attendances with a representative of the welfare committee, and was told that the time of starting did not suit them, also the bus service did not suit the times of starting. We went to a lot of trouble to get the starting times and finishing times to work in with the bus service, and we had co-operation of the bus company on the matter, but it is evident [sic] from the miserly £15 on a Saturday that our efforts were of no avail. I should like to propose that we go back to the single feature program for the week-end, and save on film hire and cartage. Honestly, Mr Townsend, I don't feel like trying to do anything for these people any more.²⁰⁹

Townsend agreed to discontinue the double-features and responded, 'We certainly agree that it is extremely hard to know what the people in this district want. We can only hope as the months go by that we will get a clearer picture of their requirements.'²¹⁰ A couple of months later, Williams reported that 'We continue to do our best with this place and we cannot blame the product for any fall off of business, again we are experiencing Bus [sic] trouble'.²¹¹ Williams's frustration with his audience continued.

The West Coast seems to have a likeing [sic] all of their own. As I feared "GIGI" (1958) was most disliked, but this is common of musicals in this town they honestly do not like a musical of this nature. The second film which has done very well everywhere else but failed to click here was "I'M

²⁰⁸ Letter from R. P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, February 18, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁰⁹ Letter from R.P Williams to T.S. Townsend, March 8, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²¹⁰ Letter from T.S. Townsend to R.P Williams, February 25, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²¹¹ Letter from R.P Williams to T.S. Townsend, June 3, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

ALL RIGHT JACK" (1959), this very excellent [sic] film was described to me by a member of the miners [sic] union as a lot of pomi [sic] rubbish'.²¹²

The British trade-union comedy, *I'm All Right, Jack* (1959), starring Peter Sellers, was the most popular film in Britain in 1959,²¹³ and it did well elsewhere in New Zealand. The *Listener* reviewer F.A.J. said the film was 'mainly concerned with doing over trade union tactics' and he felt the jokes aimed at the trade union representative in the film were 'in rather bad taste'. Given that the West Coast had a strong union-affiliated workforce, and the miner's union a particularly strong one, the film's apparent lack of empathy for working-class issues would help to explain why the film was poorly received by local residents. This suggests West Coast audiences supported the assertion made by Robert James in his historical study of the relationship between leisure and class in Britain that 'audiences want to see films which encourage their sense of self and which provide reassurance about their place in society'.²¹⁴ A further study by James, which focused specifically on miners in South Wales as a film audience, found that films that focused on the deprivations faced by working-class communities, and most importantly, sought resolutions for them, were attractive to mining communities.²¹⁵

Bob Williams altered his approach to his 'difficult' audience:

It is perfectly understood by us here in Greymouth that we will get every film, and owing to the peculiar nature of the theatre going public and the way they seem to change their ideas about films, we would hate to try and influence you into any kind or type of film which we would like to have. We have now a motto in Greymouth and that is accept everything and try and sell it on its merits.²¹⁶

Along with their unpredictable cinematic tastes, the residents of the West Coast had certain scheduling requirements, according to theatre manager Frank Roy at the Criterion Theatre in Reefton. The length of *The Sixth Inn of Happiness* (1958) at 14,804 feet, paired with the short

²¹² Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, May 26, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²¹³ According to the Gallup Poll as reported by Leslie Mallory in the British daily newspaper, *News Chronicle*, reported in 'Contact', In-house communication to staff, July 1960, Issue 5, p. 17, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²¹⁴ Robert James, 'Popular Film-going in Britain in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46:2, 2011, pp. 271-287, p. 283.

²¹⁵ Robert James, 'A Very Profitable Enterprise': South Wales Miners' Institute Cinemas in the 1930s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 27:1, March 2007, pp. 27-61, p. 36.

²¹⁶ Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, May 26, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. Williams had a particularly unsuccessful season with *The Man Who Understood Women* (1959), an American comedy starring Henry Fonda and Leslie Caron. In keeping with his new policy, he did not blame his audience: 'The film registered an all time low at this theatre, for three sessions we only put through 207 and made £28. This is the first time I have seen an audience walk out en-block [sic]. To see what was wrong I saw part of the film myself and with regard to the theatre, plays and films I consider my-self [sic] above average, and I am still wondering what this film was all about. So this time I will not blame the lack of intelligence on the part of the WEST COASTER.' Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, June 3, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

documentary of the Queen and Prince Philip's trip to the United States and Canada, *Royal River* (1959), at 2,300 feet, totalled 17,104 feet, which was approximately three hours viewing, excluding intermission. This made the screening too long, according to Roy, as even with a 7:45pm start it would be after 11pm before the film concluded. With 'Reefton being a coalmining town, Patrons [sic] rising at 6am will probably think twice before coming to this program'.²¹⁷

The scheduling of films in dairying areas was clearly an issue. Joe Norton, manager of both the Opera House and Regent in Hawera, commented that because of the lengthy double-features that were scheduled at the Opera House, the sessions would need to start at 7pm to enable the show to have finished before the midnight screening at the Regent. He noted that 7pm was 'too early a start time for the cow-cookies to come in and after they have had three and a half hours at the Opera House they have had enough and do not attend the late session so it affects us at the Box Office [...] even if we have to go to a single bill we feel that it would be much better'.²¹⁸

The audience that frequented Otorohanga's Town Hall was comprised of 'approximately 50% to 60% Maoris', who liked 'action, especially Westerns, and Rock'n'roll', according to manager, Jim Verity, who thought a programme of one of each of these genres would do particularly well. Verity commented that the Town Hall patrons were 'very different' to the Regent's.

Until a few months ago, many of the more respectable types would not go there [to the Town Hall] and some Usherettes would not go there to work. This was mainly due to bad language and noise with a few filthy remarks thrown in [...] I have been firm in stopping this and several people have since told me they "Don't Mind" going there now.

Verity added that Regent patrons, the 'better-class' of patron, were not keen on Westerns, but the 'odd Rock 'n' Roll mid-week would do well'.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Letter from Frank Roy, Criterion Theatre Manager, Reefton, to T.S. Townsend, February 21, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²¹⁸ Letter from Joe Norton Opera House and Regent Theatre Manager, Hawera, to T.S. Townsend, February 22, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²¹⁹ Letter from Jim Verity, Town Hall and Regent Theatre Manager, Otorohanga, to T.S. Townsend, February 18, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

These accounts²²⁰ suggest that film consumption, including the different tastes in stars, genres, and individual films, and the experience of movie-going, varied from theatre to theatre and region to region even in as relatively small a geographic area as New Zealand, and with its correspondingly small bi-cultural population. Studies by Richard Abel, and Mark Glancy and John Sedgwick, which found this to be true in the United States, are less surprising, given the vast and varied geographic space of that country and the multi-cultural nature of its population.²²¹

These examples indicate that the make-up of audiences of the 1960s was diverse, with diverse tastes. Comments from contemporary theatre managers show they made considerable effort to obtain the right films for their audiences, whether it be for children's matinees and school holidays, or for differences in regional taste. It was not therefore a case of audiences watching whatever film the distributor sent to their theatre, in an uncritical, unengaged way, but rather that audiences expressed their feelings about a film, either verbally to theatre staff, by walking out, or by not attending. This tension between audience and exhibitor was also evident between theatre managers and their managers, with the latter usually supporting their 'person on the ground', but occasionally using their seniority, and by implication, superior experience, to determine what would be screened. Exhibition, then, was a finely-tuned skill that often resulted in managers walking a tightrope between the preferences of their audience and the product that was scheduled for them by head office and the company's distribution centre.

²²⁰ Other examples include: The manager of the Britannia in Ponsonby, Auckland, commented: 'The average patron in Ponsonby appears to stay away from the down to Earth [sic] types of drama, and from shows that might possibly be classed as semi Hot [sic] shows but they appear to prefer a good mystery and shows that conduct them away from their real life problems.' Letter from Britannia Manager to T.S. Townsend, February 26, 1960. Audiences at the Kinema theatre in Kilbirnie, Wellington, did not like horror films, according to Manager R.T. Nelson. '[Horror of] *Dracula* (1958) is one that might let us down as "Horror" shows have not been a success in the past. However, we understand that this one is better than average and having done two weeks at St James we will exploit this one to the best advantage and justify its inclusion. Letter from R. T. Nelson, Kilbirnie's Kinema Manager, to T.S. Townsend, February 20, 1960. Manager of the Hamilton Embassy, manager Frank Johnstone wrote that *Life in Emergency Ward 10* (1950), a British hospital drama, had been changed 'to something more suitable for here', a double bill of *The Trap* (1959), an American crime drama and *High Hell* (1958), a British adventure story. *Woman of Circus* (unknown) was changed to the British crime drama *Violent Playground* (1958), which was 'more to our type'. Letter from F.S. Johnstone, Manager of Embassy, Hamilton, to T.S. Townsend, February 25, 1960. According to Pahiatua's Regent Manager, Merv Kisby, 'the public here seem to like War-Westerns-Comedy. Musicals of course are poison.' Letter from Merv Kisby, Manager of Regent Theatre, Pahiatua, to T.S. Townsend, February 18, 1960. Harry Kennedy, from Timaru's Majestic, acknowledged the strong interest in action films 'for one type of audience who never seem to resist the smell of the powder from the shooting irons'. Letter from Harry Kennedy, Manager of Majestic Theatre, Timaru, to T.S. Townsend, May 11, 1960. The manager of the Regent in Whanganui was concerned as to how well two up-coming Peter Sellers movies, *The Mouse that Roared* (1959) and *Two Way Stretch* (1960), would do, given that Peter Sellers was 'not too popular' with the Regent audience, with previous movies of his having 'fallen down'. Letter from Les Rogers, Manager of Regent Theatre, Whanganui, to T.S. Townsend, March 30, 1960. All of these examples are from Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²²¹ Richard Abel, 'Patchwork Maps of Moviegoing, 1911-1913', pp. 94-112, and Mark Glancy and John Sedgwick, 'Cinemas in the United States in the mid-1930s', pp. 155-195, in Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen (eds.), *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, Exeter, U.K.: University of Exeter, 2007.

'There are many audiences'.²²²

The variety of marketing strategies used in the *Playdate* publication reinforced the existence of segmentation of the movie-going audience. While the magazine was most aligned with teenagers, effort was made to reach a wider audience. Theatre managers were required to make significant efforts to sell the magazine and, given their hands-on approach in the running of their theatres and their subsequent knowledge of their audiences, they were encouraged to provide feedback on ways the magazine could be made more popular. Almost all their suggestions included a multi-faceted approach to ensure the magazine reached their many audiences.

The manager of the Regent in Gisborne, Dugold McPhail, suggested that 'A good knitting pattern would have definite appeal to women readers beyond the teenage group', while 'A 'Sports Profile' feature, one subject each issue, would have appeal to the teenage male'. He added, 'The Dear Sheba problem-page has its critics, with an impression that it doesn't ring true'. Readers were apparently of the opinion that 'the replies are written by a man with his tongue in his cheek', with the implication that as it was primarily for women, a female advisor would have been more appropriate.²²³ The September 1965 issue was 'packed with topical talk, eye catching pin-ups and a variety of features to make every walk of life a potential customer'. It included a feature on modelling 'for the girls', 'a tremendous four page cartoon feature "The Way It Is With Westerns" for the boys', an article on "Taking Up the Slacks" for the 'fashion conscious' [woman], along with the usual regular film reviews and other features.²²⁴

Timaru's Majestic Theatre manager, Bob Williams, focused on youth as the target audience, believing the magazine was 'still to [sic] wordy for young folk'. If you study the reading habits of the 'young folks', said Williams, 'they don't seem to read the captions on the bottom of pictures, but will look at a comic, and drink it all in as if it was written by PLATO'. He suggested including a serial in comic format, to match this reading preference. Williams added that the cover of the magazine needed 'to have BEEFCAKE. It seems that 90% of the buyers are the young girls, a woman on the cover does not appeal to them.'²²⁵

²²²'Contact', In-house communication to staff, July 1960, Issue 5, p. 19, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²²³ Letter from D. McPhail, Manager of Regent Theatre Manager, Gisborne, to Robert Kerridge, September 18, 1964, Playdate Follow-up Correspondence 1964, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²²⁴ *Playdate* promotion to Theatre Managers, August 18, 1965, Box 133, File 480, Circulars 1-12/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²²⁵ Letter from R.P. Williams, Majestic Theatre Manager, Timaru, to Bob Kerridge, February 20, 1964, Playdate Follow-up Correspondence 1964, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Specific groups were also regularly targeted as part of a theatre manager's advertising campaign. Extra promotional efforts by Percy Chase of the Regent in Palmerston North ensured he received 'well above average results' when he screened *The Miracle Worker* (1962), the biographical drama of Helen Keller. Chase personally advised groups he thought might be interested, including local women's clubs and associations, the Hard of Hearing, the Crippled Children's Association, and local parents' associations, of the upcoming screening of the film. Chase was also commended for being 'quick off the mark' when he saw *A Child is Waiting* (1963) included in his screening line-up. The film, starring Burt Lancaster and Judy Garland, and 'dealing with handicapped children', was 'obviously of interest to local women's organisations', so he 'contacted all interested, and achieved excellent results with this film, which would otherwise have received mediocre box office results'.²²⁶ Women were clearly defined as primary caregivers.

Another example of targeting a particular audience, this time of a denomination, was seen with the screenings of *Marcelino* (1959, Philippines) at the Regent in Dannevirke. The theatre manager contacted the local convent and arranged to show the film after school one day, while the public screening was announced to the congregation at mass on the Sunday before. The manager admitted, 'If it were not for the Catholics we would have had a very lean season with this film. We totalled £44 for our two days here.'²²⁷

The Attraction of the Movies

Two of the universal reasons for going to the movies, entertainment and escapism, which were highlighted in the previous decade, continued to be important factors for movie-goers in the 1960s.

Escapism

Survey respondents continued to emphasise the attraction of 'escaping' that a trip to the movies provided.²²⁸

²²⁶ Showman's Round Table, September/October, No. 6, 1964, Circulars, 10/62-12/64, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²²⁷ Letter from Keith Gill, Regent Theatre Manager, Dannevirke, to T.S. Townsend, September 24, 1964, Box 123, File 444, 2/64-12/64, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²²⁸ Further comments include: Female, born 1954, 'Getting lost in the story'; Mervyn, 'The willing suspension of disbelief. Escape from reality'; Cleone, born 1937, 'In the early 60's going to a movie was an enjoyable 25 mile track to town which was an escape from the country'; Allan MacGibbon, 'Escapism. An opportunity to sit in a dark room and get taken away and thrilled, humoured and entertained'; Ross Nicholson, 'Takes you away from the restrictions of your current world into a whole different realm'; Vicki, born 1948, 'Films were fantasy and make believe. So different to my real life'; Female, born 1950, 'Change of location, feeling of it being an event, and welcoming the entertainment after the daily grind'; Male, born 1946, 'Pure escapism. Big screens, full colour and great sound.'

I enjoyed the emotions involved, getting off the world for a couple of hours, going 'out' - mostly it was a way of escaping an urban NZ life into a world of fantasy and imagination.²²⁹

Being transported into other worlds, other times, places I'd never been. Enjoying films as a family activity that we could share with our children as they grew up.²³⁰

Being transported into a world that was far outside my provincial reality. Being challenged in my thoughts and emotions.²³¹

The 60s was also a good time when briefly the world or some of it came together and there was a sense of optimism and community living.²³²

I needed a night out from work and domestic commitments.²³³

The general love of movies and the magic they can bring. Training as a nurse meant it was great relaxation to be in a 'pretend' world.²³⁴

'Escaping from reality' has long been acknowledged as a universal attraction for going to the cinema, and these examples illustrate that New Zealanders also wanted to 'escape' from the mundane, the boring, the 'daily grind'. There were still relatively few leisure activities outside the home, particularly in the evenings, in the 1960s, so the movies offered somewhere to 'escape' to. This sentiment echoes the comment by Maurice Gorham that in Britain 'a great deal of the fare they [cinemas] offered would never have found takers had the urge to escape from drab domesticity been less strong.'²³⁵

Socialising and Romance

The movies also continued to provide both an easy and socially acceptable opportunity for people to meet up with friends of both the same and the opposite sex, with this being particularly important for young people.²³⁶

²²⁹ Male, born 1954.

²³⁰ Wendy Zemanek, born 1942.

²³¹ Murray, born 1950.

²³² Enid, born 1927.

²³³ Christine, born 1943.

²³⁴ Female, born 1943.

²³⁵ Maurice Gorham, 'Television: A Medium in its own Right?' in Roger Manvell and R.K. Neilson Baxter (eds.), *The Cinema: 1951*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1951, pp. 131-146, p. 133.

²³⁶ Further comments on what was attractive about going to the movies include: Male, born 1940, 'Fun group outing'; Dale Hendry, 'Social event and gave topics for discussion'; Richard, born 1941, 'Social atmosphere'; Ailsa, 'In my early years, it was a rare treat. Being with friends'; David, 'A night out, meeting other folk with similar interests'; Sandra, born 1951, 'Being with friends when older'; Shirley-Ann Kinsella, 'Enjoyed the company, the story of the movie'; Nigel Ramsden, 'Particularly enjoyed the company - family or friends'; Margaret, 'Enjoyed Passivity of viewing after studying when I was a uni student. Something social to do with a friend or friends'; Female, born 1946, 'Feeling very grown up. Chance to meet friends or boyfriend.'

For me, in my teens, it was all connected with having a social life outside of the family home. Entertainment yes, and also sharing it with peers, and starting to go out on dates with the opposite sex.²³⁷

It was part of the popular thing to do with friends or on a date. It was social as there was half time and after the movies we would go to a cafe for coffee and listen to music etc. You could hold hands with your boyfriend in the dark and he might even put his arm around you.²³⁸

A pleasant thing to do with girlfriends. A usual activity for 'a date'.²³⁹

Going to the movies was a big part of our social world. It was a reason to meet, go out for a coffee afterwards. I'm sure the social world today is far more varied.²⁴⁰

As I got into my teenage years it was the place to hang out & meet local lads on a Friday night - my first kiss was at the local cinema think when I was 14 or 15 years old.²⁴¹

Audience members shared a number of the same reasons for going to the movies, and they received many of the same enjoyments, but individuals brought their own personal expectations and experiences to the movie theatre, their own contextual factors, thereby ensuring their own uniquely individual experience. As one person said, 'I seem to remember less about the movies than the experience generally'.²⁴² For Janet Staiger, these contextual factors account for the experiences movie-goers had more than the textual factors of the films themselves.²⁴³ The detailed recollections from two respondents illustrated the importance of contextual factors to their movie-going experience.

The atmosphere played a large part in the enjoyment of going to the movies, i.e. the gathering of patrons on the foyer, the posters etc. In pre-TV days there were news clips (Movietone News) which provided snapshots of activity around the word, followed by other 'shorts' which might include travel a documentary or a serial and sometimes a cartoon - and this was all before the trailers. Then there would be 'half time' when, if it were a Kerridge-Odeon theatre, that 'foyer experience again' and patrons would queue at the 'Nibble Nook' for ice-creams etc. The main feature would begin after half time. Until I was a young adult, I would always be amazed at the feeling of stepping outside into the daylight after watching a day-time movie.²⁴⁴

²³⁷ Anne, born 1944.

²³⁸ Female, born 1946.

²³⁹ Rosalie, born 1941.

²⁴⁰ Female, born 1943.

²⁴¹ Female, born 1954.

²⁴² Carolyn Deverson, born 1949.

²⁴³ Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, New York: New York University Press, 2000.

²⁴⁴ Male, born 1949.

The romance of it, sitting in the dark. Not knowing what to expect. Being in a crowd of other kids all sucking on lollies or ice-creams. Being taken to another world, much more exciting than my own rather mundane one. I would live in that fantasy land until the next movie! The whole weekly ritual, of walking to the local theatre, queuing up, buying the ticket and ice-cream. And then coming back outside into the light of the real world. Seeing and learning about other lives, countries and attitudes, though these could be rather selective for the time, as I later found out.²⁴⁵

These examples illustrate Staiger’s belief that ‘the pleasures sought by people in their attendance at the movies are much more perverse than our standard text-focused and institutional-based histories have been able to acknowledge.’²⁴⁶ Going to the movies was about much more than going to see a film.

Barriers to Movie Attendance

Of the 164 survey respondents who answered the question relating to barriers to going to the movies, and who went to the movies most often in the 1960s, 33, or 18%, said there were no barriers that prevented them from seeing the films they wanted to see. If they wanted to go to the movies, they went.

Cost

For the remaining 131 people, the most frequently mentioned factor was the cost, which was cited by 48% of this cohort. The average ticket price more than doubled during the decade, while the nominal weekly wage of employees went up by 39%, as shown in the following table, clearly illustrating the significantly higher real cost of a movie ticket.

Year ²⁴⁷	Admission Price (c)	% Increase	Nominal Average Weekly Wage ²⁴⁸	% Increase
1960	26.6		246	
1961			250	2
1962	27	1.5	256	2
1963			263	3
1964	31.4	16	271	3
1965			288	6
1966	39.7	26	296	3
1967			311	5
1968	46.2	5	323	4
1969	54	17	342	6

Table 2.20: Price of admission and average nominal weekly wage, 1960s.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Waveney, born 1950.

²⁴⁶ Staiger, *Perverse Spectators*, p. 31. Staiger’s use of ‘perverse’ is not in the sense of turning away from what is right or ‘normal’, or being self-willed, or in having a ‘disposition marked by opposition and contradiction’. She uses the term to highlight the ‘wilfulness’ of the spectator in ‘finding their own pleasure’. p. 32.

²⁴⁷ As at November of each calendar year.

²⁴⁸ Figures are for adult employees. Nominal Weekly Wage Rates Index, *Wages and Earnings, 1979-1983, Part B*, Wellington, N.Z.: Department of Statistics, November 1984, p. 13.

²⁴⁹ Price of Admission from *NZOYB*, 1971, p. 366. The figure for 1969 is from the CPI, *NZOYB*, 1969, p. 683.

Some of the comments by survey participants around the issue of cost are shown here. These examples illustrate not just that money was short for many, but that a variety of economic and societal factors impacted on families at this time, including single parenthood, transport problems and low wages. Other comments reflect aspects of domesticity, including children learning to budget, the role of 'Mum' as the controller of the household budget, and child discipline.²⁵⁰

We didn't have enough money to go more often – there were four of us kids.²⁵¹

Pocket money from your parents had to be budgeted between say buying lollies and ice cream, comics or magazines, or using it for tram fares. Sometimes my parents would cut my pocket money allowance for misbehaving.²⁵²

Dad was on a low wage, so Mum sent us as often as she could afford it.²⁵³

In the early 1960's it was a treat to go to any movie as our parents were not able to afford much. Coming from a family of nine it was a privilege. However back in those days you used to get one shilling for an empty crate of beer bottles and so if there was a movie we wanted to see we would sneak around the back of the wholesalers (as they were known as back then) and nick an empty crate and take it around to the front and get our shilling. That allowed three of us to get into the movies for four pence (4d). We eventually got rumbled and got a good kick up the bum for our troubles.²⁵⁴

Even though mum was a solo mother (from my 10th year) she always seemed to have a shilling for each of us 6 kids.²⁵⁵

While lack of money was clearly a factor in preventing movie attendance for some, going to the movies was important enough for others to ensure the price of admission was available, especially for children. Many survey respondents easily recalled the exact amount it cost for a ticket, particularly as children, when they were also budgeting for the inevitable ice-cream or lollies, and often the price of transport to get home. An adult movie-goer at this time also remembered the cost of admission, and the comparison between cities: 'In New Plymouth

²⁵⁰ Additional comments include Marilyn McIntyre saying 'Mum's purse' impacted on her ability to go to the movies; Female, born 1957, said her mother was 'tight' with money; Neil, born 1945 said a shortage of 'household money' meant it wasn't until he was working that he could afford to go; Helen, born 1956, 'we were given sixpence for the movie and threepence to spend on lollies - we nearly always walked to the pictures so we didn't incur the tram fare'; Sue, born 1952, 'As students we did not have a lot of spare cash'; Male, born 1941, 'Cost was a factor – was on a modest income'; Elizabeth, born 1960, 'It was "an extravagant use of money" when I was little so visits were limited because of cost'.

²⁵¹ Juliet McGuik, born 1963.

²⁵² Spiros, born 1946.

²⁵³ Alison, born 1947.

²⁵⁴ Ross Miller, born 1955.

²⁵⁵ Waveney, born 1950.

we paid 2s and 3d for a good seat and 2s and 9d for a better one. When I was dating in Wellington if you were lucky you might sit upstairs for 3s and 3d.²⁵⁶ Occasionally theatre managers reported on local examples of regional hardship, as seen with the concern over the continued 24 hour a week strike at the Strongman mine. Greymouth Regent Theatre manager, Bob Williams, informed his Head Office that it looked to be 'a long time before the dispute is settled'.²⁵⁷

A significant change in the pricing of tickets was the removal of the amusement tax on cinema admission prices in June 1965. This resulted from petitions received by the Government from those in the film business who felt the tax was unfair, as it affected no other forms of entertainment. It was also pointed out the tax had been removed by other Commonwealth countries 'some years ago'. Kerridge-Odeon senior management informed theatre managers that the removal of the tax 'will not result in any adjustment to admission prices paid by the public'.²⁵⁸ A week later, however, this was amended.

With the lifting of Amusement Tax it is now possible for us to have a complete review of prices, "rounding off" such prices as 3/11 and 5/7, and generally introducing a range of prices that bear a logical relationship between different types of theatre and to several parts of each theatre. The new prices will result in some increases; there will also be decreases in some prices, whilst a great number of existing prices will remain as they are at present.²⁵⁹

This rounding off of ticket prices, a practice by one of the major cinema chains almost certainly mirrored by the other, was reflected in the 16% increase in ticket prices from 1960 through until 1964-5, as seen in the previous table. As was the policy with any change in price with Kerridge-Odeon theatres, no public announcement was made. Illustrating the comfortable relationship between the two chains, Kerridge-Odeon management informed Amalgamated Theatres of a change in their prices in November 1967, saying that the rate charged for the front stalls in some of their city theatres, 'constitutes something of an anomaly in that the price of 30 cents for adults in the evening is too low on present day standards'. They informed Amalgamated that they planned to remove the differentiated

²⁵⁶ Female, born 1946.

²⁵⁷ Letter from R.P. Williams, Regent Theatre Manager, Greymouth, to T.S. Townsend, March 8, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁵⁸ Letter from General Manager T.S. Townsend to Theatre Managers, June 11, 1965, Circulars 1 January to 31 December 1965, Box 133, File 480, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁵⁹ Letter from T.S. Townsend to Theatre Managers, June 17, 1965, Circulars 1965, Box 133, File 480, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

front stalls price from their theatres in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Once again, the policy was 'to be effected as unobtrusively as possible'.²⁶⁰

One change in policy that provided some good news for a particular segment of the audience was Kerridge-Odeon's decision to extend the age of eligibility for children's tickets by one year, so that children's prices would apply to those of 14 years of age and under, rather than 13 years. In courteously informing Amalgamated Theatres of this in a letter marked 'Private and Confidential', Kerridge-Odeon stated that this policy was to be implemented immediately, but there would be no publicity because 'if there were a press announcement it could be misreported or misinterpreted to our detriment'.²⁶¹ Given that a price decrease for all those aged 14 was positive news, the only 'detriment' would be the possible public perception that the movie business was in trouble and the policy would illustrate how bad things really were.

It is clear that the cost of attending the movies was a negative factor to movie-attendance for some movie-goers in this period. Ticket prices went up markedly more than did the average nominal wage. This was also a period of substantial family sizes, with the average number of births to Pakeha women 4.3 and Maori women 6 in 1961.²⁶² The combination of these factors is reflected in the increased number of movie-goers who said that the price of admission was a factor that prevented them from attending the movies as often as they would have liked.

Marriage and Family

Many survey respondents said that getting married and starting a family was a reason for their decrease in movie-going and one which goes hand in hand with limited finances. Given that in New Zealand the early 1960s saw marriage become 'almost universal', and a trend for 'early childbearing and the shortening of birth intervals',²⁶³ it was inevitable this would have some effect on movie-attendance. Those who married and started a family at this time,

²⁶⁰ Letter from N.J Glover to Bert Allen, Amalgamated Theatres, November 13, 1967, Box 149, File 550, 1/67-12/67, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶¹ Letter from N.J. Glover to Bert Allen, Amalgamated Theatres, September 12, 1967, Box 149, File 550, 1/67-12/67, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁶² *NZOYB*, 1972, pp. 112-117; 2000, p. 98.

²⁶³ *NZOYB*, 2000, p. 98.

or 'wed and bred' to use Bronwyn Dalley's phrase,²⁶⁴ shared what effect this had on their ability to attend the movies.²⁶⁵

I would have liked to go far more often in the late 60s and early 70s but had young children so it cost more (for babysitting). Plus at that stage it was mostly evening movies, none in late afternoons or at a variety of weekend times and I was too tired in the evening.²⁶⁶

I got married in 1965 and had a family. We had a television and were on a low income so any outings were few and far between.²⁶⁷

Raising a family and working full time didn't leave much time to go to the movies.²⁶⁸

Went to cinema less often with arrival of tv but cinema viewing was also restricted by having children.²⁶⁹

A busy lifestyle with young children tended to mean going to a film was a luxury not often enjoyed.²⁷⁰

1961 advent of children. It had to be a very good movie to go to the trouble of getting a baby-sitter.²⁷¹

Once into my twenties [the mid-1960s onwards], the early parenting role took over from the 'going out and socialising' experiences of my teens.²⁷²

Television had an impact, but other factors came into play, especially raising a family and not having the freedom to just pop off and go to the cinema.²⁷³

It is worth noting the number of times television is mentioned in conjunction with marriage and children, indicating its role in the domesticity of this period. Newly-weds had children early in their marriage in the sixties,²⁷⁴ and television fitted with their change in lifestyle. While the 1950s were also a period of high birth-rates, television was not an entertainment option then. A number of respondents mentioned the difficulties involved in getting reliable baby-sitters in the 1960s, with the effort outweighing the enjoyment of a night out, although

²⁶⁴ Dalley, 'The Golden Weather', p. 308.

²⁶⁵ Further comments included: Male, born 1940, 'Watched more television after marriage'; Male, born 1940, 'Having a family changed habits more than TV'; Anne, born 1933, 'Children arrived. We went out less. TV was always there'; May, 'It was the time we were all having family'; Female, born 1942, 'Once I was married with children - late 60s then 70s - not much time'; Wilma, born 1933, 'Had five children and did not have time'.

²⁶⁶ Christine, born 1944.

²⁶⁷ Ann, born 1948.

²⁶⁸ Heather, born 1936.

²⁶⁹ Dale Hendry, born 1938.

²⁷⁰ Kay, born 1936.

²⁷¹ Male, born 1937.

²⁷² Anne, born 1944.

²⁷³ Margaret Gauden-Ing, born 1944.

²⁷⁴ Dalley, 'The Golden Weather', p. 308.

one couple found a creative way to ensure they both saw a movie, saying 'sometimes one of us went one night and the other the next night. Then we discussed the content.'²⁷⁵

Transport and/or Distance from Theatre

Lack of transport and/or distance from a theatre continued to provide a barrier to movie attendance for some survey respondents, despite the rate of car ownership increasing from one car for every 4.7 persons in 1960 to one car for every 3.3 persons in 1969.²⁷⁶ Survey respondent Helen, who frequented the Ascot in Wellington as a child in the 1960s, said she most often went to the movies with her sibling and they almost always walked to the theatre to avoid the tram fare. Their money was instead used for admission and 'lollies'. Barbara commented that there were no theatres in Tawa, where she lived, and so movie-going was restricted to 'after work on a Friday nite [sic]' when she went to Wellington.²⁷⁷ Another respondent, who lived in Caversham, Dunedin, and as a child would go into the central city with her siblings to see a film, said they only went to the movies if her parents 'had the available money', and that transport was also an issue, as they needed to 'catch either the steam train or the trolley bus into the city - that also cost additional money'.²⁷⁸ Pamela O'Neill cited all three of the most prevalent barriers to movie attendance: 'caring for small family, lack of transport, and also financial' preventing her from attending the movies as often as she would have liked.

Other Leisure Activities

This period saw an increasing number of leisure activities available for the public to spend their time and their discretionary money on. Any competing attraction was a cause of concern for theatre managers and they were quick to report these to explain any drop in revenue that might eventuate.

Dunedin's Regent Theatre manager, Lester McKellar, reported the huge crowds that attended the opening of the new Moana swimming pool in Dunedin in November 1964 to his Head Office. The pool attracted crowds of 13,547 for one weekend, with the local newspaper reporting that 'No pool in New Zealand, and possibly no pool in the world, has had to contend with such crowds.' McKellar made sure his manager was aware that this

²⁷⁵ Wendy Zemanek, born 1942.

²⁷⁶ *NZOYB*, 1966, p. 325; 1971, p. 324. The number of licensed cars in 1961 was 523,847, which increased by 59% to 833,488 in 1969.

²⁷⁷ Barbara, born 1944.

²⁷⁸ Female, born 1958.

extremely popular new attraction could well draw patrons away from his theatre in summer months.²⁷⁹ Merv Kisby of Pahiatua described the impact of a solid month of family-oriented attractions in his district: 'The month of February was unfortunately very poor for us due to heavy outside opposition, firstly the circus, then a 75th school jubilee, and the A&P show running for two days and nights. All of these are heavy spending activities and naturally our business was affected as a result.'²⁸⁰ A similar occurrence was reported by Bob Williams, from the Regent in Greymouth, with strong competition for movie attendance expected from the upcoming local Centennial attractions, which were at their height in February and March; the Roman Catholic Centennial year; the Industries Fair; and Bullen's Circus, all attractions that were 'being looked forward to with great expectation' by local residents.²⁸¹

The variety of entertainment options available to movie-goers of this period was reflected in comments from survey respondents, with one saying her leisure time was shared between watching television, going to the movies, or a live show.

Got married and saved money to buy a Television [sic] set which we rented first to see if it was a good idea and of course it was so we didn't go to the movies unless it was something very special that we wanted to see. I still took my Mum now and again to any good Shows that came to Christchurch. Cliff Richard was a highlight for her.²⁸²

Another contemporary movie-goer said 'There was an expansion of entertainment alternatives from the mid/late 1960s including professional theatre in Auckland (Mercury) and restaurants,' although she added that 'Films were still popular'.²⁸³

Theatre managers had to become more creative and flexible in this increasingly competitive environment. One example seen in Palmerston North was the screening of movies on Saturday nights, after the popular speedway racing event had finished. The films shown often targeted young people, on the assumption that they were the most likely to be looking for further entertainment after the racing finished. The Mayfair ran the following advertisement for the screening of *Dragstrip Girl* (1957) in January 1961.

TEENAGE REBELS! CAR CRAZY ... SPEED CRAZY ... BOY CRAZY ... Here is the
Raw-Edged Violent Story of Today's Teenagers ... The Rock and Roll

²⁷⁹ Letter from Lester McKellar, Regent Theatre Manager, Dunedin, to T.S. Townsend, November 24, 1964, Box 123, File 445, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁸⁰ Letter from Merv Kisby, Pahiatua Theatre Manager, to T.S. Townsend, March 3, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁸¹ Letter from R.P. Williams, Regent Theatre Manager, Greymouth, to T.S. Townsend, March 8, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁸² Female, born 1937.

²⁸³ Debbie, born 1953.

Crowd, The Petting Parties, The Wild Dance crazes, The Hot Rods, The Boys and Girls on the Loose ... a blast of thrills. Packed Dramatic Dynamite That Never Lets Up! [...] REMEMBER THE MAYFAIR IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER FROM THE SHOWGROUNDS!²⁸⁴

A fortnight later, the Mayfair screened *Shake, Rattle and Rock!* (1956) as their after-speedway attraction, stating it was 'Just The Kind Of A Movie To Really Top Off Your Night's Entertainment!' The opposition theatre, Amalgamated's State, also began screening post-speedway movies in competition to the Mayfair,²⁸⁵ with both theatres continuing their Saturday 10:30pm screenings throughout the speedway season.

Dances had always been popular, particularly for young people, as they provided an opportunity to be in the company of the opposite sex in an organised forum acceptable to parents. With the advent of rock 'n' roll, dances became even more popular as youngsters learned the new dance steps, and with the ongoing popularity of Elvis Presley and new musical influences such as Cliff Richard, who also appeared on the big screen, dances were as much about trying out the latest dance moves as they were an opportunity to catch the eye of a potential boy or girl friend. A survey respondent commented that 'Movies were the main form of outside entertainment available during that period other than parties and dances',²⁸⁶ and this trio of entertainment options was repeated by another contemporary movie-goer who said, 'The movies were an alternative to dance nights and parties.'²⁸⁷ The attraction of dances was foremost for one survey respondent, who said that he went to the movies more often when he was younger, but as a teenager the 'Saturday night dances were always first choice'.²⁸⁸ Another respondent enjoyed watching dancing on television, and then went out to a dance, saying 'We didn't go out on a Saturday night till *C'mon* was over. That was probably early enough to still get to a movie, but we went more often to dances.'²⁸⁹ That disused theatres were converted into dance halls indicates the continued popularity of this form of social gathering.

²⁸⁴ *The [Manawatū] Times*, January 6, 1961, p. 1.

²⁸⁵ *The [Manawatū] Times*, January 21, 1961, p. 1.

²⁸⁶ Female, born 1949.

²⁸⁷ Sally, no birth year given.

²⁸⁸ Male, born 1948.

²⁸⁹ Carolyn Deverson, born 1949. *C'mon* was a local television show featuring singers and 'go-go' dances which screened from 1967-9.

The extension to the hours of public bars from 6pm closing to 10pm in October 1967 has been credited with assisting in the drop in audience numbers at the cinema²⁹⁰ and two survey respondents recall it had an impact on their leisure time.

I think transport improvements changed how we lived. Saturdays changed. We didn't stop going to movies because of TV. We went out. Pubs n clubs. 6 o'clock closing changed the way we spent our free time. In Waiouru the cinema was a focus because we had bugger all else to do and tv then was rubbish, aside from bonanza and the like, but they were not draw cards like Bond was. Then the car and pubs became the focus. I still went to movies but far less frequently.²⁹¹

Pub closing time altered from 6 till 10. This affected TV viewing as well as causing the closing of our country weekly dance. People seemed to love the late pub time closing.²⁹²

Attendance statistics, however, do not reflect any significant drop off in attendance after the 1967 extension in hours, over and above the steady decline that was already taking place.²⁹³ Tony Goodliffe, a former employee of Kerridge-Odeon, claimed that Robert Kerridge approved of the extended hours, calling those who opposed them 'wowers' and 'caught up with religion'.²⁹⁴ Prior to the change in their hours, public bars were very much a male domain, as men quickly filled the hour between finishing work at 5pm and heading home at six. The extension of open hours till 10pm still saw very few women in bars, but 'within a few years' the pubs attracted female patrons as they provided comfortable seating, wine options, and live entertainment.²⁹⁵ Given that young people were not allowed into bars, and that married women, if not men too, will have largely remained at home with their families, it is probably not surprising that this potential impact on movie-going received little mention from my survey respondents.

The 'night trots', evening harness horseracing, introduced to New Zealand in 1958, was another leisure activity that has been linked to the decline of cinema-going,²⁹⁶ but evidence of this is not seen in attendance statistics. The decrease in attendance of three percent per person per year from 1956-7 to 1958-9 is in line with the reduction in attendance happening

²⁹⁰ Wayne Brittenden, Tony Froude, Valmond Page and Warren Smyth all believe 10pm closing had a negative effect on movie attendance.

²⁹¹ Allan MacGibbon, 1952.

²⁹² Female, born 1941.

²⁹³ NZOYB statistics show a 33% decline in number of attendances per person per year from 1962-3 to 1964-5, a 27% decline from 1964-5 to 1966-7, and a 29% decline from 1966-7 to 1968-9. The decrease from 1968-9 to 1970-1 was 11.5%.

²⁹⁴ Tony Goodliffe and Terry Snow, *Stars in My Eyes: 40 Years in New Zealand Show Business*, Auckland, N.Z.: HarperCollins, 1996, p. 34.

²⁹⁵ Jock Phillips, 'Generations 1965-1984', in Bronwyn Dalley and Gavin McLean (eds.), *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z.: 2005, pp. 336-363, p. 340.

²⁹⁶ Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus*, p. 143.

throughout the 1950s. Attendances increased in 1960-1, after which they declined. While a variety of factors were mentioned by survey respondents as reasons for their declining attendance, night-trotting was not one of those. Nevertheless, there is no doubt of the popularity of this activity, if the crowd at Auckland's Alexandra Park, in 1959, was a regular occurrence.²⁹⁷

What Films Were Popular and Why?

The popularity of particular films for this decade has been determined by comments from contemporary theatre managers and management, from the number of screenings obtained from exhibitors' record books where these are available, from newspapers and magazine advertisements and commentary, and from my survey respondents' comments. While comprehensive attendance data is not available for this period, with the exception of screenings at the Majestic Theatre in Timaru from 1965 until the end of 1969, a number of patterns of preferences still clearly emerged. The films discussed are not the only hits of this period, but are those highlighted by the exhibitor record books and survey respondent comments.

According to those survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s, and who specifically selected a movie to go to rather than going to 'whatever was on', the genre of a film continued to be the most influential factor in choosing what movie to see, as shown in the following table. A notable change from the previous decade is the lessened importance of who the actors were, 'the stars'. Instead, 'word-of-mouth', what William Paul referred to as 'the most intangible of all Hollywood marketing strategies',²⁹⁸ became the second most important factor in film selection for movie-goers of this decade. As movie-going became less of a habit and more of an occasional attendance, it appeared that what others had to say about a film, and whether one's friends were seeing it, became more important to survey respondents. Film author Kristin Thompson has linked the reduced importance of the star to the arrival of television, arguing that before then movie-goers would generally not expect to see a film again. If the film was particularly popular, it could be rescreened, but there was no guarantee of that. Post-television, old Hollywood films were a programming mainstay of the 'small screen', so movie-goers no longer had to wait for a

²⁹⁷ Mary Mountier, 'Horse and greyhound racing - Harness racing: late-20th-century trends', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/39024/night-trotting-alexandra-park-1959> retrieved January 28, 2017.

²⁹⁸ William Paul, 'The K-Mart Audience at the Mall Movies', *Film History*, 6:4, Winter, 1994, pp. 487-501, p. 495.

new film at the cinema to see their favourite stars.²⁹⁹ Jeremy Butler also stressed the importance of the star in the ‘studio-era’ years as a source of ‘product differentiation as significant as narrative-based genres’.³⁰⁰ Survey respondents’ appear to have reflected these industry changes in their decision-making.

Reason for Choice of Film	# Often and Sometimes	# Often responses	# Sometimes responses	# Never responses
The genre	200	138	62	7
Word-of-mouth	183	75	108	14
Your friends were seeing it	174	70	104	23
Who the actor/actresses were	165	74	91	32
Screening time suited	149	77	72	46
Because of the picture theatre	115	54	61	74
Your parents allowed it	109	53	56	84
Because of its reviews	104	26	78	84
Who the director was	48	11	37	137

Table 2.21: Factors determining choice of film for those who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s.

Of the 210 respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s and who answered the question on their favourite genre, comedy was the most preferred after respondents’ top six genres were tallied, and was the second favourite ‘first-choice’ genre.

Genre	Favourite First Choice Genre (#)	Genre	Favourite Genre When Top Six Tallied (#)
Drama	46	Comedy	161
Comedy	34	Musical	140
Musical	30	Drama	122
Action/adventure	25	Action/adventure	118
Western	23	Western	106
Romance	15	Historical Epic	103
Historical Epic	11	War	84
War	9	Romance	77
Crime	5	Crime	60
Science Fiction	4	Documentary	51
Cartoon/Anima	2	Cartoon/Anima	46
Documentary	2	Serials (for children)	39
Serials (for children)	2	Science Fiction	37
Horror	2	Horror	28

Table 2.22: Favourite genres of those who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s.

Women’s favourite genres were notably different from men, as seen in Table 2.23, although their preferences contained few surprises. As illustrated, the six favourite genres of drama,

²⁹⁹ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: How ‘The Lord of the Rings’ Became a Hollywood blockbuster and put New Zealand on the Map*, North Shore, N.Z.: Penguin, 2007, p. 5.

³⁰⁰ Jeremy G. Butler, ‘The Star System and Hollywood’, in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 342-353, p. 343.

comedy, musical, romance, action/adventure, and western, are all strongly delineated according to gender. Female respondents had a significantly stronger preference for romance than their male counterparts, and their preference for drama and musicals was also notably stronger. Males had a significantly stronger preference for westerns, which were given a middle ranking by female movie-goers. Men also had a notably stronger preference for action adventure and war movies than did women. The least popular genres of the serial, documentary, horror, and cartoon/animation have a much more even split in popularity according to gender. Women were singled out in marketing not only because their 'occupation' as homemaker ensured they had a 'need' to 'escape' the home, but because of their particular preference in films.

Genre	Female (122 responses)		Genre	Male (86 responses)	
	Favourite First Choice Genre	Favourite Genre When Top Six Tallied		Favourite First Choice Genre	Favourite Genre When Top Six Tallied
	Placing / (# 'votes')	Placing / (# 'votes')		Placing / (# 'votes')	Placing / (# 'votes')
Drama	1 st (35)	3 rd (84)	Western	1 st (20)	3 rd (60)
Comedy	2 nd (23)	2 nd (96)	Action/Adventure	2 nd (18)	1 st (64)
Musical	3 rd (22)	1 st (97)	Drama	3 rd (11)	7 th (37)
Romance	4 th (14)	4 th (61)	Comedy	4 th (10)	2 nd (63)
Action/Adventure	5 th (7)	6 th (54)	Musical	5 th (7)	6 th (41)
Historical Epic	6 th (6)	5 th (58)	War	6 th (6)	4 th (56)
Western	7 th = (3)	7 th (46)	Historical Epic	7 th (5)	5 th (43)
War	7 th = (3)	11 th (27)	Science Fiction	8 th (3)	9 th (23)
Crime	7 th = (3)	9 th (33)	Crime	9 th (2)	8 th (26)
Serial	10 th (2)	12 th (26)	Documentary	10 th = (1)	11 th = (16)
Science Fiction	11 th = (1)	13 th (14)	Horror	10 th = (1)	11 th = (16)
Documentary	11 th = (1)	8 th (34)	Cartoon/Animation	10 th = (1)	10 th (17)
Horror	11 th = (1)	14 th (11)	Romance	10 th = (1)	13 th (15)
Cartoon/Animation	11 th = (1)	10 th (29)	Serial	14 th (0)	14 th (13)

Table 2.23: Favourite genres of those who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s, by gender.

Musicals

Musicals continued their popularity, with the biggest film of the decade, *The Sound of Music* (1965), outperforming its competition, both in New Zealand and internationally.³⁰¹ *Variety* magazine described the film's 72 million dollar take, after just one release, as an 'unprecedented box office performance', and compared the film's earning capacity with the

³⁰¹ New Zealanders ranked *The Sound of Music* as the 23rd 'greatest movie ever made'. <http://www.flicks.co.nz/blog/lists/the-100-greatest-movies-ever-made-user-voted/> retrieved July 10, 2015. Pirie ranked the film as the number 1 musical hit of 'all-time', *Anatomy of the Movies: Inside the Film Industry*, London: W.H. Smith & Son, 1981, p. 254; Finler as the highest box-office hit in the United States of the 1960s, *The Hollywood Story*, London: Wallflower Press, 2003, p. 359; Reid as the top road show film in Britain in 1965 and the top general release film for 1966 and 1967, *Top-Grossing Pictures at the British Box-Office 1936-1970*, Wyong, NSW, Australia: Reid's Film Index, c 1997, pp. 38-9; BFI as the second all-time favourite film of the British, Ryan Gilbey (ed.), *The Ultimate Film: The UK's 100 Most Popular Films*, London: BFI, 2005, p. 330.

second biggest box-office success, the ever-popular and continually re-released *Gone with the Wind*, which achieved a total revenue of 71 million dollars, but needed seven releases to do it.³⁰²

Amalgamated Theatres had the rights to *The Sound of Music* and their Auckland Plaza Theatre holds the record for the longest run in New Zealand cinema history, with the film screening for 77 weeks from April 8, 1965 until September 29, 1966.³⁰³ It also had a spectacular run at the State in Christchurch,³⁰⁴ with the local newspaper running a 'Progress Report on NZ's most popular film', saying

As of November 23 [1965], over 900,000 New Zealanders have seen the 20th Century Fox production, IN SEASONS THAT HAVE SET ALL-TIME RECORDS IN THESE CITIES...HAMILTON, TIMARU, DUNEDIN (20TH WEEK), NEW PLYMOUTH, GISBORNE, NAPIER, WHANGAREI, INVERCARGILL AND AUCKLAND (currently in 36th week) AND IN CHRISTCHURCH. 34TH WEEK COMING UP AT AMALGAMATED'S STATE.³⁰⁵

Amalgamated brought the film back to the State for screening in the January school holidays in 1969, no doubt to provide some competition for the child-friendly *Oliver!* (1969) and *Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang* (1968), that were both enjoying very successful seasons at local Kerridge-Odeon theatres.³⁰⁶ The film also did well at the King's in Wellington for the same period, screening at 109 sessions, illustrating its ability to continue to draw crowds. *The Sound of Music* not only had outstanding success at the box-office at the time of its release, but continued to be remembered and loved decades later, being the most-cited favourite film of those survey respondents who went to the movies most often in the 1960s (53 citations from 204 respondents), and for all survey respondents, across the three decades, who named their favourite films (94 citations from 485 respondents). One elderly movie-goer said that even now the film held an important tradition for her family, as it was watched by family members every Christmas, and had been for decades.³⁰⁷

³⁰² Abel Green, 'Kids as Talent and Consumers', *Variety*, January 7, 1970, 257:8, p. 38.

³⁰³ Brittenden, *Celluloid Circus*, p. 163.

³⁰⁴ It screened from April 15, 1965 to August 10, 1966.

³⁰⁵ *The [Christchurch] Press*, November 30, 1965, p. 31.

³⁰⁶ Not everyone was enamoured with *The Sound of Music* however, as the *Monthly Film Reviewer* gave it an underwhelming review, describing the film as 'an exceedingly sugary experience [...], full of good thoughts and religious feelings and as wholesome as the well-scrubbed face of its heroine', where those ingredients 'would have been bearable, if the songs had been better'. *Monthly Film Reviewer*, v. 32, 1965, pp. 72-3, p. 72. Deborah, a survey respondent, described *The Sound of Music* as her 'all time 'blech' film'.

³⁰⁷ Member of Palmerston North branch of University of the Third Age, April 7, 2016.

Other musicals that proved to be very popular with audiences during the decade were *West Side Story* (1961),³⁰⁸ *My Fair Lady* (1964), *Mary Poppins*, (1964), *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967),³⁰⁹ *Funny Girl* (1968)³¹⁰ and *Oliver!* (1968). Of *West Side Story* (1961), one survey respondent said she 'Travelled 80k's there and 80k's back once to Nelson in 1963 to see *West Side Story* that I had already seen in Wellington. Desperation!! I was working in a very small town.'³¹¹ Its popularity locally was in line with its international reception.³¹²

Organising release dates and screening details of 'big' films, including agreeing to admission prices, was no small task. Arthur McClure, the Managing Director at Warner Bros. Sydney, invited Robert Kerridge to a special screening of *My Fair Lady* there on September 29, 1964, so that they could discuss 'release arrangements for New Zealand in harmony with release dates for the rest of the world'.³¹³ They eventually agreed that two prints of the film would be sent to New Zealand, opening at the Embassy Theatres in Auckland in March 1965, and Wellington in April. The Odeon Theatre in Christchurch would be the first South Island theatre to show it, in October 1965, with Kerridge-Odeon guaranteeing the season would run for at least 20 weeks in Auckland and 16 weeks in Wellington and Christchurch.³¹⁴ At Wellington's Embassy the film opened on April 29 and ran until December 8, 1965, with its 412 screenings making it the most screened film at that theatre for the decade. The very

³⁰⁸ *West Side Story* ran for four months at the Wellington Embassy, from November 28, 1962 until March 21, 1963, with 194 sessions. Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection. It was the most screened film at Napier's Odeon in 1963, screening from September 20 until October 3, 1963, with 30 sessions. Odeon Theatre, Napier, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection. There was still interest in the film in 1966, with an audience of 1,249 people seeing it at the Majestic Theatre in Timaru, from November 25 until December 1. Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection.

³⁰⁹ Was a particularly big hit at the Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, screening 56 times from August 17 till September 14, 1967. Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, Exhibitors' Record Book, Val Page collection. Was the most popular film at Timaru's Majestic theatre in 1967, screening 42 times from August 18 till September 7, 1967, attracting an audience of 7,500. Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection. Screening at the Hastings' Regent in August 1967 and at Napier's Odeon in September 1967, the film was one of the most popular of the decade at both of those theatres. Exhibitors' Record books, David Lascelles collection. The film was also very popular in Britain where it was the number one road show film in 1968. Reid, *Top Grossing Pictures*, p. 41.

³¹⁰ *Funny Girl* (1968) ran for 38 sessions at Napier's Odeon in October 1969, making it the 5th most screened film at that theatre for the decade, and the second most screened film of in 1969.³¹⁰ Its nineteen screenings at Timaru's Majestic made it the third-equal most screened film at that theatre for 1969. The film was also popular at the Regent in Hastings, screening 45 times from October 3, 1969, making it the third most screened film for the decade. Pirie records it as being the 11th 'all-time hit musical' and the 4th most popular musical of the 1960s. Pirie, *Anatomy of the Movies*, p. 254. Finler ranked the film as the 11th highest grossing film in the US in the 1960s, and the 2nd highest grossing film of 1968. Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, London: Wallflower Press, 2003, p. 359.

³¹¹ Marene Frost, born 1944.

³¹² Pirie ranked *West Side Story* 4th in his 'all-time hit musicals' and the 2nd most popular musical for the 1960s, behind *The Sound of Music*. Pirie, *Anatomy of the Movies*, p. 254. Finler ranked it as the highest top-grossing film in the U.S. in 1961 and the 18 top-grossing film for the decade. Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 359.

³¹³ Letter from Arthur McClure, Managing Director, Warner Bros. Sydney, September 4, 1964, Circulars, 10/62-12/64, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³¹⁴ Letter from Arthur McClure, Managing Director, Warner Bros. Sydney, to Robert Kerridge, November 9, 1964, Box 133, File 480, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

limited number of copies imported meant there was a significant delay before provincial regions screened the film.³¹⁵

The family musical *Oliver!* (1968) was popular here and in Great Britain, where it was the highest grossing film in 1969.³¹⁶ It was the most popular film of the decade at Napier's Odeon and the Regent in Hastings.³¹⁷ It was also the most popular film at Timaru's Majestic in 1969, with an audience of 11,751 and revenue of \$6,487.³¹⁸ Showing that New Zealand audiences were not always in synch with their international counterparts,³¹⁹ *Doctor Dolittle*, *Hello, Dolly!*, and *Star!* did very well at the King's Theatre in Wellington, with the former screening 156 times over the summer of 1967-8 and returning for 42 screenings during the August-September school holidays of 1968. *Hello, Dolly!* (1969) screened 211 times from December 18, 1969 till March 26, 1970, and *Star!* screened 138 times from September to December 1968.³²⁰ New Zealand audiences might well have continued to attend at higher levels if such fare had continued to be available.

The 1958 musical *South Pacific* was still circulating in the early 1960s and was screened 107 times at Dunedin's Octagon from October 21 until 20 December 1960, more than any other film in the decade preceding it.³²¹ In Palmerston North, a considerable fanfare was made of the film's arrival at the State, with the first advertisement stating

AT LAST It's On Its Way After 10 MONTHS IN AUCKLAND! 9 MONTHS IN
CHRISTCHURCH! 7 MONTHS IN WELLINGTON! Bringing you the most
completely "ENCHANTED EVENING" of Your Entertainment Lifetime!³²²

³¹⁵ Napier's Odeon premiered *My Fair Lady* for one night on April 28, 1966, with its season from May 20 - June 16, 1966 and 48 screenings making it the second most screened movie at that theatre for the decade. At Amalgamated's Majestic in Timaru it ran for the same period, attracting a total audience of 13,289 which made it the most popular movie at that theatre from 1965 through until the end of 1969.

³¹⁶ Reid, *Top Grossing Pictures*, p. 42.

³¹⁷ With 58 and 68 screenings respectively. Exhibitors' Record books for Odeon Theatre, Napier and Regent Theatre, Hastings, David Lascelles collection.

³¹⁸ Exhibitors' Record book, Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Gavin List collection.

³¹⁹ The blockbuster mentality had led Hollywood into a 'cycle of expensive, heavily promoted commercial flops', with *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), *Star!* (1968), and *Hello, Dolly!* (1969) being the frontrunners. These films lost US\$11million, US\$15 million, and US\$16 million respectively. Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 15-44, p. 21.

³²⁰ King's Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, MA0559, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

³²¹ Octagon Exhibitors' Record Book, 1950-1961, Hocken Collections Archives and Manuscripts, AG-225-A1.

³²² *The [Manawatū] Times*, January 23, 1961, p. 1. Because of the expected demand for tickets, and for 'the benefit of country Patrons', postal bookings were accepted, although phone bookings were not. Admission prices were usually increased for 'bigger' pictures so the prices were advertised: Circle 5/7, Children 2/9, Stalls 3/11, Children 2/3, with no reduction for children attending on Saturday nights. The film's popularity when it screened at Timaru's Theatre Royal from October 2-9, 1965 was held responsible for the poor weeknight attendance at the Majestic which screened Peter Sellers and Elke Sommer in *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), and the weekend's screening of *The Loudest Hour* (1961), starring Audrey Hepburn. (Note made in Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection). When the film screened 10 years after its first release at the Cinerama in Wellington, its continuing popularity ensured it ran for six weeks, from February 23 - April 10, 1968. (Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.)

The significant number of musicals produced in the 1960s that went on to be box-office successes, as well as the most popular films 'of all time', questions John Kobal's comment that 'More than any other genre, because of their cost, musicals were the major victim of the great and crippling defeat of movies by television'.³²³ Musical may have continued their popularity simply because they provided maximum 'entertainment': audiences enjoyed their music, dance, and spectacle. To compete with television and to provide something that that medium could not, musicals were produced on large sets, with wide-screen technology and filmed in technicolour, thus ensuring a big impact. Comments from survey respondents reinforced the notion that part of the attraction was 'the big screen' and 'glorious colour'. Others enjoyed the music, 'learning the songs',³²⁴ 'getting lost in the story/glamour/music',³²⁵ and the feeling that life was being 'enriched' by the music and dance.³²⁶ Another said it was 'The visual experience, especially widescreen movies with memorable scenes and music'.³²⁷ David Considine has suggested audiences might have wanted to escape from films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Peyton Place* (1957), and *The Restless Years* (1958), with their 'sustained portrait of paternal plight' and the breakdown of the family, into fairy-tale families such as those found in *The Sound of Music* and *Mary Poppins*.³²⁸ Given the extraordinary success of musicals of this period, Considine's theory has merit, although there is no mention by survey respondents that they specifically chose musicals in preference to the realism found in other films.

Elvis and the Beatles

Of significant interest to young people as this time was rock 'n' roll, with Elvis Presley the biggest star. Presley had begun his film career in the 1950s and he starred in 27 films in the 1960s, an output that certainly helped consolidate his star status. Less rock 'n' roll and more 'pop', were the British band, the Beatles, who greatly influenced popular culture internationally. Robert Ray commented that it would be hard to exaggerate the impact their film, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), had on the American film industry and he argued that it 'finally made available to the American audience the stylistic innovations of the French New Wave'.³²⁹ The film's popularity may have assisted in the transition of some mainstream film-goers to the 'art cinema' that was increasingly being screened in this decade.

³²³ John Kobal, *Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance: A History of Movie Musicals*, London: Hamlyn, 1983, p. 262.

³²⁴ Wendy, born 1956.

³²⁵ Female, born 1962.

³²⁶ Ann, born 1948.

³²⁷ John, born 1947.

³²⁸ David M. Considine, *The Cinema of Adolescence*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1985, p. 91.

³²⁹ Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Princeton: Princeton University, 1985, pp. 20, 272.

Both Elvis and the Beatles had a considerable impact on young people in New Zealand, with their music and films featuring regularly in the discourse of contemporary cultural commentators and those scheduling their movies for screening. Theatre managers were often reluctant to screen Presley films because of the youthful audience they attracted and the threat of bad behaviour they believed accompanied them. The manager of the Plaza in Christchurch, Ossie Beckett, claimed that the planned double feature of the Presley movies *Jamboree* (1957) and *Rock, Rock, Rock* (1956), 'Could upset the Plaza for the future'.

If these two pictures went in to a big house like the Regent with 1600 seats, and as there is [sic] about five or six hundred bodgie-wodge and teddy boy types in Christ Church [sic] they would be only a third of the house which would leave them very small [as a % of the audience] but in the Plaza with only 600 seats they would drive the good patron away because this type of picture is right up their alley, then on the other hand with a transfer of a film from another Theatre [sic] may cancel the above pictures, my opinion is that these two films would take better money in the Tivoli Theatre with seating at 750 and as it is a [sic] action house the patronage wouldn't alter. I would like to have the above mentioned films cancelled for something else.³³⁰

Beckett was told that the Rock'n'roll double bill had been very successful elsewhere, but the booking office changed the programme to Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953), a dramatic thriller.³³¹

The manager of the Regent at Masterton commented that the booking of *King Creole* (1958), starring Elvis Presley, would 'certainly not be acceptable' to the 'better type of patron' who regularly attended his Saturday night screening. Furthermore, he added, the 'normal Saturday takings are approximately £200 so one poor booking could prove costly'.³³² The manager of the King George in Lower Hutt was 'less happy about the impending showing of "Rock and Roll" ... but it is for one night only', he consoled himself. The King George received its films either after their screening in Wellington, or, in the case of *Rock and Roll* (1956) [also known as *Rock Around the Clock*], because they had been rejected by a Wellington theatre.³³³ Other theatre managers advertised Presley films to a wide audience, with the Regent in Palmerston North saying *G.I. Blues* (1960) was a film 'that will make Everybody Happy from

³³⁰ Letter from Ozzie Beckett, Plaza Theatre Manager, Christchurch, to Trevor Townsend, March 10, 1960, Box 101, File 366, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AUMM.

³³¹ Letter from Trevor Townsend to Ozzie Beckett, Plaza Theatre Manager, Christchurch, March 16, 1960, Box 101, File 366, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AUMM.

³³² Letter from Regent Theatre Manager, Masterton, to Mr T.S. Townsend, May 10, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³³³ Letter from King George Theatre Manager, Lower Hutt, to Mr T.S. Townsend, February 29, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Teenagers to All Ages. PEOPLE FROM 9 to 90. It Stars The New ELVIS PRESLEY With a Proper Hair Trim and Without the Sideburns'.³³⁴

These comments from theatre managers, with their talk of 'the good patrons' and the 'better class of patron', indicated not only the divide between adults and teenagers as differentiated audiences, but also hinted at class differentiation, implying that Elvis Presley and his music did not have the cultural cachet that some expected from the cinema. This was particularly so if Presley films screened at Kerridge-Odeon's Regent Theatres, which were generally the flagships in towns and cities that had more than one Kerridge-Odeon theatre, and as such were reserved for the 'best' films. The Palmerston North Regent's advertisement that gave a nod to the 'new' Presley, sporting a 'decent' haircut, was an obvious attempt to make him more acceptable to what were seen as that theatre's older and more conservative patrons.

Despite some managers being cautious or reluctant supporters of rock 'n' roll films, they can only have been pleased when their attendance figures were strong, as was the case when Presley's *Blue Hawaii* (1961) screened at the Majestic in Timaru for three days in April 1965 and attracted a total audience of 2,547. The Saturday sessions alone brought in 1,829, with the biggest session the 2pm matinee with 832 attendees. Another Elvis film, *Paradise Hawaiian Style* (1966), screened over the Christmas period in December 1966 and attracted an audience of 2,773 over its six-day season, making £488.17.0.³³⁵ In Great Britain *Paradise Hawaiian Style* was the eighth highest grossing film in 1962.³³⁶

The Beatles' seven-day tour of New Zealand, which started on June 21, 1964, has been claimed to be 'the moment that young New Zealand plugged into an international youth culture'.³³⁷ Certainly, local youth were as enraptured with the Beatles as their cohorts internationally. Despite their stage performance being only 30 minutes long, with concert-goers having to sit through five 'opening acts' before the Beatles came on, the concerts were a sellout.³³⁸ Their films were equally popular, with long queues for *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) at the Regent in Christchurch on the morning of Saturday August 15, 1964.³³⁹ The Kerridge-Odeon staff newsletter declared

³³⁴ *The [Manawatū] Times*, January 27, 1961, p. 1.

³³⁵ Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection.

³³⁶ Reid, *Top Grossing Pictures*, p. 35.

³³⁷ 'The Beatles in New Zealand', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/beatles>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 5-Aug-2014, retrieved April 26, 2016.

³³⁸ <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/beatles-programme-1964> retrieved April 26, 2016.

³³⁹ Letter from John Hart, Regent Theatre Manager, Christchurch, to T.S. Townsend, August 3, 1964, Box 123, File 444, 2/64-12/64, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Beatlemania Grips Theatre Managers, From one end of New Zealand to the other, campaign details have been pouring in for the United Artists smash, *A Hard Day's Night*. [...] In 90% of all situations where *A Hard Day's Night* played, excellent free Press was received and radio co-operation reached an all-time high. Excellent window displays were also obtained tying in with records, books, tea-towels, and Beatle fashions. Many new "Theatre Records" have been set.³⁴⁰

Ten survey respondents said *A Hard Day's Night* was one of their favourite films, with one saying she saw it four times at the cinema, 'because it was The Beatles'.³⁴¹ Another said they loved *A Hard Day's Night*, because 'I got Beatlemania like everyone else!',³⁴² with another saying this was her only favourite film from this period because the Beatles made it so 'memorable'.³⁴³ Another respondent said that because his family did not have much money, going to the movies was a treat, but he did recall 'Dad taking us to [...] the Beatles movie only because he wanted to see it for himself!'³⁴⁴

The Beatles' second film, *Help!* (1965), was also particularly popular. At the Majestic in Timaru, *Help!* (1965) was screened over the Christmas/New Year of 1965/1966, with its Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve screenings the only days in 1965 that a film screened four times in one day at that theatre. Its matinee session on December 27 attracted an audience of 666, the second largest matinee audience for the theatre for the years 1965-1969.³⁴⁵

Comedy

Comedy remained a popular genre, with 'having a good laugh' a frequent reason given by survey respondents to explain what they enjoyed about going to the movies, with one adding, it was 'Most enjoyable going to something for a laugh on a grey day!'³⁴⁶

British comedy was particularly popular with New Zealanders and most popular in this decade were the *Carry On* films, which were frequently mentioned by both contemporary theatre managers and survey respondents. The manager of the Regent in Greymouth, Bob Williams,

³⁴⁰ 'Showman's Round Table!', to Theatre Managers, September/October 1964, Circulars, 10/62-12/64, Box 122, File 440, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. The film screened an exceptional 24 times at the Embassy in Hastings, where films rarely screened more than eight times, making it the third-equal most screened movie at that theatre for the decade. The short 'documentary' *The War Game* (1965) screened 48 times and *The Graduate* (1967) screened 30 times. *The Right to be Born* (1966), a Mexican drama was also screened 24 times. Embassy Theatre, Hastings, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁴¹ Lynne, born 1949.

³⁴² Female, born 1940.

³⁴³ Female, born 1945.

³⁴⁴ Female, born 1950.

³⁴⁵ The most popular matinee for these years at the Majestic was Elvis Presley's *Blue Hawaii* (1960) with an audience of 832. Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection.

³⁴⁶ Barbara Branch, born 1947.

reported that *Carry On Nurse* (1959) gave his theatre an excellent return, requiring two extra five o'clock sessions, attracting a total of 5,406 attendees and netting £666.³⁴⁷ While determining the filmic tastes of movie-goers at the mining settlement of Blackball continued to prove a quandary for Williams, he noted that *Carry on Sergeant* (1958) performed particularly well, playing to 'a large house' and taking £47.³⁴⁸ The series obviously struck a chord with the local audience, as *Carry on Nurse* (1959) was also popular, earning £48 for a single Sunday screening.³⁴⁹ *Carry on Sergeant* (1958) did 'excellent' business at the Regent in Hawera and was very well received by patrons,³⁵⁰ while at the Regent in Waimate the film provided the theatre with its 'second biggest take ever'.³⁵¹

Another popular British comedy was the *Doctor* series, the first of which had performed particularly well in New Zealand in the 1950s. *Doctor in Love* (1960) screened 21 times at the Regent, Palmerston North, from February 7-16 1961, where bookings were being taken six days before the film opened, 'For the Humorous, Witty, Hilarious, Saucy, New Doctor Film Which is Breaking All N.Z Records'.³⁵²

Laurel and Hardy films had a long life and were still being shown, along with other shorts and features, in the 1960s. At the Mayfair in Palmerston North during the 1961 January school holidays, the Laurel and Hardy short, *The Fixer Uppers* (1935), was shown along with 'A Real Goony Comedy', the British-made *Over the Garden Wall* (1950), and the American comedy *The Pinch Singer* (1936).³⁵³ In the December school holidays of 1962, the State in Palmerston North screened Shirley Temple in *Bright Eyes* (1935), in a double feature with Laurel and Hardy in *Great Guns* (1941),³⁵⁴ which was followed a week later with the Marx Brothers in *A Night in Casablanca* (1946) and Laurel and Hardy in *Beau Hunks* (1931). These popular older films were invaluable to exhibitors in filling the increasing gaps in children's programmes.³⁵⁵

An American comedy that did particularly well in New Zealand and the United States was the Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis, and Jack Lemmon film, *Some Like it Hot* (1959). It had a lengthy 14-week season at the Odeon in Auckland, and also did an 'outstanding 6 week season' at

³⁴⁷ Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, March 8, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁴⁸ Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, February 18, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁴⁹ Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, March 8, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁵⁰ Letter from Joe Horton to T.S. Townsend, February 22, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁵¹ Letter from Regent Theatre Manager, Waimate, to T.S. Townsend, March 14, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁵² *The [Manawatū] Times*, February 4, 1961, p. 1.

³⁵³ *The [Manawatū] Times*, January 5, 1961, p. 1.

³⁵⁴ *The Times [Manawatū]*, December 19, 1962, p. 17.

³⁵⁵ *The Times [Manawatū]*, December 26, 1962, p. 11.

the Majestic in Christchurch, before being transferred to the Plaza to complete its Christchurch screening with a two-week season.³⁵⁶ The manager of the Mayfair in New Plymouth was 'particularly pleased' to see *Some Like It Hot* (1959) on his schedule for March 1960, as he had seen it in Auckland and 'like most other people, thought it excellent'.³⁵⁷ The Whanganui Theatre manager was not sure of the film's popularity locally due to his perception that Marilyn Monroe was not well-liked by his audience. However, he was told that it was 'a really first class film' and was assured that 'you will find that any lack of popularity of Marilyn Monroe will very quickly disappear at the wonderful reception this film will get'.³⁵⁸ *Some Like it Hot* was a favourite film of 13 survey respondents.

Two action-adventure-comedies, following in the footsteps of the 1950s hit, *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), were particularly popular in this decade. Spencer Tracy starred in *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), which screened at the Cinerama in Wellington from August 18 until December 15, 1966, with 218 screenings. It was just as popular at the Christchurch Cinerama, where it ran for 22 weeks over 1965-6. The film was the sixth 'All-time Hit Comedy' according to Pirie³⁵⁹ and the fourteenth highest grossing film of the 1960s in the United States.³⁶⁰ *The Great Race* (1965), starring popular duo Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, along with Natalie Wood, ran from August 19 until October 20, 1965 at Wellington's Embassy with 126 screenings making it one of the top 15 most screened films at that theatre over the decade.³⁶¹ The film attracted the third biggest audience for 1967 when it screened at Timaru's Majestic from May 5-18, with an audience of 4,715.³⁶²

Comedy was rated as the favourite genre for survey respondents who went to the movies most often in the 1960s, when the cohort's top six favourite genres were tallied. It was the second most popular individual genre, behind drama. Alan Shepherd, the manager of the Mayfair in Napier, illustrated the general popularity of the genre with his comment that 'a good comedy gives a good boost to the Theatre'.³⁶³

³⁵⁶ Letter from T.S. Townsend to Les Rogers, Regent Theatre Manager, Whanganui, February 22, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁵⁷ Letter from F.R. Smyth, Mayfair Theatre Manager, New Plymouth, to T.S. Townsend, March 2, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁵⁸ Letter from T.S. Townsend to Les Rogers, Regent Theatre Manager, Whanganui, February 22, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁵⁹ David Pirie (ed.), *Anatomy of the Movies: Inside the Film Industry*, London: W.H. Smith & Son, 1981, p. 244.

³⁶⁰ Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 359.

³⁶¹ Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁶² *Thoroughly Modern Millie* had an audience of 7,500 and *Born Free* had an audience of 6,694. Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record book, Gavin List collection. It was the most screened film at the Regent in Hastings in 1967. Regent Theatre, Hastings, Exhibitors' Record book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁶³ Letters from Alan Shepherd to T.S. Townsend, March 15, 1960 and 28 June 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

Drama

Drama was the highest scoring individual genre for those survey respondents who went to the movies most often in the 1960s, for 46 out of 210 respondents (22%). When the top six favourite genres were combined, drama was at third place, behind comedy and musicals.

A British drama to do particularly well at the box-office in New Zealand was *To Sir, With Love* (1967). Popular British 1960s singer, Lulu, made her film debut and sang the title song, which became the number one single in the United States in 1967.³⁶⁴ Finler ranked the film as the nineteenth top-grossing film in the United States for the 1960s, indicating its considerable popularity there.³⁶⁵ At the Majestic in Timaru, *To Sir, With Love*, was the third most popular film screened between 1965 and 1970, with an audience of 11,024 seeing it over its 42 screenings. At the Embassy in Wellington, the film had the third highest number of screenings for the 1960s,³⁶⁶ and at Napier's Odeon, it was the fourth most screened film for the decade.³⁶⁷ Seven survey respondents listed it as one of their favourite films. *To Sir, With Love* had a particular affinity with young people, as it portrayed the relationship between an inexperienced teacher and his high school students from the slums of London's East End, showing their growth into young adults. As Lulu sang to her teacher, 'You've taken us from crayons to perfume'.³⁶⁸

Returning in the 1960s, just as it had done a number of times since its initial release in 1939, was *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Its five week screening at Auckland's Civic toward the end of 1962 made it one of the ten most screened films of the decade at that theatre,³⁶⁹ and it screened for over two months at Wellington's Cinerama between April and June 1968.³⁷⁰ Twenty-seven survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s named it as one of their favourite films, with 44 of all respondents saying it was one of their favourites. One said *Gone with the Wind* was her 'all-time favourite film' and she saw it 'about four times during this period and another six times in later years'.³⁷¹

³⁶⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billboard_Year-End_Hot_100_singles_of_1967 retrieved April 28, 2016.

³⁶⁵ Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 359.

³⁶⁶ 237 sessions from April 25 - August 1, 1968. It was one of only five films to screen more than 200 times during the decade. The other 4 were *My Fair Lady*, 412 screenings, *Oliver!* 295, *Hawaii* 204, and *El Cid* 202. Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁶⁷ Screened 41 times from September 6 - 26, 1968. The other 3 films were *Oliver!* 58 screenings, *My Fair Lady* 48, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* 42. Odeon Theatre, Napier, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁶⁸ *To Sir, With Love*, lyrics by Don Black and music by Mark (Marc) London.

³⁶⁹ 7 other films screened for 5 weeks, while *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962) screened for 8 weeks and *Bullitt* (1968) for 6. Civic Theatre Notebook, Eric Kearney, Box 6108.002 Box 2 of 3, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, Wellington.

³⁷⁰ Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁷¹ Wendy Zemanek, born 1942.

Action Adventure

One of the most popular franchises to emerge in the 1960s was James Bond, with films doing well at the box-office and as favourites with survey respondents (22 cited either individual Bond titles, or the franchise generally). One woman associated the series with her father, saying that she used to go to the movies as a teenager with him, 'which was a pretty special thing. We liked the James Bond movies.'³⁷² *A Thunderball* (1965) and *From Russia With Love* (1963) double feature at the end of May, 1969, was one of the most popular screenings of the decade at the Embassy in Hastings, while at the Odeon in Napier, that honour went to *Goldfinger* (1964). At Timaru's Majestic, *Thunderball* attracted 10,478 people with its 28 screenings in May 1966, averaging 374 people at each screening. At Palmerston North's Regent, *You Only Live Twice* (1967) was one of the top-performing films of the decade, when it screened over the Christmas/New Year period of 1967-8.

Other popular films of this genre were aided in their box-office successes by star-studded casts, as seen with John Wayne and Red Buttons in *Hatari!* (1962), which attracted good crowds wherever it screened. At Palmerston North's Regent it was the most screened film of 1963 and one of the most popular for the decade, while at Petone's State in April 1963 it screened for twice as long as the usual season at that theatre.³⁷³ *Hatari!* also performed particularly well at the Odeon in Napier, as did another historical action film, *55 Days at Peking* (1963), starring Charlton Heston and Ava Gardner. That was one of the top performing films of the decade at the Regent in Hastings and the State in Petone.³⁷⁴

Historical Epic

The historical epic genre continued strongly into the first part of the 1960s, reaching its peak and entering its present period of decline.³⁷⁵ Two 1950s epics, *Ben Hur* (1959) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956), were still circulating around theatres in the early 1960s, and their popularity ensured they had return screenings throughout the decade. Survey respondent Tim Darlington recalled seeing *Ben Hur* on the 'huge curved screen' at the Cinerama in Christchurch in the late 1960s, which 'was awesome – the thing was literally enormous as well as being a big movie in all other respects'.

³⁷² Female, born 1958.

³⁷³ Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, Exhibitors' Record Book, Val Page collection.

³⁷⁴ Odeon Theatre, Napier, Regent Theatre, Hastings, and State Theatre, Petone, Exhibitors' Record book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁷⁵ Vivian Sobchack, "'Surge and Splendor": A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic,' in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader IV*, Austin; University of Texas, 2012, pp. 332-359, p. 323.

Theatre managers who had not yet screened *The Ten Commandments* (1956) eagerly awaited its arrival, confident that it would boost their box-office takings, not just because of its popularity, but because of the higher prices charged at the screening of 'big' films. It was expected to 'break all records' at the Regent in Greymouth, given it was a 'universally famous attraction',³⁷⁶ and it was expected to do well at Gisborne's Regent, with there being 'a good degree of advance interest'.³⁷⁷ At the Regent in Hastings, *The Ten Commandments* was so well attended that the theatre manager doubted 'if a better film has ever been made' and he was sure 'that better figures have never been recorded before'.³⁷⁸ At the Regent in Hamilton, the film made an 'all-time record', netting £1,916,³⁷⁹ while at Whanganui's Regent it had a 'record first week at £1,590, beating *80 Days Around the World*, by £188'.³⁸⁰ At the Regent in Palmerston North, *The Ten Commandments* ran for 37 sessions in January- February, 1960, making it the most popular film at that theatre for the first three years of the decade and one of the most popular for the whole of the 1960s.³⁸¹ Eleven survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s said that *The Ten Commandments* was one of their favourite films.

Another popular epic was the 1962 Oscar winner for Best Picture, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). The film screened in the South Island first and made its North Island debut on January 1964, opening simultaneously in Auckland, Tauranga, Hamilton, Whangarei and Gisborne; Kerridge-Odeon's 'Auckland Province'.³⁸² During its South Island season, 'party bookings' were introduced for the first time by the Kerridge-Odeon chain, 'with great success, in situations such as Gore, Greymouth, Blenheim, Timaru, Waimate, [and] Oamaru'. This practice was continued in the North Island, with concession prices for group bookings, and a minimum of 20 seat sales constituting a 'group', with no maximum number.³⁸³ Tony Goodliffe, manager of the Regent in Hamilton, ran a large campaign for the film, which included closing the main street for a parade, and running a two-page advertisement in the local newspaper. The film

³⁷⁶ Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, June List Report, June 3, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁷⁷ Letter from Dugald McPhail, Regent Theatre Manager, Gisborne, to T.S. Townsend, February 19, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁷⁸ Letter from N.H. Kennedy, Regent Theatre Manager, Hastings, to T.S. Townsend, March 9, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁷⁹ Letter from A.J. Goodliffe, Regent Theatre Manager, Hamilton, to T.S. Townsend, February 18, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁸⁰ Letter from Les Rogers, Regent Theatre Manager, Whanganui, to T.S. Townsend, February 19, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁸¹ There is a gap in the records kept for the Palmerston North Regent Theatre from August 1963 until July 1966.

³⁸² Head Office *Lawrence of Arabia* Auckland Province Campaign, November 11, 1963, pp. 2-4, Box 114, File 414, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁸³ Head Office *Lawrence of Arabia* Auckland Province Campaign, November 11, 1963, p. 5, 'Lawrence of Arabia Publicity Material', Box 114, File 414, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

ran for three weeks, at a time when, according to Goodliffe, a film at his theatre generally played for three days.³⁸⁴

Part of the hype surrounding the epic *Spartacus* (1960), apart from its star-studded cast of Laurence Olivier, Kirk Douglas, Jean Simmons, and Charles Laughton, was that it was the most expensive film shot in Hollywood at that time, having started out as a US\$5 million dollar production which had increased to US\$12 million.³⁸⁵ The film did well at Wellington's Embassy in 1961,³⁸⁶ and at the Cinerama in Wellington later in the decade.³⁸⁷ It was one of the most popular films at the Regent theatres in Hastings and Palmerston North, and at the Odeon in Napier, with well above the usual number of screenings. One survey respondent jokingly recalled, 'My lovely father promising to take me to *Spartacus* and never getting around to it, for which he has never been completely forgiven, long dead though he is!'³⁸⁸ Eleven survey respondents included *Spartacus* as one of their favourite films.

While only 11 of the 218 survey respondents who went to the movies most often in this decade, and who answered the question on their favourite genres, rated the epic as their favourite, it rated in 103 respondents' top six genres, indicating a solid popularity. That production of the genre declined from the early-to-mid 1960s has been blamed on 'the budgets of the overblown failures' of films such as *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962) and *Cleopatra* (1963) that 'began to terrify studio executives', and convinced them that 'trying to keep audiences away from television was a losing proposition'.³⁸⁹ While some of these films did well at the box-office - *Mutiny on the Bounty*, for example, was the most popular film of the decade at the Auckland's Civic, screening for eight weeks in 1963³⁹⁰ - their very high production costs ensured they still ran at a loss. Director David Lean saw the decline in production of the epic as an example of the industry abandoning its audience.

When I started out in movies they used to tell me, 'Remember the under-60s.' As I went on, it was, 'Remember the under-50s,' then the under-40s. Now it's, 'Remember the under-20s.' Really, if you were a biscuit manufacturer, you'd think there was something wrong with the head of your business if someone over 20 wouldn't eat your biscuit, wouldn't you?³⁹¹

³⁸⁴ Goodliffe and Snow, *Stars in My Eyes*, p. 22.

³⁸⁵ 'Contact', In-house communication to staff, July 1960, Issue 5, p. 6, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

³⁸⁶ Screened 120 times from July 21 - September 28, 1961. Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record book. David Lascelles collection.

³⁸⁷ Screened from November 22 - December 12, 1968. Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record book. David Lascelles collection.

³⁸⁸ Carolyn Deverson, born 1949.

³⁸⁹ Allen Barra, 'The Incredible Shrinking Epic', *American Film*, March 1989, 14:5, pp. 40-45, 60, p. 42.

³⁹⁰ Civic Theatre Notebook, Eric Kearney, Box 6108.002 Box 2 of 3, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives.

³⁹¹ Barra, 'The Incredible Shrinking Epic', p. 42.

The combination of the focus on producing films for youthful audiences with more contemporary story lines, and the caution over the very real danger of tipping studios into bankruptcy, were factors that helped lead to the decline of the historical epic in the latter years of this decade. They remained popular in New Zealand but new product was no longer available.

Horror

Horror films were not new, with ‘virtually every company’ producing them in earlier decades,³⁹² and they had a rich history, dating back to the German *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919).³⁹³ The early 1950s saw the ‘dormant market for filmic fright’ come to life, and in 1956, Britain’s Hammer Films produced *The Curse of Frankenstein* which, it is claimed, ‘fathered the most prolific and durable of all ‘50s exploitation cycles - the horror teenpic’.³⁹⁴ Films of this genre were produced in the later 1950s and throughout the 1960s, finding their way onto New Zealand screens in the 1960s. Theatre managers, ever mindful of their role as showmen, unleashed their flair for sensational advertising and exhibition, with a range of gimmicks to attract patrons. Late night and midnight screenings, along with combining two or three films to form double and triple ‘extra-horrific’ features, were tactics used regularly as part of the hype that surrounded these movies. An example of this was a successful midnight double-feature marketing campaign in Palmerston North.

SPOOKS TAKE OVER NEW ZEALAND

In the remote village of Palmerston North, nestled quietly on the Manawatū plains, an evening of horror struck overnight!! An ominous dark cloud descended around the Meteor Theatre as crowds of clamouring blood-thirsty citizens savagely attacked the Manager and friendly policemen barricading the door, brandishing a “House Full” notice – the reason, A SUNDAY NIGHT SPOOK SHOW. John Hart, Manager of the Meteor and Mayfair, was delighted with the results both press-wise and public-wise, of a special Sunday midnight horror show incorporating THE SPIDER [1958] and NIGHT OF THE BLOOD BEAST [1958], as a double-feature [...] His takings exceeded his wildest hopes, and although the show was meant to be only in the Meteor, such was the public interest in these films that John had to bring in to operation the Mayfair as well. Working on a “skeleton” staff and aiding the help of various friends, John ran his show not only successfully, but cheaply.³⁹⁵

Palmerston North residents clearly relished horror films as an advertisement in the Saturday edition of *The Times* advised; ‘In reply to numerous requests ... Yes we will definitely open

³⁹² Heffernan, *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold*, p. 3.

³⁹³ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 143.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁹⁵ ‘Contact’, In-house communication to staff, July 1960, Issue 5, p. 17, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMW.

the Mayfair theatre when the Meteor fills to capacity ... Providing the Demand is Great Enough.³⁹⁶ Monday's newspaper announced extra screenings, 'By Public Demand owing to hundreds of People being turned away for the double feature, screening 'The Most Horrific Double Feature Programme Ever Conceived', *The Brides of Dracula* [1960], and *The Leech Women* [1960], both with R16 ratings.³⁹⁷

Palmerston North councillors debated the practice of midnight horror screenings after reports of complaints from 'the police, the churches and citizens', regarding the behaviour of young people at Sunday midnight screenings. It was suggested that the Council abolish midnight screenings, until it was pointed out that because the sessions began very early on the Monday morning, the Council did not have any jurisdiction. A Councillor commented that 'We are trying hard to keep up a high standard in the community and I am certain that these types of films do not help the community at all', just as it was 'not desirable for the community for young people to be hanging about the streets after midnight'.³⁹⁸ Both the Amalgamated and Kerridge-Odeon companies 'gave an assurance that screening of this type [horror] of picture would not be continued in the future.'³⁹⁹

A 'Special Shriek Session' at Amalgamated's Christchurch theatres in January 1969 suggests horror was as popular at the end of the decade as at the beginning. The newspaper advertisement emphasised the films' unsuitability for children with their by-line 'Leave the Children at home and if you are squeamish stay home with them!' The screenings consisted of *The Brides of Dracula* (1960) and *Cult of the Cobra* (1955) at the Lido, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* (1943) and *The Deadly Mantis* (1957) at the Avenue, with the Barclay screening *House of Dracula* (1945) and *The Monolith Monsters* (1957). The films all carried either 'A', 'R13', or 'R16' certificates.⁴⁰⁰

Despite its apparent popularity at the time, horror was rated poorly by survey respondents, at the bottom of the rankings of both the individual genre, and when the top six genres were tallied, as seen earlier in Tables 2.22 and 2.23. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) was one of only two films singled out negatively, when respondents were asked to name their favourite films. Pamela O'Neill said succinctly, 'not *Psycho*'. Other negative comments about the

³⁹⁶ *The [Manawatū] Times*, April 1, 1961, p. 1.

³⁹⁷ *The [Manawatū] Times*, April 3, 1961, p. 1.

³⁹⁸ 'Sunday "Horror" Films', *Manawatū Standard*, July 25, 1961, p. 12.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *The [Christchurch] Press*, January 2, 1969, p. 14.

horror genre included, 'I do not like scary films; I like films to end happily otherwise I spend half the night 'finishing' the story to make it happy!',⁴⁰¹ while another said, 'I don't like scary ones: horror, bloodshed, supernatural, etc.'⁴⁰² Another recalled that 'as a young teen I was not allowed to go to any movies that were thrillers or horror movies even if my friends were allowed to go. To this day I dislike horror movies!'⁴⁰³ These comments indicate that many movie-goers went to the cinema for the pleasure obtained from 'happy' or feel-good stories, rather than to be scared witless. The horror genre appealed to a niche audience. One respondent singled out the late-night Sunday horror screenings, saying 'I enjoyed suburban Sunday night horrors/double features - good way to finish the weekend'.⁴⁰⁴ Another said a factor that influenced their moviegoing was their interest in different genres such as 'Hammer Horror, or the Scandinavian school'.⁴⁰⁵

'Foreign' Films

Also appealing to a niche audience were the increased number of 'foreign' films imported into New Zealand (as seen earlier in Table 2.16), with survey respondents indicating a variety of reasons for their enthusiasm. The 'mature themes' of these films, said to have been 'synonymous with naked women and a suggestion of pre-marital sex', were an element that some found attractive.⁴⁰⁶ Robin Reynolds remembered the French film, *Jules et Jim* [*Jules and Jim*] (1962), about the 'love triangle' between two men and a woman. Survey respondent Lew, in his twenties in the 1960s, remembered the first foreign film he saw was the French/Italian *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* [*Last Year at Marienbad*] (1961). He also recalled seeing *Jules et Jim* (1962), and two French/Italian films, *La Notte* [*The Night*] (1961), and *8½* (1963). Lew was at Auckland University at that time and had 'begun to feel sophisticated'. A number of respondents who were in their late teens or early 20s indicated their attraction to foreign films was linked to the perception of maturity associated with these films. Ann said that when she was 'about nineteen or twenty' in the early 1960s, when she became 'quite serious' about her movie-going.

I joined the Auckland Film Society and I became very interested in foreign films. When I married, in 1962, my husband was also a film fan, and we went together to most of the new wave films of that period. We particularly loved Ingmar Bergman, Jean Luc Goddard and Fellini.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰¹ Carol, born 1943.

⁴⁰² Male, born 1942.

⁴⁰³ Barbara Branch, born 1947.

⁴⁰⁴ Trevor, born 1949.

⁴⁰⁵ George Farrant, born 1942.

⁴⁰⁶ B. Gosden interviewed by Simon Sigley, November 2000, in Simon Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013, p. 182.

⁴⁰⁷ Ann, born 1942.

Mike enjoyed 'European movies' that he saw in Auckland and Wellington and specifically remembered *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959, French/Japanese), and *Last Year in Marienbad*,⁴⁰⁸ while Elizabeth remembered the Italian *La Strada* (1953) because it was the first foreign film she saw and she remembered it being 'arresting'.⁴⁰⁹ Other respondents did not necessarily remember titles of films, but remembered the increasing diversity of films at this time. One said

It was the great expansion of what we were exposed to, moving from a conservative diet of westerns and English/American dramas, to the much wider and eye-poppingly stimulating and challenging Scandinavian and Japanese genres. We were absolutely passionate about foreign films because they fulfilled our desire to see how producers in other parts of the world had a completely different take on how they saw their world.⁴¹⁰

Another believed the 1960s were

A foundation period for "great" European directors, who were now being seen globally. Their legacy lives on. The range and number of films increased as did their availability via art-houses and film societies. Film in NZ was finally considered an ART.⁴¹¹

One female survey respondent liked foreign films because they showed 'different experiences and issues,'⁴¹² while another said, 'My husband was passionate about films made by famous producers, so many of the films we saw were produced in foreign countries'. The 'foreign' films she recalled enjoying were *La Dolce Vita* (1960, Italian/French), which she saw twice; the Brazilian *Black Orpheus* (1959); the Italian/French *Two Women* (1960), starring Sophia Loren; *Nights of Cabiria* (1957), the story of a prostitute trying to find true love, which she gave 'three ticks'; the Russian *Alexander Nevsky* (1938); and *Marcelino* (1959).⁴¹³

Mainstream theatres were increasingly showing 'foreign' films, with some exhibitors aware of their quality and the growing interest in them from mainstream movie-goers. Palmerston North's Regent screened *La Dolce Vita* (1960, Italian) six times in November 1961, *La Vérité* (1960, French) eight times in June 1962, and the R18 *La Ronde* (1964, French/Italian) six times in May 1966. At Timaru's Majestic *La Ronde* was also shown six times, attracting an audience of 311. At Napier's Odeon *La Dolce Vita* screened six times in March 1962 and seven times over three days at the Regent in Hastings in September 1962. This same season was given to *La Vérité* in December 1963. The Oscar-winning *8½* (1963) screened seven times at the

⁴⁰⁸ Mike, born 1938.

⁴⁰⁹ Elizabeth, born 1947.

⁴¹⁰ George Farrant, born 1942.

⁴¹¹ Male, born 1943.

⁴¹² Cleone, born 1937.

⁴¹³ Wendy Zemanek, born 1942.

Hastings Regent in July 1965.⁴¹⁴ Simon Sigley accredits the gradual decline in members of the Wellington Film Society throughout the 1960s, apart from a spike in the middle of decade, to the Society's success. By introducing 'exotica into an aesthetically impoverished land' and by making 'foreign' films more popular to audiences, mainstream exhibitors were alerted to and encouraged to enter 'this niche market'.⁴¹⁵

Western

Audiences continued to have a solid attachment to the Western, ranking it the fifth favourite of the 14 genres, and the favourite genre for males, of those going to the movies most frequently in the 1960s. Along with their role in attracting male audiences, westerns also helped fill children's matinee and school holiday screening schedules. An examination of exhibitor record books and contemporary newspapers shows theatres made extensive use of re-screening older westerns at children's matinees, particularly given the shortage of films made expressly for children. Although not just found in serials, they were certainly a major genre in them, as seen by the number of recollections from survey respondents who were children at this time. Westerns, or 'cowboys and Indians', were often paired with 'Tarzan' when children recounted their favourable matinee experiences, and the genre was also linked with 'war films' in a number of survey respondents' recollections. One said that they often went to westerns and war films because that was their father's preference and his was the strongest influence on what the family would see.⁴¹⁶ Another said that westerns and war films were suitable for all their family when they went to the movies together, and there were a lot of them produced at this time,⁴¹⁷ while another said he and his friends would 'spend days afterwards replaying scenes from the latest western or war film.'⁴¹⁸ Another respondent recalled that the family went to the movies together, saying 'We wouldn't go to 'just anything', only to films that my parents considered would be 'good' films'. An example of what they considered a 'good' film was *High Noon* (1952).⁴¹⁹

There were four primary advantages to using westerns to 'fill' matinee screenings for children. Children, particularly boys, liked westerns and even if some girls did not, they had long got used to them being a part of their Saturday movie-going experience as they waited

⁴¹⁴ *8½* is also known as *Eight and a Half*. The director was Federico Fellini and the Oscars were for Best Foreign Language Film and Best Costume Design, Black and White. Records for the Palmerston North and Hastings Regent theatres and the Odeon, Napier are from Exhibitors' Record Books, David Lascelles collection.

⁴¹⁵ Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture*, p. 177.

⁴¹⁶ John Neal, born 1942.

⁴¹⁷ Neil, born 1945.

⁴¹⁸ Alec Mclean, born 1950.

⁴¹⁹ Female, born 1947.

for the rest of the programme. The films could be old, and therefore seen before, without that being a negative factor, and they could be 'B' grade, with lesser known actors and low production costs, thereby reducing the hireage fees the theatre had to pay. A typical example was the B-grade *Sierra Stranger* (1957), described as 'a cheapie western at its worst',⁴²⁰ which screened during the school holidays at the Mayfair in Palmerston North during January 1961, with little fanfare and the smallest advertisement possible.⁴²¹ Finally, despite their violence, westerns were generally considered appropriate fare for children.

In comparison, 'quality' westerns could command considerable hype, as seen with the New Zealand Premiere of *The Unforgiven* (1960) at the Regent in Palmerston North, which was advertised on the same day as *Sierra Stranger*. Starring Burt Lancaster, Audrey Hepburn and Audie Murphy, the film was sensationally advertised.

A New Triumph from the ACADEMY AWARD WINNER JOHN HUSTON
A film so breathtaking in splendour, so colourful in technicolor, so big in the telling, that only the mighty Regent screen is big enough to show this gigantic film in all it's [sic] vastness. A story so packed with action, adventure and romance, that you will be held spellbound through it's [sic] 11,000 feet of thrilling entertainment.⁴²²

The film drew large audiences, with 6,495 people seeing it in two days.⁴²³ After its season at the Regent it was transferred to the Mayfair, with the 'capacity weekend crowds' compelling the theatre to hold the film over for another few days.⁴²⁴ Following *The Unforgiven*, the Mayfair's theatre management continued their western enthusiasm, screening John Wayne's *Hondo* (1953) as part of a double-feature 'Monster Technicolor Show For the Whole Family!'⁴²⁵ While *The Unforgiven* was screening, a double-feature 'Sensation' at the Mayfair included *Shane* (1953), 'Rated As The Greatest Of All Western Films, Now Returning For The Benefit Of Countless Lovers of Outdoor Action Dramas!'⁴²⁶ Palmerston North audiences would have found it hard to avoid seeing a western over this period.

Palmerston North was not exceptional in having a solid booking of westerns, particularly during school-holiday periods. At Patea's Civic, an Independent theatre run by the local Council, 2pm matinees only occurred on Saturdays. For the last three Saturdays of 1961,

⁴²⁰ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050970/?ref=fn_al_tt_1 retrieved June 7, 2016.

⁴²¹ *The [Manawatū] Times*, January 3, 1961, p. 1.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, January 9, 1961, p. 1.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1961, p. 1.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1961, p. 1.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, January 6, 1961, p. 1.

during the school holidays, westerns were screened, with *Tonka* (1958), *Fort Massacre* (1958), and *Cast a Long Shadow* (1959) shown on successive Saturdays. Even with its reduced days and hours of opening, four western feature films were screened over the remaining three weeks of the school holidays.⁴²⁷ In the January school holidays in 1964, the State in Petone scheduled 11 matinees for children’s entertainment. Of those eleven films, seven were westerns, as indicated in the following table.

Date Screened January 1961	Title of Film	Genre	Year film produced
1	<i>Underwater Warrior</i>	Adventure	1958
3	<i>Watusi</i>	Adventure	1959
6	<i>The Oklahoman</i>	Western	1957
9	<i>Man From God’s Country</i>	Western	1958
15	<i>The Fastest Gun Alive</i>	Western	1956
16	<i>Quantrill’s Raiders</i>	Western	1958
22	<i>Gun for a Coward</i>	Western	1957
25	<i>Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki</i>	Comedy	1955
28	<i>Gunmen from Laredo</i>	Western	1959
29	<i>The Last of the Fast Guns</i>	Western	1958
31	<i>Tarzan and the Lost Safari</i>	Adventure	1957

Table 2.24: Predominance of westerns at Petone State Theatre, January 1961.

The Mayfair in Christchurch had a hugely successful run of 31 weeks with *How the West Was Won* (1962), which was the longest run of any film at the theatre for the decade.⁴²⁸ It was one of the favourite films of six survey respondents and is ranked fourth in Pirie’s ‘all-time hit westerns’.⁴²⁹

Clint Eastwood and his three ‘Man with No Name’ westerns, the Sergio Leone films, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (1966) were the favourite films of 13 survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in this decade. Attendance at their screenings were solid, and the films were regularly re-run as double- and triple-screenings throughout the ‘sixties and into the next decade.

Another favourite film with survey respondents was *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), which, along with the *Return of the Magnificent Seven* [also known as *Return of the Seven*] (1967), had good seasons wherever they screened.⁴³⁰ Seven survey respondents listed *The Magnificent Seven* as a favourite film, with Don Esslemont commenting that he had seen it

⁴²⁷ Picture Calendar for December 1961 and January 1962, U2 AOI, South Taranaki Museum, Patea.

⁴²⁸ David Lascelles, notes from personal collection. The next most screened films ran for 22 weeks; *South Seas Adventure* (1958) over 1963/4 and *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963) over 1965/6.

⁴²⁹ Pirie, *Anatomy of the Movies*, p. 208.

⁴³⁰ *The Magnificent Seven* screened 21 times from Jan 23- Feb 1, 1962, at the Odeon in Napier, with *Return of the Magnificent Seven* screening 15 times in a week, from Sept 29 - Oct 5, 1967. The same season of 22 and 15 screenings, respectively, played at the Hastings Regent, with slightly longer seasons at Palmerston North’s Regent, in Feb 1962 and June 1967.

at least 20 times, nearly always in a cinema, 'to enjoy it again [and] to look for things I might have missed on an earlier viewing.'⁴³¹ *The Magnificent Seven* did particularly well in Britain, where it was the second most popular film in 1961.⁴³²

Westerns still featured strongly at the end of decade, as seen at Christchurch theatres during the January summer holidays of 1969. The Regent screened the 'big' western, *Shalako* (1968), with 'THE DYNAMIC POWER OF [Sean] Connery and THE SULTRY PASSION OF [Brigitte] Bardot.'⁴³³ The Barclay, an independent theatre in the suburb of Papanui, was showing *Waco* (1966) at its 2pm matinees, while the Lido in New Brighton screened *For A Few Dollars More* (1965) at its matinee, 5pm and 8pm screenings and its Sunday night feature. The Savoy advertised its 8pm Sunday screening of *Minnesota Clay* (1964), starring Cameron Mitchell, with the advertisement helpfully advising that he played the character of 'Buck' in the popular television series, *High Chaparral*.⁴³⁴ Meanwhile, the Tivoli was screening a favourite children's matinee combination, as quoted by survey respondents, of 'a western and Tarzan', with its three-screenings-a-day double-feature, *Tarzan and the Jungle Boys* (1968) and *Buckskin* (1968).⁴³⁵ These westerns were advertised over a three-day period, indicating the genre's strong presence.

The last year of the decade saw three popular westerns produced, although *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) had the majority of their screenings in the 1970s. *The Wild Bunch* (1969) screened 144 times at the Embassy in Wellington over the summer of 1969/1970.⁴³⁶ Also released in 1969 was *Mackenna's Gold* (1969), starring Gregory Peck and Omar Sharif, which was one of the top performing films of the decade at both the Odeon in Napier⁴³⁷ and the Regent in Hastings.⁴³⁸ At Timaru's Majestic it attracted an audience of 5,074, from 19 screenings, making it the second most popular film at that theatre for the year, behind *Oliver!*⁴³⁹

⁴³¹ Don Esslemont, born 1935.

⁴³² John Howard Reid, *Top-Grossing Pictures at the British Box-Office 1936-1970*, Wyong, NSW, Australia: Reid's Film Index, c 1997, p. 34.

⁴³³ *The [Christchurch] Press*, January 4, 1969, p. 26.

⁴³⁴ *The [Christchurch] Press*, January 4, 1969, p. 26.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, January 2, 1969, p. 14.

⁴³⁶ Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

⁴³⁷ Screened 32 times in August, 1969. Odeon Theatre, Napier, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

⁴³⁸ Screened 48 times and was the 2nd longest running film at that theatre for the decade. Regent Theatre, Hastings, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

⁴³⁹ Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection.

War

The popularity of war films with movie-goers in the 1960s continued, although production of the genre was not as prolific as in the second half of the 1950s. Michael Paris argued that audiences, particularly younger people, had generally lost interest in the combat films that had emerged after the Second World War, showing the strength of American military power and the 'heroic doings' of elite British servicemen. Instead, they were increasingly influenced by antiwar sentiment.⁴⁴⁰ However, a number of war films were particularly popular in New Zealand during the 1960s, indicating audiences here still had an interest in seeing Allied success stories. Fifteen survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1960s said that *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) was one of their most popular films, making it the eighth most popular film of the decade for this cohort.⁴⁴¹ The next most popular was *The Great Escape* (1963), starring Steve McQueen and James Garner, with 13 respondents citing it as a favourite. Evidence of the popularity of the genre was seen early in the decade, with the manager of the Princess in Kaitia informing his booking office that there had been a 'marked preference for war stories, of which we have had several lately'.⁴⁴² War films were popular enough for the Regent in Palmerston North to run an 'Escape Festival of World War Two' from September 17-22 in 1966, screening six British war films over six days.⁴⁴³ Another popular screening was *Where Eagles Dare* (1968), a joint United Kingdom and United States production starring Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood, which screened at the Cinerama in Christchurch for fifteen weeks in 1969, and at the Cinerama in Wellington for almost three months in 1969, making it one of the most popular films of the decade for both of those theatres.

One of the most screened war films of the '60s was a British 'docu-drama' *The War Game* (1965), which was banned from public screening in Britain by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) until 1985.⁴⁴⁴ Despite the film winning an Oscar for best documentary in 1967, it was a fictional depiction of the consequences of a nuclear attack in Britain. Although the BBC allowed the film to be made, a screening for government representatives resulted

⁴⁴⁰ Michael Paris (ed.), *Repicturing the Second World War*, pp. 3-6.

⁴⁴¹ It was the 7th most screened film of the decade at Napier's Odeon, with 35 screenings from July 13-26, 1962. Its 10 screenings at the Petone State, from October 5-11, 1962 made it one of the 9 most screened films at that theatre for the first half of the decade. Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection. It was one of only 3 films to screen 28 times at Palmerston North's Regent in 1962, the most screenings of any film for that year. Exhibitors' Record Book, Val Page collection.

⁴⁴² Letter from Mr. F. M. Cade, Princess Theatre Manager, Kaitia, to Mr T.S. Townsend, February 26, 1960, *Dunkirk* (1958) gave the Princess 'its best Late Session take for some time, that of £32 nett, against the present average of £18.' Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁴⁴³ The films were *Danger Within* (1959), *The Colditz Story* (1955), *The Wooden Horse* (1950), *The One That Got Away* (1957), *Albert R.N.* (1953), and *Very Important Person* (1961), and their storylines were all of Allied soldiers escaping from prisoner-of-war camps. Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, Exhibitors' Record Book, Val Page collection.

⁴⁴⁴ The film did screen to film societies in Britain. Robert Hanks, 'Culloden/The War Game', *Sight and Sound*, July 2016, p. 100.

in it being banned, with outrage expressed at the vision of Britain reduced to ruin through starvation, radiation sickness, and executions from firing squads 'weirdly reminiscent of the WWII resistance films, but with the British government replacing the Nazis'.⁴⁴⁵ None of this upset the censor or audiences in New Zealand and the 46 minute film screened 102 times at the Regent in Palmerston North in July 1968, while at the Majestic in Timaru it was shown 10 times on its opening day of Friday July 5 1968, attracting a total audience of 1,442 and earning the theatre \$558 for the day. It screened 45 times over a week, attracting an audience of 4,835 and grossing \$1801.20.⁴⁴⁶

A notable difference in the war films of this period compared to the previous decade, was the significant reduction in the number of British-produced films. Putting aside the deliberate all-British schedule at the Regent in Palmerston North, of the other popular war films mentioned, only three were produced solely by the British. If the British had continued their prolific production of war films, it is quite likely the genre would have had an even stronger impact with audiences in this decade.

Star Power

While who was starring in a movie was less important for those going to the movies most frequently in the 1960s than for those who went most frequently in the 1950s, according to my survey respondents, it still had considerable influence (see Table 2.21).

Editors of the cinema publicity magazine, *Playdate*, ensured as many photos and articles of stars as possible were included in each edition, as seen with the content of the August 1965 copy.

Unusual and eye-catching cover a composite of four starlet portraits of Susan Strasberg, Beba Loncar, and Ann-Margaret. Pinups inside the issue are of Jocelyn Lane and Michael Cane [sic], the popular star of ZULU [1964]. Features include an eight-page spread of James Bond [...]. Special articles include stories on Charlton Heston, Claudia Cardinale, Michael Cane [sic], Elke Sommer [...]. Of tremendous selling potential is an article by Elvis Presley called "I'm Looking".⁴⁴⁷

The November 1965 issue was anticipated to be a sell-out due to its coverage of Elvis Presley, Gene Pitney, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, with Elvis Presley

⁴⁴⁵ Hanks, 'Culloden/The War Game', p. 100.

⁴⁴⁶ Exhibitors' Record books from David Lascelles collection, with the exception of Timaru's Majestic Theatre, which is from Gavin List's collection.

⁴⁴⁷ *Playdate* promotion to Theatre Managers, July 15, 1965, Box 133, File 480, Circulars 1-7/65, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

'again make[ing] the cover a sure seller'. This line-up illustrated the continuing drawcard of 'film stars', and the inclusion of Bob Dylan reflected the increasing interest in popular music artists in the 1960s.⁴⁴⁸ Likewise, while John Lennon had featured in films, the popular interest in him was for his music as a member of The Beatles. Popular New Zealand singers Ray Columbus and Gray Bartlett were also included in the issue.⁴⁴⁹

While survey respondents were not asked to name their favourite actors or actresses, many mentioned these in response to other questions. When asked to name their favourite films, 19 replied with 'any Elvis Presley film', or similar, with the next most cited actor, John Wayne, receiving 14 mentions. This tendency supported Edward Buscombe's belief that the genre and 'star' of a film were mutually reinforcing.⁴⁵⁰ Janet Thumim's research of Britain's postwar cinema industry also found that stars were often identified with particular genres.⁴⁵¹ When asked to name films they saw more than once, one survey respondent said he would go to the same movie again, with one of the reasons being 'because it had an actress who I loved,' although he did not name any favourites.⁴⁵² Another respondent paired a 'hot male movie star' with 'the huge screen, ice-creams, Jaffas, [and] adventure', as attracting her to the movies.⁴⁵³ Few directors were mentioned by survey respondents, which is not surprising given they rated who directed a film as their least important influence, but Alfred Hitchcock was an anomaly, receiving six citations in the context of 'any Alfred Hitchcock's movies' as favourites.

British or American?

When asked whether they preferred British or American films, or whether it did not matter, just over one-third (35%) of questionnaire respondents who were going to the cinema most frequently in the 1960s said they preferred British films, with only 1 percent (2 of the 213) saying they preferred American. The remainder said that whether the film was from the United States or from the United Kingdom made no difference to their movie-going.

⁴⁴⁸ Dylan could not be considered a film star having featured in only 1 episode of a tv mini-series, BBC's *The Madhouse on Castle Street* (1963), http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001168/?ref=nr_sr_1#actor retrieved June 3, 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ Memo from A.J. Goodliffe, Circulation Manager, to Theatre Managers, October 15, 1965, Circulars 1/65- 12/65, Box 133, File 480, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁴⁵⁰ Edward Buscombe, 'Walsh and Warner Brothers', in P. Hardy (ed.), *Raoul Walsh*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival and British Film Institute, 1974, pp. 50-61, p. 59, cited in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

⁴⁵¹ Janet Thumim, 'The 'popular', cash and culture in postwar British cinema industry', *Screen*, 32:3, Autumn 1991, pp. 245-271, p. 254.

⁴⁵² Dough, born 1951.

⁴⁵³ Female, born 1953.

While there was little change between the numbers of those who preferred British films over American, the proportion of films that came from the United States was lower in this decade, at less than half of the total. This was a considerable change from the previous decade when only one year (1957) achieved the same result (48%). There was a slight increase in the percentage of films originating from Commonwealth countries, compared with the pre-1962 category of 'United Kingdom', and a significant increase in the percentage of films from other countries, as seen in the following table. Given that one-third of survey respondents who were going to the movies most frequently in this decade preferred British films, it is possible audiences could have been sustained to a greater degree if there were more British films available.

Year	Total # films	% films from US (#)	% films from Comm. (#)	% from 'Other' (#)
1961-2	526	40 (210)	23 (123)	37 (193)
1962-3	479	47 (224)	22 (105)	31 (150)
1963-4	401	42 (170)	23 (91)	35 (140)
1964-5	439	41 (179)	22 (97)	37 (163)
1965-6	362	39 (143)	22 (78)	39 (141)
1966-7	303	43 (131)	23 (71)	33 (101)
1967-8	338	48 (163)	17 (59)	34 (116)
1968-9	336	47 (158)	21 (71)	32 (107)

Table 2.25: Origin of feature films (35mm) seen by the Censor, 1960s.⁴⁵⁴

Because the Kerridge-Odeon chain was partly owned by the British company, Rank Organisation, much was made of the Rank films. Early in the decade, the publicity manager for Rank Film Distributors of New Zealand, Warren Scott, informed Kerridge-Odeon exhibitors that they had the 'finest and most challenging' line-up to be offered by the British film production industry for some years. He added that 'British films are taking their places more and more in the world's cinemas'.⁴⁵⁵ Theatre managers frequently praised the Rank product, although given Robert Kerridge's close relationship with J. Arthur Rank, it was in their best interests to do so.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Figures from *AJHRs*: 1963, H 22, p. 51; 1965, H 22, p. 44; *AJHR*, 1967, H 22, p. 47; *AJHR*, 1969, H 22, p. 54. The country of origin of films from 'Other' countries are provided, but not the country of origin of films from the Commonwealth.

⁴⁵⁵ Letter by Rank Distribution Manager, Warren Scott, to Theatre Managers, no date, included with 'Contact', In-house communication to staff, July 1960, Issue 5, Box 64, File 216, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁴⁵⁶ The Mayfair Theatre Manager in Napier, Alan Shepherd, noted any of the 'J. Arthur Rank films gave a good boost' to theatre patronage, using the war film *Operation Amsterdam* (1959) as a recent example. Letter from Alan Shepherd, Mayfair Theatre Manager, Napier, to T.S. Townsend, Circulars 9/56-3/63 Box 101, File 366, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM; Duglad McPhail, Regent Theatre Manager, Gisborne, commented that *Sea of Sand* (1958), a war film, *Bachelor of Hearts* (1958), a comedy, *Ferry to Hong Kong* (1959), an action adventure, and *The 39 Steps* (1959), were 'particularly successful and put a quality rating on our product generally. A tonic month!' McPhail, in looking at his upcoming screening schedule, added that *Damn Yankees!* (1958) 'may please the musical fans' as long as it is 'not too American in theme and too free with its fantasy'. Letter from Duglad McPhail, Regent Theatre Manager, Gisborne, to T.S. Townsend, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM; Kerridge-Odeon auditor noted that Taihape manager, Mike Nicol, was not happy that 'Rank product was screened ahead of him at Waiouru', saying that it definitely 'hurt' the attendance at his theatre. Memo from Mr Vella to Mr Glover,

The support for British product and content, and the ongoing passion New Zealanders had for the Royal Family, is seen with *Wedding in Springtime* (1960), the film that captured the wedding of Princess Margaret to Antony Armstrong-Jones on May 9, 1960. Advanced notification advised that nearly 40 countries had ordered copies and those copies would be flown to the respective countries in time to coincide with the film's release in British cinemas. It was expected to be 'the biggest-scale coverage of a Royal occasion' since the Rank Organisation's colour film of the Queen's Coronation, *A Queen is Crowned*, in June 1953.⁴⁵⁷ Because of the limited number of copies available, provincial towns and cities had the film for only a week before it was moved on.⁴⁵⁸ Tony Goodliffe, at the Regent in Hamilton, was congratulated by Kerridge on his success with *Wedding in Springtime*. Goodliffe had screened the film on the hour, every hour, from 10am until 5pm, saying 'Everybody saw it', with his estimate being 'something like 50,000 [people] in ten days'. He said 'It was like printing money'.⁴⁵⁹

The Queen and Prince Philip's tour of New Zealand in February 1963 was filmed in 'glorious Technicolor' and screened as *The Royal Return* (1963). Vern Clouston, the Kerridge-Odeon exhibition manager, encouraged theatre managers to emphasise its use of colour, given that television was screening in black and white.⁴⁶⁰

Truly, no greater interest subject has even been shown in this country. The focus, the definition and brilliant colour make this the most glorious spectacle we have ever seen. Television looks very "trite" after seeing this magnificent coverage. Treat this film with the greatest of reverence – it is going to make a terrific difference to your Box Office. [...] Emphasise in your advertising "IN BRILLIANT COLOUR".

Other examples of the popularity of British material was seen with the success of the British comedies in this decade, and the emergence of the Bond spy series. Even though the latter

November 27, 1962, Head Office Memos, Box 100, File 363, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM; The Regent manager in Waimate reported he was looking forward to a 'further allocation of the top Rank films, and also [...] the full series of the *Carry On* presentations'. Letter from Regent Theatre Manager, Waimate, to T.S. Townsend, February 20, 1960, Circulars 9/56-3/63 Box 101, File 366, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM; Bob William, Regent Theatre Manager, Greymouth, reported they had had a 'record month', which he attributed to 'the RANK outstanding films we have had'. Letter from R.P. Williams to T.S. Townsend, March 8, 1960, Box 101, File 366, 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁴⁵⁷ 'Overseas Extra', no date, Head Office Memos January 1960-June 1960, Box 63, File 214, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁴⁵⁸ Palmerston North's Regent Theatre screened the film 28 times from May 11 - 18, before sending it to the Regent in Hastings, where it screened 20 times from May 18-23. From Hastings it went to the Odeon in Napier, where it was shown 36 times during the week of May 24-30, 1960. The projectionist there noted that as the film was a short feature and could be played on the hour over a number of hours, that '36 equal to 12 normal sessions'. Exhibitors' Record Books for those theatres, David Lascelles Collection. Les Rogers, from the Regent in Whanganui, screened *Wedding in Springtime* as part of their matinee programme, saying 'business was very good'. Letter from Les Rogers, Regent Theatre Manager, Whanganui, to T.S. Townsend, July 22, 1960, Box 101, File 366, Circulars 9/56-3/63, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁴⁵⁹ Goodliffe and Snow, *Stars in My Eyes*, pp. 25-6.

⁴⁶⁰ Letter from V.J. Clouston, Exhibition Manager, to Theatre Managers, March 28, 1963, Box 114, File 414, 4/63-6/64, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. Clouston also recommended that each theatre screen the film four times over the lunch period, at 12 noon, 12:30, 1:00, and 1:30pm.

was backed by American money, its production base was in Britain and its generic lineage, that of the imperialist spy thriller, was British.⁴⁶¹

Despite these specific British successes, the increase in the number of films from 'foreign' countries, and the continued predilection of many movie-goers for British films, the predominant movie culture remained American. The majority of films that were particularly popular with New Zealand audiences in this decade were American productions.

Conclusion

The decade was one of radical change for cinema-going in New Zealand, given the impact of television, the considerable decline in the numbers of people attending the movies, and the subsequent reduction in the number of movie theatres. The arrival of television coincided with a continuation of the high marriage and birth rates that were seen in the 1950s and its convenience fitted perfectly with this domesticity.

The primary reasons for going to the movies were much the same as during the previous decade; for entertainment, escapism, socialising with friends, going out on 'dates', and 'for something to do.' The single biggest barrier to going to the movies as often as one would have liked was the cost of admission, the same reason found for the 1950s. The cost of a ticket more than doubled while the average nominal wage increase for this decade was 39%, showing a considerable increase in the real cost of a ticket.

The film genres that were particularly popular in this decade were also very similar to those of the 1950s. Musicals, in particular, broke box-office records and comedies, especially British-made, attracted consistently good crowds. Drama, epics and westerns continued to do well, with re-runs of the latter genre doing especially well in filling out children's programmes. War films were not as prolific as they had been, but those that were produced still drew good audiences. The showing of horror films was notably more prolific in this decade, aimed primarily at the burgeoning youth market. The hit movie of 1950, the 'exploitation' film *The Secrets of Life*, made a brief return, with its advertising as sensational as it had been on its first outing.

⁴⁶¹ Chapman, *Cinemas of the World*, p. 288.

A change in audience composition was seen in this decade with audiences becoming more segmented, driven partly by the increase in the number of films with content designed specifically for mature audiences, which censorship restricted from children. These adult-oriented films originated primarily from 'foreign' countries, but a change in content was also seen in American films due to that country's change in its film industry's self-imposed moral values, and its increasing focus on producing material aimed at the young adult market. These factors resulted in a clear demarcation between child and adult audiences, with this increase in adult material in turn resulting in a greatly reduced number of General Exhibition films being made, which led to a shortage of product suitable for children. While older teenagers could attend adult movies, the film's subject and content had to be something that would attract them, and the rise in the 'teen-pic' horror genre was a result of this. Another genre that was especially attractive to the younger audience was films that incorporated the music, dance, and popular culture of their idols of the time, particularly Elvis Presley and the Beatles. The popularity of the Beatles' films were enhanced by their tour of this country in 1964, which coincided with the release of their first film, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). In catering increasingly for mature and youth audiences, film producers overseas were neglecting a longstanding cinema stalwart in New Zealand, children. While the production of children's material lessened, the children's audience remained, which created pressure for exhibitors to obtain appropriate films for them. Pressure was also put on exhibitors from regional areas where audiences indicated specific dislikes or preferences, suggesting that even in a country as small as New Zealand regional idiosyncrasies existed.

Women continued to be targeted by exhibitors, as their perceived need for 'escape' from their daily routines and their domestic isolation provided a point of difference from other movie-goers. Furthermore, women were used by exhibitors to influence their husbands into taking them out to the movies.

The biggest challenge for the cinema industry, however, was the arrival of television, which, because of its late arrival to this country, had a swift uptake, helped by full employment and relatively high wages. This new form of entertainment, despite its restricted hours of transmission and poor reception in many places, was greatly suited to the large numbers of young people who settled down and started families (by the mid-1960s over half of all grooms and almost three-quarters of all brides were under 25).⁴⁶² Hence results from my survey

⁴⁶² NZOYB, 1957, pp. 79-81; 1972, pp. 112-117.

respondents show that the number of people going to the movies on a weekly basis decreased in the 1960s compared to the 1950s, and, correspondingly, the number of people going on a once-monthly basis increased. Television was definitely the primary competition to movie-going, with many survey respondents describing their movie-going memories in a 'before' and 'after' television synopsis. The only other real leisure options for young people and adults, according to my survey respondents, were dances and parties, although the increase in live-theatre and restaurants, along with the extension of public bar open hours to ten o'clock, were mentioned by a very small number of respondents.

Chapter Three: The 1970s

Following the format of the previous two, this section will investigate the popularity of movie-going with New Zealanders in the 1970s, audience composition, what films were popular, why people enjoyed going to the movies, and what barriers existed to their going as often as they would have liked. It will also continue the discussion and analysis of the impact of television on movie-going, given that this decade saw two significant broadcasting events occur: the implementation of colour television and of a second channel.

How Popular Were the Movies in New Zealand in the 1970s?

Attendance

Movie attendances fluctuated in the first half of the decade. There was a relatively strong start in 1970-1, with 'interest in the cinema at a high rate,'¹ a decline in 1972-3, and an upswing in 1974-5. No official statistics were gathered for the latter half of the decade but by 1980-1 attendance was at a new low.² The rise recorded for the 1974-5 year was due to the particular popularity of films such as *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), with Roger Moore in the starring role of his second Bond film, *The Day of the Jackal* (1973), *Airport 1975* (1974), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), and *American Graffiti* (1973) doing exceptionally well with their first runs at Kerridge-Odeon theatres. Amalgamated Theatres drew crowds for *The Three Musketeers* (1973), *The Towering Inferno* (1974), and an R18 Australian 'Ozploitation' film, *Alvin Purple* (1973), described as 'Australia's most successful film release between 1971 and 1977'.³ Given the lack of national attendance statistics for the second half of the decade, we are unable to gauge the full impact of the immensely popular films *Jaws* (1975), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Grease* (1978), although individual exhibitor record books show that these films out-performed others and were particularly popular at their respective theatres across the country. Available admission statistics for the period are shown in Table 3.1.

¹ Letter from T.A. Kincaid, to Kerridge, Townsend, and Glover, October 7, 1970, Box 177, File 716, KO Archives MS 98/39, AWMM. This was due, according to a senior manager at Kerridge-Odeon, 'to the present restless and free-spending attitude of the general public'. Letter from Glover to J.R.A Felton, General Manager, Cinema International Corporation, N.Z. Ltd, December 16, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives MS 98/39, AWMM.

² NZOYB, 1983, p.257. 'The Census of Cinemas for the year ended March 31 1981 formed part of the Department of Statistics' 5 year series of integrated economic censuses. For this reason, any comparison with previous censuses, the last of which was for the year ended March 31, 1975, should be treated with caution.'

³ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069698/trivia?ref=tt_trv_trv retrieved September 2, 2106.

Year	Theatres #	Admissions (000)	Average Ticket Price (c)	Yearly admissions per head of mean population
1968-9	227	14,308	46	5.2
1970-1	210	13,087	63	4.6
1972-3	208	11,870	79	4.0
1974-5	203	15,035	107	5.1
1980-1	154	12,177	218	3.8

Table 3.1: General cinema statistics, 1969-1981.⁴

According to my survey respondents, the number of people going to the movies on a regular, weekly basis continued to decline, as seen in Table 3.2. Less than a quarter of those going to the movies were going on a weekly basis. Those going to the movies on an occasional, once or twice a month basis remained relatively consistent in this decade, as it had in the previous two. Those going more than once a week had dropped by two-thirds, although this cohort had never consisted of more than ten percent of movie-goers. The most significant change was the considerable increase in the number of movie-goers who went to the movies less than once a month; up from 6% in the 1950s, to 29% in the 1970s. This group will have had the biggest negative impact on movie-going, particularly given that those in this category could now have been attending movie theatres as infrequently as once or twice a year. Attendance according to gender continued the pattern of the previous two decades with males and females going to a similar degree in the 'once a week' and once or twice a month categories. There was a considerable difference, however, in their attendance in the 'two or three times a week' category, with only one percent of females compared with seven percent of males in this category, the most pronounced over the three decades. In contrast with the previous two decades, males and females were attending infrequently, less than once a month, to almost the same degree (27 and 31% respectively). This suggests that the significant withdrawal from cinema-going was not gender specific.

Frequency of Cinema Attendance	Those going most often in 1970s %	Those going most often in 1960s %	Those going most often in the 1950s %
Two or three times a week	3	8	9.5
Once a week	23	37	47
Twice a month	26	23	23
Once a month	18	14	12
Less than once a month	29	17	6
Other	1	1	2.5

Table 3.2: Survey respondents' frequency of attendance.

⁴ NZOYB, 1980, p. 354; 1983, p. 257. Cost of admission is from the NZOYB Consumer Price Index.

One of the reasons for the continued decline in audience numbers was the change in motivation for attending the cinema. Cinema-going in the 1950s was for many New Zealanders a matter of routine. People often went regardless of what was on and Hollywood had depended on people 'loving movies in general' and going regularly.⁵ By the 1970s, people were no longer going irrespective of what was screening, but instead chose a specific film, as the habitual 'going to the pictures' was replaced by 'going to a picture'. The change in the pattern of attendance in New Zealand followed that of overseas audiences. Sue Harper and Justin Smith's study of British film culture in the 1970s found a 'widening gap between the regular cinemagoer (a much-diminished category) and the new "event movie" audience',⁶ while Sian Barber's study of Southampton cinema-going found a 'discernible difference' in the attendance of 'blockbuster' films and other releases.⁷ This change in movie-going habit had actually been forecast in Britain, by Roger Manvell, in the early 1950s.⁸

Theatres

The first half of the decade saw the number of New Zealand theatres remain relatively stable with little change also recorded in their seating capacity. The late 1970s saw a steady decline, so that by 1980-1 the number of theatres was three quarters that of 1975. The trend toward smaller, more intimate theatres continued, particularly in the inner-city. This pattern, which had begun in Auckland and Christchurch, was seen in Wellington, with Kerridge-Odeon obtaining a licence for a triple cinema complex in the city, on the understanding that their 2,000 seat Majestic would close prior to the complex opening.⁹ Theatres continued to be adapted or demolished to fit the changing cinema-going culture and the practice of renovating, refurbishing, and renaming theatres that had always been a part of cinema history in New Zealand continued. The number of cinemas (with the percentage of their total in brackets) and their seating capacity are outlined in Table 3.3.

⁵ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: How 'The Lord of the Rings' Became a Hollywood Blockbuster and put New Zealand on the Map*, North Shore, N.Z.: Penguin, 2007, p. 5.

⁶ Sue Harper and Justin T. Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 211.

⁷ Sian Barber, 'Cinema-going at the Southampton Odeon: Exhibition data and popular taste, Appendix II', in Sue Harper and Justin T. Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, pp. 275-281, p. 277.

⁸ Roger Manvell, 'A Head Start in Television', *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, 7:3, Spring, 1953, pp. 246-252, p. 252.

⁹ *AJHR*, 1979, G 7, p. 20.

Seating capacity	1970-1	1972-3	1974-5	1980-1
Under 200	10 (4.8%)	16 (7.7)	13 (6.4)	
Under 250				19 (12.3%)
200-499	76 (36.2%)	68 (32.7)	78 (38.4)	
251 to 499				57 (37%)
500-999	103 (49%)	105 (50.5)	95 (46.8)	67 (43.5%)
1,000+	20 (9.5%)	19 (9.1)	17 (8.4)	11 (7.1%)
Circuit cinemas	1 (.5)	0	0	0
TOTAL:	210	208	203	154

Table 3.3: Theatre seating capacity.¹⁰

Robert Kerridge explained the changing patterns of cinema-going in New Zealand to the Hollywood distributors with which his company had contracts.¹¹

You are of course, familiar with the changing pattern of film patronage which New Zealand shares with most countries in the Western world, whereby we have the phenomenon of increasing concentration of box office revenue in relatively few pictures; and the long runs of these popular favourites. With the amount of current film production, this extended occupancy of first release channels by relatively few pictures, creates pressure on playing times which is one of our major problems at the present time. Being confined by the regulations under the Cinematograph Films Act and thereby prevented from an expansionist programme, we are seeking to meet this situation as best we can by upgrading the status of houses in the key centres – investing considerable sums on modernisation, refurnishing and equipment to provide cinema outlets consistent with current world trends. You are aware of what we have achieved with the Berkeley [Mission Bay, Auckland] and the response illustrated in the current extended run of CACTUS FLOWER [1969]. The Odeon, Dunedin, approaches completion. We have purchased and will upgrade the Tivoli in Christchurch. Similarly we will take possession as soon as we legally can of the Princess in Wellington and convert this into another first run outlet. With the co-operation of our Distributor friends this will provide additional first run playing time; and most important, on a much lower level of operating costs, so that films of specialised appeal can be mutually profitable.¹²

Kerridge's letter was well received, with the General Manager of Paramount Pictures (NZ) replying that he felt a 'glimmer of hope' in Kerridge's reply, acknowledging that 'the establishment of small theatres with appreciably lower operating costs will be a step forward in fully exploiting the market, picture by picture'.¹³ With first-run films screening for considerably longer than they had in earlier decades, the number of first-run theatres

¹⁰ NZOYB, 1975, p. 351; 1977, p. 345; 1983, p. 258.

¹¹ Columbia, Paramount, Universal Artists, and Warner Bros.

¹² Letter from Robert Kerridge to Ron Kivell, Columbia Films Manager, New Zealand, June 24, 1970, Box 171, File 653, MS/98/39, KO Archives, AWMM.

¹³ Letter from J.R.A Felton, Paramount Pictures (NZ) General Manager, to Robert Kerridge, June 26, 1970, Box 171, File 653, MS/98/39, KO Archives, AWMM.

needed to increase. Also, because films often screened for months and not just for a few days, cinemas no longer needed to be the large picture-palaces of days gone by, created to cope with the enthusiastic influx of cinema-goers every few days when the latest new feature screened. Accordingly, the changes to the theatre-scape in the 1970s resulted in smaller theatres taking over the space once occupied by much grander ones. Kerridge-Odeon's Embassy in Dunedin reopened on July 24, 1970 as the Odeon, with its timely refurbishment ensuring its survival with the chain throughout the seventies, with its seating reduced from 600 to 376, in line with the prevailing trend.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Dunedin's 1845-seat Regent, a 'dying dinosaur' as a picture theatre,¹⁵ was the subject of negotiations between Kerridge-Odeon and the City Council,¹⁶ which eventually assumed its ownership, primarily for utilisation as a live performance theatre and occasional film-festival venue.¹⁷ In Christchurch, the large 1,600-seater Majestic closed in 1970 after a fire, and was not used as a cinema again.¹⁸ The 800-seater Tivoli, Kerridge-Odeon's Christchurch double-feature theatre since the demise of the Embassy in 1959, was refurbished and reopened as the Westend as a first-run theatre in 1971, in line with the trend for more upmarket, intimate theatres.

In Wellington, Amalgamated's Roxy closed down in 1974, Kerridge-Odeon's once-lavish St. James fell into disrepair and closed, along with the Regent. Auckland's State, which had had its last screening on 30 March 1960,¹⁹ was purchased from Kerridge-Odeon by the Chinese community and became known as the Auckland Chinese Hall.²⁰ It reopened in 1972, showing action films on Sunday nights, but closed for good in 1976.²¹ The \$1.2 million upgrade of Amalgamated's Auckland Civic in 1975 went against the trend of closures, although the theatre's seating capacity was reduced from 2,300 to 1,600. The former Wintergarden restaurant was refurbished as a separate but complementary 300-seat theatre with access via the Civic's foyer. While the theatre was thought worthy of preservation because of its

¹⁴ <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/2665> retrieved August 5, 2016.

¹⁵ Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre, 1925-1970*, Auckland, N.Z.: Random House, 2008, p. 210.

¹⁶ Miscellaneous: Theatres D – G, 1971, 1971, Box 175, File 703, MS/98/39, KO Archives, AWMM.

¹⁷ <http://hauntedauckland.com/site/regent-theatre-dunedin/> retrieved September 7, 2016.

¹⁸ Those initially interested in leasing the building included the Christchurch Police, a local wine and spirit firm and a company interested in turning the building into a bowling alley. The Police found the stalls auditorium not big enough for their proposed 'Stolen Cycles Department' and offices, the 'bottle-store' did not like the one-way street access, and the bowling alley venture found the floor of the stalls unsuitable for their needs. Letter from Trevor King, Avon Theatre Manager, Christchurch, to N.J. Glover, September 20, 1971, Box 177, File 713, MS/98/39, KO Archives. The theatre became Moby Dick's Nite Spot but was permanently closed later in the decade after another fire. <http://canterburyheritage.blogspot.co.nz/2008/08/majestic-theatre> retrieved August 29, 2016.

¹⁹ Memo from Mr Townsend to Mr Forrest, March 17, 1960, Box 63, File 214, Head Office Memos 1/60-6/60, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

²⁰ <http://chinesecommunity.org.nz/en/site/images/show/1048>, retrieved June 13, 2016.

²¹ Bruce W. Hayward and Selwyn P. Hayward, *Cinemas of Auckland 1896-1979*, Auckland, N.Z.: Lodestar, 1979, p. 9 and Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre*, Auckland, N.Z.: Random House, 2008, p. 147.

uniqueness, (former manager Hector Olsen believed 'no theatre in the cinema mecca, Hollywood, can match the gaudy magnificence of the Civic'),²² one commentator cited 'nostalgia, the "disease" currently sweeping the western world' as having played a part.²³

Toward the end of the decade, despite difficult trading conditions, three new cinemas opened in 1977-8: the Westside in Henderson, Auckland, the Roxy in Christchurch's New Brighton, and the Academy in the Christchurch Arts Centre. The Academy's licence was restricted to screenings of art films, continuing the trend of increasing interest in non-mainstream films.²⁴ One survey respondent singled out the Academy as her most-frequented theatre, specifically because of the art-house movies.²⁵

Sundays and Public Holidays

The declining market encouraged management to exploit holidays to their utmost and to clamp down on screenings taking place outside the industry.

Sunday screenings were popular, particularly on holiday weekends, which led to Amalgamated and Kerridge-Odeon managers working together to extend Sunday screenings during holiday weekends in some regions. Rather than the current alternate Sunday arrangement, both chains wanted to operate on long-weekend Sundays. Larry Vella, Kerridge-Odeon Cinema Division Manager, informed the managers of the Regent theatres in Palmerston North, Hamilton, Whanganui and Invercargill, the Odeon theatres in Gisborne and Napier, the Mayfair in New Plymouth, and the Majestic theatres in Timaru and Nelson, to 'discuss the matter with [your] local Amalgamated manager, and jointly approach the Town Clerk to informally apply for permission for the two theatres to screen on those weekends'.²⁶ A similar letter was sent to the managers of Amalgamated theatres at those destinations by Joseph Moodabe, Junior.²⁷

Christmas Day had long been considered a day free from commercial activities and for families to be together and Robert Kerridge had endorsed that practice. Things had changed by 1971, as seen when the manager of Dunedin's St. James, Dugald McPhail, informed Larry

²² Lesley Lundy, 'Restored to a Magnificent Past', *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, October 6, 1975, pp. 24-27, p. 24. The Civic's lease reverted to the Auckland City Council in 1994. Almost \$42million was spent on restoring and strengthening the theatre. <http://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/itemdetail.cfm?itemid=2500> retrieved October 22, 2017.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ NZOYB, 1978, G 7, p. 19.

²⁵ Jacqueline, born 1954.

²⁶ Letter from L.K. Vella to Theatre Managers, November 5, 1971, Box 177, File 715, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

²⁷ Letter from J.P. Moodabe to Theatre Managers, November 8, 1971, Box 174, File 701, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

Vella of the theatre's projectionists' 'refusal' to work on the upcoming Christmas Day. Christmas Day, like Sunday screenings, were voluntary for staff, in that they could not be forced to work. This did not prevent Larry Vella from being much put out.

The reporting of their refusal to work significantly overlooks a couple of very important considerations that we made when we asked them in respect of Christmas Day. One was that we would only open one cinema in the very big centres for one evening performance only, and the other was that work would be on a purely voluntary basis. However, despite these conditions they still have, somewhat to our disappointment, refused to help us provide a public service.²⁸

While the 'condition' allowed staff to turn down work on Christmas Day, managements' irritation that they would do so is suggestive of the pressure they were under.

A close eye was kept on competing leisure activities, particularly if they involved the screening of films. Kerridge-Odeon solicitor, A.R. Mackey, notified theatre managers at Napier, Gisborne, Opotiki, Mt. Maunganui, and Tauranga of a 'Rock Show' that had been put on at Whakatane over Labour Weekend in 1971, which had included 'some old time movies and some surfing movies'. The exhibitor did not have a licence to screen films and Mackey accordingly 'complained to the appropriate authorities'. Concerned that this sort of 'show' could be put on at 'other Summer Resorts in your area', Mackey asked those managers to keep an eye out for advanced advertising of such events, so that they could be checked.²⁹

A further example of the close attention managers kept on what was being screened in their area was seen when the General Manager of the Australasian branch of United Artists, John Neal, was asked to investigate the alleged screening of *The Graduate* (1967) at Otago University by the 'University Union'. Although the film was to screen on June 8 and 9, 1970, the screenings did not occur because the film had not arrived from New York in time, so Neal was able to reassure Robert Kerridge that no 'illegitimate' print was circulating.³⁰ A similar concern was expressed over the 11pm nightly screenings at the Varsity Theatre at the Victoria University Students' Union Building in Wellington, with students admitted for 30 cents on the presentation of their Student Union cards.³¹ Films were obtained from 'the

²⁸ Letter from Larry Vella to Dugald McPhail, St. James Theatre Manager, Dunedin, November 25, 1971, Box 177, File 716, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

²⁹ Letter from A. R. Mackey to selected Theatre Managers, November 15, 1971, Box 177, File 715, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

³⁰ Letter from John Neal to Robert Kerridge, July 3, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

³¹ A female survey respondent recalled that at Teachers' College films were screened every week and were free (part of Student Association fees).

Embassies', indicating they were 'foreign' films, but there was a 'rumour' that the Fox Corporation had agreed to supply feature films. Amalgamated Theatres, which were owned by Fox, reported to Kerridge-Odeon that they had checked and Fox were 'emphatically' not supplying films to students.³² These examples not only illustrate the close eye kept on any perceived threat to their business, but also the growth of interest in film by university students. A number of survey respondents mentioned they increased their viewing, particularly of foreign films, while at university, with an added attraction that screenings were either free or very cheap.

Drive-In Theatres

The viability of drive-in theatres, which had featured in industry and government discussions since the 1950s, was again up for discussion in 1976, with interest expressed in their establishment, particularly in Auckland and Christchurch. After consultation with 'interested parties' the Government decided that 'it would not be advisable to allow drive-in cinemas at present'.³³ However, the issue refused to go away, appearing again in 1978 when the Minister of Internal Affairs asked the Film Trade Board for its views on proposals to establish pilot drive-ins in Auckland and Christchurch. The issue was keenly followed by exhibitors and distributors as the 'possible effect of such cinemas on the "hard-top" trade is a factor of considerable importance'.³⁴ The Film Trade Board were unable to reach an agreement and the issue remained open for public discussion, although it was noted that the Government was unlikely to support any proposals in 'the present fuel and economic conditions'.³⁵

Despite this less-than-favourable environment, Independent Drive-Ins Ltd lobbied the government in 1979 to allow drive-in theatres. Part of their argument was that Australia, 'a country of almost identical heritage, culture, and life-style', had had drive-in theatres for more than two decades, with their current number sitting at 310. It was noted that a public opinion poll conducted by the *Auckland Star* in May 1978 gave an 'overwhelming endorsement' to drive-in theatres, with a vote of 1,854 to 152 in favour of their establishment'.³⁶ It was argued that local government leaders were among those who supported drive-ins, seeing them as 'desirable community entertainment centres' that

³² Letter from N.J. Glover to Royce Moodabe, Amalgamated Theatres, September 13, 1971, Box 174, File 701, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWM. M.

³³ *AJHR*, 1976, G. 7, p. 16.

³⁴ *AJHR*, 1978, G. 7, pp. 19-20.

³⁵ *AJHR*, 1979, G. 7, p. 20.

³⁶ Independent Drive-Ins Ltd., *A Case for the Introduction of Drive-In Cinemas in New Zealand*, Auckland, NZ.: Independent Drive-Ins Ltd, April 1979, p. 1.

would provide young people with an entertainment option, at a time, particularly in the South Auckland area proposed for drive-in development, when there was a 'paucity of entertainment'.³⁷ Support for Independent Drive-Ins Ltd was received from Robert W. Selig, Chairman of the Theatre Association of California, the biggest drive-in organisation in the United States. Selig outlined the particular audience that were attracted to drive-ins in his country.

64% of our attendance is comprised of young married couples with two or three children. The drive-in theatre in this country is about the only affordable source of entertainment via first-run films which a typical young American family may enjoy. This is the economics: at the drive-in, the family need engage no baby-sitter and pay no parking fee. In most cases children under 12 are admitted free. For six or seven dollars (even in the fact of this country's prevailing inflation), the entire family may enjoy all of the top quality first-run pictures – and still eat food and refreshment from commodious, beautiful cafeteria-like snack bars, which rival America's supermarkets in facilities.³⁸

In contrast to the practice in the United States, Independent Drive-Ins Ltd went to great pains to stress that any New Zealand drive-in theatres would feature second-run films and so would not be competition with the first-run, 'hard-top' theatres, and that their audiences were made up of different segments of the population, with drive-ins being attractive to young families who would not frequent traditional cinemas anyway.

The Government's decision to disallow 'the introduction of a type of entertainment which encouraged the use of motor vehicles' effectively put an end to the debate, with there being no indication it would amend its view in the foreseeable future.³⁹ The 'energy crisis' of the 1970s (most famously the carless days scheme which ran from July 1979 until May 1980) made anything that appeared likely to increase car use unpopular with the Government.

Television

Television continued to expand its network, with two changes in broadcasting in the 1970s making owning a television set even more alluring than when it was first introduced. Conversion to colour transmission began in October 1973 and was completed by March 1975.⁴⁰ Television Two opened in Auckland and Christchurch on June 30, 1975 and within

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁹ *AJHR*, 1980, G. 7, p. 14.

⁴⁰ *AJHR*, 1975, F. 3, p. 4.

twelve months it was reported it reached approximately 70% of the population.⁴¹ By the end of the decade over 94% of homes had television sets, with almost 60% of those colour.⁴² The total number of television licences increased by 37% over the course of the decade, as illustrated in the following table.

Year	# TV Licences	% increase	% households with TV	Colour TVs ⁴³	% of Colour TVs
1969-70	627,617		78.4 ⁴⁴		
1970-1	664,440	5.8			
1971-2	696,192	4.7	83.7		
1972-3	732,250	5.7			
1973-4	754,623	3.0		15,331	2
1974-5	790,599	4.7	85 ⁴⁵	82,027	10.4
1975-6	811,182	2.6		188,911	23.3
1976-7	815,798	0.5		302,212	37
1977-8	843,555	3.4		394,195	46.7
1978-9	859,885	1.9	94	499,210	58

Table 3.4: Number of television licences and colour sets, 1970s.

The advancements of colour television, making viewing more attractive, and the establishment of a second channel, providing more viewing options, were mentioned by a number of survey respondents as having had an effect on their movie-going. One respondent said ‘as more channels were added, and films were televised, I went to the movies less often’,⁴⁶ while another said that ‘the arrival of colour television was a biggie’, indicating colour made a significant impact on some viewers.⁴⁷ However, this effect should not be exaggerated, as 80% of those survey respondents who went to the movies most often in the 1970s said that television had no impact on their movie attendance, as seen in Table 3.5.⁴⁸

How did television affect your movie-going?	%
It had no impact, I went as often as I had always done	78.5
I went less often	18
It changed the sort of movie I went to see	2
I stopped going to the movies	1
I went at a different time or on a different day	.5

Table 3.5: Impact of television on movie-going, for those going most frequently in the 1970s.

Comments from those respondents provide a broader understanding of why television did not affect their movie-going.

⁴¹ NZOYB, 1976, p. 351.

⁴² NZOYB, 1980, pp. 350-1.

⁴³ The number of colour television sets are included in the total number of licences, but recorded in a separate column to illustrate their rapid uptake. NZOYB, 1978, p. 349.

⁴⁴ NZOYB, 1971, p. 357. As at July 1970. Comparative figures for other countries: US 93, Canada 92, Britain 86, Australia 80.

⁴⁵ AJHR, 1975, F. 3, p. 29.

⁴⁶ Richard, born 1950.

⁴⁷ Female, born 1958.

⁴⁸ 207 people who said they went to the pictures most frequently in the 1970s, answered this question. It should be remembered that because of the preselected criteria of ‘going to the movies most frequently in this decade’ (as is the same for the previous decade) it could be expected that television would have less of an impact on the cohort.

When I was a student we didn't have TV so it didn't affect movie going.⁴⁹ Movies weren't so accessible at home on TV, others watching it with different ages/tastes.⁵⁰

We got TV before my peak movies consumption era so by the time we were really into the movies TV was old hat, everyday stuff.⁵¹

In my teens and early twenties I didn't sit around watching television all that much - mostly on week nights after dinner if I wasn't at a mates place or with my girlfriend.⁵²

By the 70s and as a teenager it did not affect the amount of movies I went out to see. TV was for serials, episodes of family favourites, the odd movie and nature programme, but movies was for going out with friends.⁵³

We were watching different things on TV and at the movies. I don't remember watching movies on TV, only TV and serial programmes.⁵⁴

TV was so much lower quality than the movies, so watching TV didn't compare at all to the magic of movies on the big screen.⁵⁵

A number of these comments reinforce that it was younger people who were going to the movies rather than staying at home watching television, as we saw earlier in Table 2.11. Colour television and more choice may have had a greater impact on older cinema-goers in encouraging them to choose watching television over seeing a film.

Television and its impact was still very much part of the cultural and social discourse a decade after its implementation. Before broadcasting had even begun in New Zealand, the *New Zealand Listener* was publishing cartoons that depicted television in a negative light, with these cartoons most often found strategically placed on the Film Review pages, indicating a strong editorial bias from this cultural adjudicator. The cartoons frequently depicted deteriorating relations between spouses, with the third member of the 'family', the television, usually occupying a central role, as seen in Figure 3.1. The cartoon suggests it is older people who watched television, reinforcing that film-going became increasingly for young adults, particularly those who were unmarried.

⁴⁹ Lesley, born 1953.

⁵⁰ Heather, born 1958.

⁵¹ Alistair Watts, born 1955.

⁵² Male, born 1953.

⁵³ Anne, born 1956.

⁵⁴ Female, born 1959.

⁵⁵ Catherine McCartin, born 1961.

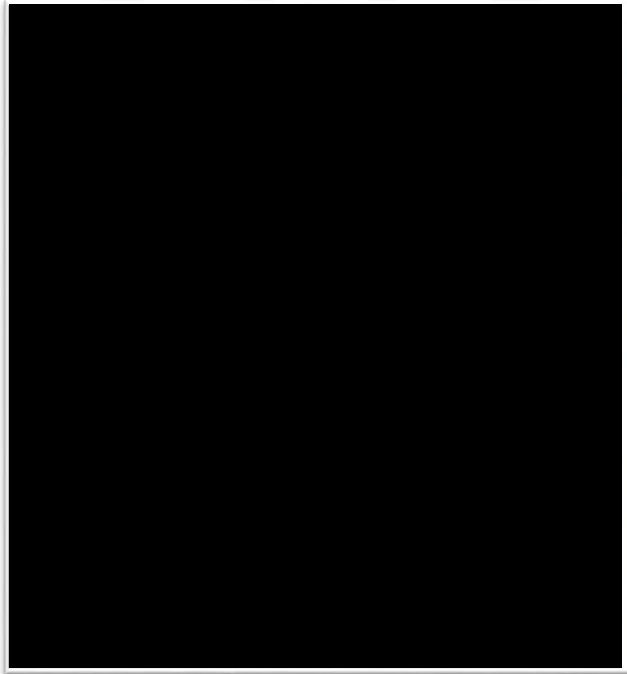


Figure 3.1: *New Zealand Listener*, June 22, 1970, p. 46.



Figure 3.2: *TeeVee*, Eve Merriam. *The Patea Mail*, June 14, 1978, p. 9.

Disparaging remarks about television were not restricted to cartoons, as seen in this poem published in a small town newspaper in 1978, when television was approaching its twentieth anniversary in New Zealand.⁵⁶ The popular theme of deteriorating spousal relations was still a favourite one. Both the cartoon and the poem portray the television set as having a primary role in matrimonial disconnection.

The 1970s Audience

Censorship and the 'Adult' audience

An overseas commentator maintains that audiences of the 1970s were made up of 'older baby boomers [who] were reaching a critical mass as a target market and were something of a countercultural force as well, caught up with the antiwar movement, civil rights, and the sexual revolution'.⁵⁷ In reflecting the changing social and cultural environment in America, Hollywood's films at the beginning of the decade had 'as much in common with European

⁵⁶ Eve Merriam, *The Patea Mail*, June 14, 1978, p. 9. U2 A01 Patea Pictures, South Taranaki Museum.

⁵⁷ Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 15-44, p. 22. 'Older baby boomers' would still have been relatively 'young' for most of the 1970s, with the oldest 24-34 in the decade. The youngest were mostly teenagers.

art-cinema as with classical Hollywood',⁵⁸ according to Thomas Schatz, as they borrowed heavily, both stylistically and technically, from European film-masters. Peter Biskind emphasised the importance of non-American films in this particular period, to both film-makers and to audiences.

Wherever you looked – Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Japan, Latin America – directors with unpronounceable names were making stunning movies. It was the Golden Age of postwar European and Japanese cinema, the French New Wave, of Ingmar Bergman, of Akira Kurosawa, of Antonioni and Fellini. Although these films were 'foreign', they seemed more immediate, more 'American' than anything Hollywood was turning out. They hit home with a shock of recognition.⁵⁹

The interest in 'foreign' films continued to grow for New Zealand audiences throughout the 1970s, and the increased number of art-house theatres made this 'genre' the only growth area in the cinema business in New Zealand.⁶⁰ The first Auckland International Film Festival in 1969 attracted 11,000 patrons, and audience numbers increased at a phenomenal rate over the subsequent years with 19,000 in 1970, 30,000 in 1971, and 38,000 in 1972.⁶¹ The attraction of the festival was partly attributed, according to Roger Horrocks, one of the festival organisers, to the 'severe' censorship in New Zealand, which resulted in the festival offering a rare opportunity to see 'edgy' films. Horrocks believed the success of art-house films was due in part to the aura of 'culture' that surrounded them and 'in part due to sex'.⁶²

With the strict Hays Code no longer governing American movie production, films became increasingly 'adult' in their themes, and along with the foreign films coming into the country, many cinema goers, particularly younger people, became interested in expanding their cinematic horizons. For some movie-goers the 'sophisticated European mores' were more attractive than the 'provincially prudish' films they had been accustomed to seeing.⁶³

The decade began with the Censor stating that although the high incidence of violence in films decreased in 1970, the 'exploitation of aberrant attitudes to sex', often including drugs and sexual violence, increased.⁶⁴ Given the increasingly mature themes, censorship not only continued to be an issue throughout the 'seventies, but the debate grew more public. The

⁵⁸ Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', p. 21.

⁵⁹ Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998, p. 21.

⁶⁰ Simon Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013, p. 183.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-201, p. 199.

⁶² Roger Horrocks in Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture*, p. 199.

⁶³ Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture*, p. 170.

⁶⁴ *NZOYB*, 1970, H 22, p. 30.

strongest voice of protest was from Patricia Bartlett, a former nun and Lower Hutt school teacher, who founded the Society for the Promotion of Community Standards in 1970. Bartlett and the Society campaigned against what they considered pornography in the media and lobbied the Government for improved standards of 'decency' and higher moral standards. Bartlett's conservative views had support, with her petition advocating for a tightening up on film censorship raising over 41,000 signatures, 'no doubt mostly from folk who are not cinema patrons', according to Ron Usmar of the New Zealand Film Society.⁶⁵ Examples of films Bartlett considered 'good' were *My Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Lawrence of Arabia*, all of which she 'certainly enjoyed' and she believed that many more of that 'good' sort of film should be produced.⁶⁶

Concern over language was behind a letter to the editor, signed 'Parent', which criticised the *Love Story* (1970) for 'its disgusting words', words that the letter's author believed would commit an offence and be punishable by law if they were heard in public. The title of the film had led these cinema-goers to believe they were going to see something 'uplifting and beautiful', and instead they were left wondering how the film got past the censor 'without pruning'.⁶⁷ Censor, Doug McIntosh replied

The film *Love Story* was definitely recommended as suitable for adults only; and if parents cannot control their children, the censor can't do so. As far as language is concerned, the film includes the type of language which is used in America quite commonly. If we don't like bad language we don't have to follow suit. Often, hearing bad language puts people against it.⁶⁸

Playdate magazine came under attack from the Wellington Housewives' Association when the President, Ethel McLennan, wrote to Robert Kerridge saying that members of her organisation 'abhor the tone of the magazine which you sponsor for teenagers, with its female nudity and baretop scenes, which are banned from films but printed in *Playdate* magazine for children to see'. Anger was also expressed at the 'large advertisements for contraceptives, and this in a magazine for teenagers'. Calling on Kerridge's 'high standards', McLennan asked why he allowed the printing of 'bare scenes instead of the clothed ones, [...] immodest instead of the modest ones', adding that 'A few years ago you would never have printed this type of Scene [sic] why has your standard dropped so low?' As 'Mothers

⁶⁵ Letter from R.A. Usmar, New Zealand Film Society, to the New Zealand Motion Picture Distributors Association, July 23, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

⁶⁶ Pauline Swain, 'Patricia Bartlett Interview', *New Zealand Listener*, March 8, 1971, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁷ *Otago Daily Times*, September 28, 1971, p. 4.

⁶⁸ 'Film Censorship', *Otago Daily Times*, September 28, 1971, p. 4.

and grandmothers', members of the Housewives' Association hoped that 'in the future your magazine, which is read by many young teenagers, may be made more wholesome for them by removing nudity and female baretop scenes and contraceptive advertisements'.⁶⁹ Kerridge's reply assured Mrs McLennan that he 'personally' shared her concern 'for the permissive way of life which seems to have taken over in most parts of the world' and which had 'regrettably been met by film producers, theatrical producers and writers'. However, he informed McLennan that *Playdate* was not exclusive to Kerridge-Odeon, with it being 'an industry publication covering various aspects of entertainment', adding, 'Its readership is not, as you surmise, young children. Sales to this section are negligible.' Kerridge ended by saying, 'I personally believe that the era through which we are now traversing will pass and that humanity will progressively get back to its former standards.'⁷⁰

A cartoon from the *New Zealand Listener* suggests this was not likely to happen in the foreseeable future, given the considerable appetites of some movie-goers for the 'adult' fare that was now screening at their local cinema. The cartoon, shown in Figure 3.3, refers to *Am Curious Yellow* (1967), a Swedish film with explicit sex scenes,⁷¹ that was shown after the censor's decision requiring excisions was upheld against an appeal to the Censorship Board of Appeal.⁷²

Protesting against Miss Bartlett 'and the people who associate themselves with her ideals', Helen Lloyd pointed out that they could easily avoid any film they found disagreeable, which would leave the rights of other individuals to make up their own minds as to whether to see the film or not, which



**Figure 3.3: "I suppose it was all right – as far as it went".
New Zealand Listener, April 12, 1971, p. 13.**

⁶⁹ Letter from Ethel McLennan, President of the Wellington Housewives Association, to Robert Kerridge, August 11, 1970, Box 171, File 652, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁷⁰ Letter from Robert Kerridge to Ethel McLennan, President of the Wellington Housewives Association, August 11, 1970, Box 171, File 652, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁷¹ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0061834/?ref=mv_sr_1 retrieved October 11, 2016. For more detail on the film see Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture*, p. 205.

⁷² *AJHR*, 1973, G. 7, p. 32. According to the *New Zealand Gazette*, v. 1, 1977, p. 1318, a 16mm edition was approved for exhibition only to members of approved film societies. Decision dated April 15, 1977.

Lloyd thought was better for society than not having the choice at all. She commented that if Miss Bartlett could read so-called 'harmful' literature or see 'harmful' films without her morals becoming corrupt, then so too should others.⁷³ The New Zealand Film Society wrote to Kerridge-Odeon and Amalgamated informing them that Bartlett's petition, which called for the 'Banning of nudity, bare breasts and sex' in films and asked that the movie industry be placed under the control of the Crimes Act, was to be presented to Government. The Society were keen to obtain full details of the petition so as to ensure 'the Industry may have the opportunity of providing the Committee with factual information concerning censorship and audience reaction'.⁷⁴

Their 'counter agitation for the relaxation or abolition of censorship for adults' was unsuccessful, as was Bartlett's petition, with the government remaining of the opinion that 'censorship is necessary and that the present situation where the Censor operates under broad, flexible guidelines laid down in the legislation is the most satisfactory situation'.⁷⁵ That New Zealand was not alone in coming to terms with these 'new attitudes to living' was emphasised in a 1974 report that claimed that throughout the Western World previously accepted standards of conduct and behaviour were being challenged, and while some countries had relaxed their censorship, nowhere had it been completely abolished.⁷⁶ The Chief Censor undertook a 'study tour' of overseas countries to gain insight into their issues and practices and concluded that not only had 'no country produced an answer which satisfies all of its citizens', but that practices by countries could not be 'transported directly to New Zealand' as 'film censorship law and practice in our country must have primary regards to the standards and aspirations of our own society'.⁷⁷

At the beginning of the decade, excisions by the censor for sexual content increased in films from countries other than the United States, where they fell. While small, the number of cuts due to horror content increased in films from all categories. These figures are produced in Table 3.6, with the previous year's figures in brackets.

⁷³ Helen F. Lloyd, *New Zealand Listener*, March 29, 1971, p. 14.

⁷⁴ Letter from R.A. Usmar, New Zealand Film Society, to the New Zealand Motion Picture Distributors Association, July 23, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

⁷⁵ *AJHR*, 1971, H. 22, p. 38.

⁷⁶ *AJHR*, 1974, G. 7, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁷ *AJHR*, 1975, G. 7, p. 21.

Origin of Film	Films Examined #	Reason for Excision				TOTAL CUTS
		Violence #	Sex #	Horror #	Other #	
Commonwealth	98 (71)	29 (46)	42 (32)	3 (2)	4 (11)	78 (91)
United States	118 (158)	73 (202)	47 (73)	9 (0)	16 (33)	145 (308)
Other Countries	116 (107)	61 (132)	33 (15)	1 (0)	14 (7)	111 (154)
TOTAL:	332 (336)	163 (380)	124 (120)	13 (2)	34 (51)	334 (553)

Table 3.6: Analysis of feature film (35mm) excisions, 1970.⁷⁸

Statistics were not published in this format after 1974, which makes an exact comparative analysis over the course of the decade difficult. However, details of the films seen by the Censor and his decisions regarding excisions, ratings, and bans were published in the *New Zealand Gazette* from 1977. By the end of the decade there is a significant reduction in cuts overall, particularly in the areas of violence and sex, although the number classified as ‘Other’ rose noticeably, with these including anti-social language, anti-social behaviour, indecent language and indecent behaviour. A small number of films had cuts for their portrayal of crime or cruelty. In total, 298 35mm feature films were examined, with cuts made to 23% of them.⁷⁹ The results are shown in Table 3.7.

Origin of Film	Reason for Excision				TOTAL CUTS
	Violence #	Sex #	Horror #	Other #	
Commonwealth	9	9	1	7	25
United States	31	15	5	46	97
Other Countries	13	7	2	6	29
TOTAL:	53	31	8	59	151

Table 3.7: Analysis of feature film (35mm) excisions, 1979.

The considerable change in the type of film being produced is clear when a comparison of films certified as General Exhibition, with no qualification regarding the age the film is best suited for, and the percentage of films given a restriction certificate, is carried out over the three decades of this study. Films given an ‘S’ certificate, denoting a family film with a particular suitability for children, had been low since its inception in 1956, although the usefulness of the category is questionable given that in 1976 the only film given an ‘S’ rating had the addendum that it was unsuitable for children under 13. While this decade began with only 24% of films issued with a General certificate, ‘a new low’,⁸⁰ by the end of the decade the number had dropped even further, to 14%, as shown in Table 3.8. The result was

⁷⁸ *AJHR*, 1970, H. 22, p. 33.

⁷⁹ *AJHR*, 1979, G. 7, p. 21.

⁸⁰ *AJHR*, 1970, H. 22, p. 32.

even fewer films that children and most teenagers could see, and further emphasising the increasingly adult audience.

Year	G certificate (%)	Restricted (%)
1949-50	62	1
1954-55	62	3
1959-60	52	11
1964-65	39	16
1969-70	24	26
1974-75	14	28
1979-80	14	45

Table 3.8: G-certificate and restricted films, 1950-1980.⁸¹

A survey respondent recalled her displeasure at this change in the types of film being made:

I generally found movie-going very pleasant until I watched *A Clockwork Orange* [1971 R18]. This was the beginning of quite cruel and graphic films which I didn't and still don't enjoy. It upset my relaxed enjoyment of the movie and worked against my need for some pleasant escapism!⁸²

At the annual New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association (NZMPEA) conference in 1970, Doug McIntosh spoke to delegates about his role as censor and some of the trends he was seeing. One of these was the increased number of A-certificate and R-Rated films, with McIntosh recalling, inaccurately, that 70% of films were classified as suitable for General Admission ten years ago, while in 1970 less than 30% of films achieved a G-certificate. McIntosh acknowledged that at times the very fact of a film being restricted increased its attractiveness to 'a certain type of audience', adding that 'there is only one gimmick that is popular throughout the world, and that is sex', which he believed accounted for the increasing number of films incorporating acts of a sexual nature.⁸³ In the United States 'peddling sex' had become big business, netting over 500 million dollars a year, across all media, with curiosity about sex appearing to be 'insatiable'.⁸⁴ American Main Street theatres showed X-rated erotica, which many would describe as pornography, with one of these *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970), a box-office success in a year 'of doldrums on most California motion picture lots'.⁸⁵ The film was originally banned in New Zealand and eventually edited and screened with an R18 rating.⁸⁶ This was a far cry from the earlier era

⁸¹ *AJHR*, 1950, H. 22, pp.26-7; 1955, H. 22, p. 21; 1960, H. 22, p. 49-50; 1965, H. 22, p. 45-6; 1970, H.22, p. 32; 1975, G. 7, p. 23; 1980, G. 7, p. 15.

⁸² Anne Marie, born 1959.

⁸³ Doug McIntosh, Dominion Council of New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association, *N.Z Motion Picture Exhibitors' Bulletin*, July 4, 1970, p. 9, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. A male survey respondent, born in 1952, acknowledged he went to films precisely because they were controversial, citing *A Clockwork Orange* as an example.

⁸⁴ William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America 1932-1972*, New York: Bantam Books, 1973, p. 1193.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *AJHR*, 1973, H. 22, p. 42.

under the Hays Code where even actors playing the role of a married couple were not allowed to be seen in bed together.

Another censorship issue that frustrated those in the film industry, and one that McIntosh included in his conference speech, was the different standards of censorship between what was screened on television and what was screened at the cinema. The responsibility for the censorship of television programmes had shifted in 1969 from the Film Censor to the NZBC, with its own set of unpublished standards. Not only did this result in those in the film industry having no basis for comparison with the standards used by the Film Censor, but it also resulted in films that had been given a restricted certificate for the cinema screening on television without any notification of its censorship classification. The Minister of Internal Affairs, David Seath, and the NZMPEA agreed that such practices were not in the best interests of the public.⁸⁷ Robert Kerridge had an opposing view, which he shared with the NZMPEA, saying 'we doubt the wisdom of submitting proposals for more stringent censorship, or notification of censorship classifications', with regards to television, instead advocating that cinema be allowed to follow television's practice with 'the notification of censorship classification of films screened at cinemas, be relaxed'.⁸⁸ This issue remained unresolved, as the difference in standards between television programmes and the cinema was reported as an 'area of censorship giving rise to continuing public concern' in 1979.⁸⁹

Children

The greatly reduced number of films with a General exhibition certificate meant ongoing pressure on exhibitors to find appropriate material for their youngest audience members. The dearth of family-friendly films produced in this period was reflected in Noel Brown's statement that 'in the context of the early-1970s film industry, the family film was dying a slow death',⁹⁰ while Biskind believed *The Sound of Music* 'represented the last gasp of family entertainment'.⁹¹ The Department of Internal Affairs commented that it was surprising the film industry 'persists in failing to cater sufficiently for a large portion of its clientele'.⁹²

⁸⁷ David Seath, Minister of Internal Affairs speech to Dominion Council of New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association, *N.Z Motion Picture Exhibitors' Bulletin*, July 4, 1970, p. 5, 7, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁸⁸ Letter from Robert Kerridge, to Mr Cunningham, Secretary, NZMPEA, February 13, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

⁸⁹ *AJHR*, 1979, G. 7, p. 20.

⁹⁰ Noel Brown, 'Hollywood, the family audience and the family film, 1930-2010', PhD Thesis, Newcastle University, 2010, p. 200.

⁹¹ Biskind, *Easy Riders*, p. 20.

⁹² *AJHR*, 1975, G 7, p. 23.

This dilemma created tension between parents and what their children were viewing, or wanted to view. Doug McIntosh believed that the censor's classification was a guide and that it was primarily the responsibility of parents to supervise what their children were watching, a role he believed they did not show much interest in.⁹³ However, of the survey respondents who were born in the 1960s and were therefore children or youth in the 1970s, and who answered the question regarding parental control of their viewing, 65% said their parents tried to control what they saw at the movies, with 85% of those parents succeeding. Comments from survey respondents illustrate this.

My parents wouldn't let me go and see 'Grease' because it was R16 - and I was underage. A fact I deeply resented at the time, as many of my friends WERE allowed to go and see it! And 'Saturday Night Fever' was definitely a no-go (also resented!).⁹⁴

Age restriction ratings on some of the popular movies [prevented me from attending].⁹⁵

If the movie had an 'R' rating on I couldn't go.⁹⁶

Up to about the age of 15 (1975) I pretty much only went to the movies with my parents, so saw what they wanted to see. I recall at about the age of 7 being bitterly disappointed at not being allowed to go see the current James Bond movie, which my 2 brothers and sister were going to, as my parents thought I was too young. Once I was paying my own way, I pretty much saw what I wanted.⁹⁷

Parental control also extended to when movie-going was allowed.

I was only allowed to go out on Friday or Saturday nights [non-school nights].⁹⁸

Movies were a big deal, there were Matinees which I always went to but as I got older I was allowed to go to the night screenings, which was a treat.⁹⁹

Going to the movies was something I was allowed to do on a Saturday and school holidays.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Doug McIntosh, Dominion Council of New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association, *N.Z Motion Picture Exhibitors' Bulletin*, July 4, 1970, p. 9, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

⁹⁴ Sarah, born 1964.

⁹⁵ Female, born 1969.

⁹⁶ Pauline Prince, born 1963.

⁹⁷ Male, born 1970.

⁹⁸ Jillian, born 1961.

⁹⁹ Female, born 1966.

¹⁰⁰ JoJo, born 1965.

One concerned parent wrote to the editor of the *Otago Daily Times*, warning mothers who intending taking or sending their children to a film during the school holidays, 'to be very careful to select a suitable one'.¹⁰¹ Her warning came after her experience with *Lost in the Desert* (1969) which, given it was described as 'An epic adventure for all ages', she assumed would be 'quite suitable' for her two children, aged seven and nine. Instead, she described the film as 'anything but suitable for children and [it] was so gory and frightening that some of them were sobbing and cringing in their seats. A number of children who were with their mothers were taken out, but the others, who were on their own, saw the whole thing.' In defence of the film, the manager of the St James where the film was shown, Dugald McPhail, said the film was rated with a 'G' classification, meaning it was approved for General Exhibition to audiences of all ages. Furthermore, McPhail said the film had the 'rather rare distinction of being applauded at its conclusion by the largely children audiences attending matinee sessions'. He added, 'Many adults have expressed the opinion that it is one of the finest films they have viewed in a cinema'. The film was based on the true events of a plane crash in the Kalahari Desert, resulting in an 8-year old boy and his dog wandering the desert while searchers attempt to find them. McPhail explained that 'Life in the desert has never been, or will ever be, a picnic; and had the film represented it as such, it would have been a travesty of truth, and children, with their acute sense of right and wrong, would have scorned it as a fake not worthy of their interest'.¹⁰² The letter to the editor was signed 'Mother' and the writer addressed her advice to other 'mothers', clearly illustrating that from her perspective, or experience, the decision making and key responsibility for children's movie selection and attendance was with the female parent. The film had a particularly successful season at its first Australian release at the Capital in Melbourne, taking \$14,356 in its first week, with the audience comprising mainly children, given the film's 'very strong Disney type appeal'. Columbia Pictures informed Robert Kerridge that the film was ideally suited for 'holiday playing time' and it was expected to do well when it was released in Auckland in January 1971.¹⁰³

Matinees and school holiday programmes continued to be popular drawcards for children and the importance of school holidays to a child's ability to attend the movies was mentioned by survey respondents.

¹⁰¹ 'Children's Films', *Otago Daily Times*, May 22, 1971, p. 15.

¹⁰² *Otago Daily Times*, May 22, 1971, p. 15.

¹⁰³ Letter from T. (Tom) Nicholas, Columbia Pictures Pty. Ltd. to Robert Kerridge, September 10, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

Would see a film during school holiday trips into Wellington City, then saw the same print months later once it was making its way up through the small towns weekend by weekend.¹⁰⁴

Parents wanted to get the kids out of the house during the school holidays. Movie going was usually during the May, August, and Xmas holidays.¹⁰⁵

Cost- large family, could not afford to go. So mostly 1 movie in school holidays.¹⁰⁶

We lived on a farm and really only went to the movies during the school holidays when we stayed at our Grandmother's place in Stratford.¹⁰⁷

Shorts and Featurettes

Parents' concern over children's viewing extended beyond the feature film to include the shorts and advertising that made up the rest of the programme, as exhibitors were faced with problems of not only obtaining enough 'shorts', but with finding appropriate subject matter that was both appropriate for children's viewing, and was of a subject matter in keeping with that of the main feature. When Robert Kerridge enquired of Columbia Films if it were possible to preview shorts before their screening, he was told that while Columbia were happy to make shorts available for previewing, it was quite likely that at that stage they would be unable to indicate their allocation to any particular screening programme.¹⁰⁸

Twelve months later shorts were still causing problems for exhibitors, leading Kerridge to express his dissatisfaction to distributors over the calibre of many shorts, including those that were inconsistent with the subject matter of the particular feature being screened. Kerridge-Odeon theatre managers were reminded that ideally they should view the whole programme at its first screening, or at least on its first day, and to report back to the company's Exhibition Division if anything was amiss. Furthermore, managers were authorised to choose not to screen any material which was deemed to be 'specifically unsatisfactory'.¹⁰⁹

These examples show that despite Hollywood's reduced focus on the cinematic needs of children, they were still an important segment of the movie-going audience. Not least

¹⁰⁴ Scott Cooksley, born 1966.

¹⁰⁵ David, born 1970.

¹⁰⁶ Male, born 1967.

¹⁰⁷ Anne-marie, born 1962.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from R.W. Kivell, General Manager of Columbia for New Zealand, to Robert Kerridge, September 17, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from T.S. Townsend to Theatre Managers, December 8, 1971, Box 177, File 715, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

because of the increased emphasis on censorship in this decade, exhibitors were required to expend some effort to ensure an appropriate and attractive programme was available for children, particularly in their peak screening times of Saturday matinees and school holidays. Given the shortage of suitable films, this was a struggle and they were not always successful.

The Attraction of Going to the Movies

Socialising and Romance

Going to the movies in the company of others, particularly one's friends or one's romantic partner, remained the standard practice for those survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1970s, just as it was for those going most often in the previous two decades. There was a greater likelihood of going out with a group of people in the 1970s and a much lower likelihood of going with members of your family than in the 1950s. The biggest movement had, however, occurred in the 1960s, and the 1970s just confirmed the trend. The results across the decades are shown in the following table.

Who You Usually Went to the Movies With	1970s	1960s	1950s
	%	%	%
Alone	7	8	7.5
With a friend(s)	29	29	24
With your girl/boyfriend or wife/husband	26	27	24.5
With a group	18	15	13
With a parent(s) or care-giver(s)	9	8	12
With a sibling(s)	8	10	12
With your child(ren)	0	0	.5
Other: A range of family and extended family	1	2	6
Other: Combinations of family, friends, romantic partner, friends' parents, neighbours	2	1	

Table 3.9: Who survey respondents usually went to the movies with.

Qualitative comments from those going to the movies most frequently in this decade reinforce the communal aspect of movie-going for young adults. The physical space of the cinema continued to play an important role in the social and romantic lives of young people, as a place approved of by their parents and which they could frequent without supervision.

It was a chance to go out with boyfriends that parents allowed.¹¹⁰

My boyfriend and I were too young to get into pubs and we usually went out at night so movies were usually the best choice. Sometimes we would go to whatever was on just so we could go out. I used to go to the box-office at Collinson & Cunningham's [Palmerston North] to buy the movie tickets in advance and the ladies there used to call us their box-office

¹¹⁰ Helen Warboys, born 1956.

romance. They were very excited when we got engaged during this period.¹¹¹

I was growing up in a small town in rural New Zealand [Alexandra, Central Otago]. Going to 'the pictures' was the only regular social option for young people. It also met parent's needs for supervision (i.e. she can't get into trouble at the pictures); it was an exciting outing for young people (dark!). What movie was being shown, was actually much less important than the social opportunity. Going to the pictures was a hugely important part of me and my friends' social development - this is where we sat with boys and had our first kisses!! And then Dad would pick me up straight after the movie!¹¹²

In Opunake it was the main social activity for older kids to attend without parents. It gave us a sense of independence.¹¹³

As a 'tween' and young teen, it was one of the few things you could do with your friends in an adult environment, without parental supervision.¹¹⁴

As a teenager living in the country we hardly ever went to the movies but I remember on one of my first dates, being allowed to go out to the movies in town. It turned out we didn't actually go to the pictures, we drove around town and met up with others. When I got home Mum and Dad asked about the movie and I was too afraid to say we hadn't been, so I made something up.¹¹⁵

Other comments from respondents who were teenagers in this decade indicate there were few entertainment options available to them. Seeing a film was an easy activity they could do together.

In Palmerston North in the late 1970s going to the cinema was one of the few social things young people could do; I can't remember cost being any kind of factor in deciding to go to a movie. We were too young to go to pubs and going to the movies was the only entertainment option outside of the home.¹¹⁶

Going to the movies was my main social activity during my teens - for several years I went most weekends, and it didn't worry me too much what the movie was or which theatre it was in.¹¹⁷

It was great to catch up with girls and boys from my high school [at the movies].¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Female, 1959.

¹¹² Marise Martin, born 1958.

¹¹³ Female, born 1965.

¹¹⁴ Sarah, born 1964.

¹¹⁵ Female, born 1960.

¹¹⁶ Female, born 1971.

¹¹⁷ Male, born 1954.

¹¹⁸ JoJo, born 1965.

There wasn't much else to do for teenagers in Gisborne in the '70s!¹¹⁹

There wasn't a lot of other entertainment available, especially in the evening as a teenager.¹²⁰

The movies was about all there was to do in Masterton back then.¹²¹

Was something to do in an otherwise very boring town [Rotorua].¹²²

There wasn't much else to do in our town [Tokoroa] except go to the pubs which were pretty rough and we were technically underage anyway.¹²³

These examples suggest that rural, small-town New Zealand provided little in the way of entertainment for young people, and the picture theatre provided a vital social function. The social gathering after the movie continued to be one of the attractions of going to the movies.

Relatively cheap entertainment, time to spend with friends, coffee afterwards.¹²⁴

It was the social aspects of going to the movies - so it was often combined with a meal out or a drink with friends before or after the movie.¹²⁵

The social aspect was important for children too, whether as a special occasion or a regular outing.

Even as children we loved going to the Saturday matinees in big groups.¹²⁶

Invited to friends birthday parties which consisted of going to the movies.¹²⁷

For those who either wanted to be 'alone' or who did not have a large group of friends, the movie theatre provided solitude in a safe space and the theatre's darkness provided more than one role.

'Darkness' - a lot you could get up to under cover! Only saw half of a lot of movies. But as a child the darkness was exciting and alluring. I can still remember the excitement of the different coloured lights playing on the curtains, just before the movie began. It was the whole event - the travel, the lollies, the sense of occasion - of the darkness as much as the film. I

¹¹⁹ Jillian, born 1961.

¹²⁰ Nadine, born 1961.

¹²¹ Tracey, born 1962.

¹²² Eric, born 1958.

¹²³ Female, born 1963.

¹²⁴ Female, born 1954.

¹²⁵ Female, born 1959.

¹²⁶ Female, born 1962.

¹²⁷ Female, born 1959.

can remember occasions when it was somewhere nice to 'be alone', in the dark amidst others of course.¹²⁸

I enjoyed being with people socially without having to talk to them.¹²⁹

One of my flat mates and I had a very disappointing social life, compared to the others, so we formed 'the bad film club' -- on the Saturdays when we were left out, we would choose what looked like the worst film on offer in Wellington. 'Mandingo' [1975 R-rated] is a stand-out memory.¹³⁰

A survey respondent who attended Cashmere High School (Christchurch) in the 1970s said the school screened films on a weekly basis in the school's lecture theatre. She joined the film club and attended screenings every week.

It was an after-school activity that appealed to me and fitted my schedule. I was quite shy but I had a (rather latent) interest in the arts, which the school would not let me study because I was in the 'wrong stream'. Film has gone on to be a life time interest. I am still involved in the local film society (Secretary).¹³¹

Another high school student, from Auckland, also joined the school film club, although her motivation was different.

Before I left school I was also a member of our school film club. This met in the school hall once a week, and once again it didn't matter what the film was, we went to them all for the sake of the club/friends.¹³²

The social function of movie-going was multi-faceted as these memories from survey respondents illustrate. Whether for a group of children or teenagers, a romantic couple, friends, siblings, members of the family, or being 'alone with others', the picture theatre provided entertainment and a safe place to be.

Escapism

As well as the appeal of the social aspect of movie-going, the long-held ability of movies to 'transport' the viewer to another world continued to be a key attraction, as these comments from survey respondents who went to the cinema most frequently in the 1970s attest.

Escapism from my current reality!¹³³

The huge enveloping screen, sound system and visuals enabling you to be sucked in to a different world.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Margaret, born 1952.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth, born 1960.

¹³⁰ Lesley, born 1953.

¹³¹ Female, born 1960.

¹³² Anne, born 1956.

¹³³ Anne Marie, born 1959.

¹³⁴ Andy, born 1962.

Being transported to another world.¹³⁵

I enjoyed the emotions involved, getting off the world for a couple of hours, going 'out' - mostly it was a way of escaping an urban NZ life into a world of fantasy and imagination.¹³⁶

Fantasy, dreaming of being in another world.¹³⁷

The feeling of being transported outside of my small world.¹³⁸

However, respondents also wrote of films making them aware of 'the bigger world out there', indicating that for some it was more than escapism they were after, but an awareness, or an education, on the reality of the world outside their own.

Wanting to understand world trends and cultural movements.¹³⁹

I wish I'd gone to the movies more, actually. Movies opened my eyes to how big the world was ... and my world was pretty little!¹⁴⁰

Looking at scenery/houses on film - how other people lived.¹⁴¹

Usually went if the film was based on a true story.¹⁴²

American author Larry McMurtry explained the duality of the escapism and realism that was a universal attractive to many movie-goers.

That the experience one absorbed in watching movies was highly romanticized and often blatantly unreal in no way invalidated its importance to the culture of the small town, or for that matter, the city ... movies provided frequent points of comparison, but also the leaven of escape: a chance to be drawn into an experience not generated by the family, the neighbourhood, or the town.¹⁴³

The Candy Bar

An aspect of movie-going that appealed to many survey respondents was the consumption of food, usually confectionery, as part of the cinema-going experience. Movie-goers often described it as part of the 'treat' factor of their attendance, or that the attendance itself provided the 'excuse' for its consumption. Richard Farmer suggested that the enjoyment of

¹³⁵ Female, born 1963.

¹³⁶ Male, born 1954.

¹³⁷ Female, born 1962.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth, born 1960.

¹³⁹ Diana, born 1954.

¹⁴⁰ Female, born 1958.

¹⁴¹ Anne-marie, born 1959.

¹⁴² Susan, born 1946.

¹⁴³ Larry McMurtry, *Film Flam: Essays on Hollywood*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, p. 151.

watching what was on the screen was not only heightened, but facilitated by the attraction of ice-cream and sweets, which is particularly understandable during the war years he referred to, when rationing made certain food items even more appealing than usual.¹⁴⁴ It is evident, however, that for New Zealand audiences the appeal of confectionery continued even when such food items were no longer scarce. For those going to the movies most frequently in the 1970s, cinema food was mentioned by 51 of the 200 (25.5%) who answered the question asking what they most liked about going to the movies, higher than for those going to the movies most often in the 1960s (mentioned by 18% of respondents) and the 1950s (11% of respondents). Ice-cream was the most mentioned item across all three decades,¹⁴⁵ while 'Jaffas' were the most frequently mentioned brand of sweets. Popcorn received very few citations, with one survey respondent specifically mentioning their dislike of its smell.¹⁴⁶ Not all theatres had their own Candy Bar or Nibble Nook, but half-time refreshments were always available, either from a nearby dairy, or from usherettes or 'tray boys', who circulated throughout the theatre with a tray attached to a leather strap that was looped over their shoulders.

A factor that aided the acquisition and consumption of cinema confectionery was the intermission that enabled supplies to be replenished. When double features played, the interval was timed to coincide with the end of one film and the beginning of the second. With single features an intermission was often incorporated into the film, although when this did not happen the interval was often slotted in after the shorts and the newsreel, which meant patrons sometimes had their intermission a mere twenty minutes after they had sat down. This timing could lead to complaints from patrons who were not ready to supplement their confectionery supplies, as seen with a Kohimarama resident who complained at the screening of *The Graduate* at the Berkeley, in Mission Bay, Auckland on Saturday June 26, 1971. The screening did not start until 8:23, eight minutes late it was noted, and the interval was at 8:40, with the film recommencing at 8:53pm. The complainant felt the 'extreme lateness' of the start and the imbalance of the first and second half 'spoilt an otherwise pleasant evening', and he claimed several of his fellow patrons felt the same way. Theatre managers had long felt frustrated with imposed timings of intermissions, as seen in the letter from the manager of Dunedin's Regent to his manager regarding the 'even earlier' intermission time of 14 minutes from the session's start,

¹⁴⁴ Richard Farmer, "A Temporarily Vanished Civilisation': Ice Cream, Confectionery and Wartime Cinema-going, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*', 31:4, December 2011, pp. 479-497, p. 483.

¹⁴⁵ 31 citations for those going most frequently in the 1970s, 24 for the 1960s, and 11 for the 1950s.

¹⁴⁶ 4 for the 1970s cohort, 3 for both the 1960s and 1950s.

pointing out that these particularly early intervals had an adverse effect on confectionery takings, with any reduction in revenue a considerable cause for concern.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, theatre managers were well aware of the importance of confectionery to their profits. American economist Richard McKenzie believed most managers understood they were not simply in the business of selling tickets to watch a movie. They were selling ‘experiences’ or ‘entertainment bundles’, with the film and ‘popcorn’, he argued, two of the more important components to the ‘bundle’.¹⁴⁸

The Whole Experience

When asked what they most enjoyed about going to the movies, many survey respondents described not just one or two elements, but instead gave a detailed account of what they enjoyed, often combining many facets of the movie-going experience.

I enjoyed the whole thing. The company I was with, the big screen, opening of the curtains, smell of popcorn, escape from ordinary life, the story and acting, the look of the stars and feeling amazed how they could be made up so differently for their characters, special effects (especially in sci fi), the portrayal of historical events (as in *Anne of the 1000 Days* [1969]). I remember when we even had to stand for the national anthem (God Save the Queen), and the intros of newsreels and cartoon classics, and then intermission for ice-cream and chippies.¹⁴⁹

As a child, going out with parents or grandparents to the movies was a big thing, getting ice-creams at halftime, standing up for God Save the Queen at the beginning, later on was reason for outing with partner or friends, but mostly nearly always enjoyed the movies themselves, so many good movies, many were really engrossing.¹⁵⁰

Late night food, crowds, big screen, big sound, big colour.¹⁵¹

It was such a thrill. Not only the movie but the ice-creams and Jaffa’s and Snifters. It was a real outing then.¹⁵²

The huge screen, ice-creams, jaffas, hot male movie stars, adventure.¹⁵³

The big screen, the sense of occasion, an outing with friends, being able to get lollies at half time (they still had intermission back then).¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Memo from Mr. L. G. Radburn, Regent Theatre Manager, Dunedin, to Trevor Townsend, June 21, 1960, Box 68, File 230, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

¹⁴⁸ Richard B. McKenzie, *Why Popcorn Costs So Much at the Movies: and Other Pricing Puzzles*, Irvine, California: Copernicus Books, 2008, pp. 79-100, p. 89.

¹⁴⁹ Anne, born 1956.

¹⁵⁰ Catherine McCartin, born 1961.

¹⁵¹ Female, born 1955.

¹⁵² Christine, born 1959.

¹⁵³ Female, born 1953.

¹⁵⁴ Geoff Watson, born 1969.

Whole experience. Very grand old theatre, huge velvet curtains, music, preview time, 2 movies, being with friends.¹⁵⁵

Everything, it was epic and exciting.¹⁵⁶

Being with friends. The big screen. The surround sound. Dark theatre with vivid screen. The skill of acting, directing, clever plot. The chance to debrief with friends afterwards.¹⁵⁷

Escape from reality: something to do: enjoyed the "big screen" entertainment: having fun: excuse to eat crisps and other food.¹⁵⁸

Experience of the big screen; a night out with friends; interval and going to the candy shop!¹⁵⁹

References to 'the big screen' effectively differentiate between a television screen and a cinema screen as survey respondents who were going to the movies most frequently in the 1950s did not mention 'the big screen'. With no television in that decade there was no need to emphasise the attraction of the large cinema screen. This changed in the 1960s with the arrival of television and eight people who went to the movies most frequently in that decade commented that 'the big screen' was something they particularly enjoyed about cinema-going. However, the significant difference is seen in the 1970s, when television programming was more extensive, resulting in 28 of those who were going to the movies most frequently in this decade specifically mentioned 'the big screen' as being an attraction of going to the cinema.

Comments from many survey respondents about the general enjoyment they derived from a trip to the pictures reminds us that 'cinemas were sites where more than films were consumed'.¹⁶⁰ The social, cultural and technological attractions described by survey respondents indicated how, for many, 'watching a film' became 'a night at the pictures' which according to Farmer, became 'something potentially different and altogether more exciting'.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Karen, born 1965.

¹⁵⁶ Female, born 1963.

¹⁵⁷ Female, born 1959.

¹⁵⁸ Anne, born 1954.

¹⁵⁹ Pauline Prince, born 1963.

¹⁶⁰ Farmer, 'Ice Cream, Confectionery and Wartime Cinema-going', p. 493.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Barriers to Movie Attendance

Of the 174 survey respondents who answered the question relating to barriers to going to the movies, and who went to the movies most often in the 1970s, 12% said there were no barriers that prevented them from seeing the films they wanted to see. If they wanted to go to the movies, they went. This is fewer than for those who went most often in the 1960s (18%) and the 1950s (21%). This increase in the number of barriers to movie-going in the 1970s, according to my survey respondents, supports the continual decline in movie attendance statistics.

Cost

At the beginning of the decade, the financial climate in the New Zealand cinema exhibition industry was no better than that in Hollywood. Robert Kerridge wrote to the Warner Bros. representative in Sydney, A.G. McClure, early in the decade, assuring him that while he was 'naturally desirous of collaborating to achieve the maximum potential', he was sure that 'Mac' would 'appreciate the relevance and importance of our feelings on admission prices, especially having regard to the current possibility of Government intervention and reinstatement of price control'. Kerridge informed McClure that the New Zealand public

have quite a different attitude to cinema prices from our Australian counterparts, especially in the country areas where patrons are very sensitive to price fluctuations. This sensitivity has been accentuated by the severe drought conditions of which you are aware. [...] The difference between \$1.00 and \$1.10 may appear of minor significance; but the \$1.00 has a measure of consistency for the relevant houses, that enables us to accept it without undue apprehension as to its possible implications.¹⁶²

The difficulties facing the cinema industry were again outlined by Kerridge only a few months later, as he explained the issues to representatives of the Hollywood studios with which his company had distribution contracts.

We cannot disassociate ourselves from the prevailing economic trends. The inflationary pressure of rising prices, aggravated by over-full employment and an aggressive Unionism is creating national problems. [...] I realise that faced with ever increasing costs, we must charge adequate admission prices bearing in mind the non-essentiality of our business and the inevitable operation of the law of diminishing returns if prices exceed public acceptance. We must however be conscious of our vulnerability through our inclusion in the official Price Index with its resultant publicity; and the ease with which price control could be reinstated by the Government for political expediency if there is public agitation. Cinema admission prices have increased during the past year

¹⁶² Letter from Robert Kerridge to A.G. McClure, March 13, 1970, Box 171, File 653, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

or so by a substantial margin – not only by increases in basic structure but also in the number of special pictures at advanced prices. I personally am convinced that in some areas and in respect of some pictures, our gross would have been higher had our prices been lower. [...] The present pricing structure and the changed motivation of patrons from a weekly habit to a conscious choice of entertainment, has produced a vastly enhanced potential for the popular pictures; and conversely, has drastically diminished the returns from lesser favoured vehicles – quite irrespective of their production merit. In view of this great disparity (which is a phenomenon of recent years) it is surely in our mutual interest to utilise available playing time to maximum advantage by getting the highest gross from the films the public want to see.¹⁶³

This clearly illustrates Kerridge's full awareness of the issues facing the industry and his determination to provide strategies to meet them. His acknowledgement that movie-going was a 'non-essential' activity is difficult to dispute, but is a truism that those in the cinema industry rarely admitted. Furthermore, his reference to the increased prices charged for 'special' pictures indicates a lack of influence over this aspect of the negotiations his company carried out with their distributors. John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny have pointed out two of the negative impacts of the pricing policy of increased charges for 'special pictures'. Firstly, that increasing prices reduced audience numbers because it negatively affected the 'ticket buyer's value-for-money perception of the relationship between the anticipated pleasure to be derived from the film and its cost of consumption'. Secondly, that an increased price would 'induce much more strategic behaviour on the part of consumers and would discourage risk-taking in consumption'.¹⁶⁴ Kerridge's acknowledgement of the changed attendance patterns of movie-goers away from their habitual weekly attendance to a 'conscious choice of entertainment', not only supports Sedgwick and Pokorny's research that increased prices led to more 'strategic' decision making by movie-goers, but is central to the discussion on movie-going in this period.

Given this, it is unsurprising that the most frequently cited barrier to attendance for survey respondents going to the movies most often in this decade was the cost of an admission ticket. Jocelyn Williams wrote to Robert Kerridge, after having taken months to 'work up courage to write', saying she was 'movie mad', but the price of movie admission was now 'right out of my means' after the recent prices increases that 'went really up.' Ms Williams

¹⁶³ Letter from Robert Kerridge to Ron Kivell, Columbia Films Manager, New Zealand, June 24, 1970, Box 171, File 653, MS/98/39, KO Archives, AWMM. The same letter was sent to representatives of Kerridge-Odeon's other distributors, Paramount, Universal Artists, and Warner Bros.

¹⁶⁴ John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny, 'Consumers as Risk Takers: Evidence from the Film Industry during the 1930s', *Business History*, 52:1, February 2010, pp 74-99, p. 96.

wrote that she was 'trying to bring up three kiddies on Social Security' on her own, and she asked Kerridge if he 'couldn't give me a sort of pass or such that would enable the same privilege as a Senior Citizen – I get no more than they when it's all boiled down – and I love a good movie so'. Williams added that 'It makes me ache to see good movies come and go – unseen. I love a good period piece – *A Man for All Seasons* [1966] – *Henry 8th* [unknown] – *Camelot* [1967] – those ones in which a dreamer like myself can forget this mad modern cut throat world for an hour or more.'¹⁶⁵

A similar letter was received from the Gisborne Solo Parents' Club Secretary, Mrs C. Hayes, in January 1972, which asked if any consideration could be given to solo parents receiving the same concession as senior citizens. Mrs Hayes explained that solo parents had limited means and opportunities for entertainment of any kind, and as any outing invariably necessitated the need for the employment of a baby-sitter, the added expense usually made an evening at the pictures beyond the means of the parent.¹⁶⁶ These requests were not granted. An increase in single parenthood in the 1970s was part of the decade's trend of rapidly decreasing marriage rates and rapidly increasing divorce rates. While marriage rates were at their highest point of the three decades in 1971 with 9.50 marriages per 1,000 of population (27,199 marriages)¹⁶⁷ they had plummeted to the lowest rate of 7.14 by 1979 (22,332).¹⁶⁸ Divorce rates rose considerably, assisted by an amendment to the Matrimonial Proceedings Act (1963) in January 1969 that saw the three years of separation required before a divorce was granted reduced to two years.¹⁶⁹ In 1975 the rate of divorce per 100 marriages was 19.41 which increased to 27.32 by 1979, a rise of 41%.¹⁷⁰ There was also an increase in the number of babies born out of wedlock, from 37.72 per 1,000 women in 1966 to 44.90 in 1976.¹⁷¹ The Domestic Purposes benefit, which came into force on 14 November 1973, had 17,231 recipients in 1975 which had grown to 35,385 in 1979, an increase of over 50%.¹⁷² Single-parenthood was a growing segment of the population who found the cost of going to the movies was a barrier to their, or their children's, attendance. Two survey respondents mentioned their mothers were 'solo mums' and could not afford for them to attend the movies frequently.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Jocelyn Williams to Robert Kerridge, no date but written in 1970, Box 171, File 652, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶⁶ Letter from C. Hayes, Gisborne Solo Parents Club, Inc., January 25, 1972, Box 175, File 703, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁶⁷ NZOYB, 1974, p. 115.

¹⁶⁸ NZOYB, 1980, p. 109.

¹⁶⁹ NZOYB, 1974, p. 119.

¹⁷⁰ NZOYB, 1980, p. 113.

¹⁷¹ 1966 was the first year Maori women were included in the statistics. NZOYB, 1977, pp. 90-1..

¹⁷² NZOYB, 1980, p. 151.

Senior citizen Avis Gardner wrote to Kerridge asking if he was aware of the ‘discrepancies with regard to the admission of senior citizens to matinees’. Mrs Gardner pointed out that until recently the Princess in Wellington, ‘a small theatre of your chain’, admitted senior citizens to matinees ‘at the reduced rate’, which for Saturdays had now ceased. She continued

We happen to be very fond of the modern, avant garde and foreign films which do not pack out the theatres – with some notable exceptions. Surely it is better to have a few seats filled at the reduced rate, than to have them empty? Hoping you will give senior citizens this concession on Saturdays. As you know there is no comparison in the present purchasing power of our money with what we were accustomed to.¹⁷³

As a postscript, Mrs Gardner added that her husband, ‘like many old men, still works, and Sat is our only outing as we never go out at night’. The admission charge for Senior Citizens, with the exception of Saturdays, was half that of adult tickets.¹⁷⁴ This request was also turned down.

It was not just senior citizens or single parents who struggled to pay the admission cost. Over half of those who went to the movies most frequently in some or all of the years of the 1970s, and who cited barriers to their attendance, said that financial constraints were a reason they did not go to the movies as often as they might have liked (82 of the 153 people, or 54%). This was particularly so for those from larger families.

We didn't have a lot of money – there were seven of us and going to the movies was an expensive exercise for my parents.¹⁷⁵

With children (1970s), the cost of getting the whole family in would have been the biggest thing [preventing attendance].¹⁷⁶

Money. There were 9 of us in the family! As kids got older they tended to go by themselves allowing the younger ones to go with mum. Dad wasn't that interested in movies.¹⁷⁷

Parents wanted to get the kids out of the house during the school holidays. Movie going was usually during the May, August, and Xmas holidays. As there were six kids in my family, it was not always affordable to frequent the cinema. And when we did go, sweet treats were a rarity.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Letter from Avis Gardner to Robert Kerridge, March 12, 1971, Box 175, File 703, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM. Brittenden describes the Princess Theatre as a ‘more or less continuous house [...] offering generally second runs, until its closure in 1975’. *The Celluloid Circus*, p. 173.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Norman Glover to Larry Vella, March 5, 1971, Box 177, File 714, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

¹⁷⁵ Sue, born 1956.

¹⁷⁶ Female, born 1950.

¹⁷⁷ Brian, born 1971.

¹⁷⁸ David, born 1970.

Financial reasons. I was one of 6 children in a family of 8. It was expensive for all of us to go.¹⁷⁹

The rise in the average admission price charged by theatres throughout the decade are outlined in the following table, along with the average nominal wage. In November 1971 the Kerridge-Odeon chain implemented changes to their admission prices, ‘to correct some existing inconsistencies and anomalies, and to partly recover the increase in theatre costs due to the continuing inflationary situation’. It was urged that the changes be made as ‘unobtrusively as possible’, with no public announcement or advertising. It was also stressed to managers to make ‘absolutely sure that no child turning up with the old price of admission is turned away’. Children were to be given a ‘reasonable period of time’ to become aware of the new prices.¹⁸⁰

Year	Price ¹⁸¹	% Increase each year	Nominal Wage ¹⁸²	% Increase each year
1970	63c		386	
1971	70c	11	474	23
1973	79c	13	517	9
1973	87c	10	578	12
1974	\$1.07c	23	657	14
1975	\$1.25c	17	747	14
1976	\$1.47c	18	835	12
1977	\$1.74c	18	949	14
1978	\$1.76c	1	1077	13
1979	\$2.13c	22	1246	16

Table 3.10: Price of admission and average nominal weekly wage 1970s.

The price of an adult movie ticket more than tripled from the beginning of the decade until the end, considerably more than the 66 and 74% increases for the 1950s and 1960s respectively. However, wages increased by a similar amount, making any difference in the real cost of movie attendance negligible, although the cost of a ticket rose more than wages increased for six of the nine years. Compounding the affordability issue, prices varied considerably, depending on the region, the individual theatre, and seats within the theatre. Theatres in main centres charged considerably more, as seen with the prices to attend the Odeon and the Westend in Auckland, in Table 3.11.

¹⁷⁹ Lachlan, born 1969.

¹⁸⁰ Letter from L.K. Vella to Theatre Managers, November 15, 1971, Box 177, File 715, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

¹⁸¹ Average price of admission per adult per night screening, as at November 15 of that year. These statistics are from the *NZOYB* Consumer Price Indexes. Statistics for the previous two decades are from the *NZOYB* Cinema section, which stopped recording statistics between 1975 -1981. The Consumer Price Index recorded statistics from the mid-1950s so neither section holds statistics for the entire 3 decades.

¹⁸² Figures are for adult employees. Nominal Weekly Wage Rates Index, *Wages and Earnings, 1979-1983, Part B*, Wellington, N.Z.: Department of Statistics, November 1984, p. 13.

Session Time	Circle Price	Stalls Price
Adult Night	\$1.10c	80c
Adult Matinee	80c	60c
Adult 5pm	80c	60c
Child Evening	55c	40c
Child Matinee	45c	35c

Table 3.11: Admission prices for Odeon and Westend theatres, Auckland, 1971.¹⁸³

At the Opotiki Theatre, which, in a sure sign of decreasing audiences, reduced its screenings to Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday of each week from April 2, 1971,¹⁸⁴ the price structure was simpler, with adults charged 60 cents for any seat at a night-time session. Children were charged 30 cents for any seat at a Friday and Monday night screening, and 50 cents for a screening on Saturday and Sunday nights.¹⁸⁵

Transport and/or Distance from Theatre

Just as it was in earlier decades, the distance from theatres and lack of available transport was an issue for a number of survey respondents, with the problem compounded by the closure of many theatres, particularly in rural and suburban areas. While the shift from rural to urban living had increased steadily from the 1950s, as seen in Table 3.12, and despite the increase in car ownership, which had risen steadily to one car for every 2.5 persons by 1979,¹⁸⁶ for many of those who remained in rural areas access to a theatre was problematic, as comments from survey respondents indicate.

Census	Urban %	Rural %
1945	67.6	32.4
1951	69.6	30.4
1956	70.8	29.2
1961	73.9	26.1
1966	77.3	22.7
1971	81.9	18.1
1976	83.0	17.0
1981	83.9	16.1

Table 3.12: Percentage of population in urban and rural areas.¹⁸⁷

Parents had to take me - we lived half an hour out of town [New Plymouth].¹⁸⁸

We lived in the country and it was a long way to go to the movies [in Gisborne], it was considered a special occasion.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Letter from N.J. Glover to Doug Coward, St. James Theatre, Auckland, Theatre Manager, October 14, 1971, Box 177, File 715, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

¹⁸⁴ Memo from Trevor Townsend to various Kerridge-Odeon staff, March 8, 1971, Box 177, File 715, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM

¹⁸⁵ Memo from Trevor Townsend to Messrs Glover and Wyatt, April 8, 1971, Box 177, File 715, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

¹⁸⁶ *NZOYB*, 1981, p. 327. There was 1 car for every 4.8 persons in 1959, *NZOYB*, 1961, p. 348 and 1 for every 3.3 persons in 1969, *NZOYB*, 1971, p. 325.

¹⁸⁷ Statistics for years up until and including 1966 in *NZOYB*, 1970, p. 73; 1971 and 1976 in *NZOYB*, p. 64; 1981 from *NZOYB*, 1987-8, p. 132.

¹⁸⁸ Male, born 1967.

¹⁸⁹ Female, born 1963.

Distance to Nelson (Wakefield only played in the weekend, and closed down at some point).¹⁹⁰

I lived out in the country in the earlier years so I had to go to town [Gisborne] when my parents were going.¹⁹¹

Living in rural area - distance from the theatre [in Whanganui] and reliance on parents for ride into town.¹⁹²

Distance from Movie Theatre [in Invercargill] approx. 55km.¹⁹³

Spent five years in the 70s living in Harihari, South Westland - nearest cinema was 50 miles away, which certainly put a damper on movie-going.¹⁹⁴

When I got married my work transferred me to a small town with no movie theater (there was actually a movie theatre but the building had been condemned so it was not in use and was subsequently pulled down). This meant travelling for 30 to 40 minutes [to Hamilton] to get to a movie theatre.¹⁹⁵

Had to travel to Palmerston North from out of area.¹⁹⁶

It was special trip to go see a movie, as at that time Queenstown did not have a cinema complex. Only option was Invercargill a 2 hour return trip.¹⁹⁷

[In deciding what to see], it was a mix of what was on, the time and location. We could get to the nearest theatre in Woburn by bus but once my mate got a car the whole Hutt Valley and sometimes Wellington central were possibilities.¹⁹⁸

From 1974 until 1980 we lived 250 km away from the nearest movie theatre although we did show movies at the local school on the school projectors.¹⁹⁹

A number of local studies on picture theatres indicates suburbs and provincial areas were well catered for, cinematically, through until the 1960s, after which there were a significant number of theatre closures.²⁰⁰ The increase in the number of survey respondents who cited

¹⁹⁰ Lesley Courtney, born 1954.

¹⁹¹ Jillian, born 1961.

¹⁹² Female, born 1969.

¹⁹³ Ian, born 1953.

¹⁹⁴ Tim Darlington, born 1962.

¹⁹⁵ Male, born 1953.

¹⁹⁶ Pauline Prince, born 1963.

¹⁹⁷ Michele, born 1967.

¹⁹⁸ Alistair Watts, born 1955.

¹⁹⁹ Helen Ngapo, born 1946.

²⁰⁰ Titles included but are not limited to: Hayward and Hayward, *Cinemas of Auckland*; Tony Froude, *Where to go on Saturday Night: Wellington Cinemas and Movie Halls, 1896-2000*, Paraparaumu, N.Z.: T. Froude, 2000; *Big Screens in the Valley: Cinemas and Movie Halls in the Hutt Valley 1906-2002*, Paraparaumu, N.Z.: Spectro Print, 2002; Tony Froude, *Reel Entertainment:*

lack of available transport and/or distance from a theatre as a barrier to attendance in this decade (22%), compared with the previous two (15% in both the 1950s and 1960s), could be explained by the reduced number of theatres.

Limited Cinematic Options

The reduced number and/or reduced operating hours of theatres resulted in limited viewing options for some survey respondents. This was compounded by the increasing trend for films to screen for longer, particularly in larger urban theatres, resulting in some movie-goers being hampered by a lack of choice of film.

When I was young, I lived in Taihape, had only one movie theatre so you could only see what was on there and I could only go if it was a child's movie.²⁰¹

Timing of screening was a factor. Went to see everything that was screened, we only had a few options that would come and go fairly quickly.²⁰²

Movies were only shown on a Saturday night - and occasionally one in the afternoon.²⁰³

Only one screening a day, and [I] often worked nights.²⁰⁴

There was no movie theatres in Newlands (a suburb out of Wellington) where I lived and infrequent public transport in to Wellington city to get to the movies.²⁰⁵

There was only 3 theatres where I was growing up [Palmerston North] there was not the choice of movies and the three picture theatres seemed to have their own agendas on what type of movies they showed.²⁰⁶

Slow turnover of movies - I might want to go, but I had already seen the movies that were screening.²⁰⁷

Large number of cinemas closed from the 1970s onwards so going to the cinema became rarer.²⁰⁸

These comments, and those related to transport difficulties and the distance from the theatre, suggest a vicious cycle of rural and small-town theatre closures or reduced

Cinemas and Movie Halls in the Twentieth Century Tawa to Tokomaru, Paraparaumu N.Z.: Spectro Print, 2002; Allan Webb, *Cinemas of the Waikato*, 2002, 7 Booklets, MS 2007/48, AWMM; Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus*; Knewstubb, Bradley, *Cinemas: Dunedin and Districts 1897-1974*, Dunedin, N.Z.: Knewstubb, 1974.

²⁰¹ Catherine McCartin, born 1961.

²⁰² Female, born 1965.

²⁰³ Marise Martin, born 1958.

²⁰⁴ Heather, born 1958.

²⁰⁵ Andy, born 1962.

²⁰⁶ JoJo, born 1965.

²⁰⁷ Female, born 1955.

²⁰⁸ Richard, born 1950.

numbers of screenings due to declining audiences. For those having to travel greater distances to a cinema, there was less of a range of films to see because of the reduced number of films produced and blockbusters screening for longer seasons. The result was fewer people going to the pictures.

Marriage and Family

Despite the trend of fewer marriages, people not marrying as young as they once had, and increasing divorce rates, marriage and starting a family was still a strong part of New Zealand society and a focus of many couples in this decade. The number of births are outlined in the following table, and the high rates at the beginning of the decade, which come close to meeting the record-breaking 1961 for the most births in one year (65,476), shows that raising children was still a significant occupation for many young people in this decade. This is especially so, given that the high birth rate throughout the 1960s would see that decade's babies becoming children and teenagers throughout the 1970s.

Year	Births	Marriages
1970	62050	25953
1971	64460	27199
1972	63215	26868
1973	60727	26274
1974	59336	25412
1975	59336	24535
1976	55105	24154
1977	54179	22589
1978	51029	22426
1979	52279	22326

Table 3.13: Number of births and marriages, 1970s.²⁰⁹

While the number of births had decreased by almost 16% from the beginning of the decade to the end, there were still a lot of small children requiring their parents' care, and this continued to have a negative effect on young couples' ability to attend the movies. Whereas in earlier decades it is possible that parents would have returned to cinema-going once their children had grown up, it is conceivable that in this decade parents would choose to stay at home and enjoy the benefits of television ownership, particularly given the reduced number of films on offer to them. Comments from some survey respondents reflect their focus on family life.

After getting married and starting a family [in the 1970s], my movie watching days were all but finished!²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ NZOVB, 1975, pp. 87, 117 and 1981, pp. 90, 111.

²¹⁰ Male, born 1954.

Once the babies arrived in the 1970's we had to choose carefully as it meant getting a babysitter. Also we didn't have a lot of spare cash, only one wage then.²¹¹

Bringing up four children between 1967 and mid 1975 probably had more effect than TV [on our reduced movie attendance].²¹²

Stopped going as bought a house and then had kids. Money was tight.²¹³

When the family arrived that really slowed up movie watching.²¹⁴

What Films Were Popular and Why?

It has been argued that the latter years of the 1960s and the early years of the 1970s were something of a watershed in American cinema history with Hollywood's economic downturn resulting in a period of cinematic creativity and originality. The period has simultaneously been called a 'disruptive moment in Hollywood history',²¹⁵ and a 'truly golden age'.²¹⁶ David Cook considered the years from 1967 to 1975 to be a 'Hollywood Renaissance' due to the 'European-style auteur cinema' of the period,²¹⁷ while Peter Biskind and Shyon Baumann both emphasised the rise in the influence of the director, infusing films with their individuality and creativity.²¹⁸ Biskind believed that the uncertainty of the studios, due to a succession of big-budget, blockbuster failures, provided the opportunity for a new generation of directors who were free from the contracts with the major studios that had seen their predecessors view themselves as 'nothing more than hired help (over) paid to manufacture entertainment'.²¹⁹ These new directors²²⁰ introduced a style of movie-making that was dubbed 'the New Hollywood' because of its production of 'risky, high-quality work' that, in a move away from 'Classical' Hollywood, was 'character- rather than plot-driven, defied traditional narrative conventions, challenged the tyranny of technical correctness, broke the taboos of language and behaviours [and] dared to end unhappily'.²²¹ Baumann agreed with Biskind, believing that in the studio era the producer had been in control, while

²¹¹ Alison, born 1947.

²¹² Mervyn, born 1941.

²¹³ Linda Carre, born 1956.

²¹⁴ Tom Robertson, born 1950.

²¹⁵ Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction*, London: Berg, 2011, p. 94.

²¹⁶ Biskind, *Easy Riders*, p. 16.

²¹⁷ David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000, p. xv11.

²¹⁸ Biskind, *Easy Riders*, pp. 15-22; Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007, pp. 59-66.

²¹⁹ Biskind, *Easy Riders*, p. 15.

²²⁰ They included Francis Coppola, Warren Beatty, Peter Bogdanovich, Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, and George Lucas.

²²¹ Biskind, *Easy Riders*, p. 17.

in this 'New Hollywood' it was the directors who were in charge, as they adopted auteurist principles in their film making, where conveying their message was a key motivation in their making films at all.²²²

Robert Ray, on the other hand, believed the 'New' cinema was 'superficially radical' while really 'internally conservative', and he placed films of this period into Left and Right 'cycles', with those on the 'Left' intended 'to appeal to the counterculture's most visible elements'.²²³ Such films included *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967), *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Easy Rider* (1969), and *A Clockwork Orange* (1972). Ray cited Nixon's election and the 'surprising popularity of the old-fashioned' *Airport* (1970) as 'demonstrating the existence of a large conservative audience and setting off a wave of right-wing films',²²⁴ among which he included *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *The French Connection* (1971). Keith Johnston also cited *Airport* and *The French Connection*, along with *Love Story* (1970), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) and *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) as indications audiences were still interested in 'generic filmmaking rather than adult or director-led works'.²²⁵ Robin Wood pointed out that the 'disaster' films that were released in this period were 'expensive super-productions, producers' rather than directors' movies, studio-dominated with a minimal of individual creativity', and strongly dominated by 'status quo ideology'.²²⁶ In other words, the period was perhaps not as revolutionary as some have argued. With the exception of the family-friendly *Fiddler on the Roof*, most of these films disproportionately appealed to young people, whether 'right' or 'left', rather than families.

Other perspectives are seen in the variety of eras commentators believe constitute this 'New Hollywood', and the differing films chosen to represent it. Ethan Alter claims that 1975, with the release of *Jaws*, represented

The dividing line between the classic and contemporary period of American film history [...] an omnipresent blockbuster that provided an industry that had largely been adrift since the collapse of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s and the various financial and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and early 1970s, a template to follow going forward.²²⁷

²²² Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 64.

²²³ Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 298.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-299.

²²⁵ Johnston, *Science Fiction Film*, p. 94.

²²⁶ Robin Wood, *From Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. 24-5.

²²⁷ Ethan Alter, *Film Firsts: The 25 Movies that Created Contemporary American Cinema*, Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2014, p. ix.

Peter Kramer referred to the years between 1967, with the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* and 1977, with *Star Wars*, as being the period that encapsulated the New Hollywood.²²⁸ While there are differing perspectives of the years that define this period, two aspects in particular are universally agreed upon. Firstly, the large studios were in financial difficulties and were therefore forced to change their business models.²²⁹ By 1969, five of the eight major studios were 'awash in red ink' with much of their difficulty stemming from their attempt to gain 'that one big smash hit film' which would put them back on their feet.²³⁰ The failure of big-budget films to strike enough of a chord with audiences to return a profit led to a temporary halting of 'blockbuster' production of traditional, mainstream films, and ensured the environment was right for experimentation and innovation. The other factor generally agreed upon is that admissions at cinemas in the United States were at an all-time low in 1971, at 16 million per week (832m per year), after which they slowly increased.²³¹ As Baumann neatly summarised, '[If] the existing formulas do not work, something new must be tried'.²³²

Thomas Schatz credited *The Godfather* (1972) with being the first film to indicate that Hollywood's 'financially troubled years' were ending, declaring that in the United States the film was that 'rarest of movies, a critical and commercial smash with widespread appeal, drawing art connoisseurs and disaffected youth as well as mainstream moviegoers'.²³³ The film was one of only three that screened more than 200 times at Wellington's Embassy during the 1970s, significantly out performing its nearest rivals with its 280 screenings compared with their 210.²³⁴ Without referring to any specific film, but using the year *Jaws* was released as his defining year, Roger Horrocks pointed to 1975 as the year that 'Hollywood regained its equilibrium,' citing as reasons the end of the Vietnam war, the 'dispersal' of the hippies, and the major Hollywood studios having been sold and/or restructured.²³⁵ The remainder of the decade saw a number of films including *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Grease* (1978) do spectacular box-office business in the

²²⁸ Peter Kramer, *The New Hollywood: From Bonnie and Clyde to Start Wars*, London: Wallflower, 2005.

²²⁹ Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, London: Wallflower, 2003, pp. 376-381.

²³⁰ Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976, p. 435.

²³¹ Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 379.

²³² Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow*, p. 106.

²³³ Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 15-44, p. 23.

²³⁴ *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) both screened 210 times at their first season. Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record book, David Lascelles collection.

²³⁵ Roger Horrocks, 'Hollywood', in Malcolm McKinnon (ed.), *The American Connection: Essays from The Stout Centre Conference*, Wellington, N.Z.: Allen & Unwin, 1988, pp. 66-78, p. 73.

United States, injecting the film industry with renewed confidence in its ability to produce films that ensured huge attendances and box-office receipts.

To determine what films were particularly popular with New Zealand audiences in this decade, exhibitors' record books, survey respondents' preferences, comments from contemporary theatre managers and management, and newspaper and magazine advertisements have been analysed. While specific audience attendance data is not available for this period, with the exception of Amalgamated's State in Timaru from June 1977 until the end of 1979, a number of patterns of film preferences still clearly emerge.

According to my survey respondents, the genre of a film continued to be the single most important factor in deciding what movie to see at the pictures, with it 'often' used significantly more frequently than any other factor, as seen in Table 3.14. 'Word-of-mouth' and 'your friends were seeing it' were both used to a similar degree, while who was starring in the film was the fourth most frequently used determinant. Despite the argument that directors were assuming more prominence in the film-making of this period, this was not perceived by survey respondents, as who directed the film continued to be the least important factor in their determining what film they would see. One survey respondent said that 'nobody really talked about directors, at least not in Napier!'²³⁶ Horrocks suggested the blame for audiences' lack of interest in directors lay with the 'bad habit' of exhibitors in 'their failure to include the name of the director in film advertising [with] the result that audiences think only in terms of actors and actresses', when, according to Horrocks, 'the flavour and quality of a film usually depend to a far greater extent on the director than on the cast'.²³⁷ It was to be some years before this was widely recognised by New Zealand audiences.

Reason for Choice of Film	Total 'Often' and 'Sometimes' Responses (#)	Often Responses (#)	Sometimes Responses (#)	Never Responses (#)
The genre	203	156	47	10
Word-of-mouth	187	94	93	13
Your friends were seeing it	186	91	95	20
Who the actor and actresses were	159	66	93	39
Time suited when you could go	146	56	90	48
Because of its reviews	108	33	75	81
Your parents allowed it	107	50	57	88
Because of the picture theatre	99	51	48	91
Who the director was	47	14	33	141

Table 3.14: Factors determining choice of film for those going most frequently in the 1970s.

²³⁶ Bruce, born 1952.

²³⁷ Roger Horrocks, 'Film as art, film as business', *New Zealand Listener*, May 24, 1971, pp. 14-15.

The favourite individual genres selected by survey respondents were drama and action/adventure, with both scoring 45 nominations each, as seen in Table 3.15. Drama was consistently popular over each of the decades and while the action/adventure genre featured strongly in the previous decade with the arrival of the James Bond franchise, it was not until this decade that it reached the most-favoured position.

Genre	Favourite First Choice Genre (#)	Genre	Favourite Genre When Top Six Tallied (#)
Action/adventure	45	Comedy	157
Drama	45	Action/adventure	146
Comedy	26	Drama	127
Science Fiction	22	Musical	110
Musical	18	Romance	88
Romance	14	Western	82
Western	11	Science Fiction	79
Cartoon/Anima	7	Historical Epic	78
Historical Epic	6	Cartoon/Anima	66
Horror	5	War	65
Crime	4	Crime	61
War	4	Horror	40
Documentary	1	Documentary	38
Serials (for children)	1	Serials (for children)	23

Table 3.15: Favourite genres of survey respondents going most frequently in the 1970s.

A breakdown of favourite genres according to gender show some considerable differences in the taste preferences of men and women, as seen in Table 3.16. Women preferred drama significantly more than men did, with 40 women (31%) indicating it was their single most preferred genre. Only five men, or six percent, rated drama as their favourite genre. Unsurprisingly in this decade of *Star Wars*, the science fiction genre made a strong appearance for the first time, with 16% ranking it as their favourite genre. It was significantly more popular with males than females. Another genre with a considerable gender bias was romance, which ranked as the fifth favourite genre for women when their top-six genres were tallied, but it ranked a lowly twelfth equal out of the fourteen genres for men. The female audience showed a considerable decrease in interest in war films with that genre at the bottom of their table, indicating that not only did it score badly as their first choice, but it also rated poorly in their top six genres. While the western scored poorly as a first choice for female movie-goers, it scored relatively strongly in women's top six favourite genres, with a middle-placed ranking. Comedy continued to be one of the most popular genres with both genders, as it had done in the previous two decades. A primary difference between these preferences and those of audiences in the United States is that women here had a far strong liking for action/adventure than their American counterparts, with this no doubt aided by the particular popularity of the Bond franchise in New Zealand. New Zealand women also

enjoyed westerns more than their counterparts. Other genre preferences were line with American audiences, including ranking horror as one of the least preferred genres. A 1982 audience survey in the United States added romance films to women's preferences and noted their dislike of war, Westerns, and science fiction, while American men disliked musicals, romance, and animated features. New Zealand men had a stronger liking, or tolerance, of musicals than their American counterparts.²³⁸

Genre	Female (129 responses)		Genre	Male (82 responses)	
	Favourite First Choice Genre	Favourite Genre When Top Six Tallied		Favourite First Choice Genre	Favourite Genre When Top Six Tallied
	Rank and #	Rank and #		Rank and #	Rank and #
Drama	1 st (40)	1 st = (96)	Action/Adventure	1 st (28)	1 st (67)
Action/Adventure	2 nd (17)	4 th (79)	Science Fiction	2 nd (13)	4 th (46)
Comedy	3 rd 16	1 st = (96)	Comedy	3 rd (10)	2 nd (61)
Musical	4 th (14)	3 rd (80)	Western	4 th (8)	5 th (42)
Romance	5 th (13)	5 th (75)	Drama	5 th (5)	6 th (31)
Science Fiction	6 th (9)	10 th (33)	War	6 th = (4)	3 rd (49)
Cartoon/Animation	7 th (5)	7 th = (40)	Musical	6 th = (4)	7 th (30)
Historical Epic	8 th = (3)	6 th (49)	Historical Epic	8 th (3)	8 th (29)
Western	8 th = (3)	7 th = (40)	Cartoon/Animation	9 th = (2)	9 th (26)
Crime	8 th = (3)	9 th (41)	Horror	9 th = (2)	11 th (17)
Horror	8 th = (3)	12 th (23)	Crime	11 th = (1)	10 th (20)
Serial	12 th (1)	13 th (17)	Documentary	11 th = (1)	12 th = (13)
Documentary	13 th = (0)	11 th (25)	Romance	11 th = (1)	12 th = (13)
War	13 th = (0)	14 th (16)	Serial	14 th 0	14 th (6)

Table 3.16: Favourite genres for survey respondents going most frequently in the 1970s, according to gender.

Re-runs of popular movies featured strongly in theatres across the country. Showing just how prolific repeat screenings were, Wellington's Cinerama screened *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *How the West Was Won* (1962), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *The Great Race* (1965), *South Pacific!* (1958), *Exodus* (1960), *Dr Zhivago* (1965), and *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), all between July 1970 and January 1972, and all for seasons of between one and five weeks.²³⁹ Although John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny believe audiences did not frequently revisit films in the years before video and DVD, with major studios expecting films to circulate for 12-15 months after which they were considered 'dead',²⁴⁰ popular films were regularly rescreened in New Zealand to good attendances. Forty-seven percent of those going to the movies most often in this decade said they saw a

²³⁸ Peter Kramer, 'A Powerful Cinema-going Force? Hollywood and Female Audiences Since the 1960s', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, London: BFI, 1999, pp. 93-108, pp. 94-5.

²³⁹ Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

²⁴⁰ Sedgwick and Pokorny, 'Consumers as Risk Takers', p. 78.

film(s) more than once at a theatre. The length of the season of the films reshowed at the Cinerama indicated they were not just ‘fillers’, chosen to fill a gap due to either the non-arrival of a scheduled film or due to the shortage of product available, but were popular films chosen specifically for their ability to attract strong audiences. The rescreening of older films was noted by Sue Harper and Justin Smith in their study of exhibition practices and audience tastes in Portsmouth (United Kingdom) in the 1970s, where they found a ‘significant proportion of films made in the previous decade’ sustained exhibition in that city between 1971-1974’. They attributed the rescreening of older material to being ‘one of the recourses [available to] cinemas in the face of the economic crisis of 1971-1974’.²⁴¹

Occasionally films did not perform as well as they were expected to and in those cases the length of season and/or the pricing structure was renegotiated with the distributor. An example of this was seen with the decision to remove the ‘special’ (increased) pricing for *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970), *Catch 22* (1970), *Darling Lili* (1970), and *Getting Straight* (1970), with the explanation provided to exhibitors, ‘Now that we have had experience of the performance of these films, it is evident that they have a better potential if screened at normal prices so please cancel the previous instructions regarding these attractions.’²⁴² A more direct explanation was that the films were not popular enough to warrant charging higher prices. Another ploy used for films that did not perform as well as was expected was to increase the advertising of the film ‘in an effort to stimulate public interest’, as seen with *Love Story* (1970) where its screening in Auckland had seen ‘business fallen off much faster than anticipated’,²⁴³ indicating the American hit did not perform so well in New Zealand’s largest city. It was, however, included in the ‘Favourite Films’ of ten survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1970s, and 16 of the total number of respondents.

The top ten favourite films of those survey respondents who were attending the cinema most frequently in this decade are shown in Table 3.17. These films all did particularly well at the box-office in New Zealand.

²⁴¹ Sue Harper and Justin T. Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, p. 217. The number of British films over 72 minutes registered with the British Department of Trade decreased 18% between 1970 and 1975 (from 85 to 70). From 1970 to 1980 the decrease was 52% (85 to 41). Patricia Perilli, ‘Statistical Survey of the British Film Industry’, in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds.), *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983, pp. 372-382, p. 373.

²⁴² Letter from Norman Glover to Mr Wyatt, September 7, 1971, Box 177, File 714, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AUMM.

²⁴³ Letter from N.J. Glover to Trevor King, Avon Theatre Manager, Christchurch, September 10, 1971, Box 177, File 713, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AUMM.

Title of Film	Country of Origin	# Citations
<i>Star Wars</i> (1977)	USA	51
<i>James Bond</i> (various)	UK/USA	48
<i>Sound of Music</i> (1965)	USA	47
<i>Grease</i> (1978)	USA	32
<i>Jaws</i> (1975)	USA	26
<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i> (1969)	USA	19
<i>Saturday Night Fever</i> (1977)	USA	18
<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> (1968)	USA	17
<i>Gone with the Wind</i> (1939)	USA	14
<i>The Godfather</i> (1972)	USA	13

Table 3.17: Top ten favourite films of survey respondents going most frequently in the 1970s.

To continue the investigation into which films were particularly popular, and in lieu of the detailed information from the Kerridge-Odeon organisation that helped comprise the same analysis for the previous decades, exhibitors' record books from a variety of theatres have been examined, and compilations of some of those theatres' most screened films from the decade are shown in the following tables.

The top screening films at Rotorua's Odeon for each year of the decade contain no surprises, with the Bond franchise in evidence, along with well-known titles *The Sting*, *Airport*, and *Jaws*. The family musical *Fiddler on the Roof* and the 'rock-opera' *Jesus Christ Superstar* indicate that musically inspired films were still drawing crowds. The pairing of two of the biggest stars of the time, Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal, in the perennial favourite genre, comedy, *What's Up, Doc?* received good audiences. Ryan O'Neal also starred in one of the Odeon's most screened films of the decade, *A Bridge Too Far*, along with Sean Connery and a host of other stars, ensuring the war genre had a continued presence. That film was the fifth-highest performing 'British' film in the United States for the decade,²⁴⁴ and it was among the most-shown films at Portsmouth's theatres for the decade, screening for 14 weeks.²⁴⁵ Eight out of the ten films were shown during school holidays, clearly showing the important role the cinema had in providing entertainment for children, even if the film being screened was not specifically produced for that audience.

²⁴⁴ Justin Smith, 'Cinema Statistics, Box-Office and Related Data, Appendix 1', in Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, pp. 261-274, p. 274. The top performing British films in the United States for the decade were *Superman* (1978) with rentals of \$82.8 million, *Alien* (1979) \$40.3m, *Moonraker* (1979), \$33.9m and *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) \$24.4m. *A Bridge Too Far* earned \$20.4m.

²⁴⁵ Peri Bradley, 'Top Films Shown at Portsmouth Cinemas, 1970-1979', in Sue Harper and Justin T. Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, pp. 282-284, p. 282.

Year Screened	Title	Screenings #	Genre(s)	Origin
1970	<i>On Her Majesty's Secret Service</i> (1969) (Screened Jan school hols)	32	Action (James Bond)	UK/US
1971	<i>Love Story</i> (1970)	42	Romance	US
1972	<i>Fiddler on the Roof</i> (1971) (August school holidays)	36	Musical	US
1973	<i>What's Up, Doc?</i> (1972) (May school holidays)	42	Comedy	US
1974	<i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> (1973) <i>The Sting</i> (1973)	42 42	Musical Action	US US
1975	<i>Airport 1975</i> (1974) (May school holidays)	50	Action (Disaster)	US
1975/6	<i>Jaws</i> (1975) (Dec/Jan school holidays)	74	Action (Thriller)	US
1977	<i>A Bridge Too Far</i> (1977) (August school holidays)	50	War Drama	UK/US
1977/8	<i>The Spy Who Loved Me</i> (1977) (Dec/Jan school holidays)	53	Action (James Bond)	UK/US
1978/9	<i>Superman</i> (1978) (Dec/Jan school holidays)	44	Fantasy	US

Table 3.18: Most screened films, Odeon Theatre, Rotorua, by year, 1970s.²⁴⁶

A similar taste-preference to Rotorua's Odeon was seen at the Odeon in Napier, with a number of the same films featuring in that theatre's 'most screened' line up, as seen in the following table. *Love Story* appears to have performed better at Rotorua and Napier than it did in Auckland.

Year Screened	Title	Screenings #	Genre(s)	Origin
1970	<i>Battle of Britain</i> (1969) (screened January school holidays)	54	War	UK
1971	<i>Love Story</i> (1970) (part of August school holidays)	49	Romance	US
1972	<i>Fiddler on the Roof</i> (1971) (August school holidays)	34	Musical	US
1973	<i>The Godfather</i> (1972)	31	Drama Crime	US
1973/4	<i>Live and Let Die</i> (1973) (Dec/Jan school holidays)	46	Action (James Bond)	UK
1974/5	<i>The Man with the Golden Gun</i> (1974) (Dec/Jan school hols)	42	Action (James Bond)	UK/US
1975/6	<i>Jaws</i> (1975) (Dec/Jan school hols)	47	Action Thriller	US
1977	<i>The Gumball Rally</i> (1976) (January school holidays)	39	Comedy	US

Table 3.19: Most screened films, Odeon Theatre, Napier, by year, 1970-1977.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Quota Books, Odeon Theatre, Rotorua, MA 0541, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision.

²⁴⁷ Odeon Theatre, Napier, Exhibitors' Record Book, until March 1977. David Lascelles collection.

While the Bond films did well wherever they screened, records from the Palmerston North Regent theatre show they were especially popular with that theatre’s audience, as seen in Table 3.20. Sue Harper and Justin Smith’s analysis of popular films in Britain in the 1970s found that the Bond franchise performed ‘unevenly’ in that decade, which they attributed to the ‘transition from Sean Connery’s reign to Roger Moore’s tenure’, which received mixed responses with audiences. Sian Barber’s analysis of films screened at the Southampton Odeon theatre for this period found that the newly released Bond films ‘made very little impact’ at that theatre.²⁴⁸ While Bond’s popularity was ‘uneven’ in Britain, the franchise performed very well with New Zealand audiences. That *Carry On Abroad* screened during the school holidays is an illustration of not only the popularity of the series, but an indication of the shortage of films specifically produced for children, given the series was generally exhibited in New Zealand with an ‘A’ certificate. As we have seen, survey respondents’ feedback indicated it was not at all unusual for children to see these films, either with their peers or with their family members, and this is reflected in the popularity of the film at Palmerston North’s Regent. All of the films shown in Table 3.20 screened in the December/January school holiday period.

Year Screened	Title	Screenings #	Genre(s)	Origin
1969/70	<i>On Her Majesty's Secret Service</i> (1969)	45	Action (James Bond)	UK/US
1971/2	<i>Diamonds are Forever</i> (1971)	47	Action (James Bond)	UK/US
1972/3	<i>Live and Let Die</i> (1973)	51	Action (James Bond)	UK/US
1973	<i>Carry on Abroad</i> (1972)	51	Comedy	UK
1974/5	<i>The Man with the Golden Gun</i> (1974)	41	Action (James Bond)	UK/US
1975/6	<i>The Man From Hong Kong</i> (1975)	40	Action	HK/Aust

Table 3.20: Most screened films, Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, 1970-1976.²⁴⁹

The two-and-a-half years of exhibitor records available for Timaru’s State theatre show that *Grease* (1978) considerably outperformed *Star Wars*, with an audience of 21,317, compared with *Star Wars*’ 15,846.²⁵⁰ However, the single biggest audience at this theatre over this period was the 1,107 who saw *The Sound of Music* on Saturday June 30, 1979. In comparison, *Grease* achieved a single largest audience of 752, and *Star Wars* 751, which it achieved on the opening night of its return season, three months after its first, suggesting either word-

²⁴⁸ Sian Barber, ‘Cinema-going at the Southampton Odeon: Exhibition data and popular taste, Appendix II’, in Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, pp. 275-281, p. 278.

²⁴⁹ Regent Theatre, Palmerston North, Exhibitors’ Records Book, Val Page collection.

²⁵⁰ Attendance at *Grease* is made up of 15,979 from 1st season of 39 screenings in Sept 1978, 5,070 from 2nd season of 22 screenings in Jan 1979, and 268 from a Sunday night double-feature with *Saturday Night Fever* on Dec 9, 1979. Five screenings from the 2nd season were double-features with *Saturday Night Fever*. The audience for *Star Wars* was obtained over three seasons, the first from Dec 17, 1977 until Jan 5, 1978 (the 54 sessions attracting an audience of 9,969), the 2nd from April 22-26, 1978 (the 9 screenings attracting 3,428), and the 3rd from August 17-22, 1978 (15 screenings attracting 2,449), making a total of 78 screenings. Majestic Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors’ Record Book, Gavin List collection.

of-mouth and/or a particularly strong fan-base. This illustrates not only the phenomenal popularity of *The Sound of Music*, but reinforces that traditional musicals may have continued to attract audiences if they were still being produced. The following table illustrates the degree of popularity of *Grease* and *Star Wars* in comparison to other films screening at that time. This was also seen at the Cinerama in Wellington, where both of those films considerably outperformed others screening for 26 and 27 weeks respectively, with the next most screened film *The Poseidon Adventure* screening for 17 weeks.²⁵¹

Film Title	Audience (#)	Total Audience (#)
<i>Grease</i> (US 1978)	15,979	21,317
<i>Star Wars</i> (US 1977)	9,969	15,846
<i>Jaws 2</i> (US 1978)	6313	
<i>Saturday Night Fever</i> (US 1977)	6252	7,445
<i>In Search of Noah's Ark</i> (US 1976)	6217	
<i>Abba The Movie</i> (Aust/Sweden 1977)	5114	
<i>Orca</i> (US/Netherlands/Italy 1977)	5099	
<i>Star Trek</i> (US 1979)	4645	
<i>The Muppet Movie</i> (US/UK 1979)	4602	
<i>Airport '77</i> (US 1977)	3498	

Table 3.21: Most popular films, State Theatre, Timaru, 1977- 1979.²⁵²

At the Civic in Auckland the standout film of the decade, allowing for the absence of records from 1975 and 1978, was *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), which screened for considerably longer than any other film. *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The French Connection*²⁵³ were also particularly popular, as shown in the following table. These films all performed well in both the United Kingdom and the United States.²⁵⁴ The western *Soldier Blue* was the most screened film in 1971 although it screened for a shorter period than the other 'best performers' of the decade. This was possibly due to the R-rated film's 'unbelievably extreme violence that involves hacked body parts, rape, and infinite bloodshed',²⁵⁵ and the 'simple if horrifying way [it] restages the 1864 Sand Creek massacre to evoke the 1968 My Lai massacre'.²⁵⁶ It was the third most screened film in Britain in 1971,²⁵⁷ although it was not so well received in the United States. It was rereleased in the United States in 1974 with much of the violence cut.

²⁵¹ Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

²⁵² State Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Book, Gavin List collection.

²⁵³ *The French Connection* screened 502 times at Wellington's King's Theatre, in 1972, considerably more than any other film at that theatre, with the exception of the 561 screenings of *The Sound of Music* in 1966. The next most screened film was *The Magnificent Men and their Flying Machines with 255 screenings in 1965*. MA0559, King's Theatre Records, Folder 3, D0982 0982.003.03, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, Wellington.

²⁵⁴ Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, pp. 359-360, and Smith, 'Cinema Statistics', pp. 269-270.

²⁵⁵ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066390/?ref=fn_al_tt_1 retrieved February 28, 2017.

²⁵⁶ Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 72.

²⁵⁷ Smith, 'Cinema Statistics', p. 269.

Year Screened	Title	# Weeks Screened	Genre(s)	Origin
1970	<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i> (1969)	22	Western	US
1971	<i>Soldier Blue</i> (1970)	6	Western	US
1972	<i>The French Connection</i> (1971)	13	Action Crime	US
1972/3	<i>Trinity is Still My Name</i> (1971)	8	Western	Italy
1973	<i>The Poseidon Adventure</i> (1972)	16	Action Adventure	US
1973/4	<i>The World's Greatest Athlete</i> (1973)	8	Family Comedy	US
1974	<i>Dirty Mary Crazy Larry</i> (1974)	8	Crime	US
1976/7	<i>King Kong</i> (1976)	6	Fantasy, horror	US
1977	<i>Airport '77</i> (1977) ²⁵⁸	6	Action Disaster	US
1978/9	<i>Jaws 2</i> (1977)	8	Action	US
1979	<i>Animal House</i> (1978)	7	Comedy (R16)	US

Table 3.22: Most screened films, Civic Theatre, Auckland, 1970s (excluding 1975 and 1978).²⁵⁹

Notable genres of this period, including films within the genre, and comments from survey respondents are outlined in the following analysis.

Science Fiction

The science fiction genre made a newly significant impact on movie-goers in the 1970s. While the genre was not new, *Star Wars* did far more than consolidate its position as a significant genre; it 'left mere moviedom behind for pop-culture godhood'.²⁶⁰ It was the top box-office hit of the decade in the United States²⁶¹ and was the favourite film of my survey respondents who were going to the movies most often in this decade, with 51 out of 205 citing the film as one of their favourites. The reasons for its popularity were varied.

It was new and amazing.²⁶²

It was something radically new in movie production at the time.²⁶³

I saw it five times when it first came out in 1977. It was the first science fiction movie I had seen - the effects in it were so great, plus the story was good and we all had crushes on Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford to boot!²⁶⁴

For a seven/eight year old this was probably the most exciting thing that I had ever seen.²⁶⁵

I saw it five times when it first came out in 1977. It was the first movie that I remember there being a lot of "buzz" about.²⁶⁶

²⁵⁸ *Airport '77* followed its six weeks at the Civic by screening at their smaller theatre, the Wintergarden.

²⁵⁹ Auckland Civic Theatre Projection Room Log Books, MA2689, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision. *The French Connection* and *Animal House* both returned for a second season, which is included in the total number of weeks screened.

²⁶⁰ Alter, *Film Firsts*, p. 11.

²⁶¹ According to Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 359, the film made US\$185.1 million in rentals. David Pirie in *Anatomy of the Movies*, London: W.H. Smith, 1981, p. 205, has the film making US\$181.3m and Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', p. 29, says *Star Wars* made \$127m in rentals in 1977 and \$38m in a reissue in 1978.

²⁶² Female, born 1962.

²⁶³ Female, born 1969.

²⁶⁴ Sarah, born 1964.

²⁶⁵ James, born 1969.

²⁶⁶ Sarah, born 1964.

Star Wars - huge epic, who wouldn't go more than once!!²⁶⁷

The advent of Star Wars was the most important factor in changing my movie going tastes.²⁶⁸

Star Wars - the alternative reality world.²⁶⁹

STAR WARS [was my favourite film] -there was so little SF in cinema when I was growing up.²⁷⁰

Paul Conder was the ultimate fan, saying he saw *Star Wars* 'almost every week from December 77 to about August 78'.²⁷¹ On the other hand, survey respondent Geoff Watson may have been the only eight-year old in New Zealand to turn down the opportunity to see the film, preferring instead to spend time playing outside with a friend.

While many contemporary movie-goers regarded *Star Wars* as a science fiction film, Schatz has said the 'hell-bent narrative careens from one genre-coded episode to another – from western to war film to vine-swinging adventure'.²⁷² One of the founders of *Film Threat* magazine,²⁷³ Chris Gore, commented on the number of influences on *Star Wars*, 'from fantasy and science fiction [...] from *Flash Gordon* to Buck Rogers to Westerns and war movies'.²⁷⁴ It is possible that this variety of genres, even if primarily unrecognised, or at least unarticulated, by young contemporary cinema-goers, provided a cultural resonance with viewers tapping into their affinity with traditionally popular genres, particularly the western, contributing to the film's phenomenal success and subsequent 'godhood' status. *Star Wars* was the most screened film of the decade at Wellington's Cinerama with its 27-week season resulting in the film screening 425 times.²⁷⁵

Other science fiction films also did well in this decade. One survey respondent said as a teenager he enjoyed *Logan's Run* (1976) because 'it was totally bonkers sci-fi and Jenny Agutter takes her clothes off'. He also had two favourite science fiction films later in the decade; Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), which he recalled seeing in 1979,

²⁶⁷ Anne, born 1956.

²⁶⁸ Dave Marshall, born 1967.

²⁶⁹ Female, born 1966.

²⁷⁰ Elizabeth, born 1960.

²⁷¹ Paul Conder, born 1965.

²⁷² Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', p. 30.

²⁷³ *Film Threat* started as a fanzine in 1985 with its primary aim being to support independent film. <http://filmthreat.com/about/> retrieved April 1, 2017.

²⁷⁴ Chuck Tryon, 'Fan Films, Adaptations, and Media Literacy', in J.P. Telotte and Gerald Duchovnay (eds.), *Science Fiction Film, Television, and Adaptation*, New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 176-189, p. 179.

²⁷⁵ *Star Wars* outperformed *Grease*, with the latter screening for 23 weeks (353 screenings) and returning for a second season of 3 weeks (52 screenings), making a total of 405 screenings. Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

and *Quadrophenia* (1979).²⁷⁶ A number of survey respondents saw science fiction films more than once at the picture theatre with their comments explaining why.

The Omega Man [1971], liked it, missed some of the background the first time.²⁷⁷

2001: A Space Odyssey [1968]. A favourite, also studied at school for English in 1975.²⁷⁸

I saw *Alien* [1979] and *2001* [A Space Odyssey 1968], more than once at the theatre because they redefined movie design, and each viewing revealed more and more.²⁷⁹

What I enjoyed most about the pictures was the escapism and excitement, especially in the sci-fi genre.²⁸⁰

2001, [A Space Odyssey], to try and understand it!²⁸¹

Naturally enough, not everyone enjoyed science fiction, with one respondent saying 'I never liked science fiction or fantasy movies. Gritty realism appealed to me more,²⁸² with another saying, 'Liked pretty much everything, but least favourite was Science Fiction.'²⁸³

Musical

The Broadway-style musicals that had performed at record-breaking levels in the 1960s had all but disappeared by the new decade with one of the last, *Darling Lili* (1970), starring Julie Andrews, failing to do well here, just as it had failed in the United States.²⁸⁴ It was the music-themed rather than the Broadway-styled musicals which were to find a resonance with New Zealand, and international, audiences in this decade, particularly young adults. The documentary of the rock concert, *Woodstock* (1970), was very well received by New Zealand audiences. Robert Kerridge had thought the film, with its nudity, language, and drug-taking, offensive and subsequently declined to show it. The Amalgamated chain, however, had no such qualms and the film screened very successfully at their theatres, where it was the highest grossing Warner Bros film in New Zealand in 1970.²⁸⁵ At the King's in Wellington it

²⁷⁶ Tim Darlington, born 1962.

²⁷⁷ Male, born 1960.

²⁷⁸ Male, born 1959.

²⁷⁹ George Farrant, born 1942.

²⁸⁰ Male, born 1960.

²⁸¹ David, born 1958.

²⁸² Male, born 1959.

²⁸³ Doug, born 1950.

²⁸⁴ It screened for an unremarkable 13 times at Napier's Odeon from Nov 26-Dec 2 1971; only 7 screenings at Hasting's West end from March 24, 1972. Exhibitors' Record Books, David Lascelles collection.

²⁸⁵ David Lascelles interview, May 19, 2014.

screened 133 times between October 21 and Christmas Eve, making it the most popular film at that theatre for 1970.²⁸⁶

Pete Townshend and The Who's double album 'Tommy', released in 1969, was the first musical work to be billed as a 'rock-opera', a style of 'rock music that presents a dramatic story over multiple songs in the traditional manner of an opera'.²⁸⁷ This record album was made into a film of the same name, which was released in 1975, and it screened for a ten-week season at Wellington's Cinerama.²⁸⁸ *Tommy* was one of only three films to be reviewed by the Film Censorship Board of Review in 1977-8 where the initial classification of R20 was upheld.²⁸⁹ British-made *Tommy* performed very well in the United Kingdom and was one of the top performing films there in 1975 and 1976.²⁹⁰ Another rock-opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), was also popular with audiences, being one of only three films to screen more than 200 times at Wellington's Embassy during the decade.²⁹¹ One survey respondent saw the film eight times, saying 'I was madly in love with Ted Neeley and loved the music.'²⁹²

The significant 'musicals' of the decade, however, came in the form of two films that made heavy use of catchy 'pop' music sung by popular contemporary artists. The Bee Gees' music formed the backdrop for *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), which elevated television actor John Travolta into movie-star status with his iconic disco dance moves that were practised in living rooms and on dance floors by young people throughout the country. Notwithstanding the catchy music and subsequent 'disco-fever', the film contained violent sex, drug-use, and profanities, earning it an R16 rating, which ensured the film created 'particular problems' for cinema management, given that the film was 'apparently' aimed at the young audience. Many who wanted to see the film, particularly for its music and dance, were too young, although that did not prevent many from trying, and succeeding. A prosecution was taken against Amalgamated's Plaza in Wellington, with the Crown alleging that the theatre had shown the film to persons under sixteen. The theatre successfully defended its stance that all reasonable steps had been taken to ensure the film was only seen by those allowed to see it.²⁹³ Despite its age restriction, which naturally limited its audience numbers, the film did

²⁸⁶ King's Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, MA0559, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

²⁸⁷ http://www.larockopera.com/what_is_rock_opera.html, retrieved September 2, 2016.

²⁸⁸ Screened July 18-Sept 25, 1975, Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record book, David Lascelles collection.

²⁸⁹ It was thought the increase in charge from \$100 to \$300 to appeal a film's classification was responsible for the drop in requests for reviews. *AJHR*, 1978, G. 7, p. 21.

²⁹⁰ Smith, 'Cinema Statistics', pp. 271-2.

²⁹¹ Screened from Jan 18-May 2, 1974, a total of 210 screenings. Embassy Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

²⁹² Gabrielle, born 1956.

²⁹³ *AJHR*, 1979, G. 7, p. 20.

very well at the New Zealand box-office, particularly at the Plaza, where it had a three-month season, with its 185 screenings only bettered by one other film during the decade.²⁹⁴

Travolta followed *Saturday Night Fever* with the exceptionally popular *Grease* (1978), which, combined with a more family-friendly story-line and PG rating, 'local' Australian pop star Olivia Newton-John in the lead female role, and Travolta himself, ensured the film was even more popular than *Saturday Night Fever*, making it one of the most significant hits of the decade. It drew a total audience of just over 21,000 at Timaru's State, notably more than the 15,846 that went to *Star Wars* at the same theatre and it had a lengthy 22 week season, with 353 screenings, at Wellington's Cinerama from August 1978 until February 1979. The film was named as a favourite by 49 survey respondents, 41 female and 8 male, continuing the strong preference women had for musicals over their male counterparts. One survey respondent recalled that one of the pupils at his school was given the day off school by his parents so that he could see the film.²⁹⁵ Another said she saw *Grease* three nights in a row when it screened in New Plymouth and she recalled it was the first time she had seen queues of people waiting to get into the picture theatre.²⁹⁶

Action

The decade had a number of very successful action films that did particularly well at the box-office. The stand-out film, and one whose significance to the movie industry has already been discussed, was *Jaws* (1975). The movie was talked about throughout the country, with the arrival of the mechanical shark, about an hour into the film, the highlight.²⁹⁷ Even macho teenage boys were not afraid to recount their fright and their subsequent healthy respect for the water, particularly given that the film screened in New Zealand over the summer, when large numbers of the population spent time at the beach.²⁹⁸ The film's 57 screenings at Hastings' Regent and 47 screenings at Napier's Odeon making it the second most-shown film at both theatres for the decade.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴ *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* had a six month season, screening 491 times from January 30-July 31, 1970. *Saturday Night Fever* ran from May 20-August 18, 1978. Plaza Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record book, MA0559, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

²⁹⁵ Geoff Watson, born 1969.

²⁹⁶ Patricia, born 1960.

²⁹⁷ Spielberg had planned to put this 'feat of special effects engineering on display as often as possible during the course of the movie', but ongoing technical problems meant shooting had to start before the shark was available, hence its delayed presence on screen. Ethan Alter, *Film Firsts, The 25 Movies that Created Contemporary American Cinema*, Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2014, p. 2.

²⁹⁸ My family stayed at Oakura Beach for a week over the summer of 1975/6 and *Jaws* was a popular topic of conversation with fellow holidaying teenagers.

²⁹⁹ *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Love Story* (1970) were the most screened films at the Hastings' Regent and Napier's Odeon, with 63 and 49 screenings, respectively. *Easy Rider's* total, however, was achieved over 4 seasons, its first season comprising 52 screenings. Exhibitors' Record Books, David Lascelles collection.

Other popular action films included *The French Connection* (1971), *Deliverance* (1972), *Papillon* (1973), and the Bond-sounding *The Man from Hong Kong* (1975, known as *The Dragon Flies* in the United States) starring ex-James Bond, George Lazenby. The decade featured a number of male action stars such as Roger Moore, Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood, Robert Redford, Burt Lancaster, George Lazenby, Bruce Lee, Steve McQueen, and Sylvester Stallone.

‘Disaster’

The ‘disaster’ movie had a very strong presence in the 1970s. The first of the *Airport* series was in 1970, followed by *Airport 1975* (1974), and *Airport ’77* (1977). The latter was one of only a small number of films to screen for more than six weeks at the Civic in Auckland,³⁰⁰ while *Airport 1975* was one of only six films to screen 40 or more times throughout the decade at the Regent in Hastings.³⁰¹

Another successful disaster film was *Earthquake* (1974), starring Charlton Heston and George Kennedy, along with Ava Gardner, and Lorne Green, from the popular western television series, *Bonanza* (1959-1973), which had an 11-week season at Wellington’s Cinerama between February and May 1976. *The Towering Inferno* (1975), starring Paul Newman and Steve McQueen, spent 18 weeks at the Cinerama in Christchurch in 1975.³⁰² This film was the favourite ‘disaster’ film of my survey respondents, receiving ten mentions, while *Earthquake* received two, and the *Airport* films only one in total. Disaster films have been described as ‘key to the upturn’ in Hollywood’s domestic and international market, which earned revenue nearing US\$2 billion in 1974, surpassing Hollywood’s postwar box-office peak.³⁰³

Martial Arts

Another type of film to make its presence in this decade was the martial arts film, inspired by Bruce Lee, whose skill and early death at the age of 32 in 1973 earned him a ‘reputation as the twentieth-century god of martial art [who] is known in almost every city, town, and village on the planet’.³⁰⁴ Lee’s influence is not restricted to practitioners of martial arts as he has been credited with ‘fundamentally chang[ing] movie fight scenes [...] martial arts are now

³⁰⁰ The film screened for six weeks at the Civic Theatre, Auckland after which it screened at the smaller Wintergarden Theatre, below the Civic theatre, but still part of the complex.

³⁰¹ Regent Theatre, Hastings, Exhibitors’ Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

³⁰² Cinerama Theatres, Wellington and Christchurch, Exhibitors’ Record Books, David Lascelles collection.

³⁰³ Schatz, ‘The New Hollywood’, p. 23.

³⁰⁴ Toby Miller (ed.), *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader*, London: Routledge, 2009, p. 94; Paul Bowman, *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-fantasy-fighting-philosophy*, 2010, Amsterdam: Brill Academic Publishers, p. 14.

employed in nearly every fight in nearly every action movie'.³⁰⁵ John Garrett, ex-manager of the Downtown multi-theatre complex in Palmerston North (now called Event Cinemas), who had worked at the independent Starlight theatre in Papatoetoe in Auckland,³⁰⁶ recalled that in Auckland the 1970s 'were full of karate movies', which were 'that popular you couldn't get in'.³⁰⁷ Lee's last film, *Enter the Dragon* (1973), and *The Way of the Dragon* (1972) performed well in New Zealand, with the former achieving one more screening than *Grease* at Rotorua's Odeon.³⁰⁸ It also performed well at Wellington's King's theatre, screening 87 times between January 25 and February 21, 1974. A number of survey respondents commented on Bruce Lee and/or martial arts films, with five saying that *Enter the Dragon* was one of their favourite films and three citing 'Bruce Lee movies' as being among their favourites. A survey respondent who was a teenager in this period said he watched 'Predominantly Karate/Kung Fu movies - Everything with Bruce Lee',³⁰⁹ while another said that she and her friends 'used to watch a lot of the Kung Fu type movies ... a lot of Bruce Lee movies or anything of that kind even though we knew that what they did was really far-fetched'.³¹⁰ The genre was prolific in the 1970s, which Paul Bowman credits partly to the phenomenon that 'cinema abhors a vacuum', resulting in the 'hole' left by Lee's death 'quickly filled with copies, re-releases, re-edits, re-hashed attempts at recombining old footage into new products and Bruce Lee 'clones' – indeed, a whole subgenre of movies and commerce that has been called 'Bruceploitation'.³¹¹ The violence in 'oriental "Kung Fu"' films were the cause of considerable censorship cuts in feature films, with 109 of these films examined in 1975, with 82 requiring 'substantial' cutting and only 27 being approved uncut. None was approved for General exhibition.³¹²

Western

Westerns illustrated their longevity as a reliable audience-pleasing genre, with popular first-run titles and re-runs screening throughout the decade. The longest running film of the decade at the Civic in Auckland was *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), screening for 22 weeks from February till May, 1970.³¹³ The film also significantly outperformed all

³⁰⁵ Bowman, *Theorizing Bruce Lee*, p. 15.

³⁰⁶ 'Downtown Cinema 7' Advertising Feature, p. 3, *Evening Standard*, June 19, 1996.

³⁰⁷ John Garrett, interview, March 23, 2010.

³⁰⁸ *Enter the Dragon* screened 37 times during the school holidays of May 10-23, 1974, while *Grease* screened 36 times from September 29 till October 12, 1978.

³⁰⁹ Male, born 1960.

³¹⁰ Female, born 1961

³¹¹ Bowman, *Theorizing Bruce Lee*, p. 12.

³¹² *AJHR*, 1975, G. 7, p. 22.

³¹³ Eric Kearney, Correspondence, January 17, 2016. Civic Theatre, Auckland, Exhibitors' Record books, which are missing 1975 and 1978, provided the exact dates. MA2689, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

others at the Plaza in Wellington, where it ran for six months, from January until July, 1970, screening 491 times.³¹⁴ While genre was the most important factor in determining what film to see, according to my survey respondents, this particular film suggests an anomaly, whereby the importance and attraction of the stars, Robert Redford and Paul Newman, were more important to some movie-goers than the genre. Evidence of this is seen in the higher number of women who said the film was one of their favourites (17), compared with men (11), given that women in this decade had not ranked the western in their top-six genres.³¹⁵ One female survey respondent said; 'I was reluctant to go to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* because I didn't like Westerns. But Robert Redford was such a dreamboat and the humour was great. I loved it. My number one at the time.'³¹⁶ Part of the attraction of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* was that it appealed to those who 'didn't like Westerns' as well as to those who did because, it is argued, it modernised the genre by using the contemporary motifs of anti-establishment and anti-hero, as well as 'being hip'.³¹⁷ The film is ranked as the second 'all-time box-office' western, and the fifth highest-grossing film in the United States for the 1960s, showing its popularity was not limited to New Zealand audiences.³¹⁸

The Italian western, *Trinity Is Still My Name* (1971), starring Italian actors Terence Hill (born Mario Girotti) and Bud Spencer (Carlo Pedersoli), had particularly good seasons at the Civic in Auckland, screening for eight weeks over the Christmas/summer period in 1972-73 and at Wellington's Cinerama over the same period in 1973-74. The popularity of the western genre was such that it not only ensured Italian-made westerns (without the star power of Clint Eastwood) were well received, but also seemed to assist the musical western, *Paint Your Wagon* (1970). The musical/western genre pairing had long been popular, especially with children, as seen with the longevity of the 'singing cowboy' Gene Autry, but *Paint Your Wagon* was a film for adults. Furthermore, those adults were used to seeing Clint Eastwood in tough-guy, taciturn roles, not being treated to the unusual sight, and sound, of him singing 'I Talk to the Trees'. Also typically an actor of strong masculine roles, Lee Marvin's rendition of 'I was born under a Wandering Star' made it to the top of the music charts in the United Kingdom,³¹⁹ although it was not so successful in New Zealand. The film had a season of 172 screenings when it re-opened the renovated Embassy in Wellington on May 15, 1970. It also did particularly well at Portsmouth theatres in Britain, screening at theatres there for 19

³¹⁴ Plaza Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Books, MA0559, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

³¹⁵ The western was 7th equal of the fourteen genres, once the top six genres were collated.

³¹⁶ Carolyn Deverson, born 1949.

³¹⁷ John Sanders, *The Film Genre Book*, Leighton Buzzard, UK: auteur, 2009, p. 295.

³¹⁸ Pirie, *Anatomy of the Movies*, p. 208, and Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 359.

³¹⁹ <http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/19700301/7501/> retrieved September 5, 2016.

weeks, making it their third most screened film of the decade.³²⁰ Six survey respondents cited *Paint Your Wagon* as a favourite film, which, while not a high number, was the same number received by *How the West Was Won* (1962), and only two fewer than *High Noon* (1952) and *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), which are far more well-known and have carried their cultural cachet into the new century. They could have been expected to greatly out-perform *Paint Your Wagon* as favourite films.

Horror

Horror films continued to screen to small numbers of devotees throughout this decade. As seen in Tables 3.16 and 3.17, it was not a popular genre with the majority of survey respondents. Horror films often screened at midnight sessions at first-run theatres, sometimes as double- and triple- features, to utilise a 'dead' time, or in 'flea-pit' theatres, usually with other horror films, or with R-rated films that would not screen at more prestigious first-run theatres. Fans of the horror genre were particularly enthusiastic in the recollections of their movie-going experiences, with two recalling their enjoyment in some detail.

The bulk of movies [I went to] were Sunday night double features, which ran at the Civic and St James theatres in downtown Auckland, and various suburban theatres such as the Capitol in Balmoral, the Delta in New Lynn, plus others whose names I don't recall in Mt Albert, Avondale and Pt Chevalier. I went to those double features with my best friend almost every week - they were typically horror double-bills.³²¹

Our favourite was going to the midnight horrors, either at the Roxy in Manners Street, or the Ascot in Newtown. The Roxy had double features, but the Ascot had four films in a row (I was generally asleep by the fourth one, but my boyfriend/husband seemed to last the distance till 6 a.m.). The enjoyment came sometimes from the awfulness of the Hammer horror stable with clunky prop birds of prey being lowered into window frames and pretty girls, who were hardly actresses, being preyed upon, and the very creaky performances of Vincent Price who somehow had made his mark in these sorts of films. Audience participation was de rigueur in the early days. I remember, fresh from playing Duncan in a VUW *Macbeth*, my husband calling out, in response to the deathless line "Your father has been murdered" one of Shakespeare's equally deathless lines, "Oh! By whom?" The audience included very colourful characters, and I remember one drag queen arriving and announcing to the assembled masses, "Rosie(?) is here. The show can start!" The manager himself was equally flamboyant, calling out on one occasion, "I'm the only fairy here!" As I remember, this joyous part of the routine was discouraged in later years. In among the B-grades, though, were some gems. I remember one

³²⁰ Peri Bradley, 'Top Films Shown at Portsmouth Cinemas, 1970-1979', in Harper and Smith, pp. 282-284, p. 282.

³²¹ Male, born 1960.

called *The Frogs* [1972] which was at least as chilling as *The Birds* [1963 Hitchcock dir.] with a dystopian tale of environmental degradation which current generations might be surprised to know we were already thinking about.³²²

One young male movie-goer said that 'getting a good scare at the b-grade horror flicks' was one of the things he most enjoyed about going to the pictures.³²³ Of course not everyone liked the genre, with one viewer saying, 'I left the theatre during *The Exorcist* [1973] because I was terrified. I would never choose to go to a horror film if that is where my friends/boyfriend had decided to go',³²⁴ and another said 'Horror films never appealed'.³²⁵

Local Films

A small number of locally made films with a distinctly New Zealand flavour performed strongly. A combination of lecture and film given by and about Sir Edmund Hillary was a sell-out at the Avon in Christchurch on Sunday, August 16, 1971, with 300 patrons being turned away, and a profit of \$2,650 made.³²⁶ The publicity for *To Love a Maori* (1972), directed by New Zealanders Ramai and Rudall Hayward, included the proclamation, 'At Last Entertainment for the Whole Family!' The Maori Queen Te Atarangiāhū said of the film, 'As well as being really entertaining the picture has something to say', while New Zealand diplomat, Sir Guy Powles, commented

It was an experience which we shall long remember AND I thought that as a dramatic documentary it ought to make a great impact ... I hope it is widely shown and seen because I testify very strongly to the complete accuracy in our social milieu of each of the episodes and of the general theme.

The *New Zealand Herald* reported it was 'A remarkable motion picture of race relations in New Zealand. The film is of crucial importance'.³²⁷ When it screened at Tauranga's Odeon for a week in November 1972, its 12 screenings gave the film the longest season for any film at that theatre for the year, equalled only by the family film *The Flight of the Doves* (1971) which screened in the January school holidays.³²⁸ Two New Zealand shorts, *Alpine*

³²² Female, born 1951.

³²³ Male, born 1960.

³²⁴ Anne, born 1956.

³²⁵ Diana, born 1935.

³²⁶ Memo from Trevor King, Avon Theatre Manager, Christchurch, to N.J. Glover, August 16, 1971, Box 177, File 713, KO Archives, MS98/39, AWMM.

³²⁷ Publicity and Ephemera, 'To Love a Maori', MA2983, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

³²⁸ Odeon Theatre, Tauranga, Exhibitors' Record Book, MA0568, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

Shepherds of New Zealand (1967) and *Katherine Mansfield's 'The Doll's House'* (1973) screened with *To Love a Maori* at the Kerridge-Odeon South Island season.³²⁹

The New Zealand-made documentary, *Off the Edge* (1977), showing the escapades of skiers and skateboarders in the Southern Alps, was nominated for an Oscar in 1977. The New Zealand Film Commission describe it as

a depiction of the longing in each of us to be free and to be part of the natural world around us. It is a fresh statement, a picture on a human scale, not the filming of an impossible dream. It confirms that fact that such experiences exist and are within our grasp.³³⁰

That the film was popular is seen by its 121 screenings at Wellington's Cinerama from September 16 till October 27, 1977, which was only bettered by the science fiction duo of *Logan's Run*, which screened over the 1976 -1977 summer period, and *Star Wars*, which began screening at the end of that year.³³¹ Timaru's State made a particular effort with *Off the Edge*, scheduling four sessions per day for the two Fridays and Saturdays the film was screened, which bettered the scheduling of *Star Wars* with its four screenings for the first two Fridays and three on Saturdays. Over its 23 screening season, 3,254 people attended *Off the Edge*.³³²

Sleeping Dogs (1977) was the first 35-millimetre colour fiction film to be made in New Zealand and the first feature film to get an American cinema release.³³³ According to Hamish McDouall, New Zealanders' proclivity toward cultural cringe was 'banished' (he suggests it may have been due to the 'participation of the Royal New Zealand Air Force with its fighter jets and helicopters, or the images of crash-helmeted police'), that 'captured the imagination' of the more than 250,000 who saw it on its initial release.³³⁴ At Timaru's State it screened from November 29 until December 8, 1977 with its 18 screenings attracting an audience of 2,952.

³²⁹ Nelson Majestic April 5, Dunedin St. James April 26, Gore May 28, Oamaru June 4, Invercargill June 28, Ashburton July 9, Greymouth July 16, Westport July 24, 1973. Publicity and Ephemera, 'To Love a Maori', MA2983, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives, Wellington.

³³⁰ http://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=64765 retrieved August 22, 2016.

³³¹ Cinerama Theatre, Wellington, Exhibitors' Record Book, David Lascelles collection.

³³² State Theatre, Timaru, Exhibitors' Record Books, Gavin List collection.

³³³ Hamish McDouall, *100 Essential New Zealand Films*, Wellington, N.Z.: Awa Press, 2009, pp. 173-175.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

British or American?

When survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in some or all of the years of the 1970s were asked whether they preferred British or American films, their response, as it was in the previous two decades, was overwhelmingly 'It did not matter'. While there was little difference throughout the three decades in the number of those preferring American films, there is a noticeable decrease over those years in the number preferring British films, as seen in the following table. A variety of factors will have contributed to this trend, not least that of a new generation of movie-goers who had no memory of the war and New Zealand's close ties with Great Britain throughout those years. As the century moved closer to the millennium, and, by extension, further away from the years of colonial heritage, New Zealanders' attachment to Great Britain was declining. Added to this was the greatly reduced number of British films being produced in this decade, from 85 in 1970 down to 40 in 1979.³³⁵

Preference	Those going most often in 1970s %	Those going most often in 1960s %	Those going most often in 1950s %
British	24	35	36
American	5	1	4
Did not matter	71	64	60

Table 3.23: British or American Preference.

In line with this changing affiliation, the playing of 'God Save the Queen' was dropped from theatres in this decade. Amalgamated were the first to drop the tradition, no doubt aware that 'Standing up for the Queen in sandaled or even bare feet and then sitting down to the likes of *Woodstock* didn't make a lot of sense'.³³⁶ Amalgamated informed Kerridge-Odeon in 1971 that they planned to reduce the playing of the anthem to the first session of the day. This change was reported in the Hawke's Bay newspaper, along with the plans for the State theatres of Napier and Hastings. Kerridge-Odeon theatres would continue to play the anthem before every screening, with Brian Jamieson, Manager of the (Kerridge-Odeon) Odeon Theatre in Napier saying

We have received no directive from our head office about when to play 'God Save the Queen'. I don't think we will follow suit. I personally like to have the national anthem before each show. I think by doing away with it we would be losing something. After all it is tradition. We definitely do need to have some sort of anthem. It's part of the atmosphere of live theatre and cinema.³³⁷

³³⁵ Harper and Smith, *British Film Culture in the 1970s*, p. 209.

³³⁶ Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus*, pp. 98-99.

³³⁷ Newspaper clipping, *The Daily Telegraph*, December 1, 1970, no page number included, Box 174, File 701, KO Archives, MS 98/39, AWMM.

This emphasis on tradition is interesting, given the substantial changes the cinema industry had gone through, and still needed to go through, in order to rejuvenate itself. Perhaps cinema exhibitors had clung to the practice for as long as they did, precisely to retain some part of the tradition and showmanship that had attracted them to the cinema in the first place.

Sixteen survey respondents recalled 'the National Anthem'³³⁸ and the requirement to stand for the duration of its playing, with one remarking that her husband was Irish and refused to stand for the anthem which 'cut down my enjoyment'.³³⁹ Another recalled going to the movies in London and discovering the experience was not as enjoyable as it was in New Zealand, as patrons 'talked and smoked and there was no standing for the national anthem – the sense of occasion was not there.'³⁴⁰

Conclusion

The decline of cinema audiences that had begun in the 1960s continued into the 1970s. Despite a small rallying in 1974-75 when yearly admissions rose slightly to 5.1 visits per head of population per year, by the beginning of the 1980s they had reached an all-time low of 3.8. As audiences discarded their frequent movie-going habit, the numbers of those going to the cinema on a weekly, or more frequent basis, decreased significantly in comparison to earlier decades, according to my survey respondents. Of those who were going to the movies most frequently in this decade, the largest group (29%) were attending less than once a month, a considerable change from the previous decade when the largest group (37%) were attending once a week. The number of theatres dropped from 210 in 1970-71 to 154 ten years later, and the trend toward smaller, more intimate theatres in the larger centres continued.

The continuing decline in the number of those going to the cinema can be attributed to a number of factors. Television increased its appeal when colour broadcasting and a second channel were implemented. The conversion to colour took place between October 1973 and May 1975, and the commissioning of a second channel, which began in 1975, also provided viewers with a greater range of viewing options. The total number of television

³³⁸ In November 1977, over 100 years since it was first performed, *God Defend New Zealand* was formally made the country's second national anthem, on equal standing as *God Save the Queen*, although it had been in use prior to this recognition. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/video/new-zealands-national-anthems>, retrieved December 18, 2016.

³³⁹ Kay, born 1936.

³⁴⁰ Rosalie, born 1941.

licences increased by 37% over the course of the decade, and by the decade's end almost 60% of households had a colour television set. Some survey respondents reported that it was not until this period that television had an impact on their cinema attendance, as prior to this, television's limited hours of transmission, poor picture quality, and restricted programming did not provide enough of an attraction to entice them from the movie theatre. Another factor having an impact on cinema audience numbers was the price of tickets, which rose considerably in this decade, which saw New Zealand enter into a period of economic depression. Where once the cinema provided a cheap place to 'escape into another world', this was no longer the case. Over 50% of those going to the movies most frequently in this decade and who had factors that prevented them from attending the cinema as often as they would have liked, said that financial reasons impacted negatively on their attendance. Further barriers to attendance, according to survey respondents, were lack of transport and/or the distance to a theatre, which was compounded by ongoing theatre closures, and the time, energy, and financial requirements in bringing up a family.

Of significance to this decade is the change in the type of film being produced. With the strict Hays Code no longer governing American movie production, films became increasingly 'adult' in their themes, with the Censor noting an increased 'exploitation of aberrant attitudes to sex' in films early in the decade.³⁴¹ Reduced film production from the United States and the United Kingdom led to more 'foreign' films coming into the country and audiences, particularly younger people, were increasingly interested in expanding their cinematic horizons, with the more sexually liberal European films attracting increasing interest from movie-goers. This in turn led to the rise of moral crusader Patricia Bartlett and her supporters who advocated for tighter control on film content. A counter agitation was raised against any censorship in the media, with both points of view being overruled by the government, which believed some form of censorship was necessary and that the current situation with the Censor operating under 'broad, flexible guidelines' was satisfactory. This resulted in an increasing percentage of films receiving restricted certificates, which in turn led to the continuation of a significant shortage of films suitable for children, who still constituted an important segment of the audience. In 1949-50 two-thirds of films seen by the Censor were given a General (G) Exhibition certificate, with only one percent receiving a Restricted (R) rating. By the beginning of the 1970s the number of 'G' certificate films had dropped by half, so that less than a quarter of films (24%) designated for mainstream viewing

³⁴¹ NZOYB, 1970, H 22, p. 30.

were classified as appropriate for young children and/or families.³⁴² By the end of the decade this had decreased further to 14%. The number of films given an 'R' rating, in turn, had increased to 45%.³⁴³

In the middle of the decade Hollywood production entered a new phase, emerging from its financial woes of the latter 1960s and early 1970s with *Jaws* (1975), which has been credited with heralding 'the New Hollywood' with its 'blockbuster' style of marketing and exhibition. The 'blockbuster' phenomenon reinforced a change in attendance as many people went from going to the cinema regularly to specifically selecting the film. Rather than 'going to the pictures' people were now 'going to a picture'. The biggest film of the decade was *Star Wars* (1977), both at the box-office, and as the most cited favourite film for those survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in this decade. Films from the *James Bond* franchise,³⁴⁴ *Jaws*, *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), and *Grease* (1978) were all particularly popular, although the perennial favourite, the 1960s *The Sound of Music* still drew good audiences as it continued screening throughout the country.

The preference for British films over those from the United States decreased slightly, according to survey respondents, with over 70% saying the origin of a film did not matter to them. The long-held tradition of standing for the playing of 'God Save the Queen' was dropped in the first half of the decade. With television now broadcasting the activities of the royal family, the cinema's role in sustaining this colonial link was greatly diminished.

The role of the cinema in providing entertainment, escapism, and a place for social and romantic interactions was as important for movie-goers as it had ever been. The greatest change for many movie-goers, however, was the further reduction in the number of occasions they sought out these attractions, with movie-going now frequently centred round the specific selection of an 'event' film for an occasional trip to the cinema, rather than the routine of going irrespective of what was being screened.

³⁴² *AJHR*, 1970, H. 22, p. 32.

³⁴³ *AJHR*, 1980, G. 7, p. 15.

³⁴⁴ This tally includes all mention of James Bond by survey respondents answering this question, as well as individual *James Bond* titles cited.

Conclusion

The decades covered by this study witnessed social, cultural, and economic transformation, both internationally and in New Zealand. For the movie industry it was a period of enormous change, with dramatically declining audiences the most visible of those changes and, for the industry, the most immediately concerning. The first aim of this thesis was to investigate the extent of change in the frequency of movie-going of New Zealanders over the decades of 1950, 1960, and 1970 and to explain any changes that occurred. The second aim was to determine what types of films were popular with local audiences, and to ascertain and account for any change in tastes that occurred.

Changes in Frequency of Movie-going, 1950 - 1980.

From the very earliest screenings, going to the cinema has been a particularly popular pastime in New Zealand, and this continued throughout the 1950s. Official attendance statistics show a high participation in this leisure activity, which is supported by data from my survey respondents. Yearly admissions at the beginning of the 1950s were 19.3 per head of population, with this decreasing only slightly (by 14%) to 16.6 by the decade's end. Almost 60% of survey respondents said they were attending the cinema at least once a week, with only six percent going less than once a month. Another indication of the healthy state of the industry was seen with the 600 theatres in operation in 1950, with this figure decreasing by less than 10% throughout the decade, to 547 in 1959, with most of those being itinerant exhibitors. The number of licences granted to permanent exhibitors in 1959 was almost identical to that in 1950.

While attendance was high throughout the 1950s, there were barriers to attending the pictures with the most significant of these being the cost of admission, according to my survey respondents. Ticket prices rose 66% over the course of the decade, while the average nominal wage increased by 56%. Having a young family, and the corresponding pressure on finances, time, and energy, coupled with the difficulty in finding babysitters, also prevented some movie-goers from attending as often as they would have liked. This is in keeping with the period's high marriage rate, with people marrying younger, and the 'cultural imperative' of parenthood, which saw families started almost immediately after marriage.¹ The resulting 'baby boom' and its associated domesticity ensured that family life was a major

¹ Graeme Dunstall, 'The Social Pattern', in W.H. Oliver (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z.: Oxford University Press, 1981, pp.397-429, p. 400.

focus for many people. Other factors that provided barriers to attendance for some movie-goers were lack of transport and/or the associated distance from a theatre, particularly for those in rural areas.

The beginning of the 1960s saw movie attendance continue at a high rate, with a slight increase in yearly admissions per head of population to 17 in 1960-61, with 545 theatres in operation. However, this increase was very temporary and by 1964-65 New Zealanders' movie-going had dropped dramatically to 10 admissions per head of population, a decrease of 57%. By the decade's end attendance per head of population had fallen by almost 70% to 5.2 and the number of theatres had dropped almost 60% to 227. The pattern of attendance from survey respondents reflected this decrease. Those who were going to the cinema most frequently in this decade were going less often than those who were attending most frequently in the previous decade, with the proportion going less than once a month more than doubling, from six to seventeen percent.

Evidence for the primary cause of this decline in movie attendance points emphatically to the arrival of television. My 'fine-grained' look into the spread of television reception throughout the country clearly indicates it was the primary factor in causing a reduction in audience numbers in New Zealand. Within two years of television's first transmission in Auckland in 1960, attendance per Aucklander per annum had decreased by 25% and within four years it had halved. Dunedin began television transmission in 1962 and two years later attendance per Dunedin resident per annum had decreased by 39%. After four years it had also halved. Television transmission began in Christchurch on June 1, 1961 and financial records for the city's Tivoli Theatre show its surplus decreased by almost 75% between 1961 and 1962 and by 1963 it was in deficit. The theatre closed in November 1963 and an exhibitor's license application by an independent operator was declined on the grounds of economic unviability. In the rural, topographically challenging coastal region of Western Taranaki, the itinerant exhibitor who screened films at the Okato hall had ceased operation within six weeks of the arrival of television's transmission to the area.

Evidence unearthed from exhibitors at a variety of locations, and correspondence from senior management of the largest cinema chain, Kerridge-Odeon, to their theatre managers, demonstrates that they too saw the direct link between movie-going decline and the arrival of television. A number of strategies were implemented in an attempt to offset what

evidence from overseas had indicated, namely that the impact of television on movie-going would be considerable. Such strategies, which became a regular part of many exhibitors' schedules in this decade, included regular Sunday screenings, midnight horror double- and triple- features, and late Friday and Saturday night screenings (usually at 10:30pm), particularly after events such as stock-car races. While Robert Kerridge continued to exude optimism about the future of the cinema industry, always the consummate businessman, he nonetheless expanded his business into alternate leisure activities such as the Waiheke Island hydrofoil (New Zealand's first hydrofoil), the Pakatoa Island resort in the Hauraki Gulf, and the 'spectacular' White Heron Lodge and Four Canoes Restaurant in Parnell. Such ventures acknowledged both the international trend of an increased focus on leisure time and activities, and the need for some prudent diversification strategies.

While the arrival of television had the biggest impact on audiences by a considerable margin, a number of other factors continued to provide barriers to attendance to movie-goers in the 1960s. The average ticket price more than doubled over the course of the decade, while the nominal weekly wage of employees went up by 39%, illustrating the higher real cost of a movie ticket. With a virtual duopoly, Kerridge-Odeon and Amalgamated appear to have reacted to falling revenue by raising ticket prices. According to my survey respondents, the focus on marriage and having a family continued throughout this decade, and a difficulty in getting to the cinema, particularly in rural and suburban areas where cinema closures were most common, continued as barriers for some.

The decline in audience numbers continued into the 1970s, so that by the beginning of the 1980s, attendance per head of population was at 3.8, down 27% from the beginning of the decade, and the number of theatres was only 154. Almost 30% of my survey respondents who were going to the movies most frequently in the 1970s were going less than once a month and 18% were going on a monthly basis, resulting in almost half going to the movies once a month or less. Compared to the almost 60% of survey respondents who were going to the movies at least once a week in the 1950s, only 26% were doing the same in the 1970s. The continual decline of movie audiences throughout the 1970s can be attributed to the expanding impact of television, as those who had put off getting a television, or who still appreciated the colour and (in cities) the choice provided by the cinema, found the arrival of colour television and a second channel greatly lessened the competitive attraction of going to the movies. By 1979, 94% of households had a television set, compared with 77% in 1969.

While the expansion of television services had an impact on movie attendance, other factors continued to contribute to barriers to attendance in the 1970s. The cost of a ticket continued to be a barrier for some, as although the disparity between movie ticket prices and the average nominal wage was no longer a factor in this decade, ticket prices rose more than wages for six of the nine years. Survey respondents' comments and letters to Robert Kerridge indicate cost was a particular issue for solo parents, those from large families, and the elderly.

Lack of transport and/or the distance from a movie theatre continued to have a negative impact on a number of movie-goers, according to my survey respondents. Despite car ownership increasing from one car for every 4.8 people in 1959 to one car for every 2.5 persons in 1979, and with New Zealand becoming increasingly urbanised with over 80% of people living in urban areas by 1976, lack of transport was a bigger barrier to attendance in the 1970s, according to survey respondents, than it had been for those going to the cinema most often in the 1950s and 1960s. While overseas research has argued that a higher rate of car ownership had a negative impact on movie attendance because increased mobility gave people access to leisure activities that were further afield, according to my survey respondents this was not so much the case in New Zealand. Instead, respondents recall limited leisure options outside of the home over these decades, with a good number of respondents indicating there was little else to do other than go to the pictures (dances were the exception, particularly in the 1950s, and these had always been a popular activity). Coupled with this was the impact of increasing numbers of theatre closures in suburbs, small towns and rural areas, resulting in many of those residents having increased difficulty in accessing the cinema. For rural and small-town residents, going 'into town' to see a film now required access to a vehicle that may not have been easy to come by, particularly for children and young people who had to rely on adults. Given these factors, access to a car was frequently mentioned as providing *the* means of going to the cinema, rather than providing access to an alternative leisure activity.

The extended trading hours of public bars which came into effect in October 1967 has been credited with assisting in the decline of New Zealand's cinema audience attendances, and two survey respondents mentioned its impact, with one saying it reduced their movie-going because they went to 'pubs 'n' clubs' instead. However, attendance statistics do not indicate any significant decline in movie-going post 1967, over and above the steady decline that was

already taking place. The 'night trots', introduced to New Zealand in 1958, are another leisure activity that has been linked to the decline of cinema-going, although no evidence of this is found in attendance statistics either. The decrease in attendance of three percent per person per year from 1956-7 to 1958-9 is in line with the reduction in attendance happening throughout the 1950s. Night trotting is not mentioned by survey respondents a reason for their declining attendance, although this is not to deny it was a popular leisure activity in the limited number of centres where it occurred.

While the arrival of television has been deemed too simplistic an explanation for the decline in cinema attendance overseas, a close analysis of the timing of television's implementation from 1960 and movie attendance in New Zealand, shows that it was the primary reason for the rapid decline in the number of people who went to the cinema. This decline continued into the 1970s with the arrival of colour and a second channel and resulted in the significant decrease in picture theatres throughout the 1970s, with suburban, small-town and rural theatres particularly hard hit. There were other factors that worked as a barrier to attendance, with the most significant of these, according to responses from survey participants, being the cost of admission, the impact of marriage and starting a family, and the distance to a theatre and/or the lack of transport.

What Was Popular and Why, 1950 - 1980.

Research into what types of films were popular in this period highlights the complex relationship between production, distribution, exhibition and audience taste. Given that almost all films screened were not specifically produced for New Zealand audiences, exhibitors to a large degree had to accept what was supplied from the United States and the United Kingdom. However, evidence from exhibitors indicated that, within this constraint, they went to considerable lengths to match their programmes with the specific tastes of their audiences, with variable tastes throughout the country evident.

Some general conclusions can be made, however, as to what types of films were particularly well liked by audiences across the country, and why. A film's genre was the most important factor taken into consideration for those who specifically selected a film, across the three decades, according to my survey respondents. Leo Handel had found the same result in his research carried out in the United States in the 1940s, suggesting that the 'type' of film was important to audiences across geographical boundaries. The number of survey respondents' who combined genre and star in their recollections of favourite films, with examples such as

'John Wayne westerns' and 'Elvis Presley musicals', supported Edward Buscombe's belief that the genre and 'star' of a film were mutually reinforcing.² Janet Thumim's research of Britain's postwar cinema industry also found that stars were often identified with particular genres.³

Comedies were very popular with audiences throughout these years and were well-loved by both genders. That genre was ranked as the top favourite for each of the decades, when respondents' top six favourite genres were collated. The attraction of having 'a good laugh' was considerable. There was a change in the type of comedy produced over this period, as light-hearted American films with stars such as Bob Hope, and the more slap-stick comedy of *Ma and Pa Kettle* and *Abbott and Costello*, gave way to the more adult-themed comedy of the British *Doctor* and *Carry On* series. Audiences appear to have accepted and enjoyed the change in style, although respondents who as children attended these movies with their parents or older siblings recalled they often did not understand what their fellow movie-goers were laughing at. Despite comedy being the most preferred genre for those going to the cinema most frequently in the 1970s, with the exception of notable British series, there appeared to be fewer comedies exhibited in this decade, compared with the previous two. This suggests a gap between audience preference and film production, a problem which exhibitors were well aware of. In the words of one, 'A good comedy gives a good boost to the Theatre.' One can be sure that exhibitor was referring to box-office takings.

Musicals were a consistently popular genre over these decades, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, and while they were enjoyed by male audiences, females were especially enamoured of the glamour, the lavish sets, the singing and dancing, and the 'stars'. The genre also underwent a change, moving from the 'song and dance' style of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), to rock'n'roll bands and singers such as Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, who captured the growing youth audience. Musical productions abounded in the 1960s, with the phenomenal success of *The Sound of Music* (1965) both in New Zealand and internationally, resulting in a flurry of big-budget musicals being produced in the second half of the decade, in the hope they would replicate that film's success. A number of these failed at the box-office internationally, and studios, unable to recoup their production costs and fearful of more losses, dropped the

²Edward Buscombe, 'Walsh and Warner Brothers', in P. Hardy (ed.), *Raoul Walsh*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival and British Film Institute, 1974, pp. 50-61, p. 59, cited in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

³ Janet Thumim, 'The 'popular', cash and culture in postwar British cinema industry', *Screen*, 32:3, Autumn 1991, pp. 245-271, p. 254.

production of musical-extravaganzas. Not all of these 'failed' musicals were unsuccessful in New Zealand, as seen with the three-and-a-half month season of *Hello, Dolly!* (1969) in Wellington. While *The Sound of Music* appealed to almost everyone, and survey respondents ranked it as not only the most popular film of the 1960s, but the most popular film over all three decades, the 'music film' of the 1970s with its documentary style footage of rock concerts, rock-opera, and disco films was popular with younger New Zealand audiences. These films scarcely rated a mention from survey respondents born in the 1940s and earlier, yet were among the favourite films for a number of those born since then, particularly *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and *Grease* (1978). Older cinema-goers who wanted musicals in the style of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire will have been sorely disappointed, as that style of musical had fallen from favour with producers who were increasingly intent on satisfying the needs of younger cinema-goers. The musical's popularity with New Zealand audiences is also seen in the six titles that feature in survey respondents top ten films over the three decades.⁴

War films were popular in the early 1950s but featured particularly strongly in exhibitors' record books and box-office ratings from the middle of that decade and through into the 1960s, with British productions in particular appealing to audiences. It appeared an appropriate passage of time had passed from the ending of the horrors and fears that wartime had brought, and safe in the knowledge of the Allied success, audiences were able to appreciate the 'story' behind the reality of war. Stories of Allied escape and heroic deeds were particular hits. Production of the genre declined from the 1960s, especially those from the British cinema industry which was in a state of considerable decline, due in part to the removal of Hollywood funding as Hollywood itself struggled financially. The genre had had a solid standing with New Zealand audiences, both male and female, in the 1950s and 1960s, but by the 1970s it had sunk to the least preferred genre for women. For men, however, it increased slightly in its ranking as a preferred genre, sitting at sixth equal for individual genre preference, and at third place, its highest over the three decades, when respondents' top six genres were collated. While a number of individual 'hits', such as *The Battle of Britain* (1969) and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), kept the genre alive with New Zealand audiences in the 1970s, its strong popularity with male audiences who were going to the movies most often in that decade suggests more war films would have been well received. This is a further example of the tension between overseas production and New Zealand audience taste and the

⁴ *The Sound of Music* is 1st, *Grease* is 3rd, *West Side Story* 8th, *My Fair Lady* 9th, *Saturday Night Fever* and *Mary Poppins* 10th equal.

extremely limited ability of local audiences and exhibitors to influence the content of films being produced elsewhere.

Other types of films to do particularly well in the 1950s and 1960s were historical epics, which made a huge impression on audiences and did very well at the box-office, particularly those of a biblical nature, as 'the Bible worked, as always'.⁵ New Zealand audiences flocked to *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben Hur* (1959), both of which were re-screened throughout the 1970s. *Ben Hur* was the fifth most popular film of the three decades, according to survey respondents, with its popularity evenly split between male and female movie-goers. However, the genre went the way of the Broadway-inspired musical, and the large budget over-runs and international box-office failures of *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962) and *Cleopatra* (1963) saw production of epics ease off. It was not cost alone, however, that saw the genre disappear, but the increasing focus of Hollywood on younger audiences and the need for more contemporary story lines than the epic provided. British director David Lean lamented the decline of the epic, and producers' focus on young people by saying, 'Really, if you were a biscuit manufacturer, you'd think there was something wrong with the head of your business if someone over 20 wouldn't eat your biscuit, wouldn't you?'⁶

Films featuring the royal family, whether newsreel, short documentary, or full-length feature, were especially popular with New Zealanders before the arrival of television. The Queen's coronation, *A Queen is Crowned* (1953), drew over 650,000 to theatres that year, almost double the size of the next biggest film for the Kerridge-Odeon chain. New Zealand and New Zealanders still had close 'colonial' links with Britain in these years, as seen with the requirement to stand while 'God Save the King/Queen' played before every screening, a practice which continued until the early 1970s. A number of survey respondents recalled this practice, with mixed emotions. One said that her husband was Irish and refused to stand, which lessened her enjoyment of a trip to the pictures. Those who were children at the time recalled that their cohorts who remained seated were always pulled upright by an adult. Others did not mind this particular ritual, as it added to the sense of occasion. The arrival of television, with Royal events now screened on that medium, negated the need for newsreels and films to show those activities at the cinema. As British film critic, author, and lecturer Roger Manvell had stated, 'television is on its strongest ground when it gives a well-observed

⁵ Penelope Houston, *The Contemporary Cinema*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963, p. 57.

⁶ Allen Barra, 'The Incredible Shrinking Epic', *American Film*, March 1989, 14:5, pp. 40-45, 60, p. 42.

telecast of an exciting public event'.⁷ As early as 1961 the New Zealand Broadcasting Service was declaring that New Zealand had been brought nearer to other countries as a result of television, with the televised Queen's Christmas message and other royal activities mentioned ahead of any other significant world events in support of this declaration. This indicated not only the central place Britain held in this country's sense of its own identity, but also the considerable interest many New Zealanders had in the royal family, a commonality they had with many of their British counterparts.

A film of a completely different nature, a 'one-off' exploitation film, *The Secrets of Life*, did extraordinary business in 1950. The feature film was noteworthy for a number of reasons, not least because of its use of sex as an 'educational' tool, along with the 'sex expert' Elliot Forbes who answered questions from the audience at interval, and nurses who were present at each screening, in case the graphic images were too much for audience members. Forbes was in fact an actor playing a role. The segregated audiences, demanded by the censor, were a rarity in New Zealand movie-going practice, and screenings for females (at 2pm and 6pm) outnumbered those for males (8:30pm). Matters of sex 'hygiene' and birth control were part of a woman's domestic role, after all. The film screened in the United States in 1945 as *Mom and Dad*, and had been seen by 20 million viewers by 1949. It was equally as popular in New Zealand, where it was the most attended film of the Kerridge-Odeon circuit in 1950. The film returned in 1965 with males and females allowed, this time, to share the same theatre, although they were segregated in the stalls and circle. The inclusion of footage of childbirth, a Caesarean operation and the impact of venereal disease led advertisers to stress the film's appropriateness for all young people, deeming it a necessity to see the film before one married. Despite its singularly noteworthy features and the rarity of such films screening in New Zealand, *The Secrets of Life* was not mentioned in any context, by any of my 600 survey respondents.

Exploitation films of a slightly different nature, horror, what Doherty called 'the most prolific and durable of all '50s exploitation cycles - the horror teenpic',⁸ developed strong niche audiences in New Zealand and overseas in this period, particularly from 1956 with the advent of British 'Hammer Horrors' and *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1956). Horror screenings were aimed particularly at younger people, with screenings often at the family-unfriendly hours

⁷ Roger Manvell, 'The Place of the Film in the Age of Television', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 103:4941 (December 24) 1954, pp. 75-88, p. 81.

⁸ Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilisation of American Movies in the 1950s*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988, p. 142.

of late night or midnight, and often featuring double- or triple-billing. While a number of survey respondents recalled with avid enthusiasm their attendance at horror screenings, the often colourful characters who attended them, and a degree of audience interaction that appears is a feature of the genre, the genre was not a popular one with survey respondents, who ranked it as their least or penultimate least favourite genre, across all three decades, irrespective of their gender.

The 1970s saw the Hollywood industry emerge from its troubled years of the end of the 1960s, when the problems of significantly reduced audiences and financial difficulties had coalesced, resulting in a period that has been described as both one of considerable economic instability⁹ and its 'truly golden age'.¹⁰ The 'golden age' is said to have come about because the economic difficulties led to a period of considerable innovation and creativity as the increasingly unsuccessful 'old' way of doing things, evidenced by a number of big-budget box-office flops, was replaced with the 'new'. This included the emergence of a number of up-and-coming young directors who, unbound by restrictive contracts with the major studios, were able to infuse films with their own creative vision. Some commentators have credited one of the films from that period, *The Godfather* (1972), directed by Francis Coppola, one of the new school of directors, with pulling Hollywood out of its slump and into a period that has been dubbed the 'New Hollywood'. *The Godfather* was deemed both a critical and commercial 'smash' hit overseas and it also did very well in New Zealand.

Part of the change in New Zealand audience's movie-attendance culture in the 1970s was the increasingly long seasons given to films, as the habitual 'going to the pictures', was replaced by 'going to a picture'. This trend had been forecast by Roger Manvell as early as 1953.¹¹ The change in attendance pattern in New Zealand followed that of overseas audiences: as one studio Head succinctly put it, 'We can't depend on habit any more. We have to make 'I've got to see that picture.'"¹² Movie-going shifted away from many people going to many movies to many people seeing a few movies. So, despite the 1970s being a decade of low movie attendance in New Zealand (the decade started with 4.6 movie attendances per person per year and ended at 3.8), it was notable for a number of 'hit' films that drew large crowds and had long seasons, with *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Grease* (1978) being the front-runners. These three films all featured in the top ten favourite films

⁹ Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 15-44, p. 21.

¹⁰ Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998, p. 16.

¹¹ Roger Manvell, 'A Head Start in Television', *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, 7:3, Spring, 1953, pp. 246-252, p. 252.

¹² The Shock of Freedom in Films, *Time*, 90:23, December 8, 1967, pp. 74-83, p.79.

of my survey respondents, over the three decades, at tenth equal, second, and third place respectively, suggesting that the 'smash hit' strategy used in the production and marketing of films from the 1970s, and the increasing focus on making films for younger audience members, had some resonance with cinema goers. The increasingly lengthy season for films at theatres is in stark contrast to the high turnover of films that exhibitors (and particularly projectionists) coped with in the 1950s. This trend is clearly evident in the exhibitors' record books of some of the larger, first-run theatres, such as the Wellington Embassy, where records show that in 1950 46 films were screened, with 53 and 52 screened in 1951 and 1952 respectively. Films had fewer screenings as they were frequently changed. Twenty years later, the Embassy screened 8 films in 1970, and 11 each in 1971 and 1972. Going to the movies had shifted from routine attendance to 'special event' attendance for many. This change was reflected in the increased importance of the socially-oriented 'word-of-mouth' and 'your friends were seeing it' as motivators for deciding which film to see, which had begun in the 1960s and was consolidated by those survey respondents who went to the movies most frequently in the 1970s. With films increasingly specifically selected, what one's friends and family thought about the film grew in importance, particularly if they were your movie companions.

An overseas trend that was not picked up by New Zealand audiences, much to the frustration of local film commentator Roger Horrocks,¹³ was the acknowledgement of the influence of film directors, with survey respondents placing 'Who the director was' as the least important of the nine factors that influenced their decision on what film they would see, across all three decades. With the exception of 'Alfred Hitchcock movies', which received 10 citations in answer to the 'Favourite films' question, the importance of who was directing a film was generally not acknowledged by mainstream New Zealand audiences during this period.

Despite Hollywood films dominating New Zealand screens throughout the three decades, only a very small percent of survey respondents said they preferred films from the United States (4% of those going to the movies most frequently in the 1950s, 1% for the 1960s and 5% for the 1970s cohorts). Films from the United Kingdom were preferred by 36% of those survey respondents who were going to the movie most frequently in the 1950s, although this had decreased to 24% by the 1970s. The overwhelming majority of survey respondents said it did not matter to them where the film was produced (60% for those going most

¹³ Roger Horrocks, 'Film as art, film as business', *New Zealand Listener*, May 24, 1971, pp. 14-15.

frequently in the 1950s, increasing to 71% for those going most frequently in the 1970s). There were indications however, that British films had a particular resonance with movie-goers, with war and comedy productions particularly popular with audiences. In the 1950s and 1960s any footage of the Royal family was sought out by audiences, with the historic crowning of the Queen in 1953 a significant highlight.

Increased Demarcation between Adult and Child/Family Films

A significant feature to emerge from a study of which films were popular in New Zealand over these three decades is the considerable increase in films from countries other than the United States and the United Kingdom. This trend was first noticed by the Department of Internal Affairs in 1955 when it noted that New Zealand cinema had taken on an 'international aspect' which was more pronounced at that time than at any time since silent movies, when language was no barrier. In 1950, 78% of films being watched by audiences in New Zealand came from the United States, while 18% came from the United Kingdom. Only four percent came from 'other' countries. Because of their non-mainstream nature, films from 'other' countries were generally regarded as 'art' films and were, in the main, films screened by film societies and festivals. Throughout the 1950s, the percentage of American films screening in New Zealand ranged from a high of 80% in 1951 to a low of 48% in 1957, while the percentage of films from the United Kingdom ranged from 24% in 1955 and 1957 to 15% in 1951. Films coming from other countries ranged from 4% in 1951 to a high of 28% in 1957 and 1958.

Throughout the 1960s, the percentage of films that came from the United States decreased significantly in comparison to the 1950s, sitting at between 39 and 48% over the course of the decade. Films from the United Kingdom (the category became known as the Commonwealth from 1961-2) were more consistent; between 21 and 23%, with the exception of 1967-8 when they dropped to 17%. There was a significant increase in the percentage of films from other countries - between 31 and 39 throughout the decade. Throughout the 1970s, films from the United States ranged between 28 and 43% of the total number of films into the country, while films from other countries were between 28 and 38% for the first half of the decade.¹⁴ Films from countries other than the United States and the United Kingdom were increasingly being screened in mainstream theatres, as evidenced by entries in exhibitors' record books and newspaper advertisements.

¹⁴ A change in the censor's recording of statistics from the middle of the decade, which included films from the United Kingdom with films from 'Other' countries, puts statistics from the latter half of the decade out of sync with those from the decade's first half.

Comments from survey respondents have indicated that a number of cinema-goers were keen to seek out these films that offered what Simon Sigley called 'significant alternative experiences'¹⁵ to mainstream films. Horrocks attributed the attraction of these films to both the aura of 'culture' that surrounded them, and the sex that appeared to be an intrinsic element of them.¹⁶ Both of Horrocks's perspectives were supported by comments from survey respondents, with some recalling that foreign films made them feel grown up and sophisticated, while others commented on their attraction to the sex, or the 'mature themes', as this aspect of the films was often referred to. David Lascelles has quipped of this period that censors 'couldn't sharpen their scissors quickly enough'.¹⁷ It was not just foreign films that included sexual material, as films produced in the United States and United Kingdom increasingly included adult content, resulting in New Zealand censors' increased use of both 'their scissors' and restricted ratings. One such film was *Ulysses* (1967), with its censor's requirement of audience separation according to gender, creating mirth overseas and ensuring the film received strong interest locally.

The censorship debate reached a peak in New Zealand in the early 1970s with the censor noting an increased 'exploitation of aberrant attitudes to sex' in films,¹⁸ and moral campaigner Patricia Bartlett in full voice, with many in support of her protest against what they deemed to be pornography in films. A counter agitation was raised against any censorship, with both points of view being overruled by the government which believed some form of censorship was necessary and that the current situation with the Censor operating under 'broad, flexible guidelines' was satisfactory. The outcome of this debate was that the significantly increased number of films coming into the country containing 'adult' material resulted in a correspondingly higher percentage of films being given restricted ratings. This, in turn, led to a not inconsequential decline in the number of films available for family and/or child audiences. In 1949-50 two-thirds of films seen by the Censor were given a General (G) Exhibition certificate, with only one percent receiving a Restricted (R) rating. Ten years later 52% of films were given a 'G' certificate and 11% of films an 'R' rating. By the beginning of the 1970s the number of General certificate films had dropped by half again, so that less than a quarter of films (24%) designated for mainstream viewing were classified as appropriate for young children and/or families, and by the end of the decade

¹⁵ Simon Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013, p. 177.

¹⁶ Roger Horrocks interviewed by Simon Sigley, March 2002, in Simon Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013, p. 199.

¹⁷ David Lascelles, interview May 19, 2014.

¹⁸ *NZOYB*, 1970, H 22, p. 30.

this had decreased further to 14%. The number of films given an 'R' rating, in turn, had increased to 45%.

This significant decrease in films suitable for children had a considerable effect on New Zealand exhibitors, who found themselves short of material for one of their most stalwart audiences. From the 1960s, this resulted in a constant tension between exhibitors and their management/distribution centres, as theatre managers struggled to overcome the paucity of children's material and to cope with the often contradictory messages from their senior managers. On the one hand, exhibitors were cautioned to take extreme care in providing films that were appropriate for children as senior management were ever mindful of complaints from parents and child advocates, yet exhibitors were also told that due to the shortage of children's film, it was necessary for them to screen 'Y' (most suitable for those 13 and over) and 'A' (most suitable for adults) certificate films, as those classifications were legally allowed to be screened to children. This dichotomy accounted for some of the recollections of survey respondents who went to these films with their older siblings or their parents and who recalled they were not quite sure what the film was about, or what the audience was laughing at. The films that made up the British comedy series *Carry On* (1958-1992)¹⁹ were an example of those that carried a 'mature' audience certificate and that were attended by children.

A commonly used strategy by exhibitors to overcome the shortage of childrens' material was to make solid use of westerns. This genre was a steadfast favourite of both exhibitors and audiences throughout the three decades of this study, as seen in both exhibitors' record books and with survey respondents' feedback. The western ranked particularly highly with males over the three decades, with it their most preferred genre in the 1950s and 1960s, and it also scored well when their top-six genres were collated, at second and third favourite respectively. While it dropped in preference in the 1970s, it was still a respectable fourth favourite individual genre and fifth across this cohorts' six favourite genres. While it was less popular with females, it was the fourth equal favourite genre for women going to the movies most often in the 1950s, and in the middle of the rankings for those going most often in the 1960s and 1970s. According to respondents, girls appeared quite happy to watch the westerns that dominated children's matinees, secure in the knowledge that these programmes provided a mixture of shorts, cartoons, serials and features, of which the

¹⁹ The series had, in effect, ended in 1978 with *Carry on Emmanuelle*, but a one-off film was made in 1992 (*Carry on Columbus*).

western was just one component. Despite production of the genre declining from the 1960s, its popularity ensured older films could be successfully re-run, particularly at matinees, childrens' school holidays, and as double features at 'action' houses, over the three decades of this study.

Another ploy used by exhibitors to overcome the shortage of childrens' material was to compile their own programme with the films they had available. This might mean holding on to an appropriate film from a previous screening, where this was possible, and using it for a matinee before sending it on to the next exhibitor. Another option was to screen a combination of the older material occasionally kept on site, with exhibitors happy in the knowledge that 'old-favourites' such as Shirley Temple, Charlie Chaplin, and Laurel and Hardy could be re-circulated almost indefinitely. Another 'type' of film that was also almost universally loved by children were Disney productions, with ten survey respondents using the phrase 'Disney films' in reply to the question that asked for their favourite films (individual titles and characters received their own nominations, for example *Cinderella* (1950) five and *Donald Duck* (various) two. *Mary Poppins* (1964) received 30 nominations and made it into the top ten films of all survey respondents over the three decades).

While children overseas could make up any shortfall in cinematic fare with the entertainment provided by television, New Zealand children had fewer options. Television transmission began in June 1960 for only two hours every Wednesday night, and while children were catered for with episodes of *Robin Hood*, *Lassie*, and *Fury* (the story of a boy and his horse), transmission did not begin until 7:30pm, when many young children will have been in bed. Saturday and Sunday television did not begin until 1961, but the start time of 6pm still left cinemas with the important role of providing entertainment for children at matinee times. As a survey respondent said, 'As a child going to the pictures was an afternoon activity, TV was for night time'. By 1965, weekend television was screening from 2pm but the programme, while suitable for children, was not specifically targeted toward them, with sports and old movies making up a good portion. Child favourites such as *Lassie* were screened at 6pm. In the 1970s, the sporting programmes *Grandstand* or *Sport on One* had pole position on Saturday afternoon, starting after the news at 2pm and going through till approximately 5pm, when something of more interest to children was usually screened. This still left children looking for entertainment at their traditional peak-viewing time, the Saturday matinee (either 11am or 2pm), so it is not surprising that a number of survey

respondents who were children in the 1960s said they still went to the movies because of the limited fare available to them on television.

Both the influx of 'foreign' films into New Zealand and the shortage of material for children's viewing assist in highlighting the key role that distribution and exhibition played in New Zealand's cinema-going in this period. Roger Horrocks has reminded us of the importance of distribution, stating that the focus of academic reception theory has instead tended to focus on the text, its production, and its reception.²⁰ The importance of exhibition needs to be added to Horrocks's reminder. While distribution played the key role in getting the film to the exhibitor, my research has highlighted the vital role of the exhibitor. Not only did they have the direct point-of-contact, via 'the big screen', with their audiences, but they were, in turn, the direct point-of-contact between the audience and the distributor. There was constant communication, and often tension, between exhibitors and their managers/distributors that clearly illustrated exhibitors did not just screen whatever was sent to them. Continuous negotiations took place over what was to be screened and when, as exhibitors worked tirelessly to secure the films that would best 'fit' their audiences' tastes, whether the audiences were children or adults. There most certainly was not a 'one-size-fits-all' doctrine when it came to exhibition in New Zealand, with different regions, and theatres within regions, often catering for quite a specific taste-preference. Apart from the specific needs for children's matinees, at Pahiataua and the West Coast for example, exhibitors reported that their audiences had a strong dislike for musicals, while in Whanganui the locals apparently did not like Marilyn Monroe or Peter Sellers. Furthermore, the efforts made by exhibitors in securing films that would best suit their clientele were not just made in times of low audience attendance, as records show considerable time and effort was put in to film selection, advertising, and marketing in the 1950s.

The Attractions of Cinema-going.

The attractions of a trip to the cinema were many, according to my survey respondents, and they reinforce the comments by both Roger Manvell and David Morley that there was more to cinema-going than seeing films.²¹ Over the course of the three decades, many of the pleasures received from a trip to the cinema remained constant although there was a subtle

²⁰ Roger Horrocks, 'Forward', in Simon Sigley, *Transnational Film Culture in New Zealand*, Bristol, U.K.: Intellect, 2013, pp. vii-xi, p. ix.

²¹ Roger Manvell quoted in Margaret O'Brien and Allen Eyles (eds.), *Enter the Dream-House: Memories of Cinemas in South London from the Twenties to the Sixties*, London: BFI, 1993, p. 13; David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 157.

shift in the motivation behind a trip to the cinema that developed from the latter half of the period, particularly in the 1970s. The routine of movie-going in the 1950s, regardless of what was screening, changed to the deliberate decision to see a specific film, placing more importance on the film itself.

Nevertheless, a constant attraction of a trip to the movies, over the course of the three decades, was for the entertainment it provided, and this was not provided by the film(s) alone. For many cinema-goers the whole experience was one of delight. For children, particularly through the 1950s and 1960s, it was a case of saving their pocket money, doing odd jobs, or asking Mum for the admission price (according to survey respondents Mum was almost always the keeper of the purse-strings), meeting up with friends or going with family members, buying the tickets and perhaps going to the candy bar. Choosing a seat in front of the curtains, the lighting, and the 'big screen', standing for the national anthem, and watching the shorts and laughing at the cartoons all provided much entertainment before the main feature had even started. Interval provided the opportunity to head out to the foyer, or perhaps the nearby dairy, to replenish one's supplies, before eagerly returning to the theatre for the entertainment of the main feature(s). For children, the entertainment did not finish with the end of the film, as walking home from the theatre, and the days following the screening, would be spent in playful recreation of the action and drama they had seen on screen. In this way, a trip to the cinema provided hours, if not days, of entertainment. New Zealand children were no different than the Rhodesian Copperbelt children of Charles Ambler's research or Richard Maltby's childhood in Scotland, where children dressed up in clothing and played with props reminiscent of the 'cowboys and Indians' of the iconographic American Western. Just as Maltby asserted that his play was not exclusively that of the American west, so too did New Zealand children mix elements of all their favourite film characters and scenarios: American cowboys on horseback, sword-wielding swashbuckling European heroes, and the athletic grace of Tarzan could all be utilised in the one play session.

For older audience members the enjoyment of the film could be supplemented with some 'romantic time' with their boy or girl friend, having an ice-cream at interval, and/or talking about the film with friends or spouse afterwards, perhaps at a 'coffee bar' or on the way home. Many survey respondents mentioned food or drink in their cinema-going recollections, either in the form of cinema confectionery such as the much-loved ice-cream

and jaffas, or in seeking out food after the cinema, indicating it was an important part of the pleasure of the cinematic experience. The importance of cinema confectionery was notable, particularly for those going to the movies most often in the 1970s, with one in four commenting on its attraction as either part of the 'treat' factor of their attendance, or that the attendance itself provided the 'excuse' for confectionery consumption. While the pleasures of the consumption of ice-cream and confectionery has been researched by Richard Farmer in wartime cinema-going in Britain, when its attractiveness increased due to the shortage of those items, it appears New Zealand audiences had a strong desire for cinema ice-creams and confectionery across the three decades of this research.

A significant attraction for movie-goers over the years of this study was the escapism the cinema provided. What was being escaped from included 'the hard times', 'a very ordered and predictable life', and 'time-out from a busy home life'. What was being escaped to was often described as 'another world', with some of those worlds consisting of 'a magic world of a mixture of make believe and reality', 'the false world of the movies', and 'a fantasy world'. Despite these years being ones of relative prosperity, the desire to 'escape' into an alternative world was very much a part of respondents' cultural memory. The escapism was provided not just by what was being screened, as the attractive curtaining, lighting, décor and design of many theatres assisted in providing an illusion of another world.

A very important aspect of movie-going, according to survey respondents, was the social interaction it provided. Only a small percentage (less than 10% over each of the three decades) of people attended the cinema alone, but even alone the theatre provided the proximity of others, so that one was part of a community of movie-goers. As one respondent said, 'I can remember occasions when it was somewhere nice to 'be alone', in the dark amidst others of course'. While going alone was acceptable practice, the majority of movie-goers went with friends or with their 'romantic partner'²² and this was consistent across the three decades. The cinema was particularly important as a site for romance at a time when socially acceptable places for young people to congregate were still limited, as were night-time leisure activities. Going to the pictures was accepted by society as a 'suitable' place to conduct one's romance, as even under the cover of darkness, there was little that could be done in a public space that was regularly patrolled by usherettes with their torches.

²² Boy or girl friend, or husband or wife.

Going to the cinema with members of the family was also a frequent occurrence, with a slightly higher propensity for this to happen in the 1950s (a quarter of respondents went most often with family members) than in the 1970s (17%), according to my survey respondents. The important part family played in movie-going was also found in Jacob Mayer's study of United Kingdom audiences and Tom Stempel's of American audiences, where both noted the relatively high incidence of family movie-going, including the many young children who recalled being introduced to the cinema by their parents or older siblings. The cinema was an important place for social interactions of all kinds, whether with friends, family, and for couples, and the memories of New Zealanders' social interactions as part of their cinema experience give credence to Morley's belief that, 'Rather than selling individual films, cinema is best understood as having sold a [...] certain type of socialised experience.'²³

An important role played by the cinema in the pre-television years was in providing information, with newsreels, royal events, and New Zealanders in the international sporting arena just some of the documentary-style films that were well attended. Even if the 'news' was already known, obtained from the radio or newspaper, these screenings provided important visual images to supplement that knowledge, and were enhanced by their being seen in a cinema with others, providing a shared sense of community. With the arrival of television, however, which brought coverage of these activities into the home every night, the need to go to the cinema for this information disappeared. Furthermore, cinematic production of this material phased out, as television became the primary medium for news.

Despite a number of the pleasures of cinema-going remaining constant over the three decades, there was a subtle shift in the purpose of movie-going. A trip to the cinema in the 1950s was a regular routine for many, with the attractions much more than just seeing the film(s). This was a period when many survey respondents said it did not matter what was screening, they went to the pictures anyway. This was true, to a degree, of the 1960s, although attendance was much less frequent, as the impacts of television, family life, increased ticket prices and theatre closures took their toll on cinema attendance, according to my survey respondents. By the 1970s, movie attendance was far from routine, with cinema-goers instead specifically choosing what film they would see, as evidenced by the duality of the occasional 'blockbuster' that attracted large crowds and resulted in extended

²³ David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 157-8.

seasons, and the low number of admissions per person per year. This change in pattern of attendance was supported by qualitative data and quantitative comments from my survey respondents.

An integral part of the changing pattern of cinema attendance and movie-goers' tastes over the course of these three decades, was the vital role of exhibitors as the 'voice' of their audience. Far from merely screening what was distributed to them, exhibitors played a key role in negotiating films that would specifically suit the regional and/or the theatre-specific preference of their audience. One film did not suit all. While New Zealand audiences did not have the ability to influence what was produced overseas, they could, to a degree, influence what was screened to them, given that 'Even in a one-cinema town, there is always the choice between entering and passing by.'²⁴ As New Zealanders responded to the arrival of television by leaving the cinema, exhibitors adapted their practices in an attempt to attract audiences back to theatres. The fact that audience attendance continued to decline throughout these three decades is no reflection on the efforts made by exhibitors, but instead is a result of movie-going being inextricably bound up with the social, cultural and financial environments it operated in. While the primary attractions of cinema-going, the 'escapism', the 'big screen' entertainment, and the opportunity for social engagement, were still important motivators to movie-goers, a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors were in force that ensured the once habitual 'going to the movies' instead became 'going to a movie'.

²⁴ Clara Pafort-Overduin, 'Watching Popular Films in the Netherlands, 1934-36', in Karina Aveyard and Albert Moran, (eds.), *Watching Films: New Perspectives on Movie-going, Exhibition and Reception*, Bristol: Intellect, 2013, pp. 331-349, p. 334.

Appendix One – Survey

(Including Information Sheet and Consent Form)



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

Investigation of the Movie-going Habits of New Zealanders During 1950-1980

Information Sheet

My name is Pauline Knuckey and I am a PhD student at Massey University in Palmerston North. I am researching the movie-going habits of New Zealanders during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and investigating what factors appear to have affected cinema attendance and choice of film during those decades. Specific areas being examined include the extent to which the frequency of movie-going changed and the factors that influenced attendance, the type of movies that were most popular, and any patterns that emerge regarding the degree to which one's social identity and social context shaped movie consumption.

A significant focus of my research will be engaging directly with those who attended the movies during this period. This engagement will be in the form of a questionnaire that asks participants a number of questions about their movie-going habits. The information obtained from this questionnaire will form part of my research. Because of the time period of the research, participants born after 1970 will not be included as it is very unlikely they will have movie-going memories of the period from 1950-1980. There is no limit to the number of participants, in fact the more the better.

I would very much like your participation in this project and I extend an invitation to you to take part in it.

Project Procedures

Participants can take part in this project by:

1. Filling out the questionnaire in either hard copy or online formats
2. Writing down their memories in letter or email format

The information participants share will only be used for the purposes of this research unless you have agreed to otherwise (see the Participant Consent Form). Any information participants share will remain anonymous, unless prior permission has been given (see the Participant Consent Form).

Your Rights as a Participant

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- provide information on the understanding that it will not be used for any other research except this one, unless you give permission to the researcher;

- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

You are invited to contact myself or my supervisors if you have any questions, comments or concerns about this research.

My contact details are:

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LOW RISK NOTIFICATION

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Compensation for Injury

If physical injury results from your participation in this study, you should visit a treatment provider to make a claim to ACC as soon as possible. ACC cover and entitlements are not automatic and your claim will be assessed by ACC in accordance with the Accident Compensation Act 2001. If your claim is accepted, ACC must inform you of your entitlements, and must help you access those entitlements. Entitlements may include, but not be limited to, treatment costs, travel costs for rehabilitation, loss of earnings, and/or lump sum for permanent impairment. Compensation for mental trauma may also be included, but only if this is incurred as a result of physical injury. If your ACC claim is not accepted you should immediately contact the researcher. The researcher will initiate processes to ensure you receive compensation equivalent to that to which you would have been entitled had ACC accepted your claim.

Thank you. Pauline Knuckey



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

Investigation of the Movie-going Habits of New Zealanders During 1950-1980

Participant Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I give approval to the information I submit being placed in an official archive for future use

I do not give approval to the information I submit being placed in an official archive

I wish to remain anonymous in this study

I give my consent for my first name/first and last names being used (Please delete what is not applicable).

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name - printed



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

Survey

Movie-going in New Zealand in the decades 1950-1980

Section A: Details about you

Name:

Address:

Email contact:

Phone contact:

1. Are you:
 Female
 Male
2. What year were you born?
3. How old were you when you left school?
4. What was your occupation(s) during the 1950-1980 period?
5. Would you describe yourself as:
 Asian
 Maori
 New Zealand European
 Pacific Island
 And/or New Zealander
 Other (please specify) _____

Section B: About your movie-going

6. How old you were when you first went to the movies? (an approximate age is fine if you can't remember exactly).
7. In the period 1950-1980, when did you go to the movies most frequently? (please give either the year(s) or your age).

8. At the time you went most frequently, did you go on average:
- Less than once a month
 - Once a month
 - Twice a month
 - Once a week
 - Twice or three times a week
 - Other (please specify how often)
9. At the time you went most frequently, did you usually go
- Alone
 - With a friend
 - With your boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/wife/partner
 - With a group
 - With a parent(s)/caregiver(s)
 - With a sibling
 - With your child(ren)
 - Other – please specify _____
10. Where were you living at the time you were going most frequently? (the city, town, area etc.)
11. Where did you go to the cinema when you were going most frequently? (place and/or name of cinema e.g. Palmerston North, Regent Theatre).
12. When you were going most frequently, what factors helped you decide what film to go to?

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Because of who was in the movie (the actors/actresses)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of who directed the movie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of the type of movie (its genre e.g. musical, war)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of the reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of 'word-of-mouth' (you were told it was good)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because it fitted the time you could go	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of the cinema the film was being shown at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because it was what your friends were going to see	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because it was what your parents allowed you to see	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please elaborate on any of the factors in Question 12 if you have more you want to say:

13. Were there other factors that influenced or impacted on your decision to go to the movies? If yes, what were they?

14. Were there factors that prevented you from going to the movies as often as you would have liked? If yes, what were they?

15. What types of movie did you most enjoy? Please rank your top 6.

- _____ Action/Adventure
- _____ Cartoon/Animation
- _____ Comedy
- _____ Crime
- _____ Documentary
- _____ Drama
- _____ Historical Epic
- _____ Horror
- _____ Musical
- _____ Romance
- _____ Science Fiction
- _____ Serials (for children)
- _____ War
- _____ Western

Other (please specify) _____

16. What were your favourite movies between 1950 and 1980? (that you saw at the picture theatre).

17. Did you ever see the same film, at a picture theatre, more than once?

Yes

No

18. If yes, which one(s) and why?

19. Did you prefer British or American movies, or did it not matter to you?
- American
 - British
 - Didn't matter
20. What did you particularly enjoy about going to the movies?
21. In the period you were going to the movies between 1950 and 1980, did your movie tastes change? If yes, please describe how?
22. Did your parents try to control what you were allowed to see as a child?
- Yes
 - No
23. If you answered yes to Q 22, did they succeed?
- Yes
 - No
24. How old were you, or what year was it, when you or your family first got television?
25. How did television affect your cinema going?
- It had no impact; I went to the movies the same as I had always done
 - I stopped going to the movies
 - I went less often
 - I went at a different time or on a different day
 - I changed the sort of movie I went to see (please explain what changed and why you made that change).

26. Did television affect the cinema-going habits of any of your friends or family members and if so, how?

27. Is there anything else about the period from 1950-1980 that you would like to mention?

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Your answers will provide invaluable data for my research project.

Pauline Knuckey

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Manuscripts

Auckland War Memorial Museum

MS 98/39 Kerridge-Odeon Archives

Box	File	Description
3	12	Head Office Memos 7/54-12/55
4	13	PN Regent Theatre 5/54-4/56
4	15	Head Office Memos 1/55-3/56
6	19	Special Files Cinemas A to F 3/50-12/54
6	20	Special Files Cinemas G to O 3/50-12/54
7	21	Special Files Cinemas P to T 3/50-12/54
7	22	Special Files Cinemas W 3/50-12/54
10	13	Head Office Memos 7/55-8/56
11	38	Circulars 8/54-12/56
14	47	PN Meteor and Mayfair 3/54-9/56
15	49	Wellington Embassy and Majestic 3/54-9/56
16	55	Head Office Memos 8/56-12/56
17	65	Head Office Memos 7/56-5/57
19	69	Circulars 4/56-8/57
24	88	PN Meteor, Mayfair and Regent 9/55-9/57
24	89	Letters to more than one theatre 2/55-9/57
25	93	Head Office Memos 10-56/10/59
25	94	J Arthur Rank Inwards and Outwards Correspondence
29	106	Circulars 12/57-7/58
30	109	Head Office Memos 1/54-7/58
30	111	Weekly Sales Analysis 3/57-9/58
33	122	Palmerston North Regent 10/56-9/58
35	128	Head Office Memos 10/57-9/58
38	136	Circulars 6/58-12/58
39	141	Auckland Theatres 7/54-12/58
46	162	Circulars 1/59-6/59
53	185	Auckland Theatres 10/54-6/59
55	191	Circulars 7/59-12/59
63	214	Head Office Memos 1/60-6/60
64	216	Circulars 1/60-6/60
68	230	Head Office Memos 1/60-8/60
80	297	Royal Tour Data 1/53-4/62
82	306	Head Office Memos 4/61-3/62
100	363	Head Office Memos 1/61-3/63
100	364	Memos and Letters 4/61-3/63, 'Television' folder
100	365	Children's Matinee File and Odd Memos 4/61-3/63
101	366	Circulars 9/56-3/63
114	414	Letters to more than one theatre 4/63-8/64
122	440	Circulars 10/62-12/64
123	441	Correspondence Sir Robert Kerridge, Townsend, Foster, Glover 1/64-12/64

123	443	ChCh Majestic 1/64-12/64
123	444	Misc. Theatres 2/64-12/64
123	445	Dunedin Regent 1/64-12/64
125	451	PN Mayfair, Meteor 1/64-12/64
125	452	PN Regent, Stratford Plaza 1/64-12/64
126	455	Wellington Majestic Inwards 1/64-12/64
126	456	Wellington Majestic Outwards 1/64-12/64
126	457	Wellington, Westport 7/64-12/64
127	459	Correspondence, senior management 4/63-12/64
127	460	Correspondence, senior management 2/63-12/64
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