

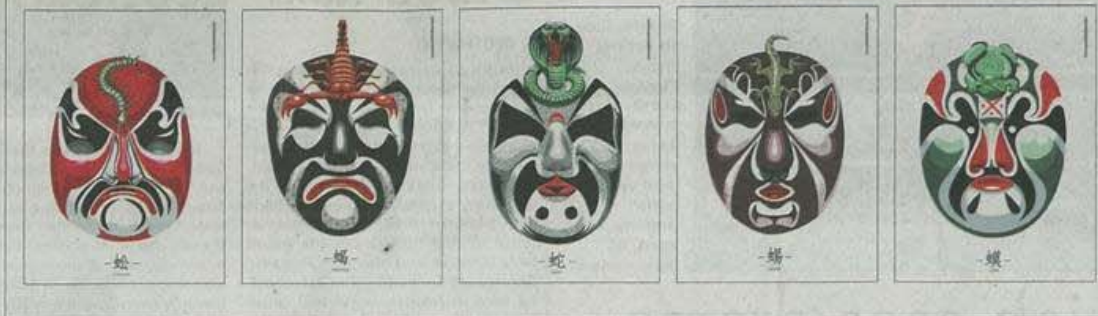
**The great outdoors:** Last year's Films at the Fort (left and above) was a sell-out. The event will be expanded to 10 days this year to feature a wider variety of films.

**'With all the cineplexes offering more or less the same Hollywood blockbusters, we believe that smaller film societies ... can fill the gap to provide more film choices.'**

*- SCUM Cinema's Herman Ho*

## Getting a flick fix

Discerning local cinephiles are getting their fill from alternative film events, reports  
**DYLAN TAN**



**Movie memorabilia:** (Clockwise from above) To defray costs, SCUM sells original limited edition prints and merchandise such as masks for last December's screening of gongfu films; posters for 'The Warriors' next week; SCUM has found a new home at The Arts House where it plans to hold bi-monthly screenings

It's no secret that Singaporeans love going to the movies. On any given weekend, the multiplexes sell out sessions hours ahead in advance, and an increasing number of cinema operators not only run midnight screenings on weekdays but even go to the extent of operating 24 hours on weekends to cope with the demand.

Cinephiles who want to go beyond mainstream releases are also getting their fix outside the multiplex with various independent outfits: organising their own film events. These range from regular screenings at smaller venues in museums to larger outdoor festivals.

Fort Canning, which has hosted numerous "live" concerts, was transformed into an open air cinema last year for Films at the Fort. All 6,000 tickets for the four-day event were completely sold out, and it will be expanded to 10 days this year to feature a wider variety of films.

**Perfect weather**

Ben Williams of Groundswell Events, the Films at the Fort organiser, says that the concept of open-air cinemas is popular in Europe, North America and Australia. In major cities such as Paris, New York and Sydney, it often heralds the arrival of summer.

Barring rain, our tropical climate makes it suitable for holding such events all year round. "Singapore has pleasant balmy evenings that are perfect for the outdoor cinema experience," says Mr Williams. "(Open air cinemas) are a great place to relax with friends, watch a film under the stars and enjoy being in the outdoors."

Movie fans do not even need to wait till August for the next Films at the Fort because a new outdoor film event will be held at the same venue next month.

Billing itself as Singapore's first on-screen music festival, Encore will feature three nights of screenings plus themed after-parties with a "live" DJ that will kick off after the final credits roll.

"This is a new brand of movie festival for Singapore's entertainment scene," says Adela Teo of Sirens Network, the organisers of Encore. The 17-year-old company is a specialist in open-air cinema events, and incidentally handled the audio-visual equipment for Films at the Fort. It prides itself on challenging the conventional movie-going experience, and so far has organised screenings everywhere from beaches to rooftops.

**Different movie-going experience**

Festivals like Encore and Films at the Fort's aim is to provide movie-goers with a totally different experience from what they get at a multiplex. For instance, both offer gourmet food and drinks which one will not find at a typical cinema concession stand.

The beverage selection at Films at the Fort last year included Australian and New Zea-

land wines, French champagnes, boutique beers and ciders; while food came from Delicacies Hospitality Management, the owner of restaurants such as L'Entrecote and Sabio. This year, festival goers can pre-order picnic hampers if they want to skip the F&B queue. Encore has roped in a sponsor, Kronenbourg 1664, to run a full bar and will offer free-flow popcorn alongside a selection of other food and beverages.

Like the after-party segment that Encore has added on, Films at the Fort also went beyond just screening the main feature every night – it added one short film by an emerging Singaporean filmmaker every evening in a show of support for the local arts scene. "A short film about *karung guni* was a real hit with the audience," remarks Mr Williams.

**Souping up the classics**

While the line-up for these festivals usually feature titles that have already been cinematically released and are available to rent or buy on DVDs, Ms Teo feels confident of drawing a

crowd because the three movies that Encore is running – The Beatles' 1964 black-and-white comedy *A Hard Day's Night*; John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John's 1978 high school musical *Grease*; and the 2008 big-screen adaptation of the ABBA juke-box West End hit *Mamma Mia!* – are "timeless classics".

"Even if you have seen them on your TV or cinema, the outdoor big screen is still a very much more organic and interactive experience compared to the solitary nature of watching a movie in a cinema," she says. "Movies like *A Hard Day's Night* and *Grease* really have to be seen on the largest screen and in immersive surround-sound to really feel their impact."

Not only that, Ms Teo adds that the older titles have been souped up from their original 35mm prints and mono sound to the latest 4k resolution and 5.1 digital sound. "The experience of watching these classics on the big screen should be as good, if not better than when they were on screens the first time round," she notes.



Films at the Fort's Mr Williams adds that when the Tom Cruise fighter-pilot classic *Top Gun* was screened last year, the audio set-up made it feel like planes were flying over the audience's heads.

**Driven by passion**

While Encore and Films at the Fort are ticketed events, SCUM (Society for Cult & Underground Movies) is a local collective of three



working professionals who share their passion for alternative cinema by running free screenings of anything from old school gongfu flicks to blaxploitation, anime and long-lost creature features.

Formed in early 2007, it started as a one-man operation before manpower constraints took its toll and SCUM Cinema was suspended indefinitely, according to Herman Ho, who runs his own creative agency and is one-third of the collective.

But driven by their love of movies, SCUM decided to make a comeback last year with a new blog and a double bill of Shaw Brothers gongfu films held at its new home at The Arts House.

"Moving forward, we are aiming to hold a screening bi-monthly," says Mr Ho. "Our goal is to have a SCUM Film Festival in the near future which we can tour around the region, and who knows, maybe even around the world... We are also hoping to work directly with more film distributors and directors to expand our repertoire of films."

As a fully independent outfit, SCUM still faces many challenges: On top of dedicating time and effort to maintaining the website, its Facebook page and organising screenings, the trio also have their own careers to juggle.

In addition, operational and licensing costs come directly out of their own pockets. To defray that, original limited edition prints and merchandise – produced specifically for each screening – are on sale at the venue.

Mr Ho adds that "sheer passion" is what drives SCUM on, and the memory of Singaporeans filling out venues where alternative titles were being screened at the Singapore International Film Festival during the 90s remains an inspiration for them to pursue this cause.

"Honestly, we hope to keep this going for as long as possible, and we strongly feel there is a market out there for such films," he says. "With all the cineplexes offering more or less the same Hollywood blockbusters, we believe that smaller film societies like SCUM Cinema can fill the gap to provide more film choices (for local cinema-goers)."

Or as Encore's Ms Teo simply sums it up: "We're just movie lovers who want to watch our favourite movies on the big screens the way we watched it when we were kids!"

By DYLAN TAN

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**Coming attractions**

**SCUM CINEMA PRESENTS THE WARRIORS**

**When:** Feb 28, 8.30pm  
**Where:** The Arts House Screening Room (Singapore)  
**Tickets:** Free; e-mail [scumcinema@gmail.com](mailto:scumcinema@gmail.com) with full name and number of seats (maximum four per e-mail)

Walter Hill's *48 Hours*, *Streets of Fire*, *Red Heat* gangland classic was panned by critics for its violence when it was first released in 1979 but has gone on to achieve cult status over the decades.

Interest in the film was revived again in 2005 when the makers of *Grand Theft Auto* adapted the film into a video game that also doubled as a prequel.

Not only that, some of the film's original cast returned to voice their own characters. (For more info and future screenings, check [www.scumcinema.com/events](http://www.scumcinema.com/events)).

**ENCORE**

**When:** March 28-30, from 5pm till late  
**Where:** Fort Canning Green  
**Tickets:** \$25 (excluding booking fee) from [www.encoreatfortcanning.com](http://www.encoreatfortcanning.com)

Catch the sunset as gates open every evening from 5pm with a music session.

The main features (*Mamma Mia! The Movie* the first evening, followed by *A Hard Day's Night* on the second and *Grease* on the final night) screen at 7.45pm when it gets dark. DJ Deepak from



Ku De Ta takes over the decks after the films end and spins tunes till late.

**FILMS AT THE FORT**

**When:** Aug 1-10  
**Where:** Fort Canning  
**Tickets and info:** To be announced on Films at the Fort's Facebook page (<http://goo.gl/gS53z8>)

The organisers of Films at the Fort are asking for suggestions and comments on their Facebook page to make this year's event better. Food queues will be shortened with picnic hampers available for pre-order and pick-up at the venue. The inflatable cushions which only a lucky few received last year will be given to everybody this year. But one thing's almost certain: Expect a line-up that will feature a selection of award-winning new releases as well as classic films.