

Art house cinemas for Theatre Royal?



by John O'Shaughnessy

THERE is a strong possibility that Limerick could have, in the near future, two art house cinemas located at the former Royal Cinema in Upper Cecil Street.

The City of Limerick VEC are to appoint suitably appointed professionals to carry out a feasibility study for the conversion of the Theatre Royal Cinema into a media centre, comprising two cinemas, workshops, cafe and ancillary works.

The former art house cinema, at the once Grand Central in Bedford Row, and also at the Belltable, run by Declan McLoughlin, ceased to operate some years ago and shortly afterwards, the building was demolished.

With Limerick being a university city there is a consensus of opinion that it should have at least one theatre to cater for a niche market, limited as it might be, denied non-mainstream product.

Over the years, independent films screened successfully at film festivals worldwide, failed to make it to Limerick, mainly because the operators of the Omniplex and Storm deemed them not to be financially and commercially viable. Recently, the Kino Cinema in Cork's Washington Street, and which mainly screened subtitled films, closed its doors.

Experience has shown that local audiences tend to shy away from subtitled and independently made films.

However, a number of UK and American movies with

limited audience appeal, bypassed Limerick on their initial release over the last few months.

Some surfaced later at the Omniplex - A Single Man, starring Colin Firth, and Precious, for example- but received scant support. It must also be pointed out that there are instances where distributors release only a small number of prints into Ireland, concentrating mainly on Dublin. Perhaps, Limerick's answer is a dedicated film club, where weekly screenings could whet the appetite. Limerick's Theatre Royal, now owned by the VEC, is steeped in history.

It was transformed into a concert venue over two decades ago but has now been lying vacant for some time.



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