

The PENNY MATINEE

1938 - Entertainment for the masses was provided by local cinemas. Here, the public could leave their worries of everyday life behind, and enjoy a few hours in the magic land of Tinseltown.

City centre cinemas were usually quite elaborate in decor and lighting, with plush tip up seats, on carpeted flooring, whereas local district cinemas were less palatial, a bit downmarket, but whilst admission prices were lower than city centre cinemas, one still had to pay a part of hard earned money to gain admission.

However, there was one cinema where one could gain admission at very modest entry fees. This was the "Scotia", located at the top of Millerston St, near Duke St., and close to the corner where Boia's cafe once stood. Boia's was well known in the area, and was handy for buying sweets before going in to the "pictures", and then, after the show, going back for an ice-cream or a plate of hot peas and vinegar - provided you had the money.

The Scotia usually opened its doors at 5.30pm and films ran continuous until 10.30pm or thereabouts. Inside, the auditorium was rather spartan, the big screen was not covered by nice fancy curtains like some other cinemas had, nor did it have fancy coloured lighting, just plain ordinary house lights. The seating in the area nearest the screen were just wooden benches, screwed down on to a plain wooden floor - no carpets - not

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anywhere in the cinema. This area was known as the "Pit". Halfway up the cinema, a wood barrier, with gates at the aisles separated the "Pit" from the "Back Stalls". Here were individual "tip up" seats, covered in moquette, providing a higher standard of seating, but still on a wooden floor which sloped towards the front of the cinema.

Entrance here was a wee bit more ~~cash~~. Even more expensive were the seats in the balcony - best in the house, and reserved for adults, we said, "where the toffs sat!" If my memory serves me correctly, the prices of admission were as follows:-

The 'Pit' - Children 2^d, adults were not asked to sit on wooden benches.

'Back Stalls' Adults 6^d, Children 4^d - if in the company of an adult.

'Balcony' - Adults 9^d, Children 6^d, again if in the company of an adult.

Unaccompanied children were not allowed upstairs.

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The Scotia also ran a matinee for children on Saturday afternoons, admission to this show was 'ONE PENNY.'

On this day, a notice was hung up at the pay box to the effect that "This was a childrens matinee, adults are advised to STAY AWAY. However, if they insisted, they would be admitted at normal prices, but the management would not listen to any complaints afterwards. Very few adults came - with good reason.

Its Saturday afternoon. No matter what picture was showing, hundreds of kids from all around the district would converge on the Scotia between 1⁰⁰pm and 1³⁰pm, hoping to get in on time for an advertised 2⁰⁰pm start. A great queue formed outside, it was bedlam as they waited to get in. Arguments and fights broke out for little or no reason, if someone left the queue for sweets or maybe a "pee" - they would

have serious trouble trying to claim their place back. The queue was a complete shambles and ever so slow moving, and as we neared the entrance we could see why. On the pavement outside the doors, two members of the staff - regarded by us as old fuddy-duddies - (probably in their 30^s) were doing their best, trying to bring some semblance of order as they entered the cinema. The kids would be pulling their clothes, calling them names, trying to trip them up, trying to jump the queue and shouting, "I'm before him mister" - the answer was always "Shut up, get in line, have your money ready" - it was mayhem. It must have been hell for those people. (A thought - if 400 children turned up on a Saturday, each paying ONE PENNY, with 240 pennies to the pound then, the total takings for the afternoon show would be less than £2. - makes you think)

Across the street, opposite the entrance, a man stood with a barrow, loaded with whelks, which he sold for a penny a bag, including a pin to extract the edible part, whilst the shell could become ammunition. Then - panic, someone calls out "The hall's full - nae mair gettin in", this causes a surge towards the door, but the stewards call "Calm down - plenty of room inside" and order was restored.

At last, our turn to gain entry, we hand over our pennies and enter the auditorium. We are shepherded to our seats by guys who are bf., with flat topped peak hats (their badge of authority - no pretty girl usherettes) and told to "sit and be quiet". Be quiet, - its bedlam inside, kids were standing on the benches, shouting to pals on the other side of the hall, some were running back

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forth across the front, some were wrestling with their mates. When the benches were full, an attendant would come up behind us, pushed us closer together, saying "move up, move up, make room for more". This usually ended up with the one at the end of the bench, falling off, and having to run round to the other end to get back on again. So it went on, when the benches were full up, the overflow was allowed into the back stalls, to sit on the better seats, and gradually, the place filled up.

When the bulk of the queue was seated, the lights dimmed and the whole audience cheered like mad. Then the face of Mickey Mouse lit up the screen to another almighty cheer, and for the next seven or eight minutes, peace reigned as Mickey and his dog Pluto, had fun with Donald Duck. Some appreciative applause rippled around as the cartoon ends. Another great cheer erupts as the 3 Stooges

come on to the tune of Three Blind Mice, and for 20 mins, laughter and cheers resulted as Larry, Mo and Curly, held interest. The stewards appeared again - "move up - move up" this to make room for latecomers, and the person at the end falls off, and had to run round to start again.

The 'stoges' frolic ends with great cheering and applause, and next on was the big picture, a western. The opening scene shows a man sitting astride a horse, overseeing a large herd of cattle, peacefully grazing on a plain. From the rear, a voice calls out "moo-oo-oo" and in a second, the whole audience is moo-oo-ing. "Quiet, quiet" shout the stewards, as a handful of whelk shells clatter off the stewards flat hats. "Who did that" - no answer.

The picture continues, not much action, but a fair bit of dialogue. Kids have no interest in all this talk and become

restless. One group decide to see who can blow the biggest bubble with their bubble-gum, some race each other round the aisles. A wee boy says "I cannae see," his sister tells him to sit up on the back of the bench, and a chorus from behind shout for him to sit down, with uncomplimentary remarks.

The film is warming up again, and there is a scene where the hero is holding a "baddie" at gunpoint, and as if rehearsed, the audience starts to shout "Shoot, shoot, shoot" and at the same time, stamping their feet on the wooden floor. The actors mouths are moving, but you cannot hear a single word being said. Again, the stewards call for silence, a handful of whelk shells, land on a few heads, thrown from the rear.

A couple of young boys go to the toilet, when they get there they find a group of bigger boys passing around a cigarette each having a puff in turn, (In those days, it was

possible to go into the corner shops and buy a "fag and a match" for a halfpenny) then the big boys refuse to let the wee boys out of the toilet, unless they pay over a half-penny.

The wee boys start crying and screaming and this brings an attendant. He soon realises what's going on and calls for assistance.

They then take the smokers by the scruff of their necks, march them up the centre aisle, and to the sound of mixed cheers and boos they are thrown out, onto the street.

On the screen, a saloon bar brawl breaks out, the cheers are loudest when a cowboy crashes through an upstairs bannister, and lands on a table smashing it to smithereens. Another poor cowboy crashes through a plate glass window to howls of great delight. When the brawl ends, half a dozen simulated fights

break out in various parts of the hall, boys acting out what they have just seen on the screen. The stewards are going crazy trying to restore order, a half eaten orange lands smack on the back of ones head.

The film has quieted down again to a lot of talk and no action, the audience are hissing, some booing, some talking among themselves, and again, the sound track is drowned out. Some of the smaller children need a "pee". Their charges don't want to take them to the toilet, so they tell them, "Just bend down and ~~doe~~ it on the floor!" With plain wood on a sloping floor small rivulets of urine are now running down to the front of the auditorium, where they are clearly noticeable by the reflection of light from the screen.

Somebody lets off a stink bomb, all around are holding their noses and

cries of OOH'S and AAH'S bring the "hats" again. The culprit is pointed out, and amid a chorus of cheers, he makes the long walk to the street. Meanwhile, the picture is moving on now towards its climax.

There is a bit of action, and for once, the audience is reasonably quiet. A wagon train has formed into a circle, and is being surrounded by whooping Indians on horseback. They are shooting and firing arrows into the wagon train, a cheer erupts every time an Indian bites the dust, as the settlers return fire. It is made clear, within the wagon train that their position is not good. They have taken casualties, ammunition is running low, and the Indians are taking the upper hand. Then - in the distance, the faintest sound of a trumpet.

Wait! there it is again, a little louder, a trumpet sounding the 'Charge' A roar which would do justice to a Scotland goal at Hampden almost lifts the roof, as the good old U.S. cavalry come charging up the valley. The Indians high tail it, to come back another day, and the wagon train is saved. The hero, with an arrow sticking in his left arm hugs the heroine, then passes out.

The final scene, the hero, his arm in a sling, kisses the heroine, as the sun sets to the chorus of AW^S and AH^S, and another great cheer as 'THE END' appears on the screen. Immediately, a picture of the King appears on the screen, and the "hats" shout out "STAND." - as they strategically place themselves around as the National Anthem booms out. The house lights come on during the anthem, and when it ends, a record of a military

band playing Sousa's ¹⁴ Washington Post march
plays, and the "hats" shout 'MARCH', and
hundreds of feet pound the wooden floor
in unison with the music, as they make their
way to the exits. I'm certain this was done
deliberately.

And so - the show is over, for this
week, and I'm sure the building itself would
heave one great sigh of relief. Outside, on
the street, hundreds of kids, all talking
and shouting about the picture, then slapping
their own backsides, shooting with their
fingers would "ride" all the way home -
until next week, when the whole lot
would be played all over again.

IT'S ALL TRUE.

I know, because I was there.

Thomas Sheeran