

“The Difference the Big Screen Makes:  
The Dedication of the IU Cinema”

IU Cinema Dedication Ceremony

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

IU Cinema

Bloomington, Indiana

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4:00 p.m.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Our honored guest and newest alumni Peter Bogdanovich once said, “If you don’t see a film on a big screen, you haven’t really seen it. You’ve seen a version of it, but you haven’t seen it. That’s my feeling, but I’m old fashioned.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, as we celebrate the dedication of this magnificent new cinema, all of us might be described as a bit old fashioned because we can all recognize the difference the big screen makes.

## 2. THE POWER OF CINEMA

The very best cinema creates community. It brings people together from varied backgrounds to explore other worlds, to visit other times, and to suspend their own lives for that moment in the theatre. It is not isolated to the living room or the desktop, not

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<sup>1</sup> “Indie Saviours?: An Entrepreneur and a Film Director Team Up To Showcase Art-House Films On TV.” CanWest News Service. 10 July 2008. <[http://www.canada.com/story\\_print.html?id=486b7bef-4b64-435a-a752-5249ac2c860a&sponsor=>](http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=486b7bef-4b64-435a-a752-5249ac2c860a&sponsor=>)

conveyed by television or computer, not controlled by a button on the remote or the click of a mouse.

Masters like Ford, Kurosawa, and Bergman saw their distant horizons, their minimalist landscapes, their shaded faces, and ticking clocks stretched out on the big screen. They heard the simultaneous laughter and gasps of hundreds of people in the audience, all reacting to the same moment on film. To share that moment allows us to share the essence of our humanity: our passions and our fears; our greatest happiness and deepest sorrow.

This quintessential art form of the 20<sup>th</sup> century forges bonds between people and creates a shared cultural history that somehow transcends culture. This is the power that the cinema harnesses every time the lights dim and the curtain rises.

### 3. IU CINEMA: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BUILDING

With the dedication of the new IU Cinema, Indiana University is now home to that power.

The magnificent space that surrounds us was originally dedicated in 1941 and, for sixty-one years, was home to the University Theatre. With classic art deco features, the theatre embodies IU's longstanding commitment to the arts, combining great traditions of performance and visual art. In addition to its decades as a theatre, it is home to four panels of Thomas Hart Benton's Indiana murals, originally created for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Provost Hanson will say more about those murals in just a moment.

But in 2002, the theatre went dark.

Eventually, campus leaders began exploring how best to repurpose this space. Inspired by this university's outstanding tradition in film scholarship and our outstanding faculty,

past and present, I announced in my inaugural address the conversion of the University Theatre into a state-of-the-art cinema at the very heart of this campus.

This extraordinary resource has come, incandescently, to life once again, and the works of cinematic luminaries now quicken this beautiful space.

#### 4. AUDIENCE RESPONSE

Audiences from the campus and the surrounding community are now able to see the masterpieces of cinema as they were meant to be seen.

Over two thousand people have already been to film screenings and lectures here since the public opening of the cinema on January 13. At least seven screenings in the first two weeks of showings have sold out, including every one of David Lean's films. I say "sold out," but the vast majority of the film screenings here are free and open to the public.

I attended the screening of *Dr. Zhivago* earlier this week, and the audience was incredibly enthusiastic from the THX trailer before the movie—after which they cheered—to the final scene of Lara's painful departure and Zhivago's tragic death—after which they applauded in testimony to a great work of art.

I have probably seen thousands of movies in theatres over the course of my life, and after only a handful have people applauded.

After every movie I have attended at the IU Cinema, the audience has applauded.

Nearly 11,000 tickets have been issued for spring film screenings, and I am confident that number will increase dramatically as the semester progresses.

## 5. EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY AND BUILDING COLLABORATION

But, of course, this is not just a space for watching movies.

This space is creating other opportunities for film scholars and students of film.

The Jorgensen Guest Filmmaker Lecture series has already included two-time Academy Award-winning production designer Terence Marsh, who shared his stories of working with David Lean on *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Dr. Zhivago*.

It has included musician and accompanist Dennis James discussing his career in a WFIU NPR radio interview, conducted on the stage of the IU Cinema.

It has included a visit from Dan Ford, John Ford's grandson, and the screening of never-before presented John Ford home movies, with voiceover narration and background stories. That presentation preceded Peter Bogdanovich's documentary *Directed by John Ford* last week.

Jane and Jay, we are indebted to you and your family for your vision and commitment to bringing cinematic masters to campus to share their expertise.

Would you all once again help me thank the Jorgensens?

And this is only the beginning.

This facility is already taking academic collaboration in new directions. For instance, this spring, it will present silent film screenings accompanied by live orchestral music performed by IU Jacobs School musicians, beginning with Fritz Lang's 1927 legendary classic *Metropolis*.

That screening actually sold out earlier this week.

## 6. SPECIAL THANKS

From the beginning, the IU Cinema has been about more than film.

It has been about people from across the campus, across the state, and around the world coming together to bring this vision to reality.

As I mentioned earlier, the inspiration for this project has, in part, been Indiana University's outstanding film faculty, who come from across the university. In fact, part of my passion for this project grew out of Peter Bondanella's 2006 Distinguished Research Lecture on Federico Fellini.

As I mentioned earlier, Greg Waller and Barb Klinger deserve our special praise for helping lead the IU Cinema Planning Committee, as does Bob Meadows, former University Architect, who brought his enthusiasm and understanding of historic renovation and restoration to this project and Bob Richardson, who succeeded him on this project.

Doug Pearson, whom I also mentioned earlier, provided the technical expertise vital to this project from the outset, and Vice President for Information Technology Brad Wheeler assisted greatly in this effort by negotiating an important partnership with Sony.

I should also mention Doug Booher and Jonathan Michaelsen, who were integral to this project, representing the interests of the Auditorium and Theatre and Drama, respectively.

Specialized facilities like this often require champions who dedicate countless hours as advocates and see the project through from initial planning to final details. This project had two champions, both of whom were members of the original planning committee.

Jim Naremore was the first person I called about the idea of an IU Cinema in, I think, 2001—an appropriate year for one of the great scholars of Stanley Kubrick. He has been extremely generous with his expertise, his time, and his advice ever since, especially considering the fact that he actually retired in 2004. Would you please help me thank Jim for all that he has done?

This project's second champion has been Kelly Kish from my office. She has helped oversee this project from start to finish, attending to countless details from fund-raising to equipment contracts to architectural plans down to the design of the chairs and fabric choices. It is no exaggeration to say that she has eaten, slept, and breathed this project for the past four years. Would you help me thank her for her magnificent efforts?

Finally, I want to thank Jon Vickers and his staff for their superb efforts thus far that have brought the cinema to life with such vigor and energy.

Would you help me thank them?

The response that I have received about the new cinema has really been quite remarkable with people stopping me around town to thank me on behalf of Indiana University for this facility.

But when they thank me, they are also thanking every person who has had a hand in moving this project forward, and I pass along my own gratitude for everyone's dedicated and tireless efforts.

## 7. CONCLUSION: THE ESSENTIAL LANGUAGE OF FILM

The new Indiana University Cinema, like the rest of IU's magnificent Fine Arts Plaza, represents years of determination, dedication, and intellectual effort all directed towards strengthening and honoring Indiana University's great traditions in—and commitment to—the arts and humanities.

Like the IU Art Museum, the Lilly Library, the Lee Norvelle Theatre and Drama Center, and the Auditorium, this new facility is a symbol of IU's rich cultural heritage. Each of these facilities enables this university's outstanding faculty and students to preserve, transmit, and build upon that heritage.

The IU Cinema, in particular, will help them understand and translate the language of film. This is a language, which, according to the incomparable director Ingmar Bergman, is "literally ... spoken from soul to soul in expressions that, almost sensuously, escape the restrictive control of the intellect."<sup>2</sup>

It is a language that will now be spoken nearly every day at Indiana University with fluency and grace to dazzle to entrance, to enlighten, and to enrich.

Thank you very much.

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<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Rothstein, Mervyn. "Ingmar Bergman, Master Filmmaker, Dies at 89." *The New York Times*. 30 July 2007. <[www.NYT.com](http://www.NYT.com)>.