



CASE STUDY: Aura Films – Colchester Film Festival



Cultural Organisation Group:

Aura Films – Colchester Film Festival

Sector: Film Making

Key groups targeted by this project: All

Author: Culture team, Essex County Council

Delivery period of project:

September 2022 – January 2023



INTRODUCTION

Tristan Syrett and Steven Dorrington run film production company Aura Films (<https://aurafilms.co.uk>). Tristan is a multiple award-winning filmmaker and editor who has had his work screened at film festivals around the world to critical acclaim. His varied skill set includes producing, cinematography and all aspects of post-production from editing to visual effects.

Steven Dorrington is also a multi-award-winning filmmaker. As well as producing and directing commercials, corporate videos and promotional films, Steven's has seen his array of award-winning short films selected for over 500 film festivals around the World. Steven currently runs production company, Aura Films, and is a freelance film tutor.



THE STORY OF COLCHESTER FILM FESTIVAL

Colchester Film Festival began as a short film festival in 2012 and gradually grew in scale over a six-year period adding film challenges, feature films and guest speaker events. After the 2017 edition the festival paused due to funding issues.

During the pandemic Aura Films found new ways to educate and help aspiring filmmakers in the region by offering support and guidance to recent graduates from degree level film courses. This programme was much needed due to it currently being one of most difficult periods in recent times to be a graduate in the creative sector.

The 2022 Colchester Film Festival took place from Saturday 5 November to Saturday 12 November at Firstsite, Colchester, with screenings each evening of feature films that have no or limited cinema or streaming release in Essex or the wider region.

Also, a series of masterclasses with questions and answer sessions, as well as a large networking event for filmmakers across the region, brought the festival to a close on Saturday 12 November.

Speakers at the festival included director and writer, Deborah Moggach, as well as BAFTA award winner, Caroline Barfleet, and Oscar winner, Chris Overton.

The festival - which had an audience of over 700 people attend over the course of the week – saw Aura Films stimulate and inspire the next generation of film audiences and filmmakers by exhibiting the best films from around the World.

Also, by hosting educational events with established film professionals meant increased access for residents to film education who would not otherwise have the means or the opportunity to attend high-quality film masterclasses.

THE “CHALLENGE” OR “OPPORTUNITY”

The key challenge Aura faced was marketing and particularly encouraging an identified younger target audience to attend the festival.

The aim was to inspire the next generation of young filmmakers through screening the best new cinema and hosting high-profile guest speaker events. The challenge faced was getting the message out to the younger target audience who use a variety of social media platforms and various educational bodies. Aura was therefore unable to narrow down their marketing and had to advertise across a wide range of media.

Engaging this audience via educational bodies such as schools, colleges and universities was a challenge, as finding the correct contact to enable direct contact with students was problematic.

The other issue faced was that due to Covid-19 the majority of the target audience had not been to similar or live events and were also not attending the cinema. This was in contrast to an older audience - who seemed keen to attend these events - while younger people were a lot more apprehensive.

The positive that came from this was that Aura Films were able to engage these younger audiences to attend, the feedback was 100% positive, and it was clear they would attend similar events in the future.

WHY THE GROUP OR PRACTITIONER CHOSE TO PARTNER WITH ECC

The festival has received Essex Small Grants in the past and felt the 2022 film festival was suitable for this funding.

HOW THE ECC CULTURE TEAM RESPONDED

Aura Films application to the Arts and Cultural Fund clearly outlined the Essex residents it aimed to engage with via an exciting programme, using high-quality film screening and masterclasses to engage with the creative sector.

The ECC Culture team has supported the project via regular catch up's, offering assistance wherever needed in terms of marketing, PR, and general project advise.

THE RESULTS

The first thing Aura Films had to address with the community, and particularly young people, was outlining what a film festival is and how it can benefit them.

Aura Films utilised social media and spoke with educational bodies to explain to younger audiences why film festivals are important, why they should attend them and how it could benefit their careers.

The key results in attracting so many young and new people to the film festival, was inspiring the next generation to pursue a career in the arts and getting them to network together and meet like-minded people.

Surprisingly, there was a number of young people who stated that they haven't heard of or hadn't ever been inside Firstsite Arts Gallery before they attended the festival, however, having attended the film festival they said that intended to come back.



GETTING INVOLVED

Here at Essex County Council, we are passionate about arts and culture and keen to support projects across the county. If you have an idea you would like to share with us, take a look at the Arts and Cultural Fund page on the Explore Essex website: www.explore-essex.com/culture/arts-culture-fund and get in touch via email: culture@essex.gov.uk