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Roxy rolling

Carsten Knox pulls up a lawn chair at the Creighton Roxy, the new, weekends-only outdoor cinema in north end Halifax.

By Carsten Knox



John Mathews, Adam Kelly & Keeley McLean at the Creighton Roxy

From the street, you might not even see it. The anonymous line of semi-detached houses gives no indication of the cinematic venue behind: You need to walk through the "hole in the wall," a driveway at 2480 Creighton, that leads from the street to the rear.

There you'll see a communal vegetable garden, a few trees that provide shade and privacy, a few chairs, a bench or two and a 20-by-30-feet white rectangle on the side wall of an adjacent warehouse.

This is the Creighton Roxy. "Roxy is a classic cinema name, especially in the UK," says cineaste and guerilla film screener John Mathews, who enlarged a pre-existing screen (this warehouse is actually where the Harbour Hopper sleeps at night) with a can of oil paint in order to show movies and videos in a not-for-profit outdoor cinema.

A Northern Ireland native and recent NSCAD new media masters graduate, Mathews is aided by Creighton Street resident Keeley McLean, who helps out with electricity and popcorn, and by artist friends Lucas Dambergs and Adam Kelly. It was Kelly and fellow artist Dennis Hale who originally conceived of the projection space, says Mathews, "a couple of years ago when they both had artists' studios here and used to show 16-millimetre NFB films."

You could say showing movies in unusual places is a passion for Mathews. At NSCAD he "used to take out projectors and do stuff in different locations." In May he was part of a group that held a fundraiser for the Ink Storm Screen Printing Collective, a "bicycle drive-in movie matinee," at a car park under an old rental-car dealership on Gottingen Street. They screened '70s dystopic science-fiction pictures *The Omega Man* and *THX 1138*.

With a digital data projector, a stack of VHS players and a DVD player, Mathews can show whatever he chooses using the handy screen, plus an amplifier and speakers reclaimed by Dambergs from city garbage, which provide a fine sound. "It's pretty good acoustics because of the courtyard here," says Mathews. "It takes awhile to set up and get it cued up right but it's really quite impressive."

The space has already been tested successfully as an outdoor cinema. One evening last summer Mathews screened two punk documentaries—Julien Temple's *The Filth and the Fury* about The Sex Pistols, and Jim Shields's *The End of the Century: The Story of the Ramones*. He also had an evening of socialist-worker documentaries that included Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave*, about striking miners in Yorkshire, England, in 1984, and *The Take*, Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein's look at factory workers in Buenos Aires.

"We tend to have themes," he says. He also tries to be considerate, thinking of the neighbours when choosing the weekend to have his semi-regular screenings. "We don't want to disturb them during the week."

This summer's series of screenings kicked off with a music night on June 9, one of the first nights warm enough to sit outside. It saw a modest crowd of 20 or 30 turn up to see a selection of videos and live performances taped from TV shows: from work as current as that by video and filmmaker Michel Gondry as well as material going back to Sly and the Family Stone, Iggy Pop and Roxy Music. It was as though choice YouTube selections were being projected for a crowd of enthusiasts.

The upcoming Roxy showing on July 7 is *The Bad and The Beautiful* from 1952—Vincente Minelli's noirish vision of Hollywood, starring Kirk Douglas as an ambitious film producer. Continuing the music theme, also debuting will be The Stolen Minks' new video, "Stop Talking," directed by Ben Jeddrie.

"I was talking with friends about an artists' video night," says Mathews. "I'm certainly really keen if anyone wants to curate their own film program." The next night on the Roxy schedule is a bicycle-themed movie evening, planned for Friday, July 27, after that evening's Critical Mass bike ride.

Everyone is welcome, and is encouraged to bring a pillow, and a blanket or a folding chair. Light rain won't stop the show, but if it's a deluge? "We would have to cancel and reschedule," says Mathews. "Such is the nature of outdoor cinemas."