

The Moviehouse

“The Moviehouse”, as an institution, is at a precipice.

The Warner Theater in Ridgewood. The Fabian 8 in Paterson. The Bergenfield Theater in Bergenfield. All wiped clean from New Jersey’s cinematic landscape in less than two years. Something dark looms on the horizon. That looming figure could be the end of the moviehouse.

For the film industry, the aftermath of the 2020 lockdown has been cruel and unyielding. That chapter in history taught moviegoers, young and old, that staying home to watch a movie could hold the same value as going to the theater. Cinephiles are now free and absolved from inconsiderate moviegoers, grimy theaters and overpriced concessions. Stay at home and be at peace. With a little patience and a few streaming services, you don’t even have to get dressed to go to the movies.

So, what’s the downside?

In the short term, there doesn’t seem to be one. Dune 2 premiered in March and will be available to stream before the end of this month. The same goes for the vast majority of films coming out this year and for the foreseeable future. The consumer saves money, time and aggravation. The only loss is the size of the screen, right?

Well, this is the niche that arthouse theaters were made to fill. Arthouse theaters give movie buffs more than just a 50’ projection screen. They offer a place where audiences come to not only watch but partake in the movie, not go live on Instagram or text friends at the “boring” parts, but to savor the experience of watching a film in the dark and emerging with a new outlook on the world that only those in that theater were able to share. They present the audience with a space where the theatrical experience is valued and revered. (And, in the case of Cinema Underground, an ice cream parlor that even has churros for a reasonable price.)

Arthouse theaters are where the film-loving community can gather to see unique and original storytelling on display. At the moviehouse, viewers get the chance to see classic films the way they were intended: on a screen that looms over you with the awesome power of the moving picture. Here, guests can enjoy an experience presented by employees who love film and want to nurture that love in others.

Besides that, arthouses are needed to tell the movie studios what the public will pay to see. When audiences make “Jurassic World” one of the top ten grossers of all time, movie producers see that success and want to match it with more soulless, sci-fi extravaganzas. But when they see the unstoppable might of “Barbenheimer”, they will try to match that as well. It’s a simple game but audiences have to participate to get what they want. Just swap the box office with the voting booth and tickets with ballots.

From live music to recordings to digital to disposable and books to comic books to comic book movies to “content” and the big screen to the small screen to Youtube to tiktoks our art is shrinking every day and in from all sides. We have to save it. This is the clarion call.

See you at the movies.

But please put on more than just underwear.