



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

SCALA!!! (18)

Director: Ali Catterall, Jane Giles
UK, 2023, 1 hour 36 minutes, English

Former Scala programmer Jane Giles (who also produced a 2018 book on the cinema's history) and journalist Ali Catterall have assembled many of the Scala's habitual attendees for their feature documentary *Scala!!!* – perhaps a few too many, in truth. There are more than 40 interviewees in this snappily edited 96-minute film... It is suggested in the film that the Scala had become a marked venue some time before its closure, with the authorities looking for a reason to shut it down, and it's not hard to see why. The cinema's culture of drug-taking and sex is cheerfully discussed, as is the lack of any age restrictions on its clientele. Two customer deaths during screenings are mentioned by interviewees; the second of these, recounted by an emotional Mark Valen, is the film's most affecting moment. – **BFI**

SCALA!!! (which is subtitled 'Or, the incredibly strange rise and fall of the world's wildest cinema and how it influenced a mixed-up generation of weirdos and misfits') is a film fuelled by stories, memories, experiences. Now-famous patrons such as Waters, Strickland, filmmaker Mary Harron and songwriter Matt Johnson, together with former staff members, enthusiastically share their own personal pieces of the Scala – from life-changing moments in front of the screen to the bizarre things they encountered elsewhere in the building. – **Screen Daily**

It's instructive how many British filmmakers used to go to the Scala, from Peter Strickland to Ben Wheatley, soaking up the anything-goes programming ethos that championed everything from *Eraserhead* to '70s black-and-white porno *Thundercrack!* (no one can quite explain how the latter found its way into Scala lore). 'It was as if the building had recommended these films to you,' remembers comedian Stewart Lee. In the end, even 'anything goes' has its limits. An illegal screening of Kubrick's banned *A Clockwork Orange* was one of the things that finally put it out of business in the early '90s. The fact that it was organised by Giles herself is a bittersweet detail that tickles Waters pink. Being hauled up in court in the cause of cinema, he notes, is a noble calling. – **Time Out**

Notes compiled by Holly Dennison

If you liked **SCALA!!!**, you may also enjoy:

CELLULOID UNDERGROUND (12A) - The second documentary from Ehsan Khoshbakht (*Filmfarsi*) is an intensely personal story that throws light on how closely cinema in Iran is bound up with resistance to cultural oppression.

STOP MAKING SENSE (PG) - One of the all-time great concert films, the late Jonathan Demme's newly restored *Stop Making Sense* captures new wave rock band Talking Heads at their exuberant early '80s peak.