

Watershed, 1 Canon's Road, Harbourside, Bristol BS1 5TX

Box Office: 0117 927 6444

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I have just spent the last weekend hanging out and helping organise the **Slapstick Festival** here in Bristol. The festival has been developing over the past 5 years growing from the enthusiasm of Bristol Silents organiser Chris Daniels for all things silent. The extraordinary thing about Slapstick is that it gets packed audiences of all ages for films that were made 80 to 100 years ago.

The centrepiece is comedian Paul Merton's Gala at the Colston Hall which seats 1600 and sold out once again this year. That audiences at this capacity not only watched the early shorts and the Buster Keaton feature but responded as though the films were made yesterday is testament to the brilliance of the creative expression of these pioneers both behind and in front of the camera.

Of course silent films were never silent, they were always shown with live musical accompaniment. If you have ever watched a silent film silent you will know how awkward and heavy the experience becomes and how, in a curious way, the artificiality of cinema is exposed.

In the Gala, as indeed with all screenings in the festival, the films were accompanied by live music. In this instance by the Prima Vista Social Club – a loose grouping of international musicians marshalled by supreme musical accompanist Neil Brand. This year Neil was on nail biting baby birth watch and couldn't make the festival – you might like to know that Charlie Brand appeared on the day of the gala showing as impeccable timing as his dad! For 2009 the musicians were led by

German musician Gunther Buchwald with Pianist John Sweeney covering for Neil. The Prima Vista Social Club do a magnificent improvised score which enhances, amplifies and breathes life into Keaton's 1923 **Our Hospitality**.

If you want to know more about the above mentioned musicians have a look at – and I do urge you to do it - <http://www.neilbrand.com> where you can hear samples of Neil's extraordinary scores and put Gunther Buchwald into a search engine to find out more about his extraordinary musical work. The Colston Hall has a fabulous organ – ooh er missus (Well, it *is* Slapstick!) – and Gunther said he would love to come back and do his score to **The Hunchback of Notre Dame** on the organ.

Another highlight of the festival was the world premiere of the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain performing their new show Ukulelescope – seven Ukulele players performing to a selection of odd, quirkily beautiful silent short films from the British Film Institute's archive. This was a sublime triumph, bringing to life films which have not been seen for decades with an eccentric but completely appropriate musical accompaniment. I felt personally and professionally pleased as I was a little involved in nudging the project into being. This was the first time the Orchestra had performed to a film and it is no mean feat. The result was excellent and had a fantastic reception. It will hopefully find its way to other festivals and venues later in the year. Certainly a London show must happen. Keep your eyes on their website:

<http://www.ukuleleorchestra.com>

Following the Slapstick Festival my thoughts are turning to the Berlin Film Festival and getting my head into what is happening in contemporary filmmaking. Word from Sundance is that British cinema

seems to be continuing to make an impact and independent cinema in general is in rude health. I certainly hope so and will be blogging from the Berlinale at <http://www.dshed.net/studio/festivals/>

That's all for now. Remember to check out those websites, in particular Neil's, which has great samples of his scores.