

THE DYING OF THE LIGHT

A film by Peter Flynn

94 min / English / 2015 / Color / USA / Digital



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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Logline

For 120 years they brought the light to our screens. Now their light is dying.

Synopsis

Largely unchanged for more than a century, the projection of photochemical film faces an uncertain future in the digital age. The practice of handing and projecting film is in danger of being lost; and the role of film projectionist is nearing extinction.

THE DYING OF THE LIGHT explores at the history and craft of motion picture presentation through the lives and stories of the last generation of career projectionists. By turns humorous and melancholic, their candid reflections on life in the booth reveal a world that has largely gone unnoticed and is now at an end. The result is a loving tribute to the art and romance of the movies—and to the unseen people who brought the light to our screens.

Filmmaker Statement

THE DYING OF THE LIGHT is a love letter to the cinema-going experiences of my youth, in the days before multiplexes, when curtains opened and closed, and a glance over your shoulder revealed the outline of a projectionist, framed by the portholes of the booth, orchestrating the light on screen.

The film's title comes from Dylan Thomas—"Do not go gently into that good night. Rage, rage, against the dying of the light." The 120-year tradition of the presentation of photochemical film is at its end and the afterlife of digital cinema will see a great many things being lost: not simply careers and skill-sets, but also a way of life and a culture that emphasized quality over convenience, that built things to last, and built them beautifully. My film is an attempt to outline that 120-year-old tradition, to remind us of what's being forgotten, and to celebrate those people who do not go gently into that good night—those who continue to handle and project photochemical film.

– Peter Flynn

Filmmaker Biography

PETER FLYNN teaches film production at Emerson College in Boston, MA. He is the writer/director of the feature documentary *BLAZING THE TRAIL: THE O'KALEMS IN IRELAND* (2011) and co-producer (with the Irish Film Institute) of the DVD box-set, *THE O'KALEM COLLECTION*. He is the co-founder of the Boston Irish Film Festival, which he directed from 1999 to 2009. His writings on early film history have been published in a variety of film journals, including *Cinema Journal* and *The Movie Image*. *THE DYING OF THE LIGHT*, which he produced, directed, edited, and photographed, is his second feature documentary.

FILMOGRAPHY:

The Dying of the Light (2015, 94 mins)—Director, Producer, Editor, DP.

Blazing the Trail: The O'Kalems in Ireland (2011, 87 mins)—Director, Writer, Editor, DP.

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/dying-light-film-review-842166>

By JOHN DEFORE

Published: November 19, 2015

Meet the last of the old-school projectionists.

A doc that isn't nearly as funereal as its title suggests, *The Dying of the Light* demonstrates at most that a certain charming way of life — not cinema itself — is being killed by the transition from film to digital projection in theaters. One part history of the movie business, three parts exploration of the projectionist's monastic lifestyle, the very enjoyable film has little to say about the new tech's impact on cinema itself or the moviegoer's experience. One suspects that Peter Flynn chose his melodramatic title in advance and stuck with it even after some of his charming interviewees — who together represent hundreds of years of exhibition experience — failed to share its apocalyptic view. Cinephiles should respond warmly to the film at fests and in niche theatrical presentations.

Flynn, a prof at Boston's Emerson College, sticks mostly to the Northeast here, visiting small community theaters and digging through several ruined palaces that haven't shown a movie since the '70s or '80s. Analog projectors were built like tanks, one retired projectionist shows us, applying the little bit of elbow grease required to get a long-dormant system back to life.

But plenty of finesse was required to keep the projectors operating for several shows daily, and Flynn enjoys talking to seniors who learned the machines' intricacies from their predecessors. One of the increasingly rare jobs where apprenticeship was the only means of entry, the projectionist's craft ensured a tutor-pupil lineage stretching back to the glory days of moviegoing.

David Kornfield, of Somerville Theater in Massachusetts, is one of our most animated guides here, helping Flynn track how the projectionist's role evolved from being a key part of the event (hand-cranking projectors at the back of a small room) to the "man behind the curtain" who ruled for decades. But the chipper, nattily dressed Kornfield doesn't supply the most colorful stories about what it was like to spend long, lonely nights in that little overheated projection booth. From the woman who had to make her apprenticeship in porn grindhouses to the gruff old dude who clashed with rowdy drive-in patrons, Flynn finds plenty of voices to balance the doc's more academic side.

As it charts how rapidly new DCP systems replaced cumbersome film projectors, the doc only discusses image quality briefly, comparing today's digital images with the glory of 70mm — and speculating about the possible impact of Quentin Tarantino's upcoming *The Hateful Eight*, for which the Weinstein Company has arranged to refurbish scores of out-of-commission large-format projectors. Moviegoers who prefer even a battered 16mm print to multiplex precision will have to look elsewhere for someone to champion the glow of celluloid from a viewer's perspective: For many of the pros interviewed here, digital is just one more sea change in an industry that has endured plenty since the days of the magic lantern.

Indiewire

<http://www.indiewire.com/article/10-must-see-documentaries-at-doc-nyc-2015-20151109>

By ERIC KOHN

Published: November 9, 2015

Voted one of the “10 Must-See Documentaries at DOC NYC 2015”

Not to be confused with last year’s Nicolas Cage vehicle, Peter Flynn's documentary apes the famous line from Dylan Thomas' poem for more specific purposes: the much-ballyhooed decline of film projectors in the digital age. As theaters worldwide struggle to afford the now-dated technology, Flynn's film surveys the rarefied skill of film projectionists in their words, aiming to capture a generational shift with a mixture of nostalgia and introspection. Of course, as anyone who saw the recent season of "Project Greenlight" knows, filmmakers continue to shoot on film for reasons that defy bottom-line values — and countless older films remain preserved on the same materials. But even if projectionists' skills remain useful, they no longer speak to the industry standards that created an entire field. To that end, "The Dying of the Light" promises quite the topical swan song.

Selected Credits

CAMERA, LIGHT, & SOUND

Peter Flynn

ADDITIONAL CAMERA

Allyson Sherlock
Dave Humphreys
Raber Umphenour
David Kornfeld
Angel Campoamor
Melissa Rogers

ADDITIONAL SOUND

Dave Humphreys
Allyson Sherlock

SOUND MIXING FACILITY

Modulus Studios

SOUND RE-MIXER

Damon Addleman

SOUND FX EDITING

Eleanor Osborne

COLOR CORRECTION

Peter Flynn

TECHNICAL ADVISOR

David Kornfeld
Lou DiCresenzo

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS

Harvey O'Brien
Cob Carlson
Thomas Finn
Hassan Ildari
and
Jim Delaney

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

Dave Humphreys
Jim Murray

FEATURING
(in alphabetical order)

Bernie Anderson
Paul Bader
Fred Baez
Jim Barron
Jon Berberian
Dorman Bermingham
Terry Borton
Christopher Bricklemyer
Armando Cabrera
George Christ
Chaplin Cutler
Glenn Damato
Lou DiCresenzo
Robin Doty
Bill Duelly
Mitchell Dvoskin
Jack Fanning
Matt Franks
Walter Gonet
Matt Gress
Bob Hodge
David Kornfeld
Bruce Lawton
Nick Lazzaro
Dave Leamon
Sara Meyers
Ben Model
Jim Murray
Herb Nipson
Nick Pawlow
Jack Polito
Paul Rayton'
Blair "Pepper" Reilly
Matt Schultz
Jason Sheckley
Larry Shaw
Jack Theakston
Bob Throop
Raber Umphenour
Joe Vannicola
Jay Wallace
Newt Wallen
Tom Wilson
and
The Staff at Boston Light & Sound