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Streaming alone will not save Swiss cinema

Platforms promoting Swiss films saw rapid growth during the corona lockdown period. But it won't be enough to save Swiss-style auteur cinema.

KATY ROMY *

Cinemas shut, shooting on hold, film festivals cancelled. For almost two months, the lockdown imposed in Switzerland to protect inhabitants from the COVID-19 pandemic brought the film industry to a standstill.

Whether to kill time or to indulge their passion for cinema, people in lockdown from all over the world have turned to streaming or video on demand (VOD). Film consumption has reached record highs. Industry leader Netflix has recorded the strongest

growth levels since its creation. But in the midst of the giant American platforms, small Swiss productions are invisible.

Swiss cinema is promoted on local portals, such as Cinefile, Filmingo and Artfilm, which also saw rapid growth at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of Filmingo users quadrupled. Cinefile recorded five times more viewers than throughout all of 2019, while the little platform Artfilm, dedicated exclusively to Swiss

productions, saw 20 times more traffic than usual. But despite this significant growth, streaming will not be able to save Swiss cinema, according to key actors in the sector.

Streaming is not a business model

Laurent Dutoit, CEO of distribution company Agora Films and owner of several independent cinemas in Geneva, considers that local portals have made it possible to "maintain contact with the clientele and preserve the cultural side of things". "However, the increase in the number of users is insignificant compared to the drop in people visiting the cinemas," he states.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Citoyen Nobel



Stéphane Goël (CH, 2020). *Citoyen Nobel* was released a week before the lockdown. It tells the story of how life changed overnight for Swiss scientist Jacques Dubochet after he won the 2017 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Film website: www.citoyennobel.com
 Trailer: ogy.de/trailer-citoyen-nobel

Discover the world of Swiss film

With film lists that are continually updated, Swiss streaming and video-on-demand platforms allow you to watch Swiss films even if you live abroad. Here are our latest movie tips.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Platzspitzbaby



Pierre Monnard (CH, 2020). *Platzspitzbaby* was at the top of the Swiss film charts before cinemas had to shut in March 2020. Set in the 1990s just after the closure of Zurich's open drugs scene, its story centres on a girl whose mother is addicted to heroin.

Film website: www.platzspitzbaby.ch
 Trailer: ogy.de/trailer-platzspitzbaby

One week before the lockdown, Agora Films brought out the documentary "Citoyen Nobel", directed by Stéphane Goël from Lausanne, on the subject of Jacques Dubochet, winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize for Chemistry. "We tried to release the film again when we reopened, but it was too late. We lost 10,000 tickets for that film alone, which represents a loss greater than all of the viewings of Swiss films through streaming for the entire period," he explains.

Even if streaming is winning over a growing number of viewers, it is cinemas that generate sales revenue. The CEO of Agora Films estimates that the cinema accounts for more than 50 percent of film earnings, while streaming makes up a maximum of 20 percent. "On the big platforms, which are the ones that work best, there is even

more competition from American films," remarks Dutoit.

Save Swiss cinema by saving the cinemas

In Switzerland, the most successful VOD service remains that of the country's primary telephone operator, Swisscom TV. "But people watch the films that are advertised on the home page, which are those with the greatest potential commercial value," comments Dutoit. As such, Swiss auteur films have low visibility. The prognosis of this distributor is clear: "Swiss cinema won't survive on its own. If we want to save it, we have to ensure the survival of cinemas and independent distributors."

Watching a film on the big screen from the comfort of a cinema chair and eating popcorn is a collective experience. Director and President of the Swiss Filmmakers Association (Association Suisse des scénaristes),

Moskau einfach!



Micha Lewinsky (CH, 2020). In autumn 1989, at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, hundreds of thousands of people are being spied on in Switzerland. Unfortunately, zealous policeman Viktor falls in love with the actress he is supposed to monitor.

Streaming: www.kino-on-demand.ch
Trailer: ogy.de/trailer-moskva

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Mistress

Andrea Štaka (CH/DE, 2006). Since fleeing the former Yugoslavia in search of a better life in Switzerland, Serbian Ruža has managed to establish herself. Then young Ana from Sarajevo enters the scene. The film explores the pain of loneliness and of breaking with your own past.

Streaming: www.cinefile.ch oder www.artfilm.ch
Trailer: ogy.de/trailer-fraeulein

Taking teens to the screens

According to Swiss owners and distributors, teenagers have abandoned the cinema. Certainly, the children's cinema club, "la Lanterne magique", which has 20,000 members in Switzerland, helps those aged between 6 and 12 years to discover the seventh art, but does this mean that they will grow into fans of the cinema itself? The answer is no. "Cultural autonomy develops between 15 and 20 years old. It is therefore necessary to offer something to this age group," explains Ilan Vallotton, director of "la Lanterne magique".

The association and other industry players have therefore developed the #ciné concept, to entice 14-18 year olds to reinvest in film and become regular cinema-goers. Currently present in eight towns throughout the country, the project entrusts the organisation of cinematic events destined for teens to groups of adolescents of the same age. Once a month, they take over a cinema in their town to present a preview of a film of their choosing. "The idea is to position the cinema as a place where adolescents can take control," explains Ilan Vallotton.

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Barbara Miller, highlights the need to preserve the idea of the cinema as a meeting place, but also a place for exchange with the audience, particularly during festivals. "Streaming is a reality and it is set to grow. But I hope that it won't become too popular, as it would really detract from our sector," she comments.

Glimmer of hope

The director fears the "Americanisation" of the seventh art. To fight against this phenomenon, the Swiss cinema industry is placing its hopes in the amendment of Switzerland's Film Act, currently under discussion in parliament. Under the amendment, online providers would be required to invest at least 4 percent (gross) of their receipts in Swiss cinema, or else pay a corresponding tax. These platforms

would also be required to ensure that European productions make up 30 percent of the films in their national catalogue. "This would make it possible to guarantee the screening of independent films, and prevent the disappearance of our culture. This type of measure already works very well in other European countries," concludes Miller.

Local portals offering films through streaming:
www.filmingo.ch/en/
www.artfilm.ch/en/artfilm-ch
www.en.cinefile.ch

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WWW.SWISSINFO.CH

RECOMMENDATION 5

Paradise War – The Story of Bruno Manser

Nilklaus Hilber (CH, 2019). In 1984, Swiss Bruno Manser travels into the jungles of Borneo to take up the fight of the Penan tribe whose existence is acutely threatened by deforestation. He becomes one of the most renowned environmentalists of his era. But there is no happy ending.

Streaming: www.cinefile.ch
Trailer: ogy.de/trailer-manser

The Divine Order



Petra Volpe (CH, 2017). It is 1971. Nora lives with her husband and two sons in a quiet Swiss village. When she begins to petition for women's suffrage, this has consequences in her village and in her own family.

Streaming: www.cinefile.ch
Trailer: ogy.de/trailer-ordnung

Alpine Fire



Fredi M. Murer (CH, 1985). Franz, a deaf boy, and his sister Belli live on an isolated farm. Their father refuses to send Franz to a home. Belli, who wanted to become a teacher, has to give her brother lessons. The two of them become inseparable and have a fateful close encounter. A moving piece of Swiss cinematic gold.

Streaming: www.cinefile.ch
Trailer: ogy.de/trailer-hoehenfeuer