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The Byron Carlyle celebrates its 50th Anniversary

By: Kareem Tabsch

Moviegoining has always been one of the most popular pastimes throughout the world. Long before Netflix and chill became a part of the American lexicon, date night for generations of Americans meant a trip to the neighborhood theater. Though how we consume media has changed in recent years, one thing remains unchanged: there is nothing like sitting in a large dark room full of strangers and collectively being swept away by the magic of the movies. For generations of Miami Beach locals, the Byron Carlyle Theater has been where that movie magic has always come alive. Now under the tutelage of O Cinema, we've embarked in a new era for the theater as a local epicenter of independent film.

As Miami Beach grew in the post-war era, the demand for affordable, entertainment options increased, and soon there was a multitude of theaters scattered throughout the island. Places like the Carib, Colony, and Roosevelt were favorites among locals. In North Beach, The Normandy and The Surf, both on Collins Ave, were the go-to spots for the latest Hollywood fare.

Moviegoining in Miami Beach was set to change when in Wometco opened a new theater on 71 Street, aptly named the Byron-Carlyle Theater, after the two avenues that nestled the building. When it opened in December of 1968 with a red carpet premiere of Otto Preminger's 'Skidoo' hosted by Larry King and with star Jackie Gleason in attendance, the Byron-Carlyle was the largest theater in South Florida, with two separate auditoriums, and nearly 1,600 seats.

For a generation of Beach natives, the Byron-Carlyle was where they first saw pop culture classics like Jaws and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. By the 1980's, movie theaters started expanding and adding screens and the Byron-Carlyle underwent a rebirth with it's two massive auditoriums divided into seven different screens. At one point, the theater was the only mainstream movie house on the whole island.

In the early 2000's, the City of Miami Beach purchased the property and partially renovated the building. For over a decade the venue-operated sporadically as a rental house for touring shows and local theatrical productions.



In the fall of 2014, O Cinema was invited to take over the management of the Byron-Carlyle. We were excited by the friendly, small-town vibe of North Beach. O Cinema has always been about more than just showing movies; we believe in the power of films to change communities and change lives. At its heart, O Cinema is a neighborhood theater, and as such, we knew that we could be a vital part of the community- offering low-cost, high-quality artistic programming for residents and tourists and making a positive economic impact for neighboring restaurants and businesses. In the four years, we've been operating the facility we've seen just that. In our first year alone we doubled our projected attendance. By 2017, we welcomed over 27,000 guests to the theater. Those are not just folks coming to see a film; they're exploring the neighborhood, visiting nearby restaurants and contributing to the local economy.

While there have been challenges along the way, we're so proud of our accomplishments. Bringing high profile events like the Miami Film Festival and Sundance and hosting guests like punk icon Iggy Pop, Fashion diva Iris Apfel, Oscar president Cheryl Boone Isaacs, actor Edward James Olmos and The Fugee's Pras Michel among others.

In 2018, the Byron-Carlyle Theater is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. We're marking this milestone with another 50th anniversary- that of The Beatles classic, Yellow Submarine presented in a stunning new full restoration starting July 20th.

It's been our great pleasure bringing this community asset back to life. Today, residents and tourist alike can walk to the theater any day of the week and experience the best in contemporary independent film at accessible prices. Our mission at O Cinema is to entertain, educate and inspire through the cinematic arts, using film as a window to the world around us while celebrating our differences and embracing our commonalities. As the future of North Beach is being planned, we hope to be sharing the magic of the movies in North Beach for generations to come.

