

BENDING THE MESSAGE SO IT HITS HOME WITH VARIOUS AGE GROUPS

IMAX® theater productions face ongoing challenge.

It's music to a film exhibitor's ears when patrons exiting a theater are overheard exclaiming how enthralled they are with the movie they've just seen. And that is magnified at IMAX® theater venues, where finding the right mix of entertainment and education—yet still appealing to various age groups—is so important to the success of a documentary film.

The new release, “Animalopolis,” seems to be one of those unique, visually stimulating cinematic offerings that does just that. This whimsical look at the animal kingdom is reaching out to young and old, causing movie theater managers to hear symphonies of excitement.

Developed to be one of the first Giant Screen productions to encompass children as young as three-years-old in the target audience, “Animalopolis” is a light-hearted, Seussian-styled film treatment done in rhyme and verse with a heavy dose of humor mixed in. It focuses on the lifestyles—and the environmental and conservation concerns—of 13 wild animals found in their native habitats. Sometimes ascribing human-like attributes to the animals, the audience reactions to this unique pairing has pleased theater managers.

According to Jo Haas, executive director at the Louisville Science Center, she has seen positive reactions from children as young as three, as well as parents and teachers who have accompanied large groups.

“One mom of three children ages 18 months to three years said that everyone was engrossed for the whole time,” said Haas. “Hands down, all the adults loved it; even the parts I thought would be too intense for the kids were a hit with both girls and boys. Everyone in the audience gave it two thumbs up,” she said.

Mark Kresser of K2 Communications, the film's distributor, believes these reactions are indicative of the efforts of the creative production team. He said that both the director and producer have lengthy, successful histories of bringing excitement and relevance to documentary films.

Tim Huntley, who directed, is an Academy Award® winner for “Up,” a live action short, and has also received an Emmy® and three additional Emmy nominations.

Paul Novros, producer, received an Academy Award nomination for “Alaska, Spirit of the Wild,” one of the most successful IMAX theater films on record, and has participated in the production of four other Academy Award nominated films.

According to Kresser, “this team found the appropriate avenues to enable everyone in the audience, regardless of their age, to connect with the on-screen entertainment and find a message or two that resonates once they’re out of their seats. It’s a rare occurrence, but one that we’re pleased to be part of,” he concluded.

The film—which runs a tidy 32-minutes—easily hold the attention of its audience. And, the producers have made a Teacher’s Guide available, downloadable at the film’s website, www.animalopolis.com, that drives home and expands on many of the interesting messages contained in “Animalopolis.” The guide was created by Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo, and features interesting fact cards on each of the featured animals.

The film’s emphasis on educational aspects isn’t lost on those responsible for booking it at their venues.

John Amistead, Director of IMAX, Sci-Port: Louisiana’s Science Center, said, “we are just beginning to get school field trips. I think when that gets going, a lot of school field trips will want to see Animalopolis.”

K2’s Kresser is counting on it. And, he’s also pleased with the way adults are being drawn to the film’s playful presentation.

According to Craig Blower, COO at San Diego’s Reuben H. Fleet Science Center, “we were pleasantly surprised at how well it did, even at the more ‘adult’ time slots.”

K2 brings a wealth of success and experience in all aspects of production oversight, global distribution, and marketing. Beyond theatrical distribution, K2 was first to recognize and capitalize on the television aftermarket, acquiring a library of 65 films independently produced for IMAX and other Giant Screen theaters, which they converted to high quality HD format. Their library of films is now playing in 40 countries and has been licensed to other media, including Internet sites, airlines, cruise ships, and hotel rooms. To solidify its leadership role in the industry, K2 Communications also operates the only comprehensive Giant Screen consumer/fan website, www.BigMovieZone.com. More information is available at www.k2communications.com.