# Nostalgia offers a lifeline, but cinemas must innovate to revive communal film culture



Last week, I had the unique experience of attending a screening of Nicolas Cage's latest film, *The Surfer*, in a practically deserted cinema. In this cathedral of solitude, I found myself reflecting on a prevailing narrative in film discourse: that nostalgia is suffocating contemporary cinema. While this argument – resting on the assertion that Hollywood now predominantly churns out sequels, prequels, and remakes – is compelling at first glance, it ultimately oversimplifies the complex condition of cinema today.

*The Surfer* is a gripping tale that showcases Cage's return to his Australian roots, blending psychological tension with sun-bleached madness. This film stands as a testament to the continued potential for original storytelling, a quality that many critics believe has been overshadowed by the relentless sea of nostalgia-driven content flooding the box office. Yet, as I watched this lesser-known film where the seats were empty around me, it became clear that the issue isn't nostalgia itself but rather how cinema adapts—or fails to adapt—to changing audience behaviours.

Indeed, the streaming revolution has changed the landscape of film consumption dramatically. The comfort of watching films at home has dulled the excited rush of going to the cinema, especially for younger viewers who now have the world of cinema at their fingertips. This demographic shift has been explored in detail, with articles noting how Generation Z has begun to engage with classic films in ways that echo a bygone appreciation for traditional cinematic experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, leading to an unexpected revival of the communal viewing experience—a critical aspect of cinema culture that had been dwindling in recent years.

Despite the critiques of nostalgia-dominated cinema, it's crucial to acknowledge the commercial success that nostalgia seems to bring to the box office. Re-releases of classic films have generated significant profits, indicating that while audiences may vocally critique the industry's lack of originality, they still show up in droves for familiar titles. Moreover, surveys suggest that those classic screenings often provide a sense of community that creates shared moments, something that newer, original films struggle to replicate when they are met with sparse audiences.

Contrary to the binary narrative that pits original filmmaking against nostalgic content, the evolution of cinema may lie in communal events that transcend mere film viewing. For example, one successful strategy has been the big-screen premiere of television episodes. *Doctor Who's* 50th-anniversary special is a prime example—offering something unique that fans couldn't experience at home, it generated significant box office returns and united fans in a shared emotional journey.

Thus, the question emerges: how can cinemas evolve to attract audiences in this new era? Creative potential exists in broadening the definition of what cinema can encompass. Screenings of season premieres, finales, or even entire theatrical events such as concerts and live debates could revive interest. The industry could harness the communal energy of these experiences, encouraging audiences to return as they reconnect with the ritual of cinema-going.

Such innovative programming would also allow cinemas to build excitement around new, original works, as audiences returning for live events may find themselves enticed to stay for the next sleeper hit. Therefore, it is less about combating nostalgia and more about seizing the opportunity to redefine cinematic spaces as dynamic event locations that foster community.

In sum, nostalgia isn’t the enemy of cinema; rather, it serves as a lifeline while the industry searches for its next chapter. The real challenge lies in moving beyond the nostalgia machine that props up immediate concerns and crafting a cinema experience that thrives on innovation, accessibility, and community connection. This could yet be the revival that the cinematic landscape desperately needs.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.creativebloq.com/entertainment/film-video/nostalgia-isnt-killing-cinema-its-all-its-got-left-and-that-has-to-change), [[4]](https://www.idsnews.com/article/2023/10/opinion-film-industry-hollywood-nostalgia-sequels-remakes-live-action)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.creativebloq.com/entertainment/film-video/nostalgia-isnt-killing-cinema-its-all-its-got-left-and-that-has-to-change), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/23/covid-cinephilia-lockdown-gen-z-cinema), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/article/2024/aug/09/there-is-an-incredible-hunger-for-it-why-classic-films-are-making-a-comeback-in-cinemas)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.theprospectordaily.com/2023/10/04/is-the-film-industry-running-out-of-ideas-or-are-they-just-nostalgic/), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20211118-ghostbusters-afterlife-is-nostalgia-killing-cinema)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/23/covid-cinephilia-lockdown-gen-z-cinema), [[7]](https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/nostalgia-biggest-existential-threat-cinema/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/article/2024/aug/09/there-is-an-incredible-hunger-for-it-why-classic-films-are-making-a-comeback-in-cinemas), [[4]](https://www.idsnews.com/article/2023/10/opinion-film-industry-hollywood-nostalgia-sequels-remakes-live-action)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.creativebloq.com/entertainment/film-video/nostalgia-isnt-killing-cinema-its-all-its-got-left-and-that-has-to-change), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/23/covid-cinephilia-lockdown-gen-z-cinema)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.creativebloq.com/entertainment/film-video/nostalgia-isnt-killing-cinema-its-all-its-got-left-and-that-has-to-change> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/23/covid-cinephilia-lockdown-gen-z-cinema> - This article explores how the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have influenced cinema, particularly focusing on Generation Z's engagement with classic films. It discusses the resurgence of interest in traditional cinema experiences and how younger audiences are rediscovering the art of film appreciation, challenging the narrative that digital streaming has led to the decline of cinema culture.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/article/2024/aug/09/there-is-an-incredible-hunger-for-it-why-classic-films-are-making-a-comeback-in-cinemas> - The piece examines the recent trend of classic films making a comeback in cinemas, highlighting the growing demand for re-releases of older titles. It delves into the factors contributing to this resurgence, including audience nostalgia and the desire for communal viewing experiences, and discusses the financial success of these re-releases in the current market.
4. <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2023/10/opinion-film-industry-hollywood-nostalgia-sequels-remakes-live-action> - An opinion piece critiquing Hollywood's reliance on nostalgia-driven content, such as sequels, remakes, and live-action adaptations. The author argues that this trend reflects a lack of original storytelling and a dependence on past successes, questioning the industry's creative direction and its impact on the diversity of cinematic narratives.
5. <https://www.theprospectordaily.com/2023/10/04/is-the-film-industry-running-out-of-ideas-or-are-they-just-nostalgic/> - This article discusses the film industry's tendency to revisit past eras, particularly the early 2000s, through movies that emulate the aesthetics and themes of that time. It reflects on how this nostalgia influences contemporary filmmaking and audience reception, suggesting a cyclical nature in cultural trends and media production.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20211118-ghostbusters-afterlife-is-nostalgia-killing-cinema> - The article examines the role of nostalgia in the film industry, using 'Ghostbusters: Afterlife' as a case study. It discusses the balance between honoring original material and creating new content, and how studios' focus on nostalgic elements may affect the future of cinema and audience engagement.
7. <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/nostalgia-biggest-existential-threat-cinema/> - This piece explores the argument that nostalgia-driven filmmaking poses a significant threat to the future of cinema. It critiques the industry's overreliance on past successes and the potential consequences for original storytelling, suggesting that a shift towards innovation is necessary to preserve the art form's vitality.