
Case Study: Open City Documentary Film Festival

Listen With Your Eyes: Experimental Films for Families

About the Programme:

Organised by London-based [Open City Documentary Film Festival](#), [Listen With Your Eyes: Experimental Films For Families](#) is a short film programme that aims to create a space for children of all ages to engage with and enjoy experimental forms of cinema.

Curated by Hyun Jin Cho and Oliver Wright — both parents of young children — the series presents works on 16mm and video, including abstract animations, hand-coloured collages, optical printing experiments, and essay or diary films.

Each programme is loosely themed around ideas of play, movement, or performance and encourages children to see, hear and interpret what unfolds on screen in their own way.

Initially launched as part of Open City Documentary Festival 2024 with a screening in partnership with the Barbican Family Film Club, the programme has since continued with screenings at Close-Up Cinema in Shoreditch and A House For Artists in Barking.

Age-range:

Children of all ages are welcome but the films are specifically aimed at engaging toddlers and young children aged 2 - 7 years old.

Films:

The programme is approximately 40 minutes in length and has included films such as:

- Dots, dir Norman McLaren, 1940
- My New Born Baby, dir Lin Chuang, 1967
- Calypso, dir Margaret Tait, 1955
- Play, dir Sally Potter, 1970



Schedule of screenings:

Screenings are hosted on Saturday or Sunday morning at 11am alongside a pre-screening workshop.

Additional activity:

The most successful activities alongside the programme have been:

Direct Animation workshop:

The events at Barbican, Close-Up and the Barking Community Cinema have been accompanied by direct animation workshop in which children are encouraged to paint directly onto 16mm film, using pattern and repetition to create moving images with the help of stickers and nail files to embellish and scratch the film. The results of this activity are then screened at the end of the programme on a portable 16mm projector.

Filmmaker Q&A:

A screening at the Barbican in May 2025 included a Q&A with the director Sally Potter. A pause was built into the programme to allow the director to briefly introduce the film and once the film had screened, the audience were invited to ask Sally Potter questions.

Creating the right environment:

The programme is always screened in relaxed environments where the young audience is free to make noise and move around as they please.

Children are encouraged to find their own ways to engage with each film; be it through its use of colour, sound, movement or imagination.

During the screening the audience are handed instruments and encouraged to create their own soundtrack for the non-dialogue pieces.

Main challenges:

The programme is recommended by the programmers as a U certificate however most of the films selected have not been officially certified by the BBFC.

For some venues this means they are unable to screen the programme as they are prohibited from screening uncertified titles to young audiences.



Biggest success:

The Q&A with Sally Potter at the Barbican screening in May 2025 was particularly memorable due to the audience's enthusiasm and level of engagement with the film. Many wonderful questions were asked, and the way in which Sally spoke to the young audience about her filmmaking was equally inspiring.

Funding:

In 2025 the Open City Documentary Festival was awarded the FAN Film Exhibition Fund by Film London in support of three further Listen With Your Eyes events to take place in November 2025, January and March 2026.

The fund contributes towards print transport, speakers, workshop delivery and curation of the events. Each event will include at least one filmmaker in attendance and a 16mm direct animation workshop for young audiences.

For more information on the FAN Film Exhibition Fund check the [Film London](#) page.

Contact:

For more information about the Listen With Your Eyes programme or to host a screening contact Oliver Wright at Open City Documentary Film Festival on Oliver@opencitylondon.com

