Full Glory of Cinema Art Resides in 70mm ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’

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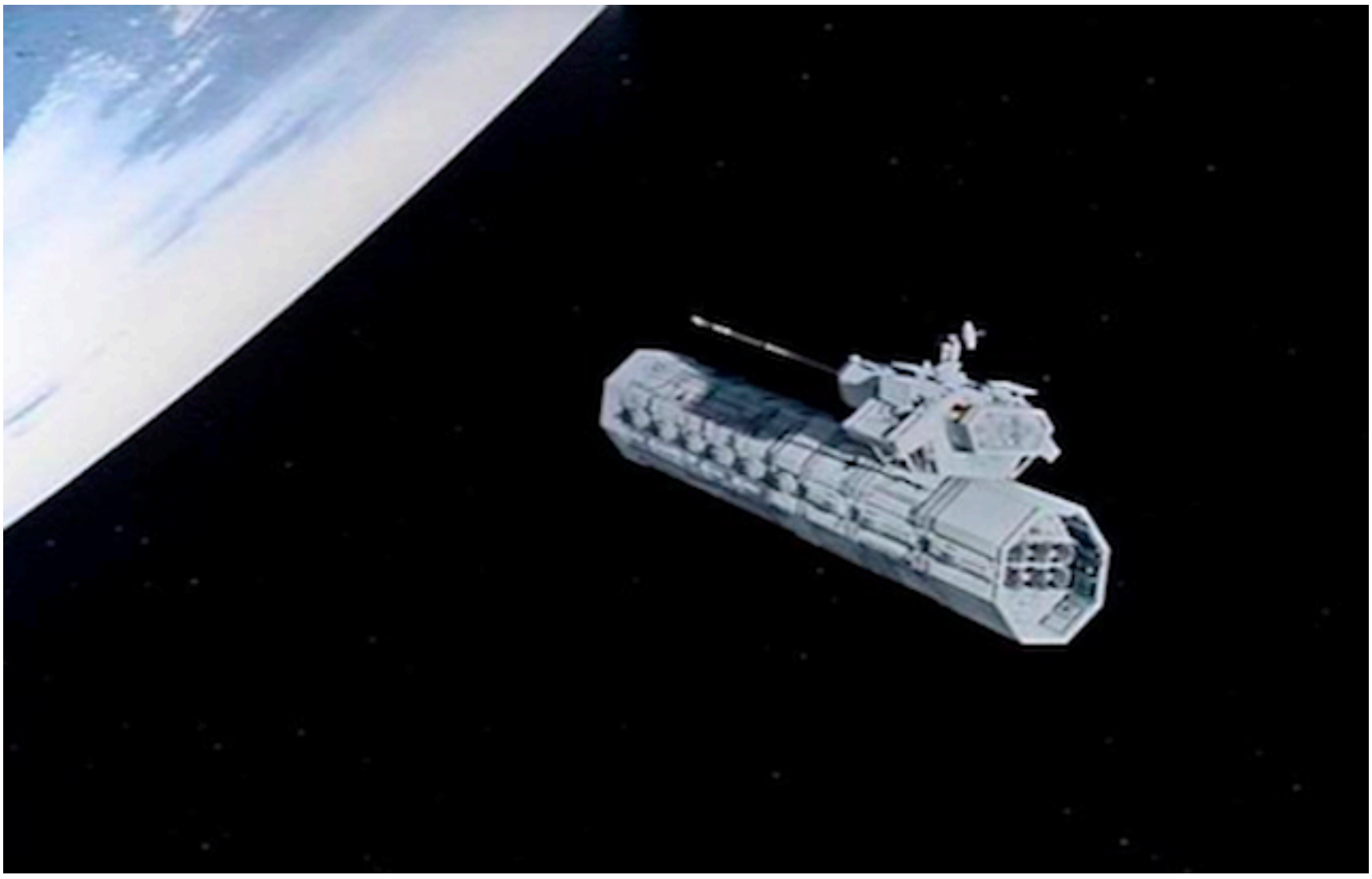


Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – It is the 50th Anniversary of director Stanley Kubrick’s “2001: A Space Odyssey,” and the film has lost none of its power, freshness and thought process, in a journey of truth that ponders existence. The film has been recently restored in 70mm (overseen by director Christopher Nolan) and now is on a roadshow tour, including Chicago’s historic Music Box Theatre.

The scope of the project, which used the cutting-edge special effects of 1968, is like a fine art painting in the 70mm film format, filling the edges of the widescreen with pure and rich cinema. In that undertaking, Stanley Kubrick not only evolved his reputation as a filmmaker, but advanced the filmmaking in a way equivalent of the transition from silent film to sound. The influence of “2001” can be seen in all science fiction films afterward, including and especially “Star Wars,” and has generally inspired a generation of movie creators. One such grateful admirer is director Christopher Nolan (“Dunkirk”), who painstakingly oversaw a new 70mm photochemical recreation (not digital) made from the original camera negative, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary. This is a must-see for those who appreciate both fine art and the history of film.

The “Dawn of Man” sequence begins the film, as ape-like creatures millions of years ago awaken to find a black, rectangular monolith. Their curiosity regarding it eventually perplexes them, and somehow they are impelled to take up bones as weapons. One such bone is thrown into the sky, and cuts to a future space station orbiting earth. The next chapter of the story is about to begin.



The Dance of Space in Stanley Kubrick’s ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

A space bound bureaucrat, Dr. Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester) arrives at the station, assigned to investigate an epidemic on the Moon. When he arrives there the same monolith that bedeviled the apes has been dug up under the lunar surface. Shattering that exploratory crew, it may also affect a mission to Jupiter, where the next chapter begins… with a ship computer named HAL (voice of Douglas Rain), and astronauts David Bowman (Keir Dullea) and Frank Poole (Gary Lockwood). What transpires next might alter the destiny of everything.

The mysteries, the interpretations, and the sheer audacity of the presentation is all part of the fun of the film. Yes, I said fun. Kubrick opens up and challenges the vistas of film technique, but he also flatly presents the humans as colorless mission controllers who get sucked into something their training can’t explain. For example, the conversation between a Russian diplomat crew and Dr. Floyd is absurdist in its blankness. Old Stanley just couldn’t help himself, coming off of “Dr Strangelove.”

Also fun – in an artistic manner – is the elaborate universe that Kubrick created. The Dawn of Man sequence is stark and foreboding, and goes on longer than I had remembered. The famous “match cut” edit between the bone and the space station is stunning in 70mm, and the famous use of the classical pieces “Blue Danube Waltz,” “Atmosphéres” and of course, “Also sprach Zarathustra” (ba-baaa-baaaaa, badah, boom boom boom boom) is just sublime.

The best atmosphere is saved for the Jupiter sequence, although the landing of the Lunar Transport (that takes Floyd from the space station to the Moon) is intensely elaborate, in design and function. HAL and the astronauts have a bit of a tussle in this part of the Jupiter mission, and the challenge to complete the journey is replete with interpretive elements that have influenced more stoner conversations than spinning and discussing Pink Floyd all night.



Poole (Gary Lockwood), Bowman (Keir Dullea) and HAL (center) in ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

If there are any frustrations, which is part of the whole cloth of the film, it is in the “room” sequence toward the end. The scene repeats themselves several times, and its twee formality is uncomfortable, which is probably the point. Who knows? Kubrick never said a word about interpreting his film, and 50 years later we can laugh a bit in his use of brand names that have long since been retired (Pan Am and Howard Johnson’s). Do you love seat back TV screens on airplanes and FaceTime on your phone? Stanley predicted both in “2001: A Space Odyssey.”

Ba-baaa-baaaaa, etc. just continues to thrill, especially in the sound design paired with the 70mm at the Music Box in Chicago. If this film is on your movie bucket list, or you want to revisit it after many years, or you’re just curious about the hype, get thee to your local film exhibition emporium and revel in the glory of a 50-year-old fever dream.

“2001: A Space Odyssey” opened in Chicago on May 18th – at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 North Southport – part of a nationwide road show release. See local listings for theaters and show times in your area. Featuring Keir Dullea, Gary Lockwood, William Sylvester, Douglas Rain and Daniel Richter. Written by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Rated “G”

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