

THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GREAT FILMS WITH BRUCE JACKSON & DIANE CHRISTIAN

PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO AND THE MARKET ARCADE FILM AND ARTS CENTER

NOVEMBER 20, 2001 (IV:12): *DON'T LOOK NOW* 1973

DON'T LOOK NOW (1973) 110 minutes

Julie Christie...Laura Baxter

Donald Sutherland...John Baxter

Hilary Mason...Heather

Clelia Matania...Wendy

Massimo Serato...Bishop Barbarrigo

Renato Scarpa...Inspector Longhi

Adelina Poerio...Dwarf

Directed by **Nicolas Roeg**

Written by **Chris Bryant** and **Allan Scott**

Based on the short story by **Daphne Du Maurier**

Produced by **Peter Katz**, **Frederick Muller**, **Steve Previn**

Original music by **Pino Donaggio**

Cinematography by **Anthony B. Richmond**

Film Editing by **Graeme Clifford**

Nicolas Roeg (15 August 1928, London, England) has a total of 20 directing credits, several for forgettable made-for-tv films (*Samson and Delilah* 1996, *Full Body Massage* 1995, *Heart of Darkness* 1994, an episode of "The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles" 1992), some theatrical films that are more silly than interesting (e.g. *Castaway* 1987, most of which consists of Oliver Reed walking around grousing and Amanda Donahoe walking around totally naked—but n'er sunburnt or melanomaed—on a south seas island). And he directed a small number of films that are superb, among them *The Man Who Fell to Earth* 1976, *Don't Look Now*, *Walkabout* 1971, and *Performance* 1970 (codirected with Donald Cammell). He began in the industry as a camera operator, then became a highly-regarded cinematographer. Some of the films he shot before shooting his own films *Walkabout* and *Performance* were *Petulia* 1968, *Far from the Madding Crowd* 1967, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* 1966, and *Fahrenheit 451* 1966.

Anthony B. Richmond (7 July 1942) has been cinematographer for about 50 theatrical and made-for-tv films, including four other films directed by Roeg: *Bad Timing* 1980, *Full Body Massage* 1995, *Heart of Darkness* 1994, and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* 1976. He was Roeg's focus puller on *Far from the Madding Crowd* 1967.

Julie Christie (14 April 1941, Chukua, Assam, India) won a best actress Oscar for *Darling* 1965; she was nominated for the same award for *Afterglow* 1997, and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* 1971. She appears in *I'm with Lucy*, due out next spring. Some of her other films: *Hamlet* (1996), *Heat and Dust* (1982), *Heaven Can Wait* (1978), *Nashville* (1975), *Shampoo* (1975), *Petulia* (1968), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), and *Billy Liar* (1963).

Donald Sutherland (17 July 1934, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada) has enacted, in more than 120 films, characters of great sensitivity and intelligence and some of film's great creeps. Some of his movies are *Space Cowboys* 2000, *Virus* 1999, *Outbreak* 1995, *Disclosure* 1994, *Six Degrees of Separation* 1993, *A Dry White Season* 1989, *Ordinary People* 1980, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* 1978, *Animal House* 1978, 1900 1976, *The Day of the Locust* 1975, *Steelyard Blues* 1973, *Johnny Got His Gun* 1971, *Klute* 1971, *Start the Revolution Without Me* 1970, *MASH* 1970, *The Dirty Dozen* 1967, and *The Bedford Incident* 1965.

from *World Film Directors* V. II. Ed. John Wakeman, H.H. Wilson Company, NY, 1988

Roeg seldom provides us with protagonists that we can comfortably identify with. He deliberately "plays with film grammar" and denies us "the crutch of time" in movies that go "in fits and starts." His work is full of "perceptual assaults" and his elliptical editing suppresses transitions and withholds narrative information and value judgments, forcing us to ponder, speculate and reassess what we are taking for granted. "Of course I could make a film in the realist tradition," he told Brian Baxter, but, Roeg explains, "it would not be me and I could only do it once. People would see through it."

Roeg is said to be unnervingly percipient about the people around him, so that "actors and others feel naked in front of his observations." He himself is elusive, and puts up "a constant smokescreen of manners, humor and outrage for anyone who tried to put a finger on his own personality." Asked to contribute a statement to this volume, he responded: "I feel very strongly that every thought about the past, even in documentary detail, destroys the imagined or real facts about the present and certainly about the future of any human being. It has always been my opinion that, in order to know something about an artist (or indeed anybody) it is better to build up one's own picture from other people and odd snippets of biography and then come to some personal conclusion. I think the artist can't help but use his own imagination and dreams of the things he might wish to have been or probably become. I am sure everyone's sense of self-invention becomes so real to them that they must believe in it, and that this applies both to very straightforward historical detail and also to the hopes and desires, rethought, of the past." Roeg's feature films have not made him rich, and he supplements his income by making television commercials.

from *Nicholas Roeg Film By Film*, Scott Salwolke. McFarland & Co, Jefferson N.C. & London, 1993

Nicholas Roeg has taken risks with his films that few other directors have taken and he has paid a price for this decision. Although he has directed some of the most innovative films of the past quarter century, he remains an anonymous figure, seldom mentioned in most histories of film. He has yet to have a

major commercial success, and critics have always been divided about his work. . . .

In their color scheme and in their presentation of themes, his films most recall the works of Michael Powell and like Powell's films, Roeg's films were often neglected on release only to be reexamined more favorably at a later date. Roeg's editing and battles with censorship are the direct result of his fascination with French films, particularly those of Alain Resnais.

. . . he has held to the belief that film is not just a commercial medium, but also an art form. He says, "I believe film is an art. I believe it. I truly believe that. Thought can be transferred by the juxtaposition of images, and you mustn't be afraid of an audience not understanding. You can say things visually, immediately, and that's where film, I believe, is going. It's not a pictorial example of a published work. It's a transference of thought."

Roeg. . . often remains as inaccessible as many find his films. He does not make the traditional rounds of the media when a film is released because he believes a film should stand on its own. An intensely private man, he has given few details of his personal life and, with the exception of a handful of interviews, has told little of his early life. One can often see Roeg, however, in the characters in his films, and he has described this relationship between his own life and his directing: "With film, certainly the way I approach it, one has to delve into one's life to put "truth" onto the screen. One delves into one's emotions and tries to translate that to the story one wants to tell. All our imagination is bound by experience. And when all that is ultimately portrayed in the characters of the film, it becomes a melancholic affair."

"I don't believe my films are inaccessible. If they were, I would be inaccessible myself. What I am trying to do, like anyone who works in any form of art, is to express an emotion. The film audience is so curiously demanding in conservatism. People never say of dance or theater, "I don't understand what is happening." Yet film is the newest and should be the freest of all."

"I am concerned with breaking barriers, challenging assumptions, and moving the possibilities of film on a bit. Part of my job is to show that the cinema is the art of our time and can break through previous terms of reference. That doesn't mean ignoring them so much as expanding them as far as possible. Usually producers read scripts, and they want something rooted in the reality they know. I'm more anxious to look for what we don't know."

Roeg remains disappointed that his films have not received the acceptance that they deserve or that he desires. "As I've said before, all I hope from my work is that someone out there will say, 'Hey, I've got a sort of curious, twisted mind like yours, so I know what you're talking about.' That's all we're doing with our work anyhow is saying, 'Hey, is anybody out there?' That's all we're doing with our lives, really. 'Is there anybody out there who understands me?'"

For his next work [after *Performance* and *Walkabout*--sometimes criticized as too confusing for the average viewer] he wanted to direct a film in which the story was more accessible to audiences, as he explains: "I wanted to keep it within a story form that *Performance* and *Walkabout* hadn't taken. They were yarns too, of course, but they were different movements. One was a film of emotions and ideas; and the other I wanted to make--I hate to use the word because it always conjures up another connotation--a documentary using a story form. Now I wanted to make another film developing a similar idea and not to lose sight of the yarn. To stick to the yarn."

[*Don't Look Now*] opens with rain falling on a lake, and the camera moves in on the scene as the title is superimposed. This image fades into one that is harder to discern; only later do we realize that it is the window of the hotel John and Laura will stay in Venice. Already the present and the future coalesce.

Roeg was particularly interested in contrast between the Baxters' position and the tragic events that overtake them: "The tragedy I wanted to show was that although there is what appeared to be privilege--they were the golden people--even golden people can't escape life. You know life actually deals the blows. The Kennedys--the most golden people of all--have tragedies coming out of the blue like some terrible sickle sweeping away."

The sequence that Roeg is most identified with is the succeeding one, in which the couple's lovemaking is interspersed with their subsequent dressing. The sexual content is among the most frank in mainstream cinema, but the eroticism is diluted in the montage so that the attention is on the participants. Laura is relaxed because she is not only freed from the guilt of her daughter's death, but is also anticipating the birth of another child. (As she dresses, she rubs her stomach and smiles to herself.) Roeg experimented with this sequence by presenting it in a linear form, but found it lacking the impact he was seeking: "Without that love scene, you never see them get happy together; they're always rowing, they're always rowing, Julie's always grumbling and running beside this tall chap saying 'You don't understand.' They seem so miserable all the time! But most people seem miserable: Love is a very miserable affair. And when I put the scene back in, suddenly you can't get confused about them. They're like a married couple."

This fragmented approach also prefigures the dissolution of John and Laura's relationship. Although they are united in sex, they are photographed separately as they dress, as if they are already moving toward their separate destinies. Roeg describes this technique: "Because we see the sex in flashes and because the emotions of the sex also suffuse the dressing, the intercutting makes the sequence doubly erotic--yet also melancholy. For we sense that, no matter how intense their love or how satisfying their sex may be, John and Laura still cannot save themselves. The splintered editing imposes a feeling of desperation on their thrusting and caressing. And since the two scenes are shown simultaneously although they presumably happened one after the other, we get lost with the characters as past, present, and future merge into a single evanescent mirage."

As Tom Milne has pointed out, *Don't Look Now* works as a companion piece to *Performance*: We are back again, as with *Performance* and to a lesser extent *Walkabout*, in a Borgesian world where the natural and the supernatural coexist, and where life is a dark labyrinth through which man is impelled to run towards an encounter with his 'demon.' Don't look now, Roeg might be saying, but every time you hear or see something, your mind is drawing connections and conclusions from depths of which you know nothing."

COMING UP NEXT WEEK, NOVEMBER 27, THE PENULTIMATE 2001 BUFFALO FILM SEMINAR: Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* 1978

Terrence Malick has directed only two other feature films: *Badlands* 1973 and *Thin Red Line* 1998. All three are haunting, resonant, and beautiful. The great Cuban cinematographer Néstor Almendros won an Academy Award for his work on this film. The award should have been shared with Haskell Wexler, who shot at least half the film but for some unexplained reason received only a minor credit. Richard Gere, Brooke Adams, and Sam Shepard are caught in a desperate triangle of love, survival, and death, and Linda Manz, as character and narrator, provides the exquisite perspective of a child's vision. Roger Ebert describes *Days of Heaven* as "one of the most beautiful films ever made. Malick's purpose is not to tell a story of melodrama, but one of loss. His tone is elegaic."

A REALLY SPECIAL MOVIE THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN NEXT WEEK

A Matter of Life & Death (Stairway to Heaven) will show at The Amherst Theater 3500 Main Street on Wednesday November 28th at 7:30. Introduced by Diane Christian.

This 1946 Archers classic in spectacular Technicolor has some of the finest filmically sensitive fantasy effects in film history. (Diane thinks this outshines Spielberg and Lucas.) David Niven stars in his finest role as a pilot-poet who misses his date with death, falls in love and fights his fate. Marius Goring is the French aristocratic Conductor 71 who misses his man due to English fog. Kim Hunter is the American WAC who hears the pilot's last words as he bails out of his fiery plane without a chute and falls in love with his gallant English spirit. Does the pilot suffer heavenly hallucinations from a brain tumor or is he really in a fight for his life with a heavenly court and order? Michael Powell, (who, with Emeric Pressburger, wrote, directed and produced as 'The Archers') said he disapproved of the American release title *Stairway to Heaven*. "They saw it all as a fairy tale," he said, "I saw it as a surgical operation." Imagination and reason come together in this extraordinary film. Don't miss it.

WHAT DO TO WITH YOUR TUESDAY EVENINGS AT THE END OF WINTER AND THE BEGINNING OF SPRING...

Here is our tentative list of films for Spring '02. We're still checking on availability, so there may be some changes before we start up with BFS V on Tuesday, January 22. The penultimate film in that series, *The Long Good Friday*, is a great gangster movie with superb performances by Bob Hoskins and Helen Mirren, and a young Pierce Brosnan as an IRA thug, but British mobsters and Irish hitmen are no way to head into the summer. So we're varying our usual pattern of screening the films chronologically by ending the series with one of the best movie comedies ever made, Billy Wilder's *Some Like it Hot*. It's got great performances by Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon and Joe E. ("Nobody's perfect") Brown. It's timeless.

Jan 22 Mervyn LeRoy, *Little Caesar* 1930
Jan 29 Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, *I Know Where I'm Going* 1945
Feb 5 David Lean, *Great Expectations* 1946
Feb 12 Akira Kurosawa, *Rashomon*, 1950
Feb 19 Satyajit Ray, *Pather Panchali* 1955
Feb 26 Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo* 1958
March 5 Jean-Luc Godard, *Breathless* 1959
March 12 John Ford, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* 1962
March 19 John Boorman, *Point Blank* 1967
April 2 Stanley Kubrick, *Barry Lyndon* 1975
April 9 Lucino Visconti, *The Innocent* 1976
April 16 Yasujiro Ozu, *Floating Weeds* 1979
April 23 John Mackenzie, *The Long Good Friday* 1980
April 30 Billy Wilder, *Some Like it Hot* 1959

THIS COMING SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 25, IN THE MAFAC SUNDAY CLASSICS: INGMAR BERGMAN, *THE SEVENTH SEAL* 1957

Antonius Block (Max Von Sydow), a knight, returns from a 10-year crusade with his squire, J ns, to find his homeland ravaged by the plague. When the black-cloaked figure of Death appears to claim them, Block, whose war experiences have left him cynical about the existence of God and the afterlife, challenges Death to a game of chess to stall for time and gain some insight into the meaning of life before passing on. The game is intermittently paused and resumed during the journey home while Block and J ns meet several traveling companions, including a mute girl whom they save from a bandit, and a family of poor traveling players--Jof, a gentle visionary; his wife, Mia; and their infant daughter. Block witnesses much suffering and anguish along the way (an encounter with a woman accused of witchcraft who is about to be burned at the stake is especially jarring) but also finds evidence of human kindness and love, prompting him to realize that even a single gesture of goodwill might make the long struggle of his existence worthwhile. The title of Ingmar Bergman's highly acclaimed allegorical film stems from the Book of Revelation.

For notes and links for each film and for the goldenrod handouts in Adobe Acrobat, visit our website: www.buffalofilmseminars.com.

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