

OCTOBER 18, 2000

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

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

CHENAULT/WARNER

1966/129 MINUTES

MIKE NICHOLS (Michael Igor Peschkowsky, 6 November 1931, Berlin, Germany) was a highly successful Broadway theater performer (*An Evening with Mike Nichols and Elaine May*) and director (*Luv, The Odd Couple, Barefoot in the Park*) before he turned to film with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* He has made only 17 films, but what a memorable group of films they are. The year after *Virginia Woolf* he directed Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate*, followed by *Catch-22* 1970, *Carnal Knowledge* 1971, *The Day of the Dolphin* 1973, *Gilda Live* 1980, *Silkwood* 1983, *Heartburn* 1986, *Biloxi Blues* 1988, *Working Girl* 1988, *Postcards from the Edge* 1990, *Regarding Henry* 1991, *Wolf* 1994, *The Birdcage* 1996, *Primary Colors* 1998, and *What Planet Are You From?* 2000. He was also producer of nearly all those films, as well as *The Remains of the Day* 1993, *All the Pretty Horses* 2000 and several other films. He was nominated for four best director Oscars—*Working Girl, Silkwood, The Graduate* (won), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

ELIZABETH TAYLOR (27 February 1932, Hampstead, London, England, of American antique dealer parents) still acts—most recently in *These Old Broads*, a made-for-tv film scheduled for release early in 2001—but nearly all of her memorable acting work was before *Virginia Woolf*. Some of those earlier films are *Butterfield 8* 1960 (for which she won her first Academy Award), *Suddenly, Last Summer* 1959, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* 1958, *Raintree County* 1957, *Giant* 1956, *A Place in the Sun* 1951, *Life with Father* 1947, *National Velvet* 1944, and *Lassie Come Home* 1943. She was nominated for three other best actress Academy Awards: *Suddenly, Last Summer, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Raintree County*. The Academy gave her its life Achievement Award in 1993. She was *Hasty Pudding Theatricals'* Woman of the Year in 1977. Her million-dollar salary on *Cleopatra* 1963 was a first for a film actress. She met Burton in the course of that film and left her husband, Eddie Fisher (1952-1957), for him. She had previously been married to Conrad Hilton (1950-1951), Michael Wilding 1952-1957), and Michael Todd 1957-1958). She and Burton married in 1964 and divorced in 1974, remarried in 1975, then divorced again in 1976. She subsequently married Senator John Warner (1976-1982) and Larry Fortensky (1991-96). When asked about her many marriages she said, "What do you expect me to do? Sleep alone?" When, after her most recent divorce, she was asked if she would get married again, she said, "What, are you kidding?" She had plenty of

Well, here's something you don't see very often: every actor and every principal crew member in this film received an Academy Award nomination, and so did the picture. The winners' names are asterisked.

Elizabeth Taylor*....Martha
Richard BurtonGeorge
George Segal....Nick
Sandy Dennis* Honey
DIRECTOR **Mike Nichols**
SCRIPT **Ernest Lehman**
(based on a play by Edward Albee)
PRODUCER **Ernest Lehman**
MUSIC **Alex North**
CINEMATOGRAPHER **Haskell Wexler***
EDITOR **Sam O'Steen**
ART DIRECTORS **Richard Sylbert***
and **George James Hopkins***
COSTUME DESIGN **Irene Sharaff***
SOUND **George Groves**

practice for the booze-guzzling Martha in *Virginia Woolf*. "I had a hollow leg," she once said of herself. "I could drink everyone under the table and not get drunk. My capacity was terrifying."

For much of the latter part of his career, **RICHARD BURTON** (Richard Walter Jenkins Jr., 10 November 1925, Pontrydyfen, Wales—5 August 1984, Geneva, Switzerland, brain hemorrhage) was a celebrity—one of those people known at least as much for who they are as for what they do. His on-again off-again relationship with Elizabeth Taylor was covered by the popular press as if the fate of the Western world were at stake. As an actor he was like the little girl with the little curl: when he was good he was very very good and when he was bad he was horrid. Nobody did rage or obsession better than Burton. Some of his films are *Equus* 1977, *Exorcist II: The Heretic* 1977, *The Assassination of Trotsky* 1972, *Candy* 1968, *The Comedians* 1967, *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* 1965, *The Sandpiper* 1965, *The Night of the Iguana* 1964, *Becket* 1964, *Look Back in Anger* 1958, *The Desert Rats* 1953, and *My Cousin Rachel* 1952. In 1974 he played Churchill in *The Gathering Storm*. It wasn't a good experience for him: "In the course of preparing myself," he wrote, "I realized afresh that I hate Churchill and all of his kind. I hate them virulently. They have stalked down the corridors of endless power all through history.... What man of sanity would say on hearing of the atrocities committed by the Japanese against British and Anzac prisoners of war, 'We shall wipe them out, everyone of them, men, women, and children. There shall not be a Japanese left on the face of the earth?' Such simple-minded cravings for revenge leave me with a horrified but reluctant awe for such single-minded and merciless ferocity." The BBC immediately banned him from all future productions. Burton and Peter O'Toole are the only actors to win seven best Oscar actor nominations without winning. Laurence Olivier cabled Burton at the height of the Cleopatra scandal: "Make up your mind, dear heart. Do you want to be a great actor or a household word?" Burton replied: "Both."

BURTON AND TAYLOR acted in 16 films together, beginning with *The V.I.P.s* and *Cleopatra* in 1963 and ending with *Under Milk Wood* and *Divorce His—Divorce Hers* in 1973. In 1967, they made *Doctor Faustus*, with Burton as the curious scholar and Taylor as Helen of Troy. With only a few exceptions, most of their film collaborations capitalized on their celebrity status as famous-people-who-had-tumultuous-marriages-and-spent-huge-amounts-of-money, and were short on acting, narrative, or production values. One of those films did spend a lot of money on production values—*Cleopatra* 1963, one of the biggest film money-losers of all time.

GEORGE SEGAL (13 February 1934, Great Neck, Long Island) was in about 60 films, most of them forgettable and none as perfectly suited to his style and ability as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Some of his other films are *Look Who's Talking* 1989, *Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?* 1978, *Fun with Dick and Jane* 1977, *The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox* 1976, *The Black Bird* 1975, *California Split* 1974, *The Terminal Man* 1974, *Blume in Love* 1973), *A Touch of Class* 1973, *Where's Poppa?* 1970, *The Owl and the Pussycat* 1970, *Bye Bye Braverman* 1968, *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* 1967, *The Quiller Memorandum* 1966, and *King Rat* 1965. Segal has been doing a lot of tv lately: he was nominated for a 1999 Golden Globe for best actor in a comedy series for his continuing role in "Just Shoot Me" and he played himself in three episodes of "The Larry Sanders Show." **SANDY DENNIS** (27 April 1937, Hastings, Nebraska—2 March 1992, Westport, Connecticut, ovarian cancer) began her career on "The Guiding Light" in 1952. She was pregnant during the filming of *Virginia Woolf* and had a miscarriage on the set. Her last film was *The Indian Runner* 1991. Some of the others were *Come Back to the Five and Dime*, *Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean* 1982, *The Four Seasons* 1981, *The Out-of-Towners* 1970, *Up the Down Staircase* 1967, and *Splendor in the Grass* 1961.

HASKELL WEXLER (6 February 1926, Chicago) directed and photographed some of the most important political films of the past 40 years, three of which are *Medium Cool* 1969, *Underground* 1976 (with

Mary Lampson and Emile de Antonio), and *The Bus* 1965 . He won his second best cinematography Academy Awards for *Bound for Glory* 1976, and was nominated for *Blaze* 1989, *Matewan* 1987, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* 1975. He filmed the breathtaking railroad segment in *Days of Heaven* 1978 (Nestor Almendros shot the rest of the film, and won an Academy Award for it.). Some of his other films are *Mulholland Falls* 1996, *The Sixth Sun: Mayan Uprising in Chiapas* 1995, *Other People's Money* 1991, *The Man Who Loved Women* 1983, *Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip* 1982, *No Nukes* 1980, *Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang* 1978, *Coming Home* 1978, *Interviews with My Lai Veterans* 1970, *The Thomas Crown Affair* 1968, *In the Heat of the Night* 1967, *The Loved One* 1965, *The Best Man* 1964, and *The Savage Eye* 1960.

George: You take the trouble to construct a civilization...to build a society based on the principles of...you make government and art, and realize that they are, must be, both the same...you bring things to the saddest of all points...to the point where there is something to lose...then all at once, through all the music, through all the sensible sounds of men building, attempting, comes the Dies Irae. And what is it? What does the trumpet sound? Up yours.

Martha: I looked at you tonight and you weren't there...And I'm gonna howl it out, and I'm not gonna give a damn what I do and I'm gonna make the biggest god-damn explosion you've ever heard.

George: Try and I'll beat you at your own game.

Martha: Is that a threat George, huh?

George: It's a threat, Martha.

Martha: You're gonna get it, baby.

George: Be careful Martha. I'll rip you to pieces.

Martha: You're not man enough. You haven't the guts. **George:** Total war. **Martha:** Total.

George: All I said was that our son, the apple of our three eyes, Martha being a cyclops, our son is a beanbag and you get testy.

Martha: You're all flops. I am the Earth Mother, and you are all flops. I disgust me. You know, there's only been one man in my whole life who's ever made me happy. Do you know that?...George, my husband...George, who is out somewhere there in the dark, who is good to me - whom I revile, who can keep learning the games we play as quickly as I can change them. Who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy. Yes, I do wish to be happy. **George and Martha:** Sad, sad, sad...Whom I will not forgive for having come to rest; for having seen me and having said: yes, this will do; who has made the hideous, the hurting, the insulting mistake of loving me and must be punished for it. **George and Martha:** Sad, sad, sad...Some day, hah! Some night, some stupid, liquor-ridden night, I will go too far and I'll either break the man's back or I'll push him off for good which is what I deserve.

Martha: Truth and illusion, George. You don't know the difference.

George: No, but we must carry on as though we did.

Martha: Amen.

For detailed notes on and analysis of Albee's play, visit
<http://www.rlc.dcc.edu/WorldLang/English/mah8420/Albee-Woolf-Notes.htm>

Join us next Wednesday 25 October for John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy*...for cast and crew info on almost any film: imdb.com/search.html or allmovie.com...for information on major American films, including detailed plot summaries: www.filmsite.org... email Bruce Jackson: bjackson@buffalo.edu...email Diane Christian: engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu...for the series schedule, links and updates: www.buffalofilmseminars.com... for the weekly email in formational notes, send an email to either of us.

**THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS ARE PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO
& THE MARKET ARCADE FILM & ARTS CENTRE**