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Imitation of life, Sirk, Douglas, 1959
La Habanera, Sierck, Detlef, 1937
There's always tomorrow, Sirk, Douglas, 1955
Captain Lightfoot, Sirk, Douglas, 1954
All I desire, Sirk, Douglas, 1953
Taza, son of Cochise, Sirk, Douglas, 1953
Take me to town, Sirk, Douglas, 1952
Lured, Sirk, Douglas, 1947
Has anybody seen my gal?, Sirk, Douglas, 1951
Magnificent obsession, Sirk, Douglas, 1954
Written on the wind, Sirk, Douglas, 1956
Thunder on the hill, Sirk, Douglas, 1951

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DOUGLAS

Between 1935 and 1958 Douglas Sirk (Detlef Sierck) made almost 40 feature films in Germany, France, Holland and the USA. Although Sirk reached the peak of his profession in both Berlin and Hollywood, he remains relatively unknown as a director. This retrospective, in cooperation with the Edinburgh Film Festival, is the first one of its size (23 feature films) ever to be mounted, and is a unique chance to view Sirk's work as an ensemble.

Sirk had been a successful theatre director in Weimar Germany, before the advent of Hitler. He carried over into the cinema a strong sense of drama, particularly rather downbeat stories of dreams that are frustrated, vacillating characters who fail to achieve their aims, impossible loves. He was highly skilled at setting these stories in lavish and complacent surroundings, lulling the suspicions of conventional producers – and much of his audience. Sirk is perhaps the most extraordinary example of an extremely gifted artist fighting his way through adverse studio circumstances to place his own gloomily scintillating vision of the world on the screen.

These films allow one to see the great range of Sirk's work. His ability to conjure a successful melodrama out of nothing (*Schlussakkord* or *Magnificent Obsession*); his ironic dialogue (*Scandal in Paris*); his painter's gift of composition and colour (*Written on the Wind*, or *Imitation of Life*). Through all the films, even the gloomiest, runs a warmth, and a melancholy, which reach their culmination in the later American films: *Written on the Wind*, *Tarnished Angels*, *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*.

Sirk was also an outstanding director of actors: Zarah Leander, Willy Birgel, George Sanders, Jane Wyman, Rock Hudson, Dorothy Malone, Robert Stack, Lana Turner and many others had their best parts under his direction. Sirk understood, too, about balance and structure in a film: his interesting characters, the split and restless ones, are always set off against pillars of stability (like Rock Hudson or Lauren Bacall).

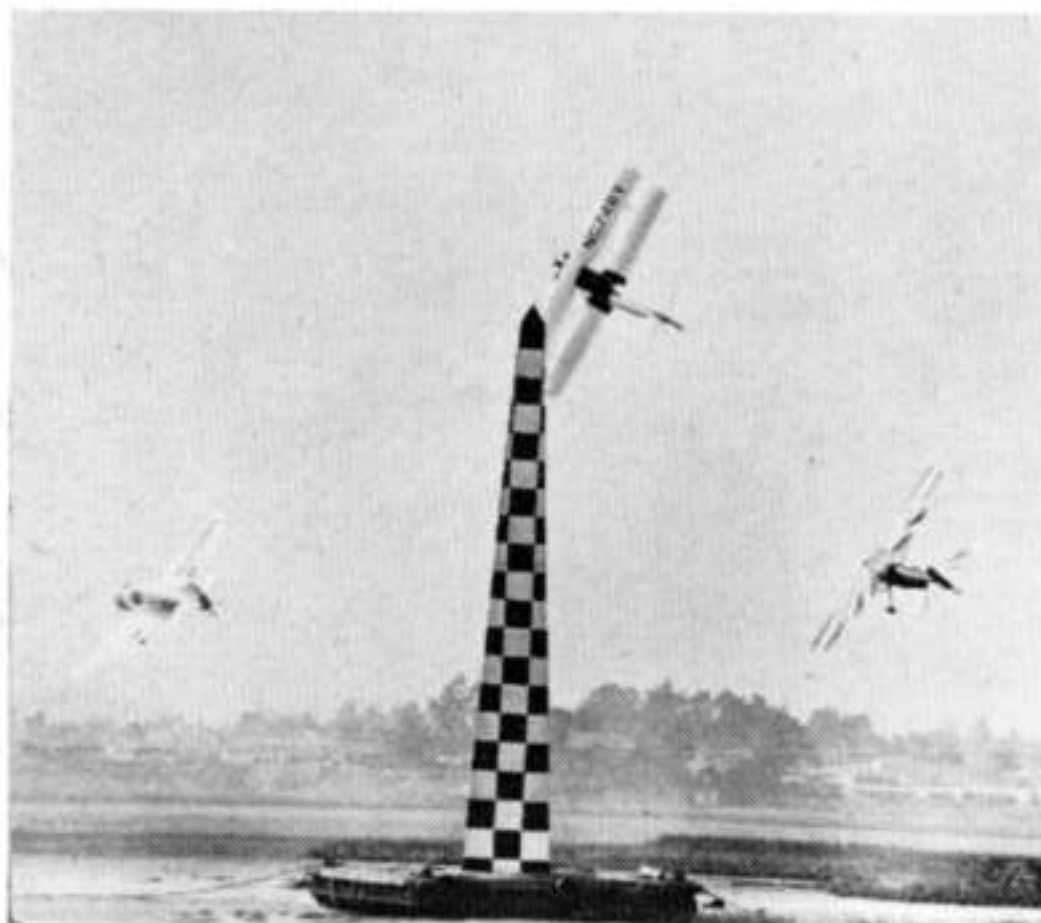
Sirk was always a show business man, who believed in entertainment. But he brought to his entertainment decades of study of the classics, and of experience on the stage. He shrank from nothing. He could write *Alcestis* in invisible ink beneath *Magnificent Obsession*, or *Tamburlaine* beneath *Sign of the Pagan*, but he could equally involve the audience up to the hilt in a melodrama like *Imitation of Life*. Whether reflected in mirrors, or through broken glass, maybe in long shot, the dark, magical world of Douglas Sirk exercises a strange fascination, as one is drawn into a world where hope, doubt and failure rule the play. – Jon Halliday.



Mon 28 Aug 6.30

Written on the Wind

The world of the Texas super-rich. Beneath a veneer of wealth and possessions, Sirk shows the steady disintegration of an American family. Robert Stack and Dorothy Malone give superb performances as the sick and split Hadleys, brother and sister, set off against the two more stable and solid outsiders: Rock Hudson and Lauren Bacall. Sirk's gifts of lighting and composition are shown to striking effect as his characters struggle against alcohol, money and sex (both unrequited sexual desire and imagined sterility). The strength of the repression suffered by all the characters prevents any of them breaking out, and even their attempts at violence are futile. *U.S.A.* 1956.



Mon 28 Aug 8.45

Tarnished Angels

Sirk's second film with Albert Zugsmith has the same cast as *Written on the Wind*: Robert Stack, Dorothy Malone and Rock Hudson. This adaptation of Faulkner's *Pylon* was a favourite old project of Sirk's which he had first tried to make in Germany. Stack plays the split and tormented flyer, Roger Shumann, a First World War ace, with a beautiful wife, LaVerne (Dorothy Malone), and a son he knows is not his. Rock Hudson as a newspaper reporter watches this unhappy family fighting a losing battle for their survival in the dark and miserable world of New Orleans in the Depression. Through the reporter, Sirk draws the spectator into an understanding of the fascination which the flyers, these "crazy gypsies of the air," deeply committed to a lost cause, exercise over Hudson. *U.S.A.* 1957.

Tue 29 Aug 6.15. 8.30

Pillars of Society

(*Stützen der Gesellschaft*)

Sirk's third feature film for UFA was an adaptation of Ibsen's famous play, *Pillars of Society*, which Sirk had already staged once, in 1923, with the great Albert Bassermann in the lead. For the film version Sirk cast Heinrich George, then Germany's leading stage actor, as Consul Bernick, the rich Norwegian shipowner, hiding his past, living a life of deceit. Several characteristic Sirkian elements can be detected in the film: the strengthening of Ibsen's social criticism; the removal of classical suspense; emphasis on falseness and pretence in small town life – detonated and blown away by the return of the innocent 'victim' (Albrecht Schoenhals), as in *All I Desire*. *Germany 1935/With Maria Krahn, Horst Teetzmann.*





Wed 30 Aug 6.30

Summer Storm

Apart from the mauled *Hitler's Madman* (1942), Sirk's first feature in the United States, four years after he had been invited there by Warners after the success of *Zu Neuen Ufern*. *Summer Storm* is an adaptation of Chekhov's only novel, *The Shooting Party*. Sirk has moved the story up much closer to the Russian Revolution, and kept the flashback construction of the Chekhov original. George Sanders (as the corrupt provincial judge), Edward Everett Horton (as Count Volsky) and Linda Darnell (as the peasant girl, Olga) are all excellent. Sirk delicately evokes the crumbling world of provincial Tsarist Russia, with its social tensions, despair and diseased romanticism. U.S.A. 1944.

Wed 30 Aug 8.45

Final Accord

(Schlussakkord)

After the unsuspected success of *Stützen der Gesellschaft*, Sirk was presented with a highly melodramatic project by UFA: a beautiful young woman (Maria von Tasnady) hires herself as a nurse to the family which has adopted her own son (Peter Bosse). Sirk's first full-blown melodrama shows him intensifying the conventions of the genre: Beethoven, clairvoyants, suicides, courtroom drama all contribute to the emotions in which Sirk ruthlessly implicates his audience. Willy Birgel (as Garvenberg, a famous conductor) and Lil Dagover (as his wife) ably sustain the melodramatic mood conjured up by Sirk's direction. A crucial work for Sirk's later development as a director of melodrama in America. Germany 1936.



Thu 31 Aug 6.15. 8.30

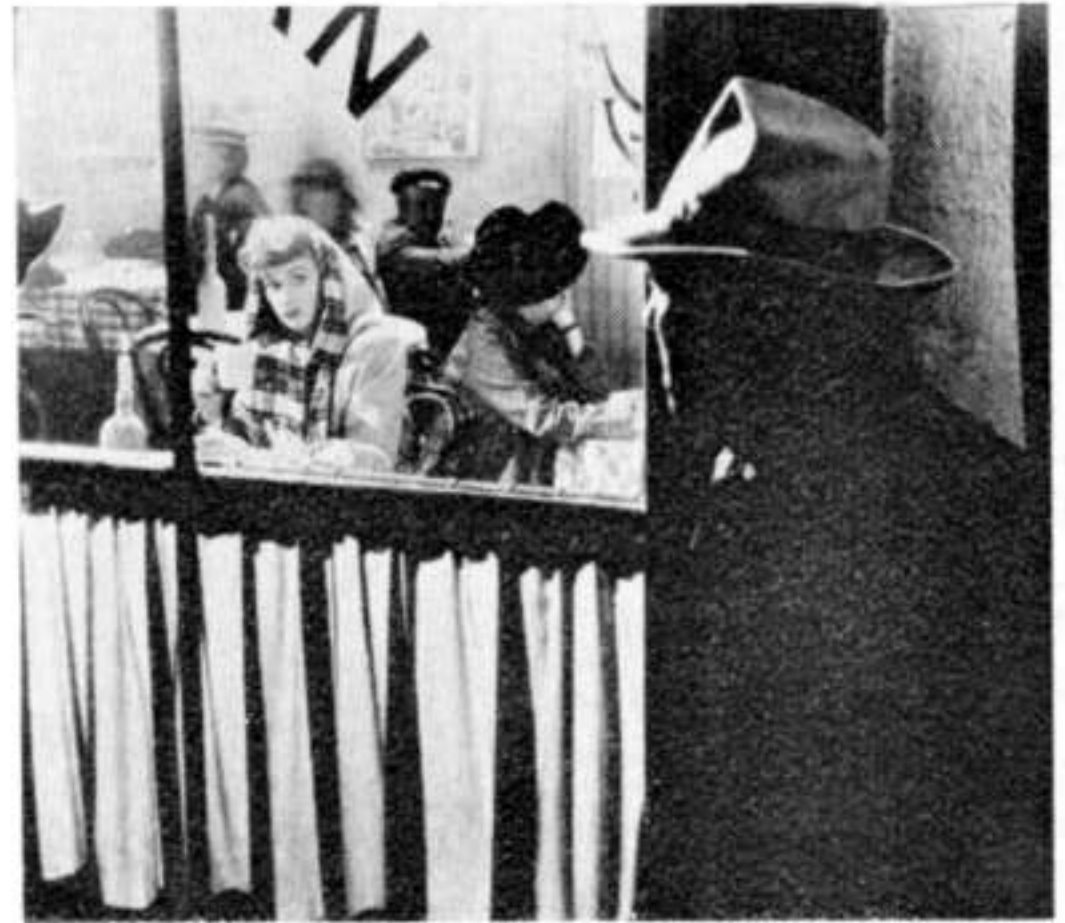
Scandal in Paris

The life of François Eugène Vidocq, the crook who became the head of the French Sûreté early in the nineteenth century. Sirk has again cast George Sanders, his favourite actor, in the lead, where he is able to give full play to his talents as an in-between man – this time crook and policeman. The script, by Sirk and Ellis St. Joseph, is ideally suited to Sanders's talents as a cynical wit, striving to get to the top, but unsure of himself and his real goals. Akim Tamiroff as a confused but direct sidekick acts as a foil to Sanders's repartee. The music by the great German Marxist composer, Hanns Eisler, has some fine moments. U.S.A. 1945/With Signe Hasso, Carole Landis.

Fri 1 Sep 11.00

Lured

The last of Sirk's independent films during his first period in America, also known as *Personal Column*. A highly bizarre story in which Lucille Ball agrees to go to work for the vice squad in London in the early days of this century to try to trap a white-slaver, who is an admirer of Baudelaire. Sirk revels in throwing together a heterogeneous cast: George Sanders, Lucille Ball, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Boris Karloff and Charles Coburn. Again, a very good script (by Sirk and Leo Rosten), and outstanding sets by Nicolai Remisoff. A good example of Sirk's irony and humour, with characters rarely what they seem to be. *U.S.A. 1946.*



Sat 2 Sep 4.00. 6.15. 8.30

To New Shores

(*Zu Neuen Ufern*)

In 1937 UFA asked Sirk to turn their new discovery, the Swedish singer Zarah Leander, into a star. Sirk cast her in a period melodrama drawing heavily on the tradition of Weill and Brecht to mix songs and dialogue. Most of the film is set in mid-nineteenth century Australia, whither Zarah Leander has been consigned by a class-prejudiced British court for an offence committed by her ex-lover, a weak and spend-thrift British officer, Sir Albert Finsbury (played by Willy Birgel, the lead in *Schlussakkord*). With the gifted cameraman Franz Weihmayr in charge of photography, and with a big budget, Sirk here demonstrates the extraordinary range of his talents, particularly in shifting mood and juxtaposing contrasting worlds. *Germany 1937.*

Sun 3 Sep 6.30

La Habanera

A follow-up to the hugely successful *Zu Neuen Ufern*, again with Zarah Leander in the lead, as a Swedish woman who jumps ship on a tropical island (Tenerife-Puerto Rico) to marry the local potentate (Ferdinand Marian). The marriage is a complete disaster, and after ten years Zarah Leander is dying to get out, off the island, away from the sun and the heat. A plague hits the island, and her husband, a big plantation owner, tries to cover it up to prevent moves against his fruit exports. He dies, and Zarah Leander is rescued by a young Swedish doctor (Karl Martell). Sirk himself wrote the lyrics for the Zarah Leander songs, giving the film the same combination of songs plus drama as *Zu Neuen Ufern*. *Germany 1937/With Julia Serda.*





Sun 3 Sep 8.45/Sun 17 Sep 8.30

A Time To Love and A Time To Die

Sirk returned to Germany to shoot this adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's book. One of Sirk's rare straightforward love stories – which naturally ends with the death of one of the parties (John Gavin). The film opens and closes on the German-Russian front, where John Gavin is a foot soldier. He returns to Berlin on leave towards the end of the war and there meets an old childhood friend whom he marries (Lilo Pulver). They live a brief, intense love amid the ruins and the bombs. The mind of the German soldier is opened up through love. He returns to the front; decides not to continue as before; refuses to allow Russian civilian prisoners to be shot – and is himself killed in return, reading the letter from his wife telling him she is expecting a baby. U.S.A. 1957/With Jock Mahony.

Mon 4 Sep 6.15. 8.30

First Legion

Charles Boyer is the head of a Jesuit seminary, peopled with uncertain, doubting priests – including William Demarest, Wesley Addy and H. B. Warner. Sirk explores the relationship between the 'rational' and the 'irrational', and the very narrow (perhaps non-existent) borderline between the two. An agnostic doctor effects a 'miracle' cure on one of the ailing Jesuits, and sets off a train of events, culminating in a 'real' miracle, when the crippled Barbara Rush rises from her wheelchair. An independent production, where Sirk had freedom of action to explore some of his down-to-earth metaphysical concerns. U.S.A. 1950/With Lyle Bettger, Leo G. Carroll.



Wed 6 Sep 6.15. 8.30

Thunder On The Hill

During a flood in Norfolk, a convicted alleged murderess (Ann Blyth) is brought to a convent-hospital for shelter en route to her execution. One of the nuns, Claudette Colbert, who has a 'dubious' past, detects Ann Blyth's innocence. Investigating, she sets off a sequence of repression from the convent authorities, and the two guards on Ann Blyth; eventually, she forces the real murderer, a doctor, out into the open. One of Sirk's recurrent themes: the discovery of 'reality' and the uncovering of pretence and deceit, in a world where appearances may be deceptive: the convent is also a hospital, wherein the doctor is a murderer. U.S.A. 1951/With Robert Douglas, Gladys Cooper. British title: *Bonaventure*.



Thu 7 Sep 6.15. 8.30

Take Me To Town

A simple, happy story of rural Oregon around the turn of the century. Ann Sheridan is a girl with a past, on the run. Sterling Hayden is a lumberman who doubles as part-time preacher. He is also a widower with three young sons. The children go looking for a wife for him, and choose Ann Sheridan, who gladly goes along when the sheriff comes looking for her. Back in Sterling Hayden's village, the locals object strongly to her, but the children and Ann Sheridan herself, who fights off a bear and proves to be a wonderful cook, eventually win them round. A magnificent ending, with melodrama on stage and 'real life' drama off stage, framed by Russell Metty's lens. *U.S.A.* 1952.



Fri 8 Sep 11.00

Interlude

A Jamesian story (in fact loosely adapted from James Cain's *Serenade*) of an American girl, June Allyson, who comes to Europe in search of a change and meets a rich, handsome, but married conductor, Rossano Brazzi. The world of old European culture and wealth (gloomy, sad and mad – Brazzi's wife, Marianne Koch actually being mad in the film) as seen through the touristy eyes of a naive American, who shortly wants to get back to her 'real' home, America, with a steady and boring doctor (Keith Andes). Sirk's second study of a conductor, this time unable to break out of a cocoon, driving his wife mad and his American lover back to the wilderness. *U.S.A.* 1956.

Sun 10 Sep 4.00. 6.15. 8.30

All I Desire

One of Sirk's planned series about small-town American life, set in the earlier part of the century. Barbara Stanwyck is an actress who returns from her life in vaudeville to the family she left many years before after a much-criticized affair with 'Dutch' Heineman. Sirk's most concentrated study of the American family: the initial reactions of the children gradually shift as they come to understand the respective roles, desires and dreams of both their mother and father – and their own desires and dreams. As in *Stützen der Gesellschaft*, the return of a figure out of the past explodes the false tranquillity of the small town. Everyone comes to realize that things are more ambiguous than they had thought, a point partly undermined by the trick "happy ending" forced on Sirk by Ross Hunter. *U.S.A.* 1953.





Mon 11 Sep 6.30
Magnificent Obsession

Sirk's first really big success at Universal was this stunning transformation of a mawkish, amorphous tale by Lloyd C. Douglas. Jane Wyman plays the widow of a do-gooding doctor who dies when his respirator is being used to resuscitate a worthless playboy (Rock Hudson) who has had an accident in his speedboat. Through Hudson's importuning, Jane Wyman has an accident and goes blind. Hudson goes back to his abandoned medical practice, contacts Jane Wyman under an assumed name, and eventually cures her at death's door. *U.S.A. 1953.*



Mon 11 Sep 8.45
All That Heaven Allows

The studio-inspired follow-up to *Magnificent Obsession*: again, Jane Wyman as the older woman in love with Rock Hudson, the younger man, and Agnes Moorehead as Jane Wyman's best friend. A beautiful evocation of the rotten world of bourgeois New England, where class and pretence block the chance of true love. Jane Wyman lives in a world where her friends, her children, her dead husband and even objects conspire to immure her in her solitude. Rock Hudson, the local gardener, fights to get her out and, in the end, succeeds. *U.S.A. 1955.*



Tue 12 Sep 6.15. 8.30
Taza, Son of Cochise

Sirk's only Western, written with his favourite script-writer, George Zuckerman (who also did *Written on the Wind* and *Tarnished Angels*). Taza (Rock Hudson) takes over as chief of his tribe on the death of his father, at a time of increased U.S. Government pressure on the Indians and their few remaining rights. Taza opts for peaceful coexistence, against the advice of his militant brother, who forms an alliance with Geronimo. Washington increases its pressure, and Hudson struggles in between, advocating surrender as the only way to survive. *U.S.A. 1953. With Barbara Rush.*



Thu 14 Sep 6.15. 8.30
Captain Lightfoot

The Irish Revolution against the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Entirely shot on location in Ireland. The Revolution is seen as a very merry, almost light-hearted affair, even though terrible things happen, including the imprisonment of the protagonist, Rock Hudson. Sirk plays the film mainly for comedy, but also for true love, a sure sign he is far away from contemporary America. Rock Hudson is rescued by the leader of the Revolution, Jeff Morrow, falls in love with Morrow's daughter (Barbara Rush) and ends up succeeding Morrow. *U.S.A. 1954.*

Fri 15 Sep 6.15. 8.30

There's Always Tomorrow

Fred MacMurray is the prosperous owner of a toy factory, caught in a non-successful marriage with Joan Bennett. He accidentally meets up with an old love, Barbara Stanwyck, who finds him a man who has been successful in business but a failure in his own home. She realizes it would be pointless to try to start up again. MacMurray's children take an active and moralistic part in preventing their father re-starting the affair. Along with *All I Desire* (also starring Barbara Stanwyck), Sirk's main study of the family. U.S.A. 1955/With Jane Darwell.



Fri 15 Sep 11.00

Imitation Of Life

Sirk's last film, and his farewell to Hollywood. A story of two types of imitated life: that of a successful white actress (Lana Turner) who oppresses or ignores all around her in her drive to the top, and of a young black girl (Susan Kohner) who revolts against her mother's acceptance of her servile situation and tries to escape into the imitation world of white show business. A devastating picture of the entertainment world. Sirk shows his complete mastery over the intractable material in an astounding demonstration of lighting, camera movement and angles. U.S.A. 1958.



Sun 17 Sep 4.00

Has Anybody Seen My Gal?

Sirk's first colour feature at Universal, his first film with Rock Hudson whom he was trying to manufacture into a star and one of a projected sequence of early small-town Americana, with Charles Coburn as a good-humoured ageing millionaire wondering whether to leave his money to the Blaisdell family. The Blaisdell children strike up a warm relationship with the eccentric Coburn and the Blaisdell parents want to use the money to escape into social climbing. All ends well: the parents drop their pretences and they get the money. U.S.A. 1951.



Sun 17 Sep 6.15

Sign Of The Pagan

An interesting project of Sirk's to film Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* was re-routed by the studio into a story about Attila the Hun, strikingly portrayed by Jack Palance. Although bearing many of the hallmarks of a studio *mélange*, the film recurrently shows the potential of the Sirk idea. In particular, Sirk thrusts the violent, filthy, apparently unreliable Palance against the boring, feeble world of 'civilized' Constantinople and Rome, embodied by Jeff Chandler and Ludmilla Tcherina. Pope Leo (Moroni Olsen) appears through the mists to ward Attila away from Rome. U.S.A. 1954.

