

Document Citation

Title	Elstree calling
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	book excerpt
Language	English
Pagination	129
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Elstree calling, Brunel, Adrian, 1930



Asquith: 'a feeling for and dramatic use of nature'

... but whereas Hitchcock was the originally silent *Blackmail* throughout Asquith was able to do only one short dialogue sequence in *Dartmoor*.

... film that really consolidated his reputation and put him on the same popular footing as Hitchcock. The film bears strong traces of the Germanic style, or, as Raymond Durgnat calls it, Asquith "out-Hitchcocks" Hitchcock before Hitchcock became Germanic. As in *Shooting Stars* Germanic cross cutting is in evidence, and, in the *Dartmoor* film, a feeling for and a dramatic use of nature that recalls Sjöström, Stiller and the German silent cinema. As Geoff Brown says in the *Film Bulletin* for January 1976: "Asquith's later work, *A Cottage on Dartmoor*, is a major revelation. It displays the director's lively and sensitive imagination at full stretch before he succumbed to the aesthetic and moral blandness of "quality" cinema. Theme and style are equally pronounced. Indeed, the movie's intensity and originality seem positively un-English. At the time of their original releases Asquith's films were frequently criticised for being artificial and synthetic in style ... Yet the film tricks work perfectly well in context. Asquith's style for a tale which deals in passions and hysteria, the lighting and again reflects expressionist practice: the figures inside the cottage are played in half-lights and shadows play about the characters whenever they move. The image of the cottage constantly recurs - in the bars of the cottage's cot (behind which Joe crouches, an image of domestic bliss), in the shadows on the wall as Joe lies dying. Asquith also employs his editing: objects and people in the

boarding-house, barbershop and cinema are jostled around at a frenzied rate. More spectacularly, Joe's tortured state of mind is conjured up by subjective montages: footage of sporting events is intercut with shots of him barbering, resulting in a surreal dislocation worthy of Bruce Conner's *A Movie* (qv). Other moments are more facile, yet still prove effective in puncturing the mundane setting and furthering the nightmare mood: the profile of a hen is juxtaposed (Eisenstein fashion) with the profile of a hen-like customer; in the seconds before Joe threatens with the razor, there are a few frames of a cannon firing and a rope snapping. Elsewhere, Asquith impresses with the sheer fluidity of his editing: we cut from scene to scene (with many jumps in time and place) quite unaided by titles.'

Elstree Calling GB 1930. D: Adrian Brunel; Ph: Claude Friese-Greene; LP: Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Donald Calthrop, Anna May Wong, Tommy Handley, and others; 16 Sd/85.

The film is basically a music-hall revue but has other more cinematic points of interest too; it was photographed by Claude Friese-Greene, the son of William Friese-Greene, one of the cinema's pioneers, and at least one sketch was directed by Hitchcock. Some of the sketches were filmed in colour, but unfortunately only black and white prints remain.

Elstree Calling is among the very early sound films made at Elstree and is a very English reply to the various *Revue*s, *Parades* and *Follies* with which Hollywood was celebrating the advent of sound. Much of the material is lifted quite straight from various stage shows with precious little regard for cinematic style. However, the director Adrian Brunel can hardly be blamed for this. Brunel had worked on this kind of film for Gainsborough in the silent days, and had thus had both time and opportunity to work out a reasonably cinematic approach. Also,

along with Ivor Montagu, he had had experience editing foreign films for the English market (and especially for the Film Society founded by Montagu), and was strongly influenced by the Russian school of editing. Thus Brunel approached the making of the film with well worked out and quite elaborate plans for camera and editing treatment, and deployed all his skills in filming the stage-derived sequences as ingeniously as possible.

As it was, before the film was released much of Brunel's work was re-shot (including the *The Taming of the Shrew* sequence which was re-shot by Hitchcock) and the film was edited without his aid and against his wishes. Brunel's 'fancy editing' and 'revolutionary techniques' did not stand him in good stead, and he found it increasingly difficult to get work. However, he later worked with Cavalcanti on the fascinating and neglected *Yellow Caesar*.

Murder GB 1930. D: Alfred Hitchcock; P: John Maxwell; PC: British International Pictures; Sc: Alma Reville, from the play *Enter Sir John* by Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson; Ph: Jack Cox; Ed: Emile de Ruelle, René Harrison; LP: Herbert Marshall, Nora Baring, Phyllis Konstam, Esmé Percy, Edward Chapman; 16/Sd/102.

Murder: 'evil and confusion lurk beneath the most normal-seeming surfaces'



An actress is convicted of murder, but a member of the jury believes her innocent and sets out to prove it. Eventually he unmasks the real murderer.

Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol point to *Murder*, *Rich and Strange* and *The Thirty-Nine Steps* as Hitchcock's finest British films. They remark on this film's richly varying tone and style, its easy and fluent mixture of stylisation and straightforward narrative, comedy and seriousness, as evidence of Hitchcock's increas-