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Une vie sans joie (Catherine), Renoir, Jean, 1922

Le testament du Docteur Cordelier (The testament of Doctor Cordelier), Renoir, Jean, 1961

Chotard & cie, Renoir, Jean, 1933

La nuit du carrefour (Night at the crossroads), Renoir, Jean, 1932

Toni, Renoir, Jean, 1935

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Le caporal épinglé (The elusive corporal), Renoir, Jean, 1962

La bête humaine (Judas was a woman), Renoir, Jean, 1938

La grande illusion (Grand illusion), Renoir, Jean, 1937

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French cancan, Renoir, Jean, 1955

Tire au flanc (The army game), Renoir, Jean, 1928

Le crime de M. Lange (The crime of M. Lange), Renoir, Jean, 1936

The river, Renoir, Jean, 1951

Le journal d'une femme de chambre (Diary of a chambermaid), Renoir, Jean, 1946

Nana, Renoir, Jean, 1926

Le déjeuner sur l'herbe (Picnic on the grass), Renoir, Jean, 1959

Le petit théâtre de Jean Renoir (The little theatre of Jean Renoir), Renoir, Jean, 1969

Swamp water, Renoir, Jean, 1941

Les bas-fonds (The lower depths), Renoir, Jean, 1936

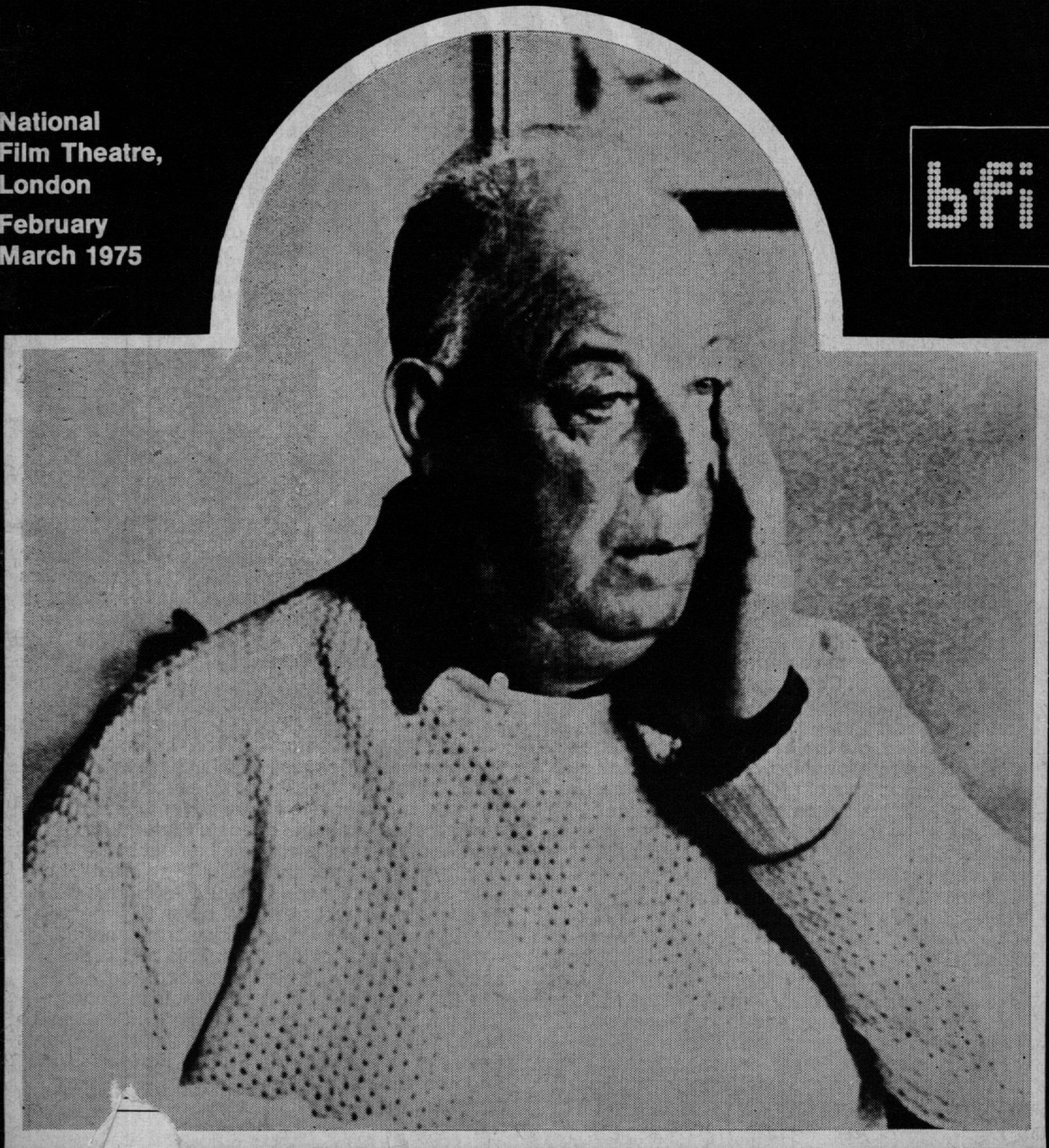
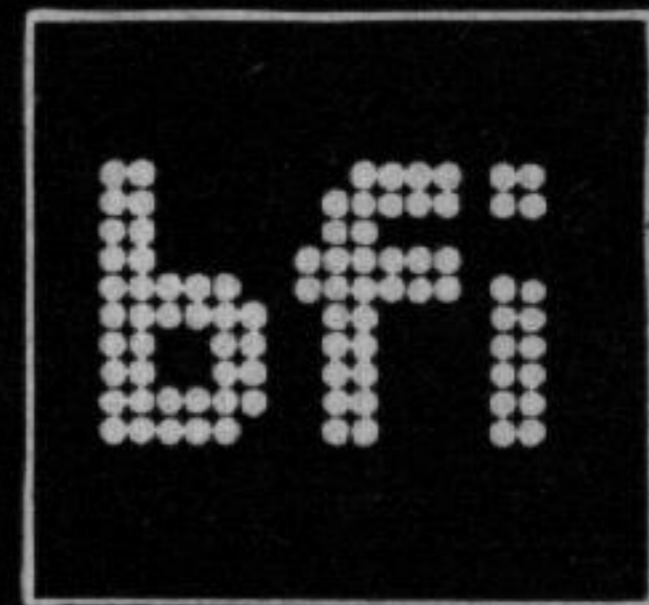
The southerner, Renoir, Jean, 1945

Boudu sauvé des eaux (Boudu saved from drowning), Renoir, Jean, 1932

La fille de l'eau (The water girl), Renoir, Jean, 1924

JEAN RENOUÏR

National
Film Theatre,
London
February
March 1975



Jean Renoir

For almost half a century, from *La Fille de L'Eau* (1924) to *Le Petit Théâtre* (1969), Jean Renoir has been studying the human face. Many of his films have become classics of world cinema, acclaimed for their visual beauty, affectionate humour, zest for life, and warm humanity. His first works do not have enormous interest, apart from the acting of Catherine Hessling, but with *Nana* (1926) he begins to paint his vast social fresco. The brush strokes are ill-defined, not yet boldly applied, but the basic colours are already present: the relationship between the weak and the strong, the love of theatre, the Pandora-like woman, and, the denominator of all his work, water with its many reflections. In his films, words are unnecessary, the images speak for themselves: the mask of cruelty in *Le Tournoi* (1928), of comedy in *Tire au Flanc* ('28) or *Chotard et Compagnie* ('32), of irony in *Boudu* ('32), of doubt in *La Grande Illusion* ('37) or *The Southerner* ('45), and of everyday humanity in *Toni* ('34). With *La Règle du Jeu* ('39) his dramatic study of society – the tensions which lie beneath the surface and the relationship between men of different social classes – reaches its climax. Renoir watches, Renoir listens, and sets up a dialogue between himself and Nature – Nature lovingly presented in *Une*

Partie de Campagne ('36), sensuously portrayed in *The River* ('50), and tangible in *Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe* ('59). From *The Southerner* onwards he is no longer content to be a mere observer. In *The Golden Coach* ('52) he takes his bearings and questions himself but, overcome by his love of theatre, he makes *French Can-Can* before really tackling the whole problem of freedom in *Le Testament du Docteur Cordelier* ('59) and *Le Caporal Epinglé* ('62). For Renoir the human element – i.e. the actor – is more important than technique and, because of this, there is sometimes confusion. Occasionally he loses himself behind his own mask, but he never embarrasses, never makes us feel ill at ease. Renoir, the painter of images, is above all a poet in the way he reconstructs the world: "The artist", he said, "creates the world". And viewing his work as a whole, we will, perhaps, begin to penetrate the only mystery he considers worth penetrating – the personality of the artist. This NFT retrospective will provide a unique opportunity to see the complete works of Renoir in concentrated form. We would like to thank all those who have made it possible and especially the French Embassy in London, the French Foreign Office and the Cinémathèque Française.—Bernard Mylonas.

Mon 3 Feb 6.30. 8.45

Boudu Sauvé des Eaux

The cafe music which underscores this film is a perfect accompaniment to the light bourgeois comedy which arises from the accidental rescue from drowning of Boudu, the untrainable tramp, lively and irreverent. Delicious performance given by Michel Simon as Boudu. Among other outstanding scenes, Boudu slapping black polish on his shoes with his fingers, and then going off in search of something with which to clean his hands, a task which leads him on a truly chaotic tour of the kitchen and bedroom.

—C. Hedges. France 1932/With Michel Simon, Charles Granval.



Tue 4 Feb 6.15. 8.30

Catherine (Une vie sans joie)

Conceived, written and directed to display the beauty of his father's former model, the film is an attempt to realise Catherine Hessling's dream: to be as great a star as Gloria Swanson, Mae Murray or Mary Pickford. Although he was only the producer, Renoir couldn't help becoming involved in the direction. This love story between a maid and the son of the house has a banal script but one which allowed Renoir, like Méliès, to recreate the world, combining magic with everyday reality. France 1924/Dir Albert Dieudonné.



Wed 5 Feb 6.15. 8.30

La Fille de L'Eau

"*La Fille de L'Eau*" says Renoir, "sprang from a strange combination of Catherine Hessling and the forest of Fontainebleau". It is the story of a boatman's daughter who runs away and joins the Parisian Bohemian life. It is also a nod in the direction of the avant-garde, especially in the dream sequence which he was to use again in *The Little Match Girl*. Renoir does not attempt to convey reality; he uses unusual camera angles, stylised lighting and rapid cutting as he wants to give a new dimension to the sets, the landscapes and the faces. France 1924/With Catherine Hessling, Pierre Lestringuez.



Thu 6 Feb 6.15. 8.30

Nana

"My first film worth talking about," says Renoir. Directly influenced by *Foolish Wives* and German film making, *Nana* is the first of three major adaptations of Zola's novel. Catherine Hessling's wooden acting reaches its peak. "It contains the major themes of Renoir's work: The love of theatre, woman's self destruction and the lover who is too sensitive to live. *Nana* rhymes with *Eléna*" (Truffaut). France 1926/With Catherine Hessling, Werner Krauss, Pierre Lestringuez, Claude Autant-Lara.





Fri 7 Feb 6.15. 8.30

Marquitta

Renoir's first film without Catherine Hessling was based on de Saint Garnier's popular song "Marquitta". It tells the story of a girl from the streets who became a stage star and coquette. Technically interesting because of the use of models as sets; the actors play in front of a model of the Barbés Tube Station which, reflected in a mirror, created the illusion of its being life size. *France 1927/With Marie-Louise Iribe, Jean Angelo, Henri Debain.*



Sat 8 Feb 4.00. 6.15. 8.30

Tire au Flanc

Based on Mouézy-Eon and Sylvane's vaudeville play, this is one of the best comedies of the silent period. Renoir's film concerns a young man who joins the Army; it does for barracks life what Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite* was to do for life in a boarding school. One sketch follows another separated only by rather racy intertitles. The film marks the screen debut of Michel Simon and his face-pulling which will soon become well known. Situated half way between Chaplin and Mack Sennett, *Tire au Flanc* alternates between comedy and tragedy, fantasy and cruelty. *France 1928/With Michel Simon.*



Sun 9 Feb 4.00. 6.15. 8.30

Le Tournoi dans la Cité

A period piece set in the time of Catherine de Medici concerning the conflict between the Protestants and Catholics and featuring a jousting tournament as its centerpiece. The film was shot at Carcassonne and used members of the famous riding school in Saumur for its superbly staged tournaments and jousts. Renoir's realism here is twofold: psychological in the character of De Baynes (Aldo Nadi), a complete mixture of nobility and cruelty; and social in its painstaking reconstruction of the past, a detailed painting of an age marked by violence. *France 1928/With Aldo Nadi.*



Mon 10 Feb 6.15. 8.30

Le Bled

Renoir's great love for American cinema and for Douglas Fairbanks is evident in every image of this film. The film is both a kind of African western and a documentary about Algeria. The story concerns a young man, Pierre Hoofer (Henrique de Rivero) who goes to Algiers to borrow some money from his uncle. On the boat he meets a girl (Jackie Monnier) who is also going to collect her inheritance. Their adventurous love story is depicted with verve and effective sentiment. *France 1929.*

Tue 11 Feb 6.15. 8.30/Wed 12 Feb 8.30
On Purge Bébé

"My first sound film was a kind of exam" . . . Renoir wanted to make *La Chienne*, but to do that he had to prove he was able to work quickly. *On Purge Bébé*, a comedy about a child who refuses to take his medicine and thus disrupts his father's business life, was shot in three weeks and released immediately. Within a few days it brought in enough money to cover its costs. At a time of contrived sounds, Renoir's recording of a flush passed for an audacious innovation. Michel Simon and Fernandel played a great part in the film's becoming a success. *France 1931.*



Sat 15 Feb 6.30. 8.45

La Chienne

Montmartre seen by Renoir with *mauvais garçons, petits bourgeois*, and between them Lulu, a prostitute involved in an adventure with a clerk. Renoir the filmmaker or Renoir the painter? His naturalism takes on a poetic dimension, and his camera caresses without disturbing. Michel Simon's portrayal of Mr. Legrand is one of his best screen performances. "His face is as moving as a mask in a Greek tragedy". *France 1931/With Michel Simon, Janie Maréze, Georges Flament.*



Mon 17 Feb 6.15. 8.30
La Nuit du Carrefour

"Gunshots shattering the darkness: the purr of a Bugatti setting off in pursuit of the traffickers, the air of confusion, craziness or corruption about the villagers wandering on the main road, Winna Winfred with her English accent and the curious eroticism of her drug-addicted philosophising Russian; Pierre Renoir's lazy eagle eye: every detail, every second of each shot makes *La Nuit du Carrefour* the only great French thriller, or rather, the greatest French adventure film of all." (Jean-Luc Godard). *France 1932/With Pierre Renoir, Winna Wintred, Georges Terof.*



Tue 18 Feb 6.15. 8.30
Chotard et Cie

A delightful farce about a small town writer who wins a major literary prize and is catapulted to fame. Renoir says: "I wanted to do something comparable to a nice American comedy." What happens if a poet becomes a greengrocer? Nothing much. But when he gets the Prix Goncourt, everything changes. *France 1932.* Plus *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes*, a 29-minute film based on the Hans Christian Andersen story with Catherine Hessling. "My film embodies a preoccupation that I have always had, the conflict between exterior realism and exterior non-realism." *France 1928.*





Fri 21 Feb 6.30. 8.45

Madame Bovary

Renoir planned a three-hour film but was forced to release it in its present two-hour length. Many alterations were made to the character of Flaubert's Madame Bovary, but Renoir remains faithful to the scenes and dialogue of the novel. The major theme of the novel and the film is that of uncertainty. "Madame Bovary is real even when she is most contrived, artificial even in her moments of truth", as one critic pointed out. Renoir may be overemotional in such scenes as the agricultural fete, the theatre, and the death-agonies of Emma. *France 1939.*



Sat 22 Feb 6.30. 8.45

Toni

"Toni gave me freedom of expression", says Renoir. A pivotal film in the director's career and a forerunner of Italian Neo-realism, it concerns the tragic love affair of an Italian immigrant labourer in the South of France. It was the most remarkable attempt of its time at cinematic realism, shot entirely on location and using actors of the same social class and nationality as their roles in the film. The sincerity of the acting, combined with Renoir's realistic settings, hauntingly conveys the tragic mood of the story. *France 1934/With Charles Blavette.*



Mon 24 Feb 6.30. 8.45

Le Crime de Monsieur Lange

Set in a publishing house, Renoir's film concerns a writer of westerns who is forced to kill to protect his colleagues' co-operative success. Shot just before the arrival of the Front Populaire, and profoundly marked by social idealism, it is an ill-defined defence of the working class, proletarian against capitalist. The biting wit of Jacques Prévert's script is an admirable foil to the poetic romanticism of Renoir; the film's realism, pushed to the extreme, thus takes on a poetic dimension. *France 1935/With Jules Berry, René Léfèvre, Florelle.*



Tue 25 Feb 6.30. 8.45

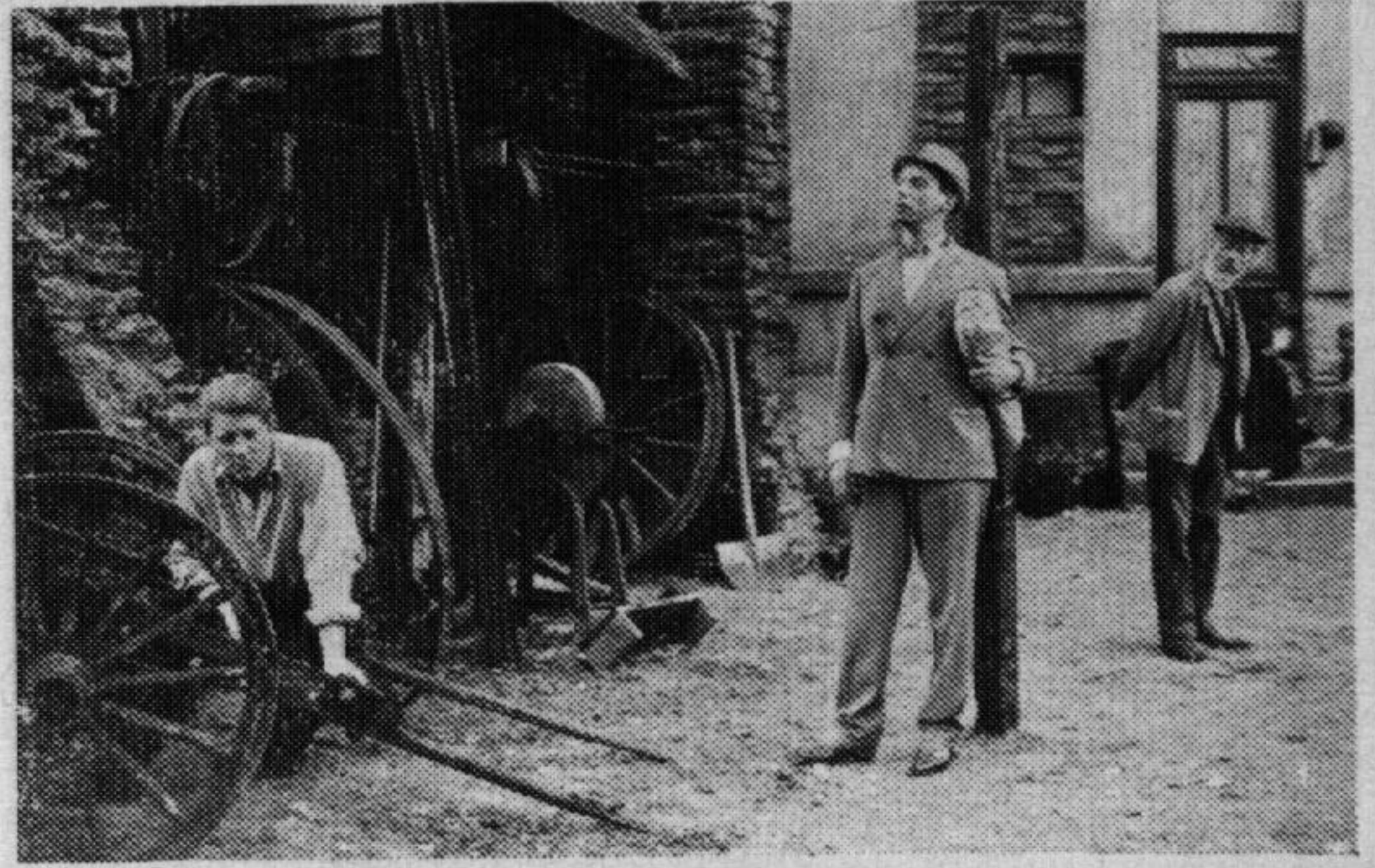
La Vie est à Nous

Written in collaboration with Paul Vaillant-Couturier and others, this Communist-backed film is rather like a propaganda documentary for the French Communist Party. It is composed of three sketches about social problems interspersed by political speeches. Forbidden by the censors for 22 years, it was rediscovered after May 1968. *France 1936. Plus La P'tite Lili, a 1927 short, adapted from a 1900 popular song, featuring Renoir as an actor. Director Alberto Cavalcanti limits himself to a glimpse of life around him. France 1927.*

Thu 27 Feb 6.30. 8.45

Les Bas Fonds

"I was not trying to make a Russian film, I wanted to make a human drama based on the play by Gorky." The film is a curious mixture of both styles and themes. A baron ruined by gambling and women (Louis Jouvet) befriends a thief (Jean Gabin) and goes to live with him. This is the most Chaplinesque of Renoir's films. Jouvet and Gabin are so convincing that they really are Baron and Thief. Junie Astor reminds one of Paulette Goddard, and there is a direct quotation from *Modern Times* at the end of the film. France 1936/With Jean Gabin, Louis Jouvet, Suzy Prim.



Fri 28 Feb 6.30. 8.45

Sat 1 Mar 4.00. 6.15. 8.30

La Grande Illusion

During World War I, a group of French soldiers plan their escape from a prison camp. The least disputed of Renoir's films, based on the idea that the world divides itself horizontally, by affinities, and not vertically, with borders. "We have to make war politely" says Captain de Boeldieu, for the great illusion is to believe that this war is to be the last. But a common denominator between men exists: woman. After the recapture of Douaumont, it is an English soldier dressed as a woman who starts singing the *Marseillaise*. France 1937.



Tue 4 Mar 6.15. 8.45

La Marseillaise

Jean Renoir's carefully woven tapestry of the French Revolution depicts the turbulent events of July 15th 1789 to August 10th 1792, from the storming of the Bastille by an undisciplined rabble to the defeat of the mighty Prussian infantry by a united nation. One of Renoir's favourite films. Behind the historical figures, Renoir looks for the human reality of his characters and his heroes keep a human dimension. France 1938/With Pierre Renoir, Louis Jouvet, Lise Delamare.



Wed 5 Mar 6.30. 8.45

La Bête Humaine

Released in Britain as *Judas was a Woman*, this is another film based on a novel by Zola. As in Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko*, Jean Gabin plays the part of a man marked by Fate whose only answer is suicide. Renoir noted that "Jacques Lantier interests me as much as Oedipus Rex". Renoir uses depth of field not only to link heroes with their milieu but also to affirm his poetic realism. The photography reminds one of the "photogénies mécaniques" in Gance's *La Roue*. France 1938/With Jean Gabin, Simone Simon, Fernand Ledoux.





Fri 7 Mar 6.30. 8.45

La Règle du Jeu

Renoir's masterpiece, first (1939) greeted with jeers and shouts, then (1959) acclaimed as one of the greatest films of all time. This "cinephiles' Credo" is a very subtle painting of a social class in decay. Renoir develops complex parallel relationships with great ease and the scene in which a rabbit shoot degenerates into a human battle must remain one of the most moving cinematic passages of all time.

(C. Hedges). *France 1939/With Jean Renoir, Marcel Dalio, Nora Grégor, Julien Carette.*



Tue 11 Mar 6.30. 8.45

La Tosca

Renoir went to Rome at the request of Mussolini, in order to give lectures on directing at the Experimental Film Centre. Carl Koch and Michel Simon went with him. But Renoir only had time to shoot a few scenes – (horses galloping through the night at the beginning of the film) – before war was declared and he had to leave Italy. Carl Koch finished the film based on a scenario by Luchino Visconti. *Italy 1940/With Michel Simon, Imperio Argentina.*



Wed 12 Mar 6.15. 8.30

Swamp Water

The first of Renoir's American films shot for Fox. Based on an original script by Dudley Nichols, it is a kind of country drama that does for the American cinema what *Toni* did for the French. The formidable Darryl Zanuck allowed Renoir to film on location in the deep south. The film marked the real debut of Anne Baxter and drew an impressive performance from Walter Huston as Ben Ragan's father. *USA 1941/With Dana Andrews, Walter Huston, Anne Baxter, Walter Brennan.*



Fri 14 Mar 6.15. 8.30

This Land Is Mine

"I wanted to show the Americans a less conventional view of occupied France . . . perhaps I was unskilful, perhaps I didn't understand the state of mind that reigned in France after the Liberation. In any case, I was inundated with insulting letters from France and was castigated by the Parisian Press. For once I was sincerely distressed not to have been understood." — Renoir. *U.S.A. 1943.* Plus 1944 short *Salute to France*. Sponsored by the War Information Office, it is a kind of documentary on France meant for the future Liberators.

Sun 16 Mar 4.00. 6.15. 8.30

The Southerner

"A poor family is born, loves and dies..."—Renoir. Based on a novel by George Sessions Perry *Hold Autumn in Your Hands*, *The Southerner* concerns the tribulations of a poor white Southern American family and is the most successful of Renoir's American films. For the first time he is no longer content to watch, but passes a judgement on man in his contest with nature. U.S.A. 1945/With Zachary Scott, Betty Field, J. Carrol Naish.



Mon 17 Mar 6.30. 8.45

The Diary of a Chambermaid

Artificial lighting, sets made of stucco, France rebuilt inside a studio, all this may ring false. But in fact Renoir had deliberately given up the realism of his earlier French works. Even more than in *La Règle du Jeu*, one can see that Renoir attains here, without reserve and with a dazzling unity of style, one of his fundamental creative goals: the synthesis of the comic and the serious. Paulette Godard and Burgess Meredith appear as pure tragedians. U.S.A. 1946/With Paulette Goddard, Burgess Meredith, Hurd Hatfield.



Tue 18 Mar 6.30. 8.45

Woman on the Beach

The last of Renoir's American films, shot for RKO, and certainly his most sensual film. This is neither a thriller, nor yet a psychological melodrama. A man falls in love with a woman with a blind husband. Renoir is clearly trying to point various morals, some with a now dated post-war flavour. Yet the strength and brooding atmosphere still come over perfectly, and the film is an off-beat and rewarding experience. U.S.A. 1946/With Joan Bennett, Robert Ryan, Charles Bickford.



Thu 20 Mar 6.30. 8.45

The River

Renoir in search of the absolute. Based on the novel by Rumer Godden, the film tells the story of an English family in Bengal. Once again Renoir the painter is in evidence, *The River* being above all a summary of impressions both sensuous and tactile, a kind of poem on nature touching on the problem of absolute knowledge. Renoir discovers India and its mysteries through the eyes of Harriet, the little girl. The images are so powerful they seem to go beyond the screen. U.S.A.-India 1950/With Nora Swinburne, Esmond Knight, Patricia Walters.





Sat 22 Mar 6.30. 8.45
The Golden Coach

The Golden Coach is one of Renoir's key films and shows him in both the gayest and the blackest of moods. The story concerns the three loves of an actress. Again, fundamental themes are present: truthfulness in love and the artistic vocation. The performances of the *Commedia dell'Arte* introduce the themes of illusion and reality while the satirical treatment of court life is a combination of the serious tone in *La Règle du Jeu*, and the farcical mood of *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. Almost an Anna Magnani one man show. *France-Italy 1952/With Anna Magnani, Duncan Lamont.*



Mon 24 Mar 6.30. 8.45

French Can-Can

A magnificent pictorial evocation of Paris in the 1880s, the world of Auguste Renoir, the director's father. Jean Renoir has described the film as "a piece of tapestry, a composition of colours, with the music being used not only as an accompaniment and commentary but also as a counterpoint." Close to *The Golden Coach* it stresses the artist's love of his profession. Impresario Danglard (Jean Gabin) discovers a talented laundry girl. *France 1954/With Jean Gabin, Maria Félix, Françoise Arnoul.*



Tue 25 Mar 6.30. 8.45
Eléna et les Hommes

A comedy of manners among the rich and powerful in the 1880s. "Eléna is Renoir's most Mozartian film. Not so much on the surface, like *La Règle du Jeu*, but in its philosophy. The Renoir who had just finished *French Can-Can* and was preparing *Elena* is spiritually a little the same man as the one who had just finished the *Concerto For Clarinet* and was beginning *The Magic Flute*. In content there is the same irony, the same disgust; in form, the same daring and masterly simplicity." (Jean-Luc Godard). *France 1956/With Ingrid Bergman, Jean Marais, Jean Richard.*



Wed 26 Mar 6.15. 8.30

Le Testament du Docteur Cordelier

First conceived as a live TV play and produced in collaboration with French TV. For this version of the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde story set in contemporary Paris and shot scene by scene (instead of shot by shot), Renoir used up to eight cameras and 12 microphones. It is not among his best works but is nevertheless interesting as an attempt to create a new cinematic language. One of the major interests of the film lies in Renoir's masterly use of Jean-Louis Barrault. *France 1959/With Jean-Louis Barrault, Teddy Billis, Michel Vitold.*

Thu 27 Mar 6.00. 8.45

Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe/ Une Partie de Campagne

Two of Renoir's finest films, both dealing with the theme of nature, but treating it in different ways. *Picnic on the Grass* (1959) is the sensual, almost breath-taking story of a scientist seized by the physical sensations of the natural outdoors in the form of the beautiful Catherine Rouvel. *A Day in the Country* (1936) is a more cool and delicate treatment of a country excursion during which a young couple fall in love. Both films reveal Renoir's close relationship to his artist father in their painterly images.



Sat 29 Mar 6.30. 8.45

Le Caporal Epinglé

"Where the conventional anti-war film simply says that killing people is wrong, *The Vanishing Corporal* makes the statement that killing ME is wrong. The hero's driving force is that he wants to get out of his prison camp. Renoir somehow communicates that his comic hero is a man of great virtue which, however, has nothing to do with War Office propaganda. He takes for granted the fundamental fact that the catastrophes of war happen to a man in isolation." (P. Gilliat). *France 1962/With Jean-Pierre Cassel, Claude Rich, Claude Brasseur.*



Sun 30 Mar 4.15. 6.30. 8.45

Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir

Renoir's latest film and probably the last cinematic achievement in his long and splendid career. *The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir* is a slight film but no less delightful for that. It consists of three stories introduced by the director himself with an interlude featuring Jeanne Moreau singing. *Le Dernier Reveillon* is a return to the story of the little match girl, but this time with an elderly couple. *La Cireuse Electrique* concerns a woman obsessed with having a shining floor. The final episode, *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, is the most successful and concerns a love triangle resolved with tolerance. Despite the innuendos of the villagers, the old man (marvellously portrayed by Fernand Sardou) succeeds in having the last splendid laugh. *France-Italy 1969. With Françoise Arnoul, Dominique Labourier.*

