

Document Citation

Title	Powell and Pressburger: the best of British
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Source	<i>Art Institute of Chicago. Film Center</i>
Date	1986 Mar
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Pressburger, Emeric (1902-1988), Miskolc, Hungary Powell, Michael (1905-1990), Bekesbourne, Kent, Great Britain
Film Subjects	The life and death of Colonel Blimp, Powell, Michael, 1943 Black narcissus, Powell, Michael, 1947

Powell and Pressburger: The Best of British

Britain and cinema, Francois Truffaut once suggested, seem incompatible terms. And indeed British films are often praised for qualities of acting and literary adaptation that have little to do with strictly cinematic creation. Yet there is a strand of eccentric, sometimes perverse, flamboyance that runs through even the darkest ages of British cinema and is largely due to the unique partnership of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger.

Together they signed eighteen films as joint creations, and their total *oeuvre* runs to over seventy titles, made in half a dozen countries. While their best work may have been the string of Forties masterpieces—49TH PARALLEL, THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP, STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN, I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING, BLACK NARCISSUS, THE RED SHOES—few of their films, made either separately or together, fail to strike some spark of imagination or insight. If they have a trademark, it is finding some narrative novelty or fanciful association in even the most unpromising material.

In recent years their achievement has been recognized in numerous retrospectives and special awards. Some of their forgotten films, like BLIMP and A CANTERBURY TALE, have been restored to their original form and delighted a new generation of critics and audiences with their idiosyncratic splendor. Deeply romantic in their vision, they were never afraid to tackle the big subjects irreverently and obliquely—and for this they often paid the price of critical disdain. Now, with the passage of time, their boldest fantasies seem to speak directly to us in a language of "real film magic" (as Martin Scorsese terms it) that underlines the poverty of so much of today's cinema.

Scorsese is only one of many leading current directors who has acknowledged his debt to their example (Coppola, DePalma, and in Britain Neil Jordan, Derek Jarman, are others). The Film Center is proud to welcome Michael Powell as a guest to inaugurate a two-month retrospective that will include all the newly-released films (BLIMP will receive its first non-festival screening in the United States, in the version that has taken Britain by storm.) We are also delighted that Martin Scorsese, now shooting his latest film in Chicago, will help launch this major series on March 2.—Ian Christie

Acknowledgements to The British Film Institute/National Film Archive and Rank Film Distributors for assistance with the series. Copies of *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* by Ian Christie will be on sale at the Art Institute Museum Shop where there will be an autographing session with Michael Powell on Saturday, March 1 between 1 and 2 pm.



THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP,
March 21, 22, 23



BLACK NARCISSUS,
March 16, 19



MICHAEL POWELL

Sunday, March 2

March 1
3:30 THE RED SHOES

March 2
1:00,
7:15 THE RED SHOES
3:30 Michael Powell in Person
with Martin Scorsese

March 5
6:00 THE SPY IN BLACK

March 16
4:00 BLACK NARCISSUS

March 19
6:00 BLACK NARCISSUS

March 21
6:00 THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
COLONEL BLIMP

March 22
3:00,
6:00 THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
COLONEL BLIMP

March 23
6:00 THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
COLONEL BLIMP

March 26
6:00 ONE OF OUR AIRCRAFT IS
MISSING