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Michael Powell

PAMELA GENTILE

A TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL POWELL AND EMERIC PRESSBURGER

by David Thomson

Michael Powell would have been 90 this September, and Emeric Pressburger 93. They cannot be with us. Their old partnership, *The Archers*, is remade in a heaven where—we hear—against considerable bureaucratic opposition and technical difficulty, they have introduced Technicolor. So, if life here is duller without them, we have that much more to look forward to.

A Matter of Life and Death

Special guest Thelma Schoonmaker Powell.
For Festival Event information, see page 13.

See program note on page 59.

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We know that they would want us to celebrate, and this year is ripe with excuses. For this spring sees the publication in America of Powell's second volume of autobiography, *Million Dollar Movie*, and of *Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter*, by Pressburger's grandson, Kevin Macdonald. The second book makes the story of *The Archers* especially intriguing, for it shows how different and antagonistic the two men were. Powell, the Englishman, was passionate, Celtic, impulsive, often difficult, not always nice. Pressburger, the exile from Hungary, was calm, orderly, a gentleman who longed to be thought English. It's the material for a Powell-Pressburger film, the touching friendship between Roger Livesey and Anton Walbrook in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*.

Michael Powell needs less introduction in San Francisco. He received the Akira Kurosawa Award at the Festival in 1987. He even lived for a while in the Bay Area, in a cottage on the doorstep of San Quentin prison, that belonged to his wife, Thelma Schoonmaker. For, as Pressburger characteristically withdrew from London and the movie world, and went to live in a cottage in Suffolk, so Powell came into his own in the last decade of his life. He had fans and friends in America, most notably Martin Scorsese. Powell came to this country as a visitor. He taught for a term at Dartmouth; he found Thelma in Scorsese's editing room; he became director emeritus for Zoetrope; he wrote his very successful autobiography. And he enjoyed acclaim for those vivid, deeply imaginative films made by *The Archers*: *The Red Shoes*, *Black Narcissus*, *The Small Back Room*, *I Know Where I'm Going*, *A Canterbury Tale*, *Colonel Blimp* and many others. Today, no one has any doubts but that Powell and Pressburger are among the greatest movie-making partnerships, or that Powell was any less than a rare uncompromising genius.

Some directors deserve to be honored every year—every week. We are proud to be able to show a glorious, newly restored print of one of the Powell-Pressburger masterpieces, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946)—the very film in which heaven's lack of color was first noted, but which can be shown again now in a glorious, restored print. It is also our tribute to a fierce argumentative collaboration, too tidily masked by what Scorsese has called the greatest of credits: "Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger."