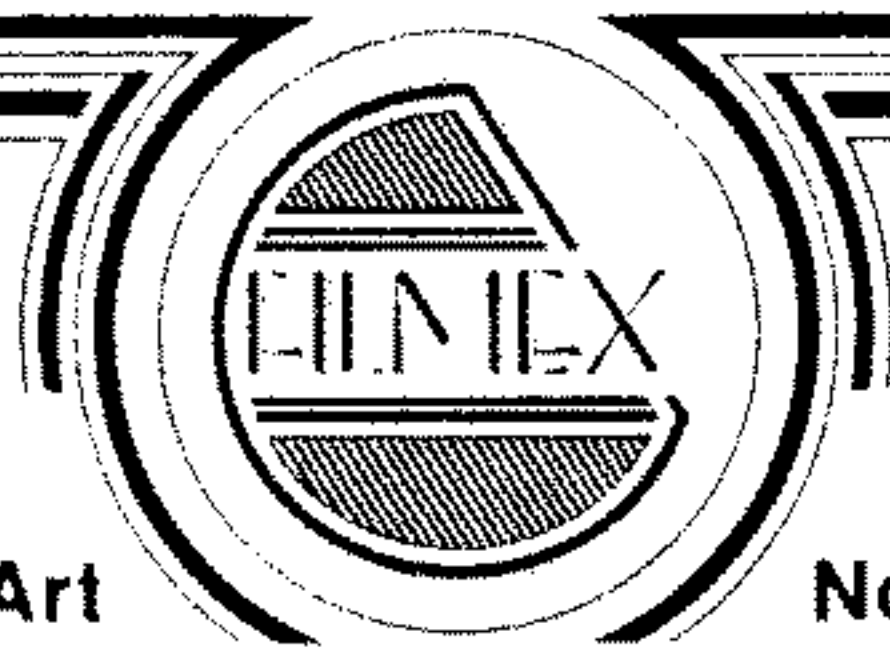


Document Citation

Title	Psycho
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Los Angeles International Film Exposition</i>
Date	1973 Dec 01
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Psycho, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1960

THE GREAT AMERICAN FILMS

Los Angeles County Museum of Art



November 15—December 16, 1973

9:30 pm, December 1, 1973

PSYCHO

A Paramount release, 1960, 109 minutes

Directed and Produced by Alfred Hitchcock; Screenplay by Joseph Stefano, from the novel by Robert Bloch; Edited by George Tomasini; Cinematography by John L. Russell; Music by Bernard Herrmann; Art Direction by Joseph Hurley and Robert Clatworthy; Set Decorator: George Milo

Cast: Anthony Perkins (Norman Bates), Janet Leigh (Marion Crane), Vera Miles (Lila Crane), John Gavin (Sam Loomis), Martin Balsam (Milton Arbogast), John McIntire (Sheriff Chambers), Simon Oakland (Dr. Richmond), Frank Albertson (Tom Cassidy), Pat Hitchcock (Caroline), Vaughn Taylor (George Lowery), Lurene Tuttle (Mrs. Chambers), John Anderson (Car Salesman), Mort Mills (Policeman), and Alfred Hitchcock

* * *

"You have to remember that "Psycho" is a film made with quite a sense of amusement on my part. To me it's a fun picture. The processes through which we take the audience, you see, it's rather like taking them through the haunted house at the fairground..."

--Alfred Hitchcock

"Psycho" is one of the key works of our age. Its themes are of course not new - obvious forerunners include "Macbeth" and Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" - but the intensity and horror of their treatment and the fact that they are here grounded in sex belong to the age that has witnessed on the one hand the discoveries of Freudian psychology and on the other the Nazi concentration camps. I do not think I am being callous in citing the camps in relation to a work of popular entertainment. Hitchcock himself in fact accepted a commission to make a compilation film of captured Nazi material about the camps. The project reached the rough-cut stage, and was abandoned there, for reasons I have not been able to discover: the rough-cut now lies, inaccessibly, along with vast quantities of similar raw material, in the vaults of the Imperial War Museum. But one cannot contemplate the camps without confronting two aspects of their horror: the utter helplessness and innocence of the victims, and the fact that human beings, whose potentialities all of us in some measure share, were their tormentors and butchers. We can no longer be under the slightest illusion about human nature, and about the abysses around us and within us; and "Psycho" is founded on, precisely, these twin horrors. For Hitchcock it was a "fun" picture, and a streak of macabre humour ("Mother...what is the phrase"...isn't quite herself today") certainly runs through it. Is it, then, some monstrous perversion? Many have found it so, and their reaction seems to me more defensible than that of those (must we include Hitchcock himself?) who are merely amused by it ("...make us think twice about stopping at any building looking remotely like the Bates motel..."). David Holbrook, for example, remarks (presumably with

"Psycho" in mind, since his book appeared in 1962), "Of course, if we live in the world of detective stories and Hitchcock films we may take all this sordidness in a light-hearted spirit as a snuff-like piece of stimulation. But if we are responding to poetry and drama our senses should be sharpened..." (Llareggub Revisited). Yet this seems to me a short-sighted and insensitive verdict: if one is responding to "Psycho," one's senses should be sharpened too. No film conveys - to those not afraid to expose themselves fully to it - a greater sense of desolation, yet it does so from an exceptionally mature and secure emotional viewpoint. And an essential part of this viewpoint is the detached sardonic humour. It enables the film to contemplate the ultimate horrors without hysteria, with a poised, almost serene detachment. This is probably not what Hitchcock meant when he said that one cannot appreciate "Psycho" without a sense of humour, but it is what he should have meant. He himself - if his interviews are to be trusted - has not really faced up to what he was doing when he made the film. This, needless to say, must not affect one's estimate of the film itself. For the maker of "Psycho" to regard it as a "fun" picture can be taken as his means of preserving his sanity; for the critic to do so - and to give it his approval on these grounds - is quite unpardonable. Hitchcock (again, if his interviews are to be trusted) is a much greater artist than he knows.

--Alfred Hitchcock by Robin Wood

* * *

35mm print courtesy of Universal Pictures (Clark Ramsay and Bill Hornbeck)

The Music before the Film: Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta by Bela Bartok