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The thirty-nine steps, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1935

The girl was young, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1937

Murder!, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1930

Number seventeen, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1932

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Press Release

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Early Hitchcock

June 2, 5, 6, 12, 13, 18, 27, 30

British Film Institute Presents Piper-Heidsieck Classic Film Collection Early Hitchcock

During June we have the special treat of seeing the British films of Alfred Hitchcock in preserved 35mm prints from the British Film Institute. This is Hitchcock, young, brash and experimental; Hitchcock working on the dark themes, the devilish humor, and the narrative tropes that he would import to Hollywood in 1939.

Hitchcock's apprenticeship in Germany shows in the brand of Expressionism with which his early thrillers are invested. But with their many bizarre indulgences and macabre humor (the Monty Pythonesque birdshop scene in *Sabotage* comes to mind); with theatricality as a preoccupation more than a mood; and with their unmatched feel for *place*, whether in virtuosic chases through the streets and sites of London or investing the pastoral with the chaos of the unknown, the British Hitchcocks are most enjoyable for being so thoroughly British (or more precisely English). In fact, being English is what a film like *Rich and Strange* is all about, and one could make the same argument for several of the others.

Early Hitchcock is a touring series presented by the British Film Institute Piper-Heidsieck Classic Film Collection, a major international initiative that will offer thematic seasons of films to prestigious venues world wide for the next several years. The Collection is a celebration of the art of film, and its aim is to make available classic films in new and restored prints so that audiences can see them in beautiful condition, on the big screen. Early Hitchcock is the first of these series to tour the United States. The British Film Institute in London conceived the Classic Film Collection and is coordinating the project. Funding for the Collection is provided by Piper-Heidsieck Champagne. Special thanks are due to Roger White and Erich Sargeant of the British Film Institute for their invaluable assistance.

Sources cited in our notes include *Hitchcock*, by François Truffaut; *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock*, by Raymond Durnat; *Hitchcock—The Murderous Gaze*, by William Rothman; and "The Pleasure of Hitchcock," by Marilyn Fabe, PFA '92.

Wednesday, June 2

**BFI Presents: Piper Heidsieck Classic Film Collection—Early Hitchcock
At the Castro Theater, S.F.
Dennis James on Wurlitzer**

Double-Bill Admission: \$8. Advance tickets sold at Castro (after May 1) and PFA.

Blackmail 7:30

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1929)

Blackmail is a dark, expressionist, guilt-obsessed tale that reveals the director's deep-seated fear that the forces of law and order can themselves be corrupt. It tells the story of a young woman who, dissatisfied with her boring policeman suitor, seeks a more exiting lover who can broaden her horizons. But the results are disastrous. The man attempts to rape her and she stabs him to death. Her policeman lover, assigned to the case, withholds evidence linking her to the crime, prevents her from confessing, and hounds a would-be blackmailer to suicide. Everyone thinks the blackmailer is the killer and the girl goes free, but does she? The film ends with her united with the one person in the world who knows her guilty secret. Blackmail indeed. Made in 1929 on the cusp of film's conversion from a silent to a sound medium, *Blackmail* appears in a silent and sound version. We will have the privilege of viewing the rarely seen silent version in a stunning archival print.—Marilyn Fabe

◦ Written by Hitchcock, Benn W. Levy, Charles Bennett. Photographed by Jack Cox. With Anny Ondra, Sara Allgood, John Longden, Cyril Ritchard. (78 mins, Silent, B&W, 35mm)

Murder! 9:10

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1930)

When a young woman silently accepts her prosecution for murder, the lone juror who believes her innocent begins his own investigation. He finds himself confronting a particularly clever killer. “*Murder!* is the masterpiece of Hitchcock's early films. The philosophical dimension implicit in *The Lodger* and *Blackmail* becomes explicit in the arguments between the protagonist and the cunning and articulate murderer against whom he is pitted....The philosophical concerns of *Murder!* are those of all of Hitchcock's films and include the problems of human identity; the relationships among love, desire, murder, dreams, madness, and theater; and the nature of viewing. And underlying the film's arguments are its reflections on its own nature as a film.”—William Rothman

◦ Written by Alma Reville, from a story by Clemence Dane, Helen Simpson. Photographed by Jack Cox. With Herbert Marshall, Nora Baring, Phyllis Konstam, Edward Chapman. (94 mins, B&W, 35mm)

Saturday June 5

Early Hitchcock

Juno and the Paycock 6:00

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1930)

Hitchcock had an affinity for Sean O'Casey (“I had O'Casey in mind when I showed a bum in a cafe announcing the end of the world in *The Birds*,” he told François Truffaut); for his play, *Juno and the Paycock* (“I liked the story, the mood, the characters, and the blend of humor and tragedy very much”); but not particularly for the filming of it (“it had nothing to do with cinema”). Hampered by the technology of the early sound era, when the camera temporarily lost

the freedom to become a narrative element in and of itself, Hitchcock concentrated on the strengths of the Irish Players, led by Sara Allgood as Juno, the only realist in a family of shirkers and cynics during “the troubles” in Ireland. A possible but improbable inheritance from a distant cousin sets the gullible family to dreaming, but, as Hitchcock would ironize two years hence in *Rich and Strange* (perhaps picking up where O'Casey left off), sudden wealth offers “no way out.”

◦ Written by Alma Reville, based on the play by Sean O'Casey. Photographed by J. J. Cox. With Sara Allgood, Edward Chapman, Maire O'Neil, Barry Fitzgerald. (97 mins, B&W, 35mm)

Blackmail 8:00

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1929)

Jon Mirsalis on Piano

For program notes please see June 2.

Mary 9:35

Alfred Hitchcock (UK/Germany, 1930)

“It has often been remarked that the Hitchcock ‘touch’ has a little Germanic force behind it. It might even be claimed that Hitchcock was the first non-German director to open up the Anglo-Saxon cinema to Expressionist influence. Which makes the emergence of *Mary*, the German-language version of his 1930 film *Murder!*, shot at the same time on the same sets but with a German cast, a fascinating case for study....In many respects it looks a much smoother job of filmmaking than *Murder!*....But in becoming a tighter movie, it has also become less characteristically Hitchcock. The irony is, looking at *Murder!*, that some of those characteristics seem precisely what one might call the Expressionist influence. In almost every instance, these feed into the social comedy, the preoccupation with class and style, theatricality and self-presentation, which concerns [the original] film as much as its murder plot and accounts for its rather rambling air....*Mary* is a neat little potboiler, efficient but rather empty....”—Richard Combs, *Sight & Sound*

◦ Written by Georg Klaren. Photographed by Jack Cox. With Alfred Abel, Olga Tschekowa, Paul Graetz, Lotte Stein. (82 mins, In German with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm)

Sunday June 6

Early Hitchcock

Murder! 7:00

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1930)

For program notes please see June 2.

Elstree Calling 8:50

Adrian Brunel, Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1930)

This very British reply to Hollywood's popular revues and follies of the early sound era delightfully captures the spirit of the British music hall. If it seems to lack any one cinematic style, it is largely because project director Adrian Brunel's elaborately worked-out schemes and montage sequences ended up on the cutting-room floor and some portions of the film were reshot. This is how Alfred Hitchcock came to direct the *Taming of the Shrew* burlesque, originally shot by Brunel. Hitchcock is also responsible for the "Thriller" episode, and connecting-scenes of Gordon Harker trying to capture the revues on a home-made television set (remember this is 1930) with little success. But more than anything *Elstree Calling* is a stage for a large cast of British performers whose names would become household words, including Will Fyffe, Jack Hulbert, Lily Morris, Anna May Wong, Cicely Courtneidge, and Teddy Brown.

◦ Written by Val Valentine. Photographed by Claude Friese-Greene. (86 mins, B&W, 35mm)

Saturday June 12

Early Hitchcock

The Skin Game 6:00

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1931)

"*The Skin Game* is another photographed play, less enclosed than *Juno and the Paycock*. To write about it is to find oneself writing about [the playwright] Galsworthy rather than Hitchcock. Class is the only theme they have in common, central in one and reticent in the other, perhaps because downhill for Galsworthy is uphill for Hitchcock....Hitchcock's film seems to be of greatest interest, not only because Galsworthy's play can still involve us in its drama and carry us along, but because the film reproduces so many attitudes of a period roughly contemporaneous with the play, and quite without the falsities of cultural elevation. Indeed, Hitchcock slightly alters its social perspective. Galsworthy, a Forsyte by class, began by trying to criticize his kind, but ended up by admiring them....Hitchcock refuses to relax his focus into any sentimental fuzziness" (Raymond Durgnat). The story tells of a feud between rival families, one landed gentry, the other nouveau riche.

◦ Written by Hitchcock, Alma Reville, from the play by John Galsworthy. Photographed by Jack Cox. With Edmund Gwenn, Jill Esmond, John Longden, C. V. France. (80 mins, B&W, 35mm)

Number Seventeen 7:35

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1932)

A dark and mysterious house, a handcuffed corpse, a stolen necklace, a band of criminals, a prowling detective and a female crook who falls for him: "Although it was taken seriously at the time, Hitchcock intended *Number 17* as a spoof of the genre, which accounts for some of its deliberate lapses in logic. Spoof or not, it's an exciting film....The first half displays many echoes of Hitchcock's apprenticeship in Germany, and is fine, atmospheric 'old-house' stuff. [In the second half] it launches into a marvelously exciting climactic chase, which is still a most impressive example of editing and imaginative (if extended) use of miniatures" (William K. Everson). "Although the movie seems to be remembered today chiefly for its concluding chase of model bus after model train, before the latter crashes into a model ferry—a sequence which Claude Chabrol and Raymond Durgnat have each aptly compared to Jiri Trnka's puppet films—it

is worth noting that Hitchcock handles the entire film like a mechanical toy, a top to be kept spinning at all costs” (Jonathan Rosenbaum).

◦ Written by Hitchcock, Alma Reville, Rodney Ackland, from the play by J. Jefferson Farjeon. Photographed by Jack Cox, Bryan Langley. With Leon M. Lion, Anne Grey, John Stuart, Donald Calthrop. (64 mins, B&W, 35mm)

Rich and Strange 9:00 **Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1932)**

A little stranger than it is rich, being neither fish nor fowl—neither suspense nor outright comedy—this is a film that, early on, lends irony to many of Hitchcock's own tropes, even as it plays with those of the silent era just passed. An inveterately bored couple, up to here with steak-and-kidney pie and umbrellas that won't open, use an unexpected inheritance to “suffer a sea change,” in Shakespeare's words, and suffer they do. On a cruise, between bouts of nausea, he courts a gold-digging “princess” and she, a gentleman, and the marriage looks to be over until they are reunited by what appears to be a mutual desire for death—complacency in the face of the abyss. Our heroes are *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* in early form: offered a way out of the “grey blanket” of marriage, they burrow in deeper. Durnat: “English entertainment shows an early awareness of the absurd, and it isn't difficult to moralize over *Rich and Strange*...in a Sartrean way...Each will die without having ‘suspected what the other is.’”

◦ Written by Alma Reville, Val Valentine, based on a story by Dale Collins. Photographed by Jack Cox. With Henry Kendall, Joan Barry, Betty Amann, Percy Marmont. (81 mins, B&W, 35mm)

Sunday June 13 **Early Hitchcock** **The Thirty-Nine Steps 7:30, 9:10** **Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1935)**

Hitchcock's sound-era filmmaking hit its stride with *The Thirty-Nine Steps*; among the most delightful and satisfying of the British Hitchcocks, this thriller also brings some of the disturbing elements of the silents into play again. Robert Donat's Richard Hannay may be an innocent abroad (he is Canadian), but he is drawn along in a dangerous intrigue in part by his own desire to know too much. (Mr. Memory, who “has left his brain to the British Museum,” shows both the extremes and the limitations of such a passion.) The film is filled with wry humor and wonderful touches. But Hannay's journey is away from innocence toward a broader humanity; toward becoming, like a spy, a man without a country. (Locale, from music-hall to moors, is bathed in mystery; a landscape of fog and sheep is by turns vampirish and serene.) The pursuit of that which makes him “lonely and helpless with the whole world against me” is a trial run for *Saboteur*, *North by Northwest*, and even *Vertigo*: it has to end where it began.

◦ Written by Charles Bennett, Alma Reville, based on a novel by John Buchan. Photographed by Bernard Knowles. With Robert Donat, Madeleine Carroll, Lucie Mannheim, Godfrey Tearle. (87 mins, B&W, 35mm, Permission Kino International)

Friday June 18
Early Hitchcock
Sabotage 7:30
Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1936)

Sabotage is a prescient thriller that puts London on bomb alert well before the real seige of WWII occurred. It's a sad little film seemingly out of Hitchcock's subconscious: it does away with the law (guilt and innocence are taken by another measure altogether), the cruel father, and childhood itself. The settings include a greengrocer's whose friendly lettuce-salesman reports to Scotland Yard (Hitch's father was a greengrocer); a movie theater where the behind-the-screen life of Sylvia Sidney, Oscar Homolka and their "happy family" is more brutal than what is on-screen; and images of childhood that are nothing short of ominous (a Disney cartoon asks "Who Killed Cock Robin?" and ye olde pet shoppe is anything but). *Sabotage* is one of the most "British" of Hitchcock's British films for its marvelously choreographed street scenes, an almost constant sideshow that becomes a key element in the story as a little boy is sent to Picadilly Circus with a film, a bomb, and his youthful curiosity. *Sabotage* itself is a "sound and light" show in the truest cinematic sense; both elements are used expertly, and there is nothing wrong with the film's being mainly important for style. There's so much of it.

◦ Written by Charles Bennett, Ian Hay, Helen Simpson, Alma Reville, E.H. Emmett, based on the novel *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad. Photographed by Bernard Knowles. With Sylvia Sidney, Oscar Homolka, John Loder. (77 mins, B&W, 35mm, Permission Kino International)

The Secret Agent 9:05
Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1936)

This entertaining curiosity stars a handsome young John Gielgud as a WWI soldier and novelist, the reports of whose death are greatly exaggerated in order to install him as a secret agent abroad. In a Swiss hotel he pretends to be married to fellow agent Madeleine Carroll (playing at marriage is a Hitchcock device that never tires since it's so much more romantic than the real thing); while Peter Lorre "does his thing" as a trigger-happy hitman. Lorre would be largely superfluous were the film not precisely concerned with the temptations and titillations of murder. Hitchcock plays with our own "pleasure" in on-screen death by portraying it here as a very human thing that can easily happen to the wrong guy. Murder comes in extreme-long-shot through a telescope that doubles for a camera that doubles for our sight. And it's not a pretty picture. Carroll's lady spy, having arrived full of (our) excitement for the kill, leaves questioning its justice altogether, even if it's the *right* guy. Movies aren't supposed to do that.

◦ Written by Charles Bennett, from the play by Campbell Dixon, adapted from the novel *Ashenden* by W. Somerset Maugham. Photographed by Bernard Knowles. With John Gielgud, Madeleine Carroll, Peter Lorre, Robert Young. (85 mins, B&W, 35mm, Permission Kino International)

Sunday June 27

Early Hitchcock

The Lady Vanishes 6:00, 9:30

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1938)

One of the best-loved of Hitchcock's films, perhaps for the seamless blend of humor and thrills which makes its sinister and bizarre elements less threatening than, say, those in *Sabotage* and, much later, *Strangers on a Train*. Almost all the action takes place on a transcontinental train where a young English woman (Margaret Lockwood), having dozed off, awakes to find that the tweedy-whimsical old lady (Dame May Whitty) with whom she had been conversing has disappeared. Everyone else in the carriage quietly denies that she was ever there. *The Lady Vanishes* is squarely pre-WWII: it is 1938, and the train speeds through the Tyrolean alps to a place where nobody can be neutral. (A running-gag reference to "how England is doing"—cricket, that is—is a double entendre.) "The verve of Sidney Gilliatt's dialogue in no way submerges the director's personality. It's an excellent English film, an excellent Hitchcock film" (Claude Chabrol).

◦ Written by Sidney Gilliatt, Frank Launder, from the story by Ethel Lina White. Photographed by Jack Cox. With Margaret Lockwood, Dame May Whitty, Michael Redgrave. (96 mins, B&W, 35mm, Permission Kino International)

Young and Innocent 7:50

Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1937)

"In *Young and Innocent*, based on a Josephine Tey mystery, a movie star is found murdered and suspicion falls upon a struggling writer who escapes from court and fights to establish his innocence. It is one of Hitchcock's most underrated works, a complex study in the relationship between cinema and reality (expressed in the ambiguous imagery, and specific visual coups such as the dazzling ballroom crane shot [which Claude Chabrol has called "the most beautiful forward tracking shot to be found in the history of film"]); and yet another story of injustice whereby chaos intrudes upon ordinary lives and families" (National Film Theatre, London). "*Young and Innocent* sustains a mixture of light comedy and thrills in deft proportion, and to constantly surprising ends....The settings range across the Cornish countryside, and provide the opportunity for both exciting location photography and some devastating satire of well-to-do British gentry in their seaside and country-manor retreats..." (Albert Johnson, SFIFF '71)

◦ Written by Charles Bennett, Alma Reville, based on the novel, *A Shilling for Candles* by Josephine Tey. Photographed by Bernard Knowles. With Derrick de Marney, Nova Pilbeam, Basil Radford, Mary Clare. (84 mins, B&W, 35mm, Permission Kino)

Wednesday June 30
Early Hitchcock
Jamaica Inn 7:30
Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1939)

A costume drama of cutthroat smugglers on the Cornish coast *was* an anomaly for Hitchcock. But his last British feature, based on a Daphne du Maurier novel, offers pleasures that are not all camp. Charles Laughton is deliciously overwrought as a hypocritical squire who moonlights as a criminal mastermind. But he knows and we know that, while his character is depraved, he is not mad, as the script would have us believe. Maureen O'Hara's damsel-in-distress is of the *Notorious* mode: in a house filled with murderers, she slips into the intrigue in such a way as to save not only herself but the supposed agent of her rescue (Robert Newton). Marie Ney as the mistress of the lonely inn is a variation on Hitchcock's beleaguered farmers' wives; she answers for her brutal husband (Leslie Banks) till the bitter end, just as O'Hara's affinity for Laughton offers the film "its dark blossom of lyricism," in Raymond Durgnat's words.

◦ Written by Sidney Gilliat, Joan Harrison, based on the novel by Daphne du Maurier. Additional dialog by J. B. Priestly. Photographed by Harry Stradling, Bernard Knowles. With Charles Laughton, Maureen O'Hara, Leslie Banks, Robert Newton. (99 mins, B&W, 35mm)

Intermission

Bon Voyage and Adventure Malgache
Alfred Hitchcock (UK, 1944)

Hitchcock temporarily returned to Britain to make his contribution to the Allied war effort with two French-language films for the British Ministry of Information which were intended to encourage resistance in France and, especially, the French colonies. *Bon Voyage* and *Adventure Malgache* were shot by the eminent German cameraman Günther Krampf and featured the Molière Players, refugees from France who had formed a theatrical group in London. Both were spy/Resistance intrigues based on true cases—and both, in the words of a British critic, "rattling good yarns."

In *Bon Voyage*, an RAF man is taken out of France through Resistance channels, escorted by a Polish officer whom he befriends. After he is startled by a revelation concerning the officer's true identity, the film takes us "through the journey across France all over again, but this time we show all sorts of details that the young RAF man hadn't noticed at first..." (Hitchcock, to Truffaut). *Adventure Malgache* is the true story of two of the Molière players who were on opposing sides of the struggle in Vichy-dominated Madagascar, and who find themselves sharing a dressing room as actors in London. Because of its sensitive subject, dealing with conflicts among the Free French, it was not, after all, released.

◦ Both Photographed by Günther Krampf. With The Molière Players. *Bon Voyage*: Written by J. O. C. Orton, Angus McPhail, from an original subject by Arthur Calder-Marshall. Also with John Blythe. (26 mins). *Adventure Malgache* (31 mins). (Total running time: c. 57 mins, Both in French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm)