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Champagne, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1928

The pleasure garden, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1927

Easy virtue, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1927

The lodger: a story of the London fog, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1927

The ring, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1927

Secret agent, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1936

Elstree calling, Brunel, Adrian, 1930

The shame of Mary Boyle, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1929

The farmer's wife, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1928

Number seventeen, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1932

Shelley - an early NFT series
f.y.i.

The English Hitchcock

Well, to put it bluntly, isn't there a certain incompatibility between the terms 'cinema' and 'Britain'? — François Truffaut.

One day, perhaps we shall re-discover Hitchcock's British films and do them justice — Robin Wood.

On 13th August Alfred Hitchcock will be celebrating his 80th birthday as he prepares to make his 54th feature film. It is to be a thriller.

The NFT is pleased to pay tribute to Hitchcock on this special occasion by screening the films he made in his home country, from *The Pleasure Garden* in 1925 to *Jamaica Inn* in 1939. We hope to be able to follow this season with a retrospective of Hitchcock's work in America but only when certain key films become available again: Donald Spoto has opined that the continuing unavailability of *Vertigo* is 'one of the most regrettable artistic deprivations of our time'.

But let us now celebrate the British Hitchcock; indeed, the English Hitchcock, for the films seem essentially English in character and in their ideological patterns: their quirkiness, humour and theatricality (a recurrent motif) reflect the ideals of a nation then great, complacent, frighteningly naïve, implacably conservative — pre-war, pre-Attlee, pre-Suez. We hope this season will contribute to the process of re-discovery that Robin Wood hopes for and will demolish Truffaut's assertion, which goes on to speculate that our national characteristics — 'the English countryside, the subdued way of life, the stolid routine' — are anti-dramatic. He might well have been drawing a picture of Hitchcock himself, failing to recognise the

tensions beneath the disciplined facade that Hitchcock presents to the world. Although Hitchcock has come a long way from his modest late Victorian beginnings in Leystonstone to the secluded homes of Beverly Hills (which, were it not for the sun and palm trees, might be stockbroker Surrey) his attitudes have not changed, even though his celebrity has. Characteristically, Hitchcock's films are obsessive romances, struggles between instinct and desire, order and chaos.

The notes on the individual films are based to a large extent on the following sources: John M. Smith's article, 'Conservative Individualism: A Selection of English Hitchcock', published by *Screen* (Vol 13 No. 3), *Hitchcock's Films* by Robin Wood, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* by Donald Spoto, *Hitch* by John Russell Taylor, *Hitchcock's British Films* by Maurice Yacowar, *Hitchcock* by François Truffaut and *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock* by Raymond Durnat.—Adrian Turner.

Raymond Durnat will be presenting a seminar relating to this season in NFT3 on Tuesday 28 August at 8.30pm. Admission free.

The Stills Library of the National Film Archive has arranged an exhibition in the clubroom to accompany this season.

(Members will notice that two of Hitchcock's most famous films, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) are missing from this season. We have been prevented from screening them because of the recently released remakes).



Wed 1 Aug
6.15 8.30

The Pleasure Garden

Hitchcock's first completed film as a director (*Number Thirteen* was unluckily aborted) was shot in Germany as a co-production and concerns the affairs of two chorus girls and two flawed colonial men, one of whom becomes a drunkard and a murderer. Critics have noted the germs of Hitchcockian romantic obsession and certain visual motifs (the staircase, for instance): 'These are small touches, but they indicate a significant talent hurrying through an apprenticeship in traditional melodrama' (Spoto). GB-Germany 1925.



Fri 3 Aug
6.30

The Lodger

Regrettably we pass over *The Mountain Echo* which is a lost film, to *The Lodger* which is generally regarded as the first 'genuine' Hitchcock picture, a fine study of sexual torment and suspicion, clearly influenced by German expressionism and perhaps owing something to Lang in its portrayal of mob psychology. Its ambiguities are remarkable (the lodger is suspected of being a Jack-the-Ripper type) the film shows Hitchcock's willingness to experiment (not always successfully — the celebrated glass ceiling is an obvious gimmick). GB 1926/With Ivor Novello.



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Downhill

One of Hitchcock's most interesting silent film *Downhill* takes as its starting point a curious pact made by two schoolboys and then follows the course of disillusionment and fantasy; Ivor Novello having been falsely accused of theft at school suffers a progression of disasters, ending up as a gigolo. *Downhill* is the first film in which Hitchcock will exercise that anxiety most fully developed in *Vertigo*, the temptation, obsession, fascination with an unstable footing, the lure of the chaos beyond our normal life' (Yacowar). GB 1927. Plus an extract from *Spellbound* (USA 1945).



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Easy Virtue

Until its Archive Night screening two years ago *Easy Virtue* was a lost film. It would be an exaggeration to claim it as a major re-discovery but its merits and entertainment value are considerable. It blithely avoids much of Noël Coward's original play about a rich girl whose disreputable history finally catches up with her as she marries an aristocrat, settling instead for a series of technically complex set-pieces and sunny location work on the Riviera, the moral emptiness of which, Spoto observes, anticipates *Catch a Thief*. GB 1927. With Isabel Jeans.



Mon 6 Aug
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The Ring

The Ring concerns the rivalry of two prizefighters for a girl, beginning vividly in the fairground and then moving up-market to the Albert Hall for its elitist audiences and champagne for revellers and punch-drunk boxers. The film is characteristically rich in visual symbolism: Yacowar writes of three basic images of rectangle, circle and triangle. The film can be seen as a contrast between partial commitment and total commitment, between the casual and the intense, between the arc and the circle. An ambitious film and possibly Hitchcock's most technically accomplished of the silent era. GB 1927. With Carl Brisson, Gordon Harker.



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The Farmer's Wife

COLLECTION OF
TOM LUDDY

'The three principal objects of the farmer's frustrated wife-hunt — a horsey widow, a prissy hypochondriac old maid and a simpering overweight baby-doll — are pilloried with a ruthlessness which may have lent some colour to Hitchcock's cinematic reputation as a misogynist; the tea party which is reduced to a shambles is a testament to his talents for immaculately timed knockabout comedy which one would not otherwise have suspected of Hitchcock' (Taylor). GB 1928. With James Thomas, Lilian Hall-Davis, Gordon Harker.

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Wed 8 Aug
8.45

Champagne

Champagne is more interesting for what it isn't than for what it is: most of the books on Hitchcock recount the ingenious moral fable the director backed out of shooting and demur at the slight, compromised plot he ended up with, about an heiress forcibly reduced to making her own living in Paris as a waitress in a night-club. Hitchcock describes it as his 'lowest ebb', but Truffaut detects 'the lively qualities of Griffith comedies' in it, whilst Betty Balfour's performance has some appropriate sparkle. GB 1928.



Sat 11 Aug
6.15 8.30

The Manxman

Hitchcock told Truffaut that 'the only point of interest about (*The Manxman*) is that it is my last silent movie'. But Hitchcock, perhaps recalling his impatience to make a talkie, underrates many aspects of the film: its location work is quite remarkable (towering cliffs and wild seas dwarfing the characters' struggles), and the story of an obsessive *ménage à trois* between a fisherman, a lawyer and 'perhaps the first clear example of a classic Hitchcock blonde' (Taylor) is startlingly candid and desperate for its time. GB 1929/*With Anny Ondra, Malcolm Keen.*



Sun 12 Aug
6.15 8.30

Blackmail

Begun as a silent, *Blackmail* ended up as Britain's first talkie and Hitchcock's first thriller since *The Lodger*. The plot revolves around a girl forced to kill in self defence, her subsequent problems with a blackmailer and her relationship with the detective who investigates the case. There are some striking experiments with sound (the famous *Knife* scene) and a fine chase through the Schufftan room at the British Museum, its exhibits as much a symbol of continuity and order as Mount Rushmore and the Statue of Liberty. GB 1929. Plus an extract from *Saboteur* (USA 1942).



Mon 13 Aug
6.15 8.30

Elstree Calling

Elstree Calling is a collection of variety acts (Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Anna May Wong, Tom Cobbely) staged by a number of inexperienced directors. '(Hitchcock's) contribution was the framing device which has a working class family, not unlike those in *The Lodger* and *Blackmail*, trying fanatically to tune in to the show on their new television set (which in early 1930 was more science fiction than science fact) and being constantly frustrated by the incompetence and irascibility of the father' (Taylor). GB 1930.



Wed 15 Aug
6.30

Juno and the Paycock

Adapted from Sean O'Casey's play, *Juno* was a daunting task for Hitchcock, who feared repercussions should he tamper too much with O'Casey's great original. The result, though dismissed by Hitchcock as 'filmed theatre', works, maybe thanks to the authenticity of the Dublin locations and the largely Irish cast. Sara Allgood plays Juno, the practical wife, Edward Chapman the dreamy husband whose expected legacy does not materialise and John Laurie their son, who is shot as an informer. GB 1930.



Wed 15 Aug
8.45

Murder

One of Hitchcock's few whodunnits, *Murder* is adapted from a play by Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson and revolves around a repertory theatre company, focusing on an actress (Norah Baring) wrongly convicted of murdering the wife of a fellow actor. Amateur sleuth Herbert Marshall eventually tracks down the real culprit. A failure on release, because it was seen as melodramatic and laughable, *Murder* was possibly too sophisticated for its time in its treatment of a homosexual theme and its ironic view of the protagonists. GB 1930. With Esme Percy.



Fri 17 Aug
6.30

The Skin Game

Derived from John Galsworthy's play, *The Skin Game* contrasts the old order of the decent conservative, Hillcrest, with the irruption of the "new" man, Hornblow, a self-made industrialist who ushers in modernity with its cruelty and dynamism. Hillcrest's insubstantial purity is lost, and the old order dies by virtue of the fact of there being a conflict. Both sides are chastened, each having been cruel to the other, while the young couple suggest a possible future unity' (Smith). GB 1931. With Helen Haye, Edmund Gwenn.



Fri 17 Aug
8.45

Rich and Strange

Rich and Strange deals with a suburban couple (Joan Barry and Henry Kendall) who spend an inheritance to go on a world cruise in search of adventure – with disastrous results. 'The pattern established here is fundamental to Hitchcock's work: bourgeois "normality" is empty and unsatisfying, everything beyond it terrifying' (Wood). 'It's a thousand pities that the critical consensus fastened on a minor amusement like *The Thirty-Nine Steps* rather than this, as their notion of a good Hitchcock movie' (Durgnat). GB 1932. Plus an extract from *Marnie* (USA 1964).



Mon 20 Aug
6.15 8.30

Number Seventeen

Number Seventeen stands as something of a premature self-parody: half of it is set in a creaking, empty house and the second half is a splendidly irrelevant mad-hat chase between a goods train and a hijacked Green Line bus which end up sinking a cross-Channel ferry: 'That train, coach and ferry are clearly models doesn't spoil things, our natural preference for genuine catastrophes being compensated for by nostalgic references to Hornby Trains and Dinky Toys, all taking on the curious artificiality of a dream' (Durgnat). GB 1932. Plus *Bon Voyage* (GB 1944), the first of Hitchcock's two war-time propaganda shorts.



Tue 21 Aug
6.30

Waltzes from Vienna

If Hitchcock were Lubitsch, *Waltzes from Vienna* might really have sparked. The Danube isn't in Hitchcock's blood and neither is light comedy without darker undertones, but he decks out the silly story about the two Strausses with some fine visual *coups*, and Jessie Matthews, though no Jeanette MacDonald, gives a lively performance, ably supported by Fay Compton and Edmund Gwenn. GB 1933. Plus an extract from *Mr and Mrs Smith* (USA 1941), Hitchcock's American attempt at Lubitsch-style comedy.



Wed 22 Aug
6.30

The Man Who Knew Too Much

With this film Hitchcock entered a more mature, technically assured, political phase on which his British reputation largely rests and which ultimately led him to Hollywood. The film's elaborate spy-plot, beginning with a secret agent's assassination at St. Moritz and culminating in the Albert Hall, hardly matters – what does is 'subversion as disorder . . . The achievement of meaning for those characters who break the rules is an image for the film's own formal achievement' (Smith). GB 1934/With Peter Lorre. Plus Hitchcock's second propaganda short *Aventure Malgache* (1944).



Fri 24 Aug 6.30/
Thu 30 Aug 6.30

Secret Agent

Based on Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden*, *Secret Agent* sends John Gielgud to Switzerland to kill an enemy agent. By mistake, he kills an innocent tourist. The Hitchcockian pursuit embodies 'the characteristic themes, of rooting out pretence in oneself by thoroughly acting it out, and a compulsive professionalism' (Smith), describing a movement from 'espionage as patriotic fun to sickmaking duty' (Durgnat). GB 1936/With Peter Lorre, Madeleine Carroll. Plus extract from *North by Northwest* (USA 1959).



Fri 24 Aug
8.45

Sabotage

A *film noir* about an anarchist planting bombs in London (under cover as the manager of a flea-pit), *Sabotage* is considered by Durgnat to be 'the profoundest film of Hitchcock's thriller period, and perhaps of his career'. Smith has discussed Hitchcock's affinities with Conrad (on whose *The Secret Agent* this film is based) and how they treat political and other kinds of subversion 'primarily as *disorder*, which the novelist and director react against but which they feel compelled to deal with'. GB 1936/With Sylvia Sydney, Oscar Homolka. Plus an extract from *The Birds* (USA 1963).



Tue 28 Aug
6.30

Young and Innocent

In *Sabotage* the anarchist poses as a cinema manager. In *Young and Innocent*, 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) and yet another story of injustice whereby chaos intrudes upon ordinary lives and families. GB 1937. With Derrick de Marney, Nova Pilbeam.



Thu 30 Aug
8.45

Jamaica Inn

Hitchcock made this adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's novel as a way of killing time before going to Hollywood (where he made du Maurier's *Rebecca*). Fraught with clashes of temperament and drastic re-writes, *Jamaica Inn* is an engrossing hybrid: part thriller, part period melodrama, part meditation on damnation set in 18th century Cornwall, where Maureen O'Hara finds her family involved with a gang of wreckers. Turning to the local pillar of society for help (Charles Laughton), she finds him organising it all. The model-shots and lurid backdrops contribute to the general delirium. GB 1939.