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Hitchcock: A brilliant career built on boyhood fears

Alfred Hitchcock spent his lifetime trying to control the deep fears and anxieties which threatened to rule him. He never completely succeeded.

But in the struggle for control, he coped with his own anxieties by transferring that same, strong sense of fear to generations of suspense-hungry audiences. His talents in doing so made him one of the most wealthy and well-known movie directors ever.

Hitchcock and filmmaking practically grew up together—each influencing the other in dramatic ways. Born August 11, 1899, and raised in the family of a prosperous London greengrocer, young Alfred was exposed to both the theater and the cinema. His preference for the latter was not the socially acceptable choice, but that didn't matter to him. He was a loner anyway, more prone to watching the other children on the playground than to joining in their games.

The impact of this early upbringing was significant to both his lifestyle and his career. Reportedly, one of his earliest memories was of being sent with an unexplained note to the local police station by his father. An officer read the note then locked the five-year-old lad in a dark, damp cell for nearly 10 minutes. Upon releasing him, the officer warned, "That's what we do to naughty boys." The trauma of the incident scarred Hitchcock permanently, forcing him to live with a fear of police so great that he never learned to drive just to avoid the possibility of getting a ticket. Many of his films later reflected his fascination with handcuffs and innocent men who couldn't go to the law.

Religion also was a strong influence on the youngest offspring of Emma and William Hitchcock. They raised all three of their children according to their own devout Roman Catholic beliefs and educated them in strict Jesuit schools. It was while attending the Jesuit prep school, St. Ignatius College, that Hitchcock was first introduced to the concept of suspense.

Corporal punishment was common

at St. Ignatius, and the young school-boys were often disciplined for their offenses by being struck forcefully across the hand with a hard rubber stick. A classroom instructor would pronounce guilt for some misdeed and issue a sentence for the number of blows to be received. Knowing his fate, the young offender could then choose when to report to the special priest for his stinging punishment. Being normal youngsters, most of the boys delayed as long as possible. The dreadful suspense of waiting was as painful as the blows themselves. Hitchcock would never forget this fear-filled experience.

In 1914, the Hitchcock family was shaken by the death of Alfred's father. His brother, nine years older, took over the family business. Confused and uncertain, 15-year-old Alfred decided to pursue his vague interest in mechanics and went off to study engineering. About the same time he began reading the film industry trade magazines.

When he was 18, he landed his first job as an apprentice mechanical engineer for the W. T. Henley Telegraph Company. Later, he was moved to their advertising department.

He was just barely 20 years old when Famous Players Lasky (later Paramount Pictures) opened their Islington, England, movie studio in 1920. By this time, Hitchcock knew he wanted to work in the movies, and he approached the studio with a makeshift portfolio of title cards.

He impressed the studio executives who put him to work writing and

designing title cards for their silent films. Thus began a brilliant career that would span nearly 60 years.

Alfred Hitchcock learned his trade from the bottom up, from the inside out, from the beginning. And he did it so well that his name and his rotund profile would one day bring immediate recognition from audiences around the world.

He didn't set out to achieve greatness. In those early years, he was satisfied just to be part of making movies. He enjoyed his job, and soon he was in charge of the title department. From there he naturally moved into writing scenarios, then to art direction. Before long, he was an assistant director.

Meanwhile, his relationship with Alma Reville also progressed. In 1926, he married this script girl and editor he had worked with for four years. She became his "Duchess" and continued as a scriptwriter and consultant through most of his career. No opinion ever mattered as much as Alma's.

Hitchcock directed 53 films in his career, 23 of them in England. The first true Hitchcock film was *The Lodger*, a silent thriller about a mysterious boarding house guest suspected of being Jack the Ripper. In one scene the suspect is pacing and Hitchcock wanted to show the building apprehension in the house. Limited by the absence of sound, the inventive director got the same effect by using a clear glass floor through which the pacing feet could be seen. Such innovation became a trademark.

The Lodger marked the beginning of another famous trademark: Hitchcock's appearances in his films. The tradition started when one more body was needed to fill the screen and it continued first as a superstition then as a gag.

Hitchcock gained world attention with a string of British classics including *Blackmail* (1929-first British sound picture), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934-original), *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935), *The Secret Agent* (1936), *Sabotage* (1936), *Young and Innocent* (1937), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938).

Producer David O. Selznick brought the great director to Hollywood in 1939, where he achieved cinematic immortality with a parallel string of U.S. classics including *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Rear Window* (1954), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956-remake), *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960), and *The Birds* (1962).

Hitchcock's work has been praised by critics and peers alike. His pictures have earned a total of 52 Academy Award nominations, including five for Best Director (*Rebecca*, *Lifeboat*, *Spellbound*, *Rear Window*, *Psycho*), though he never took an Oscar home himself.

But the most important reaction was that of the audience. Hitchcock made his movies with the average moviegoer in mind. His characters were ordinary people, easily identified with—which provided the key for the director's manipulation. He placed these characters in unusual situations, artfully controlling the rhythm of their actions, building and relaxing tension to a shocking climax. The viewer never knew what to expect next.

After years of making heart-stopping dramas, it was Hitchcock's own heart which stopped on April 29, 1980. But his legacy lives on to terrorize and thrill generations yet to come through the increasing availability of his work to the home video audience.



For a "Good Eee-vening" of suspense and intrigue... Hitchcock Classics

Sabotage (1936)
Starring: **Sylvia Sidney, Oscar Homolka**
An elaborately detailed thriller about a woman who suspects her kindly husband of keeping something from her. Hitchcock has you on the edge of your seat with his splashes of intrigue. Based on Joseph Conrad's novel, *The Secret Agent*.
VHS: 214-5 B&W • 76 min.
Beta: 264-1 **\$19.95**

Rear Window (1954)
Starring: **James Stewart, Grace Kelly**
Stewart stars as a voyeur photographer who spies on his courtyard neighbors and uncovers a murder in one of Hitchcock's most stylish thrillers. The witty and macabre tale demonstrates why Hitch was known as the "Master of Suspense."
VHS: 200031 Color • 113 min.
Beta: 200032 **\$49.95**

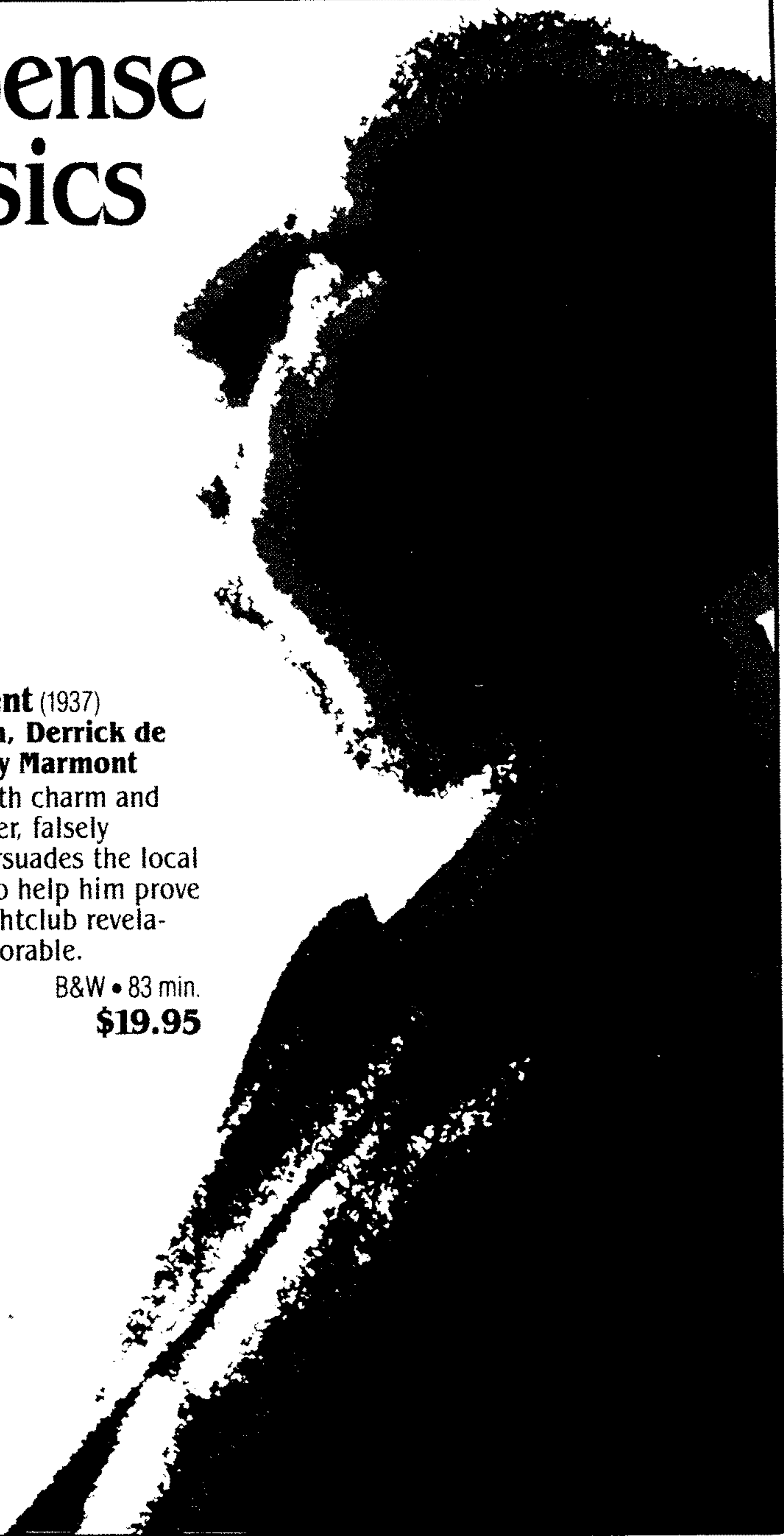
Blackmail (1929)
Starring: **Anny Ondra, John Longden, Cyril Richard**
The first talking picture for both the famed director and the British movie industry. You'll thrill to all the familiar Hitchcock trademarks: drama, suspense, murder, blackmail and an exciting climax.
VHS: 190-4 B&W • 85 min.
Beta: 240-4 **\$19.95**

Vertigo (1958)
Starring: **James Stewart, Kim Novak**
Hailed by critics as Hitchcock's ultimate masterpiece. It is a haunting, dream-like tale of obsession, phobia and murder with Novak and Stewart at the peak of their form. A genuinely great film which demands multiple viewings.
VHS: 200033 Color • 128 min.
Beta: 200034 **\$49.95**

Young and Innocent (1937)
Starring: **Nova Pilbeam, Derrick de Marney, Percy Marmont**
A Hitchcock thriller with charm and humor as a young writer, falsely accused of murder, persuades the local constable's daughter to help him prove his innocence. The nightclub revelation is especially memorable.
VHS: 223-4 B&W • 83 min.
Beta: 273-0 **\$19.95**

The Secret Agent (1936)
Starring: **John Gielgud, Madeleine Carroll, Peter Lorre**
First-rate Hitchcock espionage has Carroll and Gielgud as secret agents on assignment in Switzerland to kill an enemy spy. The intrigue and pursuit climax with an aerial bombardment and spectacular train wreck. Lorre is fabulous as a hired Mexican killer!
VHS: 086-X B&W • 84 min.
Beta: 186-6 **\$19.95**

The Man Who Knew Too Much (1934)
Starring: **Peter Lorre, Edna Best, Leslie Banks**
Assassins kidnap a child to ensure her family's silence in the original version of Hitchcock's classic tale, filmed in England. Jimmy Stewart and Doris Day later starred in the Hollywood remake.
VHS: 084-3 B&W • 72 min.
Beta: 184-X **\$19.95**



Hitchcock Trivia Quiz

1. Of the 30 films Alfred Hitchcock made after he came to the U.S. in 1939, how many titles contained only one word?
2. Peter Lorre had his first English-speaking role in what movie?
3. Robert Young was the villain in what movie?
4. In what movie was a Walt Disney Silly Symphony cartoon shown and what was the name of that cartoon?
5. In what movie did the leading lady direct Hitchcock in his cameo appearance? Who was she?
6. What movie had its climax atop the Statue of Liberty?
7. What was Hitchcock's first film in color?
8. Marlene Dietrich starred in what film?
9. What ironically happened to James Stewart at the end of *Rear Window*?
10. In *Vertigo*, where did Kim Novak try to drown herself?
11. Besides Alfred Hitchcock himself, who has appeared in the most Hitchcock films?
12. What was the name of the motel where Janet Leigh stayed in *Psycho*?
13. What kind of business establishment was blown up in *The Birds*?
14. What movie contained the line "You Freud, me Jane"?
15. What was Hitchcock holding in his cameo scene in *Torn Curtain*?
16. In what movie did Paul Newman star?
17. What movie received the review "Leave no tern unstoned"?
18. What was Anthony Perkins' hobby in *Psycho*?
19. What did Grace Kelly take from Raymond Burr's apartment in *Rear Window*?
20. What movie was shot in 3-D?
21. What film had its climax on a merry-go-round?
22. What actress appeared in the most Hitchcock films?
23. What was James Stewart's first Hitchcock film?
24. What was the nickname for the murderer in *Shadow of a Doubt*?
25. What was the name of the first film Hitchcock made after he came to the U.S.?
26. Who was declared dead at the beginning of *Secret Agent*?
27. Who was John Gielgud's partner in *Secret Agent*?

- ANSWERS:**
1. Twelve
 2. *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934)
 3. *Secret Agent* (1936)
 4. *Sabotage* (1936), "Who Killed Cock Robin?"
 5. *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941), Carole Lombard
 6. *Saboteur* (1942)
 7. *Rope* (1948)
 8. *Stage Fright* (1950)
 9. After having one leg already in a cast, he breaks the other leg
 10. Underneath the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco Bay
 11. Leo G. Carroll, five
 12. The Bates Motel
 13. A gas station
 14. Marnie (1964)
 15. A baby
 16. *Torn Curtain* (1966)
 17. *The Birds* (1963)
 18. Taxidermy
 19. A gold wedding band
 20. *Dial M for Murder* (1954)
 21. *Strangers on a Train* (1951)
 22. Ingrid Bergman & Grace Kelly, each with three
 23. *Rope* (1948)
 24. The Merry Widow Killer
 25. Rebecca (1940)
 26. John Gielgud
 27. Peter Lorre