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Tales of Hoffmann, Powell, Michael, 1951

One of our aircraft is missing, Powell, Michael, 1942

The spy in black, Powell, Michael, 1939

A Canterbury tale, Powell, Michael, 1944

The red shoes, Powell, Michael, 1948



# PREVIEW

## DEC. 31-FEB. 26

The Michael Powell renaissance continues. The Museum of Modern Art began saluting him last month, the Cinémathèque Française has a tribute scheduled for February and here we are—on the heels of David Thomson's article in the November issue of *American Film*—with an appreciation of our own.

The ground swell began in 1977 when Martin Scorsese paid an in-person homage to the then shamefully neglected filmmaker at the Telluride Film Festival, and really took hold when Corinth Films' newly-restored, full-length print of *Peeping Tom* was unreeled before a stunned audience at the 1979 New York Film Festival. But if Powell's contribution had been eclipsed in recent years, the revitalized interest in his work is hardly surprising to those who recall the cinematic glory that was England's in the period spanning the mid-'30s to mid-'50s.

Powell's first important film, *The Edge of the World* (1937), so impressed Alexander Korda that the producer signed him to a contract. That, in turn, led to Powell's meeting Emeric Pressburger, a Hungarian screenwriter who became a crucial half of one of the most harmonious collaborations in the history of motion pictures. Their best-known films—*One of Our Aircraft Is Missing*, *I Know Where I'm Going*, *Stairway to Heaven*, *Black Narcissus*, *The Red Shoes*, *Tales of Hoffman*—would help form the nucleus of any British retrospective of the period, and so, perhaps, would many of the Powell-Pressburger titles currently ripe for re-discovery: *The Spy in Black*, *The Invaders*, *A Canterbury Tale*, *The Small Back Room* and *Pursuit of the Graf Spee*. No less illuminating are the films Powell made without Pressburger: *The Edge of the World* and its near-unique 1978 sequel, *Return to the Edge of the World* (for which we give special thanks to Ruth Pologe Levinson); Korda's magnificent *The Thief of Bagdad*; and, of course, *Peeping Tom*.

Because many Powell films are either out of distribution in the United States

or available only via inferior prints, this series would not have been possible without cooperation from David Francis and Elaine Burrows of the British Film Institute and Adrienne Mancina of The Museum of Modern Art. We are especially indebted to the BFI for supplying us with rare, 35mm prints of *The Edge of the World*, *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing*, *A Canterbury Tale* and a full-length, Technicolor copy of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. If you've ever wanted to see these films, along with such other in-limbo titles as *The Invaders* and *The Small Back Room*, now is the time. Only *Aircraft* is likely to re-surface in the U.S. very soon.

Although the Powell tribute and our European Film Festival contain the greatest number of hard-to-see titles in the January-February calendar, our lineup of misappreciated films has some rarities, too.

A misappreciated film is not necessarily the same thing as a "sleeper," the latter term generally reserved for low budget, specialized, scantily promoted or unjustly criticized movie orphans that never (at least on general release) find



Dorothy McGuire in Robert Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase*.



John Justin and Sabu in *The Thief of Bagdad*.



## THE RED SHOES

Wed, Dec 31, 6:30 pm  
Thurs, Jan 1, 6:00 pm  
Sat, Jan 3, 5:00 pm

*Produced, directed and written by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: Moira Shearer, Leonide Massine, Robert Helpmann, Anton Walbrook, Marius Goring. 1948, color, 133 minutes. A Janus Film released through Kino International.*

"The story of the movie and of the ballet within it are more or less the same, and both derive from a Hans Christian Andersen tale about a pair of red shoes (ballet toe shoes in the picture) that magically taint the wearer with an irresistible urge to dance. . . . Besides Shearer, Helpmann and Massine, dance notables in the film included ballerina Ludmilla Tcherina, the celebrated teacher and impresario, Mme. Marie Rambert, and a flock of dancers from Sadler's Wells, among them Alan Carter, later a distinguished choreographer and ballet master. . . . *The Red Shoes* detonated a bit of a dance explosion of its own, especially in this country, and no doubt the seeds of the present ballet mania can be traced to its mark on thousands of impressionable young viewers of another time."—Alan M. Kriegsman in *The Washington Post*.

## THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

Sun, Jan 4, 4:30 pm

*Written and directed by Michael Powell. Produced by Joe Rock. With: John Laurie, Belle Chrystal, Finlay Currie, Niall MacGinnis. 1937, b&w, 80 minutes. Print courtesy of the British Film Institute.*

After five years of hoping, Powell finally got the financing to spend four months shooting this dream project on the island of Foula. The storyline deals in general with the fishers and crofters who battle the elements, and, more specifically, with a friendly rivalry between two men that ends in death for one and romantic frustration for the other. *The New York Times'* Frank Nugent raved, saying: "It is one of the most beautifully photographed, most unusual and most dramatic films England has given us this year—and England has sent over a number of great ones." Alexander Korda was impressed, too, and signed Powell to a contract—which eventually led to his being hired to collaborate on *The Thief of Bagdad*.

—ALSO—

## RETURN TO THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

*Directed by Michael Powell. With: John Laurie, Belle Chrystal, Niall MacGinnis, Finlay Currie. 1978, color and b&w, 85 minutes. Print courtesy of Ruth Pologe Levinson.*

Forty years after the release of *The Edge of the World*, Powell went back to the same island with some of the same actors to film a new prologue and epilogue in color. The new material, co-produced with

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From *The Red Shoes*.

the BBC, shows the deserted island now revived by the unexpected discovery of oil—pointing up the contrast between the old way of life and the prosperous new one as people start to return. Although the duplication of Powell's original material in both films makes for a challenging viewing experience, the pairing of both features in a single bill provides a near-unique illustration of the movies' unequalled ability to play with time.—Michael Clark.

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP

(Rare, full-length version)

Mon, Jan 5, 8:45 pm  
Wed, Jan 7, 9:00 pm

*Directed by Michael Powell. Written and produced by Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: Roger Livesey, Deborah Kerr, Anton Walbrook, Roland Culver. 1943, color, 163 minutes. Print courtesy of the British Film Institute.*

Winston Churchill was so upset by this satirical portrayal of the British soldier that he forbade its exportation until World War II was almost over—and only then in a version cut by more than an hour. Thanks to the cooperation of the British Film Institute, we are showing the only full-length print known to exist. Beyond that, *Colonel*

*Blimp* stands as one of wartime Britain's rare forays into Technicolor filmmaking, due to the shortage of color stock and equipment in the early '40s. Said Jerry Vermilye in *The Great British Films*: "Originally created by cartoonist David Low for *The London Evening Standard*, Colonel Blimp was a pompous, upper-class figure of ridicule—a symbol of the typical British reactionary—designed to express World War II criticism of the Establishment. . . . Differing considerably from the Low original, he is here the far more sympathetic Clive Candy, V.C., an entirely fictitious professional soldier whom we encounter at various stages of his career, from 1902 to 1943 and the London blitz. In this time-spanning role, 35-year-old Roger Livesey gave perhaps the definitive performance of his long film career, ranging from the dynamic, hirsute young Boer War officer to the paunchy, bald-pated and thick-necked old soldier who discovers, all too suddenly, that his resignation time has arrived. Livesey's make-up metamorphosis alone is quite astonishing to behold. Providing the dramatic conflicts which cross the years with Candy are his long-running love-hate relationship with a Prussian officer (Anton Walbrook, in an equally winning performance), and his varying luck with the opposite sex. As three different women in their lives, Deborah Kerr nearly walked off with the picture."



## A CANTERBURY TALE

Thurs, Jan 8, 6:30 pm

*Produced, directed and written by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: Eric Portman, Sheila Sim, John Sweet, Dennis Price, Kim Hunter. 1944, b&w, 124 minutes. Print courtesy of the British Film Institute.*

This Powell-Pressburger collaboration is much beloved by the few who've seen it, but the film played only a brief engagement here in 1949 and hasn't been shown since. In a favorable review of a truncated version, *The New York Times* said: "A *Canterbury Tale* manages through the efforts of Powell and Pressburger and a meticulously handled cast to epitomize a true Anglo-Saxon entente. This tale, a modern parallel to Chaucer's report, is the story of the effects of that storied countryside on an American GI and three Britishers who find themselves en route to the hallowed cathedral on the same Pilgrim's Way taken by travelers some 600 years ago. . . . It spins an endearing yarn, which is often genuinely humorous and which, like *Stairway to Heaven*, says simple, direct, unaffected and charming things about the venerated traditions of Canterbury, the English and the American Army which 'invaded' the area back in 1944. . . . What with the rustic beauty of the rolling Kentish vistas caught by the cameras and the basically human tale developed, it is a pity that it couldn't have reached here in its entirety." Thankfully, tonight's print is the complete version in what—aside from *The Museum of Modern Art's* showing last month—amounts to a U.S. premiere.

## TALES OF HOFFMAN

Mon, Jan 12, 6:30 pm

Tues, Jan 13, 9:15 pm

*Produced, directed and written by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: Robert Rounseville, Moira Shearer, Robert Helpmann, Pamela Brown. 1951, color, 118 minutes. A Janus Film released through Kino International.*

*The New York Times* called the Powell-Pressburger *Tales of Hoffman*, "By far the most glowingly ambitious and swanky attempt ever made to recreate classical opera on the motion picture screen." Looking back on the project in 1978's *A Critical History of British Cinema*, Roy Armes said: "In 1951 Powell found his freedom again with *Tales of Hoffman*, a version of Offenbach's opera for which he had the collaboration of Sir Thomas Beecham. Working with their customary team and reunited with the dancers from *The Red Shoes*, Powell and Pressburger re-explored the themes of art and life in a vivid, spectacular production. For Powell as director it provided the culmination of his concern to elaborate visual effects corresponding to the rhythms of a pre-established musical score."

## THE THIEF OF BAGDAD

Fri, Jan 16, 6:30 pm

Sun, Jan 18, 5:15 pm

*Directed by Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, and Tim Whelan. Adapted by*



Deborah Kerr and Roger Livesey in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*.

*Miles Malleon from Sir Richard Burton's translation of the Tales of a Thousand and One Nights. Produced by Alexander Korda. With: Sabu, Conrad Veidt, John Justin, June Duprez, Rex Ingram. 1940, color, 106 minutes. Print courtesy of Kino International.*

Sabu IS Abu in one of the greatest adventure fantasies ever made. "The Korda film has since been imitated but never equalled in its creation of a fairytale world of marvel and wonder. It tells in flashback the complex story of Ahmad (Justin) and his conflict with his equal Grand Vizier, the necromancer Jaffar (Veidt). Both love the beautiful daughter of the Sultan of Basra (Duprez), but Jaffar uses his magic skills to turn his erstwhile companion, the little thief Abu, into a mongrel dog. . . . Aided by his brother Vincent's sumptuous sets (the largest and most powerfully lit up to that time for a color picture), by Georges Perinal's sophisticated and tastefully decorative photography, by the protean inventiveness of the special effects department and by the barbaric quasi-oriental score of Miklos Rozsa, Korda created some of the most striking fantasy sequences in all cinema."—*Hollywood in the Forties*. Winner of Academy Awards for color cinematography, interior decoration and special effects.

## THE INVADERS (aka THE FORTY-NINTH PARALLEL)

Sat, Jan 17, 2:00 pm

Sun, Jan 18, 7:30 pm

*Produced and directed by Michael Powell. Written by Rodney Acklund and Emeric Pressburger. With: Anton Walbrook, Eric Portman, Leslie Howard, Raymond Massey, Laurence Olivier, Glynis Johns, Finlay Currie. 1941, b&w, 95 minutes.*

*The Invaders* and *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing*, both released here in 1942, are prime examples of the stiff-upper-lipped morale boosters that Britain was turning out in the early days of World War II. *Aircraft* has the advantage of being the better film, but *The Invaders* is a stargazers delight for lovers of British cinema. The film tells the story of "six survivors

from a Nazi submarine, sunk in Hudson's Bay, who endeavor to flee across Canada to pre-Dec 7 sanctuary of the United States . . . [and] is made immeasurably effective by the realistic manner in which it has been put together by Powell. The Canadian backgrounds are the real thing and are full of air and space and freedom. And the performances of all the actors are excellent. Eric Portman as the Nazi leader is especially fine—cold, hard and relentless. And Laurence Olivier as a French-Canadian trapper, Raymond Massey as the Canadian soldier on "leave," Leslie Howard as an easy-going humanist and Anton Walbrook as the Hutterite leader share top honors."—*New York Times*.

—ALSO—

## ONE OF OUR AIRCRAFT IS MISSING

*Produced and directed by Michael Powell. Written by Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: Godfrey Tearle, Eric Portman, Hugh Williams, Bernard Miles, Pamela Brown, Joyce Redman, Googie Withers. 1942, b&w, 106 minutes. Print courtesy of Crystal Pictures and The British Film Institute.*

*The New York Times* picked this one as one of the 10-Best of 1942, saying: "Powell has placed six members of an R.A.F. bomber crew in occupied Holland, and out of their wanderings and ultimate escape to England he has created a closely knit, finely drawn melodrama that almost literally holds its breath. It never slackens its taut line of suspense for an instant. *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* is a good title, suggestive of an exciting adventure. The film more than lives up to the promise."

NOTE: *Invaders* runs first on Jan 17; *Aircraft* heads the bill on Jan 18.

## STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN (A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH)

Mon, Jan 19, 7:00 pm

Fri, Jan 23, 6:30 pm

*Produced, directed and written by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: David Niven, Kim Hunter, Robert Coote, Kathleen Byron, Raymond Massey, Richard Attenborough. 1946, color, 104 minutes. Print courtesy of The Learning Corporation of America.*

"A *Matter of Life and Death* [the film's title in England] is about a bomber pilot (David Niven) who falls in love with a radio operator (Kim Hunter) in the moments before his death. In heaven, he claims a reprieve on the grounds of that last-minute love, and so a bizarre trial is arranged in a bureaucratic, monochrome heaven, while on Earth (a Technicolor paradise) Niven prepares for a brain operation that may cure his hallucinations. It is Powell's favorite film, still, one in which he seems to have played like a child. There is hardly another example of a commercial feature feeling so much a work of whim, sport and impulse, or of those passing fancies turning into such dream-like effects.



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Alfred Junge built a stairway to heaven; there are ping-pong games that freeze with time; and there is the lovely and mysterious resemblance between the trial in heaven and the operation Niven faces that makes everything in the movie a reflection of something else. Its mood is cheerful enough, but *A Matter of Life and Death* is the work of a sunny Buñuel."—David Thomson.

## BLACK NARCISSUS

Wed, Jan 21, 8:30 pm

Thurs, Jan 22, 6:30 pm

*Produced, directed and written by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, from the novel by Rumer Godden. With: Deborah Kerr, Flora Robson, David Farrar, Jean Simmons, Sabu. 1947, color, 99 minutes. A Janus Film released through Kino International.*

Winner of several well deserved awards: Oscars for best color cinematography and best art direction plus a best actress citation for Deborah Kerr from the New York Film Critics. Based on Rumer Godden's novel, *Black Narcissus* relates a story of five nuns who try to establish and maintain a hospital and school in the high Himalayas. As the nuns struggle with the rigors of the climate and the suspicions of the natives, they must also come to terms with their limitations as people. Although regarded by some as the most beautiful color film ever made, it is as famous for the censorship problems it experienced as for its unforgettable "look." Said William K. Everson: "Three of the [Legion of Decency] cuts concerned (in flashback) Deborah Kerr's former life—and romance—before becoming a nun, the objection presumably being that nuns should be so rigorously dedicated to the church as to preclude wishful thinking about the past, let alone an implied love affair. A further cut was of the mad/nymphomaniac nun deliberately applying lipstick, in closeup, in the face of the Sister Superior's prayers. And most idiotic of all, the sequence in which the former nun tries to seduce the British overseer, and is repudiated by him."

## THE SMALL BACK ROOM

Sat, Jan 24, 1:30 pm

Sun, Jan 25, 7:00 pm

*Produced, directed and adapted by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, from a novel by Nigel Balchin. With: David Farrar, Kathleen Byron, Jack Hawkins, Leslie Banks. 1948, b&w, 108 minutes.*

"*The Small Back Room* was not a success [upon release,]" said David Thomson, "but it is a major film, about a crippled, brooding bomb expert who has to conquer self-pity, booze and a cunning new German bomb. Shot in sombre black and white, with David Farrar and Kathleen Byron as Powell's most erotically eloquent lovers, it also has a dream sequence with a whiskey bottle as big as the Ritz and a nail-biting climax as Farrar takes apart a dainty bomb on a pebble beach." Adds William K. Everson: "Badly cut in the U.S. release—two complete sub-plots were removed—this is





Marius Goring and David Niven in *Stairway to Heaven*.

the full version of one of the most notable Powell-Pressburger productions. There are one or two moments of typical P/P fireworks and some delightful comedy interpolations, but for the most part it concentrates on both the personal and 'career' problems of the back-room-boy scientists in the later stages of the war. The climax is one of the tensest thrill sequences ever put on film, and the acting from a distinguished cast is outstanding."

—ALSO—

## I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING

*Produced, directed and written by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: Wendy Hiller, Roger Livesey, Finlay Currie, Pamela Brown, Petula Clark. 1947, b&w, 91 minutes. Print courtesy of the Learning Corporation of America.*

Headstrong Hiller intends to marry for money but falls in love with Livesey after she's stranded for a week in a Scottish seacoast town. "A lovely, lyrical, gentle, totally civilized film, meticulously crafted and designed, very much a labor of love, yet approached with that casual affection which often begets major films. Powell and Pressburger actually made it, developing it from a vague idea, only because they were being forced to await delivery of Technicolor stock for their much more ambitious *Stairway to Heaven* and didn't want to be idle in the meantime.... [The picture has] a great deal of charm, some marvelous location photography, a remarkable special effects climax, many rich and warm characterizations, and interesting insights into British and Scottish character and social strata. It's a lovely film which brings forth added delights with each re-viewing, and of course the marvelously vibrant acting of Wendy Hiller (with Pamela Brown running a close second) is a major asset in

itself."—William K. Everson.

**NOTE:** *Room* runs first on Jan 24; *Going* heads the bill on Jan 25.

## PURSUIT OF THE GRAF SPEE

Mon, Jan 26, 8:15 pm

*Produced, directed and written by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With: John Gregson, Anthony Quayle, Peter Finch, Ian Hunter. 1956, color, VistaVision, 106 minutes. Print courtesy of The Learning Corporation of America.*

"The Graf Spee was the German heavy cruiser that was engaged by three British light cruisers in December, 1939, off the River Plate and was driven to seek refuge in Montevideo Harbor.... This drama of three intrepid little cruisers deliberately closing in on one vastly stronger vessel and accomplishing by sheer audacity enough damage and bewilderment to rout the latter was a natural for the British camera men. And, with the cooperation of three British cruisers and the U.S.S. Salem in the role of the Graf Spee, they have filmed an exciting re-enactment of that famous engagement.... High point of the actual engagement is when one of the smaller ships (the Exeter) is pounded out of action and is set upon by the Graf Spee, only to have her two associates plunge to her rescue by directly attacking the larger ship. It is in this daring action that the traditional heroism is best displayed."—*The New York Times*.

—ALSO—

## THE SPY IN BLACK (U BOAT 29)

*Directed by Michael Powell. Written by Emeric Pressburger and Roland Pertwee.*

*Produced by Irving Asher. With: Conrad Veidt, Valerie Hobson, Sebastian Shaw. 1939, b&w, 82 minutes. Print courtesy of Crystal Pictures.*

"*The Spy in Black* was an odd film to bring out in 1939, with Britain on the brink of war with Germany. Released after the war began, it proved a surprising commercial success. Possibly with the full realities of war still in the future, the British found comfort in its civilized attitude to war, and in its depiction of the German as a sympathetic and gentlemanly opponent. Conrad Veidt, almost repeating his *Dark Journey* performance, and Valerie Hobson—midway between her Mrs. Frankenstein and Mrs. Profumo periods—made a good team, and co-starred again in the more conventional *Contraband*. Most of all though, *The Spy in Black* scores on its pictorial elements, many of which have their roots in the silent German cinema. Veidt, rigid against a wall, one with his own shadow, recalls his own image in the 1919 *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, while as he prowls the misty boat in his black hat and cape, he conjures up memories of the 1922 *Nosferatu*. But *The Spy in Black* has a Hitchcockian humor, too, and though now largely forgotten, stands the test of time as well as Carol Reed's *Night Train* and other more famous British melodramas of the early war years."—William K. Everson.

## PEEPING TOM

Wed, Jan 28, 9:00 pm

Thurs, Jan 29, 6:30 pm

*Produced and directed by Michael Powell. Written by Leo Marks. With: Carl Boehm, Moira Shearer, Anna Massey, Maxine Audley. 1960, color, 109 minutes. Print courtesy of Corinth Films.*

A genuine cult classic, with admirers like Susan Sontag and Martin Scorsese keeping its reputation alive in this country, *Peeping Tom* was distributed for a few years in the early 60s (mostly to grind houses) before the bankruptcy of Astor Pictures (the American distributor) forced its removal from circulation. Beyond that, the critical reaction was vitriolic enough to bring an unhappy halt to Powell's long and distinguished career. Yet 20 years later, the film seems wholly worthy of revival at the New York Film Festival, restoration to its uncut state through Scorsese's intervention and being extolled in *Film Comment*—all of which it was two years ago. It's not difficult to see why the initial reaction was so negative; the picture examines, in clinical detail, the voyeurism inherent in the personality of all film fanatics and thus hits many audiences—and every critic—where they live. To top it off, the story goes 50 steps beyond by casting creepy Carl Boehm as an amateur filmmaker who photographs movies of women while he is murdering them and watches the finished product for sexual release in the privacy of his own apartment. With its once heavily censored footage restored in a new print, *Peeping Tom* is a one-of-a-kind whose very existence is almost as much as a revelation as what is shown on the screen. Andrew Sarris called it "a consciously nightmarish inspiration for a new generation of American filmmakers"—and it is.—Michael Clark.