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University Art Museum Pacific Film Archive

Press Release

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Made in Britain: Alan Clarke

A Retrospective Tribute to
one of the greatest directors
of British television

Eleven programs at Pacific Film Archive:
Thursday, February 3 through Saturday, February 19

On Thursdays and Saturdays in February, Pacific Film Archive pays tribute to Alan Clarke (1935-1990), one of the most talented directors in British television. The San Francisco International Film Festival and PFA introduced Clarke to American audiences with screenings of seven of his works during the 1993 Festival; PFA is now pleased to offer screenings of 12 of Clarke's powerful and unique dramas. Film scholar David Thomson, author of *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*, and of "Walkers in the World: Alan Clarke", published in the May-June, 1993 issue of *Film Comment*, will introduce the program on Saturday, February 12.

Clarke gained acclaim for giving expression to the pent-up emotions of a variety of ordinary Britons—especially those left behind during the economic turbulence of the Thatcher era. Walking and talking, Clarke's characters vent their frustrations and repressed energy -- in surprising, touching, and sometimes darkly funny ways.

Born a bricklayer's son in 1935, Clarke moved to Canada to work in the theatre. In 1961 he returned to England and began working in television; by 1969 he had joined the BBC as a director of television "plays".

Clarke's 1974 drama **Penda's Fen**, written by David Rudkin, describes a boy who encounters a mythic, pagan power in the rural landscape. *The Times* of London stated that it "remains one of television drama's most challenging works." **Diane** (1975) illustrates Clarke's "commitment to changing people's lives" in a non-melodramatic story about incest in the life of an ordinary 13-year-old girl.

In 1977, Clarke clashed with the BBC over **Scum**, a powerful drama set in a borstal, or boys' reformatory. It was shelved indefinitely by the network, which criticized it for being too exaggerated *and* too realistic in its depiction of the complicity of guards during vicious power struggles among inmates. In 1977, Clarke remade **Scum** as a film; its broadcast on Channel 4 was also an occasion of great controversy.

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Beloved Enemy, inspired by Charles Levinson's exposé, *Vodka Cola*, is an entertaining and chilling look at amoral executives of a multinational firm. In search of profits, they are more than willing to offer weaponry secrets to Russian technocrats.

Rita, Sue and Bob Too (1987) is the only film by Clarke released theatrically in the U.S. Set in scruffy council estates in Yorkshire (and filmed in the same housing project where writer Andrea Dunbar grew up), this quirky, energetic film offers the tale of two working-class girls who enter into a *ménage-à-trois* with a middle-aged *nouveau bourgeois* man.

On Saturday, February 12, film scholar David Thomson introduces one of Clarke's most acclaimed films, **Made in Britain** (1983). Tim Roth gives a wonderfully vital and disturbing performance. As Thomson notes, "He is a skinhead, foul-mouthed, as lean and hard as a dancer in both boots, without hope or self-pity, a mix of the Artful Dodger and Sid Vicious. . ." The second program on February 12 begins with **Christine** (1987), the saga of a 13-year-old suburban girl whose quiet demeanor masks the fact that her life revolves around her addiction to heroin; and continues with **Elephant** (1989), one of three Clarke films in this series that look at Northern Ireland. **Elephant** is a frightening film; without commentary to provide context, it depicts 18 shootings. Scott Rosenberg in the *San Francisco Examiner* describes the film as "unanesthetized and unaestheticized. It's a stunning piece of work that forces you to face every question editorial writers have ever raised about violence on film. . ."

Contact (1989) follows a group of British soldiers on reconnaissance missions in Northern Ireland near the Irish border. "The 'Irish situation' is not addressed, but we absorb the inevitability and futility in the conflict." (—David Thomson) **Psy-Warriors** (1981) is a chilling examination of interrogation methods as used on suspects in a bombing case.

The PFA series ends February 19 with two of Clarke's most celebrated films. **Road** (1987), is a tremendously moving portrait of the residents of a bleak estate in Northern England. Based on a play by Jim Cartwright, **Road** is relentlessly cinematic, using a Steadicam to follow the characters as they pace in their cramped houses, or stride through the empty streets, speaking of their cheerless lives and their desperate wishes that they "somehow might escape". In **The Firm** (1988), Clarke demonstrates his gift for moving from the news -- in this case, soccer hooliganism -- to the creation of unforgettable characters. Gary Oldman stars as a middle-class fan of the West Ham United soccer team. He and his pals indulge in the hobby of head-bashing fights with rival gangs before matches. David Thomson calls it "a crackling entertainment, built around an exuberant performance from Gary Oldman, and possibly Clarke's funniest film. . .only incidentally does it expose England as hardly fit for living."

"Made in Britain: Alan Clarke" is coordinated by the British Council, London, and the Film Center, Chicago. All screenings will take place at Pacific Film Archive, 2625 Durant Avenue (one-half block west of College Avenue), Berkeley. General admission is \$5.50 for one program, and \$7 for double bills.

A complete series schedule follows. For additional information, please telephone PFA at (510) 642-1412

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Made in Britain: Alan Clarke

Schedule of screenings at
Pacific Film Archive
2625 Durant Avenue
(one half-block west of College Avenue)
Berkeley, California 94720

General admission: \$5.50 for one program, \$7 for double bills

For additional information: (510) 642-1412

Thursday, February 3

7:30 pm: **Penda's Fen** (1974)
9:00 pm: **Diane** (1975)

Saturday, February 5

7:00 pm: **Scum** (1977) Preceded by: **Director: Alan Clarke** (1991)
9:15 pm: **Beloved Enemy** (1980)

Thursday, February 10

8:30 pm: **Rita, Sue and Bob Too** (1987)

Saturday, February 12 -- Introduced by David Thomson

7:30 pm: **Made in Britain** (1983)
9:30 pm: **Christine** (1987) and **Elephant** (1989)

Thursday, February 17

7:30 pm: **Contact** (1989)
8:50 pm: **Psy-Warriors** (1981)

Saturday, February 19

7:30 pm: **Road** (1987)
8:50 pm: **The Firm** (1988)

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