

PYGMALION

Great Britain (1938); 96 minutes; Cert. U

Producer: Gabriel Pascal
 Directors: Anthony Asquith
 Leslie Howard
 Script: W.P. Lipscomb
 Cecil Lewis
 Anthony Asquith
 Based in a play by: Bernard Shaw
 Photography: Harry Stradling
 Editor: David Lean
 Art Director: Laurence Irving
 Music: Arthur Honegger

Cast:

Eliza	Wendy Hiller
Professor Higgins	Leslie Howard
Doolittle	Wilfred Lawson
Mrs Higgins	Marie Lohr
Colonel Pickering	Scott Sunderland
Mrs Pearce	Jean Cadell
Mrs Eynsford Hill	Everley Gregg
Freddy	David Tree
Clara	Leueen Macgrath
Count Karpathy	Esme Percy
Ambassadors	Violet Vanbrugh
Ysabel	Iris Hoey
Perfide	Viola Tree
Duchess	Irene Brown
Grand Old Lady	Kate Cutler
Vicar	O.B. Clarence
First Bystander	Wally Patch
Second Bystander	H.F. Maltby
Third Bystander	George Mozart
Sarcastic Bystander	Ivor Barnard



ANTHONY ASQUITH
 British director (1902-68)

The son of the first Earl of Oxford and Asquith, the British prime minister from 1908 to 1916, and nicknamed "Puffin", he went into films as soon as he graduated from Oxford, going to America to learn the craft. Along with Bernard Shaw, H G Wells, Julian Huxley and other members of the London intelligentsia he co-founded the Film Society in 1925 which enabled banned works, some by Eisenstein (qv), to be shown to British audiences. His first film, the silent *Shooting Stars* (28) pioneered new techniques. He made several films in collaboration with the playwright Terence Rattigan including *The Way to the Stars* (45), *The Winslow Boy* (48) and *The Browning Version* (51), three adaptations of Shaw plays, and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (52). He portrayed the middle and upper classes with gentle satire, at its best in *The Demi-Paradise* (43). Despite his patrician background he was a staunch upholder of workers' rights and a prominent figure in film trade unionism.



LESLIE HOWARD
 British actor, director (1893-1943)

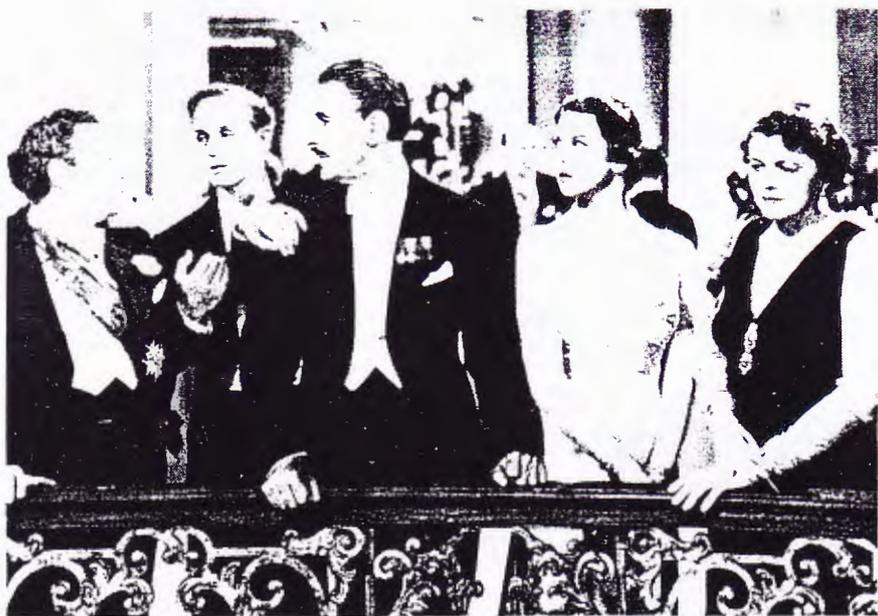
Quintessentially the tolerant, pipe-smoking Englishman, Howard (who dropped his surname of Stainer) was the son of Hungarian immigrants. A stage actor before he went in to films, he achieved stardom in Hollywood in the 1930s playing opposite Bette Davis (qv) in *Of Human Bondage* (34) and *The Petrified Forest* (36), and with Norma Shearer (qv) in *Romeo and Juliet* (36). He also appeared as Sir Percy Blakeney in Korda's (qv) *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (35) and as Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion* (38), which he co-directed with Anthony Asquith (qv). After playing Ashley Wilkes in *Gone With the Wind* (39) he returned to Britain and made films such as *Pimpernel Smith* (41) *The First of the Few* (42) and *The Gentle Sex* (43) to boost wartime morale. He died when his airliner was shot down by the Germans between Lisbon and London.

Everyone knows of "Pygmalion", perhaps not from the original George Bernard Shaw play of 1913, or the film of 1938 which we are going to see tonight, but certainly from the record breaking Lerner and Loewe stage musical "My Fair Lady" of 1956 and the later film in 1964.

I am not therefore disclosing any secrets in referring to the story. A Professor of phonetics (Henry Higgins) takes a bet that he can turn a cockney flower seller (Liza Doolittle) in six months into a lady, with an immaculate upper class accent, who can pass as a Duchess. So far so good, but Higgins has overlooked the content of polite conversation and Eliza (as she now is) causes consternation at her first tea party by intoning with perfect precision "Not bloody likely" when asked if she is planning to walk home.

"Pygmalion" was one of the most heartening and adult British films of the thirties and also one of its biggest international successes in the second half of that decade. It was a great success as well for many people. For its Hungarian producer Gabriel Pascal, who had succeeded, where others had failed, in persuading Shaw not only to sell the screen rights to his play, but also to cooperate in its filming. Pascal also persuaded Leslie Howard to return from Hollywood to play Henry Higgins and to co-direct the film with Anthony Asquith.

"Pygmalion" was a triumph for Asquith's polished direction. With a touch both beautifully light and neat he extended his talent for English satire. Anthony Asquith, the son of the Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, had gone into films as soon as he left Oxford, going to America to learn the craft. Along with Shaw, H.G.Wells, Julian Huxley and other members of the London intelligentsia he helped found the Film Society in 1925 which enabled banned works, including some by Eisenstein, to be shown to British audiences. Asquith's career had been languishing, but "Pygmalion" put him back among leading British directors. Previous attempts to put Shaw on the screen had had little success and the task of transferring something so essentially uncinematic as Shaw's "Pygmalion" to the cinema was an endeavour from which others might well have shrunk. Asquith was a very capable craftsman with a particular feeling for actors and for somewhat theatrical material. He later directed, amongst other films, Shaw's "The Doctor's Dilemma" and "The Millionairess" and Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" and he collaborated with Terence Rattigan on eight films including such hits as "French Without Tears", "The Winslow Boy", "The Browning Version" and "The Way to the Stars".



ESME PERCY, LESLIE HOWARD, SCOTT SUNDERLAND,
WENDY HILLER, IRENE BROWN



Leslie Howard & Wendy Hiller

In directing "Pygmalion" Asquith was surrounded by talent: by David Lean whose crisp editing helped to move the film along at a faster pace than most British films of the period; by Laurence Irving as production manager; by Harry Stradling, photography, another with subsequently a huge list of credits to his name in the United States; and by Arthur Honegger, the Swiss composer. But apart from Shaw's words, and the dramatist's cooperation extended to writing additional scenes for the film, it is the acting which counts.

Aside from the two principals we have the then stalwarts of the British stage. Wilfred Lawson, who revelled in eccentric parts, was well cast as Doolittle. And Marie Lohr, Esme Percy and Jean Cadell, all distinguished stage actors, should be familiar, at least to the older members of the audience.

"Pygmalion" made Wendy Hiller a star in only her second film. She gives a fine performance, particularly in the first part of the film and along with Leslie Howard received an Academy Award Nomination. Leslie Howard, the great British star at the time, and yet another prominent personality in the British film industry with a Hungarian background, ensured the success of the film, even though he did not see eye to eye about it with Shaw. Howard contended that Higgins was in love with Eliza, but Shaw wouldn't agree. Shaw, irritated by the way things had turned out, wrote at the time "it is amazing how hopelessly wrong Leslie is. However, the public will like him and probably want him to marry Eliza, which is just what I don't want." However Shaw was right about one thing: the public did like Howard and the film, but without Howard they might not have done. Wendy Hiller probably got it right in her conclusion that the film would not have had a world market without Leslie Howard. "Pygmalion" confirmed Howard's status as a top ranking romantic actor. But both before and after "Pygmalion" he achieved a string of successes in such films as "Of Human Bondage", "The Scarlet Pimpernel", "The Petrified Forest", "Gone With the Wind", "Intermezzo" and the great wartime films "49th Parallel" and "The First of the Few". Leslie Howard was tragically killed in April 1943 when the plane in which he was a passenger from Lisbon to London was shot down by German aircraft over the Bay of Biscay. The circumstances surrounding this incident have been the subject of endless speculation but it still remains something of a mystery.

Shaw's "Pygmalion", a comedy of bad manners, is extremely well filmed and contains many memorable lines and performances. It remains one of the cinema's most civilised comedies. It was an enormous success when it was produced and is still absorbing to watch today.

Neville Ledsome

● Larger than life and seemingly indestructible, comedy actor Chris Farley - who was found dead on December 18 aged 33 - found fame on the cult show *Saturday Night Live*, and appeared in the films *Wayne's World* (1992), *Tommy Boy* (1995), *Black Sheep* (1996) and *Beverly Hills Ninja* (1997) among others.



● Synonymous with one role above all others, Stubby Kaye - who died on December 15 aged 79 - made Nicely-Nicely Johnson his own in hundreds of stage performances, as well as the movie version of *Guys & Dolls* (1955). He also appeared in *The Cool Mikado* (1963), *Cat Ballou* (1965) and *Sweet Charity* (1968).

● A familiar face on television, Richard Warwick - who died on December 16 aged 52 - appeared in such films as *Romeo & Juliet* (1968), *If* (1968), *Sebastiane* (1976), *Hamlet* (1991) and *Jane Eyre* (1996).

● Perhaps best known for his TV work in *The Life & Times of Grizzly Adams* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*, Denver Pyle - who died on December 25 aged 77 - also appeared in such films as *The Alamo* (1960), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) and *Bonnie & Clyde* (1967).

● A stalwart British character player in many films, Richard Vernon - who died on December 4 aged 72 - appeared in the films *Village of the Damned* (1960), *The Servant* (1963), *The Yellow Rolls Royce* (1964), *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Goldfinger* (1964), as well as countless TV shows.

● A popular comedian, writer and wit, John Wells - who died on January 11 aged 61 - appeared in such films as *Casino Royale* (1967), *Rentadick* (1972), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981) - in which he reprised the role of Denis Thatcher), *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (1984), and *Princess Caraboo* (1994) which he also wrote.

● Immortalized as the voice of Betty Boop, Mae Questel - who died on January 4 aged 89 - also appeared in the films *Funny Girl* (1968), as Woody Allen's mother in *New York Stories* (1989) and in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* (1989).

● In his time a pop star, a Congressman and the other half of Sonny & Cher, Sonny Bono - who died in a skiing accident on January 5 aged 62 - dabbled in acting, and together with his wife made the film *Good Times* (1967).

● A familiar, avuncular figure, Frank Muir - who died on January 2 aged 77 - worked extensively in radio and television, but made a cameo appearance in *Innocents in Paris* (1952) and wrote the film *Bottoms Up* (1960).

● An actor and producer, William Alland - who died on November 11 aged 81 - was long associated with Orson Welles, playing the unseen reporter unravelling the mystery in *Citizen Kane* (1941). He also produced such sci-fi classics as *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *This Island Earth* (1955).

● A film editor associated with the work of David Lean, Peter Taylor - who died on December 17 aged 75 - won an Oscar for *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). He also worked on *Cairo Road* (1950), *Hobson's Choice* (1954), *The Man Who Never Was* (1956) and *This Sporting Life* (1963).

● A legendary actor in his native Japan, Toshiro Mifune - who died on December 24 aged 77 - will forever be associated with his greatest hit *Seven Samurai* (1954). He also appeared in *Rashomon* (1951), *Throne of Blood* (1957), *Yojimbo* (1961), *Hell in the Pacific* (1967) and *Winter Kills* (1979).



43 Reactions, average score of 8.03

Comments

What a shame it had to finish!

Makes Rachmaninov bearable.

Even better on the second viewing.

Practically perfect in every way!

Moving film. Great acting and music.

Very touching. A monument to survival.

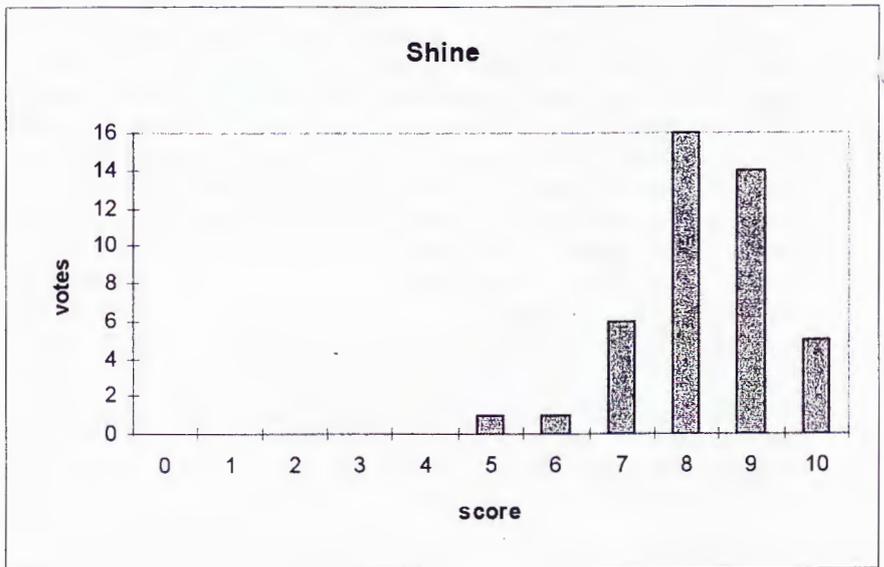
Enjoyed the Vivaldi and Beethoven but could happily have missed the rest.

How did Geoffrey Rush get an Oscar for 40 mins work when Noah Taylor was on screen for the first hour?!

Another great co-production from Australia with a superb performance from Armin Muller - Stahl in the first half and Geoffrey Rush in the second. A compelling film.

Excellent performances by all the Davids.

Helen Sayers



COMING NEXT

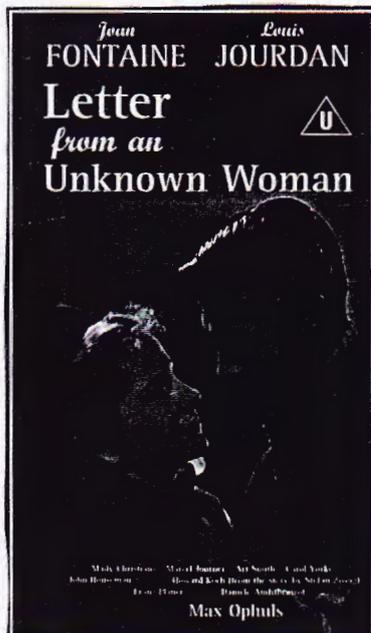


12th March 1998

BIG SCREEN

at Mayford Village Hall, commencing at 8.00 pm

Programme ends at 10.05 pm (approx)



Max Ophüls/USA 1948

"I'd come to tell you about us, to offer you my whole life, but you didn't even remember me." A strong vein of masochism runs through this enrapturing, fatalistic romance, set in turn-of-the-century Vienna. At times, the young woman (Joan Fontaine) in love with the young pianist (Louis Jourdan) seems naïve. How could she be so stupid as to devote her life to a charming philanderer who only wants to seduce her? There are hints that she realises her pursuit of him will destroy her, but she presses on regardless. Ophüls contrasts his cynicism with her idealism. The story unfolds in flashback. Her memory magnifies even the most trivial incidents: for instance, how he turns to look at her when she holds the door for him, or her sense of wonder at the tacky fairground trip he takes her on. But any irony in Howard Koch's intricately layered screenplay (based on a story by Stefan Zweig) is swept away by the strength of Fontaine's obsession.

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