



WOKING'S NEW CINEMA CLUB

# SPECIAL EVENT

## Shooting Stars

[GB: 1928]

88 minutes

Directors           A V Bramble  
                          Anthony Asquith

Cameraman         Karl Fischer

Writer              Anthony Asquith

Editor              Anthony Asquith



### Main Players

Mae Feather (An actress)           Annette Benson

Her Husband                         Brian Aherne

An Actor                               Donald Calthrop

*With LIVE piano accompaniment by  
**Neil Brand**  
from the National Film Theatre.*



I saw tonight's film when the Barbican cinema had a season of silent films and Neil Brand performed his own score, with fellow musicians. At the time I thought the film had many elements which made it an attractive option for screening by ourselves, and thankfully this now proves possible.

By the general standards of silent cinema made in Britain, this feature is very intelligent film made by 25 year old Asquith. The title is a pun - it's a tale of jealousy and murder with interestingly for the time, a woman taking the lead in her relationships with her husband and another actor. This is played with admirable control by all three actors.

It is in essence a melodrama, which sees a famous starlet trying to kill her husband in order to runaway with her lover. The satire in the story works best in the scenes of film making in a studio, from the opening shot to the poignant close.

Anthony Asquith (1902 - 68) was the son of the Earl of Oxford, Prime Minister. After being educated at Winchester and Balliol College, Oxford, went to Hollywood to study the film industry. Having studied the industry at first hand, living in the house of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, and wrote the script for tonight's film, which appropriately perhaps is a satire of film studios.

He went on to direct over 40 features and had a particular feeling for actors and for material of a somewhat theatrical nature. Some of his best films were in fact quite clearly based on plays: he collaborated with Terence Rattigan on eight films,

beginning with *French Without Tears* (1939) and including *The Way to The Stars*; *While The Sun shines*, *The Winslow Boys*, *The VIPS* and *The Browning Version*.

Members may recall last season's screening of *Pygmalion*. On the day Asquith appeared before the BBC board with a view to joining the corporation, he received a message asking him to make Bernard Shaw's story. There had been two previous versions, made in Europe, but Shaw himself paid most attention to this one. He visited the set on the first day when Leslie Howard (who directed) and Asquith (who handled the camera movement and other direction) were shooting. That film is different to the play in that it included a scene at the Ambassador's Ball. He had to have lunch with Shaw to persuade him to accept the innovation.

"For some reason or another Shaw liked my phrase 'she came up the stairs with the frozen calm of a sleep-walker' and he wrote the scene for us."

*The Importance of Being Earnest* (1951) was Asquith's most financially successful film, and it was his first colour film. Although many of his films adhere to their stage origins, this one is firmly introduced by the director as being in the grand tradition of stage comedy. We see a man and a woman enter a box in a theatre, then a close up of their programme notes provides the credits and finally the curtain rises to reveal the stage set for the first scene.

The film of course starred Michael Redgrave and Michael Denison, who passed away last year. It also, memorably, had Dame Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell.

Asquith recounted "I remember we were told that the Americans didn't know the word 'perambulator' and so we decided to say baby carriage instead. But Edith Evans drew herself up and pronounced magnificently "*As a Dame of the British Empire, I protest against this*".

Dorothy Tutin had her first role in this film and Asquith was responsible for introducing many actors and actresses of repute to the screen. However he admitted, with some embarrassment, that he turned down Audrey Hepburn for a part in *The Woman in Question*.

Another Shaw play, *The Millionairess*, was brought to the screen in 1960. "I had no reverence for the play whatsoever - I merely thought it a very good idea when someone suggested having Sophia Loren and Peter Sellers together in a picture". It was his first film in Cinemascope, a gauge he disliked intensely. "It's frightfully limiting; you can't concentrate and it's much slower because the eye has time to wander. Besides, the point of a close-up is that it's close but that it isolates".

As can be seen from the above, in a long and varied career, Asquith created a canon of films that today have stood the test of time. Indeed, judging from the good score you gave to *Pygmalion*, and your requests for his version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (sadly not presently available in our 16mm format) his films will continue to be enjoyed for some considerable time.

Iain McGlashan

**PLUS: The Great Train Robbery [Edwin S. Parker; USA, 1903]**  
14 mins - tinted, with nickleodeon music by Gaylord Carter.

Another part of each season is that we try to show short features with films, and tonight we are showing *The Great Train Robbery* from 1903.

This was the first film of Tom London (1883 - 1963) who appeared in more than 2,000 movies and therefore it is claimed to have been the most prolific movie actor in history (for example, by way of comparison, John Wayne made 151). London was for many years a leading man at Universal Films. In the later part of his career, he specialised in B-Western movies, mostly as a Sheriff. His last film was *The Lone Texan* in 1959.

WELCOME TO 1999 FROM IAIN McGLASHAN, CHAIRMAN

I hope you all had a very enjoyable festive season. We start the final year of this Millennium (I predict that will be one of the most used words this year!) with a very special evening.

Tonight is one of the highlights of this Season. It is rare for Film Societies, let alone commercial cinemas, to screen silent films with live musical accompaniment and WNCC can therefore be justifiably proud tonight to continue its tradition of annually screening a silent film.

When I first joined the Club, I attended the silent film with some trepidation, having pre-conceived ideas of dated films with poor acting. However these concerns were dispelled and indeed I have attended silent films as part of a special season at the Barbican cinema and also as part of the London Film Festival.

I found myself marvelling at the ability of the musicians to produce sounds that blended in so well with the images being shown.

After a couple of years without musical accompaniment, we are delighted to welcome Neil Brand, who last performed for the club when we were in Goldwater Lodge.



*Neil Brand*



Neil Brand is known by many avid filmgoers as an accomplished pianist, often seen in action at the NFT, whose improvised accompaniments for silent films have placed him in demand in Britain and all over the world. Indeed, in recent years, he has performed in Italy, Canada, Luxembourg and, in 1996, in France, where the setting was the magnificent Musee d'Orsay for a screening of a programme of Harold Lloyd films.

Neil is also a composer, with two stage musicals and a number of TV scores to his credit, and has also appeared on the stage as an actor. His introduction to film accompaniment came about almost by accident, when, in 1984, he was working at the arts centre in Eastbourne and was approached by Eastbourne Film Society to accompany a screening of Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill Jnr*, because they were aware of his twin interests in film and music. The good reaction of that 'one-off' audience kindled his interest, leading to an audition with the National Film Theatre in 1986 - the rest, as they say, is history !

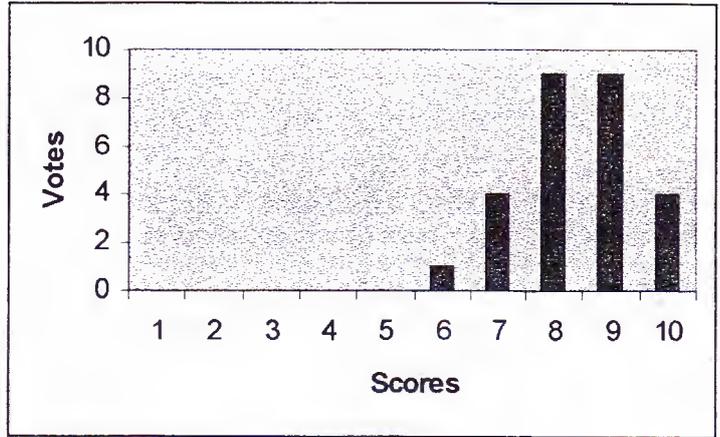
When not working at the NFT, Neil has toured with a programme called *Through the Sound Barrier*, which serves as an excellent introduction to the technique of silent film accompaniment. He has also recently written a book about his experiences, a few copies of which will (hopefully) be on sale this evening. In 1996, Neil described his art as follows: "*The essence of playing live is half of what the film is telling you to do; 25% what you yourself are bringing to it; and, without any doubt, the other 25% is what the audience are contributing to it*" [Film - June 1996].

It's A Wonderful Life (11/12/98)

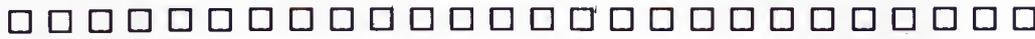
27 Reactions, average score 8.41

Comments

- Sickly sweet.
- Three cheers for Clarence!
- A real Christmas tear jerker.
- No. 1 in my desert island films.
- The original feel good factor film.
- Jimmy S showed he could really give it to us.
- A real thought provoker with a brilliant light touch.
- Timeless and unashamedly, nostalgically and emotionally appealing.



Helen Sayers



**28<sup>th</sup> January** - Celebrate Humphrey Bogart's centenary as he spars with Katherine Hepburn in:  
**THE AFRICAN QUEEN [A]**, USA, 1951. Directed by John Huston.

*Huston got the best from the inspired casting of Oscar-winner Bogart as an old salt and Hepburn as a prissy spinster, forced to travel together on a rusting hulk down an African river during World War 1, combatting the elements, the occupying German forces and their mutual distrust. A genuine 'classic'.*



Programme ends at 10.05 pm (approx)

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