

**WNCC tonight presents two films by the director  
Lindsay Anderson - THE WHALES OF AUGUST plus a  
40 minute short, entitled "Every Day Except  
Christmas".**

**THE WHALES OF AUGUST**

USA                    1987                    Cert. U                    91 minutes

Director	Lindsay Anderson	Photography	Mike Fash
Producer	Mike Kaplan	Music	Alan Price
Editor	Nicolas Gaster		
Scriptwriter	David Berry		

(Based on his 1981 play)

Cast

Libby Strong	Bette Davis	Old Randall	Frank Pitkin
Sarah Webber	Lillian Gish	Young Randall	Mike Bush
Mr. Maranov	Vincent Price	Young Libby	Margaret Ladd
Tisha Doughty	Ann Sothorn	Young Tisha	Tisha Sterling
Joshua Brackett	Harry Carey Jr.	Young Sarah	Mary Steenburgen
Mr. Beckwith	Frank Grimes		

**Lindsay Anderson** was born on 17 April 1923 and passed away on 30 August 1994.

He began his film career in 1948, making documentaries for industrialist Richard Sutcliffe. He continued to work in the documentary field throughout the 1950's. Tonight we screen his 1957 film *Every Day Except Christmas*, which the Ford Motor Company commissioned. It is a tribute to the merchants of Covent Garden. This film won the Grand Prix award for the best documentary at the Venice Film Festival that year.

In the same year, he became the director of the Royal Court Theatre. This became known for presenting new playwright's, such as David Storey. Indeed Anderson's first feature, *This Sporting Life* (1963) which Storey adapted from his own novel.

After the radical impact of *If....* in 1968, which marked a fierce departure, the career of Lindsay Anderson appeared to stagnate, and some reviewers considered that tonight's film was perhaps an unusual choice. However not many directors at that time could claim to create a film using such a venerable cast, and certainly not one with such a significant involvement in the creation and development of the cinema.

He was one of the most active and idiosyncratic figures of the Arts scene in this country since the War.

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In their summer cottage in 1954 in Maine, widowed sisters Sarah Webber and Libby Strong contemplate the end of the season. In their youth the appearance of whales off the coast in August always signalled the change.

Both also think in their different ways of the spectre of age. Sarah is tirelessly busy and optimistic but Libby, now blind, is sardonic and embittered. Premonitions of death also haunt her.

You are in for a disappointment if you are expecting a “crash bang wallop” film tonight!

However, from the following extracts from the book “More than a Woman - an intimate biography of Bette Davis” by James Spada, it appeared that there were a few sparks during the production.....

“Vincent Price recalled “She arrived on set, telling everyone within earshot that she wished she was doing the film with Katharine Hepburn instead of Lillian.” Ann Sothorn added “She wasn’t very nice to Lillian. I don’t know why. I think she felt threatened because Lillian is a great lady.”

Anderson pointed out “Lillian was *at least* her co-star. I don’t think she wanted to share the limelight. There wasn’t anything else. There was nothing precipitated by Lillian. But Bette’s attitude was one of hostility.”

Gish was hard of hearing and sometimes had her lines fed via a concealed headset. Whenever this was necessary, everyone on the set was understanding - except for Davis. “You try working with a deaf mute” she once exclaimed.

After a comment that Gish looked wonderful in close up, Davis snapped “She *ought* to know about close ups. Jesus, she was around when they invented them!”

Gish heard Davis’ off the cuff cruelties. However, Price noticed that “whenever Bette went into one of her sustained tirades, Lillian would just turn off her hearing aid.” She even managed to get back a little by pretending not to hear her cues, which kept Davis off balance. Price recalled “This surprised Bette a little. I don’t think she thought Lillian had it in her.”

However, it appears that Gish felt sorry for her. “She must be a very unhappy woman” she told Ann Sothorn, and later was heard to say “That face! Have you ever seen such a tragic face? Poor woman! How she must be suffering. I don’t think it’s right to judge a person like that. We must bear and forbear.”

Anderson was less sympathetic “Directing Bette Davis was like playing with a very sharp knife. She met the world like an enemy - to collaborate was to concede. She had the charm of vitality, but there was the threat of cruelty as well. Even if she wasn’t offensive, she conveyed the fact that at any moment she might be.”

The first Sunday into production, Davis quit the picture. Anderson recalled “There was a terrific hubbub, telephone calls between her and Robbie Lantz [her agent] and her lawyer. It was total nonsense, really, it wasn’t about anything. It was just Bette churning things up. She was capable of a lot of bullshit.”

Davis came back, but according to Anderson, “There were endless problems of Bette trying to get a companion who would look out for her and cook for her [while being] continually insulted and treated very badly by Bette.”

Davis was particularly touchy apparently about how the long white wig she wore in the film should be dressed. Ann Sothern recalled "She had a couple of hairdressers. She hit one! She just punched her in the chest."

Anderson found that Davis' contrariness extended far beyond the superficial. "She wasn't very open to suggestions. She had a sense of rivalry about it. I remember her saying 'Oh that's *twice* I've given in to Anderson today.' Which is nonsense. It was a sort of game with her, and not a helpful game. Reason didn't really come into it. It was temperamental and emotional. I said to her 'You mustn't waste your energy fighting unnecessary battles.' The unit was absolutely on her side, extremely respectful.. We did everything we could to make it enjoyable, but she was dead against that. She didn't want it to be enjoyable. It was tragic, really."

When Gish threw a dinner party for cast and crew, Davis left after a few minutes of idle chatter. Davis hosted a gathering of her own, at which she spent the entire time sitting in a corner, chain smoking and ignoring her guests.

In one scene they stood on a hill overlooking the ocean. The wind was so fierce that burly grips had to hold onto the women's waists, out of camera range, to prevent them from toppling over in the gusts.

As filming drew to a close, Anderson noticed an odd shift in Davis' attitude. "Suddenly she was being friendly to everyone. She would come to the set even after she was through shooting and just hang around and be very pleasant. I realised that she didn't want to leave the island, didn't want the job to end. Because it was work, and work was everything to her."

The film was released in 1987. Perceived as an art film, it had a limited distribution. The reviews were respectful and Gish garnered the best notices for her magical presence.

She was still able to convey more emotion in one glance than most actresses could through pages of dialogue.

As one critic pointed out, Davis provided a strong counterpoint in her best performance in years. "Bette crawls across the screen like a testy old hornet on a window pane, snarling, staggering, twitching - a symphony of misfired synapses. Lillian's performance is as clear and simple as a drop of water filled with sunlight."

Davis may have basked in the small triumph, but instead she reacted with petty jealousy to Gish's acclaim. When she heard that she and Gish would share a title card at the beginning of the film, she insisted that she have her *own* card, flashed before Lillian's.

Perhaps she sensed that Gish's performance was being hailed as the better of the two. She refused to attend the world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, with Gish and Lindsay Anderson. Told that the New York premiere had been scheduled on Lillian's birthday, she stayed away, telling the press that she based her decision on "self preservation".

Ann Sothern recalled that whenever Bette Davis was asked to autograph the photos of herself and Lillian in the film, "She would sign her name in big black letters - right over Lillian's face."

There was much talk in early 1988 that both stars would receive Oscar nominations as Best Actress. Apparently, Davis was badly disappointed when only Ann Sothern was cited, in the Supporting Actress category.

At her home in Idaho, Sothern received a call from Davis, the morning of the announcement of nominations. "She didn't really congratulate me," Sothern recalled. "What she did say was, 'Now, listen, if you can't get to L. A. for the ceremonies, I'll accept your award for you.'"

Davis' lack of support may have hurt the film's chances in the box office, where it did only moderate business. Lindsay Anderson however considered "The public likes to see Bette Davis in *Now, Voyager* or *All About Eve*. They don't want to be reminded of what life does to us, as it did to her, the age and the suffering."

In Japan, Anderson pointed out, the elderly are far more revered than in Western cultures, and there the film did quite well."

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**Lillian Gish** was born on 14 October, 1896 and died on 27 February 1993.

Acknowledged as one of the first to create screen acting, she entered the fledgling industry at a time when most "serious" thespians regarded motion pictures as a rather base form of employment. However, she brought a sense of craft substantially different from her theatrical colleagues. In time her sensitive performances elevated not only her own stature as an actress but also the reputation of movies as an art form.

With her sister Dorothy, she was introduced to stage work at an early age. In 1912 the girls travelled with their mother to New York to pay a courtesy call on their friend Gladys Smith. The friend later became more widely known as Mary Pickford.

At the film studio, she introduced them to the company's top director, D. W. Griffith. So taken was he by the girls' that he cast them on the spot in his current production, *An Unseen Enemy*. Their mother was also added to the cast!

A long professional association between Griffith and Lillian Gish had begun. His contribution to cinema has been well documented. However, this was one of those rare occasions when two visions combine to revolutionise an art form. Gish was a firm believer in art as a higher ideal; she did not consider acting to be a mere profession.

She soon came to share her director's belief that film was a legitimate medium that possessed more potential for artistic expression than the stage. The pictures they made together over the next nine years bear witness to this conviction, and quickly led to Gish becoming regarded as "The First Lady of the Silent Screen".

The barbed quotation above from Bette Davis, about Gish being around when the close up was invented, was fairly accurate. The strategy of controlling emotion, especially during close ups, became one of her hallmarks. Unlike the arm waving, eyelid fluttering histrionics by other actresses, who carried the method over from the stage, Gish practised the art of small yet meaningful gestures.

Her affection and admiration of Griffith remained throughout her life. Indeed she called her 1969 autobiography "Lillian Gish: The Movies, Mr Griffith and Me." He in

turn said of her “She is not only the best actress in her profession, but she has the best mind of any woman I have ever met.”

They remained as a collaborative partnership until the early 20’s when they amicably parted over a salary dispute.

By the late twenties, a new type of modern heroine was in fashion. This allied to the advent of the “talkies”, gave Gish’s appeal a somewhat nostalgic air. She accepted her decline gracefully, appearing in only 18 movies after 1930.

Instead she moved her attention towards Broadway. She, and indeed her sister, remained active stage actresses into the 1960’s. She also appeared in television roles. The plays were transmitted live and she found this produced a similar tension to when she first appeared on a movie set. Her involvement in television had an echo of her initial cinema work, since the small screen was frowned upon by both theatrical and cinema actors, and certainly by “names” as significant as her own. She also undertook lecture tours.

In 1970 she was awarded a special Oscar for her cumulative work.

Earlier this season WNCC screened “The Night of the Hunter” where she made one of her rare film appearances. Tonight’s film was to be her last.

She became a forceful advocate of film preservation, and remained a tireless supporter of her mentor. She even led a campaign, which resulted in a stamp being printed with his picture on it.

Even after her death, she continued to support his films since she left her money to the Museum of Modern Art so they could preserve of the work of D. W. Griffith.

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**Bette Davis** was born Ruth Elizabeth Davis on 5 April 1908. She made some 100 films, for which she received 10 Academy Award nominations, winning best actress twice.

She signed for Universal Pictures and in 1930 moved to Hollywood, from New York. Ironically Gish was making the reverse journey at around that period.

After her first Oscar in 1935 for *Dangerous*, she considered that she was being offered poor scripts and became rebellious. She refused another role and the studio suspended her without pay. She accepted an offer to appear in films in England in 1937, but Warner Bros., to whom she was contracted until 1942, issued an injunction. She promptly sued the company, but lost the court battle. To her surprise, Warner not only paid her expenses, but began treating her with greater respect and offered her roles to suit her temperament and talent.

During the following decade she reached new artistic maturity. Audiences flocked to see the spitfire as much as the genius. Davis herself once said “I adore playing bitches.....there’s a little bit of a bitch in every woman; and a little bit of a bitch in every man.”

As we have seen, it is obvious that in real life she could also be very abrasive!

In 1977 she became the fifth recipient of the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award. She was the first female so honoured.

She died in Paris on 6 October 1989.

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**Vincent Price** was born in St. Louis, on 27 May 1911. The son of a confectionery manufacturer, he had a privileged youth and an early introduction to the fine arts, including a grand tour of Europe's art museums as a gift upon graduation from high school. After a degree in art history and English from Yale, he tried unsuccessfully to crack the New York stage.

He then came to this country, where he obtained his master's degree in fine arts from the University of London. He also made his stage debut in a small part in 'Chicago' that starred John Gielgud in 1935.

He made his Hollywood debut in 1938. Although he appeared in many straight dramas, he became associated almost exclusively with horror films.

However he was also a noted arts collector and connoisseur. He was a lecturer of some note and for several years served as art buying consultant of the Sears Roebuck company. He also published and edited several books on art as well as his other passion, the culinary arts.

He died in October 1993.

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Alan Price provided the music for the film. He was a founder of the 1960's pop group *The Animals*. He also collaborated with Anderson for *Oh Lucky Man* (1973) and *Britannia Hospital* (1982).

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Whenever asked her age, the manager of Lillian Gish always said "She's as old as film". As we move into a new Millennium, tonight's film with its venerable leading ladies, gives us an opportunity of linking back with the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the start of the cinema. At that time very few had seen a moving picture.

What will the world be like 100 years from now?

**IAIN McGLASHAN**  
**CHAIRMAN**