

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (1978)

Starring: Brad Davis (Billy Hayes), John Hurt (Max)

Director: Alan Parker

A devastatingly effective piece of cinema or a cynical and manipulative film - just two of the critical reactions to this Alan Parker's second film, which tells the story of Billy Hayes, a young American, who is arrested at Istanbul airport by the Turkish security forces - on the look out for international terrorists - and found to have four pounds of hashish taped to his body. He is given a four year prison sentence which is about to end when the authorities decide thirty years might be a more fitting punishment. The events of his imprisonment and his catching of the 'Midnight Express' are unrelentingly harrowing and create a feeling of emotional outrage at the almost Dickensian social injustice.

When the film was first released it was much criticised for its violence which was described as gratuitous and irresponsible, and its depiction of virtually every Turk as sub-human, brought strong protests from Turkey.

Despite all the criticism it became a huge box office success, especially in America, making Alan Parker a name director (his next film was 'Fame'), and although financed by American money it was made by a British crew and its success was a major factor in the revitalisation of the ailing British film industry.

Stephen Lock

Thursday 25th November - Don't miss a rare chance to see G.W. Pabst silent classic 'PANDORA'S BOX' starring Louise Brooks - the 'Incarnation of Intelligent Eroticism'.

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