

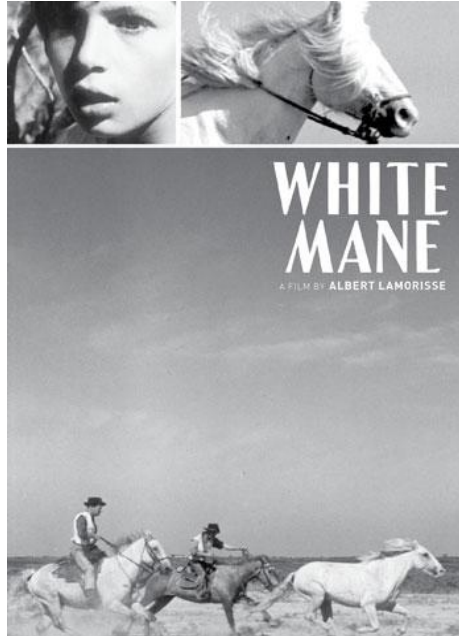
The Main Feature



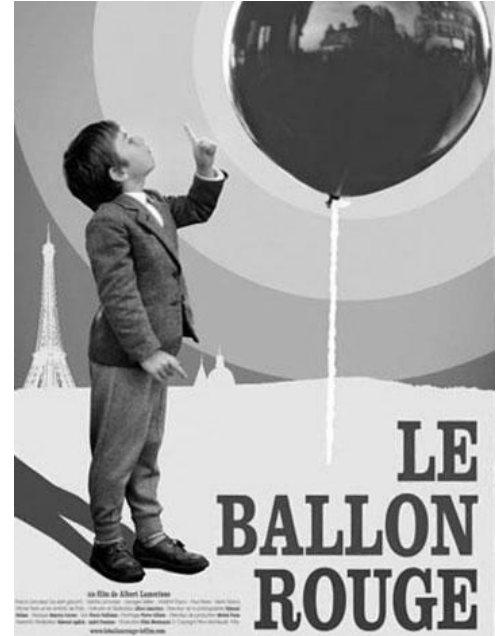
Season 33 - Issue 9 (screening 24.1.13)



1963 22 minutes, Certificate: U



1953 47 minutes, Certificate: U



1956 34 minutes, Certificate: U

When I had the pleasure of revealing the titles for this season, the reaction to the announcement of “The Red Balloon” was instant and universally positive. Not having seen the film I was rather taken aback by the comments from those who recalled seeing the film, many having seen it when a school child.

Barbara Millington the club’s honorary secretary has her own recollection:

“Do you remember the first film you ever saw? I do, it was the “Red Balloon” the film was six years old and so was I. I watched it on a black and white television which had a screen the size of a postage stamp, mesmerised by the little boy not much older than me wandering around on his own with a magic balloon, speaking a language I had never heard before. I remember I thought he was a sad lonely little boy, the grown-ups were grumpy and the big boys were horrible. Now for me it is a nostalgic look at Paris in the fifties and the magic relationship between the boy and the balloon.

I hope you enjoy this film as much as I still do as you watch it in full colour on the big screen.”

Researching tonight’s titles I found on the Criterion website the following article which echoes the experience of Barbara and others. It was written by the author Brian Selznick, whose book *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, was the basis for Stephen Spielberg’s film “Hugo”, which we screened last November:

*“My first trip to Paris took place inside the darkened cafeteria of Warnsdorfer Elementary School in East Brunswick, New Jersey. A few times each year, the entire student body was brought together to watch movies cast from a rickety 16 mm projector at the back of the room onto a large white screen pulled awkwardly down from the ceiling. I don’t remember if we were told what we were about to see, but sitting there in the dark and listening to the projector’s soft whir would give me a thrill every time. And though the seats were uncomfortable and light leaked in from the drawn shades, I was always ready to be transported. Perhaps it was fourth grade, or it might have been fifth, but I’ll never forget watching *The Red Balloon*, French filmmaker Albert Lamorisse’s nearly wordless 1956 film starring his son, Pascal, and a beautiful, unnaturally round and rosy red balloon.*

As with young Pascal and his balloon, my relationship to the film was love at first sight. Did I know that The Red Balloon was filmed and set in faraway Paris? The film doesn't include any shots of the Eiffel Tower, the icon that could have immediately clued me in. Yes, the city was strange and the sparse bits of language required subtitles, but I understood Pascal as if I had grown up next door to him. Even my experience of walking to school seemed similar to Pascal's. I lived one block away, but I had to cross streets and pass houses, fences, and trees to get there; though it couldn't have been more than several hundred yards, this was my entire world—and it takes quite a while to walk across the world. And like Pascal's, my world was filled with many terrors: the dreaded gym class, the awful older kids, the unsupervised expanse of the blacktop behind the school. But there were also many ways to find refuge: making projects in the art room, putting on shows with the chorus, playing "monster" at the end of my block, reading with the librarian, and, of course, escaping into movies.

I've asked many of my friends, mostly children of the 1970s, if they recall The Red Balloon, and it turns out that my experience at Warnsdorfer Elementary was far from unique. In fact, because of the inexpensive deals forged with 16 mm film distributors, The Red Balloon was the single largest-selling nontheatrical print in history (even before Janus Films bought all English-speaking territory rights in 1981), and its distribution to elementary schools across the United States was a notable foreshadowing of home video. Remembered with great love, the film, for many, is often inextricable from tactile memories of being shepherded into school cafeterias or gymnasiums or libraries, or hunkering down in a sleeping bag at camp.

The Red Balloon has returned to me again and again. I rediscovered it after college, when I came to New York City in 1989, working at a store called Eeyore's Books for Children, with the hope of one day illustrating and writing books myself. I knew nothing about children's literature at this point, so my boss took me under his wing and sent me home every night with bags of books to read; one of my favorites was Lamorisse's picture-book version of The Red Balloon, filled with stills from the movie. Recently, as I prepared to rewatch Lamorisse's tale, about a lonely boy's powerful bond with what seems to be an equally lonely balloon, which he bravely rescues from the top of a lamppost, I had so many questions running through my mind: What is it about this movie that made us fall in love with it as children? Would it be meaningful to me as an adult as well? After several more viewings, I found that this thirty-four-minute movie was richer and stranger than I remembered, and adults as well as children will find themselves thinking about its implications long after it ends.

The Red Balloon is filled with indelible images, but as I screened it again, I was struck repeatedly by the filmmaker's use of sound. It's a nearly wordless film, but it's not silent. There is Maurice Le Roux's enchanting score, full of sweet melodies, jaunty strings, mischievous woodwinds and horns, something that sounds like a music box, and surprising moments of panic and fear. Especially lovely is the theme that plays when we first realize that the balloon has a consciousness of its own: After Pascal takes it inside his apartment, the balloon is released out of the window by the boy's guardian, yet instead of floating away into the sky, it hovers outside the balcony and waits for its new friend in midair. The music shifts and slows down; overlaid with the tinkling sound of bells, or possibly a xylophone, it hints at things mysterious and fantastic. The soundtrack is also layered throughout with the city's ambient traffic and transportation sounds, the screams of bullies, Pascal's footsteps clacking on cobblestones. Lamorisse added all the aural effects and minimal dialogue in postproduction—as Jacques Tati did for his urban fantasies—resulting in a slight disconnect between what we see and hear, lending every moment an otherworldly, magical edge."

The Red Balloon premiered in France on 15 October 1956, was released in the United Kingdom on 23 December 1956 (as the supporting film to the 1956 Royal Performance Film *The Battle of the River Plate*...which ensured it a wide distribution) and was released in the United States on 11 March 1957.

Film director Terence Davies (and WNCC are screening his "Of Time and the City" on 28 February) in an article in the Daily Telegraph on 13 April 2012 explained why the film still moves him today:

"I was 11 when I went to one of the many cinemas near my home in Liverpool to see The Battle of the River Plate — a Powell and Pressburger film — but what was on before it was this short film.

I was knocked out by it. After it had finished I could not stop crying. It is the greatest short ever made. It's only about half an hour long, but you feel as though you've seen an entire film. It captures the very nature of being a child — the way the world seems so rich and how life could be both wonderful and cruel. The film is in ravishing Technicolor and the boy is living in a rather downtrodden arrondissement in Paris, but even that looks so beautiful with the colour. The performance from the child [Pascal Lamorisse] — who is actually the director Albert Lamorisse's son — is also miraculous. He's very natural in front of the camera.

The film is about a little boy who finds a red balloon on a lamppost and it becomes his friend. The balloon is a character — you really do care about it. I can't even speak about it today without being moved by it. There were no special effects in those days, but you can't see how they got the balloon to follow this lad. The film shows that you can overcome disaster. What happens to the balloon is a disaster for the child — which is also what it feels like watching it. I think the film symbolises not only the ecstasy and terror of childhood and of life, but the end also signifies hope."

When *The Red Balloon* was re-released in the United States in late 2006 by Janus Films, *Entertainment Weekly* magazine film critic Owen Gleiberman, praised the film's direction and simple story line that reminded him of his youth, and wrote, "More than any other children's film, *The Red Balloon* turns me into a kid again whenever I see it...[to] see *The Red Balloon* is to laugh, and cry, at the impossible joy of being a child again."

Albert Lamorisse was born in Paris on 13 January 1922. A former photographer he turned to directing short subjects in the late 40s. It is tonight's films that ensure his ongoing popularity. Both received a grand prize at the Cannes Film Festival, with *The Red Balloon* also winning an American Academy Award. In the early 60s he turned to feature length films with considerably less success, then retreated to documentary shorts. He was killed in a helicopter crash while shooting a documentary near Teheran. That film, *Le vent des amoureux* (1978), a visually stunning helicopter tour of Iran, was later edited from his notes and was nominated for an Oscar as best feature documentary for the Academy Award ceremonies of 1979.

In addition to films, he created in 1957 the board game *La Conquete du Monde* (French for "The Conquest of the World"), which Parker Brothers introduced it to the United States, with slight modifications to the rules, in 1959. Parker Brothers renamed the game *Risk: the Continental Game*. which Parker later sold worldwide under the title "Risk", which continues to be sold today – recent special editions have included Lord of the Rings Trilogy Edition and Risk: Star Wars – Original Trilogy Edition.

In "White Mane" with its wonderful black and white cinematography, look out for the toddler brother as the actor is Pascal Lamorisse, who plays the main character in tonight's other short directed by his father.

As a film aimed at children made only a few years after WWII what appears to be an old fashioned boy's adventure story is actually another beautiful allegory about the eternal battle between good and evil. It introduces the viewer to the notion that standing up for what is right regardless of the outcome is one of the most important things in life and does not depend on age or strength. The poetic narration, delivered by Jean-Pierre Grenier and co-written by the acclaimed author and film critic James Agee, adds an extra dimension of sensitivity to the film that the viewer, whether child or adult, can immediately respond to. *White Mane* is a truly gorgeous film that will remain with you.

After Eric Rohmer's death in 2010 at the age of 89, his obituary in *The Daily Telegraph* described him as "the most durable film-maker of the French New Wave", outlasting his peers and "still making movies the public wanted to see" late in his career. "La Boulangere de Monceau" was the first of the "Six Moral Tales" with the last ("Love in the Afternoon") made in 1972. Each tale follows the same story, inspired by F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927): a man, married or otherwise committed to a woman, is tempted by a second woman but eventually returns to the first woman. It shows the stirrings of what would become the Eric Rohmer style: unfussy naturalistic shooting, ironic first-person voice-over, and the image of the "unknowable" woman. A law student (played by producer and future director Barbet Schroeder) with a roving eye and a large appetite stuffs himself full of sugar cookies and pastries daily in order to garner the attentions of the pretty brunette who works in a quaint Paris bakery. But is he truly interested, or is she just a sweet diversion?

Iain McGlashan

The printing of the notes for each film is undertaken by Repropoint free of charge



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sponsors photocopying of *the main feature*

Reactions to **The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel** 10.1.13

Score 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Votes ~ ~ ~ 1 ~ 1 6 12 9 9

Total received – 38 Average Score – 8.39

Your Comments

Excellent – so enjoyable
 A most entertaining film and evening
 Why don't they make more films like this one?
 Nice to see the wide vistas!
 Even better 2nd time around - superb
 More sensitive than I expected
 Absolutely brilliant! Thoroughly enjoyed it – what a cast(le)
 Seen it before and liked it so much that I came to see it again – excellent in all respects
 Sentimental but very well acted with lovely views of India
 Four of my favourite actresses.....and younger people will become “older people” one day!
 Seeing it for the second time, found many enjoyable features
 Just like the India we visited in November last year - brought back happy memories (our hotels though were 5 stars!)

This film is hilarious and serious at the same time I shall go to bed smiling

| Position | Film | Average Score |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 st | The Best Exotic marigold Hotel | 8.39 |
| 2 nd | The Artist | 8.28 |
| 3 rd | Hugo | 7.84 |
| 4 th | My Week With Marilyn | 7.56 |
| 5 th | A Separation | 6.97 |
| 6 th | Pal Joey | 6.88 |
| 7 th | La Grande Illusion | 6.67 |
| 8 th | Peepli Live! | 6.17 |

**Our next
film:**

**8pm on
Thursday
14
February
2013**

*Whatever one's age,
falling in love can
bring both joy and
pain*

