

Seachd: The Inaccessible Pinnacle

UK

Cert PG

91 mins

UK cinematic release 5 October 2007

Directed by Simon Miller

Director of Photography Ian Dodds

Music Jim Sutherland

Produced by Christopher Young

Written by Jo Cockwell, Ishbel T MacDonald, Iain F MacLeod,
Aonghas MacNeacail and Simon Miller

Character

Aonghas (Angus)

seanair (grandfather)

Aonghas aged 20 (Angus aged 20)

seanmhair (Peggy, grandmother)

Eàrdsaidh (Archie)

Màiri (Mary)

Donnchadh

Ciara Ghunnach (Akira Gunn)

draoidh (the magician)

Pàdruig Loch (Patrick Loch)

an diùc (The Duke of Sutherland)

Actor

MOIREASDAN, Pàdruig

CAIMBEUL, Aonghas Pàdraig

DÒMHNALLACH, Colla

MacLENNAN, Dolina

WALKER, Daibhidh

BROOK YOUNG, Winnie

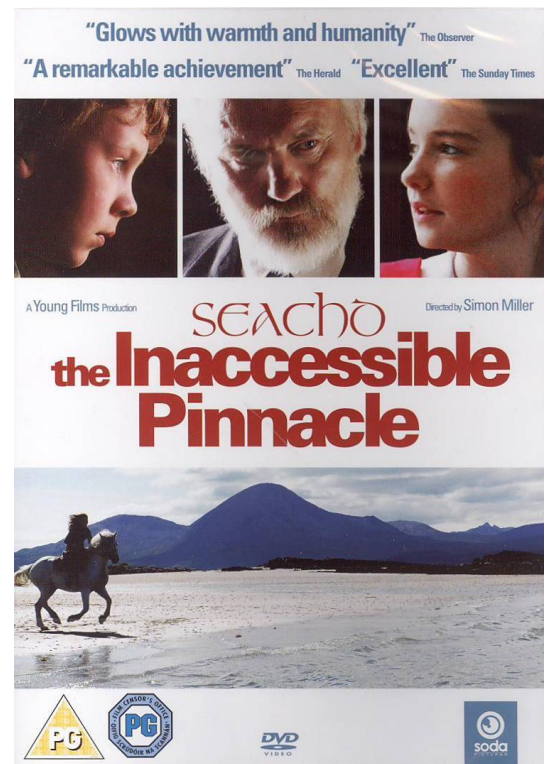
DÒMHNALLACH, Crisdean

NicLEÒID, Annie

MacFHIONGHAIN, Calum

HANDY, Scott

ROBERTSON, Toby



One reviewer commented:

"Seachd has been warmly reviewed yet few in England are likely to see it, partly because cinemas say they can't show a film the public can't pronounce. The movie is called Seachd. No, that's not a misprint for "searched", but Gaelic for seven. Actually, Seachd is pronounced "shack"."

Other reviews referred to "They found their lead actor up a tree and they held the premiere in a cinema on wheels" which plant the idea in one's mind of a quirky film almost with a "let's make it here" air.

That however would be a disservice to the film and it's director Simon Miller and producer Christopher Young.

They had been looking for a boy to play the lead and then heard about a boy from Grimsay, which is connected to North Uist whenever the tide goes out. He came from a family with great storytelling traditions, was fluent in Gaelic Stephen Graham, who plays Combo, was asked how he felt about the film receiving an 18 certificate?

"Padruig is such a find," says Miller, a genial former Wall Street banker turned writer and director. "We went to every school we could find. Then we heard about this boy. When we got there, I was sold in five seconds. He was in the tree the whole time, and we talked about the script and he challenged parts of it and said what he thought might happen. He was totally unfazed, exactly the kind of kid you need."

For Young, the film and its themes are close to home. His previous works include Venus Peter, Gregory's Two Girls and Festival, for which he won a British Comedy Award for best film, and a Bafta nomination for best British film. He relocated to Skye in the 1990s with his family and his company, Young Films.



He knew some people would think he was taking a risk in making his film in Gaelic. According to the 2001 census, only 1.2% of the population of Scotland speaks the language, some 58,600 people; and that's a 15% decline over the previous decade. Most are in the Western Isles.

"For me, the question is not why make a film in Gaelic but why not make a film in Gaelic?" says Young, who is self-taught in the tongue and whose children are fluent. "It seemed strange that a culture so full of storytelling didn't particularly have a tradition of cinema. I have never been to a cinema to see a film in Gaelic. There is plenty of Gaelic drama but it does seem to have suffered from stereotype. It tends to have been period works. There is a feeling that Gaelic is old-fashioned. I wanted to tackle that head-on."

"Film is the kind of thing that, if you get it right, it does not matter what language it is in," says Miller. "Mel Gibson has proved that more than anyone in recent years. You don't have to know the language to experience the film." For both men, authenticity was the key. So they collaborated with Gaelic writers, co-directors and a local Gaelic amateur crew and actors. The soundtrack features noted Gaelic musicians, and the whole thing was shot on the island of Skye for £650,000.



It was given the alternative English title *The Inaccessible Pinnacle*, the name of one of the most treacherous peaks in the Cuillin mountains that dominate Skye and provide a magnificent backdrop for some of the film's most dramatic scenes.

(It is worth pointing out that there was actually a previous Gaelic feature film. But few people took *Hero* - a fifth-century medieval

epic, made 25 years ago - seriously. *Time Out* called it "a clumping village pageant").

I was amazed to see Toby Robertson appearing as the Duke of Sutherland. He is a distinguished theatre director and actor who ran the Prospect Theatre Company, the Birmingham Rep, and London Old Vic. However for me his name is associated with Theatr Clwyd near Mold in North Wales where he was the Artistic Director between 1985 and 1992 during which time, as the venue was within walking distance of our bungalow, I spent many hours being a volunteer usher developing a love of cinema and theatre.

Seachd has been warmly reviewed and featured at Cannes and at film festivals in Vancouver and Rome. However both the Director and Producer wanted its British public premiere to be in the heart of the Gaelic community, before it went on release across Scotland. Therefore "The Screen Machine", Britain's only mobile cinema, which expands into a 102-seat auditorium, had the honour of screening the premiere parked up outside a Benbecula hotel on the isle of Uist in the Outer Hebrides.

Interestingly the film did cause something of a stir when BAFTA decided not to submit any entry from Britain for the Oscars' foreign language category on the grounds that they considered no film to have been good enough. Chris Young, the film's producer, resigned from the academy in protest and commented "I have put my neck on the line because I think it's a disgraceful decision," he said. "I don't want to be associated with the decision because I think it's parochial. All BAFTA is showing itself interested in is narrowing the possibilities of people seeing a wide range of films."

Richard Staniforth, the producer of another rejected entry, the Welsh film *Calon Gaeth*, or *Small Country*, and a former chairman of BAFTA in Wales, told the *Guardian*: "The relationship between Celtic language film-makers and London is quite poor, and I think that the M25 enclave is quite dismissive of films which are made in the nations."

To avoid this film because it is subtitled is to miss out on an opportunity to witness some amazing talent at work. We are therefore proud to be one of the few venues in England (and in light of the above one so close to the M25!) prepared to present what is after all a regional British film.

Of course this is a double bill evening and details of our second Scottish themed film follow.....

The Edge of the World

UK 81 mins Cert U 1937

Director and Storywriter Michael Powell
Camera Ernest Palmer; Skeets Kelly and Monty Berman

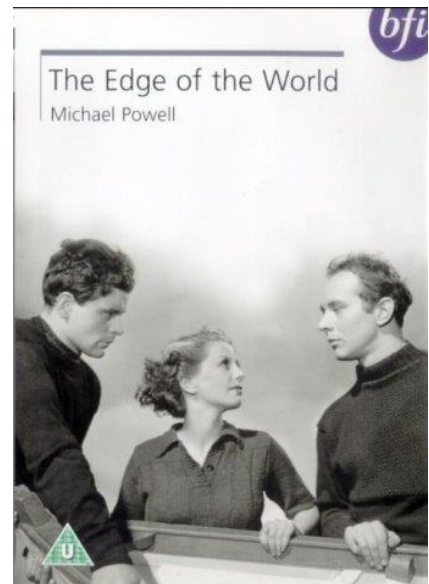
Cast:

John Laurie (Peter Manson); Belle Chrystall (Ruth Manson); Finlay Currie (James Gray); Niall Macginnis (Andrew Gray); Eric Berry (Robbie Manson)

Michael Powell was one of the greatest British directors, and his career included *"The Red Shoes," "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," "Black Narcissus," "The Thief of Bagdad," "A Matter of Life and Death," "Stairway to Heaven," "Peeping Tom"*. (Although the controversy caused by that film badly affected his subsequent career, however it is now widely acknowledged as his most groundbreaking film).

His life paralleled the development of the cinema. Born in 1905, he died in 1990 still deeply involved in the cinema as a consultant to Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and other successors. His widow (and second wife), is the Oscar winning film editor Thelma Schoonmaker (born after tonight's film was made!), and they were introduced by Scorsese with whom she has worked since *Raging Bull*.

Powell began in silent films, made talkie thrillers he was indifferent to, and finally got the chance to make the first of his films that he "wanted to make" with tonight's ambitious drama, which he called "the turning point of my life in art". It has long been unavailable, but thanks to the British Film Institute we are presenting a restored version.



Powell based his script on the true story of the evacuation of thirty-six people from St. Kilda, an island ten miles off the west coast of Scotland, on 29 August 1930. The film was made over four months during the summer of 1936 on the island of Foula, in the Shetland Isles. Permission was denied to film on St. Kilda, which is in the Hebrides, and where they actually speak Gaelic, while on Foula they speak Norse. Powell was adamant that local people be in the film, and that it all be shot on location (which, except for some pick-up shots back at the studio, turned out to be the case). Powell told the story of the filming in his first book, *200,000 Feet on Foula*.

To today's audiences the mixture of documentary and drama, location footage and studio filming is occasionally awkward, as is the combination of professional and non-professional actors (although with the limited transport options of the 1930's the fact that Powell insisted on filming on location provides a justifiable explanation of the later point). However, despite its simple and rather melodramatic story, *The Edge of the World* still stands up today, particularly for its stunning location cinematography, as well as the film's opening scenes in which we see various ghostly apparitions on the now deserted island. Also notable is John Laurie's brooding, yet sympathetic performance as Peter Manson, the film's most complex role, one which is shown to be inextricably linked with the fate of the island itself. Powell's script and direction also give the first real indication of the love of nature and his mystical use of landscape to shape and comment upon human stories, which would be developed further in his celebrated collaborations with Emeric Pressburger which began in 1939.

In 1978 Powell and members of the cast and crew revisited Foula for a BBC documentary, *Return to the Edge of the World*.

I trust you agree that on the night nearest to the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns (25 January 1759) that tonight's unusual choice of films are a suitable means of marking that landmark occasion in the history of Scotland, and once again demonstrate how Woking's New Cinema Club is prepared to present films that whilst not mainstream titles nevertheless do deserve to be given a wide audience.

Mr Iain McGlashan. Chairman