



The Hitchcock 9

Silent Films of Alfred Hitchcock

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The Lodger (British Film Institute)

Presented at the National Gallery of Art
and the American Film Institute Silver Theatre



Alfred Hitchcock's work in the British film industry during the silent film era has generally been overshadowed by his numerous Hollywood triumphs including *Psycho* (1960), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Rebecca* (1940). Part of the reason for the critical and public neglect of Hitchcock's earliest works has been the generally poor quality of the surviving materials for these early films, ranging from Hitchcock's directorial debut, *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), to his final silent film, *Blackmail* (1929). Due in part to the passage of over eighty years, and to the deterioration and frequent copying and duplication of prints, much of the surviving footage for these films has become damaged and offers only a dismal representation of what 1920s filmgoers would have experienced.

In 2010, the British Film Institute (BFI) and the National Film Archive launched a unique restoration campaign called "Rescue the Hitchcock 9" that aimed to preserve and restore Hitchcock's nine surviving silent films — *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), *The Lodger* (1926), *Downhill* (1927), *Easy Virtue* (1927), *The Ring* (1927), *Champagne* (1928), *The Farmer's Wife* (1928), *The Manxman* (1929), and *Blackmail* (1929) — to their former glory (sadly *The Mountain Eagle* of 1926 remains lost). The BFI called on the general public to donate money to fund the restoration project, which, at a projected cost of £2 million, would be the largest restoration project ever conducted by the organization. Thanks to public support and a \$275,000 donation from Martin Scorsese's The Film Foundation in conjunction with The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, the project was completed in 2012 to coincide with the London Olympics and Cultural Olympiad.

The results of this groundbreaking campaign are remarkable: nine films have been beautifully restored through the expertise of the staff at the National Film Archive, the

The Pleasure Garden (British Film Institute)

First Born (British Film Institute)

cooperation of various archives around the world in providing materials, and the support of the public. By compiling the best available materials, ranging from original camera negatives to 35 mm and 16mm prints, and utilizing the latest digital technology, the National Film Archive has been able to restore the films and create stunning 35 mm prints that reveal Hitchcock's immense talent, even in his earliest films.

The National Gallery of Art is pleased to join with the American Film Institute in presenting these new restorations to Washington audiences for the first time. Hitchcock's first four films will be screened at the Gallery, while the remaining five will be screened at the AFI Silver Theater.

Alfred Hitchcock

Sir Alfred Joseph Hitchcock was born in Leystonstone, Essex on the eastern edge of London on August 13, 1899 to William and Emma Jane Hitchcock. The youngest of three children, Alfred grew up in a home above the greengrocers shop run by his parents. He attended Salesian College and St. Ignatius College before leaving school at the age of fourteen. He later worked as a telegraph clerk and studied drawing at the University of London. These skills enabled young Alfred to enter the film industry in 1920, starting out as a title card designer for Famous Players-Lasky, an American production company that had recently started to make films in the United Kingdom. He later moved on to work at the famed British production company Gainsborough Pictures, where he came into contact with Graham Cutts, a leading British director, who took him under his wing as an assistant director.

In 1925 Michael Balcon, head of Gainsborough Pictures, sent Hitchcock to Germany to work at the famed UFA studios, where he witnessed firsthand the direction of F. W. Murnau. It was in Germany that Hitchcock received his first shot at directing, with *The Pleasure Garden* (1925). Billed as "the world's youngest director," at just twenty-five and a mere five years after entering the film industry, he was quickly signed to a £10,000 contract. In 1926, Hitchcock married Alma Reville, who would become his close collaborator, and in 1928 they had a daughter, Patricia. Hitchcock completed a total of ten films by the close of the decade, and by 1929 (with the universal advent of sound), he had become the leading director in Britain, demonstrating the tremendous skill and precision that later set him apart in Hollywood.

Hitchcock remained in Britain throughout the 1930s, completing many of his masterpieces including *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). At the end of the decade Hitchcock left Britain for Hollywood, where he would become world-renown as "The Master of Suspense." For his first American film, he directed *Rebecca* (1940), which won the Academy Award for best picture, and for which Hitchcock received the first of his five nominations for best director (though he never won).

Hitchcock experienced his greatest critical and commercial success during his time in Hollywood, directing a string of remarkable films including *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Notorious* (1946), *Rope* (1948), *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Psycho* (1960), among many others. By his final film, *Family Plot* (1976), Hitchcock was both an American legend and a cultural icon, famed for his mastery and invention within the thriller genre, his incredible body of work, and his distinct public persona. In 1980, Hitchcock was knighted by Queen



Elizabeth II, a remarkable testimony to the impact of his life and work. Hitchcock passed away due to natural causes on April 29, 1980, leaving behind one of the greatest bodies of work in the history of cinema.

About the Films

Fully restored and including twenty minutes of previously lost footage, Hitchcock's first film, *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), reveals an already confident filmmaker utilizing elaborate editing and strong continuity, while also suggesting future Hitchcockian motifs, including voyeurism, a fascination with staircases, and even the use of a dog as a moral compass. His second film, *The Lodger* (1926), which Hitchcock himself later dubbed the "first true Hitchcock film," demonstrates both his fascination with the dark side of humanity and the caustic humor that appears in many of his later films. Starring British matinee idol Ivor Novello as a suspected murderer, the film hints at themes of mistaken identity and paranoia that appear in later works such as *Suspicion* (1941) and *The Wrong Man* (1956).

Novello also stars in *Downhill* (1927) as a young man falsely accused of theft, who flees England and watches his life fall apart in Paris amidst a series of lurid relationships. In this film, Hitchcock experiments with superimpositions, dream sequences, and unique color tinting, and finds much in common stylistically with French filmmaker René Clair. The fourth Hitchcock film in the series, *Easy Virtue* (1927), proved to be the greatest challenge for restoration, as no 35 mm materials are known to exist. This left restorers with only sub-par 16 mm source materials. The result is nonetheless very impressive, and represents the immense skill and craft of the restoration

Downhill (British Film Institute)

Easy Virtue (British Film Institute)

team. The film is a free adaptation of a Noel Coward play, and shares similar themes with *Downhill*, as a young woman (Isabel James) flees England after a divorce and later faces scorn as she tries to re-enter society with her new husband. As Charles Barr notes, the film also shares similarities with the later *Notorious* (1946), particularly between James' protagonist in *Easy Virtue* and that of Ingrid Bergman in *Notorious*, as both are "oppressed by journalistic cameras...and hounded in the same way by a mother-in-law who is intent on discovering...disreputable secrets."¹

In addition to these films, the Gallery is proud to present two silent features written by Hitchcock's wife, Alma Reville. Lady Hitchcock was a collaborator on many of her husband's films, including *The Ring* (1927), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), and *Stage Fright* (1950), in addition to numerous other productions. The first film, *The First Born* (1928), directed by and starring Miles Mander, shows sophistication ahead of its time in the depiction of marital dissolution. Reville's strong script filled with risqué subject matter joins with Mander's skilled direction to create what Bryony Dixon describes as "a tour de force of late silent filmmaking."² The second film, *The Constant Nymph* (1928), is based on an incredibly popular 1920s play by Basil Dean and Margaret Kennedy. Long considered lost, and only rediscovered in 1992 through the BFI's "Missing Believed Lost" campaign, this little-seen film remains very compelling due to its shocking mix of adolescent desire and illicit entanglement. Reville was responsible for adapting the screenplay and arranging continuity. These two rare films hint at the significant influence that Reville had upon the work of her husband, while also demonstrating her great skill as a screenwriter.

Notes

1. Charles Barr, *English Hitchcock* (San Francisco, 1999), 47.

2. Bryony Dixon, "First Born, The (1928)," BFI Screenonline, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1366436/index.html>

