



#### Lehre deutsch mit Petra von Kant

(Teach German with Petra von Kant)

Single channel video (8 mins)

Colour with stereo sound

Ming Wong, 2017

#### Bourbon Street Blues

Director: Douglas Sirk

Cinematography: Michael Ballhaus

Script (Writer): Maria E. Faria-Yaber

Based on the play 'The Lady of Larkspur Lotion' by:

Tennessee Williams

Cast:

Annemarie Düringer

Rainer-Werner Fassbinder

Doris Schade

Richard L. Wagner

West Germany 1979

25 mins

Thanks to Film Heritage, a project of the CreatiF Center of the University of Television and Film Munich, for permission to screen *Bourbon Street Blues*.



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#### Too Much: Melodrama on Film

## Beyond Camp: The Queer Life and Afterlife of the Hollywood Melodrama

Old Hollywood 'women's pictures' have been a part of queer culture for decades, with stars like Bette Davis and Joan Crawford still reigning as gay icons. Fassbinder, Almodóvar and Haynes have all queered the Sirk-style weepie, while latter-day 'camp classics' such as *Mommie Dearest* and *Showgirls* have become firm favourites in the LGBTQ+ community. This event includes a rare screening of Douglas Sirk's *Bourbon Street Blues* (West Germany 1979, 25min).

**Speakers:** Fyzal Boulifa, filmmaker; Alex Davidson, curator; Ming Wong, artist. Hosted by Sarah Cleary.

#### Bourbon Street Blues

No outline of Sirk's German work would be complete without mention of the three films which he directed at the Munich film school in the 1970s: *Sprick mit mir wie der Regen* (1975), *Sylvesternacht* (1977) and *Bourbon Street Blues* (1979). The first and third are based on one-act plays by Tennessee Williams (*Talk to Me Like the Rain* and *Let Me Listen* and *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* respectively). Williams' *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* was the last play Sirk directed (at the Thalia Theatre, Hamburg, in 1969). *Sylvesternacht* is based on a playlet by Arthur Schnitzler, one of the director's favourite dramatists, whose *Liebelie* and Anatol's *Hochzeitsmorgen* he had staged at the Bremen Schauspielhaus during the 1920s.

Although these three short films are almost unbearably intense distillations of Sirk's favourite themes and obsessions, they remain virtually unknown in Britain. The most elaborate of the trio is *Bourbon Street Blues*, in which the owner of a dilapidated New Orleans boarding house, Mrs Miller-Raczinski, who foolishly imagines herself to be descended from the Habsburgs, is drinking and dreaming herself into oblivion with her neighbour, a down-at-heel writer (Fassbinder) who thinks he is Anton Chekhov. Here the links with Sirk's other works are at their most explicit: through the window we glimpse the flashing neon sign of the Habanera Inn, the New Orleans setting recalls *The Tarnished Angels*, and of course Sirk himself had adapted Chekhov's *The Shooting Party* as *Summer Storm*. Most fascinating of all, however, is the casting of Fassbinder; here Sirk's fabled irony reaches its greatest heights. As Eithne Bourget aptly put it in one of the very few pieces written about any of these films in any language (*Positif*, April 1980): 'He symbolises Sirk, every cineaste, every author, indeed every artist. In the ironic juxtaposition of the character – who does not have enough talent – and the actor – who has too much? – there is a critique of the artist, of the cineaste [Sirk] himself who is, in the last analysis, only a creator of illusions. Impotent in the face of the corruption of humanity and the decline of society, all that is left to him is irony, by means of which he can transmute sentimentality into melancholy.' A fitting figure, indeed, for Douglas Sirk's last film.

Julian Petley, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1987-88

## Too Much: Melodrama on Film

### **Imitation of Life**

Tue 2 Dec 18:00 (+ intro by Ellen E Jones, film & TV journalist and author); Sat 20 Dec 15:10

### **Beyond Camp: The Queer Life and Afterlife of the Hollywood Melodrama**

Wed 3 Dec 18:15

### **Tea and Sympathy**

Wed 3 Dec 20:25; Sun 7 Dec 18:15

### **Lola Montés**

Sat 6 Dec 14:30; Wed 17 Dec 20:40

### **Way Down East**

Sun 7 Dec 12:15; Tue 16 Dec 17:50 (+ intro by Pamela Hutchinson, film critic and historian)

### **New Women** Xin nuxing

Tue 9 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by Cynthia Gu, Milk Tea Films); Sat 20 Dec 20:45

### **The Heiress**

Wed 10 Dec 20:35; Sat 27 Dec 15:00

### **La otra** The Other One

Fri 12 Dec 18:15 (+ intro by Camilla Baier, co-founder and curator of Invisible Women);

Thu 18 Dec 20:40

### **The Silences of the Palace** Samt El Koussour

Sat 13 Dec 20:30; Thu 18 Dec 18:00 (+ intro by Ifriqiya Cinema)

### **The Cloud-Capped Star** Meghe Dhaka Tara

Sun 14 Dec 18:15; Sun 28 Dec 11:50

### **UK Premiere of Restoration: Beyond Oblivion**

Más Allá Del Olvido

Fri 19 Dec 18:15; Mon 29 Dec 20:50

### **The Seventh Veil**

Fri 19 Dec 20:35; Sun 28 Dec 15:00

### **Floating Clouds** Ukiyomo

Sun 21 Dec 18:15; Tue 30 Dec 20:30

### **Portrait of Jennie**

Mon 22 Dec 18:20; Sat 27 Dec 18:15

### **Pandora and the Flying Dutchman**

Mon 22 Dec 20:30; Mon 29 Dec 18:10

### **Rouge** Yin Ji Kwan

Sat 27 Dec 20:50; Tue 30 Dec 18:10

## 25 & Under

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**Fyzal Boulifa** is a British writer-director of Moroccan origin, based between London and the North of Morocco. His films, combining melodrama and social-realist influences, are remarked for their singular use of non-professional actors. His films have been BAFTA-nominated, awarded at the Cannes Film Festival and screened widely in international film festivals. His most recent film as director is queer melodrama set in working class Morocco *The Damned Don't Cry*. He has more recently begun working as a screenwriter, collaborating with other directors, most notably co-writing the script of Mahdi Fleifel's *To a Land Unknown*, premiering at Cannes Director's Fortnight 2024.

**Alex Davidson** is a cinema curator at the Barbican, a former programmer for JW3 and a former curator for the BFI National Archive. He has written for a variety of film publications, both at the BFI and beyond, and given cinema talks and presentations across the UK. His specialism is queer cinema and television.

**Ming Wong** is a Singapore-born, Berlin-based artist whose work contends with cinema and popular culture to consider how identity is constructed, reproduced and circulated. Through imperfect translations and reenactments in which the artist often plays all of the characters, Wong's videos, photographs, installations, and performances uncover the slippages that haunt ideas of 'authenticity' and 'originality'. His work 'Life of Imitation' is currently on display at Tate Modern. He is the 2025 artist-in residence at the National Gallery London.

**Sarah Cleary** is a freelance film curator based in London. She has appeared on panels and presented screenings at BFI Southbank, the Rio, the Garden and Picturehouse. She has also contributed writing to outlets such as *Sight and Sound* and *Little White Lies*. Since 2023, she has been screening films at the Prince Charles Cinema in London as the curator of the Funeral Parade Presents, an ongoing monthly LGBTQIA+ film strand. Under the Funeral Parade moniker, Sarah has curated and hosted screenings ranging from exploitation oddities to arthouse classics.

## Further viewing

*Now, Voyager* (1942)

*Tea and Sympathy* (1956)

*Written on the Wind* (1956)

*The Children's Hour* (1961)

*The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (1972)

*Polyester* (1981)

*Mommie Dearest* (1981)

*All About My Mother* (1999)

*8 Women* (2002)

*Carol* (2015)