



O DREAMLAND! LINDSAY ANDERSON'S DARK BRITISH CINEMA

# Lindsay Anderson: Meet the Pioneer

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### This Sporting Life

Wed 1 May 20:20; Wed 15 May 17:50; Thu 23 May 12:00

### Lindsay Anderson: Meet the Pioneer

Thu 2 May 18:10

### No Film Can Be Too Personal

Thu 2 May 20:20

### Home

Sun 5 May 15:20

### The White Bus

Sun 5 May 17:30

### If....

Mon 6 May 17:50; Thu 16 May 20:30; Tue 21 May 18:10; Fri 24 May 12:10; Tue 28 May 20:45

### BFI Library Event: Outing Anderson

Wed 8 May 20:00 BFI Reuben Library  
In Celebration

Thu 9 May 20:25; Wed 22 May 18:00

### O Lucky Man!

Sun 12 May 14:10; Sat 18 May 14:20; Mon 27 May 19:20

### Britannia Hospital

Tue 14 May 20:35; Sat 25 May 18:00

### The Whales of August

Thu 16 May 12:20; Sat 25 May 16:00; Fri 31 May 20:30

### The Old Crowd

Thu 16 May 18:30

### Lindsay Anderson vs the Short Films

Industry + intro by Patrick Russell,  
Senior Curator of Non-fiction, BFI  
National Archive

Thu 23 May 18:20

### Stand Up! Stand Up!

Thu 23 May 20:30

### Never Apologize

Fri 24 May 17:50

### In Collaboration: Anderson and Others

Sun 26 May 18:10

### Lindsay Anderson Experimenta

Mixtape, curated by Stephen Sutcliffe

Thu 30 May 18:10

### With thanks to

The Lindsay Anderson Archive at the  
University of Stirling

### O Lucky Lindsay Anderson!

4-week course from 7 May – 28 May, 2-4pm at City Lit, Keeley St. exploring the work and influence of visionary director, Lindsay Anderson, with course tutor John Wischmeyer. To book online [www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/o-lucky-lindsay-anderson](http://www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/o-lucky-lindsay-anderson) or call 020 3871 3111 and quote course code **HF364**

Join season curators William Fowler and James Bell as they explore Anderson's life and work, and interrogate the career of a filmmaker who remained a singularly combative thorn in the side of British cinema, whether as a critic or as a filmmaker. Illustrated with rare clips taken from Anderson's films, TV plays, interviews and commercials, and sourced from the collections of the BFI National Archive, the talk will consider the complex legacy of one of British cinema's true iconoclasts.

[bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)

Born in Bangalore, India, on 17 April 1923, younger son of a Scottish army officer stationed there, Anderson was named for Australian poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon, much admired by his mother. Educated at Cheltenham College, he announced there his intention to 'rebel' and spent the rest of his life carrying out this aim. At Cheltenham, he began a life-long friendship with writer-to-be, Gavin Lambert, drawn together by their love of American films; sixty years later, Lambert would write an elegant account of Anderson's (and his own) life and work.

Following World War 2 service as a cryptographer with the Army's Intelligence Corps, he read Classics at Wadham College, Oxford. Here, very significantly, he co-founded (with Lambert) the short-lived but influential critical journal, *Sequence*, in which he set down his passionately held views on such filmmakers as his heroes John Ford and Humphrey Jennings, on Hollywood musicals – and, with almost uniform severity – on the British cinema of the day, which he saw as irredeemably middle-brow and middle-class. In *Sequence* he indulged the luxury of 'saying exactly what [he] liked', and maintained the habit, sometimes to his own cost, for the rest of his life. He was not a man who changed his mind, and the passions of those early years informed the rest of his life.

*Sequence* ran to fourteen polemical issues, after which Anderson continued to write for such journals, including *Sight and Sound* and *The New Statesman*, as would publish his often irascible views. He wanted film to be much more socially and morally aware than British cinema of the time characteristically seemed to him. In the late '40s he began making short documentary films, consciously focusing on aspects of British life largely neglected by Britain's feature film industry. The most famous of these early films is *Thursday's Child* (1953), an Oscar-winning documentary about teaching deaf children, photographed by Walter Lassally, subsequently a frequent collaborator of Anderson's and of other film-makers now associated with the term 'Free Cinema'. Not really a 'movement', the latter was the umbrella name given to several National Film Theatre programmes of films made by Anderson, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson and others. Anderson's poetic film about the old Covent Garden stall-holders, *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957), was one of the best-known Free Cinema titles; these were essentially films which the makers were happy to 'sign', as personal statements.

Anderson was the last Free Cinema director to make his feature debut, but he arguably outstripped them all. Based on David Storey's novel, *This Sporting Life* (1963, produced by Reisz) is an excoriating account of an emotionally inarticulate footballer, whose aggression serves him well on the rugby field but not in dealing with the deeply inhibited woman he loves. The film was set around Wakefield, Yorkshire, where Anderson had shot his first four documentaries, and its surface realism, on sporting-field, in locker-room, street and pub, is impeccable; but it is the rendering of the man's bruising inner life that is most remarkable. Masterly as this film is, it is his next feature – *If....* (1968) – with which his name is inextricably associated.

Before *If....*, there were two curious, little-seen short films: *The White Bus* (1966), which was one of a planned triptych of art films that never came to pass and was released alone as a short, and the Polish documentary, *The Singing Lesson/Raz, Dra, Trzy* (1967). But *If....* proved the one indisputable commercial success of Anderson's

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fitful screen career. Filmed at his old school, Cheltenham, which was not made privy to the full nature of its iconoclasm, *If....* struck a very resonant chord in the year of student uprisings in several continents. Its image of the rebellious public schoolboy, Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell), armed to the teeth on the chapel roof, became a treasured icon for disaffected youth. The film railed against the debilitating class system which was Anderson's recurring *bête noire*, and, winding its exhilarating way between black-and-white and colour sequences, it exposed hypocrisy in school, church and the military. It remains Anderson's key denunciation of the ills of British society as he persistently saw them. He retained Travis/McDowell as the protagonist of two further 'state-of-the-nation' films: the picaresque Brechtian satirical fable, *O Lucky Man!* (1973), with Travis as a Candide-like coffee-salesman, and *Britannia Hospital* (1982), with Travis a reporter and the nation now, metaphorically, an ill-run hospital, rather than public school. Neither was much liked on release – his curmudgeonly socialism was out of step with the times – but hindsight may teach us to value them better.

His only other feature films were the fine, cinematically fluent 1974 adaptation of his friend David Storey's play, *In Celebration*, which Anderson had directed at the Royal Court Theatre, and, US-made, the final, elegiac *The Whales of August* (1987), which did honour to two of the screen's greatest stars, Lillian Gish and Bette Davis. Anderson never found it easy to bring his projects to screen fruition, partly because he acquired a reputation for being difficult and uncompromising, but he survived on his own terms and there is no trash in his oeuvre. Joining the English Stage Company at the Royal Court in 1957, he was also a noted director of plays, classical (e.g., a fine production of *The Cherry Orchard*, 1983) and – groundbreakingly – modern (e.g., Storey's *Home*, 1970); he directed the savage Canadian miniseries, *Glory!* (1989) which dealt swingeing blows at TV evangelism, acted in several films, including *Chariots of Fire* (1981), and wrote two valuable books about film, *The Making of a Film: the Story of 'Secret People'* (1952) and *About John Ford* (1981). His last screen work was to provide an angry, very recognisable voice on the telephone in Mark Herman's *Blame It on the Bellboy* (1992).

In British cinema's history, he is a lonely but strangely heroic figure. He died in Périgueux, France, on 30 August, 1994.

Brian McFarlane, *Reference Guide to British and Irish Film Directors*, from BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)

### James Bell – Senior curator, fiction

James joined the curatorial team as senior curator of fiction in 2021, following many years as features editor at *Sight and Sound* magazine.

James also worked as BFI special projects editor. He has been series editor of the BFI Compendium book series, whose titles include *39 Steps to the Genius of Hitchcock* (2012), *Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film* (2013) and *Electric Shadows: The History of Chinese Cinema* (2014).

He is regular programmer of BFI Southbank's biannual Deep Focus film seasons, which have included focuses on pre-Code Hollywood, psychological Westerns, Method acting and Golden Age Japanese Melodrama. He has also worked on several of the BFI's major projects, including as programmer of 2024's Cinema Unbound: The Creative Worlds of Powell and Pressburger.

### William Fowler – Curator, artists' moving image

Will joined the BFI in 2005 as the archive's first dedicated curator of artists' moving image. Since then he has undertaken a number of film restoration projects, seasons and DVD releases, including GAZWRX: the films of Jeff Keen, *Queer Pagan Punk: Derek Jarman* (the largest ever Jarman retrospective) and *This Is Now: Film and Video After Punk*, currently touring internationally through LUX. He co-conceived and co-programmed with Vic Pratt the popular monthly programme *The Flipside* and regularly contributes to the BFI Flipside Blu Rays and DVDs. He programmes the monthly BFI Southbank Experimenta strand and the Experimenta Mixtape.