



Made in England

The Films of Powell and Pressburger

Director: David Hinton

©: P & P Film Limited,

British Broadcasting Corporation

Presented by: BBC Film, Screen Scotland

A Ten Thousand 86, Ice Cream Films

production

In association with: Sikelia Productions,

Altitude Film Sales, BFI National Archive,

Cohen Media Group, ITV Studios Global

Distribution, Park Circus Productions,

Studiocanal, Turner Classic Movies

Made with the co-operation and assistance

of the Estates of Michael Powell and

Emeric Pressburger

Developed with the support of:

Arts Alliance Productions Limited

Supported by: the Scottish Government and

the National Lottery through Creative

Scotland

Executive Producers: Martin Scorsese,

Olivia Harrison, Thelma Schoonmaker, Will

Clarke, Charles S. Cohen, Thomas Hoegh,

Mark Thomas, Claudia Yusef, Eva Yates

Produced by: Matthew Wells, Nick Varley

Archive Producer: Sam Dwyer

Associate Producer: Jamie Muir

Line Producer: Penny Davies

Line Producer (NY Crew): Mevlut Akkaya

Production Manager: Nadja Lapcevic

Production Coordinator: Celeste Carrigan

Production Accounting: John Letham

Post-production Supervisor: Lesley Weir

Director of Photography (NY Crew):

Ronan Killeen

Edited by: Margarida Cartaxo,

Stuart Davidson

Online Editor: David Leishman

Additional Editing: Mike Trevett,

Matthew Wells

Graphic Artist: Noriko Okaku

Visual Effects: Serious FX

Main Title Design: Jason Hillier

Original Music: Adrian Johnston

Music Supervisors: Oliver Jay,

Lisa McCaffery

[Music] Recorded & Mixed by: Steve Parr

Sound Recordists (NY Crew): Todd Maitland,

Damian Rodriguez

Re-recording Mixer: Daniel Taylor

Consultant: Ian Christie

Film Restoration Services: Janos Pilenyi,

Daniel DeVincent, Mark Bonnici

Presented by: Martin Scorsese

UK-USA-France 2024©

133 mins

Digital

An Altitude Film Distribution release

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at

BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals.

Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

NEW RELEASES

Made in England The Films of Powell and Pressburger

When I interviewed Martin Scorsese for the October issue of *Sight and Sound* about *Killers of the Flower Moon*, I took the opportunity to ask for his thoughts on Powell and Pressburger. He's one of their most impassioned advocates, combining scholarly knowledge and a career-long creative engagement with their oeuvre both together and individually. And in his touching 1991 foreword to Ian Christie's excellent 1985 book *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger*, Scorsese picks out the one thing above all that makes them such an inspiration: 'They were the only independent filmmakers who managed to work within the system and still get away with making truly experimental films.'

He is therefore the obvious figure to act as guide in a new documentary, *Made in England: The Films of Powell & Pressburger*. The documentary is directed by David Hinton, who co-directed a charming *South Bank Show* about Powell in 1986, the year the latter's eloquent memoir *A Life in Movies* came out. And Scorsese and Hinton are working in close collaboration with Powell's widow, the brilliant Oscar-winning editor Thelma Schoonmaker, who is committed to making sure the films of Powell and Pressburger continue to find new audiences.

When we meet, the only material still to be shot for the doc is Scorsese's own appearances. 'Thelma's working on certain aspects of clips from certain films,' he says – and Scorsese has thought deeply about the art of the clip, as the maker of some magnificent documentaries on the cinema, from the epic *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies* (1995) to *My Voyage to Italy* (1999) and *A Letter to Elia* (2010, co-directed with Kent Jones). 'It's very hard to clip these films,' he says. 'It's very hard to clip any film. People want to say too much in the clips and I explain, "No, then what's the point of seeing the movie?"... I've thought about that a great deal... I'm being very, very careful with David and Thelma, saying, "Let's evoke these films." The real experience is seeing the film.'

Scorsese's first encounter with a Powell and Pressburger film came on TV in the late 1940s with the magic of *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940); and in 1948, when he was just five, as he wrote in *Arrows of Desire*, 'The first time I recall seeing the Archers' logo in colour was when my father took me to see *The Red Shoes* at the Academy of Music on 14th St. I was mesmerised... What I was really drawn to was the mystery of the red shoes, the hysteria of the picture, the extreme close-ups of Moira Shearer's eyes as she feels herself being borne to her death by the shoes, or is it by herself? This was shocking for me.' *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) he saw in a hacked-down black-and-white version on a strand called Million Dollar Movie, which gave Powell the title for his second, posthumous, volume of memoirs in 1992. Colour is an intense experience in the Archers' films, and Scorsese has recalled of *Black Narcissus* (1947): 'When I saw their work on screen it was like being bathed in colour, it was palpable.'

Meeting Powell resolved some mysteries, Scorsese recalls. 'The extraordinary unique thing of their sharing a title was mysterious, to the point where we thought maybe they were pseudonyms for other filmmakers, because there was nothing written on them. We knew Sidney Gilliat and [Frank] Launder, and we also knew the Boulting brothers, but they weren't the same kinds of films. So these Archer films seemed to be something that from [*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*] in the 1970s – which was almost impossible, you couldn't really see it [until the 1983 restoration, it was only seeable much shortened, in black and white] – to *The Red Shoes* [1948], and *A Matter of Life and Death* [1946] as best you could see that too, that was in an edited version... all these films were very, very special. The big productions like *Tales of Hoffmann*, how come we don't know who made these movies? So that was the mystery until I got to England in '75, and met Michael.'

The new documentary will investigate the mysteries of that collaboration. 'It's a very complex piece. It has to be balanced and it's interesting, [in the screen credits for a number of their films] it's "Written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric

NEW RELEASES

Close Your Eyes Cerrar los ojos

From Fri 12 Apr

Love Lies Bleeding

From Fri 3 May

Made in England

The Films of Powell and Pressburger

From Fri 10 May

Hoard

From Fri 10 May

RE-RELEASES

Rome, Open City Roma città aperta

From Fri 17 May

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info:

sightsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop. We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

Pressburger.” I suggest it's too easy to take the line that Pressburger wrote the scripts, then Powell rewrote the dialogue and directed them. Scorsese agrees. 'It's not that. No, I don't think it is. And in order to really understand, as best you can, well, first of all, [you can read] the two volumes Michael wrote, and then the volume written on Emeric Pressburger [*Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter*, by his grandson Kevin Macdonald, in 1994]. Then you take a look at the film and I think you get a good sense of it. I think what David has put together is fair and just.

'I mean, Michael's directing,' he continues, 'but on the other hand, well, Emeric came up with the idea of doing heaven in black and white in *A Matter of Life and Death*. That's a big, a major contribution.'

After they met in London, Scorsese has recorded elsewhere, Powell saw *Mean Streets* (1973) and wrote to say 'how much he liked it – except that I used too much red. "Too much red?" It's all over his films and that's where I'd got it from!' The meeting was the start of a developing friendship. 'He became part of our lives, he was with us all the time... very close to my parents, pretty much every holiday, birthdays, et cetera, we'd celebrate, screen films from time to time. He was very much part of the family.' In 1984 Powell married Schoonmaker and the intimacy was even closer for the remaining six years of his life. He admired and supported Scorsese, whom his posthumous memoir calls 'a real king of the movies'; and he famously wrote the discouraged Scorsese a decisive letter in 1988 urging him to make *GoodFellas* (1990): 'It is a stunning script, and will make a wonderful film, and a priceless social document.'

Personally, too, 'he was a big supporter, particularly in some difficult periods I had in the early 80s – in '82, trying to finish *King of Comedy*. He was a person who would be able to talk with me in a way that was not judgemental; and had a way of saying things without saying them. As opposed to other people who were, at the time, making declarations and isolating me... I was having a difficult time... But he was pretty much there, in that period, without judgement... or at least he didn't let me know if he was judging!' Scorsese laughs at the thought.

When they met, Powell had already been, as he has continued to be, a presence and inspiration in Scorsese's cinema: there are minor characters called Powell and Pressburger in *Boxcar Bertha* (1972); Robert De Niro's Jimmy Doyle signs the hotel register in *New York, New York* (1977) as 'Mr. Powell'. The close-ups of Travis Bickle's face in *Taxi Driver* (1976) were shot at 36 and 49 frames per second, influenced by the shots of Robert Helpmann in the Venetian duel in *The Tales of Hoffmann*. The build-up to the duel in *Colonel Blimp* inspired the focus on the rituals of the ring rather than the actual boxing in *Raging Bull* (1980). Scorsese's commentary on the Criterion edition of *Black Narcissus* says the fluency and inventiveness of camera movement and framing of bodies and faces there directly influenced the scene in *The Color of Money* (1986) in which Tom Cruise is moving round the pool table entering and exiting the frame; and that the handling of Deborah Kerr's Irish memories inspired the transitions by simple cuts between Rupert Pupkin's real experience and his fantasy life in *The King of Comedy* (1982). The trick he learnt from Powell: 'Treat the fantasy as just as real.'

Scorsese has been thinking about *A Canterbury Tale* (1944). I mention its extraordinary tone, as a playful pastoral comedy unfolding in Kent just before D-Day: everyone we see doing apparently frivolous things is touched by the war; many of them are about to go off to fight and very possibly die. Scorsese agrees, citing the scene in which Alison (Sheila Sim) sits on the grassy hilltop looking out over Canterbury. '*A Canterbury Tale* is magical. It's just the music [by Allan Gray] shifting, the shots of the cathedral from afar, as she sits in the grass, the listening to the... here's the past come up. It's something worth looking at... what the past means to us in our culture and our lives, and how it speaks to us. That, again, is like the landscape in *Archipelago* [Joanna Hogg, 2010]. Or the prairies out in Oklahoma, it speaks to you if you shut up and listen. And we did [on *Killers of the Flower Moon*]. Granted I come from Manhattan, but still it said something. I don't know what the hell it was, but it said it. But in *A Canterbury Tale*, the past speaks to you through the land. It's beautiful.'

Philip Horne, *Sight and Sound*, November 2023