



EDGAR WRIGHT'S LONDON AFTER DARK

Passport to Shame

One of those rare B-movies that manages to live up to or even exceed the lurid promise of its title and poster. It finds an (American) London cabbie on a dangerous mission to rescue an innocent French girl tricked into prostitution, and also packs in Herbert Lom as a murderous pimp, Man Ray-style dream sequences and the first onscreen appearance of Michael Caine and Anne Reid (in a registry scene). Highly entertaining Soho hokum.

Edgar Wright

Opening with a solemn introduction by Inspector Robert Fabian (of *Fabian of the Yard* fame) in which he expresses his disgust at the rise of organised prostitution rackets, or 'the white slave trade', *Passport to Shame* is in fact a typical piece of 1950s (s)exploitation, claiming to expose a pressing social evil while rarely missing an opportunity to show 'guest star' Diana Dors parading in basque and suspenders.

She plays prostitute Vicki, trying to raise enough money to pay hospital bills for her sister Maria, scarred for life in an acid attack by the vicious Nick Biaggi (Herbert Lom), a dapper gangster whose surname hints at the Italian and Maltese dominance of the Soho sex trade of the time. Shortly after the film was released, the 1959 Street Offences Act attempted a crackdown on street prostitution, but this had hardly any effect on operations like Nick's, where the prettiest girls would be 'groomed' to service high-profile clients behind the scenes.

Malou (Odile Versois) is doubly trapped: wanted by the police in France for (framed) theft, her arranged marriage lets her work legally, but also makes her wholly dependent on her new masters. Depressingly, the mechanics of her enslavement are virtually identical to the scenario depicted in Lukas Moodysson's *Lilja 4-Ever* (2002), suggesting that little has changed in nearly half a century.

This was Canadian-born Alvin Rakoff's first cinema feature after a few years in television. His treatment is broadly realistic, with the occasional Expressionist flourish, notably a startling dream sequence that anticipates the much later *Repulsion* (1965) in its images of anonymous clutching male hands. Less effective is the contrivance of Malou clutching a kitten throughout her discovery of the true nature of her new home. Versois' performance has enough genuine wide-eyed innocence to make such heavy-handed symbolism over-obtrusive.

Some now-familiar faces make fleeting appearances: *Carry On* icon Joan Sims as a telephone operator, novelist Jackie Collins as one of Nick's 'girls' and an uncredited Michael Caine as a bridegroom. Of the leads, Dors and Lom were the biggest names, while Versois (sister of the actress Marina Vlady) and the American-born Eddie Constantine spent most of their careers in France, each making a handful of British films in the 1950s. Constantine would later appear in *The Long Good Friday* (1979), a vastly superior exploration of the seamier underside of London gangland life.

Michael Brooke, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

A contemporary review

This wildly incredible story, introduced as a social document by Fabian of the Yard, must be the most wholeheartedly absurd prostitute drama yet. Motivations are mysterious and characterisations grotesque. Connoisseurs of the bizarre may relish some of the production’s most ambitious moments, notably the conclusion, which features Herbert Lom scattering hundreds of bank notes from a blazing brothel in an endeavour to hasten the approaching firemen.

Monthly Film Bulletin, March 1959

PASSPORT TO SHAME (AKA ROOM 43)

Directed by: Alvin Rakoff
©/Production Company: United Co-Productions
Presented by: British Lion Films
Produced by: John Clein
Production Manager: Barry Delmaine
Location Manager: Albert Pearl
Assistant Director: Peter Crowhurst
Continuity: Pamela Carlton
Screenplay by: Patrick Alexander
Director of Photography: Jack Asher
Camera Operator: Nick Roeg
Editor: Lee Doig
Art Director: George Beech
Wardrobe: Evelyn Gibbs
Make-up: Jim Hydes
Hairdresser: Ann Box
Music Composed, Arranged and Directed by: Ken Jones
‘Never, Never More’ Music by: Jeff Davis
‘Never, Never More’ Lyric by: Geoffrey Parsons
Sound Recording: Claude Hitchcock
Recorded on: RCA Sound System
Dubbing Editor: John Glen
Made at: Walton Studios

Cast

Odile Versois (Malou Beaucaire)
Herbert Lom (Nick Biaggi)
Eddie Constantine (Johnny McVay)
Brenda De Banzie (Aggie)
Robert Brown (Mike)
Diana Dors (Vicki)
Elwyn Brook-Jones (Heath)
Cyril Shaps (Willie)
Percy Cartwright (registrar)
James Ottaway (assistant registrar)
Denis Shaw (Mac)
Joan Sims (Miriam, telephonist)
Pat Pleasance (Sally)
Steve Plytas (café boss)
Charles Price (Nick’s chauffeur)
Lana Morris (a girl)
Jackie Collins (English girl)
Margaret Tyzack (June, Heath’s secretary)
Robert Fabian (himself, introduction)
Michael Caine (bridegroom) *
Anne Reid (bride) *
Pauline Stroud (Maria) *
Jerold Wells (taxi driver in office) *
Rosalie Marshall *
Robert Crewdson *
Yvonne Buckingham *
Gareth Tandy *

UK 1958©
90 mins

* Uncredited

EDGAR WRIGHT’S LONDON AFTER DARK

Passport to Shame (aka Room 43)
Mon 18 Oct 20:50; Sat 13 Nov 18:10
Peeping Tom
Tue 19 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 18:20
Beat Girl
Fri 22 Oct 20:40; Sun 31 Oct 16:20
West End Jungle + Look at Life: Market Place
+ Look at Life: Rising to High Office
Sat 23 Oct 20:40; Sat 20 Nov 14:40
The Pleasure Girls + Look at Life: Members Only
Mon 25 Oct 20:50; Mon 29 Nov 18:20
Frenzy
Wed 27 Oct 20:45; Fri 19 Nov 18:30

Darling

Thu 28 Oct 20:30; Sat 20 Nov 13:20
Bitter Harvest + Look at Life: Coffee Bar
Fri 29 Oct 18:00; Tue 9 Nov 20:45
The Small World of Sammy Lee + Look at Life: In Gear
Sat 30 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 20:45; Tue 23 Nov 14:30
Primitive London + Look at Life: Goodbye Piccadilly
Mon 1 Nov 20:50; Thu 25 Nov 20:50

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