



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# Notorious

ALICIA: My car is outside.

DEVLIN: Naturally.

ALICIA: Wanna go for a ride?

DEVLIN: Very much.

Seven decades after its premiere in New York on 15 August 1946, it's impossible to shake the feeling that Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* is a perfect film – a rare feature in which you wouldn't want to change a thing.

Next to *Vertigo* (1958), it's certainly the Master of Suspense's gravest, saddest and most perverse offering. Yet, in its opening moments, there's something close to the lighter mood of screwball comedy in the bemused exchange between party host Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman) and suave gatecrasher Devlin (Cary Grant), the lone awake survivors at Alicia's decadent soirée.

Here's how it starts:

DEVLIN: There's one more drink left apiece. Shame about the ice.

ALICIA: What is?

DEVLIN: Gone.

ALICIA: Who's gone?

DEVLIN: The ice.

The writing is by Ben Hecht, a man whose brisk, effervescent scripts for classic screwballs such as *Nothing Sacred* (1937) and *His Girl Friday* (1940) deserve their own AOC certification.

We've been introduced to Devlin from behind, in mysterious shadow, watching silently as the other party guests either leave or pass out in distended stupors. Bergman's sozzled hostess, wearing an immortal, striped party outfit, bare at the waist, doesn't really remember inviting this interloper, but she thinks he's all right ('You're quite a boy,' she says, as he downs a nightcap).

The after-hours lighting (cinematography by Ted Tetzlaff) seems to make everything in the room glisten, from Devlin's brilliantined hair to Alicia's boozemisted eyes as she makes inquisitive glances towards the stranger. She suggests a picnic, outside. It's early morning, chilly even in Miami, so Devlin ties a scarf around her midriff as they head out to the car. Do we want to go for a ride? We do.

We're already falling for Alicia and Devlin falling for each other. A drunken joy ride follows – a precursor to the drink-driving episode in Hitchcock's later spy thriller *North by Northwest* (1959), when Cary Grant takes the driving seat. Here Devlin lets Alicia drive, ready to grasp the wheel if she falters, while she accelerates ever faster to 'wipe that grin off your face'. 'This fog gets me,' Alicia says – though Devlin points out it's just her wind-blown hair in her eyes.

They're both careering headlong into one of the most anguished relationships in American film. Alicia is the daughter of a traitorous German American father, who we see convicted of war crimes in the film's opening court scene. Devlin is an intelligence man, sent to enlist Alicia's help in infiltrating a circle of

her father's Nazi friends living in South America – namely an old paramour of Alicia's called Sebastian (Claude Rains).

What follows is a brilliant spy movie (the best of them all, and without a gun in sight). But it's not exactly in the jolly vein that Hitchcock perfected back in England with *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). Nor, though there are kindred elements, does it precisely resemble the paranoid, nightmarish espionage movies that Fritz Lang was making around this time, such as *Ministry of Fear* (1944) or *Cloak and Dagger* (1946). More lastingly, it is an agonised love story, closer to *Vertigo* in its ruthless demonstration of how twisted and neurotic our attraction to others can be.

At first, neither Devlin nor Alicia realises how far it will be necessary for Alicia to go in her mission to ensnare Sebastian: feigned love to start with, then marriage. It's a seduction that the once loose-living party girl could have done in her sleep, but – having put her in this situation – Devlin misinterprets her willingness as her old habits dying hard. As he begins to shrink from her, she throws herself into her dangerous task, masochistically whoring herself for Uncle Sam because the man she loves thinks no better of her.

Like *Vertigo*, *Notorious* is a Hitchcock film that you remember for its tortured feelings and faces as much as for its suspense plot. There's a brilliant and very famous sequence involving the furtive search of Sebastian's wine cellar, as Hitch intercuts to the champagne running out at the party upstairs. And it's preceded by some inspired technical wizardry, in which a crane shot moves from a wide perspective on the guests arriving at said party, swooping down from the grand staircase to end on a tight close-up of Alicia's hand, clutching the key that will gain her entry to the cellar.

But no less momentous is an extended clinch that Alicia and Devlin enjoy on their balcony in Rio, in their all-too-brief honeymoon romance before the nature of her patriotic duty is revealed. Since the censor forbade screen kisses lasting longer than three seconds, Hitchcock prolongs the moment and considerably ramps up the eroticism by having the lovers intersperse their kissing with nuzzling and murmuring. This way, it lasts for two and a half minutes – and the atmosphere of almost carnivorous desire is electric.

It must be said that, in navigating these turbulent waters, Hitchcock has at his disposal some of the most immaculate lead performances that have ever graced a film. Ingrid Bergman, Cary Grant and Claude Rains – this is a top-three cast billing made in movie heaven. The director had started to burrow into Grant's dark side with *Suspicion* (1941), which had more melodramatic questions about the extent to which such charming men might actually be murderers. Here the interrogation is far more subtle and searching, drawing all masculinity into its doubt.

1946 was a very fine vintage of American cinema. *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Big Sleep*, *My Darling Clementine*, *Gilda*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Duel in the Sun* all saw their first release – and so many of those too are tinged with anxiety, sexual or existential.

Like these other septuagenarian classics, *Notorious* remains a lasting demonstration of the potency and complexity possible in old Hollywood at the peak of its powers. But its balance between pleasure and pain, between its seductive surface and plungingly dark depths, is uniquely Hitchcockian.

**Samuel Wigley, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk), 15 August 2016**

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## NOTORIOUS

*Directed by:* Alfred Hitchcock  
*Production Company:* RKO Radio Pictures  
*Production Assistant:* Barbara Keon  
*Assistant Director:* William Dorfman  
*Screenplay:* Ben Hecht  
*Director of Photography:* Ted Tetzlaff  
*Special Effects by:* Vernon L. Walker, Paul Eagler  
*Edited by:* Theron Warth  
*Art Directors:* Albert S. D'Agostino, Carroll Clark  
*Set Decoration:* Darrell Silvera, Claude Carpenter  
*Miss Bergman's Gowns Designed by:* Edith Head  
*Music by:* Roy Webb  
*Musical Director:* C. Bakaleinikoff  
*Orchestral Arrangements:* Gil Grau  
*Sound by:* John E. Tribby, Terry Kellum

*uncredited*

*Producer:* Alfred Hitchcock

### Cast

Cary Grant (*Devlin*)  
Ingrid Bergman (*Alicia Huberman*)  
Claude Rains (*Alexander Sebastian*)  
Louis Calhern (*Captain Paul Prescott*)  
Madame Konstantin (*Madame Sebastian*)  
Reinhold Schunzel (*Dr Anderson*)  
Moroni Olsen (*Walter Beardsley*)  
Ivan Triesault (*Eric Mathis*)  
Alex Minotis (*Joseph*)  
Wally Brown (*Mr Hopkins*)  
Sir Charles Mendl (*Commodore*)  
Ricardo Costa (*Dr Barbosa*)  
Eberhard Krumschmidt (*Emile Hupka*)  
Fay Baker (*Ethel*)

*uncredited cast*

Gavin Gordon (*Ernest Weylin*)  
Antonio Moreno (*Senor Ortiza*)  
Friedrich Ledebur (*Knerr*)  
Louis Serrano (*Dr Silva*)  
Ramon Nomar (*2nd Dr Silva*)  
William D. Gordon (*Adams*)  
Charles D. Brown (*judge*)  
Fred Nurney (*Huberman*)  
Herbert Wyndham (*Mr Cook*)  
Peter von Zerneck (*Rossner*)  
Alfred Hitchcock (*champagne drinker at party*)  
Harry Hayden (*defense council*)  
Dink Trout (*clerk of court*)  
Warren Jackson (*district attorney*)  
Howard Mitchell (*bailiff*)  
Garry Owen, Lester Dorr (*motor cops*)  
Tom Coleman (*court stenographer*)  
John Vosper, Eddie Bruce, Donald Kerr, Ben Erway, Emmett Vogan,  
Paul Bryar, Alan Ward, James Logan (*reporters*)  
Howard Negley, Frank Marlowe, George Lynn (*photographers*)  
Bea Benaderet, Virginia Gregg, Bernice Barrett (*file clerks*)  
Tina Menard (*maid*)  
Alfredo De Sa (*Ribero*)  
Sandra Morgan, Aileen Carlyle, Lillian West, Beulah Christian,  
Almeda Fowler, Leota Lorraine (*women*)  
Richard Clark, Frank McDonald (*men*)  
Frank Wilcox (*FBI man*)  
Patricia Smart (*Mrs Jackson*)

USA 1946©

101 mins

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## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### The Manchurian Candidate

Mon 1 Aug 14:40; Fri 5 Aug 18:00; Sun 14 Aug 14:40

### M

Tue 2 Aug 18:15; Wed 10 Aug 20:45; Tue 23 Aug 20:50;

Mon 29 Aug 12:00

### Sweet Smell of Success

Tue 2 Aug 20:50; Sat 13 Aug 18:10; Mon 29 Aug 18:30

### Dance, Girl, Dance

Wed 3 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Pamela Hutchinson, Film Critic and  
Historian); Thu 18 Aug 20:45

### Gaslight

Thu 4 Aug 18:15; Mon 8 Aug 20:45

### Persona

Fri 5 Aug 20:50; Thu 11 Aug 21:00; Wed 31 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff  
Andrew, Programmer at Large)

### Raging Bull

Sat 6 Aug 20:30; Thu 11 Aug 20:30; Fri 26 Aug 20:30

### La Haine

Sat 6 Aug 21:00; Fri 19 Aug 20:50; Wed 24 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Ginette  
Vincendeau, Professor of film studies at King's College London)

### Citizen Kane

Sun 7 Aug 14:30; Tue 16 Aug 18:15; Wed 24 Aug 20:40

### The White Ribbon (Das weisse Band)

Tue 9 Aug 17:50; Sat 27 Aug 17:50

### Kes

Tue 9 Aug 20:45; Mon 15 Aug 18:15; Tue 30 Aug 20:40

### The Night of the Hunter

Wed 10 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Director of Public  
Programme and Audiences); Mon 22 Aug 20:45; Sun 28 Aug 12:20

### Notorious

Thu 11 Aug 18:10; Wed 17 Aug 20:45; Sun 21 Aug 12:20; Thu 25 Aug  
18:15

### Bigger Than Life

Fri 12 Aug 20:40; Wed 17 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,  
Programmer at Large)

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