



## MURIEL BOX: A WOMAN'S TAKE

# The Seventh Veil

### The English Inn

Director: Muriel Baker  
Production Company: Verity Films  
Producer: James Carr  
Script: Thomas Burke, Max Munden  
Photography: James Rogers, Reg Wyer  
Editor: John Durst  
Music: William Alwyn  
Studio: Merton Park  
Cast:  
Max Munden  
UK 1941  
11 mins

A BFI National Archive print

### The Seven Veil

Director: Compton Bennett  
Production Company: Ortus Films, Theatrecraft  
Producer: Sydney Box  
Production Executive: A.R. Shipman \*  
Production Manager: Knox Laing  
1st Assistant Director: Herbert Dorsett  
Continuity: M. Norton  
Original Story and Screenplay by:  
Sydney Box, Muriel Box  
Director of Photography: Reginald Wyer  
Cameraman: Bert Mason  
Focus Puller: Kenneth Smith  
Camera Assistant: Herbert Knifton  
1st Camera Operator: Terry Turtle  
Stills Photography: Frank Otley, Arthur Armour  
Editor: Gordon Hales  
Assistant Editor (1st): Helga Cranston  
Art Director: James Carter  
Portrait of Miss Todd painted by: Frank O. Salisbury  
[Senior] Draughtsperson: Ivan King  
Draughtsperson: Noel Waterfield  
Dresses: Dorothy Sinclair  
Make-up: Nell Taylor  
Hair: Frieda Steiger  
Lab Work: George Humphries & Co., Kay Films  
Music: Benjamin Frankel  
Pianist: Eileen Joyce \*  
Conductor: Muir Mathieson  
Sound Direction: George Burgess  
Sound Recording: L. Clarke  
Sound Camera Operator: Arthur F. Kelly  
Dubbing Crew: George Burgess, Norman Hemsley,  
William Sanger, Thomas Goghan  
Boom Operator: Gordon Hay  
Boom Assistant: Peter McManus  
Studio: Riverside Studios  
Cast:  
James Mason (*Nicholas*)  
Ann Todd (*Francesca Cunningham*)  
Herbert Lom (*Dr Larson*)  
Hugh McDermott (*Peter Gay*)  
Albert Lieven (*Maxwell Leyden*)  
Yvonne Owen (*Susan Brook*)  
David Horne (*Dr Kendal*)  
Manning Whiley (*Dr Irving*)  
John Slater (*James*)  
Grace Allardyce (*nurse*)  
Ernest Davies (*Parker*)  
Arnold Goldsborough (*conductor*)  
Muir Mathieson (*conductor*)  
London Symphony Orchestra (*music played by*)  
UK 1945  
94 mins  
\* Uncredited

A BFI National Archive print

Muriel Box was the first woman to win the Oscar™ for Best Original Screenplay (shared with her husband Sydney), for this story inspired by her fascination with new methods of therapy. When a young pianist attempts suicide, her treatment by hypnosis reveals what is behind the 'seventh veil' of her subconscious and helps her choose between the four men who are in love with her.

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

One of James Mason's most indelible contributions to British cinema was the moment in which he smashed his cane down on concert pianist Ann Todd's hands. Given the date (1945) and the motive (obsessive jealousy), it sounds as though it came from one of the many Gainsborough costume melodramas that helped establish Mason as the era's biggest British star, but *The Seventh Veil* was in fact made independently by producer Sydney Box, its glossy sheen belying the relatively low budget (under £100,000) and rapid shooting schedule

However, the film largely adopted the Gainsborough formula of a strongly female-centred narrative revolving around a troubled and complex relationship with a brooding, aloof and faintly sadistic man, and emphasised the debt by casting Mason in a familiar role. Here, though, the setting is the present day, and the story is largely told in flashback, with psychiatrist Dr Larson (Herbert Lom) gently but persistently probing the traumatic events in the life of pianist Francesca Cunningham (Todd) in an attempt to help her come to terms with her past, to break through the 'seventh veil' which he believes conceals the secret of her various neuroses.

Although the explicitly Freudian explanation of Francesca's neuroses would probably be dismissed today, this scenario makes for compelling melodrama, the flashback structure serving to present her life as a series of emotional peaks and troughs, her triumphs in the concert hall invariably dashed by romantic disappointment, the resurfacing of unpleasant memories, or her constant paranoia about the sanctity of her hands. In the concert scenes, the latter were doubled by the pianist Eileen Joyce, who generously waived her credit when she saw how convincing the illusion was.

Despite the similarities to its Gainsborough contemporaries, *The Seventh Veil* was a notably bigger critical success: the *Spectator* announced it as 'an event in the development of the British film industry' and even the notoriously acerbic C.A. Lejeune (*The Observer*) was unusually complimentary. A huge domestic box-office hit (nearly sixty years later, the BFI calculated that it was still the tenth most successful UK box-office hit in terms of ticket numbers), it also made an impact in the US, where its screenplay won an Oscar. The following year, Sydney Box was appointed head of Gainsborough Pictures, on the assumption that he would work similar magic on the ailing studio – but *The Seventh Veil* turned out to be an unrepeatable one-off.

Michael Brooke, [BFI Screenonline.org.uk](http://BFI Screenonline.org.uk)

## MURIEL BOX: A WOMAN'S TAKE

### The Seventh Veil + The English Inn

Mon 1 May 13:00; Thu 11 May 18:10 (+ intro by Lucy Bolton, Reader in Film Studies at Queen Mary)

### Good-Time Girl

Mon 1 May 15:40; Fri 12 May 18:10 (+ intro by Television Producer and Director, Rebecca Towers)

### Muriel Box: The Odd Woman Out

Tue 2 May 18:15

### The Passionate Stranger (aka A Novel Affair)

Tue 2 May 20:30 (+ intro by filmmaker Carol Morley); Thu 18 May 18:20; Tue 30 May 20:30

### Easy Money

Wed 3 May 18:20; Mon 8 May 16:00

### Holiday Camp

Sat 6 May 15:30; Wed 17 May 20:30

### The Lost People (aka Cockpit)

Sat 6 May 18:30; Sun 21 May 13:40

### The Happy Family (aka Mr Lord Says No/Live and Let Live)

Sun 7 May 18:10; Sat 20 May 15:15

### Street Corner (aka Both Sides of the Law/Gentle Arm/The Policewoman)

Mon 8 May 13:30; Tue 30 May 18:20 (+ intro by season curator Josephine Botting)

### Simon and Laura

Mon 8 May 18:10; Sun 28 May 16:00

### Philosophical Screens: The Seventh Veil

Thu 11 May 20:15 Blue Room

### Rattle of a Simple Man

Wed 17 May 18:10; Tue 23 May 20:30

### The Truth about Women

Thu 18 May 20:40; Sun 28 May 18:10

### Eyewitness (aka Point of Crisis) + A Ride with Uncle Joe

Sun 21 May 18:20; Fri 26 May 18:10

### This Other Eden

Thu 25 May 18:20; Sat 27 May 13:45

### With thanks to

StudioCanal for their new 4K restorations from the best available original materials, scanned and restored to produce three brand new HD masters



Three restored Muriel Box titles (*The Passionate Stranger*, *The Truth about Women* and *Rattle of a Simple Man*) are being released on Blu-ray and DVD by StudioCanal in May and will be available from the BFI Shop.

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## Contemporary Reviews

A strangely attractive and tantalising British film... beautifully acted by Ann Todd and James Mason, imaginatively directed by Compton Bennett, and brilliantly adorned by the work of an anonymous pianist (whom I am assured is Miss Eileen Joyce), and for the first sixty minutes I could ask nothing better. Then comes the parting of the ways, and it is inconceivable that the clear and lively minds who had the ordering of the first two-thirds of the film could have been responsible for the tedious and tatty ending... That is the disqualification of *The Seventh Veil* as a serious bit of cinema, but it will not prevent it from being a vast and largely merited success.

*The Observer*, 21 October, 1945

Francesca Cunningham is a celebrated pianist whose hands have been burned in a car accident and who is suffering from acute depression. She attempts suicide, and afterwards becomes silent and lifeless. A psychiatrist, Dr Lassen, places her under narco-hypnosis, during which she reveals the truth of her past life, episode by episode. Each stage in her life has led to her depression: the headmistress who canes her on the hands the day before an important music examination, the guardian who tyrannises over her in order to force the pace of her training and career, the collapse of her adolescent and mature love affairs.

James Mason plays his usual role, sardonic, brooding, the man to whom wealth and a mysterious past permit a romantic licence for ill-manners and egocentric behaviour. Yet the film has distinct virtues and distinct cinematic power; the opening is beautifully and brilliantly handled, haunting and tense. The music is a delight to hear (Chopin, Mozart, Grieg, Rachmaninoff, Beethoven). The psychological theme, the neurosis of a talented girl whose thwarted emotional life culminates in an acute regard for her hands, which she wrongly believes injured beyond healing, seems correctly conceived, and the psychiatrist is well played by Herbert Lorn.

James Mason is an excellent actor with a fine face for screen-work. Why must he always play a Victorian maidservant's conception of a rich, romantically overbearing lord? Ann Todd's performance is sensitive and true to the character. She performs the difficult task of being completely satisfying and convincing in her portrayal of a great artist in another sphere of art. One went through the artist's agony of initial public appearance at concerts which demand the highest standards of discipline and execution.

*Monthly Film Bulletin*, 31 October, 1945