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**MICHEL PICCOLI:  
A FEARLESS TALENT**

**La Mort en ce jardin (Evil Eden)**

Thu 1 Jun 20:35; Tue 6 Jun 18:15

**Le Mépris (Contempt)**

From Fri 2 Jun

**The Diary of a Chambermaid**

**(Le journal d'une femme de chambre)**

Fri 2 Jun 18:15; Fri 16 Jun 20:55

**Belle de jour**

Fri 2 Jun 20:40; Sun 25 Jun 18:45

**Les Choses de la vie (The Things of Life)**

Sat 3 Jun 12:30; Tue 13 Jun 20:45

**Themroc**

Sat 3 Jun 15:00; Wed 14 Jun 18:15

**La Grande Bouffe (Blow-Out)**

Sat 3 Jun 20:30; Mon 12 Jun 18:10

**Ten Days' Wonder (La Décade prodigeuse)**

Sun 4 Jun 15:20; Sat 17 Jun 20:40

**Vincent, François, Paul et les autres**

Sun 4 Jun 18:00; Sun 18 Jun 13:10

**Beyond Good and Evil:**

**The Discreet Charm of Michel Piccoli**

Mon 5 Jun 18:15

**Passion**

Tue 6 Jun 21:00; Fri 16 Jun 18:20

**Spoiled Children (Des enfants gâtés)**

Wed 7 Jun 18:10; Mon 12 Jun 20:40

**Une chambre en ville (A Room in Town)**

Wed 14 Jun 20:45; Sat 24 Jun 13:00

**Mauvais sang (The Night Is Young)**

Sat 17 Jun 15:15; Thu 22 Jun 20:40

**Milou en mai (Milou in May)**

Sun 18 Jun 16:00; Mon 26 Jun 20:40

**Belle toujours**

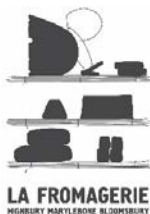
Wed 21 Jun 20:50; Sun 25 Jun 16:30

**La Belle Noiseuse**

Sat 24 Jun 15:20; Wed 28 Jun 18:10

**Habemus Papam – We Have a Pope**

Sun 25 Jun 14:00; Thu 29 Jun 20:45

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**MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT**

## Beyond Good and Evil: The Discreet Charm of Michel Piccoli

*Due to unforeseen circumstances, Dr Catherine Wheatley is unable to join us for this event. Geoff Andrew will be now joined on stage by film writer and writer-director-producer David Thompson.*

Good evening and thank you for coming along to this evening's talk and discussion about the work of Michel Piccoli. I should qualify that statement a little; we shall be looking at his work as a film actor. He also wrote, directed and produced films, and he had a very distinguished parallel career as a stage actor; those aspects of his long and prolific creative life are beyond the scope of our survey tonight, just as they are not reflected in the season I put together devoted to his work. As it is, his CV as a screen actor is so extensive that I was able only to include a fraction of his output. (My original wishlist included about 30 titles, but for reasons of space in the programme, we had to reduce that number to 16, alongside the re-release of *Le Mépris*.) There were many regrettable omissions, but I hope at least that the final selection – like the clips screened this evening – will be sufficient to persuade you of Piccoli's great talent.

Piccoli has been important to me for almost as long as the cinema itself. I first realised that film could be a serious art form when I was a first-year student in 1973. Having caught the art-movie bug with Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*, I immediately began seeking out work by other major directors of that time. Three years of leavening my studies with trips to cinemas and film societies were followed by half a decade working at the Electric Cinema Club, where I would watch many of the 20 or so films screened each week. During those years, I'd find Piccoli turning up on screen again and again. It was the perfect time to catch his work of the 60s and 70s, when he was collaborating with directors like Buñuel, Ferreri, Chabrol, Faraldo, Tavernier, Malle and Godard.

He appeared, often, to be an archetypal bourgeois male: suave, urbane, intelligent, a little cynical, probably concealing some dark secret; Buñuel, particularly, liked to add a whiff of corruption, decadence or perversity. Yet Piccoli somehow seemed to exist beyond conventional notions of good and evil; whatever one's first impressions of the character he was playing, as the film progressed one noticed other aspects of his personality that complicated any simplistic reading. Unexpected hidden depths might be revealed; beneath the apparent self-assurance, there could be intimations of insecurity, anxiety and doubt. But it also helped that he could call on considerable charm. As I write, I am reminded that much the same could be said of Cary Grant, whose screen persona was likewise ambivalent, especially in his collaborations with directors like Hitchcock, Hawks and Cukor. There are other similarities – like Grant, Piccoli always made acting look effortless – but there is one crucial difference. Grant, working in the Hollywood studio system from the 30s to the 60s, faced numerous generic, aesthetic and moralistic constraints, whereas Piccoli, coming to the fore at the height of the *nouvelle vague* and consolidating his career just as the European cinema was engaging with and reflecting all kinds of social, political and ethical change, was able – and ready – to range far more widely. And he sometimes did so in movies that were potentially – or even intentionally – controversial.

So some of those films I saw him in were deeply unsettling. But he was always compulsively watchable, and whenever, in later years, I saw Piccoli's name among the credits, I felt pleased: he was a dependably interesting presence. While it's probably fair to say that he (or at least the characters he played) mellowed as he grew older, he never lost the capacity to surprise and astonish. I hope I'll be able to demonstrate that aspect of his work with this evening's film clips.

I confess I find it harder to write or speak about actors and acting than I do about directors and direction. (Indeed, many actors clearly find it hard to explain what

## RAZOR SHARP: THE FABULOUS WOMEN OF HOWARD HAWKS

### Razor Sharp: The Hawksian Woman Revisited

Thu 1 Jun 18:15

#### Twentieth Century

Thu 1 Jun 20:40; Fri 16 Jun 18:30;

Thu 22 Jun 21:00

#### Barbary Coast

Fri 2 Jun 18:20; Thu 15 Jun 20:40

#### Bringing Up Baby

Sat 3 Jun 12:00; Mon 19 Jun 20:40;

Fri 23 Jun 18:20

#### Only Angels Have Wings

Sat 3 Jun 15:45; Thu 15 Jun 14:30;

Tue 27 Jun 17:50

#### Ball of Fire

Sat 3 Jun 17:55; Tue 20 Jun 20:30

#### To Have and Have Not

Sun 4 Jun 19:00; Fri 23 Jun 20:40

#### I Was a Male War Bride

(aka You Can't Sleep Here)

Wed 7 Jun 20:35; Sun 25 Jun 18:30

#### Rio Bravo

Mon 12 Jun 17:50; Sun 18 Jun 14:30;

Fri 30 Jun 20:20

#### His Girl Friday

Wed 14 Jun 20:50; Sat 17 Jun 13:30; Thu 29 Jun

18:20 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, King's

College London)

#### Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

Thu 15 Jun 18:15; Thu 29 Jun 21:00

#### The Big Sleep

Wed 21 Jun 18:25; Wed 28 Jun 20:45

#### The Thing from Another World

Sat 24 Jun 18:30; Fri 30 Jun 18:15

#### Philosophical Screens:

##### The Philosophy of Marriage: His Girl Friday

Thu 29 Jun 20:15 BFI Reuben Library

## SIGHT AND SOUND

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they do; their work has so much to do with instinct and intuition.) But I hope to be able to shed a little light on why I consider Piccoli such a fine actor, not to mention a major figure in European cinema for half a century. That said, responses to actors and performances are always highly subjective, and my take on Piccoli, whom I first encountered on screen in 1973, 50 years ago, may be very different from that of many filmgoers today; moreover, what was considered 'progressive' back then may not seem so today. Attitudes change. For those and other reasons, we thought it would be fruitful, this evening, to provide another, possibly different perspective on Piccoli; hence the decision to follow my brief talk with a discussion with Catherine Wheatley, who will offer her thoughts about the actor. As I write, all I really know is that she finds him interesting; I have no idea what her take on Piccoli and his films will be, and I am very much looking forward to finding out where we differ and where (or if) we agree.

Finally, another personal note. In my work as a journalist I was fortunate enough to meet Michel Piccoli twice. The second occasion was at a reception at the French Institute to mark (I think) the UK release of Manoel de Oliveira's film *I'm Going Home*, in which he had played the lead; our conversation consisted largely of Piccoli expressing his admiration and affection for the great Portuguese filmmaker, who was by then a spritely 93-year-old, and at that moment demonstrating his enduring energy levels by repeatedly climbing on to and off a chair in the corner of the room. (I jest not.) My first and longer encounter with Piccoli had been a decade earlier, during the 1991 London Film Festival, when I interviewed him for the release of Jacques Rivette's remarkable *La Belle Noiseuse*. I spent an hour with him, and when I left to walk back to the *Time Out* office in Covent Garden, my mood was matched by the murmuration of many hundreds of starlings gathering to roost for the night in Leicester Square. I too felt as if I was flying, so exhilarating had the encounter been. It was only the following day, when I came to transcribe the recording of our conversation, that I realised that Piccoli's comments, while always engaged, articulate, intelligent and enlightening, had in fact been nothing out of the ordinary. Clearly, I had been dazzled by his very discreet charm.

Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large

**Geoff Andrew** is Programmer-at-large for BFI Southbank. Formerly Head of Film Programme for BFI Southbank, he was also film editor of *Time Out* magazine for many years, and is a regular contributor to *Sight and Sound*; he has also served as a long-term programme advisor to the BFI London Film Festival. His numerous books on the cinema including studies of Nicholas Ray and the American 'indie' filmmakers of the 1980s and 90s, and BFI Classics monographs on Kieślowski's *Three Colours Trilogy* and Kiarostami's *10*. He is the editor of *Sight and Sound*'s 'Auteurs Series' anthologies devoted to Jean-Luc Godard, Martin Scorsese and Spike Lee and of two subsequent volumes exploring *The New Hollywood 1967-1980*. He has contributed to many anthologies and DVD extras, lectured widely on the cinema, and served on film festival juries in Cannes, Venice, Istanbul, Turin, Krakow, Morelia, Sarajevo and elsewhere. In 2009 the French government made him a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. He writes on film, music and the other arts at [geoffandrew.com](http://geoffandrew.com)

**David Thompson** has worked as a film programmer and film critic. Based in London, from 1990 he produced and directed arts documentaries at the BBC, working on such series as *Omnibus*, *Arena*, *Moving Pictures* and *The Late Show*. He has made films on artists, writers, musicians and composers, as well as profiles of the directors Jean Renoir, Quentin Tarantino, Milos Forman, Paul Verhoeven and Robert Altman. Since going freelance in 2008, he has worked in France for the series *Il était une fois (Once upon a Time...)* and for *Arena* has made portraits of Paul Scofield, Jonathan Miller and Nicolas Roeg. He has programmed several seasons at the BFI, including the first retrospectives devoted to Martin Scorsese and Jonathan Demme. Aside from contributing to magazines such as *Sight and Sound* and *Film Comment*, he was co-editor of the book *Scorsese on Scorsese* and editor of *Altman on Altman*.