



50TH ANNIVERSARY

# The Exorcist

## The Exorcist

Directed by: William Friedkin

Production Companies: Warner Bros.,  
Hoya Productions

Executive Producer: Noel Marshall

Produced by: William Peter Blatty

Associate Producer: David Salven

Production Office Co-ordinator: Anne Mooney

Iraq Sequence Production Manager: William Kaplan

Administrative Assistant: Albert Shapiro

1st Assistant Director: Terence A. Donnelly

2nd Assistant Director: Alan Green

Script Supervisor: Nick Sgarro

CASTING: Nessa Hyams, Juliet Taylor, Louis DiGiarmo

Written for the Screen by: William Peter Blatty

Based on the novel by: William Peter Blatty

Director of Photography: Owen Roizman

Iraq Sequence Director of Photography:

Billy Williams

Colour Consultant: Robert M. McMillian

Assistant Camera: Tom Priestley \*

Key Grip: Eddie Quinn

Gaffer: Dick Quinlan

Still Photographer: Josh Weiner

Optical Effects: Marv Ystrom

Optical Effects Supervisor: Linwood G. Dunn \*

Special Effects: Marcel Vercoutere

Supervising Film Editor: Jordan Leonopoulos

Editors: Evan Lottman, Norman Gay

Iraq Sequence Film Editor: Bud Smith

Assistant Film Editors: Michal Goldman,

Craig McKay, Jonathan Pontell

Iraq Sequence Assistant Film Editor: Ross Levy

Production Design: Bill Malley

Assistant Art Director: Charles Bailey

Set Decorator: Jerry Wunderlich

Master Scenic Artist: Eddie Garzero

Property Master: Joe Caracciolo

Costume Designer: Joe Fretwell

Jewellery Design for Cartier: Aldo Cipullo

Furs: Revillon

Ladies' Wardrobe: Florence Foy

Men's Wardrobe: Bill Beattie

Make-up Artist: Dick Smith

Hairstylist: Bill Farley

Title Design: Dan Perri

Music: Krzysztof Penderecki, Hans Werner Henze,  
George Crumb, Anton Webern, Mike Oldfield,  
David Borden

Additional Music Composed by: Jack Nitzsche

Music Editor: Gene Marks

Sound Designer [2000 re-release]: Steve Boeddeker

Sound: Chris Newman

Iraq Sequence Sound: Jean-Louis Ducarmé

Sound Consultant: Hal Landaker

Dubbing Mixer: Buzz Knudson

Re-recording Mixers [2000 re-release]:

Michael Minkler, Gary A. Rizzo

Special Sound Effects: Ron Nagle, Doc Siegel,

Gonzalo Gavira, Bob Fine

Sound Effects Editors: Fred Brown, Ross Taylor

Technical Advisers: Reverend John Nicola S.J.,

Reverend Thomas Bermingh, Reverend William

O'Malley S.J., Norman E. Chase Md, Herbert E.

Walker Md, Arthur I. Snyder Md

Photographic Equipment: Panavision

Double for Linda Blair: Eileen Dietz Elber \*

Cast:

Ellen Burstyn (Mrs Chris MacNeil)

Max von Sydow (Father Lankester Merrin, S.J.)

Lee J. Cobb (Lt William Kinderman)

Kitty Winn (Sharon Spencer)

Jack MacGowran (Burke Dennings)

Introduced by Mark Kermode

When 12-year-old Regan displays unusual and disturbing behaviour, and after all medical options have been exhausted, her mother becomes convinced the girl is possessed by an evil spirit. An exorcism is sanctioned, and ageing priest Father Merrin is dispatched to carry it out. But at what cost for all? William Friedkin's horror classic shocked audiences on first release. 50 years on, it remains just as compelling, memorable and disturbing.

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'Strange as it may sound, I tried not to make a film about Satan. *The Exorcist* is more about expectancy, the mystery of faith, the mystery of goodness. What it is to me is a realistic film about unexplainable things. I personally have no strong conviction about Satan or a personified devil. I have no strong conviction about either, but I didn't want to make a film that pushed that. There is a very solid underpinning in the film for any other explanation that one may wish to gather, but I take it that not too many people want other explanations.'

(William Friedkin, 1974)

At the beginning of the 70s, America was an anxious country. Social, racial and generational divisions were rife. Where only recently the Air Force had dropped food parcels for the crowds of beatific Woodstock revellers, now the Army was shooting American college kids protesting about the Vietnam War. Hippies, once tolerated, found themselves tarred with the same brush as Charles Manson, the cult-murderer who made shaggy hair, sex and drugs synonymous with brutal killing and pagan sacrifice. The death of Meredith Hunter at the Altamont Free Festival in 1969 had left a generation of flower children wondering what had happened to all the peace, love and understanding with which they were going to save the world. Even the government was unravelling inexorably, as President Richard Nixon became increasingly implicated in a string of suspicious, even criminal, subterfuges. By late 1973, the presidency was on the brink of collapse, the walking wounded from Vietnam were everywhere in evidence, and the only thing America was exporting with any success was paranoia.

At around the same time, a minor storm was brewing in Europe: Pope Paul VI had issued a statement expressing his concern about demonic influences in the modern world. On 15 November 1972, he proclaimed:

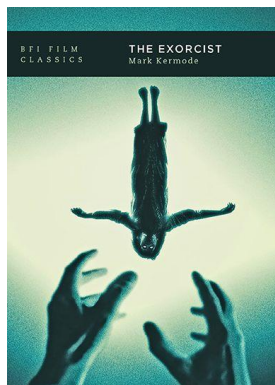
'Evil is not merely a lack of something, but an effective agent, a living spiritual being, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality ... So we know that this dark and disturbing spirit really exists and that he still acts with treacherous cunning; he is the secret enemy that sows errors and misfortunes in human history. The question of the Devil, and the influence he can exert on individual persons as well as communities is a very important chapter of Catholic doctrine which is given little attention today, though it should be studied again.'

It was in the midst of such social and religious unease that *The Exorcist* opened in the US on Boxing Day 1973 – a year after the Pope's controversial address, and just seven months before the House of Representatives initiated impeachment proceedings against Richard Nixon, making him the first American president ever to resign from office. Produced by a major studio,

Jason Miller (*Father Damien Karras, S.J.*)  
 Linda Blair (*Regan Theresa MacNeil*)  
 Reverend William O'Malley S.J. (*Father Dyer, S.J.*)  
 Barton Heyman (*Dr Klein*)  
 Pete Masterson (*clinic director*)  
 Rudolf Schündler (*Karl*)  
 Gina Petrushka (*Willie*)  
 Robert Symonds (*Dr Tanney*)  
 Arthur Storch (*psychiatrist*)  
 Reverend Thomas Birmingham S.J.  
 (*president of university*)  
 Vasiliki Maliaros (*Karras's mother*)  
 Titos Vandis (*Karras's uncle*)  
 Wallace Rooney (*Bishop Michael*)  
 Ron Faber (*assistant director*)  
 Donna Mitchell (*Mary Jo Perrin*)  
 Roy Cooper (*Jesuit deacon*)  
 Robert Geringer (*senator at party*)  
 Mercedes McCambridge (*voice of the demon*)  
 Yvonne Jones (*Bellevue nurse*)\*  
 Vincent Russell (*subway vagrant*)\*  
 William Peter Blatty (*movie producer*)\*  
 Victor Argo (*voice of language expert*)\*  
 USA 1973©  
 132 mins

\* Uncredited

*The Exorcist* (revised 2020 edition) by Mark Kermode is available to buy from the BFI Shop: <https://shop.bfi.org.uk/pre-order-the-exorcist-bfi-film-classics.html>



adapted from a best-selling novel and directed by an Oscar-winning filmmaker, *The Exorcist* bore as little resemblance to the gothic horror chillers of the 60s as Nixon did to JFK. Eschewing the costumed high-campery of the traditional Hammer romps, *The Exorcist* presented a credible portrait of the modern urban world ripped apart by an obscene, ancient evil. For the first time in a mainstream movie, audiences witnessed the graphic desecration of everything considered wholesome and good about the fading American Dream – home, family, church and, most shockingly, the child. But below the gaudy surface, something far more complex and contradictory was at work in *The Exorcist*. For all the outrage that it provoked among the ‘moral majority’ and the religious right, the tensions that it portrayed were recognisable and credible, even to those who despised the movie. Rebellious children, the breakdown of the family, the lack of respect for religious traditions, the destruction of the home – these were all issues that deeply troubled the conservative elements of America. More importantly, the solutions *The Exorcist* appeared to offer were oddly reassuring for those who longed for a return to an absolute moral order. For here was a clear-cut struggle between good and evil in which priests, policemen, good mothers and devoted sons fought a righteous battle to release rebellious, parent-hating children from the grip of a lustful, all-consuming devil. For all its terrifying reputation, wasn't *The Exorcist* more a fantasy of wish fulfilment than a nightmare of horror?

It is in this tension between the progressive and the regressive, the divine and the depraved, the hidden and the apparent, that the power of *The Exorcist* lies. Written by a Catholic, directed by a Jew and produced by the vast multinational Warner Bros., this was a movie that was championed by sometime political radicals such as Jerry Rubin, picketed by concerned pressure groups, paid for by millions of eager punters, praised by the Catholic News for its profound spirituality, and branded satanic by evangelist Billy Graham. Never before or since has a mainstream movie provoked such wildly diverging reactions. In the UK its power led to it being banned on video. Nearly a quarter of a century after its creation, it remains an unresolved mystery, with equal power to elate and disturb, thrill and appal, engage or enrage. It is also a movie at war with itself, a divided entity which, even after its blockbusting opening, was declared incomplete and unfinished by its writer, and which continues to provoke its creators to oscillate between agreement and dissent.

Mark Kermode, *The Exorcist* (BFI Film Classics 1997; revised editions 2003/2020)

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