



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Pandora and the Flying Dutchman

Pandora and the Flying Dutchman

Director: Albert Lewin

Production Companies: Dorkay Productions, Romulus Films

Producers: Albert Lewin, Joseph Kaufman

Assistant to the Producers: Gordon Griffith

Screenplay/Original Story: Albert Lewin

Director of Photography: Jack Cardiff

2nd Unit Photographer: Ted Scaife

Technicolor Consultant: Joan Bridge

Still Photographer: Man Ray

Special Effects: W. Percy Day

Editor: Ralph Kemplen

Production Designer: John Bryan

Assistant Art Director: Tim Hopewell-Ash

Set Dresser: John Hawkesworth

Paintings/Chess Set Design: Man Ray *

Costume Designer: Beatrice Dawson

Costumer: Julia Squire *

Music Composed and Conducted by:

Alan Rawsthorne

Music Director: Hubert Clifford

Sound Recording: Alan Allen

Sound Editor: Harry Miller

Publicity: Catherine O'Brien *

Cast:

James Mason (*Hendrick van der Zee*)

Ava Gardner (*Pandora Reynolds*)

Nigel Patrick (*Stephen Cameron*)

Sheila Sim (*Janet Fielding*)

Harold Warrender (*Geoffrey Fielding*)

Mario Cabré (*Juan Montalvo*)

Marius Goring (*Reggie Demarest*)

John Laurie (*Angus*)

Pamela Kellino (*Jenny Ford*)

Patricia Raine (*Peggy Ford*)

Margarita D'Alvarez (*Señora Montalvo*)

La Pillina (*Spanish Dancer*)

Abraham Sofaer (*Judge*)

Francisco Igual (*Vicente*)

Guillermo Beltran (*barman*)

Lila Molnar (*Geoffrey's housekeeper*)

Phoebe Hodgson (*dressmaker*)

Gabriel Carmona (*Montalvo's banderillero*)

Antonio Martin (*Montalvo's picador*)

John Carew (*priest*)

Edward Leslie (*doctor*)

Christina Forbes (*nurse*)

Helen Cleveley (*2nd nurse*)

Gerald Welsh (*assistant doctor*)

UK 1950

122 mins

Digital 4K

* Uncredited

Made a decade or two earlier, Lewin's marvellous fantasy might at least have stood some chance of being annexed to the surrealist pantheon. Instead critics, surprisingly unanimously, dismissed it as an embarrassingly arty aberration, a comedy of manners that was all too unintentionally comic and much too mannered. Characters who quote as liberally and as literately as Lewin's do always seem to be a source of unease – witness reactions to Godard's early work – as though mere quotation were itself a pretension. Yet as Godard realised (and if you consider *Le Mépris* in relation to *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, there can be little doubt where his debt lies), allusion is a rich source of texture, adducing tenuous parallels, reverberating echoes and mysterious insights in support of perspectives whereby (to quote Novalis) 'The world becomes a dream and the dream becomes a world'.

The opening images of *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* already suggest two extremes as Spanish fishermen casually laugh and chatter about their work, suddenly stilled into a kind of awed wonderment as they gaze off-screen at what they have caught: the hands, as we see later, of Pandora and the Dutchman, entwined in death and shrouded in the net. Immediately a bell tolls and the camera dissolves – as though in response to its timeless summons – to a high angle shot of the beach, the sea and the ancient ramparts, slowly craning back to include, on the balcony of a modern apartment house, a young woman staring intently through a telescope. This enlargement of the perspective is a device Lewin resorts to again and again, sometimes to apparently naturalistic ends (the pan from the flamenco dancers in the cabaret which discovers Pandora watching from a table), sometimes with metaphoric intent (the high-angle shot, after Hendrick deliberately disillusiones Pandora and she runs away down the beach, which reveals him watching as she disappears but is replaced beside him by the statue on which she had earlier draped her scarf), but always suggesting the involuntary interplay between two separate worlds.

Similarly, quite early on in the film, Geoffrey remarks, apropos Stephen's sacrifice of his car, that in olden times his deed would have become the stuff of legend, while Stephen teases Pandora over her fascination with the yacht (white, luminous and serene, a fitting Grail for the imagination) by supposing that she expects to find Nelson or the Flying Dutchman aboard. Casual jokes, underlined by Geoffrey's rider that whoever owns such a yacht will certainly be fat and bald, but also introducing the note of myth that is subsequently orchestrated by cabalistic portent when Pandora 'foresees' the future by setting her wedding date to coincide exactly with the term of the Dutchman's time ashore, or when Geoffrey adumbrates Pandora's sacrifice of her life by quoting 'some Greek' in homage to Stephen's sacrifice of his car: 'The measure of love is what one is willing to give up for it'. When Pandora later quotes this phrase to Hendrick by way of intimating her willingness to die for him, it is as though the two worlds, one of casual flirtation, the other of eternal solemnity, had become mirror images of each other.

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Other 'doublings' littered throughout the film support its free passage between fantasy and reality, ancient and modern, myth and mundanity, whose gateway is the beach where Hendrick becomes mortal and Pandora immortal, and on which an astonishing fraternisation is sealed between the litter of classical statuary and the litter of revellers jiving it up to a jazz band. There is a distinct correspondence, for example, between Hendrick's blasphemy against God and Juan Montalvo's desecration of his father's portrait, between Hendrick's murder of his wife and Juan's 'murder' of Hendrick. One reason why Juan dies (though at peace with God) whereas Stephen lives: the latter's passion, unlike Juan and Hendrick's, is mere infatuation (a distinction beautifully drawn by the deliberately callow portrayals of Stephen and Janet: mere mortals and no heroes they). But the doubling is pursued most systematically through Pandora: literally in that she is the wife whom Hendrick kills, being therefore the likeness both in the miniature he carries and the portrait he paints; metaphorically in that on one occasion a classical statue stands in for her by virtue of the yellow silk scarf she drapes over it, and on another she is metamorphosed into the statue of a goddess when, unexpectedly encountering Hendrick as she regally descends a stone stairway robed in white, she momentarily freezes.

One of the pleasures of the film, in fact, is the way its disparate fragments of legend and literature coalesce into a fantasy as richly satisfying as *La Belle et la Bête*, as beautifully (and meaningfully) shaped as the antique pot Geoffrey the archaeologist finally succeeds in reconstructing. The other (apart from the superlative performances of Mason and Gardner) is the sheer visual pleasure afforded as much by Lewin's *mise en scène* as by Jack Cardiff's exquisite images. *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* is an astonishing feast for the eye in the obvious sense, but also in the delicacy of its effects: the subtle elision of the actual murder in Hendrick's flashback narrative of his wife's death, as though it were too painful to relive (a flashback in which the images detailing his endless solitary vigil on the seas recall the uncanny supernatural mystery of Murnau's *Nosferatu*); the beautifully judged interplay of light, shadow, voices and hesitant glances as Hendrick and Geoffrey, poring over the ancient manuscript, first realise that the Dutchman's secret is now mutually shared. A neglected masterpiece, no less.

Tom Milne, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1985

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