BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Grand Budapest Hotel

The Grand Budapest Hotel
Director: Wes Anderson
©: TGBH LLC, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, TSG Entertainment Finance LLC.
Production Company: Fox Searchlight Pictures
In association with: Indian Paintbrush, Studio Babelsberg
Presented by: American Empirical Picture
Made in Association with: TSG Entertainment
With the support of:
DFFF – Deutsche Filmförderfonds, MDM – Mitteldeutsche Medienfordefung, MFG Filmförderung, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg
Executive Producers: Molly Cooper, Charlie Woebcken, Christoph Fisser, Henning Molfenter
Produced by: Wes Anderson, Scott Rudin, Steven Rales, Jeremy Dawson
Screenplay by: Wes Anderson
Story by: Wes Anderson, Hugo Guinness
Inspired by the Writings of: Stefan Zweig
Director of Photography: Robert Yeoman
Editor: Barney Pilling
Production Designer: Adam Stockhausen
Costume Designer: Milena Canonero
Original Music: Alexandre Desplat
Sound Mixer: Pawel Wdowczak
Cast:
Ralph Fiennes *(M. Gustave)*
F. Murray Abraham *(Mr Moustafa)*
Mathieu Amalric *(Serge X.)*
Adrien Brody *(Dmitri)*
Willem Dafoe *(Jopling)*
Jeff Goldblum *(Deputy Kovacs)*
Harvey Keitel *(Ludwig)*
Jude Law *(young writer)*
Bill Murray *(M. Ivan)*
Edward Norton *(Inspector Henckels)*
Saoirse Ronan *(Agatha)*
Jason Schwartzman *(M. Jean)*
Tilda Swinton *(Madame D.)*
Tom Wilkinson *(author)*
Owen Wilson *(M. Chuck)*
Tony Revolori *(Zero Moustafa)*
Léa Seydoux *(Clotilde)*
Tom Wilkinson *(author)*
USA/Germany 2014©
100 mins
Digital

'His world had vanished long before he entered it,' the aged owner of the Grand Budapest Hotel, Mr Moustafa (F. Murray Abraham), tells the Author (Jude Law), 'but he certainly sustained the illusion with a marvellous grace.' He's recalling his predecessor and mentor, legendary hotel concierge M. Gustave (Ralph Fiennes), who in the pre-war period ran the hotel with impeccable control, style and suavity. But much the same could be said of Wes Anderson, who, inspired by the illustrative work of his co-screenwriter Hugo Guinness and the writings of Stefan Zweig, has created an intricate fairytale vision of the world of Middle Europe as it probably never was but perhaps should have been before at least one and possibly both world wars. Anderson has always striven to devise alternative universes of his own; *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is his most complete fabrication yet, a fanatically and fantastically detailed, sugar-iced, calorie-stuffed, gleefully overripe Sachertorte of a film. According to taste, it will likely either enchant or cloy; but for those prepared to surrender to its charms, the riches on offer – both visual and narrative – are considerable.

Shooting in three different ratios – 2.35:1, 1.85:1 and the classic 1.33:1 – to differentiate the film's three main timelines, Anderson deploys a cast that even by his standards is bewilderingly star-studded. Along with a roster of Anderson veterans – Edward Norton, Jason Schwartzman, Adrien Brody, Owen Wilson, Willem Dafoe and, inevitably, Bill Murray – *Grand Budapest* indulges itself in the luxury of casting such luminaries as Tilda Swinton, Harvey Keitel, F. Murray Abraham, Jeff Goldblum, Léa Seydoux, Tom Wilkinson, Jude Law and Mathieu Amalric in relatively minor roles.

But it's Fiennes who coolly walks off with the film. Switching seamlessly between courtliness and profanity (having seen off the elderly Madame D with old-world charm, he remarks to his startled protégé, the young Moustafa, 'She was shaking like a shitting dog'), he displays a gift for comic timing that's rarely been unleashed since his Essex gang boss in 2007's *In Bruges*. He plays Gustave as polymathic, omnicompetent and casually bisexual, besides being plugged into a network of fellow concierges, the Society of the Crossed Keys, whose help he can call upon in time of crisis. The role was originally planned for Johnny Depp; no disrespect to Depp, but it's hard to believe he could have filled it quite so consummately.

The film abounds in the gliding lateral tracking shots that Anderson loves, as well as in expensive luggage (see *The Darjeeling Limited*, passim) and covert jokes. Much of the plot revolves around a valuable painting, 'Boy with Apple', which Madame D (Swinton) has left to Gustave, to the fury of her brutal son Dmitri (Brody). When Gustave makes off with the work in question, a piece of glossy pseudo-Renaissance kitsch by the fictitious Jan van Hoytl, he fills the gap on the wall with an exquisite double nude by Egon Schiele. Noticing the substitution, Dmitri smashes the Schiele in rage. Comic words of nonsense German are tossed into the mix. '*Ich war gespannt wie ein Fritzlburger*', the Author (Wilkinson) tells us in voiceover: *gespannt* means excited, *Fritzlburger* doesn't exist. History is blithely played with: the war that engulfs the characters breaks out in 1932 – 'a combination', Anderson explains, 'of the 1914 and 1939 wars'.

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Orlando
Fri 10 Nov 14:30; Wed 29 Nov 18:20 (+ intro by writer, curator and researcher Jenny Chamarette)
The Grand Budapest Hotel
Fri 3 Nov 20:50; Sat 11 Nov 20:40; Fri 24 Nov 18:15
The Age of Innocence
Sat 4 Nov 14:20; Mon 13 Nov 17:50; Tue 28 Nov 20:20
Blackmail
Sun 5 Nov 12:00
The Private Life of Henry VIII
Tue 7 Nov 20:50; Mon 27 Nov 14:40
French Cancan
Thu 9 Nov 20:30
Phantom Thread
Fri 10 Nov 10:30; Thu 23 Nov 20:30
A Midsummer Night's Dream
Sun 12 Nov 12:00
La Ronde
Tue 14 Nov 20:45; Sun 19 Nov 12:00; Thu 30 Nov 18:20
Black Orpheus Orfeu Negro
Wed 15 Nov 18:00 (+ intro by journalist and broadcaster Kevin Le Gendre)
The Queen of Spades
Thu 16 Nov 20:40
Do the Right Thing
Fri 17 Nov 18:10
Casablanca
Sat 18 Nov 11:40
The Tempest
Sat 18 Nov 13:00; Wed 22 Nov 18:20 (+ intro by Claire Smith, BFI National Archive Senior Curator)
Blood and Sand
Sat 18 Nov 20:30
Pandora and the Flying Dutchman
Mon 20 Nov 20:30
Wings of Desire Der Himmel über Berlin
Tue 21 Nov 14:30; Sat 25 Nov 20:25
An American in Paris
Thu 23 Nov 18:00; Sun 26 Nov 11:30

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In keeping with the film's ludic mode, Anderson indulges in mini-pastiches of other cinematic genres. The pursuit and murder of lawyer Kovacs (Goldblum) by Dmitri's hired thug (Dafoe) in the darkened galleries of an art museum channels *film noir*, while Gustave's escape from jail with a group of fellow cons parodies every jailbreak movie by following them through a hole dug in the cell floor, a dumb waiter, the prison kitchens, the guards' bunkroom (tiptoeing delicately over the sleeping custodians), a steam vent, the laundry and a sewer. There's skilled pastiche, too, in Alexandre Desplat's score, with its perky zithers and doom-laden organ chorales. Yet beneath all the jokiness there's a sense of loss, a nostalgia for an age that neither the filmmakers nor all but a few of their audience can ever have known.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, March 2014

'How Lubitsch would do it?' was a prompt that Billy Wilder had framed and hung over his desk in ornate calligraphy by Saul Bass. If there's one director working today who might have the same motto displayed in his office, it is Wes Anderson.

The influence of Ernst Lubitsch – along with Alfred Hitchcock and J.D. Salinger – loom large over the films of Anderson, a director who works somewhat like the giant of the studio era. Well known for his industrious pre-planning, he storyboards all his movies; has a penchant for intricate staging, madcap scenarios and imaginary worlds infused with opulence and artifice; and he likes to marshal the power of an ensemble cast. Like Lubitsch, he writes screenplays that prioritise wit and charm and his flawed but endearing fast-quipping protagonists – from Rushmore's Max to the 'Fantastic' Mr Fox – are bundles of energy his films are in a rush to keep up with.

The Grand Budapest Hotel, Anderson's latest, is a screwball comedy chase extravaganza and his most Lubitsch-like film yet. The film's many action sequences, however, owe more to Hitchcock than Lubitsch – including a museum chase Anderson says he lifted directly from *Torn Curtain*. Like *North by Northwest*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is constantly on the move, and in the rare moments it stops for breath – in typical break-the-fourth-wall Anderson mode – it's just at the moment when the villains are on to our heroes.

A common complaint about Anderson's films is that they're all the same, set in similar hermetic child-like worlds. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* does contain all the Andersonian tropes, from fetishised uniforms (look out for the purple socks) to Gustave and Zero's mentor/protégé relationship, but the WWII backdrop brings a new dimension, involving tragedy on a much larger scale than in any of his previous films. 'The movie is a comedy, an adventure, but another key inspiration was *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Hannah Arendt and her analysis of how the many occupied countries in Europe responded to the Nazi's demands.' The film has plenty of cartoonish punches and over-the-top severed body parts, but the Nazi's treatment of paperless immigrant Zero is captured by Anderson with a sense of real menace.

Normally, Anderson's comedies swerve to a halt when their formal *joie de vivre* clashes with their melancholy subject matter. In the final scenes here though, Anderson swaps his bright, multicoloured palette for a sombre black and white. 'I couldn't give you a proper explanation,' he says of the abrupt change. 'If someone asked me why when we were shooting, I would want to leave it that way, but I wouldn't be able to make a case for it. It's just what felt right.'

Isabel Stevens, *Sight and Sound*, March 2014