



CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL + PRESSBURGER

# The Love Test + Something Always Happens

## The Love Test

Directed by: Michael Powell

Presented by: Fox Film Company Ltd.

Unit Producer: Leslie L. Landau

Scenario & Dialogue by: Selwyn Jepson

An Original Story by: Jack Celestin

Photography by: Arthur Crabtree

Sound System: Visatone-Marconi

Produced at: Wembley Studios

uncredited:

Production Company: Fox-British Pictures

Producer: John Findlay

Cast:

Judy Gunn (*Mary Lee*)

Louis Hayward (*John Gregg*)

Dave Hutcherson (*Thompson*)

Googie Withers (*Minnie*)

Morris Harvey (*company president*)

Aubrey Dexter (*company vice-president*)

Jack Knight (*managing director*)

Gilbert Davis (*Hosiah H. Smith, chief chemist*)

Eve Turner (*Kathleen*)

Bernard Miles (*Allan*)

Shayle Gardner (*night watchman*)

James Craig (*boiler man*)

uncredited:

Ian Wilson (*'Amoeba', a chemist*)

Thorley Walters (*chemist*)

UK 1935

64 mins

Digital 4K

## Something Always Happens

Director: Michael Powell

Production Company:

Warner Brothers First National Productions

Executive Producer: Irving Asher

Screenplay/Dialogue: Brock Williams

Director of Photography: Basil Emmott

Editor: Ralph Dawson

Art Director: Peter Proud

Gowns: Louis Brooks

Sound: Leslie Murray, H.C. Pearson

Cast:

Ian Hunter (*Peter Middleton*)

Nancy O'Neil (*Cynthia Hatch*)

Peter Gawthorne (*Benjamin Hatch*)

Johnny Singer (*Billy*)

Muriel George (*Mrs Badger, the landlady*)

Barry Livesey (*George Hamlin*)

uncredited:

Millicent Wolf (*Glenda*)

Louie Emery (*Mrs Tremlett*)

Reg Marcus (*'Coster'*)

George Zucco (*proprietor of 'Café de Paris'*)

Janet Fitzpatrick

UK 1934

66 mins

Digital 4K

Remastering has been supported by Matt Spick and the Charles Skey Charitable Trust.

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Male chauvinist pigs meet 1930s girl power in Powell's superior quota-quickie, in which chemists seeking a formula for fireproofing celluloid take exception to colleague Mary's upcoming promotion – she's a woman after all, and a 'serious-minded little frump' to boot. A plot to distract her from her vocation via shameless seduction ensues, but will Mary find true love after all? Powell's answer to the screwball comedy is polished off with Deco designs and lashings of witty banter.

Simon McCallum, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)

Michael Powell sometimes used the very circumstances of the cinema in which he worked for story material. In *The Red Ensign* (1934) for instance, the quota act is the basis for a plot about a shipbuilder determined to stop the beleaguered British shipping industry being run down by ships flying under foreign flags. *The Love Test* (1935) instead revolves around attempts to render celluloid less flammable, the highly combustible properties of nitrate film stock being one of the reasons why so many movies from the period have vanished.

What is impressive about *The Love Test* is not so much the hackneyed story (at a research lab, boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl), but rather its sexual subtext and frequently stylish presentation. Powell's visual grace notes (with credit also due to cinematographer Arthur Crabtree) include a complicated opening tracking shot (over a minute long) that snakes all around the central research lab; 'framing' the lovers (in a taxi, in the corner of a restaurant, or through a gap in the laboratory equipment) to create more intimate romantic scenes; and giving the climax a small stylistic fillip by having the hero's voice, when suddenly heard in the office through a heating shaft, matched visually by a series of quickly edited shots of the grille to heighten the impact of the scene.

This is the earliest of Powell's films to point to the sensuousness and sexuality which later became so prominent in his work. While using incendiary nitrate dolls for transitions in the stages of the couple's love affair is plain enough, a real surprise is the subtle but clear suggestion of lesbianism in the character of Mary's neighbour, who 'feminises' her with new clothes, make-up and hair-do and is then permanently excluded when Hayward arrives. This is contrasted amusingly with scenes in which Googie Withers gives Hayward kissing 'lessons', in a role that *Variety* magazine, in its inimitable style, described as 'a gum-chewing secretary-vamp who crank-starts Hayward's engine'.

These elements reveal the enthusiasm, vigour and humour that mark many of Powell's surviving quota features. In the movie, Hayward finds a commercially viable solution to making nitrate film less flammable; sadly, the film industry itself wasn't able to do so until 1951. *The Love Test*, a film long thought lost, was, fortunately, restored and re-presented at the London Film Festival in 1990.

Sergio Angelini, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)

## **CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL + PRESSBURGER**

### **The Love Test + Something Always Happens**

Sun 3 Dec 15:30; Tue 19 Dec 20:20

**Wanted for Murder** + intro by Simon McCallum,  
BFI curator

Mon 4 Dec 20:40

### **Projecting the Archive: The End of the River** +

intro by film scholar Dr Kulraj Phullar

Tue 5 Dec 18:20

### **The Phantom Light**

Wed 6 Dec 20:30; Sun 17 Dec 12:30

### **Peeping Tom**

Thu 7 Dec 20:45 (+ intro); Sat 9 Dec 15:00 (+

Doesn't Exist magazine launch and panel

discussion hosted by Victor Fraga); Fri 15 Dec

20:50; Mon 18 Dec 20:45; Thu 21 Dec 18:00; Sat 23

Dec 18:00; Fri 29 Dec 18:15

### **The Red Shoes**

From Fri 8 Dec

### **The Red Shoes in the Spotlight**

Fri 8 Dec 18:00

### **Bluebeard's Castle (Herzog Blaubarts Burg)**

Fri 8 Dec 20:40; Fri 15 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by writer

Lillian Crawford); Sat 23 Dec 13:30

### **Crown v. Stevens + Behind the Mask (aka The Man Behind the Mask)**

Sat 9 Dec 12:40; Sat 23 Dec 15:00

### **The Tales of Hoffmann**

Sat 9 Dec 17:30; Tue 12 Dec 20:20 (+ intro by

Andrew Moor, Manchester Metropolitan University);

Sat 16 Dec 14:45; Sat 30 Dec 17:30

### **Honeymoon (Luna de miel)**

Sun 10 Dec 13:25; Thu 28 Dec 20:40

### **The Small Back Room**

Sun 10 Dec 18:30; Sat 16 Dec 20:45; Fri 22 Dec

18:20; Wed 27 Dec 20:30; Sat 30 Dec 15:00

### **Queering Powell + Pressburger**

Tue 12 Dec 18:00

### **Experimenta: Michelle Williams Gamaker and**

**Powell + Pressburger** + Michelle Williams

Gamaker in conversation with Dr Kulraj Phullar

Wed 13 Dec 18:05

### **Oh... Rosalinda!!**

Wed 13 Dec 20:45

### **They're a Weird Mob**

Sat 16 Dec 17:45; Fri 29 Dec 20:40

### **Espionage: Never Turn Your Back on a Friend /**

**A Free Agent** + intro

Sun 17 Dec 15:15

### **Library Talk: The Glass Pearls**

Tue 19 Dec 19:30 BFI Reuben Library

### **Lazybones + Her Last Affaire**

Wed 20 Dec 17:50

### **Age of Consent**

Fri 22 Dec 20:45; Wed 27 Dec 18:15

### **A Matter of Life and Death**

Sat 23 Dec 15:00 BFI IMAX

### **Black Narcissus**

Sat 30 Dec 14:30 BFI IMAX

With thanks to



## **Something Always Happens**

After three films at Gaumont-British, Powell returned to quota productions with this sprightly comedy about a freeloading charmer who romances the daughter of a wealthy petrol station owner, before conflict ensues when he takes a job with a rival. No surprise if that sounds like a Hollywood screwball: the story was lifted from the script library of Warner Bros' American offices.

James Bell, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)

*Something Always Happens*, a comedy where authority figures get taken down a peg or two while the poor get rich quick, neatly encompasses many of the recurring themes of Depression-era cinema in 1930s Britain. In fact most of the 23 low budget films Michael Powell directed between 1931 and 1936 focus on money and class in some way. A third element, which obliquely combines the two, is hypergamy, marriage to a person of a class higher than one's own, which appears in *Night of the Party* (1934) and *Her Last Affaire* (1935), but is nicely reversed in *Something Always Happens*.

The film tries to have its cake and eat it, its amiable but lackadaisical hero (Ian Hunter), blissfully unconcerned by his lack of money or prospects, eventually still becoming hugely rich. His seemingly imperturbable character prefigures the one Hunter would play in *Lazybones* (1935), where once again he has to prove himself by getting a steady job and making a success of it. This foregrounds the aspirational tendencies of most moviegoers of the time, showing that even those without money can become a success through perseverance and ingenuity

The nexus between high and low society had already been ingeniously explored by Powell in *Rynox* (1931), in which the rich Benedik and the working-class ruffian Marsh aren't just two sides of the same coin, but actually turn out to be the same person, part of a complicated scheme to save Benedik's ailing company. Brock Williams' tightly structured screenplay for *Something Always Happens* goes out of its way to draw parallels between rich and poor, young and old, as dialogue and actions are repeated or developed in adjacent scenes, constantly juxtaposing contrasting situations and characters to draw out the links that tie them together. This is emphasised in the early scene in which the destitute hero pretends to be rich while the fabulously wealthy girl he's just met lets him believe she is a poor shop girl.

This slick, fast moving comedy makes good use of its location filming (especially the market scene) and offers, despite a rather insipid leading lady, a variety of incidental pleasures, such as casting George Zucco (shortly before he decamped for Hollywood) as an Italian restaurant owner. Powell himself remembered it affectionately: 'We played it all out for laughs; great speed, excellent dialogue and it was about a chap who never paid for anything'.

Sergio Angelini, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)