



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Psycho

### Psycho (original theatrical cut)

Directed by: Alfred Hitchcock

©/Production Company: Shamley Productions

A Paramount release

Unit Manager: Lew Leary

Assistant Director: Hilton A. Green

Screenplay by: Joseph Stefano

Based on the novel by: Robert Bloch

Director of Photography: John L. Russell

Special Effects: Clarence Champagne

Edited by: George Tomasini

Pictorial Consultant: Saul Bass

Art Direction: Joseph Hurley, Robert Clatworthy

Set Decorator: George Milo

Costume Supervisor: Helen Colvig

Make-up Supervision: Jack Barron, Robert Dawn

Hairstylist: Florence Bush

Titles Designed by: Saul Bass

Music by: Bernard Herrmann

Sound Recording by: Waldon O. Watson,

William Russell

Sound System: Westrex Recording System

uncredited

Producer: Alfred Hitchcock

2nd Assistant Director: Les Berke

Script Supervisor: Marshall Schlom

Camera Assistant: Jim Sloan

Key Grip: Frank Harper

Gaffer: George Meerhoff

Best Boy: Norman Cassidy

Cast:

Anthony Perkins (*Norman Bates*)

Vera Miles (*Lila Crane*)

John Gavin (*Sam Loomis*)

Martin Balsam (*Milton Arbogast*)

John McIntire (*Sheriff Al Chambers*)

Simon Oakland (*Dr Richmond*)

Vaughn Taylor (*George Lowery*)

Frank Albertson (*Tom Cassidy*)

Lurene Tuttle (*Mrs Chambers*)

Pat Hitchcock (*Caroline*)

John Anderson (*car salesman*)

Mort Mills (*policeman*)

Janet Leigh (*Marion Crane*)

uncredited

Sam Flint, Francis De Sales, George Eldredge

(officials)

Alfred Hitchcock (*man outside realty office*)

USA 1960©

109 mins

Digital 4K

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away the film's ending.

This much imitated but never bettered mix of suspense, horror, mystery and black comedy famously begins with a woman suddenly deciding to steal money from her employers and head west – with fateful results for herself and several others. A delicious melange of narrative twists, ironic dialogue and precise, suggestive imagery, it sees Hitch manipulating the viewer's sympathies with effortless expertise. Undoubtedly one of his greatest movies.

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### A contemporary review

What keeps the public happy is undoubtedly their obsession with narrative craftsmanship. Your average critic, on the other hand, tends to be more concerned with the story itself than with its telling and when, as in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, he finds an outrageous story allied with a portentously irregular press-show and publicity, his conditioned reflexes automatically cause him to hiss and jeer.

Admittedly, there is some justification for the view that a thriller which, by its very nature, stands or falls by its action is merely exposing its debility when it comes to depend on a complex, last minute explication: a movie psychiatrist's explication at that. Hastily, therefore, one must affirm that *Psycho* bears about as much relation to Freud as Eva Marie Saint's high-heeled scramble down Thomas Jefferson's face does to American Central Intelligence routine; and once the tics of its amateur taxidermist have made the fact abundantly clear, then no experienced Hitchcock student has the slightest reason to expect anything other than the unreasonable. Nor, once the heroine has braved the fruit cellar, to feel exactly stunted, either. A shy young matricide who lugs his dear departed out of her grave, preserves her for ten years alongside the rest of his stuffed specimens in a swamp-bordering motel, speaking to and for her, dressing in her clothes, murdering any girl whose attraction for him might make the possessive old thing jealous, until the only way he can survive a rapidly growing burden of understandable embarrassment is by seeking total refuge in his mother's identity... Set down in cold print, the only mystery Hitchcock's solution seems unable to explain is why the critics should have even tried to believe such arrant nonsense, and what happened to their sense of humour in the first place.

There is surely plenty to laugh at. The whole second movement preceding this coda is an expert blend of Gothic wit and horror showing a proper respect for the traditions of its *Old Dark House* and *Cat and the Canary* genre. A fair example is the tart rejoinder of the pretty victim (Janet Leigh), told by her sinister admirer (Anthony Perkins) that she eats like a bird and glancing up at a roomful of stuffed comparisons before conceding that he, after all, ought to know. A few moments later, the boy is agitatedly insisting that his mother, though hateful and probably mad, is really as harmless as his stuffed birds, and one gives Hitchcock the first of several credits for playing fair and literal with his audience. No one, for instance, could presumably be fooled by that tall, uncomfortable female figure fitting briefly across the width of a lighted upper window; nor by that Old Mother Riley voice with dialogue to match. ('So you want to shut me up in the fruit cellar eh boy eh? You think I'm fruity, I suppose!')

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### Shoot the Pianist *Tirez sur le pianist*

Mon 1 Jan 15:30; Sat 13 Jan 12:10; Tue 16 Jan 14:30

### Charulata

Tue 2 Jan 20:40; Sun 14 Jan 17:45; Thu 18 Jan 14:30

### Psycho (Original Theatrical Cut)

Wed 3 Jan 18:10; Fri 12 Jan 20:50; Thu 18 Jan 18:20

### The Lady from Shanghai

Thu 4 Jan 20:40; Wed 17 Jan 18:30 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large); Fri 26 Jan 18:10

**Lift to the Scaffold** *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*  
Fri 5 Jan 18:35; Sun 14 Jan 11:50; Tue 23 Jan 20:45

### Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans

Sat 6 Jan 12:15; Wed 10 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by freelance film programmer Margaret Deriaz); Fri 19 Jan 18:15

### The Lady Eve

Sun 7 Jan 12:20; Thu 25 Jan 18:30

### California Split

Mon 8 Jan 20:45; Mon 22 Jan 18:10

### 8 1/2 *Otto e mezzo*

Tue 9 Jan 17:30; Sun 28 Jan 18:00

### Madame de...

Thu 11 Jan 14:40; Sun 21 Jan 12:10; Wed 31 Jan 17:50 (+ intro by film critic Phuong Le)

### The Portrait of a Lady

Fri 12 Jan 14:30; Sat 27 Jan 18:00; Tue 30 Jan 20:15

### A Serious Man

Mon 15 Jan 18:10; Mon 29 Jan 20:45

### The Bigamist

Sat 20 Jan 11:45; Wed 24 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by Foster Hirsch, author and professor, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York); Sat 27 Jan 21:00

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Yet the audience is fooled, for the simple reason that there is something horribly and persistently compulsive on the other side of the coin. And it is here that Hitchcock's showmanship comes in. Having given Janet Leigh the kind of postscript star billing conventionally reserved for drunk scene 'guest' appearances and murder victims, and relying on word of mouth reports that *Psycho* contains one of the bloodiest murders ever filmed, he then asks this spirited actress to sustain the daylight panic of a secretary in love who has robbed her firm of \$40,000. This she does, for a full 30 minutes, through a series of false trails and encounters with a lantern-jawed cop in dark glasses so increasingly unnerving that one feels her guilt pouring down one's own brow. But it is not until the switch from first to second gear that one becomes fully aware of Hitchcock's diabolical ingenuity. There is the car ride itself, reminiscent of *Orphée* in its imperceptible shift from the everyday exhaustion of pursuit and blinding headlights to the cold, latent horror of the missed turning, dusk, rain on the windscreen and death in the vulnerable, hygienic setting of a motel shower. Inevitably, the beastliness of the murder itself comes almost as a relief, especially when followed by the symbolic, guilt-assuaging detail of mopping-up operations and the washing of blood-stained hands. But the respite is brief. With the swamp's disinclination to swallow the car and its corpse at one gurgle, the burden of panic and guilt is transferred to the candy-chewing killer, Norman Bates, watching under the branch of a withered tree. An aura of nightmare embraces the whole cast. An innocent-seeming old lady in a hardware store is heard asking for painless insecticide; hayforks form a menacing, serpentine crown round the head of the dead girl's sister.

For all the fake intimacy of the opening love scene and the manifest absurdity of the denouement, *Psycho* comes nearer to attaining an exhilarating balance between content and style than anything Hitchcock has done in years. Of course, it is a very minor work. But its virtues of tension, surprise, virtuosity and control are all major ones. The unacademic chop and change of George Tomasi's editing and John L. Russell's camerawork is effectively unsettling, notably in the second murder sequence; the strange bond that seems to unite Bates with the birds which obsess him is conveyed by feral, blood-curdling shrieks on the sound-track each time he strikes (not to mention that low-angle, beak-like close-up of his under-jaw at one point); one notes the subliminal, momentary dissolve from our last sight of Bates into his mother's grinning skull, and the minatory quality of Bernard Herrmann's score. Finally, there is some excellent acting: from Martin Balsam as the tenacious private detective, John McIntyre as the sceptical local sheriff, above all from Anthony Perkins as Bates, all stammers and spasmodic charm concealing a festering and malignantly disordered mind.

Peter John Dyer, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1960