



NEW RELEASES

SCALA!!!

SCALA!!! Or, the Incredibly Strange Rise and Fall of the World's Wildest Cinema and How It Influenced a Mixed-up Generation of Weirdos and Misfits

Director: Jane Giles, Ali Catterall

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Production Companies: Anti Worlds, Channel X

Development Executive: Lisa-Marie Russo

Executive Producers: David Babsky, Paula Jalfon, Robert Randolph, Shanida Scotland

Produced by: Alan Marke, Jim Reid, Andy Starke

Line Producer: Michelle Brondum

Film Research: Marc Morris

Based on the book *Scala Cinema 1978-1993* by: Jane Giles

Animation Director: Osbert Parker

Animator: Osbert Parker

Cartoonist: Davey Jones

Edited by: Edward Mills, Andrew Starke

Graphics: Luke Insect

Colourist: Jason R. Moffat

Original Music: Barry Adamson

Sound Designer: Martin Pavey

Recordists: Michael Clayton Jr, Clement Harper, Chris Watson,

Max Riches, Benja Schweimler

Sound Editor: Nikki Ruck

Dialogue Editor: Simon Capes

PR & Publicity: Zoe Flower

UK 2023

96 mins

Digital

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Fasten your seatbelts for the return of the homegrown hit of this year's LFF, featuring John Waters along with John Akomfrah, Adam Buxton, Caroline Catz, Matt Johnson, Isaac Julien, Beeban Kidron, Stewart Lee, Peter Strickland, Ben Wheatley, Jah Wobble and many more. Archive footage, eye-popping movie clips, acid-crazed animation and some famous names combine to tell the story of London's infamous, influential Scala cinema, in a film dedicated to evoking the true spirit of the place and what it felt like to be in the audience there. With its cracked marble floors, resident cats and mysterious, extrasensory rumblings, the Scala was both a magic place and a refuge from Britain during the Thatcher years. Hilarious, irreverent, and ultimately heart-breaking, with a fabulous original score by Barry Adamson, *SCALA!!!* is more than mere nostalgia; it's an X-rated love letter and a universal shout-out to the power of cinema to inspire impressionable young minds and create a sense of community for outsiders – a place where everyone is welcome.

Jason Wood, Season Curator

The Scala was perhaps London's most notorious cinema during its short but influential life, renowned for its doublebills, all-night film marathons and for being the haunt of many a budding filmmaker – including Isaac Julien, Peter Strickland and Ben Wheatley. Following her mammoth 2018 book *Scala Cinema 1978-1993*, Jane Giles, who was a programmer at the cinema, is turning its story into a documentary feature, *SCALA!!!*, co-directed by Ali Catterall. The aforementioned filmmakers are just some of the dozens of Scala audience members interviewed for the film.

Giles: 'One point I'm really trying to make in the film is the age of the people who were running the cinema at the time... I was in my early twenties when I got my job. Young people have energy and they're kind of reckless, or they can be if they're allowed to be.' Giles believes that the Scala's youthfulness was key to its experimental programming and the filmmakers used a similar ethos when picking their crew: 'We used graduates from the MA course at the National Film and Television School for the line producer and [to do] the sound; the runners tended to be undergraduates. This was really important to me and my co-director. We needed some youth to bring their energy and vision and they really delivered on it.'

Other creative roles have been filled by former Scala audience members, including the composer Barry Adamson, who has worked for David Lynch and Carol Morley, among others. But perhaps the most intriguing addition to the crew is the sound recordist Chris Watson, known for his work with David Attenborough and as a founder member of pop experimentalists Cabaret Voltaire, who spent a day doing 'field work' in the Scala for the film. 'We knew that the Scala sounds incredible, because you can hear the rumble of the underground trains coming up through the building,' Giles says. 'Something that people talked about in the interviews time and time again [was] how amazing it was to sit in this enormous, very atmospheric building.' The recordings should imbue the documentary with the Scala's unforgettable atmosphere.

Thomas Flew, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2021-22

Scala!!! The very name has become synonymous with post-punk transgression and subversion. This most infamous of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll picture houses, in the heart of King's Cross in London, was a beacon for weirdos and misfits during the tumultuous Thatcher years.

But the Scala was more than just a lodestar – its repertory fare galvanised a generation of filmmakers, artists, musicians and more. Not coincidentally, it was ultimately programmed by that audience. If a film performed well, it was shown again – and again. Take *Thundercrack!* (1975): the legend is that there existed just one print of Curt McDowell's notorious art-porn oddity, and it was fed through the cinema's barnacled 16mm projector so often that it eventually fell apart.

A crucial part of this ecosystem was the Scala Selection Box. Punters would post their dream triple bills through the slot, often the most extreme material: *Café Flesh* (1982),

SCALA: SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK AND ROLL CINEMA

Basket Case

Mon 1 Jan 15:20; Thu 25 Jan 20:40

Pink Flamingos

Mon 1 Jan 18:20; Fri 19 Jan 18:20; Fri 26 Jan 20:50 (+ intro by Mark Moore and Tasty Tim)

Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!

Tue 2 Jan 18:20; Thu 18 Jan 21:00 (+ intro by film scholar and writer Virginie Selavy)

Taxi zum Klo

Wed 3 Jan 20:50; Mon 8 Jan 20:40 (+ intro by Vic Roberts, Scala usher)

The Warriors

Sat 6 Jan 18:15; Sun 14 Jan 12:00; Wed 17 Jan 20:55 (+ intro by SCALA!!! co-director Ali Catterall)

Thundercrack!

Sat 6 Jan 20:00; Sun 14 Jan 14:10

The Evil Dead

Fri 5 Jan 20:45 (+ intro by Graham Humphreys, freelance illustrator and designer of the original UK marketing for *The Evil Dead*); Tue 30 Jan 18:10

Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom

Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma

Tue 9 Jan 20:35 (+ intro by season curator Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Tue 23 Jan 18:10

Sight and Sound Presents: Scala Spirit 1993-2023

Thu 11 Jan 18:20

Shivers

Thu 11 Jan 21:00; Sun 21 Jan 15:20

Pee-wee's Big Adventure

Fri 12 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by Ben Roberts, BFI CEO); Wed 31 Jan 18:20

Pink Narcissus + Un chant d'amour

Fri 12 Jan 20:40; Thu 25 Jan 18:20

The Saint: Teresa + intro by Dick Fiddy, Archive TV Programmer + The Avengers:

A Touch of Brimstone

Sat 13 Jan 14:30

Looking for Mr Goodbar + Dick

Sat 13 Jan 17:45 (+ intro by season curator Jane Giles); Mon 22 Jan 20:10

The Thing

Sat 13 Jan 20:40; Mon 29 Jan 20:45

The Beast

La Bête

Tue 16 Jan 20:45; Tue 23 Jan 20:50

Surprise Film + intro by season curator

Jane Giles

Sat 20 Jan 17:10

A Clockwork Orange

Sun 21 Jan 18:00; Wed 31 Jan 20:25

Shock, Horror! The Scala All-nighter: An

American Werewolf in London; The

Creature from the Black Lagoon – 3D;

Videodrome; The Incredible Shrinking

Man; Nightmare on Elm Street

Sat 27 Jan 22:30 BFI IMAX

Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom (1975), *Supervixens* (1975), *Pink Flamingos* (1972). The programme promised: 'The film with the most votes gets screened. Fun, huh?!'

As former Scala programmer Jane Giles wryly asked in her 2018 book *Scala Cinema 1978-1993*, 'What could possibly go wrong?' The scrawled suggestions for the box, she recalled, 'ranged from the mundane to the ridiculous and the inspired – often including titles which had never even made it into production. *One Saliva Bubble* by David Lynch, anyone?' One has to admire the chutzpah of the Scala member who requested '*Valley of the Dolls. Beyond the Valley of the Dolls. And Valley Girl.*'

Sometimes it was wiser to ignore certain things that flopped through the letterbox, especially requests to screen *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), as the Scala found to its immense cost: the cinema became embroiled in a year-long court case brought by the Federation Against Copyright Theft (Fact) after an illicit screening of Kubrick's film in 1992.

It's tantalising to wonder what films might have played had it not closed the next year. The Scala certainly functioned as an unofficial film school for dozens of filmmakers, including Peter Strickland, Mary Harron, Ben Wheatley and Martin McDonagh (proud winner of a Scala programme caption competition in April 1992); it's no surprise to find so many of their movies suffused with that ol' 'Scala Spirit', a most intoxicating liquor.

Strickland credits a single programme in particular: February 1990, the month he first encountered the Scala (and London: his mum insisted he took his name and address on a piece of paper 'in case I got lost') with influencing his entire filmography. You can see what he means: on that month was Kenneth Anger's *Magick Lantern Cycle* (1947-81); Dario Argento's *Opera* (1987); *Eraserhead* (1977); *Peeping Tom* (1960); and, courtesy of a 'Bitches, Whips and Heels' all-nighter from BDSM magazine *Skin Two*, *Venus in Furs* (1969), *Maitresse* (1976) and *Mano destra* (1986)... Strickland's own catalogue slides into such stuff like a lubricated fist.

Similarly possessed by the Scala spirit, one can easily imagine Matthew Barney or Darren Aronofsky competing for attention on the Scala's monthlies, alongside Lucile Hadžihalilović, Gaspar Noé, Harmony Korine, Gregg Araki and Todds Haynes and Solondz – or ageing *enfants terribles* like Larry Clark and Lars von Trier. Plus allnighters from Kevin Smith, Edgar Wright, Roberto Rodriguez, the Wachowskis, the later works of Miyazaki Hayao and Studio Ghibli, as well as films by former Scala regular Christopher Nolan.

The cinema was also instrumental in introducing East Asian filmmakers such as John Woo and Jackie Chan to broader audiences; it's pleasing to fantasise about an alternative history in which not just Park Chanwook, Bong Joon Ho and Miike Takashi but the likes of Yeon Sangho and Nishimura Yoshihiro have found an ecstatic reception in the UK thanks to the Scala. Of the younger crop of directors, the cinema would surely have embraced Ari Aster, Jordan Peele, Prano Bailey-Bond (*Censor*, 2021), Luna Carmoon (*Hoard*), Nia DaCosta (the superb 2021 *Candyman* reboot) and Julia Ducournau, whose chewy coming-of-age debut *Raw* (2016) and its high-octane follow-up *Titane* (2021) would have been a shoo-in for a classic body-horror double bill.

Over the decade that followed its closure, the mainstream would soon become used to knocking back liberal measures of the bad-taste, the ironic – and, yes, generous shots of that ol' Scala spirit. Quentin Tarantino and other gunslingers would take what the Scala had unselfconsciously provided and repackage it with postmodern ribbons and bows. Vintage threads on new coat hangers. Counterculture, coiffed.

By June 1993, the cinema was shot full of arrows like Sebastiane, beset by the court case, which was lost, and a rapidly expiring lease. But, like Jack Arnold's *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), the Scala and its immortal, indomitable spirit didn't so much fade away as get subsumed, at a subatomic level, into the cinematic universe. The legacy of the ultimate outsiders' cinema is all around us: it just took the rest of the world a while to catch up.

Ali Catterall, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2023