SCALA: SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK AND ROLL CINEMA

A Clockwork Orange

A Clockwork Orange
Directed by: Stanley Kubrick
©: Warner Bros, Inc., Polaris Productions
Presented by: Warner Bros.
Made on Location by: Hawk Films
Executive Producers: Max L. Raab, Si Litvinoff
Produced by: Stanley Kubrick
Associate Producer: Bernard Williams
Production Accountant: Len Barnard
Unit Production Manager: Eddie Frewin *
Location Manager: Terence Clegg
Location Liaison: Arthur Morgan
Production Assistant: Andros Epaminondas
Production Assistant: Margaret Adams *
Assistant to the Producer: Jan Harlan
Production Secretary: Loretta Ordewer
Director's Secretary: Kay Johnson
Assistant Directors: Derek Cracknell, Dusty Symonds
Continuity: June Randall
Casting: Jimmy Liggat
Screenplay by: Stanley Kubrick
Based on the novel by: Anthony Burgess
Lighting Cameraman: John Alcott
Additional Photography: Stanley Kubrick *
Camera Operators: Ernie Day, Mike Molloy
Focus Puller: Ron Drinkwater
Camera Assistants: Laurie Frost, David Lenham
Grips: Don Budge, Tony Cridlin
Supervising Electrician: Frank Wardale
Electricians: Louis Bogue, Derek Gatrell
Editor: Bill Butler
Assistant Editors: Gary Shepherd, Peter Burgess, David Beesley
Production Designer: John Barry
Art Directors: Russell Hagg, Peter Sheilds
Special Paintings/Sculptures: Herman Makkink, Cornelius Makkink, Liz Moore, Christiane Kubrick
Prop Master: Frank Bruton
Propmen: Peter Hancock, Tommy Ibbetson, John Oliver
Construction Manager: Bill Welch
Costume Designer: Milena Canonero
Wardrobe Supervisor: Ron Beck
Make-up: Fred Williamson, George Partleton, Barbara Daly
Hairdresser: Olga Angelinetta
Consultant on Hair and Colouring: Leonard of London
Electronic Music Composed/Realised by: Walter Carlos
Sound Recordist: John Jordan
Boom Operator: Peter Glossop
Dubbing Mixers: Bill Rowe, Eddie Haben
Sound Editor: Brian Blamey
Technical Adviser: Jon Marshall
Stunt Arranger: Roy Scammell
Promotion Co-ordinator: Michael Kaplan
Studios: Pinewood Studios, EMI-MGM Elstree Studios
Cast:
Malcolm McDowell *(Alex DeLarge)*
Patrick Magee *(Frank Alexander)*
Michael Bates *(chief guard)*
Warren Clarke *(Dim)*
John Clive *(stage actor)*
Adrienne Corri *(Mrs Alexander)*
Carl Duering *(Dr Brodsky)*
Paul Farrell *(tramp)*
Clive Francis *(Joe, the lodger)*
Michael Gover *(prison governor)*
Miriam Karlin *(cat lady)*
James Marcus *(Georgie)*

In the week that *A Clockwork Orange* first lurched into UK cinemas in January 1972, the song dominating the top of the charts was The New Seekers' 'I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing', an ode to multicultural peace and harmony that had begun life as a jingle for the Coca Cola company. Sold off the back of the drink's famous 'hilltop' commercial, the song was the era-perfect synthesis of hippie idealism, MOR square culture and corporatised good vibrations.

There is singing in *A Clockwork Orange* too – a rendition of the joyous title song to the MGM musical *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) – but it occurs as Malcolm McDowell's Alex DeLarge and his gang of droogs brutally assault a couple whose home they've invaded. As an act of cultural desecration, of one generation pissing over another's sacred cow, the moment is gobsmacking. Half a century on, this ironic recontextualisation remains one of the most disturbing things about this most disturbing of films.

It's one of the few embellishments in this largely faithful adaptation of Anthony Burgess's 1962 novel. In an interview for *Sight & Sound* magazine at the time, director Stanley Kubrick said: 'This was one of the more important ideas which arose during rehearsal … We spent three days trying to work out just what was going to happen and somehow it all seemed a bit inadequate. Then suddenly the idea popped into my head – I don't know where it came from or what triggered it off.'

Kubrick had form for perverse retoolings of fondly remembered songs, having soundtracked nuclear apocalypse to the strains of wartime morale-booster Vera Lynn in his black comedy *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). But to choreograph a vicious beating to a Gene Kelly song-and-dance number was even more iconoclastic – what James Naremore calls 'a leering assault on a great Hollywood film'. It could also be seen as a bellwether for something new and destructive in the cultural ether: the urge to rip it up and start again.

In science-fiction terms, *A Clockwork Orange* was the scuzzier flipside to Kubrick's milestone release of four years previously, the infinity-traversing space-travel epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which arrived in cinemas – post-Summer of Love, pre-moon landings – in May 1968. Notwithstanding *2001*'s grave warnings about unchecked technological progress – HAL, too, has been taught to sing, but that doesn't curb the supercomputer's own vicious side – the film landed at an optimistic moment in the human race's sense of its place in the universe. Its dazzling intergalactic visuals, notably in the psychedelic Stargate sequence, made it mandatory viewing for the longhairs and acidheads of the hippie era. Kubrick had provided the flower children of the 60s with the ultimate trip.

If *A Clockwork Orange* was its B-side, it was the kind in which dark messages were said to be inscribed in the grooves. Transmitted into Edward Heath's Britain, where that January's unemployment figures were the highest for two decades, it was a message that was swiftly picked up on by a British audience too young, too poor or too angry to have had their heads turned by the hippie scene, and who were on exactly the right wavelength to receive it.

In contrast to *2001*'s sleek, white, futuristic spaces, *A Clockwork Orange* offered them a vision of a no-future future that looked suggestively like the no-future present: brutalist housing estates, self-serving politicians and tribal gangs of marauding youths jacked up on stimulants. 'If you were a teenager in Britain in 1972,' wrote erstwhile music journalist Tony Parsons in a 1995 memoir about Kubrick's film, 'then *A Clockwork Orange* got under the skin in a way that no other film did before or has done since. Because it was more than a movie. It was a validation of a way of life.'

Aubrey Morris *(Deltoid, P.R.)*
Godfrey Quigley *(prison chaplain)*
Sheila Raynor *(Em, mum)*
Madge Ryan *(Dr Branom)*
John Savident *(Dolin, conspirator)*
Anthony Sharp *(minister of interior)*
Philip Stone *(Pee, dad)*
Pauline Taylor *(psychiatrist)*
Margaret Tyzack *(Rubinstein, conspirator)*
Steven Berkoff *(constable)*
Lindsay Campbell *(inspector)*
Michael Tarn *(Pete)*
David Prowse *(Julian)*
Barrie Cookson
Jan Adair *(handmaiden)*
Gaye Brown
Peter Burton
John J. Carney *(C.I.D. man)*
Vivienne Chandler *(handmaiden)*
Richard Connaught *(Billyboy)*
Prudence Drage *(handmaiden)*
Carol Drinkwater *(Nurse Feeley)*
Lee Fox
Cheryl Grunwald *(rape girl)*
Gillian Hills *(Sonietta)*
Craig Hunter *(Dr Friendly)*
Shirley Jaffe
Virginia Wetherell *(stage actress)*
Neil Wilson
Katya Wyeth *(girl in Ascot fantasy)*
Barbara Scott *(Marty)* *
George O'Gorman *(Bootick clerk)* *
Pat Roach, Robert Bruce *(milkbar bouncers)* *
Steven Counterman *(running teenager)* *
USA-UK 1971©
136 mins
35mm. A BFI National Archive print

* Uncredited

Burgess had caught the scent of anarchy in the UK as early as the late 1950s. He'd returned from living abroad to find a national media fixated on juvenile delinquency. Youth culture was on the rise, and the arrival of American rock'n'roll had inspired the wave of British rebels known as Teddy Boys – a term coined by the *Daily Express* to refer to this new tribe's dandified 'New Edwardian' get-up. The dangerous side of this new subculture was infamously confirmed during the 1958 Notting Hill race riots, when gangs of Teds, during escalating tensions toward immigrant black communities, attacked the homes of local West Indian residents.

Such incidents created an air of moral panic around teen gangs that would play into Burgess's most famous novel, his rampaging droogs in turn foreshadowing a ramping up in youth violence as the 60s wore on. The Sussex coast, where Burgess lived, hosted infamous clashes between mods and rockers in 1964, while by the early 70s skinheads were becoming an ever more frightening presence on the streets. A tribe that had started out as a working-class reaction to bourgeois hippie culture was becoming increasingly infiltrated by far-right politics and racism.

I asked Jon Savage, author of Sex Pistols chronicle *England's Dreaming*, what he remembers about the time when Kubrick's film adaptation first appeared. He tells a story about how – as a young wannabe hippie – he'd gone to see a James Taylor and Carole King concert in Newcastle in 1971 ('terribly nice, terribly polite'). On the way back to the train station, he witnessed a gang of skinheads throw somebody through a plate glass window, and the contrast was eye-opening. 'The 70s were very violent; people tend to have forgotten that,' Savage says. 'The gloss of the swinging 60s had disappeared, and everything was sliding downhill.'

Kubrick's film goaded the gangs by appropriating aspects of their mode of dress. The droogs wore the clothes of the present, torqued for the future. Bovver boots and braces were longstanding ruffian favourites, but debut costume designer Milena Canonero provocatively teamed these street fashions with incongruities such as cod pieces and canes. Images in the Stanley Kubrick Archive reveal the many different hats that the creative team trialled: cowboy hats, peasant hats, military hats. But the droogs didn't work until they tried bowler hats. Suddenly, the symbol of the City gent was made startling and dangerous, and waves of Clockwork-copyist suedeheads quickly followed suit.

David Bowie was also taking fashion tips. Before even seeing the film itself, he'd been eyeing up Kubrick's promotional materials, snatching ideas for the look of his Ziggy Stardust persona, which he launched onstage that same January. *A Clockwork Orange* remained a vital Bowie reference point through *Aladdin Sane* and the dystopian imagery of *Diamond Dogs*, even up until his final album, *Blackstar*, in 2016, which contains a track with lyrics in Burgess's Nadsat slang. 'He was trying to unlock a look and a mood that he thought would connect with a young audience,' Savage tells me. 'He'd been through the 60s, he was smart enough to realise that the 60s were over, that the 1970s demanded a new kind of pop culture and a new kind of pop music.'

'You have to try and kill your elders,' Bowie himself told *Mojo* magazine in 2002. 'We had to develop a completely new vocabulary, as indeed is done generation after generation. The idea was taking the recent past and re-structuring it in a way we felt we had authorship of. My key "in" was things like *Clockwork Orange*: that was our world, not the bloody hippy thing. It all made sense to me. The idea of taking a present situation and doing a futuristic forecast, and dressing it to suit: it was a uniform for an army that didn't exist.'

Samuel Wigley, bfi.org.uk, 3 April 2019