



O DREAMLAND! LINDSAY ANDERSON'S DARK BRITISH CINEMA

# Lindsay Anderson: Meet the Pioneer

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### Lindsay Anderson: Meet the Pioneer

Thu 2 May 18:10

### No Film Can Be Too Personal

Thu 2 May 20:20

### Home

Sun 5 May 15:20

### The White Bus

Sun 5 May 17:30

### If....

Mon 6 May 17:50; Thu 16 May 20:30; Tue

21 May 18:10; Fri 24 May 12:10; Tue 28

May 20:45

### BFI Library Event: Outing Anderson

Wed 8 May 20:00 BFI Reuben Library

### In Celebration

Thu 9 May 20:25; Wed 22 May 18:00

### O Lucky Man!

Sun 12 May 14:10; Sat 18 May 14:20; Mon

27 May 19:20

### Britannia Hospital

Tue 14 May 20:35; Sat 25 May 18:00

### This Sporting Life

Wed 15 May 17:50; Thu 23 May 12:00

### The Whales of August

Thu 16 May 12:20; Sat 25 May 16:00; Fri

31 May 20:30

### The Old Crowd

Thu 16 May 18:30

### Lindsay Anderson vs the Short Films

Industry + intro by Patrick Russell,

Senior Curator of Non-fiction, BFI

### National Archive

Thu 23 May 18:20

### Stand Up! Stand Up!

Thu 23 May 20:30

### Never Apologize

Fri 24 May 17:50

### In Collaboration: Anderson and Others

Sun 26 May 18:10

### Lindsay Anderson Experimenta

Mixtape, curated by Stephen Sutcliffe

Thu 30 May 18:10

### With thanks to

The Lindsay Anderson Archive at the  
University of Stirling

### O Lucky Lindsay Anderson!

4-week course from 7 May – 28 May, 2-

4pm at City Lit, Keeley St. exploring the

work and influence of visionary director,

Lindsay Anderson, with course tutor John

Wischmeyer. To book online

[www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/o-lucky-](http://www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/o-lucky-lindsay-anderson)

[lindsay-anderson](http://www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/o-lucky-lindsay-anderson) or call 020 3871 3111

and quote course code **HF364**

Join season curators William Fowler and James Bell as they explore Anderson's life and work, and interrogate the career of a filmmaker who remained a singularly combative thorn in the side of British cinema, whether as a critic or as a filmmaker. Illustrated with rare clips taken from Anderson's films, TV plays, interviews and commercials, and sourced from the collections of the BFI National Archive, the talk will consider the complex legacy of one of British cinema's true iconoclasts.

[bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)

### 'I have never felt accepted as a director': Lindsay Anderson interviewed in 1989

I have done hardly anything for television before *Glory! Glory!*, except for one play, what they call a television play, *The Old Crowd* [1978], from a script by Alan Bennett. I had a very good time working on that with Alan, but it was received with great hostility by almost all the critics and I was labelled 'the only man who had ever made Alan Bennett unfunny'. I think that was because we really went out on a limb and made a film which was satirical and a bit surreal, in places a kind of homage to Buñuel, and that isn't at all the kind of thing people expect to see on television. It was really gratifying that it created such a stir and was so disliked, though when it was shown again recently nobody took any notice of it at all.

The only result, unfortunately, was that I wasn't invited to do anything else for television in Britain. So when this invitation arrived from America I was particularly intrigued, because the script had a kind of satirical energy and edge to it which seemed unusual for television, and quite close to many contemporary issues, I am happy to say, notably in its satirical view of TV evangelism. The Canadian writer Stan Daniels, who is experienced and very good – he has worked on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* – did a script which was more intelligent and hard-hitting than you might expect. The reason, I think, is that *Glory! Glory!* has been taken on by Home Box Office, American cable, rather than a network, and HBO are anxious to produce the kind of work that can't be seen on network. They are happy that we should be a bit trenchant or outrageous, and there has never been any suggestion that the edge of the film should be blunted.

I had been going to do *The Admirable Crichton* in the West End, but my negotiations with the producer fell through. So I was at a loose end when this offer arrived out of the blue. It had to be undertaken quite soon, so there wasn't any of that tiresome business of having to work for ages on the script and argue over it with the producers or the sponsors. I thought, 'Well, it's time I had a go. Maybe it's time I sold out!' I haven't sold out yet, and I'm getting tired of being labelled as someone of great and rather boring integrity – so let's have a go. And that's how I got into it, and came to Toronto to film it.

*I understand that HBO wanted you to shoot this three-and-a-quarter-hour film in 35 days, which on the face of it seems an impossibility. How did you cope with that?*

I didn't have any preconceived plan; in fact, I was extremely doubtful that I would be able to do it. The only wise precaution I took was to ask [cinematographer] Mike Fash to join me. I worked with him on *Britannia Hospital* [1982] and *The Whales of August* [1987], and he has now emigrated to America and has also done a lot of work in Toronto. He knows people here, he knows technicians, he was able to pick a very good crew, and I insisted that he should be the cameraman. If they hadn't got Mike, I might well not have done it, because I would never have been able to shoot in 35 days. I am not a very slow director, but I'm not a lightning director either. However, I was very lucky; our unit was extremely good; we had an excellent first assistant and on the floor the organisation was first class.

## **CHASING THE REAL: ITALIAN NEOREALISM**

### **Ossessione**

Sat 4 May 20:15; Sun 12 May 17:50

### **Paisà**

Mon 6 May 15:20; Fri 10 May 20:30; Sun  
19 May 15:30; Mon 20 May 12:00; Wed 29  
May 12:00

### **Journey through Italian Neorealism**

Tue 7 May 18:10

### **Four Steps in the Clouds** Quattro passi fra le nuvole

Tue 7 May 20:30 (+ intro by season  
curator Giulia Saccogna); Mon 13 May  
18:20

### **The Children Are Watching Us** I bambini ci guardano

Wed 8 May 20:45; Thu 16 May 18:20

### **Shoeshine** Sciuscià

Tue 14 May 18:10 (+ intro by season  
curator Giulia Saccogna); Tue 21 May  
20:45

### **A Tragic Hunt (aka The Tragic Pursuit)**

Caccia tragica

Wed 15 May 21:00; Sat 25 May 15:40

### **The Mill on the Po** Il mulino del Po

Thu 16 May 20:40; Sat 25 May 18:20

### **The Bandit** Il bandito

Fri 17 May 20:50; Sun 26 May 18:30

### **Germany, Year Zero** Germania anno zero (aka Deutschland im Jahre Null)

Sun 19 May 18:20; Wed 22 May 12:30;

Mon 27 May 15:00; Wed 29 May 20:40

### **Bicycle Thieves** Ladri di biciclette

Sun 19 May 20:20; Mon 27 May 18:00

### **Bitter Rice** Riso amaro

Wed 22 May 20:40; Thu 30 May 18:15

### **La terra trema**

Sun 26 May 15:00; Fri 31 May 20:00

### **Course: City Lit at the BFI Italian Neorealism – The Cinema of Everyday Life**

Wed 8 May – Wed 12 Jun 18:30-20:30

*There is a great admiration in North America for British films which are said to be made for television, whereas the American made-for-TV film only has a reputation for cutting corners.*

In Britain, Channel 4 has helped to finance films and then has the right to show them, either before or after their cinema screenings. But the films have not exactly been made for television – they have been made for Channel 4, if you like, and that is a different thing. Though if you take *My Beautiful Laundrette* [1985], the interesting thing is that it was made for television and was shown in cinemas really quite by chance and at first somewhat to the alarm of the director, Stephen Frears, because he said, 'Well, I only made it for television.' I think the real difference is the kind of subject liable to be financed by Channel 4, which leads to some of the new British films being a bit lacking in the ambition one associates with a cinema film. There is a certain restriction of imagination or idea, rather than the feeling that if you make a film financed by television you have to restrict it in terms of technique or style.

*Glory! Glory!* is somewhat different. Plainly, although the spread of the story is quite great, it's not possible in 35 days to give it the kind of wit you would have in a movie. If we were making it as a movie, we would certainly have had at least a week or ten days in Texas to shoot some locations. Here we have had one day shooting at York University and that has been our exteriors. My approach to it has been completely pragmatic – to get the script on to film as inventively and expressively as possible. When you take on a subject like this, I don't think you indulge too much in theory.

*How far did the schedule force you into different procedures from those you followed on The Whales of August?*

If we had been making *The Whales of August* for television, I imagine it would have been done on a four-week budget, and it wouldn't have been shot in Maine but in a studio with a few exteriors. It would have been a different kind of film and it would have been much diminished. I think the fact that we were making a movie creates a psychological difference. I know that some of the American technicians on *The Whales of August* expected us to shoot it like a television movie. They just expected us to give it an overall lighting and then go in to shoot all the sequences. But, of course, we didn't. We shot it with the care that goes with making a movie. But that is true of this film also, and how you have to look at it, if you like, is that the restrictions or economies are present in the script.

I've had the producer say to me once or twice, 'Oh, it looks a bit claustrophobic,' and I have to say to her, 'Well, since you gave me one day to shoot exteriors, and since we never had a particularly convincing exterior location for the headquarters of this evangelist movement, what more do you expect?' But, of course, the trouble is that the better the film turns out, the more they begin to judge it as though it was *Gone with the Wind*. I have to repeat '35 days' and, of course, they forget about that.

*You started doing documentaries, you have directed features, you have filmed plays, a rock concert, commercials, you even did a music video, you've worked in the theatre, and now you have done television in the American sense, what they call a miniseries. Looking at all this, you must feel a certain amount of satisfaction?*

I am more conscious of the fact that critics, journalists and producers find it difficult to pigeonhole one if one has done such a variety of things and in different styles. The essence of media success, as you know, is to be pigeonholed, and if I am put in any slot it is as a result of *If... [1968]*, *O Lucky Man!* [1973] and *Britannia Hospital* [1982] as a difficult, ironic, satirical and not exactly popular commentator on the ways of the world. That means I have never felt precisely accepted as a contemporary director, chiefly because people don't quite know how to define what I do or what I have done.

None of that matters a great deal, except that with a reputation for being difficult, which actually means being demanding, one finds oneself not the first choice on many people's lists. It may be significant that the last two things I have done have been in America.

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Not characteristically American, not Hollywood productions, but not British either. I don't think I would ever have been invited in Britain to direct something like *Glory! Glory!*. It has been a stimulating experience, an extremely exhausting one, and I am looking forward to completing it. What will happen next – I haven't the slightest idea.

I'm surprised, however, that I have made as many films as I have. I never thought that I was particularly difficult and I've always had a feeling that I could do many different kinds of films, but I can see how I certainly have typed or seemed to type myself. I also realise, looking back on things, that I have always been lacking in career dynamics. That's due to a certain laziness that is within me. I'm not lazy when I'm actually working, but I'm like many people who are very obsessive when they work. When they have finished a job they become extremely lazy and don't want to do anything, because they remember how awful it was.

Really, considering the kinds of demands I have made and the kinds of films I have managed to complete, I think it is quite extraordinary that I have made as many as I have. I count them up sometimes – I can't remember how many there are – and I'm certainly pleased, after a rather choosy career, to end up with an American miniseries. At least it shows that I have had it in me to make, I hope, a popular film. I've always thought the films I've made are going to be popular, but they almost never turn out to be. This one, which I've had great doubts about, I've been told by one or two people is going to be popular. So I hope they are right: it would be a good way to bring an erratic career to an end.

Journalists and critics seem to expect every filmmaker to make two a year. But in fact, while needing, if you like, to make films of a certain personal quality, I have also very much enjoyed working in the theatre. Film people hardly acknowledge the existence of the theatre. They don't go to it, they know very little about it, so that side of my career is generally not at all marked by film writers. I only wish that some of the productions I have done could have been recorded. It's sad that experiences and achievements of that kind vanish into thin air, and we are left with the often extremely inaccurate accounts of writers and critics. However, there they are – they have mostly gone, but they have represented a considerable part of my life and one I am proud of.

Interview by Gerald Pratley, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1989

### James Bell – Senior curator, fiction

James joined the curatorial team as senior curator of fiction in 2021, following many years as features editor at *Sight and Sound* magazine.

James also worked as BFI special projects editor. He has been series editor of the BFI Compendium book series, whose titles include *39 Steps to the Genius of Hitchcock* (2012), *Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film* (2013) and *Electric Shadows: The History of Chinese Cinema* (2014).

He is regular programmer of BFI Southbank's biannual Deep Focus film seasons, which have included focuses on pre-Code Hollywood, psychological Westerns, Method acting and Golden Age Japanese Melodrama. He has also worked on several of the BFI's major projects, including as programmer of 2024's Cinema Unbound: The Creative Worlds of Powell and Pressburger.

### William Fowler – Curator, artists' moving image

Will joined the BFI in 2005 as the archive's first dedicated curator of artists' moving image. Since then he has undertaken a number of film restoration projects, seasons and DVD releases, including GAZWRX: the films of Jeff Keen, *Queer Pagan Punk: Derek Jarman* (the largest ever Jarman retrospective) and *This Is Now: Film and Video After Punk*, currently touring internationally through LUX. He co-conceived and co-programmed with Vic Pratt the popular monthly programme *The Flipside* and regularly contributes to the BFI *Flipside* Blu Rays and DVDs. He programmes the monthly BFI Southbank *Experimenta* strand and the *Experimenta* Mixtape.