



## NEW RELEASES

# Made in England The Films of Powell and Pressburger

### Made in England

#### The Films of Powell and Pressburger

Director: David Hinton

©: P & P Film Limited,

British Broadcasting Corporation

Presented by: BBC Film, Screen Scotland

A Ten Thousand 86, Ice Cream Films  
production

In association with: Sikelia Productions,  
Altitude Film Sales, BFI National Archive,  
Cohen Media Group, ITV Studios Global  
Distribution, Park Circus Productions,  
Studiocanal, Turner Classic Movies  
Made with the co-operation and assistance  
of the Estates of Michael Powell and  
Emeric Pressburger

Developed with the support of:

Arts Alliance Productions Limited

Supported by: the Scottish Government and  
the National Lottery through Creative  
Scotland

Executive Producers: Martin Scorsese,  
Olivia Harrison, Thelma Schoonmaker, Will  
Clarke, Charles S. Cohen, Thomas Hoegh,  
Mark Thomas, Claudia Yusef, Eva Yates

Produced by: Matthew Wells, Nick Varley

Archive Producer: Sam Dwyer

Associate Producer: Jamie Muir

Line Producer: Penny Davies

Line Producer (NY Crew): Mevlut Akkaya

Production Manager: Nadja Lapcevic

Production Coordinator: Celeste Carrigan

Production Accounting: John Letham

Post-production Supervisor: Lesley Weir

Director of Photography (NY Crew):

Ronan Killeen

Edited by: Margarida Cartaxo,

Stuart Davidson

Online Editor: David Leishman

Additional Editing: Mike Trevett,

Matthew Wells

Graphic Artist: Noriko Okaku

Visual Effects: Serious FX

Main Title Design: Jason Hillier

Original Music: Adrian Johnston

Music Supervisors: Oliver Jay,

Lisa McCaffery

[Music] Recorded & Mixed by: Steve Parr

Sound Recordists (NY Crew): Todd Maitland,

Damian Rodriguez

Re-recording Mixer: Daniel Taylor

Consultant: Ian Christie

Film Restoration Services: Janos Pilenyi,

Daniel DeVincent, Mark Bonnici

Presented by: Martin Scorsese

UK-USA-France 2024©

133 mins

Digital

An Altitude Film Distribution release

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No filmography is an island, but the peak works of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger so tower over British cinema that they might constitute a loftier realm. For some years, too, they were shrouded in fog. Powell's critical shaming and shunning after his native industry's rejection of *Peeping Tom* in 1960 is well-rehearsed, but by that decade many of the pair's joint glories, from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) to *The Red Shoes* (1948), had been recut then spurned, left to neglect and decay. Yet however tattered their form, their spirit would not stay corked. As Martin Scorsese recounts near the beginning of this heartfelt tribute and testimony, the films' very devaluation helped them reach new shores: at a time when Hollywood would not license its own wares to US television, leaving a gap filled by cheap imports, a very young and film-hungry Scorsese was peering at grubby, monochrome, recut scenes from Powell's co-directed *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) and more on his family TV and recognising magic.

The older Scorsese, patron saint of film restoration with his World Cinema Foundation – which would help resurrect *Blimp* and *Red Shoes* – has hardly been a lone polisher of the Powell and Pressburger lamp in the years since. Critics, scholars, curators – and Derek Jarman – began reviving and reclaiming the films in the 1970s; Gavin Millar presented a 1981 BBC *Arena* documentary, 'A Pretty British Affair', when the pair were made BAFTA fellows; David Hinton marked the first volume of Powell's autobiography, *A Life in Movies*, in 1986 with a *South Bank Show* portrait, rich with Powell's playfully staged recollections. Hinton has also directed this new film, which borrows footage freely from its forerunners; but though the title elides it, the film sits with Scorsese's own *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies* (1995) and *My Voyage to Italy* (1999) as another of his incisive first-person disquisitions on film history. Indeed, it's his most subjective yet, not only narrated by Scorsese direct to camera but laced with direct illustrations of Powell and Pressburger's influence on his own work as he recounts the progress of his relationship to Powell in particular, from fan to acolyte, mentee, friend, even matchmaker. The film is co-edited (along with Margarida Cartaxo and Stuart Davidson) by an uncredited Thelma Schoonmaker, Scorsese's longtime collaborator and Powell's widow. It's a movie-family affair and a eulogy: to the qualities, the convictions and passions that elevated Powell and Pressburger's cinema and raise us with it – love being the foremost.

If the taciturn Pressburger is less visible, his traces are evident in the movies, not least their bravura story conceits: ragtag Nazis in Canada showing their true colours in *49th Parallel* (1941); wartime pilgrims finding succour in the English landscape in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944); a comatose air force pilot caught between heaven and love in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). When asked what drew him to Pressburger, Powell doesn't pause: 'It was a beautiful mind I responded to.' He recalls his introduction to the free-thinking writer at a script meeting: 'I wasn't going to let him get away in a hurry.' Even after their reluctant separation following *Ill Met by Moonlight* in 1957, admitting their ambitions had diverged, Pressburger was still crediting love for their art as the glue holding together their achievements – they were 'amateurs in a world of professionals'.

Scorsese notes how *A Matter of Life and Death's* 'vision of renewal and love' (leading to the even headier passion plays of *Black Narcissus*, 1947, and *The Red Shoes*) jarred with post-war film noir cynicism, and posits a shift from wartime

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idealism to peacetime realism as the cause of their fall from grace. The war had been the defining event for these filmmakers, giving their work depth and purpose: from defining who we fight in *Contraband* (1940) and *49th Parallel*, and how we fight in *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942), to the elucidations – in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and onwards – of higher values that needed defending. Pressburger called *A Canterbury Tale* and its follow-up, the storm-whipped Hebridean romance *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945), episodes in their 'crusade against materialism'; Scorsese concurs, noting their sermonising and spiritual-mystical qualities, not to mention the latter's sheer joy in losing yourself. (Scorsese recommends it for special date communion: 'I know I'm not the only one to do that.')

They took the name The Archers – a shared authorial credit even more curious than now – after their success with *49th Parallel*, which won Pressburger a screenplay Oscar. I was reminded how, after the success of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata set up Studio Ghibli in Japan, another artist-led enterprise underwriting the independence of two risk-taking magicians and spirit-workers. Would The Archers have gone farther with a devoted producer like Ghibli's Toshio Suzuki at their back? For their golden years they had the confidence of their patron Arthur Rank – until he saw *The Red Shoes*; after which they struggled to find benefactors in austere post-war Britain. But they still grew their stock company, in front of and behind the camera. *Made in England* devotes a section to Alfred Junge's feats of production design on, especially, the stairway to heaven in *A Matter of Life and Death* and the studio-staged Himalayas of *Black Narcissus*, though there's no mention of Hein Heckroth, Junge's fellow German émigré and successor on *The Red Shoes* onwards.

In his *Arena* programme, Millar hailed 'films which seemed bizarrely foreign in their imaginative flair and flavour'. In what England were they 'made'? We see Powell filming *Age of Consent* (1969) in Australia (there's no space for other late minor works), and he also filmed in Canada and his beloved Scotland. Clearly Powell and Pressburger's England was a centrifugal one: curious, generous, hybrid, metaphysical. Scorsese demurs at the suggestion they were English romantics: 'I don't know what that means.' In fact, in the *South Bank Show* Powell rejected the term romantic: like Blimp, he counts himself 'honourable, puzzled, innocent'. (The immigrant Pressburger, in this analogy, brings the outsider affection of Blimp's sparring partner, Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff.) Scorsese runs a clip from his *The Age of Innocence* (1993), drawing on *Blimp's* interrogation of idealism and the frustrated desire and regret of experience. 'The longer I live, the stronger grows my sense of what the characters are feeling,' he says. 'Growing up, growing old, and eventually having to let go.' Until then, we can cling to these movie dreams.

Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, June 2024