



### Big Banana Feet

*Directors:* Murray Grigor, Patrick Higson  
*Production Companies:* Viz Productions, Unicorn Enterprises  
*Producers:* Patrick Higson, Murray Grigor  
*Production Assistant:* Penelope Thomson  
*Script:* Patrick Higson, Murray Grigor  
*Director of Photography:* David Peat  
*Additional Photography:* Mark Littlewood  
*Assistant Photographer:* Jan Pester  
*Graphics:* Donald Holwill  
*Editor:* Patrick Higson  
*Assistant Editor:* Bert Eeles  
*Title Design:* Donald Holwill  
*Music:* Billy Connolly  
*Sound Recording:* Ian Leslie  
*Sound Re-recording:* David Skilton, Colour Film Services  
UK 1977  
77 mins  
Digital

Available on BFI Dual Format DVD and Blu-ray from Monday 20 May

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### EVENTS

# Billy Connolly: Big Banana Feet

+ Q&A with Douglas Weir and director Murray Grigor (18:10 screening only)

### Murray Grigor on 'Big Banana Feet'

Billy Connolly was already the talk of the town in the late 60s with his wry, outrageous re-enactments of the Crucifixion, complete with such heresies as Christ being arrested for carrying his cross the wrong way up a one-way street to the Glasgow Gallowgate. By 1972 he was making waves in Edinburgh with 'The Great Northern Welly Boot Show' on the Festival Fringe. This cabaret-style extravaganza celebrated the building of welly boots, instead of shipbuilding on the Clyde. With the poet and playwright Tom Buchan, they created a brilliant fusion of badinage and song which included his sing-along homage to the welly boot. Although this show had its first try-out as part of Glasgow's Mayfest the year before, the actor Kenny Ireland had the idea of bringing it to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. His circle of friends included Bill Paterson, Alex Norton, Juliet Cadzow, Patrick Malahide, with Robin LeVèvre as director. As a cooperative venture they took over the vacant Waverley Market. Scaffolding was hired to seat the audience around three sides of what became a thrust theatre stage. John Byrne painted gloriously imaginative sets and designed the costumes. The production was entirely self-funded on the basis that once the costs were covered everyone would receive the same share of the box office. But no one realised that opening the show at 7pm in August that the sun would still be streaming down from the skylights. In an extraordinarily courageous moment Billy offered to introduce the show at every performance. For the entire run of the Fringe, he kept the audience in fits of laughter for close on an hour, before the band struck up, the lights came on and the Great Northern Welly Boot Show began.

A year later I had an offer to celebrate the Clyde resorts on film, funded by the closing of Scotland's ancient Royal Burghs. I thought it would be fun to feature that old Glasgow saying of the 'Man who came up the Clyde on a bike'. Who would be better to play him than Billy. Especially if he was caricatured by his talented friend John Byrne and brought brilliantly to life by the animator Donald Holwill. We set off on a glorious summer in 1972 for the happiest, funniest film shoot ever – all thanks to Billy's unstoppable witty repartee. He was up for anything. We even had him appear as an Edwardian Pierrot, emerging out of a 1911 silent film with his fellow Pierrot, the *compleat* musician, Ron Geesin. He went on to render Loch Lomond on ships' foghorns and hooters. Our Clyde film got a cinema release and when it played the Glasgow Odeon, there up on the large playbill, under John Wayne, was Billy Connolly in Clydescope.

An opportunity came to film Billy's brave decision to play Dublin and Belfast over a weekend at what was then the height of the 'The Troubles'. Our film was inspired by Leacock-Pennebaker's documenting of Bob Dylan's British tour of 1965. Fortunately, David and I had a rehearsal of observational filming for Roger Graef's series on British Steel, where participants agree to ignore the crew. We covered a confidential Glasgow meeting to consider the closure of the Hunterston B nuclear power station. David excelled in covering the participants, unnoticed by those being filmed, just as the ladies are who serve

## IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

### Mark Kermode in 3D at BFI IMAX

Mon 27 May 18:30; Mon 17 Jun 18:30;  
Mon 15 Jul 18:30

### Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

Next Sohee Da-eum So-hee  
Tue 11 Jun 20:25

### Melvyn Bragg: Broadcasting the Arts

Sun 16 Jun 15:15

### Melvyn Bragg: Broadcasting the Arts – Screening Choices

Sun 16 June 17:45

### TV Preview: Douglas Is Cancelled + Q&A with writer Steven Moffat, producer Sue Vertue and cast TBC

Tue 18 Jun 18:15

### Griffin Dunne in Conversation

Wed 3 July 18:00

### An American Werewolf in London + intro by Griffin Dunne

Wed 3 Jul 20:30

### Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

### The Nature of Love Simple Comme Sylvain

Thu 11 Jul 20:40

### Bug

Thu 25 Jul 20:50

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the tea. It was the perfect prequel for filming Billy in Ireland. Especially in his Belfast dressing room – as Billy kept retuning his guitar with the tension mounting, in came the tea ladies, magically breaking the tension as he joked over a poorly pouring teapot.

When my partner Patrick Higson had assembled a rough cut of around 40 minutes I contacted Billy Cotton, the Head of Light Entertainment at the BBC. He was interested enough to send his assistant. We screened the film for him at BBC Scotland, and he seemed to have liked what he saw, but Billy's scatological jokes stuck in his craw. He suggested to pare them down and trim the film down to under 30 minutes. But when we sat down later, we realised there wouldn't be much left if we censored the alleged lewd jokes. It would have been like a film of St. Francis of Assisi without his birds. So, we added in even more ribald sequences which soon stretched our film to 75 minutes. When it was screened at the London Film Festival, with great relief, *Big Banana Feet* was an outstanding success.

My only regret was that it was acquired by Brent Walker, who organised the British cinema release. They re-edited the film, removing Billy's in-flight parody of Ian Paisley, with such lines as 'Connolly is a blasphemer', and placed it as a voice-over at the opening, as well as censoring two other gags. Douglas Weir, who should win a prize as the nation's top film ferret for discovering a copy from the Falklands, went on to remaster the film, replacing the Paisley sequence over the plane's arrival in Belfast and reinstating the two gags. But the saddest loss for me is that the Belfast show started with a girl looking up at Billy on the stage and handing him a bouquet. Billy then slowly raised it to his nose and bellowed 'B-o-00-o-m!!' Fortunately, this shot remains, ricocheting the audience to applause, almost out of relief, but the opening shot of the girl is sadly gone. I learnt later that the house included the whole spectrum of political discontent in the North and that many guns had been surrendered to security. It was also sad, because of security, that our second unit were unable to capture the tension as the crowd arrived. Never mind. We managed to capture a portrait of Billy in the earlier years when his talents would soon extend into his legendary two, two-and-a-half, and even three-hour talkathons of continuous acting and yarning; wretchedly now hobbled by Dr Parkinson's, he expresses himself imaginatively in other ways, like his 'Born on a rainy day' art now made up into sculptures. Altogether now; 'Long Live Sir Billy Connolly.'

**Murray Grigor OBE** is a Scottish filmmaker, writer and curator whose vast body of work includes the documentaries *Mackintosh* (1968), *Space and Light* (1972), *Scotch Myths* (1983) and *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright* (1983).