



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Taxi Driver

### Taxi Driver

Directed by: Martin Scorsese

©: Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

a Bill/Phillips, Italo-Judeo production

Presented by: Columbia Pictures

Produced by: Michael Phillips, Julia Phillips

Associate Producer: Phillip M. Goldfarb

Creative Consultant: Sandra Weintraub

Assistant Director: Peter R. Scoppa

Script Supervisor: Kay Chapin

Casting: Juliet Taylor

Atmosphere Casting: Sylvia Faye

Written by: Paul Schrader

Director of Photography: Michael Chapman

2nd Unit Camera: Michael Zingale

Camera Operator: Fred Schuler

Assistant Cameramen: Alec Hirschfeld,

Bill Johnson, Ron Zarilla

Special Photography: Steve Shapiro

Special Effects: Tony Parmelee

Supervising Film Editor: Marcia Lucas

Editors: Tom Rolf, Melvin Shapiro

Visual Consultant: David Nichols

Art Director: Charles Rosen

Costume Designer: Ruth Morley

Special Make-up: Dick Smith

Make-up: Irving Buchman

Hairdresser: Mona Orr

Title Design: Dan Perri

Optical Effects & Colour Prints by: M.G.M.

Music by: Bernard Herrmann

Music Arrangers/Conductors: Dave Blume,

Bernard Herrmann \*

Conductor: Jack Hayes \*

Re-recording Supervisor: Tex Rudloff

Re-recording Mixers: Dick Alexander, Vern Poore

Cast:

Robert De Niro (*Travis Bickle*)

Jodie Foster (*Iris*)

Albert Brooks (*Tom*)

Harvey Keitel (*Sport*)

Leonard Harris (*Charles Palantine*)

Peter Boyle (*Wizard*)

Cybill Shepherd (*Betsy*)

Diahnne Abbot (*concession girl*)

Frank Adu (*angry black man*)

Vic Argo (*Melio*)

Gino Ardito (*policeman at rally*)

Garth Avery (*Iris's friend*)

Norman Matlock (*Charlie T.*)

Steven Prince (*Andy, gun salesman*)

Martin Scorsese (*passenger watching silhouette*)

USA 1976©

114 mins

Digital 4K

\* Uncredited

+ intro by Chantelle Lavel Boyea, BFI Assistant Curator of Television  
(Wednesday 3 July only)

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

New York in the 1970s as seen through the rabid eyes of disillusioned Vietnam veteran Travis Bickle (De Niro), working nights as a taxi-driver and increasingly determined to clear the streets of the moral turpitude he believes is overtaking the city. Scorsese's film is a deeply unsettling foray into a poisoned mind, reflected both in Michael Chapman's infernal imagery and in Bernard Herrmann's expressive score.

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Perhaps the place to begin is with John Hinckley III, the man who, in 1981, tried to kill President Ronald Reagan so that, as the defence explained at his trial, 'he could effect a mystical union with Jodie Foster', the actress who played a preteen prostitute in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and who, at the time of Hinckley's assassination attempt, was a freshman at Yale University. Hinckley's action assured *Taxi Driver* a privileged position in cultural history, making it the only film to inspire directly a presidential assassination attempt. That the assassination failed is only fitting, since *Taxi Driver* is a film steeped in failure – the US failure in Vietnam, the failure of the 1960s counterculture and, most unnerving, at least to 49 per cent of the population, the failure of masculinity as a set of behavioural codes on which to mould a life.

Or perhaps the place to begin is a decade earlier, with Arthur Bremer, who, in 1972, attempted to assassinate Alabama Governor George Wallace, but merely succeeded in paralysing him from the waist down. The front page stories about Bremer, along with Sartre's *Nausea*, Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and Robert Bresson's film *Pickpocket* (1959), directly inspired Paul Schrader's *Taxi Driver* screenplay.

Schrader read the Bremer coverage while he was in a Los Angeles hospital, recovering from a gastric ulcer, at what he describes as the low point in his life. He was 26 years old, his marriage had broken up, he had quit the American Film Institute where he had been a fellow and he had been living in his car and drinking heavily. He said that when he checked into the emergency room, he realised that he had not spoken to anyone for weeks. No wonder his imagination was captured by Bremer, who was also totally isolated and living in his car while he stalked various political heavyweights. Coming of age in the aftermath of a decade of political assassinations (JFK, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy), Bremer had convinced himself that the surest and fastest way for him to get the attention he was starved of was by assassinating a famous politician. When he failed to penetrate Nixon's security, he turned his attention to Wallace.

Bremer kept a diary. Parts of it were found in his car and parts in an apartment where he'd lived before taking off on the journey that would land him, at age 21, in the penitentiary with a 63-year sentence. The diary wasn't published until 1974, but passages from it made their way into the news stories. Schrader, who was already wedded to the first-person, voice-over narrative, found it fascinating that Bremer, an under-educated, lower middle-class, Midwestern psychopath, would talk to himself in his diary just like a Sorbonne dropout in a Robert Bresson film.

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Wed 3 Jul 17:50 (+ intro by Chantelle Lavel Boyea, BFI Assistant Curator of Television); Sat 13 Jul 18:00; Tue 16 Jul 12:15; Tue 23 Jul 12:20

### The Passenger

 Professione: reporter

Thu 4 Jul 20:40; Sat 6 Jul 12:00; Mon 15 Jul 18:10; Fri 19 Jul 12:20

### Au hasard Balthazar

Fri 5 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 12:20; Fri 19 Jul 20:45; Wed 31 Jul 18:10 (+ intro)

### The English Patient

Sat 6 Jul 17:15; Sun 21 Jul 19:20

### The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie

 Le

Charme discret de la bourgeoisie

Sun 7 Jul 17:10; Thu 11 Jul 12:20; Sat 20 Jul 16:10

### Theorem

 Teorema

Mon 8 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 18:15 (+ intro); Wed 17 Jul 12:30; Sun 28 Jul 20:30

### Wild Strawberries

 Smultronstället

Tue 9 Jul 20:50; Sun 21 Jul 14:20; Tue 30 Jul 18:20

### Pierrot le fou

Fri 12 Jul 20:40; Mon 15 Jul 12:10; Mon 29 Jul 20:45

### Gloria

Sat 13 Jul 13:10; Tue 16 Jul 20:35; Sat 20 Jul 13:30; Tue 30 Jul 20:30

### Unforgiven

Sun 14 Jul 19:50; Tue 23 Jul 20:30; Thu 25 Jul 14:40

### Point Blank

Wed 17 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sat 27 Jul 18:30

### Bitter Victory

Thu 18 Jul 20:45; Sun 28 Jul 12:00

### Daughters of the Dust

Mon 22 Jul 12:20; Wed 24 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Arike Oke, Executive Director of Knowledge, Learning and Collections); Sat 27 Jul 20:45

### F for Fake

Mon 22 Jul 18:20; Wed 24 Jul 12:40; Fri 26 Jul 20:50

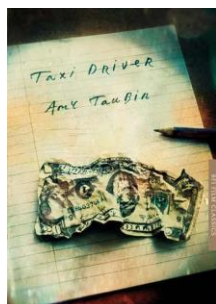
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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

*Taxi Driver* by Amy Taubin is available from the BFI Shop: <https://shop.bfi.org.uk/taxi-driver-bfi-film-classics.html>



Schrader got out of the hospital and wrote the script of *Taxi Driver* in about ten days. 'The theme,' he says, 'was loneliness, or, as I realised later, self-imposed loneliness. The metaphor was the taxi, a metal coffin on wheels, the absolute symbol of urban isolation. I'd had this song by Harry Chapin in my head, about a cab driver who picks up a fare and it turns out to be his former girlfriend. And I put all that in the pressure cooker of New York City.' And who was Travis Bickle? Was he Arthur Bremer? 'Travis Bickle,' Schrader replied, 'was just me.'

In case there's anyone who doesn't know, *Taxi Driver* describes one stifflingly hot summer in the life of Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), an alienated ex-Marine who drifted to New York shortly after the end of the Vietnam War. This background sketch may or may not be true, since we have only Travis's word for it. With small exceptions, the film is told from Travis's point of view and he is, to put it mildly, an unreliable narrator. Travis takes a job as a cabbie. Unable to sleep at night, he cruises in his taxi through a city that seems to him a hell. He becomes obsessed, in turn, with two women: Betsy (Cybill Shepherd), a campaign worker for a presidential primary candidate, and Iris (Jodie Foster), a 12 year-old prostitute. Betsy is the Madonna Travis wants to turn into a whore, while Iris is the whore he wants to save.

The seemingly desultory narrative is rigorously divided into three acts. In the first, Travis's rage is diffuse; he rides around in his cab, more a witness than a man of action. In the second, he finds a mission and an object for his rage. ('One day, indistinguishable from the next, a long, continuous chain. And then, suddenly – there is change,' he writes in his diary.) In the third, he puts his homicidal fantasies into action, taking aim at one father figure (the presidential candidate) and, when that attempt fails, turning his gun on another (Iris's pimp Sport, played by Harvey Keitel). The carnage that ends *Taxi Driver* is devastating, but it's also voluptuous – as voluptuous as anything in American movies – and all the more so because of the sense of repression that pervades the film until this moment. The entire film has been built so that this eruption of violence would seem both inevitable and more horrific than anything we might have imagined.

Extracted from *Taxi Driver* by Amy Taubin (BFI Film Classics, 2nd edition, 2012).

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