



## EVENT

# Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb

+ Q&A with Armando Iannucci and Sean Foley

We celebrate the 60th anniversary of Kubrick's classic film in the company of the creative team behind the forthcoming stage production.

When *Dr. Strangelove* was released, many people assumed its humour derived chiefly from Terry Southern, who was strongly associated with 1960s' counter-culture. Kubrick insisted that the satire was his own idea and that the order of script credits on the screen (himself first, Peter George second and Southern third) was proper. At one point, he threatened legal action against MGM for advertising *The Loved One* (1964), an adaptation by Southern of a novel by Evelyn Waugh, as a film by 'the writer of *Dr. Strangelove*'. In fact, Kubrick deserves a good deal of credit, if only because he recognised how easily the basic elements of George's story could be tipped over into absurdity (it takes only a minor alteration, for instance, to transform 'Peace on Earth' into 'Purity of Essence'). Because of this strategy, combined with Kubrick's direction, *Dr. Strangelove* became a box-office hit and one of the most effective black comedies in film history. A risky commercial venture at the time of the Cuban missile crisis and the assassination of John F. Kennedy, it has never lost its edge and still looks refreshingly irreverent in today's world of global capitalism, nuclear proliferation and flag-waving militarism.

At the time when *Dr. Strangelove* was produced, Hollywood had long been involved in the nexus of profit interests that President Eisenhower dubbed 'the military-industrial complex'. During the Cold War, it was unusual to see any film about modern military hardware made without the active participation and endorsement of the armed services – an arrangement that allowed filmmakers to obtain expensive equipment and the military to enhance its public relations. The credit sequences in war pictures invariably thanked some branch of the service and often listed the officers who were supplied as advisors. (The tradition is alive today in spectacular action movies such as Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* [2001].) The US Strategic Air Command had encouraged and received particularly lavish screen treatment of this type. The most awe-inspiring example was Paramount's *Strategic Air Command* (1955), directed by Anthony Mann and starring Air Force Reserve Colonel James Stewart, which took colour, Vista Vision cameras directly inside the huge nuclear bombers and showed stunning aerial photography of mid-air refuelling techniques. That film was followed by Warner's colour and CinemaScope production of *Bombers B-52* (1957), which was virtually a recruitment film for the Air Force. In contrast, the black-and-white *Dr. Strangelove* lists no military advisors and inserts a crawl that precedes its credits, every line of which invites the viewer's knowing scepticism: 'It is the stated position of the US Air Force that their safeguards would prevent the occurrence of such events as are depicted in this film. Furthermore, it should be noted that none of the characters portrayed in this film are meant to represent any real persons living or dead.'

Despite or perhaps because of its cheeky approach, *Dr. Strangelove* became the most popular film in America for 17 straight weeks. It won a New York Film Critics Award for Kubrick, but not before it had prompted a remarkably large and contentious response from critics and intellectuals. Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris gave it mixed reviews, *Sight and Sound* panned it and several of the established newspaper critics were downright offended. Phillip K. Scheuer of the *Los Angeles Times* described it as 'snide' and 'dangerous', and argued that '[its] villains are not funny per se – especially when there are no good guys

### Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb

Directed by: Stanley Kubrick

©/Production Company: Hawk Films

Production Company:

Columbia Pictures Corporation

Produced by: Stanley Kubrick

Associate Producer: Victor Lyndon

Production Manager: Clifton Brandon

Unit Manager: Leon Minoff \*

Assistant Director: Eric Rattray

Continuity: Pamela Carlton

Screenplay by: Stanley Kubrick, Peter George, Terry Southern

Based on the book *Red Alert* by: Peter George

Director of Photography: Gilbert Taylor

Camera Operator: Kelvin Pike

Camera Assistant: Bernard Ford

Travelling Matte: Vic Margutti

Special Effects: Wally Veevers

Editor: Anthony Harvey

Assembly Editor: Geoffrey Fry

Assistant Editor: Ray Lovejoy

Production Designer: Ken Adam

Art Director: Peter Murton

Wardrobe: Bridget Sellers

Make-up: Stewart Freeborn

Hairdresser: Barbara Ritchie

Main Title by: Pablo Ferro

Music: Laurie Johnson

Sound Supervisor: John Cox

Recordist: Richard Bird

Dubbing Mixer: John Aldred

Sound Editor: Leslie Hodgson

Aerial Adviser: Captain John Crewdson

Filmed at: Shepperton Studios

Cast:

Peter Sellers (Group Captain Lionel

Mandrake/President Merkin Muffley/*Dr Strangelove*)

George C. Scott (General 'Buck' Turgidson)

Sterling Hayden (General Jack D. Ripper)

Keenan Wynn (Colonel 'Bat' Guano)

Slim Pickens (Major T.J. 'King' Kong)

Peter Bull (Ambassador de Sadesky)

James Earl Jones (Lt Lothar Zogg, bombardier)

Tracy Reed (Miss Scott)

Jack Creley (Staines)

Frank Berry (Lt H.R. Dietrich, D.S.O.)

Robert O'Neil (Admiral Randolph)

Glen Beck (Lt W. D. Kivel, navigator)

Roy Stephens (Frank)

Shane Rimmer

(Captain G.A. 'Ace' Owens, co-pilot)

Hal Galili (Burpelson base defender)

Paul Tamarin (Lt B. Goldberg, radio operator)

Laurence Herder (Burpelson base defender)

Gordon Tanner (General Faceman)

John McCarthy (Burpelson base defender)

UK/USA 1963©

95 mins

Digital

\* Uncredited

Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, starring Steve Coogan, co-adapted by Armando Iannucci, and co-adapted and directed by Sean Foley, plays at the Noël Coward Theatre from 8 October.

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**Funday Workshop: Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit**

Sun 29 Sep 10:30

**Funday: Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit + intro by Nick Park and Merlin Crossingham**

Sun 29 Sep 12:00

**Nick Park and Merlin Crossingham in Conversation**

Sun 29 Sep 14:15

**TV Preview: The Life and Deaths of Christopher Lee + Q&A with Peter Serafinowicz, director Jon Spira, producer Hank Starrs and Christopher Lee's biographer Jonathan Rigby**

Tue 1 Oct 18:00

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around to offset them' (2 January 1964). Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* admitted that it was 'cleverly written and most skilfully directed and played', but found it 'a bit too contemptuous of our defence establishment for my comfort and taste' (2 January 1964). Two weeks later, after a series of pro and con letters about the film began to appear in the New York papers, Crowther wrote a follow-up review in which he pronounced *Strangelove* 'malefic and sick', 'close to being irresponsible', 'a rather flagrant indulgence of free speech', 'defeatist and destructive of morale' and 'foolish and hysterical'. Not only was it a 'dangerous indulgence' of 'extreme anxieties', but also a misrepresentation of the US defence system 'based on military and political flaws that are so fanciful and unsupported by any evidence that they are beyond belief' (16 February 1964).

Soon afterward, the respected cultural critic Lewis Mumford came to Kubrick's defence in a lengthy letter to *The New York Times*, in which he accused Crowther of having failed to understand *Dr. Strangelove's* satiric method and 'the soundness of its morals'. 'It is not this film that is sick,' he wrote.

'[W]hat is sick is our supposedly moral, democratic country which allowed this policy [of nuclear warfare] to be formulated and implemented without even the pretence of open public debate ... This film is the first break in the catatonic Cold War trance that has so long held our country in its rigid grip.' (1 March 1964)

Of all the film's US admirers, however, theatre critic and director Robert Brustein gave the most persuasive explanation of its power. Writing in *The New York Review of Books*, Brustein contended that *Dr. Strangelove* 'may well be the most courageous movie ever made', in part because it 'pays absolutely no deference at all to the expectations of its audience' and creates 'the kind of total theatre that Antonin Artaud would have admired'. In contrast to the 'weary meanderings of Resnais, Fellini, and Antonioni', who seemed to Brustein by the mid-1960s to be 'inexorably closing in on the spiritual lassitude of certain melancholy French or Italian aristocrats', Kubrick had made a picture that was 'fun' – enjoyable 'for the way it exploits the exciting narrative conventions of the Hollywood war movie ... and even more, for the way it turns these conventions upside down'. What was arrestingly new, Brustein argued, was the film's 'wry, mordant, destructive, and, at the same time, cheerful, unmoralistic tone'. This tone had 'rumbled a little bit under the conventional noises of *The Manchurian Candidate*, but here it exploded to the surface; if the film managed to remain open, it might even 'knock the block off every ideologue in the country'.

The iconoclastic attitude Brustein was describing could be detected elsewhere in America in the 1950s and early 1960s – in Nabokov's *Lolita*, in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, in pulp fiction by Jim Thompson and Charles Willeford, in the early issues of *Mad* comics, in Lenny Bruce's nightclub act and even in certain episodes of Alfred Hitchcock's television show. But the sheer popularity of Kubrick's Juvenalian satire was unexpected. Far from being harmed by negative reviews or picketed by right-wing bullies, the film prospered. Perhaps because of its gleeful, totalising cynicism, it especially appealed to young people (Elvis Presley was said to be one of its biggest fans). Without actually planning it, Kubrick had moved ahead of the cultural curve, tapping into a youth audience that would sustain him over the next decade no matter what the critics said.

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