



Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

# Performance

## Performance

Directed by: Donald Cammell, Nicolas Roeg

©: Warner Bros, Inc.

A Goodtime Enterprises production

Made by: Goodtime Enterprises Limited

Distributed by: Warner Bros.

Produced by: Sanford Lieberson

Associate Producer: David Cammell

Production Manager: Robert Lynn

Unit Manager: Kevin Kavanagh

Production Runner: Christopher O'Dell \*

Assistant Director: Richard Burge

Continuity: Anabelle Davis-Goff

Written by: Donald Cammell

Photographed by: Nicolas Roeg

Camera Operator: Mike Molloy

Film Editors: Antony Gibbs, Brian Smedley-Aston

Art Director: John Clark

Set Dresser: Peter Young

Turner's House Design Consultant:

Christopher Gibbs

Costume Consultant: Deborah Dixon

Wardrobe: Emma Porteous, Billy Jay

Mr James Fox's Suits by:

Hymie of Waterloo, London

Make-up: Paul Rabiger, Linda De Vetta

Hairdresser: Helen Lennox

Colour by: Technicolor

Music by: Jack Nitzsche

Played by: Ry Cooder, Bobby West, Russel

Titelman, The Merry Clayton Singers, Milt Holland,

Amiya Dasgupta, Lowell George, Gene Parsons

Moog Synthesizer: Bernard Krause

Santur: Nasser Rastigar-Nejad

Music Conducted by: Randy Newman

Sound Recordist: Ron Barron

Sound Editor: Alan Pattillo

Buffy Sainte-Marie performed musically through the  
courtesy of: Vanguard Records

Dialogue Consultant and Technical Adviser:

David Litvinoff

Completed at: Twickenham Film Studios

Cast:

James Fox (*Chas Devlin*)

Mick Jagger (*Turner*)

Anita Pallenberg (*Pherber*)

Michele Breton (*Lucy*)

Ann Sidney (*Dana*)

John Bindon (*Moody*)

Stanley Meadows (*Rosebloom*)

Allan Cuthbertson (*the lawyer*)

Antony Morton (*Dennis*)

Johnny Shannon (*Harry Flowers*)

Anthony Valentine (*Joey Maddocks*)

Ken Colley (*Tony Farrell*)

John Sterland (*the chauffeur*)

Laraine Wickens (*Lorraine*)

USA-UK 1970©

105 mins

35mm

\* Uncredited

A BFI National Archive print

Moviedrome transmission date: 7 July 1991

'What is a cult film? A cult film is one which has a passionate following but does not appeal to everybody. Just because a movie is a cult movie does not automatically guarantee quality. Some cult films are very bad. Others are very, very good. Some make an awful lot of money at the box office. Others make no money at all. Some are considered quality films. Others are exploitation.' From 1988 to 2000 *Moviedrome* was presented by Alex Cox and then Mark Cousins. Across that time, more than 200 features were shown, and generations of movie fans and filmmakers would be informed and inspired by the selection, alongside the wit and wisdom of the introductions that preceded each screening. *Moviedrome* was a portal into the world of weird and wonderful cinema. This two-month season features some of the most notable titles screened and wherever possible they are preceded by the original televised introduction.

Nick Freand Jones, season curator and producer of *Moviedrome*

**Alex Cox:** *Performance* was made in Britain in 1968, immediately shelved by the studio that paid for it, then re-edited by seven different editors and released in 1970. It was co-directed by Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg. Cammell also wrote the script; Roeg photographed it. Some say this film is the product of Roeg's genius, others that it's all down to Donald Cammell – as if it was some sort of contest rather than a collaboration. For the record, Donald Cammell has also directed the computer slasher movie *Demon Seed* and the cult slasher *White of the Eye*. Roeg has made too many great films to mention.

It is, or appears to be, the story of a weird battle of wills between a London gangster and the inhabitants of a hippie pad on Powys Square in Notting Hill. There is so much to *Performance* – what it has to say about sex, violence, reality, illusion, counterculture and the culture of money, life, death, Brian Jones – that I have decided to eschew these weighty issues and concentrate instead on drugs and the nature of cool.

*Performance* was made at a time when drugs in our society were viewed neither as an escape or a night off, nor as the demons unscrupulous cops and politicians have made them out to be. Certainly, drugs in excess are bad for you, and that includes coffee and tobacco and alcohol and contraceptive pills. Even so, far fewer people die from drugs than die from guns and bombs. And back in 1968, drugs, specifically mushrooms, mescaline, peyote and chemical analogues like acid, were being used as a shortcut to the Mystical Experience, a sort of short-circuit satori. Anything that makes you doubt the ethics of a materialistic doomed culture isn't all bad. Anything that makes you able to see your demons, as Turner does in *Performance*, is pretty interesting. Turner's got it all figured out: he knows the ultimate drug of all is power, and power grows out of the barrel of a gun.

The other pressing question we must deal with here, although doubtless not resolve, is Who is Cooler? Turner the former rock star, played by Mick Jagger, or Chas the murderous gangster, portrayed by James Fox. When the film was made, in the late sixties, it was obvious. Chas was a vulgar wideboy, who dressed like a straight and poured red paint on his head in a ludicrous effort at disguise. Turner, on the other hand, had long flowing hair, and two girlfriends, and had once been a major pop singer, and was played by Mick Jagger. In 1970, Turner was king, although things did get a little strange when Jagger launched into 'Memo from Turner' (the first rock video?) with his hair slicked back and a drape jacket like a Teddy Boy. By 1980, the opposite was true. Turner seemed like a strange artefact, a rather uncool and dilapidated relic of the sixties... Chas, on the other hand, with appalling taste in suits and his

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### Johnny Guitar

Fri 1 Aug 20:30; Sun 10 Aug 14:45;  
Tue 19 Aug 18:10

### The Harder They Come

Sat 2 Aug 15:00; Fri 8 Aug 20:45; Sat 23 Aug 18:10  
**Yojimbo**

Sat 2 Aug 20:45; Mon 11 Aug 18:15;  
Sun 24 Aug 12:30

### What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?

Sun 3 Aug 14:45; Sat 16 Aug 12:00;  
Thu 21 Aug 20:25

### Mommie Dearest

Sun 3 Aug 18:20; Thu 14 Aug 20:30

### Carnival of Souls

Wed 6 Aug 18:40; Fri 15 Aug 20:50

### The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Thu 7 Aug 19:00; Sun 10 Aug 17:30;  
Sun 24 Aug 17:30

### The Girl on a Motorcycle

Fri 8 Aug 18:30; Sun 17 Aug 15:40

### Badlands

Sat 9 Aug 12:30; Sat 16 Aug 18:10;  
Tue 26 Aug 20:50

### Performance

Sat 9 Aug 18:20; Mon 18 Aug 20:50

### Diva

Sat 9 Aug 20:30; Tue 19 Aug 20:40;  
Fri 29 Aug 18:15

### Escape From New York

Mon 11 Aug 20:45; Sat 23 Aug 20:50;  
Thu 28 Aug 18:20

### To Sleep with Anger

Tue 12 Aug 20:35; Sat 16 Aug 15:10

### Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters

Wed 13 Aug 18:20; Mon 25 Aug 14:50;  
Sat 30 Aug 20:40

### White of the Eye

Wed 20 Aug 20:40; Sun 31 Aug 15:10

### Electra Glide in Blue

Thu 21 Aug 18:15; Fri 22 Aug 20:45

### With thanks to

Sue Deeks, Simon Chilcott, Carl Davies,  
Josephine Haining and Andrew Abbott

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**SIGHT  
AND  
SOUND**

bright red spiky-top, was up to the minute, the first punk movie hero since Gaston Modot.

Ten, twelve years later, ponytails are being worn again in fashionable bistros all across the land. The sixties are now in vogue again, Turner triumphant. Chas laid low. Poor Chas. He doesn't even have a mobile phone.

Alex Cox's original introduction for *Moviedrome*. Also published in *Moviedrome: The Guide 2* (BBC, 1993). With thanks to [moviedromer.tumblr.com](http://moviedromer.tumblr.com)

## A contemporary review

*Performance* is the kind of brilliant, baffling film about which it would be marginally more easy to write a book than a review. At its core is the essentially mystical idea of the interchangeability of all identities, so that instead of a finite series of equations between Turner and Chas Devlin, one finds oneself inside some hermetic hall of mirrors, looking hopelessly for one definitive image that will prove more than a reflection of a reflection.

The idea of a vicious, male role-playing gangster and an androgynous fallen pop idol each recognising the other as his alter ego is already an audacious one, and it is developed rather subtly, with the characters' similarities left unstated: the fact that each finds himself suddenly cast outside the chosen element where once he reigned supreme, 'stuck', as Pherber says of Turner, with no way but death of continuing in his once chosen role; the fact that both are 'performers', agents for gratifying other people's desires, vicarious symbols of virility and power. Turner may, as Pherber states, have been waiting for Chas, but the audacious idea of them as complementary halves of the same being takes on labyrinthine ramifications when we notice that Turner is also Flowers (in Chas' nightmare), is also Lucy (when she climbs into Chas' bed), is also Chas himself (as he steps into the death car); or that, as Pherber tries to demonstrate to Chas when she uses a mirror to show him his face on her body, they are all both male and female.

As the film progresses, the idea unfolds that every identity is an assumed identity and that the trap is inescapable: most people act out their self-important roles unaware of the hidden system of correspondances whereby the lawyer is the criminal is the mystic; and those, like Turner, who do perceive the system are paralysed by their vision into waiting immobile for death to release them. The principal source for the film's ideas (unobtrusively signalled through books and a poster that swims across our field of vision) is Borges, though Cammell also freely acknowledges the influences of Hesse, Norman O. Brown and Artaud. But what is admirable about *Performance* is not the fact that Donald Cammell should have written a script under the influence of such dauntingly heavyweight writers, but that he and his co-director Nicolas Roeg should have succeeded in creating a purely cinematic language for expressing their ideas. For *Performance* is not a mystical essay but a film, relying entirely on what it shows, what we see, to suggest the working of less visible forces. It has a witty script – terse, abrasive and devastatingly accurate for the scenes in the gangster milieu, more flowery and incoherent for the conversations inside Turner's private Kathmandu.

The two worlds through which Chas moves are both convincingly created on the level of realism, yet with no obvious rules or rituals in common; and once Chas enters Turner's hermetic world, the narrative abandons the gangsters' activities until the final showdown, so that – like Chas himself – the audience, having grown familiar with one 'language', is forced to start again and learn to decipher the symbols of an entirely new one. But though visually dazzling, wittily and literately scripted, and brilliantly conceived, the film inevitably derives much of its strength from its performers, nearly all of whom achieve a near-symbiotic relationship with their roles.

Jan Dawson, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1971