



## Projecting the Archive

# Latin Quarter

### Latin Quarter

*Directed by:* Vernon Sewell

*Presented by:* British National Films

*Produced by:* Louis H. Jackson

*Associate Producer:* Derrick de Marney

*Production Manager:* Fred A. Swann

*Assistant Director:* Denis Johnson

*Written by:* Vernon Sewell

*Based on the play 'L'Angoisse' by:*

Pierre Mills, Celia de Vilyars

*Director of Photography:* Günther Krampf

*Camera Operator:* Gerald D. Moss

*Editor:* Lito Carruthers

*Art Director:* R. Holmes Paul

*Scenic Artists:* Olga Lehman, Gilbert Wood

*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Maude Churchill

*Make-up Artist:* Henry Hayward

*Hairdresser:* Marjorie Whittle

*Music Composed by:* Alan Gray

*Musical Director:* Hans May

*Ballet Sequences Arranged and Staged by:*

Espinosa

*Assisted by:* Eddie Kelland Espinosa

*Sound Supervisor:* Harold V. King

*Sound Recordist:* Cecil V. Thornton

*Sound Editor:* Jean Barker

*Made and Produced at:* British National Studios

*Cast:*

Derrick De Marney (*Charles Garrie*)

Joan Greenwood (*Christine 'Tina' Minetti*)

Frederick Valk (*Dr Ivan Krasner*)

Joan Seton (*Lucille Linbec*)

Beresford Egan (*Anton Minetti*)

Lilly Kann (*Maria*)

Martin Miller (*morgue keeper*)

Valentine Dyll (*prefecture of police*)

Anthony Hawtrey (*the specialist*)

Bruce Winston (*Jo-Jo*)

Kempinski (*sergeant of police*)

Espinosa (*ballet master*)

Margaret Clarke (*ballet mistress*)

Rachel Brodbar (*country girl*)

Sybille Binder (*Madame Cordova, the medium*)

Billy Holland (*Julian Dupré, cave man at party*)

Cleo Nordi (*Suzanne*)

British Ballet Organisation (*dancers*)

UK 1946

80 mins

35mm

A BFI National Archive print

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**SIGHT  
AND  
SOUND**

+ intro by Jason Morell, actor and son of Joan Greenwood

When a young dancer has her career cut short by illness, she marries an eminent sculptor whose cruelty drives her into the arms of another man. This early role for Joan Greenwood sees her perfectly cast as the fragile ballerina trapped in an abusive relationship. Vernon Sewell's atmospheric evocation of the *fin de siècle* decadence of bohemian Paris is enhanced by the camerawork of silent horror veteran Günther Krampf. Based on a French play, which the director adapted four times across his career, this macabre tale exploring jealousy and spiritualism serves up a shocking final twist.

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

Vernon Sewell was an often inventive director of British B-movies and sometime collaborator with the great Michael Powell. One of his odd peculiarities was an obsession with an obscure French theatrical thriller, *L'Angoisse* by Pierre Mills and Celia de Vilyars, the basics of which he used no fewer than four times, starting in 1934 with the short *The Medium*. *Latin Quarter* (released in the US as *Frenzy*) came next, and the plot was recycled again for *Ghost Ship* (1952) and *House of Mystery* (1961) with *Latin Quarter* the only one of the quartet to retain the French setting, Paris in the Latin Quarter ('the Mecca of artists of all nationalities') in 1893 to be precise.

According to the BFI's Screenonline, Sewell 'revealed ingenuity in the use of foreground models to achieve special effects' and there's a superb example of this in *Latin Quarter's* opening shot. We pan across an intricately detailed recreation of the Paris rooftops, the camera swooping down into the bustling streets and into an artist's billet where an organ appears to be playing itself. It's a breathtaking, virtuoso piece of camerawork of the sort one might not expect to find in a British film (or any other film come to that) of the period. What follows is a brooding tale of obsession, madness, betrayal, and guilt with hints of the supernatural.

The billet formerly belonged to sculptor Anton Minetti (Beresford Egan) but has recently been taken over by his rival Charles Garrie (Derrick De Marney) who mysteriously insists that nothing about the lodgings be changed. Landlady Maria (Lilly Kann) is so terrified by the ghostly sounds of the organ playing at all hours that she can barely bring herself to enter the rooms and Garrie is soon experiencing odd events, like lamps that turn themselves on and off every night at eleven. Minetti goes insane and dies not long after his wife Christine (Joan Greenwood) disappears and the police, led by the Préfet de Police (Valentine Dyll) are baffled enough to call upon the services of 'France's most famous criminologist' Dr Ivan Krasner (Frederick Valk) for help. In flashbacks we learn that Christina was a promising ballet dancer until diagnosed with a heart condition and eventually married Minetti who had hired her as a model. But at her wedding she met Garrie and the two fell instantly in love, beginning an illicit affair. She vanished on the night that they'd planned to run away together and Krasner proposes that they stage a séance with famous spirit medium Mme. Cordova (Sybille Binder) to try to locate her. And it turns out that Christine is far closer to hand than anyone expected...

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+ intro by Grace Barber-Plentie, BFI Festivals

Film Programmer

Fri 12 Jun 18:15

### Experimenta: Experimental Cinema Structures, Systems and Strategies

+ writer and artist Simon

Payne in conversation with BFI National Archive

curator William Fowler

Thu 18 Jun 18:10

### Seniors' Free Matinee: A Dry White Season

+ intro

Mon 22 Jun 14:00

### Relaxed Screening: How to Marry a Millionaire

+ intro and discussion

Mon 29 Jun 18:30

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Having set out his stall with that opening shot, Sewell proceeds to make a beautifully designed and shot film that drips in atmosphere. The sets by R. Holmes Paul are packed with period detail, but Sewell's most valuable ally is the extraordinary cinematographer Günther Krampf, an Austrian émigré who had worked in Germany on the likes of *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), *Orlacs Hände* (1924), *Der Student von Prag* (1926), *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929), *Alraune* (1929) and many others. He'd arrived in Britain in 1931 where he stamped his unique mark on *The Ghoul* (1933), *The Tunnel* (1935) and *The Night Has Eyes* (1942) before joining Sewell at Elstree where he leant *Latin Quarter* an almost noir-ish feel. His lighting during the climactic séance is particularly eerie.

It's not hard, perhaps, to work out the central mystery but Sewell's screenplay is commendably streamlined, the mystery unfolding largely in flashbacks that keeps the riddle of Christine's fate bubbling along quite nicely until the final act. None of this would have worked without a first-rate cast and Sewell gets terrific performances from de Marney, Greenwood and particularly Egan who becomes increasingly unhinged as the film goes along.

*Latin Quarter* was rather overshadowed by its near contemporary, Ealing's classic anthology film *Dead of Night*, which opened a week before Sewell's film. The quality of some of Sewell's later genre work – *The Blood Beast Terror* (1968), *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968), *Burke & Hare* (1971) – could give one cause to dismiss him as something of a hack but his earlier work suggests a far more talented director than that. *Latin Quarter* is a particularly impressive film, deserving of more attention than it often gets. There are moments where one might wonder quite why we need to be seeing all this – the ballet school scene in particular adds little to the story and could have been considerably pruned – but overall, Sewell hits just the right note of mystery and the macabre, the film's horror moments coming not only in the creepy séance scene but in a startling moment when a tall masked figure dressed as a medieval executioner stares silently at Garrie and Christina at a lavish Right Bank masquerade ball.

Kevin Lyons, [eofftvreview.wordpress.com](http://eofftvreview.wordpress.com), 9 November 2023