



Ken Russell's *The Devils*

Directed by: Ken Russell
©/Production Company: Warner Bros.
Production Company: Russo Productions
Produced by: Robert H. Solo, Ken Russell
Associate Producer: Roy Baird
Production Controller: Harry Benn
Production Manager: Neville C. Thompson
Unit Manager: Graham Ford
Assistant Director: Ted Morley
Continuity: Ann Skinner
Screenplay by: Ken Russell
Based on the play 'The Devils' by: John Whiting
Based on the book by: Aldous Huxley
Director of Photography: David Watkin
Assistant Cameraman: Peter Ewens
Camera Operator: Ronnie Taylor
Electrical Supervisor: John Swan
Special Effects: John Richardson
Editor: Michael Bradsell
Assistant Editor: Stuart Baird
Art Director: Robert Cartwright
Assistant Art Director: Alan Tomkins
Sets Designed by: Derek Jarman
Set Dresser: Ian Whittaker
Design Consultant: Christopher Hobbs *
Property Master: George Ball
Construction Manager: Terry Askey
Costumes Designed by: Shirley Russell
Wardrobe Supervisor: Tiny Nicholls
Chief Make-up: Charles Parker
Chief Hairdresser: Ramon Gow
Music Composed and Conducted by: Peter Maxwell Davies
Performed by: The Fires of London
Period Music Arranged and Directed by: David Munrow
Performed by: The Early Music Consort of London
Choreographer: Terry Gilbert
Sound Recordist: Brian Simmons
Dubbing Editor: Terry Rawlings
Cast:
Vanessa Redgrave (*Sister Jeanne*)
Oliver Reed (*Father Urbain Grandier*)
Dudley Sutton (*Baron de Laubardemont*)
Max Adrian (*Ibert*)
Gemma Jones (*Madeleine*)
Murray Melvin (*Father Mignon*)
Michael Gothard (*Father Barre*)
Georgina Hale (*Phillipe*)
Brian Murphy (*Adam*)
Christopher Logue (*Cardinal Richelieu*)
Graham Armitage (*Louis XIII*)
John Woodvine (*Trincant*)
Andrew Faulds (*Rangier*)
Kenneth Colley (*Legrand*)
Judith Paris (*Sister Judith*)
Catherine Willmer (*Sister Catherine*)
Iza Teller (*Sister Iza*)
Imogen Claire, Doremy Vernon, Selena Gilbert (*nuns*) *
USA-UK 1971©
114 mins
35mm (preview screenings) / Digital 4K (restoration)

A BFI re-release

* Uncredited

Re-releases

Ken Russell's *The Devils*

Inspired by the true story of 17th-century priest Urbain Grandier, accused of bewitching a convent of nuns, *The Devils* lays bare the collusion of church and state through a searing vision of religious persecution, collective hysteria and institutional corruption. Oliver Reed gives one of his greatest performances as Grandier, opposite an extraordinary Vanessa Redgrave as Sister Jeanne, whose repressed desire unleashes a religious and sexual mania. Derek Jarman's visionary production design and Shirley Russell's striking costumes help create a feverish world at once historical and startlingly modern. Censored from its original release, Russell's film became one of cinema's most legendarily compromised works. This long-anticipated restoration reaffirms *The Devils* as an overwhelming, uncompromising and singular achievement of British cinema.

James Bell, BFI National Archive Senior Curator

Ken Russell on 'The Devils'

At the time that I made *The Devils*, I was a devout Catholic, and secure in my faith. I knew I wasn't making a pornographic film. Far from it. In fact, the movie had the blessing of the Jesuits. Even to this day it is still taught at Loyola University in Chicago as a good Catholic movie. For myself, although I am not a political creature, I always viewed *The Devils* as my one political film. To me, it was about brainwashing, about the state taking over. It is based entirely upon John Whiting's play *The Devils*, and upon the writings of Aldous Huxley. Huxley was by no means a sensationalist – he was a historian of some note.

According to Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, in 17th-century France there was a crisis caused by the desire of Cardinal Richelieu, the king and their cohorts to pull down the walls of the city of Loudun. This would render Loudun defenceless, so it wouldn't be a threat to the crown or the church. The same had already happened to other cities, with the result that they subsequently had to concede to every indignity and injustice imposed upon them. The people of the town felt that as long as the walls of Loudun were standing, then they could defend themselves.

When I first read this story I was knocked out by it – it was just so shocking – and I wanted others to be knocked out by it too. I just felt I had to make it. I had done three films for United Artists, *Billion Dollar Brain* [1967], *Women in Love* and *The Music Lovers*, and they just automatically said: 'Well, what do you want to do next?' I said: '*The Devils*,' and they said: 'Fine.' Then somebody at UA actually read the script. The next thing, they refused to touch it. So Warner Bros picked it up.

I didn't have the censors in mind when I shot the film, but I did have a great deal of respect for John Trevelyan. He was the chief censor of the BBFC at that time, and it was he who had been responsible for getting *Women in Love* through the censors, complete with the nude male wrestling scene. I know he had to fight hard to convince the other members of the kangaroo court that this wrestling scene was Lawrence – it wasn't just me making it up. It was an integral part of the story, and without it there was no meaning.

I don't recall ever showing Trevelyan a script of *The Devils*. As I remember, his first contact with the movie came when I actually showed him the cut that I wanted to call my own. Before that I really hadn't discussed the picture with

Re-releases

Ken Russell's *The Devils*

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Pan's *Labyrinth* El Laberinto del Fauno

From Fri 6 Nov

Marie Antoinette

From Fri 13 Nov

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him at all. In the main, Trevelyan's objections to my original cut were that the scenes of torture, such as the skewering of Grandier's tongue with needles, or the breaking of his knees, simply went on too long. To him, these scenes needed only a few frames to tell the audience what was happening. After that, the sounds and their imaginations would fill in the rest. With the exception of one sequence, the Rape of Christ, which was removed in its entirety, all Trevelyan did was to tone down or reduce the scenes as I had cut them.

When the film was released in Britain, there were people who felt it was 'disgusting'. My response was that I knew this was a disgusting event in the first place. I just filmed it. I stylised it, obviously, because I don't believe in filming ancient cities as a load of mossy old rocks. To the people living in Loudun at that time, it was not ancient, it was a modern city. I know that the stylisation did throw some people, although many of the really weird things that they objected to, like the green lipstick, were completely factually accurate. In fact, we had to put a disclaimer at the beginning of the movie, one of those terrible, rolling, old-fashioned *Treasure Island* titles which said: 'The events you are about to see actually happened.'

One thing I remember very clearly was hitting [the *Evening Standards* long-time critic] Alexander Walker with his own review of *The Devils* because there were two instances to which he referred which were simply not in the film. One was that we see Oliver Reed's penis being crushed. Well, that may be wishful thinking, but it simply is *not* in the film. We were on a TV show [the BBC's *Tonight*] together, and I confronted him about this inaccuracy, and he simply wouldn't answer. In the end I got so exasperated that I just rolled up the paper and went *bamm* [hitting Walker on the head with it] and then just walked off. We still smile at each other, occasionally, across crowded rooms.

When the film went to Venice, some high-ranking church official threatened to stop it being shown because he thought it was blasphemous. As a result, the people of Venice burnt him in effigy from a lamp post! Ha! And then there was the [conservative Christian campaign group] Nationwide Festival of Light picketing the film in Britain even though they had never seen it. I remember talking to these people outside a cinema and asking them why they hadn't seen it. They were the usual morons, a slightly strange-looking lot, and of course it transpired that they were all just acting on instructions from above.

Ken Russell interviewed by Mark Kermode, originally published in the 'Forbidden Cinema' supplement to *Sight and Sound* June 1995