

Midnight movies recall golden age of horror

This year's KVIFF late-night screenings showcase best work of British fear merchants

Gillian Purves

The highly popular Midnight Screenings section this year dips into the archives and comes back up with seven chillers from a golden era of British horror. Vic Pratt, fiction curator from the British Film Institute National Archive has brought a selection of classics and rare gems to the festival. "I wanted to do a retrospective that touched on some of the key British horror films from the 1930s to the 1960s," says Pratt. "So what I've tried to do is pull out things that people will recognize, ones like *Dracula* and *Peeping Tom*, and some more obscure ones."

The oldest two films in the selection, *Dark Eyes of London* and *The Man Who Changed His Mind*, are very rare 35-mm prints, possibly the only prints in circulation, so this is a unique opportunity to see them. *The Man Who Changed His Mind* is our first stop on this trip through British cinema history. "Everyone should go and see this," says Pratt. "Boris Karloff in a much underrated British horror that he made between making films in America. It's about a scientist who learns how to transfer brains from the body of one person to another – a classic idea. It's one of the very best of that kind of film."

The Dark Eyes of London features the brilliant Bela Lugosi as a murderously evil insurance broker who knocks people off for his own gain. The setting is eerily foggy London by gaslight. Director Walter Summers' creepy feature was the first British film to be certified as "H" for horrific, the censors having deemed it unsuitable viewing for under-16s.

Dead of Night, which was made by Ealing Studios, was released just after the Second World War. It offers audiences the chance to enjoy the work of four different directors in one tightly constructed "port-



Michael Redgrave in the Ealing horror *Dead of Night*.

manteau of horror." A man arrives at a house in the country, which he has never been to before, only to discover that it is the setting of a recurring nightmare that he has been experiencing and that all of the people in the house have featured in this disturbing dream. Each person then relates an uncanny experience of their own where logic has failed them. One of the most famous sequences showcases Michael Redgrave as a disturbed ventriloquist who believes his dummy has a mind of its own.

A lull followed until Hammer Film Productions kick-started British horror again. "*Dracula* was one of two key films, along with *The Curse of Frankenstein*, which started a horror boom that ran into the 1960s," says Pratt. KVIFF audiences can look forward to seeing a very special version of director Terence Fisher's *Dracula* from 1958 that has just been restored by the BFI. "It's a high-quality restoration which has restored the Technicolor to its original luster, reinstated the original British title sequence,

which was missing for many years, and four missing seconds that the censors cut out from its original release have been put back in," says Pratt. "It's a key four seconds where a vampire gets a stake hammered into its chest. You hear this terrible scream and there's blood. It's a great moment. But it was too strong for the censor in 1958."

Peeping Tom caused such a stir when it was released in 1960 that it effectively destroyed the career of respected director Michael Powell. The spellbinding Carl Boehm plays a voyeuristic loner who has been left deeply disturbed after being used as a guinea-pig in his father's scientific experiments, which involved filming children's reactions to fear. It questions the nature of filmmaking itself and hints at the sickness and voyeurism that inspire some people to make movies.

The Innocents (based on the Henry James novella *The Turn of the Screw*) "is a very cerebral film," says Pratt, "about a governess who becomes obsessed with the idea that the children she's looking after are somehow perverse, and possessed by spirits. It's a very creepy film, but not entirely characteristic of that period because it's not very bloody. It's about repression, about pent up sexuality. There's no blood and gore. It's about the mind. So that's a nice counterpoint to *Dracula* I think."

Witchfinder General was directed by Michael Reeves, who was somewhat of a "boy genius" of British cinema in the late 1960s and strongly influenced by the work of director Don Siegel. "It features Richard Price as a witchfinder traveling around 'ye olde England' hunting out witches," says Pratt. "It's very bloody and very much influenced by people like Don Siegel. It's brutal and in your face, that realist strand of filmmaking that Don Siegel liked to do."

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

Albert Milgrom
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA



■ So, what brings you to KVIFF?

Well, I'm representing the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival and looking for some movies I haven't caught up with yet. Also I'm running two arthouse cinemas and have been since 1962. The Czech New Wave films from the sixties actually gave me my first impetus to do that.

■ How long have you been coming to the festival?

Since 1981. Karlovy Vary has always played an important role in my own cultural background, partly because it was always one of the few viewing posts for Central European film.

■ What sort of profile does Czech cinema have in Minnesota today?

Well last year at the festival we showed a number of Czech films, including the US premiere of *Citizen Havel*. Both that and Jan Svěrák's *Empties* were among the top films in our audience poll. I was very surprised at how well *Empties* travelled.

ON THE TOWN

Pub Watch

Barracuda Caribbean Cocktail Bar

Jalitská 7
☎ 774 708 000
Open daily from 7pm to 4am

This is a place where people often stay a lot longer than they should. And little wonder too. With special samba-inspired DJs lined up for the fest, this is a good port of call for those who feel like partying Latino-style after the midnight movie. Most cocktails cost around 85 CZK. Mojitos are a firm favorite with the locals, but this joint also does its own special Barracuda Colada, which is a marvelous concoction of Spanish liqueur, pineapple juice and cream served in a coconut shell.

Thermal Restaurant

I. P. Pavlova 11
Breakfast 7.30am to 10am,
lunch: 12pm to 2pm, dinner:
6pm to 8pm.

With retro commie decor and elevator muzak that will make your ears bleed, this place in the basement of the Thermal hotel doesn't look too enticing at first glance. Nonetheless, the set lunch and dinner menu is really good value for festivalgoers who simply want to refuel quickly between screenings. For just 135 CZK you get a choice of soup starters, a self-service salad bar and a selection of five courses. Most of these are perfectly edible, but we would advise you to

Food and Drink

pass on the french fries, which tend to taste like they were made in the morning and then left under a hot lamp for the rest of the day.

Hotel Promenáda

Tržiště 31
☎ 353 225 648
Open daily from 12pm to 11pm

The Promenáda is at the other end of the culinary spectrum to that occupied by the Thermal. A firm favorite every year with KVIFF luminaries, this place is just one of two eateries outside of Prague to have been included in the latest list of best Czech restaurants compiled by the *Grand Restaurant Guide*, which

is kind of like a local *Zagat*. Specialties include *fois gras* roasted with Calvados and venison medallions with cranberries. With most main courses costing around 400-500 CZK, you'll definitely have to fork out more than you would in a lot of other local eateries, but it's definitely worth it if you feel like treating yourself to a real gourmet experience.

Re Carlo Pizzeria-ristorante

Moskevská 5
☎ 733 217 388
Food served from 10am to 2am.
Bar open around the clock.

Let's be honest: KVIFF is more

of a Mecca for film fanatics than for foodies, and festivals are rarely known for promoting healthy dining habits. Thus, locating a good pizzeria within easy walking distance of the cinema is no small feat. Pies at Re Carlo are light-crusted, imaginative affairs, decked out with toppings that range from eggplant to anchovies, all reasonably priced at 95-155 CZK. Pastas are equally inspired, with some of the more authentic Italian interpretations available in town (79-135 CZK). With outdoor tables looking onto the bustling Moskevská Street, Re Carlo attracts a stylish clientele – usually a good sign of classy cuisine and atmosphere.

Side Events

With the fest well and truly underway, there are now plenty of accompanying events to keep you entertained. The ZigZag Bar on Třída Dr. Davida Bechera will have a selection of Czech and international DJs on the decks from 2pm. If you fancy a bona fide Czech musical experience, we would strongly recommend the Čechomor concert, which starts at 7pm on Divadelní náměstí. This traditional Moravian folk band is pretty sensational and should not be missed. If you don't want to take our word for it, you can sample some of their stuff at www.cechomor.cz/ukazky.php before heading off to enjoy their stunning live show.

DAILIES



Photo: Lukáš Táborský

Robert De Niro and KVIFF president Jiří Bartoška.



Photo: Laura McGinnis

KVIFFers make a rare daylight foray for more tickets.



Photo: Laura McGinnis

KVIFF bag ladies hit the town.