



The Main Feature

Season 42 – Issue 2 – Screening 22 September 2022

Day for Night (La nuit américaine)

France 1973

120 mins. Certificate 12

Director	François Truffaut
Screenplay	François Truffaut Suzanne Schiffman Jean-Louis Richard
Cinematography	Pierre-William Glenn
Music	Georges Delerue

Cast

Jacqueline Bisset	Julie Baker
Jean-Pierre Aumont	Alexandre
Valentina Cortese	Séverine
Jean-Pierre Léaud	Alphonse
François Truffaut	Ferrand, the director



When the committee said Pauline and I could select two films for this season it sounded a great idea and I thought I would like to revisit a film that the club had shown in its 42 years. However, when I started to look back I worked out that we had seen about 778 films during this time (calculating that the average evening is 3 hours, that's 2,334 hours or 97 days sitting on hard chairs in the dark!) As some of you may be aware we have been members from the start of the club on 2nd October 1980 in The Woking Centre Halls Committee Rooms, with *Enter the Dragon* being the first film. (The original venue was going to be Winston Churchill School until the headmaster found out one of the films in the season was *Last Tango in Paris* and he wasn't going to have that kind of film shown in his school!)

Tonight's film was originally shown on 29th October 1981 in the club's second season. At the time I was only vaguely aware who François Truffaut was, (he had appeared in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) and thought of subtitled films as being in black and white and a bit boring, so this film was a bit of a surprise to me as it is entertaining, funny and in colour. Back in the early 1980's it was very rare to see subtitled films on any of the three mainstream television channels and those that were shown tended to be older 'classic' films. This is what is enjoyable about the club – as well as watching new releases, classics etc, it gives

the opportunity of viewing films that you have no knowledge of that can be a revelation and alter the way you think and feel. (Yes, I know you can also see a film that you really wouldn't watch again even if they paid you).

Made in 1973 *Day for Night* is about the production of a film *Je Vous Présente Paméla* (*Meet Pamela*), a comedy/drama/romance starring aging screen icon Alexandre (Jean-Pierre Aumont), former diva Séverine (Valentina Cortese), young heartthrob Alphonse (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and a British actress, Julie Baker (Jacqueline Bisset), who is recovering from both a nervous breakdown and the controversy over her marriage to her much older doctor.



Truffaut also appears in the film as the director and narrator. "Shooting a movie is like a stagecoach trip," he says. "At first you hope for a nice ride. Then you just hope to reach your destination." During the course of the movie romances end and begin, marriages are threatened and repaired, people lock themselves in their rooms, a cat refuses act, and we learn about some of the trade secrets of moviemaking, such as how they make it snow in the summertime, how a third-floor balcony can have no building beneath it, and how scenes are shot "day for night" (a filter is used to give the effect of night while shooting in daylight). The original

French title *La Nuit Américaine* (American Night), is the French name for this process.

The unknown author of the film notes to accompany the Club's 1981 showing quoted, "Truffaut goes so far as to virtually depict himself in what must be the most honest and amusing account of the day by day trials and tribulations of film making. Apart from the humour, Truffaut instils *Day for Night* with warmth and great feeling. As the director he plays in the film, he also shows much human understanding in dealing with all the problems that arise – and there are quite a few!"

I think this is a perfect film for a cinema club as it shows us some of the tricks of the filmmaker's trade, but far from spoiling the illusion, it actually enhances our enjoyment. For once, we the audience, get to share in the moviemaking experience. "People like us are only happy in our work," Truffaut's character, Ferrand, comments at one point, a statement which certainly applies to himself. In a recurring dream sequence Ferrand remembers himself as a little boy stealing stills of *Citizen Kane* from in front of a cinema, but you don't have to be a film buff to be caught up in the humour and charm of the film. Although the tone is light, at the end one has a sense of having seen something profound.

Day for Night won the 1973 Oscar for best foreign film, and won the 1973 BAFTA awards for Best Film and Best Director for François Truffaut and Best Actress in a supporting role for Valentina Cortese.

Stephen Lock



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Jean-Luc Godard: a genius who tore up rule book without troubling to read it

Peter Bradshaw of The Guardian celebrates the New Wave director who has died aged 91

The last great 20th-century modernist is dead. At the last, Jean-Luc Godard had become like a charismatic but remote cult leader; it was as if Che Guevara had evaded assassination and grown old hiding out in the Bolivian jungle: less visible, less important, but still capable of masterminding from afar those bank-heists and spectacular acts of armed resistance which reminded people of his revolutionary vocation. Godard was at first hero-worshipped and adored and then shrugged at and yawned at: as unthinkingly mocked and jeered at as he was once unthinkingly swooned over. He was influential in the sense that the French New Wave shook up Hollywood and all film-makers; his own rarefied experimental procedures have nowadays migrated to video art.

Godard exploded on to world cinema with *À Bout de Souffle*, or *Breathless*, in 1960, from a treatment by François Truffaut, the story of a young American girl in Paris, played by Hollywood star Jean Seberg, and her doomed affair with a sexy tough guy on the run, played by Jean-Paul Belmondo. Godard tore up the rule book without troubling to read it: his wild digressions, offbeat dialogue scenes, vérité location work, non-narrative excursions and “jump-cuts” – the inspired, semi-deliberate wrong editing created by an intuitive, untutored auteur.

The 1960s were his glorious period, when images and slogans could change the world; he was making films with breathtaking fluency and speed. Godard was garrulous, effortlessly fashionable, the epitome of continental cool. That picture of him holding up a roll of film and inspecting it is pretty well iconic – but grumpy unconvinced types wondered if he mightn’t be able to look at it better if he took off the dark glasses. Sexual morality and the agonising impossibility of intimacy and love were his themes, combined with cerebral discussions of politics. *Bande à Part* (1964) and *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967) have a wonderful energy and style: they jump for joy and defy gravity on the way down.

But my favourite Godard movie of that period, actually favourite Godard movie ever, is his *Une Femme Mariée* (1964), a mature yet approachable masterpiece, comparable to Agnès Varda’s *Cléo From 5 to 7*. Macha Méril is the stunningly beautiful Charlotte, a young married woman conducting an affair with a handsome actor. It is intensely erotic, with a pure freewheeling brilliance; it’s a digressive cine-essay and a movie-flaneur’s wander through Paris – where else? It has a Warholian interest in magazine interviews and the iconography of advertising, a fetishistic rapture for underwear. Godard also uses subtitles for what Charlotte is thinking as she eavesdrops on two women talking about sex: prefiguring Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall*. It is one of the sexiest, strangest films ever made and I prefer it to the more self-importantly cinephile film *Le Mépris*, or *Contempt* (1963) with Brigitte Bardot.

Often a Godard film like *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) would be bafflingly wild, almost incoherent, absorbing into itself some of the disputatious disorder of the shoot itself: action would be frenetic, almost farcical – a satiric comment on the childishness of Hollywood melodrama – and yet there was always time for long intellectual debates. Godard would always return to militarism and imperialism, to French guilt and shame about the war, to the horrible shadow of the death camps, and of course Vietnam, that key 60s issue which sent Godard into a conceptual thicket of radical Maoism and leftism from which he never entirely emerged.

Uniquely among film-makers, he was the director who was also theorist, critic, *maître à penser*, experimentalist: a radical who was the first film-maker in the medium’s short history seriously to think about what cinema was and what it meant. But bafflingly, Godard would not celebrate cinema as an art form in its thrilling infancy but behave as if it was all over. The final credits for *Weekend* (1967) read: “End of story – End of cinema.” He was a little like the literary critic George Steiner in this regard, who controversially declared that tragedy was dead, or the German language was dead. Godard provocatively and exasperatingly liked to declare that cinema was dead – a haughty *après moi, le déluge* affectation, which never stopped his own rampant productivity. Godard became the mysterious, exasperating magus who wanted to make, not films, but “cinema”, somehow to liberate the sound and image from the four boundary-walls of the screen. He was crucially inspired by the great critic André Bazin of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, beginning his own career as a critic in that remarkable journal, a founder of the New Wave movement, when to criticise was to intervene decisively in cinema, and to make films was to intervene in life itself. Cinema was a seizing of reality.

Comparisons are irresistible. Godard was cinema’s sternly judging Robespierre, or he was a John Lennon – Paul McCartney being François Truffaut, that more emollient and commercially-minded New Wave comrade with whom Godard was to fall out. Or maybe Godard was the medium’s Socrates, believing that an unexamined cinema was not worth having.

Godard’s savant gift for divining the zeitgeist never quite deserted him. His movie *Goodbye to Language*, gnominically discursive and enigmatic as ever but playfully enlivened with 3D, was thought of by American critics to be the best film of 2014. His film *Socialisme* (2010) was another collage of images and ideas, showing people on holiday: stateless, alienated. Much of the film took place on a cruise ship. What was Godard saying about socialism, we wondered? Then history itself took a hand. The cruise ship on which Godard was filming was in fact the notorious Costa Concordia, which capsized in a spectacular disaster in 2012; many commentators argued that the tall design, to accommodate more and more paying customers, makes pleasure craft of this sort top-heavy. For me, in these later movies, Godard’s camera lens is almost like an impossibly powerful telescope. It is as if he is looking at human beings from a long way away, maybe from another planet.

Many simply gave up on Godard, or were embarrassed at their extravagant former hero worship of a 60s figure, who declined to sell out, or grow up, or make commercial movies, or drift to the right, but carried on in the same old severe way: although his sexual politics started to look troglodytic and his loathing of Israel appeared sometimes to cross the line into antisemitism. For many, his mature masterpiece after *Breathless* was the epic eight-part video documentary project *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1988-1998) – a staggeringly ambitious textual collage of quotation, a quilt of clips with which Godard creates a personal landscape of cinema, a labour

of passionate cinephile love. Before this, I myself had never found much that was moving, exactly, in Godard – though plenty that was formally brilliant and intriguing and exciting. Yet there is something mysterious and moving in the *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*. There is, and was, no one like Godard, and his loss makes this a sombre day. It's a day to watch *Une Femme Mariée* to be reminded of how exciting and sexy his films were.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2022/sep/13/jean-luc-godard-dead-breathless-bardot-french-new-wave>

Comments and reactions to: **The Duke**

No of reaction slips received = 20

Average score = 7.75

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	2	3	~	9	5	1

Amazing true story with a great cast

Can't beat a good British film! Great acting

Curiously uninvolved. Main character irritating. Helen Mirren the usual good value, but didn't rescue film

This was the second time I have watched The Duke which I enjoyed both times. A very light but enjoyable film

Beautifully acted, so funny yet also a very moving depiction of the era and place; northern England

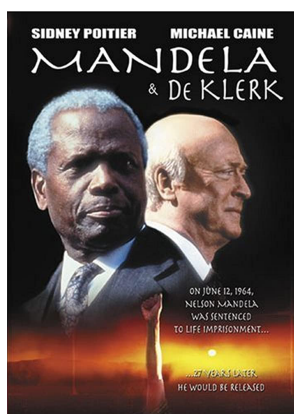
Much improved (for the ancient) by the introduction of sub-titles

A portrait of a highly complex character: it might have been better as a drama rather than a comedy

A brilliant start to the new season and great to be able to have a laugh on a very sad day. The stars were excellent and the fact that it is based on fact made it even more enjoyable

Position	Film	Average score
1	The Duke	7.75

Forthcoming attraction: 13 October 2022 – **Mandela and de Klerk**



On June 12, 1964, Nelson Mandela, along with numerous political detainees, was sentenced to life imprisonment in what remains the most sensational treason trial in the history of South Africa. The incarceration of Mandela and other political prisoners on Robben Island would become a symbol of the struggle to end apartheid and win freedom for the black majority in South Africa. On February 2, 1990, President F.W. de Klerk stood before Parliament and announced the legalization of the African National Congress and a host of other banned political organizations. At the same time, he announced that Nelson Mandela, having served twenty-seven years in prison, would be released within seven days. Yet the world, and indeed most South Africans, knew little about how this momentous occasion came to pass. Until now. This movie was filmed in South Africa. Most of the locations are those where the actual events took place, and the dramatized sequences are

augmented with newsreel footage to ensure the most accurate portrayal possible of recent historical events. Radio Times