

WNCC

WOKING'S NEW CINEMA CLUB
The Main Feature

Season 42 – Issue 14 – Screening 13 April 2023

Midnight Cowboy

US 1969
113 mins. Certificate 18

Directed by	John Schlesinger
Screenplay by	Waldo Salt and James Leo Herlihy (based on his novel)
Cinematography	Adam Holender
Music	John Barry

Cast

Ratso	Dustin Hoffman
Joe Buck	Jon Voight
Cass	Sylvia Miles
Mr O'Daniel	John McGiver
Shirley	Brenda Vaccaro
Towny	Barnard Hughes



The late 1960s were turbulent times for the United States. Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Martin Luther King was assassinated on 4 April 1968 inflaming racial tensions and leading to riots in more than 100 cities. Two months later, Bobby Kennedy, the brother of President John F Kennedy, was himself assassinated as he was campaigning for the Democratic nomination for President. The United States had been involved in the Vietnam war for over ten years, leading to draft card protests against unfair conscription in 1967. The Tet Offensive and My Lai massacre took place in 1968 with the anti-war protests around the Democratic National Convention in August of that year. Richard Nixon succeeded Lyndon B Johnson in the White House in January 1969.

In the cinema were the stirrings of what later became known as the New Hollywood era, distinguished by the emphasis on directors rather than studios. Early examples are *Bonny and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1968), *Easy Rider* (1969) and tonight's film *Midnight Cowboy* (1969).

Midnight Cowboy - based on the 1965 book of the same name written by James Leo Herlihy - was directed by John Schlesinger, and starred Dustin Hoffman and Jon Voight. Set in a seamy New York City (there were teachers' strikes in 1968 as well as sanitation workers), it shows the unlikely friendship between two hustlers: naïve sex worker Joe Buck (Voight), and ailing con man Enrico "Rico" Rizzo (Hoffman), known as "Ratso".

Its two stars were at the beginning of their careers in cinema. Dustin Hoffman's breakthrough role was in *The Graduate* (1967) where he played the character of Benjamin Braddock, a recent college graduate who has an affair with Mrs Robinson, the wife of his father's law partner. And *Midnight Cowboy* was also one of Jon Voight's first films. In the early 1970s he appeared in Mike Nichols' *Catch 22*, and then starred in *Deliverance* (1972) the story of a canoe trip in a feral, backwoods America.

John Schlesinger was much more experienced. One of his notable early works (and one of my favourite documentaries, alongside *Night Mail*) was *Terminus* (1961), an unlikely elegy to Waterloo Station. His first two fiction films, *A Kind of Loving* (1962) and *Billy Liar* (1963) were gritty dramas set in the North of England whilst his third feature film, *Darling* (1965), was one of the first films about 'swinging London'. Schlesinger's next film was the period drama *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), accentuated by beautiful English country locations and a marked contrast to *Midnight Cowboy* with its characters on the fringe in the bad side of New York City. Later in the 1970s Schlesinger made an array of films that were mainly about loners, losers and people outside the mainstream world, such as *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971 – I remember watching a scene being filmed one wet Sunday night outside South Kensington underground station), *The Day of the Locust* (1975), *Marathon Man* (1976) and *Yanks* (1979).



Critical response to the film was largely positive. The New York Times thought it 'tough and good in important ways, although its style is oddly romantic and at variance with the laconic material. ... As long as the focus is on this world of cafeterias and abandoned tenements, of desperate conjunctions in movie balconies and doorways, of catchup and beans and canned heat, *Midnight Cowboy* is so rough and vivid that it's almost unbearable. ... it often seems to be exploiting its material for sensational or comic effect, but it is

ultimately a moving experience that captures the quality of a time and a place.'

This was reflected in the awards, where *Midnight Cowboy* won the Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Screenplay. Indeed, it was the first X-rated film to win Best Picture. At the BAFTAs it won Best Film, Best Direction, Best Screenplay, Best Editing together with Best Actor for Hoffman and Best Newcomer for Voight.

Has the film lasted well? A great deal has changed in society since 1969, and the film's concerns may no longer be relevant. But Peter Bradshaw of the Guardian gave it five stars when he reviewed it on its fiftieth anniversary, and concluded: 'In the end, *Midnight Cowboy* is a film about homelessness. Ratso and Joe are always on the brink of living on the streets; effectively they are living on the streets, given that their derelict building is like a cave. Schlesinger's camera discovers everywhere something rarely glimpsed in Hollywood movies – poverty. And their one chance at escaping this poverty, an invitation to a Warholesque party of smug hipsters, has come because, without realising it, they look grotesque: the cowboy and the tramp. [...] I am a little agnostic about Hoffman's mannered performance – especially as Voight's is so miraculously easy and light – and there are some uneasy nods to the zeitgeist: a rather unconvincing generic "demo" with placards reading "Liberate Freedom". But everything is delivered with such potency and force and the Harry Nilsson song *Everybody's Talkin'* is one of the most evocative of the age.'



Michael Hipkins



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Programme for the 43rd season

(subject to confirmation)

2023 14 September	<i>The Banshees of Inisherin</i> (2022, Ireland, 100 min, cert 15). Two lifelong friends find themselves at an impasse when one abruptly ends their relationship, with alarming consequences for both of them. Won four BAFTAs
28 September	<i>Mrs Harris Goes to Paris</i> (2022, UK, 115 min, cert PG). A widowed cleaning lady in 1950s London falls madly in love with a couture Dior dress, and decides that she must have one of her own. Based on the novel by Paul Gallico
12 October	<i>Classe Tous Risques</i> (1960, France, 110 mins, cert 12). A ruthless criminal flees from the pursuit, involving more and more casualties. 'The greatest of all French gangster movies ... it singlehandedly puts muscle, sinew, soul and brains back into the French gangster movie ... don't miss it' <i>Guardian</i>
26 October	<i>Rams</i> (2020, Australia, 119 min, cert 12). A decades-long feud between two sheep farming brothers comes to a head when disaster strikes their flocks. An Australian remake of the 2015 Icelandic film.
9 November	<i>The Lost King</i> (2022, UK, 109 min, cert 12). In 2012, after having been lost for over 500 years, the remains of King Richard III were discovered beneath a carpark in Leicester. The search had been orchestrated by an amateur historian whose unrelenting research had been met with incomprehension by her friends and family and with scepticism by experts and academics.
23 November	<i>Decision to Leave</i> (2022, South Korea, 139 min, cert 15). Hae-Joon, a seasoned detective, investigates the suspicious death of a man on a mountaintop. Soon, he begins to suspect Seo-rae, the deceased's wife, while being unsettled by his attraction to her.
14 December	<i>Downton Abbey – a New Era</i> (2022, UK, 125 min, cert PG). The Crawley family goes on a grand journey to the South of France to uncover the mystery of the dowager countess's newly inherited villa.
2024 11 January	<i>Living</i> (2022, UK, 102 min, cert 12A). In 1950s London, a humourless bureaucrat decides to take time off work to experience life after receiving a grim diagnosis. Inspired by the Japanese classic <i>Ikiru</i> (1952).
25 January	<i>Dog Day Afternoon</i> (1975, USA, 125 min, cert 18). Three amateur bank robbers plan to hold up a bank. A nice simple robbery: walk in, take the money, and run. Unfortunately, the supposedly uncomplicated heist suddenly becomes a bizarre nightmare as everything that could go wrong does.
8 February	<i>Where the Crawdads Sing</i> (2022, USA, 125 min, cert 15). A woman who raised herself in the marshes of the Deep South becomes a suspect in the murder of a man with whom she was once involved.
22 February	<i>Vagabond (Sans toit ni loi)</i> (1985, France, 105 min, cert 15). A young woman's body is found frozen in a ditch. Through flashbacks and interviews, we see the events that led to her inevitable death.
14 March	<i>Empire of Light</i> (2023, UK, 119 min, cert 15). Sam Mendes' drama about the power of human connection during turbulent times, set in an English coastal town in the early 1980s.
28 March	<i>Parallel Mothers (Madres paralelas)</i> (2022, Spain, 123 min, cert 15). The story of two mothers who bond in unexpected ways after giving birth the same day.
11 April	<i>Top Gun Maverick</i> (2022, USA, 131 min, cert PG-13). After thirty years, Maverick is still pushing the envelope as a top naval aviator, but must confront ghosts of his past when he leads TOP GUN's elite graduates on a mission that demands the ultimate sacrifice from those chosen to fly it.
25 April	<i>Till</i> (2023, USA, 130 min, cert 12). In 1955, after Emmett Till is murdered in a brutal lynching, his mother vows to expose the racism behind the attack while working to have those involved brought to justice.
9 May	<i>The Guilty</i> (2018, Denmark, 85 min, cert 15). A police officer assigned alarm dispatch duty enters a race against time when he answers an emergency call from a kidnapped woman.
23 May (and AGM)	<i>Good Luck to You, Leo Grande</i> (2022, UK, 97 min, cert 15). Nancy Stokes, a retired school teacher, is yearning for some adventure, and some sex. And she has a plan, which involves hiring a young sex worker named Leo Grande.

Comments and reactions to: **Elvis**

No of reaction slips received = 32

Average score = 7.59

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	1	~	2	3	6	12	6	2

Watching Austin Butler is like watching Elvis reincarnated

Amazing!

Brilliant interpretation of a sad/triumphant genius

Cakes very good

Overdramatised (wrong title) Poor sound?

Glory, Glory Alleluia!

Enjoyed Tom Hanks' performance, but I felt I was being assaulted for 2 hours and 40 minutes

Good acting and a story well-portrayed

Very enjoyable if rather noisy!

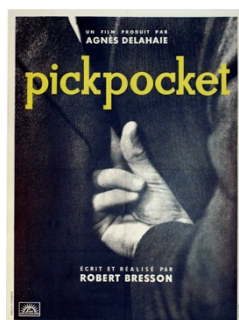
Excellent choice – remarkable film – sensory near-overload – but just pulled it off!

Too frenetic. Actor playing Elvis was amazing: spoilt by OTT acting from Tom Hanks as Colonel Parker

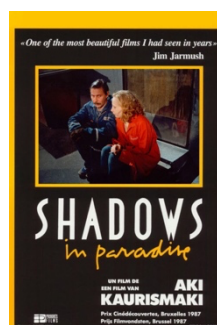
2nd half much better (enjoyed) than first. Actor who was Elvis was amazing, but not my favourite film

Position	Film	Average score
1	Belfast	7.96
2	The Duke	7.75
3	Seven Chances	7.61
4	Elvis	7.59
5	Mandela and de Klerk	7.47
6	After Love	7.36
7	The Perfect Candidate	7.16
8	The Band Wagon	6.91
9	Flee	6.79
10	Day for Night	6.57
11=	The Mole Agent	6.00
11=	Son of Saul	6.00
13	Guardians of the Galaxy	5.53
14	L'Eclisse	3.00

Forthcoming attraction: 27 April 2023 – Double Bill: Pickpocket and Shadows in Paradise (Varjoja Paratiisissa)



Bresson's 1959 film about a misfit who dreams of rising above conventional morals is a brilliant example of the cinema of ideas
Guardian



An episode in the life of Nikander, a garbage man, involving the death of a coworker, a love affair and much more. IMDb