

SEASON LISTINGS

GIRL LIKE US: BRITISH WOMEN IN WWII CINEMA

Introducing Girls Like Us

TRT 90min

In this special event to launch the season, curator Stephen Woolley, producer of *Their Finest*, will share his insights into women's wartime cinema with a richly illustrated talk. He'll then be joined by a panel to explore how women's wartime work was depicted on screen, how female wartime audiences responded, and to celebrate women's contribution to WWII cinema.

Tickets £6.50

TUE 18 APR 18:00 NFT3

Went the Day Well?

UK 1942. Dir Alberto Cavalcanti. With Leslie Banks, Marie Lohr, Elizabeth Allan, Thora Hird. 92min. 35mm. PG

This unique WWII Ealing production shows women taking on the disguised vanguard of a German invasion with a variety of weapons (most memorably a hatchet!). Graham Greene's short story, co-adapted by Ealing's only female resident writer Diana Morgan, is almost supernatural in its telling – Cavalcanti, well known as a documentary filmmaker, was also schooled as a surrealist in Paris. It's a gripping tale that feels ground-breaking even today.

+ Miss Grant Goes to the Door

1940. Dir Brian Desmond Hurst. 7min

In this MOI short, two spinsters deal with German paratroopers dropped into their garden!

FRI 14 APR 18:10 NFT3 / TUE 25 APR 20:45 NFT2

The Foreman Went to France

UK 1942. Dir Charles Frend. With Clifford Evans, Constance Cummings, Tommy Trinder, Gordon Jackson. 82min. 35mm. U

Diana Morgan was an uncredited co-writer on this prime example of Ealing's dramatisation of the 'people's war' and the strength of ordinary folk. Against the advice of his superiors, a foreman tries to rescue essential munitions equipment from the advancing Nazi army, with the help of a quick-witted American woman and two working class squaddies.

+ Channel Incident

1940. Dir Anthony Asquith. 9min

A woman decides to join the flotilla of boats rescuing soldiers in Dunkirk.

SAT 15 APR 18:15 NFT2 / FRI 28 APR 18:20 NFT2

The Gentle Sex

UK 1943. Dirs Leslie Howard, Maurice Elvey. With Jean Gillie, Lilli Palmer, Joan Greenwood, Joan Gates. 93min. 35mm. U

An all-female cast in a plot-thin feature celebrating the joys of Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) was an unlikely UK box-office smash in 1943! Moie Charles co-adapted her own story, which Leslie Howard 'rescued' from the MOI for the big screen, inspired by the need to reassure the public that the ATS was a suitable environment for women of all backgrounds, and not a hotbed of sexual promiscuity.

+ Jane Brown Changes Her Job

1942. Dir Harold Cooper. 9min

In this MOI short, a typist retrains for war work.

MON 17 APR 15:40 NFT2 / WED 26 APR 20:40 NFT2

Perfect Strangers (aka Vacation from Marriage)

UK 1945. Dir Alexander Korda. With Deborah Kerr, Robert Donat, Ann Todd, Glynis Johns. 102min. 35mm. PG

Based on a play by Clemence Dane (who also co-wrote the screenplay), Korda's movie, made towards the end of the war with victory in sight, reveals the transformative powers of conscription. Kerr and Donat play a couple who reassess their marriage – and the dreary pre-war drudges they once were – having separately become vigorous, purposeful (and attractive!) members of the armed forces.

+ A Letter from Home

1941. Dir Carol Reed. 17min

In her first screen role made exclusively for a US (female) audience, Celia Johnson dramatises London life in the Blitz in a letter to her estranged children in NY.

MON 17 APR 18:00 NFT2 / SUN 30 APR 20:10 NFT2

Millions Like Us

UK 1943. Dirs Sidney Gilliat, Frank Launder. With Patricia Roc, Anne Crawford, Gordon Jackson, Megs Jenkins. 103min. Digital. U

A heart-warming and heart-breaking story of a young Londoner sent to an arms factory in the Midlands, where she encounters a supportive world of women from across the class system. Gilliat and Launder (who counted Hitchcock and Reed among their previous collaborators) were experienced comedy writers making their directorial debut, so it's no surprise to find Caldicott and Charters, the bumbling Englishmen they created for *The Lady Vanishes*, appearing here as characters pointing out the absurdities and hilarities of wartime austerity.

+ Night Shift

1942. Dir Jack Chambers. 14min

A short documentary about a shift of all-female munitions factory workers.

+ A Call For Arms!

1940. Dir Brian Desmond Hurst. 9min

An MOI short that disastrously mis-portrays the factory floor. Shown at the beginning of *Their Finest*, the phrase 'a million bullets by morning' became a catchphrase of derision.

TUE 18 APR 20:20 NFT3 / SAT 22 APR 15:00 NFT2

Piccadilly Incident

UK 1946. Dir Herbert Wilcox. With Anna Neagle, Michael Wilding, Coral Browne, Frances Mercer. 103min. 35mm. PG

Diana (Neagle) and Captain Pearson (Wilding) meet during a blackout in London's (then) notorious Piccadilly. A light-hearted comedy seems to be evolving, but fate – and Florence Tranter's story – takes us into melodramatic Douglas Sirk territory. Diana's journey touches on illegitimacy, a common issue by 1945, and includes years washed up on a desert island; it may stretch incredulity, but Neagle remains charmingly convincing.

+ Night Watch

1941. Dir Donald Taylor. 8min

Two lovers search for some privacy to kiss during the blitz.

WED 19 APR 18:15 NFT2 / SUN 30 APR 17:40 NFT2

Unpublished Story

UK 1942. Dir Harold French. With Valerie Hobson, Richard Greene, Basil Radford. 92min. 35mm. PG

An unusual mix of screwball comedy, conspiracy thriller and battle-of-thesexes. Hobson is perfectly cast in a sphinx-like role she played so often during the war, with Greene as a cynical reporter returning from Dunkirk. This is also an excellent depiction of life in the London blitz and blackout regime.

+ London Scrapbook

1942. Dirs Eugeniusz Cekalski, Derrick De Marney. 11min

This amusing doc, co-written and presented by American Bessie Love, offers a female perspective of war-torn London.

WED 19 APR 20:40 NFT2 / SUN 23 APR 17:50 NFT2

Two Thousand Women

UK 1944. Dir Frank Launder. With Phyllis Calvert, Flora Robson, Patricia Roc, Renee Houston. 97min. 35mm. PG

Writer-director Launder originally sent this idea – based on the true story of a female internment camp at Vittel, France – to Hitchcock, but then decided to make a more comedic version himself. The first section of the film plays like a precursor to the director's later *St Trinian's* satires, with anarchic role-reversal, inversion of stereotypes and selective cross-dressing!

+ Down Our Street

1942. Dir Terry Bishop. 6min

Three women cross the class divide to buy war bonds.

FRI 21 APR 18:15 NFT2 / SAT 29 APR 18:20 NFT2

Demi Paradise (aka Adventure for Two)

UK 1943. Dir Anthony Asquith. Laurence Olivier, Penelope Dudley-Ward, Marjorie Fielding, Margaret Rutherford. 107min. 35mm. U

Penelope Dudley-Ward lights up the screen as a spirited industrialist's daughter who educates a Russian engineer (Olivier) on the mysteries and charms of the English psyche and class system before and after the outbreak of the war. A thinly disguised propaganda film to promote better relations with the Soviets, this is also a genuinely funny romantic comedy.

+ Lady Be Kind

1941. Dir Rodney Ackland. 8min

A landlady reconsiders her harsh lack of generosity towards her lodger in this MOI short.

SAT 22 APR 17:50 NFT2 / SUN 30 APR 15:10 NFT2

In Which We Serve

UK 1942. Dirs Noël Coward, David Lean. With Noël Coward, Celia Johnson, John Mills, Joyce Carey. 114min. Digital. U. Restoration supported by The David Lean Foundation

Coward and Lean reinforce the status quo in this celebration of the British class system. Celia Johnson makes her feature debut as a dutiful wife – a role she played earlier in Carol Reed's propaganda short *Letter From Home*. No other actor epitomised the upper-middle class British woman more convincingly or beautifully than Johnson, and American audiences agreed in droves. '[The film] set a new standard in English cinema,' said Dilys Powell.

+ We Serve

1942. Dir Carol Reed. 30min

An incredible female cast (including Celia Johnson and Googie Withers) was paid £5 each to appear in this training film for ATS officers.

SUN 23 APR 14:45 NFT2 / MON 24 APR 20:15 NFT3

Female Stars of British WWII Cinema

TRT 90min

Did you know that British screen legends like Celia Johnson, Deborah Kerr and Anna Neagle played key roles in the war effort? Through richly illustrated presentations and lively discussions, a variety of expert speakers including season curator and producer of *Their Finest*, Stephen Woolley, will examine how their onscreen performances were engineered to encourage the women in the audience to roll up their sleeves and pitch in. We'll also explore how the war shaped the careers of these British stars.

TUE 4 MAY 20:30 LIBRARY

Women Behind the Camera in World War II Cinema

TRT 90mins

The World War II period presented opportunities for women to begin making films to support the war effort. How did they navigate the male-dominated film industry? What was their contribution to the war cinema? We gather a group of experts including Dr. Toby Haggith and Jane Fish, both from the Imperial War Museum, and Sarah Easen, to shed light on key female directors of the period including Ruby Grierson, Rosie Newman, Kay Mander and Margaret Thomson.

MON 15 MAY 18:30 LIBRARY

From Book to Script to Screen

Before *Their Finest* was a film, it was a novel – a smart and revealing tale of London life during the Second World War, which was long-listed for the Orange Prize and then adapted into an acclaimed film starring Gemma Arterton. We welcome novelist Lissa Evans and screenwriter Gaby Chiappe to discuss the process of crafting the story for page and for screen and the true-life inspiration behind the characters.

TUE 16 MAY, 18:15 NFT3

Yellow Canary

UK 1943. Dir Herbert Wilcox. With Anna Neagle, Richard Greene, Albert Lieven. 98min. 35mm. U

Anna Neagle is extremely convincing as a Mitford-style Nazi sympathiser who migrates to Canada. Adapted from a story by Pamela Bower, this film successfully subverts Neagle's squeaky-clean image, established by her public persona and portrayals of Queen Victoria and Amy Johnson, and explores the dilemma of romance

amongst spies and double agents, foreshadowing Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946). Wilcox elicits a strong central performance from his spouse and lead actress, who persuasively exudes treachery and betrayal.

+ Dangerous Comment

UK 1940. Dir John Paddy Carstairs. With *Carstairs, Penelope Dudley Ward*. 12min

Prime example of 'Careless Talk Costs Lives'.

MON 1 MAY 16:00 NFT2 / WED 3 MAY 18:20 NFT2

English Without Tears

UK 1944. Dir Harold French. With *Penelope Dudley-Ward, Lilli Palmer, Margaret Rutherford, Michael Wilding*. 88min. 35mm. U

One of the few films starring Dudley-Ward (her career was cut short by her 1946 marriage to Carol Reed), this Anatole de Grunwald and Terence Rattigan-scripted comedy teams her with Michael Wilding, whose lovelorn butler cannot consider crossing the class barrier until he becomes an army officer. An otherwise ordinary jaunt is enlivened by Dudley-Ward's portrayal of a vivacious modern wartime 'lady' who, in joining the Auxiliary Territory Service, finds herself in opposition to her now pompous ex-servant and paramour.

+ Partners in Crime

UK 1942. Dir Sidney Gilliat, Frank Launder. With *Irene Handl, Robert Morley*. 8min

Ministry of Information comedy short warning of the dangers of the black market.

MON 1 MAY 18:10 NFT3 / MON 8 MAY 20:30 NFT3

One of Our Aircraft Is Missing

UK 1942. Dir Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger. With *Googie Withers, Godfrey Tearle, Eric Portman, Hugh Williams, Bernard Miles, Hugh Burden, Emrys Jones, Pamela Brown*. 106min. U

Powell and Pressburger followed up the successful propaganda features *49th Parallel* (1941) and *Contraband* (1940) with this adventure thriller, which traces the journey of a bomber crew trapped in Nazi-controlled Holland, whose escape is made possible by the underground people's network controlled and run mainly by women. Googie Withers is in particular good form as the resistance leader who controls their destiny.

+ Fighting Allies

UK 1941. Dir Louise Birt. 9min

A rare female-directed short about Czech refugees in the UK.

WED 3 MAY 20:30 NFT3 / SAT 13 MAY 18:20 NFT2

A Canterbury Tale

UK 1944. Dir Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. With *Sheila Sim, Eric Portman, Dennis Price, Sgt John Sweet*. 124min. 35mm. U

One of the few box office flops by the Powell and Pressburger team during the Second World War, this film as unsuccessfully recut and rereleased in the USA – though many now claim it to be their masterpiece. The propaganda element of this movie revolves around a land girl and her platonic friendship with an American soldier and Powell's view of England, which is far from jingoistic. Casting a non-actor (a real hero) in the lead is almost its biggest failing, although his lack of charisma is curiously harmonious with the film's tempo and Chaucerian view of Britain.

+ Westward Ho!

UK 1940. Dir Thorold Dickinson. 8min

A charming Ministry of Information short extolling the virtues of child evacuation to mothers.

SAT 6 MAY 18:00 NFT2 / SAT 13 MAY 20:40 NFT2

Thursday's Child

UK 1943. Dir Rodney Ackland. With *Sally Ann Howes, Stewart Granger*. 82min. PG

The only 1940s British feature about the filmmaking process stars successful 13-year-old ingénue Howes and is a personal essay by the writer-director Ackland on the cynical methods the film industry used to exploit young starstruck women. Ackland wrote many of the MOI shorts featured in this season (including *A Call for Arms* (1940)), and as an established playwright he worked as a scriptwriter for Hitchcock, Reed, Powell and Asquith in the 1930s. His disdain for the hand that fed him is palpable in this amusing expose of British film production.

+ W.V.S.

UK 1942. Dir Louise Birt. 22min

Birt's short film is a testament to female Volunteers across the UK.

MON 7 MAY 16:00 NFT2 / TUE 16 MAY 20:40 NFT2

Great Day + intro by Dr Toby Haggith, Imperial War Museum*

UK 1945. Dir Lance Comfort. With Flora Robson, Eric Portman. 80min. 35mm

A visit to a small English village by Mrs Roosevelt provides the catalyst for the women to pull together. 'Quite simply, *Great Day* is a masterpiece, which combines radical sexual politics with a ravishing visual style. It is the only film of the period I have seen which successfully maintains a coherent mode of address to the female audience, while at the same time insisting on the pleasures of female energy and sisterhood.' Sue Harper, *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and Cinema in World War Two Britain* (Manchester University Press, 1996)

+ Choose Cheese

UK 1940. Dir Ruby Grierson. 7min

+ They Also Serve

UK 1940. Dir Ruby Grierson. 10min

Two rare female-directed Ministry of Information shorts. Grierson sadly died while making a film about evacuating children to safety in Canada when the liner she was on was torpedoed.

MON 15 MAY 20:40 NFT2* / FRI 19 MAY 18:20 NFT2

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

UK 1943. Dir Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger. With Deborah Kerr, Roger Livesey, Anton Walbrook. 163min. Digital

Deborah Kerr played Roger Livesey's muse and the object of his obsession in three roles in this epic movie, which spans the two wars and was shot in glorious Technicolor during the Blitz. Despite the incredibly valuable propaganda message to both UK and US audiences, *Blimp* was almost banned by Churchill at script stage. Powell eventually made the film against the advice of the Ministry of Information and his adaptation of the popular comic strip character, depicting the travails of a career soldier out of step with modern warfare, is hailed as not only a great humanist testament at a time when Britain was supposed to hate all things German, but also as one of the greatest British films ever made.

SUN 14 MAY 16:00 NFT2 / SAT 20 MAY 20:40 NFT2

Tomorrow We Live

UK 1943. Dir George King. With Greta Gynt, John Clements. 87min. 35mm. U

Based on a story by Dorothy Hope and scripted by Katherine Strueby, the US title, *At Dawn We Die*, is a more apt description of this exciting tale of secret agent espionage and French resistance. Greta Gynt plays the fictional Marie Duchesne – part fictional Mata Hari but also based on real-life operators like Special Operations Executive (SOE) agent Pearl Witherington – who leads the underground partisans while wooing the German occupying commander. The ruthlessness of the Nazis is vividly portrayed.

+ Now It Can Be Told

UK 1946. Dir Teddy Baird. With Jacqueline Nearne. 9min

Real-life SOE agent Jacqueline Nearne re-enacts dropping into enemy-held France in this extract.

SUN 21 MAY 18:20 NFT2 / SAT 27 MAY 18:20 NFT2

Candlelight in Algeria

UK 1944. Dir George King. With Carla Lehmann, James Mason. 86min

The writing team of Dorothy Hope and Katherine Strueby combined with director King to tell the story of a British agent (Mason) and an American sculptor (Lehmann) resident in the UK during the war, who combine to outwit the Nazis, who are hoping to disrupt a meeting of the Vichy French and the Allies. Lehmann also starred in half a dozen other propaganda films including *Cottage to Let* (1941). This nourish thriller was handsomely lensed by Otto Heller, who later photographed *The Ipcress File* (1965).

+ Women at War

UK 1941. Ed Louise Birt, narrated by Janet Murrow. 9min

Made for an American audience, this is edited, narrated and written by three women (including writer Mary Walsh), with no director credited.

SUN 21 MAY 20:40 NFT2 / FRI 26 MAY 18:20 NFT2

Night Train To Munich

UK 1940. Dir Carol Reed with Margaret Lockwood, Rex Harrison. 95min

Reuniting *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) team of Lockwood and writers Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat and their creations, the bumbling Brits Charters and Caldicott, this thriller made a big impact in America, where Gordon Wellesley's original story was nominated for an Oscar. The scenes of Lockwood with Paul Heinreid in the German concentration camp were fairly unique, as the MOI feared reprisals on British POWs if films exaggerated their treatment. Lockwood was top billed, cementing her popularity with the UK public as the seemingly demure but feisty heroine.

+ Go To Blazes

UK 1942. Dir Walter Forde. With Will Hay. 9min

Diana Morgan-scripted Ministry of Information short. Will Hay is shown how to dispose of firebombs by his wife.

MON 22 MAY 18:20 NFT2 / MON 29 MAY 16:00 NFT2

The Way to the Stars

UK 1945. Dir Anthony Asquith. With Rosamund John, John Mills, Michael Redgrave. 87min

The fatality of British and American pilots is brought to the fore in this taut and darkly amusing drama. Rosamund John is the ultimate British stoic and bereaved wife and John Mills (the role model for Hugh Grant's tongue-twisted romantic sap) sums up a middle class dilemma: how can you honourably marry when death is just around the corner? The moral horror of social stigmatisation that hovers over *Brief Encounter* (1945) invades this incredibly entertaining Asquith/Rattigan classic with strong echoes of Rattigan's play *Flight Path*.

+ Victory Wedding

UK 1944. Dir Jessie Matthews. 20min

Matthews directs this war bond 'informational'. Mills is a soldier on leave who confronts his supposedly cheating girlfriend.

SAT 27 MAY 20:40 NFT2 / MON 29 MAY 18:20 NFT2

Dangerous Moonlight + intro by Matt Lee, Imperial War Museum*

UK 1941. Dir Brian Desmond Hurst. With Anton Walbrook, Sally Gray. 94min. 35mm

Filmed during the Blitz at Denham Film Studios, which was itself caught in the onslaught, this hugely successful wartime romance was retitled *Suicide Squadron* for release in the USA. Sally Gray plays an American reporter who falls in love with a Polish pilot and concert pianist, played by Walbrook. The 'Warsaw Concerto', specially composed for the film, became one of the most loved pieces of music composed during this time and was, for Londoners, synonymous with the Blitz.

+ London Can Take It

UK 1940. Dir Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt. 9min

Inspirational and moving doc of the London Blitz that helped

SUN 28 MAY 16:00 NFT2 / WED 31 MAY 20:40 NFT2*

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Press Contacts:

Liz Parkinson – Press Officer, BFI Southbank

liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk / 020 7957 8918

Elizabeth Dunk – Press Office Assistant

Elizabeth.dunk@bfi.org.uk / 020 7985 8986

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