

# He Who Dared: Dirk Bogarde



## August – September at BFI Southbank

**Dirk Bogarde's** name was first 'above the title' in 1948, and it was still there in 1990, some 60 films later. Throughout August and September **BFI Southbank** will honour this great and enigmatic screen actor with a season of his most daring and thought-provoking films. Bogarde's belief was that 'the camera photographs thought', and this will be demonstrated perfectly in part one and two of the programme, starting with the landmark in British cinema that was **Victim** (1961) - which celebrates its 50th anniversary this August and which helped to decriminalise homosexual acts between adults in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act - and **The Servant** (1963). A selection of Bogarde's work for television can also be seen in **Bogarde on the Box** - available in the BFI's free-to-view **Mediatheques** across the country. To complement these programmes two new **BFI Classics** titles will be published: *Victim* by **John Coldstream** (season curator) and *The Servant* by Amy **Sargeant**.

In the austerity Britain of the 1950s Dirk Bogarde was truly famous. Thanks in the main to *Doctor in the House* (1954), he became one of the few actors in the early post-war years to experience the full force of matinee idolatry, accompanied by the ensuing box-office clamour and a studio contract, that brought a lack of fulfilling work to such an intelligent actor. But by Christmas 1960 he was negotiating a severance from Rank and nearing his 40th birthday when **Basil Dearden** presented him with a script of serious political intent, about a compromised barrister in a story of homosexual blackmail Bogarde seized on it with relish. *Victim* (1961) altered the course of his career and of his life. From that moment he embraced the cinema of the intellect, and in doing so achieved critical acclaim, international respect and immense personal satisfaction.

The first part of this BFI Southbank season charts Bogarde's career as he moved away from the mainstream with films he made while still living in Britain in the 60s. ***I Could Go On Singing*** (1963) was a vehicle for **Judy Garland** in which the actor proved to be a great support to the Hollywood star. **Joseph Losey's** *The Servant* was the film that first brought Bogarde acclaim in Europe, while **John Schlesinger's** *Darling* (1965) – for which Bogarde won a **BAFTA Award** – would make his name known in the US. Losey's adaptation of the comic strip

**Modesty Blaise** (1966) followed, casting him as a master criminal in a dazzling example of 60s Pop-Art - quite a contrast with the haunting **Accident** (1967), the next project made by the director and actor, with a screenplay by **Harold Pinter**. August concludes with the rarely seen **Arena: The Private Dirk Bogarde** (BBC 2001) and **Our Mother's House** (1967), directed by **Jack Clayton**, which gained Bogarde the attention of **Luchino Visconti**.

Part two of this season begins with Dirk Bogarde's second dabbling with Hollywood and a venture with **George Cukor** in **Justine** (1969), which also starred **Anouk Aimée**, **Michael York** and **Anna Karina**. By August of the same year he was living on the outskirts of Rome when Luchino Visconti, with whom he had already made *The Damned*, offered him the role of Gustav von Aschenbach in **Death in Venice** (*Morte a Venezia*, 1971). Bogarde said that this role was the peak of his career and it brought him international renown. The films that followed found him working with **Cavani**, **Resnais**, **Fassbinder** and **Tavernier**, with subject matter that was variously challenging, intense and in one case – Cavani's **The Night Porter** (*Il portiere di notte*, 1974) – controversial to this day. The 70s ended with **Despair** (*Despair – Eine Reise ins Licht*, 1978) in which the collective talents of Fassbinder directing and **Tom Stoppard** adapting the screenplay, from a **Vladimir Nabokov** novel, proved a tempting challenge to Bogarde.

Finally, he was lured from virtual retirement by the prospect of playing a gravely ill expatriate Englishman opposite **Jane Birkin** in **These Foolish Things** (*Daddy Nostalgie*, 1990) for Bertrand Tavernier – the director he called 'a genius in the minutiae of life'. In that phrase is the secret of Bogarde's fascination with, and success in, the work of European directors. They, in their turn, saw in him someone for whom any grandstanding heroics had become utterly alien. When he left Britain in the 60s, without any guarantee that great material would come his way, it was a decision that resulted in the most handsome of dividends, artistically if not financially, and brought him respect from critics, from audiences and from his peers. He had dared, and he had won.

### **Bogarde on the Box**

With our two-part retrospective of Dirk Bogarde's later cinema career starting this month, this new collection takes a look at the mercurial actor and writer's less celebrated but no less interesting work for the small screen. Bogarde was never a huge fan of television, making his few credits all the more intriguing. His work both in front of and behind the camera is represented by his **Graham Greene** adaptation **May We Borrow Your Husband?** (1986) and the feature-length version of his novel **Voices in the Garden** (1993), while his most prominent TV starring role, in sci-fi drama *The Vision*, has hardly been seen since its only broadcast in 1988.

**To complement this season BFI Publishing launches two new books in the BFI Film Classics series:**

**Victim by John Coldstream: 9781844574278, £9.99, 15th July**  
An intimate study of this landmark film, written by Bogarde's official biographer and published to mark the 50th anniversary of the film's release.

**The Servant by Amy Sargeant: 9781844573820, £9.99, 2nd September**

A detailed discussion of the film's production and reception, in addition to a textual analysis of Harold Pinter's adaptation of Somerset Maugham's novel.

### **Programme:**

#### **Victim**

UK 1961. Dir Basil Dearden. With Sylvia Syms, Dennis Price, Peter McEnery, Donald Churchill. 100min. **PG**  
A landmark both in British cinema, for its unprecedentedly direct approach to homosexuality, and in society, for helping to bring about legislative reform, Basil Dearden's 'modest, tight, neat little thriller' (in Bogarde's words) is notable otherwise for its atmosphere, its understatement and for two

unforgettable scenes between Bogarde as the barrister whose personal quest for justice will cost him his career, and Sylvia Syms as his resilient wife.

**Wed 3 Aug 18:10 NFT1\*, Tue 9 Aug 20:40 NFT3**

**\*Introduction by John Coldstream. We hope to welcome Sylvia Syms and Peter McEnery for a Q&A following this screening**

### **I Could Go On Singing**

UK 1963. Dir Ronald Neame. With Judy Garland, Jack Klugman. 101min. **U**

A panicky title-change (from *The Lonely Stage*) did no favours to this made-to-measure portrait of a singer grappling with her many demons before a London Palladium concert. Bogarde, who plays a surgeon and single parent to their schoolboy son, described the shoot as 'a brakeless roller-coaster', but his performance, his contribution to the dialogue and his pastoral care for Judy Garland ensured that Ronald Neame's film emerged with merit.

**Sat 6 Aug 17:40 NFT1, Thu 11 Aug 20:50 NFT1**

### **The Servant**

UK 1963. Dir Joseph Losey. With James Fox, Sarah Miles, Wendy Craig. 115min. **15**

A 'mean and shabby man' was Bogarde's reading of the eponymous Barrett, who manipulates his master (Fox) to the point of destruction in the devilishly dark rendering by Harold Pinter and Losey of the Robin Maugham story. This was the film that first brought Bogarde acclaim in Europe. The fact that he found the character so easy to play detracts not a whit from his electrifying, Mephistophelian performance.

**Wed 17 Aug 18:00 NFT1\*, Sun 21 Aug 18:00 NFT1 \*Introduction by Amy Sargeant**

### **Darling**

UK 1965. Dir John Schlesinger. With Laurence Harvey, Julie Christie, Roland Curram 128min. **15**

Frederic Raphael's lethal bonfire of the vanities that preoccupied Swinging London was immaculately realised by John Schlesinger, whose film secured BAFTA Awards for Bogarde and Julie Christie, as well as Oscars for both Christie and the costume designer Julie Harris. Bogarde convinces as Robert Gold, a television reporter who leaves his family for the bewitchingly wayward Diana Scott; and Laurence Harvey is in his element as a deeply disagreeable industrialist.

**Thu 18 Aug 17:50 NFT1, Sat 20 Aug 20:30 NFT1**

### **Modesty Blaise**

UK 1966. Dir Joseph Losey. With Monica Vitti, Terence Stamp, Harry Andrews. 119min. **PG**

Bogarde considered this adaptation of the celebrated comic strip as 'nearly a compromise between commercialism and intellect'. Certainly it was a dazzling Pop-Art departure both for Losey and for himself, in which he displayed a refreshing exuberance as Gabriel, a silver-wigged Blofeldian master criminal defying the best efforts of special agent Modesty to thwart his perfectly natural pursuit of ill-gotten diamonds, if not world domination.

**Sun 21 Aug 15:40 NFT3, Mon 22 Aug 20:30 NFT1**

### **Accident**

UK 1967 Dir Joseph Losey With Stanley Baker, Jacqueline Sassard, Michael York, Delphine Seyrig 105min **PG**

Nicholas Mosley's story inspires a haunting, stifling, lovingly shot and soundtracked chamber-piece, in which Losey and Pinter explore class, mores, sexual jealousy and a yearning for lost youth through rival Oxford dons and a gilded student couple. Bogarde said the role of Stephen had entailed 'quite the most exacting work I have ever had to do on the screen.' His reward was handsome recognition for contributing to an acknowledged masterpiece.

**Mon 22 Aug 18:20 NFT1, Wed 24 Aug 20:45 NFT1**

### **Our Mother's House**

UK 1967. Dir Jack Clayton. With Margaret Brooks, Pamela Franklin, Mark Lester. 105min. **15**

When a mother dies, leaving seven young children, they bury her in the garden rather than face the orphanage. Into their lives comes her estranged husband, the devious Charlie Hook, played with panache by Bogarde, who said Jack Clayton's film was 'one of the happiest I have ever made'. A

'distinguished failure', perhaps, but at its Venice Festival screening Bogarde's performance caught the attention of an illustrious guest: Luchino Visconti.

**Thu 25 Aug 20:45 NFT1, Fri 26 Aug 17:50 NFT3, Tue 30 Aug 20:45 NFT1**

### **Arena: The Private Dirk Bogarde**

BBC 2001. Dir Adam Low. Scr/narr Nicholas Shakespeare. c115min

This elegant documentary, first screened on Boxing Day 2001, contained footage lent by Bogarde's estate from many hours of 16mm home movies shot principally by his companion of 40 years, Anthony Forwood. Adam Low's revealing film was distinguished further by unprecedented contributions from members of the Van den Bogaerde family, as well as interviews with Charlotte Rampling, Sylvia Syms, James Fox, Bjorn Andresen, Liliana Cavani, Michael York and Gore Vidal.

**Sun 7 Aug 15:30 NFT2**

### **Justine**

USA 1969. Dir George Cukor. With Anouk Aimée, Michael York, Anna Karina, Robert Forster. 119min. **15**

On only his second 'business' trip to Hollywood (after *Song Without End* in 1959) Bogarde found himself again working unexpectedly with Cukor, who tried to rescue this adaptation of the first book from Lawrence Durrell's tetralogy (*The Alexandria Quartet*) when Joseph Strick was fired after a month's shooting in Tunisia. Our screenings afford a rare opportunity to see why Bogarde scooped the available plaudits for his performance as the enigmatic consular official, Pursewarden.

**Fri 2 Sept 18:10 NFT3, Sat 3 Sept 20:30 NFT3**

### **Death in Venice** Morte a Venezia

Italy-France 1971. Dir Luchino Visconti. With Bjørn Andresen, Silvana Mangano, Romolo Valli 130min. **12A**

Playing Gustav von Aschenbach for the director he dubbed 'the Emperor' was, said Bogarde, the peak of his career. Both film and performance divided critical opinion, but there is no denying the extraordinary impact given by Visconti to Thomas Mann's elegy, with a ravishing aesthetic – both visual, through the photography of Pasqualino De Santis, and aural, through the music of Mahler.

**Thu 1 Sept 20:45 NFT1, Sun 4 Sept 18:30 NFT1, Thu 15 Sept 20:45 NFT1**

### **The Night Porter** Il portiere di notte

Italy 1974. Dir Liliana Cavani. With Charlotte Rampling, Philippe Leroy, Gabriele Ferzetti. 118min

Liliana Cavani told Bogarde that his characters in *The Servant* and *Darling* were reflected in her writing of Max, the former SS officer whose unexpected meeting at a small Vienna hotel with one of his concentration camp charges (Rampling) reignites a profoundly dangerous love affair. Her disturbing – and at the time hugely controversial – film is elevated by the conviction with which the two principals interact.

**Sun 4 Sept 20:45 NFT1, Mon 5 Sept 20:45 NFT1**

### **Providence**

France-Switzerland 1977 Dir Alain Resnais With John Gielgud, Ellen Burstyn, Elaine Stritch 110min. **15**

After ten years and at least two unrealised projects, Bogarde finally achieved his ambition to work with Resnais in this opaque chamber piece performed from David Mercer's script by a dazzling and exquisitely balanced quintet. As the barrister son of a dying novelist, Bogarde holds his own against the effortless, scene-stealing antics of the old master, Gielgud.

**Sun 11 Sept 18:30 NFT1, Fri 16 Sept 20:30 NFT3**

### **Despair** Despair – Eine Reise ins Licht

West Germany-France 1978 Dir Rainer Werner Fassbinder With Andréa Ferréol, Klaus Löwitsch 119min. **15**

Stoppard, Nabokov, Fassbinder – 'Not a bad package,' decided Bogarde when he was offered the role of Hermann Hermann, the prosperous Russianémigré owner of a chocolate factory in inter-war Berlin. Although unhappy at the final cut delivered to Cannes by his brilliant, maverick director, Bogarde considered his study of a descent into madness, against the broader picture of societal dislocation, the strongest performance he had ever given.

**Wed 14 Sept 18:30 NFT1, Mon 19 Sept 20:45 NFT1**

**These Foolish Things** Daddy Nostalgie

France 1990. Dir Bertrand Tavernier. With Jane Birkin, Odette Laure. 107min. Some EST. **PG**

'Nothing very much happens in a Tavernier film,' wrote Bogarde. 'Just all of life.' And so it does in this minutely observed, achingly sad and finally positive portrait of an Anglo-French couple and their emotionally distant daughter. Bogarde was lured from an unofficial retirement by the prospect of working with the man he called 'the Genius', and the result is a piquant valediction to a great screen-acting career.

**Sun 18 Sept 15:50 NFT3, Thu 22 Sept 18:20 NFT2**

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- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

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