

Kirk Douglas season at BFI Southbank **1 September – 4 October 2016**



Monday 25 July 2016, London.

Ahead of **Kirk Douglas'** 100th birthday this December, BFI Southbank pay tribute to this major Hollywood star with a season of 20 of his greatest films, running from 1 September – 4 October 2016. Over the course of his sixty year career, Douglas became known for playing iconic action heroes, and worked with the some of the greatest Hollywood directors of the 1940s and 1950s including Billy Wilder, Howard Hawks, Vincente Minnelli and Stanley Kubrick. Films being screened during the season will include musical drama *Young Man with a Horn* (Michael Curtiz, 1949) alongside Lauren Bacall and Doris Day, Stanley Kubrick's epic *Spartacus* (1960), *Champion* (Mark Robson, 1949) for which he received the first of three Oscar® nominations for Best Actor, and the sci-fi family favourite *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Richard Fleischer, 1954).

The season will kick off with a special discussion event **Kirk Douglas: The Movies, The Muscles, The Dimple**; this event will see a panel of film scholars examine Douglas' performances and star persona, and explore his particular brand of Hollywood masculinity. Also included in the season will be a screening of *Seven Days in May* (John Frankenheimer, 1964) which Douglas starred in opposite **Ava Gardner**; the screening will be introduced by **English Heritage** who will unveil a new blue plaque in honour of Ava Gardner at her former Knightsbridge home later this year.

Born Issur Danielovich into a poor immigrant family in New York State, Kirk Douglas began his path to acting success on a special scholarship at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City, where he met Betty Joan Perske (later to become better known as Lauren Bacall), who would play an important role in helping to launch his film career. After a stint in the US Navy during WWII, Douglas worked in New York on the stage, as well as in radio and commercials, until Lauren Bacall helped him get his first film role by recommending him to director Hal Wallis, who was looking for a supporting male for his latest film *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946); the role, opposite Barbara Stanwyck, became Douglas's debut screen appearance. A number of screen roles including *Out of the Past (aka Build My Gallows High)* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947) and *A Letter to Three Wives* (Joseph L Mankiewicz, 1949) followed, but it was his Oscar® nominated turn in *Champion* (Mark Robson, 1949) that propelled him to stardom.

Douglas is on peak-form in *Ace in the Hole* (Billy Wilder, 1951) as a ruthless journalist hoping to return to the big time by exploiting the predicament of a man trapped by a New Mexican rock-fall. Adapted from Sidney Kingsley's play, *Detective Story* (William Wyler, 1951) stars Douglas as a detective who is investigating an abortionist and various other suspects while dealing with a few

personal issues. Douglas was often famed for starring in Westerns, and the season will include screenings of some of his best, such as Howard Hawks' *The Big Sky* (1952), *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (John Sturges, 1957) opposite Burt Lancaster, and the gripping and touching modern western *Lonely Are the Brave* (David Miller, 1962).

Douglas received his second nomination for the Best Actor Oscar® for *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Vincente Minnelli, 1953) for his deft portrayal of the rise and fall of an ambitious Hollywood producer, as remembered by a star, director and writer who disowned him. A sort-of-sequel, *Two Weeks in Another Town* (Vincente Minnelli) followed in 1962, with Douglas starring as an actor reduced to dubbing movies while hoping for a comeback role from a producer. There will be family screenings of sci-fi adventure *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Richard Fleischer, 1954) in which Douglas starred alongside James Mason and Peter Lorre; based on the classic novel by Jules Verne, and produced by Walt Disney himself, this steam-punk sci-fi remains a firm family favourite. Douglas' third nomination for the Best Actor Oscar® came for his admirably intense yet understated performance as Vincent Van Gogh in *Lust for Life* (1956), his third collaborations with Vincente Minnelli.

Douglas worked with Stanley Kubrick twice: first in *Paths of Glory* (1957) as a French army officer defending three soldiers unfairly accused of cowardice in the trenches of WWI, then in Kubrick's epic account of the slaves' revolt in ancient Rome in *Spartacus* (1960). Douglas has claimed that with the latter film he helped break the Hollywood blacklist by insisting Dalton Trumbo write *Spartacus* with an official on-screen credit. Based on real events, *The Heroes of Telemark* (Anthony Mann, 1965) is a stirring war-movie which sees Douglas star as a Norwegian professor who joins a resistance leader and his team of saboteurs in planning to destroy the heavy water plant where the Nazis are working to develop the atomic bomb. Also screening is *There Was a Crooked Man* (Joseph L Mankiewicz, 1970), a delightful comedy of manners set largely in an Arizona prison written by *Bonnie and Clyde*'s Robert Benton and David Newman. Completing the season is western *Posse* (1975) which Douglas directed as well as starred in; made shortly after the Watergate scandal, *Posse* pits a renowned marshal with political ambitions (Douglas) against an imprisoned outlaw played by Bruce Dern.

Kirk Douglas' work is notable for its sharp intelligence, emotional intensity and robust physicality; unafraid of playing unpleasant characters, he avoided sentimentality, trusting in the viewer's readiness to simply be affected by good acting. He epitomised a particular brand of Hollywood masculinity, but never took himself too seriously; even in his darker roles, he seems to be enjoying himself.

– ENDS –

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SCREENINGS AND EVENTS DURING THE SEASON:

Kirk Douglas: The Movies, The Muscles, The Dimple

Known for playing iconic action heroes and cowboys, Douglas epitomises a particular brand of Hollywood masculinity. But is this 'brand' more complicated than we might initially understand? We gather a group of expert commentators (film scholars Lucy Bolton, Mark Glancy, and Julie Lobalzo Wright) to examine Douglas' performances and star persona, and explore what he can tell us about the evolution of 20th-century Hollywood's masculine ideals.

MON 19 SEP 18:30 LIBRARY

The Strange Love of Martha Ivers

USA 1946. Dir Lewis Milestone. With Barbara Stanwyck, Van Heflin, Kirk Douglas, Lizabeth Scott. 119min. 35mm. PG

Douglas made his film debut in this superior noir melodrama, atypically playing an insecure, alcoholic District Attorney unhappily married to a wealthy, domineering woman (Stanwyck) due to a shared guilty secret; when her old flame (Heflin) reappears out of the blue, fear, desire and jealousy take their toll. Robert Rossen wrote the steamy script; the leads give it all they've got.

THU 1 SEP 18:10 NFT3 / SAT 3 SEP 20:40 NFT2

Out of the Past (aka Build My Gallows High)

USA 1947. Dir Jacques Tourneur. With Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer, Kirk Douglas, Rhonda Fleming. 97min. 35mm. PG

With Daniel Mainwaring's intricate script, Nick Musuraca's meticulously lit cinematography, and uniformly pitch-perfect performances, Tourneur's film noir about a private eye-turned-gas station owner (Mitchum at his best) trying but failing to avoid various characters from his shady past – notably the lovely but duplicitous Kathie (Greer) – is a masterpiece of romantic fatalism. Douglas excels as a charming but menacing gambler-cum-gangster.

FRI 2 SEP 20:30 NFT3 / FRI 9 SEP 17:55 NFT3

A Letter to Three Wives

USA 1949. Dir Joseph L Mankiewicz. With Kirk Douglas, Ann Sothorn, Linda Darnell, Jeanne Crain. 103min. Digital. U

A typically literate, sophisticated and witty confection from Mankiewicz, with an opening voiceover announcing that three of the (unseen) narrator's country-club friends will soon receive a letter informing them that she's run off with one – but which? – of their husbands. Flashbacks test the success or otherwise of the relationships in question; Douglas impresses as a teacher married to career-woman Sothorn.

SAT 3 SEP 16:15 NFT2 / MON 5 SEP 20:40 NFT2

Champion

USA 1949. Dir Mark Robson. With Kirk Douglas, Marilyn Maxwell, Arthur Kennedy. 99min. 35mm. PG. Print courtesy of UCLA Film & TV Archive

Douglas' no-punches-pulled playing of Midge Kelly, a boxer who treats everyone around him with a self-serving ruthlessness, won him his first nomination for a Best Actor Oscar®. If the character's bad behaviour is a little simplistically attributed to a troubled childhood, there's no denying the power of the fight scenes (beautifully shot by Franz Planer) or the star's snarling intensity.

SUN 4 SEP 15:40 NFT2 / FRI 9 SEP 20:40 NFT2

Young Man with a Horn (aka Young Man of Music)

USA 1949. Dir Michael Curtiz. With Kirk Douglas, Lauren Bacall, Doris Day, Hoagy Carmichael. 112min. 35mm. PG

Loosely inspired by the life of jazz trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke, this has Douglas as 'Rick Martin,' successful despite his reluctance to compromise his musical ideals, but wrestling with a rocky marriage and boozy despair. A redemptive ending is Hollywood corn, but the soundtrack (with trumpet dubbed by bandleader Harry James) and the darker scenes work well, with Douglas fittingly driven and tortured.

SAT 3 SEP 18:20 NFT2 / WED 7 SEP 20:30 NFT2

Ace in the Hole

USA 1951. Dir Billy Wilder. With Kirk Douglas, Jan Sterling, Robert Arthur. 111min. Digital. PG

Douglas is on peak-form as Chuck Tatum, a ruthless journalist hoping to return to the big time by exploiting – and needlessly extending – the predicament of a man trapped by a New Mexican rockfall. Wilder’s vitriolic script lets no one off the hook: the victim’s callous wife, an electioneering sheriff, local businessfolk, the sensation-hungry public. Sadly all too prescient, it’s compelling viewing.

TUE 6 SEP 20:40 NFT2 / SAT 10 SEP 14:50 NFT1

Detective Story

USA 1951. Dir William Wyler. With Kirk Douglas, Eleanor Parker, William Bendix, Cathy O'Donnell. 103min. Digital. 12A

Adapted from Sidney Kingsley’s play, this charts a day in the life of the 21st Precinct, particularly detective Jim McLeod (Douglas), investigating an abortionist and various other suspects while dealing with a few personal issues. Lee Garmes’ camera, gliding through an impressive set, keeps staginess at bay, while Douglas’ portrait of a man nearing the end of his tether is typically unvarnished.

SAT 10 SEP 17:50 NFT2 / THU 15 SEP 18:15 NFT2

The Big Sky

USA 1952. Dir Howard Hawks. With Kirk Douglas, Dewey Martin, Steven Geray, Elizabeth Threatt. 138min. 35mm. U. Print courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, New York

This handsome and leisurely western depicts the arduous odyssey up the Missouri river undertaken by two Kentuckians (Douglas and Martin) on a pioneering expedition to buy furs from Blackfoot Indians. Though obstacles abound, Hawks is most interested in the men’s relationship with each other and with a Native American they hold hostage but both come to love. Warm, witty, wholly engrossing.

SAT 10 SEP 20:20 NFT2 / TUE 13 SEP 17:45 NFT2

The Bad and the Beautiful

USA 1953. Dir Vincente Minnelli. With Kirk Douglas, Lana Turner, Barry Sullivan, Dick Powell. 118min. 35mm. PG

Douglas received his second nomination for the Best Actor Oscar® for his deft portrayal of the rise and fall of an ambitious Hollywood producer, as remembered by a star, director and writer who disowned him. Minnelli’s elegant direction and a fine cast (Gloria Grahame, Walter Pidgeon and Gilbert Roland are in there too) do justice to Charles Schnee’s knowing, agreeably allusive script.

SUN 11 SEP 14:00 NFT1 / FRI 16 SEP 18:10 NFT1

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea

USA 1954. Dir Richard Fleischer. With Kirk Douglas, James Mason, Peter Lorre. 127min. 35mm. U (suitable for ages 6+)

Troubled Captain Nemo (Mason) is in charge of a submarine with a loyal crew. Working out of his secret island base, he carries out attacks on warships in order to avenge a family tragedy. When Nemo allows three shipwrecked sailors on board, he starts a high-seas adventure full of thrills and spills! Based on Jules Verne’s classic novel, and personally produced by Walt Disney himself, this steam-punk sci-fi remains a firm family favourite.

SUN 11 SEP 13:30 NFT2 / SAT 17 SEP 15:30 NFT2

Lust for Life

USA 1956. Dir Vincente Minnelli. With Kirk Douglas, Anthony Quinn, James Donald. 122min. Digital. PG

Douglas’ third nomination for the Best Actor Oscar® came for his admirably intense yet understated performance as Vincent Van Gogh, struggling both with a world that barely understands his art and, later, with his own inner demons. Quinn makes for a memorable Gauguin, while Minnelli this time pulls out all the stops with his dynamic ‘Scope compositions, complete with colours matching the hues of Vincent’s paintings. Miklós Rózsa’s superb score adds to the overall impression of an unusually intelligent account of creativity; indeed, as produced by the great John Houseman, it’s one of the finest films about an artist ever made for a Hollywood studio.

SUN 11 SEP 17:40 NFT3 / SUN 18 SEP 15:50 NFT1

Gunfight at the OK Corral

USA 1957. Dir John Sturges. With Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas, Rhonda Fleming, Jo Van Fleet. 122min. 35mm. PG. Print courtesy of UCLA Film & TV Archive

Sturges' disarmingly old-fashioned account of the events leading to Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday's showdown with the Clantons, free of troubling psychological undercurrents, is as unconcerned with historical accuracy as Ford's *My Darling Clementine* had been. The chemistry between Lancaster's Earp and Douglas' Holliday is backed up by a strong generic cast (John Ireland, Lee Van Cleef, Kenneth Tobey et al).

SUN 11 SEP 20:10 NFT2 / SUN 18 SEP 18:15 NFT1

Paths of Glory

USA 1957. Dir Stanley Kubrick. With Kirk Douglas, Adolphe Menjou, Ralph Meeker. 86min. Digital. PG

Douglas' powerful yet subtle playing of a French army officer defending three soldiers unfairly accused of cowardice in the trenches of WWI ensures that this is Kubrick's most emotionally affecting movie. Virtuoso tracking shots suggest the terrible inevitability of the court martial, while the supporting performances highlight the self-serving hypocrisy of the military establishment and the awful expendability of ordinary men.

SUN 18 SEP 20:20 NFT2

Spartacus

USA 1960. Dir Stanley Kubrick. With Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Jean Simmons. 197min. Digital. PG

Originally an Anthony Mann project, this account of the slaves' revolt in ancient Rome centres on a characteristically robust, muscular but persuasively intelligent performance from Douglas as their leader. Paying meticulous attention to historical detail and eliciting fine performances from a superior cast, Kubrick focuses on the revealing shifts of power and influence within the different strata of Roman society.

SUN 4 SEP 19:00 NFT3 / WED 28 SEP 19:00 NFT1

Lonely Are the Brave

USA 1962. Dir David Miller. With Kirk Douglas, Gena Rowlands, Walter Matthau. 107min. 35mm. PG

A gripping, touching modern western in which an ex-con cowboy (Douglas, in his own favourite performance) pits his horse and wits against a pursuing sheriff (Matthau) and technological 'progress.' If Dalton Trumbo's script is laden with symbolism and allegory, Miller's pacy direction and Philip Lathrop's monochrome camerawork make the most, dramatically and visually, of the hero's movements through an endangered landscape.

FRI 23 SEP 18:20 NFT2 / SUN 25 SEP 20:20 NFT2

Two Weeks in Another Town

USA 1962. Dir Vincente Minnelli. With Kirk Douglas, Edward G Robinson, Daliah Lavi. 107min. 35mm. PG

This sort-of-sequel to *The Bad and the Beautiful* sees Douglas as an actor reduced to dubbing movies at Rome's Cinecittà studios, hoping for a comeback role from a producer (Robinson). Douglas digs deep for a dark study in desperate compromise and disillusionment, highlighted by Minnelli's near-expressionist direction. The superb cast includes Cyd Charisse, George Macready, Claire Trevor and George Hamilton.

SUN 25 SEP 18:30 NFT1 / TUE 4 OCT 20:45 NFT1

Seven Days in May + intro by English Heritage, as they honour Ava Gardner with a blue plaque*

USA 1964. Dir John Frankenheimer. With Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas, Fredric March, Ava Gardner. 118min. 35mm. U

In this taut conspiracy thriller, Douglas plays a colonel who suspects that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, led by a charismatic, politically ambitious general (Lancaster), are planning a *coup d'état* in response to a nuclear treaty with Russia, negotiated by the unpopular President (March). Sturdy performances and a focus on technological hardware paint a scarily plausible portrait of a world controlled by the military.

SUN 25 SEP 15:15 NFT2 / TUE 4 OCT 18:10 NFT1*

The Heroes of Telemark

UK 1965. Dir Anthony Mann. With Kirk Douglas, Richard Harris, Michael Redgrave, Ulla Jacobsson. 131min. 35mm. U

Based on real events, this stirring war-movie sees a Norwegian professor (Douglas) join a resistance leader (Harris) and his team of saboteurs in planning to destroy the heavy water plant where the Nazis are working to

develop the atomic bomb. Characteristically, Mann makes much of the Norwegian landscape and monumental industrial architecture, thanks to Robert Krasker's spectacular Panavision camerawork.

TUE 27 SEP 18:05 NFT3 / MON 3 OCT 20:20 NFT3

There Was a Crooked Man

USA 1970. Dir Joseph L Mankiewicz. With Kirk Douglas, Henry Fonda, Hume Cronyn, Warren Oates. 126min. 35mm. 15

Written by *Bonnie and Clyde's* Robert Benton and David Newman, this delightful comedy of western manners is set largely in an Arizona prison, where the idealistic warden (Fonda) hopes to improve conditions with the help of another new arrival (Douglas), a robber and conman secretly planning his escape. A cautionary tale of compromise and corruptibility, beautifully acted by a fabulous cast.

WED 28 SEP 20:30 NFT3 / SAT 1 OCT 18:10 NFT3

Posse

USA 1975. Dir Kirk Douglas. With Kirk Douglas, Bruce Dern, Bo Hopkins. 92min. 35mm. PG

More satisfying than his first stab at direction (*Scalawag*), Douglas' western, made shortly after the Watergate scandal, pits a renowned marshal with political ambitions (Douglas) against an outlaw (Dern) he's captured and imprisoned in the Texan town where he's keen to win votes. A wry, deftly observed and pleasingly subversive portrait of greed, treachery and bogus authority, complete with well-staged set-pieces and plot twists.

SUN 2 OCT 20:20 NFT3 / MON 3 OCT 18:00 NFT1

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- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

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***** PICTURE DESK *****

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