

LIFT TO THE SCAFFOLD

(Ascenseur pour l'échafaud)

Directed by Louis Malle

Featuring an original improvised score by Miles Davis

France 1958, 92 mins, Cert PG

Jeanne Moreau, Maurice Ronet, Georges Poujouly, Lino Ventura



**Opening on 7 February 2014 at BFI Southbank, Curzon Renoir
and selected cinemas nationwide**

9.12.13 – The brilliant debut feature of Louis Malle, *Lift to the Scaffold* catapulted Jeanne Moreau to international stardom and ushered in the French New Wave. A dazzling thriller, both nail-bitingly suspenseful and moodily atmospheric, it returns to the big screen on 7 February, released by the BFI in selected cinemas nationwide.

Julien Tavernier (Maurice Ronet), a veteran of the Indo-China and Algerian wars, plans the perfect murder of his boss, an arms manufacturer who is also his lover's husband. Having emerged successfully from the scene of the crime, he returns to retrieve a vital piece of evidence but finds himself trapped in a lift – increasingly desperate to escape before the police discover the victim's body. Meanwhile, his lover Florence (Jeanne Moreau) is left to pace the streets of Paris, anxiously waiting and searching for him with no way of knowing what has happened. And Julien's car – which he had left parked in the street with the key in the ignition – is stolen by Louis and Véronique, a couple of teenage joyriders whose gleeful escapade rapidly takes a nightmarish turn.

The screenplay for *Lift to the Scaffold*, loosely based on a novel of the same title by Noel Calef, was co-written by Malle and Roger Nimier, a young novelist whom the director admired. Henri Decaë, who had already worked with Melville and would go on to shoot the first films of Chabrol and Truffaut, contributed the superb black and white cinematography. Furthermore, the jazz-crazy Malle managed to persuade Miles Davis – who happened to be playing for a few weeks in Paris club – to provide a marvellous improvised score. Davis watched the film just twice and worked through one long night in a Paris studio to record what is now acknowledged to be one of the most important jazz film scores ever.

In making his first feature, the 24-year-old Malle deliberately set out to emulate both Hitchcock and Bresson (he had worked as director's assistant on *A Man Escaped*). It was also his aim to portray a new young generation and a new Paris. In *Malle on Malle* (edited by Philip French, 1993) he says: "*Traditionally, it was always the René Clair Paris that French films presented, and I took care to show one of the first modern buildings in Paris. I invented a motel – there was only one motel in France and it was not near Paris, so we had to shoot it in Normandy. I showed a Paris, not of the future, but at least a modern city, a world already somewhat dehumanized.*"

Lift to the Scaffold (known in the US as *Elevator to the Gallows*) won the prestigious Prix Louis Delluc, one of France's oldest and most important film awards, for Best French Film in 1957 and has since become an undisputed classic of French cinema, widely acclaimed as one of the greatest of all *films noirs*.

-ends-

For further information please contact:

Jill Reading, BFI Press Office

Tel: 020 7957 4759 or jill.reading@bfi.org.uk

Lucy Aronica, BFI Press Office

Tel: 020 7957 4833 or lucy.aronica@bfi.org.uk

Images are available at www.image.net >BFI>Theatrical releases

More details on venues at www.bfi.org.uk/releases

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- 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
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences