

**PETER SELLERS' MR.TOPAZE (1961)
CHOSEN BY BRITISH PUBLIC TO BE NEWLY DIGITISED.
"LOST" PETER SELLERS CLASSIC COMEDY AVAILABLE ON BFI PLAYER
FREE TO VIEW THIS WEEKEND (SATURDAY 30TH APRIL – MONDAY 2ND MAY)**

MISSING LINK IN PETER SELLERS' FILM CAREER



London, 27th April 2016. **Mr. Topaze** (1961), directed by and starring Peter Sellers, has been chosen by the British public to be digitised following an online vote earlier this year.

Described by Sellers' biographer, Roger Lewis, as a "lost classic", Mr Topaze marked the actor's official directorial debut, and teams him with his Ladykillers and Pink Panther series co-star Herbert Lom in a cast that also features Billie Whitelaw, Leo McKern, John le Mesurier and Joan Sims. It's a witty comedy about a provincial French schoolteacher turned rapacious businessman.

Using the only known surviving prints, held in its own collections (including Peter Sellers' personal copy on 16mm acquired in 1997), the BFI National Archive has produced a painstakingly cleaned-up digital version so that the film can be made accessible to the public via its VOD platform, BFI Player. The film is the highlight of an intriguing new collection entitled **Forgotten Features**, which presents a fascinating selection of British films that have undeservedly disappeared from public view. The collection is released online from Thursday 28th April 2016.

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/collections/forgotten-features/>

Mr. Topaze is free to view Saturday 30th April – Monday 2 May (pay per view after that date).

Mr. Topaze dir. Peter Sellers, UK 1961, 97min

Already a huge comedy star at home but not yet the international movie star he would become, Peter Sellers made his debut as a feature director with this deliciously dark comedy, from a play by Marcel Pagnol. Sellers also masterfully plays Topaze, a mild-mannered school teacher who metamorphoses into a chillingly cutthroat businessman. Dubbed at the time “an enchanting comedy” with a “witty script, crazy characters and fantastic story”, the film was more recently acclaimed by Sellers' biographer Roger Lewis as a “lost classic”. The BFI National Archive preserves what may be the only surviving 35mm materials for this essential but long unseen entry in Sellers' comedy canon, and after extensive remastering it can now be seen again on **The Goons** and films such as **The Ladykillers** (1955), **I'm Alright Jack** (1959) and **The Mouse That Roared** (1959). When he went to Hollywood he continued to star in major films such as **Lolita** (1962); **The Pink Panther** (1963) and four Inspector Clouseau sequels; **Dr. Strangelove: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb**; **What's New Pussycat** (1965); and **The Party** (1968). He was nominated for an Oscar and won many other awards for his portrayal of Chance the gardener in **Being There** (1979). **Forgotten Features** is a rich collection of 50 British films which have unfairly fallen off the cultural radar. Hand-picked from the vaults by expert curators from the BFI National Archive and Regional and National Archives, the films range from the 1920s to the 90s and include rarities unseen by even the most ardent film fan.

Five to try:

Bless 'Em All (1948) Much-loved light entertainer Max Bygraves made his film debut in this cheerfully old-school slapstick army comedy. Long considered Missing in Action, until a print was discovered in Belgium.

Symptoms (dir. José R. Larraz, 1974) This atmospheric horror thriller was Britain's entry to Cannes in 1974, but only a few home-taped VHS copies were known to survive. Symptoms was one of the BFI's top ten ‘Most Wanted’ films, until the negative was tracked down by curators. Now, after a painstaking digital clean-up, its reputation as a lost genre classic is confirmed.

They Came to a City (dir. Basil Dearden, 1944) Utopian vision or 'socialist propaganda'? This one-of-a-kind wartime fantasy, written by JB Priestley, follows nine characters arriving at a mysterious city and responding with delight or horror to what they find there. Long hard to see but recently remastered by the BFI, it's one of the strangest films from the glory years of Ealing Studios.

The Silent Playground (dir. Stanley Goulder, 1963) In this unusual and affecting drama set around South London, a learning disabled man unwittingly poisons children with prescription drugs he thinks are sweets. A fascinating, sometimes progressive period piece, *The Silent Playground* revealingly reflects 1960s attitudes to both learning disability and mental illness. Desmond Llewellyn - best known as Bond boffin Q - appears as a noble doctor.

Wild West (dir. David Attwood, 1992) The first Asian-British honky-tonk comedy! Zaf (Naveen Andrews) defies his conservative Pakistani family to become Southall's first Country & Western star.

This amiable, energetic comedy arrived a little too far ahead of the late-90s Asian boom (led by Bend Sinister, East is East) to find its audience, and well deserves a second chance.

www.bfi.org.uk/player **BFI Player** is the BFI's VOD platform which includes over 3,000 titles, most of which are available free to view.

The public vote took place during February and March 2016 via the BFI's website. The three films under consideration were: **The Assam Garden** (1986) starring Deborah Kerr, **Bedelia** (1946) starring Margaret Lockwood, and **Mr. Topaze** (1961). Over 2000 votes were cast with Mr. Topaze emerging as the winner.

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

A selection of film and device images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Player can be found at www.image.net BFI / BFI Player / Forgotten Features

ABOUT BRITAIN ON FILM AND UNLOCKING FILM HERITAGE

Britain on Film is one of the largest and most complex archival projects ever undertaken and is part of the BFI's Unlocking Film Heritage programme (2013-17). Unlocking film heritage for everyone in the UK to enjoy is a key strategic priority for the BFI, and Britain on Film is the public launch of a vast programme of work, which has been ongoing for over three years. This work has included a sophisticated programme of data capture, cataloguing, copying to archival standards, meticulous preservation of original materials, thorough searching of archives across the country, new state-of-the-art equipment and digital storage facilities and the transfer of films to the BFI's online video platform, BFI Player.

ABOUT FILM IS FRAGILE

Film is Fragile is the BFI's fundraising campaign to protect our national film collection. The BFI looks after one of the most important collections of film in the world – films from as early as 1895 to the latest British features just released in cinemas. As a charity we rely on the generosity and support of film-lovers to continue this culturally important work. Any donation, large or small, makes a huge difference. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/filmisfragile/>

Unlocking Film Heritage and Britain on Film are thanks to £15 million funding from the National Lottery.

**Britain on Film is a project from the BFI National Archive and the UK's Regional and National Film Archives
About the Regional and National Film Archives**

The English Regional Film Archives and other National Film Archives (listed below) hold significant collections of film and video material specifically relevant to their regions or hold dedicated collections such as Imperial War Museums, preserved in specialised storage facilities and made widely available for education, research, communities and the wider public.

- East Anglian Film Archive
- Imperial War Museums
- London's Screen Archives
- Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln
- North East Film Archive
- North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University
- Northern Ireland Screen Digital Film Archive
- Scottish Screen Archive

- Screen Archive South East
- South West Film & Television Archive
- National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales
- Wessex Film and Sound Archive
- Yorkshire Film Archive

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead organisation 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
- 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.

Press contact:

Brian Robinson, Communications Manager, Archive & Heritage, BFI

Brian.robinson@bfi.org.uk

Tel +44 (0) 207 957 8940 Mobile: 07740 17 1968