

Playing the Bitch **BFI Southbank, 1 – 30 June 2019**

‘When a man gives his opinion, he’s a man. When a woman gives her opinion, she’s a bitch’ Bette Davis

Wednesday 1 May 2019, London.

Throughout June BFI Southbank will present a season that celebrates and explores some of the most wickedly compelling female characters on screen. **PLAYING THE BITCH**, a thought-provoking season developed by *Woman with a Movie Camera* programmer Anna Bogutskaya, will showcase and trace the rich lineage of self-determining, independent, defiant, but always charismatic anti-heroines in film and TV. In other words, the screen’s greatest bitches. **PLAYING THE BITCH** will look beyond the simple ‘strong female character’, to explore more powerful – but not necessarily positive – representations of women on screen. The season will explore why they are so compelling to watch and question whether these roles have been limited to classic American cinema. It will centre actresses whose performances are key in making often unlikeable characters charismatic; from Bette Davis’s Regina Giddens in *The Little Foxes* (William Wyler, 1941) and Joan Crawford’s eponymous *Harriet Craig* (1950, Vincent Sherman) to Glenn Close’s Marquise de Merteuil in *Dangerous Liaisons* (Stephen Frears, 1989) and Linda Fiorentino’s Bridget in *The Last Seduction* (John Dahl, 1994).

While this season focuses on how woman actors have created a unique relationship with audiences in front of the camera, the BFI Southbank’s **Woman With a Movie Camera Summit** is also back for its second year on **Saturday 22 June**, where audiences will be able to take part in lively debates and conversations around gender issues on screen and in the screen industries. More details to follow.

PLAYING THE BITCH will also start a conversation about the power of the word ‘bitch’, how its meaning has been reinterpreted and reclaimed by new generations of women, the inherent power and privilege of the characterisations, and the defining roles that writers, directors and actors have created in order to challenge and delight audiences. Special guests appearing onstage during the season will include screenwriter **Deborah Davis**, who will talk about bringing the *The Favourite* (2018, Yorgos Lanthimos) to the screen, while other events with guests to be announced soon will include:

- **The Hot Take: The B Word** a provocative event with thinkers and commentators from both sides of the argument debating whether the word bitch has been, or can be reclaimed, by women looking to diminish its power to insult them
- **TV’s Bad Girls**, during which a panel will look at the history of the small screen bitch – from *Dynasty* to *Killing Eve*, *Harlots* to *Empire* and ask, how does today’s TV drama reflect those dynamic, strong and often downright badly behaved women, created for and by women?
- **The Luxury of Being Difficult**, a panel exploring how issues of race, class and sexuality have impacted the portrayal of ‘difficult’ women, the absence of women of colour in these types of roles, especially as modern interpretations of more complex female characters emerge
- **An Attempted History of the On-screen Bitch by Anna Bogutskaya** – a lively talk about the history of on-screen bitches and how this character type can be defined, as well as paying tribute to the vital role of the actresses who embody these characters

Heather Stewart, BFI Creative Director said: “In recent years, here at the BFI we have committed to a programme that re-appraises and celebrates women’s contribution to film and TV: not only looking at women directors, but also at the contribution that women actors and writers make. In **PLAYING THE BITCH** we want to look at a key stereotype, where the woman protagonist is a malicious, treacherous, control freak. There is a whole history of these roles in film and TV where the woman is most definitely the subject, not the object. Actors and audiences both create and make meaning and this season will explore how the power of the performer in these roles – from Bette Davis as Regina Giddens in *The Little Foxes* to Taraji P Henson as Cookie Lyon in *Empire* – makes the audience root for these ‘bitches’

and their despicable behaviour, critically shaping the narrative. The audiences' response to, and pleasure in, the film is highly ambivalent as a result."

Anna Bogutskaya, PLAYING THE BITCH and Woman with a Movie Camera programmer said: "This season will look beyond simplified 'strong female character' tropes to attempt to centre women that are both subversive and empowering, and posits that there is a character type of "screen bitch" that has both delighted and challenged audiences. This season also asks why female characters should have to play nice when there is so much praise heaped upon bad boys, anti-heroes and complicated men on screen. We will address the pleasures, and problems, of seeing 'badly-behaved' women on screen, the 'bitch' behaviour that makes up this character type, and ask difficult questions around the reclamation of the word bitch in contemporary culture – has it been or can it be reclaimed? We'll welcome thinkers from both sides of the argument to address this debate head-on."

No season exploring onscreen bitches would be complete without Bette and Joan, whose real-life Hollywood feud on the set of *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* became the stuff of legend. In one of her lesser-known roles, Joan Crawford stars in *Harriet Craig* (Vincent Craig, 1950) as a woman who appears to be the epitome of suburban perfection. But behind the impeccable facade she lies to and bullies everyone around her: a perfect domestic goddess with a rotten core. Crawford plays the manipulative, neurotic, controlling and obsessive perfectionist Harriet to a tee. Based on a play and screenplay by Lillian Hellman, *The Little Foxes* (William Wyler, 1941) features Bette Davis in an iconic role as the Southern aristocrat Regina Giddens – a woman struggling within the confines of a society that won't allow her to own land. Davis' performance oozes a viciousness, ambition and callousness that few other actors have managed to match. Bette Davis also stars in the classic study of ambition and conflict among creative women, *All About Eve* (Joseph L Mankiewicz, 1950), based on (but not credited to) a short story by Mary Orr. The story centres on acclaimed but aging Broadway star Margo Channing and her relationship with young fan Eve, who ingratiates her way into Margo's life and slowly but surely works towards her own goal.

The modern take on Bizet's opera *Carmen Jones* (Otto Preminger, 1954) features an all-black cast, led by Dorothy Dandridge as tempestuous factory worker Carmen Jones, who sets her sights on a do-gooder officer who's already engaged, played by Harry Belafonte. Carmen is a seductive siren, who relishes destroying men for the fun of it, and Dandridge's take on the infamous character still remains one of the most extraordinary and one of the very few examples of a woman of colour playing a significant role of this type. Fay Weldon's potent and hugely entertaining novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, which was adapted for a BBC series in 1986, made a huge splash with its mix of dark drama and jet-black comedy. When the ungainly, unwieldy and unworldly Ruth is cruelly ditched by her cheating husband she harnesses a powerful, primal rage to free her inner-bitch and devise a fearsome, almost satanic revenge on him and his wealthy mistress. This 4-part series will have a rare screening in its entirety and will be followed by a panel discussion, with guests to be announced soon.

In *Dangerous Liaisons* (Stephen Frears, 1988) Glenn Close gives one of her most acclaimed and iconic performances as the manipulative villainess who engineers a complex scheme of revenge on her former lover by disgracing his new, younger fiancée, played by Uma Thurman. With the aid of her friend, the similarly unprincipled Valmont, the *bitch du court* of pre-Revolution Paris plays with the lives of those around her with no regard for anyone but herself. We'll celebrate the self-obsessed divas of *Death Becomes Her* (Robert Zemeckis, 1992) with a special screening hosted by a drag queen on **Friday 21 June**. The film stars Meryl Streep and Goldie Hawn as old friends Madeline and Helen, whose tenuous bond is broken when Madeline steals Helen's fiancé. It's tested even further when a potion promising eternal youth is offered to them by a mysterious woman. The film is full of gorgeously camp lines and boasts an over-the-top horror aesthetic, but its beating heart is the relationship between the two frenemies.

The Last Seduction (John Dahl, 1994) stars Linda Fiorentino as Bridget, who, after her husband insults her, steals the cash he's made from a one-time drug deal and hits the road. Lying low in a small town, she becomes involved with a naive local, and leaves a trail of destruction behind her. Whip-smart, uncompromising and rotten to the core, Bridget Gregory is one of the defining femmes fatales of the 90s. Fiorentino gives a much-lauded performance, and sizzles with a ruthlessness and blatant greed that's usually the preserve of male characters. Nicole Kidman gives one of her most underrated performances as the manipulative and immoral Suzanne Stone, a small-town reporter obsessed with becoming a world-renowned TV personality, in *To Die For* (Gus Van Sant, 1995). Using her charm, she tries to climb up the broadcasting ladder, calculating every precise move towards small-screen stardom. But when her husband tries to get her to focus on starting a family, she plots to get rid of him with the help of two teenagers.

Adapted from a Ruth Rendell novel, *La Cérémonie* (Claude Chabrol, 1995) provides one of Isabelle Huppert's darkest roles as the impertinent and dangerous Jeanne, a local postmistress who develops a friendship with introverted Sophie, who is hired by a well-off family to take care of their remote mansion. *Young Adult* (Jason Reitman, 2011) sees Mavis, a divorced, alcoholic YA ghost writer, played by Charize Theron, return to her hometown, determined to get back together with her high-school sweetheart, who's now happily married with a child. Living as if she were still the adored and feared prom queen, Mavis – wonderfully written by Diablo Cody – is flawed and dislikeable; but that's what makes her such a great character.

Gillian Flynn adapted her own cult novel, *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014), resulting in a film that helped cement the 'cool girl' concept, and is almost impossible to describe without spoilers; on the day of their anniversary, Nick Dunne (Ben Affleck) wakes up to find his wife Amy (Rosamund Pike) missing, possibly kidnapped. A manhunt and media frenzy ensue, with the evidence pointing towards her murder. The season is completed by one of the most acclaimed films of last year, *The Favourite* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2018), based on a long-gestating screenplay by Deborah Davis, who will introduce the film on **Tuesday 25 June**. *The Favourite* is a unique take on the period drama, focusing on the ugly machinations and power play of three women: Queen Anne (Olivia Colman), her confidante Lady Sarah (Rachel Weisz) and ambitious newcomer Abigail (Emma Stone). The twisted dynamic between Sarah and Abigail as they vie for the Queen's favour reaches extraordinary levels of viciousness, which have been relished by audiences and critics since the film debuted at the Venice Film Festival last year.

– ENDS –

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SEASON LISTINGS:

An Attempted History of the On-screen Bitch

TRT 90min

What do we mean when we say 'on-screen bitch'? What does it mean to play one? In this lively talk, richly illustrated with clips from film and television, we attempt to present a history of the 'bitch', pay tribute to the actresses that embody this archetype and how we might just be living in a golden age of on-screen bitches.

Tickets £6.50

TUE 4 JUN 18:30 NFT3

The Little Foxes

USA 1941. Dir William Wyler. With Bette Davis, Carl Benton Reid, Charles Dingle. 115min. 35mm PG

There could be no season exploring anti-heroines without Bette Davis. Based on a play and screenplay by Lillian Hellman, the film has Davis in an iconic role as the Southern aristocrat Regina Giddens – a woman struggling within the confines of a society that won't allow her to own land. Davis' performance oozes a viciousness, ambition and callousness that few other actors have managed to match.

SUN 2 JUN 15:45 NFT2 / FRI 7 JUN 18:10 NFT3

Harriet Craig

USA 1950. Dir Vincent Sherman. With Joan Crawford, Wendell Corey, KT Stevens. 94min. 35mm PG

Harriet Craig's house, hair and husband are the epitome of suburban perfection. But behind the impeccable facade is a woman that lies to and bullies everyone around her: a perfect domestic goddess with a rotten core. Joan Crawford, in one of her lesser-known roles, plays the manipulative, neurotic, controlling and obsessive perfectionist Harriet to a tee.

SUN 9 JUN 15:30 NFT3 / TUE 11 JUN 21:00 NFT2

All About Eve

USA 1950. Dir Joseph L Mankiewicz. With Bette Davis, Anne Baxter, Marilyn Monroe, George Sanders. 138min. Digital. U

Based on (but not credited to) a short story by Mary Orr, this witty classic is a study in ambition and conflict among creative women. The story centres on acclaimed but aging Broadway star Margo Channing (Davis) and her relationship with young fan Eve (Baxter), who ingratiates her way into Margo's life and slowly but surely works towards her own goal.

SUN 9 JUN 17:10 NFT2 / MON 24 JUN 20:15 NFT3 / SUN 30 JUN 15:00 NFT1

Carmen Jones

USA 1954. Dir Otto Preminger. With Dorothy Dandridge, Harry Belafonte, Pearl Bailey. 105min. Digital. U

In this modern take on Bizet's opera, with an all-black cast, Dandridge plays Carmen Jones, a tempestuous factory worker in a military base who sets her eyes on do-gooder Joe (Belafonte), an officer who's already engaged. Carmen is a seductive siren, who seemingly relishes destroying men for the fun of it, and Dandridge's take on the infamous character still remains one of the most extraordinary.

SAT 1 JUN 20:25 NFT3 / THU 13 JUN 18:15 NFT2

The Life and Loves of a She-Devil + panel discussion

BBC 1986. Dir Philip Saville. With Julie T Wallace, Patricia Hodge, Dennis Waterman, Tom Baker, Liz Smith. 4 x 60min + interval. 15

When the ungainly, unwieldy and unworldly Ruth is cruelly ditched by her cheating husband she harnesses a powerful, primal rage to free her inner-bitch and devise a fearsome, almost satanic revenge on him and his wealthy mistress. Fay Weldon's potent and hugely entertaining tale, expertly adapted by Ted Whitehead, made a huge splash when it first appeared. It still impresses today with its mix of dark drama and jet-black comedy. Don't miss this special screening of the complete series.

SUN 16 JUN 14:45 NFT2

The Last Seduction + intro by season programmer Anna Bogutskaya*

USA 1994. Dir John Dahl. With Linda Fiorentino, Peter Berg, Bill Pullman. 110min. 35mm 18

After Bridget's (Fiorentino) husband insults her, she steals the cash he's made from a one-time drug deal and hits the road. Lying low in a small town, she becomes involved with a naive local, and leaves a trail of destruction behind her. Whip-smart, uncompromising and rotten to the core, Bridget Gregory is one of the defining femmes fatales of the 1990s. Fiorentino – who shone bright in the 90s before quitting the film industry – gives a much-lauded performance, and sizzles with a ruthlessness and blatant greed that's usually the preserve of male characters.

TUE 4 JUN 20:40 NFT3* / SAT 15 JUN 18:15 NFT3

To Die For

USA-UK-Canada 1995. Dir Gus Van Sant. With Nicole Kidman, Joaquin Phoenix, Matt Dillon. 107min. Digital. 15

Suzanne Stone (Kidman) is a smalltown reporter obsessed with becoming a world-renowned TV personality. Using her charm, she tries to climb up the broadcasting ladder, calculating every precise move towards small-screen stardom. But when her conservative husband (Dillon) tries to get her to focus on starting a family, she plots to get rid of him with the help of two teenagers. Kidman gives one of her most underrated, electric performances as the manipulative and immoral Suzanne.

SAT 15 JUN 20:40 NFT2 / WED 19 JUN 18:10 NFT2

Death Becomes Her: Drag Show Bitch-along

USA 1992. Dir Robert Zemeckis. With Meryl Streep, Goldie Hawn, Bruce Willis, Isabella Rossellini. 104min. Digital. 12A

Narcissistic actress Madeline Ashton (Streep) and writer Helen Sharp (Hawn) are old friends, whose tenuous bond is broken when Madeline steals Helen's fiancé (Willis). It's tested even further when a potion promising eternal youth is offered to them by a mysterious woman (Rossellini). The film is full of gorgeously camp lines and boasts an over-the-top horror aesthetic, but its beating heart is the relationship between the two frenemies. We celebrate these self-obsessed divas with a special screening hosted by a guest drag queen (to be announced).

FRI 21 JUN 18:20 NFT1

*Also available on **BFIPLAYER***

La Cérémonie

France-Germany 1995. Dir Claude Chabrol. With Isabelle Huppert, Sandrine Bonnaire, Jacqueline Bisset. 112min. Digital. EST. 15

Introverted Sophie (Bonnaire) is hired by a well-off family to take care of their remote mansion. At first she keeps to herself, but soon develops a friendship with the local postmistress, Jeanne (Huppert), who is despised by Sophie's employers. Both women bond over a shared secret... Adapted from a Ruth Rendell novel, this film provides one of Huppert's darkest roles as the impertinent and dangerous Jeanne.

SUN 16 JUN 20:10 NFT3 / FRI 28 JUN 18:10 NFT2

Young Adult

USA 2011. Dir Jason Reitman. With Charlize Theron, Patton Oswalt, Patrick Wilson. 94min. Digital. 15

Divorced, alcoholic YA ghost writer Mavis Gary (Theron) returns to her hometown in Minnesota, determined to get back together with her high-school sweetheart (Wilson), who's now happily married and has a child. Living as if she were still the adored and feared prom queen, Mavis – wonderfully written by Diablo Cody – is flawed and dislikeable; but that's what makes her such a great character.

SAT 8 JUN 18:20 NFT3 / SAT 22 JUN 20:40 NFT3

Gone Girl

USA 2014. Dir David Fincher. With Rosamund Pike, Ben Affleck, Neil Patrick Harris, Tyler Perry. 149min. Digital. 18

On the day of their anniversary, Nick Dunne (Affleck) wakes up to find his wife Amy (Pike) missing, possibly kidnapped. A manhunt and media frenzy ensue, with evidence pointing towards murder. Gillian Flynn adapted her own cult novel, resulting in a film that helped cement the 'cool girl' concept, and is impossible to describe without spoilers.

TUE 18 JUN 18:10 NFT1 / SUN 30 JUN 19:30 NFT3

Dangerous Liaisons

USA-UK 1988. Dir Stephen Frears. With Glenn Close, John Malkovich, Michelle Pfeiffer, Uma Thurman. 119min. Format tbc. 15

Glenn Close gives one of her most acclaimed and iconic performances as the manipulative villainess who engineers a complex scheme of revenge on her former lover by disgracing his new, younger fiancée (Thurman). With the aid of her friend, the similarly unprincipled Valmont (Malkovich), the *bitch du court* of pre-Revolution Paris plays with the lives of those around her with no regard for anyone but herself.

MON 17 JUN 18:00 NFT3 / WED 26 JUN 20:45 NFT2

The Favourite + Q&A with screenwriter Deborah Davis*

Ireland-UK-USA 2018. Dir Yorgos Lanthimos. With Olivia Colman, Emma Stone, Rachel Weisz. 119min. Digital. 15

One of the most acclaimed films of the last year, *The Favourite*, based on a long-gestating screenplay by Deborah Davis, is a unique take on the period drama. It centres on the ugly machinations and power play of three women: Queen Anne (Colman), her confidante Lady Sarah (Weisz) and ambitious newcomer Abigail (Stone). The twisted dynamic between Sarah and Abigail as they vie for the Queen's favour reaches extraordinary levels of viciousness.

WED 5 JUN 20:35 NFT1 / TUE 25 JUN 20:15 NFT1*

The Hot Take: The B Word

TRT 120min

What power does a word hold? 'Bitch' is usually a term of contempt directed at women – but has it/can it be reclaimed? In what's likely to become a heated event, with thinkers, commentators and performers giving their take on it, we hope to address the debate head-on: is it time to re-define the word 'bitch'?

Tickets £6.50

THU 13 JUN 20:30 BLUE ROOM

The Luxury of Being Difficult

TRT 90min

Join us to reflect on the anti-heroine, and ask who is allowed to be dislikeable on screen? And how have issues of race, class and sexuality impacted on the portrayal of 'difficult' women on both big and small screens? We bring together a panel of special guests to explore these pertinent questions as modern representations of demanding female characters emerge.

Tickets £6.50

WED 26 JUN 18:30 BLUE ROOM

TV's Bad Girls

TRT 90min

How does today's TV drama reflect those dynamic, strong and often downright badly behaved women often lazily labelled as bitches? It's a long way from the camp villainy of Kate O'Mara in *Dynasty* to the present crop of more nuanced and psychologically motivated 'bitches' we see on TV today. Crucially, many of these characters are now created by and for women, and reflect the multifaceted nature of conflict between women themselves. Join us as we discuss modern anti-heroines from your favourite shows such as *Killing Eve*, *Harlots*, *Bad Girls* and *Clique*, assisted by special guests and plenty of clips. The event will be hosted by Lorraine Candy, Editor-in-Chief of *The Sunday Times Style* magazine.

Tickets £6.50

MON 10 JUN 18:30 NFT1

About the BFI

The BFI is the UK's lead organisation for film, television and the moving image. It is a cultural charity that:

- Curates and presents the greatest international public programme of World Cinema for audiences; in cinemas, at festivals and online
- Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
- Actively seeks out and supports the next generation of filmmakers
- Works with Government and industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

BFI Southbank

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £13.75, concs £11.25 including Gift Aid donation. Members pay £2.20 less on any ticket - www.bfi.org.uk/southbank.

Young people aged 25 and under can buy last minute tickets for just £3, 45 minutes before the start of screenings and events, subject to availability - <http://www.bfi.org.uk/25-and-under>.

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Shop

The BFI Shop is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

BFI Reuben Library

BFI Southbank is home to the BFI Reuben Library which holds the world's largest collection of books, journals and digitised material about film, television and the moving image. The library is free to access and hosts a year-round programme of talks and events.

'Not just for movie nerds - this huge collection of film and TV books, periodicals, scripts, stills and posters is full of inspiration for anyone involved in the creative arts' – Evening Standard Magazine

The BFI Reuben Library is open 10:30-19:00, Tuesday-Saturday.

The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

BFI Mediatheque

Free to access BFI Mediatheques offer users an opportunity to explore the digital collections drawn from the BFI National Archive and partner collections, at select UK-wide locations.

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

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank can be found via the link below:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/uezw03rabjvrvp/AADFs0t2dbKGv3SLMmr0HXg7a?dl=0>

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