

13/11

Returning to Oz



8 February 2013, London.

From **1-14 March BFI Southbank** will be **Returning to Oz** with a season dedicated to the fictional world created in 1900 by **L Frank Baum**. With the imminent release of Sam Raimi's *Oz the Great and Powerful* (screening at **BFI IMAX** from March 8) and the global success of the musical production *Wicked*, it seems that Oz's appeal is unfaltering. This season will take a look at the fairyland at the end of the yellow brick road with screenings of the classic 1939 musical ***The Wizard of Oz***, but also a series of film adaptations which audiences may not be so familiar with. These will include ***The Patchwork Girl of Oz*** (1914), ***The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*** (1910), two further films ***The Wizard of Oz*** (1925 and 1933) as well as late-70s New York set ***The Wiz*** (1978). Completing the programme will be a screening of BBC documentary ***In Search of Oz*** (1994) and a lively discussion event ***The Radical Land of Oz***.

Along with illustrator WW Denslow, in 1900 L Frank Baum published a small children's book called ***The Wonderful Wizard of Oz***. The story of a little girl from the Kansas prairies whirled by a cyclone to a land of dreams would become a best seller and the basis for ***The Wizard of Oz*** (1939), which in 2010 was declared by the Library of Congress as the most-watched film of all time. Baum returned to Oz 16 times in print between 1900 and 1920. However, less well known is that during the same period he co-founded one of the first film studios in Los Angeles, the Oz Film Manufacturing Company, which produced three feature-length **Oz** films in its short life. These early films were a critical but not a commercial success, and today – despite not surviving in their entirety – their qualities still shine, with inventive special effects and glorious physical performances, including acrobat Pierre Couderc in ***The Patchwork Girl of Oz*** (1914). Screening alongside this will be the earliest surviving film of the Oz story ***The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*** (1910).

The 1925 version of ***The Wizard of Oz*** was essentially a vehicle for the comedian Larry Semon who directed and co-starred in the film. Structured like a pantomime, the film played with several levels of story within story and is bookended with a toymaker reading *The Wizard of Oz* to his granddaughter. Ted Eshbaugh's ***The***

Wizard of Oz (1933) is charmingly rendered in Technicolor animation and was the first adaptation to portray Kansas in monochrome and Oz in colour - it would not however be the last. In 1939 MGM made **The Wizard of Oz** starring the spellbinding Judy Garland as Dorothy. The film whisks Dorothy away from a sepia tinted farmland to a Technicolor fairyland. At the then enormous cost of \$2,777,000 it is one of the most lavish, elaborate and polished productions ever to come out of Hollywood.

The season wouldn't be complete without a screening of **The Wiz** (1978), the late-70s New York set Motown inspired rendering of Oz. With an all star cast including Michael Jackson as a body-popping Scarecrow and Diana Ross as Dorothy, as well as vast and spectacular dance numbers, *The Wiz* is essential viewing for all Oz fans. Also screening will be the BBC's **In Search of Oz** (1994), an insightful, richly illustrated documentary examining the enduring interest in the Land of Oz, with contributions from noted admirers like Salman Rushdie and Gore Vidal. Completing the programme will be a lively discussion event **The Radical Land of Oz** in which panellists will examine different readings of Oz; guests will include writer and critic Sophie Mayer and academic Matthew Beaumont (UCL).

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Screenings taking place in the season:

The Patchwork Girl of Oz

USA 1914. Dir J Farrell Macdonald. With Violet Macmillan, Fred Woodward, Frank Moore, Raymond Russell. c81min. U. Live piano accompaniment by Stephen Horne

The first of the Oz films by the Oz Film Manufacturing Co., scripted by L Frank Baum himself, differs substantially from the book, though several of the familiar characters are present: Ozma, the Wizard, the Scarecrow and Cowardly Lion. The principal characters are Ojo, a munchkin boy, and his uncle, who encounter the Patchwork Girl (played by acrobat Pierre Couderc), a kind of ragdoll animated by a magician and his wife who have been accidentally petrified. Ojo and an ever expanding cast of followers set off to Oz to find an antidote.

+ The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

USA 1910. Dir Otis Turner. With Bebe Daniels. c13min. U

This, from the Selig Polyscope Company, is the earliest surviving film of the Oz story, showing the fabulous special effects of the stage version.

Introduced by Archive curator Bryony Dixon

Fri 1 Mar 18:20 NFT2

Sun 3 Mar 16:00 NFT2

The Wizard of Oz

USA 1925. Dir Larry Semon. With Dorothy Dwan, Joseph Swickard, Otto Lederer, Oliver Hardy. c92min. U. Live piano accompaniment

This outing of the famous Oz story is just about recognisable as an adaptation of L Frank Baum's book. It was essentially a vehicle for the comedian Larry Semon and rewrote the book's plot, but it did include many of the favourite Oz characters, such as Dorothy, the Scarecrow (which Semon played himself) and the Tin Woodman played by a young Oliver

Hardy. The film is structured like a pantomime, playing with several levels of story within story, bookended with a toymaker reading *The Wizard of Oz* to his granddaughter.

+ The Wizard of Oz

USA 1933. Dir Ted Eshbaugh. 8min. U

Eshbaugh's charming Technicolor animation was the first adaptation to portray Kansas in monochrome and Oz in colour.

Sat 2 Mar 15:50 NFT2

Tue 5 Mar 20:30 NFT2

The Wizard of Oz

USA 1939. Dir Victor Fleming. With Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ray Bolger, Bert Lahr, Jack Haley, Billie Burke, Margaret Hamilton. 98min. Digital. U

An extreme weather event transports Dorothy Gale from her monochrome Kansas farm to a Technicolor dreamworld beyond the rainbow, beginning one of the greatest fantasy adventures ever to light up the screen. Witches' potions, ruby slippers and MGM's studio wizardry aside, it's 16-year-old Judy Garland's spellbinding screen presence, and Dorothy's unquestionable power to inspire love and self-belief in the broken and downcast, that create the real enchantment. Presented in a stunning digital restoration.

Fri 1 – Thu 14 Mar

The Wiz

USA 1978. Dir Sidney Lumet. With Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Richard Pryor, Lena Horne. 134min. U

The time has surely come for this ghetto-fabulous, all-star Motown transposition of Oz to late-70s New York. Michael Jackson certainly steals the show as a body-popping Scarecrow, but there's so much more here. The sheer vista of the dance numbers is spectacular – yes that's the World Trade Center plaza playing the Emerald City. If you can suspend disbelief – and can accept a 33-year-old Diana Ross as Dorothy – then you will love this film.

Fri 8 Mar 18:00 NFT1

Wed 13 Mar 18:00 NFT2

In Search of Oz

Arena. BBC 1994. Dir Brian Skeet. 60min

+ Oz: The Tin Woodman's Dream

USA 1960. Dir Harry Smith. 14min extant

The BBC's insightful, richly illustrated and elegantly crafted documentary examines the enduring interest in the Land of Oz, with contributions from noted admirers like Salman Rushdie and Gore Vidal. Paired with dazzling and tantalising fragments of an intended (but sadly never fully realised) feature-length psychedelic animation by 1960s underground luminary Harry Smith, confirming the abundant fertility of Baum's Oz and its durability in inspiring such a diverse range of filmmakers.

Mon 4 Mar 18:20 NFT3

Discussion Event: The Radical Land of Oz

Since L Frank Baum began to chronicle The Land of Oz at the turn of the 20th century, it has tantalised those seeking escape to an alternative world. This discussion event examines the possibility of identifying Baum's imagined otherworld – and various artistic iterations of it – as radical utopia and political fantasy: The Wonderful Socialist Queer Psychedelic Land of Oz? Chaired by season curator Rhidian Davis, with guests to include writer and critic Sophie Mayer and academic Matthew Beaumont (UCL).

Tickets £5

Mon 4 Mar 20:30 NFT3

Sam Raimi's Oz: The Great and Powerful opens at the BFI IMAX on Thu 8 March

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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
- 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 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 £10.00, concs £6.75 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

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

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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.

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

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank / March 2013