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The Dude Abides... A Tribute to Jeff Bridges Part One: June 2011



This June **BFI Southbank** will present the first part of a season dedicated to **Jeff Bridges**. He is an actor who Pauline Kael once wrote he 'may be the most natural and least self-conscious screen actor who ever lived'.

This tribute season addresses an extraordinary career spanning six decades and over 60 films which have earned him five **Oscar** nominations, including his most recent performance in **Joel and Ethan Coen's True Grit** (2010), and, somewhat tardily, the **Academy Award for Best Actor** in **Crazy Heart** (2009). An Extended Run of the rarely screened classic **Cutters Way** (1981) provides a centrepiece to the programme alongside the continuation of the recently revived **The Last Picture**

Show (1971). Part one will include films from Bridges' early career including **Fat City** (1972), **Bad Company** (1972), **Michael Cimino's Thunderbolt and Lightfoot** (1974) and **Tron** (1982), while part two will include **Terry Gilliam's The Fisher King** (1991) and **The Big Lebowski** (1998).

The enduring interest of audiences in seeing Bridges on the big screen may stem from the fact that he has simply appeared to be the character he's playing. His seemingly effortless performances and self-assurance may be linked to his having started so early; his first film cameo, with his mother and brother Beau, was as a four-year-old in *The Company She Keeps* (1951), while in his teens he could be found in father Lloyd's *Sea Hunt* television series (1958 - 1960) and a clutch of TV movies. His breakthrough role won him an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor in **Peter Bogdanovich's The Last Picture Show**, followed soon after by the western *Bad Company* (1972).

Mannerisms and grandstanding don't feature in his work. In **Bob Rafelson's Stay Hungry** (1976) he portrays the uneasy heir to a family fortune who opts out for a job in a gym. His ability to make almost any role look as if it were tailor-made for him has made for considerable versatility, whether it's playing the brother of an assassinated president, caught up in a conspiracy,

in **Winter Kills** (1979) or an arcade games hacker locked in an alternate reality in **Tron** (1982).

Unusually for an actor of his age, this will mark the second time that the BFI has devoted a season to Jeff Bridges which serves as further testament to the quality and breadth of the work undertaken since that retrospective in 1988. Back then, he had only fairly recently attained full star status with *Jagged Edge* (1985) and *The Morning After* (1986), despite having already had a busy and well respected career over the previous twenty years. In part two in July, the season will focus on Bridges' later work, from **Tucker** (1988) through **Fearless** (1993) and **The Big Lebowski** (1998) to his Oscar-winning performance in **Crazy Heart** (2008) and most recently **True Grit** (2010).

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Extended Run 24 – 30 June (continues in July):

Cutter's Way aka *Cutter and Bone*

USA 1981. Dir Ivan Passer. With Jeff Bridges, John Heard, Lisa Eichhorn, Ann Dusenberry, Nina Van Pallandt. 109min. Digital. **15**

Made towards the end of the last golden age of American cinema, Passer's taut crime drama is also an unusually rich, resonant study of embittered vengeance and emotional and moral lassitude. At a Santa Barbara parade, beach-bum Richard Bone (Bridges) spots a man he thinks he might have seen some nights previously disposing of a corpse; his volatile Viet-vet friend Alex Cutter (Heard) embarks at once on an obsessive, Ahab-like quest to nail the tycoon, be he guilty of murder or merely of fat-cat crimes against ordinary people. Trouble is, the deeply damaged Cutter's rants convince neither his buddy nor his semi-alcoholic wife Mo (Eichhorn) – whom, inconveniently, Bone too loves... Brilliantly acted, superbly shot so that the dazzling Southern California sunshine itself becomes part of the nightmarish intrigues, and written so subtly yet vividly that it harks back to Melville and Chandler while antipating the Coens – like *Lebowski*, *The Long Goodbye*, *Chinatown* and *The Big Sleep*, it's classic LA noir and, 30 years on, ripe for rediscovery.

The Last Picture Show

USA 1971. Dir Peter Bogdanovich. With Cybill Shepherd, Timothy Bottoms, Ben Johnson. 118min. **15**

Bridges' first major film role already displays his relaxed, seemingly effortless style of acting, beautifully suited to the slightly callow Duane, best friend of the more sensitive Sonny (Timothy Bottoms), as the pair try to negotiate the complexities of life after high school in early 50s smalltown Texas. Kickstarting the careers of a host of young actors (as well as the golden age of 70s American cinema), the film is funny, touching, and memorably vivid as a portrait of lost innocence. Bridges was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar.

Fri 3 June 18:40; Sat 4 June 18:40; Sun 5 June 18:40; Fri 10 June 20:50; Sat 11 June 18:40; Sun 12 June 18:40 (all screenings in Studio)

Fat City

USA 1972. Dir John Huston. With Susan Tyrell, Candy Clark. 96min. **15**

This admirably authentic account of the crossed paths of two smalltime boxers – one (Bridges) a young hopeful, the other (Stacey Keach) a boozy has-been attempting a comeback – is one of Huston's very greatest achievements, its frank, unsentimental assessment of forlorn ambitions and dashed dreams harmonising

perfectly with the seedy gyms, bars, boxing rings and flophouses of the Stockton, California setting. The cast is uniformly superb.

Wed 1 June 18:30 NFT1; Fri 3 June 20:45 NFT1

Bad Company

USA 1972. Dir Robert Benton. With Barry Brown, Jim Davis, David Huddleston, John Savage. 93min. **15**

Benton's first and arguably finest film as director is a truly marvellous western set in the 1860s, in which an idealistic innocent (Brown) leaves his Ohio home to seek his fortune out west, only to fall in with a ragged crew of Civil War draft-dodgers led by the conniving, decidedly unheroic would-be outlaw Jake Rumsey (Bridges). A funny and finally moving account of deluded folly confronted by harsh, largely hostile reality, with Bridges offering a lovely study in bluff (albeit vulnerable) bravado.

Fri 3 June 18:30 NFT1 (With intro by Geoff Andrew); **Wed 8 June 20:45 NFT1**

Thunderbolt and Lightfoot

USA 1974. Dir Michael Cimino. With George Kennedy, Geoffrey Lewis. 115min

Perhaps the best known of Bridges' early films, primarily because bank-robber Thunderbolt, partner in crime to his drifter Lightfoot, is played by Clint Eastwood. Cimino's warmest and wittiest movie, it charts the tensions that arise among a motley, far from honourable quartet of thieves as they plan a massive bullion heist; unusual in its semi-explicit acknowledgment of the gay undercurrents common in buddy movies, it's perhaps most memorable for its scenes with Bridges in drag.

Thu 9 June 18:10 NFT3; Sun 12 June 20:30 NFT1

Hollywood Cowboy aka *Hearts of the West*

USA 1975. Dir Howard Zieff. With Blythe Danner, Andy Griffith. 102min. **PG**

A rightly acclaimed if now seldom seen comedy set in Tinseltown soon after the advent of the talkies, and starring Bridges as a hick from the sticks bent on finding fame as a writer of dime-store western novels but forced to take work as an extra in a lowly oater. A sly, sharp but engagingly affectionate satire on the corruption, plagiarism, narcissism and downright lunacy that have always blighted the movie capital. The delightful cast also includes Alan Arkin and Donald Pleasence.

Sat 11 June 18:10 NFT3; Sat 18 June 20:45 NFT1

Stay Hungry

USA 1976. Dir Bob Rafelson. With Sally Field, Robert Englund, RG Armstrong. 101min. **15**

As in *Five Easy Pieces*, Rafelson again centres on a rootless protagonist uneasy about his family's wealth and values, though in the case of Bridges' Alabama heir, forsaking a future in real estate to focus on helping out a gym where would-be Mr Universes (including Arnold Schwarzenegger) work out, the tone is lighter, more comic and very pleasingly wayward. A psychologically and socially astute account of rebellion improbably transformed into commitment, it allows Bridges ample room to feel his way into his role... and he simply excels.

Sat 11 June 20:30 NFT3; Fri 17 June 18:20 NFT2

Winter Kills

USA 1979. Dir William Richert. With Anthony Perkins, Sterling Hayden, Eli Wallach. 96min
Adapted from a typically dark, witty conspiracy thriller by Richard Condon (*The Manchurian Candidate*), this sees Bridges as the brother of an assassinated US president, up to his neck in deadly intrigue as he tries to track down the assassin. Since the echoes of the Kennedys are clearly intended, John Huston is especially enjoyable as the tycoon patriarch, though the labyrinthine narrative also makes space for the likes of Toshiro Mifune, Elizabeth Taylor, Dorothy Malone and Ralph Meeker.

Sun 12 June TBC NFT3; Sat 25 June 20:30 NFT3

Heaven's Gate

USA 1980. Dir Michael Cimino. With Kris Kristofferson, Christopher Walken, Isabelle Huppert, John Hurt. 219min

The complete original version of Cimino's absurdly maligned epic which charts the progress of the Johnson County Wars, waged between rich cattle barons, starving European immigrants and almost powerless lawmen in 1890s Wyoming. Ambitious, lavish and elegant (stylistically the presiding spirit is not so much Ford as Visconti), the film explores the moral compromises and violent atrocities behind the American dream; on a personal level it also helped to persuade Bridges (while contributing his relatively modest but very effective role) of the superb beauty of the Wyoming landscape.

Fri 17 June 20:45 NFT1; Sun 19 June 20:45 NFT1

Tron

USA 1982. Dir Steven Lisberger. With Bruce Boxleitner, David Warner. 96min. 70mm. **PG**

A chance to revisit Disney's original pioneering fantasy in which Bridges' whizzkid hacker is abducted and trapped within the virtual world of a computer, where he has to become an active participant in gladiatorial video games in order to survive or escape. While no great success at the box-office – it was, perhaps, ahead of its time in some respects – both conceptually and stylistically the film influenced what later became a significant strand of mainstream cinema, anticipating films such as The Matrix, not to mention, of course, Tron: Legacy.

Sun 19 June 18:30 NFT1; Mon 20 June 20:45 NFT1

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- 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

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