

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

CEYLON SENDS FILMS OF ITS MOST IMPORTANT FILMMAKER TO MUSEUM

Ceylon, one of the newer nations, will provide a one-man film retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art. From March 26 until April 1, the Museum will present the works of Ceylon's leading filmmaker Lester James Peries, formerly a writer and painter, widely recognized by European critics because his films have been seen frequently at festivals abroad. They have also had occasional showings in Great Britain, but otherwise have not been seen outside of Asia.

Donald Richie, the Museum's visiting curator and an authority on Asian film, is responsible for bringing the Ceylonese films to this country. According to Richie, Peries has created, practically by himself, a whole film world. "He has the purity of vision which makes us forget that his locale is exotic, his people foreign. He is making films for the whole world. He is a humanist speaking through the language of film."

The film industry in Ceylon, which is the size of the state of West Virginia, only began in the past twenty years. The country now has several small studios, though Peries also films on location, using non-professional as well as professional actors. He started his film career as an assistant director, working with the Government Film Unit, created in 1948 to inform the newly enfranchised Ceylonese people of various changes and aspects of life in a democratic state.

Today the film industry produces many entertainment films, but it also has a quota of "serious" pictures for a sizable, sophisticated audience that has been exposed to the best of the world's cinema at film societies, in Colombo, the nation's capital. While there are several name stars in Ceylonese films, the director, script writer, composer and cameraman all occupy positions of importance in

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the mind of the public. None, however, ranks with Peries, who is said by European critics to work in the tradition of Renoir. He has also been compared to Robert Flaherty because his films are "models of poetry and honesty," in the words of the late film historian, Georges Sadoul.

In sum, as Mr. Richie comments, Lester James Peries is to Ceylon what Satyajit Ray is to India. He remains the major figure in its burgeoning film industry. With his first film, "Rekava" (The Line of Destiny), made in 1956, he moved Ceylonese cinema from the closed, contrived world of the situation comedy and filmed stage play to the outdoors. He began to look at the world around him, and expressed what he saw and felt cinematically.

Peries' films are rooted in the lives and customs of the people of his country, concentrating on mood, atmosphere, and the inner relationships of people to each other and to their surroundings. "Golu Hadawatha" (The Silence of the Heart), for example, concerns the love between two university students. Customarily, students would appear, at most, in an episode of a Ceylonese film, but Peries devoted an entire movie to their relationship.

"Gamperaliya" (The Changing Countryside), a 1964 film to be shown here, dramatizes the changing ethos of Ceylonese life, the conflict between old customs and modern mores. A similar interest in conflict appears in "Delovak Athara" (Between Two Worlds), a film which examines a crisis of conscience in a young man whose upbringing has oriented him toward the West. Likewise in "Akkara Paha" (Five Acres of Land), a film receiving its world premiere during this series, the conflict is between an undecided younger generation and the landed older generation.

Of his own films, Peries himself has said, "For me the cinema is unsurpassed in its ability to reveal the interior life of its characters. Nuances of feeling, of emotion, the minutest changes in sensibility, these can be caught by the camera with the precision of a seismograph. To me it is more important to portray the

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undramatic, because in cinema this is where the true drama lies."

There have been two retrospectives of Peries' work -- one in New Delhi and another in Colombo, where it was stated in a program note that "the plot, as we commonly understand the term, has little significance ... his films move on the plane of psychological motivation rather than on that of overt action."

The schedule of the Peries Retrospective follows.

Thursday, March 26 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00 P.M.)

REKAVA (The Line of Destiny). 1956. Directed by Lester James Peries. English subtitles. ca. 100 minutes.

Friday, March 27 (2:00, 5:30 P.M.)

GOLU HADAWATHA (The Silence of the Heart). 1968. Directed by Lester James Peries. English subtitles. ca. 110 min.

Saturday, March 28 (3:00, 5:30 P.M.)

GAMPERALIYA (The Changing Countryside). 1964. Directed by Lester James Peries. English subtitles. ca. 105 minutes.

Sunday, March 29 (2:00, 5:30 P.M.)

RANSALU (The Yellow Robes). 1967. Directed by Lester James Peries. English subtitles. ca. 100 minutes.

Monday, March 30 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00 P.M.)

DELOVAK ATHARA (Between Two Worlds). 1966. Directed by Lester James Peries. English subtitles. ca. 105 minutes.

Tuesday, March 31 (2:00, 5:30 P.M.)

AKKARA PAHA (Five Acres of Land). 1969. Directed by Lester James Peries. In Sinhalese, no English subtitles. WORLD PREMIERE.

Wednesday, April 1 (2:00, 5:30 P.M.)

AKKARA PAHA (See Tuesday, March 31)

Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. (212) 956 - 7296, 7501.