

The Museum of Modern Art

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MUSEUM HONORS BRITISH DIRECTOR DAVID LEAN

Preceding the world premiere of David Lean's new film "Ryan's Daughter," The Museum of Modern Art will present a selection of films by the British director including the uncut version of "Oliver Twist," starring Alec Guinness. The most controversial picture in Lean's career, "Oliver Twist" was withheld from American release for three years, and when it was shown here the role of Fagin, interpreted by Guinness, was subject to deletions. Now the picture will be shown in its entirety October 29 at 8:00 p.m., as part of the six-day tribute to the two-time Academy Award winner. Mr. Lean received the director's prize for "The Bridge On the River Kwai" and for "Lawrence of Arabia."

In all, eight of Lean's films made in the years between 1945 and 1965 will be shown in this series. It begins with a film little known here, titled "One Woman's Story," starring Ann Todd, but most of the films have received wide critical acclaim, such as "Breaking the Sound Barrier," "Great Expectations," "Brief Encounter," "Summertime," and "Hobson's Choice." The more recent "Dr. Zhivago" will also be shown, as well as the unexpurgated "Oliver Twist."

"Oliver Twist," made in 1948, aroused the opposition of several organizations which demanded its suppression because of what was considered an anti-semitic portrayal of Fagin by Alec Guinness. The efforts to censor the film brought counter opposition from organizations that objected to the threat of film censorship as an infringement of free speech. The National Board of Review even passed a resolution opposing "open and covert acts of intimidation, boycott and arbitrary censorship."

While admitting that it was "unwise" to show the picture in Germany or Austria in that post-war period, the distinguished and late critic John Mason Brown came to

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its defense. Fagin, he said, was no more "repulsive" than other black-hearted villains in Dickens' work. However wicked and merciless he was, the character, modeled after the drawings of Cruikshank, bearded, beak-nosed and clothed in gaberdine, was only one rogue in a crowded rogues' gallery, Brown declared. Furthermore, he thought that Fagin "seemed almost kindly compared to those villainous gentiles who are his confederates," whom he called professional criminals, victims of the filth and slums of early 19th century London. Brown pointed out that the British should have protested because the film showed the uglier aspects of their past.

Curiously enough a much earlier version of "Oliver Twist," made in the United States in 1922, a silent film with Jackie Coogan and Lon Chaney in the role of Fagin, was censored in Great Britain for fear of encouraging juvenile delinquency in that country.

Before the issue of "Oliver Twist," Lean had succeeded in transposing Dickens' "Great Expectations" to the screen. "The film was never less than graceful, tasteful and intelligent," wrote the late Jim Agee. Lean, himself, declared he had tried to create a larger-than-life style to conform to Dickens' kind of writing. He succeeded for he is, in Hollis Alpert's words, "an encyclopedia of technique," though "it is all but impossible to build up a mystique about him."

Altogether Lean's career numbers 14 pictures, three of them made in the past decade. He began directing in 1942 when Noel Coward signed him as co-director of his story on Lord Mountbatten's naval exploits, titled "In Which We Serve." It is still considered one of the best of England's war films.

Lean rose from the ranks of film editing. He had worked on "Pygmalion," "Major Barbara" and "The 49th Parallel" before his own directorial debut, which came after an apprenticeship as tea carrier, messenger, clapper boy (he places numbered boards before each scene) and subsequently camera assistant, assistant director to Anthony Asquith, cutting room assistant and finally editor for British Movietone News. From news coverage he moved to feature film editing and directing on his own.

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The success of "In Which We Serve" led him to direct three other Coward stories: "The Happy Breed," "Blithe Spirit," and "Brief Encounter." The latter, scripted by Ronald Neame, won a New York Film Critics Prize. Called poignant and haunting, it was welcomed as a landmark of discretion and middle class morality, particularly applicable to the times which frowned upon extra-marital affairs. Noted were the use of flashbacks to "build a circular action, tracing events in retrospect and back again to the original point of departure. But an equally important part of the action," according to George Amberg, professor at New York University, "is the railroad station, with its trains and travelers and noises, its restlessness and transitoriness, all forming a composite montage of sights and sounds and shrieks and silences, of anonymity and familiarity, of generality and specificity--as precisely woven into the action as are the gestures and words and emotions. For this superb montage the credit is due the director."

Lesser known than "Brief Encounter" are three other pictures on the program: "Hobson's Choice," with Charles Laughton as a sodden King Lear of the retail trade, whose Cordelia-like daughter, Brenda de Banzie, married his clerk, portrayed by John Mills; "Breaking the Sound Barrier," with Ralph Richardson, from a Terence Rattigan script which probes into the emotions and spirit of men involved in the danger of jets that penetrate the air at the speed of sound; and "Summertime," from Arthur Laurent's play "The Time of the Cuckoo," with Katharine Hepburn as the naive, frustrated, lonely tourist, attracted to an Italian Lothario, middle-aged and married, played by Rossano Brazzi. "Summertime" was made in Venice, as many of Lean's pictures are shot on location, including the current "Ryan's Daughter," filmed on the peninsula of Dingle, County Kerry, Ireland. It will have its world premiere on November 9 at the Ziegfield Theater for the benefit of the Museum's Department of Film.

The David Lean Program preceding the benefit is comprised of the following

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pictures, all directed by Lean:

Thursday, October 29

2:00, 5:30: ONE WOMAN'S STORY (THE PASSIONATE FRIENDS). 1949. With Trevor Howard, Ann Todd. Courtesy of Janus Films. 86 minutes.
8:00: OLIVER TWIST. 1948. With Alec Guinness, Robert Newton, Anthony Newley. Courtesy of Janus Films. 116 minutes.

Friday, October 30

2:00, 5:30: BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER. 1952. With Ralph Richardson, Ann Todd. Courtesy of A.C.I. 110 minutes.

Saturday, October 31

3:00, 5:30: SUMMERTIME. 1955. With Katharine Hepburn, Rossano Brazzi. 98 minutes.

Sunday, November 1

2:00: HOBSON'S CHOICE. 1954. With Charles Laughton, John Mills. 107 minutes.
5:30: GREAT EXPECTATIONS. 1947. With John Mills, Jean Simmons. Courtesy of A.C.I. 118 minutes.

Monday, November 2

1:30: BRIEF ENCOUNTER. 1947. With Celia Johnson, Trevor Howard. Courtesy of A.C.I. 86 minutes.

Tuesday, November 3

5:30: DR. ZHIVAGO. 1965. With Omar Sharif, Julie Christie, Rod Steiger. Courtesy of M.G.M. 197 minutes.

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, New York 10019. Tel: (212) 956-7296 (7501).