



Lawless ladies and feisty females at BFI Mediatheques

From wicked women to demure damsels, the *grandes dames* of onscreen evil will be unleashed on an unsuspecting public at BFI Mediatheques in March – and it's all free of charge.

The collection is called *The Gentle Sex*, and features a host of femmes fatales, controlling matriarchs, scheming vixens and pretty poisoners from British film and television. From chilling to camp, these ladies mask evil intentions with a coy flutter of eyelashes, with a façade of frailty.

Loathe to let youth and beauty eclipse them, vamps in their twilight years feature large in this collection. Nothing can stand in the way of **Bette Davis** at her acid-tongued best as a merciless mother determined to keep her brood together in Hammer's *The Anniversary* (1967); and **Siobhan McKenna** delivers a sinister turn as an elderly lady with a penchant for unusual pets in *The Landlady* (1979), an episode of the classic TV series *Tales of the Unexpected*. Also from that series is *A Girl Can't Always Have Everything* (1980) - **Joan Collins** and **Pauline Collins** vie for the affections of a wealthy man, with tragic results. An apparently perfectly domesticated woman is revealed to be a violent criminal guilty of bigamy, attempted murder, deceit and child abandonment in *Lady Audley's Secret* – and we have the silent feature (1920) and the television version (2000) on offer.

When domesticity fails to deliver daily thrills, there is always crime. **Margaret Lockwood** discovers this in *The Wicked Lady* (1945), masking a life of gambling, highway robbery and husband-stealing with the façade of 17th century conventionalism; and **Faye Dunaway** revisits the role of Lady Barbara Skelton in **Michael Winner**'s comedic remake (1983), accompanied by a stellar cast that includes **Denholm Elliott**, **Sir John Gielgud**, **Oliver Tobias**, **Prunella Scales** and **Alan Bates**. This version is currently unavailable anywhere else in the UK. Another unusual gem on offer is *The Rough and the Smooth* (1959), a rarely seen feature starring **Tony Britten** as a hapless man led astray by the exotic **Nadja Tiller**.

There is the pure horror of *Lust for a Vampire* (1970), in which a newly resurrected female vampire and her undead family prey on the staff and pupils of an Austrian finishing school. Or, for more subtle fare, **David Lean**'s accomplished, dark melodrama *Madeleine* (1949), based on the real-life case of Madeleine Smith, charged with poisoning her French lover upon discovering that he wanted her only for her money and position.

Diana Dors steps away from her glamour girl persona to play a wronged woman awaiting execution for murder in *Yield to the Night* (1956); **Anna Massey** stars as the Chocolate Cream Poisoner in the Victorian true-crime drama *Christiana Edmunds* (Saturday Night Theatre, 1970); and **Phyllis Calvert**'s split personality transforms her from prim Florentine lady to jewel-thief's mistress in *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944).

The Gentle Sex collection will be launched at the Mediatheques at BFI Southbank and QUAD, Derby in March, and will be available indefinitely. The collection launch runs in conjunction with the *Femmes Fatales* season and the Bird's Eye View film festival at BFI Southbank, which run throughout March. For more information, visit www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/

Jo Botting, Curator, BFI Mediatheque, is available for interview.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

What is a Mediatheque?

A Mediatheque is a place to enjoy hundreds of British films and television collections from the BFI National Archive, totally free, at the click of a mouse. Most (85%) are not available on DVD, and a Mediatheque is the only place you can enjoy many of these hidden gems. The Mediatheque offers a window on the collections of the BFI National Archive, the most significant film and television archive in the world. The Mediatheque allows unprecedented access to our film and television heritage. You can watch as much or as little as you like at a Mediatheque: sit back and enjoy an entire feature film or take a look at fondly remembered television shows; use the database to search on a variety of subjects or browse to discover unexpected delights.

The Mediatheque @ BFI Southbank

The BFI Southbank Mediatheque is open daily Tuesday 13.00 - 20.00; Wednesday - Sunday 11.00 - 20.00. Book in advance for a viewing station which can seat between one to four people, or simply turn up. Book for as little as 15 minutes or as much as two hours. Tel: 020 7928 3535 or simply turn up.

Research what you'd like to view in advance at www.bfi.org.uk/mediatheque

The BFI Mediatheque @ QUAD, Derby

QUAD Arts Centre hosts a gallery, cinema, BFI Mediatheque and café bar in the centre of Derby. The BFI Mediatheque is free for anyone to use, though you must be a member to use the facility. Membership is free and available from the QUAD Box office. The BFI Mediatheque @ QUAD is open daily. You can just drop in but if you would like a specific

time slot it is advisable to book in advance via the QUAD Box office. Opening times are 11:00am – 8:00pm (Sundays 12 noon - 8:00pm).
For more information please visit www.derbyquad.co.uk/bfi-mediatheque

About the BFI

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