



17 April 2009

**Presented in a new restoration**

## **PIERROT LE FOU**

(France-Italy 1965)

**Directed by Jean-Luc Godard**

**Starring: Jean-Paul Belmondo and Anna Karina**

**110 min / cert 15**

**A BFI release**

**Release date: 22 May 2009**

**Opening Venues: BFI Southbank, Watershed Bristol and Edinburgh Filmhouse plus other venues tbc**

Godard's exuberant, infinitely playful tale of lovers on the run returns to UK cinemas on 22 May. Starring Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo at the height of their seductive charm, *Pierrot le fou* formed a magnificent climax to the first phase of Godard's filmmaking career. It will be re-released by the BFI in a new restoration that does full justice to its breathtaking beauty.

Ferdinand (Belmondo) is a world-weary Parisian TV executive who has recently lost his job. Bored with his rich Italian wife, but too apathetic to seek a divorce, he returns home one evening from a mind-numbing cocktail party to a revitalising encounter with the babysitter who happens to be none other than his old flame Marianne (Karina). Following a night together in her apartment, which contains a crate of guns and a bloodstained corpse, the two hit the road in a series of stolen cars, heading south in flight from bourgeois existence and in search of a romantic utopia.

Based on Lionel White's novel *Obsession* – and inspired, too, by the script for *Bonnie and Clyde* (which Godard had been sent in 1965) – *Pierrot le fou* was filmed during the months of July and August 1965 on the Côte d'Azur, the island of Porquerolles, and finally in Paris, in reverse order to the events of the film. It was shot, in Godard's words, 'like in the days of Mack Sennett ... the whole last part was invented on the spot, unlike the beginning which was planned. It is a kind of happening, but one that was controlled'.

'What upsets me is that life is so different from novels,' says Marianne at one point, a problem that the couple seek to remedy by constantly envisaging themselves as characters from a film or a novel, telling each other stories and imposing a fictional structure on their adventure. With cultural references ranging from Renoir to Rimbaud, Velázquez to the Vietnam War, and Lorca to Laurel and Hardy, *Pierrot le fou* is a brilliant exploration of

different narrative genres, mixing crime thriller, adventure film, musical and comic strip elements with autobiography (diary entries) and news clips.

It is also a rapturous ode to mad love and a lyrical lament on the impossibility of such love (made at the time when Godard's marriage to Anna Karina was falling apart). 'I just want to live a bit,' says Marianne, while the more intellectual Ferdinand (whom she nicknames Pierrot) constantly jots down reflections in his journal, hoping to surpass James Joyce by writing about 'everything that takes place between people – space and colours'. 'You speak to me with words,' complains Marianne, 'and I look at you with feelings.' Godard called this 'the story of the last romantic couple'.

In a celebrated cameo appearance, Hollywood director Samuel Fuller explains that a film is like a battleground: 'It's love, hate, action, violence, death. In one word – emotions.' *Pierrot le fou* manages to be all those things while commenting on the nature of cinema itself. Both sensuous and cerebral, it explores the relationship (and the gap) between men and women, emotion and intellect, reality and fantasy, art and life. And with the primary colours of Raoul Coutard's 'Scope photography ravishing the eye throughout, Godard's masterpiece of 1965 is still one of the most energising, exhilarating experiences the cinema has to offer.

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#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The BFI will release *Pierrot le fou* in a new restoration by the Cinémathèque Française, StudioCanal, and the Fond Culturel Americain. The restoration will be premiered in the Classics section of this year's Cannes Film Festival.

*Pierrot Le Fou* is released on 22 May 2009 at BFI Southbank, Watershed Bristol and Edinburgh Film House plus key cities tbc. It screens at BFI Southbank as part of the **Nouvelle Vague** season which runs until 31 May. [www.bfi.org.uk/releases](http://www.bfi.org.uk/releases)

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