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## Richard Burton at BFI Southbank



Born in the small mining village of Port Talbot in Wales, **Richard Burton** went on to become one of the most well known actors of his time. Although his off-screen antics often attracted more attention than his on-screen. He was married five times and his tempestuous relationship with **Elizabeth Taylor** (to whom he was married and divorced twice) frequently made the headlines. To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, we present a long-overdue retrospective with highlights from his entire career.

From his modest debut in *The Last Days of Dolwyn* (1949) and the excessive *Cleopatra* (1963) to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), Richard Burton evolved from jobbing theatre actor to bona fide movie star; and for a brief period in the early to mid-60s, his work was at its absolute zenith. Burton embraced strong product and powerful directors. In just five years he produced what is undeniably a string of first-rate performances in a diverse range of films. They included his defrocked clergyman in *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), the burned-out secret agent in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965) and the downtrodden academic in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966).

Despite a reputation for apathy and alcohol, with help from Elizabeth Taylor as wife, coach and mentor, he was able to tone down his overly theatrical mannerisms and emerge as an actor of real distinction earning **seven Oscar Nominations** for films including the Biblical epic *The Robe* (1953), the historical exploration *Becket* (1964) and the psychological thriller *Equus* (1976)

There is evidence to suggest that Burton's pursuit of film stardom was a means of securing independence and financial security. Art and the aspiration to produce it had given way to commercialism. Perhaps Burton never truly understood his talent or where it came from. But, when focused, his multitudinous gifts as an actor outweighed the abilities of most of his rivals.

### PRESS CONTACT

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### **Richard Burton: Lion of the Welsh**

Tony Earnshaw, head of film programming at the National Media Museum, Bradford, explores the work of a fearless and versatile performer. *Lion of the Welsh* is a lively and objective re-consideration of Burton's oeuvre, using many of Burton's own words and clips from his films

**Thu 6 Aug 18:20 NFT2** Tickets £5

### **The Last Days of Dolwyn**

Emlyn Williams' portrait of the class divide in late-19th-century Wales is both a curious time capsule of cinematic theatricality and a perfect example of 1940s film melodrama. Williams (as writer, director and leading man) is the bitter and resentful boy-done-good who returns home with plans to flood the valley of his birth. Burton (in his film debut) is the proud local lad who sees through his lies.

UK 1949 Dir Emlyn Williams With Edith Evans, Emlyn Williams, Alan Aynesworth 95min U

**Sat 1 Aug 15:20 NFT2, Fri 7 Aug 20:30 NFT2, Tue 11 Aug 14:00 NFT1-Seniors' Matinee**

### **My Cousin Rachel**

Burton took on what could have been a thankless task – playing second fiddle to Olivia de Havilland's arch villainess – and landed his first Oscar nomination. *My Cousin Rachel* makes the very most of its origins and lays on the gothic atmosphere of Daphne Du Maurier's story. At its most basic this is a

whodunit that asks audiences, via Burton's suspicious eyes, to believe de Havilland's smile masks pure evil.

USA 1952 Dir Henry Koster With Olivia de Havilland, Audrey Dalton, Ronald Squire 98min PG

**Wed 5 Aug 18:10 NFT3, Sat 8 Aug 15:50 NFT2, Tue 11 Aug 17:50 NFT1**

### **The Robe**

A self-important Biblical epic in the vein of Cecil B De Mille, *The Robe* represents a mighty adaptation of Lloyd C Douglas's tale of the conversion of the Roman tribune who witnesses the crucifixion of Christ. The first film in CinemaScope is over-blown and pompous, but conveys the era's penchant for grandiose showmanship. Burton acts as if for the theatre rather than the sound stage but emerges largely unscathed.

USA 1953 Dir Henry Koster With Jean Simmons, Victor Mature, Michael Rennie 135min PG

**Sun 2 Aug 15:00 NFT1, Wed 5 Aug 20:20 NFT3**

### **Bitter Victory**

Two soldiers vie for the affections of the same woman during the Allies' desert campaign in WWII. Burton is the flawed hero, Curt Jurgens the superior officer whose wife Burton once romanced. The love triangle

forms the backdrop to an intense tale of jealousy and cowardice played out beneath the blazing sun.

USA 1957 Dir Nicholas Ray With Curt Jurgens, Ruth Roman, Raymond Pellegrin 103min 15

**Mon 3 Aug 18:30 NFT1, Wed 5 Aug 14:30 NFT3, Sun 9 Aug 20:30 NFT3**

### **Look Back In Anger**

Burton tears into Jimmy Porter, the 'angry young man' of John Osborne's bitter and acerbic play. Social realism meets explosive theatricality as the learned, frustrated and deeply misanthropic Porter rages against the world, abandons his mousy wife and begins an affair with her best friend. In one of the earliest 'kitchen sink' dramas, the crisp cinematography (by Ossie Morris) brings Porter's dismal existence to electrifying life.

UK 1959 Dir Tony Richardson With Claire Bloom, Mary Ure, Gary Raymond 98min PG

**Thu 6 Aug 20:40 NFT2, Sun 9 Aug 15:50 NFT2**

### **The VIPs**

Art imitates life as an oil magnate and his bored wife play out their romantic travails against the backdrop of a London airport shrouded in fog. Burton and Taylor are the ostensible leads of this all-star pageant, though some would argue their role-playing was rather too close to home for comfort. Louis Jourdan is the gold-digging gigolo with his eye on the rich man's wife.

UK 1963 Dir Anthony Asquith With Elizabeth Taylor, Orson Welles, Margaret Rutherford 119min PG

**Fri 7 Aug 18:10 NFT2, Tue 11 Aug 20:40 NFT2**

### **Cleopatra**

A magnificent spectacle with a majestic, multitudinous cast, *Cleopatra* is arguably modern cinema's biggest, brashest, most sprawling historical epic. Based on the biography by Carlo Mario Franzero, *Cleopatra* is an example of runaway film-making at its most uncontrolled, with the added sparkle of witnessing the Taylor-Burton dalliance explode into a full-blown love affair. For sheer style and verve it remains unequalled.

UK-USA-Switzerland 1963 Dir Joseph L Mankiewicz With Elizabeth Taylor, Rex Harrison, Roddy McDowall 243min + interval 70mm PG

**Sat 8 Aug 18:00 NFT1, Mon 10 Aug 18:10 NFT1**

### **Becket**

The volatile relationship between old friends and sometime enemies Henry II and Thomas Becket is explored in this intense portrait of petulance and defiance. Creating both a consideration of friendship corrupted by power, and an unflinching depiction of idealism and faith, Peter Glenville pits two of the most hot-blooded performers of the 1960s against one another and watches the resultant fireworks. A prime example of two stars in perfect sync.

UK 1964 Dir Peter Glenville With Peter O'Toole, John Gielgud, Donald Wolfit 149min PG  
**Sun 9 Aug 17:50 NFT2, Fri 21 Aug 20:10 NFT3**

### **The Night of the Iguana**

Partnered with man-eater Ava Gardner, prim Deborah Kerr and teen nymphet Sue Lyon, Burton plays a defrocked priest desperately attempting to navigate his way through his shattered life in John Huston's magnificent adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play. Despite the usual Williams maelstrom of passions and sweatiness, Huston injects some pleasurable sly humour and is repaid with remarkable performances, particularly Burton's.

USA 1964 Dir John Huston With Ava Gardner, Deborah Kerr, Sue Lyon 118min 12A  
**Wed 12 Aug 20:40 NFT3, Fri 14 Aug 17:50 NFT1, Tue 25 Aug 14:30 NFT3**

### **The Spy Who Came in from the Cold**

Burnt out, cynical and set for the knacker's yard of espionage, shabby spy Alec Leamas gets an unexpected chance to revenge himself on his Eastern Bloc opponent. Things are complicated when he starts falling for left-wing activist Nan. Stark, downbeat and beautifully shot in crisp black and white by Ossie Morris, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* offered Burton the opportunity to show the flip side of 007.

UK 1965 Dir Martin Ritt With Claire Bloom, Oskar Werner, Peter Van Eyck 112min PG  
**Thu 13 Aug 18:10 NFT3, Sun 16 Aug 20:40 NFT2**

### **The Taming of the Shrew**

This zesty, witty romp is extraordinarily good fun as lusty Petruchio pursues tempestuous Katharina to make her his wife. An unrestrained, bawdy comedy spectacular, *The Taming of the Shrew* is a rumbustious adventure as Taylor is pummelled, pounded, kicked, slapped, spanked and generally knocked around by Burton as he woos, wins, weds and finally domesticates his fiery love. One of the very best filmed Shakespeare plays, and produced by the Burtons.

USA-Italy 1966 Dir Franco Zeffi relli With Elizabeth Taylor, Cyril Cusack, Michael Hordern 122min U  
**Thu 13 Aug 20:30 NFT3, Sun 23 Aug 15:40 NFT3**

### **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?**

Over the course of an apocalyptic, drunken evening, college professor George and his blowsy, shrewish wife Martha tear each other to pieces while the college's latest recruit and his mousy wife watch and participate in open-mouthed horror. A biting, excoriating adaptation of Edward Albee's play, the film garnered Oscar nominations for all four principals, with only Taylor and Dennis winning. Burton lost for the fifth time.

USA 1966 Dir Mike Nichols With Elizabeth Taylor, George Segal, Sandy Dennis 132min 15  
**Sat 15 Aug 15:10 NFT2, Mon 17 Aug 18:10 NFT1, Thu 27 Aug 14:00 NFT3**

### **Doctor Faustus**

Burton partnered with his former Oxford University tutor Nevill Coghill for this curious exercise in theatreturned- film. In a wayward portrait of corruption and obsession there are moments of magic with Burton's performance giving a hint of the power of his stage persona. A self-indulgent pet project, *Doctor Faustus* remains a curio, not least for Elizabeth Taylor's (mute) cameo as Helen of Troy. Burton's sole venture into direction.

UK 1967 Dir Richard Burton & Nevill Coghill With Elizabeth Taylor, Andreas Teuber 93min PG  
**Tue 18 Aug 20:45 NFT3, Wed 19 Aug 18:20 NFT2**

### **Anne of the Thousand Days**

Frustrated by his pious wife's inability to produce a male heir, King Henry VIII sets his sights on Anne Boleyn, the young daughter of an ambitious courtier. Burton roars his way through this absorbing biopic as the absolute monarch whose word is law. In her film debut, Geneviève Bujold matches Burton in the acting stakes in a role that Elizabeth Taylor was told she was too old to play.

USA 1969 Dir Charles Jarrott With Geneviève Bujold, Anthony Quayle, Irene Papas 146min PG  
**Fri 21 Aug 17:50 NFT2, Sun 30 Aug 15:20 NFT3**

### **Under Milk Wood**

Two rollicking, nocturnal visitors pass through the quiet cobbled streets of the sleepy Welsh town of Llareggub. Sinclair's inspired film adaptation of Dylan Thomas' 'play for voices' casts Burton and Ryan Davies as the drunken strangers. A formidable Celtic ensemble breathes life into Thomas's verse, lifting the lid on the quiet town and its delightfully eccentric inhabitants. A beautiful verbal epic haunted by the twin spectres of death and nostalgia.

#### **+ Dylan Thomas**

This beautifully shot, atmospheric, Oscar-winning documentary eloquently honours Thomas using many of the locations where Thomas himself grew up and found his inspiration. Richard Burton trudges along the windswept shore at Laugharne, mixes with the drinkers in the local pub and re-visits Thomas's poetry to produce an atmospheric, evocative and elegiac tribute that benefits hugely from its Bible-black monochrome photography.

UK 1962 Dir Jack Howells 31min U  
**Mon 24 Aug 18:10 NFT2, Thu 27 Aug 20:20 NFT2**

### **Villain**

Less a crime thriller than a fascinating study in psychosis, Tuchner's feature debut combines the East End's Ronnie Kray with *White Heat*'s Cody Jarrett to create cruel, mother-fixated homosexual gangster Vic Dakin. A genuine (and rare) character study

by Burton, *Villain* offers up an authentic milieu – that of the plausible crime kingpin who rules through fear, charisma and unpredictability. If Burton's accent occasionally wavers, his menace does not.

UK 1971 Dir Michael Tuchner With Ian McShane, Nigel Davenport, Donald Sinden 98min 15

**Sat 22 Aug 20:50 NFT2; Wed 26 Aug, 18:10 NFT1; Fri 28 Aug 20:30 NFT3**

### **Equus**

Psychiatrist Martin Dysart is charged with unravelling the unsettling mystery of why troubled youth Alan Strang (Firth) blinded six horses with a metal spike. Adapted from his Broadway smash by Peter Shaffer, *Equus* retains its theatrical feel but is lifted by Burton's mesmeric, Oscar-nominated performance as the tormented shrink. An absorbing movie: part psychological drama, part detective thriller and part dysfunctional family portrait.

USA 1976 Dir Sidney Lumet With Peter Firth, Eileen Atkins, Colin Blakely 137min 15

**Wed 26 Aug 20:20 NFT2, Sat 29 Aug 15:40 NFT3**

### **Nineteen Eighty-Four**

In the totalitarian state of Oceania, perpetually at war with one or other of its neighbours, love is a crime.

When lowly clerk Winston Smith falls in love, the machinations of the state are targeted against him. In his final film performance Burton delivers a chilling, understated portrait of sinister intransigence as the dead-eyed Party inquisitor, O'Brien.

Shot in desaturated, grainy colour by Roger Deakins.

UK 1984 Dir Michael Radford With John Hurt, Suzanne Hamilton, Cyril Cusack 110min 15

**Sat 29 Aug 18:30 NFT3, Mon 31 Aug 20:40 NFT2**

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

#### **Booking information**

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.00, concs £6.65 Members pay £1.40 less on any ticket. Website [www.bfi.org.uk/southbank](http://www.bfi.org.uk/southbank)

#### **BFI Filmstore**

The BFI Filmstore is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

#### **The benugo bar & kitchen**

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

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

**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

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