

Sally Potter



Sally Potter is one of the UK's most innovative and original filmmakers. Bringing the anarchic, joyous experiments of avant-garde cinema to feature films with Hollywood stars, Potter constantly reinvents herself. Transformation itself is her films' most constant theme, starting with a reversal of genre convention in *Thriller* (1979), through the magical gender-blending of *Orlando* (1993), to *Rage* (2009), which brings anti-globalisation protests and citizen journalism into fashion. This month we are delighted to present a complete retrospective of Potter's films at **BFI Southbank**. The season will launch with a screening of *Orlando*, followed by an interview with Sally Potter and **Tilda Swinton**, and will be accompanied by a programme of exciting events.

Her films mingle the challenge of the new, from feminism to camera phones, with a deep knowledge of cinematic and artistic traditions. In 1974, she started Limited Dance Company with Jacky Lansley; their juxtaposition of opera, ballet, theory and slapstick informed *Thriller*. With its success, Potter secured funding from the BFI Production Board for *The Gold Diggers* (1983), an ambitious film investigating the circulation of women and gold, featuring **Julie Christie** (to be released by the BFI on DVD for the first time on 28 December).

While struggling to fund her next feature, Potter made two TV documentaries, about women in Russian cinema and emotions respectively. Next, *Orlando*, the result of seven years' work, helped launch Tilda Swinton's career and won awards internationally for its handsome looks and dazzling, witty play with gender, class and costume drama.

Semi-autobiographical, *The Tango Lesson* (1997) follows a filmmaker called Sally falling out with Hollywood producers and in love with tango. *The Man Who Cried* (2000), Potter's biggest budget film, drew **Christina Ricci**, **Johnny Depp** and **Cate Blanchett** into the secretive world of 1940s Paris in an unabashed musical homage to melodrama. *Yes* (2005) uses iambic pentameter to infuse a relationship across East- West boundaries, post-9/11, with Shakespearean gravitas, romance and verve.

Premiered at BFI Southbank in September, *Rage* (2009) takes the formalism of *Yes* further, using talking heads to showcase striking cinematography and performances. Potter's close-up take on haute couture rediscovers the deeper meanings of 'fashion' and 'style', bringing the viewer face-to-face – as all of her films do – with the ways in which we invent ourselves through art, and through each other.

On 28 December the BFI releases Sally Potter: *Early Works* and *The Gold Diggers* on DVD each priced £19.99

JUST ANNOUNCED:

The **BFI National Archive** collects many forms of British filmmaking and is delighted to be acquiring a number of works by director, dancer and musician Sally Potter. The materials, being preserved in our purpose built archive, include the original negatives and screening material for hit film *Orlando* (1993), off-cuts from Sally Potter's interview with **Michael Powell** and several of her early experimental works made in and after the counter-culture scene of London in the late 60s. These titles include *Jerk* (1969) and the two-screen film *Play* (1970).

EVENTS:

Sally Potter and Tilda Swinton in Conversation

To launch our season of Sally Potter's films, we are delighted to welcome two of the UK's most prominent and innovative artists. In Potter's breakthrough feature, *Orlando*, it was Swinton who took the lead role. Equally excelling in challenging herself and her audiences, Swinton has effortlessly moved between performance art, art-house cinema and Hollywood blockbusters during her career.

Wed 2 Dec 20:30 NFT1

Tickets £12.90, concs £9.65 (Members pay £1.40 less) Joint ticket available with screening of *Orlando* (Wed 2 Dec 18.30) £15.15, concs £11.15 (Members pay £1.40 less)

The Shooting People Masterclass – Sally Potter

Cath Le Couteur, film-maker and co-founder of indie film network Shooting People, of which Sally Potter is a patron, will host the session with the director, very much a 'how to...', designed specifically for the emerging film-maker.

Friday 4 Dec 16:00 NFT3 Tickets £5

SP-ARK: Opening Sally Potter's Archive **FREE**

SP-ARK is a unique new resource, making Potter's rich archive of production materials available in a collaborative online environment to inspire scholarship with a global community of learners. Join Sally Potter, SP-ARK's creators, academics from Queen Mary University and students of her work for an afternoon exploring the potential of this pioneering project to revolutionise the way we access cinema's related collections.

Wed 2 Dec 14:30 NFT1 FREE, but booking essential

Member's event, Screen Epiphany:

Monsieur Hulot's Holiday *Les Vacances de M Hulot* + introduction by Sally Potter

We are delighted to announce an exciting new strand especially for Members which marks the recent publication of the BFI book 'Screen Epiphanies: Filmmakers on the Films that Inspired Them'. The BFI will regularly bring the book's concept to life by inviting key figures from the international film community to introduce their personal epiphany prior to the screening. To launch Screen Epiphanies in December, Sally Potter will take to the stage to talk about her passion for Jacques Tati's classic comedy Monsieur Hulot's Holiday.

Five years in the making, this charmingly idiosyncratic film marks the debut appearance of director Tati's alter-ego, Monsieur Hulot: a gangly and awkward Frenchman, perpetually the centre and probable cause of a whirlwind of pratfalls, mishaps and disasters. Tati's impeccable timing, scrupulous attention to detail and lightness of touch betray all the qualities of a master filmmaker at work. This joyous Holiday is not one to be missed!

France 1953. Dir Jacques Tati. With Jacques Tati, Nathalie Pascaud 87min Digital U

Fri 4 Dec 18:30 NFT1

For further information contact:

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Film Programme:

A Beginners' Guide to Sally Potter: Thriller + shorts

UK 1979 With Colette Laffont, Rose English, Tony Gaco. 33min

Thriller has its roots in Sally Potter's performance-based early structuralist shorts, which use looped film, multiple screens and subversive humour to question the relation between performer and audience. Sophie Mayer explores these early works, screening some extracts from the Archive, which set the scene for later developments, while signposting the highlights of this

month's retrospective. Arising from the zeitgeist of punk, protest and feminist theory, *Thriller* cuts up Puccini's *La Bohème* and *Psycho*'s score to ask why the woman always has to die. With boys in tutus, the Medusa's laugh, and a black Mimi, in 30 minutes Potter throws the status quo out of the window.

Fri 4 Dec 20:30 NFT3

Introduced, with a season overview, by Sophie Mayer, author of *The Cinema of Sally Potter: A Politics of Love* (Wallflower, 2008) Tickets £5

Presented with Club Des Femmes

The Gold Diggers

UK 1983 With Julie Christie, Colette Laffont. 90min U

If *Thriller* holds the mirror up to patriarchy, then *The Gold Diggers* dives into a looking-glass world. Karl Marx meets the Marx Brothers as Celeste (Laffont) investigates a ceremony in which Ruby (Christie) is taken to the bank with gold. Fairytale-style, Celeste rides up on a white charger and rescues Ruby from the ball, setting her on a spiralling journey through memory and a stunning Icelandic landscape.

Sat 5 Dec 15:50 NFT3, Mon 7 Dec 18:30 NFT3 Followed by Q&A with Sally Potter and Julie Christie

Tears, Laughter, Fear & Rage

Channel Four 1987 c104min

Do boys cry? What do women laugh about together? Can anger be expressed without violence? And what was Michael Powell thinking when he made *Peeping Tom*? These are some of the questions about emotion, identity and political life that Potter explores in this four-part television documentary, with spot-on contributions from Paul Boateng, Hanif Kureishi, Juliet Mitchell and Barbara Windsor (among others), and a dazzling array of clips.

Sat 5 Dec 18:00 NFT3, Thu 10 Dec 20:40 NFT2

I Am an Ox, I Am a Horse, I Am a Man, I Am a Woman + intro

Channel Four 1990 60min

Glasnost had barely been declared when Potter returned to the USSR (after a 1984 BFI trip led by Ian Christie) and immersed herself in the newly accessible film archives. Made for Channel Four's *Women Call the Shots*, the documentary focuses on the integration of women into Soviet film-making, using clips from films never seen west of the Iron Curtain.

Tue 15 Dec 20:30 NFT3

Preceded by a talk by Ian Christie on relations between Soviet and British filmmakers, featuring Potter's slides of the 1984 trip

Orlando

UK-Russ-It-Fr-Neth 1993 With Billy Zane, Quentin Crisp, Sasha Valandrey 93min Digital PG

Sexy, witty and provocative, Potter's adaptation of *Orlando* turned Virginia Woolf's most spirited novel, called 'the longest love letter in English literature', into a reinvention of heritage cinema that dazzled audiences and critics from the Venice Film Festival to *Rolling Stone*. Tilda Swinton's feted performance as Orlando, the time-travelling, genderswitching hero/ine, became a touchstone for a new era of cinematic and political sexual and gender liberation.

Wed 2 Dec 18:30 NFT1 * Fri 18 Dec 18:40 Studio; 20:45 NFT1 Sat 19 Dec 14:30, 18:40 Studio Sun 20 Dec 16:00, 20:10 Studio Tue 22 Dec 20:15 Studio Wed 23 Dec 14:40, 18:40 Studio Sun 27 Dec 18:20 NFT1

*** Joint ticket available with Sally Potter and Tilda Swinton In Conversation**

The Tango Lesson

UK-Fr-Aust-Jap-Ger 1997. With Sally Potter, Pablo Veron 101min PG

Sally (Potter) is being courted by Hollywood after the success of her last film, but she longs for the freedom of dance. Pablo is a brilliant *tanguero* but fears that dance leaves no trace. After meeting in Paris, Sally and Pablo move in each others' worlds – and find themselves moved to rediscover and combine their gifts. Sung, danced and ravishingly shot tangos mark each stage of their journey.

Fri 4 Dec 14:00 NFT3, Sun 6 Dec 15:50 NFT3, Fri 11 Dec 20:40 NFT2 Introduced by Fred Frith

The Man Who Cried

UK-France 2000 With Cate Blanchett, John Turturro, Harry Dean Stanton 99min 12A Paris, 1940

Jewish singer Suzie (Christina Ricci) meets Russian dancer Lola (Blanchett) in the cabaret underworld. Together they encounter Cesar (Johnny Depp), a Roma horseman, and Dante (Turturro), an Italian tenor whose voice seduces them. He and Lola become lovers, while Suzie, who falls for Cesar, hears in Dante's voice the echo of her lost father.

+ The London Story

UK 1986 With Jackey Lansley 16min U

Music and espionage combine as tragedy in *The Man Who Cried*, but play as comedy in *The London Story*.

Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* scores this glorious short in which three plotters – a dancer, a doorman and an ex-civil servant – change British government arts policy with a night at the opera, a bicycle, and an ice-skating anarchist.

Thu 10 Dec 18:00 NFT2, Sat 19 Dec 20:15 NFT2 Introduced by Dr Lucy Bolton

Yes

US-UK 2004. With Joan Allen, Simon Abkarian, Sam Neill, Shirley Henderson 100min 15

Sally Potter began to write this film in mid-September 2001, 'in an attempt to meet head-on the difficulties we were all facing'. Through lovers He (Abkarian) and She (Allen), the film gives voice (in verse) to East and West, male and female, poor and wealthy. Seeing both sides is the choral Cleaner (Henderson), at once audience and director, whose beautiful, whispered meditations frame the film's ecstatic final 'Yes'.

Wed 16 Dec 18:20 NFT2, Sun 27 Dec 20:10 NFT2

Rage

UK 2009 With Judi Dench, Steve Buscemi, Eddie Izzard, Jude Law, Dianne Wiest 98min Digital 15

Defying the usual conventions of film, *Rage* is the new creation from Sally Potter. Using a radical narrative structure, *Rage* consists of a dynamic series of interviews, as if shot by a schoolboy on his mobile phone. He goes behind the scenes at a New York fashion show during a week in which a catwalk accident turns into a murder investigation.

Tue 22 Dec 18:20 NFT3, Wed 23 Dec 20:30 NFT3, Mon 28 Dec 15:50 NFT3

EVENTS:

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 £8.60, concs £6.25 Members pay £1 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

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 *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank / December 2009