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## Peter Cook: Genius at Work At BFI Southbank in March 2012

**BFI Southbank** celebrates the groundbreaking comedic talent of **Peter Cook**



with a season of work for both film and television. Cook's surreal and often outrageous output has been an inspiration to comedians for 50 years and his influence can be seen today in comics as diverse as Noel Fielding and Stuart Lee. From the legendary ***Beyond the fringe*** (BBC 1964) and ***Not only but Also*** (BBC 1965-1966, 1970), to the supernatural big screen comedy of ***Bedazzled*** (1967), there will also be an opportunity to view a rare selection of material never seen before from the archive including sketches, interviews, adverts, chat show appearances and also a visit with **Derek and Clive**.

Arguably the brightest star of a remarkable generation of brilliant comedy practitioners to emerge from the Oxbridge fringe tradition, the rakishly handsome Peter Cook cut quite a dashing figure, often using a drag on his ever-present cigarette to act as punctuation to his acerbic comments and surreal flights of fantasy. One of his great strengths was his ability to extemporise on any unlikely subject, rambling wildly in all directions, but always somehow managing to find the humorous kernel at the centre.

Frequently his musings led him to conjure up absurdist takes on a given situation, holding it up to scrutiny and finally finding the flaw that rendered it ridiculous. He was a prolific writer and excelled at impersonating character types who sported strange speaking voices, often delivering their words in a trademark monotone. But it was with his sparkling partnership with **Dudley Moore** that Cook achieved his greatest success, the pair reinventing the double-act dynamic and inspiring each other to greater heights. Their sketch series ***Not Only But Also*** (BBC 1965-1966, 1970) was one of the most revered shows of the 1960s and one of the evenings in this season will be dedicated to that show. Elsewhere we present a rare screening of the ***Beyond the Fringe*** stage show which first brought Cook and Moore to the fore (as well as those great talents **Alan Bennett** and **Jonathan Miller**), and also look at some of Cook's solo TV work. Finally an

evening of oddities and rarities will bring together snippets from all areas of Cook's career, including material never before seen anywhere! The TV treats will be supplemented by a couple of Cook's big-screen appearances, in the political satire **The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer** (1967) and the evergreen supernatural comedy **Bedazzled** (1970).

- Ends -

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Beyond the Fringe**

BBC 1964. Dir Duncan Wood. (Extended version) 116min.

This famous stage show launched the careers of four of the generation's brightest humorists, as Jonathan Miller, Alan Bennett, Dudley Moore and Peter Cook combined their skills to present a scintillating series of sketches, skits and satirical shenanigans. The show proved a huge hit on both sides of the Atlantic and brought the new comedy of the emerging Oxbridge generation to a wider world. It almost single-handedly kick-started the satire boom that was to dominate TV comedy for much of the 1960s. The BBC originally screened only a 60-minute version of this historic tele-recording.

**Thu 8 March 18:10 NFT1**

**Not Only But Also**

BBC 1965-1966, 1970. Compilation c100min

The Cook and Moore double-act reached its zenith in this brilliant TV sketch show that was a big success for the newly launched BBC2. The pair played perfectly off one another, often seeming to stray off-script or to incorporate ad-libs in an attempt to faze each other. Moore's near corpsing, as Cook fixed him with a laser-like stare following some deftly delivered comic time bomb, became a much-loved feature of the show. We are delighted that this evening's bespoke compilation will be introduced by one of the show's original producers, Joe McGrath.

**Mon 12 March 20:40 NFT3**

**Peter Cook and Co**

ITV 1980. Dir Paul Smith. With Peter Cook, Rowan Atkinson, John Cleese, Terry Jones, Beryl Reid, Paula Wilcox. 55min

The dream supporting cast for this one-off special illustrated the high esteem in which Cook was held by his peers. Although critics at the time thought it patchy (a term perennially applied to sketch shows), it can now be viewed as a wonderful snapshot of Cook at the time, with the sketch spoofing Road Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected* particularly memorable. Plus a full supporting programme of Cook TV appearances (total r/t c100min).

**Fri 16 March 20:40 NFT3**

**Oddities and Rarities**

Sketches, interviews, adverts, chat show appearances and comedy monologues from the master himself. Tonight's specially compiled pot pourri will bring together fascinating fragments from all periods and areas of Peter Cook's career. Be warned – this screening will include adult material definitely unsuitable for those of a tender disposition, since within the programme we will be reacquainting ourselves with the notorious Derek and Clive!

**Wed 21 March 18:20 NFT2**

### **Bedazzled**

UK 1967. Dir Stanley Donen. With Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Eleanor Bron, Raquel Welch. 103min. **12A**

Cook's script crosses the Faust legend with the permissive society of the Swinging Sixties as hapless everyman Stanley Moon (Moore) falls under the spell of the Devil, in the guise of George Spiggott (Cook). Stanley is tempted to mortgage his soul to win Margaret (Bron), the girl of his dreams, but the Devil's devious machinations constantly muddy the water. Great to see Cook and Moore on the big screen and they receive terrific support from the first lady of satire, Eleanor Bron.

**Thu 1 March 20:40 NFT3**

**Sun 4 March 18:10 NFT3**

### **The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer**

UK 1970. Dir Kevin Billington. With Peter Cook, Denholm Elliott, Arthur Lowe, Harold Pinter, John Cleese, Graham Chapman, Ronnie Corbett. 102min. **15**

A biting satire, underappreciated in its day, which has since gained cult status. The ruthless but charismatic Michael Rimmer (Cook) barnstorms his way through the world of advertising before setting his sights on higher office – running the country itself. Cleese and Chapman had the original idea, though the final screenplay also credits Cook and director Kevin Billington, and the result is a wild fantasy, with various comic vignettes linked by Rimmer's irresistible charge to the top.

**Sun 18 March 18:20 NFT2**

**Wed 21 March 20:40 NFT**

### **About the BFI**

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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 £9.50, concs £6.75 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website [www.bfi.org.uk/southbank](http://www.bfi.org.uk/southbank)

**Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment**

### **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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