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Christopher Nolan Season at BFI Southbank in July 2012



In association with Media Partner: **EMPIRE**

BFI Southbank devotes July's lead season to **Christopher Nolan**, one of Hollywood's most powerful and influential directors. It was only 14 years' ago that he finished his remarkable debut feature **Following** (1998) a taut, densely intelligent thriller which effortlessly belies its tiny budget. This led to his breakthrough hit **Memento** (2000) that won Nolan widespread acclaim. This astonishingly inventive film has a man (**Guy Pearce**) determined to fathom the identity of – and – then take revenge on his wife's killer. Trouble is, he has amnesia and can barely retain any information. Critics especially praised the film's unique, nonlinear narrative structure and it received numerous accolades, including Oscar nominations for Original Screenplay and Film Editing. Two years later, he followed this up with **Insomnia** (2002), starring Al Pacino, a remake of the 1997 Norwegian film of the same name, about two LA detectives hunting for a girl's killer in Alaska.

In 2005, Nolan pitched an idea for a reboot of the **Batman** films to Warner Bros, and reinvigorated a tired franchise with **Batman Begins** by introducing psychological depth (a back-story dealing with Bruce Wayne's pre-crusading years) and contemporary relevance (Cillian Murphy's Scarecrow threatens Gotham with a fear toxin). The second film in the trilogy was by **The Dark Knight** in 2008 and concludes with this summer's blockbuster release, **The Dark Knight Rises** (in UK cinemas 20 July 2012 and showing at BFI IMAX). **The Dark Knight** was dark indeed, and delved deep into the anxieties of the post-9/11 world. This time it's the Joker creating the chaos, and he was superbly played by the late **Heath Ledger**, who posthumously won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for the role. **The Dark Knight Rises** takes place 8 years after the events of **The Dark Knight**. It introduces the characters of Selina Kyle / Catwoman and Bane (portrayed by **Anne Hathaway** and **Tom Hardy**, respectively) - two villains from the Batman mythology.

In between the Batman films, Nolan wrote and directed **The Prestige** (2006). Here, rival illusionists (**Christian Bale** and **Hugh Jackman**) become outright enemies after a trick in 1890s London goes fatally wrong, and their obsessive efforts to outwit and damage each other last years, allowing the story to cut back and forth in time. Nolan wrote, co-produced and directed 2010's release **Inception** and proved that a sci-fi action blockbuster could be intricate, sly and witty, and is arguably Nolan's most ambitious tale of conflicting narratives yet. Empire magazine rated it five stars in their August 2010 issue and wrote, "it feels like Stanley Kubrick adapting the work of the great sci-fi author William Gibson".

Nolan has created a new type of Hollywood 'mainstream': films notable not only for their considerable technical skill but also for their brilliant, complex and playful narrative ingenuity.

Films in the season

Following

UK 1998. With Jeremy Theobald, Alex Haw, Lucy Russell, John Nolan. 70min. 15

A blocked writer who's taken to following strangers he sees on the streets of London is confronted by one of his targets, who introduces him to the delights of a perverse form of burglary. But what would the blonde the writer's just met make of such activities? With its scrambled chronology, stories within stories and its play with public and private, performance and perception, Nolan's taut, densely intelligent thriller effortlessly belies its tiny budget. A remarkable debut.

Plus **Doodlebug** (UK 1997. With Jeremy Theobald. 3min): Experiences within experiences: all a matter of perspective.

Sun 1 July 16:20 NFT2

Wed 4 July 20:40 NFT2

Memento

USA 2000. With Guy Pearce, Carrie-Anne Moss, Joe Pantoliano, Mark Boone Jr. 113min. 15

The film that won Nolan widespread acclaim, this astonishingly inventive variation on traditional noir tropes has a man (Pearce) determined to fathom the identity of - and then take revenge on - his wife's killer. Trouble is, since her death his memory's so shot he can barely retain any information - a traumatic, very vulnerable condition mirrored in the film's chronological

structure, brief fragments of his consciousness waywardly working backwards in time. Tense, edgy, sometimes touching, this was a formidable achievement.

Sun 1 July 18:20 NFT1

Fri 6 July 20:45 NFT1

Insomnia

USA 2002. With Al Pacino, Robin Williams, Hilary Swank, Martin Donovan, Paul Dooley. 118min. 15

Reimagining the eponymous 1997 Norwegian thriller in Alaska, Nolan and writer Hilary Seitz turn a gripping policier about two LA detectives hunting for a girl's killer into another of the director's subtle, unsettling study of lives treated as narratives: will people believe Will (Pacino), wracked by sleeplessness, his partner (Donovan), or a novelist (Williams) questioning his assumptions and motives? The camerawork by Wally Pfister (with Nolan from *Memento* to the present) is superb, as are the cast.

Sun 1 July 20:40 NFT1

Fri 13 July 17:50 NFT1

Sun 22 July 20:40 NFT1

Batman Begins

USA 2005. With Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Liam Neeson, Gary Oldman. 140min. 12A

Nolan reinvigorated a tired franchise by introducing psychological depth (a backstory dealing with Bruce Wayne's pre-crusading years), contemporary relevance (Cillian Murphy's Scarecrow threatens Gotham with a fear toxin) and echoes of his enduring fascination with the function of narrative in power-struggles. Accordingly, the threat feels all the more urgent, a mood enhanced by the production design, less fantastic and more plausible than in the earlier Batman movies. Katie Holmes, Morgan Freeman, Tom Wilkinson and Rutger Hauer fill out the cast.

Sat 7 July 17:15 NFT1

Sat 14 July 17:15 NFT1

The Prestige

USA 2006. With Hugh Jackman, Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Scarlett Johansson, Rebecca Hall. 130min. 12A

With his interest in competing narratives, truth and falsehood, it was perhaps inevitable Nolan would turn to the world of magic. Here, rival illusionists (Bale and Jackman) become outright enemies after a trick in 1890s London goes fatally wrong; their obsessive efforts to outwit and damage each other last years, allowing the story – narrated (but how reliably?) by a colleague (Caine) – to cut back and forth in time and place. Elegant, engrossing, ingenious, it also features Andy Serkis, David Bowie (as Nikola Tesla) and real-life magician Ricky Jay.

Sun 8 July 18:15 NFT1

Mon 16 July 20:30 NFT1

The Dark Knight

USA 2008. With Christian Bale, Heath Ledger, Aaron Eckhart, Michael Caine, Gary Oldman. 152min. 12A

Dark, indeed: Nolan's second Batman feature delved deep into the anxieties of the post-9/11 world, be they about surprise attack, security strategies or the onset of sheer nightmarish meltdown. This time it's the Joker creating the chaos, and he's superbly incarnated by the late Heath Ledger in a performance as witty as it's unsettling in its evocation of brilliant, uncontrollably unpredictable insanity. If anyone still entertained doubts as to Nolan's ability to provide virtuoso action, this film surely demolished them.

Sat 14 July 20:00 NFT1

Tue 17 July 20:10 NFT1

Inception

USA 2010. With Leonardo DiCaprio, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Ellen Page, Tom Hardy. 149min. 12A

Proving that a sci-fi action blockbuster can be as complex, sly and witty as a Resnais film, Nolan creates a future where it's possible to enter dreams to steal secrets – here, though, a fugitive thief-for-hire organises a team to implant an idea that might change the world. With its multiplicity of agents operating on various levels of consciousness, this is arguably Nolan's most complex (and playful) tale of conflicting narratives yet. So audacious that the opening scenes are quite bewildering, it re-imagines the world to exhilarating effect.

Fri 20 July 20:10 NFT1

Sun 22 July 17:45 NFT1

The Dark Knight Rises at BFI IMAX and UK cinemas from 20 July 2012

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- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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