

The Passenger

aka **Professione: reporter**

Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni

Italy-France-Spain 1975, 126 mins, Cert 12A

A BFI release

"I used to be somebody else... but I traded myself in"

David Locke, The Passenger

With Jack Nicholson, Maria Schneider, Jenny Runacre, Ian Hendry



**Opening at BFI Southbank, HOME Manchester, Picturehouse Central,
Watershed Bristol, Glasgow Film Theatre, Broadway Nottingham
and selected cinemas UK-wide from 4 January 2019**

A rarely seen, but essential watch on the big screen in order to fully enjoy its cinematic beauty, *The Passenger* is an engrossing thriller starring **Jack Nicholson** and **Maria Schneider**, and the third of Italian director **Michelangelo Antonioni's** trio of English-language films. On **4 January 2019** it will be back in selected cinemas UK-wide and screening in an extended run during a two month season dedicated to the director, **Antonioni: Confronting the Modern World with Style**, taking place at BFI Southbank from 1 January until end of February 2019 in partnership with Luce Cinecittà.

Hugely atmospheric (enhanced by the use of little background music), languidly paced, *The Passenger* is more existential road trip than action-packed drama.

In a desert outpost in Chad, TV reporter David Locke (Jack Nicholson in one of his lesser-known roles) discovers that another guest at his hotel, Robertson, has died from a heart attack. Without much hesitation he transfers the photographs in their respective passports, effectively exchanges identities with the dead man.

After returning to London incognito, he sets off to Munich with Robertson's air ticket. From an airport locker picks up a briefcase containing illustrations of gun models. He is followed by two men who collect the briefcase and pay him a substantial amount of money, revealing that he has 'become' an idealistic gun-runner for an African revolutionary group.

Following the appointments jotted down in Robertson's diary, Locke flies to Barcelona where he befriends a young French student (Maria Schneider) who accompanies him on a car trip through the Spanish countryside as he continues to keep Robertson's diary appointments.

Once a film critic, Michelangelo Antonioni quickly established himself with a striking series of features notable for their visual elegance, narrative subtlety and fascination with people striving to find satisfaction in the modern world. After his acclaimed films *Le amiche* (*The Girlfriends*) (1955), *La notte* (*The Night*) (1961), *L'avventura* (*The Adventure*) (1960) and *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*) (1962) and his first colour film *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*) (1964), he signed a deal with the Italian producer Carlo Ponti to make three English language films abroad for release by MGM. *The Passenger* followed *Blowup* (1966), set in 'swinging London', and *Zabriskie Point* (1970), Antonioni's first film to be set in America.

The Passenger is based on a story by Mark Peploe (who began his career at the BBC and won the Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar in 1988 for Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*.) He co-wrote the screenplay in collaboration with Antonioni and British writer Peter Wollen, a political journalist, then film theorist and filmmaker. The film was initially titled '*Professione: reporter*'. In the original 1975 production notes for the film Antonioni commented:

"In this journalist, as in every journalist, there coexists the drive to excel, to produce quality work, and the feeling that this quality is ephemeral. The feeling, thus, that his work is valid for a fleeting moment only. In fact, no-one can better understand such a feeling than a film director, since we are working with a material, the film stock itself, which is ephemeral as such, which is physically short-lived. Time consumes it. In my film, when Jack feels saturated to the gills with this sentiment, after years of work, with age, a moment arrives when there is a break in his inner armour when he feels the need for a personal revolution."

Although not as critically acclaimed or commercially successful as the two films that preceded it, *The Passenger* is undoubtedly a masterwork of innovation – its opening 20 minutes has virtually no dialogue. It was shot by Luciano Tovoli on location in London, Munich, Barcelona, Algeria, Almeria and Malaga but it is the images of Gaudí's buildings in Barcelona that are the most stunning and memorable. The film is also famed for its seven-minute long panning shot as it draws to a close.

Geoff Andrew, BFI programmer-at-large, who has programmed next year's Antonioni season at BFI Southbank concludes: "*Suspense, intrigue, wit, visual beauty, ideas: this classic has them all in spades.*"

During the season *The Passenger* will be the subject of BFI Southbank's popular discussion series *Philosophical Screens* on Thursday 17 January at 18:05, in which film philosophers Lucy Bolton, William Brown and John Ó Maoilearca will explore the film through a philosophical lens.

-ends-

For further information and images please contact:

Jill Reading, BFI Press Office Tel: 020 7957 4759 E-mail: jill.reading@bfi.org.uk

[@bfi](http://www.twitter.com/bfi)

More film information and screening venues: www.bfi.org.uk/releases

Notes to editors:

- BFI Southbank kicks off 2019 with a major season dedicated to the groundbreaking and influential films of **Michelangelo Antonioni** running from 1 January – 27 February. This major two month season **Antonioni: Confronting the Modern World with Style**, in partnership with Luce Cinecittà, will include a BFI re-release of ***The Passenger*** (1975) starring Jack Nicholson and Maria Schneider, which will be back in selected cinemas across the UK from **Friday 4 January**. As well as screening all of Antonioni's features, the season will offer audiences a rare chance to see his short films on the big screen and there will also be a programme of events.

About the BFI

At the BFI we support, nurture and promote the art of film, television and the moving image. A charity, funded by Government and earned income, and a distributor of National Lottery funds, we are at the heart of the UK's fast growing screen industries, protecting the past and shaping their future across the UK. We work in partnership with cultural organisations, government and industry to make this happen. We bring our world-class cultural programmes and unrivalled national collections to audiences everywhere, and promote learning about our art-form and its heritage. We support the future success of film in the UK by nurturing new voices and fresh ideas, enriching independent British film culture, challenging the UK's screen industries to innovate and defining Britain and its storytellers in the 21st century.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

10 December 2018