

The 19th British Silent Film Festival



The Pleasure Garden (1925)
Saturday 26 September, 3pm
Introduced by Bryony Dixon



Production Company: Gainsborough Pictures /Emelka Film

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Producer: Erich Pommer

Assistant Director: Alma Reville

Adaptation: Eliot Stannard

Cinematography: Baron Ventimiglia

Running time: 75 minutes

Cast: Virginia Valli (Patsy Brand), Carmelita Geraghty (Jill Cheyne), Miles Mander (Levet), John Stuart (Hugh Fielding), George Snell (Oscar Hamilton), C. Falkenburg (Prince Ivan), Ferd. Martini (Mr Sidey), Florence Helminger (Mrs Sidey), Nita Naldi (the native girl)

Extracts from Pamela Hutchinson, *Silent London* (online), 18 May 2012:

This tale of backstage romance and far-flung misdeeds may have been Hitchcock's directorial debut, but he was so proud of it that he put his signature in the credits. "Actors come and actors go," he told the Film Society, "but the name of the director should stay clearly in the mind of the audiences." As for the 'cattle', American star Virginia Valli plays the heroine, Patsy, and Miles Mander the brute she is unfortunate enough to fall for. Another US star, Carmelita Geraghty, plays Patsy's friend and ambitious fellow dancer, and her love interest arrives in the form of popular Scottish actor John Stuart.

The *Pleasure Garden* was filmed in Germany, but it has a very British feel, from the leery music-hall audiences to our leading ladies' aspidistra-and-doily lodgings. It may not be a suspense thriller, but *The Pleasure Garden* opens in fine Hitchcockian style with pretty blonde showgirls (and their legs) being ogled on stage. It's good old innocent fun to start with, of course, but unless it really is 1925 and this is the first Hitchcock film you've ever seen, you'll sense a sinister frisson in such ardent voyeurism. And you'd be right to.

Like so many of Hitchcock's silents, *The Pleasure Garden* was adapted for the screen by Eliot Stannard, a towering, if often unsung, figure in British silent cinema. While Hitchcock's silents are undoubtedly less consistently surefooted than his blockbuster sound films (yer *Psychos*, yer *Vertigos*), they are all polished, sophisticated productions, deftly made by a team of film professionals. His debut benefits from the work of Stannard, Hitch's wife Alma Reville, and producers Michael Balcon and Erich Pommer, not to mention its stars, including Valli, whom you may have seen elsewhere in King Vidor's *Wild Oranges* (1924) and Mander whom you'll surely know from his tour de force *The First Born*. But it's Hitchcock's show nonetheless: indeed, when the *Spectator's* Iris Barry saw Hitchcock's bravura debut, she sniffed out "new blood" for the British film industry immediately. This juvenilia is not so juvenile.

Mark Duguid, *BFI Screenonline*.

In early 1925, Alfred Hitchcock was engaged by Michael Balcon's fledgling Gainsborough Studios, where he was completing his third film as assistant to Gainsborough's star director, Graham Cutts. The ambitious Hitchcock - still only 25 - had, in three years, performed almost every role on the film set, and his tireless energy was breeding resentment in the older Cutts, who complained that his assistant was spreading himself too thinly. Balcon sensed it was time to give his protégé a chance to direct alone, and dispatched Hitchcock to Germany (his second visit in a little over a year) for his first assignment, *The Pleasure Garden*, adapted by Eliot Stannard from a now forgotten novel by Oliver Sandys.

Stannard would collaborate on all but one of Hitchcock's silent films, and his script included many of the elements that would preoccupy the director over the next half-century, including the theatre, voyeurism, murder and male violence against women. A striking opening features the chorus girls of the nightspot of the title descending a spiral staircase, with the camera fixed on their legs. We then observe them dancing, watched with evident glee by a largely male audience. One elderly man leers through opera glasses at his favourite girl, who is first flattered, then appalled, as she realises his attention is directed at her legs. This approach, forcing the audience to recognise its own voyeurism, was to become a distinguishing feature of Hitchcock's work.



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