

# May at the movies

## Cinema



## JOYCE GLASSER LOOKS AT THE MONTH AHEAD

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### New Town Utopia

(4th) Cert. tbc, 80 mins.

You don't have to be an Essex girl or a chav to enjoy this fascinating and timely look at the utopian dreams and concrete realities behind Basildon New Town. Director Christopher Ian Smith lets the still-impressive - or progressive - architecture and residents tell the stories of what went right, and what went wrong, with MP's Lewis Silkin's 1946 visionary thinking.

The son of Lithuanian Jewish refugees who founded the still thriving city law firm, Lewis Silkin, left law in 1945 to become Minister of Town and Country Planning in Atlee's Labour Government. Smith opens the film with Silkin's inspirational Parliamentary speech of May 8 1946 (voiced by Jim Broadbent). He announces the creation of ten New Towns (the first 'wave') to lift the population out of the post-war rubble and crowded cities without employment. Residents recall being blown away by the civic art and 'space age' architecture; big houses with lots of trees and the modernism. Silkin's vision included the production of a new kind of citizen: healthy (open spaces and recreational facilities); self-respecting and dignified (local factories, shops and no division by income); with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride.

Smith devotes a lot of time to the cultural development of Basildon where the accessible Town Gate Theatre gave many working class people exposure to amateur dramatics. Punk was big at the local clubs where Depeche Mode played while local musician Phil Burdett, and Old Man Stan puppeteer Steve Waters (who learned to draw in an after school club) thrived.

By the 1980s, Silkin's lofty aspirations begin to diverge from reality. After a tour of the impressive variation in the accommodation, we hear how the heating (in the ceiling) did not always work; if it was easy for a child to get lost in the pedestrianised alleyways, the nooks and crannies were perfect places to deal drugs. Long before the internet resulted in the closed up shops and austerity hit the art club, the selling off of council properties created a new housing shortage and new selfish ethos. Thatcher's labour policies resulted in new unemployment as the factories shut down. Basildon now has one of largest income gaps in Essex.

### That Good Night

(8th), Cert. 12A, 92 mins.

Too early in writer Charles Savage's film adaptation of N.J. Crisp's 1996 play *That Good Night*, terminally ill novelist and film script writer Ralph Maitland (John Hurt) is given a lethal injection by a mysterious visitor (Charles Dance).

He is discovered by his long-suffering younger wife, Anna (Sofia Helin), lying by the pool on their hill top terrace in the Algarve. Fortunately, in Eric Styles (*Relative Values*) pedestrian adaptation, in which the supporting cast are not of Hurt's calibre, Maitland is not dead. Sadly, this is not a case of art imitating life, although John Hurt, who died last year at 77, knew of his own terminal illness when he took on this close-to-home role. And Hurt is, like Maitland, given a final chance to shine in his wonderful repartee with Charles Dance (71) even if Dance appears less like the grim reaper than a distinctive representative of Care not Killing.

Upon receiving his terminal diagnosis, Maitland summons his estranged only child, Michael (Max Brown) to the Algarve. The arrival of script-writer Michael's unannounced girlfriend Cassie, (Erin Richards) who works as a conference hostess despite a PhD, brings out Maitland's nasty side. She might remind him of his first wife, whom he claims plotted to trap him through her pregnancy (with Max). Too selfish, perhaps, to compete with a child, he refused to give second wife, Anna, the child she craved.

The film cries out for a major confrontation with a wounded Anna when she discovers that Maitland is (a bit too) suddenly thrilled with the prospect of a grandson to carry on his name. While, refreshingly, Cassie can give as good as she takes, limp, dull Michael only seems real when we discover he is a producer of Euro-pudding co-productions like this one.

### Redoubtable

(8th) Cert 15, 108 mins.

**Redoubtable**, 'The Artist' director Michael Hazanavicius's bitter-sweet comedy has been maligned by Godard fans but it is closely based on Un An Après, actress/writer Anne Wiazemsky's autobiographical account of her 12-year marriage to the revered Swiss director of *Breathless*, *Contempt*, and *Pierrot Le Fou*. That their early years together coincided with the 1968 manifestations and Godard's masochistic quest to reconcile his left wing politics with his 'bourgeois' cinema, makes *Redoubtable* much more than a film about the breakdown of a marriage. If the film is let down by Stacy Martin's vacuous portrayal of the talented Anne Wiazemsky, Louis Garrel's inspired performance as Godard is an uncanny delight.

Anne, 20, is the beautiful daughter of a French diplomat and Russian prince, while her maternal grandfather is Francois Mauriac, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature and biographer of the 1968 protesters' nemesis, DeGaulle, who like Mauriac, died in 1970. By contrast, Godard, 37 and homely, is 'tired of amusing the bourgeoisie' and humbled before uncouth

student leaders. Godard has just completed *La Chinoise*, a loose adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed* about the ideological persuasions of a group of young French Maoist radicals. Godard is shocked by the stinging reviews, made worse by the number of adoring fans who approach him in anti-government marches asking, 'when are you going to make more films like *Breathless*?'

Anne, who excelled as Veronique in *La Chinoise*, feels, 'lucky to admire the man I love; the man who revolutionised cinema ten years earlier.' What makes life with Godard so difficult is not just his possessive jealousy. It is a gradual drifting apart in which an often hypocritical Jean-Luc alienates his fans and friends and insults Anne and her family. Hazanavicius successfully turns many of the book's incidents and anecdotes into comedy, such as Godard's determination to stop the Cannes Film Festival in solidarity with the students/workers up north. He rants about being trapped in a posh seaside villa with an embarrassingly tanned wife, only to realise that it is the workers' strike he supports that is responsible for the shortage of petrol and trains to Paris.

Hazanavicius references Godard's bright pastel colours and innovatory stylistic techniques throughout the film. And in one scene, where Godard convinces Anne to turn down a starring role in a film with nudity, the two are brushing their teeth, stark naked. This might be the director's attempt to show how you can present serious questions about personal and political compromise and art and ideology within an entertaining film.

### Filmworker

(18th) Cert tbc, 89 mins.

After seeing Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film *Clockwork Orange*, Warwickshire-born, Shakespearian-trained actor Leon Vitali (who would have been perfect in *Clockwork*) told a friend, 'I want to work with this man.' Five years after landing the role of the battered Lord Bullingdon in Kubrick's 1975 masterpiece *Barry Lyndon*, Leon gave up a flourishing career in the limelight to stand behind the camera in the shadows of Stanley Kubrick. Being on call 24/7, blamed for anything awry and (by the time of *Eyes Wide Shut*, worked literally to the bone), Leon took some battering from the high-strung, moody director as well. Director/cameraman/editor Tony Zierra's (*My Big Break*) riveting documentary, is not, however, a cautionary tale of be careful of what you wish for. Over 30 years later, Leon, who is building a comprehensive archive of film elements for The Kubrick Estate, remains proud of his life-changing decision.

Leon, who faces the camera with honest answers to Zierra's questions and hilarious and humble anecdotes, is supported by a variety of talking heads, from *Full Metal Jacket* star Matthew Modine, (who compares Leon to Frankenstein's assistant Igor), to various Warner Brothers VPs, who are still bemused by this workaholic they would love to hire. His three children (Max is a dead ringer), all of whom work in the industry, do not appear to begrudge their father's work/life imbalance. But with Vitali's long and unpredictable absences from home, you long to hear from their mother(s) and about Leon's personal life.

After contacting Leon out of the blue and despatching him to the States to cast Jack Nicholson's son in *The Shining*, Leon became Kubrick's link between production/post production

and distribution. On any forms that asked for 'occupation' Leon put filmmaker. That's what I am... I do whatever it takes to get the job done.' With perfectionist Kubrick, however 'the job' was never done. 'Funnily enough,' Leon says, 'everything you did for Stanley was a full time job.'

*EDIE* starring Sheila Hancock  
release 25 May



### Edie

(25th) Cert 12A, 102 mins

Had she not come across a rucksack and her adventure-loving father's tattered postcard of a beguiling Scottish mountain, octogenarian Edie's (Sheila Hancock) widowhood would have been no different from her miserable years of marriage to a controlling, oppressive husband turned invalid. Free of caring duties after thirty years, it's Edie's turn to be cared for as her cold, clueless daughter (Wendy Morgan) drags her to depressing nursing homes. But Edie is tired of being shut in. She has a long overdue date with a mountain in Simon Hunter's heartfelt, but lacklustre feature.

Even as a showcase for 84-year-old heroine Sheila Hancock, Hunter and scriptwriter Elizabeth O'Halloran do not often rise above the formulaic. Why does Edie, with her submissive background, and strong sense of duty have to join the swelling ranks of cantankerous old film characters upon being liberated? Pairing Eddie off with mountain shop salesman Johnny (Kevin Guthrie), a young local climber with life choices of his own to consider widens the film's scope, but the subplot never goes anywhere, while Johnny and Edie's relationship remains more of a plot device than something organic and real. And even if you do not think of the comically mismatched travellers in the Bill Bryson adaptation, *A Walk in the Woods*, this central relationship is woefully short on humour. If we never believe that Jonny would drop Edie's boot in the river and fall in trying to catch it, we are not going to laugh about it.

The continual drone shots of the lochs and mountains might grow tiresome, but once Edie takes off across the expanses of moorland and bogs to conquer the imposing, majestic Suliven, you are happy enough to fall into her stride.

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