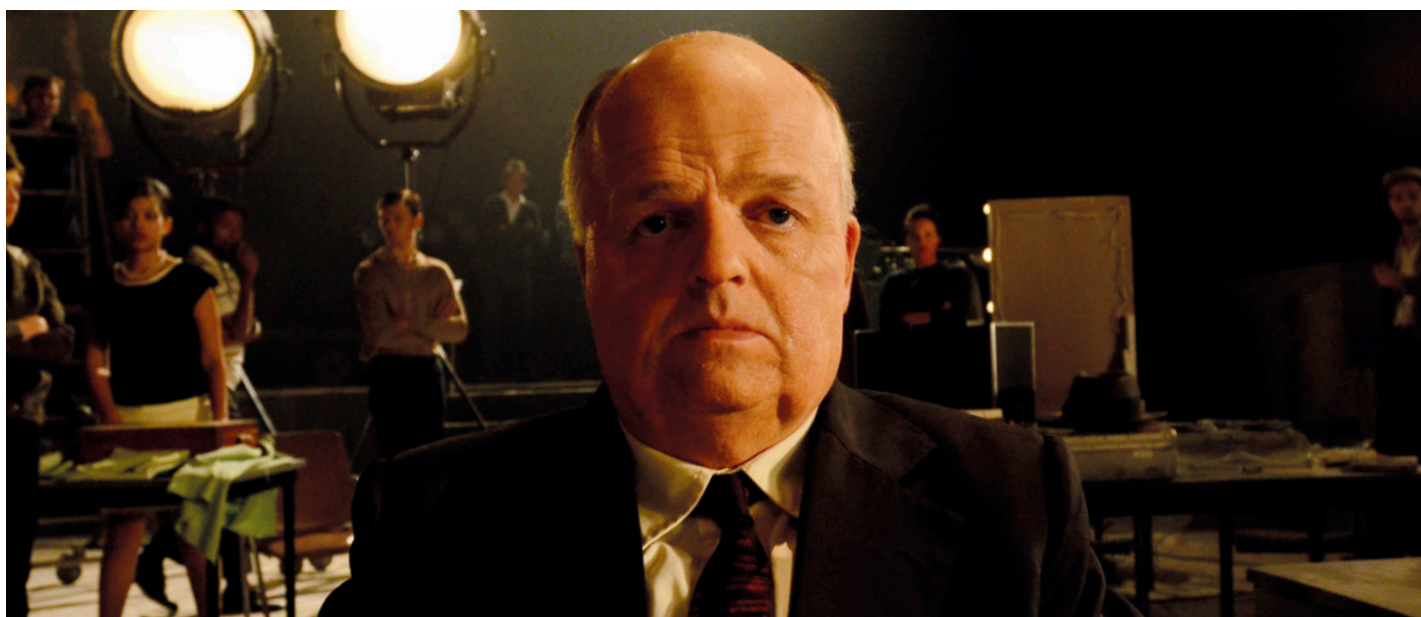


TOBY JONES SELECTS THE GIRL

As part of our BAFTA at 70 celebrations we are delighted to welcome **TOBY JONES** to discuss his career in acting with host **FRANCINE STOCK**.



“...Who pays our wages? ... the studio? ...no, the audience, who want glamour...”

A sexagenarian Alfred Hitchcock, masterfully played by **Toby Jones** in heavy prosthetic make-up, intones this manifesto to camera at the start of the BAFTA-nominated TV drama *The Girl* (2012). We learn it is a convenient mantra, allowing the great ‘Hitch’, by then a giant of the Hollywood studio system, to consider his actors as his personal property, to be treated in whichever way best titillates and satiates the supposed desires of his paying public. And who better to express those desires for them, both on set and off, than ‘Hitch’ himself?

The Girl examines the claustrophobic moral squalor lurking beneath Hollywood’s glamorous façade at a point in the early 1960s when the world was changing and the big studios had at last to confront the exploitative relationships that were making them their money. **Sienna Miller** gives a mesmerizing turn as Universal Picture’s latest break-through actress, Tippi Hedren, as she makes a bold stand and refuses to give in to the power imbalance.

Adapted by screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes from Donald Spoto’s book *Spellbound by Beauty: Alfred Hitchcock and his leading ladies*, *The Girl* focusses on the making of Hitchcock’s classic *The Birds* (1963) a production which brought to the surface both the

darker side of an ageing Hitchcock and the inner strength of his new muse Tippi Hedren, in her struggle to preserve her dignity and resist him.

As *The Girl* begins we join Hitchcock and his wife Alma (**Imelda Staunton** deservedly picking up a BAFTA nomination for best supporting actress) at their home. Hitchcock’s huge gamble with his career and reputation has massively paid off; he has appalled his high-brow critics by abandoning his trademark sumptuous and star-studded intrigue-thrillers of the 1950s to make a shocking low-budget, black and white horror, *Psycho* (1960). But it has become a global smash and as a result Hitchcock is now unassailable; the world is agog at the prospect of his next project, and with it his search for a new leading lady.

Spotting young model Tippi Hedren (Miller) fleetingly in an advert Hitchcock is immediately transfixed. Beside him his wife Alma approvingly recognises the tell-tale sign of her husband’s obsessive lust, a reliable indicator that Hitchcock has made yet another serendipitous and profitable discovery. So begins the professional seduction of the young single mother, an obscure model with virtually no acting experience, aided and abetted by a knowing Alma, who accepts Hitchcock’s creepy flirtations with Hedren as part of a well-worn technique for manufacturing the fragile beauty and tortured, nervous glamour his audiences crave.

But is this time different? Is Hitchcock’s obsession still part of his grubby and unorthodox method of getting the powerful performances only he can wring from his actresses, or is Hitchcock crossing a line, subjecting Hedren to real sexual harassment and vindictive abuse of a personal nature? In the



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Hollywood of the early 1960s we sense that, provided the finished product is commercially successful, those around Hitch are willing to look away regardless. In one memorable early scene we see Hedren fending off a sexual assault by Hitchcock in the back of his chauffeur-driven limo whilst in full public view. Hedren frantically bats him away exactly as she had to do later on set when, as punishment for refusing his crude advances, Hitchcock has his crew hurl live birds at her for five days.

Notwithstanding its period setting and sensibilities *The Girl* had enormous contemporary resonance on its release.

RELEASE YEAR: 2012

RUNTIME: 91 mins

DIRECTOR: Julian Jarrold

WRITTEN BY: Gwyneth Hughes

PRODUCER: Amanda Jenks

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Alex Graham, Leanne Klein, Lucy Richer

Hedren's struggle against Hitchcock, a powerful director taking advantage of her indentured studio status to stalk, harass and break her in the full glare of celebrity, was itself a timely echo of Miller's own personal battles with an equally powerful and amoral Fleet Street. Only a few years earlier Miller had won an unprecedented restraining order against the intrusion of unregulated paparazzi who treated her as their personal quarry. Miller's stand against this abuse led eventually to the exposure of the phone-hacking scandal and the closure of the *News of the World*.

TOBY JONES

Toby Jones' understated and effortless ability to feel his way beneath the skin of his characters, however marginal they may be, or however fleetingly they may feature, is frequently commented on approvingly.

Audiences have been as instantly comfortable and familiar with Jones on their screens and stages as they would have been with an old friend. This skill Jones attributes to his time at the renowned L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq where, having studied mime and physical comedy, he claims he at last realised what it meant to be an actor, what it means to bring not just words but the intensity of real life to every part.

Graduating in 1991 Jones immediately secured his first film acting appearance as 'second valet' in *Orlando* (1992). Walk-on parts could from then on have become Jones' stock in trade. But Jones' genius at imbuing every part with a humble reality made his audiences care about characters they were not even expected to notice.

With a burgeoning reputation and some art-house films and prestigious period dramas under his belt, Jones' major break came with *Infamous* (2006), a powerful study of the author Truman Capote (at the point Capote revealed the grit beneath his social gadfly persona whilst researching his classic *In Cold Blood*). Jones' performance was widely praised, Rex Reed in the *New York Observer* summing it up to perfection:

"...in *Infamous*... a diminutive actor with a titanic talent named Toby Jones literally becomes the man himself. This is no lisping impersonation learned from watching old Johnny Carson shows: Mr. Jones moves into Truman's skin, heart and brains. *Infamous* shows you the man's soul..."

Having delighted as one real-life figure, Toby Jones received his first BAFTA nomination for Best Actor for his portrayal of Alfred Hitchcock in the BBC/HBO TV production *The Girl* (2012). Once again Jones' consummate skill at living his part made audiences feel his Hitchcock was a many-faceted



and complex personality, as much so as any protagonist in one of Hitchcock's own movies.

Jones appearance as Neil Baldwin, the former clown and football mascot with learning disabilities in *Marvellous* (2014) again gained him a BAFTA nomination for Best Actor and the praise of critics citing his incredible skill at delivering the real rather than just the sentimental on screen.

More recently Jones fronted a Christmas television treat as the solicitor in the dark and twisting Agatha Christie tale *Witness for the Prosecution* (2016) and in October will appear in Michael Haneke's Palme d'Or nominated film, *Happy End* (2017).

FRANCINE STOCK

Francine Stock is a broadcaster, critic and writer and has fronted a range of arts and current affairs programmes for BBC Television and Radio, including *Newsnight* and *Front Row*. She also presents *The Film Programme* on BBC Radio 4; a weekly series dedicated to film.

BAFTA HERITAGE SCREENINGS

This event is part of our special programme celebrating BAFTA at 70 and has been generously supported by Heritage Lottery Fund.

