

4 DAYS • 12 NOIRS • 11 COUNTRIES • AT THE **ROXIE THEATRE** (WHERE ELSE?)

ARE NOIR IS GOOD TO FIND 2

FRIDAY MAY 5 - MONDAY MAY 8, 2017

Presented by **MIDCENTURY PRODUCTIONS**

THE man who has showcased more than 60 (sixty!) films not seen on American movie screens in more than 50 (fifty!) years is at it **again** this spring.

Not content to merely crack open the sarcophagus for lost French film noir, Don Malcolm is staking territory across three continents in bringing his second international noir festival to the Roxie Theatre beginning on Cinco de Mayo (May 5).

Just how does he do it, anyway?

“THAT’s a frequently asked question, but I am sorry to say that I’m not at liberty to provide a FAQ for that,” Malcolm laughs. “The best things in life are always a little bit mysterious.”

San Francisco audiences are now ready to follow Malcolm wherever he goes when he announces a new lineup of films. And odds are high that they’ll be out in force this May to tag along as he takes them to eleven countries over four days and twelve films.

The films are all presented digitally, as in most cases their rarity precludes the acquisition of 35mm prints. But as the world becomes smaller due to the Internet, the ability to screen ultra-rarities in this fashion has gotten larger. Malcolm is merely among the first to seize upon this realization and provide what he hopes will be hundreds and hundreds of previously unseen films to cinephiles in search of what he likes to term “brand-new old stuff.”

RARE NOIR 2 upholds what is now a kind of “holy tradition” in exhuming remarkable films that have languished in obscurity, barred from audiences due to the vagaries of time and circumstance.

Two better-known films are in this year’s festival lineup—Carol Reed’s *ODD MAN OUT* (1947) and Giuseppe De Santis’ *BITTER RICE* (1949), both of which have made inroads into the Criterion Collection, with recent DVD and Blu-Ray™ releases. “These are examples of the current process for reclaiming great international cinema from obscurity,” Malcolm notes. “We’ve included them here because these films still do not receive theatrical screenings despite their anointment as classics. Great films need and deserve the kind of collective immersion that can really only happen in a movie theater.”

And these two films are included to give the audience another way of gauging the quality of the other films in the series. “These films anchor our schedule and place it in both a qualitative and an historical context,” Malcolm says. “I’m expecting audiences to take away the idea that film noir was an essential cinematic modality all over the world for nearly twenty years following World War II, and that filmmakers often rose to the occasion and made their best work when they were working within that framework.”



THE festival opens **Friday night** with two films from far-flung locations (Egypt and Mexico). “Youssef Chachine’s **CAIRO STATION** (1958) is a film known to a subset of cinephiles, but ours will be its first theatrical screening on the West Coast in more than fifty years,” Malcolm says. The story of sexual obsession and gender cruelty set in the demimonde swarming around Cairo’s rail station—the film is shot in actual locations—is as tense and queasy as any film in the noir canon, and Farid Shawqi’s lead performance is poignantly sympathetic even in the midst of its creep-out factor.

“Here again is an example of a film that will one day be in the Criterion Collection but just needs to be seen by cinema audiences in a real theater for the wheels to start turning,” Malcolm smiles. “We want to be a catalyst for that.”

Playing with it is a completely unknown Mexican noir, **CAMINO DEL INFIERNO** (aka *THE ROAD TO HELL*), a torturous love story featuring Pedro Armendariz—one of Mexico’s most celebrated leading men—and the mysterious, alluring Leticia Palma, whose brief career was spent almost

| Year | Festival | Films | Rare-Noir | Rare-Other |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 2014 | FRENCH HAD A NAME FOR IT 1/SF | 12 | 10 | 0 |
| 2015 | RARE NOIR IS GOOD TO FIND 1 | 15 | 14 | 0 |
| 2015 | FRENCH HAD A NAME FOR IT 1/LA | 8 | 2 | 0 |
| 2015 | FRENCH HAD A NAME FOR IT 2/SF | 12 | 11 | 0 |
| 2016 | MIDCENTURYECLECTIC! 1 | 12 | 2 | 7 |
| 2016 | FRENCH HAD A NAME FOR IT 2/LA | 8 | 2 | 0 |
| 2016 | FRENCH HAD A NAME FOR IT 3/SF | 15 | 14 | 0 |
| 2017 | RARE NOIR IS GOOD TO FIND 2 | 12 | 9 | 0 |
| | TOTAL | 94 | 64 | 7 |



exclusively in cabaretara and noir films. She is currently known to American noir audiences only via another noir made around the same time, *EN LA PALMA DE TU MANO*, where she is “a Latin version of *DOUBLE INDEMNITY*’s Phyllis Dietrichson,” Malcolm says. “In our film she is much more sexualized, at least at the outset—director Miguel Morayta lingers over her physical attractiveness in order that we know just how much she knows ‘how to use it,’ as the phrase goes.”

The doomed love between Palma and Armendariz, a bitter former hitman living hand-to-mouth in a dilapidated Mexico City neighborhood, is portrayed with a uniquely downbeat melodramatic flair, building to a shattering climax. “Morayta has a cluster of such films in the late 40s/early 50s,” Malcolm notes. “This is a preview of what we hope we’ll be seeing from the Morelia Festival folks over the next years as more Mexican noir re-emerges.”

Saturday’s matinee returns us to Europe, with Italy’s *IN THE NAME OF THE LAW* (Pietro Germi, 1950) and Leopold Lindtberg’s *MADNESS RULES* (1947), from Switzerland. “Germi’s films had a retrospective in America in 1999, but I don’t think folks were quite ready to acknowledge just what a force his early neo-realist work really is,” Malcolm says. “Eddie Muller showed another of his films, *FOUR WAYS OUT*—a neo-realist heist film—just this past January at Noir City, and a number of those in the audience who saw it felt that he’d actually undersold Germi’s work a bit. We’re glad to build from that, as *IN THE NAME OF THE LAW* is a much more fraught film, one which gets deep into the subject of ‘the old ways’ and the tense conflict between a young Sicilian judge willing to take on the Mafia...it’s Germi at his best, and I hope that this screening prompts the Criterion folks to consider an early Germi box set for their Eclipse series. He deserves it.”

MADNESS RULES is “sort of *GREEN FOR DANGER* set in a mental hospital,” Malcolm laughs. “Sort of a cross between *THE BIG CLOCK* and *GREEN FOR DANGER*. Lindtberg is a director who likes his offbeat characters—he has a number of them here, just as he does in his better-known war drama *THE LAST CHANCE*.” The “breakout star” of *MADNESS RULES*, however, is 20-year-old Elisabeth Müller, who would become a noted leading lady in Europe in the 1950s.

Saturday evening features *ODD MAN OUT*, with James Mason’s towering performance as dying IRA leader Johnny McQueen. “As we know, it’s the performance that gave him his chance to come to America,” Malcolm notes. “He does a great job of leaving the canvas of his character blank so that others can project onto him their ideas of who he is. All of them are, of course, false impressions. The film really does become a terrific example of Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous observation—‘Hell is other people.’ Johnny McQueen gets a bellyful of that in *ODD MAN OUT*.”

Playing with it is another story of a man in Hell—one of his own making. *PETLA* (aka *THE NOOSE*) is Wojciech Has’ debut film, and the man who would soon after make the post-Surrealist classic *THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT* amply demonstrates his skill in crafting a tale of alcoholism that is much more soaked in despair than *THE LOST WEEKEND*, which it superficially resembles. “I think Has saw *ODD MAN OUT* and transposed the ‘Hell is Other People’ plot concept into *PETLA*—and it’s even more appropriate here, as it’s just ordinary life at work, not a killer-on-the-run situation. Has bends reality in ever-darker ways throughout the film—the cumulative effect is staggering.”

The **Sunday matinee** veers us into an even more intense intersection with surrealism, noir style. “It’s clear that for many 50s directors across the world, noir was a kind of stylistic way-station that they would pass through en route to a more individualistic form of film-making,” Malcolm notes. “That’s certainly the case with Walter Hugo Khouri, one of the most notable figures in Brazil’s Cinema Novo in the 60s.” *STRANGE ENCOUNTER* prefigures what would become much more explicit work, but weaves an early version of the oddly charged psychological collisions that would recur in his work. “It’s a fascinating cross between a B-movie and an arthouse film, with generous dollops of noir atmosphere,” Malcolm laughs. “I’d better be careful, or I’m going to sound like I’m writing copy for wine merchants! Let’s just say that the film lives up to its title!”

However, a much more truly strange encounter lies in wait with *KRAKAKIT*, a film about which Malcolm says only “there is none other like it.” Czechoslovakian director Otakar Vavra, working in the post-WWII blight of atomic hysteria and divided Europe, reaches back to the prophetic 1921 novel of Karel Capek to paint a nightmarish vision of a power-mad world hungry for tools of destruction that will give them a czar-like control over the world. The inventor of krakatit, an unusually powerful and versatile explosive, finds himself courted serially by the myriad forces of darkness, all of whom want to possess the power to hold the world in thrall via fear.

“Capek is right there with Kafka in terms of nightmare visions, and Vavra found two superb actors to play the pivotal roles from the book,” Malcolm notes. “Karel Holger has the eyes of Peter Lorre and the face of the young Richard Attenborough, and he lives through what is literally a hell of his own invention.” What takes the film out of its dystopian science-fiction trappings, however, is the presence of a femme fatale, a conniving princess who attempts to acquire krakatit “the old-fashioned way”...by means of seduction.

“And who else but Florence Marly?” Malcolm smiles. “If we could track down her films made in South America,

I have little doubt that we would have the makings of a truly unhinged version of MIDCENTURYECLECTIC! In **KRAKATIT** she is deliciously duplicitous, adding the necessary sexual danger to the proceedings. Her presence grounds the film in its noir roots, and reminds us that noir is a virus that infects all forms of humanity, channeling each of the seven deadly sins and virtually all of the intermediate vices.”

Needless to say, once seen, **KRAKATIT** will not easily be forgotten. But Sunday evening has just as much going for it, albeit in a different way. Marly’s devious princess gives way to overpowering earth goddess Silvana Magnano, who dominates Giuseppe De Santis’ **BITTER RICE**, which is now available in a (long overdue) Criterion edition.

“It is a fantastic combination of Hollywood noir visual techniques and neo-realist subject matter,” Malcolm says, “and we needed to show how that was part of the cross-pollinating process that was going on internationally right after World War II. This is another film that has always had great word of mouth from critics but never gets screened—and that’s something that we needed to rectify ASAP.”

As gripping as **BITTER RICE** is, it is actually overshadowed by the film it is paired with—the 1955 Flemish art-noir **MEEUWEN STERVEN IN DE HAVEN** (**SEAGULLS ARE DYING IN THE HARBOR**). “We showed a terrific art-noir last spring in our **ECLECTIC!** series called **THE SAVAGE EYE**, made by a committee of three writer/directors. **SEAGULLS** is clearly the template for that film—and it, too was made by a committee of three, whose vision combined into a shattering look at the forms of human alienation and the need to overcome it,” Malcolm says.

Set in Antwerp, the fraught journey of a young man on the run (played by noted artist-actor Julien Schoenaerts) is given brooding propulsion by the backdrop of the city, the stark cinematic contrasts between old and new architecture mirroring his struggles. “The promise and pitfalls of human interaction are all captured here,” Malcolm’s tones are hushed. “This is truly a singular achievement, even if it took three filmmakers to bring it off.”

Any other festival would conclude at this point, but **RARE NOIR 2** has two more aces up its sleeve as it travels to the Far East for a rousing **Monday night** finale. “**CASH CALLS HELL** is, without doubt, the very last great ‘classic noir’

ever made,” Malcolm says. “It’s 1966, black and white as a film medium is on a malfunctioning defibrillator, but Hideo Gosha brings it back from the brink of death for one last victory lap.”

The story of a hit man who changes sides and tries to save the men he was contracted to kill, **CASH CALLS HELL** is an uncompromising look at the squalid underside of Japan, featuring grimy docks, prison yards, deserted amusement parks, cheap bars and strip clubs as our hero becomes ensnared in a series of chess moves between rival gangsters.

“Tatsuya Nakadaki, still with us at age 84, is one of Japan’s greatest actors,” Malcolm notes. “He’s best remembered as the pacifist soldier in Kobayashi’s monumental **THE HUMAN CONDITION**, but he makes for one of the most anguished noir protagonists ever—and it’s fitting that he really is also, with respect to the ‘classic’ period, the last noir hero.”

Then, finally, there is **THE HOUSEMAID**. “Even those who’ve seen this film already—and it is the third best-known film in the series—remain astonished that it could come out of South Korea in 1960,” Malcolm observes. “My feminist friends are divided by it—some damn it as blaming women for their so-called sexual treachery, while others see it as shining a harsh light on the double standards imposed by a patriarchal society. What happens in the film—a family living through the consequences of an extra-marital affair under its own roof—is flamboyant as hell, and doesn’t need the spatter effects of a film like **GONE GIRL** to give you gooseflesh.”

AND as was the case with his first **RARE NOIR** festival in 2015, Malcolm hopes to showcase the incredible performance of a forgotten actress. “We feted Grace Chang in our first international festival for her work in **THE WILD, WILD ROSE**,” he notes. “Well, Ms. Chang was also a great singer and retired after marrying into wealth. But Eun-shim Lee, who is so amazing as Myung-sook—‘the Housemaid’—was never able to work again as a result of this performance. Talk about a noir situation! Can you imagine?”

What SF film fans can readily imagine is yet another singular series by the man the San Francisco Chronicle calls “the most adventurous film programmer anywhere.” Don’t miss RARE NOIR 2!

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FRIDAY MAY 5

CAIRO STATION 1958 Egypt 7:30 77min
CAMINO DEL INFIERNO 1951 Mexico 9:15 90min

SATURDAY MAY 6

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW 1950 Italy 2:00 101min
MADNESS RULES 1947 Switzerland 4:00 113min
ODD MAN OUT 1947 UK 7:00 116min
PETLA 1958 Poland 9:15 96min

SUNDAY MAY 7

STRANGE ENCOUNTER 1958 Brazil 2:00 87min
KRAKATIT 1948 Czechoslovakia 3:45 110min
BITTER RICE 1949 Italy 7:00 108min
SEAGULLS ARE DYING IN THE HARBOR 1955 Belgium 9:15 94min

MONDAY MAY 8

CASH CALLS HELL 1966 Japan 7:15 92min
THE HOUSEMAID 1960 So. Korea 9:00 109min