

BBC Charter Review Consultation
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Dear Sir/Madam

I have some complaints, which I hope will also be fed into the six month review of BBC4. By the late nineties, egged on by the BBC, ~~the~~ British TV had dumbed down into a wasteland for historically informed film culture. The BBC was given BBC4 in March 2002. This so-called Arts Channel has a slogan, which should more truthfully read: 'Everyone needs a place to think Foreign language cinema began around 1985.'

BBC4's remit talks about 'providing the range and depth not found elsewhere': in practice, it has duplicated post 1996 Channel 4's historically challenged definition of foreign cinema. However, created in 1982, Channel 4 had, for fifteen years, been a true friend to Classic Foreign Movies (C.F.M.). Within a year C.F.M. were down to one slot in eleven weeks on BBC4. Moreover, BBC4 now mirrors 1997-2002 BBC2, whose youth pandering disdain for subtitled black and white made BBC4's creation imperative in the first place.

In the late nineties I asked Steve Jenkins, BBC Head of Films and Programme Acquisitions, why BBC2 had followed Channel 4's ratings offensive and dumped C.F.M. He told me, 'we just don't have the slots'. In the past six months BBC4 has shown just three films from Foreign ^{language} Cinema's 1930-1975 Golden Age, whilst privileging over sixty slots to Foreign Films from the very era when cinema as a unique art form became increasingly colonized by the pace, tone and visuals of T.V. I asked Mr Jenkins on February 23rd 2004, why the BBC, now with several additional channels, including Fifty Five extra hours per week till 3 a.m. on a BBC Channel 'dedicated to the Arts', could do no better than perpetuate duplicate Channel 4's

advertiser Friendly travesty of Foreign cinema history. He told me, 'We just don't have the slots. The important thing is that ^{new} Foreign movies, at last, have a regular BBC slot.' No, the important thing is that while Mr Jenkins plays 'Never Mind the Quality, Feel the Width', a whole generation will continue to receive a dumbed down version of the possibilities of cinema.

All the BBC has done is to move post-1975 (although it's usually post 1985) World Cinema Lite ^(W.C.L.) from BBC2 to BBC4. Their Brave New World means the same W.C.L. is shown on Saturday, repeated the following Friday, whilst the Vermeers and Titians of cinema history, far from getting even one post-midnight slot per week, are further erased from the schedules and viewers' memories. There's a clear conflict of interest here. BBC4 was publically financed to widen choice; it's the only potential platform on British T.V. for C.F.M.; yet it hypes and monopolizes its film slots with the same W.C.L. that Mr Jenkins tells me it aids in U.K. distribution. This means any meretricious dress from 2002 automatically gets two slots per week, whilst filmmaking miracles like Jean Pierre Melville's 1948 debut 'Le Silence de la Mer' still await their British TV ~~debut~~ premieres.

BBC4's documentaries on travel, history etc etc. get two repeats a week and another delayed repeat on BBC2 (now extended till 2 a.m. weekdays). These BBC4 distributed Foreign movies and joint-financed documentaries have cost-effective repeat options structured into their deals. Consequently the airtime wolfed down by such programming means the Art and history of cinema are effectively banned from BBC4 schedules. Maybe I'm naive, but I thought BBC4 was created for viewers, not BBC accountants.

The BBC receives two billion a year. It should cut back on feeding the omnivorous celebrity monster, ~~that that takes~~ ~~large of over so much of people's time~~. Meanwhile BBC4 should receive extra funds with the proviso that it returns cinema's glorious past back to the viewers.

I'm sure BBC4's World Cinema is not considered

lightweight compared to the Hollywood and TV drama people are used to, but next to the richness and variety of Antonioni, Fellini, Melville, Bresson, Godard, Truffaut, Bunuel, Bergman, Kurosawa, Ozu - to name just a few masters from the fifties - the BBC4 audience is being sold Fool's gold. Writing these names out of Film history only makes the BBC look like the Stalinist Broadcasting Corporation, like an ageist and philistine institution that has betrayed the Art of Cinema for the Art of Selling. How can people measure the true worth of the latest overhyped BBC4 World Cinema product ('The best in international cinema on BBC4' - Only if you were born ~~just~~ yesterday) if they can't compare it to the creme de la creme of Film history. Is this how the BBC 'educates, informs and entertains'? Does BBC Radio pretend the classical and jazz ages never happened, that music began with Elvis Presley? Are we led to believe that Hollywood history was grinded into life by Tom Cruise in the eighties?

The BBC, through public funding, was supposed to be an insurance against public taste being dictated solely by the market. However, when post-1996 Channel 4 rebanded itself towards the advertisers' trendy 17-35 demographic, made trivia its King and blacklisted C.F.M., BBC2 immediately followed suit. ~~BB~~ British T.V.'s philistine's guide to Foreign Film has been consolidated by BBC4, so ultimately viewers' understanding, indeed, its limited choice of Foreign Film has been decided by the advertisers. Now instead of seeing pre-TV Age thirties Paris through the pre-TV Age eyes of Jean Renoir, BBC4 gives us thirties Paris through the 21st Century eyes of directors, writers, cinematographers etc. brought upon and trained in T.V. advertising and pop video. Cinema's love letters from the past are irreplaceable; these films are not just about art; ~~they~~ they are vital social documents ~~on~~ of the times such as the late fifties, early sixties exuberant Italian romantic comedies starring Marcello Mastroianni. Italy's greatest ever star, Mastroianni had entertained BBC2 viewers for decades. But ~~with~~ BBC2's preoccupation with

Spoon Fed youth in the late nineties, ^{meant} his death was completely ignored. Sophia Loren is a pre-1975 Foreign movie star even known to 'Hello' readers, yet for well over a decade the BBC has taught us this wonder in her early Italian movies like 'Marriage Italian Style' (1963) only made Hollywood turkeys.

Millions like myself would not have discovered Antonioni, Jean Gabin etc without the enlightened scheduling of pre 1997 BBC2. Now BBC4 executives, brought up on Old Guard BBC2, take this invaluable cultural inheritance for granted and shout, Let them eat W.C.L.! We are condemned to the trendy agenda of these creatures of media, Fobbed off with Fool's gold. Meanwhile at this years Oscars, America's First ever Female director nominee, Sophia Coppola, thanks Antonioni and Godard for 'giving me the courage to make this film'. These legendary figures have inspired many British directors as well, yet anybody who transformed Cinema into what's known in France as The Seventh Art is shunned by the BBC, hidden away at the elitist sport margins of the N.F.T., denied to millions across the UK.

In the early nineties cinema history's riches were screened on all Four channels. Now every week ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 combined screen over twenty Hollywood and UK movies per week plus Channel 4's Frequent W.C.L. Mark Byford, Acting Director General says The BBC should aspire innovate, stretch people. Well, the arrival of BBC digital means we now have two more youth driven past 1980 Hollywood movies on BBC3 to add to the eighteen Hollywood and UK movies shown on BBC1 and BBC2 each week, whilst the Frequent W.C.L. on BBC2 is now duplicated each week on BBC4. That's over forty Film slots on Britains Five main channels and not one slot, week in, week out, for the Old World charm of say Fifties Rome or sixties Paris, when the music, the cars, the clothes, the women - everything was more stylishly European. Mr Byford, cinema has been brutalized beyond repair; being a little less downmarket than the trashcan of commercial T.V. isn't good enough.

Until the mid-nineties BBC2 and Channel 4 were proud to ~~be~~ offer rarities from the ocean of cinema history. Nowadays their commitment to ^{the} pre-1975 era means the same dull, dumb, dated or overrated movies are screened every year along with repeats of T.V.'s Familiar classics - 'Casablanca', 'The Red Shoes' etc.

So because they are considered too historically obscure or arty For BBC2 and Channel 4's Reality T.V. generation, Silent Classics like Pabst's Pandora's Box (1928) with the divine Louise Brooks, Golden Age Hollywood like Ernst Lubitsch's Art Deco masterpiece 'Trouble in Paradise' (1932) and cult vintage gems like Julie Christie's now almost mythical great 'lost' movie 'Petulia' 1968 - a key insight into late sixties America - are destined For further decades of oblivion, unless the BBC grows up and treats cinema as an art Form again. The only conceivable T.V. showcase For these films is, of course, BBC4, where there is an audience of cinema literate people wondering what the hell the BBC is playing at. Meanwhile Fortunes will be blown outbidding ITV For the latest Harry Potter movie.

Pve 1996 BBC2 offered directors seasons and documentaries. Now timeless artists such as Orson Welles and Jean Renoir are blacklisted, lest they disorientate viewers infantilized by a tyranny of comedy and game shows, who can only relate to ^{celebrity} movie portraits of the ubiquitous John Wayne, Monroe etc.. Not one of the Omnibus/Arena great director profiles, not broadcast For up to thirty years, has been screened by BBC4. Why allow this classic era of engaging documentaries to gather movie archive dust? 'The clips are too expensive' says Mr Jenkins. Yet BBC Knowledge, with a smaller budget, showed Marcel Carné and Fellini documentaries just before BBC4 arrived. Not repeating these documentaries is a crass waste of talent and money; whether the clips are expensive or not, should BBC4 be wasting money on the gimmicky 'D.V.D. Show'? As the BBC caves more for crossover audiences and investing in BBC 'Personalities' than Film history, 'The D.V.D. Show' is introduced by a cheerful Radio 2 disc

C.F.M. = CLASSIC FOREIGN MOVIES
W.C.L. = WORLD CINEMA LITE

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jockey. The aim is to flatter the historically challenged 17-35 demographic. So apart from occasionally reviewing much televised oldies like 'Casablanca' and 'The Great Escape', the audience ~~is~~ is reassured that Film history really began with the glorified TV era of post-1980 Hollywood and W.C.L. This is the reactionary 21st Century pop culture or nothing mentality against which BBC4 could have rebelled. Instead we get the BBC's customary intellectual censorship, as anything astonishingly different from pre-Star Wars generation Film history is studiously ignored. 'The D.V.D. Show', a sung monument to cinematic philistinism, with its blinding ^{coloured} sets, gimmicky competitions and digital voting, is pure 2004 BBC2. So why is it on BBC4, with the same edition screened three times a week? That's over eighty hours of BBC4 airtime ~~used up~~ ^{already} used up by this D.V.D. industry promoting monstrosity, in which they could have screened over forty C.F.M. Unique to BBC4, these C.F.M. were, for me, reason enough for going digital. BBC4 blacklists them, while persisting with a show that turns Film history into a joke - something the Media has done for a decade. Quite frankly, BBC4 Cinema is a con, an ageist insult that has sold itself to the Cult of the New, not the Different. In an age where ~~the~~ marketing seems the most valued of arts, BBC4 should be the one place where people can measure ~~the~~ contemporary hype against historical perspective. But that's assuming they consider Film was ever an art form.

The BBC included over thirty pre 1975 C.F.M. in its mostly Hollywood Top 100 Films of All Time in 1995. Now the BBC's Fashion Police tell us that the 1930-1975 Italian and French Cinemas, which re-invigorated Film-making the world over, never existed.

No less than twenty two pre 1975 C.F.M. and 10 silent movies made Sight and Sound's Top Fifty Films of All Time chosen by the World's Top Film Critics, ('Observer' 11th August 2002). These critics, blessed with historical perspective, not cursed with a lust for TV ratings, were so impressed by T.V. and advertising's recent bastardization of cinema, that just two post-1976

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movies (one Hollywood, one W.C.L.) made the 2002 poll. Moreover, Forty of these Fifty classics were made in black and white. These and hundreds of other 'N.F.T. Only' gems will continue to be neglected by the scandalously complacent BBC4, unless its remit is radically altered so people can escape the tyranny of the perpetual present, of W.C.L., at least once a week.

Yours sincerely
Alex Padman

P.S.

If BBC4's new remit just promised 'to show both recent and vintage international films', it could, in theory, get away with screening ^{a mere} one classic foreign movie a year. From my letters and phone calls with BBC4 I have clear evidence, strong reasons to believe this^{is} exactly what they will do.