



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER 18, 2016
4:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

VERTIGO

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



VERTIGO's reputation has undergone ascents and descents, and returns from the dead, as dramatic as those within the film itself. When it premiered in May, 1958, VERTIGO seemed destined for success: big stars, Technicolor, VistaVision, a splashy publicity campaign—and Hitchcock, the most famous director in the U.S. His popular television series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, then in its third season, consisted of crisp half-hour mystery-suspense/twist-ending episodes, some directed by Hitchcock, all featuring his on-screen wry introductions and wrap-ups. TV confirmed him to millions as “The Master of Suspense” – a reputation earned for films such as THE 39 STEPS, NOTORIOUS, STRANGERS ON A TRAIN, REAR WINDOW, and THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH. Although VERTIGO certainly has its share of suspense, reviewers and audiences apparently were unprepared for its leisurely pace, obsessive characters, psychological intricacy, and unusual structure. Reviews were mixed, and some were downright dismissive. *The New Yorker* deemed it “farfetched nonsense”; *Time* magazine called it “another Hitchcock-and-bull story.” VERTIGO made just slightly more than its \$2.5 million budget, received only two Oscar nominations (Art Direction and Sound) and seemed destined to be relegated to the list of Hitchcock’s failures.



It would take some time for critics to discover the film’s merits. In the 1962 edition of the British Film Institute’s *Sight & Sound* prestigious poll of international film critics and historians—conducted every ten years—VERTIGO was nowhere to be found. Orson Welles’s CITIZEN KANE was #1, but American films in general—and “light entertainers” such as Hitchcock in particular—were not yet revered. Robin Wood, in the first major English-language study of the director, *Hitchcock’s Films* (1965), felt the need to begin defensively: “Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?” He answered his question boldly: “VERTIGO seems to me Hitchcock’s masterpiece to date, and one of the four or five most profound and beautiful films the cinema has yet given us.... In complexity and subtlety, in emotional depth, in its power to disturb, in the centrality of its concerns, VERTIGO can as well as any film be taken to represent the cinema’s claims to be treated with the respect accorded to the longer established art forms.”

Others shared Wood’s admiration, and in 1972’s *Sight & Sound* poll, VERTIGO just missed the top ten. Interestingly, a year later, Hitchcock decided to withdraw VERTIGO—along with four other films—from theatrical release. During the 1970s, seeing it anywhere was a holy grail experience. Perhaps its very inaccessibility made VERTIGO sufficiently legendary to jump into *Sight & Sound*’s 1982 poll as part of a three-way tie at #7. In 1983, three years after Hitchcock’s death, his estate re-released VERTIGO to theaters. It also became popular on home video, and in 1989 it was among the first 25 films selected by the Library Congress for the National Film Registry. In the 1992 *Sight & Sound* poll, it leaped to #4.

In 1996 a restoration with stereo sound (which had been recorded, but not used, for the 1958 release) had a successful theatrical run, giving the film yet another life, and inspiring Dan Auiler’s indispensable 1998 book, *Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic*. In *Sight & Sound*’s 2002 poll, VERTIGO placed #2, very close behind CITIZEN KANE, which retained the #1 status it had held since 1962. Most recently, in 2012—with the voting pool expanded considerably from 175 to 846—VERTIGO placed #1, decisively ahead of the #2, CITIZEN KANE. Hitchcock’s once-dismissed work had climbed to the top!

DIRECTED BY **ALFRED HITCHCOCK**
(1958) 128 MINS.

PRODUCED BY **PARAMOUNT PICTURES**

SCREENPLAY BY **ALEC COPPEL**
AND **SAMUEL TAYLOR, JR.**

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **ROBERT BURKS**
SCORE BY **BERNARD HERRMANN**

STARRING **JAMES STEWART, KIM NOVAK,**
BARBARA BEL GEDDES, AND TOM HELMORE

DID YOU KNOW: VERTIGO INTRODUCED A DISORIENTING TECHNIQUE COMBINING A BACKWARD CAMERA MOVEMENT WITH A FORWARD ZOOM. KNOWN BY VARIOUS NAMES, INCLUDING “DOLLY ZOOM,” IT IS OFTEN CALLED, APPROPRIATELY, “THE VERTIGO EFFECT.”

NEXT UP: COME BACK NEXT SUNDAY FOR A TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY PRESENTATION OF LEON GAST’S LANDMARK DOCUMENTARY WHEN WE WERE KINGS. A CHANCE TO CELEBRATE THE LIFE OF THE LATE MUHAMMAD ALI: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, AT 2:00 P.M.