

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 8, 2019
2 PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

ORLANDO

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



In Sally Potter's *ORLANDO*, a young nobleman played by Tilda Swinton is given a command by his queen: "Do not fade, do not wither, do not grow old." From there, the character begins a 400-year journey—struggling throughout to meet expectations around love, poetry, politics, society, sex, and childbirth—and, incidentally, changes gender along the way. This is, as Anne Ciecko describes it, a "transgender, transgenre, and transnational" story, adapted from the novel by Virginia Woolf. "With Aleksei Rodionov's evocative cinematography creating a storybook feel, Potter's swift navigation of eras feels at once epic and restrained," writes Eric Kohn. "Potter simply places Swinton as Swinton in a variety of contexts and lets the varying juxtapositions speak volumes about gender roles throughout history. The outcome is a radical anti-narrative that resists conventional emotional shortcuts."



ORLANDO was Potter's second feature film, and one that was difficult to finance due to the perceived "unfilmability" of the source material and the commercial failure of her first feature, 1983's *THE GOLD DIGGERS*. It became an international co-production, with funding from the UK, Russia, Italy, France, and the Netherlands. Filming locations included UK sites as well as St. Petersburg, where the "Olde London" scenes were filmed, and Khiva in Uzbekistan. (The desert drinking scene was written in response to the mayor of Khiva leading hours of toasts to Potter's crew, augmented by "a lot of bottles of vodka under the burning sun," a situation that continued until a bribe changed hands.)

Potter selected Swinton for the lead role after seeing her portray a man onstage, and admired the "profound subtlety about the way she took on male body language." The two worked closely on the character over years of pre-production, at one point undertaking a photo shoot using a variety of rented costumes, and Orlando's asides and direct address of the camera were developed out of that shoot. Swinton cited the direct address as "subverting the idea of being gazed upon as a woman," while Potter called it "an equivalent for Virginia Woolf's way of directly addressing the reader in the book."

Other cast members contributed to the performative and camp qualities of the film, beginning with Quentin Crisp in the role of Elizabeth I. (Potter remarked, "He is the true queen of England. He's my idea of royalty.") Jimmy Somerville of the eighties bands Bronski Beat and the Communards performed Edward Johnson's "Eliza Is the Fairest Queen" as well as a contemporary song he co-wrote with Potter, and writer Heathcote Williams played both a 17th-century poet and a modern-day editor. *ORLANDO* is noteworthy as the debut film for Toby Jones and Simon Russell Beale.

The film premiered to a standing ovation at the 1992 Venice Film Festival, and went on to receive two Oscar nominations and win two BAFTAs. While *ORLANDO* is not without its critics—Leslie K. Hankins called it "a heterosexual betrayal of a lesbian love letter" from Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, whose family's history and property were the inspiration for the novel—the film has largely been received quite positively. "This ravishing and witty spectacle invades the mind through eyes that are dazzled," Vincent Canby wrote in his review. "*ORLANDO* could well become a classic of a very special kind—not mainstream perhaps—but a model for independent filmmakers who follow their own irrational muses, sometimes to unmoored obscurity, occasionally to glory." Potter herself said of the film, "It's a loving look, a compassionate look, at the confusion around what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman. I wanted to try and do it all through a sense of humor, in fact, and with a touch of lightness so that the people would be released through laughter back into themselves."

DIRECTED BY **SALLY POTTER**

SCREENPLAY BY **SALLY POTTER**
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY **VIRGINIA WOOLF**

PRODUCED BY **ADVENTURE PICTURES**
(1992) 94 MINS.

STARRING **TILDA SWINTON, BILLY ZANE,
LOTHAIRE BLUTEAU, JOHN WOOD,
CHARLOTTE VALANDREY, HEATHCOTE
WILLIAMS, AND QUENTIN CRISP**

DID YOU KNOW: YOU MIGHT RECOGNIZE *ORLANDO*'S "GREAT HOUSE" FROM SOME OF ITS OTHER FILM APPEARANCES. HATFIELD HOUSE IN HERTFORDSHIRE HAS BEEN A SHOOTING LOCATION FOR MORE THAN 20 FEATURE FILMS, INCLUDING *THE FAVOURITE*, *GREYSTOKE*, *THE NEW WORLD*, *ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD*, *V FOR VENDETTA*, *GET HIM TO THE GREEK*, *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES*, AND TWO *TOMB RAIDER* FILMS. IT STOOD IN FOR WINDSOR CASTLE IN *MY WEEK WITH MARILYN* AND FOR WAYNE MANOR IN *BATMAN* AND *BATMAN RETURNS*. MOST RECENTLY, IT WAS THE SETTING FOR THE JONAS BROTHERS REUNION VIDEO "SUCKER," RELEASED EARLIER THIS YEAR.

NEXT UP: TREASURES PRESENTS A PACKED SEPTEMBER SCREENING SCHEDULE. ON **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20 AT 7PM**, JOIN US FOR AN EVENING OF **SHORT FILMS BY YALE WOMEN FILMMAKERS** AND A POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION WITH FILMMAKERS AND SCHOLARS. PLUS, TWO CO-PRESENTATIONS WITH THE *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* FILM SERIES: FIRST, ON ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, **DO THE RIGHT THING** SCREENS ON **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 AT 7PM**, AND ON **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27 AT 7PM**, **BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID**, IN A 50TH ANNIVERSARY PRESENTATION.