

TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

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

THE PIANO

THURSDAY
JANUARY 29, 2015
7:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

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



THE PIANO opens with a blurred image of light glimpsed through indistinct vertical obstacles, then a close-up of Ada (Holly Hunter), looking through her fingers, thereby rendering the initial shot as her point of view. Ada's narration accompanies the second shot: "The voice you hear is not my speaking voice but my mind's voice." In just thirty seconds, writer-director Jane Campion has introduced her main character; conveyed the centrality of Ada's viewpoint (which at times is only a partial glimpse of her world); established sight (and voyeurism), hearing (Ada is mute, and communicates only through sign language, written notes, and the piano), and touch (Ada's fingers: signing, piano playing) as central motifs; and announced the film's style as an intricate juxtaposition of the abstract and the concrete.

With THE PIANO, Campion made history by becoming the first – and still only – woman to win the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or. In 1986, she had won the Short Film Palme d'Or for THE PEEL (1982), made while she was a student at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. Other shorts had followed, and then the acclaimed features SWEETIE (1989) and AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE (1990). THE PIANO went on from Cannes to a place on almost every top-ten list, was a huge box-office success (budget: \$7 million; worldwide gross: \$140 million), received eight Oscar nominations including Best Picture and Director, and catapulted Campion into the ranks of the world's most respected filmmakers—one who brought a much-needed, and still rare, feminist perspective to commercial narrative cinema.

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Born in Wellington, New Zealand in 1954, Campion was raised in a theatrical family and received university degrees in both anthropology and painting before studying film. All of these disciplines are evident in THE PIANO. Campion's initial impetus for the film was anthropological: her fascination with the intersection between European culture (her own heritage) and indigenous Maori culture in 19th-century New Zealand. Another inspiration was the landscape, which Campion and cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh render in both gritty realism and fanciful surrealism. Campion: "The bush has got an enchanted, complex, even frightening quality to it, unlike anything that you see anywhere else. It's mossy and very intimate, and there's an underwater look that's always charmed me. I was after the vivid, subconscious imagery of the bush, its dark, inner world."

Holly Hunter, previously known for her perky characters in RAISING ARIZONA and BROADCAST NEWS, made a 180-degree turn here and emerged as a major dramatic actress, triumphing over two challenges: expressing a wide range of emotions without speaking and playing all of the pieces herself. For her multi-layered performance she received almost every award in 1993, including the Oscar, Golden Globe, and numerous critics' associations' prizes. Eleven-year-old Anna Paquin, known in recent years for the television series TRUE BLOOD, made her screen debut in THE PIANO, and won the Oscar for a supporting role that in fact may contain the most dialogue in the film.

The piano is also a central "character," and it is impossible to imagine the film without Michael Nyman's haunting score. Nyman: "Strangely, although the soundtrack sounds very easy and improvised, getting the right voice was difficult. As Ada can't speak, she formulates an emotional world by composing music. I had to work out how a mid-19th-century woman would do this. I asked Jane, 'If Ada could speak, what would she be saying?' I couldn't write music that was too anachronistic, or music that had nothing do with myself as a composer, so the result was a compromise: the feel of 19th-century salon music with 20th-century minimalist techniques. As Ada was a radical character, I thought she could have been a radical composer."

DIRECTED, WRITTEN BY **JANE CAMPION** (1993) 121 MIN.
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **STUART DRYBURGH**
MUSIC BY **MICHAEL NYMAN**
RELEASED BY **MIRAMAX**
STARRING **HOLLY HUNTER, HARVEY KEITEL, SAM NEILL,**
AND **ANNA PAQUIN**

WINNER OF ACADEMY AWARDS FOR **ORIGINAL
SCREENPLAY, ACTRESS AND SUPPORTING ACTRESS**

DID YOU KNOW: JANE CAMPION WAS ONLY THE SECOND WOMAN EVER TO BE NOMINATED FOR A BEST DIRECTOR OSCAR – THE FIRST WAS LINA WERTMÜLLER FOR SEVEN BEAUTIES (1976) – AND JUST TWO WOMEN HAVE BEEN NOMINATED SINCE: SOFIA COPPOLA (LOST IN TRANSLATION, 2003) AND KATHRYN BIGELOW (WHO WON FOR THE HURT LOCKER, 2009).

NEXT UP: CELEBRATE THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF GEORGE CLOONEY'S CHALLENGING AND THOUGHTFUL STORY OF THE MCCARTHY ERA, **GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK.** DAVID STRATHAIRN PLAYS LEGENDARY CBS NEWSMAN EDWARD R. MURROW, AND THE SUPPORTING CAST INCLUDES CLOONEY, ROBERT DOWNEY, JR., FRANK LANGELLA, AND PATRICIA CLARKSON. **THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, AT 7:00 P.M.**