

Cameraman: The Life & Work of Jack Cardiff

Cert PG UK 2010 85 mins

Crew

Director	Craig McCall
Cinematography	Steven Chivers Ricardo Coll Simon Fanthorpe Nicholas Hoffman Jonathan Rho Ian Salvage John Walker James Wellard Bob Williams
Editor	Dan Roberts
Art Director	Miles Glyn
Composer	Mark Sayer-Wade

With

Jack Cardiff	Christopher Challis
Charlton Heston	Ian Christie
Thelma Schoonmaker	Marton Scorsese
Kim Hunter	Kathleen Byron
Moira Sheara	Alan Parker
George E Turner	Peter Handford
John Mills	Kevin McClory
Richard Fleischer	Kirk Douglas
Lauren Bacall	Peter Yates
Freddie Francis	Raffaella De Laurentiis

Synopsis

Cinematographer Jack Cardiff (1914-2009) recalls his long life and career.

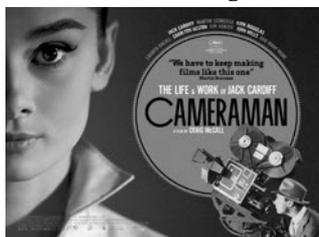
He began in the industry in 1918, as a four-year-old child actor. In 1928 he moved behind the camera, working from clapper boy through camera assistant and operator before being selected by Technicolor to be trained as a specialist colour cinematographer.

The 1940s were dominated by Powell & Pressburger's masterpieces *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948), after which he shot many films in Hollywood, becoming a director in 1958 and reaching a career peak in that capacity with *Sons and Lovers* (1960).

In the 1970s he returned to cinematography and spent the last decades of his life as one of the film industry's grand old men.

He was a guest of honour at Cannes in 1998 and the recipient of a lifetime achievement Oscar in 2001.

Sight & Sound July 2010



Review

Cameraman is a romantic eulogy to one of the great cinematographers in film history, a man whose life was dedicated to the fascinating evolution of the camera obscura. Narrated by Cardiff himself, whose octogenarian recounts are startlingly articulate, director **Craig McCall** has stitched together a rich tapestry of film clips, revealing personal footage and warm interviews that chronicle almost the entirety of Hollywood's studio era.

Born in Great Yarmouth in 1914, Jack Cardiff's career spanned nine decades; as a toddler, he appeared as an extra in Chaplin's silent films. At 14, he gained an apprenticeship at Elstree Film Studios, starting as a gofer and working his way up the hierarchy before, prestigiously, becoming the first cameraman to be trained in the new American Technicolour cameras.

His big break came when he met Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, becoming the cinematographer behind their masterpieces. After emigrating to LA, he became the trusted go-to man for John Huston, Kirk Douglas, Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles before becoming a director in his own right in the '50s and '60s.

Immersed in the history of art, and with a house full of paintings by Turner and Van Gogh, the film casts Cardiff as a great innovator, a craftsman of lighting and lensing. Constantly creating with the ever-experimental Powell and Pressburger, he famously invented the misty dissolve by breathing on the lens seconds before a take and letting the shot materialise through the evaporating condensation.

The film's second act reveals how he was revered, albeit discreetly, as someone uniquely capable of lighting the nurseries and caprices of an actresses face. Jack Cardiff, as such, worked intimately with some of the most beautiful and famous women in screen history. "Some people collect postage stamps," he says as he sorts through a pile of stunningly lit monochrome portraits of Gardner, Loren, Taylor and Hepburn. "I collected beautiful women...but only in picture form."

Although the film ironically leaves him smelling of roses, his career had its no-sedives. No mention is made of his direction of the now infamous Smell-O-Vision experiment *Scent of Mystery* which proved to be a critical and commercial disaster never to be repeated. On returning behind the camera in the 1980s, he made some strange choices, surreally shooting Schwarzenegger in *Conan The Destroyer* and Stallone in *Rambo II*.

But this film is more than just a tribute to one man, but a tribute to the dwindling pragmatics of cinematography. There is an underlying, elegiac pathos here, the sense that Cardiff was the last of a dying dynasty. In his final monologue, he talks of his experience of trying to manipulate the shot on modern films, repeatedly being told, "Jack, don't worry about it. Special effects will handle that."

There are polite hints and glimpses and discreet innuendo here, a bright rendering of beautiful people surrounded by shady characters. A film about films, it still adheres to the fallacies and fabrications of filmmaking.

Tom Seymour Little White Lies May 2010