

THE 'SECRET' IS OUT! BINGER EUROPEAN DEBUT FOR 'MACKENDRICK ON FILM' LECTURE

'Mackendrick on Film' Binger à la Carte Lecture – Paul Cronin

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Deep weather can sometimes be the perfect complement to in-depth study. Take early December, when snow flurries gusted over Amsterdam's freezing canals. In the cozy cocoon of the Binger Cinema however, heat was being generated as Paul Cronin, flown in by the Binger from New York, delivered his lively ***Mackendrick on Film*** three day lecture. Twenty-plus Binger à la Carte attendees hunkered down (well fortified by Chef Joep's amazing lunches) and dived into the positive avalanche of information, film excerpts and video interviews that Cronin spins into a fascinating journey.

The lecture, most simply described, covers a world of information that spills beyond the pages of the book Cronin edited about British director and American teacher Alexander Mackendrick. One of Ealing Studio's leading directors during its heyday, Mackendrick helmed five features there, his most well-known being 1955's ***The Ladykillers***. In Hollywood he made another four films including the much revered ***Sweet Smell of Success*** with Burt Lancaster and Tony Curtis. But the life of a freelance director found Mackendrick spending far more time making deals than making movies, so he quit the business.

In 1969 he was hired as founding Dean of the School of Film and Video at CalArts (California Institute of the Arts), just outside Los Angeles. Unlike USC and UCLA who largely produced graduates for the 'industry' of Hollywood, CalArts had no teachers or students – it simply had 'artists' with varying degrees of experience. Mackendrick thrived in this environment, and over the next twenty plus years produced hundreds of pages of class notes and sketches on the craft of filmmaking. These precious documents however, were never organised into any book format. Mackendrick died in Los Angeles in 1993.

When documentary maker Paul Cronin, editor of interview books with film heavyweights the likes of Roman Polanski, Werner Herzog and George Stevens, was invited in 2002 by Faber and Faber London to travel to LA to sift through Mackendrick's papers to "see if there's a book in it," Cronin was up for the challenge. "I get there and find this two car garage – an *American* garage," Cronin emphasises over post-lecture Binger beers, "completely full of stuff. Lecture notes, sketches, films, videos – and even though I went in thinking the last thing the world needs is another screenwriting book... A moment happened for me, reading in the sunshine outside that garage one day – of realising I'd never seen anything articulated this way, and yes, this book did need to appear."

Cronin wasn't alone in his estimation of the materials at hand. Including a foreword by no less than Martin Scorsese, Faber published the book in 2004 to high acclaim in the film world. Proof in point: at the UK's National Film and

Television School it is mandatory reading across all departments. Nevertheless, what Cronin found in those garages doesn't begin to fit in only one book, so in 2005 he also began presenting these lectures. Usually a three day affair, he can modify the length as per request.

What becomes abundantly clear seeing Cronin in action however, is that he could quite easily lecture for thirty days non-stop. His knowledge of the subject(s) before him is prodigious, and his passion is compelling. At times, quite unselfconsciously while reading along with his transcript of what's playing on screen, he moves like a conductor with his remote/baton, builds through a crescendo and zap! – pauses the screen to verbally add another layer and another reference and another fantastic quote before zap! – letting the on-screen continue, one mere instrument in his orchestral arrangement of the lecture. Yet for all of this Cronin is quick to deflect personal praise – these are not his thoughts – he's simply appearing as a conduit of Mackendrick's invaluable insights.

The lecture ranges over a wide range of subjects, from the intricacies of story structure to the technicalities of directing and acting, from the mythical significance and history of cinema to the science of visual perception. These are peppered with a thoroughly juicy selection of pertinent film clips, and video interviews Cronin has conducted with an array of film professionals and Mackendrick's ex-students. "The majority of these students were willing to share their stories," Cronin explains, "but some of them told me, only slightly tongue in cheek, 'You're giving away the secrets!'"

Well twenty Binger attendees, at the very least, are certainly glad the secret's out, for this premiere appearance of the lecture in Europe. Rinku Kalsy from Amsterdam-Mumbai Anecdote Films, was back for her third Binger à la Carte. "I used to be an editor, then switched to documentary directing," Kalsy shares one lunch break. "I thoroughly enjoyed my previous sessions here with Molly Stensgaard (editor Lars von Trier) and Sam Pollard (editor Spike Lee), and even though this Mackendrick information mostly pertains to fiction features, there are also plenty of crossovers to the creation and structuring of documentaries. I'm really glad I came. Again!" With the blizzard still raging during the closing drinks, for this hard-working group this had certainly been the hottest ticket in town.

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