

MEDIATHEQUE PLEASES CROWDS

Since it opened to the public on 14th March 2007 almost 3,000 people a month have visited the Mediatheque at BFI Southbank, enjoying unprecedented access to the BFI National Archive.

Robin Baker, Curator, BFI Mediatheque said,

“We have managed to create an appetite for archive film among people who may never have thought they had any interest in the subject. Whenever people are introduced to the collection they seem overwhelmed and delighted by the amount of material and its sheer diversity.”

“Some of our visitors are discovering the joys of a computer mouse for the first time. But all of them seem to take immense pleasure in films which were once only available to specialist researchers.”

All of the material on offer is either British or about Britain and drawn from the BFI National Archive. Over 400 titles are currently viewable at 14 stations, seating a maximum of 29 people at any one time. Each month approximately 50 additional hours of material is added. We expect to have c800 titles by the end of the year. Digitisation for this project has been funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Recent additions - July

BEAUTIFUL THINGS - coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, the Mediatheque launches a collection of 100 films and television programmes exploring lesbian and gay identities on screen from 1899 to 2007.

Forthcoming - August

BEFORE MIDNIGHT – A PORTRAIT OF INDIA 1899 – 1947: an unparalleled collection of over 100 non-fiction films from the BFI National Archive exploring life in India before independence. The collection is complemented with rarely seen dramas such as **The Alien Sky** (1956) and **A Passage to India** (1965).

The collections at the Mediatheque explore the extraordinary diversity of the BFI National Archive's holdings: already released in previous months are **Essentially British**, **London Calling**, a selection of the BBC's **Play for Today** (eventually all 270 surviving editions Play for Today will be

available), **Punk - Anarchy in the UK** marks 30 years since the summer of '77 while **A Promised Land** offers an investigation of domestic architecture in Britain since the 1930s.

Tuesday mornings are reserved for group bookings. Parties from Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, South Dartmoor Community College and Wanstead High School are among recent visiting groups.

A random sample of visitors to the Mediatheque today found someone enjoying **A Kiss in the Tunnel** (1899) followed by the **Top of the Pops Christmas Special** from 1978 while another visitor watched a newsreel about women footballers called **Quite Unfit for Females** (1921) followed by **Sean Connery's** fundraising film for the RNIB, **Another World** (1961).

The top three most viewed titles are currently:

- **Colour on the Thames** (1935), one of the earliest colour films filmed in the capital and shot in the early Gasparcolor colour process.
- **Les Bicyclettes de Belsize** (1968), a cult film long unavailable in any format, a British musical set in Hampstead inspired by The Umbrellas of Cherbourg.
- **The Acrobatic Fly** (1910), Charles Urban's surreal classic showing various houseflies filmed in close-up undertaking various feats of strength and dexterity.

The Mediatheque has an impact beyond London. We are working towards establishing a network of mediatheques across the UK. The second mediatheque will open at The Quad, Derby in 2008 with an enhanced selection of local material drawn from the BFI National Archive and regional film archives.

A Mediatheque touring programme of wartime public information films Bombs at Teatime has been enchanting audiences in cinemas and film clubs up and down the country. See full list of venues at <http://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/mediatheque.htm>)

Further touring programmes are planned including **Before Midnight**, a portrait of India before independence told through previously unseen home movies and contemporary newsreels and documentaries drawn from the BFI National Archive.

More than 6,000 copies of a DVD selection entitled **Essentially British** have been sent to every school in the UK. As an aid to study, these films can be used to explore notions of citizenship, national identity, media literacy,

representation, history, politics and social change. A Coronation procession in Bradford 1902 is seen alongside an explanation of cricket from 1951. Wartime propaganda films celebrate the British spirit while Gurinder Chadha's ***I'm British But...*** (1989) looks at British Asian identities.

What is a Mediatheque?

A Mediatheque is a place to enjoy hundreds of British films and television programmes from the BFI National Archive, totally free, at the click of a mouse. Most are not available on DVD, and a Mediatheque is the only place you can enjoy many of these well loved classics.

The Mediatheque offers a window on the collections of the BFI National Archive, the most significant film and television archive in the world. The Mediatheque allows unprecedented access to our film and television heritage and there's lots of family-friendly material in the collection.

You can watch as much or as little as you like at a Mediatheque: sit back and enjoy an entire feature film or take a quick look at fondly remembered television; use the database to search on a variety of subjects or browse to discover unexpected delights.

The BFI Mediatheque is open daily Tuesday 13.00 – 20.00; Wednesday – Sunday 11.00 – 20.00. Book in advance for a viewing station which can seat between one to four people, or simply turn up. Book for as little as 15 minutes or as much as two hours.

Tel: 020 7928 3535 or simply turn up.

What films can I see?

Research what you'd like to view in advance www.bfi.org.uk/mediatheque

Mediatheque curator **Robin Baker** is available for interview.

A guided visit can be arranged for reporting press.

– ends –

Press contact: BFI Press Office

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Notes to Editors

1. For more information on the BFI, including details of the BFI's theatrical touring programmes, DVDs and books, visit www.bfi.org.uk

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archive, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

2. A selection of images for press use are available at www.image.net in the section marked BFI mediatheque.