



HIPPODROME
silent film festival
celebrating film with live music

SUN 26 MARCH | 20:00

SHOOTING STARS

British Instructional Films

Dir. AV Bramble, co-directed by Anthony Asquith | UK | 1928 | PG | 1h 43m

Scr. Anthony Asquith and J.O.C. Orton from original story by Asquith

Ph. Stanley Rodwell, H Harris, Lighting Karl Fischer

Cast: Annette Benson, Brian Aherne, Donald Calthrop, Wally Patch, Chili Bouchier

The film was restored by the BFI National Archive in 2015

Short: *Out For Value* | Dir. Isaac Benzie | UK | 1931 | 1m 20s

Screening material courtesy of the BFI National Archive (Feature) and the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive (Short)

Performing Live: Stephen Horne (Piano, Flute, Accordion)

Films about filmmaking are always intriguing; the chance to peep behind the scenes of the glamorous world of the stars, with its heady mix of beauty and power is a temptation. Damian Chazelle's recent *Babylon* (2022) is just one in a long line of these. But it's a temptation to succumb to only rarely. It can be risky for a filmmaker. Back in 1927, Anthony Asquith, a clever young man desperate to make his mark, took that gamble with his first film *Shooting Stars* (what a great title - it works on so many levels), choosing for his first film a lampoon of filmmaking itself. This was quite a novel idea in the 1920s when celebrity culture and the star system were just hotting up. It was a bit of bare faced cheek on Asquith's part. Maybe people didn't want the veils lifted on the moral character of their heroes and heroines? Perhaps the industry didn't want its trade secrets given away? But he knew it would be an attention-grabber. His first scene is a *coup de theatre*, in which we see what appears to be a genre romantic Western titled 'Prairie Love', interrupted as a turtle dove suddenly pecks the blonde-ringleted heroine (animals always know)

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Asquith on set with A V Bramble, supervising director and probably Stanley Rodwell behind his Bell & Howell 2709, Donald Calthrop is the actor.

to reveal her as a screeching prima-donna perched on a packing-crate tree yelling at her cowboy-costumed co-star astride a cardboard horse. The camera pulls back to reveal the resigned cameraman instruct the clapperboard boy to print 'No Good' on the footage and send up the instruction to 'Save the Lights'.

During the film we see every aspect of filmmaking laid out - the studio itself, the lights and crew, the different stages on which the films were shot, the fan magazine journalists and autograph hunters, the musicians who supplied instant atmosphere for the actors, the canteen full of extras waiting stoically for a day's work. It's clear from the first scene that the 25 year-old Asquith is in love with the process.

Understandably the company, British International Pictures, wouldn't let this youth loose on the project (despite being a prime minister's son for whom doors naturally opened) and appointed responsible adult, A V Bramble to supervise the direction, but there wasn't much for him to do - the script shows Asquith had covered every detail from production value to camera angles,

Bramble was hopelessly outclassed. Asquith was making a bold statement about himself - that with his generation (Hitchcock, only three years older, was the other wunderkind) filmmaking was moving on. He had studied filmmakers in Hollywood and had visited the modern super-studios of Berlin. He knew that the modern director needed to understand all the processes profoundly, plan every shot and bring in specialist equipment and technicians. *Shooting Stars* was the gamble of Asquith's career and it paid off - his rise from then on was truly meteoric.

BRYONY DIXON

*Bryony Dixon is a curator at the BFI National Archive with special responsibility for silent film, and author of [100 Silent Films \(BFI Screen Guides 2011\)](#) and [The Story of Victorian Film \(BFI 2023\)](#). She has been lead curator on recent BFI silent film restorations, including all nine surviving Hitchcock silent films, the works of Anthony Asquith, *The Great White Silence* (1924) and *Shiraz* (1928).*

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