

For this series Paul Loosley examines the broad cinema canon of a couple of fiercely intelligent playwrights; both Dublin-born, who, while both having much to say about London society.

Oscar Wilde was a confirmed aesthete and a lover of all things beautiful. His work reflected both his self-declared wit and was peppered with Lords and Ladies and set in London townhouses.

George Bernard Shaw on the other hand was a confirmed socialist, pacifist and Christian. Frowning on the disparity between the idle rich and the hard-working poor, Shaw managed to lighten his burdensome political statements with clever metaphor and an equally superlative wit.

Before each screening Paul will discuss each film for approximately 30 minutes, giving insights into the playwright, the play and the production of the film. Altogether an interesting, instructive and enlightening evening that will also contribute to the welfare of one of London's most historic and beautiful places of worship.

1. 10th September George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1938) 1hr 29min

In, surely, his most famous play, Shaw demonstrates that accent, demeanor and birthright do not guarantee innate intelligence nor moral standards or any other desirable human value. Class, even education, is an illusion. The hilarious and ingenious use of language has never been surpassed in the theatre or on the screen. In this 1938 film Eliza Doolittle (who lived just across the street in Lisson Grove) and Henry Higgins spar brilliantly more as a modern 1930's couple rather than the Edwardian pair of the original play. Shaw added new scenes and oversaw the whole production. And, as a result, the screenplay won an Academy Award much to Shaw's bafflement. Starring Leslie Howard (who also co-directed) and Wendy Hiller.

2. 24th September Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* (1999) 1Hr 27min

This was Oscar's penultimate play. A tale of perfumed letters, stolen bracelets, past indiscretions and outright blackmail set amongst London's noble classes. With some of Oscar's wittiest repartee; in particular the line that could probably sum up Wilde's own character: "To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance". This colourful 1999 film version, directed by Oliver Parker, has a brilliant cast who simply sweep through the bourgeois opulence of Victorian upper-class life. The starched shirt fronts, the sumptuous gowns and the profusion of décolletages perfectly recreate a decadence anyone would envy. Starring Rupert Everett and Cate Blanchett.

3. 8th October George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* (1941) 2hr 1min

The play sets up the brilliant conundrum; if arms manufacture creates so many jobs and a better life for the working classes, is making and selling weapons morally bad? Barbara, the daughter of Andrew Undershaft (who is precisely such an arms dealer), is a Major in the Salvation Army; those fierce fighters for Christian beneficence and charity. Naturally she has obvious difficulty with her father's ethics; made worse when she learns that her father is one of the Salvation Army's biggest financial benefactors. Quite ironically, given the subject of weapons of mass destruction, this 1941 film was made during the WWII Blitz Bombing of London. Starring: Wendy Hiller and Rex Harrison.

4. 22nd October Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1949) 1hr 29min

Again, social scandal runs rife in Oscar's beloved high-society. Lady Windermere is convinced her husband is enamored of Mrs Erlynne, an older lady of dubious reputation. In her attempts to prove her husband's infidelity, Lady Windermere embroils herself in an awkward affair. And only the sacrifice of Mrs Erlynne, and the finding of a misplaced fan, can extricate her from the whole mess. This 1949 film was directed by an East European; Otto Preminger, with a screenplay by an American; Dorothy Parker. So, despite a very British cast, they have a very novel take on Oscar's very English wit. Staring Madeleine Carroll & George Sanders

5. 5th November George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1957) 1hr 50min

To Shaw, being a fiercely devout Christian and a confirmed pacifist, the trial and execution of Joan of Arc as a heretic was a passionately felt subject. The play, described by some as Shaw's only tragedy, was written in 1923 very shortly after Joan was finally declared a saint. In it, Shaw came to the very egalitarian conclusion that there was no blame at all to be attached; even to those who burnt Joan at the stake. Quite rightly Graham Greene, who wrote this 1957 screenplay, retains possibly Shaw's most moving line; "O God that made this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?" Starring Jean Seberg and Richard Widmark

6. 19th November Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952) 1hr 35min

Sub titled 'A Trivial Comedy for Serious People' the play is reputedly filled with gay code words and references, and was sadly (and possibly in consequence) Oscar's last play. It is a satire on how, in Wilde's world, marriage, responsibility, wealth and birthright matter more than honesty, love, affection and honour. And that everyone is always pretending to be someone they are not. And of course, it is all outrageously funny. This 1952 film is fairly faithful to the story with a bevy of superb English actors, giving superb performances. And Lady Bracknell's outraged delivery of the line "A handbag?" has become a legend in British cinema. Starring Michael Redgrave and Edith Evans.