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### **Watershed December 2009 Podcast**

I've just about recovered from the **Encounters Short Film Festival 2009**. It might be short film but there is no shortage of epic cinema! The festival was again buzzing with filmmakers in the early stages of developing their craft, experienced film practitioners from scriptwriter Jeremy Brock – of **Mrs Brown** and **Last King of Scotland** fame – to Andrea Arnold who has made a spectacular transition from shorts to features with films **Red Road** and **Fish Tank** and producers such as Chris Moll who is fronting the ifeatures scheme in Bristol and Marc Boothe from B4 media. A mix of the aspiring, the experienced and the inbetween. A festival buzz and the satisfying sense of networking, business being done and films being watched.

A major highlight had to be Michael Smith and Tom Stubbs winning two awards for their film **Light and Dark**. It was made through the Knowle West Media Centre in Bristol and is a great example of community supported documentary filmmaking. Tom has been making films for a number of years and Michael is autistic and has a fertile imagination. The pair have alter egos: Tom – a cheesy corporate video maker and the Red Fox, Michael's animated character. The film is warm, funny and dangerous. Michael has such exuberance it was a joy to see him jump out of his seat and skip to the stage – twice.

This was the first year we ran a parallel children's film festival and again it was great to see young people getting into the film festival spirit: watching and judging films, awarding prizes.

Also on the international jury we had a great mix of Singapore, Romania and Sweden who chose the moving **Princess Margaret Boulevard** as the top award. The British jury in addition to awarding **Light and Dark** the South West award gave the British award to **Photograph of Jesus** - a witty animation on the Getty photography archive's weirdest requests.

These and many of the other award films from the festival will be screened at Watershed in a special **Encounters Film Festival Award Winners** compilation from Mon 7 – Wed 9 Dec.

If you are a fan of not just classic but classic British films then it's a good month at the cinema for you. Two gems come restored and represented. Powell and Pressburger's sumptuous **The Red Shoes** and Thorold Dickinson's rarely seen (or known) **Queen of Spades**. Martin Scorsese is a great champion of both these films so you are in good company!

I was fortunate enough to see **The Red Shoes** in one of its first screenings in this restored version at the Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna earlier this year. It looked simply wonderful. The film was a huge influence on a young Martin Scorsese and you can see why he would have been seduced by its spell. Powell and Pressburger brought colour and audacious dynamic movement into British cinema and combined with the theme of the power of art you can see why it would be irresistible to Scorsese. It really is a breathtaking inspiring cinema.

Thorold Dickinson is a little known director. **Gaslight** from 1940 is probably his most well known film but many would be hard pressed to name its director. It is an atmospheric brooding thriller. **Queen of Spades** from 1949 is an adaptation of a Pushkin short story set in

imperial Russia when St Petersburg was in the grip of gambling fever. Captain Herman Suvorin (Anton Walbrook) is an outsider obsessed with making his fortune. He is intrigued by stories of the legend of a Countess (Dame Edith Evans), who supposedly sold her soul to the devil years before in exchange for the secret of success at the card game Faro.

I have to admit to not knowing the film. I may have caught it on a rainy day when I was so much younger than I am today so what follows is taken from the independent cinema office's website. The ICO are distributing the film.

**The Queen of Spades** is a wonderfully evocative and sinister drama, made at Ealing Studios by one of the most underrated of British directors: Thorold Dickinson, who throughout his career refused to compromise his artistic integrity in the face of commercial pressures. A raft of memorable performances are crowned by Anton Walbrook, as the soldier driven insane by his lust for success and fortune, (Coincidentally *The Red Shoes* also features the acting talents of Anton Walbrook ) and Dame Edith Evans as the bitter and twisted old Countess who gave away her soul for a short-lived salvation.

Oscar-winning director Martin Scorsese is one of the film's most vociferous supporters and he has kindly recorded a brief introduction to the film which will be seen by audiences before each screening of the film during its theatrical run.

*The Red Shoes* is at Watershed from Fri 11 – Thu 17 Dec.

*The Queen of Spades* with that personalised filmed introduction by Scorsese is on Sun 27 – Wed 30 Dec.