



British Film Institute

British Academy of Film and Television Arts
A Tribute to Oswald Morris OBE BSC

23 November 2005



BRITISH
ACADEMY
OF FILM AND
TELEVISION
ARTS



British Film Institute

Above: Morris (left) in his early days as a camera operator, with Guy Green and David Lean filming *Oliver Twist* (1948).
Cover: Morris checks his light meter whilst shooting *Fragment Of Fear* (1969).

Overview

If you judge a man by the company he kept during his working life, then the career of Oswald Morris OBE BSC looks rather impressive. A BAFTA Fellow, the distinguished and gifted 90-year-old cinematographer has won three BAFTA awards, an Oscar and countless other prizes for a stunning array of work over a career that began in the early 1930s and culminated in his lighting of Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal* in 1982.

In between, Ossie worked eight times with John Huston, breaking new ground in the use of Technicolor with *Moulin Rouge* and *Moby Dick*. He lit films for his friend and mentor Ronnie Neame, forged a fruitful partnership with Carol Reed and did fine work for Tony Richardson, Stanley Kubrick, Sidney Lumet, J. Lee Thompson, Jack Clayton, Martin Ritt, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Franco Zeffirelli, Herbert Ross and Guy Hamilton. Ossie also survived the paper trail that inevitably sprung from Hollywood's most infamous memo writer, David O. Selznick.

Of greater significance, however, was Ossie's masterly technique. Over the years, he lit some sumptuous colour films, but also worked on the social-realist, black and white palette of *Look Back In Anger*. He shot the downbeat espionage thriller *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* and a decade later made *The Man With The Golden Gun*. Within a two year period, he lit *Guns Of Navarone* and *Lolita*. Ossie conveyed the dour drama of *The Pumpkin Eater* while also bringing colourful musicals such as *Oliver!* and *Fiddler On The Roof* to life.

Versatility was Ossie's watchword on set but, above all, he regarded himself as the man who expedited the director's vision. For all his considerable talent, he never turned in a flashy performance if the story didn't demand it.

"I believe you have to have a good script," he explained recently, "correctly cast and with a talented director. Everything else is in the service of that." It's an amazingly ego-free statement but that's Ossie, an 'executive cameraman' to whom diplomacy was every bit as important as his technical attributes.

In a wider sense, Ossie's life has equipped him to take all things in his stride. When ww2 broke out, his was not considered a reserved occupation so he eventually found himself flying bombers – the memory of which leaves him quietly reflective. But his war service also says a great deal about the man. "One thing I learned from the RAF was leadership," he adds. "I flew the aircraft, because I didn't want some other idiot flying it, being responsible for my neck."

Twice widowed, Ossie is a proud father and grandfather many times over, so his true legacy is considerable. But for those gathered to celebrate his life in film, his work in an industry he loves stands as testament to a towering talent, but one tempered by a humanity that shines through in his finest productions. "Unless you can get on with people, you'll never make a decent cinematographer," he has said, "because, in my view, that's the name of the game."

Anwar Brett

“Ossie Morris is surely one of the greatest cinematographers in the world. Whether in popular cinema, classics, musicals or films as pioneering in modern effects as *The Dark Crystal*, his genius can be seen in spades. I was raised on the images he created, images as disparate as *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and *Room At The Top*, as intense as *Look Back In Anger* and as panoramic as *The Man Who Would Be King*. There can be no greater lesson for our cinematographers in this industry and at the NFTS to watch Ossie’s work and observe how it tells stories, giving us images to remember forever.”

Nik Powell
 Director, National Film and Television School; Film Producer



Over the years I have gone from being reprimanded as an Assistant Technicolor Technician on *Moulin Rouge*, to being praised as a second unit Cameraman on *The Man Who Would Be King*. I have never seen Ossie outwardly ruffled, except on one occasion in Morocco on *TMWWBK*. He was worried that one particular shot in deep shadow would be too dark. He did everything he could, but confided in me that he was still worried. When the laboratory report came back, it said: “This shot will not print any darker” and it needed to be...much darker! I stole the laboratory sheet, framed and hung it on my wall, to remind myself that if a cinematographer of Ossie’s super-calibre can make a mistake, there’s still hope for us lesser mortals.

Alex Thomson BSC
 Director of Photography



Ossie and I were standing together looking out of the hotel window at the fireworks display. It was New Year’s Eve in Hamburg, Germany, 1973. The next day we were to begin shooting *The Odessa File*. “The last time I was in Hamburg” said Ossie, “I was thirty thousand feet above the city dropping bombs.” I flashed back to before the Second World War, Wembley Studios, London, where in 1932, we worked together for the first time (on the ‘quota quickie’ *Murder In The Family*), starting a friendship that has continued for over seventy years. Oswald Morris OBE DFC AFC BSC, one of the best cinematographers ever, is a modest man. Well done BAFTA for giving him this special Tribute. If I had my way he would be Sir Oswald!

Ronald Neame CBE BSC
 Writer, Producer and Director



In 1980, as Jim Henson’s associate producer, I had the wonderful job of finding key crew for two feature films that Jim was to shoot back to back: *The Great Muppet Caper* and *The Dark Crystal*. I sat with Jim in his living room on Downshire Hill as he chatted with (it would be too much to say ‘interviewed’) all of the UK’s top DPs. I won’t name them, since all but one of them didn’t get the job, but they were a very starry bunch. In the end it was Ossie that Jim wanted. Of course his list of credits was extraordinary, but I know it was Ossie’s personal qualities that really drew Jim to him. Jim just knew that here was a man he could trust completely.

Duncan Kenworthy OBE
 Chairman of the Academy; Film Producer



The first time I worked with Ossie was a disaster! I was in Tunisia with him for *Golden Salamander* and left half way through when asked to work with Michael Powell on *The Small Back Room*. I have often regretted my decision, even though I enjoyed working with Micky so much. I was lucky to get a second chance with Ossie on *Moulin Rouge*, the picture on which he, I think, discovered his talent and stamped his own style. I co-operated extensively with him on *Moby Dick* and was able to give the Ossie touch to my second unit shooting. He inspired me and I valued the enthusiasm and input he gave me. Ossie has always been a respected colleague and, I am happy to say now, a great friend.

Freddie Francis BSC
 Director of Photography



I first met Ossie in 1952 on *Moulin Rouge* and soon realised that John Huston had not only chosen a wonderful cameraman but found a partner for his practical jokes. I, of course, was the butt of many of them but on our next adventure in Ravello for *Beat The Devil* the tables turned. Ossie had the captain turn the boat around and around for the light. When wrap was called we thought we’d be home in half an hour. Hours later with no sight of land, the Captain was asked how long to reach Amalfi. Astonished he replied, “Amalfi? We are sailing to North Africa!” Ossie had forgotten to turn the boat around. He took the ribbing in good part and my life was quiet for a few more days.

Angela Allen MBE
 Script Supervisor



Ossie is absolutely unique. It’s not just how good he is in knowing where to hang the lights and what t-stop to order, it’s more than that. Many adjectives apply to him – enthusiastic, talented, responsible, artistic and caring – but there are many other qualities that make him stand out among his peers. I have never worked for him – and what a pity that is, but I have had the pleasure of being associated with his remarkable career for about 40 years, ever since *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*. So I suppose I have known him long enough (both as client and good friend) to sum him up succinctly and accurately; how about ‘a technician of brilliance, a man of integrity’? That is Oswald Morris OBE BSC.

Sir Sydney Samuelson CBE BSC
 Chairman, David Lean BAFTA Foundation Trustees



Above: Morris prepares a crane shot for Franco Zeffirelli's *The Taming Of The Shrew* (1967).

Filmography

- 1949 Golden Salamander
- 1949 Cairo Road
- 1950 The Adventurers
- 1950 Circle Of Danger
- 1951 So Little Time
- 1951 Saturday Island
- 1951 The Card
- 1952 South Of Algiers
- 1952 Moulin Rouge
- 1952 Stazione Termini
- 1953 Beat The Devil
- 1953 Knave Of Hearts
- 1953 Beau Brummell
- 1954 Moby Dick
- 1955 The Man Who Never Was
- 1956 Heaven Knows Mr Allison
- 1957 A Farewell To Arms
- 1957 The Key
- 1958 The Roots Of Heaven
- 1958 Look Back In Anger
- 1959 Our Man In Havana
- 1959 The Entertainer
- 1960 Guns Of Navarone
- 1960 Lolita
- 1961 The Devil Never Sleeps
- 1961 Term Of Trial
- 1962 Come Fly With Me
- 1962 The Ceremony
- 1963 Of Human Bondage
- 1963 The Pumpkin Eater
- 1964 Mister Moses
- 1964 The Battle Of The Villa Fiorita
- 1964 The Hill
- 1965 The Spy Who Came In From The Cold
- 1965 Life At The Top
- 1965 Stop The World – I Want To Get Off
- 1966 The Taming Of The Shrew
- 1966 The Winter's Tale
- 1966 Reflections In A Golden Eye
- 1967 Great Catherine
- 1968 Oliver!
- 1968 Goodbye, Mr. Chips
- 1969 Fragment Of Fear
- 1970 Scrooge
- 1970 Fiddler On The Roof
- 1971 Lady Caroline Lamb
- 1972 Sleuth
- 1972 Mackintosh Man
- 1973 Dracula

- 1974 The Odessa File
- 1974 The Man With The Golden Gun
- 1975 The Man Who Would Be King
- 1975 The Seven Per Cent Solution
- 1976 Equus
- 1977 The Wiz
- 1979 Just Tell Me What You Want
- 1980 The Great Muppet Caper
- 1981 The Dark Crystal

Honours and Awards

Fellowships

British Academy of Film and Television Arts; The Royal Photographic Society; National Film and Television School

Lifetime Achievement Awards

American Society of Cinematographers; British Society of Cinematographers

Honorary Fellowships

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth; British Kinematograph Sound and Television Society

Awards

- 1952 BSC Award – Moulin Rouge
- 1963 BAFTA Award – The Pumpkin Eater
- 1964 BAFTA Award – The Hill
- 1965 BSC Award and BAFTA Award – The Spy Who Came In From The Cold
- 1966 BSC Award – The Taming Of The Shrew
- 1970 American Academy Award and BSC Award – Fiddler On The Roof

Other Awards

BSC Silver Tankard; BSC John Alcott Arriflex Award; Lifetime Honorary Membership of The Royal Photographic Society

Officer of the Order of the British Empire

For Services to Cinematography and the Film Industry

- 1972-1978 Member of BAFTA Council
- 1975-1977 Vice-Chairman of BAFTA Film Committee

Thanks

Oswald Morris OBE BSC
Sir Sydney Samuelson CBE BSC
Duncan Kenworthy OBE
Tony Dalton
Frances Russell
Amy Brown
Mariayah Kaderbhai

Contributors

Angela Allen MBE
Anwar Brett
Freddie Francis BSC
Ronald Neame CBE BSC
Nik Powell
Alex Thomson BSC

Film Clips and Images

BBC Television
British Film Institute
British Sky Broadcasting
Coral Brown – Granada International
Dan Curtis Productions
Disney Enterprises, Inc.
DN-Images
Jim Henson Company
John Herron – Canal+ Images UK Ltd.
Trevor Johnson
Helen Jones
Cornel Lucas
MGM Clip & Still
Paramount Pictures
Sony Pictures Entertainment
Studio Canal
The Kobal Collection
Twentieth Century Fox
Universal Studios Licensing
Warner Bros
Uli Weber
Greg Williams

At Framestore CFC:
William Sargent
Scott Griffin
William Yarrow
Mike Woods
Sarah Goodwin

Print Programme

Editor: Ruth Grenville
Editorial Assistant: Christine Beck
Design: Browns
Print: St Ives Westerham Press
Printed on: think⁴ warm.
Supplied by Howard Smith Paper
www.hspg.com

HOWARD SMITH
PAPER 