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Cameraman: The Life & Work of Jack Cardiff

(Documentary -- U.K.) An Optimum Releasing release of a Modus Operandi Films, U.K. Film Council presentation, in association with Smoke & Mirrors. (International sales: High Point Films and Television, London.) Produced by Craig McCall. Executive producers, Mason Cardiff, Lenny Crooks, Chris Roff, Julie Williams. Co-producer, Richard McGill. Directed by Craig McCall.

With: Jack Cardiff, Martin Scorsese, Kirk Douglas, Lauren Bacall, Charlton Heston, Kim Hunter, John Mills, Alan Parker, Thelma Schoonmaker, Freddie Francis, Raffaella De Laurentiis, Richard Fleischer, Peter Yates, Kathleen Byron, Christopher Challis, Kevin McClory, Ian Christie, Moira Shearer, Michel Ciment, Peter Handford, George E. Turner, Michael Powell.

By [LESLIE FELPERIN](#)

Several interviewees in "Cameraman: The Life & Work of Jack Cardiff" praise the legendary lenser for being just the right combination of "fast and good," a phrase that applies perfectly to "Cameraman" itself. Although made over 12 years, Brit helmer Craig McCall's accomplished portrait crams a lot into its trim running time, including interviews with the late Cardiff as well as a starry lineup of collaborators and fans. Judiciously blending meaty film history and gossipy anecdotes, pic could fill repertory slots in cineaste cities after exposure in Cannes. The film enjoyed a limited release in Blighty, preeming May 5.

Given the high-quality clips from Cardiff's filmography on display here (including not just from well-known masterworks like "Black Narcissus" and "The Red Shoes," but also rare footage from Cardiff's own homemovies and information films), "Cameraman" deserves, more than most film-themed docus, to be seen on the bigscreen. Nevertheless, despite onscreen participation from Martin Scorsese, Kirk Douglas, Lauren Bacall and others, the pic's audience will be strictly niche. Ancillary will be its natural habitat, as "Cameraman" would make a terrific supplementary disc for a box set of Powell-Pressburger films or, indeed, a compilation of films Cardiff shot or helmed.

Original footage throughout, shot as far back as 1998, shows still-spry octogenarian Cardiff variously strolling down the Croisette in Cannes, cruising the Lido in Venice, working on a set and talking in a studio (lit in a fair pastiche of his own classic style) about his career, which began in 1918 when he worked as a child extra. Cutaways to archive material and films Cardiff appeared in as a thesp, worked

on as a camera operator (such as 1937 Marlene Dietrich starrer "Knight Without Armor"), was credited for as a d.p. (from 1943 docu "Western Approaches" to 1985's "Rambo: First Blood Part II") or helmed himself (notably 1960's "Sons and Lovers") occur naturally as they come up in conversation.

Others interviewees' analysis of Cardiff's painterly contributions to cinema (from Martin Scorsese and ace editor Thelma Schoonmaker, both as valuable as ever), praise for his technique (helmer Richard Fleischer) and general declarations of affection and awe (Kirk Douglas, Charlton Heston and an audio-only Michael Powell, among others) hold it all together in a remarkably fluent, narration-free 86 minutes.

Cardiff's unique combination of sheer talent as a cinematographer and quiet knack for self-promotion -- especially when he appeared most self-effacing -- has made him one of the most written-about and lauded lensers in film history. Consequently, hardcore buffs won't find much in "Cameraman" they didn't know already, especially in the anecdote department. All the same, the seldom-seen archival footage is still a treat, and given that nearly every contempo docu is now shot on digital, the pic's use of the 16mm format (credited to no fewer than nine lensers) is not only a pleasure for its own granular virtues, but also reps a tribute of sorts to Cardiff, who roughly did for film stock what Rembrandt did for oils.

Camera (color, 16mm), Steven Chivers, Ricardo Coll, Simon Fanthorpe, Nicholas Hoffman, Jonathan Rho, Ian Salvage, John Walker, James Welland, Bob Williams; editor, Dan Roberts; music, Mark Sayer-Wade; art director, Miles Glyn; sound (Dolby Digital), Ian Arrow, Catherine Derry, Marcelo De Oliveira, Cameron Hills, David McJunkin, Frank Menges, Greg Molesworth, Mark Popkiewicz, David Powers, Steven Robinson; sound designer, Sandra Portman. Reviewed on DVD, Hoveton, May 4, 2010. (In Cannes Film Festival -- Cannes Classics.) Running time: 86 MIN.

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