

Time Out

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'A Bit of Scarlet'

Everyman

Andrea Weiss's documentary is a work of excavation into gay and lesbian cinematic representation (or non-representation), mining mainstream British cinema and television in much the same vein as Epstein and Friedman's witty recent study ('The Celluloid Closet') of their American counterparts. Basically, it's a clip-fest, with a sharp, tartly funny narration written by Weiss and Stuart Marshall (who, sadly, died before the film was realised) and read by Ian McKellen, which trawls the sound era from the Basil Rathbone/Nigel Bruce pairing in 1939's 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', through the recidivist belles in the St Trinians movies, the 'Carry On' films, Dirk Bogarde in 'Victim' and Malcolm McDowell in 'If...',

to Terence Davies and the present.

Serious but light, the film presents a subtly provocative, more or less orthodox gay reading, broken down into chapter headings ('Family Values' etc on silent flash-cards) and utilising mock 'rules' of behaviour to ironic effect. Undoubtedly, the participation of various archives (including the National Film and Television Archive) is an enormous plus: the shot, for instance, of Kathleen Byron's provocative glare to fellow nun Deborah Kerr in 'Black Narcissus' wouldn't seem half so powerful or erotic if it weren't presented in an overwhelmingly plush Technicolor print. But it's Weiss's skilful cross-editing and effective timing which are most notable. The film screens at the Everyman in double bills with a selection of features plundered for the film-makers' source material.

Wally Hammond



Girl power according to 'A Bit of Scarlet' (and 'Carry on Spying'), from Friday at the Everyman, Hampstead. See Repertory.