

## CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

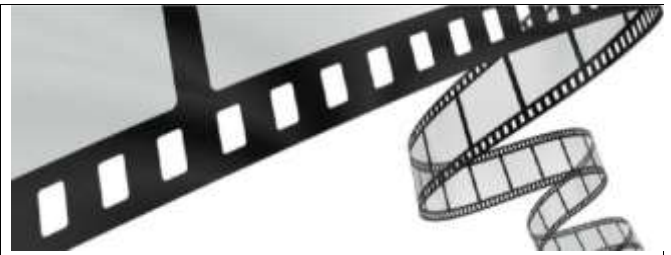
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### The Nun (La Religieuse)

Dir: Jacques Rivette (France 1965). 140 mins.

Cast: Anna Karina (Suzanne); Liselotte Pulvar (Mme de Chelles); Micheline Presle (Mme de Moni); Francine Berge (Soeur Sainte-Christine); Francisco Rabal (Dom Morel).

Music composed by Jean-Claude Eloy

The director Jacques Rivette is associated with the French 'New Wave', or *Nouvelle Vague*, of the mid-1950s to late 1960s. With Francois Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, Jean-Luc Goddard and Claude Chabrol, among others, he came to represent a way of making movies which purported to stand in marked contrast to the way films were produced in France, and much of commercial film production throughout the world. All of these directors had written articles in the critical magazine *Cahiers du Cinema*, co-founded by Andre Bazin, which argued for a new aesthetic of film production and a break with what it called the '*Cinema de Papa*'. The established French cinema of the 1940s onwards was characterised by big budgets, international co-productions, being heavily scripted and showing little experimentation. It was also in competition with a huge import of American films which swamped the market after the second world war. A younger generation of directors was emerging, called by the critic Francoise Giroud in 1958 'The New Wave'. Of particular significance was the notion of the director being an 'auteur', having authorship of the film, allowing actors to improvise, going out on location, as well as utilising the latest technical apparatus available to film production such as lighter, more portable equipment. *The New Wave*, then, was very much born out of an intellectual, theoretical preoccupation with the cinema as an art form, and *Cahiers du Cinema* looked at American popular, commercial cinema in a new light. Hitchcock, particularly, was analysed in depth and held up as a fine example of the *auteur*. Rivette's articles for the magazine focused on directors such as Howard Hawks, John Ford and Nicholas Ray.

*The Nun*, possibly Rivette's most conventional film, tells the story of Suzanne, a young woman forced by her neurotic and guilt-obsessed mother to take vows against her will and become a nun. Life in the convent is bearable for a while under the benign and humane leadership of Mother de Moni. But when the latter dies and is replaced by the cruel and sadistic sister Sainte-Christine, life for Suzanne becomes unbearable and she takes steps to be released from her vows. Transference to another convent merely results in the new mother superior becoming sexually infatuated with Suzanne, invoking the jealousy of the other young nuns. Extricating herself from the 'clutches' of the Catholic Church seems impossible. Meeting a helpful monk promises hope, but even he lets Suzanne down. She is forced to see only one way out of her malaise: death. No wonder the film was controversial in its day, being seen as 'anti-clerical'.

Rivette died in January 2016, aged 87. He was born in Rouen, the son of a pharmacist, and attended the lycée there before going to Paris in 1949, aged 21. He had hoped to study at the Institute des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques but was not accepted. He had already made a silent, 20 minute, 16 mm film called *Aux Quatre Coins* (In All Four Corners). Attending every film he could see at the Cinematheque Francaise, it was there that he met Godard, Rohmer and Chabrol. Tonight's film was his second main feature after *Paris Nous Appartient*. If *The Nun* is his most conventional, then surely his most accessible and 'charming' work is *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1974), a brilliantly comic meditation on the nature of fiction, Rivette's pre-occupation with the theatre, as well as the beauty and charm of Paris itself.

Our next screening: **I Am Not a Witch** on Tuesday 9 April.