

FRENZY

(UNIVERSAL)

Color

116 Mins.

Cast: Jon Finch, Alec McGowan, Barry Foster, Anna Massey, Barbara Leigh-Hunt, Vivien Merchant, Bernard Cribbens, Billie Whitelaw, Clive Swift, Michael Bates, Jean Marsh, Elsie Randolph.

Credits: Produced and directed by Alfred Hitchcock; Screenplay by Anthony Shaffer, based on the novel, "Goodbye Picadilly, Farewell Leicester Square," by Arthur La Bern; Director of Photography Gil Taylor; Music by Ron Goodwin; Edited by John Sympton.

One of Hitchcock's great films. About a sex killer in London and a former RAF pilot accused of a series of murders including that of his ex-wife. There are at least three scenes that qualify as "classics", you know as you watch them they'll be talked about for years to come. A witty script, and superb performances by an English cast add to Hitchcock's triumph. Big boxoffice ahead.

1832

Alfred Hitchcock's *Frenzy*, the director's first film to be made in England since *Stage Fright*, begins with an incredible travelling shot along the Thames River, approaching the Tower Bridge, then moving beneath it, culminating with a graceful zoom in on a group of Londoners listening to an anti-pollution speech (shortly a corpse will surface in the waters). Accompanied by Ron Goodwin's Britannia anthem type music on the soundtrack, this beginning looks and sounds like an overture; one is already of a mind that the movie will be the director's homage to his native land. It's a welcoming home of sorts, and the movie that follows is cause for celebration. For *Frenzy* belongs with the very best of Hitchcock.

When the afore-mentioned corpse washes up against the banks of the Thames, the dead girl is wearing only a tie, tied tightly about her neck. Later a magistrate is heard to say that the killings (there have been several murders, the victims are strangled after having been raped) are good for the tourist trade. After all, doesn't the visitor expect London to be draped in fog with a Jack the Ripper type running about littering the streets with corpses? If so, the London depicted in *Frenzy* is a tourist's delight. It should also prove a moviegoer's delight.

The hero is Richard Blaney (Jon Finch) a down-on-his-luck, former RAF squadron leader whom we first meet getting sacked from his job as a bartender. One of his cronies (Barry Foster) offers him some money; it's the least one RAF buddy can do for another. He declines, spending the night at a flophouse, having dined earlier with Brenda, (Barbara Leigh-Hunt) his ex-wife who will soon become the next victim on the tie-killer's list. Unfortunately for Blaney, he's seen leaving his ex-wife's office building after unsuccessfully trying to see her, unaware that her corpse is behind the locked door. Things look even worse for him when the barmaid (Anna Massey) with whom he has been having an affair also gets strangled and he is found with her clothing in his suitcase. Since the audience knows all along who the actual killer is the suspense and tension in *Frenzy* is in wondering how he'll trip himself up.

We don't want to give the impression that *Frenzy* is grim. Far from it. While harrowing, and in one or two scenes almost paralyzingly so, this is an extremely comic film. There is a hilarious running gag involving the Scotland Yard detective (Alec McGowan) assigned to the case coping with his wife's (Vivien Merchant) murdering the menus via her course in gourmet cooking; he discusses the case with her while she prepares her latest culinary feat, his talk of broken fingers synchronized to her snapping of bread sticks. Their table scenes together are richly funny, and possibly even a parody of the many eating scenes in Claude Chabrol's Hitchcockian films.



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Frenzy finds Hitchcock working at the height of his powers. Taking advantage of the freedoms of the contemporary screen, this is his most graphic film, and certainly his most devastating in years. There are three sequences that are bound to be talked about. An eight-minute episode in Brenda's office (her fate is sealed the minute her surprise visitor shuts the door behind him), virtually choreographed within the tight confines of ordinary office furniture, offers the last movie word in strangulation. You will never have to see it again, and Hitchcock, doesn't ever show us the grisly act again. The next victim's exit from this world is orchestrated by a declining tracking shot down a staircase, the camera descending then withdrawing into the hubbub of Convent Garden traffic, and it is one of the great moments in film. Then there is the fantastic "potato sack scene" wherein the killer, in the back of a fast moving truck, is desperately trying to find the corpse he has hidden in one of the sacks, digging through the dusty potatoes until he finds the foot, then the leg, then . . . It's an incredible scene, perverse and gruesome, and yet grimly funny; it's an instant classic.

In *Frenzy* the director is at long last reunited with a writer who shares his temperament and tastes. Anthony Shaffer's screenplay (based on the Arthur La Bern novel, "Goodbye Picadilly, Farewell Leicester Square") is clever, witty and literate; it's the best script Hitchcock's had to work with since *Shadow of a Doubt* and *North by Northwest*. *Frenzy* also marks a departure from the Hitchcock films of the past two decades in that the casting was not done with an eye on glamour. There are no Tippi Hedrens or Frederick Staffords; instead an impeccably chosen cast of English performers, and to single out any one of the performances would be a great disservice to the others. They're all perfectly cast, from Anna Massey's doomed barmaid down to old-time music hall performer Elsie Randolph as a hotel keeper who believes that when Oscar Wilde signs the guest register that's really his name. Superlatives are also in order for cinematographer Gil Taylor and editor John Sympton. Hitchcock is on target all the way with this one.