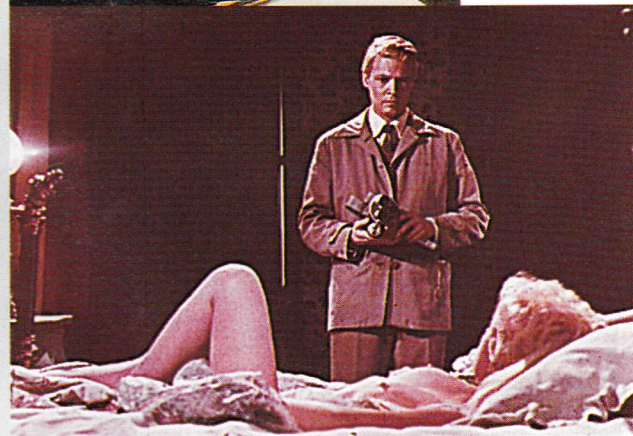




Following in his footsteps: Michael Powell, far left, casting a careful directorial eye over a single frame. *The Red Shoes*, left, is one of Scorsese's favourite films. *Peeping Tom*, below, the controversial movie that virtually ended Powell's career



HOMAGE / MARTIN SCORSESE

under the influence

Michael Powell – the Englishman who put me in the right direction

I have five favourite movies. In no particular order they are: Fellini's *8½*, John Ford's *The Searchers*, Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and then either *Sensò* or *The Leopard*, both by Visconti. Fifth is Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Red Shoes*, and I have done nothing in my career to match it.

I was just eight when I first saw that movie. My father took me to our neighbourhood cinema in New York's Lower East Side and it made an enormous impression on me. I loved the extraordinary use of colour – especially during the Ballet of the Red Shoes sequence – and the physical and facial gestures of the actors. It was such an unashamedly theatrical film and so gutsy and flamboyant for an English film of the Forties – or, for that matter, any decade. I saw other Powell films, in which he collaborated with scriptwriter Pressburger, on a Fifties' television show called *Million-Dollar Movie*. The programme would show the same film twice on weekday evenings and three times on Saturday and Sunday and I would watch them again and again.

I remember seeing *The Tales of Hoffmann* for the first time on that show. It was in black and white, interrupted by commercials and must have been 35 minutes shorter than the original, but I still came under its spell. I was immediately captured by the Powell and Pressburger logo – an archer's target with an arrow thudding into it. Whenever I saw it at the start of a film I was always filled with expectations of fantasy and magic. I was also mesmerised by the film-making in correlation to the music. Michael Powell called it "composed cinema",

and it was through *The Tales of Hoffmann* that I began to appreciate rhythm and the filming of action to music – something I put to effect in *New York, New York* and in the fight sequences in *Raging Bull*.

The Red Shoes and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (which Churchill tried to ban) would alone merit Michael Powell's position as one of the world's finest directors. But add his other films, such as *I Know Where I'm Going*, *The Tales of Hoffmann* and *Peeping Tom*, his extraordinary, controversial movie about fear and terror which virtually ended his career, and you realise that Powell was the most successful film-maker of all at making experimental films within the system. He created what I call "subversive commercial" movies – pictures which made money, but had great emotion and mysticism and fearlessly embraced the artistic.

Powell and Pressburger's films are special because they don't fit ►

manifesto

any one genre. They combine different cultural elements: they have the humour and fun of American films, the grace and beauty of Italian films – as well as all the hysteria and excess – and yet they remain distinctly British, although they are very different from other British films. Powell the man was just like that: very funny, original and intelligent, but he couldn't have been more English.

I first met him in London in 1975 after I had just finished shooting *Taxi Driver* and I told him how much people in America admired his work. Up until then I wasn't even sure he was still alive. Because I couldn't find anything written about them, I thought Powell and Pressburger might have been pseudonyms. We knew all about other British directors like Hitchcock, David Lean and Carol Reed because you could read about them in books on British cinema. But Powell and Pressburger were just footnotes in these books – usually a passing reference to *The Red Shoes*.

You get a sense of this neglect in the second volume of Powell's autobiography (which he completed shortly before his death in 1990). If the first volume, published in 1986, describes the highpoints of his career with *The Red Shoes* as its climax, the second book painfully records the downside – where he went wrong. Powell was not a man who compromised, and the book candidly details his arguments with film company bosses and how he could have handled situations better. Its most important lesson is in how to adapt and survive. Yet it's also

MUSIC /LIVE

If you know the words to Chris de Burgh's "Lady in Red", you'll have all the knowledge you need to settle into the singersongwriter's shows. De Burgh's songs are a peculiar stylistic mix: a pale, humourless pain runs through much of his writing (especially when he takes on quasi-religious

and mythological themes), but his power to seduce seems astonishingly strong. And the opposing roles come together in his strangulated but nervously gallant singing. Solve the riddle for yourselves at Birmingham (September 18, 19), Brighton (22, 23), London, Earl's Court (25, 26) and Sheffield (29). RC

an incredible read, hilarious in places, because he's a wonderful writer.

Even though Powell came from a very different world to me (it was as if, when we met, he had come out of the motion picture screen), we became very close over the last fifteen years of his life. He acted as a professional adviser on many of my films and in 1984 married my regular film editor Thelma Schoonmaker. He became like part of my immediate family. After he died, I found out that Michael had dedicated his second volume to me and titled it *Million-Dollar Movie*, after that TV programme I watched as a kid. That, to me, is a great honour.

Million-Dollar Movie is published by Heinemann on September 28, priced £16.99. The paperback edition of *Martin Scorsese: A Journey* by Mary Pat Kelly, with a foreword by Michael Powell, is published by Secker & Warburg at £9.99 on the same date. A short season of Powell films, including *Peeping Tom*, will be shown on BBC2 from late September.

