

Filmworker Short Synopsis

It's a rare person who would give up fame and fortune to toil in obscurity for someone else's creative vision. Yet, that's exactly what Leon Vitali did after his acclaimed performance as 'Lord Bullingdon' in Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*. The young actor surrendered his thriving career to become Kubrick's loyal right-hand man. For more than two decades, Leon played a crucial role behind-the-scenes helping Kubrick make and maintain his legendary body of work. In *Filmworker*, Leon's candid, often funny, sometimes shocking experiences in the company of Kubrick are woven together with rich and varied elements including previously unseen photos, videos, letters, notebooks, and memos from Leon's private collection. Insightful, emotionally charged anecdotes from actors, family, crew members, and key film industry professionals who worked with Kubrick and Leon add an important layer of detail and impact to the story. *Filmworker* enters the world of Leon Vitali and Stanley Kubrick from a unique perspective that highlights the nitty-gritty of the creative process. By experiencing Leon's journey we come to understand how the mundane gives rise to the magnificent as timeless filmmaking is brought to life at its most practical and profound level.

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Leon was living the high life as an accomplished, young actor in swinging 1970's London when he was cast as 'Lord Bullingdon' in Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*. Already an avid Kubrick fan, Leon had once declared to a friend after watching *A Clockwork Orange*, "I want to work with that man someday." Now, he could hardly believe his dream was coming true. It was the chance of a lifetime to take his flourishing career to new heights.

But the moment Leon stepped foot on Kubrick's magnificent set, his fate was sealed. During months of filming, Leon became enthralled by the director's all-encompassing process of creation. After *Barry Lyndon*, prestigious job offers poured in from film, television and stage, but Leon turned them all down to take on the humble role of assistant to the master filmmaker. It would prove to be an extraordinary, intense, often arduous journey that would push Leon to his limit and beyond.

Gone was the glamour and privilege of being a performer. Leon was plunged into a punishing mix of grueling hours and unyielding expectations. Like a medieval apprentice, he learned in meticulous detail just what it took to create and sustain timeless works of art. "People say they'd give their right arm to work with Stanley," Leon says with a knowing smile, "Let me tell you, that's just the down payment."

Kubrick was captive to the unending needs of his own creations. He dedicated himself fully to the process, no matter how detailed, difficult or endless the work might be - and he expected nothing less from Leon. Under pressure, their alliance could be fraught with tension, but their bond was unbreakable.

"You have to understand Kubrick before you understand what Leon did, does, and went through - what's imprinted on his soul and mind" says Julian Senior, former head of publicity for Warner Bros., Europe. "He did for Kubrick what half a dozen executive producers, associate producers, production managers, drivers and tailors do on other movies."

Leon's responsibilities were so vast and varied they were impossible to categorize. On travel documents, Leon wrote his occupation as: *Filmworker*. "That's what I am," he says, "I'm a *filmworker*. I do whatever it takes to get the job done." In addition to his essential role as Kubrick's creative sounding board, Leon was casting and coaching actors, performing each role in a script so Kubrick could adjust plot and dialogue to his liking, spending endless hours at film labs making sure each print met the highest standards, preparing sound mixes, overseeing subtitling and dubbing, creating layouts

for marketing materials, making trailers for international territories, coordinating inventory and shipping, keeping track of global screening schedules, and serving as a diplomatic liaison between his often volatile boss and the outside world. Leon worked hands-on with all of Kubrick's films. Constant demand for worldwide special screenings, television broadcasts, and the burgeoning home video market made it necessary for Leon to absorb each movie frame by frame, beat by beat, until seeing them through Kubrick's eyes became second nature.

On what would turn out to be Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, Leon was run ragged carrying out double duties. Not only did he attend to countless production tasks, he also gave a stellar performance as the imperious 'Red Cloak'. The experience of both assisting and acting for the master brought things full circle. Kubrick's sudden death in the midst of putting the final touches on *Eyes Wide Shut* left chaos in its wake. Without Kubrick's unassailable leadership, confusion reigned, and long simmering resentments within his circle bubbled to the surface. Exhausted, ill, and grief-stricken over the loss of the man whose dynamic presence had been his driving force for decades, Leon threw himself into a tough, constant and sometimes losing battle to keep Kubrick's uncompromising standards alive.

When Warner Bros. decided to painstakingly restore Kubrick's films, they turned to Leon as the one person who could uphold the late director's creative ideals. After decades of working by Kubrick's side, Leon had become a master who understood the rigorous method of transforming mundane details into a magnificent vision. He was the crucial link for all involved - from audio engineers, to colorists, to lab technicians to restoration specialists, who drew on his depth of hard-earned knowledge. The Herculean restoration process lasted years and insured that Kubrick's legacy would be safeguarded for generations to come.

Without a doubt, Stanley Kubrick is a legend; his name is synonymous with the pinnacle of cinematic achievement. Every day, all over the world, his films are screened, streamed or broadcast. Hundreds of thousands of visitors in countless countries flock to exhibits about him, intrigued by every artifact from his exceptional career. Yet, the most valuable icon to survive the fire of Kubrick's brilliance is a living one: Leon Vitali - *assistant to the director*. True to character, Leon isn't seeking accolades or worldly reward as he continues to share his unsurpassed knowledge of all things Kubrick. Living simply, he's sustained by his dedication to creativity, and the understanding that the path he chose led to remarkably rich experiences. By whole-heartedly helping Kubrick realize his grand and beautiful dreams, Leon became the embodiment of all the filmworkers who play a vital part in bringing great cinema to fruition. Leon's story is uniquely his own, but this chronicle of one artist who chose to serve another stands as a testament to the legions of unsung heroes whose names shine for a brief moment as the credits roll.

Director's Statement

Filmworker is one of those rare projects that every storyteller dreams of finding, complete with a fascinating main character, controversy, and a built-in emotional arc. As a young man, Leon Vitali went in search of the ultimate creative experience - and he found it. Stanley Kubrick *is* cinema. He embodies the struggle to manifest everlasting work that pushes the boundaries of an art form. Everyone who was pulled into his orbit was fundamentally changed. Kubrick, in service to his own creativity, was the force who issued the challenge: "Are you willing to give everything you have for the cause?" Leon Vitali was one of the few who eagerly answered "yes" - and lived up to that commitment, despite the price he had to pay.

As Kubrick aficionados we were well aware of Leon Vitali: *assistant to the director*. We admired his great performances in *Barry Lyndon* and *Eyes Wide Shut* and we knew he had been a key member of Kubrick's inner circle for many years. When we finally met Leon through our work on another related project, we were struck by his kindness, humility and the fascinating scope of his story. Here was a man who had been a successful actor at a young age, but had given up his high-profile, glamorous life to work tirelessly behind-the-scenes for Kubrick. What compelled him to make such an unusual, self-sacrificing choice? *Filmworker* explores the bittersweet consequences of Leon's life-changing decision, and the fierce reality of working closely with one of the most brilliant yet demanding artists in cinema history.

Because of Leon's sensitive, self-effacing nature, it took a while to get him to agree to let us tell his story. He was used to being a spokesperson for Kubrick's work but was uncomfortable opening up about himself. More than a year of intensive shooting allowed space and time to explore Leon's life in-depth before, during and after Stanley Kubrick. His vivid memories and often overwhelming emotions rose to the surface in unpredictable waves as he recounted his years with the great director. Then there were Leon's boxes stored in the attic that turned out to be a treasure trove of Kubrick-related photos, documents, memos, videos, notebooks and memorabilia. As Leon dug through them, unearthing one fascinating artifact after the other, it was like exploring the archaeology of what great masterworks are built from. We carefully examined everything and found rare and exciting materials to incorporate into the film.

Filmworker is an observation on how legends and legendary works are created. The complex, productive and interdependent relationship between Leon Vitali and Stanley Kubrick was founded on devotion, artistic passion, sensibility, sacrifice and the grueling joy of the creative process. We're honored to bring this heartfelt human interest story and important part of cinema history to the audience.

Filmworker Participants

Leon Vitali

'Lord Bullingdon' in Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* and 'Red Cloak' in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Graduate of London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Gave up his flourishing acting career to work for decades as Kubrick's trusted right-hand man. Supervised the meticulous restoration of Kubrick's films for Warner Bros.

Ryan O'Neal

'Redmond Barry' in Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*. Star of many award-winning films including the classics *Love Story*, *Paper Moon* and *What's Up Doc?*

Matthew Modine

'Private Joker' in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. Award-winning actor with many acclaimed roles in film and television including the current Netflix hit series *Stranger Things*. Author of the popular *Full Metal Jacket Diary* containing extraordinary photos and a detailed account of his two years filming with Kubrick.

R. Lee Ermey

'Gunnery Sergeant Hartman' in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. Military icon, weapons spokesman and writer of *Gunny's Rules* and *Mail Call*.

Danny Lloyd

'Danny Torrance' in Kubrick's *The Shining*. Left show business to become a biology teacher and family man. Lloyd's participation in *Filmworker* adds something special to the project since he very rarely grants interviews.

Stellan Skarsgård

One of the most versatile and sought after actors of our time. Has appeared in countless mainstream and independent films including *Good Will Hunting*, *Breaking The Waves*, *Insomnia*, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* and *Nymphomaniac*. Worked with Leon Vitali on the Swedish film adaptation of *Hamlet*.

Marie Richardson

'Marion' in Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. Internationally acclaimed for her roles in theater, film and television. Worked extensively on stage directed by Ingmar Bergman.

Tim Colceri

'Doorgunner' in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. Originally cast as Gunnery Sergeant Hartman in *Full Metal Jacket*.

Brian Capron

Popular British actor known for *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and numerous other television, film and theater roles. Attended London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) with Leon Vitali.

Pernilla August

Renowned Swedish actress, director and screenwriter known for her work in Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, Bille August's *The Best Intentions* and as 'Shmi Skywalker' in *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*. Worked with Leon Vitali on the Swedish film adaptation of *Hamlet*.

Julian Senior

Legendary Head of European Regional Advertising and Publicity for Warner Bros. for 30 years. Worked closely with Kubrick on publicity for all of his movies.

Lisa Leone

Photographer, Cinematographer, Director. Worked closely with Kubrick in many capacities on *Eyes Wide Shut*. Author of the book, *Here I Am*, a photographic journey through the history of Hip Hop.

Brian Jamieson

Award-winning director, producer, film preservationist and publicist. Worked closely with Kubrick promoting his films as Head of International Marketing & Publicity at Warner Bros. Director of *To Whom It May Concern: Ka Shen's Journey*. Co-founder of the company 'Twilight Time', specializing in releasing limited edition classic films on DVD and Blu-ray.

Chris Jenkins

Three time Academy Award-winning sound engineer who has worked on over 160 films. Shares the 2004 'President's Award' of the Cinema Audio Society with Leon Vitali and Ned Price for restoration work on Kubrick's films.

Nick Redman

Producer, director of *A Turning Of The Earth: John Ford, John Wayne and The Searchers*, *A Simple Adventure Story: Sam Peckinpah, Mexico and The Wild Bunch*, and *Becoming John Ford*, Film and music preservationist. Co-founder of the company 'Twilight Time', specializing in releasing limited edition classic films on DVD and Blu-ray.

Ned Price

Vice President of Restoration, Warner Bros. Has overseen more than 1,600 film restorations including *The Wizard of Oz*, *Ben Hur* and Kubrick's body of work.

Steve Southgate

Senior Vice President in charge of European Technical Operations for Warner Bros. Worked closely with Kubrick from *A Clockwork Orange* all the way to *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Treva Etienne

'Morgue Orderly' in Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. Known for his roles in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Falling Skies*.

Mike Alfreds

Celebrated theater director and actor. Known for his work with Sir Ian McKellan who has called Alfreds "one of the three best directors in the country". Author of *Then What Happens?* about the art of storytelling in theater. One of Leon Vitali's most important acting mentors at LAMDA

Warren Lieberfarb

Former President of Warner Home Video. Lieberfarb is widely acknowledged for his industry changing role as the architect of the DVD. Authorized the massive restoration of Kubrick's films.

Colin Mossman

Former head of Deluxe Labs. Academy Award-winning inventor who designed and developed many systems for facilitating film restoration and improving quality control. Kubrick's go-to guy for lab work.

Jacob Rosenberg

Filmmaker, author, and digital technology expert. Director of the documentary *Waiting For Lightning* about pro skateboarder Danny Way.

Phil Rosenthal

Writer, producer and creator of *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Winner of 2 Primetime Emmys for Outstanding Comedy Series.

Max Vitali

Leon's son. Director and cinematographer. Instrumental in creating the stunning music videos for international music star Robyn.

Vera Vitali

Leon's youngest daughter. Stockholm-based star known for her roles in *Monica Z*, *Blind*, and *My So-Called Father*.

Masha Vitali

Leon's eldest daughter. Photographer, event producer.

Janet Wilson

Respected Telecine Colorist for many Warner Bros. classics. Worked closely with Leon Vitali during the restoration of Kubrick's films.

Beverly Wood

Executive Vice President of Technical Services & Client Relations for Deluxe Entertainment. Master chemist and lab consultant for countless films including *The Hours*, *Monster's Ball*, *The Lord Of The Rings: Return Of The King*.

Chris Vitali

Leon's Eldest Brother

Tim Vitali

Leon's Brother

Maria Hayward

Leon's Sister

Stanley Kubrick

Director: *Killer's Kiss*, *The Killing*, *Paths of Glory*, *Spartacus*, *Lolita*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon*, *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Eyes Wide Shut*

Director Tony Zierra has been fascinated by the power of storytelling and cinema since he was a child; he was determined to make films no matter the obstacles. When time and money permitted he took film classes at New York University and later at Texas A & M and UCLA. His first documentary, *Carving Out Our Name*, follows the lives of four actors hoping to find success in Hollywood. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival to much acclaim. Next, Zierra went on the road to capture America's reaction to the attacks of September 11th. The film that emerged, titled *USA The Movie*, explores the cyclical nature of violence and retaliation. Zierra's award-winning documentary, *My Big Break*, is a cautionary tale about the darker side of celebrity and the consequences of fame that also includes his struggle to make his first film. *My Big Break* won 'Best Documentary' at The Boston Film Festival, 'Best Documentary' at Artsfest, Pennsylvania, was nominated for 'Best Documentary' at the Raindance Film Festival in London, and was an Official Selection of The American Cinematic Experience Festival in New York. Zierra has been a featured speaker at The Popular Culture American Culture (PCA/ACA) national academic conference in New Orleans, PCA/ACA Southwest/Texas academic conference and the PCA/ACA national academic conference in Boston.

Producer Elizabeth Yoffe is head of the production company True Studio Media. She received a B.A. in Theater Arts from Bennington College and an M.A. in Education from Antioch University, Seattle. She worked as a casting director for many film and television projects including *Waiting For The Light* starring Shirley MacLaine, *Dogfight* starring River Phoenix, and David Lynch's classic series *Twin Peaks*. In Los Angeles she served as president of Cinewomen, L.A., a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the role of women in film. She is the producer of *USA The Movie* and the award-winning documentary *My Big Break*. She also produced the award-winning Independent Film Channel favorite *Brightness* starring Eric Idle, and co-produced the Toronto International Film Festival Official Selection *Carving Out Our Name*. Yoffe's work as a freelance writer has appeared in *Slate*, *The Week*, *Natural Health*, *Healing Journal* and *The New York Times*.