

ART



Production still: Kevin Elton in *Arthur*
Photographer credit: James Royal

Radio Mania

An Abandoned Work

At the end of every gloriously long school summer holiday my friends and I would need something distracting to take our minds off the impending gloom of the end of our freedom and start of a new school year. The easiest way to do this in escapist fashion was a trip or two to the cinema, quite often in the afternoon in order to give that extraordinary feeling of having entered another world simply by stepping into the darkness of the cinema. One particular year the stakes were set higher than usual by the fact that we would all have to be standing on tip toe and grunting in our lowest adolescent voices in order to convince the box office staff that we should be allowed in to see this 'X cert' feature. The film in question was one in the horror/slasher series 'Friday 13th' and I believe this was 'part 3' and most important and thrilling of all was that it was a 3D production. To me, the concept of a 3D film seemed a throwback to the 50s and to B-movie making with rows of screaming girls (it always seemed to be the girls) in cardboard buddy holly-type specs and sometimes at the drive-in. Perhaps it's that historic B-movie connection with 3D

PAUL ARTROCKER RECOMMENDS WE FORGET THE SUNSHINE THIS SUMMER AND HIT THE DARKNESS OF THE BFI CINEMA AND CHECK OUT IAIN FORSYTH AND JANE POLLARD'S 'RADIO MANIA: AN ABANDONED WORK'

that caused the slasher 70s film makers to revert to what already seemed an archaic form. The film was average. The effects were impressive. Conveniently placed pitch-forks impaling unfortunate victims protruded from the screen causing several audience members to duck, while a screen-bound flying axe had the whole auditorium shrieking. Even the graphics of the credits demonstrated the mind-bending tromp 'D'oeil powers of 3D akin to those of stereo demonstration records that took 50s and 60s hi-fi users through the wonders of stereo sound through left and right speakers. It was a truly distracting trip.

Perhaps Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard had similar experiences with 3D cinema? Certainly the genre has far from become commonplace in our

entertainment experiences. In fact with the building of the huge surround-screen cinema experience at Waterloo/South Bank to show features like nature documentaries and space exploration, this format seems to have become somewhat of a redundant side show (to which we will return later). Forsyth and Pollard revel in 'haunted media' and the power of collective nostalgia concerning ephemeral moments in history. To examine ideas surrounding performance and its historical and artistic legacies this pair of artists have, in the past, staged such events as 'Silent Sound', subliminal massaging with Jason Pierce from Spiritualised, 'File Under Sacred Music', an acclaimed video of their remake of the Cramps notorious performance at Napa State Mental Institute,

and 'A Rock'n'Roll Suicide', a re-enactment of Bowie's farewell performance as Ziggy Stardust.

On commission from the BFI, Forsyth and Pollard became interested in the film 'The Man from M.A.R.S.', one of the first ever made in 3D way back in 1922 (predating my perception of 3D as a 1950's phenomenon). The film was made to demonstrate Teleview, a stereoscopic motion picture system created by Laurens Hammond (he of the legendary organ fame!). Sadly the film closed after 24 days in New York, after which Teleview and this 3D film were never seen again, although a 2D version exists in the National Archive.

The artists set about creating a new and contemporary adaptation of the film in which an inventor attempts to create a transmitting device to communicate with

aliens on Mars. Walking into the darkened space at The BFI Gallery having collected your giant 'Buddy Holly-esque' 3D glasses you are placed directly between two screens which are projecting views of the same building from different views. One view is part of a rehearsal performance of the new adaptation which includes a few simple props, some actors grasping their scripts and fumbling through the scenes, a dancing aliens routine, and some discussions of the adaptation addressed directly to the screen and to an unseen director/producer. The second view, on a screen facing the first, shows the other end of the same building (the legendary Twickenham Film Studios it turns out) with three musicians waiting to play accompanying soundtrack material to the scenes being rehearsed. A delightful artistic touch is that the 'cheesy' retro instrumental grooves being laid down by the band are being played primarily on a Hammond organ. We, the viewer, are caught between these two performances, the painted lines along the floor in the films on screen continue along the floor in the BFI gallery while once again (and still being a relative novice at this) the 3D vision is effective - 85 years of technology can produce an effect that still gets you approaching the screen to see if you can see behind actors and objects! The sound too is captured and broadcast on state of the art audio technology, and when used for what was a live performance of the rehearsal produces counter perceptions of the recorded and the live, the staged and rehearsed, and the real.

In 2009 such visual and audio trickery is far from astounding, in fact despite the obvious quality of media here, it stills feels like a technological throwback. But with scenes in the performance pitting an excitable and ingenious scientist up against his disbelieving friends and associates one can perhaps bring more contemporary developments into direct comparison. When the steam train was first introduced its speed was limited to that of a walking man because it was thought a human could not cope with such speeds. How was stereo sound first greeted by music lovers and record buyers and why are we not today all listening in quadrophonic sound - in fact there



Production still: Paul Lee, Ben Croxon and Ben Moor as Martians
Photographer credit: James Royal

is a new generation for whom a new medium for listening is in fact a technological step backwards in fidelity terms. The developments in technology and communication brought about since the inception of the world wide web have been astonishing and relatively universal and they perhaps parallel some of the hopes generated by the introduction of 3D vision in the early 20th Century.

Timing wise, 'Radio Mania' seems perfect because at Cannes Film Festival this year a milestone was reached when 'UP', the new 3D animation from Disney, was the festival's opening screening - a first for an animated feature.

Last year only a few major film releases were produced in 3D but, by all accounts, 3D films will soon become unavoidable with dozens of major studio productions being released in 2009. There is debate about how much this technology will impact on the industry - whether it will be a revelation like the development of 'the talkies' or the transformation from black-and-white to colour - so perhaps 'Radio Mania' could even be seen as a discussion about our resistance to change rather than our embrace of such developments.

While you are waiting for this tidal wave of 'spec-

wearing' experiences to hit our screens try this retro influenced installation to get in the mood. A series of accompanying events include the following:

'Do you love me like I love you, Part 5 Tender Prey'

A Q&A with Forsyth, Pollard and Nick Cave at a preview of a short film to accompany the reissue of The Bad Seeds early catalogue on Wed 17th June

'Radio Mania'

A screening of the 2D version of the original film followed by a post screening discussion on Thurs 9th July

At The BFI Southbank Gallery SE1 Until 11th July



Production still: Family Feuding as Mrs. Langdon
Photographer credit: James Royal