

ely film society = **the notes**

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latest news

The date for *SUNRISE in the Cathedral* is now Friday September 19. EFS members will get free entry on showing their card, while others will have to pay £10. A good reason to join or renew your membership! More details to come.

Forthcoming months' films are Iranian, Japanese and Czech, underlining our commitment to bringing you the best of world cinema.

Chinatown

Roman Polanski, US 1974

Written by Robert Towne and Roman Polanski

- Jack Nicholson J.J. Gittes
- Faye Dunaway Evelyn Mulwray
- John Huston Noah Cross
- Perry Lopez Escobar
- John Hillerman Yelburton
- Darrell Zwerling Hollis Mulwray
- Diane Ladd Ida Sessions
- Roy Jenson Mulvihill
- Roman Polanski Man with Knife
- Richard Bakalyan Loach
- Joe Mantell Walsh
- Bruce Glover Duffy
- Nandu Hinds Sophie
- James O'Rear Lawyer
- James Hong Evelyn's Butler



"Politicians, ugly buildings and whores all get respectable if they last long enough," says John Huston's crooked construction magnate Noah Cross in this remarkable neo-noir by Roman Polanski. What the passage of time has done for this superlative 1974 film is progressively lessen our sense of its being simply a modern pastiche of the classic 30s gumshoe thrillers. The time-gap has narrowed, and it now looks like a classic in a direct line of

succession to those earlier pictures.

Jack Nicholson has the Bogartian role of Jake Gittes, the LA private investigator who sticks his nose into a corrupt conspiracy in the state's Department of Water and Power. The plan is to create a drought in California, sending farmland prices into a dust-bowl slump so that it can be bought cheap and made the site of a colossal new dam, to be sold back at a huge

profit to the taxpayer. Jake gets that nose of his slashed by a goon – an unforgettable cameo for Polanski – but finds himself falling in love with the mysterious Mrs Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) at the centre of the murky plot.

The dialogue is crackling ("Are you alone?" – "Isn't everyone?") and the set pieces, like the one in the anti-semitic old people's home, are just superb.

Polanski brilliantly shows that money and power are not what's motivating everyone after all. There's a lower stratum of sexual dysfunction and fear at work, which is difficult, if not impossible to understand: the ultimate meaning of the chaotic "Chinatown" of the title.

Reworking the sombre underpinnings of detective noir along more pessimistic lines, Polanski and screenwriter Robert Towne convey a '70s-inflected critique of capitalist and bureaucratic malevolence in a carefully detailed period piece harkening back to the genre's roots in the 1930s and '40s. Gittes always has a smart comeback like Humphrey Bogart's Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, but the corruption Gittes finds is too deep for one man to stop.

Polanski and Towne clashed over *Chinatown's* ending; Polanski won the fight, but Towne won the Oscar for Best Screenplay. *Chinatown* was nominated for ten other Oscars, including Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Cinematography, Art Direction, Costumes, and Score. *Chinatown* was also chosen as Greatest Film Of All Time by a panel of *Guardian* and *Observer* film critics in 2010.

Roman Polanski

Born **Raimund Polanski**, on August 18, 1933, in Paris, France. At the age of three, Polanski moved with his family to his father's native city of Krakow, Poland. In 1941, his parents were imprisoned in various Nazi concentration camps, where his mother eventually died in Auschwitz. In order to escape deportation, Polanski lived with several different Polish families until he was reunited with his father in 1944.

As a teenager, Polanski developed his acting skills in radio dramas and films. In 1954, he enrolled at the Polish National Film Academy in Lodz, where his body of work consisted of short films and documentaries. Upon his graduation, he



appeared in a number of movies, many of which were the work of famed Polish director Andrzej Wajda, including *Lotna* (1959), *Innocent Sorcerers* (1960), and *Samson* (1961). In 1962, he directed his first feature-length film, *Knife in the Water*. The international recognition that followed, including an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Film, gave Polanski the chance to bring his movies to a more mainstream audience. The following year, he moved to London, where his next offering, the psychological thriller *Repulsion* (1965), was considered equally compelling by critics and audiences.

In 1968, Polanski moved to Hollywood, making his American film debut with the classic thriller *Rosemary's Baby*, which featured exceptional performances by Mia Farrow and John Cassavetes. Despite his burgeoning film career, Polanski endured a devastating tragedy the following year when his pregnant wife, actress Sharon Tate, was brutally murdered by members of the Charles Manson cult. The extreme violence experienced by Polanski throughout his life was often reflected in his films, which tended to focus on the darker themes of alienation and evil—most notably, in the modern film noir *Chinatown* (1974), featuring John Huston, Jack Nicholson, and Faye Dunaway.

In 1977, Polanski was indicted on six criminal counts for having sexual relations with a minor. The alleged act took place with a 13-year-old girl, in the home of the actor Jack Nicholson. Both Nicholson and his longtime girlfriend, actress Anjelica Huston, testified against Polanski when the highly publicized case was brought to trial. Polanski pleaded guilty to one charge of unlawful sexual intercourse and underwent six weeks of psychiatric evaluation at a state prison in California. Although additional criminal charges were still pending, Polanski fled the United States after his discharge. While authorities were not actively seeking him out, he continued to face the possibility of prison if he returned to America.

Polanski traveled to Europe and eventually settled in Paris, where he directed the critically acclaimed film *Tess* (1979)—an adaptation of Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Throughout the 1980s, he concentrated on stage acting, appearing in productions of *Amadeus* (1981) and *Metamorphosis* (1988).

Polanski returned to film work with the intense thriller *Frantic* (1988), starring Harrison Ford and Betty Buckley, followed by the erotic drama *Bitter Moon* (1992), with Hugh Grant and Polanski's current wife Emmanuelle Seigner. Both projects failed to impress critics, but Polanski reestablished himself in 1994 with *Death and the Maiden*, a film adaptation of Ariel Dorfman's play. In 1999, Polanski directed the supernatural thriller *The Ninth Gate*, which starred Johnny Depp. The film's critical and commercial reception was tepid.

Polanski staged a comeback in 2002 with the critically acclaimed Holocaust drama *The Pianist*, which won the Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Polanski won a surprise Best Director Oscar for the film, but was not allowed to attend the award ceremony due to his criminal indictment. The film's star, 29-year-old Adrien Brody, also earned an Oscar for his performance.

NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
THE APPLE
(Samira Makhmalbaf,
Iran 1998)
Monday 21 July