

THE CINEMATIC CONNERY

THE FILMS OF SIR SEAN CONNERY



A.J. BLACK

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To Dad
The first man I believed was a superhero

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PROLOGUE



NOBODY DID IT BETTER

THE NEWS CAME in the winter of 2020, on 31 October, a night more commonly remembered for the celebration of Halloween. Sir Sean Connery, the most iconic Scottish actor in cinematic history, had passed away at the grand old age of 90.

It soon became apparent that Connery had been suffering for some time with the cruel blight of dementia. By the end, he struggled to recognise even close family members. Yet, as good friend Sir Jackie Stewart recounted in his obituary, even in those final days Connery had flashbacks to the cinematic career that had spanned six decades.

‘He told me he wanted to watch Sidney Lumet’s *The Hill*, his favourite film in which he’d acted. That role meant more to him than all the Bonds. The next day, he asked me again if I’d like to see it as if he’d never asked me before. And so, we did.’

Connery’s choice of *The Hill* as the performance he loved the most speaks to the dichotomy within an actor who defined the marquee name. He was an actor who became defined by one of *the* primary characters in 20th-century popular culture history, yet always aspired for more. When the world wanted him to be 007, Connery hoped they would seek out Trooper Joe Roberts.

While he might have raised a sardonic eyebrow at his branding as James Bond, Connery will forever be remembered as the defining face of that character on the silver screen. But this obscures a deeper truth about the actor’s impact. Connery was a performer who worked across not just a diverse,

evolving era of cinema but during a social, political and cultural maelstrom. He was as symbolic to the 1960s as Andy Warhol, The Beatles and the Mini Cooper.

Yet his beginnings were inauspicious, with no indication of the life and legacy that would help to shape the cultural conversation for half a century.

*

Though young Thomas Connery, known colloquially as ‘Big Tam’ for much of his early life, was for a time destined as much for a life in professional football, a working man’s trade or even Charles Atlas-style body-building, the boy who would be Sean developed a keen interest in the cinema of his youth.

Connery was born into a tough world, on 25 August 1930, to a hard-working father, Joseph, and devoted housewife, Effie, who had barely ever set foot beyond Fountainbridge, their harsh corner of Edwardian-era Edinburgh, let alone imagined travelling the length and breadth of the world as their son would later do.

His father earned two pounds a week in a rubber factory, while his mother occasionally worked as a cleaner. With money extremely tight, Tam’s first job was a milk round in a horse-drawn cart for four hours before school. ‘I started aged nine at Kennedy’s Dairy,’ he recalled. ‘I worked there every day and would then go to Bruntsfield School.

‘I used to walk to work in the dark; my mother went to work at the same time. And then I used to go straight from there and go to school. And if you got wet, you had to sit in wet clothes at school.’

His brother, Neil, was born in December 1938, and the usual meals of porridge and potatoes had to be stretched four ways. Once a week, if the family had sixpence to spare, Tam would walk to the public baths. When he was 63, he told an interviewer that a bath was still ‘something special’.

‘Fountainbridge evokes so many crazy memories,’ he said. ‘We had gaslights in the stairs and the building had six or seven floors. The flats were small, and some had nine in a family – I don’t know how they all fitted in. There was no hot water in the whole street. We had to go to the swimming baths to get clean – which is why we were all strong swimmers!’

‘In 1940, the schools started to close down because of the threat of bombing from the Luftwaffe and they began moving kids out into the country, evacuating them. I was supposed to go to Australia but one of the ships was sunk, so my father said, “No, you’re not going.” So we were moved out of the schools and into private houses – and I never went back to school. From ’42/’43 onwards we were in people’s houses, and a lot of people didn’t want certain kids in their houses. And I was one of them. For them it was okay for me to deliver the milk but it wasn’t the same to go in and be taught [by them]. I never went back to school. I just left. And it was only later that I regretted how much I’d missed out.

‘The war changed everything. I left school at 13 and it was straightforward economics: you had to do what you could do. I got a horse and cart and I used to deliver the milk and coal and all that kind of stuff. I never had a sense of us being poor. People talk about hardships, but you don’t know anything else. What do you compare it with? And so you get on with it. It was only when I went away and joined the Navy at 16 that I was really conscious of how different everything was in other places. How much better it could be.’

Despite, or perhaps due to, these early privations, he indulged in the fantasy and escapism of cinema as soon as he was able. ‘The cinema was so formative in my childhood,’ he told Michael Parkinson in 2003. ‘You used to see the feature, the second feature, the trailer, the news . . . you could spend a week there! My parents would say, “Go to the pictures,” and they’d get rid of you. You’d come back four hours later.

‘I was limited by circumstance. I had many jobs, but none of them were as a brain surgeon. For people from my background, the target was just to get out.’

Connery would one day become part of the Hollywood establishment, but he would first play a role in enlivening a British film industry that suffered a significant downturn in the post-war period.

In contrast, during the 1940s in which Connery grew up watching the global conflict from afar through the wireless and Pathé news reels, British cinema was experiencing a ‘golden age’, the like of which it has never quite experienced since. Numerous polls over the decades have ranked the films of dynamic directorial duo Powell and Pressburger as among the greatest British films ever made, notably *I Know Where I’m Going!* (1945), *A Matter of Life and*

Death (1947), *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948). David Lean was at his peak with *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *Great Expectations* (1946), Ealing comedies were hitting highs, and J. Arthur Rank formed the Rank Organisation, which would produce, distribute and exhibit a vast amount of seminal British pictures for decades to come. During the war, the Ministry of Information began to deploy cinemas for propaganda, out of which came a range of ambitious filmmakers producing outstanding work, such as Humphrey Jennings, whose short films have resonated through the decades. (Alfred Hitchcock also directed two short films for the Ministry; unfit for military service due to his age and weight, he felt compelled to contribute to the war effort.)

Film historian Michael Brooke summed up the decade in two films released five years apart: 'Laurence Olivier's ambitious big-budget Technicolor *Henry V* [1944] was simultaneously the first great Shakespeare film and a vital contribution to the war effort, with the rousing battle scenes providing a huge morale boost. By contrast, Carol Reed's crepuscular *The Third Man* [1949], set in divided Vienna and with a multinational cast portraying characters primarily looking out for themselves, brilliantly caught the post-war mood, one of feverish, scurrying uncertainty about what lurked around the corner.'

What lurked around that corner, the world Connery came of age into, was a sense of lingering anxiety combined with a tentative hope that the devastating conflicts that had defined the first half of the 20th century would be consigned to history. The fall of Nazi Germany and the end of the Second World War resulted in significant changes for the United Kingdom, with Winston Churchill's wartime coalition being replaced by Clement Attlee's Labour government. They came to power in 1945, ushering in reforms such as the National Health Service that gave the British people access to free healthcare and better living standards on a scale never before seen in ages of nobility, monarchy and, before that, serfdom.

The Scotland, the Britain, in which Connery grew up was transforming in ways unimaginable to his parents and the generations before them.

When Connery unofficially retired from acting after 2003's CGI-heavy action extravaganza *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, it would have been hard to imagine that such a venerable titan of the silver screen started, five decades earlier, in the most unlikely of productions after he travelled to London to take part in a body-building competition with a friend (where he took third place in the Tall Man class, according to most accounts). After three years in the Navy, he was forced out on medical grounds after developing ulcers.

'I was quite skinny,' he recalled. 'Wiry. I started doing bodybuilding.' He worked as a lifeguard at Portobello swimming pool in the summer, and in the winter, 'I worked as a model at the art college in Edinburgh,' he said, 'for which I used to get . . . I don't know, one pound something an hour. You posed for 45 minutes. It wasn't nude; you wore a pouch thing, but that was it. It was very arduous – quite a good discipline. And on the back of that I went down to London for the Mr Universe competition, representing Scotland in the Tall Man's class.'

While in London he saw an advertisement in an evening paper for 'strong looking youths for an interesting job'. When he went to the address in Soho he found himself in an audition room. A company was about to tour *South Pacific* around the country and the producers, keen to feature muscular extras, were looking for chorus boys.

'They were going to go out on tour for a year, which sounded pretty good to me,' he said.

Connery sang a hesitant rendition of 'I Belong to Glasgow'. 'They then asked me to do some handsprings and handstands. And one had to look like an American, which I suppose I could pass for.' He was cast on the spot. He was, as *The New York Times* later recognised, 'back in the Navy again, as one of the chorus of American sailors.' Of that experience, Connery simply reflected: 'That was it. I couldn't think of any job but show business again. I was hooked.'

Connery doesn't recall where the nickname 'Sean' came from, but it was the handle he answered to when he joined *South Pacific*, and when asked how he wanted to be billed, he decided on Thomas Sean Connery. 'They said it was too long. I didn't know if I was gonna stay an actor, so I used Sean – Sean Connery. And it's stayed.'

This was 1953, and Connery was still a decade away from the iconic status afforded him by James Bond and global stardom, but it marked the beginning of the remarkable journey he would undertake from humble Scottish origins to near-mythic status, a journey in which his life and career would parallel and adapt to an ever-changing cinematic and global landscape.

‘I was always very conscious of the fact that I didn’t have a formal education as such,’ Connery remarked. ‘I remember being greatly impressed when I was on tour with *South Pacific* with actors and writers and directors that seemed so brilliant and seemed to know everything – and I thought I was so stupid. As I got older I realised that they weren’t so smart, but it was a great hurdle for me to overcome.

‘I remember being on a break after the first run of *South Pacific* and was playing football in Manchester. As far as childhood aspirations went, it was all about football. In the summer a crowd of us would play football in the Meadows [in Edinburgh] *all day*, run home for a piece [sandwich] and then run back. We built up an amazing stamina.

‘When I was 23, Matt Busby offered me a trial at Manchester United. Robert Henderson, an actor in *South Pacific*, said that 23 was pretty late to become a footballer – by the time you’re 25, if you haven’t done something, you’re over the hill – but as an actor you can work for life.

‘I’d never really considered it before as a career and I talked it through with him. He was the first person in my life that I’d ever had genuine guidance from, a sense of direction.

‘I asked him, “What will I have to do?” And he said, “You’ll have to be a bit of a contradiction to what you are now. You have to be able to look as though you could work in a mine *and* read Proust.” He gave me a whole list of all this stuff to do. So I went, “Okay,” and I went to work with him and went on tour with *South Pacific* for another year.’

‘During the tour, I spoke to this Connery about Ibsen one day,’ said Henderson. ‘He didn’t know who it was and I told him: “Ibsen is a playwright. You should read his plays.” In principle, it was a waste of time: the chorus boys were not hired for their intellect. But a few weeks later Connery had read them and he had come to talk to me about them. I was amazed. I told him that with his physique, if he also had a cultural background, he could have a great career.’

‘Everywhere we went I visited the local library,’ said Connery. ‘And by taking on a year in the libraries of Great Britain, I went through a whole course in literature – Shaw, Shakespeare, *War and Peace*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* . . . a whole conglomerate of books. And coming out the other side, half of them I didn’t understand, but the fact that I had made that jump was very important for my own confidence; it’s a part of your identity. And that’s why I’m not too easy on people who have had a very good opportunity with a very good education who rather dismiss it.’

The post-war domesticity and frugality of 1950s Britain was being eclipsed by the economic boom and social changes rippling across the United States, with the birth of rock’n’roll, the formation of the civil rights movement and the concept of the ‘nuclear family’ living in the shadow of the atomic bomb and Mutually Assured Destruction. Connery was yet to reach the heights of the Hollywood he venerated as a teenager, but he would dabble in the glamour, in films such as *Another Time, Another Place* (1958) alongside Hollywood legend Lana Turner, a far cry from the ‘British New Wave’-leaning existential grit of his supporting role in *Hell Drivers* (1954) or first major starring role as an over-the-hill heavyweight boxer in TV movie *Blood Money* (1957). He remained, during this decade, fully an actor of two worlds: post-austerity Britain and booming, countercultural America.

It was the 1960s when he fused the two together as an icon of British cinema shot through with Hollywood excess. Connery managed to transform Ian Fleming’s dour ‘blunt instrument’ James Bond into Albert ‘Cubby’ Broccoli’s colourful, swaggering symbol of post-colonial confidence. Particularly in *Goldfinger* (1963), the James Bond movie that established the template that the entire franchise would follow for the next forty years, Connery was a towering force of smouldering masculinity. The Swinging Sixties had fully arrived, with class barriers breaking down under Labour’s resurgent socialist rule, and Connery managed to merge his working-class origins with the establishment bulwark that was 007 with effortless style. He now served to epitomise, in movies that dominated the decade, a new, youth-centred, popular culture.

By the 1970s, edging into middle age and now an established star largely abandoning the baggage of Bond, Connery adopted a serious tone in places to

reflect a more introspective era. The optimistic brio of the 1960s was replaced with the shock and disillusionment of the calamitous mistake of the Vietnam War and the subsequent release of the Pentagon Papers that led to the Watergate scandal, seriously damaging faith in American democracy, and in Britain, seismic economic depression as post-war Keynesian thinking gave way to neoliberal insurgency and, ultimately, the rise of Thatcherism. Connery's projects veered from the traditional fare of *Robin and Marian* to the questionable colonial imperialism of *The Wind and the Lion*, through to his intense, hard-boiled performance in *The Offence*, a neo-noir film that served as a response to the 'American New Wave': countercultural, auteur-driven cinema designed for grown-up audiences seeking creative nuance and expecting no easy answers.

Connery nonetheless felt more comfortable in the 1980s, when Reagan's conservative Americana tracked alongside the blockbuster era, in an age of power ballads, vivid fashions and teenage dirtbags as the MTV generation built on what the baby boomers inherited. Having battled through the 1970s to prove his chops as an actor, eschewing the iconic space in pop culture in the process, Connery relaxed into this age of excess. He returned for one last, laconic outing as 007 in *Never Say Never Again*, won his first Academy Award in a scene-stealing turn in Prohibition-era crime epic *The Untouchables*, chewed up the scenery as a Spanish immortal in the Queen-soundtracked stylistics of *Highlander*, and won a BAFTA for his role in the medieval whodunnit *The Name of the Rose* (1986). By the time he sent up his suave heroic persona as a bookish history professor in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Connery seemed to understand his place in a world which had always wanted him to be James Bond *and* Sean Connery.

In his last full decade as a star of the big screen, the 1990s, Connery took his place as an emeritus icon of cinema: a gentleman star ageing gracefully and able to switch between accent-defying roles as a Russian submarine commander one minute and a dogged corporate detective on the other. *The Rock* allowed him to update James Bond to slick 1990s action cinema, while *The Avengers* saw him playing a literal Bond-style supervillain who would not have been out of place three decades earlier. Connery's security amidst crowd-pleasing, charismatic roles and dramatic fare complemented the unipolar safety of the

post-Cold War world, as 'Cool Britannia' allowed for a re-evaluation and nostalgic reverence of the 1960s.

When the illusion of 21st-century security was shattered by the existential trauma of 9/11, Connery seemed to understand that the time had come for a new age. In his final film, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, set in the dying days of Victorian England as shadowy forces beyond the comprehension of his colonial protagonist Allan Quatermain conspire to disturb and unseat the established order, Connery's jaded establishment figure, hauled out of retirement for one last adventure, felt strangely appropriate. 'May this new century be yours, son . . . as the old one was mine,' he tells American gunslinger Tom Sawyer.

Connery passed on two batons here: Quatermain's and his own.

*

The intention of this book is to explore the career of Sean Connery as it spans these decades and look, in detail, at the pictures that defined him and the cultural zeitgeist he, in turn, defined.

While the story of the post-war era is not encapsulated completely in cinema, the complex ebb and flow of these decades is reflected in the careers of actors such as Connery, performers whose roles and influence on culture form part of our collective experience through multiple generations, helping to shape the world we live in today.

This is not the story of Sean Connery's life, or his passing. This is the story of the world he inhabited, the world he left an indelible mark on, and what that story means to us.

ONE



SKIRTING THE NEW WAVE

‘BIG TAM’ CONNERY became an actor in the 1950s, but it was *Sean* Connery who became a star in the 1960s.

Connery entered a post-war cinematic landscape that reverberated with the shock and trauma of over half a decade of total war. His first credited appearance, as an extra in Herbert Wilcox’s Errol Flynn and Anna Neagle vehicle *Lilacs in the Spring*, came in 1954 when Winston Churchill was approaching the end of his second term as prime minister, rationing was still in place, Queen Elizabeth II was only a year into her reign and the towns and cities of the United Kingdom still displayed the ravages of conflict. Yet change was on the horizon, first signalled a year earlier across the pond.

László Benedek’s 1953 *The Wild One* immortalised the image of a youthful Marlon Brando as the leader of a motorcycle gang. Brando’s anti-establishment attitude, leathers and detached cool would pave the way for James Dean’s *Rebel Without a Cause* and the rock’n’roll explosion spearheaded by Elvis Presley that would define the decade and help form the countercultural revolution of the 1960s of which Connery would end up a major, transatlantic symbol.

For now, however, Connery was plying his trade in minor roles on television – such as *Dixon of Dock Green* or *The Jack Benny Program* – and in films of little note or substance – such as *No Way Back*, directed by Montgomery Tully, and Gerald Thomas’s condensed feature *Time Lock*. ‘I never felt comfortable in that sort of BBC situation because I wasn’t part of the old-boy network,’ said Connery of this period. ‘I didn’t go to any of their public

schools, I did not particularly appear “English”, but I could have played hundreds of parts that never came my way.’

The parts that he *did* land were neither showcases for his talent nor cultural touchstones for cinema of the 1950s, and rather positioned Connery as a toiling B-movie presence remarkable for little more than his lithe physique and rough good looks.

‘That was my Too period,’ he said. ‘Whenever I went for a job, I was either too tall or too broad or too Scots or too young or too dark. Nobody wanted to know.’

Things began to change in 1957, however, when he won roles in a collection of films that not only built his profile but began to shape the actor that the world would come to know, and love, as Sean Connery.

Hell Drivers was the first film in which Connery truly makes any kind of mark. A crime drama directed by Cy Endfield, the film is a remarkable who’s who of future stars who would influence British cinema and television in striking ways for decades.

Though Connery was not top-billed for *Hell Drivers*, and indeed the part he played was relatively incidental, co-star Herbert Lom would later recount how Connery would ultimately put the rest of the cast in the shade. ‘We had what was then called a star-studded cast – Stanley Baker, Pat McGoochan, Peggy Cummins, Dickie Attenborough, myself and a few others and, of course, Sean Connery’s name was never mentioned anywhere,’ he said. ‘I saw the picture advertised recently for a rerun on television and it said “*Hell Drivers* . . . starring Sean Connery”. Full stop. I suppose that is a compliment and fame indeed, and those of us who have worked with him are proud of that.’

Connery played Johnny Kates, a lorry driver within a haulage company with ties to organised crime, part of a crew run by Patrick McGoochan’s tough and swarthy Red, but the role is strictly secondary to Stanley Baker’s unwitting protagonist Tom Yately, an ex-con dragged back towards the murky world of crime when he gets a job at the company, despite trying to go straight.

Aged 26 at the time of filming, Connery’s Johnny was a formidable, towering presence; broad-shouldered and taller than most of his compatriots, he conveyed a physicality that was reserved primarily for japes and boorish pranks with the rest of the crew. Connery was graced with relatively few lines in the

film, but he nevertheless stood out amidst the fray to successfully mark his presence on the big screen for the first time.

Later that year, he was cast in *Blood Money*, a British remake of *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, which had been originally released as part of an anthology series of feature-length dramas called *Playhouse 90* on the American network, CBS. The script for *Requiem for a Heavyweight* had been written by Rod Serling, who would subsequently write the hugely influential *The Twilight Zone*, and starred Jack Palance as Harlan 'Mountain' McClintock. McClintock was a washed-up boxer suffering from 'punch-drunk syndrome' – brain damage – that would prevent him from taking part in the only sport he has ever known and escaping from a world embroiled with organised crime after his reckless manager bets the wrong way on a McClintock fight and now owes a fortune to the Mafia. It was a harsh and challenging piece of drama, with added dramatic weight and authenticity given Serling and Palance's previous boxing experience.

After winning Emmy and Peabody awards, *Requiem for a Heavyweight* not only put Serling on the map as a creative force, thereby helping to pave the way for *The Twilight Zone*, it also encouraged him to engage in a British remake a year later, with a televised play renamed *Blood Money* that would go out live on the BBC's *Sunday Night Theatre* programme on 31 March 1957. It would star, almost out of nowhere, Sean Connery.

Though some misgivings existed about Connery's ability to portray a heavyweight boxer in *Blood Money*, he was considered visually appealing to a female audience and his accent, also initially a possible barrier, served as an effective way of depicting the 'punch-drunk' innocence and tragedy of McClintock's character. Though a somewhat clichéd potboiler of a story, heavily influenced by American melodrama, *Blood Money* served to establish Connery as an actor capable of portraying protagonists with a flawed, haunted edge.

Sadly, *Blood Money* was one of the many *Sunday Night Theatre* episodes that did not survive the traditional purges of an era that did not value televised performance as it did celluloid, or cherish the theatrical experience, but Rakoff did, in 2014, reveal that he had recorded, for posterity, the audio of the performance, from which only still images survive. 'I had suddenly thought,' Rakoff told the BBC, 'maybe this is an important piece.'

To the history of television, perhaps not. Yet to the career of Connery, this was formative. It suggested acting talent beyond his physical presence and charisma, both of which he would marry in his cinematic career as a leading man.

Connery may not have ended up working heavily in television during his career, but following this breakthrough he nevertheless took on a number of television roles; these included classic parts such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (in the title role), Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Terence Rattigan's *Adventure Story* as Alexander the Great, as well as appearances in a variety of anthology series which brought together the burgeoning British New Wave of talent with accessible stories for the working-class viewer.

Though he skirted the movement in some of his projects, Connery was never considered a key player in the British New Wave as the 1950s gave way to a very different 1960s – unlike one of the major contemporaries of his era, Richard Burton. Mutual friend Robert Hardy commented on the similarities and differences of the two men: 'I looked at him and thought to myself then how much like Burton he was – not in looks; I think it was that sort of nationalism that they both had, and the retained accent, which crystallised my view. There was something about Sean that reminded me of Rich in that, though they were both from different national backgrounds, they were startlingly similar in their speech and movement.'

'My strength as an actor, I think, is that I've stayed close to the core of myself,' reflected Connery years later, 'which has something to do with a voice, a music, a tune that's very much tied up with my background experience.'

'I always thought a reason Richard Burton was successful was that, even when he played English kings, his tune was unmistakably Welsh. It didn't detract from his quality, it enhanced it, because it meant his emotions could be interpreted and understood. When I was younger, I used to go to the Old Vic to watch Shakespeare, and I couldn't get the actors' emotions or even understand them because their voices were so far removed from normality. When they said, "Haw naw, mah lahd of Buckingham," they might as well have been saying "jungbutpooahbo". It was like a different language.'

Burton was, crucially, considered for the role of James Bond more than once during the 1960s, and was indeed a favourite of Ian Fleming – who

famously took time to warm to Connery as 007 – and it serves as a key comparison simply for how Connery, with the slightest nudge, theoretically could have been the star of John le Carré's brittle *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* in 1965 instead of Burton. In no small part, it is an 'anti-Bond' film in its revelation of precisely how grubby, technical and nihilistic Cold War espionage was in le Carré's world as opposed to Fleming's post-colonial, sexually charged adventures. In advance of the game-changing role of 007, Connery rarely ventured into waters Burton, or another of the 'angry young men' of his ilk, often trod – with one intriguing exception.

The Frightened City (1961), directed by John Lemont, sees Connery in the substantial, if still not top-billed role, of Paddy Damion, a cat burglar drawn into the organised crime world of 1960s London by seedy mobster Harry Foulcher (Alfred Marks), in part to help provide for his crippled partner Wally (Kenneth Griffith), injured in a robbery that Paddy in part feels responsible for. Along the way, Paddy seduces Anya (Yvonne Romain), the moll of slick, ice-cool businessman-turned-gangster, Waldo Zhernikov (Herbert Lom), and is ultimately dragged into a turf war between two villains who have London in their terrified grip, while the dogged, maverick Inspector Sayers (John Gregson) works to bring them down.

With distance, *The Frightened City* might appear cliché-ridden but it was released at a time when British life, particularly in London, was consumed by the glamour of gangster culture. This was the era in which the Kray twins and their 'Firm' ran the East End, and their savage level of organised, criminal brutality sat uncomfortably alongside the glitz of the entertainment world and the burgeoning Swinging Sixties.

In a sense, the glamorisation of 1960s gangster culture exists in step with the changing dynamics of British life. *The Frightened City* fails to have a lingering effect on the viewer by bringing to life the vicious, tawdry glitz of that era, but it does suggest a growing fascination with a criminal underclass who seemed as exotic as they were dangerous. Lom, who also appeared on screen with Connery in a very different role in *Hell Drivers*, has the makings of a Bond villain in Zhernikov – quietly menacing, intelligent, cunning and from 'elsewhere', with a glamorous girl at his side, and pulling the strings of hoodlums lacking his nous.

Connery, as Paddy, is a small-time crook who ultimately retains enough conscience to help bring down the amoral gangster 'supervillains'. It is a role that is as close to his breakout 007 moment as he would get in his pre-Bond career. Many of the visual touchpoints of Bond feature in *The Frightened City* – Connery showing off his physique in the shower after a boxing match before later appearing in a variety of immaculate three-piece and lounge suits, and displaying the balance of athleticism and controlled violence that would become a hallmark of his Bond.

Many a 007 has a signature role that stood out as an unwitting audition for the James Bond role. Roger Moore spent years as a suave master of disguise in *The Saint*; Pierce Brosnan glided his way over television as the smooth Remington Steele; Daniel Craig exuded menace in *Layer Cake*. For Connery, it is hard to see beyond *The Frightened City* as the picture that might have convinced Eon Productions that he was their man. For the first time he melds together the towering strength, and vulnerability, witnessed in *Blood Money* and the vibrant and furious, even raucous, edge of *Hell Drivers* to craft Paddy as a convincing antihero, and a formative, dynamic early 1960s role for Connery as a man of action, as well as substance.

As the pallor of the Second World War hung over the 1950s, so too was British cinema particularly consumed with replaying the conflict in a litany of pictures made across the decade. Films such as *The Dam Busters*, *Sink the Bismarck!*, and David Lean's epic *The Bridge on the River Kwai* helped entrench this, but the era was already providing challenges to the post-war examination of the global conflict. *Another Time, Another Place* (1958) is a curiosity in that regard for many reasons, placing the focus on a female character and her relationship to the man she loves in an unusual context, and looking at the consequences of war through a feminine, at points melodramatic, prism.

Directed by Lewis Allen, *Another Time, Another Place* principally serves as a vehicle for Hollywood starlet Lana Turner, playing Sara Scott, an American reporter working in London at the tail end of the war, in 1945. She falls in love with a British war reporter named Mark Trevor (played by Connery), despite being in a relationship with her American boss Carter Reynolds (Barry Sullivan). As she anguishes over which man to choose, fate intervenes: Mark is killed in an air crash while reporting in Europe, and Sara, taking a pilgrimage to

his hometown in sleepy Cornwall, discovers he was married with a young son to Kay (Glynis Johns). In befriending Mark's widow, Sara must decide whether to tell her the truth about her relationship with Mark.

The great film critic of her age, Pauline Kael, once wrote of Connery: 'Connery looks absolutely confident in himself as a man. Women want to meet him, and men want to be him. I don't know any man since Cary Grant that men have wanted to be so much.'

Another Time, Another Place was the first example of Connery placing his mark on the cinematic landscape in his first signature big-screen role, even though he wasn't afforded top billing as the male co-star. His character dies just under halfway through the film, yet Connery's presence continues to dominate; in part thanks to how Mark Trevor's death serves as the catalyst for Sara's own journey and casts a shadow over the narrative, but also for Connery's instinctive matinee-idol charisma that, while still unrefined, is present in his scenes with Turner. They turn somewhat stilted, melodramatic material into compelling viewing.

'I liked her enormously, I must say,' said Connery. 'But the press made such a thing about the fact that she was 42 and I was 28.'

Connery's on-screen chemistry with Turner turned the concerned head of her then-boyfriend Johnny Stompanato, a bodyguard and enforcer for the influential Mickey Cohen crime family. Convinced the pair were having an affair, Stompanato stormed on set at Borehamwood Studios in England and threatened Connery with a gun, telling him to stay away from her. Connery, according to legend, grabbed the weapon, twisted it out of Stompanato's hand, and laid him out with a single punch. Subsequently, on heading for Los Angeles to film Disney's *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, Connery is reputed to have been advised to keep a low profile as certain mobsters were looking for him to exact revenge for his treatment of Stompanato.

These kinds of salacious details are the stuff of gossip and hard to verify, but they are of interest in the context of Connery and the eras of cinema he spanned. Audiences, retrospectively, have wanted the story of Connery facing down a real-life gangster with iron will to be true to reinforce his depiction of raw masculinity in the wake of his career-defining role as James Bond. Connery might have had the youthful look of a Cary Grant or Rock Hudson but he was

coming of age and had developed an intensity, fire and arrogance that would carry him into Bond and beyond. Not that he was without moments of trepidation on set, as Lana Turner recounts: 'It was one of Sean Connery's first films, and he often missed his marks or forgot his key lights, to the annoyance of the director. Because I was co-producer, I had to work to smooth things out to ensure that the schedule went ahead as planned.' This does not sound like the Connery who would go on to become such a towering presence on and off screen and suggests, as was already becoming apparent, that his dalliance with Hollywood melodrama did not befit the screen persona that lay beneath the surface. Just before his breakout role, another very different film set during the great second conflict of the century would make this crystal clear.

Four years after *On the Fiddle* was released in the UK, and three years after Connery's rampant success as James Bond began in *Dr. No*, *On the Fiddle* was given an American theatrical release under the curious title of *Operation Snafu* and promoted to look and sound more akin to a 007 adventure than an amiable, wartime British comedy. There was a cynicism to this move, of course. By 1965 Connery was established as a signature cinematic name while *On the Fiddle* was an archaic example of wartime, and 1950s, British culture. The 1960s was moving headlong into swinging counterculture, and colourful adventures and bawdy romps such as the *Carry On* films. *On the Fiddle* belonged, aesthetically, to the 1950s and perhaps even earlier.

The film sees Connery given second billing to Alfred Lynch, who played Horace Pope, a wartime spiv – a proto-Del Boy Trotter – who, after falling foul of the law while trying to con army recruits, ends up billeted (by court order) into the forces where he meets the gentle giant Pedlar Pascoe, played by Connery, who Horace (or 'Popey' as Pedlar calls him) drags into his get-rich-quick schemes amidst Second World War trouble and strife. Pedlar, in hindsight, could represent the kind of role that Connery might have been straitjacketed into if *Dr. No* hadn't propelled him into a different stratosphere. Not for the first time, Connery is the tall, strong comic foil for a less charismatic presence in Lynch, who would serve a role-reversal just four years later in *The Hill*, the same year *Operation Snafu* debuted to a somewhat underwhelmed American press. Reaction was typified by Howard Thompson's *New York Times* review: 'This is the old wartime romp about two British pals,

brain and brawn, who goldbrick and profiteer their way through the ranks, fleecing everybody in sight until the inevitable whitewashing climax when the two operators, good boys at heart, turn hero and squash some Nazis. The wonder is that a picture with a story already done, gag by gag, a hundred times is so easy to take. It is, though – flip, friendly, brisk and a wee bit cynical in its take-it-or-leave-it jauntiness. The film is familiar and trifling, but it's perky.'

Connery choosing to play two roles of questionable moral fortitude in *The Frightened City* and *On the Fiddle* serves as an intriguing coincidence. Trevor is a love cheat, albeit a bland one, who pays for his indiscretion with death. Pedlar is a loveable lunk who stands by Pope's side through thick and thin, even into the jaws of death. Released initially in the same year, both pictures stand as testaments to Connery's determination to stand out and be counted as more than just a comedy sidekick, a bland lover written out in the first act, or a rough-and-ready gang member in the company of the New Wave rebels. He wanted to be noticed, and one moment in *On the Fiddle* adds to the building blocks of his path to Bond. In war-torn France, fighting a German platoon in the forests, Pedlar stands and shells the Nazi forces with artillery fire from a powerful machine gun. His expression is stony and fixed. The moment isn't played for laughs. This is a warrior and, for a flicker of a time, a movie star in the traditional sense. It is no wonder *Operation Snafu*, once Connery had 'made it', sought to capitalise on this.

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In 1958, after completing *Another Time, Another Place*, Connery flew to Los Angeles to appear in a film produced by a name that pervaded cinematic and popular culture then and now: Walt Disney.

At the end of the 1950s, Walt Disney Pictures were cresting the wave of changing American social and political attitudes following the Second World War and imbuing the values of the 'nuclear age' into their films and television shows through stories of fairy tales and magical kingdoms, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* being a key example.

Directed by Disney favourite Robert Stevenson, and adapted from the original 1900s stories by H. T. Kavanagh, the film stars Irish actor Albert

Sharpe as the titular Darby O’Gill, the playful old caretaker of a rich man’s estate in a small 19th-century Irish town, who lives with his beautiful, homely daughter Katie (Janet Munro) and spends his time desperately trying to catch Brian (Jimmy O’Dea), King of the Leprechauns, convinced he will lead him to a pot of gold and riches. But when he’s replaced by the handsome and kindly Michael McBride (Connery), Darby plots to capture Brian and gain three wishes to ultimately save Katie from an untimely demise.

Stevenson’s film has, to put it mildly, become something of an artefact through a modern lens. Filled to the brim with Irish stereotypes, from the toothless villagers speaking in broad Gaelic, brawling and drinking in taverns to the quaint gender roles inhabited by Katie and Michael, its mischievous portrayal of Irish myths and legends has ended up subsumed in cliché.

One of the instances of violence directly involves Connery’s character, who otherwise stands as an example of the traditional, stock matinee idol Connery had portrayed in *Another Time, Another Place*, only with even less nuance. Mark Trevor’s moral compromise is absent in Michael McBride, who charms Katie, befriends Darby, fights, and bests the town bully, Pony Sugrue (Kieron Moore), and even sings a jolly Irish tune.

‘I had so little experience singing that it was a nightmare to learn the song and go and make the record – which we had to do before we did the movie,’ recalled Connery. ‘Janet [Munro] and I went down to record it, and a guy called Tutti Camarata was the conductor, and there was this great big orchestra. Fifty-piece or whatever it was. I was at one pedestal and she was at the other, and suddenly it was my turn to sing and nothing came out. So we had to stop. And then after a few stops and starts they realised that I had absolutely no experience of what to do at all. So they realised that they had to take a recording and I would do it against the recording. And then the nightmare came when they said, “Now we’ll do the other side of the record,” which was a song called “The Bally McQuilty Band”, which I had to learn there and then and sing. And with the help of some vodka and from Janet, we did it.’

While on the one hand McBride fills the traditional Disney role of the handsome prince who charms the fair maiden, Connery’s visible brawn is used for violent ends in what acts less as a climax and more of a needless, audience-pleasing flourish.



Connery was at his humorous and charismatic best in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* playing Henry Jones Sr., the father of the eponymous hero (Harrison Ford). *Alamy*