



Monday 02 March at 6:30 pm

AFS Fundraiser

Special extra screening open to the public – all tickets \$20

## Sullivan's Travels

USA 1941

Director, writer: Preston Sturges  
Production co: Paramount  
Associate producer: Paul Jones  
Photography: John Seitz  
Editor: Stuart Gilmore  
Music: Charles Bradshaw, Leo Shuken  
Production design: Hans Dreier, Earl Hedrick  
Costume design: Edith Head

With: Joel McCrea (John L Sullivan), Veronica Lake (The Girl), Robert Warwick (Mr LeBrand), William Demarest (Mr Jones), Franklin Pangborn (Mr Casalsis), Porter Hall (Mr Hadrian), Byron Foulger (Mr Valdelle), Margaret Hayes (Secretary)

90 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. PG medium level violence

Comedy doesn't come much more classic. If you haven't seen it, it's about time you did. – Angie Errigo, *Empire*

Tired of churning out lightweight comedies, Hollywood director John L Sullivan (Joel McCrea) decides to make *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* – a serious, socially responsible film about human suffering. After his producers point out that he knows nothing of hardship, Sullivan hits the road disguised as a hobo. En route to enlightenment, he encounters a lovely but no-nonsense young woman (Veronica Lake) – and more trouble than he ever dreamed of.

*Criterion*

Preston Sturges was a writer-director the like of which we haven't seen since. He was a well-connected anarchist in a system that frowned on such tendencies – unless they made money. Sturges's America was cheerfully corrupt, absurd and frequently unaware of its own ridiculousness, and his films were so high on comic dynamism that you could readily forgive the wayward lip service to logic. His glory days were brief. Within 10 years of his directorial debut, he was worn out, and he died bankrupt in 1959. But in his heyday he made half a dozen comedies as subversive as any now, and a good deal funnier. *Sullivan's Travels* was probably his masterpiece. – Derek Malcolm, *Guardian*

The film has sometimes been read as a defence of Hollywood escapism, but what Sturges is really doing is putting down the awful liberal solemnities of problem pictures and movies with a message. Whatever, *Sullivan's Travels* is a gem, an almost serious comedy not taken entirely seriously, with wonderful dialogue, eccentric characterisations, and superlative performances throughout.

*Time Out London*

One of the most striking aspects of *Sullivan's Travels*, in fact, is the shortfall of the vulgar clowning that the film sets out to defend, contrasted with the continuing astonishment of Sturges's comic banter, the ongoing vibrancy of his crowd scenes (the stock company remains hilarious when pushed into close quarters, so long as they're talking instead of being battered), and the ever-increasing fluency of his camera direction (as in the long but lighter-than-air opening sequence that follows Sullivan, LeBrand, and Hadrian out of a screening room and into an office in a single shot, with them arguing all the while). *Sullivan's Travels* gives you all this, plus the utterly unexpected journeys into shantytowns (in a prolonged and entirely dialogue-free sequence), prison camps, and the black church.

If *Sullivan's Travels* mounts an argument for anything, it's complexity and ambition in filmmaking, as practiced by an artist who is, unlike Sullivan, rather smarter than he lets on. – Stuart Klawns, *Criterion*



Monday 09 March at 6:30 pm

AFS thanks Time Out Bookstore

## Orlando

UK 1992

Director: Sally Potter  
Producer: Christopher Sheppard  
Screenplay: Sally Potter. Based on the novel by Virginia Woolf  
Photography: Aleksei Rodionov  
Editor: Hervé Schneid  
Production designers: Ben van Os, Jan Roelfs  
Costume designers: Sandy Powell, Dien van Straalen  
Music: David Motion, Sally Potter

With: Tilda Swinton (Orlando), Billy Zane (Shelmerdine), Lothaire Bluteau (The Khan), John Wood (Archduke Harry), Heathcote Williams (Nick Greene/Publisher), Charlotte Valandrey (Sasha), Quentin Crisp (Queen Elizabeth I), Dudley Sutton (James I), Thom Hoffman (King William of Orange), Jimmy Somerville (Falsetto/Angel), John Bott (Orlando's father), Elaine Banham (Orlando's mother), Jessica Swinton (Orlando's daughter)

94 mins, Blu-ray. PG sexual references

Rarely have source material, director, and leading actress been more in alignment than in *Orlando*, the 1992 adaptation of Virginia Woolf's novel, directed by Sally Potter and starring Tilda Swinton... Watching *Orlando* some 17 years after its US theatrical run, however, proves a welcome reminder of just how skilfully they marshalled their respective gifts here, how openly they entered into a dialogue with Woolf's playful, slippery text... Skipping across centuries of English history... Woolf refracts her ageless hero(ine)'s fantastical exploits through the archly poker-faced prism of historical biography... Rather than wrestle a more 'relatable' arc from Orlando's journey, Potter takes the novel's state of sly inquisitiveness as her guiding spirit. Her screenplay glides elegantly from situation to situation... surveying the cultural topography of a given period and zeroing in on how much (or how little) changes as she works her way across the timeline. Appropriately, a given vignette's primary concerns are announced in capitalized intertitles: poetry, sex, love, etc.

In the end, though... they play second fiddle to Potter's and Woolf's dominant double vision of gender as both an ever-malleable construction shaped by the specific historical moment, and an enduring method of social control wielded by those in power (ie men). The film bustles with soprano-voiced male singers, unwieldy wigs, and costumes paraded by both sexes, and a memorably commanding Queen Elizabeth I played by Quentin Crisp. A world of pageantry and primping, its members nevertheless divorce the porous boundaries between male and female social codes from the unequal levels of respect bestowed on each. Well-trodden ground, to be sure, and Potter pushes the satire into occasionally broad places... But if Potter's ideas are familiar, her touch is light...

She also seems very aware of the gift she was given in Swinton's magnificent central performance... Consider the waves of surprise, bemusement, and wonder that wash over Orlando's face when she gazes upon her newly female body. "Same person. No difference at all... Just a different sex," she muses to the camera, a hint of transgressive energy mixing with an almost-spiritual calm. In a film that refuses to mash up Woolf's brainy text into prestige-pic mush, Swinton provides a crucial way into Orlando's inner life... She is joined by an exemplary supporting cast... particularly true of Crisp, who transcends man-in-a-dress smirking to get at something fragile and warm beneath Elizabeth's surface imperiousness. ...And when Potter's camera finally rests on Swinton's face (a tear peacefully making its way down her cheek, a Mona Lisa smile on her lips), the synthesis of written character, actorly presence, and directorial gaze haunts the mind and fills the heart in equal measure. – Matthew Connolly, *Slant*