

Cold War medley of greatest Hitch

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Last Updated: 9:54 AM, June 2, 2010

Posted: 12:54 AM, June 2, 2010

Alfred Hitchcock's films and TV shows of the late 1950s and early '60s are examined in the context of the Cold War in the delightfully quirky quasi-documentary "Double Take," which is a lot more fun and less academic than it sounds.

Director Johan Grimonprez, a Belgian-born instructor at New York's School of Visual Arts, adroitly repurposes many of the witty introductions (written by James Allardice) that the filmmaker performed for his "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" TV series. The show made Hitch the best-known director in the world.

This collage of a film also includes unintentionally fascinating commercials from one of the show's sponsors, Folger's coffee. It also features clips from Hitchcock's films of the era such as his minimalist masterpiece "Psycho," which Hitchcock filmed using the crew from the TV series.

All this fantasy is intercut with newsreel and TV clips spanning a period roughly from Vice President Richard M. Nixon's "kitchen debate" with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at a US trade exhibition in Moscow to the Cuban Missile Crisis. (Perhaps the rarest clip shows Khrushchev and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro sledding in the Soviet Union.)

The film also has a fictional narrative thread referred to in the title.

While filming "The Birds" (his last classic film) in 1963, Hitchcock is called away from the set to take a phone call. Instead, he meets an older double of himself -- who claims to be the Alfred Hitchcock of 1980, the year of his death.

"If you meet your double, you should kill him," Hitchcock said more than once -- and doubles are a recurring theme in his films.

Hitchcock is portrayed in these new sequences principally by Ron Burrage, a former waiter turned professional Hitchcock impersonator who is briefly profiled.

Like the Master of Suspense's best films, "Double Take" (which makes great use of Bernard Herrmann's haunting "Psycho" score) is an intellectual puzzle that also works as a thoroughly accessible entertainment.

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