



Presents

# THE FORBIDDEN ROOM



A FILM BY GUY MADDIN AND EVAN JOHNSON

2015 // CANADA // 16:9 // SOUND: 5.1 // RUNNING TIME: 1:58:58

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## **Logline**

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A submarine crew, a feared pack of forest bandits, a famous surgeon, and a battalion of child soldiers all get more than they bargained for as they wend their way toward progressive ideas on life and love.

## **Synopsis**

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THE FORBIDDEN ROOM is Guy Maddin's ultimate epic phantasmagoria. Honoring classic cinema while electrocuting it with energy, this Russian nesting doll of a film begins (after a prologue on how to take a bath) with the crew of a doomed submarine chewing flapjacks in a desperate attempt to breathe the oxygen within. Suddenly, impossibly, a lost woodsman wanders into their company and tells his tale of escaping from a fearsome clan of cave dwellers. From here, Maddin and co-director Evan Johnson take us high into the air, around the world, and into dreamscapes, spinning tales of amnesia, captivity, deception and murder, skeleton women and vampire bananas. Playing like some glorious meeting between Italo Calvino, Sergei Eisenstein and a perverted six year-old child, THE FORBIDDEN ROOM is Maddin's grand ode to lost cinema. Created with the help of master poet John Ashbery, the film features Roy Dupuis, Clara Furey, Louis Negin, Mathieu Amalric, , Charlotte Rampling, Geraldine Chaplin, Maria de Medeiros, Jacques Nolot, Adèle Haenel, Amira Casar, Elina Löwensohn and Udo Kier (and more!) as a cavalcade of misfits, thieves and lovers, all joined in the joyful delirium of the kaleidoscopic viewing experience.

## **Director's Statement**

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We just have too much narrative in our heads, so much we feel our brains are going to explode. With this film, we set out to create a controlled setting, an elaborate narrative network of subterranean locks, sluice gates, chambers, trap pipes, storm sewers and spelunking caves where all the past, present and future films in our large heads might safely blow! Where no one will be hurt by the spectacular Two-Strip Technicolor havoc we'll wreak on the screen, knowing the whole thing will drain away by credit roll. Stay safe and enjoy!"

- Guy Maddin

## INTERVIEW WITH GUY MADDIN, by Jonathan Ball

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**JONATHAN: What can you tell me about your forthcoming feature, THE FORBIDDEN ROOM?**

**GUY:** It will have its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival in January of 2015. It is blessed with some of my favourite actors, Roy Dupuis, Mathieu Amalric, Udo Kier, Charlotte Rampling, Geraldine Chaplin, Maria de Medeiros, Adele Haenel, Sophie Desmarais, Ariane Labed, Jacques Nolot, fantastic newcomer Clara Furey (who is such a star!), and of course my longstanding muse, Louis Negin, WHO HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER. It was shot entirely in the studio, or in many small studios, but, strangely, in *public* studios, over three weeks at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and another three weeks at the Centre PHI in Montreal, where any visitor to those institutions could simply walk up and watch us shoot, watch the movies stars act, at very close range. I think this is by far the best picture I've ever made. It was so strange to script a movie that would be shot in public, without giving away the exact plot to that public. And the movie is in fullest, fuller-than-full colour – more colourful than any other movie ever made. How's that, you ask? I'm feeling very proud now, like I've finally figured it all out, this filmmaking business. Of course I had a lot of help from great collaborators.

**JONATHAN: What is the connection between THE FORBIDDEN ROOM and your ongoing SEANCES project?**

**GUY:** Well, they were both shot in public in Paris and Montreal, but there are big differences between the two. While The Forbidden Room is a feature film with its own separate story and stars, Seances will be an interactive narrative internet interactive that anyone online can visit and play with. It's produced by the sexy new incarnation of The National Film Board of Canada. I never thought I'd use the word sexy to describe the NFB, but it's so amazing now. The Seances site will launch in 2016, after The Forbidden Room is released. I'll describe the workings of Seances next interview, closer to launch date. I can say that the museum installation in which we shot all our footage was called Spiritismes in Paris, and Seances in Montreal, but Seances is the final and only title now. It's an interactive where anyone online can hold "séances" with the spirits of cinema, lost and forgotten cinema. The site has really evolved in recent months. It was going to be title-for-title remakes of specific lost films, but we found as we went that the spirits of many other lost movies, and the spirit of loss in general, haunted our sets and demanded to be represented in front of our cameras. I'm really excited about the results. No one knows, in spite of what might have been previously reported on wikipedia and even in earlier interviews with me, what's finally going to launch, but I feel we have something original on our hands – all this boasting, I'm so sorry! I'm not usually like this. But Noah Cowan, back when he was one of the directors at the Toronto International Film Festival, told me he didn't think it was possible to make art on the internet. That comment, from my dear friend, whom I owe \$60 by the way, reminded me of what people said about cinema when it was starting out, when the movielas and kinetoscopes were considered artless novelties, so I felt the challenge to do this, to make internet art, to really reach everyone out there online who might be inclined to like my stuff. So while I shot the two projects at the same

time, and under the same lost cinema spell, *The Forbidden Room* & *Seances* are two distinct entities, on two distinct platforms.

**JONATHAN: How did the writing process for *THE FORBIDDEN ROOM* and the *SEANCES* project differ from your previous films?**

**GUY:** I started the writing process alone, way back in 2010. I had no idea where I wanted it to go. I just knew I wanted to adapt as short films a bunch of long lost feature films. Almost every director whose career straddled the silent/talkie era has a number of lost films on his or her filmography. Some poor directors have lost almost their entire bodies of work, though they aren't alive any more to grieve over this. I wanted to shoot my own versions, as if I were reinterpreting holy texts, and present them to the world anew as reverent and irreverent glosses on the missing originals. I hired a former student of mine, Evan Johnson, as my research assistant, and he got into the project so much that he soon became my screenwriting partner. He brought on his friend Bob Kotyk to help, and soon the three of us got a lovely chemistry going. It helped that they were young and unemployed and had all the time in the world and little interest in money. Because the project soon got very large. Every day we discovered more and more fascinating things about lost cinema, every day the conceptual tenets of the internet interactive and the feature evolved, became complicated, tangled themselves up in our ardent thoughts, and then suddenly became simple. It was kind of a miracle the way we figured it all out, whatever "it" is! My wife Kim Morgan and I wrote three days worth of shooting material as well – that was a blast. And even the great great GREAT American poet John Ashbery chipped in with an enormous contribution, a screenwriting event that gave me gooseflesh of awe and soiled shorts – shat drawers of awe.

**JONATHAN: At one point, if I remember correctly, you were planning to shoot the *SEANCES* films Factory-style, in a Warhol-like process. How and why did you abandon that idea?**

**GUY:** Well, I never really abandoned the *Seances*. They were called *Hauntings* back in 2010 when I first took a stab at shooting adaptations of lost films, but once completed these were to be installation loops rather than short films. I did complete eleven of them for Noah Cowan, who installed them as projections for the opening of his Bell Lightbox Building, the nerve centre of TIFF. I deputized a bunch of talented young filmmakers I had met in my travels to shoot these *Hauntings* in a factory situation. My writing partner Evan Johnson ran the factory under the job description *Hauntings Coordinator*. He had a business card made up that read, Evan Johnson – *Hauntings* coordinated, *Coordination of Hauntings*. His job was to keep churning out movies with a production team made up of wildly disparate styles and talents hired to direct a bunch of films all at once, all in the same room. This was a chaotic situation. I think before this Evan's biggest professional responsibility had been pouring toxic detergent into Rug Doctor machines. But he kept this wild affair going for a few weeks while I directed *Keyhole*. It was genuinely surreal watching all those silent films get shot, sometimes as many as six at a time, a row-upon-row productivity resembling, I imagine, those porn factories of urban legend. Ah, silent film, post-dubbed porn! I really wish we'd made our *Hauntings* Factory

into the setting of a reality show. It looked and sounded so eerie, hearing almost nothing, while each in its own little circle of light a half dozen films made themselves in an otherwise dark room. We were going to shoot a lot of titles -- a hundred! -- but we were underprepared and definitely underfinanced, so we aborted the project after we had finished enough movies for Noah. Evan was stripped of his Hauntings Coordinator epaulettes – disgraced! But shortly after he became my full partner on these new projects. He is my co-director on both *The Forbidden Room* and *the Seances*.

**JONATHAN: What more can you tell me about your writing process for *THE FORBIDDEN ROOM* and how it differed from your process on previous films?**

**GUY:** It was pretty much the same as with George. We found ideas we liked, argued and wrote. I really like to collaborate. I can't write alone. I'm amazed I can even answer these questions alone.

**JONATHAN: You're a writer, but as a filmmaker you also work with and hire other writers. What do you look for in a writer?**

**GUY:** I don't have that much experience working with other writers, just George, Bob, Evan, Kim and Ashbery. Each is his or her own person, with incredible strengths, and, of course, varying sensibilities and sensitivities. I'm very good at inadvertently hurting people's feelings, so that's always a concern, but collaborators need to give each other the benefit of the doubt. Saving feelings **MUST** come second to the work at hand. I guess with John Ashbery we just let him do whatever he wanted to do because I revere him so much, and what he delivered was so gorgeous. So I guess I look for bright, funny and gracious souls. And I like hard workers because I can be very lazy. The ambitious shame me into working harder. Sometimes they even have to nag me. I never have to nag them.

**JONATHAN: Psychological realism still holds sway, tyrannically, even amongst writers and filmmakers that are not otherwise interested in realism, but you consciously work to create melodramatic characters and situations. Mostly, writers work to avoid melodrama — Why write melodrama?**

**GUY:** I think it's easier to achieve psychological realism with melodramatic methods. Think of the psychological plausibility, or truth, in the greatest old fairy tales, the bible, in Euripides, in a Joan Crawford or Barbara Stanwyck film, in Expressionist painting – in cave painting! There is every bit as much truth in these works as in all of Chekov, and more than in a security camera feed. And surface realism does not guarantee psychological truth, I think it merely misleads the viewer into thinking he beholds reality, when in fact the story beneath the surface might be very dishonest. I've always defined melodrama as the truth uninhibited, liberated, not the truth exaggerated as most people feel. I just watched John Waters' *Female Trouble* – not realistic at all on the surface, but pure truth to its toxically melodramatic core.

**JONATHAN: What ruins melodrama? What should a writer of melodrama work to avoid?**

**GUY:** Same thing that ruins all bad art, I guess: charmless dishonesty. There can be horrible melodrama too. I don't like all of it. I just adore it when it's done when. It feels more universal. I like all sorts of narrative genres, I don't limit my tastes to one brushstroke. I'm a bit puzzled by people who eschew all melodrama. Don't they realize they're watching it in almost everything they view? Especially in reality television, which is usually, but not always, bad melodrama, but also in the straightest most "realistic" movies. There melodrama thrives in disguise. Isn't all art the truth uninhibited to some degree? Sure, some art is the truth mystified, but honesty is usually exposed in some, sometimes inscrutable, way.

**JONATHAN:** What is the key to writing strong melodrama?

**GUY:** I'm not sure, we're still trying to do it. I would imagine even the great screenwriters and directors would admit it's different each time out, that sometimes it works and other times merely dullness results.

**JONATHAN:** I remember having lunch together and you saying that you hoped to one day write a book — at the time you'd just published your second book. You still talk often of wanting to write a book (even though you've now published three) — To what degree do you think of yourself as a writer, or perhaps as a struggling writer, and what you can tell me about your approach to writing?

**GUY:** I am always going to be an aspiring writer, just as I'm an aspiring filmmaker. I don't mean this to sound like false modesty, many people would agree with the "aspiring" part. I just think it's the best attitude to have. And, yes, I dream of someday writing a book, a really slender book, with a double-spaced novella inside. I think if I keep on learning, and get lucky, I just might have one in me. Probably just one.

*The interview first appeared on Winnipeg-based poet Jonathan Ball's website,  
[www.jonathanball.com](http://www.jonathanball.com)*

## **ABOUT THE SEANCES PROJECT**

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The feature film *The Forbidden Room* stems from an ambitious interactive project the National Film Board of Canada, Guy Maddin and Evan Johnson initiated back in 2012 called *Seances*. An installation, a film shoot and an interactive experience, *Seances* took as its inspiration the lost films of cinema history, but the result was an ecstatic haunting: lush, rapid and legion. Maddin's movie-ghosts burn bright, intermingle, and demand that you acknowledge both their absence and their multitude. The project began in 2012 at the Centre George Pompidou in Paris where Maddin shot 18 films, and culminated at the Phi Centre where the public was invited to attend the shoot that lasted for almost two weeks. A true act of cinematic spiritualism featuring several Montreal actors, *Seances* resulted in a total of 12 shorts filmed in front of a live audience over 13 days, from July 4 to 20, 2013. *Seances* will be released in 2016.

## FILMMAKER BIOS

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**Guy Maddin** is an installation & internet artist, instructor at Harvard, writer and filmmaker, the director of eleven feature-length movies, including *The Forbidden Room (2015)*, *My Winnipeg (2007)*, *The Saddest Music in the World (2003)*, and innumerable shorts. He has also mounted around the world over seventy performances of his films featuring live elements – orchestra, sound effects, singing and narration. In early 2016 he and *Forbidden Room* co-director **Evan Johnson** will launch their major internet interactive work, *Seances*, which will enable anyone online to “hold séances with,” randomly combined fragments of canonical lost films remade by Maddin and Johnson on sets installed in public spaces, most notably during three weeks of shooting at the **Centre Georges Pompidou** in Paris and the **Centre Phi** in Montreal. In the summer of 2015 **The Tibor de Nagy Gallery** in New York mounted a two-person show featuring the collage work of Maddin and poet **John Ashbery**. Twice Maddin has won America's National Society of Film Critics **Award for Best Experimental Film**, with *Archangel (1991)* and *The Heart of the World (2001)*. He has been bestowed many other awards, including the **Telluride Silver Medal** in 1995, the San Francisco International Film Festival's **Persistence of Vision Award** in 2006, and an **Emmy** for his ballet film *Dracula – Pages from a Virgin's Diary (2002)*. Maddin is a print journalist and author of three books. He is also a member of **The Order of Canada & The Order of Manitoba**.

*"[Maddin is] the most reluctantly radical and humorously tortured maverick working in the movies today."* -- **John Waters**

*"He belongs in the tradition of obsessional, poetic tale spinners and studio craftsmen such as Erich von Stroheim, F.W. Murnau, Josef von Sternberg, Jacques Tourneur, and Michael Powell, who bend public materials toward private ends and take us on a feverish ride"* -- **Jonathan Rosenbaum**

**Evan Johnson** is a writer and filmmaker living in Winnipeg with his girlfriend and son. He studied film and philosophy at the University of Manitoba and worked at Winnipeg's Rug Doctor chemical bottling plant on Chevrier Blvd. before being discovered there by Maddin in 2009.

### **Phi Films**

Established in 2007 by Phoebe Greenberg and Penny Mancuso, who are also producing partners, Phi Films engages creative minds to find modern solutions to produce, promote, and distribute artist-driven projects. Phi Films is dedicated to producing provocative independent films inspired by the vision of the most cutting edge directors, both emerging and established. Our goal is to produce work that pushes the boundaries with an openness to content that finds a place in both cinemas and art institutions. Since its inception Phi Films has established a strong brand by choosing material which best reflects a vivid, bold aesthetic and compelling storylines.

### **Buffalo Gal Pictures**

Buffalo Gal Pictures is an independent film and television production company based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The company has developed and produced many challenging and diverse projects by creating collaborative relationships with creative talent and building successful co-production partnerships.

### **NFB**

The National Film Board of Canada creates groundbreaking interactive works, social-issue documentaries and auteur animation. The NFB has produced more than 13,000 films and won over 5,000 awards including 4 Canadian Screen Awards, 7 Webby Awards, 12 Oscars and more than 90 Genie Awards. The NFB's award-winning content can be seen at [NFB.ca](http://NFB.ca) and on apps for smartphones, tablets and connected TV.

### **The Phi Centre**

The Phi Centre is a versatile space with venues that adapt to accommodate the event at hand: launches, conferences, seminars, screenings, exhibitions, concerts, performances, interactive installations. It has creative studios and production suites equipped with the latest technology for all artistic needs. It's a multifunctional centre where art can express itself in its various forms. It's a space where people can exchange, learn, discover, launch, shoot, record, and more.

### **Mongrel International**

Mongrel International, an operating division of Mongrel Media, acquires and sells films worldwide. In keeping with the parent company's mandate, Mongrel International focuses on the best in Canadian and world cinema. For 20 years, as a leading independent distributor, Mongrel Media has specialized in bringing carefully curated, culturally relevant and beautifully crafted films to Canadian audiences. Mongrel International is now doing the same for audiences around the world.



## **MAIN CREDITS**

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PHI FILMS presents a PHI FILMS and BUFFALO GAL PICTURES production  
in co-production with THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

Montreal casting ROSINA BUCCI - ELITE CASTING

Paris casting ALEXANDRE NAZARIAN

"The Final Derriere" written, produced, and performed by SPARKS

costume designers ELODIE MARD, YSO SOUTH, JULIE CHARLAND

colour & effects EVAN JOHNSON, GALEN JOHNSON title design GALEN JOHNSON

film editor JOHN GURDEBEKE

production designer GALEN JOHNSON art directors BRIGITTE HENRY CHRIS LAVIS MACIEK

SZCZERBOWSKI construction foreman GEOFF LEVINE

director of photography STEPHANIE WEBER-BIRON, BEN KASULKE (Paris)

supervising producers JEAN du TOIT, LIZ JARVIS, EMMANUELLE HÉROUX

executive producers DAVID CHRISTENSEN, NIV FICHMAN, JODY SHAPIRO,

FRANÇOIS-PIERRE CLAVEL

producers PHYLLIS LAING, GUY MADDIN for NFB DAVID CHRISTENSEN

producers PHOEBE GREENBERG, PENNY MANCUSO

written by GUY MADDIN, EVAN JOHNSON, ROBERT KOTYK

additional writer KIM MORGAN "How to Take a Bath" written by JOHN ASHBERY

co-director EVAN JOHNSON director GUY MADDIN

produced with the participation of TELEFILM CANADA

and with financial investment from MANITOBA FILM & MUSIC

and SODEC

and in association with PHI CENTRE, GEORGES POMPIDOU NATIONAL PUBLIC CULTURAL  
ESTABLISHMENT and KIDAM

## **CAST ( IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**

Louis Negin

Graham Ashmore

Angela La Muse

Kimmi Melnychuk

Charlotte Rampling

Alex Bisping

Gregory Hlady

Kent McQuaid

Roy Dupuis

Melissa Trainor

Kyle Gatehouse  
Victor Andrés Trelles Turgeon  
Neil Napier  
Clara Furey  
Noel Burton  
Marie Brassard  
Darcy Fehr  
Pamela Iveta  
Udo Kier  
Catherine Treskow  
Geraldine Chaplin  
André Wilms  
Romano Orzari  
Céline Bonnier  
Slimane Dazi  
Jacques Nolot  
Caroline Dhavernas  
Paul Ahmarani  
Judith Baribeau  
Victoria Diamond  
Mistaya Hemingway  
Mathilda Ekoe  
Lewis Furey  
Éric Robidoux  
Karine Vanasse  
Sienna Mazzone  
Kathia Rock  
John Churchill  
Matthew Comeau  
Alexandre Skeret  
Sherpa Macilu  
Jean-François Stévenin  
Mathieu Amalric  
Amira Casar  
Vasco Bailly-Gentaud  
Maria de Medeiros  
Christophe Paou  
Andreas Apergis  
Sophie Desmarais  
Arthur Holden  
Ariane Labed  
Adèle Haenel  
Marie-Sophie Roy  
Anthony Lemke

Victoire Dubois  
Elina Löwensohn  
Kim Morgan  
Luce Vigo

## FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

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2015 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL – Official Selection

2015 BERLINALE – Opening Night, Forum

!F Istanbul 2015

Las Palmas 2015- **Special Prize of the Jury**

Vilnius 2015

Hong Kong 2015

Amsterdam Imagine 2015

Copenhagen CPH PIX 2015

Budapest Titanic 2015

Bucarest 2015

Skopje 2015

Riviera Maya 2015

Barcelona Auteur 2015

Jeonju 2015

Bildrausch Filmbasel 2015- **Bildrausch Ring of Film Art**

Sydney 2015

Cluj Transilvania 2015

Karlovy Vary 2015

Revelation Perth 2015

Jerusalem 2015

Era New Horizons 2015

Seoul Museum of Modern Art 2015

New Zealand 2015

Brisbane Queensland 2015

Melbourne 2015

Two Riversides, Poland, 2015

Locarno International Film Festival

L'Etrange (Paris)

Toronto International Film Festival

New York Film Festival

London Film Festival BFI

Festival de Nouveau Cinema

Lausanne Underground 2015

Mostra de sao Paulo 2015

Mumbai 2015

Taipei Golden Horse

Turin 2015