"DIAL 'M' FOR MURDER": a 3-D masterpiece hardly anyone saw in relief

by Denis Pellerin



Illustration 1. Side-by-side stereoscopic still showing the beginning credits of Hitchcock's 1954 *Dial M for Murder* movie.

This year (2024) marks the seventieth anniversary of the release of a 3-D masterpiece, "Dial 'M' for Murder," produced by Warner Brothers and directed by the great Alfred Hitchcock. The film is well known in its flat version and has even been hailed as one of the top ten greatest mystery films ever made despite his director being so strangely dismissive about it. Few people, however, are aware that it was a phenomenal television and stage success before it hit the big sreen or that it was originally shot in 3-D. I was fortunate to attend a 3-D projection of Hitchcock's Dial M on 10 October 1997 at the Louvre Museum and my deep interest in this film, which I already knew and loved as a "flattie," can be traced to this day, when I donned polarized glasses and watched it for the first time as it had been intended to be seen. Needless to say I bought the 3-D blu ray version of it as soon as it was released some fifteen years later. I have seen many 3-D movies since, at the cinema or on blu ray, and I have been disappointed in most of them on account of the way 3-D is nearly always used as a gimmick to scare the viewers and/or throw things at their faces. 3-D is not a gimmick and can be used effectively to tell a story. Few people have understood this in the 1950s, 1980s, or even 2000s. Hitchcock did, in a big way, and since I am yet to see anything as perfect as his 3-D version of *Dial M for Murder*, I thought it would be a good thing on this anniversary year to do some research on the movie, its origin, the way it was planned and shot, and more especially why it did not prove the 3-D success it should have been when it was released seventy years ago. This research, as is generally the case, has proved a wonderful adventure and has revealed many interesting facts I was definitely not aware of when I first started.

The 1952 televised drama and stage play

It all began around 1950 when a young man in his thirties, Frederick Knott, shut himself in a cottage next to his parents' house at Ifley, Sussex, to try his hand at writing his first ever play. According to what he said to a reporter from *The New York Times* in 1961, his inspiration was the bang of a gun going off in an old oak-panelled English mansion. He worked for eighteen straight months on his manuscript, barely leaving the place, even for meals, his mother depositing food at his door so as not to disturb his writing. When he came out of his self-imposed retreat the plot had evolved miles away from the original gun shot mentioned and *Dial M for Murder* was born.



Illustration 2. Photograph of Paul Knott from a 1953 theatre programme. Author's collection.

Frederick Major Paull Knott came into this world in Hankow, China, on 28 August 1916, the second child of two Quaker missionaries, Margaret Caroline, née Paull, and Cyril Wakefield Knott, who had married on 6 April 1911 at the Consulate General, Hankow, and had been blessed with a daughter, Jean Midwood, on 1 June 1913. Soon after the birth of their only son, however, the Knotts sailed back to Britain on board the *Atsuta Maru* and landed at the London docks on 18 April 1917, right in the middle of First World War.

Young Frederick was first educated at Sidcot School, then at Oundle School, Northampshire, before going to Downing College, Cambridge, to read law. While there his skills with a racquet made him a member of the Oxford-Cambridge tennis team. Had not the Second World War started on 3 September 1939, chances are he would have played at Wimbledon. Instead of which Knott served in the British Army Artillery as a signals instructor from 1939 to 1946. By the time he was discharged he had risen to the rank of Major but was not in the same shape tennis-wise and had to be content with playing squash as a hobby.

Although Frederick Knott emerged from his parents' cottage with a play, the hardest part was yet to come: finding a theatre where it could be staged. A journalist from the *Buckingham Advertiser* wrote in 1954 that "he could have papered the walls with rejection slips he received from theatre managements," [1] but this was some journalistic exaggeration as he actually received seven rejection letters. That was enough, however, for him to try reaching a new kind of audience: television viewers.

Television had been around in Britain since 1926 when the first demonstration of a transmitted moving image was made, but it was not until ten years later (November 1936) that the world's first regular television broadcast was started by the British Broadcasting Corporation, better known by its initials, BBC. Available only to owners of television sets in the London area, the four hours of programmes were transmitted each day from Alexandra Palace with a resolution of 405 lines. The war put an end to the transmissions and by the time Knott handed his play there were still relatively few television sets in Britain and a rather limited audience, although, as you may have seen on photographs of the time, watching TV then, on a tiny screen, was often a family or even neighbourly affair. The sale of television sets was to take off in a big way the following year, 1953, with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, but too late for Knott's drama which, after being accepted as part of the "Sunday Night Theatre" series was programmed for March 1952 and was first mentioned in a local newspaper, the *Crawley and District Observer*:

Television thriller

I learn that a play by an Ifield author is shortly to appear on Television. It is, as the title, "Dial M for Murder," implies, a thriller, and the author is Mr. Frederick Knott, of Little Balgair, Langley-lane, Ifield.

A 30-year old bachelor, Mr. Knott came to live at Ifield three years ago. He is a writer of film scripts, and this is his first play. I hope it will prove a success.

Those lucky people with television sets should make a note of the date when it will be screened – Sunday, March 23, and Thursday, March 27.

Mr. Knott has made many friends since he came to live in this disctrict. He is a member of the Ifield Squash Club, but his main hobby is the somewhat unusual one of hatching goslings for which there is a great demand at the present time. [2]



Illustration 3. Advertisement for a new television set by English Electric. Published in *Picture Post* on 28 February 1953. Author's collection.

The TV play was advertised in *The Sketch*, five days later, as part of the "Highlights of the Next Fortnight." This was the first mention of the cast, producer and director.

WATCHING BRIEF

Highlights of the Next Fortnight

[…]

Will the culprit be found out? That is the question which Frederick Knott poses in his play *Dial M for Murder*, which will be seen on March 23 and 27. Leading parts played by Elizabeth Sellars, Emrys Jones and Raymond Huntly. Production: Ian Atkins; direction: Julian Amyes.

On the following day, the magazine *The Stage*, published a slightly longer piece which told the prospective viewers what they could expect and what made this particular play different from usual murder mysteries:

"Dial 'M' for Murder"

Elizabeth Sellars, Emrys Jones and Raymond Huntley will take part in "Dial 'M' for Murder," a new play by Frederick Knott, to be directed by Julian Amyes and produced by Ian Atkins on March 23 and 27. This is a murder play in which every loophole has been stopped up, so viewers who are interested in this form of writing can pit their wits against the writer's and watch points. It is not a "whodunnit"; the interest lies in guessing whether the culprit will be found out, and, if so, in what way. [4]



A week later, buyers of and subscribers to the *Radio Times*, caught their first glimpse of a scene from the play, discovered the rest of the cast — which consists of only five main characters — the names of the protagonists, as well as a little more information about the plot. all from the pen of Lionel Hale,

Frederick Knott's televised drama was first broadcast on Sunday 23 March 1952 at 8.30 p.m. and proved an instant hit with the public. It also got rave reviews in the press despite some technical glitches which, however, had nothing to do with the play itself.

Dial 'M' for Murder, the main play of the week on television, was much better than the average thriller. The personalities of the characters were carefully built up and their actions were feasible in the given circumstances. Elizabeth Sellars looked appealing and palpably innocent of the crime which her husbands tried to pin upon her. Emrys Jones, as the fortune-hunting husband, was exact in every glance and gesture as he was finally cornered by the astute detective played by Raymond Huntley [5]. Technically the production creaked a little, with various unorthodox views of the "works." [6]

Illustration 4. Issue 1480 of the *Radio Times* for March 23-29 1952, Television Edition. The page showing a photo of the TV drama and a summary of the plot. Author's collection.

And how was this televised play received? There and then I can only speak for myself, since I saw it alone in a tiny room in this newspaper office. There was, in short, even less "audience reaction" than most tele-viewers normally get.

But next morning I had not left my own street when I overheard one market-salesman saying to another in uninhibited tones: "Did you see the TV play last night – *smashing* 1"

Five minutes later my barber informed me that Dial M for Murder was a *corker*; and in the course of the same morning a young person behind a counter – a young person for Manet to paint – apprised me during an eulogium on the same play that Them who hadn't TV didn't know what they were missing. [7]

There was no telling back then how many people were watching TV at a particular time (we don't even know for sure how many television sets were around as the numbers we have are for Radio and TV licences combined) but after such good publicity there must have been more people sitting in front of their tiny screens when the televised drama was repeated on Thursday 27 March at 7.30 p.m. The reaction of the tele-viewers and the reviewers was much the same as the first time and the journalist from *The Sketch* could write one week later that it was "one of the best things television has even done" and gave full credits to Frederick Knott for a gripping "I know-who-dun-it-but-will-he-get-away-with-it?" [8]

Things could have stopped there had not one of the tele-viewers been talent-spotter Bill O'Brien who saw *Dial M for Murder* on television, found it exceptionally good and, after getting the agreement of film director and producer Sir Alexander Korda, bought the film rights from the author for £1000. The latter sum might have sounded like a lot of money for the first-time playwright who had only been paid £150 for his televised drama, but was nothing compared to the £26,785 Korda got when he later sold the rights to Warner Brothers.

Knott's streak of good luck did not stop there, however, for, among those who saw the television performance was also promoter of stage shows James P. Sherwood, of Leeds. At the time Sherwood had put on another play for a short tour which was due for production at the Westminster Theatre in London. This play, however, was not meeting its commercial expectations and, after Sherwood had checked that Knott's drama was available for the stage, he asked Jevan Brandon Evans to procure it for him, cancelled the other production, and got Emrys Jones to reprise the role of the murder-planning husband he had played on television in *Dial M for Murder*. Another member of the original cast, Olaf Pooley, joined him on stage in the role of would-be murderer Captain Lesgate, but the parts played on the small screen by Elizabeth Sellars (Sheila Wendice), Basil Appleby (Max Halliday) and Raymond Huntley (Chief Inspector Hubbard), were given respectively to Jane Baxter, Alan MacNaughtan and Andrew Cruikshank.

After only three weeks' rehearsal Frederick Knott's thriller opened at the Westminster theatre on 19 June 1952, a mere eighty-four days after its second and last television broadcast. The play became an instant hit with the spectators, critics and reviewers alike. Even though one of the latter advised potential theatregoers to "take your brains with you if you go to see it," [9] everyone acknowledged that something like this, "the first television drama to make the London stage," as *The Tatler* described it, had not been seen in years, decades even.

"The critic must abandon his functions in relation to these five players and also to the director, John Fernald," wrote the reviewer for *The People* [10], who added: "It is difficult to see how the acting or the production could be bettered." His colleague from the *Kensington News and*

West London Times went as far as admitting what every playwright and stage manager has dreamed of reading one day, namely that "the production is faultless, in fact there just isn't anything wrong with the play at all." [11] A journalist from the London Daily News prophesied, after the very first night, "this play will fill the Westminster for at least a year." [12] He was right in his estimation, and Knott's mystery play ran at the Westminster for fifty-three weeks! It was seen in July by none other than the Princess Royal, the future Queen Elizabeth II, who came to the theatre with a party of seven other people.

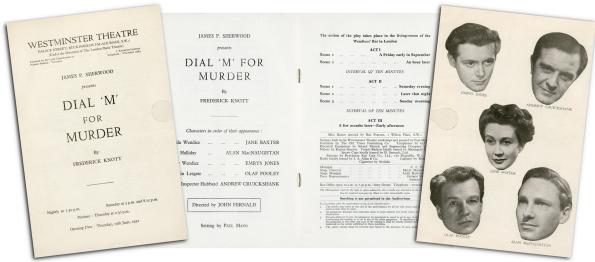


Illustration 5. Theatre programme for the play *Dial M for Murder* at the Westminster Theatre with Emrys Jones as Tony Wendice. Author's collection.

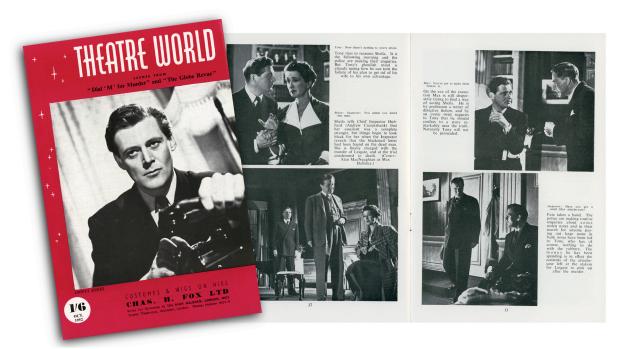


Illustration 6. Cover of the magazine *Theatre World* (October 1952 issue) showing Emrys Jones as Tony Wendice and photos of the Westminster Theatre production of *Dial M for Murder*. Author's collection.

Good fortune was not done yet with Frederick Knott. British Shakespearean actor Maurice Evans [13], who was a huge stage favourite in America but had come back to Britain for the first time since 1935 to shoot some scenes for the film *Gilbert and Sullivan* [14], went to the

Westminster theatre, saw the play, and was so taken with it that he arranged to have it staged on Broadway with himself in the lead part. As a journalist from *The Stage* remarked in September 1952: "It must surely be a record for an author to have his play televised, bought as a film, staged in the West End, broadcast and produced in New York, all in the space of less than six months." [15]

Dial M for Murder opened on Broadway, at the Plymouth Theater, on 29 October 1952. It was, however, premiered at the New Parsons Theater, Hartford, Connecticut, from 9 to 11 October and subsequently performed in Washington DC for two weeks, beginning 13 October, as a Pre-Broadway Tryout. Maurice Evans shared the stage with two other British actors: Anthony Dawson as Captain Lesgate and John Williams as Chief Inspector Hubbard. The part of Sheila Wendice, which was played in London by Jane Baxter, was held by Viennese actress Gusti Hubert, the name of her character being changed to Margot for American audiences. Two American actors, Richard Derr as Max Halliday and Porter Van Zandt as police detective Thompson, completed this international cast.

On Thursday 16 October a journalist from *The Stage* wrote that "*Dial M for Murder* has opened successfully in Washington, with Maurice Evans and Gusti Huber in the chief parts. Critics prophesy a long Broadway run." Once again the prophecy turned out to be right. The play ran for five hundred and fifty-two performances, first at the Plymouth Theater, then at the Booth Theater where it was relocated from 11 January to 27 February 1954.



Illustration 7. Playbill for the American premiere of *Dial M for Murder* at the New Parsons Theater. A total of four performances were given there from 9 to 11 October 1952. Author's collection.

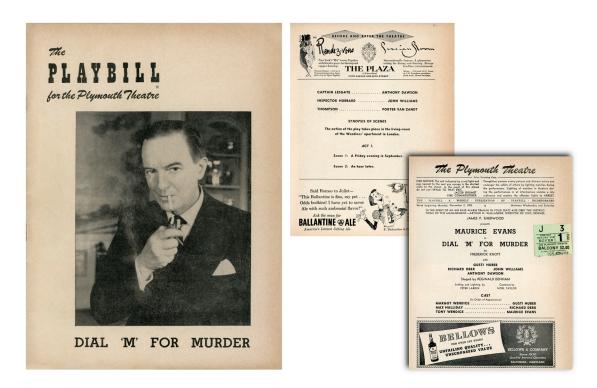


Illustration 8 Playbill for the Broadway production of *Dial M for Murder* at the Plymouth Theater. Author's collection.



Illustration 9. Set for the Broadway production of *Dial M for Murder* at the Plymouth Theater. Author's collection.

New Yorkers, however, were not the only ones who were given a chance to applaud Frederick Knott's drama. On 26 October 1952, three days before the Broadway premiere, the play opened at the Wilbur Theatre, Boston, Massachussets where it ran until 17 January 1953. It was then performed by the same company at the Cass Theater in Detroit (19 to 24 January 1953), the Harris Theater in Chicago (25 January to 16 May 1953) and at La Jolla Playhouse (25 to 30 August 1953). The Boston cast was headed by Richard Greene as Tony Wendice [16]. His fellow actors were Faith Brook as Margot Wendice, Mark Roberts as Max Halliday, Ralph Clanton in the part of Captain Lesgate and Alan Napier in the role of Inspector Hubbard. [17]



Illustration 10. Playbill for the road production of *Dial M for Murder* with Richard Greene in the lead part. Wilbur Theater, Boston. Author's collection.



Illustration 11. Playbill for the road production of *Dial M for Murder* with Richard Greene in the lead part. Harris Theater, Chicago. Author's collection.

Before the year 1952 was over Frederick Knott's play celebrated its 200th performance at the Westminster on 11 December. The event was announced in the press and *The Stage* confirmed that "Jean Lodge, Derek Bond, Ellis Irving, Andrew Crawford and Martin Case are to visit Germany in the play, which is to be toured under the Combined Services' Entertainment Scheme. This will be the first London success to be played concurrently before the troops in Germany. [...] The *Dial M For Murder* tour will open at Bad Oeynhausen on January 5, and within 28 days will play 26 centres, including Berlin. There will be two free days during the tour, one of which will give the company an opportunity to explore Berlin." [18]

The interest in the play did not diminish the following year. Knott's detective drama was adapted into French by Roger Féral [19] and opened in Paris, at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs on 28 March 1953 under the title *Crime Parfait* (Perfect Crime) with Bernard Blier in the leading part. [20]

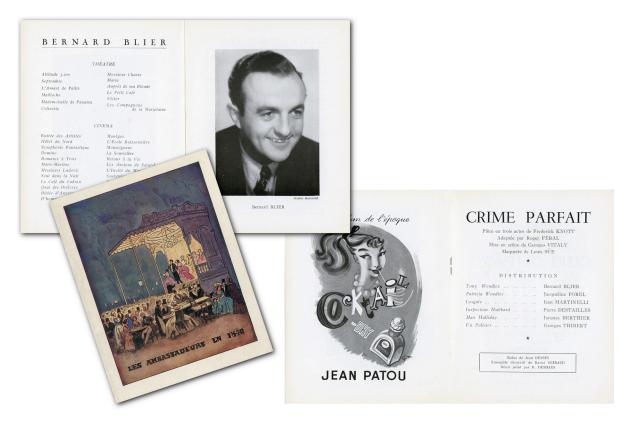


Illustration 12. Some pages from the programme of the French version of Frederick Knott's drama, *Crime Parfait*, at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs, Paris, France. Author's collection.

Around the time *Crime Parfait* opened in Paris British actor John Williams got an Antoinette Perry Award (better known as a Tony) for best supporting actor in the Broadway production of *Dial M for Murder*. A few days later the press announced that author Frederick Knott had been awarded the much coveted "Edgar," the first non-American author ever to be such honoured by the Mystery Writers of America Association.

The British play, "Dial 'M' for Murder," by Frederick Knott, which is at present running in both London and New York, has won the Edgar Allan Poe award of the Mystery Writers of America Association. The award was made for outstanding achievement in the field of mystery or crime writing. Will Oursler, Vice-President of the

Association, stated, "It is the first time; such a special award has been made to a foreign play, and the second time only that it has been given to a play of any sort, the other occasion being the 'Edgar' for Sidney Kingsley's 'Detective Story.' "The award takes the form of a statuette. [21]

Nearly on the same day the award was anounced it was revealed *Dial M for Murder* was to be turned into a 3-D Movie by Warner Brothers. "*Dial M* will be directed by Alfred Hitchcock," wrote a journalist from the staff of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "In this, his first 3-D film, Hitchcock will employ all the tricks acquired in his long distinguished career – years during which he learned that 'the only things hard to photograph are children, dogs, ships, planes, and Charlie Laughton'" [22]

Other announcements in the following days included the opening of Knott's play at the Comedy Theatre, Melbourne, Australia, on 29 April 1953 [23], and the soon-to-be-coming John Hanau production of "the first German-language version of *Dial M for Murder* at the Municipal Staedtebuehnen in Luebeck." [24]



Before we turn to the 3-D film just a few words about the continuing success of the play. Knott's drama was not only a hit in London, New York, Paris and Melbourne. It proved equally successful in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Johannesburg, Amsterdam, Berlin, Nairobi, Madrid, etc. In the five years that followed its first performance, it was produced in no fewer than thirty countries! When it was removed from the stage of the Westminster Theatre on 27 June 1953, it went on tour throughout Britain and successively visited Nottingham, Brighton, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Streatham, Liverpool, Aldershot, Peterborough, Cambridge, etc. The original cast of the road company included two actors from the Westminster production. namely Emrys Jones and Andrew Cruikshank, who were assisted by Sheila Burrell (Sheila Wendice), Richard Grant (Max Halliday) and Edward Dane (Lesgate). Over the months, however, changes were made in the cast, which means that when it played at the Embassy, Peterborough, in March 1954, the actors were Rosaline Haddon, Richard Grant, Donald Price, Guy Standeven, and Campbell Copelin. In June 1954 the play was released for repertory which allowed it to be performed by resident companies. It is still produced regularly to this day and proves as popular with the public as it was when first released.

Illustration 13. Poster for the production of Dial M for Murder for the Repertory Company at the Theatre Royal, York, in August 1954. Author's collection.

The 1953 3-D movie

Stereoscopy, although discovered in 1832, only started becoming popular towards the end of the 1851 London Great Exhibition, but even then only the wealthy could afford to buy the stereoscopic daguerreotypes that were made for the first lenticular instruments. As early as 1852, however, attempts were made to add movement to the illusion of depth created by the two flat perspectives of the stereoscopic pairs. Two persons worked at the same time on two different ideas. The first one, Antoine Claudet, photographed, in relief, the two extreme phases of a movement – a man tipping his hat or putting a cigar in his mouth and taking it out again, a seamstress putting a needle through some fabric and pulling it, etc. The resulting images were stereoscopic for the most part but also contained the movement, which could only be perceived when the observer closed one eve then the other in rapid succession or used some kind of shutter. Wheatstone, the other person working on the same project, imagined using Joseph Plateau's phenakistiscope and contacted the inventor himself, who, in turn, got in touch with French optician Louis Jules Duboscq who put a series of twelve top and bottom photographic images on the surface of the phenakistiscope disc and designed a stereoscope using two small mirrors, one looking downwards and the other upwards. When the disc was spinned retinal persistence created a smooth impression of movement which could be observed, in full depth, through the oculars of Duboscq's "Bioscope". Few examples of Claudet's and Wheatsone's methods from the 1850s survive but the former's process was revived in 1860 by two French photographers, Charles Paul Furne and Alexis Omer Tournier. who published, on paper, over forty "Épreuves à mouvement" (literally Moving Images), a sample of which can be seen below.



Illustration 14. One of Furne and Tournier's "Épreuves à mouvement". Author's collection.

Wheatstone did work on a slightly different approach in the early 1860s, using a normal stereoscope on top of a revolving drum carrying a strip of paper on which thirteen stereoscopic pairs were glued. Only one of the three surviving strips, the one featuring a steam engine in motion, works. The other two, which show a soldier drilling and would have been the very first examples of a living "actor" in stereoscopic motion, unfortunately don't. The soldier, or the photographer who took the thirteen stereoscopic pairs, had no clear idea of what constitutes smooth movement, and ended up with thirteen poses with next to no connection one to the other.

Moving fast forward, we now come to the 1920s and to that landmark in the history of 3-D motion pictures, 27 September 1922. On that day, the first stereoscopic feature film, The Power of Love, was projected in front of exhibitors and journalists at the Ambassador Theater, Los Angeles. Accounts differ as to the number of reels the film had (five or six apparently) or whether was filmed and watched through anaglyph glasses with red and blue or red and green filters. Commentators agree, however, that the projection was a real success. The film had been made using a stereoscopic camera invented by Harry Kenneth Fairall and was preceded on the screen by a documentary on Yosemite filmed with the same instrument. "Fairall's camera has two lenses, distance apart of human eyes," wrote the reviewer from the Los Angeles Evening Post-Record. "One photographs through a red lens, the other through a blue lens. Two films are superimposed in projection, and spectators wearing a red glass over one eye, a blue glass over another, obtain the stereoscopic effect." [25] The same journalist was struck by the fact that "through the spectacles the screen disappears. There seems to be a rectangular window at the end of the auditorium, and just outside it may be Hong Kong or Paris." [26] One of his colleagues from *The Los Angeles Times* described the experience as making you feel "you are right inside the picture with the characters", [27] while another one, from The Kamloops Telegram, got even more enthusiastic and lyrical. "When so equipped [with your red and blue or red and green spectacles]," he wrote, "you are apt to forget that you are looking at a picture because the scenes seem so real and lifelike that you imagine you are seeing the living characters enacting their various roles. The picture takes on the aspect of real life and the audience experiences the effect of gazing through an open door upon the real panorama of nature and life itself instead of visualized shadows on the screen." [28]

projected. This inventor has been working on roccess and now has 20 odd patents pending coverarious features of the apparatus necessary for the ang and showing of such films. In the main, his sai is largely the application of the principles of extereoscope to motion picture film production. e camera used in the making of the Fairall steriescope to cannot be used in the making of the Fairall steriescope in the contains two mechanisms propelled by rank shaft. It also has two film magazines. The anisms expose simultaneously two frames of film which two lenses fimpress the image then in front e camera. In addition to perfect synchronizing anisms, the most important features of the camera. In These are placed as far apart as the lenses.

rs, heme for finishing the positive prints, which in projecting pictures upon the screen at the provides that they shall be printed in the usual treme care is necessary to insure perfect pro-The same printer must be used for each com-

Special type of camera with two lenses and two negatives for making stereoscopic motion pictures

plementary print without an alteration of the breadth of a hair in the framing device. The print from the red filtered negative is tinted red and that from the green is tinted green. The developing, washing and drying (these are the restments of the film in the order they are given) must be given or the film in the order they are given) must be given or the film in the order they are given must be given or the film of the celluloid and the drying causes, expansion and contraction. The solution and water used for both must be of the same temperature or the expansion and contraction will not synchronize when projected. Two projection machines of any of the standard makes are required for showing the picture. These are interlocked in operation by a simple attachment and two films are projected on the screen at the same spot. To the naked eye, the projected picture contains an out of focus image with fringes of red and green around and through the lungers shown in the picture. This projected picture is corrected for the eye by the see the red and green spectacles. The projected motion picture when viewed through the colored spectacles having neutralized the complementary colors of the projected picture. The producer plans to furnish to all patrons an individual pair of spectacles, the film laborations of the projected picture of the film laboration of the projected picture of the projected picture. The producer plans to furnish to all patrons an individual pair of spectacles, the projected picture of the complementary colors of the projected picture of the project picture of the proj

The film itself. unfortunately considered lost, was not, however, presented to the public in 3-D, despite the success met with viewers from the profession, a lot of whom, who had not been able to attend on account of the limited seating capacity of the theater, even requesting a second preview. It reappeared as a "flattie" under the title "Forbidden Lover" the following year. [29]

Illustration 15. Page from the February 1923 Issue of the Scientific American devoted to the Stereoscopic Movie The Power of Love, with a photo of the camera used by Fairall to shoot the film. Author's collection.

Jumping fast forward again we now come to the 1950s and the threat television was posing to the movie industry. Spectators were deserting the cinemas and obviously preferred to stay at home and watch TV programmes there. The industry's response to avoid death by television and attract crowds back to the theaters was twofold: wide screen and 3-D. By then anaglyph glasses, which are all right for a short time but prove taxing for the eyes after a while on account of the difference in contrast between the two filters, had been replaced by polarizing ones. Invented in the late 1920s by Edwin H. Land, polarizing sheets had been used for 3-D glasses as early as the mid-1930s. The most famous example of their early use is the short made by Chrysler during the 1939 World Fair. To allow the spectators to watch in 3-D the ten-minute long stop motion animation entitled *In Tune with Tomorrow*, which promoted Chrysler's latest model, the Plymouth Sedan, polarising glasses in the shape of the car advertised were handed over, the filters being stapled where the headlights were meant to be. The black and white short, which took nine weeks to shoot, proved so popular that a colour version was made the next year under the title *New Dimensions*. It was reintroduced in September 1953 by RKO Pathé as *Motor Rhythm*.

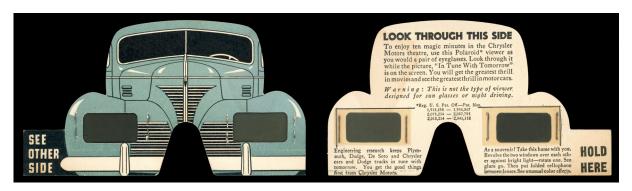


Illustration 16. Sample of the polarising glasses (front and back) that were handed over at the 1939 World Fair in New York to watch the stop-motion short *In Tune with Tomorrow*. Author's collection.

The first American 3-D feature film [31] was written, directed and produced by radio legend Arch Oboler who used the Natural Vision process developed by Milton and Julian Gunzburg. Based on a true story involving a couple of man eating lions in the Tsavo region of Kenya which were responsible for the deaths of dozens of constructions workers on the Kenya-Uganda Railway, back in 1898 [30], the film was shot entirely in California, with footage obtained earlier in Africa added for local colour. The project was announced in March 1952 under the title *The Lions of Gulu* and with Howard Miller and Broadway actress Hope Miller in the lead. By mid-June, however, the film title had been changed to Bwana Devil and Robert Stack had been signed for the role of Robert Hayward. He was soon joined in the cast by Nigel Bruce and Barbara Britton. Bruce, who had been in the first "talkie" made in England in 1928 and in the first British technicolor movie six years later, was thus adding a third first to his acting career. Anticipation built up as weeks went by and articles in the press mentioned a scene involving a lion literally leaping into the lap of the audience, a spear being hurled at the spectators and a controversial love scene "making it seem like Bob is making love directly to every woman in the audience ..." [32] The studio made the most of this and advertised the movie with the following tagline: "Imagine! A lion in your lap! A lover in your arms!"



Illustration 17. The Natural Vision Camera, from the French magazine *Mon Film* in its 26 August 1953 issue. Author's collection.



Illustration 18. 1952 Lobby card for *Bwana Devil*. Scene featuring Robert Stack and Nigel Bruce. Notice the tagline on the left. Author's collection.



Illustration 19. 1952 Lobby card for *Bwana Devil*. One of the last scenes of the film, featuring Barbara Britton and Robert Stack. Author's collection.

The movie, which was preceded by a short 3-D documentary introducing the Natural Vision premiered process [33],simultaneously at the Hollywood Paramount Theatre and Paramount Theatre in downtown Los Angeles on 26 November 1952. Life Magazine photographer J. R. Eyerman was present on the day and captured the audience wearing their 3-D glasses in what was to become his most famous photograph.

Illustration 20. Photograph of the audience wearing their 3-D glasses at the première of *Bwana Devil* on 26 November 1952. The image was published in the 15 December 1952 issue of *Life Magazine*. Author's collection.



Reactions to the preview were mixed. Most reviewers acknowledged the novelty of the process but complained that the story lacked depth. "Storywise, the film leaves much to be desired," wrote the journalist for the Los Angeles Evening Citizen News. "The plot is painfully contrived, largely unconvincing, and dramatically lacking in high points of conflict." [34] When the movie was eventually released in Britain on 20 March 1953, critics were even harsher and one of them very truly remarked "If a film is a bad one in two dimensions, a third dimension cannot make it any better." [35] It is a pity this sentence was not carved in big capital letters on the walls of every film studio from the 1950s to the present day as it would have saved us from a large number of very disappointing 3-D movies. Despite the mixed reviews there were queues outside the theatres both in the U.S.A. and in Britain and directors of major film studios suddently realised a lot of money could be made in the 3-D business. Columbia released the black and white 3-D movie Man in the Dark on 8 April 1953, two days before Warner Brothers' big 3-D hit, House of Wax, starring Vincent Price, Phyllis Kirk and a young actor who was credited as Charles Buchinsky but who is now better known as Charles Bronson. House of Wax, which was first called The Wax Works, has the peculiarity of having been directed by a man who could not see 3-D on account of only having one working eye, André De Toth. But just like Beethoven could compose masterpieces despite being deaf, De Toth is one of the few directors of the time who actually understood how 3-D worked and tried to make the most not only of the process, but also of the story and of the actors.

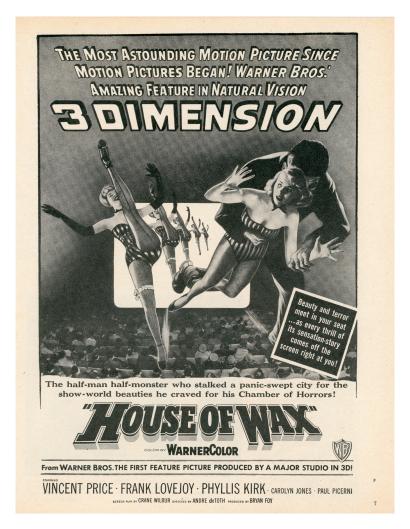


Illustration 21. *House of Wax*. 1953 Advertisement. Author's collection.



Illustration 22. *House of Wax*. Lobby card. Wax artist Professor Henry Jarrod (Vincent Price) with his masterpiece, a wax figure of Marie Antoinette. Author's collection.

House of Wax, which was the first colour 3-D feature with stereo sound, was such a huge box-office success that Warner Brothers announced in June 1953 that they were going to make twenty-two more 3-D productions that year. Among the films in the pipeline were a Western, The Charge at Feather River, a Doris Day musical, Lucky Me, a science-fiction film, Them, a horror movie, Phantom Ape, based on Edgar Allan Poe's Murders in the Rue Morgue [36], and a thriller, Dial M for Murder, which was to be directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

"3-Ds", "deepies", "depthies", or "roundies", as they were then called in the press and/or by the public, were definitely on the map!

Hitchcock's Dial M for Murder

Hitchcock reportedly said of 3-D: "It's a nine-day wonder, and I came in on the ninth day." Although I have not been able to trace the original source of this often-quoted comment, which may never have been uttered by Hitchcock himself, the fact remains that what is stated in that wry remark is true. By the time Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* was released, the 3-D craze was on the wane, as had happened several times before, when it was still called Stereoscopy.

After Warner Brothers bought the rights of the play from Alexander Korda, the studio announced as early as May 1953 that it would be made into a 3-D production directed by Alfred Hitchcock. This was meant to be Hitchcock's last film with Warner before his move to Paramount but it was to be his first attempt not only at filming in colour but also in 3-D, with the new All Media Camera that was being developed by Warner and was to be used for the first time in the filming of *Hondo*, a John Wayne Western. Fortunately for Hitchcock, director of photography Robert Burks, who worked with him on Dial M for Murder, was also involved in the making of *Hondo* and dealt with the teething problems of the Warner camera. While Burks and *Hondo*'s director John Farrow were getting familiarised with the All Media set up and solving one by one the various difficulties they encountered, Hitchcock was thinking about his cast. It has been said that it was Cary Grant who first drew his attention to Frederick Knott's drama and that Hitchcock wanted Grant to play the part of Tony Wendice, the former tennis-player who wants to have his wife murdered in order to inherit her fortune. However, Grant's agents were asking for too much money so the studio asked the director to look for a cheaper actor. He chose Ray Milland, whose involvement in the film was announced as early as June 1953, along with that of John Williams, who was playing the part of Inspector Hubbard in the Broadway production of the play and was easily convinced to reprise his role in the film. Hitchcock, who was very thorough in his preparatory work, apparently saw the Broadway play five times and also went to Chicago three times to attend performances of Knott's thriller with Richard Greene and his fellow actors.



Illustration 23. Cary Grant, Hitchcock's first choice for the part of Tony Wendice, and Ray Milland, who actually got the part, on the set of *Dial M for Murder*. Author's collection.

For the female leading part, Hitchcock was thinking of hiring Deborah Kerr, but when he happened to be invited to watch rushes for the film *Mogambo*, starring Clark Gable, Ava Gardner and Grace Kelly, he decided to cast the latter in the part of Margot Wendice. Kelly was signed before the end of June 1953 and was joined in July by Robert Cummings, whose part had first been briefly intended for William Holden. The last role to be assigned was that of the would-be murderer, Swann, alias Captain Lesgate. Hitchcock originally got in touch with Louis Hayward but once more budget dictated the choice of a less expensive actor so the director picked up his phone and called Anthony Dawson, another member of the Broadway cast who had already been killed on stage 313 times before he left his understudy in charge and headed for Hollywood.

It must have been a huge disappointment for Maurice Evans, who had originated and masterminded the Broadway production, not to mention creating the part of Tony Wendice in the States, to see two of his fellow actors chosen to appear in the Warner movie when he was being totally ignored. We'll see further on, however, that he was far from being done with Tony Wendice, which was certainly not a consolation at the time but may have somehow softened the blow later.

The shooting of *Dial M for Murder* started on Warner's stage 4 on 5 August 1953 and lasted only 36 days. [37] Frederick Knott, who had been hired by the studio to write the screenplay, also acted as a consultant and was present on the set where he discovered the joys of stereo photography. "Spurred by this photographic activity," wrote a journalist from *The Montreal Star*, "author Frederick Knott, who wrote the international hit play *Dial M for Murder* from which the movie is being made, has started photographing the sets of the Hitchcock thriller with a stereo camera. The 3-D stills will be made available by Knott to stage companies that acquire rights to present the drama which is still running on Broadway and now in nine foreign countries." [38] This very interesting piece of information was confirmed by another journalist from *The Pittsburg Press* who further stated that Knott was "making a complete stereo coverage of each key scene." [39]. I honestly wish I knew where these photos are. I have contacted Frederick Knott's son to try and find out the whereabouts of these images but I never heard back from him. If they still exist they might surface, one day! [40]

During the filming, the press, which had covered the Broadway play rather extensively since its opening on Broadway in October 1952, concentrated their efforts on the following:

- an eight-foot deep pit,
- a nightgown,
- Grace Kelly's varnished toenails,
- a pair of football hip pads,
- a telephone
- and a four and a half minute speech from one of the male actors.

The eight-foot pit was excavated in the floor of stage 4, at the request of the director, to hold the All media camera and the crew that operated it. The idea behind this unusual demand was that Hitchcock could obtain low angles of some of the actors, especially Ray Milland and Anthony Dawson, in what the press announced as "the first below level scene on a film in three-dimension." [41]



Illustration 24. Alfred Hitchcock, in his director's chair, supervising the filming of one of the scenes from *Dial M for Murder*. The pit, the All-media camera, and the two men manning it are clearly visible in this press photograph. Author's collection.



Illustration 25. Side-by-side stereoscopic still from the film showing the scene filmed in the picture above.

The chiffon nightgown, created by American costume designer Moss Mabry, "to give the effect of transparency without the revelation" [42] by means of a built-in flesh-coloured lining, is worn by Grace Kelly in the murder scene. Being awaken in the middle of the night by the ringing of the telephone, her character gets out of bed. The rest of the shot is described by a journalist from *The Birmingham News* in the following way:

"Miss Kelly's cornsilk hair is prettily tousled, her nightgown clings interestingly to her hips, and her toenails gleam as she walks barefooted across the room, lighted only by a flickering open fire to answer the phone, ready to be garrotted." [43]

Which brings us to the gleaming toenails, advertised in such headlines as:

- Only trouble they won't show. Actress Kelly's toenails iridescent hue in new film [44]
- Glowing Toenails Light Way to 'Murder' [45]

Grace Kelly's iridescent toenails glow like flying saucers on the murky set of "Dial M For Murder" — about the last thing you'd expect a lady to wear to a murder. The actress told us she figured such a polish would be less conspicuous and more ladylike than the bright red she wears at home. Director Alfred Hitchcock was forced to agree.

Hitchcock's setting on a Warner stage for the slaying is fascinating to survey. It is the comfortable serenity of an upper-middle-class London flat, decorated in quiet good taste with objects of restrained culture. The director explains that a murder is all the more shocking if it takes place in nonmurdeous surroundings — like on a merry-go-round, in a ball-room, or by a babbling brook on a sunny afternoon.

Behind the green draperies of the London flat lurks a killer, waiting for the phone to ring that will summon his intended victim with the shiny toenails from her boudoir. [...] "I hate to tell her," Hitchcock whispered, "but the only people who will see her pretty toenails are the crew. The camera is cutting her off right at the ankles. Too bad, isn't it?" [46]

This last remark by director Alfred Hitchcock is actually not true. The camera did not cut her off at the ankles and the much spoken of iridescent toenails can actually be seen briefly flashing, as is made evident in the illustrations below.



Illustration 26. Side-by-side stereoscopic stills from the film showing Grace Kelly's iridescent toenails.

Now for the football hip pads, another rather strange thing to be mentioned in a murder mystery. We hear they are "worn by the corpse, Anthony Dawson, who was developing floor sores from lying motionlessly on his back several hours each day. Director Hitchcock had found it impossible to use a dummy or lie-in for Dawson because of the scenes played around the corpse by Ray Milland and Grace Kelly." [47]



Illustration 27. Lobby card showing Ray Milland, Grace Kelly and Anthony Dawson lying on the ground, his face very much visible. Author's collection.

The next much talked about element from the movie is a prop which plays a vital part in the screenplay, although not so much in the stage version of the drama: a telephone. There are actually two phones at play in the most famous scene from Hitchcock's movie. The first one is located in a phone booth at Tony Wendice's club and is used by the latter to call his wife and by doing so to warn Captain Lesgate/Anthony Dawson, waiting hidden behind the green curtains of the Wendices' Maida Vale flat, to stand ready to murder Tony's wife as soon as she picks up the receiver. It is a well-known fact that Hitchcock, who, for dramatic reasons, wanted to show a close up of Ray Milland's forefinger dialling the first digits of Tony Wendice's number, was faced with the limitations of the 3-D camera. Although it could film close-ups of a face, or hands holding keys – as it often does in the movie since keys also have a major part to play in the plot – it did not allow the filming of such a small thing as the tip of a finger in the hole of a dial. Hitchcock overcame the difficulty by having giant props built, one of Ray Milland's finger and one of the telephone in the booth. Simple but very effective.



Illustration 28. Director Alfred Hitchcock and the giant telephone prop he had build for the telephone scene in *Dial M for Murder*. The huge finger, made of wood, lies on the floor, by the phone. Author's collection.



Illustration 29. Side-by-side stereoscopic stills showing how close the All Media camera could be used. Latchkeys play an important part in the plot and are often shown in close-up shots.

The second telephone is the one in the Wendices' ground floor apartment, sitting on a desk next to the heavy curtains behind which the murderer is hiding. In the hand of Grace Kelly and under Hitchcock's masterful directing, it becomes of sixth member of the cast:

HOLLYWOOD – Leggy blonde actress Grace Kelly discovered today she has a new kind of leading man – a telephone, cold and murderous.

Grace, who is the cat's paw in Alfred Hitchcock's new suspense thriller, was surprised to find a telephone can act.

"I always thought it was only something a girl used to refuse or accept dates on," she said, "but now I find it can ring — murder!"

It was the roly-poly director, in one of his freakish moments of genius, who discovered the acting potentiality of the telephone. And he's more excited than Alexander Graham Bell when the inventor first made the gadget work.

"It has every quality of a well-rounded performer," the director purred, "it can be angry, happy, romantic, indolent, annoying or fateful."

[...]

The big telephone scene which occurs in Warner's *Dial M For Murder* suspends the audience in horror when Hitchcock shows a closeup of the seemingly evil mechanism of the dial at work.

[...]

Hitchcock recalled the only other time he made use of the telephone in a film was in *Notorious*. Cary Grant made passionate love to Ingrid Bergman while she attempted to engage in a phone conversation with another man.

"But that was merely an unusual setting for a love scene," he shrugged. [48]



Illustration 30. Side-by-side stereoscopic stills from the film showing Grace Kelly answering the phone and her would-be murderer, Anthony Dawson, standing ready to strangle her as soon as she puts the receiver down.

The four and a half minute speech, apparently shot in one take, is uttered by Robert Cummings/Mark Halliday while trying to convince Ray Milland/Tony Wendice, on the eve of Grace Kelly/Margot's hanging, to tell the police he is the one who planned the whole thing.

Actor Speaks 4 1/2 Minutes

BURBANK. Cal. — Robert Cummings took a deep breath and plunged into his longest sustained movie scene when Director Alfred Hitchcock kept the camera on him for four minutes and thirty-one seconds during the filming of "Dial M For Murder."

[...]

Something of a record was established during the sequence when four and three quarters pages of dialogue were shot in one take without a cut, another indication of the increased trend to filming sustained scenes in 3-D pictures.

Cummings' endurance effort consisted of an impassioned plea to Ray Milland begging him to offer a murder alibi for the latter's wife, Grace Kelly. [49]

Ray Milland, who in a previous film called *The Thief* played the only speechless male part, also has a lot to say in the film, more than he ever had in twenty years of acting.



What else did the press pick on ? They did mention at some point that Hitchcock was "eleven days behind schedule because he insisted on shooting the Ray Milland flick in direct continuity," [50] and that he had discovered "a kiss was three times sexier if the man kissed a babe in the chin instead of the lips." [51] They also announced Patrick Allen had been signed for the role of a Scotland Yard detective [52], that British stage and screen actor Leo Britt had been cast for a part in the movie [53], and that "Vic Seixas, Wimbledon tennis champion, was the guest at Warner Bros. Studios of Ray Milland, who portrays a former Wimbledon tennis champion in Dial M for Murder." [54] They obviously interviewed the director, Alfred Hitchcock, but more of that later.

Illustration 31. Ray Milland as a tennis champion. Photo used in the film *Dial M for Murder*. Author's collection.



Illustration 32. Stereoscopic still showing the photo of Ray Milland as a tennis player on a chest of drawers in the Wendices' bedroom.

What the press did not and few reviewers afterwards did mention was Hitchcock's use of what could be termed "natural focus" throughout the movie. In reviews of early "depthies" commentators often wrote about how sharp everything in the movies was, from foreground to background. Now this is all very well for a photograph because everything is still and that overall sharpness therefore allows the viewer to explore all the different planes; but it is a different matter for films when the actors and/or the camera move. In normal life, when we look at an object in the foreground, the background is blurred and vice versa. And if we focus on a person who is in the middle ground both foreground and background are blurry because nothing is ever sharp from, say, 50 centimeters to infinity. Hitchcock understood this and used that very simple and taken-for-granted physiological trait to direct the viewer's gaze to what he wanted them to focus upon. Most of the time, the props in the foreground are out of focus, as is the background when what we are supposed to concentrate on are the characters in the middle planes. It is so well done and looks so natural, especially in 3-D, that it is hardly noticeable but clearly shows that Hitchcock did his homework well.



Illustration 33. Stereoscopic stills showing the blurry foreground (top and middle pictures) or background (bottom picture) in Hitchcock's shots.

As soon as the shooting was over, Frederick Knott flew back to Britain, where he got married to American actress Ann Hillary at the Savoy Chapel on 10 November 1953. Alfred Hitchcock and Grace Kelly did not have much time to rest as they worked on the film *Rear Window*, with James Stewart, from 27 November 1953 to January 1954.



Illustration 34. Press photos. On the left Grace Kelly and her would-be strangler, Anthony Dawson, sharing a very homely moment. On the right, Grace Kelly and Robert Cummings having a look at the final script of the movie. Author's collection.



Illustration 35. Lobby card showing John Williams (Inspector Hubbard) on the left and Robert Cummings (Mark Halliday) on the right in one of the key scenes from Hitchcock's Dial M for Murder. Author's collection.

Dial M for Murder was premiered at the Randolph cinema, in Grace Kelly's hometown, Philadelphia, on 18 May 1954, with the official opening on the next day. For contractual reasons, the movie could not be officially released in cinemas while the American stage production was still running, which did not happen until the end of February on Broadway and until 29 May for the road tour which was booked last in Los Angeles. This clause did not play in favour of the movie for, by the time it hit the big screen, the 3-D craze was on its last legs, as was evidenced by the audience's strong reaction in Philadelphia:

Play's the Thing as Philadelphia Fans Spurn 3-D for 2-D Version of 'Dial-M' In an effort to ensure their production's success, the canny Brothers Warner played it safe by producing "Dial M" in both three-dimensional and regulation – or "flattie" – form. And at Jack Warner's insistence, we are reliably informed it made its world bow via the Randolph's split bill on Tuesday and official opening on Wednesday complete with 3-D and polaroid-wearing customers.

The first audience proved to be a jury which not only could make up its mind but make it up in a hurry. In exhibitors' own term "Dial" literally "died".

And after just four performances on Wednesday, some long-distance telephoning to report complaints, the increasing skimpiness or customers – a good many of them making no bones of their dissatisfaction – permission was given to throw away the glasses and hastily switch to the 2-D version. Whereupon business at the Randolph took a turn to the better.

If Warner's purpose, as one suspects, was to test audience reaction to 3-D in general and specifically via a film which used the process with far greater smoothness than in the past, that purpose has certainly been fulfilled. The answer, so far as Philadelphia filmgoers, is an umcompromising "No". [55]

Reviewer Mildred Martin, who wrote the lines above, not only faithfully reported the facts but tried to explain why they had happened. "With 'Dial-M'," she carries on, "3-D's increasing unpopularity can no longer be blamed on trashy stories, imperfect projection or indifferent performances. In all of these respects, it was blameless. The necessity of donning polaroids, however, remained to bedevil it. And that, plus the fact that 3-D seemingly has run its course as a novelty resulted in fans staging their own enormously effective revolution." [56]

Although she acknowledges the brilliancy of the plot, she, like a lot of people at the time and ever since, however fails to grasp the real purpose of 3-D. Needless to say I totally disagree with the next lines she penned:

[...] Hitchcock himself, seemed stumped, for all his ingenuity, in employing any truly effective three-dimensional tricks. Consequently, either because of indifference or unwillingness to play games in 3-D, he treated the process casually, scorning to disconcert the audience or take its mind off the lethal action, by tossing objects in face or lap.

Only once in this drama of a husband who tries to have his wife murdered and, failing that, undertakes to have her convicted and hanged as a murderess after she has accidentally killed her would-be assassin, did Hitchcock really go to town with stereoptical stunts.

As a concession, then, because he is a canny craftsman not a dabbler in photographic stunts, Hitchcock piled his 3-D eggs in one dramatic basket for the big strangulation and scissors death scene, with the hand of the gurgling, gasping victim stretching out from the screen in grisly fashion.

But just as it may be crisply asked of films made on far-flung location jaunts, "Was this trip necessary?" so one may inquire of a 3-D production whether inclusion of a third dimension in any way furthered the impact of the story. Did it help or hinder? Was it, in short, "necessary," or would the film have been as good – or better – without it? [57]



Illustration 36. Side-by-side stereoscopic still from the film showing Grace Kelly's hand during the strangulation scene reaching out of the screen straight towards the spectator's face in her attempt to grab the scissors lying on the desk.

Stereoscopy, I cannot emphasize enough, is NOT and should NOT be about "threedimensional tricks", "tossing objects in face or lap", or "stereoptical stunts". It is a way of immersing oneself or a whole audience in a scene, of stepping into a picture and leisurely discovering all it has to offer in a way that monoscopy cannot achieve. The Victorians and Edwardians, who produced millions of stereoscopic pictures, hardly ever used the "comin' at ye" gimmick – and when they did it was usually by accident – because they understood the true purpose of stereoscopy. That unpleasant trick of tossing things at the audience came much later, in the 1920s and has since been held by most as the end all be all of 3-D, contributing in no small way to discrediting the whole process. I am, therefore, in total disagreement with Mildred Martin when she says Hitchcock was "stumped" or when she accuses him of "indifference or unwillingness" and of piling "his 3-D eggs in one dramatic basket". Dial M for Murder was Hitchcock's first and only attempt at 3-D and also his first colour movie. There is no doubt he more than rose to the double challenge and it cannot be said of him that he did not do his best. It is reported that he personally handpicked the props used in the foregrounds of the various scenes and we know he gave careful consideration not only to the camera angles but to the colours too. In the 1962 interviews he gave French film director François Truffaut, Hitchcock explains he "did an interesting color experiment with Grace Kelly's clothing. I dressed her in very gay and bright colors at the beginning of the picture, and as the plot thickened, her clothes became gradually more somber." [58] As far as the 3-D goes, we are amongst the protragonists all through the film and are so close to them we can actually "read" their thoughts. It feels like being at the theatre but, instead of being seated at a distance from the actors, we are allowed to move on the stage with them, to be literally part of the action. In *Dial M for Murder*, 3-D literally immerses the audience into the movie. We are close but, at the same time, silent, passive and totally helpless witnesses. We cannot lift a finger to intervene and this does add to the tension of the movie. In an interview he gave during the making of Dial M, Hitchcock, who was "having his difficulties learning about the complexities of the 3-D camera," [59] told about the way he imagined the future of 3-D and how "the new technique may have far greater results than realized at the moment." 'Imagine perfecting a machine to project pictures in 3-D scope without requiring glasses,' said the director, 'I mean being able to view actors on a screen as naturally as you see them on a stage. Think what that would do to the theater.' "[60] In my opinion, and though glasses were required, this is exactly what he achieved and what most people fail to see.

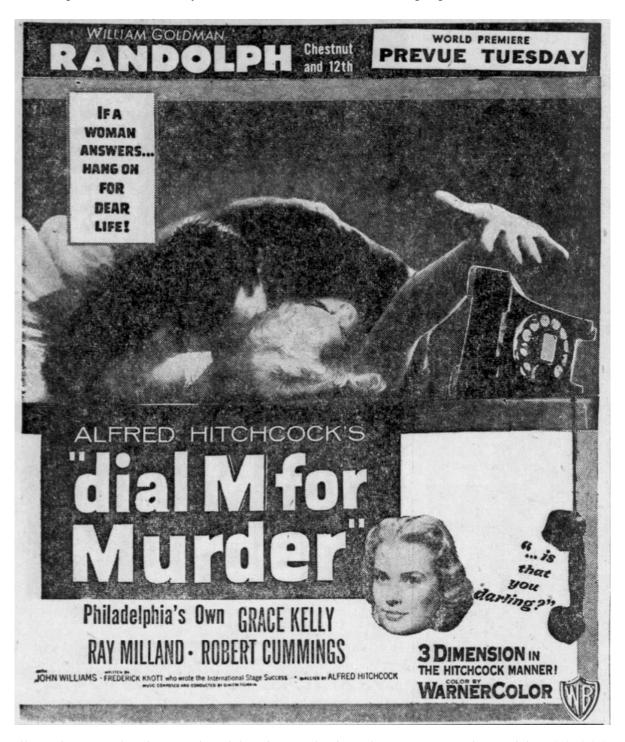


Illustration 37. Advertisement for Dial M for Murder from the 16 May 1954 issue of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Notice the tagline "3 Dimension in the Hitchcock Manner!"

After what happened in Philadelphia on the 18 and 19 April 1953, the movie was hardly seen in 3-D and advertisements in the press soon dropped the "3 Dimension in the Hitchcock Manner!" tagline which had been used before. The film was projected in 3-D in some theatres around the country but most exhibitors chose to show the flat version. The short-lived 3-D craze of the 1950s came to an end soon aftewards.

Hitchcock's movie, as a "flattie", was a success then and is still highly considered but the master himself became very dismissive of it. When interviewed by François Truffaut about it his first remark was "There isn't very much we can say about that one, is there?" [61] Had not Truffaut disagreed that is all he would have disclosed. As it was, Truffaut, who had not seen the film in 3-D as it was mostly released in its 2-D version in France, had some questions for Hitchcock who, however, insisted that the making of the film was a case of "running for cover", of simply "coasting, playing it safe." The whole film contradicts Hitchcock's statements and it is my opinion that Hitchcock's dismissive attitude was a way of hiding his disappointment at the reception of his 3-D work. It must have hurt deeply to see his efforts made very light of and his best defence was to seem to agree with his detractors. I can totally understand that kind of reaction.

In the course of five minutes or so they devoted to *Dial M for Murder*, out of some fifty hours of recording, Truffaut and Hitchcock managed to discuss the latter's faithfulness to the original play and his theory that when making a film the confined setting of the original play should be respected, that it should not be opened up. "The basic quality of any play," said Hitchcock, "is precisely its confinement within the proscenium. [...] In other words, what I did was to emphasize the theatrical aspects." [62] Further on he adds the following final remark: "I just did my job, using cinematic means to narrate a story taken from a stage play. All of the action in *Dial M for Murder* takes place in a living room, but that doesn't matter. I could just as well have shot the whole film in a telephone booth." [63] They also briefly mentioned Hitchcock's use of close up shots of Grace Kelly with colour lights in the background for the trial sequence so as not to show the whole courtroom and distract the public's attention from the main story.





Illustrations 38. Side-by-side stereoscopic stills from the film showing Grace Kelly from three different angles and as many different lightings in the courtroom sequence.

Truffaut, although he did not really understand 3-D probably because he never saw the film as it had been intended to be watched, perceived that there was more to the movie than met the eye of the ordinary spectator. "Basically," he concluded, "it's a dialogue picture, but the cutting, the rhythm, and the direction of the players are so polished that one listens to each sentence religiously. It isn't all that easy to command the audience's undivided attention for a continuous dialogue. I suspect that here again the real achievement is that something very difficult has been carried out in a way that makes it seem quite easy." (my italics) [64] I could not agree more.

The film was translated into several languages and released all over the world. It became *Le Crime était presque parfait* (An almost perfect murder) in France [65], *Bei Anruf – Mord* in Germany, *Delitto Perfetto* in Italy, *Con M de Muerte* in Spanish speaking Mexico but *Crimen Perfecto* in Spain, *Nazovi M Radi Umorstva* in Croatia, *Telefonen ringer klokken 23* in Norway, *De Moord Was Bijna Volmaakt* in Beligum, etc. Everywhere it was shown – most of the time in 2-D, unfortunately – it was the same success.



Illustration 39. Programme for the film *Dial M for Murder* in Croatia. Author's collection.



Illustration. 40 Poster for the film *Dial M for Murder* in France. Note the Flemish title for non French speaking Belgians. Author's collection.



Illustration 41. Advertising leaflet for the film *Dial M for Murder* in Spain (*Crimen Perfecto*). Author's collection.



Illustration 42. Poster for the film *Dial M for Murder* in Spanish speaking South American countries (*Con M de Muerte*). Note how the strangulation victim's legs are bare in this version of the poster. Author's collection.



Illustration 43. Programme for the film *Dial M for Murder* in Norway. Author's collection.

Maurice Evans went on playing Tony Wendice for over a decade, on stage and on television. In 1958, he reprised his part for a Hallmark Hall of Fame TV movie in which he was playing opposite Rosemary Harris and his two former stage partners, John Williams and Anthony Dawson. One of his last appearances as Tony Vendice was at the Valley Music Theater, Woodlands Hills, Los Angeles, in 1965. He was sixty-four by then.



Illustration 44. Tony Evans, John Williams and Richard Derr in the Broadway Production of Dial M for Murder



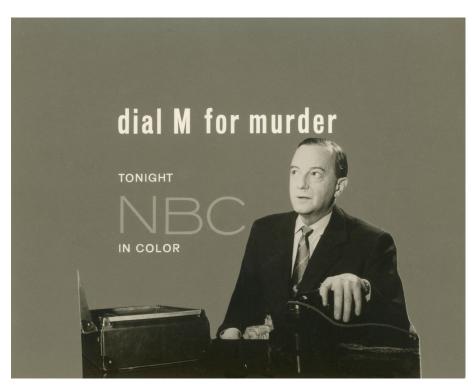


Illustration 45. (Left) Advertisement for the screening of the 1958 TV movie from an American Newspaper. (Right) Portrait of Maurice Evans on a prompt card, used in 1958 to advertise the Hallmark Hall of Fame TV movie in which he reprises the part of Tony Wendice. Author's collection.



Illustration 46. Pages from the 1965 Valley Music Theater Playbill where Maurice Evans was still playing the part of Tony Wendice. Author's collection.

Two more TV movies were made after Frederick Knott's drama. The first one, in 1967, starred Laurence Harvey as Tony Wendice and Diane Cilento as his wife Margot, with John Llewellyn Moxey as the director. In 1981 Boris Sagal directed yet another televised version of the play with two leading actors who need no introduction: Christopher Plummer and Angie Dickinson. The part of Inspector Hubbard was played by Ron Moody, whom cinema-goers are most likely to remember for being Fagin in the 1968 musical *Oliver*. A big screen movie, the 1988 A Perfect Murder, starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Michael Douglas, is loosely based on Knott's mystery play. The names of the character, the location, as well a lot of the original plot having been changed, it cannot really be called a remake of Hitchcock's 1954 work.



Illustration 48. Press photo from the 1967 televised version of *Dial M for Murder*, showing Diane Cilento in the part of Margot Wendice and Nigel Davenport as Captain Lesgate in the strangulation scene. Author's collection

Dial M for Murder: the 1980s revival

After being unearthed by the Warner Brothers studio, restored and put on a unique film strip, the original 3-D version of *Dial M for Murder* was projected in 3-D at the York Theater, San Francisco, on 23 January 1980, just over three months before the death of its director, who passed away on 29 April. Hitchcock was already in very poor health by then and it is not recorded he had a chance to see his film in 3-D again, which is a real shame as he would probably have enjoyed the public's enthusiastic reaction to it. With a new peak of interest in 3-D in the early 1980s, the Warner studio decided to release the updated 3-D version of the film in cinemas in February 1982. More people finally discovered *Dial M for Murder* as it had been carefully planned and shot nearly thirty years previously. As had happened then, however, the 3-D fad of the 1980s was short-lived, mainly on account – again – of the poor quality of the stories the films produced were based on. It seems that film-studios, like politicians, can never learn from history! It was not until 2012, when Warner Brothers released the 3-D blu-ray version of Dial M for Murder, that the film became available world-wide in its original format, to be watched and enjoyed over and over again.



Illustration 49. Ad sheets for the 1982 3-D release of *Dial M for Murder*. Author's collection.

As for Frederick Knott, without whom all of this would never have happened, he only wrote two more plays, which also proved very successful, although not as much as his very first effort. The second of his works, "Write me a Murder", opened in October 1961 at the Los Angeles Belasco Theater, where it ran for 196 performances. Knott's third and last completed drama, "Wait until Dark" premiered at the New York Ethel Barrymore Theater in February

1966. It ran for eleven months on Broadway and for two years in London. It was made into a film by the Warner Brothers' studio in 1967 with Audrey Hepburn in the leading part. *Wait until Dark* was directed by Terence Young and earned Audrey Hepburn an Academy Awards nomination for her performance.

According to his wife, who sadly passed away in 2019, Knott had two more full plays in his head but never wrote down a single word of them. He died, aged 86, in 2002, but his brainchild lives on, as does Hitchcock's 3-D masterpiece.



Illustration 50. Stereocopic stills showing the last image of Hitchcock's *Dial for Murder* movie.

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NOTES

- [1] Buckinghamshire Advertiser, 27 August 1954, p. 2.
- [2] Crawley and District Observer, Friday 7 March 1952, p. 8.
- [3] The Sketch, Wednesday 12 March 1952, p. 35.
- [4] The Stage, Thursday 13 March 1952, p. 7.
- [5] British readers will certainly remember Raymond Huntley as playing family solicitor Sir Geoffrey Dillon in the television series *Upstairs*, *Downstairs*.
- [6] Birmingham Daily Post, Thursday 27 March 1952, p. 4.
- [7] Daily News (London), Saturday 29 March 1952, p. 4.
- [8] The Sketch, Wednesday 9 April 1952, p. 32.
- [9] Bradford Observer, Saturday 21 June 1952, p. 4.
- [10] The People, Sunday 22 June 1952, p. 2.
- [11] Kensington News and West London Times, Friday 4 July 1952, p. 2.
- [12] Daily News (London), Friday 20 June 1952, p. 3.
- [13] TV viewers will probably remember him as Samantha Stephens's short-tempered but larger-than-life warlock of a father, Maurice, in *Bewitched*.
- [14] Maurice Evans played the part of music composer Arthur Sullivan along co-star Robert Morley in the role of lyricist William Schwenk Gilbert. The film, directed by Sydney Gilliat and produced by London Films, was shot between April and October 1952. It was released on 7 September 1953 but turned out to be a box-office failure.
- [15] The Stage, Thursday 4 September 1952, p. 8.
- [16] Amateurs of series may remember him as Robin Hood in the 143 episodes of the series *The Adventures of Robin Hood* which were broadcast weekly between 1955 and 1959.
- [17] Again, amateurs of series will remember Alan Napier as Alfred Pennyworth, Bruce

Wayne/Batman's butler, in the American TV series *Batman and Robin*. In the early 1970s Napier wrote a three-volume autobiography which was published under the tongue-in-cheek title *Not Just Batman's Butler*.

- [18] The Stage, Thursday 18 December 1952, p. 8.
- [19] Roger Féral's real name was Roger Boris Lazareff and he was the brother of journalist Serge Lazareff.
- [20] The other members of the cast were Jacqueline Porel (Patricia Wendice), Jean Martinelli (Lesgate), Jacques Berthier (Max Halliday) and Pierre Destailles (Inspector Hubbard)
- [21] The Stage, Thursday 23 April 1953, p. 8.
- [22] Philadelphia Inquirer, Friday 24 April 1953, p. 29.
- [23] Produced by the J. C. Williamson Company, it starred Hector Ross (Tony Wendice), Pamela Page (Sheila Wendice), Alan White (Max Halliday), Grant Taylor (Lesgate) and Ellis Irving (Inspector Hubbard).
- [24] The Stage, Thursday 30 April 1953, p. 8.
- [25] Los Angeles Evening Post-Record, Thursday 28 September 1922, p. 1.
- [26] *Idem*.
- [27] The Los Angeles Times, Friday 29 September 1922, p. 33.
- [28] The Kamloops Telegram, Sunday 28 October 1922, p. 4.
- [29] San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday 8 October 1922, p. 3.

Filmland Clamors For a Preview

From every corner of movieland comes requests for a second preview of "The Power of Love" in conjunction with the Fairall process of stereoscopic exhibition, in order that all people of the profession, whose attendance at the first preview was impossible due to the limited seating capacity, may view this remarkable advance in motion picture art, and justify the rumors that are circulating through all the channels of the industry relative to the possibility that in the near future filmland will be revolutionized, and all pictures shown to the public with this process, enhancing the beauty of realism on the screen.

- [30] Estimates vary between 30 and over a hundred victims.
- [31] The first 3-D feature movie, Semyon Ivanov's *Robinson Crusoe*, was actually shot in Russia by director Alexandr Andriyevsky. It was released on 20 Februay 1947.
- [32] Albuquerque Journal, 28 September 1952, p. 26, and numerous other newspapers.
- [33] This documentary featured actor Lloyd Nolan, Beanie and Cecil, the two puppets from the *Time for Beanie* television show, as well as Miss U.S.A. for 1949, Michigan-born Shirley Tegge. Her appearance in the short earned the latter the title of "Miss 3-D".
- [34] Los Angeles Evening Citizen News, Thursday 27 November 1952, p. 4.
- [35] Birmingham Daily Gazette, Saturday 21 March 1953, p. 4. The journalist from the Nottingham Journal, in the 21 March 1953 issue of the newspaper, described spectators coming out of the screening and commenting that "if the vision of Bwana Devil was three-dimensional, the story was one of the flattest they had ever seen."
- [36] The film was eventually released under the title *Phantom of the rue Morgue*.
- [37] That is 36 working days. Shooting ended on 25 September.
- [38] Montreal Star, Saturday 5 December 1953, p. 22.
- [39] The Pittsburgh Press, Wednesday 7 October 1953, p. 25.
- [40] If anyone knows anything about this set of stereo slides (most probably Stereo Realist ones), please contact the author at denis@brianmayarchiveofstereoscopy.org.
- [41] Montreal Star, Saturday 5 December 1953, p. 22.
- [42] The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Sunday 13 September 1953, p. 29.
- [43] The Birmingham News, Tursday 1 October 1953, p. 56.
- [44] *Idem*.
- [45] Valley Times, Tursday 1 October 1953, p. 8.
- [46] Arnold Heffernan in *The Birmingham News*, Tursday 1 October 1953, p. 56
- [48] The Daily Sentinel Tribune, Thursday 3 September 1953, p. 16.
- [49] The Miami Herald, Tuesday September 1953, p. 14.
- [50] Philadelphia Inquirer, Monday 7 September 1953, p. 9.
- [51] Philadelphia Inquirer, Monday 24 August 1953, p. 13

- [52] Patrick Allen plays the part of Detective Pearson and is credited.
- [53] Leo Britt is the voice of the narrator in the opening sequence of the film. He can only be heard for a few seconds.
- [54] *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, Tuesday 24 November 1953, p. 4 of 25. Elias Victor Seixas had just won the 1953 Wimbledon tournament in singles and was to win the US open the following year. He is still alive and turned 100 on 30 August 2023.
- [55] Philadelphia Inquirer, Sunday 23 May 1954, pp. 93-4.
- [56] *Idem*.
- [57] *Idem*.
- [58] Hitchcock by Truffaut. The definitive study. Paladin's revised edition, 1986, p. 317.
- [59] Philadelphia Inquirer, Sunday 30 August 1953, p. 93
- [60] *Idem*
- [61] Hitchcock by Truffaut. The definitive study. Paladin's revised edition, 1986, p. 312.
- [62] *Ibid.*, p. 316.
- [63] *Ibid.*, p. 317.
- [64] *Idem*.
- [65] Another film had been released under that very same title in France back in 1948, Michael Curtiz's *The Unsuspected*.