

The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

USA 2015

Director: Guy Ritchie

Certificate 12A 116m 18s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The James Bond superspy phenomenon of the 1960s inspired several popular TV series. Most prominent was *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, notionally developed by Ian Fleming, who provided the names 'Napoleon Solo' ('Mr Solo' was a gangster in *Goldfinger*) and 'April Dancer' (later, the Girl from U.N.C.L.E. in a spin-off series), but actually created by Sam Rolfe. The show ran for four seasons, from 1964 to 1968, changing tone from relatively serious to outrageous camp as it went from black-and-white to colour, then sobering up again for its final episodes. It made lasting TV stars and icons of cool out of Robert Vaughn, previously the least magnificent of *The Magnificent Seven*, who played Solo, and David McCallum, sporting a blond Beatle cut as his Russian-agent partner Illya Kuryakin. It was also a career-defining last act for character actor Leo G. Carroll, who essentially reprised his role from *North by Northwest* as avuncular U.N.C.L.E. chief Alexander Waverly.

Given that *U.N.C.L.E.* was second only to 007 in the original spy-fi cycle, it's odd that this big-screen incarnation arrives well after lesser shows such as the eccentric spy western *Wild Wild West* and the *U.N.C.L.E.* parody *Get Smart* have had cinema remakes. An *U.N.C.L.E.* film has been in development for a decade or more,



It's all relative: Henry Cavill, Armie Hammer

with creatives including Quentin Tarantino and Steven Soderbergh attached at various points and sundry stars pencilled in to replace Vaughn and McCallum as Napoleon and Illya – last seen in the reunion TV movie *Return of the Man from U.N.C.L.E.: The Fifteen Years Later Affair* (1983). In the event, it's fallen to Guy Ritchie, fresh off a brace of revisionist Sherlock Holmes films, to handle the property – to which he brings his interest in feuding friendships (Napoleon and Illya, steadfast partners in the original, here spend more time fighting each other than the enemy), complicated plots involving misunderstandings and betrayals) and the trappings of high style and luxury (Napoleon and Illya argue over which fashions Alicia Vikander's Gaby should wear).

With its predominantly Roman settings, the film brings to mind the glut of Italian superspy knock-offs that emerged from the mid-1960s – the genre's most daffy exercise in opportunism was probably Alberto De Martino's *Operation Kid Brother* (1967), which cast Neil Connery as an agent we're supposed to take for James Bond's brother. The period costumes, vehicles and style are perfect – and there's a terrific score from Daniel Pemberton that honours Jerry Goldsmith's original theme with unusual instrument choices (flute, marimba). But the script keeps tripping over wrong-for-the-era expressions ("You'll take it like a pussy", "gazillionaire", "skill-set", "computer disc"), and the plot is still a variation on the 'Kreplachistan nuclear warhead' gambit parodied in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997). After a pretty good all-terrain-vehicle chase, it's a comedown that the climax depends on the hero keeping the villain talking on the phone so that someone else can blow her out of the water with a missile.

In a mini-aping of *Skyfall*, Henry Cavill's Solo and Armie Hammer's Kuryakin are given backstories (a spell as an art thief, a disgraced father in Siberia) and new character traits (sleight of hand, berserker rages) they don't really need. Making this an origin story also means that many of the best-remembered elements of the series – including the triangular badges, the covert HQ behind a New York tailor's shop, the gadgets (a pen-phone), the catchphrases ("Open Channel D") and arch-enemies THRUSH – don't get a look-in, as if saved for sequels. The leads are fine if bland, but Vikander and Hugh Grant (with very little to go on as Waverly) steal the film, as if the real plan was to ditch the guys and move straight to a *Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* movie. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

John Davis
Lionel Wigram
Guy Ritchie

Producer

Steve Clark-Hall

Screenplay

Guy Ritchie
Lionel Wigram

Story

Jeff Kleeman
David Campbell
Wilson
Guy Ritchie
Lionel Wigram
Based on the television series

Director of Photography

John Mathieson

Edited by

James Herbert

Production Designer

Oliver Scholl

Music

Daniel Pemberton

Production Sound Mixer

Gareth John

Costume Designer

Joanna Johnston

Stunt Co-ordinator

Jimmy O'Dee

Fight Co-ordinator

Mike Lambert

Production Companies

Warner Bros.
Pictures presents in association with Ratpac-Dune Entertainment LLC
Warner Bros.
Pictures presents in association with Ratpac-Dune Entertainment a Ritchie/Wigram production
A Davis Entertainment production

Executive Producers

David Dobkin
Steven Mnuchin

Producers

A Guy Ritchie film

Cast

Armie Hammer
Illya Kuryakin
Henry Cavill

Napoleon Solo
Alicia Vikander
Gabriella Teller,
'Gaby'

Elizabeth Debicki

Victoria Vinciguerra

Sylvester Groth

Uncle Rudi

Christian Berkel

Doctor Udo Teller

Luca Calvani

Alexander Vinciguerra

Misha Kuznetsov

Oleg

Jared Harris

Sanders

Hugh Grant

Alexander Waverly

Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

The early 1960s. CIA agent Napoleon Solo thwarts KGB agent Illya Kuryakin and extracts Gaby Teller, daughter of a missing scientist, from East Berlin. Napoleon and Illya become unwilling partners when Gaby infiltrates a fascist group led by Italian industrialist Victoria Vinciguerra, who is forcing Gaby's father to manufacture a nuclear weapon for the black market. Gaby betrays Napoleon and Illya to convince Victoria to let her get close to her father, but in fact she is working for Alexander Waverly of British Naval Intelligence. When Gaby's cover is blown and her father killed, Napoleon and Illya intervene to rescue her. Victoria escapes but her yacht is blown up by the US Navy. Waverly, Napoleon, Illya and Gaby team up in a new multinational group, the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement.

Marc Quinn Making Waves

United Kingdom 2014

Director: Gerry Fox

Certificate 15 85m 21s

Reviewed by John Beagles

In its own unsuspecting way, Gerry Fox's documentary about the artist Marc Quinn may be the most important film about the 21st-century art world yet made. For future cultural anthropologists and art historians, it may even come to be a seminal artefact, a latter-day Rosetta Stone.

In the film, Quinn, a former lieutenant in the YBA army who gained notoriety for his self-portrait *Self*, made from 4.5 litres of his own blood (the ultimate self-portrait, as he terms it), and his gold sculpture of Kate Moss, is followed fly-on-the-wall style around the globe for a year by Fox and his handheld camera. Quinn, never without trademark baseball cap and scarf, is possessed of a wide-eyed faux naivety and a permanently fixed benign smile.

As it transpires – and the film is eager to detail this for us – Quinn has much to smile about. The narrative of the film, such as it is, tracks the itinerant artist and his wife Lady Georgia Byng as they glide from Venice to New York, Hong Kong to Miami, Istanbul to London, Beijing to... Usually, Quinn's tours are for the purpose of supervising the installation of spectacular works, such as his 60ft-high inflatable version of his sculpture of the pregnant artist Alison Lapper.

If Quinn's Bond-like movements don't convince you of his A-list art-world status, the roll call of his friends and patrons will. The film includes an amusingly revealing series of lo-fi, slightly off-guard celeb moments: hey, it's Elton John in Venice, looking a bit hungover; Kim Kardashian, Kanye West and Lionel Richie at a party thrown by Tommy Hilfinger for Quinn in Miami; the Queen at the Chelsea Flower show... Brushing shoulders with these A-listers and royals is the predictable cavalcade of international gallerists, collectors, dealers and fellow artists (Ai Weiwei, Jay Jopling, Francesco Clemente) – an interminable, exhausting sample of the art world's rich and powerful air-kissing and avoiding saying absolutely anything of interest.

When he isn't partying like it's 1995, Quinn is seen interacting with the ordinary people who labour to fabricate his work and act as his muse. We witness technicians using state-of-the-art kit to scan bonsai trees, conch shells and body artist Laurence Sessou, to be 3D-printed or cast at exorbitant cost in luxury materials. As director of operations, Quinn is clearly



In like Quinn: Marc Quinn, Lorraine Sessou