

'WE WANT THE FILM TO
ATTAIN THE ARTISTIC STATUS
OF THE POEM OR THE NOVEL'
JOHN MCGRATH,
CREATOR OF THE
BBC SERIES 'SIX'

FORGOTTEN DRAMAS

REDISCOVERING BRITISH TELEVISION'S NEGLECTED PLAYS

Rediscover a variety of classic plays that have rarely been seen since their original transmission, write curators **Lez Cooke and Billy Smart**

British television has rightly been celebrated for producing some classic dramas, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1954), *Cathy Come Home* (1966), *Abigail's Party* (1977) and *The Singing Detective* (1986), to name just four. But for every TV 'classic' there are countless plays, series and serials that have been forgotten or archived. This season highlights a few of the many productions that have survived being junked or wiped but have mostly remained unseen. Written by a host of famous authors from JB Priestley and John Betjeman to Alan Bleasdale and Ian McEwan, these plays showcase great performances from Alison Steadman, Ralph Richardson and Peter Cushing, and amazing directing pedigree in the form of Philip Saville, Christopher Morahan, Les Blair and Tony Richardson. In bringing these sadly neglected dramas to a wider audience we hope it will be the catalyst for rediscovering more of British TV's forgotten history.

WANT MORE?

See p44 for our (free) Mediatheque collection on *Play for Today*

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

The History of Forgotten TV Drama project, Royal Holloway, University of London



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Image: Six: *The Logic Game*



TALK

Early to Bed

Second City Firsts. BBC 1975. Dir Leslie Blair. With David Warwick, Alison Steadman, Patricia Leach. 30min

Alan Bleasdale's first TV drama is about an 18-year-old man (Warwick) who embarks on an affair with the young, married woman (Steadman) who lives next door in their small mining village in Lancashire. Filmed on location by Les Blair who, as Bleasdale acknowledged, 'made a script of some promise, but no great quality, into something worth watching.'



+ Jack Flea's Birthday Celebration

BBC 1975. Dir Mike Newell. With Sara Kestelman, David Wilkinson, Eileen McCallum. 30min

David (Wilkinson) is a young man living with Ruth (Kestelman), a woman nearly twice his age. Like the majority of *Second City Firsts*, this drama – Ian McEwan's first for TV – was recorded in the studio at Pebble Mill, with the confined set greatly enhancing the tension when David's parents visit on his birthday.

Followed by a panel discussion with actor Alison Steadman, former Commissioning Editor of Drama at Channel 4 Peter Anson, director Les Blair and producer Tara Prem



INTRO

Anastasia

Sunday Night Theatre. BBC 1953. Dirs John Counsell and Rosemary Hill. With Helen Haye, Mary Kerridge, Anthony Ireland, Peter Cushing. 100min. 35mm

Anastasia, based on the play by Marcelle Maurette, is a prime example of the rediscovery of a TV play long after it was thought to have been destroyed. Cushing gives an outstanding performance as one of the Russian conspirators who come to realise that the woman they want to impersonate Anastasia, the rumoured surviving member of the Romanov royal family, may actually be authentic.

Introduced by Dr Lez Cooke, Senior Research Officer, Royal Holloway University of London

TUE 3 FEB
18:10 NFT3

TUE 10 FEB
18:20 NFT2



INTRO

Johnson Over Jordan

Thursday Theatre. BBC 1965. Dir Lionel Harris. With Ralph Richardson, Paul Eddington, Hannah Gordon. 80min. 16mm

Ralph Richardson reprises one of his greatest stage successes in this little-known TV revival. He plays the titular Johnson, who must relive and reflect upon his existence as he passes into the afterlife. JB Priestley's drama presents a soulful, abstract, expressionist world that fully tested the resources of the 1960s TV studio to awe-inspiring and emotional effect.



+ You Know What People Are

BBC 1955. Dir Tony Richardson. With Clive Morton, Natasha Parry, Frances Rowe, John Stratton. 30min

Unseen since its original transmission, this sole surviving edition of *You Know What People Are* is a fascinating insight into JB Priestley's attempts to create an original drama that could only be told through the new medium of television, using a fixed repertory company of the same four actors for each play in the series.

Introduced by Dr Billy Smart, Television Studies Research Officer, Royal Holloway University of London



INTRO

The Logic Game

Six. BBC 1965. Dir Philip Saville. With David de Keyser, Jane Arden, Peter Henry. 62min. 35mm

Shown as one of a series of six films on BBC2, Philip Saville's *The Logic Game* features two characters playing out a complex guessing game. Co-written by Jane Arden (who also stars), the film was informed by ideas of existential psychoanalysis – it includes an interview with psychiatrist RD Laing – and aroused controversy when it was shown at the London Film Festival in 1964.



+ Shotgun

Five More. BBC 1965. Dir John McGrath. With Shirley Anne Field, Nigel Davenport, Zena Walker, Petra Markham. 50min

Shotgun was one of two films directed by producer John McGrath for the follow-up series to *Six*, this time on the theme of love and marriage. Moving between the Scottish Highlands and London, past and present, it tells a story of infidelity and deceit, with its experimental structure complemented by strong performances (including Edward Fox in a minor role).

Introduced by Dr Lez Cooke, Senior Research Officer, Royal Holloway University of London

SUN 15 FEB
16:10 NFT2

WED 18 FEB
18:20 NFT2

book online at bfi.org.uk



INTRO

Pity About the Abbey

Londoners. BBC 1965. Dir Ian Curteis. With Henry McGee, John Harvey, Suzanne Mockler, Derek Francis. 75min. 35mm

Pity About the Abbey is the only surviving play from a 1965 BBC2 series called *Londoners*. Co-written by John Betjeman, before he became Poet Laureate, it adopts a deliciously comic tone (it was subtitled 'A Comedy About the Future'), and describes a plan to knock down Westminster Abbey and replace it with a new government building.



INTRO

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+ The Golden Road

Armchair Theatre. Thames 1973. Dir Douglas Camfield. With Katy Manning, Olive McFarland, Joyce Heron. 50min. 35mm

Unseen for over 40 years, Pat Hooker's *The Golden Road* is believed to be the first lesbian drama written by a woman made for British TV. It

features a beguiling performance from Manning, shaking off her *Doctor Who* assistant persona, as the free-spirited lodger who profoundly disrupts the lives of the suburban family she moves in with.

Introduced by Dr Billy Smart, Television Studies Research Officer, Royal Holloway University of London



The Common

Play of the Month. BBC 1973. Dir Christopher Morahan. With Peter Jeffrey, Vivien Merchant, Dennis Waterman. 100min

While Peter Nichols' *Privates on Parade* and *Passion Play* have recently been revived in the West End, his contemporaneous TV dramas remain unseen. *The Common* tells the story of an affair across divisions of age and class between true-blue Jane (Merchant) and socialist teacher Sean (Waterman). The result is an effective, subtle and mature comedy about London society.

Introduced by Dr Billy Smart, Television Studies Research Officer, Royal Holloway University of London

MON 23 FEB
17:50 NFT2

THU 26 FEB
18:20 NFT2