



FROM STAGE TO SCREEN (PART ONE)



Television drama has long looked to the theatre for inspiration and, at the **BFI Southbank** throughout August and September, we pose the question, *what makes a theatre play work on television?* and present a selection of the finest plays to have crossed over from the stage and be reimagined for the screen.

Whether it be the contemporary and often controversial plays performed at the **Royal Court Theatre** or the ‘classics’ of **Shakespeare**, **Ibsen**, and **Tennessee Williams**, television drama employs both the intimacy of film and the immediacy of the theatre. The season begins with the massive influence of the **Royal Court** on both film and television with screenings of seminal works such as **Whesker’s** *Chicken Soup With Barley* (1966) and discussions about the vital importance of this theatre’s work in pushing at the boundaries of television drama. **George Devine**, the Royal Court’s first Artistic Director, wanted to bring the nation to the stage, these TV productions brought the stage to the nation.

We will look at the different routes television has taken in producing these theatrical plays; from attempting a naturalistic verisimilitude in the TV studio to examining (in Part 2 throughout September) the more recent experiments filming live performances on the stage (*Richard II live from the Globe*, *Vincent in Brixton*) and ask which approach works best and why.

This season affords the opportunity to see some of Britain’s finest actors including **Maggie Smith** and the late **Natasha Richardson** in **Richard Eyre’s** *Suddenly Last Summer* (1993), and **John Hurt** and **Brian Cox** in *Six Characters In Search of an Author* (1992). Other productions for TV will include **John Osborne’s** *Look Back in Anger* (1976) and the groundbreaking *Top Girls* (1991) directed by **Max Stafford-Clark**.

Following a special screening of Clark’s *Rat in the Skull* (1987) we will welcome **Max Stafford-Clark** and **Simon Curtis** to discuss the amazing influence of the Royal Court theatre on contemporary television drama and the role of this theatre in nurturing writing talent.

September sees Part 2 of the **Stage to Screen** season with plays filmed on location in the theatre, the ‘classics’ from **Shakespeare** to **Strindberg** and the documentary *Changing Stages* which will be followed by a discussion with **Richard Eyre**.

- END -

PRESS CONTACT:

For all press enquiries please contact Tim Mosley:
Tel: 020 7957 8918 or email: tim.mosley@bfi.org.uk

PROGRAMMER

Look Back In Anger

Play of the Month. BBC 1976. Dir John Glenister. With James Hazeldine, Ciaran Madden, Neil Darglish, Thorley Walters. 125min

This production marked the 20th anniversary of the premiere of John Osborne's play at the Royal Court in 1956. As the Royal Court's own history proclaims, it is 'the play that marks the beginning of modern British drama'. James Hazeldine gives a riveting performance as Jimmy, articulating the rage and impotence of a whole generation against the value system of the 50s establishment yet managing to convey his own vulnerability and essential loneliness.

Sun 2 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Tue 4 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Chicken Soup with Barley

Theatre 625. BBC 1966. Dir Charles Jarrott. With Margery Mason, Clive Revill, John Allison. 95min

The first play of Arnold Wesker's trilogy concerns the history of a communist working-class family, seen through the intensely domestic lens of Jewish sensibility and detail. It is this very domesticity, combined with the ability to more effectively show the passing of time, that makes it perfect for television. A mother's plea – 'If you don't care, you'll die' – is heartbreaking, as her husband is destroyed by despair and her son stares into the same abyss. Immensely powerful, it launched Wesker's career.

Mon 10 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Fri 14 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Suddenly Last Summer

Performance. BBC/Thirteen WNET 1993.

Dir Richard Eyre. With Maggie Smith, Natasha Richardson, Rob Lowe, Richard E Grant. 85min

This production of Tennessee Williams' play wrings every nuance from the horror that unfolds. A mother (Smith) obsessed by the memory of her son, employs a doctor to institutionalise the woman she regards as destroying her son's reputation. Richardson, in a performance charged with neurotic sexuality, is powerless to prevent the awful truth about the son from emerging. A fine example of how Williams' dialogue and subtext can be enhanced by television.

Thu 20 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Sat 29 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Top Girls

Performance. BBC 1991. Dir Max Stafford-Clark. With Deborah Findlay, Lesley Manville, Lesley Sharp. 111min

Groundbreaking in tone and structure, Caryl Churchill's play moves effortlessly between an all-women fantasy dinner party – at which the guests include Pope Joan – and the domestic life of Marlene, a woman trying to live the Thatcherite dream. Her success comes at the terrible price of having given her daughter away to her sister, who, in a brilliant performance from Deborah Findlay, demonstrates the chasm in values that has grown up between them.

Wed 19 Aug 20:40 NFT2

Tue 25 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Six Characters in Search of an Author

Performance. BBC 1992. Dir Bill Bryden. With John Hurt, Brian Cox, Tara Fitzgerald. 95min

Pirandello's conceit plays with our notions of what is real: the imaginary life of the theatre or perceived reality. Depending on a level of theatricality that's challenging for television, Michael Hastings' adaptation cleverly subverts this by moving the action from a theatre rehearsal to a 50s film studio. Fine performances from Cox as the baffled director and Hurt and Fitzgerald as the characters doomed to relive each tragic moment endlessly.

Thu 27 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Sun 30 Aug 18:20 NFT2

Rat in the Skull

Central TV 1987. Dir Max Stafford-Clark & Glyn Edwards. With Brian Cox, Gary Oldman, Philip Jackson, Colum Convey. 79min

Ron Hutchinson's extremely powerful and complex examination of Irish sectarian psychology. When a rookie constable (Oldman) observes the interrogation of a 'Fenian' gunman (Convey) by an RUC detective (Cox), he is way out of his depth as violence erupts and he is powerless to prevent it. The play's menacing claustrophobia – set in the hothouse atmosphere of the interview room – is intensified by this fine television production.

+ Panel Discussion: From the Royal Court to Television.

An onstage interview with director Max Stafford-Clark and producer Simon Curtis discussing the huge influence of Royal Court productions on TV drama. We will examine why so many Royal Court productions have gone to television and how and why so many TV writers have been nurtured there. We will ask whether the theatre is television's testing ground now that the single play has apparently gone, as well as providing you with an opportunity to put your own questions.

Tue 18 Aug 18:30 NFT1

NOTES TO EDITORS

Booking information

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.00, concs £7.60 Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank / August 2009