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## The Nation's Health TV Season at BFI Southbank in May 2011.



In an era when the National Health Service is facing impending and major reform, **BFI Southbank** mounts a season investigating television's love affair with the NHS across drama, comedy and documentary from the 1950's to today and asks what this tells us about our relationship with the venerable institution.

In addition to screenings of NHS based dramas including G.F. Newman's **The Nation's Health** (1983), comedies like **Only When I Laugh** (1979) and documentaries such as **Jimmy's** (1979), highlights of the season are set to include a special discussion with **Casualty** creators **Paul Unwin, Jeremy Brock** and **John Yorke** (BBC Controller, Drama Production and New Talent) who will be examining both the programme's enduring appeal and the changes it has undergone. Creator of **Cardiac Arrest** and **Bodies**, **Dr. Jed Mercurio**, will also take to the **BFI Southbank** stage to discuss the immense significance of both of his celebrated productions.

Television was quick to see the potential in the heightened emotions surrounding illness, death and the romantic attraction of doctors and nurses, all neatly contained in the one set – your average NHS hospital ward. From ATV's **Emergency Ward 10** dating from the 1950's to the BBC's current series **Holby City** these basic tenets of the hospital drama remain the same. A gift to writers and producers but also an historical document of the way we perceive our NHS and the immense changes in our relationship with it through the decades.

Any drama about the NHS depends on exploiting our ingrained empathy with the system. **G.F. Newman's** brilliant drama series **The Nations Health** Ch4 1983, formed a watershed moment in our

relationship with the NHS on television and we are delighted that G.F. Newman will be joining us to discuss his seminal series.

We will also be investigating why we find the NHS so funny. Always a favourite setting for the television situation comedy (**Doctor in The House, Only When I Laugh, Surgical Spirit**) and as more recent successes prove (**Green Wing, Getting On**) the comic potential in the hospital environment is still very much with us. To discuss this whole medical comic phenomenon we hope to welcome another Doctor in his own right, **Graeme Garden** and legendary comedy producer **Humphrey Barclay** as well as some well known cast from the world of television comedy (please check BFI Website for details).

Does television's preoccupation with the medical profession drive our own obsessions with the NHS or simply reflect them, and has our relationship with the NHS changed over the decades? Perhaps this season will help us to find out.

- Ends -

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With thanks to **Patricia Holland**

**The Nation's Health + Q&A with GF Newman**

*Ch4-Euston Films 1983. Dir Les Blair. With Vivienne Ritchie, Ian McDiarmid, Sebastian Shaw. 4x85min*

GF Newman's iconoclastic vision of the NHS was to change the way drama presented the NHS permanently. Breaking with the usual deferential attitude to the profession, it brilliantly exposed major faults in the system, with medical decisions seen to be as much a part of doctors' careerism as for the well-being of the patient. The influence of *The Nation's Health* on British medical drama, and indeed on TV drama in general, remains considerable.

**Part 1: Acute**

85min

(Interval 45 min)

**Part 2: Decline**

85min

**Sat 7 May 14:00 NFT2**

**Part 3: Chronic**

81min

(Interval 10 min)

**Part 4: Collapse**

83min

**+ Q&A**

**G.F Newman** talks about the significance of his landmark series and the way that TV has represented the NHS before and since.

**Sat 7 May 18:30 NFT2**

### **The Model NHS: Soaps & Docusoaps**

Two typical drama series from the 50s and 70s, depicting very soap-driven ideas of the NHS, versus a real-life documentary from the 80s, as we explore the dichotomy between fictional representations of the NHS and the way it really is.

#### **Emergency Ward 10**

ATV 1959. Dir Christopher Morahan. With Charles Tingwell, Frederick Bartman, Barbara Cleg. 25mins

In an age of greater social divisions, doctors were gods in their own wards and nurses knew their place. When an Indian patient is diagnosed with TB the medical stakes are high.

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#### **General Hospital**

ATV 1974. Dir Pembroke Duttson. With Joanna Lumley, David Garth, Tony Adams. 25min

When ATV decided to revisit the medical soap, General Hospital was conceived as a daytime series. When Dr Bywaters decides to go into private medicine, his colleagues are critical of his decision.

#### **+ Jimmy's (Episode 20)**

YTV 1987. Dir Nick Gray. 48min

The series that documented life in St James' University Hospital, Leeds. During a tour of the hospital, Edwina Currie, then Minister for Health, is confronted by some uneasy truths on the hospital wards. Observational documentary at its best

**Tue 10 May 18:00 NFT2**

### **The Changing Face of Casualty**

Casualty departments have always lent themselves to television with their heady mix of accident, injury and raw emotions. So how does the real thing compare to its fictional portrayal? What has to be changed and what makes these fictional dramas so popular?

#### **This Week: Casualty**

Thames 1989. Prod Lorraine Heggeseey. 25min

This documentary from the respected *This Week* strand takes an unvarnished look at problems in the casualty department of Kings College hospital as cuts bite and pressure on resources mounts.

#### **+ Casualty: Closure**

BBC 1986. Dir Jan Sargent. With Bernard Gallagher, Derek Thompson, Brenda Fricker, Cathy Shipton. 50min

When the casualty department is threatened with closure divisions break out amongst the staff over whether they should strike.

#### **+ Panel Discussion with Paul Unwin, Jeremy Brock & John Yorke**

Do changes in the series *Casualty* reflect our own changing relationship with the NHS or do they drive it? Your chance to hear and question the creators of *Casualty*, writers Paul Unwin, Jeremy Brock and John Yorke (BBC Controller, Drama Production and New Talent). We also hope to welcome other members of *Casualty's* cast and crew: please check BFI website for updates.

**Thu 12 May 18:00 NFT3**

### **What's Up, Doc?**

Join us to examine the groundbreaking medical dramas of Dr Jed Mercurio.

#### **Cardiac Arrest: Welcome to the House of Pain**

BBC-Island World 1994. Dir David Hayman. With Andrew Lancel, Helen Baxendale, Ahsen Bhatti. 25min

Written by an actual doctor, the show burst on to our screens with a new sense of realism and perhaps cynicism. It's the first day on the ward for our new houseman and his naïve idealism is immediately challenged.

**+ Bodies (Episode One)**

BBC-Hat Trick 2004. Dir John Strickland. With Max Beesley, Susan Lynch, Patrick Baladi. 58min

As the new SPR on a gynaecological ward, Rob Lake soon begins to have doubts about the competence of his boss; but should he blow the whistle? The series made a star of Beesley and is regarded as one of the finest UKproduced medical dramas to date.

**+ Panel Discussion with Jed Mercurio & Professor Anne Marie Rafferty**

Writer-director (and doctor) Jed Mercurio and Anne Marie Rafferty (Head of School of the Florence Nightingale School of Nursing & Midwifery at King's College London) discuss how these two series revolutionised the representation of doctors, nurses and surgeons and challenged our complacency about how the NHS functions. Illustrated with clips from earlier series (*General Hospital*, *Angels*) and from such major influences as *The Nation's Health*.

**Tue 17 May 18:00 NFT3**

**Nurses or Angels?**

We present three very different views of the nursing profession across drama and documentary. The changes in the way nurses are portrayed on television are huge, begging the question of whether nursing is still perceived as 'a vocation'?

**Angels**

BBC 1979. Dir Terence Williams. With Shirley Cheriton, Shelly King, Sharon Rosita. 25min  
From the team that was to create *EastEnders* (Julia Smith & Tony Holland), This hospital soap is unusual for the time in its efforts to accurately represent the wide racial mix within the NHS.

**+ No Angels**

C4-World Productions 2004. Dir Clara Glynn. With Kaye Wragg, Jo Joyner, Derek Riddell. 60min

Parties, drugs, sex and rock & roll – in refocusing the hospital drama on the private lives of the nurses the series discovered the power of humour within the profession and points up the immense changes in society's attitudes to nursing. Provocative and entertaining drama.

**+ This Week: Nursing: Condition Critical**

Thames 1986. Prod Mike Dutfield. 27min

A snapshot of the nursing profession under severe strain in the cashstrapped NHS of 1986, when hospitals were unable to recruit due to lack of resources.

**Mon 23 May 18:00 NFT3**

**Doctor in the House**

Television has long seen the comic potential in the NHS and the doctor/patient interface. These episodes are linked by storylines revolving around poor industrial relations.

**Doctor In Charge: In Place of Strife**

LWT 1973. Dir Alan Wallis. With Robin Nedwell, George Layton. 25min

When Dr Wearing gets carried away doing other people's jobs, the whole hospital grinds to a halt.

**+ Only When I Laugh: Let Them Eat Cake**

YTV 1979. Dir Vernon Lawrence. With James Bolam, Peter Bowles, Christopher Strauli. 25min

From the writer of *Rising Damp*, Eric Chappel. A superb cast excels in this story of complaints over hospital food and militant porters.

**+ Surgical Spirit: Walk Out**

Granada 1995. Dir David Askey. With Nichola McAuliffe, Duncan Preston, Marji Campi. 25min

Reflecting a new commercial era for the NHS – when privatisation of cleaning staff leads to a walk-out, the surgeons try to carry on, with only limited success.

**+ Panel Discussion with Graeme Garden & Humphrey Barclay**

Dr Graeme Garden chairs a panel including renowned comedy producer Humphrey Barclay to ask why the NHS is so intrinsically funny, and what comic representations tell us about our attitudes to the institution.

**Tue 24 May 18:00 NFT3**

### **About the BFI**

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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 £9.50, concs £6.75 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website [www.bfi.org.uk/southbank](http://www.bfi.org.uk/southbank)

**Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment**

### **BFI Filmstore**

The BFI Filmstore is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

### **The benugo bar & kitchen**

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

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](http://www.image.net) under BFI / BFI Southbank /**