



THE ALAN WHICKER CENTENARY

The Life and Legacy of Alan Whicker

Jane Ray, Whicker's radio producer – now Artistic Director of The Whickers, Alan's charitable Foundation funding the next generation of documentary makers – is joined by Michael Palin, Michael Parkinson and Jon Culshaw, to discuss his career and his legacy. Dick Fiddy, BFI TV Curator, will host the panel.

Jane Ray was Alan Whicker's radio producer in the nineties and noughties. She now runs The Whickers, Alan's legacy fund for emerging documentary talent.

Polymath **Michael Palin** emulated Alan Whicker by becoming a fascinating TV travel companion on a series of global adventures.

Michael Parkinson is the grandmaster of the television talk show and was a good friend of Alan Whicker.

Comedy impressionist **Jon Culshaw** is playing Alan Whicker in new radio drama *The Other Side of the World*.

Alan Whicker

In a late 1950s television climate where a familiar and reassuring face on the British home screen held an unshakeable trust and loyalty with the viewing public, the world of the Englishman's Englishman as personified by Alan Whicker in far-flung, exotic locales became a source of national pride and celebrity. The Whickeresque glasses, moustache and blazer became instantly recognisable, to the extent that he was called upon to play himself in the film *The Angry Silence* (d. Guy Green, 1960) and was invited to conduct the first Telstar two-way transmission at the opening of the United Nations Assembly in New York in 1962.

Born in 1921 in Cairo, Egypt, when his ex-Army officer father retired to live there, he returned to England with his mother after his father's death and was educated at Haberdashers' Aske's public school in Hampstead, London. During the Second World War he was commissioned in the Devonshire Regiment (rank of captain) and was seconded to the Army Film and Photographic Unit. After the war, as foreign correspondent with a Fleet Street news agency, he journeyed all over the world and developed a taste for travel. As a war correspondent in Korea in 1950, he went in on the Inchon landings with the U.S. Marines and, it is said, was later reported (with some exaggeration) captured and shot by the North Koreans.

He joined the BBC's *Tonight* (1957-65) team in February 1957, appearing nightly in this early and influential current affairs magazine. His filmed interviews were conducted with a noticeable flair and style, and led to the programme's regular 'Whicker's World' segment in 1958. The transition from short reports to full-length BBC documentaries came with the multi-part, characteristically unconventional observations on Australia (*Whicker Down*

Under, 1961), Alaska (*Whicker on Top of the World*, 1962) and the U.S. (*Whicker in the Heart of Texas*, 1963).

He soon progressed from overviews of the more quirkier aspects of other nations' societies to privileged insights into the more exclusive individuals in world society: *The Solitary Billionaire* (BBC, tx. 24/2/1963), with J. Paul Getty, *The Model Millionairess* (BBC, tx. 7/5/1963), with Baroness Fiona Thyssen, and *Matador* (BBC, tx. 29/7/1966), profiling legendary bull-fighter El Cordobes.

Following the demise of *Tonight* in 1965, he began *Whicker's World* (BBC, 1965-68), a series of highly personalised monthly documentaries which revealed his journalist's instinct for the most telling and bizarre aspects of a subject. Occasionally, it also offered an unfortunate glimpse of a disquieting impatience with the ordinary person interviewee, where one could almost hear the click as Whicker's sympathies cut off.

In 1969, for Yorkshire Television (in which he was a major shareholder), he began a memorable period of some of the most fascinating documentaries seen on British television; including the chilling study of Haiti's dictator Papa Doc Duvalier (*Papa Doc – The Black Sheep*, ITV, tx. 17/6/1969), which went on to win the UCLA's Dumont International Journalism Award in 1971. Another disconcerting story (which became a special edition) was told in the series *Whicker's Walkabout* (ITV, 1970) in Australia, when he entered the ominous, closed-shop union mining community of *Broken Hill – Walled City* (tx. 25/8/1970). His extraordinary interview with novelist Harold Robbins (*Harold Robbins – I'm the World's Best Writer*, ITV, tx. 13/7/1971) won the Best Interview Programme Award at the 1973 Hollywood Festival of World Television.

These ITV programmes (including *The World of Whicker*, ITV, 1971-74) also witnessed a mellowing change in the Whicker persona; the one-time slightly censorious, faintly superior character had broadened his sympathies, now less prone to judge, more likely to examine. His travels (socially as well as geographically) continued as before, but seemed destined to retrace steps and themes from past programmes: *Whicker's Orient* (ITV, 1972), *Whicker's South Seas* (ITV, 1973) and *Whicker Way Out West* (ITV, 1973).

He returned to the BBC in 1984 and, between further exotic travels, hosted a studio interview series, *Whicker!*. Later on, he was himself the interview subject on various chat shows (with Gloria Hunniford, Richard & Judy, and others), and provided a narrative guide to *The Comedy Map of Britain* (BBC, 2007-2008).

He was awarded the CBE in 2005 for services to broadcasting. He died in 2013.

Tise Vahimagi, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

Whicker's World in the Mediatheque

Explore an extensive new collection of programmes from the BFI National Archive spanning Alan Whicker's career. Book a free viewing session online or via the BFI Southbank box office.

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

The Alan Whicker Centenary:
Welcome to Whicker’s World + intro
Sat 7 Aug 14:30
The Alan Whicker Centenary:
The Life and Legacy of Alan Whicker
Sat 7 Aug 17:40
Preview: I’m Your Man (Ich bin dein Mensch)
+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Maria Schrader
Mon 9 Aug 17:50
BFI & Radio Times Television Festival presents:
TV Preview: Vigil + Q&A with cast and creatives
Mon 23 Aug 18:10

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

Limbo Continues from Jul
The Most Beautiful Boy in the World Continues from Jul
Now, Voyager From Fri 6 Aug
The Sparks Brothers From Fri 6 Aug
The Story of a Three Day Pass From Sat 7 Aug
CODA From Fri 13 Aug
Censor From Fri 20 Aug
Souad From Fri 27 Aug

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Seniors’ Free Matinee: Personal Services
+ intro and Q&A with author, Graham Rinaldi
Mon 9 Aug 14:00
Projecting the Archive: The Blue Lagoon
+ intro by actor Susan Stranks (young Emmeline)
Tue 10 Aug 18:00
Member Picks: Almost Famous
Thu 12 Aug 17:45
Silent Cinema: The Wit and Wisdom of A.A. Milne
+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI Curator
Sun 15 Aug 12:40
DVD Launch: Great Noises That Fill the Air: Music, Poetry and
Performance on Film
Mon 16 Aug 17:50
S.O.U.L. Fest 2021
Fri 20-Sun 22 Aug
Experimenta: Thundercrack!
+ intro by Jane Giles, author of ‘Scala Cinema 1987-1993
Sat 21 Aug 17:00
Relaxed Screening: Stand Clear of the Closing Doors
Tue 24 Aug 18:00
Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:
Souad + pre-recorded Q&A with director Ayten Amin
Tue 24 Aug 18:00
Terror Vision: Dr Terror’s House of Horrors
Thu 26 Aug 20:40

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