



THE FILMS OF SAINT ETIENNE

This Is Tomorrow

Introduced by Bob Stanley and Paul Kelly.

In Britain, since sometime in the 2000s, the moment of wartime austerity and post-war reconstruction has gone from being a seldom-mentioned period, alternately lamented or vaguely longed for, into a kind of minor national obsession, and one with seemingly no obvious political colouring. Something like Ken Loach's *Spirit of '45* (2013), reminding people of the creation of a welfare state that is currently in the process of final demolition, is one pole of it; another is a weird middle-class 'austerity nostalgia', where the false memories of 'Keep Calm and Carry On' posters seem to mesh into the belt-tightening rhetoric of the coalition government, responsible for said dismantlement. Go to the shop in the Royal Festival Hall (either of them, there are two, one inside, one in the new extension by Allies and Morrison) and you can find a large quantity of peculiar post-war themed memorabilia where the Southbank Centre's self-marketing combines with an appeal, at times, to a social democratic spirit of modernity and optimism, and, at others, to a self-denying spirit of self-imposed middle-class thrift – or both at once. Either way they demonstrate the same clean, clipped aesthetic – a dreamy digitisation of the designs of the likes of Abram Games or Eric Ravillous: isotype council estates on tea towels next to *Great British Cooking*. From its opening animation of the London Blitz onwards, Saint Etienne and Paul Kelly's *This Is Tomorrow*, inhabits this ambiguous space – as it should, being a celebration of the Festival Hall itself.

This Is Tomorrow is a PR film in the original sense, that is 'public relations' as conceived by the benevolent bureaucrats of the interwar years and just after. This was the world of Stephen Tallents at the GPO and Empire Marketing Board, or Frank Pick at London Transport, people who considered that they could use the new means of communication – the mass media, the cinema, radio and later TV – to, as Tallents put it, help 'the public to take the most economic advantages of the facilities that they have caused to be provided for themselves'. The likes of Tallents helped to create the British Documentary Movement – key practitioners of which were Humphrey Jennings, Len Lye, Basil Wright, Paul Rotha et al. These directors made films that were designed to make people aware of publicly funded services, whether public transport or the post, laying the groundwork for the social democratic consensus which would be established after the war. Unashamedly proud of their subjects, the filmmakers depicted workers and their machines, outlining and explaining complex networks of communication and distribution. *This Is Tomorrow* consciously follows this tradition, concentrating almost as much on the day-to-day work of refurbishing and rebuilding the Royal Festival Hall as on its history, to the extent that at times it's almost a Soviet-style 'production film' demonstrating a construction job, explaining why it is necessary, showing how it works, and patiently telling you why you ought to care. It nods to this tradition slyly by lingering on the occasionally more socialist realist moments of the Festival, from heroic sculptures of the proletarian family to a striking image of marching workers holding aloft a flag emblazoned with Abram Games' Britannia logo.

The film tells, fairly laconically, the story of the 1951 Festival of Britain, and its major edifice. As if to proclaim the end of austerity, a public celebration – a showcase of modernity – was initiated by former head of the London County Council and then-cabinet minister Herbert Morrison. It was held on the 100th anniversary of the Great Exhibition, the first of the world expos, as a reminder perhaps of Britain's precedence in industrial modernity. Although only one of the structures, the Royal Festival Hall designed by the LCC's architects, was intended to be permanent, the aggressive way the Festival's other buildings were immediately swept away when the Conservatives narrowly returned to power in late 1951 is notable. According to Churchill, Skylon and the Dome of Discovery were 'three-dimensional socialist propaganda'. The huge, lumpen half-neoclassical half-modern hulk of the Shell Centre rammed onto the vacated site, provides a rather unsympathetic backdrop to the events in this film. The Festival Hall was refurbished in the mid-2000s, and this is a commissioned film for that event, under the auspices of the Southbank Centre.

Paul Kelly does a fine job of reminding us why the place was worth caring about, both in the loving shots of the building itself (accompanied by the introductory smart animated sequences), and with some very well-chosen interviewees, many of them questioned by architectural historian Elain Harwood. Largely, the surviving architects of the LCC team (lead designers, Leslie Martin, Robert Matthew and Peter Moro, are all dead) speak with some pride of their achievements, as well they might. Jim Cadbury-Brown, one of the Festival's architects and later the architect of the Royal College of Art, speaks as one of a group of 'people fired by a kind of socialist ideal', LCC architect Trevor Dannatt recalls the driving influence of Herbert Morrison, furniture designer Robin Day recalls the challenge of designing something intended for posterity – but perhaps the most telling point is made by Leonard Manasseh, later an important designer in his own right, who remembers that at the Festival, 'for once it looked like everyone was enjoying themselves'. It's not just architects – an early staff member remembers being hired for the Festival Hall as 'the best day of my life'. Nor is it wholly positive – another remembers how some of Lambeth's terraced houses were pulled down for part of the site, 'slums – though we didn't think they were slums'.

We go from these scenes of the Festival – partly illustrated by excerpts from Maurice Harvey and Jacques Brunius' *Brief City* (1952) – to the Hall's uses for jazz, pop, baroque, whatever – and then leap rather quickly to the refurb. At one point a voice tells us that the 'site forgot what its purpose was', as we see its later, less open, stranger neighbours, the Hayward Gallery and the Queen Elizabeth Hall/Purcell Room, before arriving at the Allies and Morrison redesign. Rather a lot falls unmentioned in-between – not only in a rather brusque ('Cinderella') treatment of the fascinating, cranky later buildings (though the footage captures their complexities very neatly), but also in the Festival Hall's own travails, from its redesign with more sober, less colourful façades in the 1960s, to the opening of the foyers as all-day-long public spaces by the GLC under Ken Livingstone – a move which maybe did more than anything else to guarantee the building's enduring place in the affections of Londoners. Aspects of the redesign that sit ill with the original socialist spirit of this 'People's Palace', such as the new commercial spaces, are unmentioned.

This is, though, a portrait of, and eulogy to, a real People's Palace – a building whose ostensible function as a concert hall sometimes seems to mean less

than its status as a free space in the capital: the surviving (and thriving) fragment of the LCC’s soft-socialist South Bank powerhouse now ambiguously – if successfully – neighboured by the later, more theme park-like London Eye, Globe Theatre and Tate Modern. It’s also a very rare film about actual manual labour, interviewing the building workers who are tackling the complex work of restoring this Grade I listed building, and showing the intricate processes of, say, replacing the classic patterned carpet. It’s incredible, one of the building workers tells us, that they managed to achieve a building like this without the technologies we have today. Later parts of the film revel in the bared structure revealed by the works, the building seen truly in the raw.

Interviewees Alain de Botton and Jeremy Deller both draw attention to the way that the Festival Hall sits outside of a more and more commercialised and sold-off city, a unique place that is as welcoming and accommodating for the skateboarders and taggers in the South Bank undercroft, old ladies with thermoses enjoying the view from the foyers and courting and flirting couples, as it is for the ticket-holders and drinks-buyers who have paid to be there. ‘It’s not privatised... you can feel free to go there and not buy expensive coffee’, as Deller puts it. Yet, at this exact point, high-end chain stores were moving into the ground floor, a fate soon to be extended to the QEH and the Hayward Gallery, at least in the current refurbishment proposals. By stressing the seriousness – and achievability – of the ideals of the London County Council and its architects, *This Is Tomorrow* holds the Festival Hall to its original promises, reminding it of what it was built as, what it is still supposed to be – remembering it as something specific and concrete rather than a hazy, reified memory. We can only hope that it won’t inadvertently stand as an epitaph for it.

Owen Hatherley, ‘This Is Tomorrow’, from *A London Trilogy: The Films of Saint Etienne 2003-2007* DVD booklet (BFI, 2013)

THIS IS TOMORROW

Directed by: Paul Kelly
©/Production Company: Pilgrim
©/Presented by: Southbank Centre
Presented by: Saint Etienne
Producer: Andrew Hinton
Production Assistants: Fred Burns, Rob Petit
Filmed by: Paul Kelly
Additional Camera: Eric Trometer
Acoustic Animation: Popular Society
Acoustic Animation (Popular Society): John Brown
Editor: Mikey Tomkins, Popular Society
On-line Editor: Paul Jones, Exposure
Titles: Rob Jones, Imperial Leisure
Music by: Saint Etienne
Saint Etienne are: Sarah Cracknell, Bob Stanley, Pete Wiggs
With: Ian Catt
Choir/Orchestra Arrangements: Gerard Johnson, Ian Catt
Vocal Facilitator: Suzi Zumpe
Repetiteur: Jonathan Williams
Band Management: Martin Kelly, Heavenly Management
Site Sound Recording: Byron Blake
Additional Sound: Rob Mullender
Sound Mix: Daniel Herbert

Contributors: Jude Kelly, Trevor Dannatt, Lou Shepherd, Jim Cadbury-Brown, Leonard Manasseh, Mike McCart, Alain de Botton, Michael Lynch, Di Haigh, Larry Kirkegaard, Clive Hollick, Jean Symons, Peter Lecount, Oliver Chapple, Robin Day, Jeremy Deller
Contributors (Festival of Britain Society): Fred Peskett, George Simner
Legal Representation: Ann Harrison, Harrisons Entertainment Law
Website: Yunus Akseki, Imperial Leisure
Press: Emma Pettit, MARGARET
Vocals: Sarah Cracknell
Backing Vocals: Debsey Wykes
Guitar: James Walbourne
Bass: Ian Catt
Drums: Rob Walbourne
Piano: Tom Cawley
Flute: Jo Fraser
Keyboards: Bob Stanley, Pete Wiggs
Choir: Lilian Bayliss Technology School – Year 9 Students, London Centre for Young Musicians
Orchestra: Students from Prendergast School, Students from Sydenham School, Students from Sedgehill School, Students of Trinity College of Music
Builder interviews: Johnny Burke, Lucy Macnab
Architect interviews: Elain Harwood
Featuring the voice of: David Wykes (as ‘The Book’)

UK 2007©
54 mins

THE FILMS OF SAINT ETIENNE

This Is Tomorrow + intro by Bob Stanley and Paul Kelly
Fri 3 Sep 14:30
Asunder + intro by Esther Johnson and Bob Stanley
Sat 4 Sep 12:00
Finisterre + Q&A with Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs
Sat 4 Sep 15:00
How We Used to Live + Q&A with Pete Wiggs and Travis Elborough
Sat 4 Sep 17:20
Saint Etienne: Shorts Programme + intro by Paul Kelly and Pete Wiggs
Sun 5 Sep 13:00
Lawrence of Belgravia + Q&A with Paul Kelly and Lawrence
Sun 5 Sep 15:30
What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day? + Q&A with Pete Wiggs and Paul Kelly
Sun 5 Sep 18:30

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

UK Premiere: I've Been Trying to Tell You + Q&A with Alasdair McLellan and Bob Stanley
Fri 3 Sep 18:30, 21:00
Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI
Mon 6 Sep 18:00
Black to Front + Q&A with special guests TBA
Tue 7 Sep 18:00
Doctor Who: The Evil of the Daleks (animated)
Sun 12 Sep 12:00
Preview: Sweetheart + Q&A with director Marley Morrison
Mon 13 Sep 17:50
Prime Suspect: 30th Anniversary (First Series Complete Screening)
Sun 19 Sep 14:00
Lynda La Plante in Conversation
Sun 19 Sep 18:45
60th Anniversary: Whistle Down the Wind + actor Hayley Mills in Conversation
Sun 3 Oct 12:00

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