



NFTS AT 50

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

+ Q&A with director *Beeban Kidron*

Jeanette Winterson adapted her own novel for TV – a story of personal growth and escape from oppressive religious obsession and patriarchy in a small mining village during the 1960s and 70s. The series proved a sensation when first transmitted and launched director Beeban Kidron as a major talent. While certain elements considered highly controversial at the time (such as Jess' exploration of her sexuality) may now seem a little tame, Jess' story of self-discovery and individual freedom remains as powerful as ever.

bfi.org.uk

Adapted by Jeanette Winterson from her own semi-autobiographical novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* burst onto television screens in January 1990, in a blaze of pre-publicity. It inherited BBC2's Wednesday night 'serious drama' slot, previously occupied by the likes of Dennis Potter.

Today, more than 10 years later, one can't help wondering why so much was made of its lesbian aspect. The more powerful theme is the fight between the individual and a rigid and repressive society, manifested in Jess's (Charlotte Coleman) struggle to become her own person, rejecting the strict control of her mother (Geraldine McEwan) and of patriarchy, in the form of the church and Pastor Finch (Kenneth Cranham). She emerges to find a new world of possibilities – leaving home, her first proper job, a place at university. The individual in this case wins out over society, making this a piece of timeless drama just as relevant to modern audiences.

The drama uses conventions of televisual reality, grounding the drama in the real world, making it more accessible for the viewer and more easily appropriated by them. Without this convention the more fantastical elements of the drama might seem unbelievable and disrupt the viewer's identification with the storyline. Jess's mother certainly has quite a surreal worldview, shared by the majority of the older inhabitants of Jess's world. This would work against the drama if it weren't for the characters' grounding in reality and the easily recognisable location of a working-class mining town.

For audiences that have grown up with lesbian characters in most of the main soap operas, the routine appearance of lesbian characters in ITV and BBC dramas, and Channel 4 pushing the boundaries of 'acceptable' British television with programmes like *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000), *Oranges* seems quite tame when seen today. But for its time, it was an innovative, brave, original and, to many, shocking depiction of teenage lesbian love. By the third episode of *Oranges*, as if to illustrate how far society had moved in its tolerance of minority groups, Jess not only accepts her sexuality but fully embraces it and the lifestyle she will soon lead, far from her small-minded community.

Emma Smart, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

Alex

Alex, a painter, is at first happy when her husband gets a job. Soon however she becomes unsettled by his commitment to it and his apparent success.

ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT

Director: Beeban Kidron
©/Production Company: BBC
Producer: Phillipa Giles
Production Associate: Glyn Edwards
Production Manager: Liz Mace
Location Manager: Paul Brodrick
1st Assistant: Maurice Hunter
 Casting: Michelle Guish
Adaptation: Jeanette Winterson
Based on the novel by: Jeanette Winterson
Photography: Ian Punter
Gaffer: Dave Mason
Grip: James Grimes
Graphic Designer: Liz Friedman
Film Editor: John Strickland
Designer: Cecelia Brereton
Properties Buyer: Malcolm Rougvie
Costume Designer: Les Lansdown
Make-up Design: Lina McInnes
Music Composed by: Rachel Portman
[Music] Conducted by: David Snell
Sound Recordist: Malcolm Webberley
Dubbing Editors: Kathy Rodwell, Aad Wirtz

Cast

Emily Aston (*small Jess*)
Geraldine McEwan (*mother*)
Peter Gordon (*William*)
Barbara Hicks (*Cissy*)
Margery Withers (*Elsie*)

Elizabeth Spriggs (*May*)
Freda Dowie (*Mrs Green*)
Celia Imrie (*Miss Jewsbury*)
Sophie Thursfield (*Jess' real mother*)
Kenneth Cranham (*Pastor Finch*)
Pam Ferris (*Mrs Arkwright*)
Katy Murphy (*Mrs Virtue*)
Sharon Bower (*Mrs Vole*)
David Thewlis (*doctor*)
Bill Rogers (*ice cream man*)
Darren Scott (*boy next door*)
Kay Clayton (*gypsy woman*)
Tamar Swade (*church pianist*)
Cathryn Bradshaw (*Melanie*)
Charlotte Coleman (*Jess*)

UK tx 10.1.90-24.1.90
Episode 1 55 mins

ALEX

Director: Beeban Kidron
Production Company: National Film and Television School
Producer: Shawn Slovo
Written by: Beeban Kidron
Cast:
Sara Sugarman
Ian Mercer
UK 1990
30 mins

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Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

+ Q&A with director Beeban Kidron

Thu 23 Sep 18:00

Kurt & Courtney + Q&A with director Nick Broomfield

Sat 25 Sep 14:30

Theatre Girls + Q&A with director Kim Longinotto

Sun 26 Sep 15:40

Surge + Q&A with director Aneil Karia

Tue 28 Sep 17:40

Of Time and the City + Q&A with director Terence Davies

Sat 2 Oct 14:15

Rocks + Q&A with director Sarah Gavron

Sat 2 Oct 17:30



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