



RETURN OF THE OUTSIDER: THE FILMS OF MIKE HODGES

Tempo

Hodges succeeded Kenneth Tynan as producer of *Tempo*, ITV's arts programme. He switched its largely studio-based output to 16mm film and launched three series: *Tempo Profiles*; *Tempo Entertainers*; *Tempo International*. Samples from each are included in this programme, which features Orson Welles, Jacques Tati and Ornette Coleman (*International*); Buskers (*Entertainers*); Harold Pinter and Jean-Luc Godard (*Profiles*) and more.

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By the beginning of the 1960s, one television programme stood as the acme of arts programming – the BBC's 'flagship' series *Monitor*. It was presided over by the avuncular Huw Wheldon, who conducted interviews in the studio and introduced films on artists and their worlds, all beautifully crafted in monochrome 35mm. Future film directors John Schlesinger and Ken Russell learnt their trade there and developed a personal voice. How was the relative newcomer of independent television to compete? The answer came in the shape of *Tempo*, launched in October 1961 with flamboyant theatre critic Kenneth Tynan as editor and presenter. It ran for eight years, outliving *Monitor*, but today is less frequently cited as a force in the transmission of culture through the small screen. Yet the editor of *Arena* Anthony Wall recalls the dynamic, fluid style and open-door policy of *Tempo* as a key influence on that very individual BBC arts series.

As with *Monitor*, far less of the studio content of *Tempo* survives than the specially crafted films. Just as Jonathan Miller brought about a controversial sea change in *Monitor* when he took over in 1964, largely dropping Wheldon's big-game-hunt of great artists for an off-centre, handheld approach, so *Tempo* underwent an aesthetic makeover when Mike Hodges, future director of *Get Carter* (1971), *Flash Gordon* (1980) and *Croupier* (1998), arrived from Granada's groundbreaking current-affairs series *World in Action* to become series producer.

Already a new sensibility had crept into *Tempo* with the employment of art-school graduates, notably Trevor Preston (later the writer of such compelling crime series as *Out*) and James (later the film director Jim) Goddard. Inspired by his experience working with the Maysles brothers in the US, Hodges abandoned the studio and commissioned half hour films to be shot on lightweight 16mm equipment. He found highly accomplished crews at a Canadian company established in London, Allan King Associates. As Hodges recalls, 'The budget was only £2,000 for each programme. Out of that had to come the costs of shooting and the editing, but 16mm gave us much more access and freedom, even if we only had two days of actual filming.'

He then inaugurated *Tempo Profile*, including a frank and direct interview with Harold Pinter (and featuring extracts from *The Homecoming* with its original cast), a sharp yet curiously evasive Duke Ellington, a wonderfully expansive Orson Welles ('all shot in an architect friend's flat below mine in Notting Hill') and a strikingly intimate look at the contrasted worlds of ballet dancer Lynn

Seymour and new pop sensation Tom Jones. This bold mix of what was then characterised as high and low art was a definite breakthrough. Next, Hodges devised a series he 'laughingly' called *Tempo International*, with the majority of filming done in Paris. As Hodges explains: 'I followed union rules and took a crew over there, camera and sound plus two assistants, and split them into two crews.' There he covered most of his 'international' subjects, such as the charming portrait by director Dick Fontaine (another *World in Action* graduate) of Jacques Tati at work on his magnum opus, *Playtime*.

For Hodges, the real gear change came in 1967 with *New Tempo*. It was a last hurrah of highly experimental films, resulting in disgruntled viewers jamming the ITV switchboard; amazingly, the programme's time slot by this stage was Sunday afternoon, just after lunch. 'I was completely obsessed with Marshall McLuhan, it was such a freewheeling time, everything was breaking down, and you began to make extraordinary connections, which he was very adroit at doing.' Theme-based films in a fast-cut essay format proved to be too much too soon.

David Thompson, *Sight & Sound*, April 2013

TEMPO

Producer: Mike Hodges
Production Company: ABC Television
ITV tx 1966/67
Total running time: 116 mins

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The Terminal Man (director's cut) Mon 2 May 14:50; Mon 16 May 20:40
Mike Hodges in Conversation Tue 3 May 18:15
Black Rainbow Tue 3 May 20:40; Sun 22 May 18:10
Pulp Wed 4 May 18:15; Wed 11 May 20:50
I'll Sleep When I'm Dead Thu 5 May 18:00; Mon 30 May 17:50
Morons from Outer Space
Fri 6 May 18:05; Wed 18 May 20:50 + **World in Action: The Flipside**
Flash Gordon Sat 7 May 12:00; Thu 19 May 20:20 + **The Tyrant King: Episode 1: Scarface**
Squaring the Circle + World in Action: Goldwater for President? or How to Win Friends and Influence People Sun 8 May 11:50
A Prayer for the Dying Sun 8 May 15:20; Sun 15 May 18:10
Tempo Tue 17 May 18:00
Murder by Numbers + The Hitchhiker: W.G.O.D
Thu 19 May 18:30
Dandelion Dead Sat 21 May 13:10
New Tempo Sun 29 May 11:50

Mike Hodges interviewed by The British Entertainment History Project:
<https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/mike-hodges>

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