



GLEND A JACKSON

Horror of Darkness + Let's Murder Vivaldi

Horror of Darkness arrived in the early days of *The Wednesday Play* (BBC, 1964-70), just before the anthology series acquired its reputation as the often controversial highlight of the mid-1960s BBC TV schedules, epitomised by Nell Dunn's *Up the Junction* (1965) and Jeremy Sandford's *Cathy Come Home* (1966). The play found writer John Hopkins in bleak mood and at his most disquieting, though its underlying element of homosexuality caused only a minor ripple of controversy, even some two years before legalisation.

Set in a comfortably spacious London flat, it is an economically planned studio drama focusing on three people at a point of crisis: the young, uncommunicative commercial artist, Peter (played by a weary Alfred Lynch, all sulky looks and brooding stares), his persistently analytical partner, Cathy (Glenda Jackson, who plays with striking intelligence and understanding), and their newly-arrived, but unexpected, lodger, Peter's old art school friend Robin (Nicol Williamson giving his all to an array of anguish and pathos usually associated with Scandinavian angst).

The play describes a period when the characters suddenly become aware that they have been marking time, asking too much, or too little, of each other. Cathy watches the wistful homosexual Robin, Robin watches Peter, and Peter watches himself becoming as empty and aimless as the pathetic Robin. Behind all their eyes is a sense of puzzled pain and loss which gives the play a strangely moving quality beyond its façade of compromise.

Perhaps because of the greater complexity of the relationships, Hopkins and *Wednesday Play* producer James MacTaggart opted for a style which was simpler than that of their previous production, *Fable* (1965). The style of this play is a return to that of Hopkins' early *Z Cars* episodes, in which the burden of expression falls almost entirely on the actors.

A powerful, unrelenting performance is delivered by the main cast of three (a mixture of half-smiles, hysterical outbursts and luring close-ups) – Williamson in particular – and it is the living, breathing vulnerability of the characters that turns the play from a metaphysical exercise into an image of three people rent apart by their inability to penetrate each other's inner needs.

Tise Vahimagi, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

Ian Penman, writing in *The Sunday Correspondent* ten years after David Mercer's early death in 1980, recalled the era of 'monochrome anger, intense beards, poloneck politics' which Mercer represented in the British TV drama of the 1960s and '70s. In **Let's Murder Vivaldi**, Ben (David Sumner) is a version of Mercer himself – heavily bearded, often drunk, disillusioned, paranoid, prone to violent outbursts. As so often in Mercer's work, the characters are intelligent people tearing each other to shreds – but in a sophisticated way, using wit and sarcasm as weapons just as effective as the knives that eventually come into play. The result is powerful, adult drama, which is also bitingly funny.

Both couples are trapped in failing relationships. Gerald (Denholm Elliott) and Monica (Gwen Watford) hide behind a thin veneer of civilised behaviour, hilariously represented by the ritual of food preparation and consumption. Ben rages incoherently at the world, while Julie (Glenda Jackson) struggles to understand both him and her own feelings for Gerald. All four are relentlessly self-analytical. The play is formally structured as follows:

Ben and Julie

Monica and Gerald

Gerald and Julie

Monica and Gerald

Ben and Julie

Ben and Julie's first scene is one of physical and verbal violence, but their last finds them reaching some kind of accord and harmony, symbolised by the Vivaldi piece they practice together. Monica and Gerald's first scene is, on the surface, a model of civilised restraint, but in their last scene Monica goads and humiliates Gerald to the point where he explodes into sudden – and lethal – violence.

Gerald and Julie's scene is central, not just in its actual placing within the drama, but in its significance to the way the drama will develop and resolve itself in the final two scenes.

The acting is superb, especially from Denholm Elliott and Gwen Watford as the middle-class couple. Watford was one of television's most underrated actresses, a mistress of the barbed or outrageous phrase, delivered with utter serenity. Elliott conveys oceans of pain with the twitch of an eyebrow. The play's themes – class and sexual infighting – resonate through so much of 1960s drama and echo Mercer's own stage work at this time, notably *Ride a Cock Horse* which also features a character as a version of the dramatist. The BBC imposed a number of cuts – including a reference to the menopause – and rescheduled the play more than once.

Janet Moat, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

THE WEDNESDAY PLAY: HORROR OF DARKNESS

Directed by: Anthony Page
Production Company: BBC TV
Producer: James MacTaggart
Script Editor: Vincent Tilsley
[Written] By: John Hopkins
Film Cameraman: David Prosser
Film Editor: Alan Martin
Telerecording Editor: Roy Clarke
Designer: Tony Abbott

Cast

Alfred Lynch (*Peter Young*)
Glenda Jackson (*Cathy*)
Nicol Williamson (*Robin Fletcher*)
Catherine Clouzet (*Micaela*)
Wallas Eaton (*Philip Moss*)

BBC1 tx 10.3.1965
UK 1965
61 mins

THE WEDNESDAY PLAY: LET'S MURDER VIVALDI

Director: Alan Bridges
Production Company: BBC
Producer: Graeme McDonald
Story Editor: Kenith Trodd
Written by: David Mercer
Lighting: Kim Richards
Designer: Richard Henry
Sound: Gordon Mackie

Cast

Denholm Elliott (*Gerald*)
Gwen Watford (*Monica*)
Glenda Jackson (*Julie*)
David Sumner (*Ben*)

BBC1 tx 10.4.1968
UK 1968
64 mins

GLEENDA JACKSON**Women in Love**

Sat 2 Jul 17:40; Wed 13 Jul 20:3; Fri 15 Jul 20:30

Horror of Darkness + Let's Murder Vivaldi

Sun 3 Jul 15:20

Mary, Queen of Scots

Sun 3 Jul 18:15; Wed 20 Jul 20:30

Glenda Jackson in Conversation

Tue 5 Jul 18:15

Sunday Bloody Sunday

Tue 5 Jul 20:40; Sun 24 Jul 18:30

Hedda

Fri 8 Jul 18:00; Sat 16 Jul 16:30

A Touch of Class

Sat 9 Jul 15:15; Sat 23 Jul 20:45

The Romantic Englishwoman

Sun 10 Jul 18:10; Mon 18 Jul 20:40

Stevie

Thu 14 Jul 20:30; Sat 23 Jul 12:00

Hopscotch

Fri 15 Jul 18:00; Tue 26 Jul 20:40

House Calls

Sat 16 Jul 18:45; Fri 22 Jul 20:30

The Maids

Sat 16 Jul 20:50; Sun 24 Jul 15:50

The Rainbow

Tue 19 Jul 20:40; Sun 31 Jul 13:00

Giro City + Glenda Jackson & Politics (clip compilation)

Thu 21 Jul 17:50

Turtle Diary

Thu 21 Jul 20:50; Fri 29 Jul 20:30

Strange Interlude

Sat 23 Jul 15:30

The House of Bernarda Alba

Mon 25 Jul 17:50

Elizabeth Is Missing

Fri 29 Jul 18:15

Elizabeth R (the complete series)

Eps 1-3 Sat 30 Jul 14:20; Eps 4-6 Sun 31 Jul 14:30

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