



## EVENTS

# Shooting the Past 25th Anniversary

### Shooting the Past

Director: Stephen Poliakoff  
Production Company: TalkBack  
Commissioning Company: BBC  
Executive Producers: Simon Curtis, Peter Fincham  
Producer: John Chapman  
Line Producer: Helen Flint  
Head of Production: Sally Debonnaire  
BBC Production Executive: Jane Hawley  
Production Accountant: Penny Anderson  
Production Co-ordinator: Lia Stephenson  
Location Manager: Dee Gregson  
Picture Researcher: Henry Wilks  
First Assistant Director: Nick Heckstall-Smith  
Second Assistant Directors: George Walker, Ben Howarth  
Third Assistant Director: Rebecca Sutton  
Continuity: Mary Haddow  
Casting Director: Andy Pryor  
Script: Stephen Poliakoff  
Photography: Bruno de Keyser, Ernest Vincze  
Focus Puller: Charlie Palmer  
Clapper Loaders: Rod Marley, Jim Jolliffe  
Grip: Jim Crowther  
Gaffer: Laurie Shane  
Best Boy: Colin Powton  
Electricians: Alan Grayley, Mark Hutton  
Editor: Paul Tohill  
Assistant Editor: Russell Beeden  
Production Designer: John-Paul Kelly  
Art Director: Peter Robinson  
Standby Art Director: Emma MacDevitt  
Production Buyer: Sara Wan  
Prop Master: David Horrill  
Costume Designer: Susannah Buxton  
Costume Supervisor: Franca Knight  
Costume Assistant: Liza Bracey  
Make-up Designer: Penny Smith  
Make-up Artist: Nabila Al Own  
Composer: Adrian Johnston  
Sound Recordist: Richard Manton  
Dubbing Editor: Catherine Hodgson  
Dubbing Mixer: Paul Hamblin  
Cast:  
Lindsay Duncan (*Marilyn Truman*)  
Timothy Spall (*Oswald Bates*)  
Liam Cunningham (*Christopher Anderson*)  
Billie Whitelaw (*Veronica*)  
Emilia Fox (*Spig*)  
Arj Barker (*Garnett*)  
Blake Ritson (*Nick*)  
Sheila Dunn (*Molly*)  
Jean Channon, Jennifer House (*dinner ladies*)  
Andy Serkis (*Styeman*)  
Geoffrey Beevers (*doctor*)  
Leslie McGuire (*nurse*)  
UK tx BBC2 10/17/24. 1.1999  
Episode 1+2 122 mins  
Interval 45 mins, panel discussion 60 mins  
Episode 3 60 mins

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+ Q&A with writer-director Stephen Poliakoff and actors Lindsay Duncan and Timothy Spall

Often cited as Stephen Poliakoff's masterpiece, this story of an American corporation's proposed takeover of a building, threatening the closure of a treasured stills archive, incorporates a critique of capitalism, a eulogy to photography's capacity to capture history and remind us of who we are, and highlights the importance of the accumulated knowledge located in any archive. These major themes are woven organically within the personal story of a 'family' of curators who cherish their work and are faced with the fight of their lives to try to save their collection, alongside one American's growing awareness of the archive's value. Featuring stunning performances from an extraordinary cast, this work celebrates the power of television drama at its very best and will be followed by a discussion with Poliakoff and cast members.

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*Shooting the Past* is a compelling mixture of nostalgic drama and polemic. This technically flawless and beautifully acted work was the first of three long-format television plays which gained Stephen Poliakoff a much wider audience and consolidated his reputation as one of Britain's foremost writers. All three plays deal with themes of family and history, but *Shooting the Past* is the most contemporary and the most political.

The series is a heartfelt cry against what Poliakoff sees as the rampant philistinism of capitalism that has gradually infiltrated British attitudes towards culture and heritage. The photo archive seems to represent the 'old' Britain, with its eccentricities and core values – a portrait which could come straight out of an Ealing film – while the American company is the hard face of the market, with Anderson as the anti-hero who eventually sees the light in an audience-pleasing conclusion. But there's a sense of urgency underneath the somewhat wish-fulfilling narrative which suggests a darker reality; Oswald's despair and attempted suicide have a ring of truth which bring us up short. To Poliakoff, it seems to be a matter of life and death, even if the issue is less mortal than cultural.

As in *Perfect Strangers* (BBC, 2001), and his film *Hidden City* (1987), history is omnipresent in the form of photographs, stories and memories; photographs are often flashed before us with a hypnotic intensity. The photo archive represents the idiosyncratic, highly personal nature of history and the stories we are told from the photos are ones which impinge heavily on the characters while skirting the major events of the past. Poliakoff is fascinated with the idea of history being a series of stolen moments, captured forever on film, and the idea that the archive should be unceremoniously destroyed or divided becomes unbearable, just like the notion of the family being broken up. Marilyn's only act of real treachery is forsaking Oswald, a betrayal which becomes central to the second half of the story, and it shocks us because the staff of the archive are the family of the story, one into which Anderson is gradually assimilated. The staff and the photo archive are like an extended family with their own histories which, as Oswald's minute knowledge of the contents demonstrates, are inextricably linked. This theme of extended families being broken apart is central to both *Perfect Strangers* and *The Lost Prince* (BBC, 2003).

Mike Sutton, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)