



RICHARD EYRE: WEAPONS OF UNDERSTANDING

Just a Boy's Game + The Insurance Man

Play for Today: Just a Boys' Game

Director: John Mackenzie

©: BBC

Producer: Richard Eyre

Production Unit Manager: Geoffrey Paget

Assistant Floor Managers: Sarah Busby,
Tony Grisoni

Production Assistants: Neil Zeiger, Anthony Garner

Director's Assistant: Joan Atkinson

[Written] by: Peter McDougall

Film Cameraman: Elmer Cossey

Film Editor: Graham Walker

Designer: Tim Harvey

Costume Designer: Colin Lavers

Make-up Artist: Eileen Mair

Title Sequence by: Joanna Ball

Title Music by: Frankie Miller

Film Recordist: John Pritchard

Sound: John Pritchard

Dubbing Mixer: Alan Dykes

Cast:

Frankie Miller (*Jake McQuillen*)

Ken Hutchison (*Dancer Dunnichy*)

Jean Taylor Smith (*Grannie*)

Hector Nichol (*Granda*)

Gregor Fisher (*Tanza*)

Katherine Stark (*Jane*)

Jan Wilson (*Bella*)

Jim Byars (*Mental Dan*)

BBC1 tx 8.11.1979

70 mins

Digital

Screen Two: The Insurance Man

Director: Richard Eyre

Production Company: BBC

Producer: Innes Lloyd

Script: Alan Bennett

Director of Photography: Nat Crosby

Editor: Ken Pearce

Designer: Geoff Powell

Music: Ilona Sekacz

Cast:

Alan MacNaughtan (*doctor*)

Daniel Day-Lewis (*Kafka*)

Robert Hines (*young Franz*)

Geoffrey Palmer (*angry doctor*)

Jim Broadbent (*Gutling*)

Hugh Fraser (*Culick*)

Trevor Peacock (*old Franz*)

Diana Rayworth (*landlady*)

Teddy Turner (*old man in dyeworks*)

Phil Hearne, Bernard Wrigley (*workmen*)

Ronan Wilmot (*factory doctor*)

Jill Frudd (*nurse*)

Katy Behean (*Beatrice*)

C.J. Allen (*undermanager*)

Fred Gaunt (*foreman*)

Tessa Wojtczak (*Christina*)

Johnny Allen (*Christina's father*)

Margo Stanley (*Christina's mother*)

Judith Nelmes (*Christina's grandmother*)

Fran O'Shea (*Christina's sister*)

Vivian Pickles (*Lily*)

BBC2 tx 23.2.1986

75 mins

Digital

There will be a brief interval between the two screenings

There can be no better justification for the *modus operandi* of the BBC drama department of the 1960s and 70s than the discovery of Peter McDougall. The most original Scottish voice of the era, McDougall might never have been given a break at any other time in broadcasting history.

Having gone straight from school to the Glasgow shipyards, McDougall fled to London in the mid-60s. It was while painting the house of *Z Cars* star and future writer Colin Welland that he began relating his youthful exploits as a drum major in Glasgow's Orange Parades. The fascinated Welland suggested McDougall turn his experiences into a television play.

Director John Mackenzie was flabbergasted at McDougall's raw talent, and claims the finished film barely contained a single change from the original draft of the script. However, the Glasgow police blocked filming on a drama they feared would cause 'bloodshed on the streets in the making and in the showing.'

Not disheartened, McDougall offered the BBC another play. *Just Your Luck* (1972) told the story of a Protestant teenager who falls pregnant by a Catholic sailor. Its exposure of the religious bigotry of Scotland's West coast caused an enormous reaction, from outrage in the locality to reviews hailing it as 'the most exciting debut since *Look Back in Anger*.'

This success prompted the BBC to weather the inevitable controversy and finally make *Just Another Saturday*. The resultant film tells of one day in the life of 16 year-old John (Jon Morrison), whose excitement at leading the Orange Parade is shattered by his discovery of the violence behind the pageantry. Beyond the political issues, it is McDougall's mastery not only of the gallows humour of Glasgow's working class but of the hidden motives of parental kindness that make the drama, in Jeremy Isaacs's words, 'a masterpiece' and won the play the Prix Italia.

The Elephants Graveyard (1976) was an intimate, pastoral follow-up, teaming Morrison with Billy Connolly for the charming story of two unemployed men dodging the wives who they have deceived about their job situation. The play follows them over one gloriously irresponsible day as they revert to childhood through games, stories and examination of their fears and hopes.

The astounding *Just a Boys' Game* (1979) was another 'play in a day', pursuing hard man Jake McQuillen, whose life of alcohol, violence and emotional impotence is threatened by the arrival of a younger, razor-wielding thug. Featuring some of the strongest violence the BBC had ever dared broadcast, it was stunningly photographed by Elmer Cossey and featured McDougall's most crackling dialogue and richest characterisations, all brilliantly evoked by a cast headed by blues singer Frankie Miller in a performance that melts the camera in its intensity.

The partnership of McDougall and Mackenzie was one of the finest of the era. Their final collaboration was on HandMade Films' *A Sense of Freedom* (1981), dramatising the life of notorious Glasgow criminal Jimmy Boyle. Despite a devastating portrayal of Boyle by David Hayman and some nightmarish sequences of depravity and brutality, it suggested that McDougall was less confident in fact-based or big screen works, an unfortunate weakness as TV drama lost its taste for the single 'play'.

Simon Farquhar

RICHARD EYRE: WEAPONS OF UNDERSTANDING

Play for Today: Comedians + intro by
Sir Jonathan Pryce (tbc) + Sir Richard Eyre
Sun 1 Dec 18:40

The Ploughman's Lunch

Fri 6 Dec 18:10; Wed 18 Dec 20:50

Play for Today: Just a Boys' Game
+ **Screen Two: The Insurance Man**

Sat 7 Dec 17:45

Iris + intro by Professor Lucy Bolton,
Queen Mary University of London
Thu 12 Dec 18:10

Philosophical Screens: Iris

Thu 12 Dec 20:00 Blue Room

Play for Today: The Imitation Game

Fri 13 Dec 18:10

Notes on a Scandal

Sat 14 Dec 18:10; Sat 28 Dec 14:45

The Dresser

Sun 15 Dec 18:00

Stage Beauty

Thu 19 Dec 20:40; Sun 29 Dec 15:10

The Cherry Orchard

Sat 21 Dec 17:40

Sunday Premiere: Tumbledown

Tue 17 Dec 18:10

Performance: Suddenly Last Summer

Sun 22 Dec 15:10

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The Insurance Man

Given that Alan Bennett's screenplay for *A Private Function* (d. Malcolm Mowbray, 1984) turned postwar rationing into full-blown Kafkaesque paranoia, it comes as little surprise that he would turn to the novelist himself as a subject. In fact, he did so twice: his play *Kafka's Dick* (a rather more overtly comic portrait) was also staged in 1986.

It's not so much Franz Kafka who is the subject of *The Insurance Man* as what he created – poor Franz (no relation) is caught up in a web of bureaucratic complexity that readers of *The Trial* will recognise immediately as he tries not just to get compensation for an industrial injury but also to establish whether he's even entitled to it.

Journeying through seemingly endless corridors, up and down straight and spiral staircases, passed from one unnamed functionary to the next, Franz (Robert Hines) encounters fellow victims at every stage, from the eternally optimistic Lily (Vivian Pickles), convinced that the door she's patiently waiting beside holds the answer (it opens into a stairwell) to the embittered tribunal doctor (Geoffrey Palmer), whose grimly funny speech about the virtues of pessimism clearly mirrors his own personal journey from idealist to cynic.

This is the least-known of the three performances with which Daniel Day-Lewis made a spectacular splash in 1986 – *My Beautiful Laundrette* (d. Stephen Frears) and *A Room with a View* (d. James Ivory) were the others – but his star quality is evident even in a minor part: his Kafka isn't on screen for long, but he holds it effortlessly, seen to best effect when his calm stillness beautifully counterpoints the blustering Gutling (Jim Broadbent).

Kafka's problem is that he is more sensitive than his colleagues to his clients' problems – which makes it worse if he does nothing about it. Out of guilt, Kafka arranges for Franz to take a job in his brother-in-law's new factory, which solves the short-term problem but, in a perfect example of Kafkaesque irony, creates a long-term one as it's producing asbestos (the dangers of which weren't known at the time).

Richard Eyre had been directing television since the 1970s, but his reputation primarily came from his work at the National Theatre, and *The Insurance Man* is 'theatrical' in the best sense, using the full panoply of Expressionist techniques in lighting and design to create an off-kilter world that perfectly matches Bennett's edgy, paranoid script.

Michael Brooke