

Maggie Smith Season at BFI Southbank December 2014 – January 2015



Throughout **December 2014** and **January 2015**, BFI Southbank celebrates the work of **Dame Maggie Smith**. One of Britain's best loved and most recognisable actresses, the two part season will reflect the sheer breadth of work she has carried out on both stage and screen in a career that has, thus far, spanned six decades and innumerable accolades.

Part one of the season features examples of well known and lesser seen performances from the early part of her career. From the rarely seen 1959 television drama **Play of the Week: For Services Rendered** to her international break-through acting alongside **Elizabeth Taylor** and **Richard Burton** in **The VIPs** (1963), audiences will also have the opportunity to witness her heart-breaking role as Desdemona opposite **Laurence Olivier's** Moor in **Othello** (1965). There is also a rare chance to see her talk about acting career in the BBC documentary **Acting in the Sixties: Maggie Smith** which includes her words on Olivier, 'I was in awe of him... at first' and which features precious footage from otherwise missing TV productions such as her role in **The Recruiting Officer**

Part two of the season looks at Maggie Smith's more recent work and includes such modern classics as **A Room with a View** (1985), **Tea with Mussolini** (1999) as well as **California Suite** (1978), for which she won her second Academy Award. Some of her more recent television work is represented with screenings of both Jack Clayton's BBC production of **Memento Mori** (1992) and **Richard Eyre's Suddenly Last Summer** (1993)

Maggie Smith describes her role as Professor Minerva McGonagall in the Harry Potter films as 'Miss Jean Brodie in a wizard's hat', charting the great arc of her career from that Oscar®-winning performance as Muriel Spark's fanatical schoolmistress to the holy grail of Hogwarts. And she has trumped even that latter-day breach of the modern public's consciousness with her imperious occupation of the grand matriarch Violet Crawley, Dowager Countess of Grantham, in five triumphant series of **Downton Abbey** on television around the world.

Her career began on stage at the Oxford Playhouse and in university revues with Peter Hall and Ned Sherrin, and she was a West End star even before joining Laurence Olivier as a founding member of the National Theatre at the Old Vic in 1963. Her comic sheen – a mixed pigment of Beatrice Lillie and Edith Evans – took her to Broadway in 1956 and won her a film contract with Elstree Studios in 1957. The essence of her acting is both clinical and revelatory so she can, as Tom Stoppard once said, pull off that rare trick of being in two places at once: inside and outside any character she's playing. Her Hedda Gabler

at the National, or lead role in **The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne** (1987) on film (screening in January), become as bleak and riveting as any great tragic performance.

– ENDS –

Press Contacts:

Tim Mosley – Press Officer (Acting), BFI Southbank
liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk / 020 7957 8918

Emma Hewitt – Head of Press and PR (Acting)
emma.hewitt@bfi.org.uk / 020 7173 3256

NOTES TO EDITORS:

In partnership with The Stage newspaper **THE STAGE**

BFI SOUTHBANK EVENT LISTINGS FOR THE MAGGIE SMITH SEASON

Play of the Week: For Services Rendered

Granada 1959. Dir Henry Kaplan. With Maggie Smith, Ursula Howells, Robert Urquhart, Jack Hedley, William Fox. 111min In a rare surviving tape of her early television work, Maggie Smith plays Lois, the youngest of three daughters in a country household torn apart in the aftermath of the Great War. Somerset Maugham's bitter 1932 play was confirmed a classic in this 'live' performance, and Smith's Lois is a thoughtful portrait of a girl waking up to her own ability to exert power over men.

Tue 2 Dec 18:10 NFT3

The VIPs

UK 1963. Dir Anthony Asquith. With Maggie Smith, Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Louis Jourdan, Orson Welles. 119min. PG

The VIPs was Smith's international breakthrough as Rod Taylor's secretary in an all-star cast, where she belongs as of right. MGM's blockbuster, devised as an anti-sequel for Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor after Cleopatra, was scripted by Terence Rattigan as a Grand Hotel of the airport lounge, set in a fog-bound Heathrow. Burton said of his big scene with Smith that she didn't just steal it; she committed grand larceny.

Tue 2 Dec 20:40 NFT3

Sat 6 Dec 17:15 NFT2

The Pumpkin Eater

UK 1964. Dir Jack Clayton. With Maggie Smith, Anne Bancroft, Peter Finch, James Mason. 112min. 12A

Harold Pinter's exceptionally frank screenplay, adapted from a Penelope Mortimer novel, finds Smith as a children's nanny having an affair with her employer Jake (Peter Finch), who's married to a neurotic woman (Anne Bancroft) with eight children from three marriages. The film is starkly and beautifully shot in black and white, while Smith lightens the mood by sitting skittishly on the kitchen sink, legs and arms akimbo, telling Jake that she's frigid – a likely story!

Wed 3 Dec 20:40 NFT2

Fri 5 Dec 18:20 NFT2

Othello

UK 1965. Dir Stuart Burge. With Maggie Smith, Laurence Olivier, Frank Finlay, Joyce Redman, Derek Jacobi. 166min. U

Smith had never played major Shakespearean tragedy before joining Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre. Her Desdemona is sweet, luminous, and foil to probably the last great tragic performance of the old school delivered by Olivier as a blacked-up Moor. This is a hastily shot (three weeks) version of John Dexter's staging, and Olivier's theatricality proved controversial on film. It's a collector's item nonetheless, and Smith is heart-breaking. **Sat 6 Dec 19:40 NFT3**

Sun 14 Dec 14:50 NFT2

Young Cassidy

UK 1965. Dirs Jack Cardiff, John Ford. With Maggie Smith, Julie Christie, Rod Taylor, Michael Redgrave. 110min. PG

A real curio in which John Cassidy, based on the Irish dramatist Sean O'Casey, says 'All the world's a stage, Mick, but some of us are seriously under-rehearsed.' John Ford abandoned the film after shooting 20 minutes of Cassidy's

struggles with the Irish Citizens Army and the Abbey Theatre during the Easter Rising, and Jack Cardiff took over. Smith stars alongside the actress she emulated, Edith Evans, and plays the radiant love interest who runs the local bookstore.

Tue 9 Dec 20:40 NFT3

Sat 13 Dec 15:50 NFT3

Much Ado About Nothing

BBC 1967. Dir Alan Cooke. With Maggie Smith, Derek Jacobi, Ronald Pickup, Frank Finlay, Robert Stephens. 123min. Digital

This black-and-white television version of another National Theatre hit still conveys the vivacity of Franco Zeffirelli's production, with Beatrice (Smith) and Benedick (Stephens) engaged in a witty war of words, echoing an off-stage relationship that went sour five years later. Beatrice's mention of her mother's pain at childbirth – 'but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born' – is one of many magical moments.

Tue 9 Dec 18:00 NFT2

Acting in the Sixties: Maggie Smith

BBC 1967. Producer Humphrey Burton. 44min

Kenneth Williams joins Smith in discussion with Clive Goodwin, and provides a rare chance to see her talk about acting in general with words on Olivier 'I was in awe of him... at first', comedy, controlled hysteria, clips and cigarettes. The documentary also features precious footage from otherwise missing TV productions such as her role in *The Recruiting Officer*.

+ Bed Among the Lentils

BBC 1988. Dir Alan Bennett. With Maggie Smith. 49min. PG

Susan is a repressed vicar's wife in Alan Bennett's *Bed Among the Lentils*, part of his BBC Talking Heads series of monologues, and it's one of Smith's greatest performances: 'Geoffrey's bad enough, but I'm glad I wasn't married to Jesus.'

Sun 14 Dec 18:20 NFT2

Tue 16 Dec 17:50 NFT2

Travels with My Aunt

USA 1972. Dir George Cukor. With Maggie Smith, Alec McCowen, Robert Stephens. 109min. 35mm. 12A

Smith's Oscar-nominated performance is a fantastic example of acting with a full make-up job, she's flirting with self-parody but technically dazzling. Graham Greene's Aunt Augusta was due to be played by Katharine Hepburn but last-minute wrangling with Cukor allowed Smith to step in, dragging McCowen's delightfully docile Henry Pulling on a whirlwind adventure. Her first husband Robert Stephens features in affecting, amorous flashbacks. **Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)**

Murder by Death

USA 1976. Dir Robert Moore. With Maggie Smith, David Niven, Peter Sellers, Alec Guinness. 94min. 35mm. PG

A luxury cast of spoof detectives gather for a meal and a murder, each equipped with a motive for malice. Smith and Niven play Dick and Dora Charleston, approximate versions of Dashiell Hammett's Nick and Nora Charles. Neil Simon's script supplies a steady flow of good one-liners: Smith spots a blind butler (Guinness), muttering: 'Don't let him park the car, Dickie.'

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

California Suite

USA 1978. Dir Herbert Ross. With Maggie Smith, Michael Caine, Jane Fonda, Richard Pryor. 103min. 35mm. 12A

Smith deservedly, and ironically, won her second Oscar playing an actress preparing for the Academy awards. Neil Simon adapted his own Broadway hit, a series of vignettes showing five couples arriving in the Beverley Hills Hotel for different reasons. Caine said that playing with Smith was like attending a masterclass in comic technique, but the director reduced her to tears.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

Quartet

UK 1981. Dir James Ivory. With Maggie Smith, Alan Bates, Isabelle Adjani. 101min. 35mm. 18

In this fine adaptation of a Jean Rhys novel, shot mostly in Paris in the Montparnasse of 1927, Smith plays Lois Heidler, a character modelled on Ford Madox Ford's young wife Stella Bowen, who finds her marriage under siege from Adjani's beautiful Creole waif. Watch out for Smith in the hotel ballroom, glittering in a sheath dress with green eye make-up.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

A Private Function

UK 1984. Dir Malcolm Mowbray. With Maggie Smith, Michael Palin, Denholm Elliott. 94min. 35mm. 15

Alan Bennett's brilliant Yorkshire comedy deals with a civic 'do' to celebrate the Queen's wedding in 1947, and the habits of an incontinent pig smuggled away for the banquet. Palin's chiropodist uncovers a conspiracy while Smith, the

Lady Macbeth of Ilkley, aspires to her rightful milieu: 'Put me in a long dress and surround me with sophisticated people, and I'd bloom.'

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

A Room with a View

UK 1985. Dir James Ivory. With Maggie Smith, Helena Bonham Carter, Judi Dench, Daniel Day-Lewis. 117min. 35mm. PG
This lavish Merchant Ivory adaptation of EM Forster preceded the more garlanded Howard's End. A fine cast creates what film critic Pauline Kael called 'a comic hum' around Bonham Carter's recessive Lucy Honeychurch. Smith's spinsterish Charlotte Bartlett sees sins against propriety everywhere, and plays a particularly waspish scene with Dench's novelist on a walk through Florence.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne

UK 1987. Dir Jack Clayton. With Maggie Smith, Bob Hoskins, Wendy Hiller. 116min. 35mm. 15

This heart-wrenching adaptation of Brian Moore's novel, about an alcoholic Catholic spinster at odds with her own sensuality in Dublin, living a life of resilience and disappointment, was the first of three collaborations between Smith and Hoskins. Smith's performance is one of her starkest and most concentrated, and it won her both a BAFTA and an Evening Standard best actress award.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

Memento Mori (Screen Two)

BBC 1992. Dir Jack Clayton. With Maggie Smith, Stephanie Cole, Thora Hird, Zoë Wanamaker. 95min. DigiBeta

This long-cherished project of Clayton (who used the film script he couldn't get made), about a group of elderly people pestered by the phone calls of an anonymous angel of mortality, is a technically perfect, beautifully cast adaptation of a richly macabre Muriel Spark novel. Smith's Mabel Pettigrew is a younger, svelte and manipulative blackmailer in one of her tautest and funniest performances.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

Suddenly Last Summer

BBC 1993. Dir Richard Eyre. With Maggie Smith, Rob Lowe, Natasha Richardson, Richard E Grant. 83min. DigiBeta

Smith's first American heroine is Tennessee Williams' bereaved and bewitching southern matriarch Mrs Venable, a role wrested from Katharine Hepburn's 1959 movie version. Eyre's hothouse movie faithfully follows the play's one-act structure and restricts the horror to the dialogue, and Richardson's brilliant performance as the infatuated cousin of a poet who comes to a grisly end.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

Tea with Mussolini *Un te con Mussolini*

Italy-UK 1998. Dir Franco Zeffirelli. With Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Joan Plowright, Cher. 116min. 35mm. PG

Loving recollections of Zeffirelli's own childhood are scripted by John Mortimer, with Smith, Plowright and Dench playing a group of ex-pats before the war – Smith as the widow of the British ambassador, telling Mussolini where he's going wrong and pouring the tea ('Shall I be mother?'). Cher plays a visiting American artist, and there's a great climax in the towers of Tuscany's San Gimignano.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

The Last September

UK-Ireland-France 1999. Dir Deborah Warner. With Maggie Smith, Michael Gambon, Keeley Hawes, Jane Birkin. 103min. 35mm. 15

A beautifully composed first feature from theatre director Warner, with John Banville adapting Elizabeth Bowen's novel. Magisterial, upper-class Smith and gruffly impervious Gambon head up an Anglo-Irish family in 1920's County Cork, between the Easter Rising and the civil war. Hawes is dangerously caught between the attentions of a British officer (David Tennant) and her love for a Republican (Gary Lydon).

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

Gosford Park

UK-USA 2001. Dir Robert Altman. With Maggie Smith, Michael Gambon, Kristin Scott Thomas, Ryan Phillippe. 137min. 35mm. 15

Julian Fellowes' script for Altman's rhythmically paced 1930s murder mystery is the template for his own Downton Abbey, with Smith warming up for her Downton dowager. Among a superb cast, Smith plays Lady Trentham, acidly sympathising over another flop for Ivor Novello (Jeremy Northam), and complaining that by the time one's tipped all the maids one may as well stay at the Ritz.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

USA 2001. Dir Chris Columbus. With Maggie Smith, Daniel Radcliffe, Robbie Coltrane, Alan Rickman. 152min. PG

In the first scene in the first film of this phenomenal franchise, Smith morphs by moonlight from a sweet furry cat into Professor Minerva McGonagall, the stern but soft-hearted Jean Brodie of Hogwarts. She pops up regularly between the exciting set-pieces of flying broom lessons, Quidditch and a chess match-to-the-death, en route to finding the mysterious stone.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

My House in Umbria

US-UK-Italy 2003. Dir Richard Loncraine. With Maggie Smith, Chris Cooper, Ronnie Barker. 103min. 35mm. 12A

William Trevor is one of Smith's favourite writers, and his novella, scripted here by Hugh Whitmore, provides another great role in her gallery of sad and lonely women. Her performance as the seemingly glamorous romantic novelist Emily Delahunty, hosting a replacement family after a train bombing, won her an Emmy and a reunion with Barker from her early Oxford Playhouse days.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

Ladies in Lavender

UK 2004. Dir Charles Dance. With Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Daniel Brühl, Natascha McElhone. 104min. 35mm. 12A

A good example of the medium-budget, entertaining British movies that Smith has graced in the second half of her career, from debutant director Dance. Dench stars opposite Smith as the sterner of two pre-war Cornish sisters whose lives are upturned by a handsome young Polish violinist, a catalytic artist and David Warner's love-struck doctor – a village 'Uncle Vanya' bearing superfluous flowers.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

UK-USA 2011. Dir John Madden. With Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Bill Nighy, Dev Patel. 123min. 12A

A group of disparate oldies travel to a ramshackle hotel for the 'elderly and beautiful' in Jaipur, all leaving Britain for various reasons and each affected in different ways by the Indian capacity for enchantment and transformation. It's a lovely movie, beautifully acted, with Smith as a beady, wheelchair-bound former housekeeper operating slyly behind the scenes, which are framed by Dench's diary-style narrative.

Jan 2015 (Time/Date TBC)

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £11.00, concs £8.50 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Shop

The BFI Shop is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank