

## Women in TV: Moira Armstrong

*BFI's annual strand highlighting the role of women behind the TV camera celebrates the television director's 50 years in the industry*  
*Month long season includes screenings of **Testament of Youth** (1979) and **The Girls of Slender Means** (1975), plus a career interview on Tuesday 19 August*



**Monday 23 June 2014, London.**

Throughout August **BFI Southbank** will pay tribute to the outstanding achievements of BAFTA award-winning television director **Moira Armstrong** with a dedicated season.

A recent report from *Directors UK*, which analysed a decade's worth of British TV, revealed a decline in the opportunities for women directors in drama, entertainment and comedy in particular. With this debate at the forefront of the industry, **BFI Southbank's** annual strand showcasing the contribution made by women behind the camera provides an opportunity to highlight the work of key female drama director.

Armstrong began directing in 1964; her early work embraced famous strands such as *The Wednesday Play*, but she is perhaps best known for *Testament of Youth* (1979), which will screen in its entirety as part of the season. This dramatization of the autobiography of **Vera Brittain** showed, through the eyes of one young girl, the effects of WWI on a whole generation. The series' success was in no small measure due to Armstrong's many talents as a director: impeccable casting; the ability to draw out great performances; an instinct for the deeply-human centre of the story while eschewing over-sentimentality; and a great visual eye.

Another series that played perfectly to Armstrong's strengths was *The Girls of Slender Means* (1975), adapted by **Ken Taylor** from the novel by **Muriel Spark**. The series was highly unusual in being led by strong female characters, as a group of girls fight for survival in a London left ravaged by war. There was undeniable chemistry between the leads **Miriam Margolyes**, **Patricia Hodge** and **Mary Tamm** and after a complete screening of the series there will be an onstage reunion with a

number of the cast including Margoyles and Hodge. Other popular series followed such as *Bluebell*, along with many single plays and films for TV. During the season we will present a selection of these to demonstrate Armstrong's immense range and diversity – from political and issue-led plays such as *Minor Complications* (1980) and *Dunroamin' Rising* (1988), to the intimate simplicity of *Abide with Me* (1976) and *The Countess Alice* (1992). Following the screening of *Dunroamin' Rising* on **Tuesday 19 August**, BFI Southbank will welcome Armstrong to the stage to discuss her remarkable career and offer her views on the struggle for female directors in the TV industry of today.

Moira Armstrong will be available for interview. Please make requests to [liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk](mailto:liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk)

Presented in association with:



**– ENDS –**

### **Press Contacts:**

**Liz Parkinson – Assistant Press Officer, BFI Southbank**  
[liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk](mailto:liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk) / 020 7957 8918

**Ilona Cheshire – Press Officer, BFI Southbank**  
[ilona.cheshire@bfi.org.uk](mailto:ilona.cheshire@bfi.org.uk) / 020 7957 8986

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

#### **SCREENING IN THE SEASON:**

##### **Testament of Youth**

*BBC 1979. Dir Moira Armstrong. With Cheryl Campbell, Peter Woodward, Michael Troughton, Rosalie Crutchley. 5 x 55min (with interval)*

This five-part serialisation of Vera Brittain's autobiography – depicting her life between 1913 and 1918 – was hugely successful at the time, and the power of the memoir is such that the BBC have just started filming a brand new adaptation. The strength of the series was to focus on the personal experiences of Brittain from naïve, middle-class girl to a disillusioned nurse who loses the men closest to her, which humanised and made relevant the consequences of WWI for a generation that had not lived through it. Adapted for television by Elaine Morgan, the series made a star of Cheryl Campbell and remains in many people's memory one of the finest adaptations of a novel to the small screen that there has been. Director Moira Armstrong's great contribution was to bring a dramatic intensity and fluidity to the series that really brought home the true emotional and psychological costs of the Great War.

**Sun 3 Aug 14:30 NFT3**



##### **The Girls of Slender Means**

*BBC 1975. Dir Moira Armstrong. With Miriam Margolyes, Patricia Hodge, Jack Shepherd, Mary Tamm. 3 x 50min*

*The Girls of Slender Means* was a very rare thing – a television series driven by strong female characters – and it has since acquired something of a cult following. Adapted for television by that great master of the art Ken Taylor from the novel by Muriel Spark, the series follows the young residents of a girl's hostel who do their best to survive in a city ravaged by war. They practice elocution and jostle one another over suitors, but

behind the girls' giddy literary and amorous peregrinations they hide some tragically painful secrets and wounds.

**+ Panel Discussion and Q&A**

We reunite *The Girls of Slender Means* cast members Miriam Margolyes, Patricia Hodge, and welcome director Moira Armstrong to the BFI stage (all work permitting, please check [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk) for final confirmations).

**Tue 12 Aug 18:30 NFT1**

**Abide With Me**

*BBC 1976. Dir Moira Armstrong. With Cathleen Nesbitt, Zena Walker, Ann Francis, Geoffrey Bayldon. 70min*  
*Abide With Me* is adapted by Julian Mitchell from 'A Child of the Forest' by Winiford Foley, and its charm lies in its complete simplicity. A 15 year-old girl is sent to be housemaid to a 90 year-old, imperious and unbending mistress during the 1920s, and the film charts the deep mutual feelings of respect and fondness that grow between these two women from opposite ends of the social divide. *Abide With Me* is directed and performed with pitch-perfect sensitivity that avoids any trace of sentimentality and captures the period beautifully.

**+ Play for Today: Minor Complications**

*BBC 1980. Dir Moira Armstrong. With Paola Dionisotti, David Hargreaves, Charles Kay, Benjamin Whitrow. 75min*

Paola Dionisotti brilliantly conveys the pain and frustration of Kay – a woman who goes in for a standard operation to be sterilised but, through medical negligence, ends up with hugely debilitating complications that affect the rest of her life. Peter Ransley's script, based on actual case notes, very effectively demonstrates how the NHS and the legal system worked together to make successful claims almost an impossibility. Only Kay's dogged determination sees her through to a kind of justice.

**Fri 8 Aug 20:10 NFT3**

**The Play on One: Dunroamin' Rising**

*BBC 1988. Dir Moira Armstrong. With Russell Hunter, Elizabeth Sellars, Thorley Walters, Hugh Lloyd. 70min*  
When left-wing firebrand Ian Sinclair (Russell Hunter) moves into a church-affiliated old person's home he sets about challenging the system, and gives back a sense of purpose to the residents. Hunter gives a memorable performance as a man haunted by memories, and Colin Macdonald's moving and humorous script ensures that we too are charmed by this character as he rejuvenates all those around him.

**+ Career Interview with Director Moira Armstrong**

Moira Armstrong began directing in 1964 and has been at the forefront of British television drama ever since. In this career interview (illustrated with clips of her many great series and plays) Armstrong will discuss her remarkable career, and offer her views on the struggle for female directors in the TV industry of today.

**Tue 19 Aug 18:10 NFT1**

**In partnership with:**



**Screenplay: The Countess Alice**

*BBC 1992. Dir Moira Armstrong. With Dame Wendy Hiller, Zoë Wanamaker, Duncan Bell, Patricia Quinn. 87min*

This fine film, scripted by Allan Cubitt, was Dame Wendy Hiller's last dramatic role. In 1935 Lady Alice Monroe (Hiller) caused a minor scandal when she married a Prussian count. When her daughter (Wanamaker) visits the crumbling ancestral home startling discoveries are made that call into question Alice's entire past. Armstrong once again elicits fine, compelling performances from her distinguished cast in this atmospheric film with an agonising human story at its heart.

**+ All For Love (series 2, ep 4): Letting the Birds Go Free**

*ITV 1983. Dir Moira Armstrong. With Lionel Jeffries, Carolyn Pickles, Tom Wilkinson. 52min*

*Letting the Birds Go Free*, which screened in the *All For Love* romantic relationships strand from Granada TV, is dramatised by Stephen Wakelam from a story by Philip Oakes. An army deserter is traumatised by a tour of Northern Ireland during the troubles. He's caught stealing eggs and put to work on a remote farm, where a close relationship starts to form with the farmer's daughter. An affecting film about the importance of letting those closest to you achieve their independence.

**Fri 29 Aug 18:00 NFT3**

## **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](http://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](http://www.image.net) under BFI / BFI Southbank / August 2014 / Moira Armstrong**