

12/47

Paula Milne: The Personal As Political

With Paula Milne In Conversation, Monday 24 September



Friday 27 July - London In September **BFI Southbank** will host a retrospective of work by one of Britain's most accomplished screenwriter's for television **Paula Milne**. The season highlights will include an onstage event **Paula Milne in Conversation** during which Milne will discuss the many high points of her career including **The Politician's Wife** (1995), and the premiere of her unaired work **Thursday 12th** (2000), which examines the personal cost of political ambition. In the twelve years since it was produced, **Thursday 12th** was twice pulled from the air owing to its proximity to an election – the season will offer audiences a unique chance to see a drama which has been kept from television screens for over a decade, precisely because it was too pertinent. Milne's commitment to highlighting injustice has remained constant, and this season will feature dramas which do not shy away from difficult subjects such as **John David** (1982), **A Sudden Wrench** (1982) and **Hollow Reed** (1996) which focus on disability, female empowerment and gay prejudice respectively.

Beginning as a script editor at the BBC, Milne quickly progressed to her first major success *Angels* (1975), which was one of the first precinct drama series to place women at the centre of the narrative. Her writing skills were further honed by providing scripts for *Coronation Street*, *Z-Cars* and *Grange Hill*. This background in television would stand Milne in good stead when it came to writing the first of her single dramas, **A Sudden Wrench** (1982). What emerged was a touching and humorous portrait of a woman trying to turn

her life around by joining a masculine world populated by builders. She followed with the devastatingly powerful **John David** (1982), based on Milne's own experience of having a Down syndrome child and the pressures that society exerts on the parents of these children.

It was however the 90s that would see Milne's writing develop with new scope and ambition. Her award-winning work **The Politician's Wife** (1995) would become one of her career highlights; a subtle and powerful examination of love, politics and revenge. Starring Juliet Stevenson as a wife betrayed by her highflying cabinet minister husband, the series demonstrated Milne's ability to integrate a personal story into a much wider political landscape, and will be followed up next year by **The Politician's Husband** starring David Tennant.

Never afraid to tackle large and important subjects, **Endgame** (2009) examines the dying days of apartheid in South Africa while **Hollow Reed** (1996) tells the story of a man who loses custody of his son after he reveals his homosexuality. **BFI** is also delighted to present the premiere of Milne's unaired work **Thursday 12th** (2000). This exploration of the personal cost of political ambition was twice pulled from transmission owing to its scheduled proximity to the date of an election, and so will receive its first-ever complete screening at **BFI Southbank**.

Screenings taking place in the Paula Milne season:

A Sudden Wrench

Play for Today. BBC 1982. Dir Jon Amiel. With Rosemary Martin, Dave Hill, Sacha Mitchell, Jesse Birdsall. 60min

When Christine (Rosemary Martin) decides that her life as a housewife is at a dead-end, her family has to come to terms with her new-found career as a builder's mate. This warm and often funny look at one woman's voyage of self-discovery displays Milne's ability to use a deeply personal journey to highlight wider social and political issues.

+ John David

Play for Today. BBC 1982. Dir Rodney Bennett. With Dearbhla Molloy, James Hazeldine, Gwen Watford, Edward Hardwicke. 80min

Working from her autobiographical book, Milne courageously looks at the agonising dilemma a couple faces when their first child is born with Down's Syndrome. Putting the controversial side of the case (to place the child into care at birth), the play very movingly dramatises the emotional and psychological trauma this entails and the pressures both society and the system exerts. Fine performances combine with Milne's unsentimental and revealing script to devastating effect.

Thu 6 Sept 20:10 NFT2

Frankie & Johnnie

Screen Two. BBC 1986. Dir Martin Campbell. With Hywel Bennett, Diana Hardcastle, Tony Doyle, Norman Jones. 96min

When two teenagers are found dead in a car by a passing jogger, the reporter from the local rag (Bennett) begins to smell a rat. In the hands of the director of *Edge of Darkness*, Martin Campbell, who went on to direct James Bond movies, what unfolds is a tense psychological thriller. With Milne's intuitive instinct for portraying convincing family crisis and relationships she is able to add depth and texture to a taut and deftly executed conspiracy drama.

Mon 10 Sept 18:20 NFT2

Thursday 12th

ITV-Twenty Twenty Productions 2000. Dir Charles Beeson. With Ciaran Hinds, Peter Vaughn, Elizabeth McGovern, Maria Doyle Kennedy. 2 x 97min + interval

This screening affords a unique opportunity to see the production for the first time as, due to its theme – the price to be paid for attempting to build a political career – the film was (twice) pulled from transmission schedules with actual elections imminent. Placing a clock on the action, Milne cleverly dramatises the same 24 hours from four different perspectives within the Bannister family, to build a complex picture of the motives and past events that result in a murder. A heady mix of power, obsession and guilt combine in the best traditions of the melodrama.

Fri 14 Sept 18:15 NFT2

Endgame

Channel 4 2009. Dir Pete Travis. With William Hurt, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Jonny Lee Miller, Mark Strong. 102min

The extraordinary story of how one UK executive working for Consolidated Goldmines becomes the prime facilitator in the secret, critical negotiations between the South African government and the ANC – meetings that changed the course of history and led ultimately to the release of Nelson Mandela and the end of white minority rule. A massive subject that plays to Milne's strengths in being able to show how from the personal and the humane great political significances can flow, and how the personal and the political are always interwoven. Both immensely thought-provoking and moving.

Thu 20 Sept 18:10 NFT2

Paula Milne in Conversation + The Politician's Wife (Pt 1): Stand By Him

Channel 4 1995. Dir Graham Theakston. With Juliet Stevenson, Trevor Eve, Anton Lesser, Ian Bannen, Minnie Driver. 60min

Perhaps Milne's best known work, this tale is a subtle and powerful examination of love, politics and revenge. Stevenson is superb as the wife betrayed by her husband, highflying cabinet minister (Eve). As she comes to realise who and what he really is, she is compelled to systematically destroy his political career, moving inexorably towards a climax with all the force of a contemporary Greek tragedy. At the conclusion of the first episode Paula Milne will be in conversation with Ben Stephenson (Controller, BBC Drama Commissioning), to discuss her remarkable writing career, illustrated by clips from her past work and her eagerly awaited followup, *The Politician's Husband*.

Mon 24 Sept 18:10 NFT3

The Politician's Wife (Pts 2 & 3): Echo Chamber + Body Politic

Channel 4 1995. Dir Graham Theakston. With Juliet Stevenson, Trevor Eve, Anton Lesser, Ian Bannen, Minnie Driver. 2 x 60min

Mon 24 Sept 20:40 NFT3

**Joint ticket available £13.80, concs
£10.30 (Members pay £1.50 less)**

Hollow Reed

UK 1996. Dir Angela Pope. With Martin Donovan, Ian Hart, Sam Bould, Joely Richardson. 104min. 15

Following the break-up of his marriage after revealing his homosexuality, GP Martin Wyatt loses custody of his son Oliver to ex-wife Hannah and her new partner Frank. Oliver suffers several unexplained injuries and Martin puts two and two together and comes to the conclusion that Frank is responsible. Martin then begins a long courtroom custody battle to win back his son. Paula Milne wrote the screenplay in which violence and anti-gay prejudice combine to make a tense domestic drama.

Fri 28 Sept 20:30 NFT3
Wed 3 Oct 18:20 NFT2

Press Contacts:

Liz Parkinson - Assistant Press Officer, BFI Southbank
liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk | 020 7957 8918

Caroline Jones – Press Officer, BFI Southbank
caroline.jones@bfi.org.uk | 020 7957 8986

NOTES TO EDITORS

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- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
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- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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

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