

Only one thing on her mind

FILTH

On MASTERPIECE CONTEMPORARY

Sunday, November 16, 2008 at 9pm ET on  PBS.

“Alun Armstrong and Julie Walters...are sublime.”

The Independent

“It’s been ages since I’ve enjoyed a BBC biopic as much as this.”

New Statesman

“A delightful comedy-drama.”

Sunday Times (London)

Julie Walters (*Mamma Mia!*, *Harry Potter*) stars as Mary Whitehouse in *Filth*, the true story of a moral watchdog barking at the heels of swinging England in the 1960s. The warm-hearted, hysterically funny satire—backed by a spine-tinglingly authentic soundtrack—airs on MASTERPIECE CONTEMPORARY Sunday, November 16, 2008 at 9 to 10:30pm ET on PBS (check local listings).

Shocked by a BBC program about premarital sex broadcast at teatime, Whitehouse rises from her quaint suburban life to do battle with the innovative, taboo-breaking head of the BBC, Sir Hugh Greene, played by Hugh Bonneville (*Five Days*, *Miss Austen Regrets*).

MASTERPIECE executive producer Rebecca Eaton notes that the controversy has never really gone away. “The issue of what is—and what is not—acceptable for broadcast television is still alive and well in this country, 45 years after Mary Whitehouse began her campaign against the BBC. *Filth* is perfect for MASTERPIECE CONTEMPORARY because it’s an entertaining, sympathetic, and provocative take on this hot issue.”

The program also stars Alun Armstrong (*Bleak House*) as Mary’s taciturn husband, Ernest, who toes his wife’s moral line, while secretly curious about the new sexual openness in British society.

But Mary will have none of it and finds sexual innuendo everywhere—in plays, soap operas, and documentaries, not to mention the 44 “bloody”s in one episode of a popular sitcom. Her answer is Clean Up TV, a grass roots movement to combat the “tide of filth, violence, and degradation...smoking, drinking, open mad kisses,” and worse.

The object of her letter-writing campaign, BBC director general Sir Hugh Greene, responds that “provocation is healthy and socially imperative,” and he blithely refuses to respond to Mary’s criticisms. But he has met his match in “that demented housewife,” as he calls her.

Thanks to a mole at the BBC, Mary gets wind of a program she judges unfit for broadcast. She appeals to the postmaster general, the overseer of the nation’s airwaves, to have the show censored, winning her first sweet victory in the culture war against Sir Hugh.

At times, Mary’s demands get a little out of hand, as when she denounces the puppets on a children’s show for being “constantly unkind, to the point of callousness, to the grown-up in their program.”

But it’s the sixties and cultural dislocation is clearly getting to her. It’s fitting that her climactic clash with Sir Hugh is over the BBC’s scheduled Christmas broadcast of the Beatles’ psychedelic “Magical Mystery Tour,” featuring the notoriously obscure song, “I Am the Walrus.” One of the only lines in the song that makes sense includes the word “knickers”—a red flag for Mary if there ever was one.

Though Mary Whitehouse died in 2001, and British television is more unbridled than ever, her pressure group survives under the name Mediawatch-UK—as does her legacy of spirited debate on the proper bounds of free speech, artistic expression, and decency.

Filth is produced by Wall to Wall Media for the BBC and presented on PBS by WGBH Boston. It is written by Amanda Coe (*Shameless*) and directed by Andy de Emmony (*God on Trial*). The producer is Richard Burrell and the executive producer is Leanne Klein.

MASTERPIECE has been presented on PBS by WGBH since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting and public television viewers provide funding for **MASTERPIECE**.

September 2008

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