



## PRESS RELEASE

A king to die for

# HENRY VIII

on MASTERPIECE THEATRE

Sundays, November 7 and 14, 2004, at 9pm ET on PBS

Once upon a time a king wanted a son, but his wife, his church, and his most trusted advisor stood in the way. Too bad for them. Ray Winstone (*Sexy Beast*, *Cold Mountain*) stars as the cruel and colorful monarch who married six times, defied the Pope, and presided over a bloodbath, on MASTERPIECE THEATRE's *Henry VIII*, airing in two parts on Sundays, November 7 and 14, 2004, from 9 to 10:30pm on PBS (check local listings).

The dazzling costume drama co-stars Helena Bonham Carter (*Big Fish*, *Live from Baghdad*) as Henry's second wife, the seductress Anne Boleyn.

Emilia Fox (*Rebecca*, *The Pianist*) plays Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour, whom he claimed to love above all others. And David Suchet (*The Way We Live Now*, *Poirot*) is Cardinal Wolsey, the secret power behind the throne, until he was undone by the king's duplicity.

Also appearing are Charles Dance (*Gosford Park*, *Rebecca*) as the Duke of Buckingham, Mark Strong (*Prime Suspect 6*) as the Duke of Norfolk, Daniel Webb (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*) as Thomas Cromwell, and Michael Maloney (*Forsyte Saga II*) as Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Henry's thirty-eight-year reign saw England transformed from a sleepy backwater of jousting tournaments and Catholic piety to a nation torn by religious and political strife—all because the king wanted a male heir.

"He was a very troubled man," observes Winstone, who in the course of the film ages from the young athletic king to the burly icon familiar from Hans Holbein paintings. "This is a man who allowed two of his wives—women he loved passionately—to be murdered. At the same time, he wrote beautiful love letters, understood science and, to a certain extent, was a great ambassador. He was an intelligent, gentle, romantic man, who lost his way when it came to love."

The trouble starts in 1519 with Henry's first wife, Katharine of Aragon (Assumpta Serna, *Nostradamus*), who has numerous pregnancies but only one child who survives infancy—and that a girl (the future Queen Mary, aka Bloody Mary).

Unwilling to see the crown pass to a female, Henry convinces himself that his marriage is invalid and decides to remarry. His wandering eye has already lit on beautiful Anne Boleyn (Bonham Carter) as a potential mistress. The canny Anne persuades Henry to make her queen instead.

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The royal breakup sets off a political crisis. The Pope objects. The king's chief minister, Cardinal Wolsey (Suchet), tries to change the pontiff's mind—to no avail. Henry responds by creating, in effect, a new church with himself as head.

Wolsey's diplomatic failure, combined with Anne's suspicion of his loyalty, lands him in the Tower, where he dies before he can be executed. His fate sets the pattern for a succession of court officials, wives, gentry, and commoners who are dispensed with—often violently—when they disappoint Henry.

Among these is Anne herself, who gives birth to a daughter (the future Elizabeth I), which is interpreted by Henry as a bad omen and made all the worse when Anne later miscarries a son. Anne's doom is sealed when a court faction fabricates evidence of adultery against her.

Henry then takes wife number three, Jane Seymour (Fox), who fulfills her duty by providing a son (the future Edward VI), but later dies of infection.

Thomas Cromwell (Webb) lines up wife number four, Anne of Cleves (Pia Girard), but he loses his head when she proves to be too homely.

Wife number five, Catherine Howard (Emily Blunt, *Warrior Queen*), also ends up on the block along with her various lovers, who have satisfied her in ways the aged king cannot.

Only wife number six, Catherine Parr (Clare Holman, *Prime Suspect 6*), sees her marriage to its natural end—Henry's.

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*Henry VIII* is directed by Pete Travis (*The Jury*, *Cold Feet*), written by Pete Morgan (*The Jury*) and produced by Francis Hopkinson, and is a co-production between Granada Television and WGBH Boston. Andy Harries is executive producer for Granada. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer for WGBH.

MASTERPIECE THEATRE has been presented on PBS by WGBH since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer.

MASTERPIECE THEATRE is closed captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, and described for people who are blind or visually impaired by the Media Access Group at WGBH. The descriptive narration is available on the SAP channel of stereo TVs and VCRs. For more information about MASTERPIECE THEATRE, visit the series Web site at [pbs.org/masterpiece](http://pbs.org/masterpiece).

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Press materials and photography are available at [pbs.org/pressroom](http://pbs.org/pressroom) and [pressroom.wgbh.org](http://pressroom.wgbh.org).

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