

PRESS RELEASE

Opposites Attract  
***South Riding***  
 Adapted by Andrew Davies  
 On MASTERPIECE Classic

Sundays, May 1, 8, and 15, 2011 at 9pm ET on PBS

A feisty schoolteacher returns to her north England home and is drawn to a man who despises everything she stands for on *South Riding*, Winifred Holtby's 1936 novel of social consciousness and secret romance. MASTERPIECE Classic presents this Depression-era love story in a three-part miniseries, adapted by celebrated screenwriter Andrew Davies (*Little Dorrit*, *Pride and Prejudice*) and starring Anna Maxwell Martin (*Bleak House*) and David Morrissey (*Sense and Sensibility*).

Hailed during its UK broadcast as "a beguiling period treat" by *The Observer* (London), *South Riding* earned special accolades for its romantic leads, with Maxwell Martin singled out as "plucky and persuasive" by *Scotland on Sunday*, and Morrissey as "splendidly moody and brooding" by *The Express* (London).

Maxwell Martin plays Sarah Burton, a native of fictional South Riding in Yorkshire, returning to apply for the job of headmistress at the local girls' high school. Her goal is to bring new energy, new ideas, and a new outlook to the institution, whose students face a bleak future in the hard economic times of the 1930s.

Sarah's nemesis is landowner Robert Carne, portrayed by David Morrissey. Robert is a tradition-bound gentleman farmer, deeply suspicious of Sarah's social agenda and offended by her pacifist views, especially since he is a veteran of the Great War. But despite his opposition to her candidacy, she gets the job.

Also starring are Penelope Wilton (*Downton Abbey*) as Mrs. Beddows, a forward-thinking municipal councilor; and Peter Firth (*The Hunt for Red October*) as Anthony Snaith, Mrs. Beddows' colleague on the council, whose idea of public service is to feather his nest and ruin his opponents.

Other characters include left-leaning councilor Joe Astell (Douglas Henshall, *Collision*); lustful lay preacher Alfred Huggins (John Henshaw); brilliant but poverty-stricken student Lydia Holly (Charlie Clark); and Robert's high-strung teenage daughter, Midge (Katherine McGolpin), who is frantically protective of Robert due to a mysterious calamity that befell her mother, Muriel (Lydia Wilson, *Any Human Heart*).

Muriel's tragedy is the linchpin of the story: the reason why Robert is so secretive and private, why he is at risk of losing his estate, why Midge is sent to Sarah's school, and why Sarah and Robert's relationship takes an unexpected and impassioned turn.

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Meanwhile, momentous change is afoot at the council, where a proposal to build public housing to improve the lives of slum dwellers leads to backroom dealings that erupt in a ruinous scandal.

A modern classic, *South Riding* was the last novel by Winifred Holtby, who died at age 37 of Bright's disease a month after completing the manuscript. Knowing that she did not have long to live, she threw herself into what became her most enduring book—a chronicle of her native Yorkshire on the brink of change, as the rigid class system was starting to crumble and outspoken feminists like Sarah were charting a new path for women, not least in matters of the heart.

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*South Riding* is a BBC/MASTERPIECE Co-production. The screenwriter is Andrew Davies (*Little Dorrit*), adapted from the novel by Winifred Holtby. The director is Diarmuid Lawrence. The producer is Lisa Osborne. The executive producers are Anne Pivcevic, Hilary Martin, and Rebecca Eaton.

MASTERPIECE is presented on PBS by WGBH Boston. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. Funding for the series is provided by public television viewers with additional support from contributors to The MASTERPIECE Trust, created to help ensure the series' future.

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