

PRESS RELEASE

MASTERPIECETM
Classic

In 1948 England was the Promised Land —

until it broke its promise.

SMALL ISLAND

from the bestselling novel by Andrea Levy

on MASTERPIECE Classic

Hosted By Laura Linney

Sundays, April 18 and 25, 2010 at 9pm ET on PBS

Andrea Levy's uplifting story of Jamaican immigrants arriving in war-ravaged London with hope, energy, and a limitless capacity to accept rejection comes to MASTERPIECE Classic in a two-part adaptation, starring Naomie Harris (*Pirates of the Caribbean*) and David Oyelowo (*The Last King of Scotland*). *Small Island* airs Sundays, April 18 and 25, 2010 at 9-10:30pm ET on PBS (check local listings).

The winner of the prestigious Orange and Whitbread prizes for fiction, *Small Island* also garnered high praise in this beautifully faithful translation to film, which earned accolades from the British press during its recent UK broadcast.

The Daily Express called it "perfect Sunday evening drama—intensely acted, skillfully shot, and subtly passionate about subjects no one should ignore." "Carefully made and engrossing...a haunting story and a great cast," wrote *The Scotsman*. And *The Belfast Telegraph* echoed, "You will not see finer acting on television this year."

Author Levy agrees. "The cast does a fantastic job," she says. "They really do embody those characters. I cannot now think of the characters without seeing the actors."

Levy's eagerly awaited new novel, *The Long Song*, is being published in the US in late April, concurrent with the MASTERPIECE Classic airing of *Small Island*.

Small Island also stars Ruth Wilson (*Jane Eyre*) and Benedict Cumberbatch (*The Last Enemy*) as Queenie and Bernard, a conventional but mismatched English couple who end up as landlords to new immigrants Hortense and Gilbert (played by Harris and Oyelowo). The relations between the four, each of whom faces a grueling personal struggle, are the occasion for gentle humor and intense heartbreak.

The saga begins in Jamaica in 1939 with Hortense, an illegitimate teenager, being brought up in the family of Michael (Ashley Walters), an older-brother figure whom she

idolizes. Jamaicans of this era are proud subjects of the British empire, looking up to all things English and ready to make sacrifices for the mother country.

With the arrival of World War II, they readily accept the call to service. Michael joins the RAF to fight in Europe. And so does Gilbert, a happy-go-lucky laborer who is engaged to one of Hortense's friends. Meanwhile, Hortense trains as a teacher and saves her money, dreaming of marrying Michael and moving to England.

Her big chance comes after the war, not with Michael—who has been declared missing in action—but thanks to Gilbert, who agrees to a marriage of convenience with Hortense, so that he can buy passage to England and she can later follow as a respectable, married woman.

The British side of the story charts Queenie's own odyssey: from a pig farm in Yorkshire to the disenchanting freedom of London and an eventual troubled marriage to Bernard. He goes off to war, and she providentially meets Michael and later Gilbert. With her open heart and remarkable lack of prejudice, she represents the best that England has to offer her children from the colonies. For Queenie, it's a gift that exacts a very great price.

Small Island paints a vivid portrait of England and Jamaica at a turning point in their long relationship, when people whose ancestors had been slaves for the empire began coming to the mother country in search of opportunity.

"What happened in 1948, when my parents came to Britain, is that a lot of people here didn't know why they were coming and what relationship the Caribbean had to Britain," says Levy, who was born in England of Jamaican parents. "That was our struggle—to try and educate people what our history had been."

Levy's new novel, *The Long Song*, continues the saga by tracing the story of British-Jamaican relations to the era of slavery in a story that, like *Small Island*, is simultaneously funny and shocking, universal and intimate.

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Small Island is a Ruby Television Production in association with AL Films for the BBC, coproduced with WGBH Boston, and made on location in Northern Ireland with the assistance of Northern Ireland Screen (NIS). The director is John Alexander (*Sense & Sensibility*). It is adapted by Paula Milne (*Endgame*) and Sarah Williams (*Becoming Jane*) from the novel by Andrea Levy.

MASTERPIECE is presented on PBS by WGBH Boston. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. Funding for the series is provided by public television viewers.

Online press materials available at pressroom.wgbh.org and pbs.org/pressroom

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