

MASTERPIECE

In 1939, Hitler Lit the Match

World on Fire

An international cast portrays the reality,
heroism and tragedy of war
on MASTERPIECE

Sundays, April 5 - May 17, 2020 at 9/8c on PBS

Helen Hunt, Sean Bean, Lesley Manville and Jonah Hauer-King head an international cast in a gripping World War II drama hailed as “an epic war saga with a difference” (*The Mail on Sunday*, London). Following the lives of ordinary people coping with the greatest war in human history, *World on Fire* airs on MASTERPIECE in seven parts, Sundays, April 5 - May 17, 2020 at 9/8c on PBS.

Originally broadcast in the UK during fall 2019 for the 80th anniversary of the start of World War II, *World on Fire* was praised as a fresh approach to the conflict: “a beautifully turned ensemble piece ... far from standard wartime fare,” wrote *The Guardian* (London); “a striking, witty wartime drama that feels startlingly new,” concurred *iNews* (London); “it’s not just the bombs that shake you to the core,” declared *The Telegraph* (London), “it’s the emotions, too.”

Academy Award®-winner Helen Hunt (*As Good As it Gets*, *Mad About You*) stars as an American broadcaster reporting from Warsaw and Berlin as fighting erupts. Sean Bean (*Game of Thrones*, *Sharpe*) plays a World War I veteran-turned-pacifist trying to cope with chronic shellshock while looking after his working-class family. And Academy Award®-nominee Lesley Manville (*Phantom Thread*) is a British fascist sympathizer who finds herself sheltering a young refugee.

Also starring are Jonah Hauer-King (*Little Women* on MASTERPIECE, the upcoming live-action film of *The Little Mermaid*) as an idealistic British translator and army officer, Blake Harrison (*A Very English Scandal*) as a stalwart English sergeant, Julia Brown (*Shetland*) as a feisty armed services entertainer, Zofia Wichłacz (*The Romanoffs*) as a Polish resistance fighter, Brian J. Smith (*Sense8*) as an American doctor in occupied Paris, and Parker Sawyers (*Southside with You*) as a Parisian jazz musician.

Set in Britain, Poland, France, and Germany—on the frontlines and the home front—*World on Fire* traces the interweaved fates of several families in 1939 and 1940, from the Nazi invasion of Poland, to the near debacle at Dunkirk, to the fall of Paris and beyond.

In Manchester, England, Douglas Bennett (Bean) is fighting a losing battle for pacifism as his country spirals into war. His lawbreaking son, Tom (Ewan Mitchell, *The Last Kingdom*), is given the choice of prison or the military. His daughter, Lois (Brown), is a factory worker and talented singer, involved in a romance with upper class translator Harry Chase (Hauer-King)—much to the dismay of Harry’s aloof mother, Robina (Manville).

-more-



Posted to the British embassy in Warsaw, Harry forgets Lois when he falls in love with local waitress Kasia Tomaszewski (Wichłacz), becoming close to her family, including her studious little brother, Jan (Eryk Biedunkiewicz). Harry also befriends Nancy Campbell (Hunt), an American radio reporter trying to uncover the truth about the Nazi regime. She gives Harry a momentous piece of advice as Nazi troops converge on the city.

Meanwhile, Nancy's nephew Webster O'Connor (Smith) is pursuing his career in Europe as it plunges into chaos. Webster is a doctor at the American hospital in Paris, in love with the nightlife and attracted to a good-looking saxophone player named Albert (Sawyers).

All over Europe, no one can quite believe that their normal lives, their everyday pleasures and worries, are about to be demolished. World War II encompassed millions of people and millions of individuals' stories. *World on Fire* makes this wholesale tragedy achingly personal and, at times, heroic.

World On Fire is a Mammoth Screen (part of ITV Studios) production for the BBC and MASTERPIECE. It is written by Peter Bowker, developed by Mammoth's Creative Director Rebecca Keane, and executive produced by Peter Bowker, Damien Timmer and Helen Ziegler for Mammoth Screen, Lucy Richer for the BBC, and Rebecca Eaton for MASTERPIECE. The Series Producer is Chris Clough. The directors are Adam Smith (*Trespass Against Us*), Thomas Napper (*Jawbone*), Chanya Button (*Burn Burn Burn*), and Andy Wilson (*Unforgotten*).

About MASTERPIECE

Winner of 83 Primetime Emmys® and 19 Peabody Awards, MASTERPIECE has been essential Sunday night viewing for millions of fans since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is executive-producer-at-large. Susanne Simpson is the executive producer of the series. Funding for MASTERPIECE is provided by Viking and Raymond James with additional support from public television viewers and contributors to The MASTERPIECE Trust. Presented on PBS by WGBH Boston, MASTERPIECE is known for recent hits such as *Sherlock*, *Downton Abbey* and *Victoria*, and beloved classics such as *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Prime Suspect*, *The Forsyte Saga* and *Poldark*.

pbs.org/masterpiece

Press Contacts

Ellen Dockser, 617-300-5338, ellen_dockser@wgbh.org

Laura Garvey, 617-300-5342, laura_garvey@wgbh.org