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Classic

The best of times? The worst of times?

THE TALES OF CHARLES DICKENS

On MASTERPIECE CLASSIC

Sundays, February 15 to May 3, 2009 at 9pm ET on PBS

It seemed like the best of times, before it turned into the worst of times. Credit flowed like champagne on New Year's Eve, until the inevitable economic hangover. Wall Street in 2008? No, London in the 1820s in Charles Dickens' eerily prophetic novel *Little Dorrit*. MASTERPIECE CLASSIC presents this timely story of debt, greed, and love, along with three of Dickens' other great works, on "The Tales of Charles Dickens," airing Sundays, February 15 to May 3, 2009, at 9pm ET on PBS (check local listings).

"The Tales of Charles Dickens" features all-new productions of *Oliver Twist*, *Little Dorrit*, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, plus an encore presentation of *David Copperfield*, starring Harry Potter's Daniel Radcliffe in his first film role.

"From the financial collapse at the heart of *Little Dorrit* to Grandfather's gambling addiction to *David Copperfield*'s up-by-the-bootstraps success story, Dickens is a writer not just for his time, but for ours," says Rebecca Eaton, executive producer of MASTERPIECE.

Dickens' true genius was that he could capture the good with the bad—the love stories, great humor, and happy endings, along with life's abundant tragedies—all in magical plots populated with unforgettable characters.

"The Tales of Charles Dickens" includes such prescient creations as Mr. Merdle in *Little Dorrit*, who suckers all of London's prominent investors into his Ponzi-like scheme that could have been the playbook for certain contemporary Wall Street investors.

Then there is Amy "Little" Dorrit herself, one of Dickens' most moving heroines, who is born into poverty in debtor's prison and never asks for more than what she already has. As a young woman, her love redeems a soul-tormented businessman, who doesn't know what he wants out of life.

Then there is Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, who gives Oliver his only even break in life. Which raises the question: Who are the real criminals? Fagin's gang of pickpockets? Or the authorities, who persecute the orphaned Oliver to the brink of an early grave?

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David Copperfield, Little Nell, Mr. Micawber, Daniel Quilp—the heroes, heroines, comic characters, and villains—they are all in “The Tales of Charles Dickens,” putting viewers today in touch with the timelessness of a great storyteller:

***Oliver Twist* (two 90-minute episodes), February 15 and 22**

This bold and gripping adaptation breathes new life into the much loved Charles Dickens story about the young orphan Oliver who is sent to the workhouse where children are raised on a diet of hard work and thin gruel. But we all know the story doesn’t end there. Acclaimed newcomer William Miller is Oliver, character actor extraordinaire Timothy Spall (*Harry Potter*) is Fagin, the prince of thieves, British heartthrob Tom Hardy (*Wuthering Heights*) is Bill Sikes, Fagin’s cruel accomplice, and Sophie Okonedo (*The Secret Life of Bees*) is Nancy, Bill’s lover and Oliver’s guardian angel.

***David Copperfield* (two 90-minute episodes), March 2009 (check local listings)**

Daniel Radcliffe (*Harry Potter*) stars as young David Copperfield in Charles Dickens’ coming-of-age story based on episodes from his own life, with Bob Hoskins (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*) as the ever-optimistic Mr. Micawber, Maggie Smith (*Harry Potter*) as David’s upstanding Aunt Betsey, and Ian McKellen (*Harry Potter*) as the sadistic schoolmaster Mr. Creakle. “Of all my books,” Dickens wrote, “I like this the best.”

***Little Dorrit* (five episodes, part 1 is 2 hours, parts 2–5 are 90 minutes), March 29 through April 26**

Screenwriter Andrew Davies (*Bleak House*) adapts Charles Dickens’ most moving love story, which also has the timely theme of chronic debt and financial collapse. Matthew Macfadyen (*Pride and Prejudice* with Keira Knightley) stars as hero Arthur Clennam, with Claire Foy as Amy “Little” Dorrit and Tom Courtenay (*The Golden Compass*) as her long-suffering father, who has been incarcerated for 25 years for insolvency. Scores of other great actors appear in this poignant tale that was particularly close to Dickens’ heart, since his own father did time in debtor’s prison.

***The Old Curiosity Shop* (90 minutes), May 3**

A teenage girl and her grandfather lose everything to a maniacal moneylender and flee his relentless pursuit. The saga of Little Nell, Grandfather, and their tormentor, Daniel Quilp, is one of Charles Dickens’ most heartrending tales. Derek Jacobi (*I, Claudius*) stars as Grandfather, with Sophie Vavasseur (*Northanger Abbey*) as Nell and Toby Jones (*Frost/Nixon*) as Quilp. The Dickensian cast also includes Gina McKee (*The Forsyte Saga*) as the brains behind Quilp’s shady law firm.

Oliver Twist is a BBC/WGBH Boston co-production. *David Copperfield* is a BBC AMERICA and WGBH Boston coproduction. *Little Dorrit* is a BBC/WGBH Boston coproduction. *The Old Curiosity Shop* is a WGBH/ITV coproduction. MASTERPIECE has been presented on PBS by WGBH since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer of MASTERPIECE. Laura Linney is the host of MASTERPIECE CLASSIC. Public television viewers provide funding for MASTERPIECE.

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