



MASTERPIECE THEATRE®



PBS

WGBH

DESCRIPTION / SYNOPSSES

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

on MASTERPIECE THEATRE

Sundays, October 22 and 29 and November 5, 2006 at 9pm on PBS

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Benedict Cumberbatch (*Tipping the Velvet*, *Cambridge Spies*) stars in a three-part adaptation of William Golding's ripping sea yarn, *To the Ends of the Earth*, about a young aristocrat's nine-month voyage from England to Australia at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The cast includes Sam Neill (*Doctor Zhivago*) as a political rabble-rouser, Jared Harris (son of Richard, *Igby Goes Down*, *The Notorious Betty Page*) as the captain, and Victoria Hamilton (*King Lear*) as a proto-feminist governess. The gripping tale of survival in increasingly desperate straits recalls another of Golding's books, *The Lord of the Flies*. Golding knew a thing or two about seafaring, having served on British ships throughout World War II, including participation in the sinking of the Bismarck.

SYNOPSSES

Episode 1: *Rites of Passage*

Sunday, October 22, 2006

9 to 10:30pm on PBS

In 1814 Edmund Talbot (Benedict Cumberbatch) embarks from England for Australia to assume a post in the colonial government under the patronage of his influential godfather. But nothing has prepared him for the squalor of his first class accommodations on the aging, converted man-of-war that will be his home at sea for the next nine months. Also traveling first class are Mr. Prettiman (Sam Neill), a radical whom Edmund is to watch closely; Miss Granham (Victoria Hamilton), an impoverished member of the gentry, forced to become a governess; Mr. Brocklebank (Richard McCabe, *The Constant Gardener*), a debauched artist living in a ménage à trois with his purported wife and daughter; and Parson Colley (Daniel Evans, *The Virgin Queen*), a friendless cleric, who quickly becomes an object of ridicule among the passengers and crew. The plot hinges on a mysterious incident when Colley attempts to proselytize the sailors, becomes drunk, and takes to his cabin in an excess of shame.

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Episode 2: *Close Quarters*

Sunday, October 29, 2006

9 to 10:30pm on PBS

The ship escapes the doldrums only to be “taken aback” by a wind that also damages the mainmast due to carelessness by Lieutenant Deverel (JJ Field, *Poirot*). Captain Anderson (Jared Harris) places Deverel under arrest. But he is soon free again, with cutlass in hand, when all hands prepare for possible battle against a vessel on the horizon. She proves to be the British warship *Alcyone* with news that France is defeated. A celebratory ball takes place at which Edmund and Deverel flirt with Marion Chumley (Joanna Page, *Love Actually*), protégée of the wife of the *Alcyone*’s captain, Sir Henry Somerset (Charles Dance, *Bleak House*). Edmund plans for Marion to join his ship for Australia rather than resume her trip to India, but Sir Henry forbids it. When the *Alcyone* departs, Deverel is traded for Lieutenant Benét (Niall Macgregor, *Monarch of the Glen*), a creative officer who devises a plan to repair the ship’s hull to give her more speed—a tactic that almost sinks the vessel and incites an enigmatic suicide.

Episode 3: *Fire Down Below*

Sunday, November 5, 2006

9 to 10:30pm on PBS

Miss Granham is engaged to the dying Mr. Prettiman, whom Edmund at last befriends, sharing a bond in their love for classical literature. The wedding takes place amid ominous signs that all aboard are destined to vanish without a trace in the stormy southern seas. Benét devises another clever repair, this time securing the mainmast with red-hot bolts that 1st Lieutenant Summers (Jamie Sives, *Doctor Who*) cautions will ignite a slow fire that will consume the ship. But Captain Anderson ignores the warning. Standing watch with Summers one night, Edmund spots an iceberg that they barely manage to avoid. When the ship eventually reaches Australia, “the fire down below” takes on a double meaning, as Edmund confronts serious setbacks ashore and Benét’s risky repair catastrophically flares up. Then one day, an old acquaintance from the voyage reappears to lighten Edmund’s life.

To the Ends of the Earth is a BBC/Power coproduction in association with Tightrope Pictures from the trilogy by William Golding. The producer is Lynn Horsford. The executive producers are Justin Bodle, Hilary Salmon, Laura Mackie, Paul Abbott and Hilary Bevan Jones. The writer is Tony Basgallop and the director is David Attwood (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Moll Flanders*).

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MASTERPIECE THEATRE has been presented on PBS by WGBH since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. Funding for MASTERPIECE THEATRE is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and public television viewers.

For more information about *To the Ends of the Earth* and MASTERPIECE THEATRE, visit pbs.org/masterpiece.

Press materials and photography are available at
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