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FINAL TRANSCRIPT

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A319 LITERATURE IN THE MODERN WORLD

TV9 SERJEANT MUSGRAVE AT THE COURT

Producer.....Betty Talks

Production Assistant.....Ione Mako

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Jocelyn Herbert (ML10UA)

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GENERIC TITLE:

BBC specially shot / **A319** MUSIC:

LITERATURE IN THE MODERN WORLD Concertina 0716"

PROGRAMME TITLE

SERJEANT MUSGRAVE AT THE COURT

CAPTION:

Introduced by John Arden

BBC specially shot / JOHN ARDEN:

I wrote Serjeant Musgrave's Dance in 1958 - I'd just had a very dismal and sordid play on at the Royal Court called Live Like Pigs

STILL: Live Like Pigs / which, as its name suggests, it looked very
Snowdon drab and grey, and I thought one day at the rehearsal as I was sitting watching the set

STILL: Live Like Pigs being/built that we needed a bit of colour, we

BBC specially shot needed a bit of glamour in the thing/ which was not supposed to be allowed in the new theatre of the 1950s with its working-class relaism and so on - and I imagined a lot of soldiers in 19th century scarlet uniforms, and I thought, well, what are they doing there? They've come to kill somebody, they've got a machine gun, why? And shortly afterwards I was talking to A.L. Lloyd who did the music

for Live Like Pigs, and he knew a lot of army ballads of the late 19th century. One of them stuck in my mind very strongly - it goes...

(sings)
"And here I lie in Strangeways Gaol
I killed my officer against my will
And now I must go to the high gallows tree
Good people all pray for MacAfferty."

And I took this idea of that type of ballad, that type of physical setting, and I thought, well, you know, what's the story? And the story came right out of the newspapers in 1958 - the British army had carried out a very savage reprisal in Cyprus, attacking loads of civilians in a block of flats, and it had created a big political scandal which was bieng scandalously covered up, and I was very angry about it, and I thought, well, make that the play and put it within that setting.

LINDSAY ANDERSON:
Well I was given a couple of plays I think one day by George Devine. I don't remember what the other play was but I do remember that I

read Sergeant Musgrave's Dance by John Arden . Instinctively I knew that this was a very exciting textured play; that's to say the language was very strong and colourful and often not too easy to understand, and there was a central theme there of an examination of violence, if you like.

JOCELYN HERBERT

Its such a vivid play from the point of view from where it is, and the picture it conjures up in this snow bound village and cut off from the world, and these miners and the blackness of miners, and then this this group of soldiers who come in and this man who has blackness really and, you know, vengeance in his soul and a mixture of God and vengeance which all gradually emerges and I just had these drawings that I just did straightaway from reading the play, and showed John and Lindsay. And Lindsay was wonderful because it was one of - I think it was the second play he'd done at the Court and he was always rather suspicious of scenery, I think. He wasn't quite sure about only having a little on the stage but John responded to the idea of doing it like this and so that's really how it

Drawing: soldiers & bars /
Drawing: grave & sun /
BBC specially shot /
Drawing:
BBC specially shot

grew, and I just loved the idea of this this - you know that, when it snows the sky's a strange sort of yellowy grey colour, and that being dominant and then these red-coated figures and the black and it was all - that was entirely the colour, it was the only colour there was was the red.

Drawing: snowscene /
Drawing: soldiers

LINDSAY ANDERSON

BBC specially shot / The casting of the play was a bit difficult because the parts are very defined and they needed really first class strong actors. The theatrical side of the play is there but you have to be very careful that the theatrical side of the play doesn't get subordinated to what you might call the literary side of the play or the language, so it was a, it was quite a hard task casting it but we did end up with a superb cast.

IAN BANNEN

In doing Musgrave I just thought of some of the worst serjeants I've been under and imitated them, so particularly in the third act where you start saying right you have a rifle here take the butt put it here into your..... - cock the rifle this way, that same

sort of sergeant's voice that - that lad, not looking at me, what you looking at me lad, Clark Gable, look at me, don't be looking round here - you know you kept that sort of voice and kept up the same tone which was the start of building the crowd up. And then you gradually get more and more mad saying your eyes pop and you go into this huge dance, get, go down towards the audience and the dance is the best fun of the lot you know waving a rifle at them. I think they got an almighty shock rather like the beginning of As You Like It when.....a wrestling match wakes them all up.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

I know I spoke to John I think one of the first things he said was that he was inspired a bit by the idea of a western film that he'd seen about four anonymous mysterious horseman or outlaws riding into a small town and taking it over and there is that element in it. There's also a strong traditional theatrical element in it. I mean John was very interested in and affected by Jacobean drama, traditional English drama and there are bits of it that are rather like a pastiche of a

Jacobean play. There is a thriller element in it and that's an important thing to try and bring out in the play to sustain interest in the first two acts.

IAN BANNEN

Musgrave was, it was an enormous script in fact some some of the speeches I hadn't the faintest idea what they meant, and I remember one day we were all arguing as to what this huge speech meant, and I remember asking the writer sitting down there in the stalls, why is, why are these passages so long - couldn't you make them shorter? He said, no I see the play partly as a detective story giving away clues inside these huge speeches, and I said, well don't you think that the clues could be a bit clearer if you if didn't have so much verbiage and floral arrangement round it - he didn't like that or at least he didn't say anything.

JOCELYN HERBERT

Drawing: exterior bar / Well the bar scene was probably the most

Drawing: bar difficult. / This is one of the first drawing and it had a background of the town and the

BBC specially shot lamp posts so you had the / outside as well as

the inside and the sign hanging and then as I got more sort of austere, more more simplified I dropped the outside and just had a beam across to give a roof, and then it got even more simplified and was just a framework with a door and the bar there and the places where they sat here and then the final thing is very very simple.

Drawing: bar

Drawing: bar

STILL: bar scehe
Snowdon

Lindsay was very nervous about having just the flat but in the end he did like it, it was alright but it made him nervous. I think it was simply that of course the whole thing was more exposed but it is wonderful because the people are so, you know, they're there and you just look at them.

Drawing: Serjeant Musgrave

IAN BANNEN

MUSIC:
Concertina 0'30"

The inn scene was very sinister - they had Dudley Moore behind the flats with a little squeeze box playing very sinister strange music and when she says when I say to her, did you have a boy called Hicks ever come from this part? - and she says, yes, why do you ask? - and this strange music going behind it it was very very sinister the audience was really caught. It's sinister writing as it

BBC specially shot

is, but Lindsay Anderson's production, it added to it, this wonderful music from Dudley Moore hidden behind the flat.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

The last act does seem to be a bit influenced by, shall we say Brechtian ideas, its a sort of demonstration and it hasn't got the romantic quality, the romantic quality of language that the first part of the play has, its different and it's quite a problem staging so it has to be staged in a different, almost didactic way.

JOCELYN HERBERT

The thing about Brecht is that everything that

b & w Brecht backstage
Monitor No.73

was there was beautifully made/using actual materials instead of, and if you wanted wood you used wood and stained it rather than painting canvas to look like wood. It also meant that every prop you had, every table, I mean, those were the important things for Brecht, that he was famous for, the work that

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went on to the props to make them /look as though they really had been used, and just not

b & w Helene Weigel
Monitor No.73

a perfectly a new thing /painted a bit. The same with the clothes, with him, you grated it

or you made darns in it, you really made it look as if it took a long long time but the difference is - I mean if you ever saw Mother Courage with Helene Weigel - absolutely amazing.

b & w backstage Brecht
Monitor No.73

/Brecht wanted you to know you were in the theatre - he didn't want to pretend you were in a real place, he hated that kind or realism in the theatre - he wanted you to see the lights, you know, it didn't matter to him if you did, or see how the thing worked or how things came in, because you see it was his kind of, well, people call it alienation and all that, but it just was that he, this was theatre and theatre is make-believe, it's not real.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

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Of course it was a time/of, if you like, radicalism, it was a time when dead or dying

b & w Royal Court
BBC Omnibus

conventions were being/defied or destroyed which is what made the late fifties and then the sixties such a really exciting and fruitful time.

BBC specially shot /

BILL GASKILL

In the years we're talking about - the late fifties - there was very much a kind of liberal to left audience which came to see the plays of Arnold Wesker which was not at all the kind of audience that John Arden was after. I think John was more radical really although we didn't perhaps realise it at the time - he was more deeply political than Wesker and I don't think it's as immediately clear in Serjeant Musgrave but in fact it is a very political play and then Arden himself became more overtly political, and is now much more basically radical writer than any of the ones of that period.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

b & w audience
BBC News

In the theatre one was against the whole conception of middle class theatre / the kind of west end theatre which is still with us really - of a theatre which depends on relatively monied middle class bourgeois people for its audience and which runs away from anything truly disturbing, critical or contemporary.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

BBC specially shot

We were for a theatre above all that related directly to its audience, that related directly to the experiences, the daily experiences, the political and social experiences of its audience, but it wasn't a socialist realist theatre - in other words the sheer theatricality of work was, if you like, of paramount importance.

BILL GASKILL

We didn't come together politically we came together because we wanted to make theatre and we wanted to make new theatre, we wanted to do new plays in new ways. We didn't come together with a political axe to grind - when we came together we found out that we were, by and large, left wing committed to various causes including CND and therefore became involved in the politics of the time. Of course in the first year of the English Stage Company's existence there was Suez and Suez did influence John Osborne's second play The Entertainer so there was a very direct relationship between politics and what was written. And John Arden's play Serjeant Musgrave was partly written because of an

incident that had happened in Cyprus so there was that constant feeding in of material but it wasn't as if we'd come together to say we are going to make political theatre - I mean some of the theatre we made wasn't political at all and I think by present day standards that we wouldn't have been thought of as political but in those days because we'd associated ourselves with what was happening, as any writer and director must do, then we were thought of as being highly radical just because we didn't speak posh and we didn't speak with west end accents and all those things, but our sensation was not of being politically radical but of being artistically radical.

b & w March to Aldermaston / Contemporary Films

We all were on the Aldermaston march and it was of course a very visionary and poetic time we used to chant, /"William Shakespeare, William Blake, we are marching for your sake", and we really believed that, you know, so it was very very simple-minded, very positive and we were all part of it. And in fact the writers - you know I used to run a writers group which in of which Arden was a very important member - and we used to write plays

BBC specially shot

b & w March to Aldermaston Contemporary Films

for CND, for CND DEMONSTRATIONS.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

The fact that we went on the Aldermaston march was much more a sort of liberal almost fun kind of gesture than it was a dogged socialist demonstration. That was just the invigoration of the time when things were undoubtedly changing.

BBC specially shot

JOCELYN HERBERT

It is such a lovely theatre to work in from an acting point of view and the relationship of the audience with the stage is so intimate. The last scene - it's a village cross and there's a stage erected in front of it, and they haul up the body of this murdered soldier that was killed in the war and they have a machine gun. And I didn't know how to do the cross because in terms of this kind of scenery to have a real cross didn't seem to work, and I built this in something that looked like stone and then I put a wooden cross on the front of it which we could actually haul him up on.

STILL: b & w cross & skeleton SNOWDON

Drawing: cross

BBC specially shot

STILL: b & w cross & skeleton /
SNOWDON

BBC specially shot

IAN BANNEN

The skeleton goes up behind you. / You slowly come forward, a rifle in your hand. You started ..... up and up, blood and fire, quietly at first, one two, one two, one two, up and up, and fire, blood, death, up and up, and death, fire, death, and fire and blood, and fire, death, fire, death, fire, death, death, death, death, fire.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

The beginning of the run was a disaster, we had terrible notices.

JOCELYN HERBERT

When the curtain the voice behind me said oh Lord one of those. Another one of those, O Lord another one of those. Well that's really been people's attitude ever since.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

We all hoped that Musgrave was going to do something for John who'd had a previous play Live Like Pigs which had been a catastrophe and we hoped that his quality would be recognised in Musgrave and I very well remember the first, the morning after the

Newspaper headline I
Daily Telegraph with photo
Newspaper headline II
Newspaper headline III
BBC specially shot
Newspaper headline IV
Newspaper headline V
BBC specially shot

notices came out/ and George Devine came in in great good humour/ grinning in a rather naughty mischievous way and saying,/ worse notices than Live Like Pigs and they were, and that evening /for the second performance I came through the auditorium of the theatre from the dressing rooms round to the front and when I looked in about five or ten minutes before the play started there didn't seem to be anybody there, and I went round to the front and I said to the box office, what's happened, is there some mishap, and where's the audience, and the box office manager said to me, that is the audience. / It was a catastrophe at first but we fought back. / We got one or two good notices - we actually/ put out a broad sheet attacking the bad reviews, if I can find it I think I've got a copy here.

IAN BANNEN

Lindsay helped to make it a success by writing to the various critics particularly the Sunday Times critic and to everybody who was anybody and asking them their views of the script and publishing this enormous piece of yellow paper with little bits of what their views were of the play.

LINDSAY ANDERSON

Serjeant Musgraves Dance - What kind of theatre? And then on the back comments from some important people, more important really than the critics - Michael Redgrave "in years to come this play will be rediscovered as an important early work of a remarkable playwright, discover it now" - well he was completely right, wasn't he? Yes, Day Lewis, "another nail in the coffins of drab realism and drawing room unreality" - Peggy Ashcroft, "what do I feel after seeing myself in Musgraves Dance? - the best of all feelings, one of the deepest gratitude to author, director and actors. To me this is the most exciting theatre since I saw the Berliner Ensemble in Mother Courage" - we had our supporters.

JOHN ARDEN

Well I think the play would have died absolutely if it hadn't been for Lindsay Anderson's holding operation that he's been telling you about. He really saved that play. A year later it was done by students at Leeds University and Harold Hobson saw it and gave it first prize in the University Drama

competition which was a kind of recantation on his part and after that with the play being published it's been done quite a lot. It's been applied to different situations in different countries. Peter Brook did a version of it in France just after the end of the French Algerian conflict. There was a remarkable production - a student production I saw in Philadelphia in the middle of the Vietnam War with a black actor playing Musgrave and the theatre all hung around with blown up photographs and newspaper cuttings about Vietnam, and then in 1972 John McGrath and I put together a peculiar version of the play called Serjeant Musgrave Dances On in which we tried to rewrite it to fit the events of Bloody Sunday in Derry. This wasn't entirely successful. I don't think you can take really a poetic, legendary kind of story and fix it to a topical event but I felt very strongly at the time that the Bloody Sunday shootings had taken place. It made one feel as a dramatist totally futile. I mean there was this play which related to an atrocity by the British Army in Cyprus and here was a far worse one in Ireland 20 years later and nobody seemed to have learnt anything which I suppose

says something about the efficacy of the theatre in political development.

END CREDITS

TAKING PART

John Arden

Lindsay Anderson

Jocelyn Herbert

Ian Bannen

Bill Gaskill

MUSIC:

Concertina 0'30"

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Cicely Palser Havely

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