

Drama

Saturday Play – Mary Poppins Saturday 3 January, 2.30pm



L-R: Juliet Stevenson, Jonathan Bee, Andrew Sachs and Sophie Stuckey bring Mary Poppins to radio for the first time

Juliet Stevenson stars as Mary Poppins in the first-ever radio dramatisation of PL Travers's classic story. BBC Radio 4's *Mary Poppins* is a treat for young and old with magic, mystery and adventures galore.

Poised, punctilious and “practically perfect in every way”, Mary Poppins never explains herself or any of the things that happen to her or the children. Like PL Travers herself, she refuses to teach the children anything directly and instead helps them to make up their own minds by hints and suggestions.

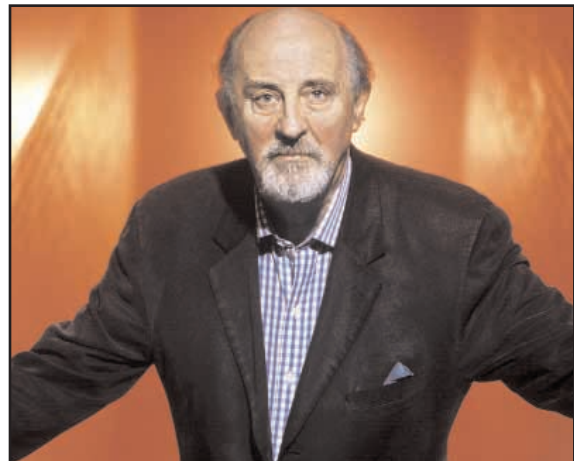
PL Travers never saw her Mary Poppins as saccharine and sweet but as a much darker, more abrasive and sometimes even frightening character, tinged as she was with a touch of magic and wonder. She believed that childhood was a “sorrowful time” and that imagination was often the only form of escapism open to children.

The radio play draws on previously undramatised adventures involving Mary Poppins and her young charges, Jane and Michael Banks. The production features original music specially composed by David Chilton.

Joining Juliet Stevenson are Andrew Sachs as Mr Turvey, David Timson as Mr Banks with Jonathan Bee and Sophie Stuckey as the children, Michael and Jane.

Producer/David Ian Neville

Classic Serial – The Pilgrim's Progress Sunday 4 January, 3.00pm Three parts



Anton Rodgers plays Bunyan in The Pilgrim's Progress

Anna Massey, Neil Dudgeon and Anton Rodgers lead the cast in a new dramatisation by Brian Sibley of John Bunyan's classic 17th-century work.

This religious poem of epic proportions concerns the adventures of a Christian pilgrim and his perilous journey to discover the true nature of

faith. It contrasts the physical hardship of poverty and imprisonment with spiritual riches.

Neil Dudgeon plays Christian, Anton Rodgers is Bunyan, who acts as narrator, Anna Massey is Interpreter, with Alec McCowen, Peter Bowles, Don Warrington, Graham Crowden and Caroline Lee Johnson. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is dramatised by Brian Sibley.

Producer/Pam Fraser-Solomon

Friday Play – A Kind Of Home: James Baldwin In Paris Friday 9 January, 9.00pm

James Baldwin was one of the finest American writers of the 20th century; a powerful voice for black Americans and a ground-breaking gay author. His novels (*Another Country*, *Giovanni's Room*), his essays (*The Fire Next Time*) and his stage plays (*Blues For Mr Charlie*, *The Amen Corner*) marked one of the most original voices of his generation. Baldwin possessed a voice of biblical power, and it was forged in New York, and most definitively in Paris, the city he chose for his home.

Caryl Phillips is one of the most eloquent voices of the present generation. He knew Baldwin in his later years in the south of France. He now writes a striking play for Radio 4 about Baldwin's critical early years in post-war Paris.

Born on the Caribbean island of St Kitts, Phillips grew up in Leeds, and read English at Queen's College, Oxford. He first attracted public notice in 1985 with his debut novel, *The Final Passage*, which won the Malcolm X Prize for Literature. At the time, he also began writing drama for Radio 3. He is now Professor of English and Henry R Luce Professor of Migration and Social Order at Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2000.

Producer/Ned Chaillet

Saturday Play – The Ipcress File Saturday 17 January, 2.30pm



Jean (Fenella Woolgar) and The Agent (Ian Hart)

The Ipcress File by Len Deighton has become one of the great popular icons of the post-war era, through both the book itself and the film starring Sir Michael Caine.

This brilliant thriller is as exciting today as the day it was published. And this new radio dramatisation remains faithful to the book, most noticeably in the character of the narrator. In the film, Michael Caine played Londoner Harry Palmer but, in the book, the narrator has no name and is from Burnley. Not a lot of people know that!

The narrator is a grammar school boy who transfers from Army Intelligence to a new agency which operates out of London's Charlotte Street. He finds himself looking for a man named Jay, who runs an organisation that gets scientists, willing or not, into the communist block. His speciality is brain-washing.

The narrator begins to discover that all is not as clear-cut as it seemed when he and his boss are present at US Atomic bomb tests in the Pacific. In a world of espionage, who do you trust – and what happens if suspicion falls on you? The narrator finds out as old friends turn into new enemies and he is arrested by the CIA, who return him to his “communist” employers in Hungary.

Can the narrator trust anyone at all – even himself – or will he be destroyed by the very system that he is there to defend?

The Ipcress File is dramatised by Mike Walker, one of radio’s leading writers with over 40 original plays to his credit, including the Sony Award-winners *Different States* and *Alpha*. Ian Hart plays The Agent and Fenella Woolgar plays Jean.

Producer/Toby Swift

Classic Serial – The Pallisers

Sunday 25 January, 3.00pm
12 parts



The cast of The Pallisers

Over 12 weeks, Greg Wise, David Troughton and Juliet Stevenson lead BBC Radio 4’s dramatisation of *The Palliser* novels by Anthony Trollope.

The sequence of novels was written when Trollope was at the height of his powers. The characters are immediately recognisable and their stories are as gripping and as relevant as they were when they were first written, between 1864 and 1880.

The central family is the Palliser dynasty, led by Plantaganet Palliser (Ben Miles), heir to the Duke of Omnium (Robert Lang). He marries the feisty Glencora (Sophie Thompson), who has been in love with the reckless Burgo Fitzgerald. The theme of dutiful marriage versus the temptations of passionate love runs through the novels. Glencora grows to love Plantaganet, in her own way, but never fully recovers from her first love.

The Pallisers follows the fortunes of Phineas Finn (Conleth Hill), a young Irish barrister who wins a seat in Parliament, which introduces him to a London life full of temptations for a man of his attractions. Several society ladies swoon at his feet but he seems destined to be pipped at the post as a potential husband.

Juliet Stevenson plays Lady Laura, Greg Wise plays Lopez, Adrian Lukis plays George Vavasor and Anastasia Hille plays Alice. David Troughton plays Trollope, who narrates the series.

The Pallisers is dramatised by Martyn Wade. Martyn and producer Cherry Cookson were the creative team behind the hugely successful radio version of *The Barchester Chronicles*.

(See also *Trollope On Trollope* on Thursday 29 January, page 9, for details of Joanna Trollope talking about her illustrious ancestor.)

Producers/Cherry Cookson and Marc Beeby

The Canterbury Tales

(working title)
Monday 2 February, 3.30pm
Five parts

BBC One’s highly acclaimed drama series the *Canterbury Tales* has a life beyond transmission. The



BBC's *Get Writing* initiative has invited viewers to write their own short stories, inspired by the *Tales*, reflecting life in the UK.

Chaucer's original *Tales* may be 600 years old but their preoccupation with sex, money, love, religion and race resonates with issues in contemporary Britain. A large selection of submitted stories will be published on the BBCi website and five will then be chosen to be developed and produced for Radio 4's *Afternoon Readings* slot, to be read by members of the cast. Some stories will also be featured on BBC local radio stations.

The selection procedure is under way and stories have been received from amateur writers all over the country as well as members of a whole range of writing groups.

This initiative is the first phase of a three-year project to inspire people, through BBC drama and entertainment programmes, to discover and develop their creative talents. *Get Writing* offers everyone the opportunity to learn more about creative writing, using the six *Canterbury Tales* films as inspiration for people to pick up their pens and tell their own tales. Further initiatives from the BBC Learning in Drama and Entertainment team will be launched throughout the year.

Producer/Gemma Jenkins

Woman's Hour Drama – Ladies Of Letters Spring Clean Monday 16 February, 10.45am Five parts

Prunella Scales and Patricia Routledge bring back proud grandmothers Irene Spencer and Vera Small to brighten the airwaves with their wit and wisdom. At the end of the last series, *Ladies Of Letters Make Mincemeat*, Irene and Vera were exhausted by their Christmas festivities, with both their children's families feuding and disintegrating. But now it is spring and, when Vera sees the daffodils waving at her cheerfully from the kitchen window, she is inspired to commence spring-

cleaning. Bottoming out her drawers, she unearths an unusual purple contraption which she assumes to be some sort of medical appliance left by Irene, so forwards it to her. Irene is amused by the receipt of this "fandangle", which she employs as a plant holder, and while she would not normally start her spring-cleaning until "the sharp March sunshine shows up the smears on the windows", Vera's letter inspires her to commence. In the process, the friends unearth both fond and uncomfortable memories.

The heart attack of Vera and Irene's mutual suitor Edward Blunt, the chicken farmer, brings further deep-seated rivalries to the fore. They vie for Edward's attention at his hospital bedside and then try to apportion blame as to whose fruit gift he was chewing when he choked to death. Tensions boil over after the funeral when Vera "falls" into the grave – but she is convinced that Irene pushed her. The fall inflames Vera's already painful hip and she finally has to face having a hip replacement. Luckily, her veterinarian son-in-law, St John, can fit her in at the Veterinarian College and she wakes up next to a hippo. And – as earlier misunderstandings have been smoothed over – she returns home to e-mails from Irene in Australia where she is visiting her daughter, Lesley.

The previous *Ladies* series are all available on BBC Worldwide cassette.

Ladies Of Letters is written by Carole Hayman and Lou Wakefield. Carole was a founder member and first woman director of the Joint Stock Theatre Company and an Associate Director of The Royal Court Theatre, for which she directed many world premieres. Carole also writes for radio, television and film. Her latest novel, *Hard Choices*, is a political satire, published in July 2003 by Aurora Metro Press and immediately short-listed for the Saga Award for Wit – known as The Silver Booker.

Lou Wakefield's first novel, *Tuscan Soup*, was read on Radio 4 and is being made into a feature film. Lou also writes for radio, stage and television and is also an experienced theatre and TV director.

Producer/Liz Webb



The Silver Pigs **Friday 5 March, 11.30am** **Four parts**

The Silver Pigs is a detective story with a difference. Set in Rome in 70AD, during the reign of the Vespasian, its hero is Marcus Didius Falco, an ex-legionnaire, a staunch republican and, currently, an “informer”.

Reluctantly, Marcus agrees to Vespasian’s proposal that he look into the matter of suspect silver ingots arriving from the distant province of Britain. Falco was once stationed there and it is the last place on earth he wants to go back to. But he follows orders, and his mission turns into a nightmare from which he only narrowly escapes alive. In the course of his detection, he meets Helena Justina, daughter of a senator and a woman of independent spirit, who takes an instant dislike to him.

The Silver Pigs is written by Lindsey Davis and is the first in a sequence of novels that feature Falco and Helena. It had been dramatised for radio by Mary Cutler.

Lindsey Davis says: “I always thought Falco would be excellent on the radio. I am delighted that Radio 4 are now to broadcast *The Silver Pigs*, especially as the scripts have been written by Mary Cutler (of *The Archers*) with whom I was at school. I am sure it makes a difference that we share the same background; we have had wonderful fun working together on the project. I can’t wait to hear the programmes myself.”

Producer/Peter Leslie Wild

Friday Play – Snatches **Friday 2 April, 9.00pm**

Verbatim snatches of secretly taped girl-talk successfully brought the US presidency to its knees. *Snatches* refers to the snippets of conversation between Monica Lewinsky and Linda Tripp recorded en route to bringing down a President. The writer, Laura Strausfeld, pored over 2,000 pages of phone conversation transcripts to select the dialogue she wanted to include in her play.

Every word uttered in the original stage play was actually spoken in real life by either Lewinsky or Tripp. Strausfeld sees the play as “an entertaining, comic story of a tragic personal betrayal”.

Lewinsky emerges as extremely naive. One phone call reveals her giddy with embarrassment because she had blurted out the words “I love you butthead” to President Clinton. A few minutes later, Lewinsky, who is considering a high-level job at the United Nations, candidly confesses: “I’m clueless about the UN!”

The play presents Lewinsky as a petulant soul, annoyed that she cannot make contact with the President, whom she views as if he was an ordinary run-of-the-mill boyfriend – and not the nation’s chief executive.

Although a comedy, *Snatches* portrays Lewinsky and Tripp as two desperate characters, often on the brink of hysteria, flailing around within their own neurotic, narcissistic worlds.

Producer/Sally Avens

Saturday Play – The Duel **Saturday 3 April, 2.30pm**

“We had to fight an enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is far more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty.” Margaret Thatcher

In March 1984, Mrs Thatcher took on Arthur Scargill. The fight between the Prime Minister and the leader of the National Union of Miners was one of the defining battles of 20th-century Britain. At stake were two totally different views of society. In the same way that Thatcher’s victory in the Falklands changed the view the world had of the United Kingdom, her victory over organised labour changed the way Britain was to be governed.

The Duel is a dramatised reconstruction of the backroom dealings, Cabinet meetings, NUM meetings, press conferences and rallies that shaped the bitterest industrial dispute in post-War Britain. It provides a fascinating insight into the duel between Thatcher and Scargill as the action is seen



from the viewpoint of both camps; the Prime Minister's at Westminster, and Arthur Scargill's NUM Headquarters in Yorkshire.

The Duel tracks the momentous events of 1984-5; the proposed closure of Cortonwood Colliery; the call to strike; the decision not to call a National Ballot; the flying pickets; the showdown between the 6,000 NUM pickets and 5,000 policemen at Orgreave; the attempt to sequester the NUM funds; averting the dock workers strike; the NACODs strike call; the drift back to work; and the final emotional statement from Scargill on the steps of the TUC that is met with the miners' response: "We've given you our hearts, we've given you our blood, we've given you everything and then you sell us out!"

The Duel relives those tumultuous months seen from the points of view of its two protagonists – Arthur Scargill and Margaret Thatcher. It is dramatised by Michael Samuels.

For details of a series of documentaries on the miners' strike please see pages 11 and 12.

Producer/Jeremy Howe