

TONY PALMER'S CLASSIC FILM ABOUT
HENRY PURCELL
ENGLAND,
MY ENGLAND

MICHAEL BALL
as PURCELL
& SIMON CALLOW
as CHARLES II

Music conducted by
JOHN ELIOT GARDINER

Written by JOHN OSBORNE & CHARLES WOOD



HENRY PURCELL
ENGLAND,
MY ENGLAND

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Tony Palmer directs this prize-winning film about the great English composer **Henry Purcell**. Very little is known about his life, but the script - by **Charles Wood** and **John Osborne** - solves this problem by launching a group of actors in the 1960s on a voyage of discovery into the 1660s and late-17th century England, the extraordinary period in which Purcell lived. But it is Purcell's music which is the driving force of the drama, with a stunning soundtrack conducted by **John Eliot Gardiner**.

This was the first ever co-production between a British company and Bulgaria.



GONZO
MULTIMEDIA

Executive producer **ROB AYLING**

ROYAL COURT

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

Started May 4th



Royal Court Theatre

Sloane Square S.W.1

Owned by the London County Council in 1932

English Stage Company

March 11th
to
March 30th

Simon Callow Michael Ball
Lucy Speed John Shrapnel

Bill Betterton presents
For Three Weeks only
Return of
IN GOOD KING CHARLES'
GOLDEN DAYS

By George Bernard Shaw

Directed by Tony Palmer

"It is the Best Young Play of its Decade"
—Kenneth Tynan, Observer

All seats bookable 5/-, 7/6, 10/6 and 15/-
Box Office SLOane 1745
Mon. to Fri. 7.30 Sat. 5.8.8.15 Mat. Wed. 2.30

And here is where that voyage of discovery all started ... John Osborne's first great play *Look Back in Anger* had had its premiere in this theatre, May 8th 1956, and he was keen that the Purcell journey began in the same theatre and in the same dressing room that his original Jimmy Porter had once occupied.

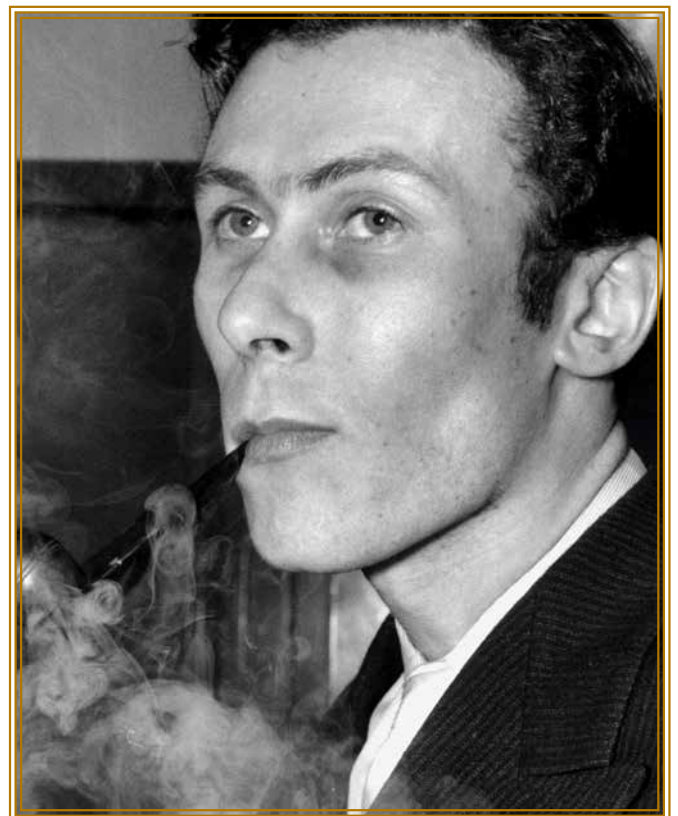
Henry Purcell is a mystery. We know where he's buried (next to Vaughan Williams in Westminster Abbey), but that's about it. We don't even know who paid for his memorial stone in the Abbey. No-one knows for sure where he was born or even precisely when he was born. We don't know who his father was nor the name of his mother. He lived exactly the same number of years as Mozart – just thirty-six – but we only know in detail what he did for three of those years. Page after page of the manuscripts of some of his master-works are completely blank. Purcell was – and is – a mystery, except that we know he wrote over a thousand works, at least one for every working week of his life.

How then to make a film about such a mysterious, almost non-existent, 'person' whose glorious music remains our principal source of 'information'? I knew that John Osborne, with whom I had worked several times, played Purcell's music more or less continuously in his great house in Shropshire – as he later wrote for the film, "*I lived among the hills foot-marked here, rooted here, in ancient English time*".

“We have thrown up a generation for whom ‘honour’ is a forgotten, meaningless currency.”

Osborne/Wood

Although already very sick, the challenge breathed new life into the old dog, as he would have said. Tragically he died before the film was completed, and his work was skilfully completed by his friend (he always referred to him as 'Corporal') Charles Wood.



John Osborne in 1956



MICHAEL BALL as Henry Purcell
NINA YOUNG as Mrs Purcell

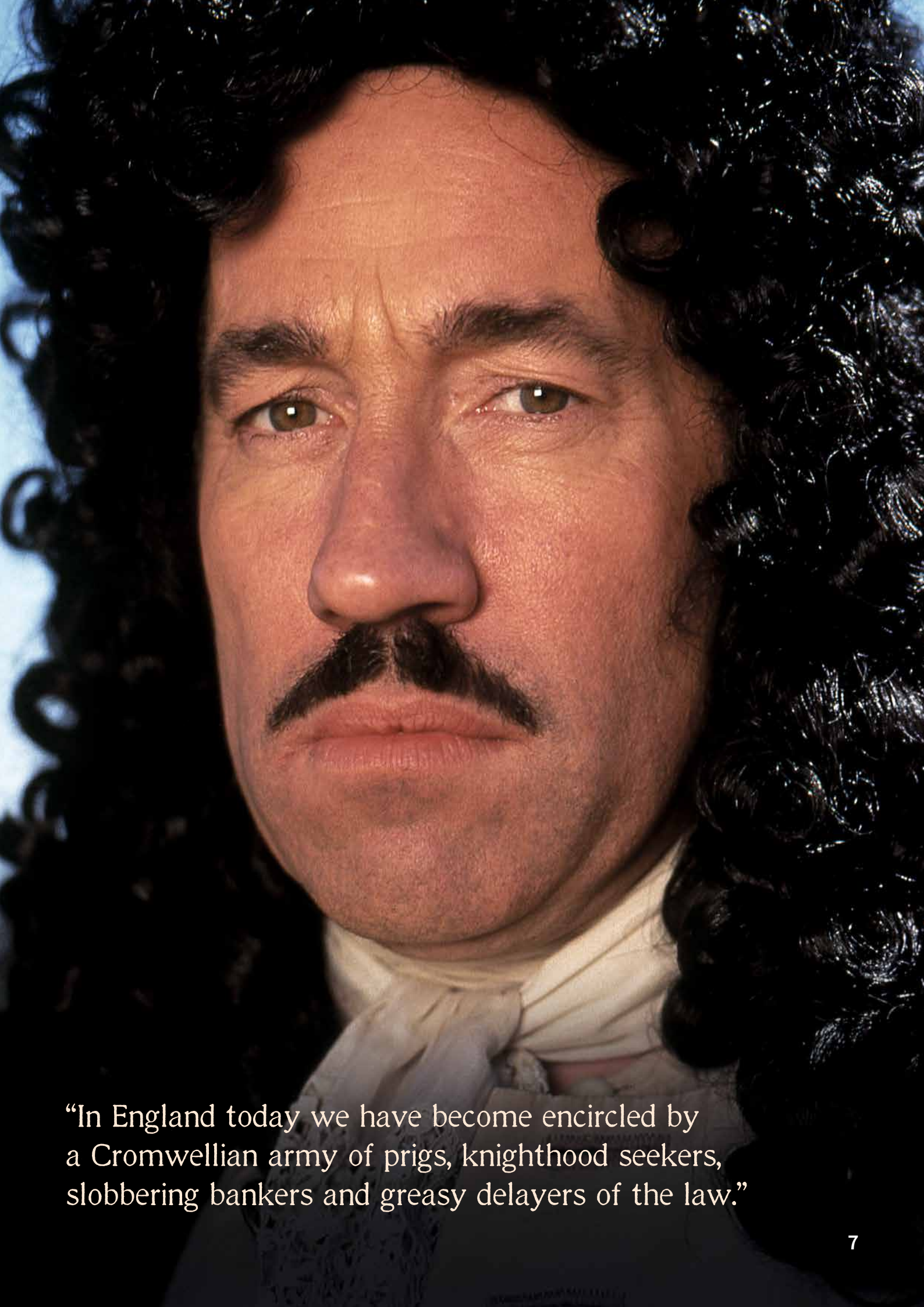


SIMON CALLOW as King Charles II and LUCY SPEED as Nell Gwyn

“The monarchy today isn’t even the tarnished gold-fillings in a mouthful of decay”.

But the essential idea belonged to Osborne, namely to parallel the reign of Charles II (1660 - 1685), the period in which Purcell had flourished, with the ‘reign’ of The Royal Court Theatre (1956 - 1979) in which Osborne had flourished. This allowed Osborne to deliver one final withering commentary on what he saw as the shenanigans of contemporary British society under the guise of describing the shenanigans of the Restoration period and its court composer, Henry Purcell.

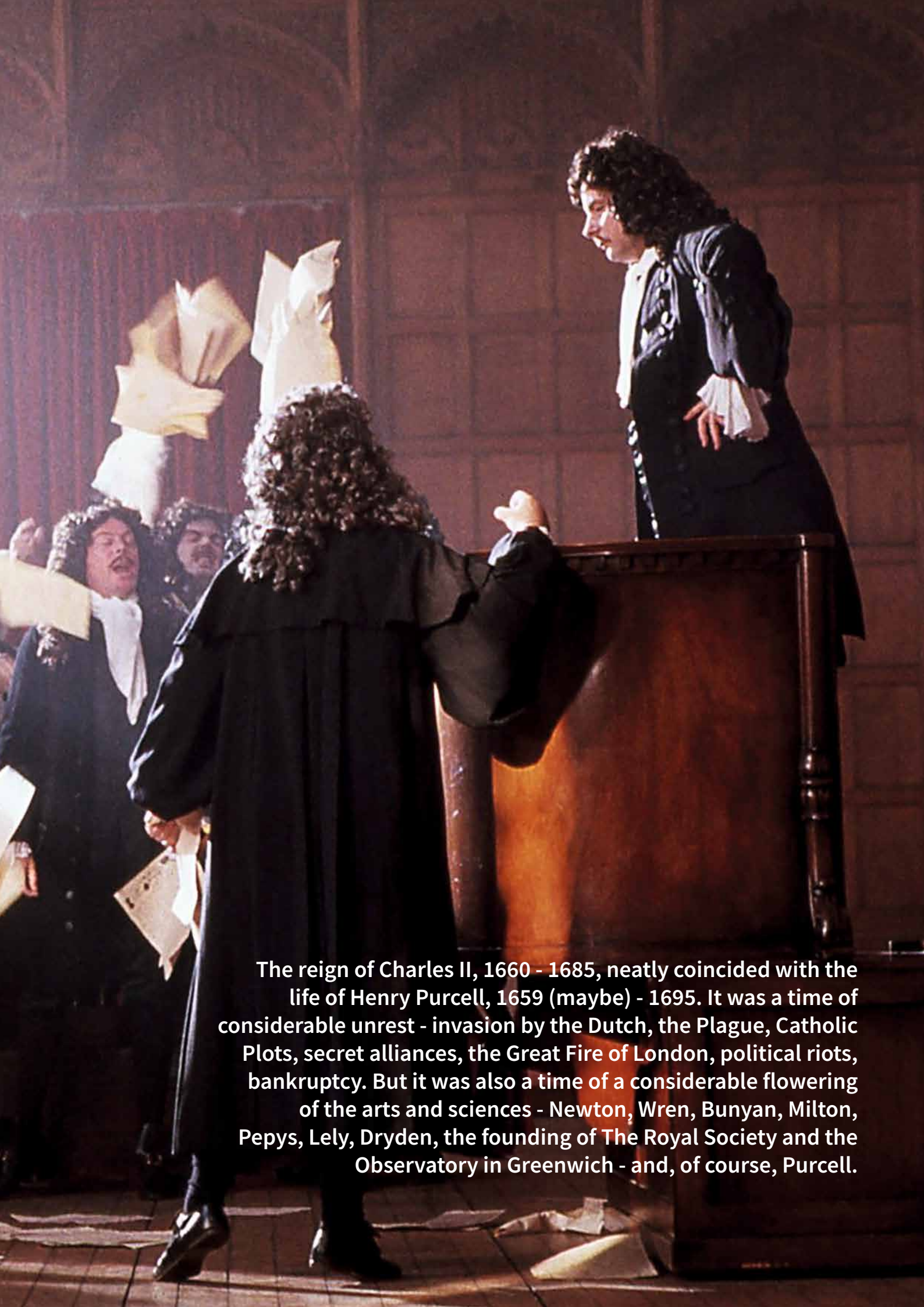
Osborne believed there were many such parallels. England in the 1660s and 1670s was preoccupied with freedom of speech, economic expansion, treaties with Europe, the collapse of conventional morality, the increase of violent crime, unemployment and the futility (and wastefulness) of war. So was England in the 1960s and 70s. And after the economic boom of the 1980s came the economic bust, just as had happened in the 1680s.



“In England today we have become encircled by a Cromwellian army of prigs, knighthood seekers, slobbering bankers and greasy delayers of the law.”

“May God rot the tyrannies
of equality, streaming, and above
all, absurd, irrelevant, ‘correctness.’
As always, the Crown’s ministers
knew better than those appointed
to rule.”





The reign of Charles II, 1660 - 1685, neatly coincided with the life of Henry Purcell, 1659 (maybe) - 1695. It was a time of considerable unrest - invasion by the Dutch, the Plague, Catholic Plots, secret alliances, the Great Fire of London, political riots, bankruptcy. But it was also a time of a considerable flowering of the arts and sciences - Newton, Wren, Bunyan, Milton, Pepys, Lely, Dryden, the founding of The Royal Society and the Observatory in Greenwich - and, of course, Purcell.

As I said, the film begins and ends in the very dressing room of The Royal Court Theatre which Osborne himself had first inhabited as a jobbing actor in 1955. A group of actors are performing Shaw's play *In Good King Charles' Golden Day* and are bored rigid by this tedious play. Worse, the box-office is dire and the 'producer' (played ironically by Bill Kenwright, then one of the West End's leading producers who had actually produced Osborne's last play, *Déjàvu*) is threatening to close the production. One of the actors (who plays Charles II in the Shaw) suggests that if he can find another play

about the period, they can use the same sets and costumes and maybe get back some of the producer's 'investment'. Think of all the amazing characters of that period, he says – Wren, Newton, Bunyan, Nell Gwyn, Milton, not to mention the Great Fire of London, the Plague, Pepys, Restoration Theatre, Purcell.....

The Producer gives them a week to come up with something.....and so begins the chase. Purcell !! We know all the tunes, says the modern day Charles. He's the one. Well, what *do* we know.....?



“Thus did our life become.
‘Tis all a cheat.
Yet, fooled with hope,
men favour the deceit.
Trust on, and
think tomorrow will repay.
Tomorrow’s falser
than the former day.”

ROBERT STEPHENS as Dryden



“To be a socialist today
is like being in the
priesthood in a world
without God, prattling
ceaselessly about a
‘classless society’ to a
middle class it dare
not defy.”

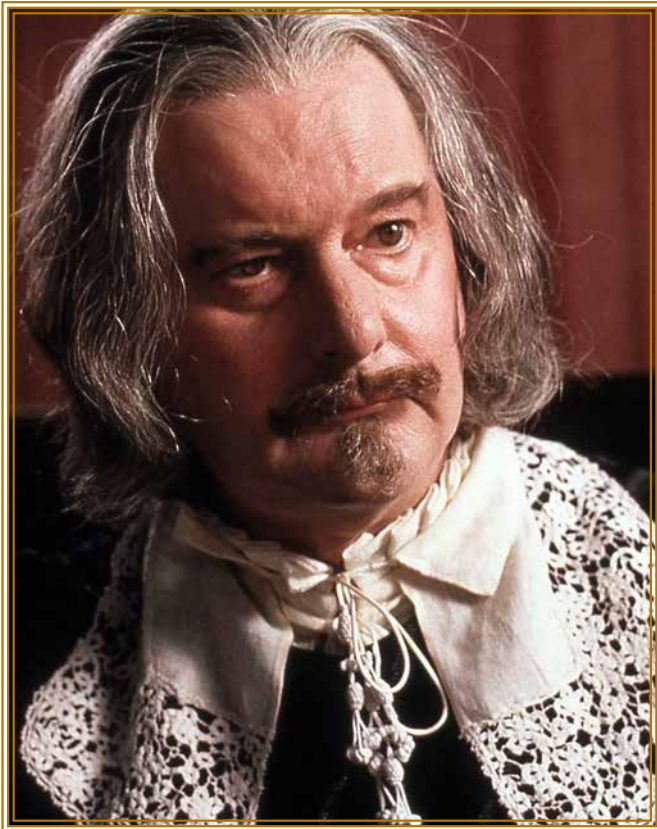
The Great Fire of London which began September 2nd 1666 in a bakery on Pudding Lane and destroyed over 13,000 houses and 87 churches, including old St Paul's. Charles and his brother James were reported as being in the forefront of those fighting the fire, while Pepys and the 7 year-old Purcell observed the conflagration from a nearby church tower. It undoubtedly had a profound effect upon him.



“The film looks and sounds like a masterpiece - wonderful to hear as it is to behold. Overwhelming... it will blow you out of your seat.”

The Australian





JOHN FORTUNE as Clarendon, Charles II's First Minister

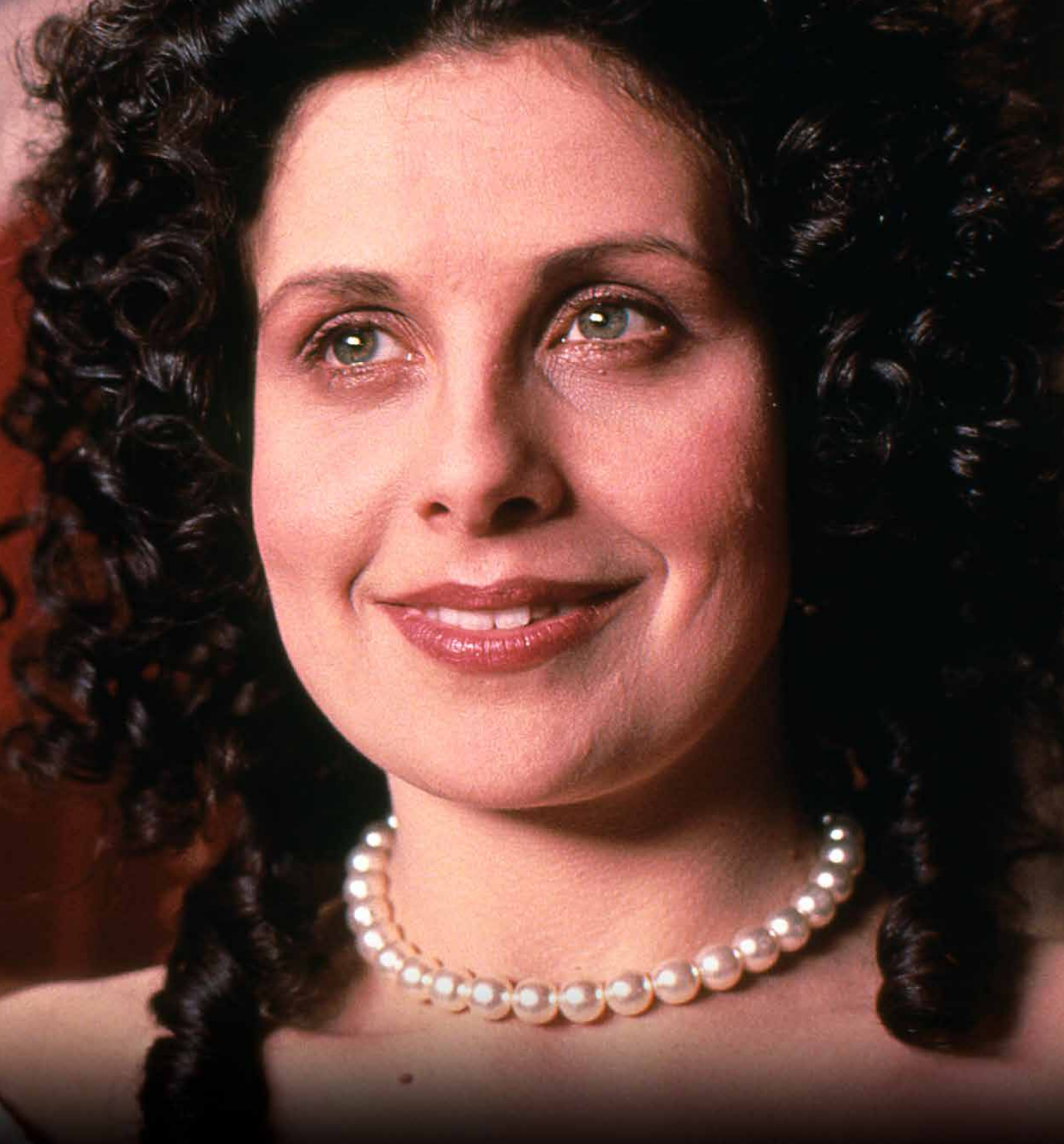


PETER WOODTHORPE as Kiffen, Charles II's Baptist money lender

The dramatic device that Osborne and Wood used to bring into focus the mysterious life of Purcell - switching effortlessly back and forth between the two periods of the 1660s and the 1960s, and using the same actors for each - has been much copied, just as his iconic title, *England, My England*, (itself a quote from an infamous letter Osborne wrote in 1961) appears frequently in other circumstances not related to anything Osborne believed. Never mind, he once told me; there is nothing more flattering than imitation. It's just a pity he never gets the credit he deserves.



MURRAY MELVIN as the EARL of SHAFTESBURY, Charles II's principal enemy.



REBECCA FRONT as Queen Mary, Charles II's niece and Purcell's patron for whom he wrote his great Funeral March when she died the year before Purcell himself. She died in agony from smallpox, the first symptoms of which are shivering, followed by red spots on the skin, a rapid rise in temperature, vomiting, headaches, intolerance to light, a swollen tongue, haemorrhage of the skin, a tearing pain, and... death. Regular bleeding, by cutting into the patient's veins, is thought to alleviate the suffering, although only temporarily.



JOHN SHRAPNEL as Pepys with SIMON CALLOW as Charles II



LETITIA DEAN as Barbara Castlemaine, one the King's 39 Mistresses,
with JOHN FORTUNE as Clarendon.



“Architecture has its political uses, public buildings being the ornament of a country. It establishes a nation, draws people and commerce, and makes men love their native country.”



Sir Christopher Wren’s masterpiece. Construction began in 1675 on the instruction of Charles II, who ordered Purcell to write “celebratory music.” Neither lived to see the building work completed, but if ever there was a memorial to their achievements, this is it. As the inscription says beneath the dome: “*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*” - “if you seek a monument, look around.”



“The film touches some profound truths about the personalities behind the music. As the titles rolled, so did this critic’s tears.” Michael White, *The Independent on Sunday*

The film was first shown in its entirety on Channel FOUR in the UK on Christmas Day to mark the 300th anniversary of Purcell’s death. Osborne was by now dead, as was Robert Stephens who played Dryden with an eloquence that will forever echo down the days. But they both had the last word.

Stephens, as Dryden, says

*“Thus did our life become. ‘Tis all a cheat.
Yet, fooled with hope, men favour the deceit,
Trust on, and think tomorrow will repay.
Tomorrow’s falser than the former day”*

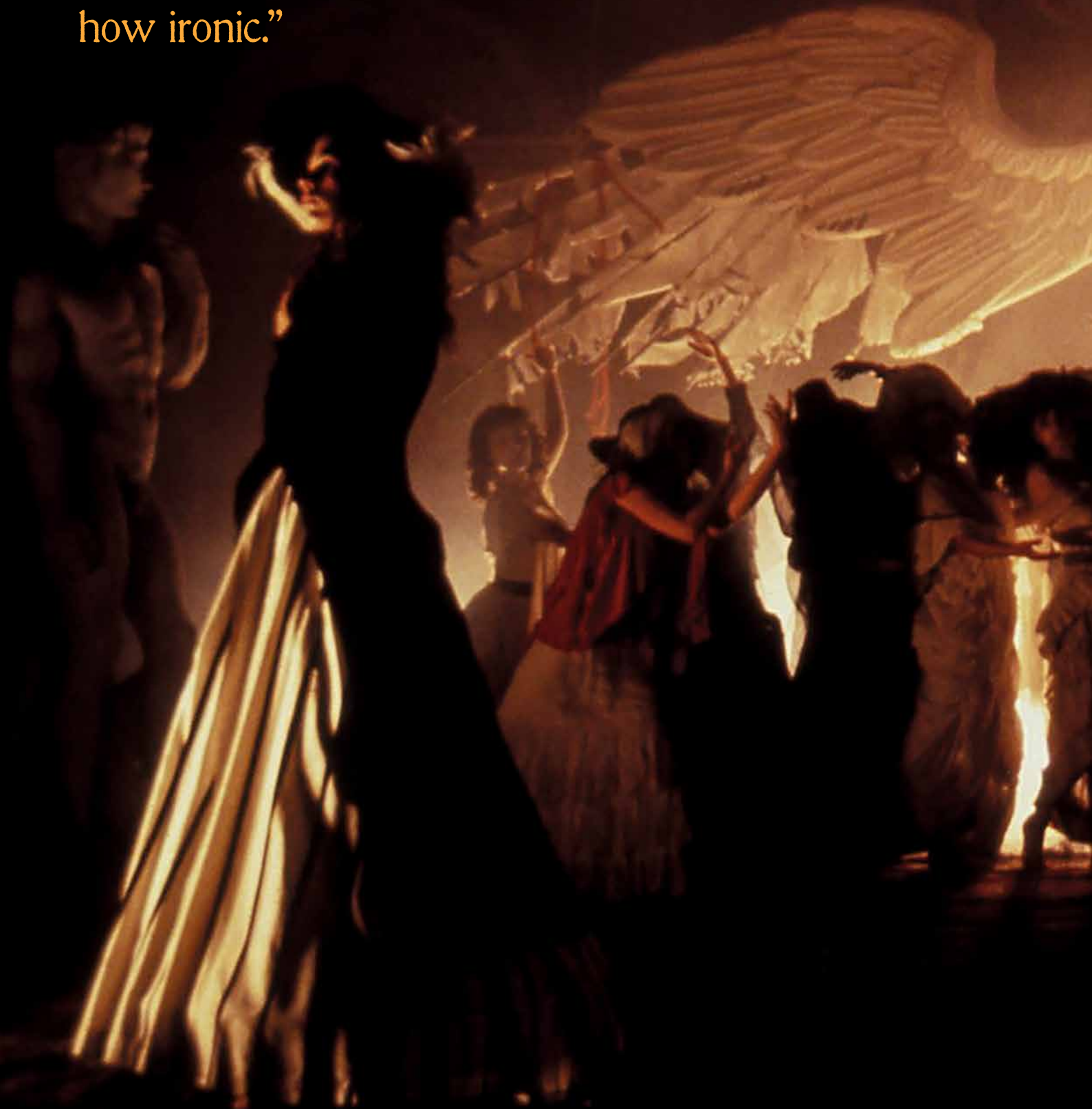
And Osborne:

*“Coherence conceals
as much as it reveals
to the lost, like me,
who contemplate the wreckage”*



One last irony. My first film was about Benjamin Britten, and he it is - and his incredible version of Purcell’s *Abdelazer* overture which became *The Young Person’s Guide To The Orchestra* - who concludes the film. And that too was Osborne’s idea. TONY PALMER

“Everyone demands answers, like happiness, as a right. How hopeless, how ironic.”





The first rehearsal of Purcell's most famous opera *Dido and Aeneas*, at Josias Priest's Girls' School sometime in 1689, no-one knows the date for certain.



CAST

SIMON CALLOW - Charles
MICHAEL BALL - Henry Purcell
REBECCA FRONT - Queen Mary
LUCY SPEED - Nell
LETITIA DEAN - Barbara
NINA YOUNG - Frances Purcell
TERENCE RIGBY - Cooke
BILL KENWRIGHT - Bill/Oates/Preacher
MURRAY MELVIN - Shaftesbury/Dresser
GUY HENRY - King James
EDWARD MICHIE - Young Harry
TOM SHRAPNEL - Young Pelham
ANTONIA de SANCHA - Louise
JOHN SHRAPNEL - Pepys
ROBERT STEPHENS - Dryden
PETER WOODTHORPE - Kiffen
JOHN FORTUNE - Clarendon
CORIN REDGRAVE - King William
REBECCA TREMAIN - Catherine/ASM
VERNON DOBTCHEFF - Wharton
PATRICIA QUINN - Elizabeth Purcell
RICHARD WELLINGS-THOMAS - Monmouth
YEOMAN JOSEPH DAVID - Garter King
BROOK WILLIAMS - Priest
KATE PENNING - Court Soprano
JOHN HIBBS - Blacksmith

Music conducted by **JOHN ELIOT GARDINER** with **THE MONTEVERDI CHOIR & ORCHESTRA**
members of **THE ENGLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA & FRETWORK**

Electronic version of Queen Mary's Funeral March from 'A Clockwork Orange'
Arranged by **WALTER CARLOS** courtesy of **STANLEY KUBRICK**

Singers

**SUSAN GRAHAM, STEPHEN VARCOE, LYNN DAWSON, NANCY ARGENTA, JAMES BOWMAN,
MICHAEL CHANCE, PAUL AGNEW, PETER HARVEY, DAVID THOMAS, ROBERT JOHNSTON,
TERESA SHAW & JENNIFER SMITH**

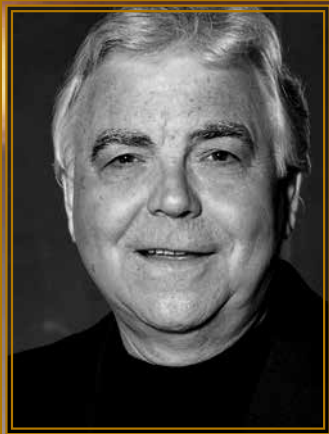
Directed & Edited by **TONY PALMER** Photographed by **NIC KNOWLAND**
Costumes by **JOHN HIBBS** Production Designer **NIGEL TALAMO**
Music recorded by **NICK PARKER** Dialogue recorded by **ALAN CRIDFORD**
at **AIR STUDIOS** Dubbing Mixers **PETER SMITH**
On-line Editor **JOHN MAYES** & **TONY ANSCOMBE**

A Co-Production with **BOYANA STUDIOS**, Sofia, Bulgaria

Associate Producers **STEFAN KITANOV** Choreographer **MILA ISKRENOVA**
& **RADOSLAV SPASSOV** Executive Producer **SIMON FLIND**
Designer **ANASTAS YANAKIEV** Produced by **MIKE BLUETT**
Costume Designer **BORIANA SEMERDJIEVA** © **ISOLDE FILMS 2020**

FILM DURATION: 152 MINS NTSC 16:9 COLOUR
SUBTITLES: ENGLISH, GERMAN, SPANISH, ITALIAN





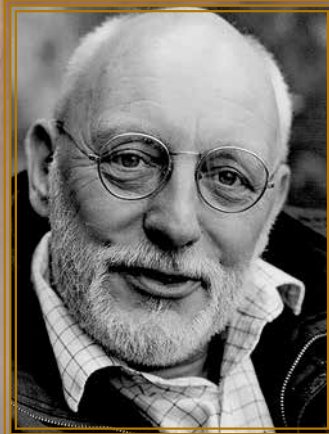
BILL KENWRIGHT



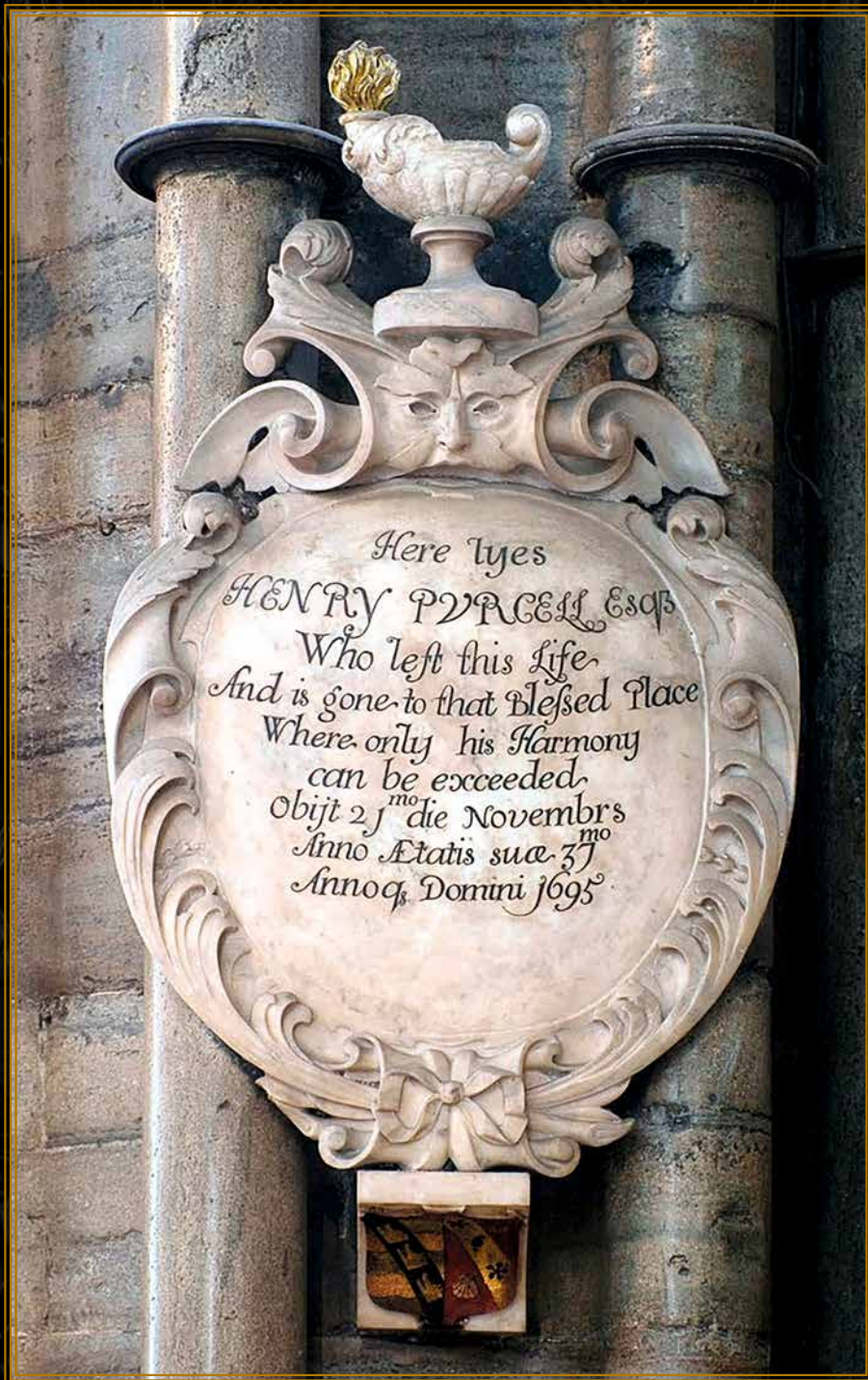
SUSAN GRAHAM



CORIN REDGRAVE



CHARLES WOOD



Henry Purcell's monument in Westminster Abbey, the only composer to be actually buried there. But just as no-one knows for certain who his mother was, or his father, or exactly when he was born, no-one knows for certain who paid for the inscription next to his grave. We do know that he died aged only 36 on St Cecilia's Day, the patron saint of music, the same day on which, 218 years later, another great composer and in many ways his successor, Benjamin Britten, was born.