



The Key

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The Key

A major new drama from BBC Scotland



The Key is a sweeping and ambitious three-part drama which re-unites the Bafta Award-winning team of writer Donna Franceschild and director David Blair, and stars Dawn Steele, Ronni Ancona, Frances Grey, Ann Louise Ross and June Watson. The drama recounts the story of the last century through the eyes of one family, encompassing three generations of a passionate Clydeside clan, headed by Mary Corrigan (Dawn Steele and later June Watson).

Barbara McKissack, BBC Scotland's Head of Drama and executive producer on *The Key* says: "Donna Franceschild has written an immensely rich and ambitious drama which brings to life both the compelling struggle of the Scottish labour movement and an epic family tale. At its heart *The Key* is a very human story. It's about three generations of a family struggling to make the best of their lives in very difficult circumstances. That's something we can all relate to."

A Little Bird production in association with Making Waves, *The Key* also features Stephen McCole, Kevin McKidd, John Sessions, Ewan Stewart and Ken Stott. The drama draws upon many of the key moments of British political history during the 20th century, ranging from Bloody Friday in 1919, when thousands of workers gathered in Glasgow to demand a 40-hour week and were set upon by mounted police, to the brutal chaos of the miners' strike demonstration at Orgreave in 1984.

McKissack continues: "Mary's life mirrors the century. Without making *The Key* sound like an exclusively women's piece, which it definitely isn't, there are very strong female characters at the core of the drama. Viewed through the prism of Mary and her family, *The Key* reflects on the human impact of cataclysmic social and political changes."

Franceschild, who made her name with such acclaimed work as *Donovan Quick*, *Eureka Street*,

A Mug's Game and *Takin' Over The Asylum*, outlines her inspiration for the series: "I was fascinated by the idea that on every life that has ever been lived is written the history of their time and their generation's struggle. We tend to forget that so much we now take for granted – votes for women, the abolition of child labour, health and safety legislation at work – was hard fought for and won."

Producer Sue Austen, who also worked with both Blair and Franceschild on the film *Donovan Quick*, says: "This is a wonderfully crafted story which, through the lives of an ordinary family, charts the rise of the trade union movement in the early part of the 20th century, the destruction of the unions in the Eighties and the birth of New Labour in the Nineties."

"*The Key* happens to be set on Clydeside," Austen adds, "but it could just as easily have been set in Liverpool, Manchester or any industrial city. The same stories happened to millions of people. In the end, it's a wonderfully uplifting human saga with resonance for every family."

"Although I lead a very different life from my mother and grandmother, there are lots of strands connecting us," continues Franceschild. "I'm angry that current events are always interpreted as if we have no history. The past explains how we got here. We have to understand it in order to know where we're going."

Director David Blair says: "It's very heartening that we can take on these huge, ambitious projects. Donna has effortlessly created a genuinely complex structure in which she manages to interweave five different periods. She shows the parallels and echoes that resonate throughout the century."

"She has a great understanding of humanity. I've worked with Donna since 1992, so our relationship is almost telepathic now. It's been such a fruitful partnership because she's always writing about subjects I'm really interested in. You know there'll always be soul in the piece."

"I gave every period its own texture. So I filmed 1915 to 1919 in black and white, 1945 in muted colours and the Seventies with a warmer, fuller look. Every scene takes the viewer into a specific period."

"It is passionate and thought-provoking, and exemplifies single-voice drama at its very best," concludes McKissack. "From *Takin' Over The Asylum*, through *A Mug's Game* and *Donovan Quick*, the BBC has always been a proud champion of Donna's unique vision."

The Key, a BBC Scotland production for BBC Two, from the Bafta Award-winning team of writer Donna Franceschild and David Blair, presents a century's history from the perspective of those who have experienced it at the sharp end.

The Key

Main cast

Mary Dawn Steele
Older Mary June Watson
Duncan Kevin McKidd
Danny Stephen McCole
Maggie Ronni Ancona
Helen Ann Louise Ross
Jessie Frances Grey
Joe Ewan Stewart
Billy Ken Stott
Spencer John Sessions
Katherine Katy Murphy

Production credits

Writer Donna Franceschild
Producer Sue Austen
Director David Blair
Costume Designer James Keast
Make-Up Designer Jane Walker
Film Editor Frances Parker
Director of Photography Nigel Willoughby
Production Designer Andy Harris
Music Composed by Anne Dudley
Executive Producers Jonathan Cavendish (Little Bird)
..... Donna Franceschild (Making Waves)
..... Pippa Harris (BBC)
..... Barbara McKissack (BBC Scotland)

*The Key is a Little Bird production in association with
Making Waves Film & Television Limited for BBC Scotland*

Episode One

Mary is drawn passionately into the politics of her time through her love for Duncan – a doomed love that becomes somehow invested in the mysterious key Mary wears around her neck.

Six decades later, Mary's granddaughter, Jessie, is a bullied and asthmatic teenager. Written off by her teachers and living in the shadow of her high-achieving sister, Maggie, she retreats into the stories she writes.

By 1997 Jessie is a single mother working at a call centre for Sogard Healthcare, a company at the centre of a bitter dispute in the community. Under a Private Finance Initiative agreement with the local council, Sogard took control of Riverview Old People's Home – where Mary now lives. Jessie's sister Maggie was deputy leader of the council that pushed the initiative through. Her mother, Helen, was regional officer of the union that opposed it.

"We fought the good fight," Helen concedes. "We lost." But Danny, a care worker at Riverview, and the object of Jessie's childhood affections, has refused to leave it at that.

Episode Two

Mary struggles through the Depression and War years. Her favourite granddaughter, Jessie, comes of age in 1979, the year Margaret Thatcher comes to power.

It is 1933 when Mary loses a strike vote opposing wage cuts at Leckie's Mill and is sacked. Supporting her mother and sister in a one-room tenement flat, she realises that her only option is to marry and she takes Billy, a violent middle-aged widower, for better or for worse. For the next 12 years, it is mainly worse.

In 1979, Jessie's wedding to Danny, her childhood sweetheart, promises to be a much happier event. However, a drunken writer, a bleeding critic, a taxi and a stolen kiss conspire to produce a disastrous chain of events that eventually leaves Danny stranded at the altar, Jessie on a train to London in her wedding dress, and her unfinished novel in the rubbish bin.

In 1997 – 18 years after Jessie left him at the altar – Danny confronts Jessie's mother, Helen, now a union representative, with evidence that Sogard Healthcare have broken vital agreements with the union over the new old people's home. He persuades her it's time for the union to fight back.

A popular campaign is launched in the Scottish press opposing Sogard's plans and the PFI agreement, which Maggie pushed through. The battle lines in the family have been drawn.

Episode Three

Having been mercifully delivered from her loveless and violent marriage at the end of the Second World War, Mary watches as Helen, her daughter, and Joe Rossi, a communist shop steward from the shipyards, settle into a life of post-war domestic contentment, producing two grandchildren: Maggie and Jessie. But their lives are irrevocably altered in 1968 when Joe is seriously injured in a shipyard accident and confined to a wheelchair.

To make ends meet, the family move into Mary's house and Mary begins the task of raising the next generation. By 1984, Maggie has become an employment lawyer and, though she has married "outside" as far as her father is concerned (her husband's family are Tories), she makes a good life for herself.

Jessie has not been so lucky. Five years after she left Danny at the altar, Jessie returns home, bruised and pregnant, and introduces the family to her four-year-old son, Andy. She is received with tears of joy.

By 1997, Jessie's life is still a disaster and, having finally secured an interview, she hopes only for promotion from the call centre floor at Sogard Healthcare to a secretarial position at head office.

In this final episode the stories of all three generations converge. As the crisis over the old people's home comes tragically to a head, it tests to the limit the loyalties of everyone in the family, and forces the timid Jessie to take the most courageous decision of her life – in which she finally discovers the meaning of her grandmother's key.

Dawn Steele plays Mary Corrigan



Dawn Steele is one of Britain's leading young actresses, with starring roles in *Monarch Of The Glen*, in which she married the laird, and *Tinsel Town*, as sassy clubber Theresa, to her credit. In *The Key*, Dawn is the young Mary Corrigan, the factory worker who becomes politicised during the First World War through contact with her fiancé, Duncan (Kevin McKidd).

Steele was attracted to playing Mary (who is played as an older woman by June Watson) as she is such a complete contrast to her previous roles. "It's fantastic that in this I'm not wearing little skirts and make-up, although by the end of the shoot I was desperate to get the make-up on again!" she laughs.

The sheer power of the role was also a lure for Steele. "Mary's a very strong character," the actress declares. "She's very political. She kick-starts the family's interest in politics, it's amazing how it all stems from her, right down to her granddaughter,

Maggie, standing for election to Parliament.

"It's great to see that her passion is carried on through the generations. Even in her eighties, she is out there demonstrating on behalf of the miners at Orgreave. She is not scared, she gets right in amongst them during the riots."

Mary shows great fortitude during the course of the drama, a fact that Steele deeply admires. According to the actress, "Terrible things happen to Mary. She only smiles twice in the whole piece. She has to deal with big riots and being beaten up by a tyrannical husband [played by Ken Stott]. And throughout all these difficulties, she has no support. She just has to get her head down and get on with it."

The actress found echoes of that steeliness within her own family. "My nana is like that. She's still going strong in her old age – she's always off to dancing classes and things like that. There's a real strength to these women."

Just occasionally, however, Steele found it hard to live up to Mary's example. "I cry quite easily, so it was difficult in many of these scenes not to let myself go," she admits. "But director David Blair kept saying to me, 'Don't cry, be strong.' Mary has got to have that inner strength or she wouldn't survive till the age of 99. However, when I first read it, I cried three times!"

Ronni Ancona plays Maggie, Mary Corrigan's high-achieving granddaughter



Whether she's Posh Spice, Carol Smillie or Judy Finnegan, comedy actress Ronni Ancona has made a *Big Impression* on audiences with her award-winning impersonations. In *The Key*, she makes her BBC drama debut as Maggie, the ambitious older granddaughter of Mary Corrigan. As Maggie ascends higher and higher up the political ladder, she finds herself increasingly having to compromise the beliefs her family inculcated in her.

It is evident from Ronni's performance in *The Key* that she is equally at home in straight drama as she is in comedy. "Right from the start, director David Blair said I was not gimmicky casting," she says. "He doesn't give a damn about what I've done in the past, he's only interested in whether I'm right for this part or not. Nor was it a conscious decision on my part to make a change. I didn't say, 'Oh, I want to do drama now.' I was just really eager to do such an excellent script."

All the same, Ancona is expecting some to carp about her choosing to appear in a straight drama. "I'm apprehensive that certain people will say, 'She's

a comedy girl – who does she think she is?"

Obviously, this is not the sort of project I'm usually associated with, but I don't approach comedy or drama any differently. As soon as you think, 'Oh I'm doing comedy now,' you're on to a loser. Whatever you're doing, you have to make it live and breathe."

The actress felt an instant bond with her character. "Maggie is full of contradictions, but that makes her very human. She's a bright girl who is very principled. She's caring, confident, feisty and intelligent and has a very dry wit. But there's no denying that she's also got a big ego."

The actress thinks that Maggie undertakes a very convincing psychological journey during the course of the drama. "She grew up with a strongly socialist background, but as she develops you can see her being pulled away from those roots. As she moves away, inevitable tensions arise between her and her family.

"It all leads to a big showdown with her mother. Maggie says that 'without power, you can't change anything'. But we can see that's a slippery slope. Where does the compromise end? Maggie feels it will stop once she gets elected as an MP, but she's merely being naïve."

The character's idealism is gradually eroded as the drama unfolds. "She has a great conscience and has worked tirelessly as an employment lawyer," continues Ancona. "Her decline is an insidious process – it's all too easy to be dragged into this world of spin. She knows in her heart of hearts that it's not right, but the New Labour spin-doctors convince her it's OK. It's very tempting for Maggie, but it slowly dawns on her that she is betraying everything her family stands for.

"Whether you're playing Posh Spice or Maggie," she continues, "the key thing is to create something believable. You have to find the reality and truly inhabit the character. If viewers can't identify with what you're doing, it's never going to work."

The actress will next be seen as a South London "masseur" in the forthcoming movie, *The Calcium Kid*.

Frances Grey plays Jessie, Mary Corrigan's favourite granddaughter



spacemen, but how often does that actually happen? We all feel unfulfilled in some way. Jessie's been victimised and lacks confidence. She would have liked to become a writer, but life has got in the way.

"Her spirit has to be rediscovered and she needs the love of a good man to achieve that. The relationship between Jessie and Danny reflects her grandmother's romance with Duncan. There is an intriguing 'will they, won't they?' quality about it. I'm drawn to romances that aren't obvious. I find them fascinating."

Frances Grey, who has had high-profile parts in such varied work as *Vanity Fair*, *Messiah* and *Murder In Mind*, felt a real affinity with Jessie. "I like her gentleness and her spirit," Grey confirms.

"When she's a teenager, she's put upon and bullied, but she still has this fighting attitude. She desperately wants to write and is bursting with feistiness and joy. However, all that has left her by the time she's 36. She's working in a call centre and manifests all the sadness of a life that hasn't fulfilled its potential."

The actress, who hails from Edinburgh, adored dressing up for the period sequences in *The Key*. "The costumes are hilarious," she laughs. "In the scenes set in 1984, I look like Shakin' Stevens's sister – it's hard to feel cool in a Flock Of Seagulls hairdo! And in the 1979 sequences, I look like the front cover of a *Jackie* annual!"

Grey believes that audiences can relate to Jessie's life. "Small children always say they want to be

Ann Louise Ross plays Helen, Mary Corrigan's daughter



Ann Louise Ross, who has appeared in dramas such as *Split Second* (directed by David Blair), *Trainspotting*, *Looking After Jo Jo*, *Hamish Macbeth*, *Life Support* and *The Acid House*, feels a real empathy with her character Helen, Mary's daughter.

"What a tower of strength she is!" Ross exclaims. "I really admire her passion. Helen has been brought up in a very political household and a lot of her mother's strong beliefs have rubbed off on her. As a result of her husband Joe's industrial accident, she has had to take work as a cleaner. She eventually becomes a full-time regional organiser for a public services union and she also has lots of relatives living in the house – all in all, she's absolutely exhausted."

The actress, who has recently been on a Dundee Rep tour of Tehran with a production of *The Winter's Tale*, hopes that the sheer political passion of *The Key* might help re-energise disillusioned voters.

"Voting figures are very depressing now. We've become disenchanted with politics because we've had it too easy and don't think politicians make any difference. There is complacency about the electorate, an apathy, a feeling of 'I'm all right Jack'. People think, 'why should I bother about people who aren't having such a good time?'"

"We have become more insular, and the idea of the extended family has gone. The old days of hanging out of the window and having a chat about life with the neighbour have passed because now we've got *Trisha* and *Kilroy* instead. So it would be lovely if this drama helped people become re-engaged with politics. I think that would be quite a contribution."

One of the key elements of the story in this very politicised family is a breakdown between Helen and her eldest child, Maggie. Despite the personal battles she has fought, Helen still has time to wage her political wars.

Ross continues: "A Private Finance Initiative threatens the closure of local old people's homes, where her mother Mary lives, and Helen is concerned that the cutbacks mean fewer staff and poor food. Maggie, who is on the verge of being elected as one of Blair's Babes in 1997, is not prepared to compromise her chances of becoming an MP, not prepared to go through the same struggles as her mother. That's a real blow to Helen. She is genuinely disappointed by Maggie's New Labour politics. Maggie hopes to change things from the inside, but her mother knows it will never happen."

June Watson plays the older Mary Corrigan



June Watson portrays Mary when she is older (she is played as a younger woman by Dawn Steele). The actress, who recently had a leading role in the Martin Clunes vehicle *William And Mary* (“I played a housekeeper who does a lot of Hoovering and looking disapproving”), reckons that ultimately *The Key* is a very positive, life-enhancing drama.

June relished tackling Mary Corrigan. “She’s a really strong, feisty woman with a fantastic set of principles. She cares deeply about both life and the fate of the workers. Her sheer strength attracted me.

“When Mary is young, her mother says to her ‘oh well, this is our lot, this is what we were born with.’ When her beloved is killed in the First World War, her determination to struggle on behalf of her fellow workers is redoubled. Her strength is also very much in evidence when she is forced into a violent, loveless marriage and she copes with everything with a tremendous sense of fortitude.”

Later in life, Mary is equally redoubtable. Watson, who has starred in dozens of TV dramas over the years, including *A Mug’s Game*, *In A Land Of Plenty*, *The Inspector Lynley Mysteries*, *Angels*, *Z Cars* and *Prime Suspect*, comments that: “When Mary is 86, she still feels so strongly that she goes to Orgreave to support the striking miners. She’s still got such passion for life. And she clings on to her humanity even as she is dying. All in all, she has a huge influence on the family.”

Watson enjoyed witnessing the magic of the make-up department as she had to age from 59 to 98. “The make-up is fantastic,” the actress observes. “They don’t use prosthetic masks to age me – they do it all with latex wrinkles or ‘green marble’, which is a sort of plastic make-up. When I have to go down to the age of 59, they give me a ‘face-lift’ with bits of invisible tape. It’s all very subtle and a real work of art.”

And extremely convincing. “When I was playing Mary at 86,” Watson recalls, “I was crossing the road with a walking-stick and looking very dodderly. Later the same day, still in costume, I was dancing around like a spring chicken. You could see the extras thinking, ‘She’s not a real old lady!’”

Donna Franceschild – Writer

Donna Franceschild's television and film credits range from *Takin' Over The Asylum* and *A Mug's Game* to *Donovan Quick* and *Eureka Street*. The trademark of this American-born writer is her enthusiastic championing of the underdog.

Donna's spirited desire to fight for the rights of those less fortunate clearly runs in her family. "When my mum was still a young woman, she found herself having to bring up four kids with no husband," the writer says. "But she never stopped battling on behalf of others."

Her inspiration for *The Key* is clearly seen in the story of the struggle for workers' rights over the last century, through the vehicle of one fascinating family. It all springs from the central character of Mary Corrigan, an extraordinarily strong woman, whose commitment is handed down through the generations.

"In the Fifties, mum had to go out to work and she discovered that the starting wage for men was the top wage for women doing the same job. She never lost the ethos that it's just not right for people to be treated in that way. You can judge any society by the way it treats its most vulnerable.

"I chose to write about people from the deprived end of the spectrum because their history is in danger of dying out. There are no big political leaders in *The Key*. This is a story of people like us who happen to get caught up in the wider power struggle."

Franceschild has created a carefully crafted structure, which interweaves stories from five different time periods. She observes: "By writing the characters' stories, I'm inevitably recounting the history of their time. I don't have to hit all the political bases because they have to spring naturally from the characters. In the end, I'm not interested in telling people what to think; I'm interested in making them think.

"By intercutting the past experiences of the grandmother with the present experiences of her

daughter and her grandchildren, it shows that you can always find parallels between the ages."

Franceschild fervently hopes that her drama will prompt viewers to reassess their own sense of commitment. "When there's a feeling that things have to change, where does it come from? Not from politicians. It comes from people thinking that things are bad and should not be this way."

She concludes with her philosophy as a writer and the importance of passion in her work. "A writing tutor once told me 'write what you're angry about'. When I stop being angry, I'll stop writing. Every single thing I've written has been guided by the belief that we can choose to be better than we are. Maybe I'm hopelessly optimistic, but I'm pushing 50 now and it's too late to change!"

Byron

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Byron

“Sensation is our only proof that we exist – that is why we crave it”

Jonny Lee Miller is joined by Vanessa Redgrave to star in *Byron*, a drama about the greatest Romantic poet of his age



Jonny Lee Miller stars as the charismatic, hedonistic and wildly rebellious Lord Byron in a major two-part drama about the poet's life and loves. Natasha Little plays his half-sister Augusta, with whom he had an incestuous affair; Camilla Power is Lady Caroline Lamb, his most famous jilted lover; Julie Cox is his betrayed wife Annabella; and, following her recent performance as Clemmie Churchill in BBC Two's *The Gathering Storm*, Vanessa Redgrave plays Lady Melbourne, Byron's confidante.

Jane Tranter, Controller of Drama Commissioning, says: "This film offers a bravura role for Jonny Lee Miller. *Byron* explores what it meant to be a sex-god aristo and it takes a muscular approach to period drama. While focusing on Byron's energy

and his desire to turn convention upside down, it also emphasises such contemporary themes as the cult of celebrity, media manipulation and the bad boy image of an outsider who wins – but despises – society's praise. It is a radical, anti-establishment historical drama."

Award-winning playwright and writer Nick Dear, whose credits include the critically acclaimed *Power*, currently at the National Theatre in London, an award-winning adaptation of *Persuasion*, and the forthcoming *Eroica* for BBC Two, says: "This is just a wonderful picaresque Faustian tale. Byron is an intensely modern and accessible figure, which is part of the reason I wanted to write about him. He was a great character, a lover, a poet, a fighter and

a rebel – an irresistible combination, everyone loves a rebel. He packed a lot into a very short life – he was dead at 36 and, when he died, his body was autopsied and the doctors pronounced that his internal organs were those of a 70-year-old!

“Romantic poetry was clearly the rock ‘n’ roll of its day. He was a very influential figure in the 19th century, and Byron is still very current everywhere in the world 200 years later, which is quite an achievement. He was truly outside the normally understood rules and regulations of how you should live, he just didn’t pay attention to them, which got him into so much trouble.”

Dear defines Byron’s poetry as “something that poured out of him and that he felt he couldn’t really control. He said he had to write because otherwise the volcano inside him would explode.” Byron spent a lot of his short life searching for meaning outside of his extraordinary creative gifts. Explains Dear: “I don’t think that he felt that his main purpose on earth was to be a poet. I think a great deal of his life and indeed what we see in the film is him searching for what his purpose might be.”

Byron was committed to his political beliefs and support of the underdog, whether Nottingham mill workers or the Greeks suffering under 300 years of Turkish oppression. “He was taken so much more seriously as an important political figure abroad than he was in his own country. His influence is still huge in South America, and throughout Europe, especially in Greece and Italy, where you find so many Café Byrons or statues erected in his memory.”

It took a long time to find the right actor to play the extraordinarily talented bad boy aristocrat. “Jonny Lee Miller was, without question, the prime candidate out of all those we saw, we couldn’t have found anyone better. It’s not just a leading part, the absolute spinal column of the film is his performance.”

Stephen Campbell Moore – who stars in *Bright Young Things*, Stephen Fry’s adaptation of Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* – is Byron’s friend John Cam Hobhouse; Philip Glenister is his loyal and patient manservant William Fletcher; and Oliver Milburn plays his Cambridge friend Scrope Davies.

Byron charts the rise and fall of an irresistible and devastatingly handsome genius who had it all and threw it all away.

Byron’s struggle to be accepted as a poet is dramatically reversed by the publication of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, which turns him into an overnight success and the toast of London society. Women throw themselves at him but, despite a passionate affair with society beauty Lady Caroline Lamb (Camilla Power), he soon tires of her and escapes into the arms of his half-sister Augusta (Natasha Little), with whom he has an illicit, incestuous affair. Although unconcerned by society’s conventions, Byron worries that a scandal will harm Augusta and, on a whim, proposes to the pious Annabella Milbanke (Julie Cox).

It’s a love triangle that is doomed to fail. Annabella soon learns that marriage to the greatest Romantic poet of his age is one of heartbreak and betrayal. Augusta, for her part, will not let her physical relationship with Byron continue once he is married. Byron goes into self-imposed exile and continues his life of hedonistic pleasure in Venice – before settling into a relationship with Italian aristocrat Contessa Teresa Guiccioli (played by Branka Katic). Eventually, as a man who has excelled in excess, he feels his passion is spent and takes up the Greek struggle for independence from the Turks.

“For a contemporary equivalent you’d have to combine people like Mick Jagger and Che Guevara to get anywhere near the status and importance Byron enjoyed,” says Dear. “Byron’s creative influence was huge and the painters and composers of his day pay homage to him in their work. Modern-day celebrities do not seem to me to have achieved anything like the body of work that he did in his short life and certainly I doubt that their work and legend will live on 200 years from now.”

Jonny Lee Miller is best known for his portrayal of Sick Boy in *Trainspotting* and his recent successes include the roles of Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* and Maclean in *Plunkett & Maclean*. He is soon to star as Arty in the forthcoming *Pardoner’s Tale*, part of BBC One’s modern retelling of *The Canterbury Tales*. Natasha Little first came to attention as the scheming Rachel in *This Life*, and



Introduction

consolidated her talents as Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*. Recently highlighted in *Vogue* as one of the UK's leading actresses, Natasha was in the BBC One hit drama series *Spooks*. Camilla Power played Becky Lawton in Sally Wainwright's *Sparkhouse* for BBC One. Julie Cox takes on her first romantic lead as Annabella following roles in *Dune*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The War Bride*.

Byron is a co-venture between the BBC's Drama and Arts departments. Writer Nick Dear has also written *Eroica*, a performance piece focusing on the day in June 1804 when Beethoven's 3rd Symphony, *Eroica*, was first played through in a private rehearsal at the palace of the composer's patron in Vienna. Starring Ian Hart as Beethoven, it is soon to be shown on BBC Two. *Byron* is directed by Julian Farino (*Flesh And Blood*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *Bob And Rose*). Ruth Baumgarten is the producer and the executive producers are BBC Head of Drama Serials Laura Mackie, Hilary Salmon and Andrea Miller, Head of Factual Television, BBC Scotland.

Byron's poetry lives on in *Essential Byron*, a companion documentary which will be shown to coincide with the drama. Presented by Daisy Goodwin, it features a selection of Byron's poems spoken by Jim Carter, Toby Stephens, Rosamund Pike, Richard Coyle, Francesca Annis, Jack Davenport and Hugh Dancy.

Byron

Main cast

Lord Byron Jonny Lee Miller
William Fletcher Philip Glenister
John Cam Hobhouse Stephen Campbell Moore
Augusta Leigh Natasha Little
Lady Melbourne Vanessa Redgrave
Annabella Milbanke Julie Cox
Lady Caroline Lamb Camilla Power
Percy Bysshe Shelley Oliver Dimsdale
Mary Shelley Sally Hawkins
John Murray Michael Elwyn
Lady Judith Milbanke Penny Downie
Sir Ralph Milbanke David Ryall
Anna Rood/Fletcher Mali Harries
Teresa Guiccioli Branka Katic
Scrope Davies Oliver Milburn

Production credits

Writer Nick Dear
Director Julian Farino
Executive Producers Hilary Salmon
Laura Mackie
Howard Kingston
Producer Ruth Baumgarten
Line Producer Julia Stannard
Director of Photography David Odd
Production Designer John-Paul Kelly
Costume Designer Jenny Beavan
Make-Up and Hair Designer Daniel Phillips
Editor Pia Di Ciaula
Casting Director Kate Rhodes James

Jonny Lee Miller plays Lord Byron

*For he through sin's long labyrinth had run,
Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
Had sighed to many though he loved but one,
And that one, alas! Could ne'er be his.
(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, 1812)*



Jonny Lee Miller is waxing lyrical about the pleasures of the open road. Whether roaring through leafy lanes on his beloved motorbike or roughing it around India and returning home “completely fearless”, the 30-year-old actor is happiest with the wind in his hair and the sun on his face. But could this air of romantic adventure have anything to do with his latest acting role?

On 10 March 1812, a little-known poet published his second book, a sensational collection of traveller's poems. In the space of a few days, every copy was sold. “I awoke,” wrote George Gordon, Lord Byron, in his diaries, “and I was famous.”

Starring Jonny Lee Miller as the aristocratic poet who lived fast and died young, Nick Dear's new drama for BBC Two tells Byron's extraordinary story – from his overnight success to his disgraced exile, via a few, turbulent years of dazzling celebrity.

“The story's got everything – there's drama, tragedy and comedy as well,” says Jonny, whose utter transformation into the dark-haired, cleft-chinned, Romantic icon astounded his co-stars.

“When I read the script, I thought, ‘God, this is seriously good’. I knew very little about Byron before that. My image of him was that he was this dark, gothic type of character, which is really only a tiny part of him. It was a real education.”

Asked how he would describe the tortured poet, Lee Miller's quick-fire response is: “That depends on which day of the week it was!”

He laughs: “I feel I've come to understand him a lot over the nine-week shoot but it would be foolish to think you could understand someone completely just by reading about them and trying to portray them.”

The softly spoken actor has mixed feelings about the playboy poet, who was famously dubbed “mad, bad and dangerous to know” by one of his many lovers. “He had the ability to be an extraordinarily nice, kind man but he also had the ability to be really quite cruel when he made his mind up about somebody. I certainly don't like the way he treated some people,” says Lee Miller, decisively.

“But the light-hearted side of him surprised me and he had a huge drive and passion for life, which I find impressive. Anyone who accomplishes many different things and has very broad horizons – that's impressive. I think he had a great understanding and a great love of humanity, and I think he was frustrated by a lot of the old systems in the country.”

That said, the Surrey-born actor does believe that he shares some characteristics with the colourful portrait painted of Byron in the BBC Two drama.

"There's the love of animals, the love of sports," says the actor, who can often be found kick-boxing and running. "I think we have quite a similar sense of humour, quite a dry sense of humour. And he did have time for a lot of people; he actually wasn't a snob, although he loved being a Lord and all that. I believe he was actually quite an Everyman and I like to think of myself like that, too."

There is one way, however, in which the young actor couldn't be more different from his historical counterpart. While the poet had an urge for self-publicity that would make even Max Clifford blush, Lee Miller seems to have deliberately shunned the limelight.

On the face of it, the actor makes perfect copy for the celebrity column: sexy and stylish, he's been called the "British Brad Pitt"; his best mates include fellow Britpackers Ewan McGregor, Jude Law and Sean Pertwee; he was once hitched (albeit briefly) to Hollywood A-lister Angelina Jolie; and counts among his other exes All Saints star Natalie Appleton and former *Holby City* actress Lisa Faulkner. But you won't find him showing the cameras around his beautiful home or pouring his heart out to Michael Parkinson. Indeed, one journalist recently called him "one of our most mysterious stars".

While for the actor, fame is simply "something that helps you get more work", for Byron it was a drug. Thrust from obscurity to the centre of high society in a matter of days, Byron basked in fame's golden glow. The toast of Regency London, he was invited to the best parties and was pursued by women determined to bed the sexiest and most exciting man in Britain.

It was a role the undoubtedly narcissistic poet relished. He carefully cultivated a brooding, sensitive yet thrillingly wicked image; commissioned flattering portraits of himself in heroic poses; and deliberately flouted convention, revelling in the scandal and gossip that ensued. But as his ego grew, so did his paranoia. It was not long before Byron began to

despise the society whose praise he had so obsessively sought.

His fame ultimately turned against him and he was eventually forced into exile in disgrace. When Byron died, helping the Greeks fight their war of independence in April 1824, his publisher, John Murray, burnt his memoirs, fearing they would destroy what remained of his great friend's reputation.

For many today, Byron's story is a cautionary tale, with as much to say about the nature of celebrity in the 21st century as about the perils of stardom in the 19th. Lee Miller agrees: "He was one of the first people to be a celebrity in that way ... and I don't know if there are many parallels in his story with how celebrity works today or if it is exactly the same! Stories still get inflated, rumours, urban myths happen, people get the wrong end of the stick. It's all the same, really. Two hundred years is very little time in human development terms."

Like Byron, Lee Miller's star went stratospheric almost overnight with the success of the 1996 film *Trainspotting*, based on Irvine Welsh's cult Scottish novel, in which he played Sick Boy.

"Though from my point of view, it didn't seem that 'overnight' – I'd been acting for years," the actor points out.

Lee Miller has, in fact, been acting since the age of eight and trained with the renowned Youth Theatre Company. "My family was in the business," he explains. "My grandfather was an actor [Bernard Lee, who famously played M in the Bond films], my great grandfather was a music hall artist and then was in stage management, and my mother worked backstage."

In addition to *Trainspotting*, Jonny has also enjoyed successes with the highwayman comedy thriller *Plunkett & Macleane*, the gangster drama *Love, Honour And Obey*, in which he stole the show with a karaoke turn, and *Hackers*. He is widely expected to return to the big screen as Sick Boy in *Porno*, Welsh's *Trainspotting* sequel. But Byron is not the only real-life character the actor has played during his varied career.

“I’ve actually done that before and it is strange – I played Michael Hickey who was one of the Bridgewater Four in a drama for the BBC called *Who Killed Karl Bridgewater?* Hickey was in prison at the time,” he says. “I didn’t have any contact with him and I was much younger then.” But the contrast with Byron is marked: “In my mind he’s fictional – I’m just playing my part in a story.”

When filming wrapped in Malta, the actor took a much-deserved holiday. He now plans to spend more time on his motorbike, though he dismisses a traditional tour of the States as “a bit tame”.

“I prefer something a little more inhospitable,” he smiles mischievously. It’s a line that could have come straight from the *Byron* script. After all, if motorbikes and leathers had been around in the 1820s, Byron would probably have been the original rebel without a cause.

Natasha Little plays Augusta Leigh

*When fortune changed – and love fled far,
And hatred's shafts flew thick and fast,
Thou wert the solitary star
Which rose and set not to the last.
(Stanzas to Augusta)*



Though directors have compared her to the ice-cool Grace Kelly, blonde Natasha Little found herself missing her cues and vexing the sound man on the set of *Byron*. But, she reveals, it was not Jonny Lee Miller's smouldering portrayal of the bad boy of poetry that had her in a spin ... it was all the babies.

Natasha Little plays Augusta Leigh, Byron's half-sister – and lover – and there's barely a scene in which she doesn't have a virtual crèche of tiny children clutching at her ankles. As a proud godparent of five, Natasha should be well-qualified for a spot of on-screen baby-sitting – "Though it doesn't mean I know what to do!" she laughs, warmly.

"There was one day when we had to do a scene in which Augusta meets Annabella for the first time and I enter carrying this tiny baby. My whole concentration was just on stopping her crying. I had my little finger in her mouth but I had to take it out to shake hands and I was just dreading it. The poor sound guy was going mad! But it's great having children around because you've just got to respond to what they're doing – though I'm sure in most of the scenes I'm completely upstaged!"

Following hot on the heels of her role in BBC One's M15 drama *Spooks* and a West End run of the celebrated *Vagina Monologues*, Nick Dear's script for *Byron* had 33-year-old Natasha utterly seduced from the start.

"I guess, like most people, I knew a little about Byron and you use the term 'Byronic' without really thinking about the man. But I wasn't aware of what a fascinating life he had," says the Liverpool-born actress.

"I was really excited by the script and immediately drawn to Augusta. I really liked her – I didn't want to play anyone else – and I hope I haven't let her down. When you're playing a real-life character, you feel a sense of responsibility to try to capture something of the spirit of that person, and Augusta was such a wonderful woman that, even if just a tiny smidgeon of that comes through, I'll be happy."

Five years older than Byron, Augusta was married to their first cousin, Colonel Leigh, and had three children. With different mothers, she and Byron had grown up apart and were almost strangers when, in the summer of 1813, she came to London.

Though more comfortable amidst the rough and tumble of her children than stepping out in high society, Augusta was good-natured, easy-going and had the great gift of being able to make Byron laugh. She accompanied him to theatres, balls and

assemblies but, as Byron himself wrote, their relationship soon landed them in “a far more serious, and entirely new scrape”.

“I really don’t want people to think, ‘Ugh! That’s disgusting – having an affair with your sister,’” says Natasha, vehemently. “I’ve kept reminding myself that they were only half-brother and -sister, almost in an attempt to justify it, but their strength of feeling for each other was so intense that it was difficult to deny.

“Unlike a lot of his lovers, Augusta wasn’t heavily into the social scene. I think she was one of the few people who loved Byron for himself and would have loved him whether he’d been a successful poet or not. Maybe it was because she was constantly surrounded by children, but there was something a little child-like about her, too. She didn’t take his poetry too seriously and she didn’t take herself too seriously.

“She was very loving, very open and had a generous spirit. At one point in the film, she tells Byron: ‘I just want you to be happy’. And I really do believe that that’s all she wanted for him. It was a tragedy for her that he wasn’t.”

When Augusta made the painful decision to end their affair, Byron was torn between passion and guilt.

“Jonny has really captured the essence of the man,” says Little of her co-star, Lee Miller, who plays the tortured rebel. “He’s made Byron a very real person. I think it would have been quite easy to turn him into a mean-spirited dandy but that’s not how he’s played it. You can see the whole person.

“I read quite a lot of Byron’s letters to Augusta and they were heartbreaking. Byron was pretty nasty to other women but his letters to her are so tender – they’re a strange combination of lover and brotherly love,” she continues. “Augusta made a really difficult decision to stay behind when he left England and her life was really quite grim. But I think she stayed to protect her children and, in the end, she sacrificed so much.”

Augusta stands in stark contrast to the characters for which Natasha is best known: the gloriously

ruthless Becky Sharp in BBC One’s *Vanity Fair*, and scheming minx Rachel in *This Life*, which finished with a memorable scene in which Rachel was punched in the face by rival lawyer Millie. “I feel quite lucky that I haven’t been playing sweet girls all the time,” she later told journalists.

Like her *Byron* co-star Julie Cox, Natasha spent her childhood on the move. She and her family travelled around the Middle East, where her father, who worked for the World Health Organisation, helped set up immunisation clinics.

“By the time I was 10, I’d lived in 11 different countries. We spent a lot of time in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Qatar – it was a great place to grow up,” she says, recalling idyllic weekends on the beach.

The family moved back to the decidedly less exotic Loughton in Essex when Little was a teenager and it was there that she joined a Saturday drama group.

“It was just something I enjoyed doing. I didn’t really think of it as acting and I didn’t know any actors. I thought perhaps that to go to drama school your parents had to be actors ... It was an alien world to me and I don’t think it was really until I left drama school that I felt it was a job. Sometimes I still can’t believe I’m living like this.”

Since leaving London’s Guildhall School of Music and Drama almost 10 years ago, Little has barely had a day without work. With recent roles in the feature film *Another Life*, based on a scandalous Twenties murder case, and the forthcoming film of *Vanity Fair*, starring Reese Witherspoon, it’s clear that the actress, who is known for knitting between takes, has an eye for a good yarn. She also starred in the second series of BBC One’s thrilling spy drama, *Spooks*, though declares that secrets are not her strong point and that she would be “absolutely hopeless in MI5” in real life.

There is one subject, however, on which Natasha is definitely keeping mum. Despite being surrounded by children on the set of *Byron*, the actress, who lives with her new husband, actor Bhodan Poraj, in east London, refuses to be drawn on the matter of her maternal stirrings.



Cast interviews

“Sometimes I’ll be holding a baby and thinking, ‘Oh, yes, this is lovely,’ and then other times I’ll think, ‘Uhh!’” she laughs. “Of course, the joy of working with them is that they are other people’s and you can give them back. We work with baby twins and if one is crying a lot you can swap it for a calmer one. Now, as far as I’m aware, that doesn’t happen in real life – there’s not a baby conveyor belt!”

Julie Cox plays Annabella Milbanke

*Oh! She was perfect past all parallel –
Of any modern female saint's comparison;
So far above the cunning powers of hell
Her guardian angel had given up his garrison.
(Don Juan, 1818)*



Byron may have called Annabella Milbanke his “princess of parallelograms” but there’s nothing square about Julie Cox, the young actress who plays the poet’s wronged wife

Julie Cox, who grew up in Indonesia and harbours a secret passion for kung fu, boasts a colourful CV, featuring roles in BBC One’s popular spy drama *Spooks*, US mini-series *Dune* and Cirque du Soleil’s dazzling love story, *Alegria*. And though her role in *Byron* is her most challenging to date, Julie threw herself into it with a passion that matched Annabella’s when she set out to save her husband’s soul.

“It’s so rare that you get the opportunity to play someone who actually existed and I’ve been absorbed in Annabella’s psychology almost to the point of obsession,” admits the 30-year-old actress.

“Annabella was incredibly complex and very intelligent, but because she was brought up in complete isolation, she didn’t really fit in with London society. She was religious, very pious, but also quite romantic and self-assured. In fact, one of the things I like most about her is that she was full of spirit, energy and idealism ... and love – she really did love Byron.”

Cox particularly relished the opportunity to play opposite Jonny Lee Miller, whose on-screen transformation she describes as “extraordinary”.

“He’s found this fantastic voice and the first time I saw him in costume, it was like seeing the ghost of Byron. I think this is going to make a lot of people take notice of him.

“Though there is something slightly disconcerting about your male star being more beautiful than you are!” she laughs.

When Annabella and Byron married in January 1815, Byron was London’s most celebrated poet and its most desirable lover. His liaison with Lady Caroline Lamb had scandalised society and left her reputation in ruins. But, as Cox points out, Byron remained “the man all the men wanted to drink with and all the women wanted to sleep with.”

And yet when Annabella first encountered the “mad, bad” poet, she did not immediately fall under his spell. While Byron stirred up passions in most women (and not a few men), he aroused only Christian concern in Annabella – something which both amused and antagonised him.

“Byron had this whole ‘bad boy’ self-image and Annabella just wanted to cut through it and say: ‘You are a good person’. They’d have these wonderful conversations and she was convinced that they had a true meeting of minds and naïvely believed that they could have a relationship,” says Cox.

And so, despite her fondness for mathematics (hence Byron’s mocking nickname for her), Annabella failed to see that this particular “one plus one” could only equal disaster.

“When they married, she initially wanted to reform him and bring out the good in him. But what actually happened was the opposite – they brought out the worst in each other.”

“Almost from the first second Annabella and Byron were married, he treated her abysmally. The amount of mental abuse she got ... I think a lot of people would have just walked away. But she saw it as her duty and she thought he could be changed.

“But she loved the sex!” she continues, laughing. “In fact, in one of the things I read when I was researching the part – I think it was in one of Byron’s letters to Lady Melbourne – he said it was sometimes the only way to shut her up!”

As the celebrity couple of their day, Lord and Lady Byron’s strange relationship quickly became the cause célèbre of Regency England. But speculation reached fever pitch when, after only a year of marriage, and just a month after the birth of their daughter, Annabella left Byron and went home to her parents – never to see him again.

Though Annabella would subsequently only hint at the circumstances that prompted her to leave, the separation gave rise to allegations of every kind of excess – including illegal sodomising by her errant husband. Lurid rumours about his homosexuality and incestuous love for his half-sister, Augusta, eventually drove Byron into exile and blighted Annabella for the rest of her life.

“It’s a tragic story and an incredible journey from the beginning for Annabella – through all the excitement and euphoria of the marriage, to the crumbling of it, the separation and post-separation.

“She underwent such a transformation and became quite bitter.”

Now based in London, Cox led a nomadic life as a child. Following the death of their Scots-Irish mother when they were very young, she and her siblings followed their engineer father around South East Asia – something which accounts for the actress’s unexpected predilection for Bruce Lee movies and proficiency in martial arts.

“I’m mad about kung fu movies – probably because that’s all we ever got to see growing up abroad,” she says. “I get really jealous when the boys get to do all the fun stuff like fencing and guns and stunts. I love all this period stuff, I love all the drama and serious acting but it would make me so happy to go out and kick some ass!”

Camilla Power plays Lady Caroline Lamb

*She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.
(She Walks In Beauty, 1814)*



It's hard to believe that, as a child, gamin beauty Camilla Power was hounded out of her posh private school because her ears stuck out so badly. "I wasn't very happy at school and used to get teased quite a bit," she recalls. "My ears were so bad that the National Health pinned them back – they were awful ... I was in a very high-pressured school and I just closed down."

Camilla's saving grace was her understanding parents who offered her the chance to go to stage school. It was there, at the famous Sylvia Young School, also alma mater to Emma Bunton, Denise

Van Outen and Keeley Hawes amongst others, that she blossomed.

With her fine features and lively spirit, Camilla is clearly ideally suited to playing the role of Lady Caroline Lamb, the wild child lover of Lord Byron who famously described him as "mad bad and dangerous to know". "Like Caroline, I'm quite impulsive and I like to push boundaries. I've never been someone who's done things particularly conventionally, although there's a huge part of me that's incredibly conventional. I've always been very much my own person, quite in charge of who I am.

"I think Caroline is also a child woman, incredibly vulnerable and one of those people with a huge life force. She was very much the centre of the social scene, not always in a good way. Someone who was definitely born before her time in terms of her outlook, quite a loose cannon and obsessive."

Camilla, no stranger to raunchy scenes in some of her previous roles, did not find it a problem having a passionate on-screen affair with heart-throb Jonny Lee Miller, who plays the title role as Lord Byron. "He's so lovely, just gorgeous and looks so like Byron as well. I was stunned when I saw him, he looked just like the real Byron does in his pictures. And the kissing was very good!

"In the first scene I shot, in the carriage with Jonny, I had to jump on him. Tough job but someone's got to do it! I think she had a few flings before Byron but in him she saw a kindred spirit. There was definitely that danger. You know how often you go for people who are in some way bad for you? He was exciting and incredibly talented and that's a huge turn on for me as well."

"I'm not necessarily attracted to bad boys like Byron, but definitely free-spirited and creative. I like

anyone who is fantastically good at what they do – if someone is talented it's a phenomenal turn on."

Power is radiant as she talks about the man who evidently fits her description, her partner, top UK agent Dallas Smith, father to her four-year-old son, Joseph. "Dallas was originally my agent, although I rarely saw him. Everyone falls in love with him, he's very handsome. I was 18 years old and he was my agent and that was that. I didn't see him much and then, a few years later, I was on my own, he was divorced and we met up to discuss work. We went out for supper and that was it.

"A few months later Joseph was on the way and that was that. It was completely unexpected and completely odd. If someone had told me when I first walked through the office that this man was going to be the father of my son, I'd have thought, 'Yeah, right'. And likewise I think if someone had said to Dallas that this rather gauche girl who walked into his office was going to be the mother of his son, he'd have laughed."

Although an actress for 15 years, Camilla spent a brief time as a model during her transition from child to adult performer. "I was 18, living on my own and had to pay the bills. Someone came up to me in Oxford Street and said, 'Do you want to be a model?' As I was desperately thinking of something to do to make some money, I said 'okay'. Select were my agency, the same as Keeley Hawes."

Camilla was not happy being a model, with the constant pressures that the industry puts on its young charges, particularly to stay thin. "The Japanese like English women and I was sent to see someone for a shoot. I had a bikini on and I was really thin. The woman got a tape measure out and she measured me saying, 'Oh no, your hips too big'. To Select's credit they were disgusted by her behaviour, they were very good at looking after the girls.

"A lot of the girls weren't skinny, most of them are curvier than you think and the main thing was always to keep fit and look after yourself. Modelling was only a means to an end for me."

Despite having had a child, Camilla has kept her enviable model figure and seems completely at ease with nude scenes, having played the starring role

that Nicole Kidman made famous in *The Blue Room* and also stripped off in *The Double* and *Beck*. She agrees that nudity is not a problem for her. "I'm more comfortable now I've had a baby, funnily enough. It doesn't ever worry me, for the most part nude scenes have only been a very small part of what I've been doing.

"I didn't put on loads of weight when I was pregnant, but my boobs came from nowhere. I was a double D! I remember being measured for a maternity bra and she came back with this parachute! I was like, 'Oh yeah!', and the bloody thing fitted!"



Eroica

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Eroica

Ian Hart is Beethoven in a unique drama of the first performance of the *Eroica* Symphony



Ian Hart, most recently seen as Dr Watson in BBC One's *The Hound Of The Baskervilles* and as Professor Quirrell in *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*, plays Ludwig van Beethoven in a unique film of the great composer's watershed symphony, *Eroica*. Written by Nick Dear, it focuses on the day in June 1804 when Beethoven's Third Symphony was first played through in a private rehearsal at the palace of the composer's patron, Prince Lobkowitz, in Vienna.

Also starring Frank Finlay, Tim Pigott-Smith, Jack Davenport, Claire Skinner and Anton Lesser, and directed by Simon Cellan-Jones (*Our Friends In The North*, *Storm Damage* and the feature film *Some Voices*), *Eroica* is a unique collaboration between the BBC's Classical Music and Drama departments, and has already been screened to acclaim at this year's Edinburgh Film Festival.

Set against the revolutionary climate of the early 1800s, *Eroica* is a real-time performance which

explores the story behind the symphony; the composer's passion for his work; and his unrequited love for an unattainable woman. Beethoven – who is suffering from a gradual loss of hearing – confounds his well-bred audience by producing a score dedicated to Napoleon Bonaparte, a remarkable move bearing in mind that Napoleon was out to destroy the power of the aristocracy. However, on learning that Bonaparte has crowned himself Emperor, Beethoven feels betrayed and famously rips up the dedication page.

Producer Liza Marshall says: "The idea behind the film was to bring a new audience to classical music. We wanted it to have a modern, radical edge – like Beethoven's music did at the time. The audience should feel like they are sitting right at the heart of the orchestra – a total contrast to the traditional style of symphony performance. As Haydn says in the film: 'Beethoven puts himself at the centre of the music. I'm sure that's why it's so noisy.'"

Screenwriter Nick Dear, whose two-part drama, *Byron*, is being shown on BBC Two in September, explains: "In this 'workshop rehearsal' format, the facts of the composer's life are hinted at and only tangentially explored. Most of the human relationships are low-key. The big drama is the music. Here, art takes prominence over life, and the orchestra, en masse, is the principal character of the film."

Executive producer and Head of BBC Classical Music, Peter Maniura, says: "Beethoven's revolutionary Third Symphony, the *Eroica*, burst upon an unsuspecting world in the summer of 1804. BBC Classical Music and BBC Drama have collaborated to recreate that day in a film drama which allows viewers to feel the full force and emotion of a work which changed the course of musical history."

Eroica features L'Orchestre Revolutionaire et Romantique, conducted by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, one of the world's foremost Beethoven experts. The performance is the first in modern times to replicate the exact number of players who performed the original symphony.

Says Jane Root, Controller of BBC Two: "*Eroica* is a unique piece of programming that brings together the skills and talents of two different genres to create an informative and compelling story. It is a new way of working that we are keen to explore on Two and there are already other cross-genre collaborations between the BBC's Factual, Entertainment and Drama genres in the pipeline."

These include *Byron*, Nick Dear's drama starring Jonny Lee Miller in the title role; *D-Day* and *Dunkirk* drama documentaries; and *Samuel Pepys*, a film by Guy Jenkin with Steve Coogan in the title role. *Larkin – Love Again*, a film based on the life of poet Philip Larkin, starring Hugh Bonneville, was shown in July.

Root continues: "With these dramas, *Eroica*, *Larkin – Love Again* or *Byron*, we're trying to get under the skin of the subjects, to capture the audience's imagination by harnessing the experience and expertise of programme-makers across the BBC to bring a new perspective to story-telling."

"Both *Byron* and *Eroica* are about transgression, about pushing the limits, breaking taboos," says Dear. "Both are about men who are outsiders, and whose personal lives cause them immense difficulties. And although both are concerned with the creation of great works of art – *Don Juan* and the *Eroica* Symphony – they are couched within the everyday experience of the artists' lives. Most of what you see is based on documented fact; a little bit is speculation.

"The structure of each film is distinctly different. *Byron* is 13 years of mayhem and debauchery – a picaresque journey through fame, downfall and exile to a muddy oblivion in the swamps of Missolonghi. I wanted the pace to be fast and the world to be peopled by big, rich characters. The themes are Faustian and the art, in this story, secondary to the life, because this man's life is so extraordinary.

"Beethoven's tale takes place over the course of a single day. A genius, like anyone else, gets up and has a wash and goes to work. So that's what he does here – except that his work today is to attend the first play-through of his ground-breaking Third Symphony. At the end of the film, Beethoven goes home and has some fish for dinner. He likes fish."

The producer of *Eroica* is Liza Marshall (*The Sins*, *Fields Of Gold*) and the executive producers are Peter Maniura and Hilary Salmon.



Cast and crew

Eroica

Main cast

Beethoven Ian Hart
Prince Lobkowitz Jack Davenport
Count Dietrichstein Tim Pigott-Smith
Sukowaty Anton Lesser
Hayden Frank Finlay
Josephine Claire Skinner
Therese Lucy Akhurst
Marie Lobkowitz Fenella Woolgar
Reis Leo Bill
Otto Fisher Trevor Cooper

Production credits

Writer Nick Dear
Producer Liza Marshall
Director Simon Cellan Jones
Director of Photography Barry Ackroyd
Executive Producers Peter Maniura
Hilary Salmon

Ian Hart plays Beethoven



Playing a deaf 19th-century composer could be perceived as an odd choice for a cult, hip actor like Ian Hart, who is usually associated with more modern protagonists. However, having the chance to play Beethoven in *Eroica* was something the Liverpool actor saw as a great challenge, especially when it came to the history of the piece.

Beethoven is an iconic figure and his passionate, mesmerising music is still celebrated all over the globe 200 years on. “Beethoven was a brilliant pianist,” explains Hart, who played Professor Quirrell in the first Harry Potter film, *Harry Potter And The Philosopher’s Stone*. “From an early age, he was touted around as the best piano player in town. He knew how good and how clever he was in what he was writing. He knew it was completely different and revolutionary.”

The symphony itself represented a watershed – a complete departure from the traditional, “classical”

style of the period – in that it introduced the “Romantic” movement. Although Hart wasn’t a fan of classical music when he took on the role – he confesses that the film *Amadeus* “was the be all and end all of my knowledge” – he could still appreciate the significance of the score. “*Eroica* was very experimental. It included elements that Beethoven had been working on for over four years and there were sounds mixed together that just seemed wrong to the majority of people at that time.

“For me it’s like *Pet Sounds*, the Beach Boys album, and I felt that Beethoven had a lot in common with Brian Wilson. Wilson became a recluse and stayed in his house for four years after recording that album, because he felt that no one understood what he was trying to do.”

Hart also likens this musical revolution to the discovery of punk rock, Elvis Presley and Eminem in more recent popular music.

“Eminem has taken a music form that wasn’t his own and made it his own and made something new as a result. He’s taken it on to a different level with help from his producer Dr Dre.

“Composers like Mozart and Beethoven were doing variations on a theme – performances of an hour and a half of variations to show how clever they were. They were doing it to show that they could play the same seven-chord progression but in a different way over and over again; alter it, layer it and structure it differently. That’s what Dre is doing, it’s what producers do. They take sounds and melodies and mix it together with a beat. Musically, it’s as great a construct as anything that Mozart or Beethoven would do, I think. I’m sure that many people would disagree but I think there is a lot to be said for what modern producers are doing, it’s not simple.”

Hart has played another great musician, John Lennon, twice for the films *The Hours And Times* and *Backbeat*. However, portraying a legend such as Lennon, or indeed Beethoven, wasn’t as formidable a task for Hart as one might think.

“John Lennon is a symbol for a lot of people but they don’t know who he really was and what he was really like,” explains Hart. “So, for me, there was a lot of freedom in playing a character like that. So long as you do that thing with your eyes and you occasionally make John Lennonesque faces, people are comfortable with it; that does half the job of convincing an audience that everything else you do is consistent with the truth.

“It’s not necessarily easier playing real people but you can get more information about them to make your performance more rounded. You have access to the same material as the writer; you can go to the books the writer went to or you can listen to the same piece of music. With a fictional character, a scriptwriter may have a very clear idea in his head of what the character is like – he may have written it about his mate or his cousin – but that never translates into the script.”

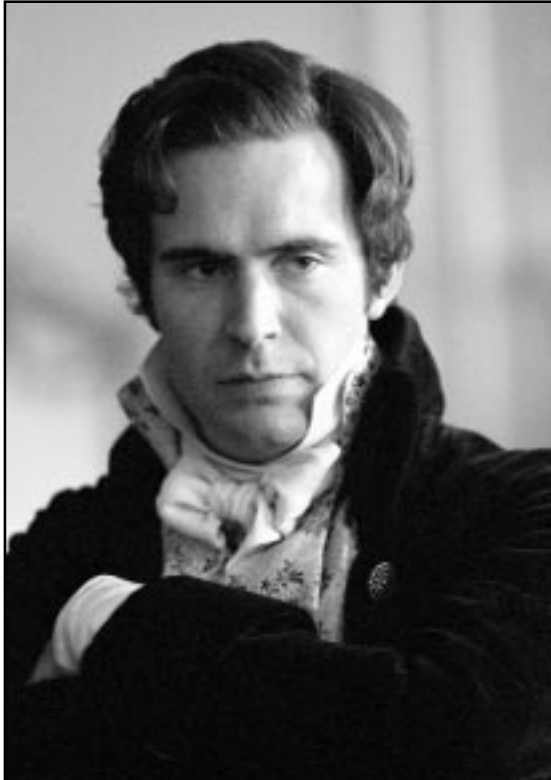
The main challenge for the 39-year-old actor was his preparation for the role, which meant music and conducting lessons, reading up on the composer himself as well as trying to get to grips with the score. “I had to start from scratch,” explains Hart. “I had to make up a new character based on what I knew about him and fill in what the story needed: a certain amount of aggression, a certain amount of anger, a feeling of isolation, of being misunderstood, which was partly borne out of his deafness.

“The more deaf Beethoven became, the less he was able to communicate with people, so he became frustrated and angry. I guess he was starting to feel paranoid as well. You would feel paranoid if you can’t hear what people are saying about you.

“I also had conducting lessons from a conductor from the Royal College of Music, but I still found it difficult. The musicians in the performance could have reacted really badly; an actor coming in with a funny wig on and he starts waving his hands around – they could have gone against me, but a lot of it is getting people on your side in that situation. I was lucky. They were lovely people and I got on well with them. My one consolation was that people would say, ‘Well Beethoven wasn’t a very good conductor!’”

After filming *Eroica*, Hart had only a short break before starting work on his new project, *White On White*, with Alan Cumming and Willem Dafoe. But he finds the insecurity of wondering where the next job is coming from hard to cope with now that he has a family. “Having a family and acting for a living aren’t always compatible, but it is the only thing I can do.”

Jack Davenport plays Prince Lobkowitz



Jack Davenport seems to have cornered the market in playing upper-crust English gents like Norrington in the recent box-office hit, *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, and saucy, ex-public schoolboy types like Miles in *This Life* or, more recently, Steve in *Coupling*. This time, however, the 30-year-old actor plays a 19th-century Viennese aristocrat with a limp: Prince Lobkowitz, the generous patron to Beethoven, for whom the rehearsal of the Third Symphony is performed.

“I rather liked Lobkowitz, in as much as I think, historically, a lot of those symphonies wouldn’t exist without him. He may not have had the talent but he did have the cash, and he chose to spend it on patronising the arts rather than just building another palace or some celebration of him and his family. I think he ended up bankrupting himself but if you are going to be profligate with inherited money, then that’s quite a good way to go!”

Davenport, an ex-Cheltonian and the son of Maria Aitken and Nigel Davenport, has established himself as one of the new Brit Pack who are conquering Hollywood. Having played significant roles in recent hits such as *The Talented Mr Ripley* and Gore Verbinski’s *Pirates Of The Caribbean* with Johnny Depp, he spends a lot of time in America but still finds the “superficial” life of LA a turn-off.

“On one level, being in Hollywood is no different to being an actor here, insomuch as all you’re really doing is going out trying to find work and nail that work down. However, it is very much a one-industry town, so people think, talk, breathe, sleep and even defecate little else. It’s all about movies which can be a bit wearing because you can end up thinking, ‘Come on guys, there are other things in life!’ But, on the other hand, it’s an exciting place to be if you’re working.

“I don’t think I’ll be moving out there just yet though. There are stories I’d like to be part of that are very much to do with being British. Something like *Eroica*, for example, would not get made over in Hollywood because, as a proposal, it would seem nigh on ludicrous and quite risky, but it is exactly the sort of thing that would get done over here, especially by the BBC. Those pieces of work can often be the more interesting ones. Yes it’s lovely to be in big, glamorous, gazillion-dollar-grossing films, but it’s not the be all and end all.

“I didn’t do a huge amount of research – a bit of reading and getting my limp right! I was playing someone who was living in the 19th century and there was the odd portrait, but he is not well known. I think it’s more difficult to play historical figures if there is any film record of them. I was once asked to play Anthony Eden, but one of the reasons I baulked at the idea was the fact that everyone knows who he is and what he looked like, and that made me quite nervous. Ian’s [Hart] absolutely stuffed in that respect because he’s playing one of the greatest composers of all time!

“Beethoven aside, the film is less about the people and more about the music. The construction of the

piece is not about giving some detailed historical re-enactment of these characters but the amazing cultural event that the first performance of this symphony entailed. Our job as actors was to respond to the music, and it seemed more important to me to keep one's responses as fresh as possible."

Davenport developed an appreciation of classical music mainly because his parents played it all the time. As well as this, the uniqueness of the piece drew him to it. "It was such an odd proposal for a film in terms of its structure – the emphasis is very much on what you're hearing rather than what you're seeing.

"I have a much fuller understanding now of how epoch-making the symphony was. The musicians told me that the symphony is the equivalent of punk rock, inasmuch as it breaks every single rule. I can now fully appreciate how nuts it is!"

Davenport has just finished a film with Deborah Messing (of *Will And Grace* fame) but is philosophical about living up to the reputation of his parents. "I will always ask what they think because my father's been a professional actor for over 50 years. Why wouldn't you ask someone with that much experience what they think?"

However, even with his Hollywood career on the ascendant, Davenport is as keen as ever to film the new series of hit sitcom *Coupling* later this year. "We know each other so well and know exactly what we are meant to be doing. And it's fun, of course. It's half an hour of penis jokes per week, and what person doesn't like a good penis joke?"