

## Publicity/Press Releases for TV Films of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*

Channel 4 Television

*The following items are the descriptions/publicity material for the four films of A Dance to the Music of Time issued by UK Channel 4 Television to publicise the production in Autumn 1997. The text of these items has been copied, unedited, from the Channel 4 TV web site, as no way has been found to provide a dynamic link to them. The text is, needless to say, Channel 4's copyright.*

**Thursday 9 October**

**21.00 A DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF TIME**

Anthony Powell's 12-volume novel sequence ... written for the screen by Hugh Whitmore, is a sharp, comic portrait of upper class and bohemian England spanning almost a century, from the early '20s to modern times. Produced as four, two-hour films, it is a witty and trenchant commentary on the social and sexual revolution which transformed British society. Friendship, adultery, ambition and failure are set against the backdrop of London's social, political and artistic life.

There have been several unsuccessful attempts to dramatise Powell's epic masterpiece, but by taking three novels per film, Hugh Whitmore was able to be faithful to the spirit of the work rather than strictly "faithful" to the books. Although he has reduced the cast of characters, there are still more than 100 roles.

Centre-stage is Kenneth Widmerpool (SIMON RUSSELL BEALE), one of the great comic characters of 20th-century literature. Once the butt of schoolboy jokes, Widmerpool's rise to power through business, the military and finally politics, confounds his blue-blooded contemporaries. The comings and goings of Widmerpool and his circle, falling in and out of each other's lives, is charted by the omnipresent Nicholas Jenkins (JAMES PUREFOY/JOHN STANDING) who acts as a guide through the web of interwoven relationships.

The distinguished cast also includes SEAN BAKER, ALAN BENNETT, JONATHAN CAKE, JAMES CALLIS, JOANNA DAVID, EMMA FIELDING, LUCY FLEMING, EDWARD FOX, JOHN GIELGUD, PAUL RHYS, MIRANDA RICHARDSON, CLAIRE SKINNER, HARRIET WALTER and ZOË WANAMAKER.

All four films of *A Dance to the Music of Time* are produced by Alvin Rakoff, who also directed films 1 and 3. His work for television has included *A Voyage Round My Father* and *Best of Friends*. The director of films 2 and 4 is Christopher Morahan, whose many major TV credits include producing and co-directing *The Jewel in the Crown* and, most recently, *Summer's Day Dream*. The music is composed by Carl Davis.

In tonight's opening episode, Nicholas (James Purefoy), a young man in his mid-twenties, is having an affair with a married woman, Jean Duport, née Templer (Claire Skinner). She tells Nicholas that her husband, Bob Duport (NICHOLAS JONES) is returning from abroad to start a new job with a man called Widmerpool.

Nicholas was at school with Widmerpool and he recalls those years in the early 1920s, and particularly his enduring friendships with Charles Stringham (Paul Rhys) and Jean's brother, Peter Templer (Jonathan Cake). Widmerpool was the school buffoon and the victim of much mockery. Nicholas and Stringham go up to Oxford together although Stringham leaves before taking a degree to start a business career with the Donners-Brebner company. Nicholas and Widmerpool meet from time to time, most notably at a splendid London ball where Widmerpool is humiliated by the girl with whom both he and Nicholas are in love. In a seedy hotel in Bayswater, Uncle Giles (Edward Fox), disreputable brother of Nicholas's father, introduces Nicholas to a mysterious clairvoyant, Mrs Erdleigh (GILLIAN BARGE) who prophesies that Nicholas will soon meet a great love.

Nicholas, now working for a publishing firm, has a drink with his old friend Peter Templer and because of this, again meets Jean. They start an affair. Nicholas takes Jean to the Wallace Collection and they hear an art historian describing Poussin's masterpiece, *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Nicholas attends an Old Boys' reunion dinner. Widmerpool makes a speech of great length and pomposity, during which their former house-master, Le Bas (OLIVER FORD DAVIES) collapses with a stroke. Later that night, Nicholas goes to Jean's flat. She tells him that her husband is returning from abroad. Their love affair is over.

**Thursday 16 October**  
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Tonight's film opens with Nicholas working as a scriptwriter in a film studio. A colleague, Chips Lovell takes Nicholas to a party given by his aunt, Lady Molly and her husband, Ted Jeavons.

Another guest is Widmerpool, who has become engaged to the Honourable Mildred Blaides. Chips tells Nicholas about Lady Molly's nieces, the Tolland girls. Chips is in love with Priscilla Tolland. During a country weekend at the cottage belonging to left-wing journalist J.G. Quiggin, Nicholas meets Isobel Tolland and falls in love with her. He takes Isobel to the house where he lived as a child and tells her of the unfortunate maidservant who believed the place was haunted.

Lady Molly gives a party to celebrate Nicholas and Isobel's forthcoming marriage. Widmerpool has been sexually humiliated by Mildred Blaides and their engagement is off. Hugh Moreland, a prominent young composer, invites Nicholas and Isobel to hear the first performance of his new piano quintet. At a party afterwards, Nicholas sees his old friend Charles Stringham who is struggling to overcome alcoholism.

Nicholas and Isobel visit Moreland in the country. They are invited to dinner at Sir Magnus Donner's castle. A fellow guest is Peter Templer and his new wife Betty. Widmerpool arrives in his uniform as an officer in the Territorial Army. Hitler is on the march and there is much talk of war.

Uncle Giles has a fatal heart attack and Nicholas travels to the seaside town where the old man lived. A fellow guest at the shabby hotel is Bob Duport, ex-husband of Nicholas's former mistress. Duport knows nothing of the affair and tells Nicholas some painfully indiscreet stories about his ex-wife's love life. Uncle Giles is cremated and Nicholas returns home to Isobel. War is declared and Nicholas is fearful of the future.

**Thursday 23 October**  
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Tonight's film is set in wartime and Isobel, now pregnant, is living in the country with her sister Susan. Nicholas, a second lieutenant, goes on a general training course where he meets a brash young officer called Odo Stevens. A weekend leave gives Nicholas an opportunity to visit Isobel and Susan. Odo Stevens gives him a lift. Priscilla, now married to Chips Lovell is also staying at Susan's house - Odo clearly finds her attractive and the feeling is mutual.

Nicholas is posted to Divisional Headquarters where his commanding officer is none other than Widmerpool. Nicholas is astonished to find that Stringham is a waiter in the officers' mess. Widmerpool is disconcerted by this, fearing that Stringham will cause trouble.

Chips Lovell goes to see Susan and tells her that Priscilla has run away with Odo Stevens. Chips is most anxious to preserve his marriage and meets Nicholas at a London restaurant to discuss the situation. Chips goes to meet some friends at a nightclub and Nicholas dines with Hugh Moreland. They see Priscilla with Odo Stevens who is on embarkation leave. That night there is an air raid and Chips is killed at the night club. Priscilla and Lady Molly, with whom she is staying, are both killed when the house is destroyed by a bomb. Nicholas learns that Widmerpool has transferred Stringham to a mobile laundry unit which is about to be sent abroad. Nicholas is angry with Widmerpool who then reveals that he is to be posted to the Cabinet Office in London. Stringham's unit is sent to Singapore where he is captured ...

## Thursday 30 October

### 21.00 A DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF TIME

Film Four. Anthony Powell's 12-volume novel sequence ... written for the screen by Hugh Whitmore, is a sharp, comic portrait of upper class and bohemian England spanning almost a century, from the early '20s to modern times. Produced as four, two-hour films, it is a witty and trenchant commentary on the social and sexual revolution which transformed British society. Friendship, adultery, ambition and failure are set against the backdrop of London's social, political and artistic life.

Tonight's final film, set 15 years after the end of the war, finds Nicholas writing a book about Robert Burton, the Elizabethan scholar who wrote *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Nicholas's left-wing friend Quiggin is publishing a new literary magazine, *Fission*, which is partly financed by Lord Warminster, brother of Isobel. Widmerpool, now a Labour MP, is one of the contributors.

When Warminster dies unexpectedly, Widmerpool and his wife Pamela are among the mourners, but at a party to launch the magazine, Pamela meets avant-garde novelist X Trapnel and runs away with him.

Nicholas returns to his old school to watch his 15-year-old son playing football. He meets Widmerpool who tells him that Pamela has returned to him. *Fission* collapses through lack of finance; Trapnel goes on an alcoholic spree and dies. Nicholas attends a literary conference in Venice where he meets an American, Russell Gwinnett, who is researching a biographical study of Trapnel. Also present at the conference is a lesbian academic, Emily Brightman who takes Nicholas and Gwinnett to see a Tiepolo painting in a privately-owned palazzo. Nicholas discovers that Pamela Widmerpool is staying at the palazzo; she has been involved in the sudden death of an eminent French intellectual and sexual perversions are suspected. Widmerpool, now a life peer, arrives at the palazzo and is taunted by Pamela who accuses him of being impotent and a voyeur. Widmerpool seems to be involved in minor espionage and tries, unsuccessfully, to enlist Nicholas's aid.

Back in London, Nicholas and Isobel attend a private opera performance given in the grand house owned by Odo Stevens and his rich wife. The performance is conducted by Hugh Moreland. A row erupts between Pamela and Widmerpool and she storms off ...

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