

Britannia Hospital
UK 1982
116 mins

Directed by **Lindsay Anderson**
Written by **David Sherwin**
Cinematography by **Mike Fash**
Edited by **Michael Ellis**
Original Music by **Alan Price**
Produced by **Davina Belling, John Comfort** and **Clive Parsons**

Cast

Leonard Rossiter Vincent Potter; **Brian Pettifer** Biles; **John Moffatt** Greville Figg; **Fulton Mackay** Chief Superintendent Johns; **Vivian Pickles** Matron; **Barbara Hicks** Miss Tinker; **Graham Crowden** Professor Millar; **Jill Bennett** Dr. MacMillan; **Peter Jeffrey** Sir Geoffrey; **Marsha Hunt** Nurse Amanda Persil; **Catherine Willmer** Dr. Houston; **Mary MacLeod** Casualty Sister; **Joan Plowright** Phyllis Grimshaw; **Robin Askwith** Ben Keating; **Dave Atkins** Sharkey; **Malcolm McDowell** Mick Travis; **Mark Hamill** Red; **Frank Grimes** Sammy / Voice of Genesis; **Peter Machin** Peter Mancini; **Marcus Powell** Sir Anthony Mount; **John Bett** Lady Felicity; **Gladys Crosby** Queen Mother; **Rufus Collins** Odingu; **Ram John Holder** Aide; **Jim Findlay** Aide; **Pauline Melville** Clarissa; **Kevin Lloyd** Picket; **Robert Pugh** Picket; **Robbie Coltrane** Picket; **Dandy Nichols** Florrie; **Glen Williams** Whooley; **Brian Glover** Painter; **Mike Grady** Painter; **Tony Haygarth** Fraser; **Jagdish Kumar** Sen; **Patrick Durkin** Blodgett; **Paddy Joyce** Feeney; **Richard Griffiths** Cheerful Bernie; **Dave Hill** Jeff; **Charmian May** Miss Diamond; **Valentine Dyall** Mr. Rochester; **Roland Culver** General Wetherby; **Betty Marsden** Hermione; **Adele Strong** Old Lady; **Ted Burnett** Taxi Driver; **Gabrielle Lloyd** Private Nurse; **Barbara Flynn** Private Nurse; **Val Pringle** President Ngami; **Robert Lee** Mr. Banzai; **Errol Shaker** Captain Mbwami; **Alan Penn** Padre; **Liz Smith** Maisie; **Robin Davies** Adrian; **John Gordon Sinclair** Gregory; **Bob Hornery** BBC Cameraman; **Paul McCleary** Assistant; **Paul Kember** Sound Recordist; **Jane Stonehouse** P.A.; **Patricia Healey** Intensive Care Sister; **Rosemary Martin** Casualty Nurse; **Robert Owen** Ambulanceman; **Ellis Dale** Man in Wheelchair; **Maggie Ollerenshaw** Miss Rowntree; **Elizabeth Bennett** Nurse / Demonstrator; **Patsy Byrne** Nurse; **Brenda Cavendish** Nurse; **David Daker** Guest Workman; **Edward Peel** Guest Workman; **Alan Bates** Macready; **Arthur Lowe** Guest Patient; **T.P. McKenna** Theatre Surgeon; **Michael Medwin** Theatre Surgeon; **Edward Hibbert** Theatre Surgeon; **Peter Holmes** Theatre Surgeon; **Salmaan Peer** Theatre Surgeon; **Janette Foggo** Theatre Nurse; **Cora Kinnaird** Theatre Nurse; **Joshua Bancel**, ; **Burt Caesar** Demonstrator; **Joe Cameron-Brown**, **Ginnette Clarke**, **Paul Cooper**, **Jo Crawford**, **Ronny Cush**, **Derek Hollis**, **Di Langford**, **Roy Macready**, **Roger Martin**, **Verity Anne Meldrum**, **Marsha Miller**, **Yasmin Pettigrew**, **Martin Ransley**, **George Savvides**, **James Stephens**, **David Telfer**, **Helen Webb**, **Major Wiley**, **Eilian Wyn** Demonstrators; **Derek Lyons** Patient

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Britannia Hospital



If this year's general election asked us to confront the idea of 'Broken Britain', we need only look thirty years or so into the past and the beginning of the Thatcher era to recall a time when all the post-war certainties of the UK seemed on the verge of catastrophic collapse. Lindsay Anderson's *Britannia Hospital*, with its truculent trade unionists, pampered private patients, physically freakish aristocrats and violent revolutionaries plays like a dark *Carry On* film, a warped microcosm of the UK in the early 1980s. It ends like a Cronenberg horror, a reminder of the persistent Frankenstein fear of medicine which far predates the genetic revolution.

In using a familiar institution to play out the dramas of a country caught between tradition and neoliberalism, *Britannia Hospital* anticipates two television series of the 1980s: Firstly *The Old Men at the Zoo*, with its animal keepers bewildered by the ways of the modern world; then *A Very Peculiar Practice*, which took up the medical territory, and even one of the leading actors. All of the grandiloquence of Graham Crowden's Professor Millar is in Dr Jock McCannon, tempered only by despair and alcohol.

Britannia Hospital's utterly bizarre climax suggests the impossibility of resolving Britain's problems in the 1980s. The machine gun-toting public schoolboys of Anderson's *If...* are reborn as a multiracial crowd, whose only demand is equality; their power and fury is both exhilarating and terrifying. Professor Millar can articulate anger at a world of simultaneous plenty and starvation, but his terrifying scientific response suggests that even Lindsay Anderson couldn't see a way out of the impasse to which Margaret Thatcher had brought Britain by 1982.

Social Justice

What *Britannia Hospital* shares with its forerunners is a vitriolic sense of social justice. The hospital of the title acts as a microcosm for all of (Thatcherite) Britain, and demonstrates the 'powder-keg' nature of a society in which the privileged classes rub shoulders with the downtrodden. The institutions and individuals of both the political Left and the Right are held responsible for the ensuing chaos - patients die in hospital corridors as hospital-workers go on strike, while policemen viciously club protesters to the accompaniment of 'God Save the Queen'. This cruel and unforgiving depiction of human society recalls, at first, the aloof detachment of Anderson's much earlier *O Dreamland* (1953).

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Big Picture is a series of screenings organised by Big Ideas which take place at The Paradise by way of Kensal Green. The film screening is followed by an open discussion around the ideas presented in the film.

www.bigi.org.uk/bigpicture
www.theparadise.co.uk

Big Ideas is a series of events, mostly held in pubs in London. Anyone is welcome to turn up.

Sessions generally start with a question. Someone who has some relevant expertise gives a very brief, informal talk. After that a discussion develops in a free and unstructured manner. It's not a lecture, and it's not a debate; it's a pub argument, but unlike any you've had before.

In case you were worried, Big Ideas isn't affiliated with any political, religious or other organisation, and we don't have any particular agenda.

Big Picture next month

Pressure



Monday 11th October
Doors 7pm / Film 7.30pm

To celebrate Black History Month, we screen the first feature film directed by a black British filmmaker, and shot in West London, right on the doorstep of the Paradise. Co-written by Sam Selvon (*The Lonely Londoners*), Horace Ove's film tangles with the politics of racism and black liberation, seen through the eyes of a young black teenager, Anthony, who discovers that Britain might not have all to offer him that he thought.

Buy tickets at
www.bigi.org.uk/bigpicture

However, *Britannia Hospital's* final scene contextualises all that has preceded it, and serves to reveal the film as the most humane in all of Anderson's work. When Professor Millar's nightmarish 'Genesis' project - an exposed, pulsating brain wired to machinery - gives a (literally) soulless rendition of the "What a piece of work is man..." speech from *Hamlet*, its failings are all too apparent. Compared to such an inhumane device, people, in all their absurdity and with all their faults, are held up as something to be celebrated.

From Peter Hoskin's analysis at Screenonline
www.screenonline.org.uk

Location, location, location

Although the film's interior scenes were filmed at studios in Wembley, London, the exterior shots - of which there were many - were filmed at Friern Barnet Hospital, New Southgate, north of London. The hospital continued to operate normally throughout the filming in September 1981, although some disruption was inevitable. The hospital's green fields were covered with marquees, providing dressing rooms, toilets and wardrobe facilities, and a kitchen to feed the five hundred cast and two hundred crew was installed in the grounds. Near the entrance, a pair of gatehouses and two tall wrought-iron gates were erected, to be knocked down by the stampede of protesters at the end of the film. The hospital itself was chosen because of its impressive Victorian architecture - albeit not quite Britannia's five hundred years old - and it received a payment of £5,000 for its involvement. The then Friern Hospital administrator Geoffrey Smith commented to local reporters: "They've certainly brightened the place up, and we've had no trouble at all"

From leonardrossiter.com

Millar's speech

Friends! Fellow members of the human race! We are gathered here for a purpose. Let us look together at mankind. What do we see? We see mastery. What wonders mankind can perform. He can cross the oceans and continents today, as easily as our grandfathers crossed the street. Tomorrow he will as easily cross the vast territories of space. He can make deserts fertile and plant cabbages on the Moon. And what does man *choose*? Alone among the creatures of this world, the human race chooses to annihilate itself. Since the last world conflict ended there has not been one day in which human beings have not been slaughtering or wounding one another in 230 different wars. And man breeds as recklessly as he lays waste. By the end of the century, the population of the world will have tripled. Two thirds of our plant species will have been destroyed, 55% of the animal kingdom and 70% of our mineral resources. Out of every hundred human beings now living 80 will die without ever knowing what it feels like to be fully nourished, while a tiny minority indulge themselves in absurd and extravagant luxuries. A motion picture entertainer of North America will receive as much money in a month as would feed a starving South American tribe for a hundred years! We waste! We destroy! And we cling like savages to our superstitions. We give power to leaders of state and church as prejudiced and small-minded as ourselves who squander our resources on instruments of destruction while millions continue to suffer and go hungry, condemned forever to lives of ignorance and deprivation. And why is this? It is because mankind has denied intelligence, the unique glory of our species... the human brain. Man is entering an era of infinite possibility, still imprisoned in a feeble, inefficient body. Still manacled by primitive notions of morality, which have no place in an age of science. Still powered by a brain that has hardly developed since the species emerged from the caves. Only a new intelligence can save mankind! Only a new human being of pure brain can lead man forward into the new era. I do not speak of dreams. Such a being exists already. I have created it! It is here, now! Prepare yourselves to meet the human of the future. Neither man nor woman. Greater than either. I have given it a name. Genesis. Birth. A new birth. A new beginning for mankind. People of today, behold your future!

Programme notes written and compiled by Danny Birchall