

CLINTON GREYN (1933-2019)

The great legacy of CLINTON GREYN (1933-2019) is as one of the 1960s' British adventure series' unsung heroes. His Captain Robert Virgin in ATV's *Virgin of the Secret Service* (1968) stands as one of the classic English gentleman swashbucklers of the decade, alongside Gerald Harper's *Adam Adamant* and Patrick Macnee's John Steed in *The Avengers*.

Created by Ted Willis, *Virgin of the Secret Service* (thankfully available on DVD since 2013) was an entertaining, tongue-in-cheek, Boys' Own-style saga of derring-do and stiff upper-lip, in which Captain Virgin, aided by the glamorous Mrs. Cortez (Veronica Strong) and his loyal batman Doublett (John Cater) defended far-flung corners of the British Empire from its foes, most frequently the scheming Teutonic villain Karl Von Brauner (Alexander Doré).

Imperial in theme, sardonic in tone, the jury's still out on whether *Virgin of the Secret Service* was short-lived because by 1968 it was too old-fashioned or, instead, because it was ahead of its time. But the fact that it was filmed in grainy black-and-white wouldn't have helped.

Clinton Greyn also guest-starred in other adventure series of the era, such as *The Champions* and *Department S*, and he lent distinguished support to several prestigious films of the 1960s: Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960) starring Paul Newman and Eva Marie Saint; Ralph Thomas's *The High Bright Sun* (1964), with Dirk Bogarde, George Chakiris and Susan Strasberg; Peter Yates's *Robbery* (1967), starring Stanley Baker; the Shirley MacLaine vehicle *Woman Times Seven* (1967), directed by Vittorio De Sica; and Herbert Ross's good-looking but ill-advised musical adaptation of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1969), with Peter O'Toole and Petula Clark.

In 1971, Greyn featured in two starry but lacklustre films: Jack Haley Jr.'s *The Love Machine*, with Dyan Cannon and Robert Ryan, based on the best-selling novel by Jacqueline Susann; and he was teamed with fellow Welshman Richard Burton in *Raid on Rommel*, directed by Henry Hathaway. Largely cobbled together from leftover footage from Arthur Hiller's *Tobruk* (1967), *Raid on Rommel* was a regrettable waste of the talents of all concerned.

Yet the early 1970s also saw perhaps Greyn's finest hour on television -- his performance as Major Euan Cameron in BBC Scotland's *Scotch on the Rocks* (1973). Based on the novel by Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond, this was a five-part drama, screened in May and June of 1973, envisaging a Scotland rent by violence and terrorism in the quest for Independence.

Scotch on the Rocks provoked such intense controversy the BBC promised it would never be repeated, and it has remained locked in their vaults ever since. I can vividly remember its terribly disturbing final scene in which Greyn's character commits suicide. This scene is, it so happens, available to view in a short clip on YouTube. And there's an ironic yet iconographic significance for Greyn. His weekly exploits as Captain Virgin ended with the credits playing against a close-up of the Union Jack flying; *Scotch on the Rocks* climaxes with Cameron dead by his own hand, as his mother beseeches the authorities not to cover his body with 'that flag'.

Banning a programme because it may upset the political sensibilities of certain sections of the population is not the mark of a mature, free, open, democratic society. It's time this ridiculous and elitist ban was lifted, so that people can make up their own minds -- and so that they can appreciate the outstanding performance of a fine actor who, sadly, is no longer with us.

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