

ELIZABETH R EPISODE 1: THE LION'S CUB

Followed by a Q&A with **GLENDA JACKSON** CBE, hosted by **MATTHEW SWEET**

Glenda Jackson's award-studded career on screen and stage has brought her a BAFTA and two Oscars wins for her film acting, an Emmy for her television work, and countless nominations (including Tonys for her Broadway appearances); but she is perhaps associated most in the public's mind with her tour-de-force portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I in the BBC's landmark historical drama *Elizabeth R* (1971).

The six-part series *Elizabeth R* is widely regarded as one of the finest dramas ever produced by the BBC. For **Glenda Jackson**, her portrayal of Elizabeth I in the title role was one of the most satisfying performances of her career. "*Elizabeth R* was the BBC at its best. Everything was very thorough in those days. I was taught how to write Elizabeth's signature, I was taught to ride side saddle. I was even taught how to fire a bow and arrow..." (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2003)

Elizabeth R was a sequel to the BBC's earlier epic *Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1970). Both proved vastly popular on both sides of the Atlantic, each series having individual episodes written and directed by different teams; but it was Glenda Jackson,

RELEASE YEAR: 1971
RUNTIME: 85 mins
DIRECTOR: Claude Whatham
SCREENWRITER: John Hale

adorned in a stunning array of period costumes, who has become seared into the collective consciousness as the living embodiment of the Virgin Queen.

The costume design for the series was showered with plaudits. Multiple award winning costume designer **Elizabeth Waller** had intricate reproductions made from historical records, including the painstaking recreation of the sumptuous gown and ruff worn by the real Elizabeth I in her 1575 'Phoenix portrait'. The dress was



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such an accurate reproduction, it now resides permanently in the Museum of London.

The series' opening episode, 'The Lion's Cub', is of special importance. It introduces us to the then princess Elizabeth at a most perilous moment in her young life; at the same time the episode allowed a young Glenda Jackson to showcase her genius at what was to prove a pivotal moment in her career.

The writer of 'The Lion's Cub' was **John Hale** who had provided the screenplay for director **Charles Jarrott's** earlier Tudor-set block-buster film, *Anne of a Thousand Days* (1969). Shortly after working on 'The Lion's Cub', Hale went on to partner with Jarrott again, as screenwriter for Jarrott's follow-up film *Mary, Queen of Scots* (1971). Jackson's impressive performance in *Elizabeth R*, especially her portrayal of the endangered princess in Hale's episode, assured Jackson an invitation to reprise this role in the 1971 collaboration, helping cement Jackson's burgeoning career in America.

THE LION'S CUB EPISODE

The title of the first episode comes from a quote from the real monarch herself: "I may not be a lion, but I am a lion's cub, and I have a lion's heart"; Jackson captures perfectly this fiery and tenacious ability of a still teenage princess to survive in a world of plots and betrayals that had killed her mother.

Beginning with the dramatic failure of her would-be lover Lord Seymour (**John Ronane**) to abduct the sickly boy king Edward VI (**Jason Kemp**), suspicions quickly turn to his ward, the young princess Elizabeth herself. Glenda Jackson awakes to an empty castle; calling for her servants she is arrested and questioned in her nightclothes. With her beloved maid being tortured to confess treason in the Tower of London all looks bleak for the princess, however, an unlikely protector in the form of William Cecil (**Ronald Hines**) emerges to save her.

The death of the teenage King Edward VI triggers a brutal royal



succession that quickly pits Elizabeth against her older, embittered sister Mary (**Daphne Slater**) in a lethal struggle. Seething rivalries at court intertwine with religious upheaval. Princess Elizabeth's youth, beauty and Protestant faith provoke Mary, now an unpopular and unstable queen, to suspect her sister of treason and witchcraft. With Slater consummately portraying an increasingly delusional Queen Mary, Jackson excels as the young princess, desperately trying to survive frightening intrigues that may cost her her life.

MATTHEW SWEET

Matthew Sweet presents *Free Thinking* and *Sound of Cinema* on BBC Radio

3 and *The Philosopher's Arms* on BBC Radio 4. His books and television programmes include *Inventing The Victorians*, *Shepperton Babylon*, *The Rules Of Film Noir* and *Silent Britain*. His most recent book is *The West End Front: The Wartime Secrets Of London's Grand Hotels*.

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