



DVD press release

Peter Whitehead and the Sixties Wholly Communion & Benefit of the Doubt

Legendary filmmaker Peter Whitehead was at the heart of Swinging London, chronicling the youth explosion, the burgeoning popular music scene and the counterculture of the 1960s. In March the NFT hosted a comprehensive retrospective of his work. Now the BFI releases two of his films for the first time; *Wholly Communion* (1965) and *Benefit of the Doubt* (1967), coupled with a new interview with Peter and additional rare footage. With over three hours of material, *Peter Whitehead and the Sixties* is a fascinating document of the radical, experimental, literary and theatrical scenes of 60s London.

On 11 June 1965, the Royal Albert Hall played host to a slew of American and European beat poets for an extraordinary impromptu event – the International Poetry Incarnation – that arguably marked the birth of London’s gestating counterculture. Cast in the role of historian, as a man-on-the-scene, and massively elevating his limited resources, Whitehead constructed the extraordinary *Wholly Communion* from the unfolding circus. As Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, Harry Fainlight, Alexander Trocchi and others took to the stage, Whitehead confidently wandered with his borrowed camera, creating a participatory and anarchic film that is as much a landmark as the event itself, and launched his career.

Following this success, Whitehead was invited to film a controversial new play, *US*, by radical theatre director Peter Brook. Building on the provocative question of Britain’s relationship to America during the Vietnam War, Whitehead pushed the issue of complicity further, challenging the relationship between the actors – including a young Glenda Jackson – and their performances. Steadfast and provocative in its consideration of international relations and war, *Benefit of the Doubt* has troubling relevance to the current political climate.

Extras

- Exclusive specially commissioned interview with Peter Whitehead – for which he returns to the Soho flat he once lived in (44 mins)
- *Jeanetta Cochrane* (1967), Whitehead’s rarely seen experimental short, featuring music from Pink Floyd
- Footage from the George Devine Memorial Plays Performances at The Old Vic featuring Laurence Olivier, Alec Guinness and Albert Finney
- Footage of Vanessa Redgrave at the Royal Albert Hall (1966)

The DVD also contains an 18-page illustrated booklet with an essay by William Fowler, Curator of Artists’ Moving Image, BFI National Archive, biography of Peter Whitehead, notes on the extras and credits

Release date: 29 October 2007

RRP £19.99 / cat. no. BFIVD750 / cert 12

UK / 1965-67 / colour / 98 mins + 91 mins extra material / ratio 1.33:1

This disc contains optional subtitles for the hearing-impaired on all items

BFI DVDs are available from the Filmstore at BFI Southbank, all good retailers, by mail order from the Filmstore on 0207 815 1350 or online at www.bfi.org.uk/dvd

Press contact: Jill Reading, BFI Press Office
Tel: (020) 7957 4759 or e-mail jill.reading@bfi.org.uk

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