



The Last Waltz

DAVE BARRIE CARRIES OUT A FURTHER POST-MORTEM ON THE ENIGMATIC PRISONER EPISODE DANCE OF THE DEAD

REGULAR readers of *In The Village* may recall an article I wrote entitled 'In The Land Of Dark Dreams And Long Shadows'. This appeared in the Spring 1994 issue and examined the episode *Dance Of The Dead* in some depth. I discussed, amongst other things, the work of Jean Cocteau, Anthony Skene's influential play *The File On Harry Jordan* and I spoke with John S. Smith, the editor, about the altered ending to the story. It was gratifying to see in the following issue members commenting on my article, and mentioning both Cocteau and 'Harry Jordan'.

I was left therefore with, I felt, an article incomplete. I thought I should do some more research and endeavour to present my findings to you. For example I wondered if the original ending had been filmed? Just why was the episode put on one side? And what of the Cocteau influence? So I embarked upon my little journey, and found more that I bargained for.

Firstly however, I have a confession to make. When I wrote my article I was labouring under the impression that Anthony Skene had not been interviewed by Six of One before. To my embarrassment I find I was wrong! It was some consolation that everybody else I spoke to could not remember the interview either, including Roger Goodman, editor of *Alert* (our first publication) who had conducted the interview by phone.

I traced this interview to the Autumn 1981 *Alert* whilst researching a future article (yes, I *do* plan to write about an episode other than *Dance Of The Dead*) and imagine my surprise at finding, not only Tony Skene's comments but the final half page of the original script. I previously thought that this had never been published until Bruce Clarke's script analysis in *Number Six* magazine. When I asked Roger Goodman about this page of script he could remember nothing about it unfortunately. Well, it was fourteen years ago...

As this interview has probably not been seen by a fair number of members I thought it might be worthwhile to include a major part of it here. What follows then, is the interview accompanied by commentary.

Dance Of The Dead is a triumph of surrealism in The Prisoner, sustained by the instinctive force of its writer's personal vision:

After all, I was allowed (such was everyone's virginity) virtually to show Number 1, even if he was an unbreakable telex. I believe it was originally scheduled to go out as the second show which would have made its conclusions even worse. Yes, the Villagers were determined on Number 6's destruction. But then, there is a fundamental belief in television all over the world that a week is a long time and people forget, particularly when the next episode starts. As long as you don't kill or cripple your hero, or give him a wife and kids, the world stays open.

And yet it was 'killing' Number 6, albeit only to the outside world, that Anthony Skene literally did within the narrative of this episode which defies normal summary. What, for instance are Mr. Tuxedo and Peter Pan doing down on the beach in the first place? What is Number 6's

observer saying to the maid at the foot of the village steps to the shore?

In a series of sub-plots that together form a kind of three-dimensional maze, the author takes us on a tortuous course:

I have always been fascinated by the labyrinth and have used it in various ways. I think also at the time I was somewhat in love with the world of Jean Cocteau. So the Orphic element (undeniably there) is shamefully second-hand. The strange voice on the radio is unashamed Cocteau, as might be the beautiful young man dead on the beach, and the two-way glass, mirror and window. Though I don't think that the central issue is life and death. I don't think it ever is in *The Prisoner*; it is about chains and freedom.

The Prisoner as a work of art - it is not for me to say. Not through modesty or even ignorance but simply because the judgement can only be made by the audience, that is their role in the exchange. I'm not sure that the whole series has the discipline that is the basic necessity in a work of art. As usual in television there was too little time. But you won't catch me laughing when I hear the suggestion made.

Yes, I do think people felt it was to be something special. Perhaps not so much special as different. It lifted everyone out of their grooves and that is no bad thing. It had a life of its own even in the early days.

It is significant to see the importance that Skene places upon the work of Cocteau. You may remember I did briefly mention the connection in my previous article.

I would like to thank those members who were kind enough to express their interest and on the strength of that I would like to open the door wider to the captivating land of Cocteau's fertile mind. Let me share glimpses, or enlarge upon that already said, attempting to describe three of his best loved films with you. I viewed them all recently.

The first film *The Blood Of A Poet* was made in 1930. It is essentially an amateur production. An unconventional film in every



way. *Halliwell's Guide* states that the film is "indescribable — and may or may not be meaningful". *Revue du Cinema* claimed "it must be placed among the classic masterpieces of the seventh art". The film attempts to describe the poetic state. Cocteau designed the film as a series of episodes centring on a poet condemned to walk the corridors of 'the Hotel of Dramatic Follies'. His crime was to give a statue life. The statue advises him to enter another world (of the imagination?) by passing through a mirror. The film opens and closes with the image of a chimney crashing to the ground, indicating all the action takes place in a relative time, from the poet's perspective. The film is sheer surreal fantasy, dream-like, full of striking imagery. Personally I found it mentally stimulating and visually breathtaking.

The second film is *La Belle Et La Bette* from 1946. I will add to that already

written in "Long Shadows". Bear in mind I had not seen the film for fifteen years. We see a film that really has the 'feel', the atmosphere of *Dance Of The Dead*. Even in *Time Out*, the notoriously critical magazine, the film critic was moved to write: "Cocteau's fairy tale set standards in fantasy which few other film-makers have reached — the sequences in the enchanted castle are pure magic". In fact this film is showered with praise by critics, "Absolute magic — diamond cold and lunar bright" is typical. It is a fairy tale and it is easy to see how Skene was captivated by Cocteau's work. In this tale of Beauty and the Beast, based on the story by Mme. Leprince De Beaumont (1757), the scenes set in the castle are remarkably reminiscent of Number 6's wandering through the subterranean corridors in *Dance Of The Dead*. Of course, the third of these films *Orphée*, filmed in 1950, with its bizarre radio messages

("One glass of water will illumine the world... twice" being one example), the beautiful dead poet, the escape from a window, the journey to the underworld, the forlorn character who could be taken for Dutton, perhaps comes closest to *Dance Of The Dead*, as Skene outlines in the *Alert* interview above. Far from lessening my admiration for the episode, viewing the Cocteau trilogy has only served to enable me to appreciate it even more.

Turning from Cocteau to the world of Anthony Skene, I would like to dwell on his play *The File On Harry Jordan*. It was mentioned by Nigel Lever in 'Village Post' and I thought readers would be interested to know more about it, particularly as both Georgina Cookson and Peter Howell take leading roles to Shane Bryant's Harry Jordan.

The play opens in a cafeteria where the background music can be identified as *We Got To Get Out Of This Place* by The

Animals. Harry, hungry, jobless, full of bravado, is seduced by the elegant Miss Cookson with the promise of a job at Jacksons, her families firm.

Prisoner enthusiasts will find much to enjoy here as the play unfolds. There is a word association test as part of the job selection procedure. ("Hope" is suggested, "Money" replies Harry). He fills in the application form in such a way that when the crosses on the form are measured against a template, the Personnel Officer realises that this is 'for most particular attention' and should be referred 'upstairs'.

Sinister agents, sent by... (the man upstairs, we assume) arrange for Harry's girlfriend to be sent to work many miles away as Harry is given the junior post of Filing Clerk. Cue room stacked with metal filing cabinets "There's always been a system, and we are its servants," Harry is told. A hidden microphone in the ceiling hears all.

Harry enquires about a colleague. "He was here yesterday — they must have moved him," comes the reply. A portrait of the founder hangs in a prominent position, it could be...

All staircases lead up, to the offices below the floor of mystery, the top floor. The lift beckons, Harry follows its upward movement with his eyes. He is an innocent caught, a victim of his ambition and curiosity, lured by forces beyond his comprehension. These forces arrange for him to accidentally meet a new 'girlfriend'. He shares his secret with her, a black book containing details of imaginary share dealings. If he was playing for real "in seven years I would have made £14 million," he tells her as she returns his gaze, a glint in her eye. They have their man.

One night he stays late, gives security the slip. Locked in with the final links slipping away. Now he can take the lift to the top floor.

"Do come in Mr. Jordan, I've been waiting for you."

"You're Mr. Jackson?" A smiling Peter Howell.

They walk from the ante room into a plush office, the door closes behind them.

"Sit down, in the chair, see if it suits you."

Harry eases himself behind the large imposing desk.

"My father devoted himself to the business, never left this office, as I..."

Harry is bewildered, still unaware of his fate. Enter the dwarf butler.

"Who is he?"

"Our servant."

"I don't get this."

"I've resigned. Sixty today. I have no

son. You are exactly what we want... I shall go now, to be free at last... You stay, get used to the feel of things. You do accept...? Your black book." He surveys the scene, smiles and exits.

Still not realising, Harry summons the dwarf. "I'm Boss — Boss of what?" The dwarf mute butler brings him a stack of files. Harry gets up to leave. The door to the ante room is no longer visible, it has merged with the wall. He opens the door Jackson left by, to reveal a gaping void, a lift shaft, and no sign of a lift. Realisation dawns. "I can never get out. No-one can get in. Help me. Someone." — End credits. —

A fascinating *Prisoneresque* piece. Turning once more to *Dance Of The Dead* itself and the unfinished business. I corresponded both with Norma West, who played Number 6's observer and Geoff Foot, who was the original editor until John S. Smith inherited this discarded episode.

Firstly I asked Norma West a number of points I wanted to clarify. There is a scene that has always perplexed some members as the *Alert* interview pointed out. After the confiscation of his radio Number 6 sees Norma and the maid talking earnestly together at the bottom of the stone staircase. The script (scene 76) merely states "The observer talks to another woman. It is the maid. They both glance up towards him, then move off together." Norma told me "Denise and I were simply told to talk together and look up at Pat — we weren't given any reason for doing so — the gist of our conversation was that Number 6 was in trouble". There. Any clearer? I asked Norma about how Mary Morris became Peter Pan, (you remember the script called for Jack-the-Ripper) and Norma replied "Mary chose to be Peter Pan".

Now to refresh our memories, let us turn our attention to the episode's ending, p47. scene 107, as penned by Tony Skene. You recall the original would have Number 6 and the observer leaving Number 2 surrounded by the broken telex. They would have joined in a formation dance. They all dance as if the devil is playing. Faster and faster. Our last shot is of a deserted Village that becomes a glow in the darkness of night.

Well, as we see, rather different to the ending we know. One dance too many perhaps? I turned to Norma again: "As far as I was concerned the only dance sequence filmed was the one shown on the finished film. I'm sure nothing more was shot".

I contacted Geoff Foot to see if he could shed light on what exactly happened to this episode and why McGooohan decided to discard it until it was saved by the timely arrival of John S. Smith. Geoff wrote me an

interesting letter and it is worth quoting in full as it covers a number of points.

Many thanks for your letter and the enclosed magazine. I must say I had no idea of the scope of your society. Surely it must be one of the bigger appreciation societies in this or any other country! Well done to all concerned!

As to the series itself, I must confess that so much film has gone through the moviola since then, that the memory of the series is almost a void! As John S. Smith told you, I was one of the original crew, Lee Doig and myself alternating as each episode came off the floor. I think I am right in saying that I only completed four, at the most five, before leaving for another assignment, and that John took over when I left.

Dance Of The Dead like the other episodes I cut, is very much a dim memory now, though I do seem to recall that when I put it together we were some minutes short of the required length. It was therefore shelved for the time being with the intention of shooting extra material before the series finished.

However, as often happens in film production (particularly in TV film production) shortage of time and money put a stop to that, so the final sequence was made up from spare takes and cuts from other episodes. John was responsible for this and I remember thinking what a very good job he had done. I don't think the delay in finishing it was other than it was too short!!

No other episode rings any sort of bell with me, so I'm not really of very much help. The only really strong memory I have is of asking Pat McGooohan "What is it all about?".

After all as co-writer (under various screen names), producer, director and star if he didn't know, who did? His answer was "Wait till you see the last episode". Well, when I saw that I was pretty convinced that he didn't know either!

I'm surprised that anyone should think of producing a new '*Prisoner*' it seems to me to be asking for trouble. How can it be recreated now? With or without Pat. It is out of its time now, it really was a child of the 60's.

Once again, thanks for the letter and magazine and good luck with the 'Six of One' society.

Sincerely
Geoff Foot

So there we must leave for now this most enigmatic and complex of episodes. And a vote of thanks to John S. Smith. If it was not for his timely arrival we may never have seen *Dance Of The Dead* and I would be writing about the 'lost' episode instead. I'm sure this isn't the end of our story. Time will tell. Just another piece of the jigsaw...

My thanks to Norma West, Geoff Foot and Steven Ricks for their valued contributions and help with this article.