

1987

1987 has been a watershed year. Below Susan Davis introduces our review of the year looking back on the heads that have rolled in the arts and the memorable productions that have come and gone.



Rejoicing: June 1987 renewed Thatcherism's mandate and displayed the disarray of the opposition



BP blunder: The privatisation programme turned into fiasco in the wake of the share crash

When we review the decade, 1987 will have the words 'decisive year' stamped across it in large letters. Decisions taken this year will have far reaching consequences and the effects of some will certainly be felt into the 1990s. Maybe beyond. It's been a year of change with some of the best known names in the arts deciding the grass on the other side really *is* greener and a year when the ebb-tide of funding has been reversed. Money and jobs are the key notes for 1987 and therefore for 1988 as well.

The Arts Minister Richard Luce caused a sharp intake of breath in the arts world when he announced in November that the grant for the coming year would be above the rate of inflation. The sharp intake of breath nearly turned to hyper-ventilation when it was realised that the grant for 1988/89 was to be 10% higher. Cynics wondered if a vital decimal point had been mislaid! It should be said, however, that this level of grant is not to be maintained and the rate will drop to just over 3% for the following two years. Again on the positive side, the precedent of three-year rolling funding has now been established and there is to be a far greater emphasis on incentive funding and sponsorship. In other words, make a success of your business and you will find your reward, if not in heaven then at least from the Arts Council's slightly fuller coffers. It is a major step in the right direction, a complete U-turn and confirms the belief that the arts are an important political force.

In the theatre world, the champion of the subsidised theatre and fierce opponent of previous government strategies on the arts, Sir Peter Hall, completed his final

year as director of the National Theatre. He went out in style with an adventurous production of *Anthony and Cleopatra* (with Judi Dench and Anthony Hopkins) and a promenade production of David Edgar's *Entertaining Strangers* which was cut from a cast of 200 actors to merely a couple of dozen. At the Royal Shakespeare Company, Terry Hands was seen to grasp the reins of power firmly with two hands after his single-grip sharing with Trevor Nunn. Unfortunately the RSC still had a difficult artistic year (certainly compared to the National) though they did have the distinction of premiering *Sarcophagus* on the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. The company also ended the year with promise after presenting *The Rover* by Aphra Benn. Nunn and Hall have been theatrical superstars and it's unlikely that their successors will have the same magnetism. Perhaps they will also have fewer critics.

Outside London the promise of a greater move to promote regional theatre and touring has again been renewed. Michael Gambon and Judi Dench both confirmed their reputations as truly 'great actors' and Alan Ayckbourn's production of Arthur Miller's *A View From The Bridge* continues to be required viewing for all who love theatre.

In the galleries, the legacy for the next years was not in the Old Masters but rather in the new. Michael Levey left the National Gallery and the plans were finally unveiled for the gallery's extension. The latest one caused considerably less fuss than the previous, which had been denounced by Prince Charles as a building which could be



Triumph: Robbie Coltrane as the boorish bopper in the highly acclaimed tv series, *TuttiFrutti*

nothing more than 'a carbuncle on the face of an old friend'. Sir Roy Strong announced he would be leaving his position at the Victoria and Albert Museum. In his last year he oversaw the tricky introduction of museum charges and finally was able to secure the opening of the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden on Shakespeare's birthday after 30 years of problems. The top job at the Tate Gallery will also be up for grabs in 1988.

'Musical chairs' looks like being the most significant production at the Royal Opera House. Both Sir Claus Moser and Sir John Tooley are standing down, with their places being filled by Sir John Sainsbury and Jeremy Isaacs, freshly departed from Channel Four. A dispute at the Royal Opera House was finally settled though both opera and ballet productions were lost over the summer. It's thought that Jeremy Isaacs in particular will have very clear ideas about the running of the venue in the future. It was the year in which Placido Domingo managed to appear both inside and outside the opera house at the same time. *La Boheme* was relayed live to a huge rain-sodden audience in the piazza. The ROH's controversial plans for its extension finally went through after much opposition.

The English National Opera had another consistent year with high standards and imaginative productions with new and old in careful blend. Jonathan Miller's *Rigoletto* was revived, and his new version of *The Mikado* was received with delight. The ENO even revived Stephen Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures*, an unlikely venture for a premier opera house. They achieved this with generous sponsorship from British Home Stores, perhaps a pattern for the future?

At the BBC, there were hot votes being cast in all the corridors of power about who would take over the top job with the departure of Alisdair Milne. Brian Wenham and Jeremy Isaacs certainly had their supporters, but in the end it went to Michael Checkland. In November, a sudden chill rush of wind blew down those same corridors when Michael Grade announced, almost overnight, that he was leaving to head Channel Four and take over from Jeremy Isaacs. Fears were expressed that Terry Wogan, or even *Terry and June*, would instantly take up most of the space on the prestige channel and that 'culture' would receive the 'order of the boot'. It remains to be seen if the fears are justified but it seems odd that Grade would take the job unless he wanted to continue in its successful



Good fortunes: Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson in *Fortunes Of War*, Olivia Manning's epic on wartime Egypt

tradition.

In the film business, 'big budget' has taken a back seat in the British cinema. Only Richard Attenborough's *Cry Freedom* overtook the two and a half million pound mark and the emphasis was on television films. 1987 was the year, however, when a British director ran a major Hollywood studio. David Puttnam went to Columbia but returned before the year was out.

There are new faces, there's new money for the first time in recent years and 1988 looks set to reap the harvest. •



Unmentionable: Peter Wright's memoirs unleashed a wave of official paranoia



Disaster: Zeebrugge cast a pall on the year, sparking a controversy on safety which was tragically revived at King's Cross