

A Listening Eye: The Films of Mike Dibb
Part Two: The Arts of Improvisation

Week Four

Available to view 19 - 25 February 2021

For the seventh week of *A Listening Eye*, we balance our focus on Mike Dibb's music films with his theatre-related works (also including song), as he engages with '70s radical theatre, the experience of Irish migration and the distinctive oeuvre of one of our most acclaimed contemporary composers.

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Red Ladder's 'Taking Our Time', 1977-78, 60'

Fringe Benefits, 70's political theatre songs 1980, 50'

I Could Read The Sky, 2005, 25'

Mark Anthony Turnage, 2002-03, BBC, 30'

Taking Our Time

This film was about the travelling, Leeds-based, political theatre company Red Ladder. More specifically it was about the making and performance of a moving and highly entertaining musical play *Taking Our Time*, which the company were collectively writing and putting together about The Plug Riots of 1842. This was the moment when the Yorkshire Wool Industry was being completely transformed by the Industrial Revolution, with many thousands of hand weavers facing the loss of their jobs and livelihoods to huge new factories housing mechanised machines. Now these same factories have in their turn disappeared (or occasionally been given a new life as historical museums), but back in the 1970s one or two were still operating, and sequences of these machines in action were skilfully interwoven during the editing with filmed scenes from the play as it was being performed in a small West Yorkshire trade union club to a very appreciative but mostly non-theatre going audience. *Taking Our Time* also includes important contributions from the social historians EP Thompson (*The Making of The English Working Class*) and his wife Dorothy Thompson (*The Early Chartists*) who were invited to a rehearsal of the play, after which they were filmed talking animatedly about the early 19th century political, religious and social worlds within which the play was set.

Fringe Benefits (Arena)

A powerful and exuberant selection of some of the best political songs created and sung by just four of the many political theatre companies that then existed around the country. In Yorkshire we filmed with members of *Red Ladder*, while in London we took over The Albany Empire for the day and invited *The Sadista Sisters* and *Belt and Braces* along to perform alongside *The Albany Combination*. Satirical, celebratory, passionate, provocative and politically hard-hitting, all the songs were brilliantly played and performed.

I Could Read The Sky

An 'off-the-cuff' filmed record of a travelling 'road show', put together by the writer Tim O'Grady, in which he's seen reading short extracts from his moving book *I Could Read The Sky*, about the Irish and exile with photographs by Steve Pyke, interspersed with a range of dazzling musical contributions from five leading Irish musicians: Martin Hayes (violin), Dennis Cahill (guitar), Mairtin O'Connor (accordion), Karan Casey and Iarla O'Lionaird (vocals). The event took place one evening at the Hammersmith Irish Centre in London and was filmed and recorded as it happened by Mike Dibb and Danny Nissim. Their material was later edited down, in collaboration with the film editor Shelagh Brady, to form this vibrant record.

Mark Anthony Turnage

BBC4 Profile with Gerard McBurney of the celebrated young British composer.