

arts

Star earns admiration

by Gordon Turtle

I first saw *Upstairs, Downstairs* quite by accident a couple of years ago on the American public network. The series was part of a larger series on PBS entitled *Masterpiece Theatre* and was hosted by no less a personage than Alistair Cooke, who is a slightly more human version of Kenneth Clarke.

After seeing only one episode of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, I realized that here was television at its unexpected best, and after watching it for three years now, I have come to the conclusion that the series represents the highest form of television yet developed.

After watching the program for a few weeks I noticed that Jean Marsh, who stars in the show as Rose Buck, the head maid in the Edwardian Bellamy household, was also the co-creator of the series, a fact which became more widespread as the

series and Miss Marsh became more popular.

Currently *Upstairs, Downstairs* is being seen in over forty countries, and Jean Marsh and her partner-friend Eileen Atkins are finally being recognized as heroes of serious television.

The co-creator and star of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, Jean Marsh, appeared in *My Fat Friend* at the Mayfield Inn's Stage West Theatre this summer, in a play that was enormously successful for Miss Marsh, Stage West, and Edmonton.

I had the opportunity to informally interview Jean Marsh during her seven week stay in Edmonton. For this reporter, this was no ordinary interview, rather, it was a chance to meet a person who has captured my attentive admiration as a star of my all-time favourite television series.

All television standards surpassed

In one of the series' episodes, Jean Marsh as Rose, is mistakenly arrested as a leader in



Jean Marsh on the set of *My Fat Friend*

a violent suffragette demonstration, and imprisoned with the rest of the protestors, one of whom is Elizabeth Bellamy, Rose's employer. While Miss Elizabeth is released on bail provided by a rich potential suitor, Rose is forced to bear witness to such events she never thought possible in England. The women, who had gone on a hunger strike to protest their arrest, were forced by having a long tube jammed down their throats.

It was this episode in which Miss Marsh established herself as a major force in modern international television. While being historically accurate, the program and Miss Marsh reached a dramatically emotional height I had previously thought impossi-

ble on TV, and *Upstairs, Downstairs* surpassed all television standards.

It was the Jean Marsh of Rose fame, humble and shy, who I expected to meet when I visited her in her suite at Edmonton House, (situated symbolically on Bellamy Hill).

It was, however, a vibrant and exciting actress, who seems to thrive on hectic schedules and frantically paced activity.

Despite this, Rose's almost-bashful, closed-mouth smile is also Jean Marsh's, as I discovered when Miss Marsh explained to me the reasons behind the numerous pigeons on her balcony.

To pass the precious few moments of spare time, Miss

Marsh had trained the pigeons to come collect the pieces of bread she had scattered on the porch, and she now thought of them as friends.

Drama achieved with apparent ease

Upstairs, Downstairs was originally conceived to be a dramatic portrayal of the relationships between servant and master in the twilight of the aristocratic era in Britain; Edwardian England.

Although the program retained its historical detail, Miss Marsh considers that there was "more romance" in the program than either she or Eileen Atkins expected, at the expense incidentally, of the sociological aims of the program.

But as Miss Marsh points out, the program was not intended to be intellectual, but rather dramatic; and this it achieves with apparent ease.

Each episode of *Upstairs, Downstairs* is rehearsed for an unusually long two-week period of intense effort. The episode is then filmed in about two days.

The series is now completed though, and the final episode leaves us in 1929, a year which is an obvious endpoint for a series of this sort. We began in 1904, saw Lady Bellamy become a victim of the Titanic's maiden voyage of 1912, were carried through the bitter realities of the first World War, and witnesses to its aftermath.

Jean Marsh is now active in North America, and is looking for permanent residence in the "New World," as did Elizabeth Bellamy. No stranger to America, Miss Marsh has appeared in theatres across the continent, including Broadway. She was seen in Hitchcock's *Frenzy*, and plays a major role in the soon-to-be-released movie, *The Eagle Has Landed*, a film which concerns itself with a plot to assassinate Winston Churchill during the Second World War.

And though Miss Marsh laments the passing of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, we in Canada are just at the beginning of the series, now seen on CBC. If I win a million dollars sometime, the first thing I will do is purchase outright, my own copy of the complete series, and live a life as a recluse in my private viewing theatre.

For this dream, I have Jean Marsh to thank.

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