



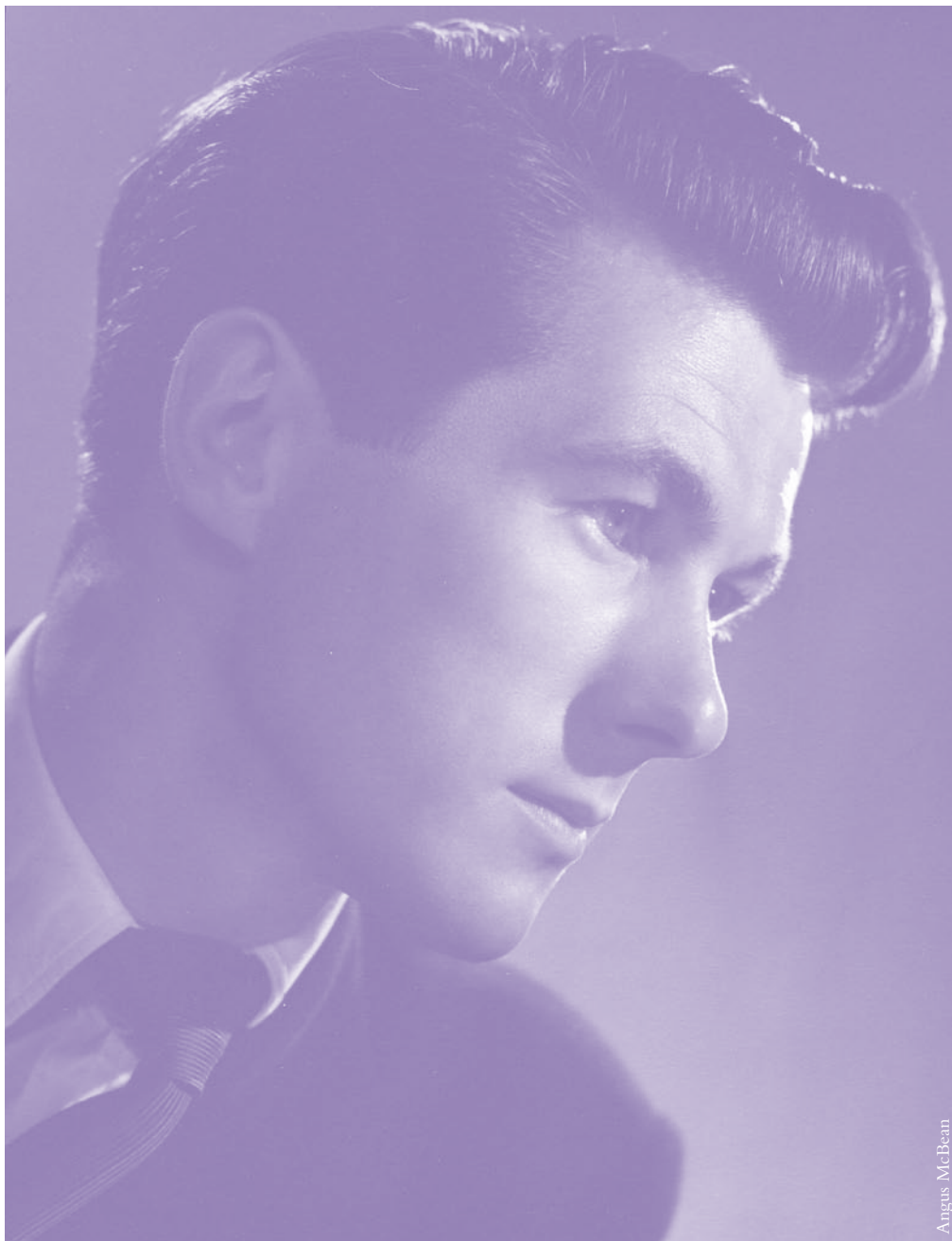
British Academy of Film and Television Arts  
A Tribute to Bryan Forbes CBE

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25 May 2007



BRITISH  
ACADEMY  
OF FILM AND  
TELEVISION  
ARTS



Angus McBean

Above: Pictured during his early days as an actor, Forbes's first role was in Michael Powell's *The Small Back Room* (1949).  
Cover: Forbes, also a keen stills photographer on set.

## Overview

With a multi-faceted career in film that spans six decades and encompasses acting, writing, directing and executive producing, Bryan Forbes's prolific work resulted in some of cinema's most memorable films. From the poignant drama of *The Angry Silence* (1960) to the eerie science fiction of *The Stepford Wives* (1975), Forbes's dexterity across several disciplines was complemented by his courage in embracing new ventures. Tonight's BAFTA tribute celebrates this outstanding achievement in filmmaking.

*The League Of Gentlemen, Whistle Down The Wind, The L-Shaped Room, Séance On A Wet Afternoon, The Whisperers, King Rat...* It's an award-winning roll call of excellence which would, in itself, be enough to ensure him a place in Britain's creative pantheon even before considering his several acclaimed novels, two volumes of autobiography and fine TV drama and documentaries (on Dame Edith Evans and Elton John). Then, sealing his position as once perhaps the most important man in the British film industry, he famously ran EMI-MGM Studios at Elstree between 1969 and 1971, overseeing successful films like *The Go-Between* (1970), *The Railway Children* (1970) and *The Tales Of Beatrix Potter* (1971).

Born John Clarke, eastender Forbes, who will be 81 in July, originally started out as an actor. After three terms at RADA and a brief spell in Rep, Forbes, just 17, went into the army for four years where he began to hone his skills as a writer with a series of short stories. It was a published collection in the early 50s that caught the attention of producer 'Cubby' Broccoli who contacted Forbes saying, "I gather you're a fast man with the pen. Can you provide some pages?" The film in question was *The Black Knight* (1954), and Forbes' uncredited work quickly led to much better things like *The Cockleshell Heroes* (1955), *I Was Monty's Double* (1958) and *The League*

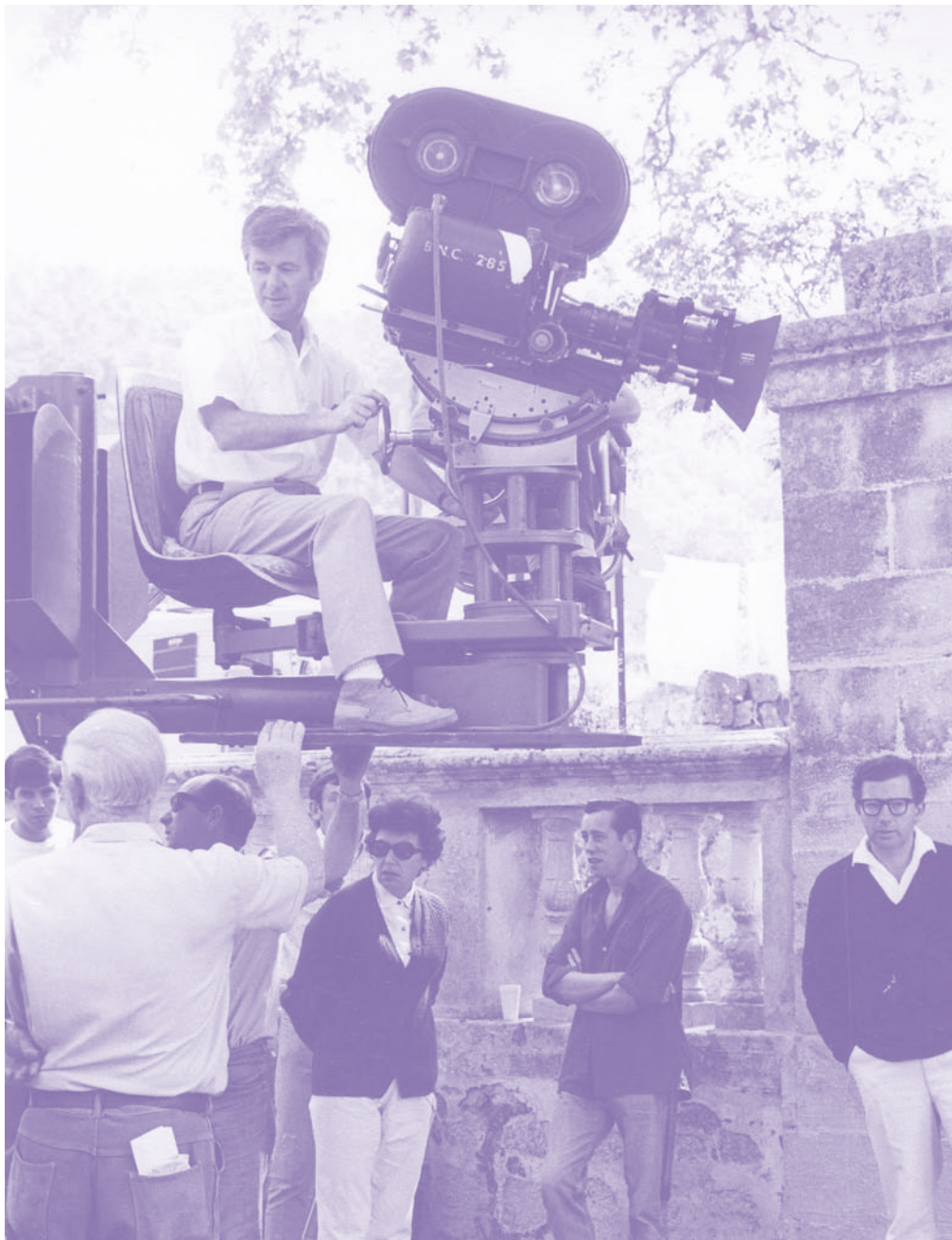
*Of Gentlemen* (1959), for which Forbes was BAFTA-nominated.

When he and close pal Richard Attenborough felt they wanted to add more strings to their filmmaking bows, the result was the formation of a company, Beaver Films. Their first production was *The Angry Silence*, in which a young factory worker rebels against an unofficial strike. It culminated in an Oscar nomination and a BAFTA win for Forbes's screenplay.

He clocked up four more BAFTA nominations for his work on coming-of-age drama *Whistle Down The Wind* (1961, and his first directing job), kitchen sink comedy *Only Two Can Play* (1962), crime drama *Séance On A Wet Afternoon* (1964) and WWII drama *King Rat* (1965). In the 20 years that followed, Forbes was one of the busiest directors around, making films in both Britain and America.

Forbes, who celebrated his golden wedding anniversary to actress Nanette Newman in 2005, continues to write; his latest novel *The Choice* was published this year. His legacy is that of a Renaissance man, whose ability to take risks and engage a multitude of skills has propelled his long and illustrious career in film.

Quentin Falk



Above: Forbes on location shooting *Deadfall* (1968), a psychological drama starring Michael Caine as a jewel thief.

## Academy Friends

### Simon Relph CBE

I am delighted that the Academy has decided, one might say finally, to pay tribute to Bryan Forbes who has made such a significant contribution to British Cinema. I was fortunate to be his second assistant director on *Séance On A Wet Afternoon*. This was the beginning of several longstanding relationships – in particular with the film’s producer and actor Richard Attenborough, now our esteemed President, and with its production coordinator Ann Skinner who became, and still is, my business partner in Skreba Films. So I have a lot to thank Bryan for personally.

Of course, Bryan and Dickie Attenborough had for sometime been my father and Basil Dearden’s partners in Allied Film Makers. Between them they produced a string of award-winning films: *Séance*, *The League Of Gentlemen*, *Whistle Down The Wind* and *Victim* amongst them.

Bryan’s first success came as an actor but he quickly turned his hand to screenwriting, a skill at which he is enormously accomplished.

I remember two things about shooting with Bryan in particular. One day, it was clear that a rewrite of the next day’s scene was needed. The following morning, he appeared with the rewritten scene typed straight on to the Gestetner skins from which, in those days, pink pages were then printed for the crew. No typos, no second thoughts, just straight out of his head and, in effect, on to the printed page. He was clearly able to work very fast and with great precision. He said that he often finished writing commissions well ahead of his deadlines but didn’t hand scripts in too early in case the producers thought it was too easy.

He directed his films with great authority and good nature. *Séance* was just the kind of film I had hoped to work on after a somewhat turgid TV series, two *Carry Ons* and a *Doctor* film. He was a real pleasure to work for.

### Lord Attenborough Kt, CBE

Forbsie and his wife, Nanette, have been Sheila and my closest friends for more than 50 years. This will tell you that any chance of maintaining my objectivity while writing about him is pretty remote. In addition, for a major portion of that half century, Forbsie and I had an extremely happy partnership and made five movies together. Nevertheless, having been involved in some 60 other films, I believe I am qualified to write about his work.

Our first collaboration was on *The Angry Silence*, which he wrote, I played in and we both produced. It was the sheer quality of this particular script, written in his mid-thirties, which demonstrated cogently that here was as fine a screenwriter as any to be found on either side of the Atlantic. His first assignment as a director was *Whistle Down The Wind*, which I still believe to be the most successful piece of cinema we ever made together.

Bryan is the most exquisite director of actors – usually working from a scenario which he himself has conceived. He has unshakable standards, demanding of all his colleagues the same uncompromising energy and dedication he brings to every project. I believe his taste and judgement are unique, resulting in a quality of work which those of us who have worked with him have ourselves rarely, if ever, managed to attain.

His loving friendship is without equal in my life. His loyalty and generosity are unsurpassed. Indeed, he has only one fault to which I would draw your attention. Very early on in our relationship, he discovered my addiction to chocolate and cruelly named me Bunter. This is a curse I have borne since 1964 and one which only my own selfless love and devotion allows me to tolerate...

That and the fact that he makes me laugh more than anyone I have ever met.

## Filmography

1992 Chaplin *Writer*  
1990 The Endless Game (TV)  
*Writer/Director*  
1985 Restless Natives *Actor*  
1984 December Flower (TV) *Actor*  
1984 The Naked Face  
*Writer/Director*  
1983 Philip Marlowe, Private Eye  
(The King in Yellow, TV Episode)  
*Director*  
1982 Better Late Than Never  
*Writer/Director*  
1980 Play For Today (Jessie, TV Episode)  
*Writer/Director*  
1980 Hopscotch *Writer*  
1980 Sunday Lovers (segment  
'An Englishman's Home') *Director*  
1980 A Life Beyond Politics –  
Edward Heath (TV)  
*Producer/Director (untransmitted)*  
1978 International Velvet  
*Writer/Director/Producer/Actor*  
*(uncredited)*  
1976 The Slipper And The Rose  
*Writer/Director/Actor (uncredited)*  
1975 The Stepford Wives *Director*  
1973 Elton John: Goodbye Norma Jean  
And Other Things (TV)  
*Producer/Director/Narrator*  
1973 Dame Edith Evans – I Caught Acting  
Like Measles (TV)  
*Producer/Director/Narrator*  
1972 Colditz (TV) *Writer*  
1972 I Am A Dancer *Director/Producer*  
*(uncredited)/Editor/Narrator*  
1971 The Raging Moon *Writer/Director*  
1971 The Tales Of Beatrix Potter  
*Executive Producer*  
1971 Dulcima *Executive Producer*  
1970 The Man Who Haunted Himself  
*Executive Producer/Writer (uncredited)*  
*/Producer (uncredited)*  
1970 The Go-Between *Executive Producer*  
1970 The Railway Children  
*Executive Producer*  
1970 And Soon The Darkness  
*Executive Producer*  
1970 Hoffman *Executive Producer*  
1969 The Madwoman Of Chaillot  
*Director*  
1968 Deadfall *Writer/Director*  
1967 The Whisperers *Writer/Director*  
1966 The Wrong Box *Director/Producer*  
1965 King Rat *Writer/Director*  
1964 The High Bright Sun *Writer*  
1964 Of Human Bondage  
*Writer/Actor (uncredited)/*  
*Director (one week, uncredited)*  
1964 Séance On A Wet Afternoon  
*Writer/Director/Producer (uncredited)*  
1964 A Shot In The Dark  
(as Turk Thrust) *Actor*  
1962 Station Six-Sahara *Writer*  
1962 The L-Shaped Room *Writer/Director*  
1962 Only Two Can Play *Writer*  
1961 The Guns Of Navarone *Actor*  
1961 Whistle Down The Wind *Director*  
1960 The Angry Silence  
*Writer/Producer/Actor (uncredited)*  
1960 Man In The Moon *Writer*  
1959 Yesterday's Enemy *Actor*  
1959 The League Of Gentlemen  
*Actor/Writer*  
1959 SOS Pacific *Writer (dialogue)*  
1959 The Captain's Table *Writer*  
1959 Danger Within *Writer*  
1958 I Was Monty's Double *Actor/Writer*  
1958 The Key *Actor*  
1957 Quatermass 2 *Actor*  
1956 It's Great To Be Young! *Actor*  
1956 Satellite In The Sky *Actor*  
1956 House Of Secrets *Writer*  
1956 The Baby And The Battleship  
*Actor/Writer (add. scenes and dialogue)*  
1956 The Black Tent  
*Actor (scenes deleted)/Writer*  
1956 Now And Forever *Actor*  
1956 The Extra Day *Actor*  
1955 The Vise (TV) *Actor*  
1955 The Bargain (TV) *Actor*  
1955 Passage Home *Actor*  
1955 The Colditz Story *Actor*  
1955 The Cockleshell Heroes *Writer*  
1954 An Inspector Calls *Actor*  
1954 Up To His Neck *Actor*  
1954 The Black Knight  
*Writer (additional dialogue)*  
1953 BBC Sunday Night Theatre:  
The Road (TV) *Actor*  
1953 Sea Devils *Actor*

1953 Wheel Of Fate *Actor*  
1953 The Million Pound Note *Actor*  
1952 The World In His Arms *Actor*  
1952 Flesh And Fury *Actor (uncredited)*  
1952 Appointment In London *Actor*  
1951 Green Grow The Rushes *Actor*  
1950 The Wooden Horse *Actor*  
1949 Dear Mr. Prohack *Actor*  
1949 All Over The Town *Actor*  
1949 The Small Back Room *Actor*

### Theatre

2002 Barrymore – It's A Hell Of A Life  
*Director*  
1987 Killing Jessica *Director*  
1986 The Living Room (revival) *Director*  
1980 Macbeth *Director*  
1980 Star Quality *Director*  
1951 Tobias And The Angel *Actor*  
1950 The Holly And The Ivy *Actor*  
1949 September Tide *Actor*  
1948 Gathering Storm *Actor*  
1948 A Touch Of Fear *Actor*  
1948 – 1950  
Sunday night BBC plays:  
Johnny Was A Hero *Actor*  
The Road *Actor*  
Crime And Punishment Theatre *Actor*  
Journey's End *Actor*  
1943 Flare Path *Actor*

### Books

2007 The Choice  
1999 The Memory Of All That  
1996 Quicksand  
1995 Partly Cloudy  
1993 The Twisted Playground  
1992 A Divided Life  
1989 A Song At Twilight  
1986 The Endless Game  
1983 The Rewrite Man  
1980 That Despicable Race – A History  
Of The British Acting Tradition  
1979 Familiar Strangers  
1978 International Velvet  
1977 Ned's Girl – The Life Of Edith Evans  
1976 The Slipper And The Rose  
1974 Notes For A Life  
1972 The Distant Laughter  
1950 Truth Lies Sleeping

### Honours and Awards

#### BAFTAs

Wins:  
1960 British Screenplay, The Angry Silence

#### Nominations:

1965 United Nations Award, King Rat  
1964 British Screenplay,  
Séance On A Wet Afternoon  
1962 British Screenplay, Only Two Can Play  
1961 British Film, Whistle Down The Wind  
1961 Film From Any Source,  
Whistle Down The Wind  
1959 British Screenplay,  
The League Of Gentlemen

#### Oscars

Nominations:  
1960 Best Writing, Story and Screenplay –  
Written Directly for the Screen,  
The Angry Silence

#### Writers Guild of America

1980 Best Comedy Adapted from Another  
Medium, Hopscotch

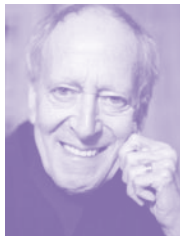
#### Writers Guild of Great Britain

1964 Best British Dramatic Screenplay,  
Séance On A Wet Afternoon  
1962 Best British Comedy Screenplay,  
Only Two Can Play

2004 **Commander of the British  
Empire for services to the arts**

“When I worked with Bryan on *Whistle Down The Wind* I was on the cusp of adolescence, wearing an overcoat two sizes too small in an attempt to bridge the gap between ‘our Nan and our Charles’ who were half my age and height. I wasn’t entirely sure it would work. Bryan never doubted it. He treated me like an adult, spoke intuitively and I trusted him implicitly. He never doubted any of the children and got brilliant performances out of them all. It was one of the happiest experiences. And the hysterical laughter in the dining room at the Kirby Hotel still echoes down the years.”

Hayley Mills  
Actress



*King Rat* was my first experience recording a film score in America. I will always be grateful to Bryan for that. I respected the fact that he wrote and directed his films; it made all of my work associations with him a positive and fruitful

experience. He has an ability and gift to understand drama and humour. *Deadfall* gave me the opportunity to compose a 20 minute romance for guitar and orchestra, something I never had the time or trust from a director to take on. We have shared a wonderful personal friendship over the years and I feel honoured to have worked with him. His contribution to my life as a composer and conductor will always be remembered with deep affection. I salute him with this well-deserved BAFTA tribute.

John Barry OBE  
Composer



Bryan is the most steadfast person to have around in any situation. He has progressed infinitely but is still the same wonderful friend I always knew. On *Deadfall*, I saw a slight political change in him when the electricians went

on strike for one morning because their breakfast eggs were too runny. In discussion with the Head of the Union, I saw working-class Bryan make a slight turn to the right. A further move in that direction came when they went on strike again because the tea wagon had got lost and there was no tea break at the correct time. Bryan overcame these obstacles as he has always done with great skill, calm and aplomb. He is a great director, writer, a wonderful friend and I love him dearly.

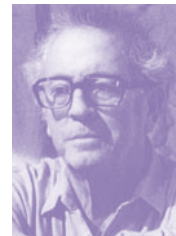
Sir Michael Caine CBE  
Actor



One of the special features of working on a Bryan Forbes film is that you become a part of the Forbes family. I arrived in Westport, Connecticut in 1974 to start editing *The Stepford Wives*, my first time in the U.S., among a crew of total

strangers. Bryan had asked the production designer, Gene Callahan, to take me under his wing. Gene, a southern gentleman from Louisiana, had a twinkle in his eye and a lethal turn of phrase. I could not have been in better company. When we were into the shooting routine, Bryan and Nanette invited me for dinner to meet local resident, Bette Davis; a memorable evening. Alongside his diverse talents, Bryan has supremely retained his capacity to be a caring and outgoing human being.

Timothy Gee  
Editor



I had been asked to go to Shepperton to discuss *The L-Shaped Room* with Bryan. Outside his office, I noticed a huge Mercedes. While admiring it, Bryan appeared and said: “Shall we go for a drive?” I thought what a wonderful way to

discuss how he expected me to treat the film. He drove us out, but instead of talking about the script, he started to ask questions about the car – what was its maximum speed and when did I think one should change down in gears. I could only guess an answer. We realised then that something was wrong. Apparently the car had just been delivered. Bryan had mistaken me for a badly informed salesman. We laughed. Happily, I don’t remember there being any misunderstanding on the entire picture.

Douglas Slocombe BSC  
Cinematographer



There have been extraordinary changes during the 60 years that I have known Bryan, but the one constant unchanging, unswerving fact is my respect and admiration for Bryan Forbes the man, the actor, author,

scriptwriter, producer, director and friend. I should have added studio boss as well, for it was under his reign at ABPC that I made *The Man Who Haunted Himself* for Basil Dearden. Despite having been friends since we served together in the British Army of Occupation in Germany in 1947, it was not until 1980 that we first worked together in *Sunday Lovers*. Four years later we worked together again in Sidney Sheldon’s *The Naked Face*, which we shot in Chicago. Sadly, we have not worked together since but I live in hope.

Sir Roger Moore KBE  
Actor



Bryan had a finished script (for *The L Shaped Room*) – human, amusing, modern. But my character, Jane, was extremely passive. I was disappointed. James Wolf (producer) said “Talk to Bryan, tell him your problem.” I was understandably

nervous when I met Bryan, so I talked and talked about the main scene, developing my argument as convincingly as I could. Bryan’s eyes were on his papers, his hand seemed to be doodling and I thought “the man isn’t even listening to me.” He looked up and handed over the pages. “Like this, you mean?” While I was talking he had re-written the whole scene – and it was perfect. Thank you for my BAFTA, Bryan, and let me add my heartfelt congratulations on this well deserved tribute to a long and brilliant career.

Leslie Caron  
Actress

“A critic once pointed out that all of my films deal with aspects of love, something I was never really aware of during the making of them but which I think has more than a grain of truth in it. The vulnerability of my characters always fascinates me and perhaps what I do best is to inject emotion into my films. If I can move an audience, whether it be to laughter or tears, then I feel I have done my job.”

### On Editing

...I know of few directors who don't spend long hours in the cutting room alongside their editing team. To deny oneself a role in this final stage would be akin to a painter mixing the colours but never putting them on the canvas. It is in the cutting room that one seeks the nuance of a performance, the look that conveys more than a page of expository dialogue and the juxtaposition of two contrasting images to produce an effect that was never apparent in the script.

### On Graham Greene

More than any other writer, living or dead, Graham influenced my own efforts. No writer had the ability to excite me more, or cast me down so quickly when I compared my own puny efforts with his mastery. There is no shame in trying to aspire to the best and to me Graham was the best although having seen the scrawled and crossed out words on the yellow legal pads he used I know that he struggled as we all struggle despite the final result appearing effortless.

### On Carl Foreman

I was in awe of Carl; a complex character. I produced the first draft [for *The League Of Gentlemen*] within six weeks. He told me politely that I had a long way to go before it was good enough to submit to Cary Grant. I did three versions before Carl allowed the manuscript to go to the typing agency. Our relationship was never quite the same after the event but that is not to say he didn't do me a great deal of good. He likes to have his own way and we were two of a kind.

### On Writing

I was a writer who became an actor who became a screenwriter who became a director, and I guess in the final analysis, because it's less ephemeral than most things, writing probably gives me the most satisfaction. But on the other hand, if you write a screenplay, and then you see it come to life, there's no greater pleasure. You have no idea how people react when they read your novels because you're not there with them; but when you sit in an audience and say, "My God, I've made them laugh; I've made them cry, that's a real satisfaction.



Above: A relaxed Forbes pictured at his home in Winter 2006.

# Thanks

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Bryan Forbes CBE  
Nanette Newman  
Lord Attenborough Kt, CBE  
Simon Callow  
Tony Dalton

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## Film Clips and Images

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Warner Bros

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