

The Drama House
Quality Film and TV Productions

Honorary Doctorate

In July 2000 Jack was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from his old University. Keele University celebrated its 50th anniversary by conferring 4 Doctorates on past graduates who were felt to best represent Keele. The Doctorate was conferred by The Chancellor, Sir Claus Moser, following this oration by Professor Chris Philipson:



"Jack Emery: We honour you today for your outstanding achievements in the creative arts, as writer, producer and director, working across the different media of stage, radio, TV and film. Over a period of thirty years, from the time of your graduation from Keele in 1967, you have produced a body of work distinguished by its commitment to educating as well as entertaining and by its concern with highlighting key moral issues of the day.

Jack Emery's career was set whilst an undergraduate with a number of award-winning productions for the Keele Drama Society. Early work on Samuel Beckett, developed with the late Frank Doherty, won national as well as international acclaim. The one man show, *A Remnant*, drawn from Beckett's plays and novels, was quickly established as a classic production. One reviewer said of Jack Emery's performance "...but his art lies in making it all seem Beckett's. He is able to transmit him without diminution, not as one might expect through the filter of his own personality, but direct, not a breath not an inflection that does not seem Beckett's own".

These early productions set the pattern for Jack's enduring fascination with the uses of language in conveying ideas and beliefs about the power of the individual to influencing the community in which they live. He displayed this commitment as a founding director of Exeter's Northcolt Theatre. It was in this setting that Jack developed his ideas about the role of the Theatre in providing "a service to the community". This vision was one of theatre becoming an "integrated part of the community it is attempting to serve... theatre as a common and shared experience". Jack's response was to develop a series of productions which explored issues relating to regional identity, using the medium of historical dramatization. These productions - on the 1685 Monmouth Rebellion (*The Bastard King*), on John Wesley (*Wesley: Man Against His Age*), set the pattern for work which combined scholarship with a passion for engaging with and drawing upon the audience's own understanding of historical time.

The recognition of the importance of history, and the role of individuals in shaping great

events, was to become a consistent theme. It was selected in his trilogy of radio plays on the English Civil War, and in his specially commissioned BBC Radio 4 drama documentary, *Justice or Murder: The Death of Charles 1*. More recent history formed the backdrop to his award-winning reconstruction, first broadcast in 1989, of the trial of the publisher of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Referring to the issues raised by the trial, Jack highlighted his passionate belief in the values of words "weighed and examined", and the need for society to debate great moral issues with itself without the threat of prosecution.

In 1992 Jack founded and became Creative Director of The Drama House, an Independent television and film Production Company. His work during the 1990s was to produce some of the most important and influential television drama of the decade. His drama documentary, *Witness Against Hitler*, was a story both about one man's resistance against oppression in Nazi Germany, and an exploration of the enduring power of human love. First broadcast in 1996, *Witness Against Hitler*, met with acclaim for the quality of the writing and for its portrayal of an individual and a family wrestling with one of the most intense moral dilemmas of the twentieth century. This portrayal was joined the following year by what, even by Jack's standards, was one of the truly great productions of the decade, *Breaking the Code*, his study of the mathematician, Alan Turing, who played a major part in Britain's war effort by cracking crucial German codes. Again Jack's production pointed up the moral issues raised by Turing's genius and refusal to compromise his own values, and the suffering of an individual incapable of deceit. *Breaking the Code* produced numerous international as well as national awards and confirmed Jack Emery's position as one of the major figures in television drama

Jack has an immense list of achievements to his credit. These are reflected in his commitment to providing a platform for young writers, his commitment to technical innovation in film and television, and his commitment to writing and scholarship. One of his colleagues offered the tribute that: "Jack is one of the unsung heroes of the last decade in terms of his selfless contribution to developing and encouraging high standards in the nation's drama."

But running through his work is also a message about individuals as forces for good as well as evil: individual actions which turn into something which we call history. He reminds us though, that history is about the choices which individuals make, and that learning about their consequences can take us to the heart of great entertainment as well as great education."