



- Silver Award - 1986
- Special Commendation - 1987
- Film Society of the Year - 1988
- Best Programme Notes - 1990
- Special Commendation - 1992

Tom Courtenay is The Dresser
The wardrobe man devoted to the Star.
Albert Finney is The Star.
The actor devoted to himself.
The story is about their friendship.
The tears. The heartbreaks. The joys.
The fears. The devotion. The dreams...

The Dresser

Great Britain, 1983
Director: Peter Yates



Photography.....Kevin Pike
Editor.....Ray Lovejoy
Music.....James Horner

Albert Finney ("Sir"), Tom Courtenay (*Norman*)

Edward Fox (*Oxenby*), Zena Walker ("*Her Ladyship*"), Eileen Atkins (*Madge*), Michael Gough (*Frank Carrington*), Cathryn Harrison (*Irene*), Betty Marsden (*Violet Manning*)

The Dresser is a film adaptation of Ronald Harwood's stage play of the same name (the play only pre-dated the film by three years). Based on his own experience as dresser to Donald Wolfit, Harwood takes us into the world of the touring theatre troupe, a world which has its share of glamour but which can also be decidedly tawdry.

The period setting is the second world war, the place: well, it could be any town with a theatre, as the characters inhabit a world largely their own. Any intrusion from the real world is unwelcome, be it in the form of the reality of old age and failing strength; or of the loss of so many men to the services and their support industries, leaving only the old and the infirm to carry on the great British theatrical tradition.

Norman, the dresser, is the loyal but unappreciated lackey who handles everything and everyone as Sir offends, exploits and shows almost total disregard for all those around him. His responsibilities extend far beyond looking after costumes and make-up. In the end, Norman finds out just how little his efforts have been recognised and although he is shocked and surprised, we can see what he could not: a man with an ego the size of Sir's simply cannot conceive of a world in which his every whim would not be of paramount importance to all those around him. What need, then, for any other reward than that of having done what was expected of one?

Relying on a long and illustrious career to present full houses, Sir has given up working at his art, and Norman must coax, bully and cajole him into performing at all. As the film unfolds, we see the obstacles placed in Norman's path, whether deliberately or not, by Sir and others.

The Dresser opens up a number of avenues for thought for us. As well as a sympathetic treatment of a gay character and implicit criticism of bullies, you can muse on the difficulties of life in war-time. Imagine settling down for a nice night out for the first time in months only to have it ruined by the sound of the air raid sirens and the dash for shelter. Even for those of us too young to remember it, an atmospheric film like The Dresser can conjure up that world.

The Dresser was nominated for a clutch of Academy Awards but, sadly, did not win any of them. The film was nominated for Best Film, Peter Yates for Best Director, Harwood for Best Adaptation, and both Courtenay and Finney for Best Actor. I wouldn't have wanted to be on the panel choosing between them!

The Dresser



Albert Finney

Born in 1936, Finney studied at RADA and made his stage debut in 1956. Most of his early roles were in Shakespearean drama, so it was a significant change of direction when he appeared as Billy Liar on stage in 1960. In the same year, he made his first film, *The Entertainer*, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. These established him as one of the rising young actors of the period but his career really took off in 1963 when he played Tom Jones.

Since then, Finney has mixed stage, television and film work, with roles in *Gumshoe* (1971), *Miller's Crossing* (1990) and as Scrooge in the musical version of *A Christmas Carol*.

Tom Courtenay



Born in 1937, Courtenay was rather later in taking to the stage than his near contemporary Finney, as he studied at London University before going on to RADA. He made his stage debut in 1960 and went into films in 1962, starring in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. In 1963, he played Billy Liar in the film adaptation of the Hall/Waterhouse play, having taken over the stage role from Finney. He was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor in 1965 for his role as Antipov in *Dr Zhivago*.

Courtenay has since appeared on stage, television and in radio drama. He re-created his role in *The Dresser* on stage in London and on Broadway.

Gill Rollings

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'**Strictly Ballroom**' (PG) (Baz Luhrmann 1992, Australia) Paul Mercurio, Bill Hunter, Tara Morice.
Right from the glorious opening, it's obvious that film-maker Luhrmann knows *exactly* what he is doing. Talented dancer Scott (Mercurio) struggles to make it to the Pan-Pacific Grand Prix, despite setbacks resulting from his refusal to stick to the steps approved by his team; his dance-tutor mum has screaming fits, the Dance Federation president threatens disbarment, and the only club member prepared to partner him is shy, clumsy novice Fran (Morice). Partly a hilarious satire of the bizarre rituals of the ballroom world, partly a contemporary fairy-tale romance, Luhrmann's exhilarating debut transcends its shamelessly familiar plot through endlessly inventive details. With its dazzling energy carrying even the stoniest hearts through the outrageous finale, this is terrific entertainment from start to finish.

PERFORMANCE ENDS 10.30 p.m.

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