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Smike

UK TV musical play : 1973 : dir. Paul Ciani : BBC : ? min
prod: : scr: Roger Holman & Simon May : dir.ph.:

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Andrew Keir; Beryl Reid

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ∅ Z ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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The merry singalong world of institutional sadism – Dotheboys Hall

Source: Into the Box of Delights

Into the Box of Delights – A History of Children's Television note:

"In the 1970s the BBC was able to afford musicals for children. Paul Ciani directed "Smike", a pop musical loosely based on "Nicholas Nickleby", by Roger Holman and Simon May. Beryl Reid starred in the Mrs Squeers role. Paul Ciani also directed Great Big Groovy Horse based on the story of the Trojan horse. Paul Jones, Bernard Cribbins, Patricia Hodge and Julie Covington were among members of the cast..."

[no listing in "BBC TV Presents – A Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration", "The Golden Age of Children's Television", "Halliwell's Television Companion", "History of Television", "How Sweet It Was" or "Television's Greatest Hits"]

No further information currently available. **"Smike"** was a fairly transparent attempt from the BBC to emulate the success of **"OLIVER!"** rendering another Dickens tale of monstrous childhood suffering into a merry all-singing, all-dancing frolic. Except that it had no good tunes to match the memorable hits of Lionel Bart, a thinner stock of central characters to replace Fagin, Bill Sykes, the Artful Dodger and Nancy, and a less compelling narrative base.

From what I recall after nigh on thirty years, the play concentrated very largely on the Dotheboys Hall episode of "Nicholas Nickleby", and made the battered, mentally-impaired Smike, not his protector Nickleby, the focus of the drama. An adult actor played the title role, needless to say, but many boys trilled prettily in the background amid the fields of waving cane. **"Smike"** was televised a full decade before the "child abuse" hysteria was exported to Britain in all its venomous fury, but one still has to question the suitability of this melodrama for a children's musical. Beneath the surface message of salvation from cruelty, or the indomitability of the human spirit, lies another message that the horrors of barely a century ago may be trivialised and sanitised for TV entertainment. Imagine the reaction today if the BBC were to set a sitcom in the wacky, laugh-a-minute world of plantation slavery. The hugely successful stage and film musical **"OLIVER!"** was never intended for a child audience anyway. It's debatable whether there was any real appetite there for cod history lessons dressed up as "pop" musicals.

See also **"OLIVER!"**, the early British silent **"DOTHEBOYS HALL"**, and subject index under **BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL, CRUELTY / NEGLECT / MALTREATMENT, DICKENS, HISTORY** and **MUSICALS**.