

TV Sets Sail With Titanic Anniversary Specials

BY FRAZIER MOORE
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From dramas to docs, the Titanic centennial won't escape TV's notice. On special programming, viewers will be welcomed aboard the doomed luxury vessel, hear stories of its passengers and crew, and explore the legacy of its tragic end.

If you don't feel like heading for your local movie house to see James Cameron's "Titanic" re-released in 3-D splendor, you can catch a new dramatic telling of the epic saga on ABC.

This four-hour miniseries can't claim Leonardo DiCaprio, but it does have a big name attached: Julian Fellowes, the acclaimed screenwriter of "Gosford Park," "The Tourist" and "Downton Abbey." It airs over two nights, beginning at 8 p.m. EST on April 14 and concluding the next night at 9 p.m. EDT to mark the 100th anniversary of Titanic's sinking.

Linus Roache ("Law & Order") stars as lofty first-class passenger Hugh, Earl of Manton, while his wife, Louisa, is played by Geraldine Somerville (the "Harry Potter" films). Their daughter Georgianna is played by Perdita Weeks ("The Tudors").

Each hour follows similar events from the perspectives of different passengers and crew, building to a powerful conclusion in the final hour that draws together all the stories during Titanic's final moments — and the final moments of many people it was carrying.

Other Titanic programming includes:

- "Saving the Titanic" (premiering April 1 at 10 p.m. EDT on most PBS stations) is a historical drama that tells of the self-sacrifice and bravery of the ship's engineers, stokers and firemen in the face of impending death. What happened in the engine and boiler rooms after the collision? Based on eyewitness accounts, it's the story of nine men from the engineering crew who battled to fight back the sea and keep the power running.

Bluegrass Icon Earl Scruggs Dies At Age 88

BY RANDALL ROBERTS
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For better or worse, Earl Scruggs will be remembered by most Americans for his banjo picking alongside partner Lester Flatt in a dated 1960s cultural artifact: "The Beverly Hillbillies."

For better, because the style that the bluegrass legend, who died Wednesday at 88, showcases will forever live in the memories of generations. For worse, because the song threatens to define Flatt and Scruggs, as well as the whole of the uniquely American form of bluegrass music, alongside the zany, know-nothing Clampetts of Beverly Hills. That placement has helped define bluegrass to the culture at large as music for hicks who dance at hoedowns and wouldn't know a lick about "real" music. (Credit goes to "Deliverance" and "Dueling Banjos" for furthering the cause.)

That's a shame, because a deep listen to Flatt & Scruggs reveals something so much bigger than a few unfortunate stereotypes. The sound that Scruggs forged, a three-fingered picking style in the 1940s as a central player in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys, came to define bluegrass. When he and Flatt struck out on their own in 1948 to form the Foggy Mountain Boys, the style had woven its way into the fabric of American music.

It's a sound that still thrives today in the work of Alison Krauss and Union Station, Ricky Skaggs, Bela Fleck, and Abigail Washburn, among many others. Virtually every time a banjo solo comes on the radio, it's played in a Scruggs-inspired picking style, and every time a TV character steps onto a farm, you can hear the spirit of Earl Scruggs. You can even get a taste of it on Madonna's new album, where her song "Love Spent" opens with a Scruggs-suggestive lick.

But that influence has spread because Scruggs never defined himself as simply a bluegrass player. As his success on the country circuit rose in the 1960s and a generation of hippies discovered the glory of the old-time country music of Bill Monroe, the Foggy Mountain Boys, the Stanley Brothers and Dock Boggs, Scruggs expanded his reach.

In 1969, his and Flatt's television show featured his banjo playing alongside the Byrds, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, and in the decades following, Scruggs played alongside younger musicians — and no doubt taught them a thing or two about the banjo. In 2001, he confirmed that influence by releasing "Earl Scruggs and Friends," which featured collaborations with Sting, Elton John and Dwight Yoakam.

The musical ideas on that recording, along with all the others, bore witness to a visionary who picked up an instrument once used mostly by former slaves and harnessed it to create amazing energy. Scruggs and the banjo ultimately went on to tell an incredibly important American musical story.

even when they realized all was lost.

- "Titanic's Final Mystery" (April 5 at 8 p.m. EDT on the Smithsonian Channel) re-examines two critical questions of the Titanic's demise: Why did it hit the iceberg in the first place? And why did the ship closest to Titanic, the Californian, never come to its rescue? Author and Titanic expert Tim Maltin uncovers evidence that both ships were deceived by mirages, dooming Titanic to its fate.

- "Titanic: the Final Word with James Cameron" (April 8 at 8 p.m. EDT on National Geographic Channel) follows the Oscar-winning

filmmaker and National Geographic explorer-in-residence as he dives back into Titanic's mysteries. Cameron gathers some of the world's leading Titanic experts to pore over underwater footage from Cameron's more than 30 dives to the wreck, as well as historical records, survivor eyewitness accounts and scenes from Cameron's blockbuster hit, as well as a never-before-seen stress model and forensic evidence. The goal: to answer questions about how the ship broke apart and why its remains are scattered.

- "Save the Titanic with Bob Ballard" (April 9 at 10 p.m. EDT on

National Geographic Channel) sets the man who discovered the ship's final resting place on a new quest: protecting Titanic's underwater graveyard. As evidence mounts that the ship is under siege by natural forces, careless visitors and, possibly, rogue salvage attempts, Ballard mounts an effort to protect the legacy of history's most famous ship. Ballard's odyssey takes him to the shipyards of Northern Ireland to meet with descendants of the men who helped build Titanic, then sailed on her maiden voyage.

- "The Titanic with Len Goodman" (April 10 at 8 p.m. EDT on

most PBS stations) examines the impact of the sinking on the thousands of affected families, part of the Titanic legacy that lives on in the victims' descendants. Len Goodman, best known as a judge on "Dancing With the Stars," has his own connection: Before he was a dancer, he was a welder in East London for the company that built Titanic, in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Goodman takes viewers on an exploration of the ship's 100-year legacy through the stories of the handicapped group of men who helped build Titanic and then died with it.

- "Why Ships Sink" (April 18 at

9 p.m. EDT on most PBS stations) is a "Nova" program that investigates the safety of current-day cruise ships, which keep getting bigger and bigger. Some engineers fear that these towering behemoths are dangerously unstable, and the recent tragedy of the Costa Concordia has raised new questions about their safety. "Nova" brings together marine engineering and safety experts to reconstruct the events that led to famous cruise disasters, including the ill-fated Concordia, the Sea Diamond and the Oceanos.

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