

It was Michael Barry, then-head of Drama at the BBC, who suggested producing **L'Aiglon** to producer Rudolph Cartier. The both knew that this play was something of a poisoned chalice, although, perversely, one of the things that appealed to both men is that it was known in certain quarters as "the most difficult play in the world." As enticing as this challenge was, and accomplished as Cartier was becoming at filling the screen with dense compositions and sterling performances, even he didn't get away from this one scot free - the initial performance over-ran by twenty minutes, a fact which did not escape the notice of an incensed Cecil McGivern, who almost fired Cartier for "unprofessional behaviour". The subsequent performance was thirty-five minutes shorter, though this may not have been done to avoid further wrath from the BBC hierarchy - a memo dated 13th April (the day after the initial performance) details that the repeat showing would have to be cut to accommodate a talk by the Chancellor.

Radio Times gave the play significant coverage, with an article by Clemence Dane ("L'Aiglon after Fifty Years: Clemence Dane introduces Edmond Rostand's romantic play"), three significant paragraphs in a 'round-up' of that week's television and a lovely photograph of Martin Starkie and Wilfred Lawson that accompanied the listing for the play's first performance.

The 'round-up' contained some interesting production information: "Rudolph Cartier, the producer, decided that the most important thing was to find somebody with a strong facial resemblance to the Duke (he is described in the dialogue as having pale blue eyes, a thin face and golden hair). The choice fell on Martin Starkie (who played **Baranowski** in Cartier's first television production **Arrow to the Heart**) after a full camera test, in costume, make-up, and **L'Aiglon** hair style, during which he spoke two of the most difficult speeches of the play. Starkie comes from Burnley, Lancashire, and has done a great many sound radio plays.

The important part of Flambeau, a veteran of the Napoleonic guards, who disguises himself among the Austrian police to watch over his beloved Emperor's son, will be played by Wilfrid Lawson, who had a great success recently in Strindberg's **The Father** at the Arts Theatre, London. It will be his first major role in television drama. Many viewers will remember him as Dolittle in the film of Shaw's **Pygmalion**.

The exciting musical score is by Richard Addinsell (of 'Warsaw Concerto' fame) and was written for the American production of **L'Aiglon**."

Clemence Dane, in her article, gives some background detail of the main character: "L'Aiglon - the Eaglet - crowned King of Rome as a baby, was the only son of Napoleon and Marie Louise, the daughter of the Austrian Emperor whose armies he had overwhelmed at the Battle of Wagram. The marriage was engineered by Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor, Napoleon's principal opponent and personal enemy.

When Napoleon's empire collapsed Marie Louise returned to Austria, was made Duchess of Parma, married privately and soon forgot Napoleon, while her son was brought up at her father's court as an Austrian Duke.

No one knows the whole truth concerning the Eaglet's brief life. Rostand's view is that the boy 'could have reigned', that he was a martyr who lived to keep his father's memory alive and all-but succeeded in defeating Metternich's intrigues and escaping to France. But partly through his own instability - somebody calls him 'the white Hamlet' - partly through romantic chivalry to a woman, his attempt failed. The effort broke him and he died."

Dane explains that it was a hard job adapting such a long play "This [...] makes cutting a cruel and necessary business, and in this version - which is, of course, a very free rendering of the original - the play is halved. It was also felt that the opulent glitter of the original verse was better suggested in English by using a scheme which is partly prose and partly irregular rhymed verse. This 'Englishing' was immensely helped by the musical background with its authentic trumpet-calls and waltzes suggested by music of the Eaglet's own period. Indeed score and English text are so much a joint work as to be inseparable."

Dane also explains that, historically, the role of L'Aiglon was always played by a woman (starting with Sarah Bernhardt in the play's inaugural performance in Paris, 15th March 1900). Cartier broke with tradition by casting a man in the role.

The play listing only covers some basic details: "The place: Schoenbrunn Castle, near Vienna; Marie-Louise's salon; the Duke's study; the park; the battle of Wagram; the Duke's bedroom at Schoenbrunn on July 22, 1832. The time: 1830-1832"

The initial production was transmitted between 08:40:22pm and 11:03:54pm on Sunday 12th April 1953 (with an interval between 09:59:10pm and 10:04:00pm). This performance overran considerably. The repeat performance is listed in the PasB as being "exactly as previously broadcast" but lists some different music timings. This was broadcast between 07:00:48pm and 08:47:25pm, Thursday 16th April 1953.

There is no documentation to suggest that this live production was tele-recorded, and the film inserts (recorded on 19th and 20th March) are also non-extant. No script exist for this production in the BBC Written Archive at Caversham.

Cast
 Franz I, Emperor of Austria.....Milton Rosmer
 Marie-Louise, his daughter,
 widow of Napoleon I.....Eileen Peel
 Franz, Duke of Reichstadt, her son.....Martin Starkie
 Metternich, Chancellor of Austria.....André van Gysegem
 Flambeau, a French Grenadier.....Wilfred Lawson
 General Hartmann, the Duke's Tutor.....William Devlin
 Count Sedlinsky, Chief of the
 Austrian Police.....Henry Oscar
 Gentz, a spy.....John Gabriel
 Count Bombelles, in attendance
 on Marie-Louise.....Raymond Young



Radio Times image that accompanied the L'Aiglon listing

Marmont, a French Field-Marshal under Napoleon.....Eric Messier
 French Attaché.....Ian Colin Prokesch, a conspirator.....Peter Wyngarde
 Tiburce du Lorget, an exile in the Austrian pay.....Charles Hodgson
 Thérèse de Lorget, his sister.....Sheila Shand Gibbs
 Countess Camerata, Napoleon's niece.....Margot van der Burgh
 Fanny Elssler, a dancer.....Peggy Simpson
 The Archduchess, Marie-Louise's sister-in-law.....Maxine Audley
 Officer.....Conrad Phillips
 Old peasant.....MacGregor Urquhart
 The Imperial Family, petitioners, a doctor, conspirators, masks and dominoes, servants, court ladies, policemen, soldiers.....Ann Cherry
Alexis Milne
Gavin Dyer
Frank Lloyd
Roderick Robertson
Neil Sieler
James Turner
Muir Mathieson
 Dancers.....Robert Harrold
Tutte Lemkow
Norman McDowell
Ronald Yerrell
 Film extras.....John Kerr
Henry Manning
Paul Machell
Jerome Breffni
Stanley Platts
Paddy Hayes
Richard Price
Oliver Hunter
Henry Rayner
Paddy Ward
Frank Pendlebury
Alfred Beale
Lewis Wilson
John Hoskin
Dermot McMahon
Bart Allison

Crew
 Written by.....Edmond Rostand
 Translated and adapted by.....Clemence Dane
 Produced by.....Rudolph Cartier
 Settings by.....Barry Leardoy
 Music by.....Richard Addinsell
 Conducted by.....Muir Mathieson
 Choreography by.....Tutte Lemkow
 Stage Manager.....Paddy Russell
 Assistant Stage Manager.....Zella Hayward
 Singers.....Margaret Young
Joan Ryan
Marjorie Holt
 Orchestra.....11 members of Eric Robinson
 (Television) Ltd
 Rehearsal pianists.....Joyce Bell
Winifred Taylor
Kathleen O'Hagan

Production Information
 Project Number.....[not listed in PasB]
 Telerecording Number.....[not listed in PasB]
 Camera Rehearsal.....11th, 12th and 16th April 1953
 Camera Recording.....12th and 16th April 1953
 Duration (Original Performance).....141'32"
 Duration (Repeat Performance).....106'37"
 Studio.....[not listed in PasB]
 Recording Format.....not recorded
 Archive Format.....non-extant

Film Sequences Used
 o War Office: 27' unspecified format film (ME109 landing and taxi-ing)
 o War Office: 26' unspecified format film (HEIII on runway and taxi-ing)
 o BBC Specially shot: 762' sound monochrome unspecified format (probably 35mm)

Music Listed as Used:
 o 27'00" (33'52" on repeat performance) of L'Aiglon Music, written by Richard Addinsell and played by an orchestra conducted by Muir Mathieson
 o 04'20" of Richard Addinsell's *The Passionate Friends*, played by the Philharmonia Orchestra (conducted by Muir Mathieson) [COL DX 1551]
 o 00'40" of Schubert's *Marche Militaire*, arranged by Rimmer and played by the Halifax Home Guard Band [REG. ZONO. MR 3454] (listed as being used on the film sequence)

BBC Effects Listed as Used
 o Side drum 00'05" [BBC EP 165]
 o Prayers 00'10" [BBC 78 94 D]
 o Carriage 00'08" [BBC 8 A 47]
 o Wind 00'20" [BBC 23 C 9]
 o Horse 00'08" [BBC 8 A 27]
 o Chatter 00'20" [BBC 2 C 152 and 205]
 o Horse 00'10" [BBC 8 A 21]
 o Bird song 00'08" [BBC 2 B 56]
 o Parrot 00'05" [BBC 2B 52]
 o Crowds 00'20" [BBC 3 C 183]

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Thanks to Andrew Pibley for the generous loan of some background information on this production

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L'Aiglon script © Clemence Dane 1953, 2004

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