



MAIGRET





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MAIGRET



Maigret Sets A Trap and Maigret's Dead Men are two stand-alone dramatic films featuring the legendary French fictional detective Jules Maigret, played by the globally-renowned actor Rowan Atkinson.

In the first film, *Maigret Sets A Trap*, set in 1955 during a sweltering summer in Paris, the city is gripped with fear as four women are murdered on the streets of Montmartre in a spree of seemingly unconnected attacks. Chief Inspector Maigret is under huge public and professional pressure to find the killer before he strikes again. Maigret sets a trap which ultimately leads to a thrilling climax.

Further cast include Fiona Shaw (*Harry Potter*, *True Blood*), Aiden McCordle (*Mr Selfridge*, *The Mill*), Shaun Dingwall (*Silent Witness*, *Death In Paradise*), Lucy Cohu (*Broadchurch*), Leo Staal (*Call The Midwife*, *Lewis*), Rufus Wright (*Miranda*, *Doctors*), Hugh Simon (*The Mill*, *MI-5*), David Dawson (*Ripper Street*, *Peaky Blinders*), Colin Mace (*Doctors*, *Lost Honour of Christopher Jefferies*) and Rebecca Night (*Starlings*).

Maigret Sets A Trap will be followed by *Maigret's Dead Man* later in the year.

The formidable character of Jules Maigret first appeared in print in 1931. Georges Simenon, who wrote 75 Maigret novels, is considered one of the greatest writers of the 20th century – selling around a billion books worldwide to date.

Maigret is produced by Ealing Studios and Maigret Productions Ltd (a Peters Fraser Dunlop Group company) and commissioned by ITV's Director of Drama, Steve November, and Controller of Drama, Victoria Fea.

Maigret is written by Stewart Harcourt (*Love & Marriage, Treasure Island, Marple*) and produced by Jeremy Gwilt (*Undeniable, Foyle's War, Torn, Home Fires*). The Executive Producers are Barnaby Thompson (*Easy Virtue, Dorian Gray, St. Trinians*) and Ben Latham-Jones (*Nina, D Train, Midsummer Nights Dream*) for Ealing Studios, John Simenon and Paul Aggett for Maigret Productions, and Stewart Harcourt.

INTRODUCTION BY BARNABY THOMPSON

I was about 12 when I really discovered the joy of reading, and that was thanks to thriller writers like Alastair MacLean and the detective fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle and Georges Simenon. I read all the Sherlock Holmes books and then discovered Inspector Maigret. I had not yet been to Paris, but I was immediately drawn to Simenon's lean, evocative descriptions of the streets of Montmartre and the Banks of the Seine. I loved his spare style, the intelligence and humanity of the pipe smoking detective and the surprising twists in the plot.

Years later, after a career making movies in America and Britain, I had the urge to develop a big international television series. I picked up a Maigret novel and was once again reminded how great a character he was and what a good writer Georges Simenon had been. I was also surprised at how contemporary the stories felt. I knew this is what I wanted to do.

I hooked up with GSL, the Georges Simenon Estate, run by his son, John, and we agreed to produce the shows together. We took the idea to Peter Fincham at ITV, whose father it turned out had been a fan of the books. We hired Stewart Harcourt, an experienced writer to come aboard and write the scripts. Stewart was very enthusiastic, responding both to the world and to the stories.

We wanted to set the drama firmly in Paris of the fifties but to emphasise the modernity of the books, and keep it as real and as visceral as possible. And to put the wonderful, thoughtful compassionate character of Maigret at it's centre.

Next came the casting and when Rowan Atkinson agreed, we were thrilled. He brings just the right measure of empathy and gravitas, and gives a performance that will surprise and amaze everyone who only know him as a comedian.

We were lucky enough to be able to attract Jeremy Gwilt, an experienced producer with enormous energy and passion. He pulled together a fantastic team of directors, designers and crew to capture the mood and atmosphere of the books. They have created a real, living breathing city - not picture postcard pretty - but one of contrasts, wide avenues and narrow slums, smokey clubs and bars, and the wonderful Quai Des Orfevres, the main Police Station where Maigret is based.

We shot the two films back to back last Autumn in Budapest and Paris, with a strong cast including Shaun Dingwall, Lucy Cohu, Fiona Shaw and Aiden McArdle.

Watching the films now, I'm reminded of my twelve year old self. I'm older, hopefully a little wiser, but I am still sucked into the magic of Simenon's Paris in the same way. There is something deeply satisfying about seeing a world I had pictured in my head whilst reading the books come alive on the screen.

I hope Georges Simenon himself would be pleased with how his work has been adapted. I feel confident that fans and those new to the character will relish the world that has been created. And I am thankful to have been lucky enough to go on this wonderful journey.

JOHN SIMENON - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

How did these two Maigret films come about?

“The underlying rights to my father’s work belong to Georges Simenon Ltd and its subsidiary, Maigret Productions Limited, are co-producers, together with Ealing with Barnaby Thompson co-exec producing. There were several projects being proposed to us at the time, including from France but Barnaby’s was the most promising.”

Tell us about your father as an author and what he created?

“Maigret represents 75 novels and 28 short stories out of a total production of 350 literary works. All the other works are non-Maigret. They are what some would call psychological noir novels. My father started working as a writer in the early 1920s around the age of 20 and he learned his trade for about 10 years, churning out what he called popular pulp novels under pseudonyms.

“When he felt he was ready to publish something in his own name, he went for what he thought was the easy way into literature, which was the detective novel. He explained that when your main character is a detective who can know everything and do anything, it’s like a prop to lean on.

“My father was not attracted by plot. He was attracted by people. His interest lies in human behaviour and the human soul. There are two short ways to characterise the Maigret novels. One is to say Maigret does not solve crimes but solves people. And the other is to say his stories are not whodunits but whydunits. That is what I would say defines Maigret in a nutshell: his empathy, his interest for other people.

“Maigret is not a hunter like the traditional policeman. All policemen will tell you they are hunters at heart. Maigret is not a hunter, he is an explorer who tries to be, in my father’s words, a “repairer of destinies”.

“In terms of readership, my father has been translated into about 55 languages and is reported to have been read by more than a billion people. He is definitely one of the most adapted authors of all times as his stories have been adapted at least 450 times, some many times over. Not only all the Maigrets but a great many of the others.”

Is that focus on human nature the reason why the stories have endured and translate so well to a modern day audience?

“I believe it is. It’s about the human condition and what my father called ‘the naked man’, separate from all the particularities of time, space and other circumstances. The man that existed ten thousand years ago and that will hopefully still exist ten thousand years from now. The core of what people are all about.

“His stories take place in the 1950s and 1960s and in the 1930s and 1970s, so they span pretty much most of the last century. The nexus of his stories is valid in any country and at any time. Because people are people and they don’t change that much. That’s why, I believe, he is translated so much, why he still endures, why he is so adaptable.

“The characters he writes about are gold mines for actors who often come to me and ask if they could play this or that particular character. To them, his characters embody everything they want to express in their own art. Plots can change with time. Human beings don’t.

“Further, his writing style is very concise and very evocative. When you read Simenon he speaks directly to your heart, not to your brain.”

What sort of father was he? What are your memories of him?

“Just an ordinary father. Key to our relationship were our regular long walks together during which we would discuss just anything. As a 10-year-old, then as a teenager, every day I would go for these long walks with him. I think they gave me a very intuitive knowledge of who he was. I can’t remember every single conversation. But I can remember some of the stupid things I would tell him. And that I’ll keep for myself.”

Was there a moment when you realised how famous he was?

“I always knew he was famous. It’s part of your life so you don’t see how special it is. If you grow up in circumstances where each time you say your name, people say, ‘Oh, you mean Georges Simenon?’ or something like that, that’s your normal environment and you don’t question it. You don’t really realise what it means until you become older and start having a life on your own. But even then it never struck me as much as when I began to manage his literary estate. It’s only then, when I saw the numbers, that I really gauged the incredible depth of his success.

“But the first turning point came when I started reading his novels as a grown up. I was about 35 when I rediscovered them, and my reaction was the same as anybody who gets into Simenon and becomes hooked on his writing.”

What do you think of Rowan Atkinson’s portrayal of Maigret?

“I don’t doubt people will share my feeling that Rowan Atkinson is probably going to be one of the truest Maigrets ever. Because he really expresses a unique sensitivity to others, an empathy that is so important.

“Which is much more important to me than anything else. These are physical attributes on which my father relied to establish Maigret at the very beginning. But then if you read the more recent Maigrets - those written after the war - you don’t see that many such descriptions of him. It’s part of the background. What is really important is his empathy, which is present from the first story in 1930 to the last one in 1972.

“A lot of what happens with Maigret works inwards. The challenge for Rowan was to express that. Not necessarily in words but also in behaviour and body language.”

These two films are set in 1950s’ Paris. What does that period bring to the story and drama?

“First it brings novelty. I don’t think there are many shows that take place in such time and location. It is very exciting because that was the eternal Paris we all love.

“It was a time of growth and people wanted to forget the war. There were still many scars from the war but people were optimistic. It was probably one of the last moments in the last 70 years when French people were optimistic and looking forward and open and excited about their future.

“It was also a time when most violence was somewhat 'ordinary'. Not that I consider any violence acceptable, but terrorists or big Mafia were not yet what they are today.”

In terms of the authenticity of the character, are there certain things Maigret does not do?

“Maigret almost never draws a gun, let alone shoots one. In the whole history of the saga I think he has probably shot his gun less than 5 times in 103 stories.

“Maigret also never drives as he doesn’t have his license. For Rowan that must be frustrating! He takes cabs all the time or is driven by his team. He also smokes the pipe and is certainly not a teetotaler.”

How would you describe the relationship between Maigret and his wife, Madame Maigret, played by Lucy Cohu?

“Their relationship is really one of ‘complicité’, in French. The English word ‘accomplice’ doesn’t fully express the same thing. She is very supportive but has a mind of her own. It is a secure relationship. They have a very strong bond and are simple people.

“They go to the movies and will hold hands doing that. They also have that little house by the Loire river where they like to go for vacations. They are very settled. But Madame Maigret is not subservient.

"It is also clear that they share the same bed. But what makes Maigret a little special is that I always think of Maigret and Madame Maigret almost like parents. You know it happens, but you don't want to see it.

"So it was important for me that Lucy and Rowan be credible in that relationship and express the great level of tenderness that exists between Maigret and Madame Maigret.

"I think this comes across very well. Rowan and Lucy are a good match. And Lucy looks very much like the Madame Maigret my father described many times. She is terrific. "

Do you have a cameo in either of the films?

"Yes, in the final scene of the first film. To illustrate Paris in the 1950s, Ashley Pearce, the director of *Maigret Sets A Trap*, chose a collection of 50s photographs which he recreated in the film as establishing vignettes of the streets of Paris.

"One of the pictures was that of a man reading a book to a young boy on a bench in a park, and that is what I played. But it could end up on the cutting room floor."

Why film Maigret in Budapest?

"Recreating Paris in the 50s requires special effects irrespective of where you shoot, but strangely enough, less so in Budapest, where many places are architecturally very similar to Paris, and which is also much less expensive."

The Simenon name is known worldwide. Has it led to any striking encounters?

"Two which really struck me. When I was 23, I went to Japan for the 1970 World Fair - Expo '70. You didn't have cell phones then, so you had to make calls through the operator. One day in Osaka, I asked the Japanese operator to get in touch with my father, giving his name and number, and she said in French, 'Simenon? Georges Simenon the writer?' That, I must say, was really quite a surprise.

"And the other one is much more recent. I was travelling with my family in Utah. We arrived at one of those truck stops in the middle of absolutely nowhere. Just a cross between two highways. So I walk into this remote motel at 10 o'clock at night and the night watch lady was reading a Simenon book. That was wonderful."

Why do readers and viewers love Maigret?

“You do escape into a different world, but Maigret also brings you back to yourself - which does not necessarily happen with other detectives. You know you could be part of that story while you read it. It’s not something so divorced from your own life. You feel it’s something that could happen to you or people you know. Not the crimes themselves. I’m talking about the human circumstances Maigret investigates. They remind you sometimes of things you have lived through or seen in your own life.

“My father’s villains are never absolute evils. They all have some humanity in them. My father didn’t believe in pure evil. He was interested in what turned ordinary people towards crime.

“A serial killer has no excuse for what he has done. Neither Maigret nor my father will let him escape his responsibility, but he’s still a human being who was once a child and was also quite likely the victim of something else. And I think people understand their empathy for such situations.”

What does it mean to you that in 2016 people still love and appreciate the work of your father?

“It’s a great gift. I don’t take it for granted. It’s a tribute to his talent, his universality and also to the man he was. So many things have been written about him, he was not an easy man. But he was a good man. Not in the sense of a gentle uncle or whatever. He was not that. He was not always reassuring. He had a lot of anxieties. But his sense of ethics was very high.”

ROWAN ATKINSON IS CHIEF INSPECTOR JULES MAIGRET



How did this role come about?

“ITV sent the script of the first film. I read it, thought about it for three months and then decided I didn’t want to do it. Which is the kind of thing I often do. Not because I didn’t want to do it but because I wasn’t sure I could do it.

“It was mainly because I didn’t really want to do it in the year in which they wanted to make it. Then, of course, a year later you don’t know whether they’ve already found someone to play the part or not. But it was still there when I woke up to it again and I was re-offered the part.

“Even then I had to think about it for some time because I had to believe I could play it. Because the odd thing about him as a character is he’s not much of a character. He’s fairly bland. He hasn’t got a French accent or a limp or a lisp and he doesn’t love opera. There isn’t a tremendous amount to get hold of in character terms. He’s just an ordinary guy doing a slightly extraordinary job in a quite unpleasant world.

“The thing I thought I could do was his thoughtfulness. That it’s his ruminative, thoughtful and quite compassionate side, I suppose, which is interesting. Because he’s definitely not an egotist, he’s not a performer, he’s not an eccentric, he’s not a weirdo, he hasn’t really got a bad streak in him.

“I’m not claiming any of those things for myself, but I felt I could probably portray a lot of the aspects of him that did exist. Particularly that quietness. I think I’m quite good at not doing very much on screen. So that drove me to say yes. We decided to make two films and that’s what we’ve done.”

Were you actively looking for this sort of role?

“Not particularly. Anyway, the idea of playing a TV detective felt like a bit of a cliché. It felt like a bit of a road down which many have trodden. In particular I’m always quite nervous about playing characters that have been played before. I think it’s in many ways more fun to create a character from scratch.

“But then if everyone followed that rule, no-one would ever play Hamlet or any of the other great roles that exist. Indeed the first time I’d ever played a role that had been played before was probably Fagin in *Oliver*, which had definitely been played many times before I did it on the West End stage five, six years ago. Actually I didn’t mind doing that because in the end you create your own version and that’s what people either come to see or don’t.

“I thought Maigret was totally and definitely different to any other TV detective. It’s not really Morse and it’s not *A Touch of Frost* and it’s not *Midsomer Murders*. It’s really none of those things. The period helps and the setting helps and just the tone of Simenon’s writing is very interesting. Quite dark, quite seedy, quite sleazy.

“Harder nosed I would say than an awful lot of TV fiction. Not detective fiction, of which there’s an awful lot of extremely unpleasant stuff out there. But in terms of what you see on TV, I think it has a unique tone to it. Whether we’ve captured it or not is for others to judge. But I liked the fact it didn’t feel like any other TV detective show that I knew currently.

“So I wasn’t particularly looking to play this sort of role. In many ways because it was a TV detective I was slightly put off it. But I quite liked the fact that I’m rather old for it because he’s supposed to be around 50 and I’m definitely around 60. In fact I am 60. But I felt as though I could probably carry it off. Because he’s not an old man, he’s supposed to be a vigorous middle aged man. But still, at least it was something that I wasn’t too young for. Let’s say that for it. And as such it felt like an appropriate thing to do.”

When did you first encounter Maigret?

“I didn’t see the Rupert Davies’ Maigret TV series in the 1960s. We didn’t have a television at home until I was 14. So that meant, for whatever reason, that I didn’t see much TV. But I’ve seen bits since. And I’ve also seen the Michael Gambon Maigret. But, again, I don’t remember either hearing about it or seeing it in 1992. It passed me by.

"I do remember reading some Maigret books when I was in my late teens and early twenties. I remember they were enjoyable and I've read far more since. I've read about eight more books since this project, mainly from the early eras."

Do you think Maigret, although set in 1950s' Paris, is relevant to a modern day audience?

"Yes, I think it is. Maigret's humanity is important and it's admirable. It's enjoyable to watch somebody witness and having to deal with great inhumanity and at the same time they are able to display such compassion to all those involved in these extremely messy and violent situations. He conveys this calm at the centre of sometimes very stormy stories."

Maigret takes a huge risk in the first film. Did you view taking this role as a risk?

"Everything is a risk to a certain extent. But like all risks you make a judgement in order to reduce the risk. So you don't play any part that comes along, you play the parts that you think you're going to do best. And then you're in the lap of the gods to a certain extent."

"But yet again you make judgements about producers, about directors, about casting. You make a judgement about everyone with whom you come into contact and you decide whether it feels like the kind of thing you want to do. And in the end in the creative world your instinct is the only real skill you have. It's the only real quality that you can lean on. And my instinct historically has been okay, I think. So you've just got to carry on trusting your instinct. That's all you've got."

Was there a moment wearing the hat and coat and smoking the pipe when you felt this was 'My Maigret'?

"He hasn't got a limp but he has got a pipe. So that's a start. The first couple of weeks on the first film I found very, very difficult. The main problem being not the fact the part is serious but that the character is very low key and his whole delivery is decidedly untheatrical and naturalistic."

"I think it's the naturalism of the character and of the performance that is of the kind required by modern television drama - that you can't do anything too big or silly or theatrical. Generally speaking even the serious characters I've played on stage have been far more characterful than Maigret is."

"Whereas with him it's just this very low key, almost inflection-free delivery which is how you're supposed to do an awful lot of television drama. It's not Henry V. And that I found very difficult. I'm used to, in many ways you might say, milking every word for all the value, whether it's comic or serious, that you can get out of it. And you've just got to let it flow. It's got to tell the story in the most low key naturalistic way. So it was the low key naturalism that I found tricky."

You decided to smoke real tobacco in the pipe?

“That was more a practical thing than anything else. Real tobacco stays alight for much longer and also it doesn’t burn.”

Maigret never drives himself. Is that frustrating for a car enthusiast?

“Yes, I do find it frustrating, actually. The first character I’ve ever played who is in close contact with a car, who doesn’t drive it. But no, he’s always chauffeured. So be it. In a Citroen Traction Avant Light 15.”

Have you had to curtail your motor racing activities due to the insurance requirements that always come with a role like this?

“A little bit. I couldn’t do anything at Goodwood this last September. I usually like to race at the Goodwood Revival. But I’m used to that. That’s happened several times on movies, on Johnny English movies and things. Not only are you not allowed to motor race during the shooting, you’re not allowed to motor race for three months before the shooting. So it can be very restrictive and has been over the years.”

All eyes are on Maigret as he leads an investigation. As a ‘globally renowned actor,’ are you able to go about your business without being bothered? Or are there places and situations you have to avoid?

“I’ve lived with recognisability for several decades now. You get used to it. And you get used to dealing with it. The modern era of the smartphone...10, 15 years ago things changed quite significantly. The fact that people very rarely ask you for an autograph now. It’s always a photograph.

“But at the same time I’m certainly not a recluse. I lead a normal life in a normal way. But you learn. If you’re going to travel by tube - which, surprisingly I do quite a lot - you know where to stand, where to face and what time of day to go.”

Presumably it’s that ‘in plain sight’ factor. People don’t expect to see you?

“Yes, exactly. If you turned up to a building in a fleet of limos with nine bodyguards you’re going to attract more attention than if you don’t.”

Maigret is often under pressure. Do you enjoy the responsibility of being the leading man at the head of a production?

“Actually, no I don’t if I have to be honest. I try not to set myself up as a team leader too much. I leave that to producers like Jeremy Gwilt on Maigret. All I want to do is the job. And my job is the same as any other actor, which is just to play the part and make it credible and tell the story. Which is the only job an actor really has. And that’s what I focus on.”

“Also I tend to take the work extremely seriously. This is not because it’s a serious part. I’m afraid I’m the same with all the comic stuff I’ve done. I’m quite a dull person to work with because I’m very absorbed in the work I do. But I hope I’m always polite and nice to people. Which I think I am.”

You’re doing a job just like anyone else?

“Yes. The job of acting. Yes, absolutely. It’s just a job.”

What has the experience of filming in Budapest been like?

“Budapest is a nice place to be. I tended to go home a lot because I don’t like being away from home, if I have to be honest. I like to be in my own bed every night rather than somebody else’s. I got away every weekend. But it’s a very nice city. It’s quite calm.

“In fact it’s rather Maigret-esque, actually, compared to some other places like Prague, which are a little more stag party in their flavour - at least certainly at weekends and evenings. Well maybe there are stag parties going on in Budapest and I have been blissfully unaware of them. It’s not that kind of city.

“It’s a beautiful city and perfect to portray Paris in the 1950s. We needed a European city, and a European city that was, I’m afraid, slightly behind the times. You can still find cobbled streets with grass growing between the cobbles in Budapest. You’ll never find that in Paris.”

Did you film any scenes in Paris?

“They did film there. I didn’t go. It involved a chase involving several people. We were supposed to be going on the Tuesday after the Bataclan theatre attacks. Then, of course, all the filming permits were rescinded and we never went.

How would you describe the relationship between Maigret and Madame Maigret?

“In the books the relationship is relatively undeveloped. Having said that, there’s a book I read in which Maigret spends the entire story in bed and Madame Maigret is running around doing everything at his bidding. But generally speaking the relationship is what you might call very old fashioned. In that it’s very calm and not overly-demonstrative but I think a very loving and genuine relationship.

“I think Maigret appreciates that calm and the normality of it. In contrast to the frequently, I’m sure, traumatic nature of his work. We’ve tried to develop the character of Madame Maigret. I think she’s more present in these stories than she would have been in the equivalent stories in the novels.

“Because you have to cast these things and you’re going to get better people the better and more fulfilling the role is. Lucy Cohu is extremely good. We’ve tried to give her a definite presence in these stories.”

Are there other career ambitions you currently have in mind?

“No. I haven’t got a bucket list, as they say. In terms of roles it’s just whatever comes along. I certainly don’t want to lose touch with comedy. I enjoy playing characters and I don’t notice the difference in terms of the job. Whether I’m playing a serious character or a comic character, the job is exactly the same as far as I’m concerned. And I enjoy them both.

“There is that slightly dull feeling sometimes that people think you should get serious when you get old. And, unfortunately, you do lose in the audience’s eyes a degree of comic authority as you get older.

“There’s something about over-45s in comedy. It’s great if you get something like Dad’s Army in which everyone was extremely old and that generally speaking their joke is about being old. You’re stupid or you’re short-sighted or you’re incontinent or whatever your little ageing characteristic is. But I don’t want to lose touch with comedy and I’m sure I won’t.”

How would you sum up the appeal of Maigret?

“I just hope we’ve done a decent job of telling some interesting stories. I think the world of Maigret is very interesting. Paris in 1955 and the characters and the crimes. I think it is different. Merely the fact they carry guns and don’t have lawyers present when they interview people. A very different world to our own. And yet humans and the human characteristics and characters are still there as much as they would be today. So I just hope people find the stories engaging. And I think they will.”

LUCY COHU IS MADAME MAIGRET



What was your reaction when you heard about this new Maigret adaptation?

"I remember watching Michael Gambon as Maigret in the 1990s' version. So I knew of Maigret. I thought it was intriguing with Rowan Atkinson taking on this part. A very big departure for him. The project sounded really interesting.

"Then when I read the scripts I thought, 'These are really juicy.' They were dark and there was something quite sexy about them. That's how I felt when I read them."

How would you describe Louise, Madame Maigret in these films?

"I had an initial meeting with the producer Jeremy Gwilt and Rowan and we all felt Madame Maigret had to be more present in these films than she is in the books. Everybody was very much on the same page when it came to that.

"In the past she's been very much portrayed as waiting there with the pipe and slippers for her husband. We wanted to do something different with her and make her far more active and involved. We really focus on this very close bond they have between each other. A very deep love there.

"She's also the only regular woman in the series. I felt it very important that she really had a voice. We wanted to make her very much her own woman. She's intelligent, thoughtful, not afraid to express herself. When she thinks Maigret has stepped out of line she is absolutely the one to tell him so. They feel very much each other's equal.

There's this history of this child they lost who would have been about 24 at the time of these stories. That's very much between them still.

"When we finished the first film Rowan and I looked at each other and went, 'We're just at the beginning of the adventure. We're at the beginning of the journey.'"

Would you say it's a traditional 1950s' marriage?

"It has traditional elements. But also I get the impression she's very much his foot soldier as well. She goes out on the streets and reports back what people are saying about cases. She picks up things in the butcher's and the baker's and she reports back to him. And he asks her. He's very keen for her opinion. He wants to know."

In one story they work together in a local cafe. Why?

"The owners have disappeared and the cafe has closed down. So Maigret thinks it's a good idea for the cafe to be seen open and running, to encourage the people to come back in, including possibly the killer. He asks her to help him and she really involves herself in it.

"Afterwards Madame Maigret says, 'Playing at a different life. I liked it.' I always felt that line referenced the fact he's away a lot of the time and she is slightly envious of the life he leads. When they were in the cafe together you see them running it."

"In any of those sort of relationships there's a degree of loneliness that goes with being a partner of someone who works in that line of business. She spends a lot of time on her own. They're an odd, intriguing couple.

"I've worked in cafes lots of times so it came to me naturally. I've spent many a time with my hands in dishes."

When not working in a cafe, what is Madame Maigret's typical look?

"She has fantastic, amazing costumes and hair and make up. Madame Maigret is very chic. But in a very understated way. I always had this thought of, What's Madame Maigret wearing?"

What was it like working with Rowan Atkinson as your screen husband?

"It felt a very natural fit. They seem very good together, him and her.

What does the 1950s' Paris setting bring to the stories?

"There's a sort of innocence about those times. Maigret, for example, puts his home address in a newspaper ad. It's a very interesting period. Obviously we filmed in Budapest. Paris is far too smart these days and Budapest still retains that old faded grandeur.

"The sets were absolutely amazing. We had a brilliant art department. The first time Rowan and I walked into what was our apartment, it was just gorgeous. The attention to detail was superb.

"It has that element of 1950s' nostalgia for the time and period. We were very lucky to be actually filming on location. That makes a massive difference. Not in studios. And the costumes are so beautiful for men and women.

"I had filmed in Budapest before for Einstein and Eddington with David Tennant and Andy Serkis. It's a beautiful city. Breathtaking. I did a daily walk from New to Old Budapest across the Chain Bridge. I tried to do that every day, with the light changing. Absolutely beautiful."

SHAUN DINGWALL IS JANVIER



What were your thoughts when you first heard about this production?

"I was very excited about it. It's an unusual drama in the sense there is nothing else like it on television at the moment. It's Paris in the 1950s, a very edgy, dangerous city and that's evoked in the scripts. So I thought it was a very exciting idea. And then, obviously, hearing Rowan Atkinson was attached to it. I completely understood how that could work with him in the title role. I thought it was a very clever idea.

"I remember Michael Gambon playing Maigret in the early 1990s. But I was at drama school at the time so I didn't see it. That was almost 25 years ago so the time is right."

Who is Janvier?

"Janvier has been a police inspector for quite a while and is Maigret's right-hand man. He's a very loyal team member. A solid detective who isn't afraid of getting his hands dirty - and actually does get his hands dirty quite a lot, doing things Maigret wouldn't necessarily do.

“What is fascinating about this particular period is that policing was very different then. There was no danger of any law suits or lots of paperwork. Police are inundated with paperwork now and it makes their job so much harder and less interesting. But they didn’t have that problem in Paris in the 1950s. It was a case of going out and solving things with a team. Just getting down to the nitty gritty. We explore that.

“It was a time when you didn’t need a search warrant. You would just go in and do it. You might get into trouble but nobody would really bother. People weren’t as knowledgeable about the law in those days as they are now. People are much more savvy about these things today, probably because of watching TV detective series.

“There is something quite hard-boiled about it all. The Second World War only ended 13 years ago. So although it’s a jubilant period in terms of peace time, there are still people around, Janvier included, who would have shot people in the war and been shot at. So there’s a closeness to danger and death. They would have had a close relationship with that.

“Maigret has a level of compassion. That’s not something Janvier has. He would find it fascinating but wouldn’t subscribe to it himself. He just wants to get on with the job. Maigret’s attitude is unusual because men didn’t necessarily show that level of compassion back then as much as they might now.”

What sort of crimes do they investigate?

“The crimes are brutal in this. We tend to have this slightly rose-tinted idea of what it was like in the 1950s. But actually it’s shocking what did happen. Georges Simenon was around then and writing about that time. So it’s authentic.”

Can a modern audience still relate to these stories?

“They can. In a way nothing has changed. They are very contemporary themes. I think that’s what’s so fascinating about it. Not a lot has changed. There might be more crime around now but there are more people.”

Were the stakes higher back then?

“Absolutely, yes. The guillotine still existed. To think that wasn’t that long ago is extraordinary. So the stakes are higher for everybody. That must also feed into the policing of the time.”

What has it been like filming in Budapest?

“Budapest is perfect to depict Paris in the 1950s. There seems to be a location on every street corner you could film on. You can almost put a camera anywhere here and you’ve got a fantastic location. There are huge pockets of Budapest that look like time stopped 70 years ago.

"It's an extraordinary place. For a start, it's one of the friendliest cities I've ever been to. But visually the architecture here is absolutely phenomenal. You have these extraordinary solid stone buildings with the big double doors. Then you walk through and you're into this extraordinary courtyard with spiral staircases and tenement buildings.

"Filming in our police headquarters - the Quai - is amazing. The world they have created for Maigret is just incredibly immersive and does a lot of the work for us as actors.

"You can also leave the blinds open on the window and see across the road. They don't have to set dress it or green screen it because there's a building outside that also looks like Paris in the 1950s. No modern lampposts or any of that modern street furniture. The fact you can see through a window is quite unusual in a costume drama.

"We've had a lot of night shoots. Everyone is in bed at 3am apart from a bunch of film-makers. And with Paris being the fashion centre it was, the police detectives are wearing reasonably sharp clothes. Visually it's a stunning time.

"My mum and dad came over to watch filming and said I look like my grandad. They were blown away by the filming and Budapest."

There were no mobiles phones or computers, so no short cuts for the police?

"They have to go into cafes to make a telephone call and will sit and have a brandy on duty. Those scenes are great fun to play, rather than just having a conversation on your mobile phone. And nobody messes with the police when they go out."

In one scene a woman called Maria spits in Janvier's face. How was that filmed?

"In the original script I got spat on twice. But the first scene was dropped. You can't really fake someone spitting in your face. I got to know Anamaria Marinca, who plays Maria, and she's a terrific woman and actress. They talked about using egg white and mixing it up with a bit of gelatine or something. And I was like, 'Let's just do it. It's so much easier.'

"So we did about three or four takes on that and I got spat in the face three or four times. It's a funny thing because she's didn't like doing it anymore than I did. You're never really comfortable with that kind of thing but you've just got to do it. It's fine."

Were there any other particularly memorable scenes for you?

“There was a scene where I did look around and think, ‘Wow.’ They had set up this Parisien cafe scene at the height of summer with hundreds of extras. So the women were in their amazing floral dresses, all the men are suited and booted and there are mopeds and cars. And I’m just driving around on my own looking for this suspect and waiting for something to happen.

“I remember driving and I completely forgot I was being filmed. Of course there’s a camera on me but I forgot about it because you get totally immersed. That was jaw-dropping.”

As Janvier, you drive a vintage Citroen Traction Avant Light 15?

“It’s like driving a tank on sand. If you want to turn a corner, you have to anticipate it about five minutes before. Absolutely stunning to look at. Drives like a dog. The brakes are also a little bit spongy so you have to anticipate that as well. It’s a completely different experience to driving a modern car. But having said that, it’s really great fun. And it will look beautiful on screen, which is the whole point.”

What was it like working alongside Rowan Atkinson?

“The amount of detail he gets in is really fascinating. I completely believe everything he says and does as Maigret. He looks extraordinary and he looks the part. Acting with him, all of his previous roles go out of the window. You forget all that. He is this super intelligent inspector, detective. You just believe it.

“People will always judge any actor and say, ‘I can only think of him as this or this.’ But this is a case of, ‘Put judgement to one side and go with it.’ Because he gets it absolutely spot on.”

LEO STAAR IS LAPOINTE



What was your first encounter with Maigret?

"I knew of the books but I'd never read them. So before my first audition I read the first story they were going to film. I was very excited when I heard about this show. I was coming off the back off about 11 months of being out of work. It had been very quiet and I had been working in a motorcycle shop for about six months, building bikes, and was very anxious to get back to acting work again.

"I got sent the script and heard Rowan Atkinson was doing it. That was really exciting because he's an incredibly bright guy and a very good choice to play a character like Maigret. The week after that first audition I was asked back to meet Rowan which was terrifying but absolutely wonderful having had the year I'd had.

"So I went in and had a lovely chat with Rowan, which was pretty much an hour's conversation about Formula One and motorcycles. He said, 'We should probably talk about the script at some point.' So we did. Then a week later I found out I'd got the part. I was outside the front of my house fixing my motorbike when the phone rang. So that was incredibly good news."

Who is Lapointe?

“Lapointe is a police inspector, the same rank as Janvier but the junior of the two. He’s one of the top two detectives in the department who work with Maigret. There is a lovely father and son relationship between Maigret and Lapointe. He looks up to Maigret a great deal.

“He is a very intelligent young man who has risen quickly through the ranks. Whereas Janvier has been there for some time. Lapointe has his own set of skills that are really valuable to Maigret.

“Lapointe listens a lot and soaks up everything Maigret has to offer. There are moments where we see Lapointe just watching Maigret do his thing. I hope I mirror that when I’m doing scenes either interviewing suspects or chasing leads. It’s a little tip of the hat to what Maigret has been doing because Lapointe learns everything from him.

“There’s an amazing online resource about all things Maigret. You can type in a character’s name and then have the chronology of everything that character does and in which book they do it. So I can figure out what Lapointe has done up until where we’re finding him and then what happens afterwards. That was really helpful.

“Lapointe and Janvier have a huge loyalty to Maigret. Even when we may not be completely following where Maigret is going with something and Lapointe and Maigret get a bit anxious about that - their loyalty to Maigret is unfaltering.

“Maigret is definitely the brains, gives us the orders and it’s Lapointe and Janvier who do the running around and drive the vehicles.”

What does Lapointe look like?

“When I first got the script I didn’t have a clear idea of how he would look. It wasn’t until reading it and having a few chats with our amazing costume designer Lucinda Wright that we worked out where we wanted to place him.

“Lapointe is very very eager to please and learns a lot from Maigret. So he’s in a three-piece suit, not too dissimilar to what we see Maigret wear. It’s all slightly mirroring who he aspires to be.”

These stories are set in the 1950s. Do they have something to say to a modern audience?

“I think they really do. There are some very interesting qualities. When I first read the scripts I was trying to work out why I hadn’t heard much about Maigret the detective before. And what made Maigret this interesting detective? He’s not a Sherlock, he’s not an alcoholic, he doesn’t have these normal hooks those other famous detectives have.

“But then the more you read you realise Maigret is the quiet in the storm. Which is an amazing thing to watch. Especially in Rowan’s playing of Maigret. He’s incredibly still and quiet when all this chaos is happening around him, yet Maigret can work things out. That’s what’s special about Maigret. It’s the quietness about him.”

What is it like working alongside Rowan Atkinson?

“A lot of people are going to be watching this expecting certain things from Rowan and I think they’re going to be blown away. It’s fascinating what he’s doing. There’s not a hint of those characters we know Rowan for. So if people are looking out for those, they’re going to be disappointed. What he’s doing is completely different and away from what we’ve seen before. It’s been incredible to watch.”

The stakes are high at this time with some facing the death penalty via the guillotine?

“Especially in the second film. It’s a very dark story. They are really dark themes we’re dealing with. It’s brutal crime at this particular time. So the stories are very serious. But there are still light touches here and there.

“The police can send a man or a woman to their death. But they wouldn’t have known any different then. You get on with the job and do it. You wouldn’t be as aware of the risks as today. We’re also at a time that these men would have served in the army during World War Two. They’ve been through some horrible things. They are familiar with death.”

What has filming in Budapest been like?

“Budapest has been an amazing city in which to film. I’ve loved it and it’s been great for filming. It’s a very special place. Normally if you shoot a period film, you go to set and you come home in the evening. When you finish a day’s filming whilst in Budapest you can look around the city you’ve been inhabiting fictionally. So you don’t really leave it and are constantly being a part of it. Which is really nice.

“It’s my first visit here and I’ve fallen in love with Budapest. We’ve had whole weekends to look around and explore. You can see why it’s such a good place to film because it lends itself to so many different cities. Some of the buildings are stunning and the apartments we’ve been filming in are beautiful and untouched.

“I’ve been to Paris a lot and feel I know it quite well. They’ve done an amazing job building 1950s’ Paris in Budapest. In the outdoor scenes you don’t feel like you’re anywhere else but Paris. It really does feel like you’re there. I’d love to come back to Budapest again.”

You have filmed lots of night shoots?

"We really appreciated the hotel fire alarm going off on a day when we were working at night and sleeping during the day. It happened to be during a week where we were doing night shoots. Our working hours were 5pm to 7am, so you'd sleep during the day. And, of course, during that week they decided to run many different fire drills with alarms. The one week you could really do without because all of our body clocks were backwards anyway."

One story involves scenes at a horse racing course. How was that to film?

"That was filmed at a real racetrack. They've now built a brand new one right alongside it. But the stands we filmed in were the original ones. It was 'dressed' amazingly with all the ripped betting tickets all over the floor and the supporting artistes in costume. It felt like a really busy place."

How would you describe the police headquarters - the Quai?

"I've never been on a set like the Quai in my life, in that it didn't feel like a set at all. There were no false walls or anything like that. They took over this incredible government building and brought it all back to the 1950s. It was such an expansive set, the like of which I've never seen before. You would wander around and the camera could follow you anywhere."

"Every little detail was there. If you open a drawer there will be some police documents written in French. I went around once exploring and every drawer was full. As an actor, half your job is done. You can play the scene and have complete freedom to do what you want."

This was a time, of course, before the internet and mobile phones?

"It changes everything in terms of the dramatic potential. It's old fashioned police work of genuinely following the clues. Everything is done by being able to read people and following where a phone call came from, visiting cafes and doing the groundwork."

Not everyone is pleased to see Lapointe?

"A woman gives Lapointe a nasty bite on his hand. Maigret arrives when he's been bitten, is screaming in pain and saying, 'She's just bitten me.' Then there's a little chuckle from Janvier in the background who finds that very amusing. Lots of fake blood."

SYNOPSES

MAIGRET SETS A TRAP



Set in 1955, during a sweltering summer in Paris, the city is gripped with fear as four women are murdered on the streets of Montmartre in a spree of seemingly unconnected attacks.

Chief Inspector Maigret is under huge public and professional pressure to find the killer before he strikes again. Maigret sets a trap which ultimately leads to a thrilling climax.

Cast for Maigret Sets A Trap

Maigret Rowan Atkinson
Madame Maigret..... Lucy Cohu
Janvier..... Shaun Dingwall
Lapointe..... Leo Staar
Judge Comelieu..... Aiden McCardle
Madame Moncin Fiona Shaw
Marcel Moncin David Dawson
Yvonne Moncin..... Rebecca Night
Dr Paul Hugh Simon
Morel Rufus Wright
Lognon Colin Mace

Production Credits

Executive Producer Barnaby Thompson
Executive Producer John Simonon
Executive Producer/Writer Stewart Harcourt
Producer Jeremy Gwilt
Director..... Ashley Pearce
Writer Stewart Harcourt
Line Producer..... Simon Moseley
Production Designer Dominc Hyman
Costume Designer Lucinda Wright
Make-up Designer Katie Pickles
Casting Director Julia Duff