



Maigret in Montmartre



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Rowan Atkinson is Chief Inspector Jules Maigret

What kind of world does Maigret investigate in Maigret In Montmartre?

"It's Georges Simenon's favourite arena, which is the seedy side of Paris. The clubs, the girls, the prostitution and the low life. Montmartre was the centre of that sort of thing in the mid-1950s.

"Also, it's indicative of the author's infatuation with young women. And particularly young women of the streets or young women who were forced to work in a certain way.

"The character of showgirl Arlette reflects Georges Simenon's interest in a woman who is so completely alluring. Extremely libidinous as a teenager and then, inevitably really, ending up in a club and being used by a string of men in different ways.

"But at the same time, she has clearly got charisma and magic and she leaves her stamp. Men find her completely irresistible. That's what the story is about. Someone who, unsurprisingly given that power she has over men, gets into a lot of trouble.

"The owner of the nightclub Fred is pretty villainous but also surprising. It's a very interesting story. I think this is the best Maigret film yet. With some very good performances."

What impression does Arlette make on Maigret?

"There is a sense that Maigret is drawn in to her and her vulnerability. Someone who is very attractive and alluring but also very vulnerable. Maigret feels that and feels the need to care for her."

Rowan Atkinson interview continued

How does Maigret handle the situation he finds himself in and what does he think of Club Le Picratt and that shady part of Paris?

"We portray him, as Georges Simenon did, as a very decent married man. Not someone - as I'm sure was probably common in his line of work then - who has affairs or gets seduced in that way. He's a surprisingly upright and decent man. And yet he is constantly dealing in the murk of Parisian low life. It's the effect it has on him.

"He is drawn to it because he seeks justice and truth. But at the same time, it's not a world in which you would expect him to feel comfortable. It's a constant dichotomy. He's drawn in and yet he doesn't feel comfortable there.

"You sense his uncertainty. He certainly doesn't relish that world. He doesn't embrace it. But at the same time he knows you have to, to a certain extent, in order to find out what's going on."

Do we get to see more of a personal side of Maigret in this film?

"Yes, I think we see Maigret and his wife at their most intimate yet. It's all very subtle. But certainly, it's indicative of the success of their relationship. He's definitely a happily married man. Maigret and his wife get on very well.

"And that's important in relation to his work. Because it's so odd for such a decent man to have to deal with such indecent people and worlds. It is that contrast between the decency and the success in relationship terms of Maigret's own life compared to the complete and utter failure of the people he's dealing with in this story."

What was the biggest challenge whilst filming Maigret in Montmartre?

"The weather was absolutely terrible. When I stepped off the plane to film in Budapest in January, it was minus 15. It was bitterly cold. The Danube froze over. I remember looking out of my hotel room when it was, effectively, completely solid. And then for a few weeks after there were just these massive ice flows on the river.

"There was one scene I wasn't in where someone is almost killed by another character. They were down by a lake where, in the script, it was supposed to be an attempt at murder by drowning. But because it was minus 12 that night the lake was frozen solid and we had to devise a new method to almost do away with the character."

As you've developed the character of Maigret have you become slightly more expansive in the way you play him?

"Yes. I feel as though I started to relax with the character a bit more and have a bit more fun with Maigret and make him a little more human. Rather than just someone who is rather stern, which is how I think he was in the first couple of films. I was a bit braver with him, I suppose."

Rowan Atkinson interview continued

The showgirls at the club put on a performance in their own way. When did you first realise that you wanted to perform?

"It was at school. I seem to remember when I was 11 or 12 standing up in front of my fellow pupils in the school changing room and doing some kind of performance. I can't remember what it was but it was undoubtedly supposed to be at least comic and aimed at amusing them.

"I started doing school plays and then carried on through my adolescence in secondary school and on to university. The age of 10, 11, 12 was when I remember doing, let's say, spontaneous performances for my peers."

TV drama is now on a global stage and can be seen to rival the film world. How do you feel about that?

"It certainly isn't the poor relation compared to the film and movie world. There's no doubt that when you look at the quality of drama on TV there are some very high production values with lots of money spent.

"You can see it draws the talent in. Directors from film are seeing the value of television drama. That actually it doesn't have to be too obvious, it doesn't have to be overtly commercial. It just has to be good. And you can have scenes that go on for much longer than scenes would normally go on for, in movies even. Because you don't have to tell the whole story in an hour and a half. You can tell it over nine hours. That's a huge freedom and a huge difference."

Do people recognise you when you travel on public transport?

"What I've had once or twice is people saying, 'Oh, hello. I know you. Oh...what's your name again?' And I say, 'Rowan Atkinson.' And they say, 'No, no, no.' A most peculiar idea where you tell people your name and they don't believe you. Or they assume you're joking. That you've made something up.

"For your identity to be denied to your face is potentially quite disturbing. It does happen. In many ways, you prefer people to be sure about recognising you rather than unsure. It's the unsure people who take longer to deal with, I'd say."

Maigret In Montmartre will be screened over the festive period. How do you feel about Christmas as a festival today? Has it become too commercialised?

"It is difficult. It's the shortness of it, actually. I like the idea of a long Christmas. I like the idea of a Christmas that starts on Christmas Day and ends, in fact by chance, on my birthday on the 6th of January. They are the 12 days of Christmas.

"Whereas what tends to happen is there is such a huge build up. But once Christmas Day is over, people think Christmas is over. For the majority of people that's it. And then it's into the sales the next day. Or this huge online business that starts later on Christmas Day and merges into the following day.

"And that's fine. But it's a very good idea for Christmas to be a time of rest and consider it a time when you are quiet and family-oriented.



Rowan Atkinson interview continued

“Of course, not everybody has the facility to rest and some people are back to work the day after Boxing Day. But if you have the mental space and the physical capability of switching off and relaxing then that is a good idea.

“Seeing as the build up to Christmas is always so hectic. Once it’s there, just enjoy it and relax. Rather than thinking, ‘Now what I should be doing?’”



Film synopsis

Arlette, a beguiling showgirl from a seedy club in Montmartre arrives at the Quai des Orfevres late one night drunk and claiming she has overheard two men discussing the murder of a Countess whilst she was performing. During initial questioning Arlette is prickly and then overcome with tiredness, she insists on lying down to sleep. Left alone, sometime later she suddenly wakes terrified and screaming the name "Oscar". As Maigret tries to dig a little deeper asking if Oscar is one of the men intending to kill. But Arlette becomes increasingly defensive and suddenly rushes from the building.

The next morning news arrives that Arlette has been found murdered in her apartment.

Maigret learns from Coroner Dr Paul that Arlette was strangled by a strong man. Her identity papers are forged and Maigret suspects Arlette had a reason to hide her past. Arriving at the scene, young inspector La Pointe is rendered unaccountably speechless at the sight of the girl. He hurriedly excuses himself and leaves the apartment. Annoyed with himself for failing to appreciate the depth of Arlette's troubles, back at the Quai Maigret vows to catch the killer. But he is interrupted by news that a Countess has also been found strangled in a similar manner.

It's a squalid scene and clear the Countess was heavily dependent on morphine. But what's left of the Countess's valuables have been left untouched and a tiara found on the stairs suggest that the killer wasn't after her money. Maigret also finds a bundle of love letters which tell of the Countess's passionate relationship with her husband.

Film synopsis continued

Later, Moers checks newspaper records and discovers that the Count apparently committed suicide when he jumped from the balcony of their 10th floor apartment. Gathering that the relationship had soured Maigret wonders whether "the old boy was pushed?" but there's no evidence to suggest it. The Concierge at the Countess's apartment tells Maigret that the only people to visit the Countess regularly were her doctor, whom she's already summoned and a pathetic rent boy who was most certainly there the night before but whose name she can't recall. Maigret wonders if the boy witnessed the murder. As he leaves the building Maigret meets Doctor Bloch who's just arrived to attend his patient. Discovering the Countess is dead Bloch is in a hurry to leave but Maigret insists he attends the Quai where he's questioned about the supply of morphine. Maigret also learns the identity and address of the rent-boy living in a garret above the Countess. His name is Philippe Martinot and together with Janvier, Maigret visits the loft but there's no sign of the boy.

Maigret obsesses over the connection between the two women, and Madame Maigret becomes increasingly frustrated that his investigation is taking over their lives. In the middle of the night Mme Maigret discovers her husband re-staging Arlette's murder in his dining room together they imagine the scenario and work out an explanation for the two types of blood found at the crime scene. Maigret is convinced the killer has unfinished business and will kill again.

At Club Picratt Maigret meets Fred, the owner and his wife Rosa. Rosa is very upset but defensive about the girls. She tells Maigret that earlier in the evening before she died, Arlette was keeping close company with a young man. Could he be the killer? Later Maigret returns to the club to question showgirls Tania and Betty and learns that Arlette's real name was Marie LeFevre.

Maigret discovers further relative information which leads his team to Lisieux and Nice and discovers the story of Arlette's early upbringing which led her to meet the Countess where she became her maid and finds out about a chauffeur named Oscar Bonvoison.

Convinced that Philippe can identify Oscar, Maigret tasks Janvier to find the boy and he is eventually cornered near a pissoir in Montmartre. In desperate need of a fix, Philippe is released in the hope that he will act as bait for Oscar and lure him out.

Maigret continues on a journey of discovery to unveil the truth behind the murders.

Cast and Production Credits

Cast Credits

Maigret

Madame Maigret

Janvier

Lapointe

Moers

Rosa

Fred

Philippe

Lognon

Dr Paul

Dr Bloch

Arlette

The Grasshopper

Madame Dussardier

Nathalie

Madama Aubain

The Countess

Oscar

Tania

Betty

ROWAN ATKINSON

LUCY COHU

SHAUN DINGWALL

LEO STAAR

MARK HEAP

LORRAINE ASHBOURNE

DOUGLAS HODGE

SEBASTIAN DE SOUZA

COLIN MACE

HUGH SIMON

ADRIAN SCARBOROUGH

OLIVIA VINALL

SIMON GREGOR

SARA KESTELMAN

TILLY VOSBURGH

JANE WOOD

NICOLA SLOANE

ADRIAN RAWLINS

CASSIE CLARE

NIKÉ KURTA

Production Credits

Executive Producer/Producer

Executive Producer

Executive Producer

Writer

Director

Production Designer

Costume Designer

Casting Director

Composer

Director of Photography

JEREMY GWILT

JOHN SIMENON

BARNABY THOMPSON

GUY ANDREWS

THADDEUS O'SULLIVAN

DOMINIC HYMAN

LUCINDA WRIGHT

JULIA DUFF

SAM SIM

DIRK NEL





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