



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Murder on the Orient Express

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Amid adaptations of Shakespeare, Beatrix Potter and E.M. Forster, the ever-tasteful British producers John Brabourne and Richard Goodwin mined their most profitable seam with a quartet of notably handsome, star-laden Agatha Christie thrillers.

The series sets off on the right track with *Murder on the Orient Express*. Director Sidney Lumet claimed that he wanted ‘glamour, gaiety and humour’, though the film also stokes hemmed-in tension reminiscent of his *12 Angry Men*, as DP Geoffrey Unsworth captures the stuffy, eerie confines of the eponymous snowbound locomotive. Ingrid Bergman won an Oscar for her timorous missionary, while Albert Finney effects the transformation of his career as an unnerving, pin-sharp Poirot.

Patrick Fahy, *Sight & Sound*, April 2014

A contemporary review

Murder on the Orient Express dates from 1934, when Agatha Christie was running rings round some of the formulas of ‘classic’ detective fiction.

The conventions allow several deaths but only one murderer; Christie pulled a switch by assembling the most internationally assorted group of travelling companions, and revealing them all as guilty of a single crime.

But of course the trick only works fully within a context of the reader’s expectation – looking for clues leading to one killer, he’s bamboozled by an ‘impossible’ crime and then presented with 12 murderers; 12 angry jurors, as in Sidney Lumet’s first film, but jurors who have carried out their own verdict.

The screen has never been much good at classic detection, with its detached deductive processes and apparatus of alibis and time-tables. Here the script, as capably carpentered as might be expected from Paul Dehn, plays a lot fairer by Christie than most adaptations; but the dryness of the mixture, in popular movie terms, demands what the film offers a liberal sprinkling of plums in the casting.

Finney’s Poirot is a succulent *tour de force* of disguise, including a voice that seems to borrow some distant intonations from the great Sidney Greenstreet and a body that appears to have been strapped into its suit. On the all-star passenger list, Widmark (the victim), Perkins (his secretary) and Gielgud (his manservant) are all more than up to their work; and there’s a *grande dame* elocution lesson from Wendy Hiller, ordering ‘a poached sole and a potato’, and some chattering entrances from Lauren Bacall, eventually revealed as a great lady of the American stage and Daisy Armstrong’s grandmother.

But the signal success in the casting is Ingrid Bergman, dowdy, tremulous and very Swedish as the missionary lady, managing to create a character as well as a counter in the game. Sidney Lumet steers them capably enough through their paces, finding a few varied angles on the inevitable flashbacks to

the fatal night, but letting the proceedings drag both early on, when we keep cutting to shots of the train, and in some of the more laborious explanations and the 12-stab ritual of the killing. By presenting neither more nor less than a puzzle, Agatha Christie dodges moral implications. The film underlines a basic Christie toughness – 12 people get away with murder, however morally justified, to save the railway company embarrassment. The film's effective prologue (shots of people in the Armstrong case linked with newspaper headlines) implies a more probing enquiry; the cheerful glass-clinking at the end calls time on a rather over-lengthy game.

Penelope Houston, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1974

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Directed by: Sidney Lumet
©: EMI Film Distributors Ltd
Made by: G.W. Films
Produced by: John Brabourne, Richard Goodwin
Production Associate: Richard Du Vivier
Unit Manager: Jim Brennan
Production Manager: Jack Causey
French Production Manager: Louis Fleury
Location Manager: Norton Knatchbull
Production Secretary: Elisabeth Woodthorpe
1st Assistant Director: Ted Sturgis
2nd Assistant Director: Richard Jenkins
3rd Assistant Director: John Downes
Continuity: Angela Allen
Screenplay by: Paul Dehn
Based on the novel by: Agatha Christie
Photographed by: Geoffrey Unsworth
Camera Operator: Peter MacDonald
Process Photography: Charles Staffell
Edited by: Anne V. Coates
Montage Sequences and Titles by: Richard Williams Studio
Assistant Editor: Richard Hiscott
2nd Assistant Editor: Mick Monks
Production Design and Costumes by: Tony Walton
Art Director: Jack Stephens
Wardrobe: Brenda Dabbs
Make-up: Charles Parker, Stuart Freeborn, John O'Gorman
Hairdressing Supervisor: Ramon Gow
Ms Bergman's & Mr Finney's Hair by: Leonard of London
Music Composed by: Richard Rodney Bennett
Music Played by: Orchestra of the Royal Opera House
Conducted by: Marcus Dods
Sound: Peter Handford, Bill Rowe
Sound Editor: Jonathan Bates
Studio: Elstree Studios

uncredited
Screenplay: Anthony Shaffer
Focus Puller: John Campbell
Assistant Camera: Cedric James
Stills: Joe Pearce
Assistant Art Director: Simon Holland
Draughtsman: John Siddall
Scenic Artists: Tony Strong, E.W. Brister
Sound Camera Operator: Trevor Rutherford
Sound Maintenance: Nick Flowers
Boom Operator: David Stephenson
Unit Publicist: Catherine O'Brien

Cast

Albert Finney (*Hercule Poirot*)
Lauren Bacall (*Mrs Hubbard*)
Martin Balsam (*Bianchi*)
Ingrid Bergman (*Greta Ohlsson*)
Jacqueline Bisset (*Countess Andrenyi*)
Jean Pierre Cassel (*Pierre Paul Michel*)
Sean Connery (*Colonel Arbuthnot*)
John Gielgud (*Beddoes*)
Wendy Hiller (*Princess Dragomiroff*)
Anthony Perkins (*Hector McQueen*)
Vanessa Redgrave (*Mary Debenham*)
Rachel Roberts (*Hildegarde Schmidt*)
Richard Widmark (*Ratchett*)
Michael York (*Count Andrenyi*)
Colin Blakely (*Hardman*)
George Coulouris (*Dr Constantine*)
Denis Quilley (*Gino Foscarelli*)
Vernon Dobtcheff (*concierge*)
Jeremy Lloyd (*ADC*)
John Moffatt (*chief attendant*)

uncredited
George Silver (*chef*)

UK 1974©
131 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Murder on the Orient Express

Sat 23 Oct 17:30; Sun 7 Nov 18:10; Tue 16 Nov 14:15

Chinatown Sun 24 Oct 11:50; Wed 27 Oct 14:15; Sat 20 Nov 20:30

Heat Sun 24 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 16:30; Mon 15 Nov 13:40

Illustrious Corpses (Cadaveri eccellenti)

Mon 25 Oct 14:15; Fri 19 Nov 20:40; Sat 27 Nov 18:10

Devil in a Blue Dress Thu 28 Oct 20:50; Wed 17 Nov 18:00 (+ intro by *Empire Magazine* Contributing Editor Amon Warmann)

Blue Velvet Tue 26 Oct 14:30; Tue 2 Nov 18:00; Sat 13 Nov 20:45; Sun 21 Nov 17:40

Dirty Harry Wed 27 Oct 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by film scholar Hannah Hamad, Cardiff University); Sun 14 Nov 18:20; Fri 26 Nov 20:45

The Silence of the Lambs Fri 29 Oct 20:40; Wed 3 Nov 19:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Professor Yvonne Tasker, author of *BFI Film Classics* *The Silence of the Lambs*); Thu 18 Nov 14:40

No Country for Old Men Sat 30 Oct 11:00; Mon 1 Nov 20:30;

Wed 24 Nov 18:00 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

In the Cut Sun 31 Oct 18:30; Tue 30 Nov 18:10

House of Bamboo Thu 4 Nov 20:50; Thu 11 Nov 14:30; Mon 15 Nov 18:10

Kiss Me Deadly Fri 5 Nov 20:40; Sat 20 Nov 18:00; Sat 28 Nov 12:15

Zero Dark Thirty Sat 6 Nov 17:30; Tue 9 Nov 14:15; Sun 28 Nov 15:20

Inside Man Mon 8 Nov 20:30; Thu 25 Nov 14:30; Tue 30 Nov 20:20

The Long Goodbye Wed 10 Nov 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sat 27 Nov 20:40

Shaft Fri 12 Nov 20:50; Tue 23 Nov 18:20

The Manchurian Candidate Sun 21 Nov 14:50

Un Flic Tue 23 Nov 20:45; Mon 29 Nov 20:55
