

John Simm ~ 47 Screen Credits and more



The eldest of three children, actor and musician John Ronald Simm was born on 10 July 1970 in Leeds, West Yorkshire and grew up in Nelson, Lancashire. He attended Edge End High School, Nelson followed by Blackpool Drama College at 16 and The Drama Centre, London at 19. He lives in North London with his wife, actress Kate Magowan and their children Ryan, born on 13 August 2001 and Molly, born on 9 February 2007. Simm won the Best Actor award at the Valencia Film Festival for his film debut in *Boston Kickout* (1995) and has been twice BAFTA nominated (to date) for *Life On Mars* (2006) and *Exile* (2011). He supports Man U, is "a Beatles nut" and owns seven guitars.

John Simm quotes

I think I can be closed in. I can close this outer shell, cut myself off and be quite cold. I can cut other people off if I need to. I don't think I'm angry, though. Maybe my wife would disagree.

I love Manchester. I always have, ever since I was a kid, and I go back as much as I can. Manchester's my spiritual home. I've been in London for 22 years now but Manchester's the only other place ... in the country that I could live.

You never undertake a project because you think other people will like it - because that way lies madness - but rather because you believe in it.

Twitter has restored my faith in humanity. I thought I'd hate it, but while there are lots of knobheads, there are even more lovely people. It delights me how witty and friendly most people are.

I can't watch shows like The X Factor, for instance. I just squirm for the people involved, for the way they're being used. It's the cruellest, most ridiculous show on television. It's ruined music, ruined everything.

Success, however you judge what that even means, brings with it certain pressures.

When I got to 40, I was happy. Now I can wear what I like, listen to what I like, don't have to try and be cool. I'm someone's dad and it doesn't matter any more. That's an enormous freedom.

There's something really interesting about having those close friends that you've had incredible times with but growing up and away from them. The underlying tensions, the shifting in the group dynamic, the little lies you tell to big yourself up: it's something that happens to us all.

I'm good at being on my own. As a kid, I was always in my room alone, so I have a high threshold for it. If I'm bored, I'll read. Hanging around doesn't go well with me.

I used to be mouthy. It was all to do with being a northerner and from Manchester, which was suddenly a big deal when I was in my 20s. When I read some of the interviews I did back then, I cringe.

It's horrible to get a cameraphone shoved in your face every time you walk out the door.

I'm not a people person. I'm not sociable. I have been and I can be, but not as a general rule.

I'm incredibly proud of Life On Mars and Doctor Who. They're just a blast to do. Why not? You do the serious stuff, the classical stuff, the populist stuff and sci-fi stuff. You're an actor, try everything.

I spent most of my youth in Manchester, in clubs and football grounds and the Manchester Apollo.

[On why he wanted to act] It was James Dean, Rebel Without A Cause. I remember seeing that and, overnight, I just thought "Wow, I want to do that." The next day I went up to the drama teacher at school, who was called Brian Wellock. I just said, "I saw James Dean last night and I really liked it. It was really good." I didn't know what I was trying to say to him, but he must have seen something. He just said, "Well, why don't you come to one of the classes?" So I gave up a football practice or something and went to the class and just thought it was really easy.

Preparing for theatre is a lot of fun. Even though you get more nervous as time goes on, you need that buzz, you need that element of nerves, otherwise you don't feel anything. It's the reason I went back to theatre, because I didn't feel anything when I was filming - anything at all.

Critics should be to actors what ornithologists are to birds: they can write all they want, but it shouldn't affect them.

I do get a lot of Doctor Who. God almighty, I'll be so happy when that's gone from my life. I'm not The Master. I'm not that evil Time Lord who rules the galaxy. I'm just in Tesco with my kids. Leave me alone.

[On stage fright] I can understand it, because I have felt that absolute terror, but I've always been able to override it ... It's a cross we [actors] have to bear.

[The character of] Hamlet is like a blank page. You could do him differently every single performance if you wanted to. Once I was comfortable with it ... I started to play with him and he was incredible. He's malleable. You can portray him however you want. He is you, really. You just be you in some strange sort of way. I found playing him incredibly satisfying ... It is the great role ... absolutely the finest, greatest role ever written for an actor.



Simm as Hamlet at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, 2010

When I left London's Drama Centre in 1992, I expected to work in classical theatre. That's what I had trained for. It just so happened that, when I left, I got an agent and got a job in Rumpole Of The Bailey and I never looked back.

RUMPOLE OF THE BAILEY : THE REFORM OF JOBY JOHNSON (TV, S7E4, 1992)



Rumpole, written by John Mortimer QC and starring crusty one-eyed Aussie Leo McKern in the title role, ran for seven series and 43 episodes on ITV between 1978 and 1992. 22 year old John Simm made his screen debut in s7e4 *The Reform Of Joby Johnson*, playing a young delinquent of that name whose story Rumpole manages to piece together - and while, by the time the episode ends we can understand what went on, Joby (though innocent) is serving five years and much plot resolution is left up in the air, which smacks of slipshod writing or production. Simm, safely launched, though, does his stuff like a pro. He's found his path and is on his way. This episode also features Patricia Hodge as a silk, Julian Fellowes as another politician (see *A Very Open Prison / Crossing The Floor*) and Julian Glover. 51 minutes.

IMDb: *Rumpole* fell off rather in its later episodes. The direction became broader and more conventional. The office life, originally filmed as "fly on the wall", ran out of story lines. The office colleagues became caricatures of themselves. Here the main characters - Rumpole, Bernard, Hilda, Henry - are as good as ever, and writer John Mortimer still has points he wishes to put before the jury. Here he wants to show us a Victorian style philanthropist who runs a private scheme to tackle juvenile delinquency by reforming individual youths - they have to confess their sins publicly. I wonder if he's based on a real person? Back in chambers, the new typist, Dot, is causing a furore by wearing a tiny nose stud. Oh, very funny (and she wears a loud polka-dot blouse too). She is a good actress - but somebody should have told her to hit the space bar and carriage return every now and then. This episode is also notable for featuring the screen debut of the now popular and ubiquitous John Simm.

HEARTBEAT : WALL OF SILENCE (TV, S2E9, 1993)



Set in the 1960s in fictional locations (Ashfordly, Aidensfield etc) in the North Riding of Yorkshire, popular ITV police drama *Heartbeat* ran for 18 series (a total of 372 episodes) between 1992 and 2010. Based on the *Constable* books of Nicholas Rhea (the pen-name of former policeman Peter Walker), the show was originally a starring vehicle for ex-*Eastenders* actor Nick Berry, cast as PC Nick Rowan, newly arrived from London with his GP wife Kate (Niamh Cusack), but when he departed towards the end of Series 7, *Heartbeat* ploughed on without him. Two actors - Derek Fowlds (below, right) and William Simons - stayed with the production for its entire 18 year run. In s2e9, entitled *Wall Of Silence*, John Simm, still (see above) looking very young, plays schoolboy Richard Francis, a butcher's son who has a crush on Susan, the local game-keeper's daughter. When a series of robberies are committed and Susan falls ill, she admits to having had a local back-street abortion and poor Richard is suspected both of committing the robberies (to fund the abortion) and being the baby's father, when in fact he is innocent of all charges. He plays his part admirably well, as usual. 43 minutes. With Bill Maynard.



SCREEN ONE : MEAT (TV, 1994)



Indifferent acting, unattractive two-dimensional characters and an inauthentic, soulless, by the numbers script (written by Daniel Boyle) add up to 84 minutes of disposable third rate TV, apparently screened just once on BBC One in September 1994. Simm takes the small part of Cecil, a rent boy peripheral to the central narrative. Some (see below) praise *Meat* liberally. Lord knows why.

IMDb: The penchant of Charlie (Johnny Lee Miller) for breaking into yet not stealing from places is rewarded with time inside. Weathering the temptations and taunting of inmates and officers, Charlie strives to make good on the outside. A chance encounter with Kings Cross prostitute Myra (Sarah-Jane Potts) establishes a tender and absorbing romance between the two with some promise of security and salvation, until her pimp Frank (Peter Wight) decides to call a halt to proceedings. Brilliantly shot and acted, the film premiered on British television in 1994 as part of a season of specifically commissioned films. Its overwhelming sense of struggle and loss draws the viewer into the gritty underworld of vice and drugs often romanticised and glamorised by similar fare. However, director Madden does not pull away from the desperation of his characters and nor does he revel in it. At times touching and poignant and at others shockingly brutal, this gem of a film is a marvellously gritty urban drama that deserves to be viewed / *Meat* is one of the best BBC dramas I have seen in years, featuring stand-out performances from Johnny Lee Miller and Peter Wight. Written by Danny Boyle, it follows the life of Charlie Dyce, a young offender who gets on the wrong side of the tracks and wants to make good. Travelling to London, he meets hooker Myra who "can't get enough of him." Her boyfriend pimp, however, has other plans and a battle of wills ensues. The film raises serious questions about "giving in" to society and whether, through choice or merely an inability to control circumstances, what happens to "us" is inevitable. A superb BBC drama, highly recommended.

CHILLER : HERE COMES THE MIRROR MAN (TV, S1E3, 1995)



Chiller was an anthology of five horror / fantasy stories shown on ITV in the spring of 1995. In the third, *Here Comes The Mirror Man*, Simm plays Gary Kingston, a psychotic schizophrenic living rough in an abandoned church in an unnamed West Yorkshire city. When a social worker comes calling, Michael, his dark *alter ego*, instructs him to dispatch her, which he does by pushing her under a lorry. His case is then referred to a singularly inept colleague, who also visits. Gary wants to bond with her, though "Michael" does not. Events progress to a fraught fell-top conclusion, with a nice twist to finish. Very tepid "horror" and no "fantasy", but a decent little drama all the same. 51 minutes.

Chiller ... is one of those shows that earned Brit TV its staid reputation. This is a "chatty" series, with characters chatting at the office, at home, at a café and so on. Every scene is very stiff and formal. Actual scares are few and far between. The show's writing and acting are so stodgy that I can't imagine today's fright fans will have the patience needed to sit through scene after scene of tea-sipping chat just to get to the occasional ghostly visage. A few well-known faces show up in episodes, including Sophie Ward, Nigel Havers, Martin Clunes, Kevin McNally and John Simm, even if the scripts give them a lot of dialogue with so little to say. The series is nicely filmed, making the most of the location shooting. In *Here Comes The Mirror Man*, the scenes inside the abandoned church are a standout, full of dark, shadowy atmosphere, something the show could use more of. Maybe you're not that into horror, and you want something more like a traditional drama with some spooky elements. That's what *Chiller* is shooting for, but even with that simple target in mind, the show just doesn't hit the mark. (Mac McEntire, *DVD Verdict*, 28 December 2012, abridged)

MEN OF THE WORLD (TV, 1994-5)



Deserted by his wife, thirtysomething Lenny Smart shares a bachelor flat with 22 year old innocent Kendle Bains, his co-worker at Simons' Travel Agency in Greater Manchester. Lenny, with the occasional help of his mate Gilby and others, attempts to turn Kendle into a "real man". The BBC aired six 29 minute episodes of *Men Of The World* in March / April 1994 and a further six in July / August 1995, with just three actors - Simm as Kendle, David Threlfall (below) as Lenny and Brenda Bruce (below) as their landlady Mrs. Daff appearing in them all. Series creator and writer Daniel Peacock plays Gilby in seven. In 2015, Simm and Threlfall teamed up again in *Code Of A Killer* (see page 86). When asked about role choices, Simm said: *You're an actor, try everything* - a commendable outlook that here sees him embracing low-key, small-scale sitcom and showing, young as may be, raw talent, comic timing, confidence and brio to spare.



BOSTON KICKOUT (1995)



John Simm's feature film debut (though his ninth screen credit) is a thoroughly enjoyable coming of age drama set in the cultural wasteland of Stevenage New Town. Looking younger than his years, with his face not yet fined off, he plays Phil, a young lad at a loose end after school, keeping bad company and not knowing where his life is going. Marc Warren, three years Simm's senior but another film debutant (the pair will work together again in *State Of Play* and *Mad Dogs*), is terrific as head case Rob and Emer McCourt as Shona convinces too. Authentic and bittersweet but ultimately life-affirming. 101 minutes.

IMDb: A Boston kickout is the act of vandalising the neighbourhood yards, uprooting plants and trampling gardens. It's behaviour that a group of middle-class wannabe bad lads in a culturally bleak Hertfordshire new town continue more from habit than conviction as they confront life after school. What begins as a fast paced albeit low budget buddy movie becomes a more intelligent coming of age story with the appearance of Emer McCourt as Irish lass Shona who wants to have fun. Seems the answer to Phil's problem was to get laid - which was my theory too when I was his age / Grim themes offset by considerable charm / A great soundtrack and visually never stale. Warren's is the pick of some excellent performances / British independent film making at its best / Deeply touching and very funny, *Boston Kickout* is one of very few accurate portrayals of what life is like growing up in suburban Britain where, underneath a seemingly bland surface lies boredom, violence, madness and the redemptive beauty and intensity of human relationships. Cracking pace, lots of energy and deeply satisfying. I loved this film / *Boston Kickout* puts across the difficult issues and worries of being a teen and coming of age in a small rural town. John Simm plays his character very well in one of the best of his early movies. People from Stevenage will enjoy the references to parts of their town. The feelings portrayed are a mix of joy and despair as Phil's life seems to be crumbling away before him, with his friends leaving, getting married or having a breakdown. When he finally finds someone he feels he can confide in, she departs too, leaving him with no way to turn. Overall, brilliantly acted and shot. A good proper British film that I would recommend to anyone.

CRACKER : BEST BOYS (TV, 1995)



Cracker, created and in part scripted by Jimmy McGovern (see also *The Lakes* and *Moving On*) was a multi-BAFTA winning psychological cop drama that ran for ten episodes between 1993 and 1996 with an additional one in 2006. The lead role of forensic psychologist Dr. Eddie Fitzgerald is taken by Robbie Coltrane with support from Ricky Tomlinson as his police colleague DCI Wise and Barbara Flynn as his wife Judith. In episode eight, called *Best Boys*, the two guest leads are Liam Cunningham as Grady and John Simm as Bill Preece. Once again Simm plays, very convincingly, a troubled teenager (aged, we learn, just 17). This story was written by Paul Abbott, who would go on to pen Simm vehicles *State Of Play* (2003) and *Exile* (2011). It's probably no coincidence that the best writers persuade the best actors to perform their work, perhaps even creating it with particular names in mind. In any event, Simm in *Best Boys* did both Abbott and McGovern proud such that, the next time a suitable part came along, they would have no hesitation in wanting to use him again - which, of course, both of them did. 99 minutes. Very good.

IMDb: It's impossible to overstate how classy this programme is. McGovern's writing is at times disturbing and violent, at times deeply compassionate and the overall tone is dark and moody but with just enough acerbic humour to lighten the weight. Coltrane is excellent, portraying Fitz with effortless panache - no easy thing given the complexity of the character - but also spoiled, having been given one of the best written roles in TV history. The supporting cast are superb and those actors brought in to play "villains of the week" almost always hold their own. Wonderful stuff / A fiercely intelligent, disturbing, powerful, funny masterwork by a writer and cast at their peak.

THE LOCKSMITH (TV, 1997)



The BBC aired a single series of *The Locksmith* in the autumn of 1997, in five parts running between 48 and 51 minutes. An overarching story ran the length of the series with sub-plots fleshing out individual episodes. Though its wrap up left the way clear for a follow-up series, none materialised, which, given the indifferent quality of this one, is not surprising. Though Warren Clarke (below, left) does his best playing against type and Chris Gascoyne (below, right) raises the odd smile, they're surrounded by a set of unappealing characters acting out a lightweight tale of robbery and vengeance, guilt and remorse. Simm appears in parts one and two briefly and in part four centrally as Paul, a housebreaking junkie, but his talents are sadly wasted here. Second rate.



DIANA & ME (1997)



This film was the victim of *very* unfortunate timing. Its principal subjects are a London-based paparazzo (Rob, played by Dominic West - see also *The Devil's Whore*) and an Australian "fan" (Toni Collette) who both stalk the Princess of Wales - one for her picture and the other in hope of meeting her heroine. Though the film doesn't grossly exploit Diana's image, it does include it. It also features disturbing footage of what is supposedly her car being chased at high speed through night-time city streets. The film must have been made shortly before Diana's death, an unforeseen event that, while acknowledged with short flower-laying scenes tacked on to front and back, inevitably changed the tenor of what we see from whimsical date-movie fluff to something altogether less wholesome and more dark. That it appears to have sunk without trace is not surprising. Simm, looking much like his scuzzy *Locksmith* character (the two productions were probably shot at the same time), plays Neil, a fellow paparazzo friend of Rob's. Had Diana lived, this 94 minute romantic comedy would have been nothing more than another mildly amusing though scarcely credible here-and-gone light drama trading on her name and image. As things are, it would probably - never mind the bankers - have been better not released.

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The Princess and the Paparazzi

Diana & Me is a film that almost didn't make it. A whimsical tale about a Wollongong girl's obsession with the Princess of Wales, it was shot not long

before that fateful Paris car journey and left its creators with a dilemma - to release or not to release? In the end they came up with an elegant solution: film two extra scenes in London to top and tail the film, acknowledging the Princess's death and setting the story in the past. The melancholy scenes outside Kensington Palace work surprisingly well, contrasting solemnly with the lightness of the main plot.



Dominic West as Rob and Toni Collette as Diana

It's a pity the rest of the film is not so elegant. Wollongong's Diana Spencer, who wins a trip to London to meet her namesake, is played capably enough by Muriel's Wedding's Toni Collette, but the characters and atmosphere around her fall a bit flat. In a series of mishaps, she ditches her Aussie boyfriend Mark (Malcolm Kennard) and links up with British paparazzo Rob Naylor (Dominic West) to pursue the Princess. It's a situation ready-made for the larger-than-life character treatment of Muriel's Wedding or Priscilla, but the actors and dialogue never stretch that far. We're left with outlandish situations played without the verve or pace that would sustain them.

As a result, the characters are hard to believe. Mark and Diana are just a bit too gosh-wow as the naive Aussie first-timers in London, and the British correspondent for Woman's Day is a cringeworthy stereotype who seems to have stepped out of a Carry On movie. Most of the characters are minor variations of stock Aussie or British types and it gets slightly embarrassing at times.

The film is also undermined by a feeling of sloppiness in the script and its execution. A joke about Prince Andrew's sexuality should have been made about Prince Edward. Bangkok Airport is stocked with Telstra Goldphones. Naylor's crucial theft of a party invitation is accomplished in an unbelievable way. Worst of all, Bob Geldof's name is misspelled in the closing credits - all small points which detract from the final product.



Diana & Me's greatest strength, however, is its look at the tactics of the paparazzi. It does this uncompromisingly, displaying the photographers' fierce rivalry and amoral invasions of privacy with clear-cut scenes which tell their own story. There's a bestial frenzy in the jostling and pursuit of their victims which Aussie Diana comes to realise is wrong. Her romance with Rob, and his gradual journey towards her point of view, is convincing without being preachy. Both sides of the debate are recognised, as Diana has to accept her part in buying the magazines that pay the paparazzi in the first place. It's a strong theme and incredibly timely, considering the circumstances of the Princess's death.

It's an enjoyable film but not a classic. Save it up for a video viewing on a wet Sunday afternoon.

Tim Richards, *Festivale*, December 1997

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THE LAKES (TV, 1997-9)



The BBC produced two quite different series of *The Lakes*. The first ran in four parts of 93, 47, 48 and 49 minutes in the autumn of 1997 with a second of ten 36-38 minute parts screened early in 1999. Jimmy McGovern wrote all of the first series, but only two episodes of the second, with the other eight farmed out to three other writers. The first series comprises a single powerful story centred around Scouse scally Danny Kavanagh, played by John Simm, while the second is much more an ensemble piece, running not one storyline but four or five, in all of which Simm is present but not prominent. Apart from a surfeit of unnecessarily explicit sex scenes and the wholly unconvincing attempt to partially redeem Kavanagh's yobbish character (acknowledged by McGovern to be semi-autobiographical) by having him spout classical verse every now and then, Series One is extremely good, with Two not far behind. Paul Copley, who plays Danny's father-in-law Peter Quinlan, will reappear in episode 1.6 of *Life On Mars* and 2015's *Code Of A Killer*. Solid Simm, top TV. Recommended.

IMDb: Nobody can accuse Jimmy McGovern of settling for a quiet life. His dramas, from *Needle*, through to *Cracker*, *Priest* and this masterpiece confirm him as one of the most exciting writers in any medium to emerge in the last decade. Occasionally he seems more concerned with hitting home his messages (about Catholicism, country-versus-city, sexual politics, etc) at the expense of his characters, but he still creates dramatic situations that are credible, raw and overwhelmingly moving without succumbing to sickly sentiment. Simm is remarkable as Danny, perfectly realising the inner conflict facing his outsider character who craves to do the right thing while aspiring to escape the emotional prison he finds himself in - in fact, the entire cast is outstanding, all perfectly getting under the skins of their characters. Superb.

A Cumbria-set tale of Liverpoolian likely lad Danny Kavanagh (John Simm), The Lakes is a hard-bitten riot of a show, scripted by Jimmy McGovern. Set in the dog days of the twentieth century, it tackles everything from gambling addiction to how it feels to be the outsider in a small community when tragedy hits. Re-watching it now, the most notable (and in some ways shocking) thing is how little has changed. If it wasn't for the clothing and the lack of mobile phones, you might think that it was set in the present, thanks to its enduring themes of the frustration of poverty and unemployment and the heady rush of being young, selfish and in lust.



The show is not without faults. The dialogue, as so often with McGovern, occasionally lurches into soapbox-rant mode, while some characters are more clearly defined than others (Robert Pugh's melancholy priest is particularly memorable). The Lakes also appears oddly rushed. The first 90 minute episode alone contains enough plot - unexpected pregnancy, shotgun marriage, gambling addiction, a tragic and avoidable accident, two hidden love affairs - to fuel nine or ten episodes of most other shows. Yet in a strange way this hyperactivity works in the show's favour. This is a drama about the recklessness of youth: the lies we tell to ourselves and to others, the heightened emotions, the crashing, over-dramatised lows. If Danny, his girlfriend Emma (Emma Cunniffe, above) and the rest of the twentysomething hotel crew seem to live on fast-forward in a blur of late '90s music, sex, drink and pills, then perhaps that's a pretty accurate depiction of life at that age, when nothing seems worth taking too seriously.

It is only a matter of time before bitter reality intrudes, of course - and by halfway through the first episode it becomes clear that we are watching a

modern-day morality play, a dark-hued tale of redemption lost and possibly regained, where the stakes are much higher than first presumed. Anchoring it all is a career-making performance from John Simm as the poetry-quoting, horseracing-addicted Danny. Never less than believable whether aching to connect with Cumbria's wide-open spaces or lose himself in booze and drugs, Simm takes what could be a fairly stock character and imbues him with heart, vulnerability and rough-edged soul. McGovern has admitted that The Lakes is partially autobiographical - he was also a gambling addict and he met his wife Eileen while working at a hotel in Cumbria - and it shows in the small personal touches. When a depressed Danny looks over the lakes and recites WH Auden's The Shield Of Achilles there's a heart-wrenching intensity that convinces you that McGovern is channelling his own conflicted memories to strong effect.



Nor is it all Simm and McGovern. Emma Cuniffe, who went on to Casualty and The Bill, is touching as the naive Emma, while Mary Jo Randle turns in an affecting, subtle performance as her mother. Best of all however is Kay Wragg (also late of The Bill) whose difficult, unloved Lucy manages to make you pity her even as she wreaks vengeance with the narcissism of a spoilt child.

The second series, which aired two years later with McGovern less closely involved, tipped into soap opera grand guignol with a plethora of overheated plots - although I still have a soft spot for the complex relationship between Lucy and Danny - but the first season remains as moving and mournful a hymn to the fatalism of youth as has been written.

Sarah Hughes, *The Guardian*, 27 September 2011

WONDERLAND (1999)



Michael Winterbottom's masterpiece, Wonderland, is a borderline Chekhovian London-set saga of three sisters and their extended families; beautifully and sensitively observed, structurally loose. The story takes place over four days in November and portrays the problems faced by one particular family. Nadia (Gina McKee) has little success finding a boyfriend. Her older sister Debbie (Shirley Henderson) is estranged from her husband and seeks solace with other men. The youngest sister, Molly (Molly Parker, above) seems to be the most contented. She is about to give birth and is happy with her partner Eddie (John Simm). But Eddie suddenly decides to give up his well-paid job and, after an argument, leaves home. (BFI)

Dreary slice-of-life drama set in London over a long weekend, examining three unhappy generations of a single family. The mise-en-scène is impeccable, the situations completely believable, but the results are less than compelling. Two stars. (Leonard Maltin)

Though sympathetic to both the above points of view - for the piece is artfully wrought and may well be Chekhovian - I lean towards Maltin, for the grimness is near unrelenting (only the hazily sketched Darren is reprieved) and the subject matter too banal for a "masterpiece" - though "sensitively observed" it is indeed. Winterbottom uses both Simm and Henderson again in *Everyday* (see page 79). May improve on repeat viewing. 109 minutes.

IMDb: The characters in this film move through streets I move through. They stop and stare at the Thames from Southwark Bridge, they go round the Elephant & Castle roundabout, they go to the Brixton cop shop, they wander down Soho streets and on into South London estates. This elicits a feeling I've only had a couple of times watching movies - that these characters are living lives somewhere near mine, in the

real world. Obviously that breaks down pretty quickly due to the familiarity of the actors, but it's still strangely pleasurable. Beyond the affection I feel for this flick because it's on my manor, it's still a good, fresh film with great moments of spontaneity. A Ken Loach sense of community via a Dogme take on filmmaking, *Wonderland* is in some ways insubstantial (these lives are *so* ordinary) but its warmth is undeniable / Wonderfully naturalistic, with an exquisite use of filters that makes Lambeth appear more beautiful than it ever could in reality / A story about ordinary people told in an extraordinarily beautiful way / Winterbottom has obviously great respect for women and not so much for men. In his movie, male figures appear to be only sleepy heads. Not far from reality, you may think / Beautiful and intelligent. Winterbottom sees the London that all who live here know and love through a barely-distanced eye. We move with the characters, we live alongside them, the film brings them an immediacy and relevance which mainstream cinema rarely tackles. The plot (what little there is) contains more drama - not to mention coincidences - than real life, but this is compensated for by the film's texture, moving from warm to cold and back again, depending on the scene and its location. Nyman's score veers between irritating and deeply moving, approaching its best in the fireworks sequence. The Dogme-style technique is less annoying than in its Danish counterparts (Winterbottom doesn't seem to have so much trouble staying in focus). Odd to think this script was written by a Frenchwoman. Hey ho / Very European. Very close to life / The city becomes a character and the camera tells a wordless story in the closing shot as it exalts Wren's dome from another era when the teeming masses lived lives of quiet desperation. It then moves back to show the concrete blocks of small flats where the inhabitants, some of whom are central characters in this film, are trying to live with some dignity. The ceaseless chatter and traffic noise rammed home to me how soulless and isolating this lifestyle can be. The is ameliorated by small moments of recognition and affection. Highly recommended / A little like a soap opera but much, much better, mostly because of the great cast / McKee (below) was the highlight of the film - she often is - and her storyline was especially good / As a study of unfulfilled lives it is never less than perceptive and often quite touching. It is a film I have grown to like / Sublime.



HUMAN TRAFFIC (1999)



I'm prepared to concede that *Human Traffic* is a film made with commitment and dedication by all concerned, but its subject matter - a weekend spent with a bunch of young wasters involved in the Cardiff drug and club scene - is so unappealing that it's very hard to care. Simm, impressive as always, both leads and narrates, and the little love affair that develops between his character Jip and Lulu (Lorraine Pilkington) is the pleasantest thing about this 99 minute ordeal. But all the noise, addled yap and juvenile japery that comes with it is not worth so modest a reward. This frank look at a generation on the brink hints at the *why* (stultifying or broken homes, a mean urban environment) and the *what next* (perhaps redemption, perhaps not). But films about growing up are for adolescents in the main - so, unless that's you, leave this one be.

IMDb: Justin Kerrigan - this time you've really done it. *Human Traffic* is going to upset the majority of film critics who will view the lack of plot, the drug induced dialogue and the futile outlook on Nineties Youth culture as a miserable and desperate view of how weekends are spent by ravers and clubheads across the UK. Moreover, they will spot camera work borrowed from *Boogie Nights* and even try and associate the whole film with *Trainspotting's* theme (because, lets face it, a Scottish heroin addict trying to clean up his act and a Welsh clubber looking for a good time with his mates are pretty much the same thing, right?).

Well, wrong. *Human Traffic* has landed - along with one and a half quality hours of clubs, drugs, pubs and parties - and it's time to leave behind your preconceptions of what a film should be like (Where's the plot? I want a plot!) and instead delve into the lives of Jip (John Simm) and his mates Lulu (Lorraine Pilkington), Koop (Shaun Parkes, who will reappear in *Blue/Orange*), Moff (Danny Dyer - see also *Is Harry On The Boat?*) and Nina (Nicola Reynolds). There's nothing special about these five friends, who just hang out together and show you the way they lead their lives. They are not Burger King, they certainly don't do it your way and, if you don't like it, well,

tough - because essentially this period piece has captured everything that Nineties Youth culture is revolving around. There are no clear solutions, in fact very few problems in the first place. At the end of the day, what Jip and his friends are doing is living and who are we to know or comment on anything different? They drink, smoke dope, pop pills and party. They know the risks and they're prepared to take them and moralists will just have to sit back and (try to) enjoy the ride.

The soundtrack is terrific and accompanies the highs and lows of the 48 hour weekend and the events that take place in it. But within this apparent social unity we see traces of individual isolation that are easy to bypass in a culture of hedonism. Jip's sexual paranoia, Koops jealous possession of Nina and Moff's increasing estrangement from his family as his drug habit digs him deeper into his own hole, ask the question 'Are things really this good?' However, they are not exaggerated to the extent that they are conspicuous, giving the film a controversial stance on drugs and their role in social integration. Kerrigan is pulling no punches. And why should he? This isn't *GO!* or any other such American rave film with clear cut margins and please-the-crowd conclusions but, rather, one that forces us to question whilst at the same time enjoy the at times hilarious and touching and at other times exciting events of 48 hours with a group of five friends. And for the die-hard British youth among you, this might not be reality, but it's a bloody brave effort at depicting it.



Shaun Parkes, Lorraine Pilkington, John Simm, Danny Dyer, Nicola Reynolds

FORGIVE AND FORGET (TV, 2000)



Produced by Scottish Television, this excellent 96 minute drama deals with issues of love, friendship, jealousy, reality TV and the scourge of homophobia. Dave, played by Steve John Shepherd (below, left) is a plasterer employed by his dad's building firm. A closet gay, he loves his best friend of fourteen years, Theo (John Simm). When Theo begins a settled relationship with his girlfriend Hannah, Dave is driven to break it up and then, remorseful of his actions and no longer willing to hide his true self, appears with an unsuspecting Theo on day-time TV tell-all Jerry Springer type show *Forgive And Forget* to confess his love for his friend to his friend, to the world, but, most importantly, to his watching parents. Though the film divides opinion (see next page), I found it admirable.



IMDb: Don't expect to feel comfortable or be warmed by a Hollywood ending. Do expect a well-acted fable about the dangers of falling in love with your best friend and how pursuing that love can destroy your friendship / Worth watching, but be prepared for an ending that is more 1963 than 2003 / A detestable story, full of logical holes and homophobic animosity, though the directing and editing values are good for a TV production / A very credible ending - and Shepherd is superb / What saves the film and makes it a worthwhile experience are the two central performances by Sheppard and Simm. Both give fully convincing, committed portrayals despite dialogue which is at times less than credible. The force of their acting compels one to empathise with the predicament of their characters / I'd like to defend this as a wonderful film, one of the best I've seen in five years. Other reviewers obviously have a different take and I can respect their views but I'd suggest a different interpretation from the one they present. The story revolves around David, a handsome and macho construction foreman who is secretly in love with his childhood best friend Theo. David has acclimated to casual sex on the side as long as his primary emotional bond with Theo is intact. When Theo becomes seriously involved with a woman David is in a crisis. David O'Neil is a man who has reached the age of 23 without having had an adolescence. Like a lot of gays, he has hidden his true feelings until well past the time when there's something of a "safety net" around him in the form of friends and older siblings who help most teens navigate the treacherous waters of love and the pain of rejection. David has the usual flaw which comes with growing up gay in a homophobic society. He's been prevented from gaining emotional maturity by expressing love for the person he loves when he's 14 or 16 years old, so he's making the sort of blunders that most people make when they are 16 years old, though unfortunately with adult consequences. I think Aisling Walsh (director) and Mark Burt (writer) are highly sympathetic with David's plight and they understand him quite well. The film is unflinching in its treatment of its subject and certainly does not end with a rosy soft focus closure. We last see David bloody and rejected by most everyone, and yet smiling and saying "This has been the best day of my life." That is the central theme of the film. Steve John Shepherd gives a riveting, wonderful performance as David. John Simm (as Theo) is one of the most effortlessly naturalistic actors I've seen, comparable to Russell Crowe in his early nineties Aussie films. Acting doesn't get much better than this / I am sure that this contrived, poorly written and directed soap opera will go down very well with "family values" audiences and the final bloody and extremely severe beating that the gay character gets from his straight friend will be a real treat for hate and neo-Nazis viewers / *Forgive And Forget* was originally written by Mark Burt and directed by Aisling Walsh as a TV movie aimed at a straight audience in the UK. That fact is important to remember as it makes this excellent film more credible to those viewing it negatively. The world at large remains homophobic. *Forgive And Forget* attempts to defuse some of that irrational behaviour yet sadly only succeeds on some levels: some are still either incredulous that this story could happen and end the way it does while others quietly nod in recognition of an atmosphere that remains essentially unchanged with the apparent passage of time's enlightenment ... The only positive aspect of David's public confession is that at last he is free of the lie he has been living and, though he has seemingly lost everything, he finally has some peace of mind on the tragically confessed happiest day of his life. Whether the audience is deeply disturbed by this film or closely aligns with its message, the film as an artwork cannot be faulted. It is a brave little movie that dares to hold a mirror up to the audience, hopefully enlightening at least a few as to the perpetuated homophobia that maligns the lives of many citizens. Recommended viewing.

CLOCKING OFF : THE LEACHES' STORY (TV, S1E1, 2000)



BBC's BAFTA-winning *Clocking Off* - 27 interconnected dramas about the lives of a group of Manchester textile factory workers - ran for four series between 2000 and 2003. In the opening episode of series one, John Simm plays Stuart Leach, a delivery driver who returns home on what he thinks is a normal day to a wife and child who haven't set eyes on him for thirteen months. Written by the show's creator Paul Abbott, who penned twelve episodes in all as well as the instalment of *Cracker* that featured Simm and *State Of Play* and *Exile*, this otherwise excellent story suffers slightly from a lack of resolution, with viewers left to decide for themselves how things worked out. Since, unlike his two brothers, Simm does not appear in any further episodes, we can presumably conclude that he returned to Sheffield! 55 minutes. Good. With Philip Glenister (see also *State Of Play*, *Life On Mars*, *TuEsday* and *Mad Dogs*) and Lesley Sharp (both below).



NEVER NEVER (TV, 2000)



Never Never, written by Tony Marchant (see also *Crime And Punishment* and *Canterbury Tales*) was first shown in two 79 and 78 minute parts on Channel 4 in November 2000. Simm plays John Parlour, a catalogue company rep giving loans and collecting payments around four metropolitan housing estates. After he's severely beaten and robbed by the brother of one of his clients, he loses his job and is forced to take a Council flat in amongst his former "victims". He first supports and eventually takes over the nascent Council-supported Credit Union being set up to undercut the loan sharks who formerly employed him. Though less than wholly credible through its final third, the story is well constructed and presented. Simm is engaging, charismatic, dynamic as ever, with Sophie Okonedo (above) fine too. Well worth searching out.

IMDb: *Never Never* starts as an exploration of debt and the people (i.e. the poor) most often in debt, but grows into so much more. John Simm plays John Parlour, an agent for RS Manors, a credit come catalogue company who specialise in lending to people that normal creditors wouldn't touch with a barge pole - low income, unemployed etc. When they can't afford the repayments, they simply extend another line of credit to cover the one in arrears. Jo Weller (Sophie Okonedo) is one of his best (i.e. most indebted) customers, whom he also takes a bit of a shine to ... The strength of Tony Marchant's script is that it makes no judgement in its resolution. John is not portrayed as bad or evil as his Union is still a million times better than RS Manors. Equally Jo simply decides to stand up for what she believes in. The decision as to who is right or wrong is left up to the viewer. This two part drama, expertly written and directed with plenty of nice humour for so serious a script, is highly recommended. John Simm and Sophie Okonedo are brilliant in the lead roles and the supporting cast are also given their moments to shine. At times it feels more like a fly on the wall documentary than a drama, such is the honesty of the execution. Aside from a niggling failure to resolve John's battle with his former employers, it is a credit to all concerned.

SPACED : BACK (TV, S2E1, 2001)



Spaced is a British television sitcom written by and starring Jessica Stevenson and Simon Pegg and directed by Edgar Wright. Two series of seven episodes each were broadcast in 1999 and 2001 on Channel 4 on a Friday night. Daisy Steiner (Stevenson) and Tim Bisley (Pegg) are two London twentysomethings who meet by chance in a café while both are flat-hunting. Despite barely knowing each other, they conspire to pose as a young professional couple in order to meet the requisites of an advertisement for a relatively cheap flat in the distinctive building at 23 Meteor Street, Tufnell Park, which is owned by and also houses the landlady, Marsha Klein (Julia Deakin). Also in the building is Brian Topp (Mark Heap), an eccentric conceptual artist who lives and works on his various pieces in the ground floor flat. Frequent visitors are Daisy's best friend, Twist Morgan (Katy Carmichael) and Tim's best friend, Mike Watt (Nick Frost), who ends up becoming a lodger after Marsha's daughter Amber Weary "flies the nest". The fourteen episodes largely concern the surreal and awkward adventures of Tim and Daisy as they navigate through life, decide on what they want to do with their lives, come to terms with affairs of the heart and try to figure out new and largely unproductive ways of killing time. Tim and Daisy repeatedly stress that they are not a couple to everyone but Marsha, though despite (or perhaps because of) this, romantic tension develops between them, particularly during the second series. In s2e1, entitled *Back*, John Simm plays Stephen Edwards, a possibly nefarious stranger Daisy meets (and briefly video-tapes) at the airport on her return from holidaying in Asia. His few seconds of screen time and no lines make this a less than essential entry in the Simm canon. Typical of Channel 4 "cult" (meaning low-budget and not very good) comedy series, *Spaced*, with or without John Simm, is not clever, not funny, not cutting edge - in short, not worth your time or money. 22 minutes.

UNDERSTANDING JANE (2001)



Footloose twentysomething lads Oz and Elliot (John Simm and Kevin McKidd) blind-date two girls who prove to be scammers intent on taking gullible men for money, meals or anything else they can get. The relationships that develop between the four make for an enjoyable though finally unconvincing film. As ever, the exemplary Simm inhabits his part like a well-fitting coat, but not even he can make up for the authenticity deficit of the script. 98 minutes.

IMDb: *Understanding Jane* is a wildly ambitious film that wants you to care about characters who don't care about themselves, made in a tiresome and uninteresting way, shot lousily by first time director Lindsay from a cheesy, melodramatic, sporadically funny script by first time screenwriter Mummery. The only saving graces to be had are the performances. Worth watching - but only just / This film, produced before *Human Traffic*, appears to have many similarities, especially the *Star Wars* speech scene which, if I'm not mistaken, even has the same actors! *Understanding Jane* is modest in its delivery but touching nonetheless / If you want to see a good film without action, brutality or crude or dumb jokes that portrays life as it is, through the eyes of another person, I'd give this a shot / *Understanding Jane* is one of those films that wants to analyse relationships and depict realistic characters in reasonably plausible predicaments. It does so merely satisfactorily. Its image quality is poor - it appears to have been shot on 16mm stock that's been resting in an oven for fifteen hours. Sound quality is reasonable - not that it means much, as the film is made entirely on location and most of the background noises intrude on what otherwise might have been the perfect edit. These bad qualities half spoil the brilliant ones: a first rate performance from Amelia Curtis as the bitchy Dallas is ruined by hammy dialogue and a sense of character that wouldn't mind any outcome. Simm is horribly wasted, giving a pre-toxic excursion of his *Human Traffic* character, except slightly less funny, witty or interesting. Ultimately, I cared little for any of the characters because the ones we're meant to root for are not only established almost instantly but get what they want in the first twenty minutes and the ones we're not supposed to like don't care anyway about what happens to them.

Hot off the back of the monumental success of Four Weddings And A Funeral, Understanding Jane was a quickly produced romantic comedy starring up-and-coming stars (such as Kevin McKidd from Trainspotting). Both the words 'romantic' and 'comedy' are used loosely in this review.

The script from Jim Mummery (his only writing credit) aims to report the romantic adventure between two girls and two boys, set against a gritty English city backdrop. The boys answer a personal ad that two unemployed and fun loving girls have made and from here the plot meanders through emotional and sexual conflict, successfully managing to avoid making any kind of comment on modern society.

Mummery tries to gain his humour from aggressive dialogue, the relationship between the two men and the naughtiness of the two women. The dialogue is delivered naturally by the actors, but this does not make it humorous in the slightest. Furthermore, the male bonding in the film is not what any viewer would call a friendship. Mummery tries to borrow from Men Behaving Badly, presenting the two as louts who drink, smoke, swear and play pool, but fails to achieve any of the same kind of chemistry captured by the BBC comedy. Director Caleb Lindsay tries in vain to create something out of nothing by speeding up clips and creating montages of the two blokes bonding. His attempts only cheapen already empty scenes.

The lead actress Dallas (or Jane) is played seductively by Amelia Curtis. However, looks and screen presence do nothing to improve her excruciatingly irritating character development. She has the attitude of a spoilt brat which is at war with her presentation as being poverty stricken; we never find out where her distaste for life and everyone in it comes from and thus she becomes a shallow and unlovable character. In this sense, she fits in perfectly with the characters in this film.

The filmmaking technique of Lindsay is cheap and cheerful, although shamelessly tacky at times (such as the dressing room scenes). The guerrilla approach could have been successful in the same way as it was in the cult classic Swingers should it have been supported by a razor-sharp, insightful script. It is not.

The characters are irritating, their activities felonious and not as cute as the writer and director think they are - so Understanding Jane is difficult to get through. There are some moments of amusement, the dull and lifeless sex scenes realistically empty and therefore worryingly familiar, but they add no depth to this shallow, highly forgettable film. I never did understand Jane, but then again, I never cared.

Joss Morrall, *Eye For Film*, 18 April 2005

IS HARRY ON THE BOAT? (2002)



Based on a Colin Butts novel, this BSkyB film, the Cockney rhyming slang title of which refers to ejaculate on the face (Harry Monk = spunk, boat race = face), concerns the debauched carryings-on of a group of holiday reps on Ibiza. Like *Human Traffic* and *24 Hour Party People*, this is another young person's film, laden with sex, drugs, drunkenness and mindless hedonism. A spin-off series with different actors followed. As in *Brothers Of The Head* (see page 52), Simm makes a very brief non-speaking appearance, this time as Crazy Liv, recipient of the Champagne Diving Award. This is the first of six projects (to date) on which Simm and wife Kate Magowan (below, with Danny Dyer) have worked together (see also *24 Hour Party People*, *Devilwood*, *TuEsday*, *Exile* and *Mad Dogs*). Many of its target audience will like it, others not so much. 97 minutes.



MIRANDA (2002)



In *Miranda*, John Simm plays an ingenuous North Country librarian who meets and is quickly swept off his feet by a young woman who, after six days, abruptly disappears from his life. Determined to find her again, he takes the bus south, only to discover that very little was what it seemed. With Christina Ricci (above) and John Hurt. Despite a serious credibility deficit, not bad. 93 minutes.

IMDb: Charming, funny and well worth your while / *Miranda* has nice performances, well-composed and lighted shots, snappy editing, whimsical and funny moments ... so why then does it ultimately fail to make a lasting impression? Perhaps because there is so little connection to the "real world", as evidenced by the way that not a single character in this piece behaves in the manner a real person would. The entire film is an artificial construct, an abstract meditation on human nature that sadly fails to reference anything recognisable in most peoples' lives. The result is a film that mostly bores, but occasionally rewards. That said, the writing is clever and even rises to inspired once or twice. Likewise, the visual sophistication of what and how things appear in-frame, the camera movements and the just-right switching between shots and angles points to something far beyond competency. Let's just say that *Miranda* is an artfully realised misfire, a "nice try" by all concerned / This film couldn't decide if it wanted to be a thriller, romantic drama or comedy. Everything was just kind of mixed together / *Miranda* is a very stylish film with a wicked soundtrack. If you like your films to fit exactly into a pigeon hole (Twisted Rom-Com is as close as I could get) then it isn't for you. However, if you're prepared to watch with an open-mind, then this is definitely one to watch, if only for the fantastic shot of the imported Elvis rug! / The first half, filled with compelling characters and interesting writing, will keep you glued to your seat. Unfortunately, the second half will make you wish you'd saved your money. I understand that movies are often about escapism, but *Miranda* goes too far. Any film that involves a financial scam should have the good manners to explain how it's done / Too much weirdness for the sake of weirdness. Eccentricity is no substitute for compelling characters and/or storylines / An otherwise dull, utterly predictable flick is rendered immensely enjoyable by stylish filmmaking / Simm is excellent / A waste of phenomenal talent, money and 90 minutes of your life. Avoid this film.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (2002)



This BBC production, shown in two parts of 91 and 89 minutes, offers Simm a golden opportunity to showcase his considerable talent, which he seizes with both hands, turning in a magnificent performance as Raskolnikov, a man who commits two murders to prove his courage but is then unable to cope with the punishing guilt that besets and erodes him until, finally, he is redeemed by a humble prostitute. Though its insistently kinetic camerawork annoys at times, overall this is fine work. With Ian McDiarmid and Geraldine James.

IMDb: *Crime And Punishment* is a superb achievement. The film makes great use of its St. Petersburg locations, brilliantly recreating the poverty-stricken Russian streets of the 1860s. The camerawork, which would be impressive at the cinema and on BBC2 was an unexpected bonus, is bold and imaginative with the viewer experiencing the main character's disorientated point of view. It is especially memorable in the frenetic, panic-stricken robbery, which makes you sweat, and those bizarre dream sequences. As a "period drama" (although that phrase seems strangely inappropriate for this production) this is obviously nothing like the usual Austen, Dickens, Trollope *et al.*, but something far superior. One warning - the murder scene is *horrible*, but if you think that a fault then blame Dostoevsky, for all concerned have stuck very closely to both the spirit and detail of his novel. Personally, I found it necessary because of the initial impact it has on you, which becomes inexplicably diminished in memory as the film progresses and our sympathy with the murderer grows. The whole cast impresses, especially Ian McDiarmid as the wily, cunning detective Porfiry, Nigel Terry as Raskolnikov's "evil double" Svidrigaïlov and - my favourite - the ever-improving John Simm as the main character himself. Simm is an actor I have always admired but one can't help but associate him with a contemporary setting. However, casting him as Raskolnikov was inspired and it is, to my mind, his best performance to date. It's astonishing how his rendition of the character is so immediately recognisable as the Raskolnikov of the novel (although you don't need to have read the book to appreciate

his excellent performance). Handsome, bedraggled, intelligent, ailing, arrogant, benevolent, confused, likeable, troubled, regretful - this is one of the most complex of characters, but Simm pulls it off, making *C&P* the most impressive drama to be shown on the box for some time. TV doesn't get much better. Highly recommended / Though a book lover, I loved this. Yes, it left out some stuff, but it's a deep and inspired adaptation with a really great cast. I came for John Simm and found him totally absorbed into the role, with no trace of The Master. He's wonderful. Ian McDiarmid is an excellent Porfiry, annoying as hell (as he should be!) and Nigel Terry steals every scene he's in. No, he's not exactly like Dostoevsky's Svidrigailov - screenwriter Tony Marchant swept his really dark depths under the rug such that he comes over less as a villain than as an aging man truly and utterly in love, almost a victim / A wonderful film, chock full of interesting camera angles, cinematography and extreme close-ups. As an adaptation of Dostoevsky's novel, though, it's not so good. Purists beware!



Ian McDiarmid as Porfiry / Geraldine James as Pulcheria

John Simm to David Algar, circa 2003, on actors who have inspired him:

I saw Rebel Without A Cause and just fell in love with the whole romance of [James Dean's] red jacket ... With Robert De Niro, I went to a method acting school, Stanislavski kind of thing. It was like a classical theatre school. I just loved what he did, the method he used. I think every young actor looks up to him. As far as David Thewlis goes, it was his performance in Naked that did it for me, because I left college because I got so pissed off with it ... I was a bit impatient, I wanted to get on with it, you know, and I remember leaving and telling them I was leaving and walking out of the college, walking to Camden Town and going to see Naked because it was on. It was just about to start and I went and sat and watched this performance and it inspired me to go back. I thought: "I've got to finish this if I want to do that" and his performance in that really inspired me to go back, so I'll always be grateful to him for that. Later on I played Raskolnikov in Crime And Punishment and I kind of based it on his look - on Johnny Boy's look - so years later it came in handy as well ... [Raskolnikov] is the ultimate bastard with a conscience - with no conscience. After I played him I thought: "Well, I can't do them any more, 'cause he's just about the lowest you can get."



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24 HOUR PARTY PEOPLE (2002)



24 Hour Party People tells the story of Tony Wilson, a presenter at Granada TV who in 1976 launched Factory Records to bring Manchester's music to the world. The film is mostly a showcase for the talented Steve Coogan as Wilson. Simm, enough of a musician that in the mid-nineties he had to choose (see page 75) between that career and acting, plays Bernard Sumner, guitarist with Joy Division / New Order. You'll enjoy this film much more if you like the trashy music it's liberally larded with - but, even if you don't, it's coherent and vibrant enough to grip throughout. Impressive, slick, fun. 112 minutes.

IMDb: What can I say? Brilliant! This film tells the story of the rise and fall of Factory Records. Steve Coogan's Tony Wilson is spot on and the soundtrack is predictably brilliant. Shame there wasn't more info on the other (non-Factory) Manc bands (The Stone Roses, The Smiths etc) who played as huge a part in the scene as the Factory bands. I think many people will find this film hugely entertaining, whether they were into the scene or not. "Turn it up! Ya should be in 'ere!" Step on, indeed / Coogan is fantastic and everyone from John Thompson, John Simm (an excellent Bernard Sumner) and Peter Kaye in bit parts are immense. But a special mention must go to Sean Harris as Ian Curtis - fantastic! Anyway, if you're mad for it, go and see what Madchester was like pre-Oasis / Refreshingly honest and funny / A film that bristles with style and vigour courtesy of Frank Cottrell Boyce's irreverent script and Michael Winterbottom's flashy direction. Steve Coogan in the central role is flawless - special mentions, too, for Paddy Considine as the irascible Rob Gretton and Andy Serkis as a thoroughly barmy Martin Hannett / A real rollercoaster ride, this is no austere documentary, but a touching, sometimes surreal, occasionally anarchic and often very, very funny portrayal of a time and a place and its music. The scenes of sex-and-drugs excess on the Mondays' tour bus and the re-creation of the Hacienda club night are superb / Moving and inspirational, like a gig that you never want to end / See this film.

WHITE TEETH : THE PECULIAR SECOND MARRIAGE OF ARCHIE JONES (TV, S1E1, 2002)



Based on Zadie Smith's 2000 novel of the same name, *White Teeth* is a series of four interconnected stories, set in London's immigrant community, first broadcast on Channel 4 in the autumn of 2002. In the first, called *The Peculiar Second Marriage Of Archie Jones*, Simm plays Mr. Hero, boss of the eponymous Archie (Phil Davis), a small part that gives him just two scenes and around two and a half minutes of screen time. Set in 1974 with a soundtrack (Rod Stewart, Slade, T. Rex, Steve Harley etc) to match, the 49 minute tale is both singular and entertaining. (The other stories, focusing on the same set of main characters, take place in 1984 and 1992). Above average, worth finding.

IMDb: While the series was great, and the acting wonderful, I would have enjoyed it more had the author bothered to get even the smallest detail about Jehovah's Witnesses correct. There were so many inaccuracies that I doubt she did any research / Quite interesting. Not the dialogue mind you, which is painfully plebeian, but the visuals and wonderful acting. Now I wish I hadn't read the book, because I'm sure I'd find it much more enthralling if I didn't know what was going to happen. The inaccuracies that people are pointing out are also in the book but don't detract from the interesting portrayal of these characters by a wonderful ensemble cast / I enjoyed the series despite the fact that I found the fourth part less enjoyable because it suddenly seemed to feel like it needed much more plot to get by. The only other thing I disliked was the *Trainspotting* feel that Channel 4 gives to too many of its drama series, by which I mean the overuse of music in an attempt to add cool and energy. This was particularly evident in Part One which was wallpapered with period music which, while appropriate enough, started to feel more like a gimmick than a soundtrack. Happily this tendency was toned down in subsequent parts. Overall, a really good mini-series, worth checking out / Very moving / Unpredictable, involving, exhilarating, fantastic!

STATE OF PLAY (TV, 2003)



Written by Paul (*Clocking Off* etc) Abbott, *State Of Play* is a taut and textured thriller concerning murder, cover-up and conspiracy in which the worlds of high politics, the press and the police collide to tremendous effect. Produced by the BBC in six parts running 56-58 minutes, it boasts a top drawer cast including not only Simm as investigative journalist Cal McCaffrey but also David Morrissey, Bill Nighy, James McAvoy, Philip Glenister (*Life On Mars* etc), Marc Warren (see *Boston Kickout* and *Mad Dogs*) and Kelly Macdonald (above - see also *Skellig*). After winning numerous awards, the series was picked up by Hollywood interests and with its story transplanted from London to Washington, remade as a two hour film. The McCaffrey role, for which Simm was allegedly considered, went eventually to Russell Crowe. Cutting an already lean tale from six hours to two can only diminish it severely, and so it proved. But forget the film and stick with this tip-top BBC original. It's gripping. It's dazzling. It's ace.

IMDb: A rollercoaster ride to the last few minutes. It is not just a driving narrative, however, for there are real people with real emotions caught up in the action. The six episodes allow several characters to become rounded and interesting. High praise indeed for writer Paul Abbott. *SOP* grips from start to finish. The acting is excellent. Morrissey and Simm play brilliantly off each other as truths are discovered. The last scene between them is corker. The journalists are the heroes but also flawed and troubled. All the actors playing the journos are great but I thought Kelly Macdonald exceptional. Bill Nighy has some hilarious lines which he gives full justice to. Forget Hollywood star names, these are proper actors. The other character that is well portrayed is London itself. London has many faces and the series brought out several: nights by the Thames, the bleak housing estates, the pretty suburban streets, the formality of Parliament, the sounds and almost the smells of eight million people jostling together, all atmospherically photographed. A superb achievement by all concerned.

CANTERBURY TALES : THE KNIGHT'S TALE (TV, 2003)



Canterbury Tales is a series of six standalone dramas originally shown on BBC One in 2003, each an adaptation of one of Chaucer's 14th century *Canterbury Tales* transferred to a modern setting. *The Knight's Tale*, scripted by Tony Marchant (who also did *Crime And Punishment* - see page 31) tells the story of boyhood pals and Category C cellmates Paul and Ace (Chiwetel Ejiofor and John Simm) whose friendship is tested to the limit when both fall in love with their literacy teacher Emily (Keeley Hawes). 52 minutes of superior TV.

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Eulogised in his day and revered at his death, Chaucer's reputation has never faltered. In the 16th century Spenser praised him. In the 17th and 18th Dryden and Pope translated him. In the 19th Wordsworth and Tennyson admired him. In the 20th Virginia Woolf was a fan. And now at the start of the 21st century the creator of Auf Wiedersehen, Pet has got involved. Snowbound in Phoenix, Arizona, during a Pet location recce, Franc Roddam retreated to Roy's Bar with his fellow executive producer on the series, Laura Mackie, who is now the BBC's head of drama serials. Over what Roddam describes as "exotic fruit cocktails", Mackie said the BBC wanted a prestige series for the new millennium that reflected the identity of Britain today. Quick as a flash, he suggested Canterbury Tales, and the result is a six-part series that starts on 11 September.

The last time the BBC dramatised The Canterbury Tales was the 1969 Nevill Coghill and Martin Starkie version, which was faithfully done in full medieval rig, but, even so, a Radio Times article reported that the language was "very mod". The new version, however, is different. Traditionalists, gird your loins, for

they have updated Geoffrey Chaucer. From a shortlist of ten tales, they have invited the cream of today's television writers to create contemporary versions in their own voices but true to the spirit of Chaucer's original.

"Chaucer held up a mirror to the 14th century and we intend to do the same for the 21st, exploring themes such as the cult of celebrity, bigotry and the obsession with youth," says Kate Bartlett, the series producer. "We wanted writers who saw something in one of Chaucer's tales and had a fantastic idea for modernising it. We spoke to a lot of writers, but we wanted the ones who would grab the material."

Grab it they certainly have. The Miller's Tale is now set in a karaoke bar. The Man Of Law's Tale is about an asylum seeker and The Sea Captain's Tale is all Asian, with scenes in a shop called "Hindu Health". Seething purists must first consider the challenging words of Franc Roddam: "The Elizabethans used to be taught 'turning'. They were given stories by Plutarch and Homer and told to rewrite them in their own style. We are turning Chaucer." Furthermore, the academic and broadcaster Susan Hitch, whose career has combined a fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, and speaking about Chaucer's women on Woman's Hour, has put the case in favour of modernisation: "This BBC approach is a much more exciting way of treating it. They are in conversation with Chaucer's texts and engaging in the process he was engaging in. At worst it will be an interesting failure. What we don't have any more is a language in which we can combine raciness and a very high seriousness. That is the sad thing about modernising just the language. It is legitimate not to be passive about the texts, particularly in other media that can much more easily produce the mixed tone and shift of register that Chaucer had available to him."

Why have so many distinguished TV writers jumped at the chance to dramatise a 600-year-old work? "The hunger is there among writers to write a single drama," Peter Bowker explains. "Canterbury Tales is one of the few opportunities you have on TV at present to write pure story that is entirely driven by character - no coppers, no nurses, no doctors." Even writers as established as Tony Marchant struggle to get non-genre work done on TV. "I am finding it harder than ever," he says. "Five years ago I wrote Holding On, but it is pretty much impossible to get something like that on now. "They want sexy dramas and something they can sell in one strap-line. A good script does not make it sexy. Canterbury Tales is reminiscent of the sort of Play For Today that stopped being made in 1970. It is an affirmation of the idea that you can write a mainstream one-hour drama and get your voice on the screen."

While television writers struggle, Chaucer is booming. Peter Ackroyd has just produced an updated Chaucer in the well-received The Clerkenwell Tales, this month the British Library is hard at work putting Caxton's edition of The

Canterbury Tales on the internet and the Oxford University Press is publishing its first ever Oxford Companion To Chaucer, while Radio Four is inviting listeners to write tales for contemporary pilgrims. As the creator of Auf Wiedersehen, Pet says: "The lasting thing about The Canterbury Tales is the morality of the stories and Chaucer's observation of human nature. There are wonderful mythological beasts in these tales, and that remains." Geoffrey lives.

(1) Peter Bowker's Tale

Asked to re-read The Miller's Tale for the first time since university, Peter Bowker (Flesh And Blood, Undercover Heart) immediately thought of Pop Idol. What struck him about Chaucer's best-known romp was not the biblical overtones that might have amused a 14th-century reader, but how it is really about the way we want to believe in expertise. "If somebody says something with sufficient certainty, people believe it. I saw parallels between this and Simon Cowell's expertise."

In Bowker's version, Nicholas (James Nesbitt) is no longer an astrologer who uses his knowledge to seduce the miller's wife, Alison. Now he arrives at a pub karaoke night claiming to be a talent spotter for a record company. "He makes Alison (Billie Piper) believe he can get her a record contract." Absalon, the foppish rival for Alison's affections, has been given a David Beckham reading and the rumour is that the red-hot poker with which he gets his come-uppance is now a sawn-off microphone stand. Bowker has also created whole new characters. "I have tried to capture the idiosyncrasies of his characters' speech in a modern idiom and Chaucer's central triangle is intact."

(2) Tony Marchant's Tale

The hardest tale to modernise was The Knight's. "A lot of writers could not see a contemporary way of translating it," said series producer Kate Bartlett of this story about two knights imprisoned in a tower. They both fall in love with the beautiful Emily, whom they have seen only at a distance through the prison bars. Tony Marchant, writer of Holding On and Kid In The Corner, responded immediately to the idea of male codes of honour. Even he, however, had to write two completely different drafts, during which he learned that you can modernise Chaucer as much as you like, but you cannot tamper with the story's essential structure.

In the first draft he turned the knights into two obsessive football fans supporting the same team, but found that Chaucer's tale simply did not work when opened out into this broader context. "In the second draft that all went and the knights became category C prisoners. You have to convince an audience

about a complex set of emotions between three people and you undermine the complexity of the prisoners' emotions by putting it in a big area." In the harsh, all-male prison they do classes together and fall in love with their teacher, Emily, who does not have a personality at all in Chaucer's original, but is merely virginal and beautiful. "For the modern viewer she had to be fleshed out into a credible, three-dimensional contemporary woman. We have to understand exactly what it is they fall in love with beyond beauty. What is Chaucerian in my version is the moral and emotional complexity of the two prisoners. Chaucer's point was that, in the end, their love for this woman was secondary to their need to assert their territory. In a demonstration of their maleness, she got forgotten. All these things still exist in my version, but she has a more pro-active and decisive role." In these six tales, it is often Chaucer's women who have changed most.



Keeley Hawes as Emily / Chiwetel Ejiofor as Paul

(3) Olivia Hetreed's Tale

It would surprise Chaucer to find that The Man Of Law's Tale not only begins with a riot in Nigeria, but also that its central character, the saintly Constance, has become a refugee who is found on a boat in Chatham docks. "In Chaucer, the protagonists have no character, only a function," says Hetreed, who has a track record of writing TV drama about women in peril (Girl With A Pearl Earring, Canterville Ghost). "The bad people are bad and Constance is good and long-suffering. I had to give them characters and recognisable motivation."

Chaucer's tale is about an innocent maiden set adrift on a boat. "That is an image whose time has come again. The more I looked into it, the more it became about immigrants and faith." Hetreed researched immigration and the

tale's other dominant theme, the tension between Christianity and Islam. "That, too, seems to be sadly relevant to our times," she said. "The Man of Law is unashamedly xenophobic in his assumption of Christian superiority over Islam. My version is not xenophobic, but it examines the conditions in which xenophobia flourishes. What survives from the original is the power of that single character who changes everything around her because she is good without compromise."

(4) Sally Wainwright's Tale

If Constance and Emily have been given a makeover, the greatest change can be seen in the Wife of Bath. Played by Julie Walters, she has been transformed into Beth Craddock, a fading soap star who injects Botox to keep up with younger actresses. "The tale itself is quite short and our idea of her comes from the Prologue," says Wainwright (Sparkhouse, At Home With The Braithwaites) who has told the Prologue story in Beth's off-screen life while the tale itself unfolds in her part in the TV soap opera.

"In all the pilgrims' comments about the Wife of Bath, it is clear they do not approve of her as a much-married woman who is able to support herself, but what I picked up on in this tale is her inability to function without a man in her life, even though she is very successful economically," says Wainwright. "Chaucer's Wife of Bath is difficult to like. I wanted mine to be sympathetic and she is much more likeable than in the original."

(5) Avie Luthra's Tale

Amid the otherwise well-known choices, The Sea Captain's Tale is something of a wild card, so it is fitting that the BBC has chosen to dramatise it a writer who had never had any of his work performed on television when he was commissioned. Now 34, Luthra studied medicine and then practised as a psychiatrist for seven years before going on the directing course at the National Film School. Two of his scripts have been honoured in the Dennis Potter scriptwriting award, but neither made it to the screen. "I have wanted to write a film noir script for a while, and The Sea Captain's Tale was perfect. I didn't know a thing about Chaucer, but the story is like 1940s film noir with the traditional noir love triangle. It was surprisingly easy to update."

In the new version, an Asian godfather figure has a young, shopaholic femme fatale wife who sleeps with his young business partner. It is fleshed out with a new subplot about a missing teenager. "The difference is that in Chaucer's tale the sea captain does not discover the adultery, but ours does. Also, my adulterous couple fall in love with each other, which provided a more emotional, melodramatic journey for the characters. Chaucer's tale is more

lightweight and comic, whereas I saw the sea captain and his wife as tragic figures in a story about the hazards of adultery." Of the six tales, this is far and away the most liberal dramatisation. "But the situation has Chaucer's signature. No matter how much you tinker with it, it remains the same. That to me is the genius of it."

(6) Tony Grounds' Tale

Asked to dramatisise The Pardoner's Tale, Tony Grounds (Bodily Harm, Births, Marriages And Deaths) said "no". He had never read any Chaucer and had never done a dramatisation: "I have always veered away from them." Even after he had been persuaded to read it, "I still felt unable to write it." One day his 11-year-old son asked him what he was working on. He told him Chaucer's story of the three ruffians who encountered death and were so avaricious they killed each other for a bigger share of the money they had found. "That sounds brilliant," said the boy, whose enthusiasm made his father think that perhaps he could do a modern version.

"Avarice is quite meaningful to a modern audience and I became interested in the heightened reality of three people in a strange world on the edge of society. I realised that it was quite like my own work. The main problem was that in Chaucer you don't get to know the three characters who are killed because the story is relayed, not enacted. Killing your three lead characters on television is much more difficult, but I can see what the tale is trying to do. I am pleased my 11-year-old persuaded me to do it."

Stephen Pile, *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 August 2003



IMPERIUM : NERO (TV, 2004)



Shot in Tunisia and made with multinational (German, Spanish and Italian) dollars that are all up on the screen, *Imperium : Nero* was intended to be the second (after *Imperium : Augustus*) of a six-part series spanning five centuries of Roman history. That the final four parts never materialised may have to do with the widespread criticism levelled at *Nero* for its free revision, distortion and embellishment of historical "fact". But it's not an historical documentary but a dramatic and romantic work of art, envisioned and realised on an epic scale, that (for non-history buffs, at least) entertains thoroughly. Nero's life is depicted from the assassination of his father and banishment of his mother when he was but a child through to his own death, when Emperor, by suicide. We're taken back to a Rome rife with gossip, intrigue and treachery, where power corrupts absolutely and inevitably, where trust and good faith are in very short supply and where the women are often as not more dangerous than the men; a Rome, too, where Christianity is beginning to take root and grow. John Simm has fun playing the loopy Caligula. His three early scenes - his interrogation of Agrippina before the severed head of her husband, his appointment to the Senate of his white horse Incitatus and his entrapment and murder - amount to about nine and a half of the film's 192 minutes screen time. But, after he's made way for Claudius, there's still much to enjoy. Hans Matheson as Nero, Rike Schmid as his slave-lover Acte, Matthias Habich as his tutor Seneca and Pierre Vanneck as Paul of Tarsus are all good, with Ian Richardson as venerable Senator Septimus his usual sure-footed self. Soapy and slick, perhaps, but well worth a spin.

He was the most ruthless, corrupt and deceptive ruler Rome had ever known - but you wouldn't know it from watching this DVD. Following on the heels of Augustus, Nero is the latest instalment of an Italian miniseries devoted to

rewriting Roman history. Much like the earlier tale, Nero turns the story of its title character into a historically dubious soap opera. Unlike Augustus, however, Nero doesn't benefit from the acting talents of Peter O'Toole and Charlotte Rampling. Without actors capable of adding gravitas to this tale, all we are left with is the script, which is easily the weakest element here. Nero covers most of the life of its central character, beginning with his father's murder and his mother's exile at the hands of Caligula, who was Nero's uncle. Nero is then sent to live among slaves, and he begins to fall in love with a slave named Acte. Ten years pass. Caligula is assassinated and Claudius, the uncle of Nero's mother Agrippina, becomes emperor. Claudius brings Agrippina and Nero back to Rome. Agrippina schemes to bring her son to the throne. She informs Claudius of his wife's conspiracy against him; Claudius has his wife killed, marries Agrippina and adopts Nero. Despite his growing love for Acte, Nero is coerced into marrying his stepsister Octavia. Claudius dies and Nero ascends to the throne. Agrippina's continued thirst for power eventually drives Nero mad. He has his mother murdered, drives Acte away and takes up with a scheming concubine named Poppaea. She uses drugs to drive Nero over the edge. Nero and Poppaea marry. The great fire breaks out. Nero vows to rebuild Rome, making the city bigger and better than before. A pregnant Poppaea collapses. A distraught Nero asks Saul of Tarsus to help her. She dies. Nero blames Rome's growing Christian population for his misfortunes. The citizens of Rome turn on Nero. Nero slits his wrists and dies in Acte's arms.

The storytelling in Nero is incredibly pedestrian. There's no thrust or drive to the miniseries. The script is unfocused; it quite often jumps around in the story's timeline, glossing over or ignoring important events, while at the same time devoting far too much time to melodrama and the manufactured contrivances of the plot. At times Nero plays like a trailer for itself, and at other times it lumbers along aimlessly. How exactly does Nero go from being a caring, idealistic youth to being an egomaniacal tyrant capable of killing his enemies on a whim? Beats me; there are no real clues here, other than the fact that he was surrounded by insufferable, overbearing witches. Historical inaccuracies in this sort of tale normally do not bother me, but the dramatic licence employed in this story is obvious and laughable (there seems to be a new conspiracy every five minutes or so). I didn't go in expecting a history lesson, but I wasn't expecting to be alternately bored and annoyed, either. The acting is also nothing to get excited about. With the exception of Matthias Habich, who plays Nero's tutor Seneca, the cast flounders. (Habich was also in Enemy At The Gates, but for the life of me I cannot place him in that film.) And other than its length, there is nothing epic about this miniseries. I know Nero was created for television, but I like some grandness and pageantry in my historical epics (I'm just stubborn that way). Devoid of spectacle, momentum, and a sense of purpose, Nero is nothing more than a colossal bore. (Mitchell Hattaway, DVD Verdict, 28 October 2005)



(1) Rike Schmid and Hans Matheson (2) Matthias Habich (3) Pierre Vaneck

TEN MINUTE MOVIE (2004)



Another Simm appearance, like *Spaced*, not worth the trouble of finding. This short film, which runs just 9:26 (including more than a minute of credits) sets a randomly chosen extra (Jimi Mistry) before the camera and tells him he can make any sort of movie he wants provided it runs no more than ten minutes. What follows - part colour, part black and white - is amateurish, ill thought out and instantly forgettable. Simm plays Nick, a friend of the protagonist, who, for no obvious reason, gets to do a Bogie impression (above) then return a few minutes later toting a gun. There's more concerning actress Alexandra Staden, but in Film-School-project apprentice work like this, who really cares?

IMDb: *Ten Minute Movie* is a very professional looking short film. It has some famous faces and appears to have had some financial backing. The directing, unfortunately, is rather bland. The fact that the main character talks to camera for the duration means any skill the director may have had is overshadowed by the breaking of this fourth wall as well as the over-energetic lead performance and erratic scene shifting. The story is very thin. An actor is shoved in front of the camera and is told he can make any kind of film he wants in ten minutes. It's kinda silly and no plot actually ever develops, apart from the lead trying to get a woman into bed. However, rather strangely, he is more intent on getting her to admit to being a virgin (a trait he has imposed on her, being the controller of the film) than with sleeping with her. I didn't get these scenes and they were really drawn out as well. It was a bore to watch and literally as every frame went by I could help but wonder what on earth the point of this film was. After eight and a bit minutes the credits roll and absolutely nothing has happened. Who knows why a 'famous' actor would appear in this and who knows why anyone would even financially back this film in the first place? Your guess is as good as mine. Perhaps the director was a friend of John Simm? Whatever the story behind how this film got made, it really shouldn't have been and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone.

SEX TRAFFIC (TV, 2004)



Jointly produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Company and Channel 4, *Sex Traffic* won no fewer than eight BAFTAs and numerous other awards, and it's not hard to see why, for its bleak story - about the buying and selling of young women like cattle, and for about the same price - compels and disturbs in equal measure. Those who complain about its unrealistically happy ending fail to hear the corporate-speak voiceover that says Big Business will shuck off this latest temporary setback and roll on regardless. There are no and can be no happy endings here - though certainly more fine filmmaking and performances to admire, not least from Simm as charity drone Daniel Appleton and Anamaria Marinca (above) as Elena, remarkably (though an experienced stage actress) making her first credited screen appearance. The story is necessarily contrived at times - as when the traumatised and vulnerable Elena is billeted out with a single man, or in Kernwell's response to and subsequent handling of the incriminating tape - but no less powerful or impressive. At 181 minutes, *Sex Traffic* is a long film about a tough subject that should on no account be missed.

IMDb: The subject matter of migration has been excellently served in recent years, through the wonderful Channel 4 documentary *The Last Peasants* and through Michael Winterbottom's sublime *In This World*. *Sex Traffic* completes a noble trilogy, with its harrowing but sadly convincing script, fine direction and stunning performances from its leads. Serious but also dramatic, this is an outstanding film / Great job! I want more. Actually, I don't. I want a bit less. I am still shook up / A must watch movie for every male and female on the planet / An excellent film that is unfortunately wasted on the likes of us. We will be appalled then dismayed to the point of tears then look for the nearest comedy / I do not want to talk about production. That is not important. Important is the thing that there are some people, girls, and they are just like Lena and Vara, but not in the movie yet in real life. How we could help them? What can we do

for not happening these things to some girl? It is awful, really awful. And I am ashamed for being a human! / I would advise everyone to watch this film, as it is chilling reminder of the level of double standards in this world, and how corporations in war torn countries operate with total impunity / One of the most amazing dramas I have ever seen. The quality of acting by all concerned and the merging of the nationalities was so intense and so perfect that both casting and directing were sheer genius / I am saddened that this film will not be watched by more people. Yes, it is gritty. Yes, it is rough, but it will change your life and will make you want to change the lives of others. This may be the most important movie you ever see / The stand out performer here has to be Simm, a bumbling, soft-hearted, unlikely hero who surprises the audience by standing up to much harder individuals than himself, and to great effect. He doesn't play the clean cut, cynical hero that audiences have become accustomed to, rather a man who truly cares and does something about it, all the while fighting his fear and pride to do so. The rest of the cast is also phenomenal, with every character becoming a real person, to be liked or loathed / Grim, gritty, brutal, must-watch television.

Slavery tale for the 21st century

A new Channel 4 series starting this week lifts the lid on the global trade in sex slaves, using real testimony to create a dark drama. Amy Raphael goes behind the scenes.

The isolated road outside Bucharest is crowded with location lorries and film crew. The locals dismount from their rusty bikes and stare. They watch bemused as two pretty young women rehearse their scene over and over - Elena and Vara saying goodbye to their mother, heaving their suitcase down the front path and into Vara's boyfriend's tiny car. The sisters look happy, full of hope and expectation. They are going to London to earn money to send home, to experience a different sort of life. Within days, however, the fantasy turns into hell on earth. Sex Traffic, written by Abi Morgan (Murder, My Fragile Heart) and directed by David Yates (State Of Play), is another great British television drama, as compelling as Paul Abbott's Shameless and as desperate as Flesh And Blood. Starring John Simm as Daniel Appleton, an investigator in a London-based charity, Sex Traffic is a terrifying thriller which takes a candid look at the \$7 billion trade of selling women into sexual slavery.

Elena and Vara are two Moldovan sisters (Romania was used as a location because of its film facilities) whose story was inspired by first-hand testimonies from some of the 700,000 women and girls who are trafficked globally for sexual exploitation. They find themselves not in London but sold by Vara's "boyfriend" to traffickers in Sarajevo. They end up being brutally raped and working against their will as prostitutes in a bar. When the filming breaks for lunch, I chat to Romanian actresses Anamaria Marinca and Maria Popistasu (26 and 24 respectively) who play Elena and Vara. Both are dedicated to theatre. Amazingly, given her assured performance, Marinca has never acted in front of a camera before.

Discovered just days before filming began, they had little time to prepare. Marinca, who is smart, articulate and quite beautiful, read Morgan's excellent script and felt the story had to be told. Moldova, Albania, Ukraine and Romania are the main countries from which young women are abducted but, she explains, the tendency is to overlook such appalling practices. Sex Traffic is so disturbing because it is based on fact. It is nothing if not ambitious, not only in terms of the difficult subject matter but also the clever way in which it weaves a series of stories together. While Elena and Vara are trafficked (for around \$1,000 each), layers of deceit and cowardice are revealed elsewhere: in the US defence contractor that takes on trafficked women as its charity of the year only for its officers to become involved in the buying and selling of teen girls and in the London-based charity that's too scared to allow its investigator Appleton to delve too deep into the plight of Elena and Vara.



[Anamaria Marinca and Maria Popistasu](#)

A few months later, at the start of 2004, filming has moved to Appleton's London flat. I sit with David Yates as he shoots a harrowing scene with John Simm and Anamaria Marinca. Elena has made it to London and is using Daniel's flat as a refuge. Yates asks Simm and Marinca to sit on the sofa and rehearse their scene. There is much discussion about how Daniel should behave with Elena, if he should kiss her. Yates seems surprisingly easy-going, encouraging the actors to go with their feelings, to be instinctive. It has the feel of a theatre workshop. A little later, Daniel glimpses Elena's bruised and battered body for the first time, witnessing at first hand the result of a severe beating by a trafficker. Between each take Simm walks around with red eyes and a runny nose, looking genuinely distraught. Yates talks to him about how degraded Elena is feeling, how she has nothing and trusts no one. Simm nods and listens intently. None of the 34-year-old's usual swagger is apparent.

Yates says that Simm will be a huge film star when the right vehicle comes along. He is impressed with his ability to be sensitive and vulnerable. "We're so lucky that John and Anamaria are great together. It was a risk. Anamaria is a real find. She's the best actor I've ever worked with." He grins. "Well, apart from John Simm, Bill Nighy and David Morrissey in State Of Play." Towards the end of an exhausting day, Marinca has her bruises taken off by make-up and becomes human again, while Simm sits in a corner flicking idly through magazines. He explains that he wasn't sure if he should take the role of Daniel Appleton. "I was worried it would be too similar to Cal McCaffrey, my character in State Of Play. Both characters are investigators who have to get under the skin of a story. In the end David Yates convinced me the two roles would be completely different and I trusted him." I talk to Simm again when he has watched the final version of Sex Traffic. He sounds a little stunned. "It was really, really, really heavy. I'm very proud of it. David [Yates] has done an amazing job with a really tough story." He pauses. "Watching Sex Traffic is not a horrible experience because it works well as a thriller, so it's exciting and you are always gunning for the good guys - but you can't escape the fact that it's a depressing subject matter."



Of course he's right. Sex Traffic is brutally honest in its treatment of a distressing subject, but it's this very honesty that makes it such a vital drama. Scriptwriter Abi Morgan explains how she set out to "capture some kind of reactive experience that will transcend the page and go to the heart of the reader, to the heart of the actor, ultimately to an audience." Sex Traffic does indeed go to the heart of the audience and its dark images stay with you for a long, long time. Difficult viewing, yes, but essential.

Amy Raphael, *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 October 2004

BLUE/ORANGE (TV, 2005)



Joe Penhall's three-handed play *Blue/Orange* premiered at London's Cottesloe Theatre in April 2000 with Bill Nighy (see *State Of Play*), Andrew Lincoln and Chiwetel Ejiofor (see *Canterbury Tales*) before moving to the West End in 2001. The work won the 2000 Evening Standard and London Critics' Circle Best Play Awards and the 2001 Laurence Olivier Best New Play Award. In 2005, Howard Davies directed an 87 minute Penhall-scripted TV adaptation for BBC Wales. Set in a mental institution, *Blue/Orange* focuses on arguments between a senior consultant (Brian Cox) and young registrar (Simm) over the diagnosis and treatment of a psychotic patient (Shaun Parkes) - and, well acted as may be, I can't remember when I last endured such twaddle, for no doctor behaving like this pair would keep his job very long, never mind gain seniority. Others clearly rate this highly. My two penn'orth? Don't waste your time.

IMDb: There is the makings of an outstanding show here. It is at its strongest when it portrays the patient caught in the crossfire between the two feuding doctors. Where it goes wrong is in failing to solidly provide the motivation for the consultant's actions. I'm sure the writer thought it best to try and leave this ambiguous, but it just makes for a weaker story as the motivations begin to conflict and appear questionable. Also, it might have been better to focus less on the racial angle and more on the consultant's need for power and control over his subordinate vs. the subordinate's idealism and desire for some autonomy, all while maintaining more ambiguity about whether the patient was truly "mad" / What this top drawer drama says to me is that we in Britain think we know all there is to know about black people, ever since colonial times and the Windrush immigration subsequent to that. In fact, we have something of an inferiority complex and the sheer nastiness of the two doctors as they engage their victim in therapy conveys this concept admirably / A great story not so much about mental health as human nature, not about right and wrong, or blue and orange, but all about shades of grey. Brilliant and thought-provoking / The actors deliver explosively, working from a script not crafted with the faint of heart in mind. Fantastic!

BROTHERS OF THE HEAD (2005)



The two characters above are John Simm and Jonathan Pryce. Both appear in the very brief opening scene of *Brothers Of The Head* then not again. Neither plays any meaningful part. Simm - on screen for just a few seconds - has no name (other than "Boatman") and doesn't say a word. So, while he's officially one of the cast, if you're drawn to this film to check out his performance, forget it. If, on the other hand, you merely want to see an original and compelling drama, then step right up. Adapted from Brian Aldiss's novel and shot in mock documentary style, *Brothers Of The Head* tells the short, sorry tale of conjoined twins Tom and Barry Howe who are plucked from a life of isolation on the bleak Norfolk coast and moulded into the frontmen of punk band The Bang Bang. The leads are played by non-conjoined twins Harry and Luke Treadaway with strong support from a company of unknowns who conspire to produce a novel, insightful, dark and memorable gem. 93 minutes.

IMDb: Directors Fulton and Pepe get full marks for the rare feat of making a film where the fake-verité style is not a distraction and takes a back seat to the story and characters. The film, about conjoined twins being sold to a music promoter who wants to make them into pop stars, is deftly crafted - and, yes, there is an actual meat and potatoes story here. The fact that these brothers are conjoined is key to the plot but, mercifully, it *not* a one-note gag that the whole film is hung on. The directors made some interesting and ultimately daring choices, such as shooting the performance scenes in what appear to be live takes, rather than having the actors lip sync to a studio recording - and they pull it off / This film lingered in the memory for days after I saw it. It was a portrait, not only of the scabbier side of the music business, but of the intimacy, love and hate that exists between siblings of all descriptions. A lot of it rang true; the cinematic values were lovingly collaged within an overall feel that was at

times stunningly beautiful. The performances, particularly of the real-life identical twin brothers, Luke and Harry Treadaway (below), were lyrical, loving and intense. There was a sense that these two talented actors - who are also rock musicians in their own right, no musical stand-ins or overdubbing here - were giving the performances of a lifetime. After all, how many conjoined-twin rock-star movies are there likely to be? Having said that, the fictional Howe brothers made a stunning metaphor for the freakishness that is almost a natural part of getting on a stage and screaming into a microphone. It really looked as though it could work, especially in this post-Slipknot world. To my surprise, I would describe this as a beautiful film, but with enough rock 'n' roll grit to keep me riveted. We need more cinema like this / Deceiving audiences is a risky business when it comes to films. You don't want to anger viewers by pulling the wool over their eyes in an effort to show how naive they are. But if you do it right, and entertain them without this intent, you can pull magic out of a hat / An extremely dark portrait of a freaks-gone-famous punk phenomenon that offers little solace for the audience and a scattershot approach to the mockumentary format that won't score points with genre fans. Don't expect any laughs or a feel-good ending either - this is mockery at its most dour. Welcome to the dark side of mock 'n' roll.



DEVILWOOD (2006)



Devilwood is a short film (running a little under twelve minutes, including nearly two minutes of credits) set back in the days of tricorne hats, coaching inns and serving wenches, relating an opaque tale of demons and *doppelgängers* barely worth the trouble of its telling. Simm plays Gabriel, a highwayman in the pay of a shadowy figure called Dante (Dylan Brown). Kate Magowan *aka* Mrs Simm (below) is Rossetti, possibly an emissary from the Pope, but then perhaps not, for no one here is who they seem. First time writer and director Sacha Bennett flexes his creative muscle to modest effect. He, Simm, Magowan, Brown and award-winning cinematographer Nic Lawson will all resurface in *TuEsday* (see page 62). An intriguing but insignificant detour along Simm's career path.



THE YELLOW HOUSE (TV, 2007)



In the first instance [the role of] Hamlet calls for an actor who can switch between contrary moods - from low melancholy to dangerously high spirits, from contained revulsion to a spiralling madness, the "antic disposition" with which the grieving Prince tries the patience and conscience of the court at Elsinore. Time and again, in a stream of high-definition, small-screen performances, Simm has shown himself just such a mercurial creature, often understated yet always intensely expressive, able to combine seriousness and questing integrity with a saving glint of mischief and boyish unpredictability. Able, too, as we saw in his hypnotic turn as The Master on Doctor Who, as the tormented Raskolnikov in Crime And Punishment and as manic, depressive Van Gogh in The Yellow House to go full tilt at high derangement.

Dominic Cavendish, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 September 2010

Based on Martin Gayford's 2006 book *The Yellow House : Van Gogh, Gauguin and Nine Turbulent Weeks in Arles*, this 73 minute Channel 4 film attempts to re-imagine that particular place and period, where and when the two artists painted, between them, "over forty acknowledged masterpieces with a current market value of circa \$1.5 billion." Though tastefully shot and powerfully acted (by Simm, though John Lynch as Paul Gauguin - see image below - struggles to convince), the script is feeble, presenting little by way of compelling narrative, rendering the whole sadly unsatisfying. But then, making a film about two painters creating masterful art was never going to be easy, was it? Besides, judging by the IMDb reviews, some people rather liked it:

IMDb: Paul Gauguin and Van Gogh set up house in the picturesque French town of Arles. Nine weeks produced forty one acknowledged masterpieces which at today's prices would fetch \$1.5 billion on the open market. But was it worth it? These masters of the Impressionist School had a relationship which at best could be described as tempestuous and at worst abusive and fans of Gauguin will be disappointed to find out what a jealous, insecure, bullying and vainglorious man he was if the writer Martin Gayford, an eminent art historian, is to be believed. Van Gogh was a chronically unstable genius, and I would recommend setting a whole day aside to visit the Museum dedicated to him in Amsterdam to reflect upon how a person can transmit so much emotion through an easel. It's just mind blowing. Various psychiatrists have gone through the available medical records and tried to reach a diagnosis of what ailed Vincent. No less than ninety one different conclusions have been reached but what is beyond discussion is that Van Gogh was a deeply paranoid individual who suffered from regular bouts of extended hallucinations which tortured him so much that, eighteen months after the time period of this film, he took his own life. Gauguin, it seems, was paid by Vincent's brother and bank roller Theo to keep tabs on the artist's mental state and attempt to get him working again. For a while the arrangement suited both men and Gauguin's vanity was appealed to as Vincent clearly admired the older man, looking to him for reassurance on a professional and personal level. Paul, however, was a bundle of psychoses himself and this fuelled tremendous conflict and rivalry which spewed onto the canvas in a furious torrent of creativity but resulted in Vincent breaking down and committing the act of self-mutilation for which he is so unfortunately famed. John Simm proves again why, for me, he is second only to Christopher Eccleston as Britain's greatest currently working actor. The intensity and pathos he portrays in Van Gogh is right up there with - and this is a big call - the best role by a British actor of this century when Simm played Dostoyevsky's seminal anti-hero Raskolnikov in *Crime And Punishment*. Simm is versatile and his role in the unexpected TV hit *Life On Mars* brings comedy to the table to complement his intensity and insight so well exemplified in the adapted-for-TV play *Blue/Orange*. *The Yellow House* is a little gem of a piece and I await the re-run with anticipation, which is always a positive sign / Despite a basic script, this is a solid film delivering an interesting story with two good performances to the fore. It isn't as clever as I would have liked and it doesn't really delve much below the surface of events and characters but is engaging enough to be worth one viewing / *The Yellow House* is a fine attempt to explain the unexplainable whilst at the same time holding its audience.



LIFE ON MARS (TV, 2006-7)



After being involved in a car accident in 2006, DCI Sam Tyler (John Simm) wakes to find himself back in 1973, the era of non-PC, *Sweeney* style policing, Mark III Cortinas and flared trousers. The BBC ran the first eight-part series of *Life On Mars* at the beginning of 2006 with a second following thirteen months later and while there was plenty of mileage in the *Ancient v. Modern* clash, as personified in Philip Glenister's loose cannon Gene Hunt (above, second left) and Simm's forensic 21st century-trained Tyler, what made the whole so special was the mystery forever hanging over it - i.e. why was Sam stranded back in time and would he ever be able to return to his own era, home and loved ones? The brilliant resolution is well worth waiting for, capping off two wonderfully written and delivered series with some unforgettable TV. Episodes run 58-59 minutes. Not to be missed. For more Simm / Glenister, see *Clocking Off*, *State Of Play*, *TuEsday* and *Mad Dogs*.

In 2010, Simm told *The Daily Telegraph's* Dominic Cavendish:

I was in every single scene [of Life On Mars] and it wore me down. I was churning it out. It got to a point where I went numb with it. I didn't feel nervous. I didn't feel a thing when the light came on and they said: "Action!" It was soulless and I thought: "This isn't why I became an actor."

He cites this as one of the reasons he chose to return to the theatre, in order to reconnect with his audience and his muse. Yet Simm's acting in *Life On Mars* is no more noticeably soulless or by-the-numbers than it is scene-stealingly fine. Rather, he performs capably, along with the rest of a cast blessed with a superbly imagined and scripted hit show they'd need to try very hard to ruin.

The original Life On Mars was produced in 2006-7, and starred John Simm as Sam Tyler. Tyler is a decorated detective on the trail of a killer when a sudden collision with a moving motor vehicle knocks him backwards in time to 1973. Or is he perhaps stuck in a hospital bed in 2006, and this new world is a creation of his mind to keep him alive? This is what Tyler will have to find out - unless this "past life" gets in the way. Tyler is expected in 1973, you see. He is the new cop in the Manchester precinct, transferring in from another town. He is to serve under Gene Hunt, a.k.a. the Gene Genie. Played with spit and gristle by Cranford's Philip Glenister, Hunt is an old-school police chief. He rules with two fists and a chest full of thunder. Sam has modern notions of how police work is done - by the book, using the latest technology, psychology, and forensic science - and he is not comfortable with Hunt's "cracking skulls" methodology. Each individual episode has, at its core, a police case that needs to be solved, and the path to doing so has Hunt on one side and Sam on the other, arguing over how things should be handled, eventually meeting somewhere in the middle. A reluctant respect and camaraderie forms between the two, and the friendship is actually the best selling point of Life On Mars. Even with all the "why is Sam in the '70s?" malarkey, the powerhouse performance of Philip Glenister and the way he and John Simm spark off each other is the true heart of the programme.

While the writers sometimes let Sam's predicament take a back seat to the immediate threat of crime and punishment, the question of what happened to him runs throughout. 2006 occasionally bleeds into his consciousness, usually via a television broadcast or a telephone call. Some cases touch on Sam's memories and the parallels suggest maybe he is getting some opportunities to pull a "do-over" and, by saving a life or changing the course of his personal history, he can escape his sci-fi prison. In one episode, solving a football-related murder reminds him of going to games with his father and allows him to help another young boy cope with losing his old man; in the first season finale, this comes around again, when Sam actually learns the true reason his father left his mother and him without a word, and he spends most of the episode trying to keep his dad in town. In another show, union strife at a textile factory has special meaning for Sam, because he knows that the efforts to rally the labour will fail - in his time, their factory is his apartment building.

The sixth episode is the highlight of the initial cycle and creates maybe the most direct situation where Sam is put into the crosshairs of fate. An old man takes a newspaper staff hostage, threatening to kill someone at 2pm. That same morning, Sam gets a future phone call from his mother where she is apologising that she is going to pull the plug on his life support. The plan is to shut down the machines at 2pm, and so Sam is convinced if he can stop the killing in 1973, he can save himself in 2006. In dealing with the hostage taker, he is also able to give more power to the female cop he has made friends with, Annie Cartwright (Liz White, The Fixer). Throughout the show, Sam empowers Annie, helping her fight against the chauvinistic old boy's club. Annie is his sole confidant, though she

thinks he's a little off his rocker. It's a more believable character detail than actually having her accept he comes from 30 years in the future. She goes a long way to keeping Sam on track, forcing him to face the reality of his current here-and-now when his instinct is to charge through things of his own accord. Naturally, romantic tensions develop there, as well.



Season Two starts out a little rocky. Flush with initial success, the producers start to ramp up the show to be bigger and better - though not always the latter. In the season's lead episode, Sam confronts the younger version of a bad guy that he was after in 2006, and as it turns out, that same bad guy is at his bedside in the hospital in the 21st Century slowly torturing him to death, the effects of said torture manifesting on Sam in his new world. While it does give Sam the opportunity to save a woman whom he knows he has failed to protect down the line, this direct interaction through time struck me as overdoing what need not be escalated. Also, a final act twist suggests there is something deeper to Sam's role in Gene Hunt's precinct than he previously knew. That, however, is rightfully set aside as the show gets back on course over the next several episodes. Life On Mars hits a real peak in the middle of season 2. Episodes 5 and 6 are possibly the show's two best hours. In 2.5, the new back and forth between the future and the past means that a mix-up with comatose Sam's pain medication takes him out of the action. Much of the show is told through flashback and reconstruction, and the final act has Sam sidelined, watching on a television set as his team mates blossom without him by taking his advice on board. Episode 2.6 takes another case where Hunt and Sam butt heads - this time over racial sensitivity - but also adds the final component to Sam's connection to this past. It hadn't occurred to me until this episode just why Sam went back in time, be it a real leap through the decades or an imagined one. He was drawn to 1973 because that was the year where his life took shape, even though he wouldn't have known it at the time. His temporal shift allows him to arrange all the pieces: seeing his father running away, altering a crime boss' trajectory, meeting the mother of his

girlfriend. These are important pieces of his history, and rather than seeing his actual life flash before his eyes the way it so often does in a near-death experience, he gets to see the building blocks of that life.

1973 is like a living character in Life On Mars. Not only is the historical difference an endless source of conflict - and don't make the mistake of thinking the producers are saying our progression from the two-fisted, hard-drinking world of Gene Hunt is all it's cracked up to be - but it's a great excuse for putting the actors in slick clothes and gathering up good music for the soundtrack. T. Rex, Slade, Gilbert O'Sullivan, Roxy Music, Sweet, Elton John, the Upsetters, tons of David Bowie - it's hard to believe a television show could afford so many great cuts. The production staff gets it exactly right, and not in a way that seems like a gimmick or an ironic ploy. Life On Mars feels real - an essential component of us buying into whatever is happening to Sam.

The new plot wrinkle that emerged at the end of episode 2.1 comes back around for the last two instalments of the series. In the penultimate segment, Sam discovers that he has been sent to Manchester to bring down Gene Hunt - something Gene, of course, very nearly does himself. The messages through the TV and radio are that a tumour has been discovered in Sam's brain, and to allow his doctors to get rid of the cancer for real, he is going to have to bolster all of his strength to get rid of the metaphorical cancer that the Gene Genie represents. In other words, while surgeons work at healing him, he must heal the world in which he has exiled himself. He must destroy his own construct. Except it's not so easy. There were a million obvious ways out of this show, and the writers of Life On Mars decide that rather than take them, they'd like to challenge their audience one last time. In the finale, evidence is presented to Sam that makes him doubt whether he has bought into the right delusion. Maybe he's not from the future at all, maybe that car accident really happened in 1973 and it's messed with his brain. In one scene, everything we've come to believe about Life On Mars is removed, and the last episode goes from being about how Sam is going to get home to what exactly "home" means.

John Simm gives a truly knock-out performance. Sam loses his whole being, and he is saddled with the same massive doubts that so intrigue us as viewers. The guy looks like he's being dragged through the wringer. The fear and tension runs thick, and the audience is kept guessing right to the end. I'll admit, I had doubts that Life On Mars was going to deliver. Shows with complicated, bizarre mysteries like this one far too often get hung up on their own weirdness. The architects design a structure that can't possibly hold. Hell, it's what happened when this show got remade for the U.S., and those guys had someone else's blueprint to follow. Thankfully, no one needs to bother with the knock-off, we've still got the original Life On Mars, and it gets the finish just right, making it sixteen hours of television worthy of the time you invest in it.

Jamie S. Rich, *DVD Talk*, 29 June 2010

DOCTOR WHO (TV, 2007-10)



In which respected actors David Tennant (below, left), Derek Jacobi (below, right), Timothy Dalton and John Simm, among others, are paid handsomely to serve up witless codswallop, delivering lines such as *He's extrapolated the gate pattern a million times over!* / *You've got asteroid lasers!* / *We will initiate the final sanction!* / *It's a white-point star!* while managing to keep a straight face. Cast as Doctor Who's evil genius adversary The Master, Simm throws himself into his role, playing with tongue-in-cheek, comic book excess. He appears in five episodes: the final three - *Utopia* (46 minutes), *The Sound Of Drums* (46m) and *Last Of The Time Lords* (51m) - of 2007's Series Three, then in the two-part (60 + 73m) 2009 Christmas special *The End Of Time*. We get to meet some Ood, a couple of Vinvocci, a Sontaran and assorted other unnamed aliens, there's plenty of leaping back and forth through time and space, with the Tardis or without, at least one countdown per episode and pyrotechnic interludes that come round like buses. It's slick but very stupid, fun to make, no doubt, but, to sit through, not so much. For the young or feeble-minded only.



TUESDAY (2008)



In 2006, actor Sacha Bennett wrote and directed a twelve minute short called *Devilwood*, featuring John Simm and Kate Magowan. He then wrote and found the money to produce his first feature film, *Tuesday*. On a very tight budget - just two locations plus a bit of street shooting, only 16 days of filming and note the bargain basement opening and closing credits - he needed to persuade his cast to work for what Philip Glenister described as "next to nothing". Simm and Magowan committed again (their fourth joint screen collaboration). The film was also Glenister and Simm's fourth shared project. *Tuesday* is a bank heist yarn with a difference - that being that three separate attempts to steal a valuable emerald are made simultaneously, with the gem eventually filched by a (not very) surprise fourth opportunist. 79 lacklustre minutes.

IMDb: There is a good, original idea at the heart of *Tuesday*, but the execution lets it down. The direction is of the clunky television variety. The story leaps about in time and space, with the same tiny slices of narrative being told over and over again, with incremental increases at each iteration. If you want to see this kind of thing done properly, watch Kubrick heist flick *The Killing* / I didn't care about the characters or storyline, the actors look bored throughout and the film ends with the most predictable anti-climax I've seen in a long while. A good cast wasted / Directing his own script, the writer failed to tell his story in a coherent fashion on the screen. There is nothing to fault in the acting (indeed there's a good cast) or technical aspects of the film, however the back and forth jumping of the timeline just doesn't work. The director also fails to make us care about (and thus root for) a particular set of protagonists. The overall feeling by the end is one of *So what?* I suspect, had the writer allowed someone else to direct his script, that the result would have been a much, much better film. A wasted opportunity / A fairly good concept in the hands of a strong cast never goes anywhere. A really peculiar film, all wrong / This could have been so much better. Boy, what a mess! / The movie really tries hard and checks every box it has to, but feels less like a classic than a try-out. Don't expect too much / A good try by a young director who did his best - a daring failure / John Simm is a fantastic actor and loyal friend. He and his wife only appeared in this as a favour to Glenister and the director. During the filming he was appearing in a play and their second child had just been born / Mediocre.

THE DEVIL'S WHORE (TV, 2008)



Part history, part drama, part adventure, part romance, part fantasy, *The Devil's Whore* was broadcast by Channel 4 in four parts of 61, 52, 51 and 50 minutes in November and December of 2008. Set in turbulent, Civil War-torn mid-17th century England, it features significant historical events and persons (not to mention social movements: the Diggers, the proto-Hippy Ranters) but offers far too little context in which to place them. Political and religious schisms are acknowledged - King Charles I, Oliver Cromwell and Leveller John Lilburne all head factions and Papism is seemingly *taboo* - but insufficiently explained, and while exposition may not be an entertainment's primary job, surely enough to hold attention is a necessity. In a further deliberate remove from history, the work's principal character is a fictional construct: Angelica Fanshawe is a feisty, free-thinking and speaking (i.e. very un-17th C.) young woman who takes three husbands, bears a stillborn child, commits two murders, shifts allegiance from King to people and sees demonic visions without ever being called to account. Mercenary turned warrior turned would-be assassin Edward Sexby is given too little back-story to render him more than a cipher. Acting talent abounds: Peter Capaldi as the King (first below), Andrea Riseborough as Angelica (second below), Michael Fassbender as Rainsborough (third below), Dominic West (see also *Diana & Me*) as Cromwell (fourth below), Tom Goodman-Hill as Lilburne and Maxine Peake as his wife Elizabeth (fifth below) and John Simm as Sexby are all fine, but scriptwriter Peter (*Our Friends From The North*) Flannery seems unable to decide whether his story is fish or fowl (the few fantasy scenes in which a devil appears to Angelica seem particularly gratuitous). Maybe it was a case of too much history and too little money or screen time to present it, or maybe it was that the paramount need to entertain trumped the wish to tell it more like it probably really was. Either way, the disappointing end result is a worthy, good-but-not-great, less than fully realised *something* in between.





[Wikipedia](#): Critical reception of *The Devil's Whore* was generally positive, though there was some criticism of the omission of some figures (such as Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon, the Earl of Bedford, John Pym, Sir Thomas Fairfax, Sir Denzil Holles, Colonel Sir John Hutchinson and Henry Ireton) and events (such as the Bishops' Wars) and the fictionalisation of others (such as the suggestion that Cromwell ordered Rainsborough's death, that Rainsborough was a closer friend to Cromwell than Sexby, that Sexby went to Ireland and lost an arm and that Sexby attempted personally to assassinate Cromwell).

Critical reception of the first episode was positive, with *The Guardian's* Nancy Banks-Smith praising Capaldi's performance and calling the drama *rollicking, well written and acted* and marked by *a quite serious attempt to explain the underlying issues*. *The Telegraph* also praised Capaldi, along with the lack of anachronisms and the treatment of the era's sexual politics. *The Independent* called it *bodice-rippingly melodramatic* and showing a tension between Flannery's *desire to get as much real political fact in*

as he can and the ... requirement that a primetime series should liven up the party with sexual tension and historical glamour. *The Times* called it a curious beast, mannered and theatrical, with modern-looking faces speaking period dialogue in an historical dreamscape and if not entirely successful ... the best sort of failure - unusual, brave and fascinating. Another *Times* critic, while complaining of slightly too much reading history backwards ... almost making Angelica look like a modern woman travelled back in time and frankly unnecessary bedroom scenes ... slipped in, presumably, to demonstrate her liberated nature, praised the production overall as gripping, cutting and lively and Simm in particular for his striking Sexby. The *Radio Times* described the series as an intelligent, richly textured labour of love while John Adamson, Peterhouse, Cambridge non-stipendiary by-fellow in History, dismissed it as a cartoon-strip version of the Civil War.

IMDb: The series is very pretty, but goes too fast to set up the story properly. If you want to see a period romp it may be enjoyable, but if you want to learn about history and the lessons we can draw from it today, read a good book / Plenty of sex, violence and even a few demonic visions, with some history thrown in - but when we do get round to the factual events they are impressively acted / A stupid potboiler in which the beautiful, free-spirited, lusty heroine plunges recklessly from adventure to adventure and man to man, running smack into famous historical characters at every turn / Flimsy Flannery: part Hollywood narrative, part Jane Austen, with a sprinkling of socialism - an odd combination and a disappointment / The concepts and ideals for which both sides of the English Civil War fought are hardly ever mentioned. Watch at your risk / Two cheers for trying - okay, make that two and a half - and if in some ways *The Devil's Whore* failed, I don't think it should get all the blame. It seems that the financial shears of necessity cut the originally conceived twelve part series down to four and, unfortunately, it shows in many ways. What finally hit the screens is by no means bad and most certainly fun, but it is something of a mongrel, hotchpotch, primary school textbook account and the problem is that those who see *The Devil's Whore* might well confuse this with 'history', which would be a shame, because, in the cause of creating rattling entertainment, enormous liberties are taken with the truth. Rainsborough, Sexby, Lilburne and, of course, Cromwell are all real historical characters but in this version are fictionalised to such an extent that often only their names remain true. There is also the quibble of coincidence, whereby the various characters always appear in just the right spot at just the right time, often managing to travel considerable distances with no bother at all. Then there's the curious matter of the devil, who appears, usually sitting on a tree, at the strangest moments. I assume he is the devil of whom Angelica is the whore, but that must remain supposition as no explanation of his repeated appearance is even attempted. And what about Prince Rupert, bosom pal of Angelica's first husband, who even turns up in the wedding chamber on her wedding night, but then suddenly disappears from view never to be seen, heard or spoken of again? No doubt such anomalies would have been ironed out had the money been there for a full twelve-part series. As it is, we have to put up with too much shorthand and suspension of disbelief. Despite all this, *The Devil's Whore* is well turned and very entertaining. The pity is that, for want of a penny or two more, it might have been - *could* have been, *should* have been - outstanding / Grandiose and beautiful but history lite / Compelling, poignant, profound - only the ending slightly disappoints / Boring and primitive with subplots that lead nowhere. A badly told romp with the devil added simply to help draw an audience. Avoid. I mean it!

It's A Man's World : John Simm

People probably think I'm a tramp as I always wear the same suit

It's Versace, though - I bought it for my wedding. It cost several thousand pounds and the only way I could justify the expense was to wear it to every major showbiz or awards event afterwards. I'm constantly being photographed in it.

When I train I'm the fashion Antichrist

I wear a pair of Manchester United football shorts and a grey T-shirt that could be used to mop floors. I don't see the point in dressing up in clothes that are going to end up soaked in sweat.

I've committed some heinous style crimes in the past

In the eighties I had a terrible hairdo. The front was a quiff and the back was a mullet. At the time I liked both Elvis and AC/DC - it was my way of making those two worlds collide.

My rule is that if I haven't worn something for a year it goes to charity

I'm constantly clearing out my cupboard and buying new gear. When I was a student I lived in second-hand clothes. Now it's my turn to recycle.

My wardrobe would be unworkable without a leather jacket

I don't really start liking them until they've been worn and battered about for years. I'll wear a leather jacket until it falls off my back and then start again with a new one, or better still one I've found in a charity shop. That way someone else has done all the hard work.

I wish I could wear hats

I can get away with baseball caps and beanies, but I'd love to be able to wear a proper hat like a trilby or a fedora. I've tried, but they just look daft on me.

My wife is my biggest style critic

She always has a view on what I'm wearing. Usually I'll pretend I'm not taking any notice, then about an hour later I'll sneak upstairs and change. She's got a horrible habit of being right.

I wear a crucifix, though I'm not remotely religious

I'm not really into male jewellery, but I bought it a few years ago. I just like the way that it feels and looks.

Facial hair is bad, because you keep finding bits of food in it

I'm not a fan of beards and moustaches, although I had to grow both for *The Devil's Whore*. At first it was a novelty, and then I just got really, really sick of finding food in my moustache.

You can't be precious about your clothes when you have young kids

I have two children - Ryan, seven, and Molly, 21 months. Thanks to my little girl, whatever I'm wearing is normally covered in baby food within the hour. I'll put a white T-shirt on and the next thing I know it's got a psychedelic carrot design on it.

As an actor you need to be pretty fit, so I spend a lot of time in the gym

I like boxing, the cross-trainer and weights. I have to take care, though; I injured my back last year when I was on stage in the comedy *Elling*. I twisted round and it just kind of went. Now, suddenly, my osteopath is my best friend.

I've had to update my tattoos

I had one done on my shoulder during a drunken evening in the nineties. It was an odd-looking Chinese symbol and I don't remember getting it done. I woke up the next day and thought 'What the hell is that?' A few years ago I had it turned into an ace of spades, which I quite like. Now, because I'm a Man U nut, I'm thinking about getting a Red Devil tattoo, or maybe just the word UNITED. But I can't see the missus going for that.

I admire the effortless style of Johnny Depp

He always looks great and seems able to just throw random things together and look like a million dollars. But as you get older you stop looking for role models. If I had any fashion tip, it would be 'Don't worry about what anyone else is doing - it's a lot more cool just to be yourself.'

The Mail Online, 15 November 2008

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SKELLIG (TV, 2009)



Adapted by Irena Brignull from David Almond's award-winning 1998 novel, *Skellig* is a children's film made for BSkyB that, done by Disney or Pixar with a megabucks budget might have been quite something, but, as rendered here, is decidedly modest fare. It concerns a young boy who moves with his parents (John Simm and Kelly Macdonald) to a new home with a tumbledown shed at the bottom of its overgrown garden. Living in the shed, the lad discovers, is a world-weary tramp-like man who proves to have not only two functional wings (though arms as well, giving him an anatomically suspect six limbs) but also magical powers. The wife has a baby with a defective heart which, of course, the boy persuades Skellig the birdman to heal. 99 minutes. The book probably reads well enough, so - Simm or no Simm - I'd stick with that.

IMDb: A heart-warming tale of love, intrigue, the natural and the supernatural. As good as the book? No. A fitting adaptation? Yes. A good film? Absolutely / A must see for fans of the book. Tim Roth as Skellig does an excellent job / As far as children's fantasy films go, *Skellig* is excellent. One of the best ever, in fact. Unlike a lot of other such adaptations to come out in the past few years, this film is never overwhelmed by special effects or action sequences. Rather, it's quite grounded in reality / Roth and Macdonald play their characters as well as you'd expect, certainly as well as I expected. Bill Milner was the surprise for me, as the main and most important part in the film is played by this fourteen year old. His character is the thread that binds all the parts of this movie and he pulls it off like a pro / Delightful. Everyone should see it / I can't say enough good things about John Simm, who gives an awesome performance once again as the father of Michael, the main character / Everything about this movie is beautiful. It's got fine family drama and, of course, elements of fantasy / Fantastic / Not that great and not as good as David Almond's book. Sure, it was close enough to the book in areas, but it just sort of failed for me / Compelling / The film tells the story with the same wonderful poetry as the book and evokes perhaps even stronger feelings.

MANCHESTER UNITED : A CENTURY OF DREAMS (Documentary, 2010)



Manchester United first played at Old Trafford on 19 February 1910 (against Liverpool, going down 4-3 before a crowd of 45,000). To celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of that event, in 2010 the club released a 130 minute DVD called *Manchester United : A Century Of Dreams*. It and each of its eight chapters - They Think It's All Over, Legends, Euro Specials, Party Time, Heart-breakers, Big Hits & Hammerings, Weird & Wonderful and Epic Encounters, is presented by United fan John Simm. Below is an interview published on the club's official website at the time of the DVD's release:



Welcome back to Old Trafford, John. Please tell us about your first experience here and the impact it had on you.

A friend's dad brought me when I was 12. It was a cup game against West Ham and Steve Coppell scored. (United won 2-0; FA Cup third round, 8 January

1983). *It had a huge impact on my life, just walking in and seeing the pitch for the first time.*

Who was your first United hero?

My first hero was Coppell, not just because he scored the first goal I ever saw at Old Trafford, but because he was a right winger and that was my position when I played. He was small, fast and dynamic. I also had a soft spot for Gary Bailey.

Who's the best player you've seen at Old Trafford?

With apologies to Ryan Giggs, it would have to be Eric Cantona, for the aura and the enigma. There was just something about his attitude, the way he used to walk out, collar up, as thousands of fans shouted his name. It's the closest thing you can get now to seeing gladiators at the Coliseum in Roman times. Eric was extraordinary to watch, especially for me as an actor, just to study his face and think, 'How must he feel?' He was a really special player. He did stuff I'd never seen before.

So is Ryan someone else you've admired?

Yes, he's been a long-time favourite. He's still playing and that's amazing in itself because I feel like I've grown up with Giggsy. He's a shining example, the perfect footballer. If you're a kid today, you should look to Giggsy.

When they next build a statue at Old Trafford, who should it be of and why?

It should be Sir Alex Ferguson, definitely. I don't need to explain why. He should be right next to Sir Matt Busby.

Do you ever get stick off other actors about supporting United?

*They can't really give me stick, can they? Especially not David Morrissey (co-star in BBC drama *State Of Play*) who's a Liverpool fan. What could he possibly say?*

What does the stadium mean to you now?

I live in London now and I have done for years and years but I grew up in the North so every time I come back I get a warm feeling. Old Trafford is a lovely place to be with seventy-odd thousand like-minded people.

* * * * *

MOVING ON : MALAISE (TV, S2E4, 2010)



Moving On was created (though not all written) by Jimmy McGovern (see also *Cracker* and *The Lakes*) with seven series totalling 37 episodes transmitted on BBC One between 2009 and 2015, with possibly more to come. Each episode tells a standalone story, set in contemporary Britain, with a common theme of someone going through some kind of change in their life, but otherwise great diversity. In *Malaise*, the fourth episode of Series Two, Simm plays Moose, a man on parole after spending eight years in prison for taking part in an armed robbery. For the last four of those years his wife and young daughter have been living with another man. Moose wants to pick up the pieces of his life and viewers' sympathies are swayed on learning that he was wrongly convicted. The 43 minute drama works through to a poignant but emotionally valid conclusion. A strong instalment of a fine series. Recommended.



Simon Hattenstone, *The Guardian*, 11 September 2010

John Simm : Sometimes I do feel underappreciated ...

His Hollywood dream turned to dust, he's not won a BAFTA and Russell Crowe nabbed his role. So is John Simm bitter? Well, maybe a bit ...

Why is John Simm so often cast as a chippy bugger? "Am I?" he asks. "Define chippy." Well, there's the brooding journalist Cal McCaffrey in TV drama State Of Play who feels he's up against the world, and the displaced detective inspector Sam Tyler in Life On Mars, thrown back into the 1970s and misunderstood by all. Then there's the vengeful Master in Doctor Who - you don't get much more chippy than him. And now he's playing the ultimate chippy bugger - Hamlet.

"Angst," he says. "They are the best parts. Maybe it's my face." He's right about the face - it's strong, handsome even, but not smooth or comforting. He's too wiry to be eye candy.



Maybe it's my face ...

We meet in a pub in Highgate, north London. By the time I get there, Simm is sitting in the garden nursing a pint. He's dressed smart-casual - Ben Sherman shirt, Ray-Ban shades, pale blue jacket, jeans - and merges into the crowd. Simm is only two days into rehearsals and admits he's terrified. But that's the way he wants it. The thing is, he says, he's done so much television that he was too comfortable and he wanted to give himself a jolt. "I was dying, really. I was a bit numb to it all - that excitement, that frisson had gone."

He seems to get bored easily, I say. He smiles. "Yeah. I don't like to hang around too long." His first significant part was in the Jimmy McGovern TV drama The Lakes, but even back then he almost did a runner. "I didn't want to do two series and I was vindicated because I talked to Jimmy about five years later and he apologised for the second series. I don't like doing too many. Life On Mars, I thought two was enough. I could feel a backlash. I've got a good sense for that." He looks as if he's biting his nails as he talks. No, he says, a worse habit - he bites his fingers.

Simm is 40, and says if he didn't play Hamlet now he never would. The great thing, he says, is that it's open to any number of interpretations, but - and this is classic Simm - even as he says it he's preparing for the snipers. "People say, 'We've seen this one, that one, we don't want another, we're sick of it' and you think, 'Well, it's one of the greatest plays ever written.'" Time for another pint. Bitter, of course.

This is his first professional Shakespeare production, and he knows there are bound to be comparisons. As well as your Oliviers and Branaghs, his Doctor Who nemesis David Tennant gave a dashing, dippy prince. After Hamlet, he is filming a new Paul Abbott work with Pete Postlethwaite. He'll have his drinking cut out there, I say - Postlethwaite enjoys a Guinness or 10. "I'll be up for the drinking with Pete. I'll either have made a right twat of myself or it will just be a relief that it's over."

Simm was born in 1970, which makes it easy for him to divide his life into decades. His childhood was poor but happy, he says. He grew up in Nelson, a town near Burnley known in recent times as fertile territory for the BNP. "You do come across casual racism up there and I can't really deal with it, whether it's someone in the family or friends of the family. It jars, it's shocking."

His mother and father divorced when he was 13, and got back together five years later and remarried. In between times, he lived with his mum and gigged with his father. His dad was a musician - Simm is a talented guitarist - and they'd play local clubs together, knocking out old songs by the Everly Brothers, the Beatles and the Shadows. Even as a young lad, he was responsible for any tricky stuff involving the tremolo. "My dad calls it the wank arm. 'Wank the arm,' he'd say. I was like, 'Don't say that, it's a tremolo. Just say push the tremolo.'" He looks embarrassed just recalling it. But they were great days, he says. "We were good friends. It was lovely."

He left school at 16 and headed for Blackpool, where he attended a musical theatre school. After Nelson, Blackpool felt like the centre of the universe - full of young kids with energy and ambition. In the past, he has said it was all drinking and shagging. I remind him, and he looks embarrassed again. He's

not quite as laddish as he once was. "Is that what I said? Well, it wasn't all shagging. I think I lost my virginity!" At Blackpool, he realised he wanted to focus on straight acting and won a place at drama school in London.

And his 20s? Ah, fantastic, he says. He was now working regularly and clubbing constantly. Did he drink or drug his way through the 90s? "Not drink. No, some drink." What was his drug of choice? He sips his bitter thoughtfully. "I've got to be careful here because it might ruin my family insurance policy! I did most things, but I didn't inject anything. Luckily, I've got a phobia of needles."

Was he a nice or horrible stoner? "I was a loved-up raver. Smoking a lot. Just having a great time. Great bunch of friends. Lovely time to be young, the New Labour thing, that false dawn. Oasis and all that. That night they got in, unbelievable. You could even overlook that shit song by D:Ream."

By then Simm had his own band, Magic Alex (pic below). They released an album, Dated & Sexist, and supported Echo and The Bunnymen on tour. "One day I went to Old Trafford in the afternoon and United won, then we played Manchester Apollo that night - it was one of the best days of my life."



He had the chance to be signed, but by then he was making headway as an actor. "I'd done Cracker and The Lakes and it was like, 'You've got to pack that in and go round the country in a little white van playing toilets.' I thought, 'Sod

that - if I stop now, I'm an idiot, because this is what I do. I've been to drama school, trained. If I throw all that away just to be in a band, it would be ridiculous."

Simm had a career plan. By 26, he reckoned, he'd be a major movie star taking the world by storm. Things didn't quite work out like that - but they could have. After State Of Play he was invited to LA by American producers to discuss remaking it into a big-budget Hollywood movie. They told him he was huge. So Simm, who was now married to the actor Kate Magowan and a father, phoned to pass on the news. "I rang Kate and said, 'I think I've taken America, we've got to move the family over.'" He grins. "And we did, and we were there for a couple of months and I was queueing up with 400 people in a room, thinking, 'I've got to audition for this part with 400 other people.' I couldn't be arsed. They make you feel like a million dollars, then you realise they say it to everybody. Very important people would say, 'My God, I'm such a fan. I love State Of Play - we're going to remake it with Brad Pitt in your part. How d'you feel about that - Brad Pitt in your part? And I'm like, 'Well done, what d'you want me to do? Dance a jig, that's great for you! Excellent.'" In the end, they remade it with Russell Crowe.

"They remake everything I do, so they know who I am. They remade Life On Mars, too, so they've watched stuff I've done, and I'm not going over there begging." Chippy? Just a bit.

And then there are the BAFTAs. Or, rather, lack of them. "It's going to sound bollocks this, but sometimes I do feel underappreciated. I was the lead in State Of Play, and two actors got nominated for BAFTAs and I wasn't even one of them. David [Morrissey] and Bill [Nighy], who are both brilliant, were nominated and I was ... 'That's outrageous!'" Simm had called his ill mother and when one of the audience asked where he was, Hart told her he was taking a nap. "So this woman wrote to me, and she said she'd driven down from Sheffield. 'We waited for you and your co-star came out and said you were having a kip. Having a kip! My husband's a farmer, he works 50 hours a day and he doesn't have a kip. We're stood in the rain, who the bloody 'ell d'you think you are?' It was unbelievable. And it was just when I'd had some bad news about my mum, who's got cancer, and I was so angry I thought, 'You don't know me, you have no idea about my life.' But they think it's all right to write hate mail or go on the open sewer that is public forums and diss you."

Some people feel they have a claim on you when you are in the public eye or they have paid money to watch you, I say. "Yes, but it doesn't say in my job remit, 'Go and meet the audience', does it? It doesn't say I've got to invite them into my dressing room and have a meal with them after, does it? I mean, I do my job and then I can go home, can't I? I got very, very angry. Wrote a letter.

Then one of my fellow actors, Lucy Cohu, said, 'That's terrible. Where's the letter?' She went, 'D'you mind?' and she picked it up and ripped it in half. And she was right."

But for all Simm's grumpiness, it is enthusiasm that wins out in the end - for work, music, friends, family. He was content as a kid, loved his clubbing years, but now he's happier than ever. "I was lamenting the 1990s for quite a few years into the noughties, then I realised the noughties were nearly over and that they've been much better than the '90s. I've got married, had two kids. I much prefer being older, don't you?"

Has he changed? Well, he says, Kate tells him he has no ambition these days. "I often see these people fly past me, like James McAvoy. State Of Play was his first job and he's brilliant. Voom! Supernova!! It's happening to Benedict Cumberbatch now, and they're suddenly huge, working with Steven Spielberg, and you think, 'How the hell does that happen?' Kate says, 'Well, you don't play the game,' because I won't go to parties or premieres or any of that shit, because I can't be arsed laughing at some producer's gags just to get a job."

Does she say that disapprovingly or proudly? He's not quite sure. "I'm halfway a twat and halfway ambitious. There was a time when I wanted to be Brad Pitt. I'd have loved to have been in Star Wars, but I was in Human Traffic, not Trainspotting. So that's the way my life has gone."

But actually, he says, he wouldn't have it any other way. He wants to see his kids (his son is nine, his daughter three) grow up, doesn't want to miss all their landmarks. "All that separation. It's physically painful. It used to be great working away from home on location, but I miss the kids. So I think that dictates a lot of decisions I make now."

Anyway, he says, he knew what it was like to have nothing when he was growing up, and he's doing just fine now. And if the work's no good, even if it is close to home, he's not interested. "I've turned down massive pay cheques." What's the biggest? "Well, I can't really name things because it's not fair on the people ... not Hollywood films, maybe third series of hit shows they want to carry on. I can't do shit for money. Getting fucked for money - surely that's the definition of a prostitute. Hee hee!" The films he's interested in tend to be small-scale and challenging - after making Wonderland and 24 Hour Party People with Michael Winterbottom, he's now working with him again on a film about a prisoner, shot in real time over five years.

Imagine if you'd gone to the States and become Ewan McGregor, I say. He grimaces. "It would have been unbearable ... but at least I'd have had enough money to build a big moat around my castle."

EXILE (TV, 2011)



In *Exile*, shown on the BBC in three parts of 59, 58 and 59 minutes, John Simm reprises his *State Of Play* investigative journalist persona, here renamed Tom Ronstadt, to unravel the mystery of why, in his mid-teens, his previously loving father gave him a beating so savage that the boy left home, never to return. The father, Sam, played by Jim Broadbent (above, right) now has Alzheimer's Disease, with Tom's 35 year old younger sister Nancy (Olivia Colman) providing his daily care. Tom's back-story is vaguely and hastily sketched in - Simm's wife Kate Magowan makes a token appearance at the start of Episode One but is then not seen or heard from again - after which the core scandal slowly unfolds. The piece exudes quality in all departments, except the denouement, which lets the rest down badly, since, though we are asked to believe that Metzler is exposed and toppled, no proof of his wrong-doing is offered, leaving the story incomplete. The effect is akin to reading a good book all the way through, only to find the last chapter missing. What remains, even so, is top class television. With Timothy West.

Broadbent steals the show as the father, delivering a consistently solid performance as a man sinking deeper into dementia. He's very believable and retains quite a bit of charm. Simm is good as the son, but in having to split time between that and the mystery investigation, his character gets pulled in a lot of different directions. The strongest overall performance comes from Olivia Colman, though, as the put-upon sister who takes advantage of her brother's presence to get some time to herself and free her life up a little bit. Known more for her comedy than dramatic roles, she does a fantastic job selling the character, giving it both humour and weight, and balancing out the father/son business that dominate her scenes. (Daryl Loomis, DVD Verdict, 28 October 2012)

EVERYDAY (2012)



John Simm holds director and fellow Northerner Michael Winterbottom in high regard, telling Alison Jane Reid: "I would work with him all the time if I could." *Everyday* is their third project together, after *Wonderland* (1999) and *24 Hour Party People* (2002). Filmed over five years so as to catch the natural changes in four young siblings growing up while their father serves a five year sentence for an unspecified crime, its message is a simple and unsurprising one - that time spent in prison is hard on family members both inside and at home. The acting is fine from Simm, from his screen wife Shirley Henderson (above, left centre) and particularly from the four real-life siblings. Almost documentary in style, *Everyday* is beautifully shot (mainly in rural Norfolk), contemplative and, despite a total absence of harshness or grit, pervaded by a sense of melancholy since you can't help but feel that, ultimately, things for Ian Ferguson and his family will not go well. To convey such feelings via a film in which virtually nothing of note happens - *Everyday* could *not* be called a drama - is a tribute to its creators. An understated 86 minute triumph.

IMDb: Worthy but never dull, naturalistic and unassuming. The acting is first rate / A lyrical, compassionate, mindful and heartrending labour of love from a great European filmmaker / A non-judgemental documentary style piece about a family living with an edge of expectation of what's round the corner, with real life pending for the moment. Simm and Henderson are completely believable ordinary parents and the natural performances of the children, who are real-life siblings, help create the documentary feel / This is no glamorisation of prison, but just the real, mundane, human stuff, which I found extremely refreshing / Exceptional / Moving in places, *Everyday* is a sensitive but surprisingly unacerbic portrait of the consequences of being sent down / The beauty of the story is the chiaroscuro of its scenes and of its pace. Quiet and bucolic and times, raucous and city-driven in other moments. I applaud the way this film was made and the people involved / *Everyday* has made a everlasting mark in my heart.

MAD DOGS (TV, 2011-13)



Sky One aired three four-part series of *Mad Dogs*, in Feb/March 2011, Jan/Feb 2012 and June 2013, with a final two-parter winding things up in December 2013. The first episode runs 45 minutes, the last 42 and the remainder 43-44. A "black comedy" and "psychological thriller" written by Cris Cole and probably inspired, at least in part, by 2000 Ray Winstone / Ben Kingsley film *Sexy Beast*, the story follows the lives of friends Rick, Quinn, Woody and Bax (Marc Warren, Philip Glenister, Max Beesley and John Simm, above) through two turbulent years. In S4, John's real-life wife Kate Magowan again (see *Exile*) shows up as his estranged love interest. David Warner and Ben Chaplin also feature. S1 is set in Majorca, S2 (though shot in Majorca) in Ibiza, S3 in Morocco then South Africa and S4 in the UK then South Africa. The first series is very good but each one thereafter diminishes in quality with the last episode of all a tremendous let-down, its eccentric plotting and denouement a wanton betrayal of all the good work that has gone before. Talking to *The Guardian's* Simon Hattenstone in 2010 about not milking a series to death, or working just for the money, Simm said: *I've got a good sense for that. What a pity it deserted him here.* Of course, if their efforts are to prevail, actors, no matter how talented, need writers, directors, editors *et al.* to come through too and there's no reason why, in more assured hands, this series could not have ended triumphantly. But, as things stand, S4 proves undeniably a step too far and anyone watching *Mad Dogs* would do well, once S3 is done, to call it a day. Good, but ...

IMDb: Weakly written with a crap ending. The first two series were pretty good but from then on it was a case of diminishing returns / A show with a great cast and theme that loses its way with ridiculousness / Ludicrous, silly and *very* funny / Irritating and predictable at every turn / Unrealistic and pointless. Do not watch this show / A real hoot / Not perfect and sometimes unsure of how seriously to take itself, but the acting is good and feels honest, without compromise. The one thing is it *not* is boring.

FATHER'S DAY (TV, 2013)



Produced on behalf of Prostate Cancer UK and released on Father's Day (i.e. 16 June) 2013, the purpose of this 18 minute film is to raise awareness of prostate cancer among British men and women. John Simm (as Dave, a personal trainer), Ray Winstone, Charles Dance (both below) and others play members of a prostate cancer support group who meet to encourage one another and discuss issues related to the affliction and its treatment. A very sympathetically and professionally realised project, informing without brow-beating, done in a worthy cause. Kudos to all concerned.



THE VILLAGE (TV, 2013-14)



The Village is a BBC drama set in the fictional Derbyshire hamlet of Highcross. The first six 59 minute episodes, covering the years 1914-1920, were broadcast in the spring of 2013, with a second six, continuing the story into the 1920s, following in the autumn of 2014. Author Peter Moffat's original intention was to write 42 hours of television (i.e. seven series) covering village life through much of the twentieth century - however, after S1 (a "misery-fest"- *The Daily Mail*) drew criticism for being overly dour and bleak (perhaps inevitable with WWI its backdrop), S2 moved away from docudrama towards *Downton Abbey* style soap opera. Nonetheless, viewing figures were disappointing, leaving the future of the project uncertain. Simm, the epitome of modern, urban man, is miscast as subsistence farmer John Middleton, not grimy, scrawny, weathered or close enough to convince, try as he might. Led by Maxine Peake (see also *The Devil's Whore*) and Juliet Stevenson, the remainder of the cast perform ably, but while period dramas come worse than this, they also come much better.

IMDb: Bloody hell, it were grim up north. Peter Moffat's new six part drama opens on an overcast, depressing day in Derbyshire in 1914, as twelve year old Bert Middleton gets locked in a tiny cupboard by his brutal, hard-drinking father, apparently for committing the terrible, heinous crime of "swimming". Bert escapes, goes to school, and is immediately thrashed by his brutal, hard-drinking teacher for being "left-handed". Bit harsh. All this is just a normal day for young Bert. Being tortured and imprisoned is about the only thing you have to look forward to if you live in *The Village*. Bert's older brother Joe (Nico Mirallegro) is equally trapped in this heavily colour-corrected hell hole. But lucky for him the Great War is about to break out, sending him and his smiley mates off for a nice break in France. So begins the cheerful tale of 100 years of life in this small Derbyshire village. We look back on it all through the bloodshot eyes of the now grown-up Bert, the "second oldest man in Britain". Sadly, the part of this 112 year old gentleman is played by an actor who looks only about 75. I'm guessing

Equity are a bit short on card-carrying centenarians. Suffragette Martha (Charlie Murphy) arrives on a bus. It's the first bus ever to come to The Village, and people get so excited about it that they momentarily stop thrashing each other. Bert falls instantly in love with Martha, goes into a field and starts touching himself in a special place. Then he climbs onto a roof and looks through a hole in the tiles at a bunch of naked women having a bath. I'm just telling you what happened. Meanwhile Bert's brutal, hard-drinking father (John Simm) has to bring in the harvest all on his own. No-one in the village likes him, presumably because he is so brutal and hard-drinking. John's long suffering wife Grace (Maxine Peake) has discovered that the only way to stop her brutal and hard-drinking husband from being brutal and hard-drinking is to stick her hand down the front of his trousers, which she does to great effect. Up at the Big House, Lady Clem Allingham (Juliet Stevenson) looks down on all of this with a quiet detachment. She's much too posh to have to deal with brutal and hard-drinking poor people, her time being exclusively taken up dealing with brutal and hard-drinking rich people. Juliet Stevenson gives great posh. *The Village* is well acted and beautifully directed by Antonia Bird, and Bill Jones gives a splendid performance as the younger version of Bert. I'm quite looking forward to episode two, but I'll take a couple of anti-depressants before watching it / If you like dreary grey drama then this is for you / Utter tripe. A brilliant cast of known actors with a potentially good story set in a great rural location is totally let down by a poor script, a contrived storyline and abysmal direction / Beautifully shot and acted, almost incessantly grim, but you do care about enough of the characters to want to keep watching / After a fantastic start, I am utterly perplexed as to why the second series became *The Village - a period soap* / The best of television since Dennis Potter / The final episode is a poignant reminder of just how much the commemoration of all the war dead was not a given, but an emotionally powerful battle as to the nature of that commemoration. It might be slower paced than other television, but sit down, switch off the phone and allow this programme to wash first over and then right into you. It will steal your heart and make you reflect not just on the past but on the present / Another BBC masterpiece. Watching a drama so well scripted, performed and filmed reminds me of how fortunate we are today / Tedious, with too little joy / A wasted opportunity that insults viewers' intelligence with almost no character development, near zero historical accuracy and farcical storylines.



Maxine Peake (Grace Middleton) / Juliet Stevenson (Lady Allingham)

PREY (TV, 2014)



First shown on ITV in the spring of 2014 in three 46 minute episodes, *Prey* tells the story of Marcus Farrow (Simm), a Greater Manchester Detective Constable forced to go on the run after his estranged wife and child are killed with circumstances suggesting that he is the guilty party. Though the situation is generic and some of its elements here are overly contrived for the convenience of the narrative, the whole moves pacily along with Simm, right in his element, delivering yet another robust performance. Followed by a second series (with Rosie Cavaliero again, and Philip Glenister, but no Simm) in 2015. Good.

IMDb: ITV have made quite a few solid crime dramas recently and *Prey* is among the better ones. Simm puts in a fine performance as Farrow and Rosie Cavaliero is equally good as Reinhardt. The rest of the cast deserve credit too, especially Struan Rodger who, in playing elderly villain Topher Lomax, manages to be threatening even though wheelchair bound and in need of an oxygen cylinder. The story grips from start to finish and it's only in the final scene that we learn whether Farrow will be cleared or not. Well worth watching if you enjoy crime drama / Loved it! / A fast-moving, gritty crime drama with a typically strong performance from Simm in the lead role / Uneven script elevated by great performances / Heavily flawed / Great drama with Simm at his best / A stupid screenplay with lot of unforgivable plot holes big enough to drive through / *Prey* includes some really clever scenes where Farrow escapes in excellent ways. It has fantastic characterisation and although Simm is excellent in every role he plays, I thought this one of his best / Unoriginal and derivative / Started out with a good plot and a couple of twists but went downhill fast. Very disappointing when it could have been so much better / One of the best mini-dramas of 2014 / Opens well but quickly runs out of steam. The plot is obvious and dull and the pace bewildering. It could have been great but is just okay / Vintage Simm / The script doesn't challenge the actors. If you want to see Simm at his best watch *The Lakes* - it's so much better.

INTRUDERS (TV, 2014)



It must be hard even for allegedly picky actors to make right choices all the time. On the page, *Intruders* probably seemed no more wacky or left field than *Life On Mars* - so why did it turn out every bit as bad as the other was good? It's a fine but telling line. If you choose to watch it, stand by for nigh on six hours (that's eight episodes running 41-44 minutes) of insufferable paranormal poppycock. Adapted from a Michael Marshall Smith book and produced by the BBC, the series flopped in the States and did little better in the UK, leading to confirmation, thank goodness, of no second series. Simm's American accent may best be described as a brave attempt - but why not just cast an American actor? Was his name above the title so important? Caution advised. Poor.

IMDb: Made by BBC America, *Intruders* is a supernatural thriller centring on a secret society, *Qui Reverti*, who have advocated that immortality can be achieved by possessing another person's life. They believe that each member of the society has two souls; prior to the death one of the members, the soul is activated and invades someone else. Shot in deliberately faded colours by Philip Linzey, *Intruders* creates a dystopian world stretching across several American cities - Seattle and Reno being two of them - drawing our attention to the extent of the intruders' power. The scenario is strongly reminiscent of *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers* (1956): apparently "normal" human beings turn out to be very different once their souls have been possessed by another person. The implication is clear - individuals must remain vigilant so as to protect themselves against possible corruption. Whether they can accomplish that task is another issue entirely. *Intruders* is a fascinating, if structurally complicated piece; its plot development is slow, forcing viewers to identify the links between its various strands by watching each episode. The links are allusive rather than overtly emphasised; it is up to us to make the connections. Hence the structure reinforces the theme; it is only by paying close attention to the story that we can acquire the vigilance that will prevent us from being invaded by the intruders. An intriguing thriller about life, death and possession / Shite / Spectacular! / Dreadfully boring / Amazing / Huh?

CODE OF A KILLER (TV, 2015)



Shown on ITV in two 65 minute parts in April 2015, *Code Of A Killer* concerns the pioneering work at Leicester University by Alec Jeffreys, first to develop a method of genetic fingerprinting and then, in conjunction with Leicestershire Constabulary, to apply it to the capture and successful conviction of a double murderer. Simm as Jeffreys and David Threlfall (below, right) as DCS David Baker do good work. Though newspaper reviewers made a number of carping complaints about the production - *The Telegraph's* review, reproduced below, is fairly representative - I thoroughly enjoyed two hours plus of excellent TV and would heartily recommend others to do the same.

* * * * *

Not a trace of tension

A couple of things drew me to ITV's crime drama Code Of A Killer. The first was David Threlfall, so impressive recently as Noah [in The Ark] in the more down-beat role of a cop. Last time he played one, in 2013's What Remains, he lifted the entire production out of the ordinary.

The second was the terrific subject matter: the real-life eureka moment when British geneticist Dr Alec Jeffreys made one of forensic science's great leaps forward, developing at Leicester University the first DNA fingerprinting techniques and identifying the murderer of two local 15-year-olds in the process. With Threlfall as dedicated Detective Chief Superintendent David Baker and the wonderful John Simm as Jeffreys, this drama had to be a winner, yes? Well no, not exactly. Threlfall was a touch too lugubrious as Baker, the

Leicestershire policeman whose misery over a failed investigation into the 1983 rape and murder of Lesley Mann was compounded when, three years later, another local girl, Dawn Ashworth, met the same fate in strikingly similar circumstances. Simm had even more trouble getting his teeth into the underwritten role of Jeffreys, who alternated between painfully repetitive explanations to students (and the presumed dullards watching) of the theory behind DNA profiling and playing the stock obsessive boffin so wedded to his lab instruments that his marriage was permanently on the brink of collapse.

The biggest problem was that the failing investigation, rather than the unique and inspiring story of scientific discovery was allowed to dominate the storytelling. Sure, chronologically, the scientist and the policeman had to be kept apart until, as in life, Baker read an article about Jeffreys' work and tapped him for help. But the imaginative spark that might have bridged the gap between their storylines, and made them bounce off each other until their paths eventually crossed, was entirely missing.

The result was an averagely engaging drama that, for the most part, could have formed the plot of just about any TV crime series on air. That said, the pace picked up considerably towards the close of this 65 minute opener as Baker and Jeffreys at last got together and progressed the case by eliminating - for the first time ever - a major suspect using DNA analysis. That left a tantalising new mystery at the heart of the story. Let's hope next week's conclusion makes better use of the fine ingredients at its disposal and proves every bit as compelling as the real-life events that subsequently unfolded.

Gerard O'Donovan, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 2015



Alison Jane Reid interviews John Simm, 2014

From the moment I first saw John Simm play the investigative journalist Cal McCaffrey in *State Of Play* - with a crusading brilliance and all too familiar zeal - I was hooked. If he can play a fearless reporter with such gritty realism, he can take on everyman. Now John Simm's renaissance reign as one of Britain's finest actors has entered an eerily stylish new chapter. With *Intruders* for BBC America, he offers up a love letter to American audiences, as he inhabits that most particular and iconic archetypes, the ex-LAPD policeman turned writer on the trail of a secret society whose members take up residence in other people's bodies in a quest for immortality!

The Quiet American

While the series feels weirdly dislocated at times, maybe deliberately so, the revelation is JS playing an American citizen. He's good. No, make that peerlessly introspective! The accent passes muster and Simm's Jack Whelan could be about to embark on a journey as exciting as anything Mulder or Scully got up to in *The X Files*. *Intruders* does look good; the sci-fi horror glossily juxtaposed with the most ghostly beautiful locations. As a backdrop, America suits Simm, and he delivers a beautifully nuanced performance, hinting at a fascinating back-story. As Jack stands outside a bookstore and gazes intently at a display of his own novel, alongside a proud photo of his old life in uniform, the audience is treated to its first tantalising clue that life can be anything but predictable.

I think it is only fair to add that the happy birthday scene with Mira Sorvino as his wife should carry a warning - look away if you don't want to see the birth of a heartthrob. Never mind the plot and a rather nasty scene with a child's pet cat. That intimate cake-licking moment in that achingly stylish kitchen must surely lead to a little global warming on both side of the Atlantic. Wow! JS finally gets to play sexy! Sorvino and Simm look good together. Finally, with a dash of stubble and timelessly sartorial wardrobe, our man gets to play the hero, husband and lover - and about time too. Watching him convey the stuff of love, life and death is a treat. This is what Simm does so very well. *Intruders* might just be the series that could transform Britain's favourite actor into a *bon fide* international star and America's new crush. If his freewheeling travelling schedule is anything to go by, 2014 is certainly shaping up to be a stellar year for Simm. "I've been on a workathon all year," he tells me. "I've been back and forth to LA, Derbyshire, Manchester and London since February." Maybe now is the time one of our most versatile British acting treasures will follow such luminaries as James McAvoy, Ewan McGregor, Clive Owen and Colin Firth into a vibrant, dual career across the pond. Let's hope that he does it his way and

that he never stops playing time travelling policemen, misfits, salt of the earth farmers or ordinary human beings with such compelling realism. Reader, they say you should never interview your acting heroes. I make an exception for Simm. When we meet in a discreetly urbane London hotel, the character from the small screen becomes flesh and blood and the man rather than the actor steps out from behind the mask. I can tell you that he is modest, open, patient, completely and utterly passionate about his work, chivalrous and gentlemanly about my not so clean biker boots! And he dislikes going to the dentist! Dressed in a midnight blue army sweater, jeans and DMs (you can take the boy out of Manchester ...) what really shines is his absolute passion and forensic dedication to the roles he plays. That is why he isn't just a good actor; he is a great actor.

The Thinking Woman's Pin-up

During a twenty-year career, he has quietly assumed the mantle of the thinking woman's pinup without the slightest idea that it is so. A man whose sulky, rebel insouciance still glitters, long after he first ruthlessly crawled under our skin in Jimmy McGovern's very grim tales of murder and dysfunction in *Cracker* and *The Lakes* or as a kind of modern Lancelot in the harrowingly unforgettable *Sex Traffic*. It was a most magnificent beginning, a preface to an unfolding, multi-faceted career, which would see Simm go on to play some of our most beloved modern heroes (and villains too), none more so than the right-on, time travelling policeman, Sam Tyler, in a television series of such brilliance. Who could ever improve on the idea of being catapulted back to 1973, to a world of Bowie, bellbottoms, car chases and outmoded chauvinism of the first degree, with immortal lines such as Sam's nemesis, Gene Hunt declaring: 'Don't walk into my kingdom and act like the king of the jungle!?' No wonder you, the reader, have just voted for Sam as your favourite JS role of all time in our reader poll.

"*Life On Mars* was just the most fantastic double act with Phil (Glenister) - he's like my screen husband!" says John with great affection. "In *Life On Mars* we felt like we were in *Starsky And Hutch* or *The Professionals*. We thought we were invincible. What's not to like bursting round a corner in a Cortina? Or jumping out and kicking doors in? It was fantastic fun, and I am so proud of what we did."

Phil And I Joke We Should Get Divorced

He jokes that he and Glenister, who are best mates in real life, really should get divorced on screen, before the audience gets sick of them for having too much fun. "Since *Mad Dogs* finished, we've considered taking up golf, but then I really would get divorced, because we would go missing for hours!" If the

measure of a great actor is that they can play the roles that capture the collective imagination just as easily as the more taxing, intellectual roles, then Simm is the man. Interestingly, his portrait of Raskolnikov was almost as popular as Sam Tyler in our poll.

So what makes Simm tick? In no particular order, I can tell you that his favourite activities are reading, sleeping and playing the guitar. At the current count, he owns seven guitars and recently discovered a garage app on I-Tunes, that he can plug in and play along to. Music is a huge passion in his life, particularly The Beatles. "The Beatles are an ever shape-shifting thing in my life. I can listen to them for hours or days, and then leave them alone for months and then rediscover the pleasures of *The White Album* or *Revolver*." Until his mid thirties, JS was a founding member and guitarist in Magic Alex, a band "named after The Beatles' drug dealer". [Though officially disbanded as of 2006, Magic Alex still gig occasionally, having played Glastonbury in June 2015 after a warm-up show at Camden's Barfly.] When I ask him which Beatle he would like to play, if the opportunity ever came along, he laughs, hesitates for a nano-second and then says "Lennon, of course - but I don't look anything like him!" Interestingly, when he is preparing for a role, he listens to classical music not pop or rock. "I love Beethoven. I can't listen to pop when I need to focus, the spoken voice gets in the way. Beethoven is just perfect." Oh and try and tear Simm away from his beloved books and you will be in trouble. He always has a huge book on the go. Recently, it was Richard Burton and John Lennon's diaries and, when he started reading *East Of Eden*, he just couldn't put it down." I stayed up all night, I just had to find out what happens!" To that you can add a passion for Dickens and Dostoyevsky, for what he calls their "extraordinary humanity." He could play guitar by the time he was eleven and he would often accompany his father on stage, playing working men's clubs, around Manchester and the northeast. This was in spite of feelings of shyness in childhood, which he says drew him to acting in the first place. "Acting lets you wear a mask and play other people and I am comfortable with that," he explains. After studying classical acting at The Drama Centre in London and immersing himself in the Manchester music scene, Jimmy McGovern took a chance on the unknown actor, casting him first in *Cracker*, and then as the lead in *The Lakes* after Simm cheekily asked him for the role at the audition.

I Never Wanted A Role So Badly As I Did *The Lakes*

"I've never wanted a role so badly, as I did *The Lakes*. I was very cheeky and very young. I remember walking out of the final recall, and then walking straight back in again, and then going straight up to the director, and saying 'Please, just give me this role, just trust me, please trust me, I won't let you down ... and looking him straight in the eyes' - then thinking 'What have I done?' It was an impulsive thing." Simm proved he had imagination, talent and

bravery to take on the great roles, and often the most uncomfortable ones too, going on to play the characters we simply can't forget from The Master in *Doctor Who* to the painter Vincent Van Gogh in *The Yellow House*, another favourite role. Characters that refuse to fade from the collective imagination. Even now, *State Of Play* still ranks as one of the finest, thrilling, edge of the seat political thrillers of the past twenty-five years. It also ignited the careers of his peers James McAvoy, David Morrissey, Phil Glenister and Marc Warren. Simm fizzed on screen with a youthful, counterculture bravado and charisma. He was cute rather than leading man handsome, but all you see on screen is the character, not the actor. That is talent. It was his innate acting ability that marked him out as one to watch, and I couldn't wait to see what he would do next.

The Golden Age From *Human Traffic* To *Life On Mars*

John tells me that this was like a golden age in his career, when the great roles just kept on coming. "The chunk of time between *Human Traffic* and *Life On Mars* was a very exciting time for me. This is when I played Cal McCaffrey in *State Of Play* and Daniel Appleton in *Sex Traffic*. They were both exceptional pieces of writing, and both wonderful to do. I also played Caligula, which was fantastic. I had to learn to ride a horse in a week, and ride it up the Senate steps. It helped me a lot to prepare for the part of The Master in *Doctor Who*. It was like a trial run." When he crashed into our collective consciousness in *The Lakes*, as hapless Danny, in a gallery of grotesques, he represented the youthful optimism of rave culture and a breezy new social order that wasn't about privilege, it was about opportunity. It was a return to a new true grit and realism that stretches back to films like *A Taste Of Honey* and *Look Back In Anger*. John is part of the brilliant fraternity of nineties actors that simply didn't seem to feel the need or desire to defect to Hollywood, they were having a ball back home.

These Days Simm Looks Less Like A Pop Star And More Like A Man Who Has Lived

Today, such is his stature and extraordinary back catalogue; no one can match him in terms of gravitas or audience loyalty. That makes him a very bankable star. Then there is the twinkling appeal of maturity. Just think of George Clooney. He was almost too beautiful in his *ER* days. Today, Simm looks less like a pop star and more like a man who has lived; a man who could take on a epic role and command sufficient presence and charisma to appeal to American audiences too. Why? Because when he inhabits a character the process and the commitment is absolute. He can do stubborn, introspective, unknowable, daring, generous and uncomfortably brilliant - the consummate everyman. From jailbird husband to coma policeman, romantic swordsman to

humanitarian, party animal to outcast journalist, it is impossible to pigeonhole Simm apart from one thing - a god-given ability and appetite to disappear into the lives of other people. Now the shyness he talks about in childhood begins to make sense.

***Prey* - A Mesmerizing Portrait Of A Fugitive**

In *Prey*, Simm is the only actor you see on the screen. The other characters appear almost one-dimensional, mere flimflam to the sweat, fear and anger of Simm's mesmerizing portrait (below) of a fugitive. At times, the atmosphere is so intimate, so tense, it is as if we can hear his heartbeat, as he jumps off bridges and crashes through streams - a wreck of man, propelled onwards by his shining, righteous innocence and a reckless determination to remain free until he can hunt down the killers of his wife and child; so far, so Simm. John is a dream for any writer or director, because he cares passionately about the craft of great writing and collaborating closely with gifted directors like Paul Abbott and Michael Winterbottom. "Michael is like the revolution," he says in a heartbeat. "I would work with him all the time if I could."



JS as his fans affectionately calls him isn't just a great actor; he is one of the finest actors to come out of the nineties, and it will be interesting to see if America gets him. Let's just say that there was point where Hollywood opened the door, but JS wasn't shaken or stirred enough to give up the pleasure of the school run or performing his beloved Pinter in the West End. If he had, he probably wouldn't have gone on play the Master in *Doctor Who*, he wouldn't

have played the washed up hack Tom Ronstadt in *Exile*, or revealed his ghastly, snarling, spitting; lank haired, brutal brilliance as Raskolnikov in one of the starkest, most atmospheric and faithful adaptations of *Crime And Punishment* ever.

Playing Raskolnikov Was A Gift

"Playing Raskolnikov In *Crime And Punishment* was a gift. When I overheard the director Julian Jarrold and the writer Tony Marchant talking about doing it, I was on it like a limpet. I wanted that role. If I had to choose between Dickens and Dostoyevsky, I would probably choose the Russian. He's one of my favourite writers. In Russia, Raskolnikov is treated like a folk hero; he's a bit like Sherlock Holmes. You don't know whether he is real or imaginary. In Saint Petersburg, you can go and see his flat. It's just as it is described in the book. People go there on pilgrimage; it's like Abbey Road is to the Beatles."

***The Devil's Whore* - A Boy's Own Adventure!**

What really comes across during my interview with John is the satisfaction, dedication and passion he brings to his roles. In *The Devil's Whore*, John really had to fight for the role of Edward Sexby, playing against type to deliver one of his most surprising, fearless and emotionally raw performances. Sexby (below) is a romantic hero, but not as we know it.



John says "He's a soldier of fortune, he falls in love, he discovers he has a heart, changes allegiance, he's a brilliant swordsman and ends up with a metal hand. What a part! It was a boy's own adventure come to life. I was offered a different role, and I understand that they wouldn't have immediately thought

of me; but I wanted to prove I could do it. I was salivating when I read the script by Peter Flannery and I would have been so pissed off if I had to watch someone else play it."

A Love So Great It Would Make A Bishop Kick In A Stained Glass Window

If you haven't seen *The Devil's Whore*, you must watch it. It is one of John's finest and most rounded, remarkable portraits of a man transformed by the power of love, beauty and the desire to be free. When we first meet Sexby, he is a mercenary and a cold-hearted butcher. His brutality makes him ugly and utterly repellent as a man. His life exists in a kind of hell played out in the mud and blood of the battlefield. Then, he falls for Andrea Riseborough's emancipated Cavalier goddess, and slowly, a remarkable change takes place. Sexby's heart of stone becomes one of stoic, sweet devotion. He goes from cruel, murderous fiend to devoted lover and protector and Simm conveys this transformation with such exquisite subtlety, such heartbreaking acts of devotion that it is a great portrait of self sacrifice and love - a love so great that it would make a bishop want to kick in a stained glass window! So, eat your heart out, Mr Darcy! The truth is that Simm is too much of a salt of the earth Manchester rebel, too much of a serious artist not to take risks. He lives to shine a light on every area of the human condition. And we are the winners, because for Simm the need to flex his creative muscle will always come first. It is as important to him as breathing and sleeping and listening to his beloved Beatles or Beethoven. There is a very poignant scene in *Life On Mars* where Simm's character Sam is utterly dejected and he goes into the local bar. 'I am losing it, Nelson,' he says. Tony Marshall's publican says 'You are where you are, you have to make the best of it'. With a little borrowed artistic licence from David Bowie and his Ziggy Stardust - *Life On Mars : It's The Freakiest Show On Earth* - no one could ever say that John Simm has ever not made the very best of art and life. So where in the universe will all this talent, passion and daring take the fantastic Mr Simm next?



TOAST OF LONDON : GLOBAL WARMING (TV, S3E6, 2015)



After a successful pilot in 2012, Channel 4 have (to date) aired three six-part series of *Toast Of London*, in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Starring and co-written by Matt Berry (below), it revolves around his character, Steven Toast, an eccentric middle aged actor with a chequered past, who spends more time dealing with his problems off stage than performing on it. In the final episode of the third series, he connives in burning down the historic Globe Theatre rather than allow a production of *Twelfth Night* with dogs in the lead roles to proceed. Several actors, including Simm, contribute condemnatory sound bites to a fictional news report of the incident. Simm speaks twelve words to camera and is on screen, in deliberately poor quality video, for all of five seconds.



ONLINE RESOURCES

A search of YouTube yields a wide variety of John Simm clips. While some relate directly to his TV work (*Doctor Who*, *Life On Mars*, even early appearances in *Oasis* and *The Bill*), there are also promo interviews (Channel 4's *The Eleven O'Clock Show*, 2000; *BBC Breakfast*, 2006; *Jonathan Ross*, 2006 and 2013; *The One Show*, 2011; *The Andrew Marr Show*, 2013, ITV's *This Morning*, 2013 and more), comedy sketches (*Ladder Party* with Steve Coogan and John Thompson from 2004's *The All Star Comedy Show* and a 2008 Royal Variety Performance skit with Armstrong and Miller), a 21 minute Magic Alex road movie shot during Echo and The Bunnymen's 2002 UK Tour, interview footage with the band - "tipped to be the next big thing" - from ITV's *Nightlife* in 1998 plus live footage from The Barfly, Camden in June 2015, a clip of Simm singing onstage with New Order at Finsbury Park in 2002, a 21 minute instalment of ITV's *Orange Playlist*, first broadcast on 10 March 2006, in which Simm chooses favourite music tracks and talks freely about his life and work and an even longer (38 minute) on-camera interview with Alison Jane Reid from 2013, his contribution to *TV Greats : Our Favourites From The North* (BBC Two, November 2011) - and that's only for starters. Lots to find, lots to enjoy.



Above left: set in an inner city farm, *Oasis* was a ten part CITV (i.e. children's) series that ran from 5 January to 9 March 1993. Simm appeared in the first, fourth and last five of the ten 30 minute episodes as Posh Robert - speaking, incidentally, with an accent to match the name.

Above right: *The Bill* ran on ITV for 26 years (1984-2010) and more than 2,400 episodes. In series 9, episode 95, entitled *Blind Spot*, first broadcast on 12 August 1993, Simm played bad boy with attitude Paul Jeffries.

After making his screen debut in *Rumpole Of The Bailey* (see page 4 above) *Oasis* was Simm's second and (after *Heartbeat* - see page 5) *The Bill* just his fourth screen credit.



In *Orange Playlist*, presented by Jayne Middlemiss and first aired on ITV on 10 March 2006, Simm pays generous tribute to his father (above, left, with young John), a club musician who not only taught his son, aged 12, to play guitar but then took him gigging. The two performed together through John's adolescent years as a duo called Us.2, providing the lad with invaluable experience of audiences, performance and stagecraft. Surely it was this more than anything else that equipped Simm with the life skills he needed to succeed.



Above, a clip from *Nightlife* (ITV, 1998) in which Simm and his Magic Alex confreres talk to camera about who they are and where they'd like to go. Below, Simm in *Ladder Party*, a funny two minute sketch with Steve Coogan and John Thompson from ITV's *All Star Comedy Show* (2004).



Above: on 7 April 2013, Simm appeared on BBC One's *The Andrew Marr Show* to help promote Series One of *The Village*. Below: he can also be seen on *TV Greats : Our Favourites From The North*. Presented by Tess Daly, broadcast on BBC Two on 26 November 2011 and featuring the last ever interview given by the posthumously disgraced Jimmy Savile, the programme celebrates the contribution made by Northern talent to the nation's favourite medium.



Above: on 11 December 2008, Simm appeared with comedians (Alexander) Armstrong and (Ben) Miller at The Royal Variety Performance, taking the part of a wartime French Resistance fighter in an amusing sketch of around five minutes. First below: Simm toured with his band Magic Alex during 2002 in support of Liverpool rock quartet Echo and The Bunnymen. A short (21 minute) and not very inspired film called *The Greatest Story Never Told* was put together by Simm and others (?) during this time, featuring a few minutes of performance footage and too many of pointless larking about. Second below: after playing Joy Division / New Order frontman Bernard Sumner on screen in 2002's *24 Hour Party People*, on 9 June of that year, Simm joined the band onstage at Finsbury Park to add vocals to their song Digital, thereby singing alongside the real Mr Sumner. Unfortunately, John didn't bring along his Les Paul, but appears to have thoroughly enjoyed himself nonetheless.



Finsbury Park, 9 June 2002: Simm with New Order's Bernard Sumner

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