

# Film Review: Murder On The Orient Express

Murder on the Orient Express

Direction: Kenneth Branagh

Screenplay: Michael Green

Cast: Kenneth Branagh, Judi Dench, Johnny Depp, Michelle Pfeiffer,

Willem Dafoe, Penélope Cruz, Derek Jacobi, Olivia Colman

Length: 114 minutes

Rating: PG 13



Kenneth Branagh stars

During the 20th century, Dame Agatha Christie, Lady Mallowan wrote 66 detective novels and 14 short story collections. Collectively, they have sold over 2 billion copies worldwide making her one of the best-selling authors in history with only the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare selling more. Half of these novels as well as more than 50 short stories feature one of her most famous characters, Hercule Poirot. On 1 January 1934, Collins Crime Club published my favourite Poirot story by Christie: 'Murder on the Orient Express'.

From 1989 to 2013, the ITV television adaptation aired for 70 episodes over 13 series and starred David Suchet as the eponymous detective, who I believe gives the greatest performance of the character, playing him in every Poirot story ever written by Christie. Others have come close, however, such as the portrayals by Albert Finney and Peter Ustinov. And now, I can officially confirm that Kenneth Branagh also makes the list with an impressively assertive and dominatingly vigorous manifestation closer to Finney than the poised perfection of Suchet and Ustinov.

Starring Oscar nominees Kenneth Branagh, Judi Dench, Johnny Depp, Michelle Pfeiffer, Willem Dafoe, Penélope Cruz and Primetime Emmy nominees Derek Jacobi and Olivia Colman, this 2017 adaptation matches the established ensemble cast of the Oscar winning 1974 version with Finney as Poirot. Improved technology is the marked difference between the two with the filmmaking quality elevated with overhead angles, tracking shots, period detail and set design. Exhilarating CGI establishing views of the Venice Simplon Orient Express (VSOE) steam train in luxurious eastern European landscapes.

It is lighter than the 2010 television version with Suchet as Poirot but darker in tone than the 1974 film adaptation while screen time for the various supporting characters is spread throughout the film rather than dealt with one by one in the original 1974 film. With this decision, there are advantages as we move back and forth between each of the characters who feature little and often but disadvantages because we can forget what all their storylines are when not dealt with one at a time, in one big scene after another.

With a plot that has to be the worst kept secret in cinematic history, Poirot ends up travelling in the Calais car on the VSOE when a murder is committed at night. I know, what were the chances? Rhetorical question! With the steam train trapped in a snowdrift, isolated in the mountains and escape impossible, the murderer must still be aboard with all the other passengers. Suddenly, a Princess, a Count, a Countess, a professor, a doctor, a governess, an actress, an assistant, a missionary, a salesman, a conductor, a butler and a maid all become suspects in an almost incalculable case that must be solved by Poirot before the police arrive and the murder produces negative publicity for the VSOE company.



Because, of course, that is the primary concern here and the most important reason to solve a murder case: negative

publicity. And then perhaps justice. Once again, the services of Hercule Poirot, the greatest detective in the world are called upon. While the clock is ticking, the intensity is escalating. In fact, Poirot may be, ironically, the most dangerous character of them all because murders only ever appear to start happening when he is in the area. He is, in effect, the kiss of death. Coincidence?

Not content with acting, directing and producing, Kenneth Branagh has also written the lyrics to the end titles original song with music by double Oscar and Golden Globes nominee Patrick Doyle, who composes the score, and performed by Michelle Pfeiffer. Called 'Never Forget', it is a hauntingly melancholy tune that should be a definite awards season contender. While Pfeiffer outshines the rest of the supporting cast with theatrical flair this is obviously Branagh's show and like his esteemed character he delivers with dramatic distinction.

"If there was a murder, then there was a murderer. The murderer is with us and every one of you is a suspect."

'Murder on the Orient Express' is in cinemas now.

8/10