

PRESS RELEASE

Sharpe is back!

SHARPE'S CHALLENGE & SHARPE'S PERIL

on MASTERPIECE Classic

From the novels by Bernard Cornwell

Hosted By Laura Linney

Sundays, March 28 and April 4, 2010 at 9pm ET on PBS

Fresh from the Napoleonic Wars, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Sharpe takes a perilous new mission in British India, in the latest installments of the series based on the bestselling novels by Bernard Cornwell. MASTERPIECE Classic presents *Sharpe's Challenge*, airing Sunday, March 28 at 9pm, followed by *Sharpe's Peril* on Sunday, April 4 at 9pm on PBS (check local listings).

Sean Bean (*Lord of the Rings*) returns as the gallant but wayward Richard Sharpe, last seen by MASTERPIECE viewers in the mid 1990s, when he was fighting Napoleon's armies in Spain. Bean is rejoined by Daragh O'Malley as Sharpe's best friend, Sergeant Major Patrick Harper.

Also starring is Padma Lakshmi (Emmy-nominated host of *Top Chef*) as the beautiful but treacherous Madhuvanthi, who toys with Sharpe in a secluded fortress where a nefarious plot is afoot.

The London *Sunday Times* hailed Sharpe's return to action, calling his opening adventure in India "superbly made and well cast," adding, "Sharpe rides again."

"Sharpe was the hero of my first novel back in 1980, and he's still going strong," says author Bernard Cornwell, who has written 24 Sharpe books to date, in addition to his other historical series. "I'm delighted that he has made it through the Napoleonic Wars and is still behaving badly—except now in India!"

A born fighter, Sharpe is also a free spirit who is in his element with the 95th Rifles, an elite unit of advanced-guard skirmishers in the British army. Sharpe retired from the military after Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. But in the new episodes he is sent on a special mission to the Subcontinent by his patron, the Duke of Wellington (Hugh Fraser, *Poirot*).

In *Sharpe's Challenge*, airing Sunday, March 28 at 9pm ET, the year is 1817 and Sharpe is appointed to rescue a missing British agent who is investigating a rebellious maharaja. Unbeknownst to the English, the uprising is being fomented by Madhuvanthi, the late maharaja's consort, together with her lover, a renegade English officer named William Dodd (Toby Stephens, *Jane Eyre*). Reluctant to take the assignment, Sharpe relents when he learns that the agent is none other than his old comrade-in-arms Sergeant Harper.

In the course of finding Harper and going undercover with him to get to the bottom of the insurgency, Sharpe comes face to face with Dodd, who fourteen years earlier led a massacre of a British garrison in India that left only one survivor: Sharpe himself. However, Dodd doesn't realize his grave mistake in not finishing the job.

Additional complications are that Dodd holds the daughter of an English general captive (Lucy Brown, *Primeval*), he employs French soldiers who are suspicious of the two British spies, and he and Madhuvanthi have a plan that will make the massacre of yesteryear look like child's play.

In *Sharpe's Peril*, airing Sunday, April 4 at 9pm ET, Sharpe and Harper trek across the plains and mountains of central India, escorting the willful Marie-Angelique Bonnet (Beatrice Rosen, *2012*) to meet her fiancé, Major Joubert (Pascal Langdale), and then to the coast where Sharpe and Harper are due to take a ship for England.

The intrepid duo think that the bride-to-be is their only problem. But they are sorely mistaken, as they soon find out when bandits attack their tiny party. The rag-tag unit is now led by the boy soldier Beauclare (Luke Ward Wilkinson). Among Beauclare's group is a man under arrest, Barabbas Hakeswell (Amit Behl), who turns out to be the son of Sharpe's sworn enemy.

Meanwhile, the deadly raids—in reality the work of a devious opium lord called Colonel Dragomirov (Velibor Topic, *Prime Suspect 6*)—grow worse and develop into a Little-Bighorn-style scenario that has all the marks of Sharpe's last stand. With his options narrowing drastically, how can our hero get out of this scrape?

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Sharpe's Challenge is produced by Celtic Films Entertainment. *Sharpe's Peril* is produced by Celtic Films Entertainment in association with Duke Street Films. They are presented on PBS by MASTERPIECE Classic. Both films were directed by Tom Clegg and were adapted by Russell Lewis from the novels by Bernard Cornwell.

MASTERPIECE is presented on PBS by WGBH Boston. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. Funding for the series is provided by public television viewers. Laura Linney is the host of MASTERPIECE Classic.

For a limited time beginning April 5, 2010 *Sharpe's Challenge* and *Sharpe's Peril* will be available to view online at pbs.org/masterpiece.

For more information about *Sharpe's* and MASTERPIECE go to pbs.org/masterpiece
Online press materials available at pbs.org/pressroom and pressroom.wgbh.org

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