

MASTERPIECE

The Plot Thickens

Downton Abbey, Season 5

With guest stars Richard E. Grant, Anna Chancellor,

Rade Sherbedgia, Harriet Walter, and Peter Egan

Sundays, January 4 - March 1, 2015 on PBS

Downton Abbey returns for an epic fifth season of intimately interlaced stories centered on an English country estate—a deliciously entertaining formula that has made it the highest-rated drama in PBS history. *Downton Abbey*, Season 5, airs Sundays, January 4 - March 1, 2015 on MASTERPIECE on PBS.

Season 5 features returning stars Maggie Smith, Hugh Bonneville, Michelle Dockery, Elizabeth McGovern, Jim Carter, Laura Carmichael, Joanne Froggatt, Allen Leech, Robert James-Collier, Penelope Wilton, Phyllis Logan, Lily James, Brendan Coyle, Lesley Nicol, Sophie McShera, Samantha Bond, Ed Speleers, Kevin Doyle, Raquel Cassidy, David Robb, Tom Cullen, Julian Ovenden, Daisy Lewis, Douglas Reith, Jeremy Swift, and Andrew Scarborough.

This acclaimed ensemble is joined by guest stars Harriet Walter (*Atonement*), reprising her role as Lady Shackleton, and Peter Egan (*Death at a Funeral*), who returns as Lord Flintshire, together with completely new characters played by Richard E. Grant (*Girls*), Anna Chancellor (*The Hour*), and Rade Sherbedgia (*24*).

“Four wonderful seasons of *Downton Abbey*, each drawing a larger audience than the last, and now Series 5,” says MASTERPIECE Executive Producer Rebecca Eaton. “This is a television dream come true!”

Season 5 recently completed its run in the UK, where it remains the most popular drama on ITV.

Written and created by Julian Fellowes, *Downton Abbey*, Season 5, is a Carnival Films/MASTERPIECE Co-Production. Carnival Films, headed by *Downton Abbey* Executive Producer Gareth Neame, is a division of NBCUniversal International Television Production. The series’ many honors include ten Emmys®, two Golden Globes®, and two Screen Actors Guild Awards®. Season 4 received 12 Emmy® nominations, including Outstanding Drama Series.

Executive Producer Gareth Neame says, “Our cast and crew have been immersed in the world of Downton for the last five years and it is a thrill to have seen it grow in popularity in the United States to become one of the most watched shows on television. Viewers can expect all the highs and lows, the heady mix of drama, romance and comedy and plenty of new surprises.”

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Viewership and social media stats have soared since *Downton Abbey* launched in January 2011. Season 4 drew an average audience of 13.2 million viewers, making it the top PBS drama of all time and one of the highest-rated dramas now on American television.

Like every previous outing, Season 4 dazzled critics. *The New York Times* wrote that the show, “casts a spell on viewers not unlike the allure of a *Harry Potter* novel.” *NPR* chimed in, “Julian Fellowes … has crafted characters so well-rounded, so complicated, and so interesting that we’re drawn to them no matter what the circumstances.”

And *Variety*’s praise entered another dimension: “This annual escape into the early-20th century is an experience in time travel not to be missed.”

Viewers can expect to follow plot threads left dangling from last season, including Lady Mary’s courtship contest, Lady Edith’s trials as a secret single mom, Thomas’s scheming against Bates, Robert’s battles against modernity, Tom’s quest to be true to his ideals, Violet’s one-line zingers, and much, much more.

One of the recurring themes of *Downton Abbey* is change, from the wrenching consequences of the Titanic disaster in Season 1 to a notorious automobile accident at the end of Season 3—plus World War I, women’s rights, and the new morals, inventions, and fashions of the 1920s.

Which is where Season 5 kicks off. It’s 1924. The United Kingdom has its first Labor Party prime minister. The radio is the latest miracle of the age. And Downton’s traditional ways are besieged on all fronts, as evidenced by this exchange between the head housekeeper, Mrs. Hughes, and the butler, Mr. Carson:

“We’re catching up, Mr. Carson. Whether you like it or not, Downton is catching up with the times we live in,” says the forward-thinking Mrs. Hughes.

“That’s exactly what I’m afraid of!” the butler retorts.

Downton Abbey is a Carnival Films/MASTERPIECE Co-Production written and created by Julian Fellowes. The series is Executive Produced by Gareth Neame, Julian Fellowes, Liz Trubridge, and Nigel Merchant. Chris Croucher is the Producer. The Executive Producer for MASTERPIECE is Rebecca Eaton. The Director of episodes one, two, and three is Catherine Morshead. The Director of episodes four, five, and nine is Minkie Spiro. The Director of episodes six and seven is Philip John. The Director of episode eight is Michael Engler.

About MASTERPIECE

MASTERPIECE is presented on PBS by WGBH Boston. Rebecca Eaton is Executive Producer. Funding for the series is provided by Viking River Cruises and Ralph Lauren Corporation with additional support from public television viewers and contributors to The MASTERPIECE Trust, created to help ensure the series’ future.

About Carnival Films

Carnival Films is a division of NBC Universal International TV Production and is the UK’s largest drama specialist. The company is responsible for the global TV sensation *Downton Abbey*, winner of two Golden Globes® and ten Primetime Emmy® awards, including Best Mini-series. It is the most nominated non-US show in the history of the Emmys® with a total of 51 nominations and is now in 250 territories worldwide. Among numerous national and international awards, the show has even garnered a Guinness World Record for highest critical ratings for a TV show. *Downton Abbey* is executive produced by Carnival’s Managing Director Gareth Neame, who sold the production company to NBCU in 2008.

Founded in 1978, Carnival has produced many hundreds of hours of popular drama both in the UK and US, including primetime series such as *Poirot*, *Hotel Babylon*, *Whitechapel*, *Jeeves & Wooster*, *Rosemary & Thyme*, *As If*, *Dracula* and *The Philanthropist*. As well as award-winning mini-series such as C4’s iconic *Traffik*, David Hare’s Worricker Trilogy (*Page Eight*, *Turks & Caicos* and *Salting the Battlefield*), *The 7:39* by David Nicholls, William Boyd’s BAFTA award winning Best Serial *Any Human Heart*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Enid* starring Helena Bonham-Carter.

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Peter Morgan's *Lost Honour of Christopher Jefferies* will broadcast in 2014 and Carnival's latest series *The Last Kingdom* is in production for BBC2 and BBC America. Carnival co-produced Royal Television Society award winning drama *The Hollow Crown*, a screen version of Shakespeare's history plays (with Neal Street productions) and the sequel *The War of the Roses* is currently in production, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Judi Dench.

Carnival has recently announced major new development projects such as *Freud*, Bill Gallagher's *Jamestown*, Neil Cross's *Bay of Plenty* with Libertine Pictures for the BBC, *Magnum* with the iconic photographic co-operative Magnum Photos and *Nostradamus* with Joseph Fiennes and Anonymous content.

Carnival was recognized as best production company at the 2011 Bulldog Awards and 2012 Broadcast Awards.

pbs.org/masterpiece

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