



“CARRIE & BARRY”

Production Notes

NEIL MORRISSEY returns to BBC ONE in CARRIE & BARRY, a brand new comedy series written by Simon Nye and from the team behind MEN BEHAVING BADLY. Candid, warm, funny and sometimes really rather rude, CARRIE & BARRY is about a modern-day couple dealing with the ordinary things in life; sex, work, friendships, tenants, fantasies and step-children. Neil plays part-time cabbie Barry with CLAIRE RUSHBROOK as his wife Carrie, MARK WILLIAMS as his best mate Kirk and MICHELLE GOMEZ as Carrie's friend and fellow beautician Michelle. SARAH QUINTRELL plays Sinead, Barry's teenage daughter from his disastrous first marriage.

After the multi-garlanded “Men Behaving Badly”, Hartswood Films went on to work with Simon Nye on two pre-watershed sitcoms, “Is It Legal?” and “The Savages”. Executive Producer Beryl Vertue comments: “I had been keen to work with Simon again on a laugh-out loud, post-watershed comedy that had some real warmth and he came up with CARRIE & BARRY which fits the bill beautifully. Simon is wonderful at writing characters. Just like “Men Behaving Badly”, CARRIE & BARRY has a very low concept. MBB was about two men living in a flat together; this is about a married couple, their two best friends and a step-daughter.”

Producer Sue Vertue was equally excited about the new project: “I think CARRIE & BARRY is very raw and very real. These are conversations that married people really do have, and that was what appealed to me about the idea. It's warm and funny, not about an angst-ridden couple having a horrible time. The series is optimistic, but not sickly – they do argue sometimes!”

In some ways CARRIE & BARRY marks a return to Simon's sitcom writing roots: “I was very proud of “Is It Legal?” and “The Savages”, but they were pre-watershed family shows really. They were deliberately filled with the sort of jokes which wouldn't embarrass you if you were watching and your nine year old walked into the room unexpectedly. It is great here to have the opportunity to allow yourself to depict life as it is. We also deal with other issues, which has been interesting to write. For example, we have an episode about a short guy moving in next door. The boundary between good and bad taste in comedy is always worth exploring, and compared with lots of comedy shows which are at the dark end of the BBC2 schedule, we are really quite cheery and wholesome!”

With a script in place, casting could begin, as Beryl explains: “Although we had got together the same production team, it was not our intention to go the whole “Men Behaving Badly” route. But when Simon drafted the first script, which he always does with no particular artists in mind, we all read it and thought: “Well, that's Neil, isn't it?” Barry has some of the characteristics of Tony, the character he played in MBB, but he is much more grown up and definitely a bit more mature – although not entirely!”

Simon takes up the story: “Although I didn't write with Neil in mind, he just fitted the bill so perfectly. I had a feeling towards the end of “Men Behaving Badly” that the comedy led to Tony being clearly more buffoonish than Neil is in person, so it was nice to write something for him that picked up on his obvious intelligence. Neil is very warm and identifiably human as a person, which makes it easier to write, really. But Barry certainly isn't straightforward – good comedy works best when the characters are deluded in one way or another!”

He continues: “Tony had a lovable quality that people responded to, but he was lacking in even the most basic self-awareness. Barry is different. He is aware that he loves his wife and aware that what comes with a stable marriage is a certain amount of effort to keep the relationship interesting and alive. So the series is a sort of exploration of what a couple does after the first thrill of marriage and settling down, how you make your life interesting, really, and how you deal with the inevitable crises that come up.”

With a long-term partner and four children of his own, Simon is somewhat different from the characters he creates: “When we were making MBB, I always thought that people were disappointed to meet me – I wasn't a lager swilling lout but looked rather more like a tired looking geography teacher! From a personal point of view CARRIE & BARRY is a chance to put a bit of my life in there. I like to write about couples, because people generally fall into them sooner or later, so I did use that aspect of myself.



"I will be amazed if my girlfriend Claudia doesn't recognise herself in there, although it isn't quite as personal as "Coupling" so I should get away with it! Comedy does always seem to come back to sex because that is the trickiest subject of all. I mean house-buying is all very well... It's interesting but actually not quite as interesting in the long run as what you get up to in bed. And it's fraught with all kinds of embarrassments!"

With the first script drafted, it was time to meet up with Neil Morrissey. Beryl takes up the story: "It just so happened that Neil was out in America at the same time as Simon and I were so we all met up. It was really weird meeting for drinks some 6,000 miles away to talk about a new series! Drinks turned into dinner and went on for absolutely ages, and we all felt really good about it. CARRIE & BARRY felt just right for Neil."

Simon adds: "We were very showbiz and met up in the Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles. Neil was actually living there, so he had the added chic of being a resident. He had various other fish to fry in the shape of his burgeoning hotel business in Wales, so we thought he might not be able to do it. But when he said yes, it freed us up hugely in casting the other characters."

The casting of Carrie was vitally important. Beryl explains that Claire Rushbrook was rehearsing at the Almeida Theatre at the time of the auditions and as a result had to keep cancelling at the last minute: "We had reached the stage where we were calling people back and had to make a decision. Somehow, thankfully, we finally got Claire in. The weather was appalling and she managed to scrape in on time looking very wet and bedraggled after getting caught in one of those thunderstorms. But we could instantly see her in the role of Carrie – the chemistry was beyond our expectations. And although Claire had never done a sitcom in front of a live audience before, she took to it like a duck to water."

Simon adds: "Claire is fantastic. I know people might compare her to Caroline Quentin because she has got this brilliant comic timing and she looks vaguely similar, but to me Caroline is quite scary and very good at playing frightening women, whilst Claire has brought a more vulnerable side to Carrie, which is fun to explore."

Sue adds: "It was very important that we got the chemistry between our two lead characters right, and Neil read in with Claire at her audition to see how it worked. Claire is very funny and has very good timing, but she is also incredibly warm and you just believe that the characters are actually together and from week to week you feel as if there is a whole life going on that you just haven't glimpsed. It's as if we dip in and out now and again. And sometimes we dip in at a slightly intimate moment!"

Fate lent a hand in the casting of Kirk, Barry's best friend, as Beryl explains: "Neil was spending a few days at his hotel in Wales with his old friend Mark Williams. He had taken the script with him and they began reading it together. Neil called with great excitement and said that Mark wanted to talk about the part of Kirk. I think Mark is terrific, so we were very happy to audition him. He came and read the part as if he was someone we didn't know, made us all laugh and he got the part."

Sue adds: "We were slightly nervous when Mark came in to audition because we were hoping he would be as good as we thought he might be, and he was – he was fantastic. You can really feel that deep friendship there which means they can be the kind of friends who nuzzle each other. Barry and Kirk have also known each other for ages. In fact they were probably at school together and decided one day that they were going to be taxi drivers and do the Knowledge together. There's a real familiarity both on and off the screen."

Simon was struck by the parallel with the casting in MBB: "Neil and Martin Clunes were old friends before they starred in "Men Behaving Badly" together, and I think that showed on the screen just as it does with Neil and Mark." He adds: Mark is offered a lot of work, so I was rather pleased that he wanted to play the part of Kirk. They had a wonderful time on set. He is also full of anecdotes from the film world which are fascinating for us TV bods."

Carrie's best friend and fellow beautician Michelle is very different from Carrie. Beryl comments: "Michelle is quite sharp-tongued. It was a part that needed to be cast carefully so that she was also likeable and sympathetic, and Michelle Gomez has struck just the right note. She is very funny, but you also sense beneath the acid tongue a vulnerability, which is why she and Carrie are such good friends."



Sue adds: "Their very different characters come over on the screen. Michelle is much harder, straight down the line, quite acerbic and very funny." Simon adds: "As a character, Michelle is one of those unpredictable people, which is nice to see on screen but a bit scary if she is looking after you, especially in a beauty salon!"

Casting the part of Sinead, Barry's teenage daughter from his disastrous first marriage, was much harder. The team saw a lot of young hopefuls at first without much joy, as Beryl explains: "We were having a read through at an early stage so everyone could meet each other and we could see how they gelled. The part of Sinead had not yet been cast, but we had seen Sarah Quintrell and asked her if she would read the part, although at that stage we could not guarantee that she would get the role. However, she was so good on the day that we had absolutely no doubt that she would be perfect. She is fresh out of drama school and has done some theatre work, but this is a real break for her. When we told her she quite literally whooped with delight, which was lovely and made me feel like a fairy godmother!"

Simon adds: "I know that not all teenagers are sulky and difficult, but I do like the chemistry between Sinead and Carrie. They are stuck on the same family tree through marriage, albeit on different branches. It can be quite a strain, so they have to learn to tolerate each other!"

Beryl adds: "We were all completely thrilled with our cast and it meant that when Simon wrote the second draft he had them all in mind. They gelled so quickly that you would never think it was the first time they had all worked together."

Neil Morrissey is Barry

Although CARRIE & BARRY marks Neil Morrissey's reunion with the team who made him a household name in "Men Behaving Badly", the part offers different challenges, as Neil explains: "Barry is completely different from Tony because he is much more of a family man. He goes out to work and basically earns a living. Very different from Tony! He's got responsibilities, he's got a daughter, he drives a taxi and has done The Knowledge and I doubt that Tony could ever remember three street names put together!"

He continues: "One of the big pulls of the job was that with Simon you know that you are in safe hands and I really wanted to work with Hartswood Films again. They are absolutely brilliant, Beryl and Sue and director Martin Dennis, top, total professionals. It was like coming back from school holidays. You just feel absolutely secure."

He has thoroughly enjoyed playing Barry: "He and Carrie are very happily married, absolutely in love and co-dependent in a really cool way. They adore each other, are completely confident with each other, and if an episode was ever written where there was any infidelity, it would destroy them both. They are so into each other and the problems that arise are to do with what's going on around them rather than to do with their relationship."

The series is indeed a candid look at the life of a happily married couple: "I would call it naughty rather than rude. The series deals with sex between a husband and wife, but no-one is trying to be Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland in "Don't Look Now"! We're not trying to do "Nine and a Half Weeks" here! Everyone is aware of their sexuality in a very grown-up, family way. These two aren't rampant teenagers trying to show off their technique to each other. They are a stable couple with a stable sex life. The series has got a lot of warmth."

Nonetheless, Barry has to deal with the fraught relationship between his wife and his daughter Sinead from his first marriage: "Carrie just hates children. Maybe she's the youngest in a family of nine, I don't know! Also Sinead is just eighteen which, as we all know, is a notoriously difficult time. There is always going to be a bit of resentment, that feeling that Carrie has taken her dad away. It's demonstrated very well in the series without being anywhere near nasty. It's just the typical problems of a hormonal teenager!"

Although they had not worked together before, Neil had met Claire Rushbrook socially a few months ago, as he explains: "Claire was at primary school with my business partner Matt, and I first met her last autumn down at my hotel one mad weekend. She is so easy going and easy to work with and it was a bit of a dream job really."

However Neil has known Mark Williams - who plays his best mate Kirk - for some fifteen years: "We appeared



together in “The Smell of Reeves and Mortimer” and did a Slade sketch together. I think he was Derek, the drummer from Slade and I played Ozzy Osbourne, their next-door neighbour. Mark and I were down in Wales and I said to him: ‘You should have a look at this script, at the part of Kirk.’ He said ‘Yes, by all means’ and of course he was bang up to the mark really. He is just so clever and fantastic. He is a lot of fun and his technique is just wonderful.”

He continues: “Kirk might be Barry’s best mate, but he still exasperates him with his overtly sexual vernacular. But then again the poor guy hasn’t had a shag for so long that he is going to explode!”

Barry also has a slightly fraught relationship with his wife’s best friend Michelle: “She gets on his nerves. She’s a bit anti-man, anti-everything and lives in her own little world, but deep down she is probably a bit of a lost soul. She has her vulnerabilities, but she doesn’t wear her heart on her sleeve – she keeps it locked well away!”

The series does call for a fair bit of intimacy between Carrie and Barry. Neil laughs: “The series starts with Barry trying to persuade Carrie to have all her pubic hair shaved off. There is some sex which is always difficult to do – we have to slot around in a few different positions, which is always awkward to act without revealing too much. It’s them having normal sex though, which a lot of people do, in a comedic way. The idea is that we are trying to spice things up a little bit and then we add the spontaneity.”

Although long identified with sitcom work, CARRIE & BARRY is only the second sitcom Neil has done. In a career spanning some twenty-five years he has mixed drama, comedy, theatre and documentary with his businesses. He owns some hotels and also runs his own production company: “Since “Men Behaving Badly” I have had a lot of fun and it’s been pretty varied! I’m still doing on-going work on “Bob the Builder”, there have been two series of “Paradise Heights” and I have been putting together a feature film for my production company Cactus Media Group. We’ve got a script written by Dick Clements and Ian Le Frenais and a full-time producer on the case.

“I’ve also been building up my hotel business. We now have three establishments up and running in Wales as well as one private members’ Bar and a fine dining restaurant, Hurst House, opening in Covent Garden in November. I go to Wales whenever I can. It’s stunning, colourful, great pubs, lovely people!”

Neil concludes: “I really think people are going to enjoy CARRIE & BARRY and identify with the characters and the situations. It’s warm and a lot of fun with a cheeky, naughty side.”

Claire Rushbrook is Carrie

Claire Rushbrook is best known for her starring roles in “Linda Green” and “Secrets & Lies”. CARRIE & BARRY is her first situation comedy:

“I am biased, but I think that Carrie is lovely. She’s really warm and loving and funny and strong, but she is not afraid to be vulnerable and she enjoys her happy marriage and a happy life, really.”

Claire had met Neil just once before: “It was a mad coincidence in that a mutual friend of ours had met Neil and his business partner at one of the hotels they own in Wales. It turned out that this business partner was at primary school with me, so she and I were invited to the hotel to meet up with Matt again after however many years. We had a fantastic weekend there as his guest and Neil, who spends time there whenever he can, happened to be around. It was out of season – quiet and cold and wintery and lovely, and we just relaxed at this gorgeous hotel for two days, drinking red wine and hanging out together. So when I came to the audition where Neil sat in, it had broken the ice and we just plunged right in to reading together.”

Claire learnt a lot from Neil and the rest of the crew who were very experienced in working on situation comedies: “I was pretty apprehensive about the technical aspects of the live recording, but the rehearsals away from the studio were similar to rehearsing for theatre or other TV programmes. By the time I came to learn about the studio days and the cameras and where to stand and how to pitch it and so on, I just loved it. Recording days are very long and you need a lot of stamina, but I love the challenge of keeping it relaxed and fresh and natural, when really you’re scared to death – and you still need to raise a laugh!”



She adds: “The first week I was nervous, but after a bit it was a real joy, and watching Neil and Mark having such fun really made me relax. I’ve also been lucky working with someone like Lisa Tarbuck on “Linda Green”. After presenting “The Big Breakfast” where banter was so much part of the experience, she was an expert at learning one hundred people’s names and having a giggle from day one. But with CARRIE & BARRY I was conscious that I was slipping into what was already a well oiled machine.”

Claire also felt it surprisingly easy to do some of the more intimate scenes with Neil: “I think we approached the whole thing in a pretty gung-ho and let’s just bite the bullet sort of a way! We didn’t want to waste time by being shy or afraid to be tactile. Although it was very embarrassing to read in the script that you had to be hard at it, in the context of the trust that we found between us, it was nowhere near as painful as it might have been. There was no room to be coy. Let’s just say that the script needed 100% commitment! I hope that we get away with it, because it takes place in the context of a loving marriage and, more importantly, there is nothing erotic about it. They are two very relaxed people just doing their thing.”

Carrie’s relationship with Barry’s best mate Kirk is not quite so relaxed: “I think she’s very fond of him deep down, but they are like schoolboys together and he quite often does bring out the worst in Barry.

“However, Sinead and Carrie really do not like each other. I wouldn’t ever wish to be in that situation; I would like to think – although it’s a lot less funny – that Carrie would perhaps display a little more understanding and warmth and love and tolerance. Given no choice I’ve just had to be horrible to her and her with me as we vie for Barry’s attention.”

Claire adds: “Michelle and Carrie are best friends, although that tag is slightly misleading as I don’t feel that they have deep conversations about tender things. The bottom line is that Michelle is quite barmy and needs Carrie and Barry’s stability more than Carrie needs her. That said, she is great and she and Michelle have a real giggle.”

She concludes: “I hope people will feel warm and rosy and have a smile on their face when they watch CARRIE & BARRY. The series is sassy and it’s sexy but there are squabbles. It’s not saccharine sweet, but it is unashamedly positive.”

Mark Williams is Kirk

Mark Williams plays Barry’s best mate Kirk: “Neil and I have been mates for a long time and we’ve both got a lot of respect for each other. We also have similar backgrounds. We’re both from the Midlands and have Irish grandparents and we’ve both got the same kind of work ethic. He’s been the top of his profession for about twenty-five years, and we’ve both got a thing about attention to detail. We’re obsessed with punctuation and pretty meticulous.

“Although we haven’t worked together since “Reeves & Mortimer”, at one point when the stage play “Art” first started there was an idea about putting Martin, Neil and me together in the cast. You can tell when people know each other; there’s a lot of shorthand and you can bring a real lightness to the relationship.”

He continues: “The BBC’s Mark Freeland described Kirk to me as “brilliantly hapless yet never beaten!” He’s a selection of confusions really. He’s got no filters and doesn’t think before he speaks. But he’s also got a great life force. He wears shorts all the time and no socks because he can’t be bothered with all that, and football shirts. He’s very active and interested in loads of stuff, but a bit frustrated, clearly, especially in the trouser department.” This leads to him seeing all sorts of sexual undertones in plates of broccoli or button mushrooms.

It can also lead to problems with the people around him: “Carrie might find his drunken passes difficult, but he doesn’t find his relationship with her problematic. Carrie really loves Barry but he hasn’t half got some baggage and Kirk is part of that - and Michelle’s no easy ride either. Watching Claire and Michelle work together made us realise that we would need to raise the game as they are really fantastic!”

Mark describes CARRIE & BARRY as “A proper sitcom; it’s people talking about sex and work in rooms. I really hope it will make people laugh as it is really funny. I’m sure everyone has said the same thing, but we all really enjoyed doing it, and hopefully that will show on the screen.”



Michelle Gomez is Michelle

TBC as Michelle is back on Wednesday...

Sarah Quintrell is Sinead

Sarah Quintrell graduated just one year ago from Drama school. She has played two lead roles on stage and made a brief appearance in "Island at War", but CARRIE & BARRY is her first major television role – and her sitcom debut: "One of the reasons I was so relaxed at the casting was because I was so convinced I wasn't going to get the part because of my lack of experience. It was daunting but also really exciting to have a regular role with so many talented people. It's a fantastic opportunity, and people keep telling me I look like Neil, which is weird!"

Sarah describes Sinead as "stropky, miserable and very naïve when it comes to men. She's at that awkward age where she wants to be treated like an adult but when it all comes crashing down around her ears, she wants to go back and be daddy's girl and for him to sort it all out for her. However, she doesn't get on at all with Carrie, who doesn't like children and isn't interested in her. They have a vague level of tolerance."

Used to theatre, Sarah enjoyed filming in front of a live studio audience: "It was great to get that live feedback. Also all of the actors and production team gave me lots of help and answered my endless questions. They encouraged me not to worry about anything technical which gave me a lot of freedom."

Sarah thinks the series should have a wide appeal: "It's really good fun to watch, it's very funny and cathartic and real and makes you laugh. I really understand Sinead. We all know people just like the characters in the series, so it is very comfortable."

Conclusion:

Writer Simon Nye is very busy at the moment – and is also being reunited with two of the other "Men Behaving Badly" cast: "Martin Clunes is starring in BEAUTY, a one-off comedy drama based on "Beauty and the Beast" which screens on ITV at around the same time as CARRIE & BARRY, whilst Caroline Quentin is starring in a series I have co-written with Tim Firth called "Trapped" which also screens from early September."

He concludes: "I hope CARRIE & BARRY will have the same kind of appeal as "Men Behaving Badly" in that people will be able to relax when they watch it. With all successful sitcoms you want to be with the people and find comfort, either because you feel superior to them or they make you laugh or they say things that you would like to have said yourself. Sitcom, like most television, is life with the boring bits cut out and the edges polished and a bit more shape added and put into a nice, manageable thirty minute slot."

Beryl concludes: "I think the audience will really enjoy the series and warm to the characters. It is also quite naughty, so viewers might wonder what they are going to get up to next. But it's not at all offensive humour; it's really candid, and if you like the people, you will laugh with them. I feel very good about CARRIE & BARRY. I hope the audience will like it. Certainly it's what we set out to do and what I hoped it would be."

Sue adds: "I hope the audience will feel the warmth and bond with the characters, feel good, laugh a lot and want to visit them all again and again!"