



“CARRIE & BARRY” Production Notes

This October NEIL MORRISSEY returns to BBC One in Hartswood Films’ *Carrie & Barry*, the comedy series written by Simon Nye and from the team behind *Men Behaving Badly*.

Simon relished writing the new series: “A second series is a great chance for a writer, particularly, to do what he should have done the first time around... In this series of *Carrie & Barry* we have toned down some of the show’s sexual excesses! In my experience viewers (and writers) love a good dirty joke, but we are making a mainstream sitcom here. I think a BBC One audience needs to feel more comfortable than we allowed them to feel last time, perhaps.

“Everyone gathered together on the sofa should be able to watch without pretending to need to walk the dog round the block because they’re embarrassed by a joke about pubic hair. That said, I think it’s important to throw in some gratuitous filth every now and again just to keep everyone on their toes. It took a series or two to get *Men Behaving Badly* right, and I think we’ve done a lot better this time.”

He laughs: “I haven’t felt the need to rummage around much in my own life for material, in fact, because I do feel *Carrie and Barry* have a life of their own now. That will come as a huge relief to my own partner, Claudia, who doesn’t really enjoy having her own life up there on screen – in a searing romance or epic drama perhaps, but not in a half-hour comedy.”

He also enjoyed writing with the actors playing the characters firmly in his mind: “Neil Morrissey and Claire Rushbrook are great to write for because they are so convincingly a couple to me. This time around I’ve put the characters under more pressure. We love to watch people suffer, if only to make us feel better about our own lives. So Barry manages to get banned from driving, and he loves being a cabbie. Frustration in all its forms is horribly funny, and Neil is very good at conveying it.”

He continues: “Barry is also going through a real crisis over the fact that his daughter Sinead – even he has to admit it – seems to be having sex with men these days. That’s all he needs, the danger of becoming a grandfather when he’s barely got used to being a Dad yet. Especially as he hates his daughter’s boyfriend.

“And Carrie finds out that she is adopted. I know so many people who are adopted (maybe it’s just me), and apparently an astonishingly high number of children don’t have the biological father they think they have. Also you don’t necessarily get much sympathy – as Carrie’s friend Michelle points out: “Most people would kill to have two mums.

“But the essence of the show remains the same: the glories of being a couple, the insane things we do to keep a relationship alive and even fun. And the terrible burden of friends; Barry’s best friend Kirk remains everything you want in a friend – loyal, local, likes a drink. And everything you don’t want – a little bit too local, needy, or not needy enough, prone to share his ridiculous thoughts. And Carrie’s best friend Michelle is one of those people who simply shouldn’t be allowed out.”



Simon adds: “I hope we touch on some contemporary issues – step-children; our failure to be quite as young and sexy as advertisers and the media think we should be; the problem of people who go up at the end of every sentence...?”

Beryl Vertue comments: “In this series everyone is so relaxed. I find the cast as a group very warm together and you can see why they are friends. You can see why Carrie is married to Barry, why Barry and Kirk get on, even though Kirk can be quite annoying at times, you can see why Kirk needs them so much.”

Producer Sue Vertue was equally excited about the new series: “I’m really pleased with how it has worked out and the way the characters interact with each other. It was very important that we got the chemistry between our two lead characters right. Neil and Claire are very funny and also incredibly warm and you just believe that the characters are actually together. **Carrie and Barry** are also doing a lot more together as a couple, Sinead is happier and in love and it’s been fun to explore the effect that has on a dad.”

She adds: “We have a new theme tune - Andy Williams ‘Happy Heart’ - and new opening titles, which sets a different tone for the series from the moment you switch on.”

Neil Morrissey plays Barry

Although long identified with sitcom work, **Carrie & Barry** is only the second sitcom Neil has done after Men Behaving Badly. Almost inevitably perhaps, first time around, people drew parallels between the characters of Tony and Barry – comparisons they should be able to put behind them now.

Simon comments: “Barry doesn’t remind me much of Tony at all, apart from the alarming physical resemblance. Barry is bright and a rounded human being who knows what’s going wrong in his life (Tony rarely did, which is why he was probably happier than Barry). The civilising hand of women is apparent in Barry, I think – he’s been married twice, he’s got a challenging daughter, whereas Tony was addicted to maleness.”

Neil Morrissey enjoys playing Barry: “Lots of different things happen in this series, such as having to deal with your daughter having sex, especially with the lodger next door, and the issue of his losing his driving licence and Carrie finding out she’s adopted – quite a lot going on, and that runs through the whole series. The narrative is very natural and as a result more problems come their way. The fun is watching people flounder, and we tend to flounder quite a lot this time round.”

He continues: “My daughter’s boyfriend is bad news to me, but to anyone else in the normal world he is a successful, young, handsome cutie. Whilst I think he’s a tosser, Carrie thinks he’s really nice and quite attractive too.”

He adds: “Mind you, they are like all good families, weathering the storm and seeing things for what they really are – every person has to cope with upsets and things going wrong in life, or what looks like wrong but it’s actually just a new turn in life.”



“To me it felt quite different from the first series, because it was written almost naturalistically but still with lots of humour and warmth, and everything you would expect from **Carrie & Barry** if you watched the first series. I definitely had to do a bit more acting! There is a heavy dose of pathos, but the opposite reaction is hilarious, so it’s very funny.”

He continues: “Barry 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. Problems that arise are to do with what’s going on around them rather than to do with their relationship. The series has got a lot of warmth.”

He concludes: “When I finished filming **Carrie & Barry** I went out to Jordan on a trip of a lifetime with my girlfriend Emma, which was bonkers. We were making a documentary for Sky One following in the footsteps of TE Lawrence; we were out on camels in the middle of nowhere for six days, eight hours a day, hanging out with the Bedouin.”

Claire Rushbrook is Carrie

Claire Rushbrook is best known for her starring roles in *Linda Green* and *Secrets & Lies*. **Carrie & Barry** was her first situation comedy, but she feels completely relaxed in front of the studio audience now. Sue laughs: “Claire loved the audience – she felt really comfortable this time round and enjoyed playing along with them and pulling faces behind Neil’s back.”

Claire agrees: “I found recording so much easier this time round. And I enjoyed the fact that there were lots of scenes with lots of us in them. Kirk, for example, has almost become part of the family now. He has his own key, he’s always around and we end up dealing with his sexual problems too.”

She continues: “Barry is having problems coming to terms with Sinead’s relationship with her new boyfriend, who she actually thinks is quite nice and attractive too. But she doesn’t like to see Barry upset and alpha-maled out of the equation, and it’s also deeply unsettling because she really is quite happy.”

Claire adds: “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.”

Was the role was a bit less demanding this time in the bedroom acting department? Claire laughs: “There is less sexual behaviour on screen – this series has got more into the relationship between us.”

Mark Williams plays Kirk

Kirk, Barry’s best friend, is played by his old friend Mark Williams. Sue had no doubt about their relationship in real life coming across: “You can really feel that deep friendship there which means they can be the kind of friends who niggle each other. Barry and Kirk have also known each other for ages. There’s a real familiarity between them both on and off the screen.”



Simon was struck by the parallel with the casting in *Men Behaving Badly*: “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.”

Sue continues: “The character of Kirk has evolved; he’s brighter and is pretty well read. He clearly spends a lot of his free time on the internet and therefore has lots of fairly useless facts at his fingertips.”

Mark comments: “Kirk is 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.”

Michelle Gomez plays Michelle

Carrie’s best friend and fellow beautician Michelle is played by Scottish-born actress Michelle Gomez, probably best known to television audiences for her role in the cult Channel 4 comedy drama series *The Book Group* in which she played Janice McCann, one of three unhappy European footballers’ wives in a mismatched reading group and from the innovative Channel 4 comedy drama series *Green Wing*. A second series was in production at the same time as ***Carrie & Barry***.

Michelle comments: “The relationship between Carrie and Michelle is really well observed on Simon’s part because when you have been old friends for a long time, all the barriers are down and you can just say anything to each other. You can even be pissed off with each other and there is still a friendship there. I loved working with Claire as well as it was just so easy.”

Beryl comments: “Michelle is quite sharp-tongued but 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!”

Sarah Quintrell is Sinead

Barry’s step-daughter Sinead is altogether more sunny and settled in this second series, as Sue explains: “Sinead has a boyfriend and is much happier, which is not necessarily a good thing for Carrie. She is also a lot more feisty and there is plenty of scope there for that terribly strong male thing about fathers and their daughters where they won’t admit they might be having sex. Adrian likes to rile Barry because he knows what it is doing to him.”

Beryl adds: “Sinead is much more her own person because she has now got a job and a uniform, which she feels is quite important and gives her a strong sense of identity, and she also has a boyfriend, which has brought another source of irritation, really, for Barry. His little girl, his little princess, as he is prone to call her.”



Sarah Quintrell was just a year out of drama school when she landed the role of Sinead: “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!”

Conclusion:

Simon Nye 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: “**Carrie & Barry** is funny and it’s warm, good family viewing, although it’s still very cheeky in places. I feel very good about this series, and really hope the audience will like it. Certainly it’s what we set out to do and what I hoped it would be. I think it’s a group of people that the audience will enjoy being with and that’s the key thing, especially for a Saturday night.”

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!”

What next?

Hartwood films are very busy at the moment, as Beryl Vertue explains: “Supernova, produced in Australia and starring Rob Brydon, will air from 11th October on BBC Two. It is very funny and very original and looks so different; we have also had several programmes commissioned by both the BBC and ITV – so next year will be a busy one for us!”

Simon is as in demand as ever: “I’m still busy as a writer, delightfully busy. There are frustrations, obviously, but it still feels like the best job in television. Not that I’m ruling out a switch to make-up design. Apart from Carrie & Barry this summer I had an ITV film in production called Open Wide starring Alexander Armstrong and Angela Griffin. And my adaptation for the BBC of My Family & Other Animals is currently filming in Corfu with Imelda Staunton. Pride, the film with real lions that I did for the BBC last year, has just been nominated for an Emmy.