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PBS to revisit 'Downton Abbey' with Sunday special

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Nov. 22, 2012 NCR Today

"Downton Abbey Revisited"
Sunday on PBS. Check local listings.

"Who will marry whom?" and "Will Mr. Bates get out of prison?" are two of the driving questions that lingered as season two of PBS's highest-rated Masterpiece series came to an end in 2011. As a teaser and fundraising event, PBS is airing a special, hosted by Angela Lansbury, that revisits key moments of the first two seasons, sums up where the series left off and entices with clips about Downtown Abbey's upstairs/downstairs folks post-World War I, coming up in season three. The new season premieres Jan. 6.

"Downtown Abbey Revisited" is filled with interviews with the actors and producers, but not a word is mentioned about the future of Dame Maggie Smith's character, Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham (rumors hint Smith is leaving the series). However, fans of the show will be very interested in seeing a new character, Martha Levinson (Shirley MacLaine), Lady Grantham's mother from America. How will the two amazing actresses interact and play off one another?

Season three of this period soap opera, co-created and written by Julian Fellows, is about relationships in the closed society of a family and their servants on an entitled estate in England, marked by epic political, economic and cultural changes in the world and at home. Fellows won an Oscar for best screenplay in 2002 for "Gosford Park," the inspiration for "Downton Abbey."

Many have tried to explain why "Downton Abbey" is so popular in the United States, and the reasons include the fascination Americans have with British aristocracy, costumed melodrama, romance, and excellent storytelling, with moral dilemmas common to many. Add to this optimum acting and appealing -- and not so appealing ? characters, and it's a perfect formula. While some may not see a spiritual dimension per se, others might see a story where the characters deal with deadly sins and struggle to live the virtues of the Beatitudes in changing times, where all that one accepted as true and right, whatever one's social status, is turned upside-down by war and economic forces.

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