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etween 1972 and 1980, David Wickes had graduated from directing such iconic TV series as *The Sweeney* and *The Professionals*, to a successful movie version of the former, and his first standalone movie, the David Essex-starring *Silver Dream Racer*.

As the 1980s dawned, the ambitiously creative Wickes looked towards making his mark in Hollywood... "Ever since I was a kid, there have been only two fictional detectives I cared about: Sherlock Holmes and Philip Marlowe, and there have been many portrayals of these heroes, especially in movies. The trouble with doing Marlowe on television was that his creator, Raymond Chandler, hated it. Before Chandler died, he told his agent Helga Greene (wife of BBC Director General Sir Hugh Carleton Greene, and the sister-in-law of novelist Graham Greene) never to license the character of Marlowe to some rubbishy TV company. Movies yes, TV no.

"When I started planning the *Philip Marlowe, Private Eye* (1983, 1986) series I didn't know this. I soon found out, though. Mrs Greene never returned my calls to Switzerland, Sir Hugh ignored me completely and the administrators of Chandler's estate (College Trustees in Guernsey) hung up on me.

"I was about to throw in the towel when a stroke of luck came out of nowhere. One day, my assistant Bronwen Gray mentioned that she had met Helga Greene's best friend Catherine Sorley Walker, a Fleet Street ballet critic. At that time, I was friendly with a ballerina, so we fixed up a little dinner party. Bingo – the ballet critic agreed to ask her friend Helga to return my next call.

"A week later, I was on my way to Switzerland. Oddly enough, the much-feared Helga Greene couldn't have been nicer. She liked the idea of a Marlowe series and told College Trustees to negotiate a deal. Now all we needed was enough money to buy the rights."

AN ACCEPTABLE STAR

"Shakespeare once wrote, 'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.' I wouldn't go that far, but the entertainment industry is often suffocated by legalities – expensive wrangles that benefit only the lawyers. After months of legal hassle, I borrowed a lot of money and became the proud owner of a very important document – the world TV rights to America's most famous detective: Philip Marlowe. I was heavily in debt but I now had something no one else had.

"That's when the publisher George Weidenfeld suggested that I contact a man called Fred Cohen in New York. Fred

one name stood out from the crowd – Powers Boothe. He had just had a big success in *Guyana Tragedy: The Story of the Jim Jones Massacre* (1980) and, miracle of miracles, he agreed to meet me.

"To be honest, I found Powers a bit gloomy over lunch, but that was just his 'meetings' demeanour; on screen, he had a truly compelling presence. I was hooked. A few days later, both HBO and LWT approved him. Now the wheels began to turn. We made two *Marlowe* series, the first in the UK and LA and the second in Canada. I directed the opening episode, as I nearly always do. Then, for the rest of the first series, I brought in Peter Hunt (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 1969), Sidney Hayers (*Baywatch* (1989-2001) and *Knight Rider* (1982-86)), and Bryan Forbes (*The Stepford Wives* (1975) and *The Whisperers* (1967)). To everyone's relief, the show got great ratings on both sides of the Atlantic and some very pleasing reviews. We won a handful of ACE Awards as well. Into the bargain, I even paid off my debt!"



Bo Hopkins (*American Graffiti* (1973) and *Midnight Express* (1978)) and, of course, the infamous Klaus Kinski. The show did a lot better than I thought it would, especially in North America. Yes, I do think it's underrated, and yes, a few of the episodes do deserve comparison with *The Twilight Zone*.

Above: Klaus Kinski gets physical with his lovely young wife Belinda Bauer in 'Lovesounds' a 1984 episode of *The Hitchhiker*, aka *Deadly Nightmares*

Robert Fairclough concludes his interview with director David Wickes, who discusses his work on such popular TV shows as *Philip Marlowe, Private Eye* and his award-winning *Jack the Ripper* TV movie with Michael Caine...

THE WICKES MAN

Part Two



had just joined a new American company called Home Box Office. HBO were just starting; they were a cable TV company specialising in sports and old movies. At that point, they'd never made a drama and had no plans to do so.

"But, at Fred Cohen's suggestion, I flew to New York and presented my half-finished *Marlowe* plans to the HBO board on 6th Avenue. This involved music demos, location photographs, budgets, crew lists, cast wish-lists, and all the usual paraphernalia. Did my half-prepared presentation work? No. I was jet-lagged out of my mind and I made a dog's breakfast of it. All I got from the HBO board, on the 34th floor of the Time Life building, were a few polite nods. I was not even close.

"Back in London, I had a chat with LWT's controller of programmes Michael Grade (later BBC Chairman and head of ITV). Michael was about to leave LWT and take up a post in Hollywood, but he loved the idea of the Marlowe series and signed LWT up for half the budget. The only problem I now faced was getting the other half. So I took a silly risk: I flew back to HBO, waving Michael's offer, and made a much better presentation. Within a week, HBO agreed to sign up – but only if I could bring them an acceptable star.

"Oh boy. Marlowe has been played by Humphrey Bogart and Robert Mitchum. How could I top them? Broke though I was, I survived for several weeks in Beverly Hills, calling agents who had never heard of me. It was my first real taste of Los Angeles power brokers. Eventually,



CANADIAN TWILIGHT ZONE

"*Deadly Nightmares* (1989-1991), originally titled *The Hitchhiker*, was a series of anthology stories linked by a recurring character, the Hitchhiker (Page Fletcher). It was something like the third or fourth drama series to be made by HBO. The series was to be shot in Quebec, Canada, but apparently the preparation period had been rather muddled. HBO asked me to go in and do some rewriting and direct a few episodes. When I got to Montreal, a lot needed doing – location finding, casting, crew selection, you name it. And there was something more: have you ever been to Quebec in November? It's colder than anywhere I had been before. It was like trying to work at the North Pole. "Nonetheless, we managed to attract some good names – Robert Vaughn (*The Man From UNCLE*, 1964-68),



RAISING CAINE

"Now the pace picked up. *Jack the Ripper* (1988) was the first prime time, coast-to-coast US network show, shown on the CBS channel, to be made by a non-US production company (Thames/Euston). There have been others since, but ours was the very first. It got record ratings in the USA and the UK (there's a *Daily Mirror* article somewhere saying over 20 million). At the Golden Globes, we were nominated for the best miniseries and Michael Caine, starring as Inspector Frederick Abberline, won the Globe for best actor. Until the American-made *Lonesome Dove* came

Above: Michael Caine as Inspector Frederick Abberline with Jane Seymour's Emma in *Jack the Ripper* (1988)

Powers Boothe (also seen above) and Kathryn Leigh Scott in *Philip Marlowe, Private Eye*

Right: David Wickes on set, directing an episode of the 1983 series





along, *Ripper* was the highest rated miniseries on US television. I've been told the show is still repeated from time to time in some countries, which is interesting.

"Nowadays, computer-generated imagery is everywhere; augmented reality and virtual reality are everywhere

else. Early versions of effects-tech were, of course, available in 1988 but I chose to avoid them. Even some present-day techniques aren't convincing, let alone scary. So we shot what are called 'floor effects' for *Ripper*, meaning something that happens in real time on the set. This involved layers of prosthetic skin with tiny inflatable balloons under them – requiring hours in the make-up chair and lots of rehearsal time. Armand Assante (in the role of the American actor Richard Mansfield) knew that the real-life Mansfield had 'transformed' himself on the London stage, terrifying audiences and causing the press to demand that the Lord Chamberlain should ban the schizophrenic-like performance at a time when a madman was loose on the streets killing prostitutes. Armand was a real trouper. He went through the prosthetics ordeal without complaint, and his acting was pretty convincing.

"Neither CBS nor Thames were specific



about restraint in depicting the murders, even though both companies had codes covering violence and gore. The lack of blood and dismemberment must be laid at my door. I was, and remain, convinced that fear of the unknown and terror of the unseen are far more powerful than overt slashings and gushes of blood. What has been called the pornography of violence is, in my view, just that – pornography, not drama.

"At the time of *Ripper*, Michael Caine was a major movie star: US studios could mount pictures solely on his name. I had been incredibly lucky to persuade him to do *Ripper*, helped by Lloyd Shirley and 'silver fox' theatrical agent Dennis Selinger. Dennis had a client list to boggle the mind – both British and American – so as soon as the *Ripper* ratings were in from both sides of the Atlantic, Dennis was on the phone. By now, he represented me as well as Michael and he wanted us to strike while the iron was hot.

"I had always liked the story of *Jekyll and Hyde* (1990), so I suggested it to Michael over lunch in his own restaurant (Langan's in Stratton Street). Michael said okay, so Dennis and my American agent (the Morris Office) fixed a meeting with the ABC Network. Before I knew it, I was on a plane again. Glamorous? Call me old

fashioned, but I'd rather be beamed up by Scottie. "America's ABC and Britain's LWT jumped at the idea of *Jekyll*. Together, they financed the show and we shot the whole thing in England. It was the first production for my own company, David Wickes Television, was two hours long – half the length of *Ripper* – but the viewer numbers stood up well. They were only a fraction less than the *Ripper* ratings so everyone was happy. Still in the 'Gothic' vein, I completed a development for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, but I couldn't get an American end-user interested. So DWT made *Frankenstein* instead. My American agent sent me to see Ted Turner. His company Turner Pictures seemed right for a TV movie of *Frankenstein*, and their casting department wanted to use Patrick Bergin. Patrick had just starred with Julia Roberts in *Sleeping With The Enemy* (1991) and was red hot. I liked the man immediately. His take on Dr Frankenstein mirrored mine, and I knew that his easy-going Irish nature would be invaluable on the set. (In the interest of full disclosure, Patrick and his wife Paula became god-parents to my son James, who's now fourteen.) I cast Randy Quaid (*Midnight Express* (1973), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) as the monster. For the blind character DeLacey, I was incredibly lucky to get the Oscar-winning British icon John Mills (*Tunes of Glory* (1960) and *Ryan's Daughter* (1970) who was actually blind



himself at that time in his life.

"So far, so good. Then I did another of my 'firsts'. As with some of the others, I soon began to wonder why. The location I chose for the picture was Poland.

"Poland had just emerged after 46 years behind the Iron Curtain, cut off from the rest of the world. The people were very welcoming, and the period architecture and landscapes were just right for *Frankenstein*. Best of all, from Turner Pictures' point of view, everything there was cheap. Our UK partner – dear old Thames – had just lost their broadcasting license and they were rather preoccupied, so they let me go full speed ahead for Poland.

"However, things were not quite as they seemed. Despite several visits to Warsaw by our crew chiefs and despite all the carefully researched prices and cost estimates we could gather, some of the information we were given in Poland was wide of the mark. The four-wheel drive vehicles we were promised didn't exist, our lamps were incompatible with their electricity supply, all the water for our effects tanks was polluted. Wherever we looked, Poland's decades of isolation had taken a heavy toll. Our start date was looming fast so there was only one thing for it. We started bringing things in from England and ordering stuff from Germany at twice the cost we had budgeted.

"This was the time when Steven Spielberg was planning *Schindler's List* (1993) – and he was looking seriously at Poland. My line producer Paul Tivers had worked with Steven on *Empire of the Sun* (1987). Now, Steven's company Amblin in LA started asking Paul a lot of questions: were there any modern camera mountings in Poland? Did they have the right sort of helicopters for aerial shots? What was the food like in the supermarkets? Tivers kept saying, 'Think carefully before coming here,' but Spielberg shot *Schindler* in Poland anyway.

"As films often do, *Frankenstein* held together. We had an ice-covered galleon on the high seas, stunts with horses, mechanical hand effects, and pleasing performances from the cast. Amazingly, the final cost was neatly covered by the mandatory contingency fund. We were on budget. It didn't do as sensationally well



as *Ripper*, of course, but it was a landmark for Turner.

RETURN OF C15

"*C15: The New Professionals* (1999) was a career highlight. With the help of Matrix Securities, DWT raised the entire budget from investors and bankers before we started shooting – no broadcasters or video companies were involved.

"What we were relying on was the worldwide reputation of the original *Professionals* series. But times change; in the 21st century, crime and terrorism are international, so we gave our elite squad an international role, not just a British one. I cast Edward Woodward in the Gordon Jackson part precisely because he was already known to audiences throughout the world as *The Equalizer* (1985-89).

"We shot in places as varied as America, France and Africa, which certainly helped when it came to world sales. At the last count, I think 44 countries have bought *C15: The New Professionals*. Our sales team offered the series to ITV but they had a full schedule, so Sky was our British broadcaster.

"How would I sum up my time in the entertainment business? It's often said that the years that I have covered here were the 'golden age' of television, much as the '40s and '50s are referred to as the golden age of Hollywood.

"Audiences change and tastes change, but I do believe that there are periods in the history of any industry when significant strides forward are made. I would like to think that I made a contribution – however small – to some of those strides in my own industry."

Clockwise from opposite below: David Wickes behind the scenes on *Jack the Ripper* (1988) with star Michael Caine; Edward Woodward as Harry Malone, boss of *C15: The New Professionals* (1999); David Wickes directing *Frankenstein* (1992); Michael Caine and Cheryl Ladd in *Jekyll and Hyde* (1990)