

# *“Murder on the Orient Express”*

By Helen Lutz

Younger folks won't remember this, but not all that long ago air travel was fun. There was no security to go through; we just walked up to our gates with family and friends waving goodbye. There were no baggage fees; the airlines assumed we wanted clean underwear during our trip. Once on the airplane the seats were comfortable and larger (and not just in first class) with plenty of leg room. On short flights a nice snack was served (hoagie sandwich and chips) and longer flights included your choice of dinner entrees all served on glass plates with real silverware. The travel was a fun part of the trip, not the draining and debilitating experience that we now must endure to get from one location to another.



Prior to airplanes, guests (those with the cash) were usually made as comfortable as possible in elegant settings. The Titanic was a show piece for crossing the seas, just poorly managed. When in Europe, one traveled on the Orient Express which luxuriously made its way between Paris and Istanbul. Director and lead actor Kenneth Branagh again brings Agatha Christie's novel "Murder on the Orient Express" to the big screen recapturing the elegance of travel in days gone by.

We meet a host of 'A list' stars as the movie begins, each as a quirky passenger/character. Hercule Poirot (Branagh), a famous Belgian detective, sporting a double mustache that defies comprehension while ensuring that his morning eggs are served 'just so.' Edward Ratchett (Johnny Depp) a suspicious art dealer who appears to be the nervous type always looking over his shoulder while Josh Gad plays Hector MacQueen his right hand man. Michelle Pfeiffer portrays the gold-digging widow while Judi Dench takes on the persona of a cantankerous Princess Dragomiroff cared for by a very patient English governess Mary Denham (Daisy Ridley). Couple these actors with Penelope Cruz, Willem Dafoe and a host of other talented performers and all we need is a dicey murder to kick off the trip.

The press screening I attended was interesting as there were only a dozen or so in attendance. One half of the audience was young and very millennial while the half on my side of the theater were, shall we say, more mature in age. My half of the theater enjoyed the movie and had read the book, it's a classic (we grew up without all the technology now enjoyed). The younger half found the story too slow (nothing blows up) and contrived.

The cinematography is gorgeous as the train makes its way through the Alps. The passenger cars are beautifully set, even though my husband kept commenting that he's never seen a train car that large (wide). I kept reminding him that it's a movie. Branagh uses the camera with shots above the crime scene and other cars to give us insight as to what is transpiring behind closed doors. He also uses unique effects when shooting various scenes, especially the questioning of the myriad of suspects to appear as though we're seeing them through prisms. I liked it, others found it distracting.

"Murder on the Orient Express" brings a 1933 'who done it' story to life. Does it completely follow the story? Mostly, with a few Hollywood touches thrown in. Even if you have never read the book but enjoy a good period piece, this film introduces a touch of grandeur of days gone by to those of us living in the current 'cattle call' travel experience. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats ... I give "Murder on the Orient Express" TWO 1/2 HARTS. It's not a film that everyone will enjoy, but will be appreciated by many.