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Jack Regan is a hard edged detective in the Flying Squad of London's Metropolitan Police (called 'the Sweeney' from the Cockney rhyming slang 'Sweeney Todd' = 'Flying Squad'). He pursues villains by methods which are underhanded and often illegal themselves, frequently violent and more often than not successful. Jack Regan is a hard edged detective in the Flying Squad of London's Metropolitan Police. He pursues villains by methods which are underhanded and often illegal themselves, frequently violent and more often than not successful. After a hard day at work, I like nothing better than to pour myself a large Scotch, settle down on the sofa, switch on the DVD player and tell the bird to shut it as I watch those diamond geezers from the flying squad getting all tooled up for another blag. This series is without a doubt an absolute classic and if you remember the seventies - this was essential viewing. John Thaw's Regan and Dennis Waterman's Carter were no nonsense coppers who went up against a London full of well dodgy villains. Sawn-off shotguns, pick axe handles, car chases, fights, flared trousers and sideburns galore as our heros battle and bring to justice the various blaggers operating on their manor while at the same time drowning themselves in booze, smoking like chimneys and chatting up the birds. Gloriously politically incorrect this was a series which we will sadly never see the like again. In a word, magnificent! **This comment contains spoilers**

The Sweeney is not well known outside the UK but on the list of great British TV series it's up there alongside I, Claudius, Fawlty Towers and The Avengers. Mention The Sweeney to almost anyone in Britain and you will probably be greeted by a reply of 'Shut it!' or 'Get yer trousers on, you're nicked!' Both are lines from the show and have long since become much quoted catchphrases. Quite an accomplishment for a series that ended over 25 years ago.

So why is The Sweeney so great? Well, for a start it features two marvellous characters. The late John Thaw (of Inspector Morse fame) stars as Detective Inspector Jack Regan of Scotland Yard's famed 'Flying Squad' (so called because of their use of high performance squad cars to get them to the scene of major crimes). Routinely mixing with violent criminals, gangsters, informers, strippers and prostitutes in those parts of London tourists never get to see, Regan is a 24/7 copper with an ex-wife and an 8 yr old daughter he rarely sees. And he's nothing like Inspector Morse. At all.

Jack Regan is as hard as they come. He displays no hesitation in beating up villains, threatening suspects, or even, in the episode 'Queen's Pawn', organising a kidnapping(!) so as to put pressure on a suspect. For UK viewers accustomed to the traditional saintly image of the English policeman, Regan was a truly startling creation and Thaw's performance remains utterly convincing not least because, with his craggy features and gruff manner, Thaw never looks like some pretty-boy poseur trying to 'act hard'.

Of course every great star has to have a loyal sidekick with whom to share the good times and the bad and Regan's best mate also happens to be his second-in-command - Detective Sergeant George Carter, superbly played by Dennis Waterman. Although ready to use his fists when required Carter is initially a bit more reluctant to use Regan style methods (although the tragic death of his wife in the sensational second series episode 'Hit and Run' brings him closer to Regan) and the pair spend much of their time exchanging insults, chasing birds and smoking like chimneys whilst trying to drink every pub in the London area dry. The delightful on screen chemistry between Regan and Carter, (one that was mirrored off screen by Thaw and Waterman) is one of the main reasons viewers adore the show. For Regan and Carter feel like real working people caught up in the stresses and strains of increasing bureaucracy, long hours, an unsympathetic boss and a shrinking home life. Like all great popular drama, regardless of setting or era, Regan and Carter's attitude to life connected directly with the millions of viewers who tuned in every week to watch them.

The other key to the success of The Sweeney was the extraordinarily high standard of writing and direction on the show. The crew were much influenced by The French Connection and Dirty Harry and, in a revolutionary approach to TV production they used that documentary style; shooting entirely on location in and around the London suburb of Hammersmith using lightweight 16mm cameras and radio mikes on the actors for a raw documentary feel. Dialogue scenes were kept short

and pace, action and humour emphasised. Even more boldly, the villains sometimes got away scott-free. The team also pushed the envelope in the depiction of violence. Excitingly choreographed fight scenes were a hallmark of The Sweeney right from the start and more than 25 years after it finished the brutality still has the power to take your breath away.

The fears and perceptions of crime harboured by the British public and the problems endemic in the police service were all superbly dramatised by a tight-knit group of some of Britain's top scriptwriters. These stories included police brutality ('Big Brother'), know nothing career climbers ('Taste of Fear'), personal involvement with villains ('Lady Luck'), European terrorism ('Faces'), police corruption ('Bad Apple') and hi-tech crime ('Tomorrow Man'). That all of these concerns are still major problems in British policing just goes to show how little the series has dated.

The Sweeney ultimately ran for four seasons, 53 episodes in all with two feature film spin offs, Sweeney! (1976) and Sweeney 2 (1978). A definitive DVD presentation of the show (immaculate digital restoration from the original film elements, commentaries, exhaustive extras, etc, etc) has recently been released in the UK and stands as testament to the show's continued popularity among viewers of all ages. This is actually a sports broadcast tune called "Rugby Special" and can be found on the CD 'BBC Sporting Themes'. The Aussie con artists appeared in two episodes and the cheerful theme that accompanied them added a more lighthearted element to the otherwise hard-edged show.

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