



The JOURNEYMAN

Book-ending Red's 15 years with two groundbreaking TV dramas, John Simm's acting life has taken him from troublemaker to time traveller, achieving respectability along the way

Photograph JASON JOYCE Words ALISON JANE REID

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, AS THE FIRST ISSUE OF *Red* hit the newsstands, John Simm was the actor everybody was talking about. His starring role as Danny Kavanagh in Jimmy McGovern's dark, sexy, dysfunctional drama, *The Lakes*, made him a household name.

Since then, he has played some of film and television's juiciest roles, from a time-travelling policeman in *Life On Mars* to The Master in *Doctor Who*. On film, he was drug-addled Jip in club culture classic *Human Traffic*, and Joy Division's Bernard Sumner in *24 Hour Party People*, a role that was close to his heart having been in his own band, Magic Alex, throughout the 1990s. 'I was part of that Manchester music scene,' he says, reclining in his chair in a London hotel. 'I would have been gutted if [director] Michael Winterbottom hadn't asked me to be involved.'

Now 42, Simm is finally moving on from the sulky rebel roles that made his career. He married actress Kate Magowan in 2004 and they have two children, Ryan, 11, and Molly, six. This month, he stars in *The Village*, BBC One's ambitious new

drama following one English village in Derbyshire across the whole of the 20th century. Simm stars as a salt-of-the-earth farmer, father and husband, opposite the rather wonderful Maxine Peake as his wife. It seems, these days, he is more than happy to play the family man, both at home and on screen.

I've never wanted a role so badly as I did with *The Lakes*. I was very cheeky and very young at the time. I remember walking out of the final recall and then walking straight back in again. I went up to the director, looked him right in the eye and said, 'Please, give me this role, just trust me, I won't let you down.' Then I left, thinking, 'What have I done?'

It is very rare that people will take a chance on an unknown actor and give you the main part. *The Lakes* was the beginning of everything for me. Before that, I'd played a killer in *Cracker*, which put me on Jimmy McGovern's radar, but *The Lakes* ignited my career. That was when I first got to know Max [Beesley]. He was in *The History of Tom Jones*, >>

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A *Foundling*, so we both had these big leads in TV and just couldn't believe it. We're still great mates today.

Priorities change when you are married. It's not just about me any more. I've got a mortgage, a family and kids at school in London. Of course it's more difficult to work because I don't like being away from my children. But, next week, I'm going to South Africa to film the fourth series of *Mad Dogs*, and it is a once-in-a-lifetime job. I am working with my best mates [co-stars Max Beesley, Marc Warren and Philip Glenister] in a beautiful location. And the characters are great. I wouldn't trust any of them, which is all the more fun.

Phil Glenister is like my screen husband. *Life On Mars* was just the most fantastic double act. We felt like we were in *Starky & Hutch* or *The Professionals*. What's not to love about bursting round a corner in a Cortina, then jumping out and kicking some doors in? It was fantastic fun and I am so proud of it.

My highlight of the past 15 years? Basically the whole chunk of time between *Human Traffic* (1999) and *Life On Mars* (2006) was so exciting. I played some

exceptional characters, like Cal McCaffrey in *State Of Play*. I also played Caligula in a TV movie, which was fantastic. I had to learn to ride a horse in a week. It was like a trial run for playing The Master in *Doctor Who*.

People would be surprised to know how shy I am. When I was in the band, Magic Alex [they released one album before splitting in 2005], I hated being on stage. It's why I decided to become an actor. Acting allows you to wear a mask and become someone else. I'm much more comfortable with that.

I've got seven guitars at home. I learnt to play when I was 11 and still do, when I've got time. I discovered the GarageBand app on the iPad, which is great. But I am also totally obsessed with classical music – I have been ever since I was 18 and played Mozart in an amateur production of *Amadeus*. I love Beethoven. It's the only music I have on while doing other things.

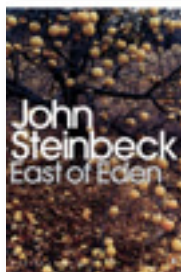
I don't cook. I used to, but since my wife really got into cooking – and she is such a brilliant cook – it's pointless, so I stay out of the kitchen. I try to help the kids with their homework, instead. Fine if it's English or history. I'm not so great at maths.

Phil [Glenister] wants me to take up golf. But I wouldn't get away with it. We would be gone for hours; I would be divorced! So when I'm not working, I just potter around and read and catch up on DVDs. And when my wife goes away to work there's the double school run. That's enough to keep me busy. *The Village* is a six-part series starting on Sunday nights on BBC One in April.

JOHN SIMM'S BEST THINGS IN LIFE

BEST BOOK:

I'm currently reading *East Of Eden* by John Steinbeck, which I can't put down. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about it. Then I have to get up and read for an hour, so I can go back to sleep again.



BEST WAY TO RELAX:

Reading, sleeping and watching DVDs. I've just done the box set of *The Killing* (above). Now it's *The Bridge*.



BEST THING IN LIFE:

Spending time with my family (above, with wife Kate Magowan and their son, Ryan), and working on a really good character.



BEST MUSIC:

Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No.5*. It's one of the greatest pieces of music ever written.