

“Downton Abbey Season 3” Begins January 6; Shirley MacLaine Joins Cast

The Great War is over and the long-awaited engagement of Lady Mary and Matthew is on, but all is not tranquil at Downton Abbey as wrenching social changes, romantic intrigues, and personal crises grip the majestic English country estate for a third thrilling season. The all-star cast, including Maggie Smith as the Dowager Countess of Grantham, returns and welcomes guest star Academy Award-winner Shirley MacLaine.

“Downton Abbey Season 3” airs on “Masterpiece” over seven Sundays beginning with the two-hour premiere on Jan. 6 at 8 p.m. CT on NET1/HD and concluding with a ninety-minute finale on Feb. 17.

The returning cast includes Hugh Bonneville, Dame Maggie Smith, Elizabeth McGovern, Dan Stevens, Michelle Dockery, Jim Carter, Penelope Wilton, Joanne Froggatt, Brendan Coyle and a host of others, joined by Shirley, who plays Martha Levinson, the very American mother of Cora, Countess of Grantham (McGovern).

Years earlier, Cora rescued Downton Abbey with her New World riches by marrying Robert, Earl of Grantham (Bonneville). Now, New World and Old World are about to clash as Cora’s mother locks horns with Robert’s redoubtable mother, Lady Violet, played by Maggie Smith.

Last season closed with the reluctant heir to Downton, Matthew Crawley, recovered from his war wounds and ready to tie the knot with the eldest of Lord and Lady Grantham’s daughters, Lady Mary. Meanwhile, Mary’s youngest sister, Sybil, has eloped to Ireland with the political-minded chauffeur, Branson, and is expecting a child.

A tantalizing glimpse ahead: Lovebird servants Anna and Bates face new ordeals in their star-crossed marriage. Downton’s impeccable butler, Carson, breaks in a new footman, who happens to be the nephew of the scheming lady’s maid, O’Brien. Following Matthew and Mary’s engagement, Robert sticks to his duty to maintain Downton more firmly than ever.

In this changing landscape nothing is assured, and could it be that even the war-weary Crawleys must fight a new battle to safeguard their beloved Downton?

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