

JUNE 07, 2015

7:55am PT by Diane Garrett

'Downton Abbey' Team Previews Final Season, Prepares to Say Farewell



PBS

IN THIS STORY



International



Downton Abbey



The series' creator and cast tease more battles between Violet and Isobel in the upcoming sixth and final season.

The end hasn't begun to really sink in yet for *Downton Abbey's* cast.

Heck, the show's patriarch doesn't even know how the British period drama is going to conclude this upcoming season, its last.

"I haven't read the series finale," said **Hugh Bonneville** Saturday afternoon during a panel discussion at the Writers Guild Theater.

"I haven't even written it," series creator **Julian Fellowes** told the crowd to uproarious laughter.

SEE MORE

Emmys: On the Set of 'Downton Abbey' as Hollywood Reporter Gets Exclusive Look at Season 5 (Photos)



Downton, for which Fellowes writes every episode, is now midway through a six-month shoot. The final season will begin airing this fall in the U.K., concluding as usual on Christmas Day, and stateside in January under PBS' *Masterpiece Theatre* banner.

Bonneville said the production has 11 more weeks to go, "so

we're coming into that final stretch really, and it being the last one hasn't really sunk in. I think it will really start having an impact when we film the last scene in the dining room or the last scene in the library or whatever, and we'll check that off the list."

"It will be funny when the each character is finished, and they say, 'And that's the last of Mrs. Patmore or whatever,'" said Fellowes. "That's always a strange moment — even on an ordinary movie or one-off job — when people who have been all through it start to peel away."

So far, however, no choking up on set.

Bonneville and fellow cast members **Laura Carmichael** and **Elizabeth McGovern** kept the spoilers about the upcoming season to a minimum at the event. But Fellowes and executive producer **Gareth Neame** did tease the audience with a short video promising more battles between Violet (**Maggie Smith**) and Isobel Crawley (**Penelope Wilton**), plus acknowledgement of growing intimacy between Carson the butler (**Jim Carter**) and Mrs. Hughes (**Phyllis Logan**), who agreed to marry at last season's finale.

Carmichael, whose unlucky in love character had an illegitimate child last season, will be spending more time in London, that much she acknowledged. But whether she will get a happy ending remains to be seen; same goes for perennially afflicted downstairs couple Bates (**Brendan Coyle**) and Anna (**Joanne Froggatt**).

READ MORE

'Downton Abbey' Castmembers Reveal Their Fantasy Endings to the Series (Video)



Fellowes took a swipe at Hollywood when discussing the romances between older characters on the show, pointing out that's true to life, even if mostly absent in movies.

"I like older characters to have emotional lives, because I think it's truthful," said Fellowes. "In movieland, everyone stops being a sexual creature at about 32, or at least the women do. The men are allowed to keep going until they are 78 — I've never worked that out," he observed. "In my world, on the whole older people have emotions like everybody else, and I think the show demonstrates that."

The show has weathered a series of actors; departures in the past two seasons, most notably Dan Stevens (**Matthew Crawley**) and Jessica Brown Findlay (**Sybil Crawley**), and ended last season with former chauffeur Tom Branson (**Allen Leech**) headed toward Boston. Fellowes acknowledged that Stevens' decision to leave at the end of Season 3, the same time as Findlay's long-planned departure, caused some creative challenges, but said "in the end it was a blessing" because it enabled him to start the next season on a time jump.

For Fellowes, the biggest surprise about writing a TV show has been seeing how the characters develop and grow over seasons, shaped by the actors who are playing the roles. "That has been very interesting," said the creator, who has an NBC show called *The Gilded Age* in the works after *Downton*.

Soon enough, *Downton* actors will have to say goodbye to each other and Highclere Castle, where a good portion of the show is filmed.

"When it's sunny in the summer outside the house, it's just dreamy — it's like not being at work," said Carmichael. "Outside lying on the lawn, trying not to get your costume dirty," she continued, "it feels like a very lucky experience."

Even now, several years in, "it's a pretty nice office to come to work in," said Bonneville.

Even so, the actors agree that it's time to bid *Downton* adieu. Said McGovern, "The story isn't over, but we've told our bit of it."

INTERNATIONAL

DOWNTON ABBEY

ADVERTISEMENT

 SHOW COMMENTS ▼