

= Séance Time =

" Séance Time " is the sixth and final episode of the second series of the British dark comedy anthology television programme Inside No. 9 . It was first broadcast on 29 April 2015 on BBC Two . The episode was written by Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith , and directed by Dan Zeff . It stars Pemberton , Shearsmith , Alison Steadman , Alice Lowe , Sophie McShera , Dan Starkey , Ciriad Lloyd and Caden @-@ Ellis Wall . The episode begins with Tina (McShera) arriving at a Victorian villa for a séance . Hives (Shearsmith) sits her at a table and then escorts the ominous , shrouded Madam Talbot (Steadman) into the room .

Like " The Harrowing " , the final episode of the first series of Inside No. 9 , " Séance Time " is somewhat more horrific than is typical for the programme , though humour remains . In writing the episode , Pemberton and Shearsmith began with the idea of a séance , and developed the plot from there . The theme was one that they had wanted to address for some time , though they wanted to approach it in an original way . The writers aimed to begin " Séance Time " with minimal humour , presenting it as straight horror , before introducing the first twist .

The episode explores both the norms of horror films and the unpleasantness of actors and the television industry . Critics responded positively to " Séance Time " , praising the horror ? several considered the episode genuinely frightening ? the humour , and the writing . Steadman 's performance was singled out as strong , with critics commending her character as a highlight .

= = Production = =

= = = Inspiration and writing = = =

The second series of Inside No. 9 was written in 2014 by the programme 's creators Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith . The idea for " Séance Time " began with the " trigger " of a séance , and the plot grew out of this , while the episode 's title was taken from a line performed by David Warner in the film From Beyond the Grave . Shearsmith had previously taken part in a séance with The League of Gentlemen in a putatively @-@ haunted house . He had heard tapping and seen movement on a ouija board , and believed he had experienced something supernatural until Mark Gatiss confessed that he was responsible . Shearsmith said that he and Pemberton had always wanted to do a séance @-@ inspired story , but had never been able to find a new angle from which to approach the theme . " Séance Time " , he thought , " felt a bit different " to how séances had previously been portrayed . The writers were unsure how to conclude the episode , and considered 15 to 20 different endings before settling on the one they used .

= = = Casting and characters = = =

As each episode of Inside No. 9 features new characters , the writers were able to attract actors who might have been unwilling to commit to an entire series . " Séance Time " starred Sophie McShera as Tina ? though Tina was played by an uncredited extra in the opening shot of a house 's exterior ? Shearsmith as " Hives " / Terry , Alison Steadman as " Madam Talbot " / Anne , Dan Starkey as " Blue Demon Dwarf " / Clive , Ciriad Lloyd as Gemma , Alice Lowe as Amanda , Pemberton as Pete and Caden @-@ Ellis Wall as William . The writers felt the episode featured a number of good roles for women . Members of Inside No. 9 's crew , include the episode 's third assistant director Saloum N 'Jie , appeared as uncredited extras playing members of a television crew . Though there were only a small production crew seen in the episode , this mirrors real crews of the kind featured .

Shearsmith had previously worked with Steadman on Agatha Christie 's Marple , while she and Pemberton had met , though the pair had not worked together . She was ill upon arrival for filming , which led to Pemberton worrying that production would have to be suspended . As a result of Steadman 's illness , her character 's croaking voice was mostly her own . One journalist

commented on the appropriateness of the casting , given the influence of Abigail 's Party ? in which Steadman starred ? on " Nana 's Party " , the previous week 's episode . The actor was one of a number (the others being Jane Horrocks and Claire Skinner) who appeared in Inside No. 9 's second series who had also starred in Life Is Sweet . During filming , Steadman expressed happiness to be working with Pemberton and Shearsmith . She explained that they are excellent writers as they are " off the wall " .

Pemberton knew McShera through his friend Siobhan Finneran , who co @-@ starred with McShera in Downton Abbey . He felt that McShera would be able to bring a " mousey quality " to the role of Tina . Shearsmith felt that her performance was funny while retaining realism . The writers found the role of " Blue Demon Dwarf " difficult to cast , but were very happy with the performance of Starkey , who kept some of his character 's props . The writers also praised Lowe , who they felt was able to make a lot of a comparatively small part . The character of Amanda , they said , was to seem bored and aloof , attempting to get away with doing as little work as possible , while also favouring people seen as more important .

The name Hives , used by Shearsmith 's character , was taken from a Laurel and Hardy butler of the same name . Meanwhile , Hives 's costume and mannerisms were inspired by those worn and adopted by Noel Edmonds in undercover practical jokes . A related influence for the episode was a prank @-@ gone @-@ wrong seen on YouTube , in which a joke 's target punches a costumed person when the latter surprises the former . Pemberton 's character spoke with a cockney accent , something unusual for Pemberton , who normally does not affect accents when acting . In addition to playing Pete , Pemberton provided the deep voice spoken by " Madam Talbot " during the séance .

= = = Style = = =

Shearsmith said that he and Pemberton sometimes aim to produce episodes with genuinely scary scenes , comparing " Séance Time " to " The Harrowing " , the sixth episode of Inside No. 9 's first series , which was also particularly horrific . He said that the writers and crew had similar aims in terms of atmosphere in " Séance Time " as they had in " The Harrowing " . The episodes also shared similar openings , with a lone woman walking towards a large house . Thematically , Shearsmith felt that the episode served to tie together a number of ideas with which he had been " obsessed " for years , including horror , ghosts and magic . The episode 's director , Dan Zeff , got behind the idea of genuine horror , and Shearsmith was happy with how the initial séance was portrayed . A large number of horror clichés were used , but the reason that these clichés are present is subsequently revealed .

Props utilised to heighten the horror included a trick candle ? swapped back @-@ and @-@ forth with a real one ? which could shoot a large flame . This was operated by a technician hiding under the table on which it was placed . A doll seen on screen , the writers claimed , was probably visible only to Terry among the characters . For the white eyes of " Madam Talbot " , Steadman wore partially white contact lenses . Had she worn fully white lenses , she would have been unable to see , and this would have led to more work for the production crew . Instead , her partially white eyes were made fully white in post @-@ production . Also added in post @-@ production was the wetness of Terry 's clothes in the final scene .

The writers hoped to fool viewers into thinking that they were doing a straightforward séance episode , and so there is little humour prior to the episode 's first twist . For Steadman , the writing meant that both the audience and the character of Tina are fooled together . Nonetheless , humour remained elsewhere in the script ; Lloyd looked forward to performing a particular joke involving blue paint . Terry refers to his colleagues variously as " Pepe and His Friends " , a reference to a variety act with a similar name , and a " warm prop " , a disparaging name which , according to the writers , has been used in the film industry to refer to extras .

= = = Filming and release = = =

Inside No. 9 's second series was filmed from the end of 2014 into early 2015 . " Séance Time " was the second episode of the second series to be filmed , and the filming was completed shortly before production ceased for a Christmas break . The episode was filmed at Langleybury , a country house in Abbots Langley , Hertfordshire . The same house was used for " The Harrowing " , as well as in Shearsmith and Pemberton 's pre @-@ Inside No. 9 television series Psychoville .

On its first showing on BBC Two , " Séance Time " was moved from Inside No. 9 's usual slot on a Thursday evening . It was instead shown on Wednesday 29 April ; this showing was at 10pm in most of the UK , and at 11.20pm in Northern Ireland . The freelance journalist Dan Owen suggested that this , combined with their refusal to release the series on Blu @-@ ray , suggested that the BBC had little faith in Inside No. 9 . He nonetheless called for a third series , a request echoed by other commentators . In their commentary on the episode , Pemberton said that he and Shearsmith had plans for a potential third series , and hoped to be able to get on with producing it . " Séance Time " , along with the other episodes from the second series , was released on DVD on 5 May 2016 , and a third series was announced in October of that year .

= = Plot = =

Tina (McShera) arrives at a Victorian villa for a séance . Hives (Shearsmith) settles Tina before retrieving Talbot (Steadman) , who arrives shrouded in black and carrying a doll . Talbot , an elderly woman with heavy cataracts , speaks in a high @-@ pitched voice , unnerving Tina . When the séance begins , objects fly around the room , Talbot 's voice becomes demonic and ectoplasm seeps from her mouth . Hives encourages Tina not to break the circle , but she does so when a blue @-@ faced demon (Starkey) appears behind her . She is terrified until Hives reveals himself to be Terry , the host of a hidden camera programme called Scaredy Cam .

Scaredy Cam production crew , including the director Gemma (Lloyd) and the make @-@ up artist Amanda (Lowe) , enter to prepare for the next prank . " Talbot " is being played by the demanding stage actress Ann , but the other crew are unable to remember the name of the extra (who they falsely believe to be a dwarf) playing " Blue Demon Dwarf " . They mostly ignore him , despite his eagerness to talk about his acting experiences and his requests for a drink . Terry is irritable and impatient , unwilling to talk to Tina or Gemma about a prank with him dressed up as a gorilla . This prank led to a young boy wetting himself and a previous cancellation of Scaredy Cam . The programme is due to return on a different channel , and Terry has chosen a different prank to be announced as the winner of a " public " vote for the programme 's best . The extra confronts Terry about the fact he was originally cast as " Spirit of Little Boy " , but Terry does not care , and the extra is sent back into a chest to wait for the next member of the public .

Pete (Pemberton) , a new mark , enters , but the prank does not work as well as with Tina . Among other problems , Pete swears too much and does not seem affected by the atmosphere , while cues are missed by the pranksters . Terry is surprised to hear a child 's voice during Anne 's performance as Madam Talbot , and , backstage , the camera stream is blurry . When " Blue Demon Dwarf " appears , Pete punches him , and the production crew rush in . The extra drifts in and out of consciousness before Gemma ? having covered her face in blue paint after giving mouth @-@ to @-@ mouth ? says he has died . Backstage , people wait for the police and ambulance ; Terry is worried about his career , Ann wants to get away for some food and Amanda is keen to retrieve props from the corpse , but Pete and Gemma show some remorse . When alone , Terry looks to the camera feed and sees the extra standing in the séance room , and , relieved , runs to see him . Facing away from Terry and speaking in a rasping voice , the figure introduces himself as " Spirit of Little Boy " , and talks of a suicide after the embarrassment of wetting himself on television . After speaking to the " boy " , Terry believes that he himself is on Scaredy Cam , but no one is watches from backstage . When he touches the figure , the extra collapses , but a child 's voice continues to shout . A corpse @-@ like child (Wall) begins to rise from the cot used for Madam Talbot 's doll . Backstage , Gemma and a police officer look for Terry . They find him in the séance room ; he has wet himself , and insists that he is on Scaredy Cam . The child 's face appears on the camera feed .

= = Analysis = =

" Séance Time " draws inspiration from horror films and " the pretensions of actors " ? two themes favoured by the writers . Horror tropes noted by journalists include the Insidious @-@ inspired arrival of " Blue Demon Dwarf " and Madam Talbot 's demonic voice , reminiscent of a similar voice in The Exorcist . For one critic , Pete 's initial failure to believe the prank results in a memorable sequence that " was a lovely statement about how old @-@ fashioned horror imagery and well @-@ worn tropes can be terrifying in the right hands , and plain ludicrous if you refuse to enter into the spirit of things " .

Though the episode begins with horror , similar to " The Harrowing " , it quickly moves into the more meta subject of television production ; something " more intimidating and probably a lot crueller " than the supernatural . For the television critic Matt Baylis , the episode is a criticism of the callousness of reality television (such as Candid Camera) from the perspective of television plays . The horror at the start of the episode , he argues , continues even once the ruse is revealed . " Ugliness " remains in Terry 's arrogance , Anne 's self @-@ obsession and the indifference of Gemma and Amanda . This builds gradually into a " moral horror " in which " the unkind got their desserts " .

Phoebe @-@ Jane Boyd , writing for the entertainment website Den of Geek , compared the television crew to individuals pulled out of the " Summerland " of cancelled television . Terry is " parasitic and dead of heart " , an example of a particular brand of " washed @-@ up middle @-@ aged television presenters " . Amanda is " so deadened to the bitchery of the entertainment industry " that she is unfazed at the thought of retrieving props from a corpse . Anne behaves in a " bitter and narcissistic " way . The " heartless asides " concerning the previous misjudged prank are mirrored by the distaste directed towards Clive .

= = Reception = =

Critics responded positively to " Séance Time " , with a number of them characterising it as genuinely scary . Vicki Power , writing for The Daily Telegraph , described the episode as " clever and chilling " , while Julia Raeside and Victoria Segal , writing for The Sunday Times , called it " cleverly executed " , and Baylis described it as " a faith @-@ restorer for those who love " television drama . Mark Jones , writing for theguardian.com , called the episode " suitably spooky " and a " fitting end to a second series that has excelled at times " , and Chris Bennion , writing for The Independent , similarly described it as a " brilliant series finale " . A contrary opinion was offered in a review in the Liverpool Echo ; the author called " Séance Time " a " decent enough watch " , but felt that it was " a relatively disappointing episode " which was " unable to match what had gone before " . Baylis and Bennion stressed that the episode was very scary , with Bennion comparing it to " The Harrowing " ; he was complimentary of both , particularly their respective final scenes . Owen also compared the two , but noted that " Séance Time " contains more humour .

Bennion commended the writing , saying that Pemberton and Shearsmith were able to subvert expectations of séances several times ; " just as you 're smugly congratulating yourself for working out every twist and turn , they pull it from your grasp " . Owen praised the writing and subversion of expectations , and , though he found some of the twists predictable and felt that the ending needed more groundwork , felt that the final sequence " was worth it for another brown @-@ trouser moment " . Bennion felt that the " genius " of the episode was the way that tension was " undercut " with humour , but felt that the humour actually served to raise the tension . He highlighted the joke involving blue paint as particularly funny . Patrick Mulkern , of Radio Times , also praised the mix of humour and horror .

Raeside and Segal felt that Steadman 's performance was the highlight of the episode , and it was also praised in the Liverpool Echo . Bennion said that Steadman " [hammed] it up beautifully " and " [nailed] each [joke] with aplomb " , also commending the " comic turns " from Lowe and Lloyd . Mulkern described Steadman 's Madam Talbot as " hilariously theatrical " , and Boyd said that Steadman 's Anne provided " some of the best fun of the episode " .

= = = Cited sources = = =

Pemberton , Steve ; Shearsmith , Reece (2015) . Séance Time (episode commentary) . Steve & Reece IN9 (via SoundCloud) . Retrieved 10 April 2016 .