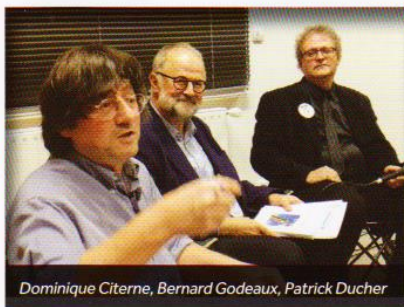


Celebrating Le Prisonnier's Fiftieth Anniversary (1968-2018)

A report by Patrick Ducher, 601 France coordinator.



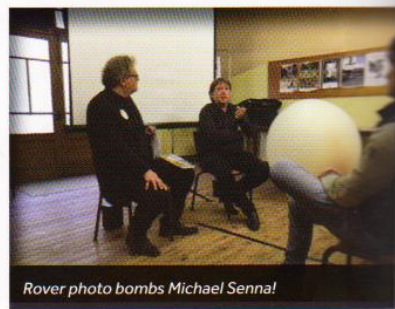
Dominique Citerne, Bernard Godeaux, Patrick Ducher

The 20th French Prisoner Convention was held between November 16-18, 2018 in the quiet little village of Saint-Symphorien sur Coise near Lyons in the heart of France. Fifty years ago, "Le Prisonnier" was broadcast in black & white on the 2nd TV channel (ORTF) between February and May 1968. The French audience nearly missed the very last episode because of a general strike which took place in the country 3 days after "Le Dénouement" (Fallout) was shown!

A special evening was organised to celebrate the anniversary at the local library on Friday, November 16: four writers were interviewed, namely :

- Michel Senna who published the first French critical filmography of McGoohan simply entitled *McGoohan*.
- Bernard Godeaux drove all the way from Liege (Belgium) to present his essay *Regards cinématographiques sur une série culte*.
- Jean-Michel Philibert published a 450-pages essay entitled *Le Prisonnier – Une mythologie moderne*.
- And yours truly, Patrick Ducher, who introduced *Je ne suis pas un numéro*, a collection of McGoohan quotes.

A podcast of this evening can be heard here, (<https://bit.ly/2S4uHU2>) courtesy of the interviewer Dominique Citerne.

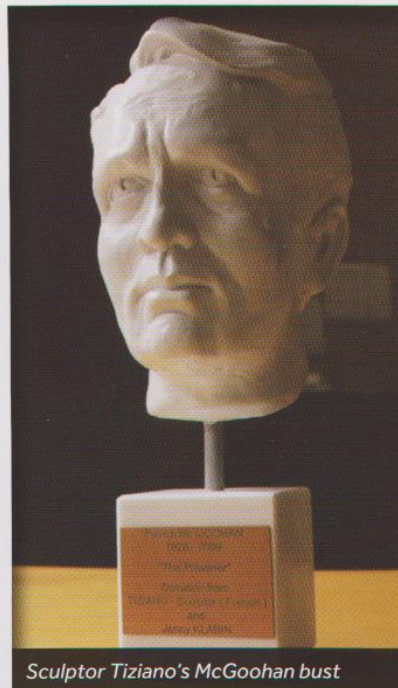


Rover photo bombs Michael Senna!

I had the pleasure of interviewing Michel Senna on Saturday. He was surprised that no book existed on the subject and talked about some very obscure films McGoohan appeared in, many of which have never been seen or even dubbed in French (*Finding Katie*, *The Quare Fellow* to name two). To be honest, many were far from being masterpieces, but Michel's approach was driven by his passion for the actor. The originality of the book resides in the fact



Christian Quidousse, Tiziano, Patrick Ducher



Sculptor Tiziano's McGoochan bust



Patrick Ducher, Michel Senna, Bernard Godeaux and Jean-Michel Philibert

that it provides a critical review, and not a simple - yet detailed - synopsis of every film. I interviewed Senna last Spring and an extract can be found on my blog www.jenesuispasunnumero.com here : <https://bit.ly/2zeA10g>.

A raffle followed, along with a *Prisoner* quiz about all the series' episodes. 8 players struggled to answer some very sharp questions (which actor was No. 2 in *Do not forsake me ?* Where does Professor Setzmann live?). There was much applause when Franck Breton defeated Christian Quidousse 5 to 4.

On Sunday 18, Jean-Michel interviewed Bernard Godeaux and myself. Bernard is an advisor to the city of Liege's libraries. In the

mid-90s, he published one of the first essays about *The Prisoner* entitled *Le Prisonnier, une théorie de l'hybridation du feuilleton*. TV *sérialisé* at a time when TV series were scorned at by the academic world. In his 100-page update, Bernard demonstrates the series' innovative and cinematic approach.

On a personal note, I decided to mark the series' 50th anniversary by collecting McGoochan quotes (nearly 200, coming from more than 50 different sources) into a booklet. The actor gave few interviews, but discovering the man behind the mask, so to speak, was quite a moving experience.

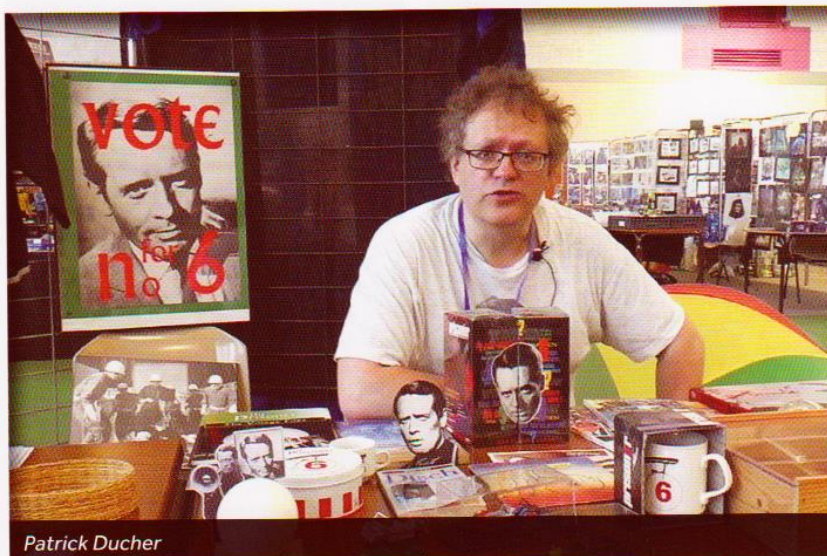
The sculptor Tiziano drove all the way up from Mougins in the South of France to

tell the story behind the making of the bronze bust of Patrick McGoochan which he presented to Portmeirion in 2017. His interview was undoubtedly the highlight of the weekend. The sculptor explained that the idea to create a bust occurred out of the blue as he was traveling through Asia. After discovering the Yris published book in 2003 (and subsequent update in 2011), he set out to design a bust in plaster. He explained how Jenny Klabin was instrumental in finding the financial arrangements to produce the bust in bronze to offer it to Portmeirion. The rest is history and Catherine McGoochan's meaningful words said it all ("You have captured my father"). An extract of my interview can be read here : <https://bit.ly/2RZpoFr>

Bonjour chez vous ! PD



Interview with Patrick Ducher of Le rÔdeur, France, conducted by Arno Baumgärtel of the German friends & supporters nr6de (who also operates the German website)



Patrick Ducher

nr6de: Pat, thanks for doing this interview albeit not face to face (which I would have appreciated)!

If you remember, in 2009 when the German *Prisoner*, known as *Nummer 6*, celebrated its 40th TV screen premiere I went asking a number of people "What makes *The Prisoner* special? What is it that got you hooked to the series?" And the final line of your answer to the question was: "What was the question again, Arno? Why is *The Prisoner* so special? Well, here's your answer: *The Prisoner* taught me about life!"

It would keep ringing in my ears all the time. After all, this is a notion inherent in many answers, if not, one way or the other, in every answer to my question. *The Prisoner* affected one's personal course of life. Arguably, TV was relatively new at the time, hence TV as such changed many lives. But I wouldn't be able to say this of another TV show. How do you feel right now that we have reached the 50th anniversary? Unbelievable isn't it?

PD: Did I really say 'it taught me about life'? Sounds a bit presumptuous. It *did* teach me a lot about life though :-)

nr6de: What was your initial approach to *Le Prisonnier*, how did you come across it?

PD: I must have been eight or ten years old. Every Saturday afternoon, I used to

watch a TV programme called *La Une est à vous*. It was dial-in programme where viewers had to phone the TV's switchboard in order to select a specific series. These were classified according to various genres : adventure, Sci-Fi, western, espionage etc. Very often, the same series were chosen: *Wild Wild West*, with Robert Conrad, *The Avengers* with Patrick Macnee, *Wanted: Dead Or Alive* with Steve McQueen, *The Outer Limits* etc. *The Prisoner* seldom came up but I remember vividly one episode with the Rover balloon which scared me so much that I had to duck under cover underneath my grandparents' living room table!

nr6de: *Le Prisonnier* appeared on French TV screens in 1968, well one year before *Nummer 6* in Germany. How was the series received at first?

PD: Back in 1992, I saw an interview with the original programme broadcasters who said it worked very well for about 3000 people. He meant that it appealed only to a niche audience. The general public did not understand that *The Prisoner* was not John Drake from *Danger Man* [*Destination Danger* in France] (er, he wasn't, was he?), which was a hugely popular series in France (and Germany too I believe). A few episodes were repeated several years later, as "fillers" whenever there was a strike on French TV. But it wasn't until 1983 and the Sci-Fi programme *Temps X* that it appealed to a new generation of more demanding viewers.

nr6de: Back in 1968/69, in France as well as over here only 13 episodes were broadcast. Is this correct? In Germany we can only speculate, and we have, as to why this was the case. How about in France, was there ever any reason given?

PD: You may know that at the time, TV companies bought series by batches of 13 instalments. So when what should have been series 2 of *The Prisoner* came up with weird episodes such as *The Girl Who Was Death*, *Do Not Forsake Me* and *Living in Harmony*, the powers that be chose to purchase only the final episode. And guess what? We had to wait until 1984 to see *Once Upon A Time*!

nr6de: The episode *The General* - *Der General* in German - was originally titled *Le Cerveau* - "The Brain". Why did they do that?

PD: Back in 1968, Général De Gaulle, French WWII hero, was head of state. The title *The General* may have drawn attention from the broadcasting authority which was under strict state control. So the episode was re-titled.

nr6de: Jacques Thébault was the Number Six voice actor in France, the man who dubbed Patrick McGoohan. I can't remember who, but it was said that the French dubbing was rather flat, perhaps not particularly accurate. What would you tell people?

PD: I would challenge the fact that it was "flat". Thébault's voice was not as metallic-sounding and harsh as McGoohan's, that is correct, but it was perfect to our French ears. Thébault was a respected voiceover artist who dubbed a lot of major Hollywood (and TV) stars including Steve McQueen, Christopher Lee, Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman to name but a few. He died aged 90 in 2015. He attended one of our conventions in the early 90s.

nr6de: In 2010 Franco-German TV station ARTE did the dubbing of the four non-German episodes. We both wrote about the event. Have you ever listened to the old episodes for which Horst Naumann did the dubbing and to our 'new Number Six' voice

ator Bernd Rumpf? In case you have: what do you think of his dubbing job?

I listened to a couple of Naumann's dubbed episodes ("Das Amtsiegel" for instance) and liked it. I couldn't say why but I prefer his work over Bernd Rumpf. In France three episodes remained unscreened for a long time (until 1991). Thébault did the voiceover work but his voice then definitely sounded different, older (mind you, 25 years later!) and not as clear sounding. Perhaps it was the same with Rumpf?

nr6de: The French Prisoner fan club or society is called *Le rÔdeur*, they have their own website and an additional blog has been set up too. Tell us a bit about its inception! Who was responsible in the beginning?

nr6de: Christian Delattre, our webmaster and myself, designed the website structure in the very late 1990s. I provided the original content and Christian devised the various modules and later added an interactive forum. Earlier this year, I decided to set up my own blog and publish regular posts in order to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first broadcast. I interviewed long-time fans, journalists, graphic artists etc. There's still an interest for the series in France, a strong one, despite the fact that the general public no longer watches TV the way they used to. The younger generation finds it hard to understand that we had to wait for a full week before watching an episode! Now it's all about binge watching

In November 2018 we organised our 20th Prisoner convention in a little village near Lyon. There were quizzes and games, and interviews with four authors, including Michel Senna, who wrote the first French filmography of McGoohan, Bernard Godeaux, from Belgium, presented an essay about the cinematographic aspects of the series, *Le rÔdeur's* founding father Jean-Michel Philibert introduced his 450 page essay about some philosophical, political and sociological aspects of THE PRISONER and I presented a collection of McGoohan quotes (more than 200!)

Bonjour chez vous!

Website: www.leprisonnier.net/
Pat's blog: www.jenesuispasunnumero.com/well-come/



Arno Baumgärtel

1969-2019 : 50th anniversary of THE PRISONER – NUMMER 6 in Germany
Wir sehen uns!

Interview conducted by Patrick Ducher of Le rÔdeur, France, with Arno Baumgärtel of the German friends & supporters nr6de, who also operates the German website.

Le rÔdeur: Can you tell a bit about the situation around the first German screening? The German public knew John Drake quite well didn't they?

nr6de: That's correct. John Drake was very popular with the German audience. Almost all 39 half-hour episodes had been broadcast in the early 60s (mind you, only two TV channels then!). Although, as with many TV series, they would cut the pre-credit action and trim the final sequences thus leaving only some 20 or 22 minutes of running time. Also notable how John Drake introduces himself: "O ja, entschuldigen Sie, mein Name ist Drake – John Drake." He apologises! Very polite, isn't it! Of the 50 minute episodes only eight were shown, nobody knows why. But after all they were broadcast as prime-time TV!

So, on August 16th 1969, very late that Saturday night, *Nummer 6* was shown for the first time. And I, well, unfortunately I cannot say whether I watched it or not. Images and impressions of the famous credit sequence have always been on my mind. Meaning, at some point I must have watched at least something.

1969, in retrospect, a remarkable period! On that very weekend the Woodstock festival was held. Only one month earlier Neil Armstrong had been the first man on the Moon. And only a couple of weeks later, on September 28th, general elections were due in the Federal Republic, in October Willy Brandt was elected Chancellor. Interestingly, the episode *Free For All* - remember: "VOTE! VOTE!..." - was omitted. It has remained a mystery until today why this particular and potentially 'unsettling' episode was not considered suitable for German post-war audiences. I have my own hypothesis... They wouldn't have their own vision of 'democratic' rituals disturbed.

Le rÔdeur: How about the broadcast, was it the same all over the federal states? Which region was the first to watch it?

nr6de: Yes, all the same. Since the nationwide TV station ZDF did the broadcast. But one mystery around the German version is the non-existent schedule or interval between two episodes. Sometimes five weeks or more would go by. You never knew when the next episode was slated. *Fall Out* wasn't shown until April 25th, 1970!

Le rÔdeur: Why was there over one year of delay compared to the UK and France broadcast?

nr6de: Good question! Nobody we have met so far - and there aren't too many people left - was able to tell us anything about it. The only one who could have known was dubbing director Brinkmann, but he passed away in 2015. As early as in 2006, when I rang him up, he apologised, told me he had no real recollection of his dubbing work. And he didn't want to be interviewed. His widow later confirmed this and we believe it is true. A sad thing. We can only guess.

Le rÔdeur: What's the reason that only 13 episodes were shown at the time?

nr6de: How many of that sort of question do you have...? We just don't know. As in France TV stations would usually buy the number 13 of a series in order to screen it, say every 2 weeks. Here everything is different because there wasn't a real broadcasting schedule. ZDF bought the