

April 2025

Television



It's all in the game

How *The Last of Us* crossed the divide between console and screen

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George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is in its 24th year.

Application procedure

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by **Wednesday 30 April 2025** on the official application form. Applicants must read all the conditions.

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From the CEO



The RTS Programme Awards are always one of the highlights of the Society's year, and last month's ceremony delivered with a vengeance. The atmosphere in Grosvenor House's Great Room was electric as we celebrated, in front of a star-studded audience, the extraordinary achievements of British television.

For the fourth year running, Tom Allen hosted the ceremony with cheeky charm and comic panache. Huge thanks to Tom. Congratulations to all the winners and nominees, and a big thank you for all the hard work of the awards juries and to the evening's sponsors, Cast & Crew, and the

Chair of the Programme Awards, Kenton Allen, CEO of Big Talk Studios.

It has been a busy time for the RTS and I am thrilled to announce that our first learners have enrolled for the RTS Mini MBA in Television and Streaming Media. It has been energising to see them take to the course so enthusiastically, and the first modules have sparked fascinating discussions in the RTS Academy forums. I wish them, and many of you who are now enrolling, the very best with your studies.

As *The Last of Us* returns to Sky for a second series, James Bennett's cover story looks at what it takes to transform a video game into a TV hit. It's a must-read as we explore creative ways to use compelling IP.

Simon Bucks considers the state of the post-production sector following the demise of Technicolor and finds

some positives as that part of our industry adjusts to new realities.

With the advent on BBC Two of *Chess Masters: The Endgame*, Mark Lawson looks back at some of the other sports and games that have graced our screens over the decades.

The past few weeks have featured some outstanding RTS events. Do read the report inside on our duty of care discussion that examined how television can improve the mental health of those who work in our industry. The RTS Centres across the UK continue to offer a brilliant variety of events: don't miss our report on RTS Southern's hugely entertaining evening, "In conversation with Chris Tarrant".

Theresa Wise

Contents

Cover: HBO

- 5 Kamali Melbourne's TV diary**
The Sky News reporter tells how the war in Ukraine has transformed his working life
- 6 Comfort classic: *Two Doors Down***
Glasgow's neighbours from hell are heaven to watch. Matthew Bell hails Britain's best-kept sitcom secret
- 7 Ear candy: *The Rest is Classified***
I spy a world dripping in intrigue, sleaze and vodka martinis. Harrison Bennett reveals all
- 8 Working lives: production manager**
Joanna Osborn tells Matthew Bell about the freezing late-night shoots involved in filming *Black Doves*
- 10 Our friend in Bristol**
Rachel Drummond-Hay celebrates an incredible year for BSL and deaf-led productions
- 11 Game on: from console to TV screen**
As *The Last of Us* returns in triumph, James Bennett asks what it takes to turn a video game into TV gold
- 14 The Scouse Sopranos**
Carole Solazzo spills the beans on *This City Is Ours*, Left Bank's tale of a warring Liverpool crime gang
- 16 A knight in front of the telly**
As the BBC attempts to turn chess into a ratings winner, Mark Lawson rewinds a century of quirky sports on TV
- 18 Chris almighty**
Is that your final answer? Chris Tarrant tells an RTS audience about his five decades in TV
- 20 Life after Technicolor**
Where next for Britain's VFX sector after the collapse of the global giant? Simon Bucks reports
- 22 Where there's a will**
Family feuds drive the gripping new UKTV thriller *I, Jack Wright*. Shilpa Ganatra reports
- 24 Inside television's mental health crisis**
Depression and anxiety afflict many in the industry. An RTS event asked how we can create a healthier future
- 26 RTS Programme Awards 2025**
The awards on 25 March at JW Marriott Grosvenor House on Park Lane, London, were hosted by comedian Tom Allen
- 35 RTS news and events**
Reports of the Society's screenings, awards and events from around the UK and Ireland



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TV diary



Sky

As Ukraine continues to dominate headlines, Kamali Melbourne tells how the conflict has transformed his working life at Sky News

It's a Tuesday morning. Usual drill. Up, exercise, read, get the boy ready for nursery, get on my bike and head for the office. It's around a quarter to four that afternoon when the "red drops" begin. These are the news wire services, telling us something important has happened. My editor is in my ear: "Check your urgent wires, getting some lines on Zelensky." What now?

■ It's now four days after the Trump-Zelensky "Oval Office debacle". Every day, this story – like a car out of control – feels as if it's careering from one side of the road to the other. At times, the brakes have been applied (Starmers London summit at Lancaster House) but, once the US gets back at the wheel, things seem to lose traction.

■ Zelensky has offered an olive branch to Trump, who wants peace and will do anything to get it – short of saying the word "sorry" for that Oval Office thing. That news broken, we move on to the next thing – Justin Trudeau responding to Trump's imposition of tariffs on Canada. He tells "Donald" they are a very "dumb thing to do".

■ We are at our best on Sky News when we bounce from event to incident to analysis. All the while giving the viewer as much of the "why" as time allows, along with the "what". It's exhilarating. I love every crazy, busy minute of it.

■ Putin signals that he'll accept

a ceasefire deal. Well, sort of. We take a news conference of the Russian leader and his Belarussian counterpart. I have to fill for the first few minutes as the two leaders spend that time signing big, important-looking books and then exchanging them. They eventually begin talking. Putin's words set the agenda for the rest of the day.

■ I speak to members of the International Broadcasting Trust for a few minutes before going on air. They are interested in what it's like to deal with breaking news. I tell them that my brain must do three things at once. They ask about the breadth of topics and how I keep engaged. Answer: be interested in and curious about everything.

■ I host a Q&A with defence specialist Professor Michael Clarke on YouTube. We take viewer questions

on what comes next in Ukraine. It's a topic I have knowledge of and enjoy discussing. I recall that Thursday morning on 24 February in 2022 when the invasion began. At the time, I was doing *The Early Rundown*, a show that airs from 5-7am. I'd arrived in the office a lot earlier than my usual 2am because we knew that the invasion was imminent.

Putin appeared on Russian state television, announcing his "special military operation". The wires told us that explosions had been heard in Kyiv. I got into the studio, and we rolled. I had Mark Stone, our US correspondent, talking about what was happening at the UN, and Deborah Haynes in the Ukrainian capital.

We bounced from New York to Kyiv to London, each moment taking us further into this profound new reality. Warfare had returned to Europe. An aggressive nuclear-armed power had invaded its smaller neighbour. From this point on, everything was going to be different.

And, in my own small way, I got to help provide the first draft of it. We rolled without interruption until 7am, when the next presenter took over.

■ As I left the studio back in 2022, it was all a bit hazy. The sense that the world had tilted would become an ever-present feeling. My job for the next few weeks and months was to pay close attention to the Russian advance and Ukrainian resistance through maps and satellite images. But, on that morning, I went home, gave my son his breakfast, a big kiss, and dropped him off at nursery.

Kamali Melbourne is a Sky News reporter

COMFORT CLASSIC



Kind-hearted and generous: Arabella Weir and Alex Norton as Beth and Eric

Two Doors Down

BBC

With the sudden death at just 48 of Simon Carlyle in August 2023, the curtain came down on a hitherto unsung sitcom that was finally getting the attention it deserved. A decade earlier, *Two Doors Down* – created by Carlyle and writing partner Gregor Sharp – received its first outing as a one-off Hogmanay special. It was a slow-burn success before becoming a Scottish institution (winning RTS and Bafta Scotland awards along the way) and finally earning a deserved promotion from BBC Two to One for its 2022 Christmas special and seventh and final series the following autumn.

Two Doors Down is set in the fictional Latimer Crescent, not the Glasgow tenements beloved of gritty social-

This tale of nightmare neighbours in Glasgow is a joy. **Matthew Bell** pays homage to Britain's best-kept sitcom secret

realist writers. This is a middle-class estate on the edge of the city, more *Abigail's Party* than *The Royle Family*, let alone the uncompromisingly Glaswegian *Rab C Nesbitt*. But, unlike some Mike Leigh dramas, it never sneers; even the worst character (yes, you Cathy) has redeeming features.

The series, said Carlyle, is about “crazy neighbours”, which is not quite true. At its heart are Beth (Arabella Weir), husband Eric (Alex Norton) and son Ian (Jamie Quinn), the sort of

people you'd love to have next door. They are kind-hearted and generous but keep themselves to themselves.

Carlyle has said that Beth was inspired by his own mother and Ian by his experience of coming out as gay while growing up in Ayr. But you wouldn't want the monstrous Cathy (Doon Mackichan) – wineglass and vape on the go, interested only in herself and flaunting her next foreign holiday – for a neighbour.

Nor would you choose Christine (Scottish acting legend Elaine C Smith, Rab's long-suffering wife in *Rab C Nesbitt*), a hypochondriac pensioner. When she's not bemoaning her own ailments, she's relating the latest woe to befall her friend, “Pat over the back”. “She did enjoy a cigarette but had cut down quite considerably towards the end... the amputation had slowed down her rolling speed.”

A couple of times an episode, Christine's potty mouth is unbuttoned: "What's next – a dry ski slope on the fucking roof, eh?" she throws at Cathy, who is hosting a tacky hot-tub party. Reminiscing about laying a patio in her own garden, Christine recalls going "back and forwards with slabs in a wheelbarrow like Fred fucking West".

The set-up of almost every episode is essentially the same – the neighbours, uninvited, abuse the hospitality of Beth and Eric and outstay their welcome. But it's the razor-sharp writing and beautifully drawn characters that sustain the show, along with the performances of top-notch comic actors, largely known only in Scotland: Cathy's ever inappropriate husband, Colin (Jonathan Watson), Ian's sweet but dopey boyfriend Gordon (Kieran Hodgson), and good neighbours Michelle and Alan (Joy McAvoyn and Graeme "Grado" Stevely).

Two Doors Down may have been Britain's best-kept sitcom secret, but to its fans (and there are no bigger devotees than this writer's family), it has been the funniest show on telly of the past

TO ITS FANS,
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DECADE

decade. We love the double-takes of Beth, Eric and Ian, aghast at their neighbours' behaviour; swearsy Christine; a Cathy explosion; and the once-a-series moment when lovely Beth cracks and finally lets rip at the ingrates who have invaded her house.

Last year, the cast reunited for the first time since Carlyle's funeral at a sold-out Glasgow theatre, where they treated fans to a read-through of two scripts. Remembering the writer, who was known for the filthy jokes and ribald stories he heard as a habitu  of Glasgow's gay bars, Elaine C Smith said: "We reckoned that Simon was really all three women in the show – Cathy was his drag queen persona, Beth was his good person and Christine was who he really was." ■

All series of *Two Doors Down* are on BBC iPlayer.

Ear candy

The Rest is Classified

Popular culture has taught us that the world of spies is dripping with intrigue, sleaze and vodka martinis. Judged by the first episode of *The Rest is Classified*, that isn't far from the truth.

At least, that was the case in 1951, when the CIA carried out its first coup in Iran at the request of an oil-thirsty British government. This audacious Anglo-American venture makes for the perfect introduction to a podcast on espionage co-presented by a British journalist and an ex-CIA agent.

Armed with redacted documents and candid memoirs, Gordon Corera and David McCloskey drolly transport us to a time of analogue tradecraft, when coded messages were delivered via BBC radio programmes – and chased with a vodka lime or three.

If this sounds like that other Goalhanger podcast *The Rest is History*, that's because it is.

What sets it apart? Mostly the presenters' specialist CVs. As a journalist, Corera has spent 25 years oxymoronically "covering the world of spies and secrets". McCloskey, the US answer to John le Carr , is an ex-CIA analyst who now writes spy fiction.

First and foremost, both are clearly writers, and this has more pros than cons. They know how to tell a gripping story filled with memorable characters. At the centre of the Iranian coup was the bizarrely named Kermit Roosevelt, grandson of Theodore, whose professionalism left much to be desired.

Roosevelt supposedly masterminded the whole operation, which saw the CIA overthrow the country's Prime Minister Mosaddegh, who had nationalised Iran's oil industry, and assert the autocratic rule of the Shah. But we soon learn how this binge-drinking,

tennis-playing, undercover operative, codename James Lockridge, was prone to cursing his real surname ("Oh, Roosevelt!"). He was knocking back vodka limes and playing Broadway musicals on his gramophone through the nery days and nights of the coup.

It's at times like these when McCloskey's insider knowledge pays dividends as he reveals that the CIA still plays music in its offices as a last line of defence against listening devices. In his time at the agency, the faux-jingoistic theme tune of *Team America: World Police* (the chorus is: "America, fuck yeah!") could be heard blasting across all US bases in the Middle East.

From the Russian mole at the heart of the Manhattan Project to the CIA's

post-9/11 operations in Afghanistan, Corera and McCloskey have been casting their historical net far and wide. But as Donald Trump has gone about chaotically remaking the global order, they have also started discussing the security implications of

that in special topical episodes.

The first saw them dive into Trump's reversal of Biden's TikTok ban. Sure, it's helpful to have an ex-CIA analyst run a "Red Cell exercise" ("a briefing from the standpoint of a foreign adversary") on potential uses of the app for China's Ministry of State Security. This includes the harnessing of TikTok's recommendation algorithm for "cognitive warfare". You can all but hear Charlie Brooker plotting his next episode of *Black Mirror*.

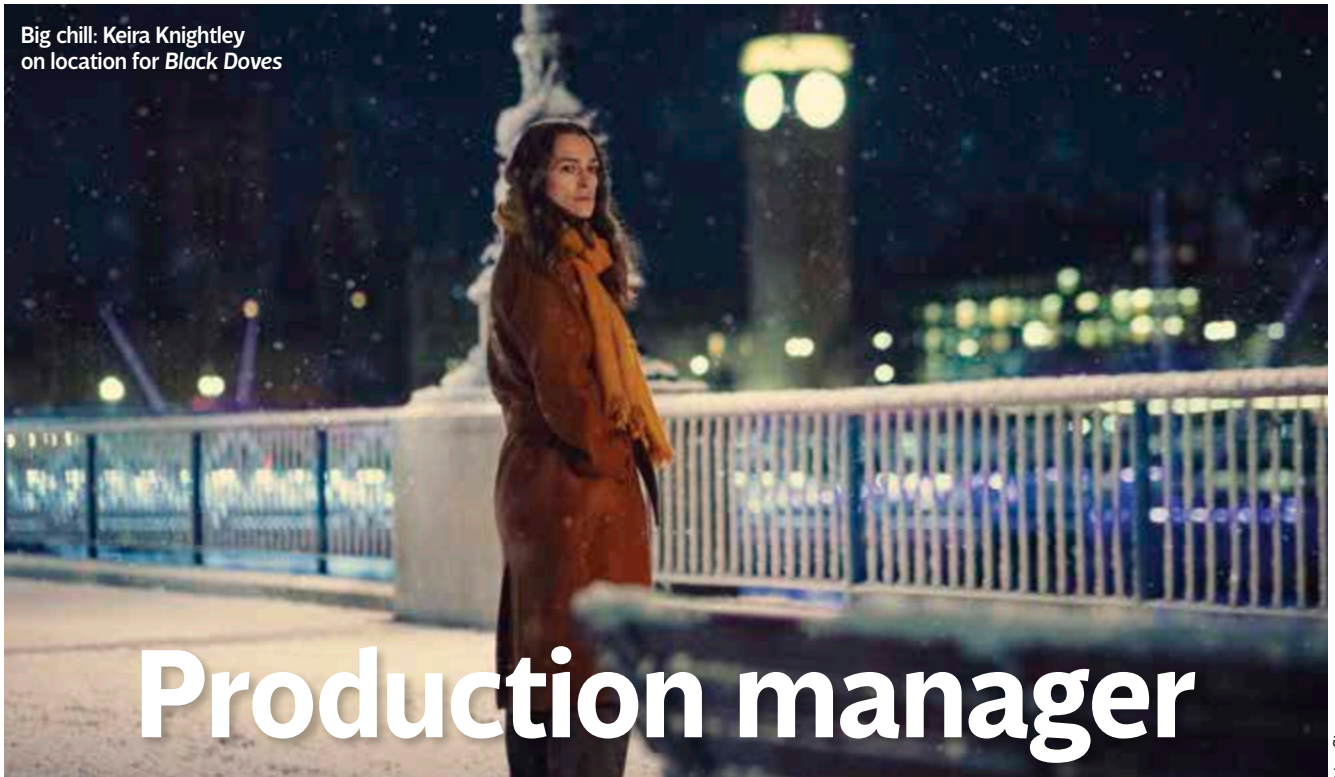
But, although informative, these topical talks can turn coldly technical and speculative, and miss the colourful, unredacted details that bring the historical episodes to life. The latest state secrets obviously do not belong on a podcast, but it has meant that, to date, I prefer it when the rest is declassified. ■

Harrison Bennett



WORKING LIVES

Big chill: Keira Knightley on location for *Black Doves*



Netflix

Joanna Osborn has kept two successful *Sister* dramas, *Black Doves* and *Landscapers*, on schedule and on budget. Currently, she's keeping HBO fantasy series *House of the Dragon* on track, and beating the drum for a better work-life balance in the industry.

What does the job involve?

I oversee the daily logistics of a production, working with the line producer to manage the budget and schedule. My role involves hiring equipment, crew, catering and facilities, as well as sourcing production offices and coordinating across all departments. Essentially, I keep the day-to-day machine running.

When are you brought on board?

Typically, I join during "soft prep", before official prep begins, to set up the production office. On *Black Doves*, I started in May 2023, months before filming in October. The shoot lasted until March 2024, and I stayed on for another couple of months to hand things over to post-production.

Did you always want to work in TV?

Initially, I wanted to work in theatre.

As a lively child, I often got into trouble at school, so my parents sent me to drama school to channel my energy. By 16, I was sick of classrooms and just wanted to work. I left school and moved towards film and TV.

How did you get to where you are?

I worked my way up in the production



'I keep the machine running': Joanna Osborn

department. At 17, I got my start as a runner on Channel 5's daytime chat show *Trisha Goddard*. After that, I took on low- and no-budget projects – often unpaid – before finding an opportunity as an assistant director (AD) in commercials. I then dipped into fashion before returning to production in film and TV in 2015. From there, I worked my way up from coordinator to manager.

What was your first show in that role?

Horrible Histories: The Movie – Rotten Romans. I was hired as a production coordinator then stepped up to manager during the shoot. My first full production manager credit was the first season of *Bridgerton*.

Did you enjoy working on *Black Doves*?

It was fun but tough. We had lots of night shoots in freezing temperatures. Shooting in central London is logistically challenging but I had a very supportive line producer (Emma Downes) and producer (Harry Munday), which made all the difference.

What are you working on now?

House of the Dragon. We have three

production teams operating different units: I'll be looking after the location unit. However, I'm expecting my second child and will be going on maternity leave before the shoot wraps.

Is it hard working in TV as a mother?

Work-life balance in the industry needs to change. For the first 13 years of my career, I worked long hours and sacrificed my personal life for the job – until I hit burnout. The Covid pandemic made me reassess and, after having my first daughter, I knew I had to make changes. The industry isn't structured for working parents, especially mothers. When we started *Black Doves*, my daughter was 18-months-old, and our line producer had six-month-old twins. We supported each other throughout the shoot to maintain that balance. That was invaluable and rare.

What changes have you made?

I advocate to work 9 to 5 in prep, which we largely achieved on *Black Doves*. I stagger my team's working hours to cover the full day, without working excessive overtime. Lack of flexible working options drives many women away, especially those in on-set roles; there's a huge drop-off when they enter their 30s and want

families. We're losing so much talent. If you read the recent Looking Glass survey on mental health in film and TV, it's clear we need to change the culture throughout the industry and support alternative ways of working, like job shares, compressed hours and hybrid working. Too many young people are leaving because they're unwilling to work our unsustainable hours.

Can things go wrong at work?

Absolutely. On *Sister's* black comedy *Landscapers*, for Sky Atlantic, we were due to film in a disused magistrates' court but two days before shooting we had a flood. The plumber discovered 90 leaks across the building – we pumped out 174,000 litres of water.

What is best and worst about the job?

Best is the pace and variety – it's always exciting. Worst is the stress and exhaustion and dealing with difficult personalities. On-set behaviour has improved over my 18 years in the industry, but there is still problematic behaviour – sexual harassment and bullying. More work needs to be done.

What makes a good production manager, and how do you become one?

Strong interpersonal skills are crucial.

You interact with crew members at every level, often under pressure. You need to juggle multiple responsibilities while keeping a level head. Most people work their way up through the production office – starting as a runner, then moving through roles like secretary, assistant coordinator, coordinator and finally production manager. But you can also transition from locations or AD roles.

What's your advice for new starters?

Get hands-on experience in different departments – you might discover a role you never knew existed. Network constantly and nurture those connections, as most jobs come through people we know. I learned on the job, but film school can also be valuable.

On *Black Doves*, you ran ScreenSkills' High-end TV Skills Fund's First Break programme...

I'm passionate about diversity and inclusion, particularly as our industry is hard to break into. When I started, I had no connections or guidance, so I understand how challenging it can be. The industry is still nepotistic – you'll often see the same surname down a unit list. First Break helps newcomers gain their first credit, exposing them to different departments and giving a taste of the demanding lifestyle. Simone Haynes was brilliant on *Black Doves* – she shadowed on the show for three weeks, rotating through departments, and when our production assistant left, we offered her the job. She has since gone on to work on other high-end TV productions.

What is your career highlight?

Landscapers. It was an incredibly creative show with a truly collaborative team. I had an amazing working relationship with line producer Harry Munday and producer Katie Carpenter.

What show would you have loved to work on?

Severance, for its masterful world-building, *Chernobyl* for its historical storytelling, balancing large-scale production with intimate performances, and *Motherland* for its sharp writing and hilarious take on parenthood. ■

Joanna Osborn was interviewed by Matthew Bell.



'Incredibly creative': David Thewlis and Olivia Colman on location for *Landscapers*

Sky

OUR FRIEND IN BRISTOL

This year, the BBC is set to launch the drama *Reunion* (written by deaf Bristolian Billy Mager), ITV's crime thriller *Code of Silence* stars deaf actor Rose Ayling-Ellis, and *Retreat*, a forthcoming BFI-funded thriller, is written and directed by Ted Evans, who is deaf, and features a deaf-led cast.

Then there's the growing trend of deaf contributors on many of our most popular factual entertainment shows, with 2025 already seeing Imy as a contestant on *The Great Pottery Throw Down* and Sarah and Jon on Stacey Solomon's *Sort Your Life Out*.

Lesser known is the work of LumoTV (formerly BSLBT, the British Sign Language Broadcasting Trust), which commissions programmes across all genres that highlight the deaf and sign language communities. Established in 2008 to offer commercial broadcasters an alternative way to provide sign language output, it is proud to be the only sign language-based commissioning body in the world. Currently, its programmes run on Channel 4, Sky and Together TV, and stream on LumoTV's website.

Commissions from LumoTV have strict criteria, not only to make engaging programmes that stand up against any other shows on their partner channels, but also to use the UK's leading deaf talent behind the camera as key creatives.

It also prioritises training and development to maintain a future pipeline of deaf talent – with the goal that this talent pool can work across both deaf/BSL content and mainstream programmes.

Series one of *Sign2Win*, the world's first gameshow in British Sign



Jon Craig

Rachel Drummond-Hay hails an incredible year for BSL and deaf-led productions

Language, was commissioned in 2021, with the fourth series due to air later this year. It has deaf culture and talent at its core – from the language (deaf or not, all contestants have to play in BSL) and the games that are played to the team that makes it.

It is a genuinely mixed deaf/hearing collaboration, with deaf talent at all levels, from the studio director and editor to runners and trainees. Not only has it proved hugely popular with a deaf audience, it has also been acquired by Challenge – home to many of TV's best gameshows.

Bristol has a legacy of nurturing deaf talent, on screen and off.

**'WE MUST
TAP INTO THE
HUGE CREATIVE
POTENTIAL OF
DEAF TALENT'**

See Hear, the BBC's flagship deaf magazine series, was made in Bristol for more than 40 years, and in 1978 the Centre for Deaf Studies was established at the University of Bristol.

As the first higher education institute in Europe, it concentrated solely on research and education that aimed to benefit the deaf community, making Bristol a hub for deaf talent across all genres. More than 100 LumoTV/BSLBT programmes have been made in Bristol over the past six years.

In spite of all the positives, it's not all rosy for Bristol and the West of England. The Centre for Deaf Studies is long gone, and last year the *See Hear* tender was won by Signpost Entertainment, meaning that the base (and a lot of deaf talent) has moved to the North East.

But the growth of deaf talent shouldn't just be looked at through a regional lens. While we should celebrate the increasingly visibility of deaf individuals on our TV screens, and more and more deaf crew in production, we have to maintain momentum. This requires long-term investment in work-based training opportunities, especially for the profoundly deaf, as well as bolder casting decisions to include more deaf people, using BSL on screen.

We must tap into the huge creative potential of deaf talent for all productions. Adjustments for working with deaf people are simple if the attitude and will exists from production companies and commissioners.

And integrating deaf talent into a team, like working with any other diverse group, only enhances the quality of any production. ■

Rachel Drummond-Hay is Chair of RTS West of England and Managing Director of Drummer Television.

Game on

As *The Last of Us* makes a triumphant return for series two, James Bennett asks what it takes to turn a video game into TV gold



'Saving the planet': Bella Ramsey as Ellie in series two of *The Last of Us*

HBO

Enter Netflix, waving big bucks. Its target is a homespun UK cartoon that went viral on YouTube and spawned a spin-off video game.

The story's creator takes the Netflix deal, leaving purist fans furious at her "sellout". So furious that she winds up sprawled in the very graveyard where her story is set. Stabbed to death.

Phew! Yes, video game story arcs can be hot properties – witness *The Last of Us*, returning in triumph this month for series two – but are they really to die for?

The scenario above, you may realise, comes from JK Rowling's sixth Cormoran Strike novel, *The Ink Black Heart*, televised last December in BBC One's ongoing series of adaptations. Happily, HBO's *The Last of Us* has so

far managed to keep gamer fans the right side of murderous rage while also crossing over to a huge TV audience and winning rave reviews.

Only Amazon Prime's equally post-apocalyptic *Fallout*, also now filming for series two, has pulled off such a coup among TV shows that began life as video games. So what's the secret of successfully turning a video game into a TV sensation – and are there more gems out there in gamer-land, ripe for plunder?

Bronagh Monahan, co-founder of talent agency and production company MonRae, advises: "Respect the source material but don't treat it as gospel. *The Last of Us* worked because it understood that the heart of the game wasn't the zombies but the relationship between [the protagonists] Joel and Ellie. The key is to find

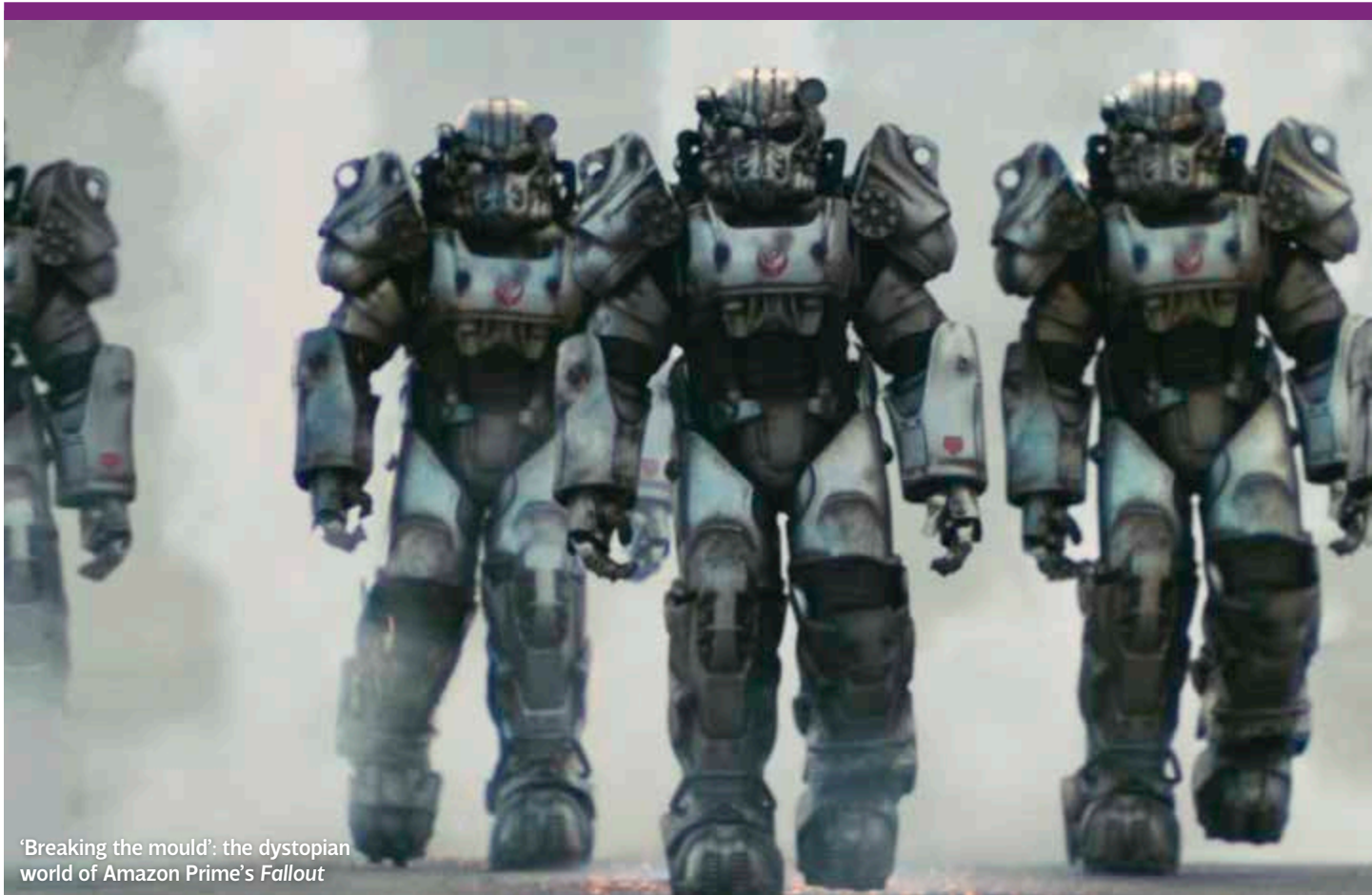
the emotional core and the unique mood, then translate that into a story that works for TV. Hiring people who actually like games helps."

As for the next potential hit, Monahan says: "Margot Robbie's prodco, LuckyChap, buying the rights to *The Sims* is genius. I could imagine a dystopian *Truman Show* feel to it."

Another tip comes from Jon Wardle, Director of the National Film and Television School: "I'd love to see *Red Dead Redemption* as an HBO series – it has the depth and emotional weight of a great prestige drama."

Wardle says there is no "universal secret" to success. "But a key reason *The Last of Us* and *Fallout* resonated is that they were made by people who love and understand the games."

Lisa Opie, a former BBC Studios executive and now MD at the video ►



'Breaking the mould': the dystopian world of Amazon Prime's *Fallout*

► game publisher Ubisoft, is in an ideal position to comment on the TV/video game transition, having crossed that bridge in her career. After years of lacklustre adaptations, she says that both *Fallout* and *The Last of Us* (known by fans as *TLOU*) “have undoubtedly broken the mould”.

Unlike many TV viewers of *TLOU*, she is well acquainted with the game: “As a player, you have agency – you define the narrative. In ‘passive media’ you’re taken there. When I watched the series, I was constantly clocking that I’d been in that scene, sat in that car. But I didn’t mind being guided through the drama. The fact that it was such a faithful recreation of an already much-loved story for gamers was important. The partnership between Neil Druckmann of [game developer] Naughty Dog and Craig Mazin [creator and producer of HBO’s masterful *Chernobyl*] was powerful.”

TLOU is set in a zombie-ravaged post-apocalyptic America, where a fungal parasite has left society in ruins. Launched in 2023, soon after the Covid pandemic, the drama hit home for millions around the world. *The Guardian*’s five-star review declared it “one of the finest TV shows you’ll see this year”: action-packed,

‘SEASON ONE OF FALLOUT WAS EXTRAORDINARY. THIS BLOWS IT OUT OF THE WATER’

yes, but also profound, intimate, meditative and often deeply moving.

Pedro Pascal (Joel) and Bella Ramsey (Ellie) – as father figure/daughter figure on a quest to save the planet – have immediate screen chemistry and drive a compelling narrative. Yet Mazin takes the risky decision to leave them behind, sometimes for almost entire episodes, to follow fascinating detours.

In the US alone, there were 30 million viewers per episode, Emmys galore and a legion of fans clamouring for more. This month, they get exactly that (no spoilers here) – along with the news that *TLOU* has already been commissioned for a third series.

Fallout, shown last year on Amazon Prime, also pulled off the trick of winning both critical acclaim and huge audiences. What’s more, it was a laugh. Another five-star review in *The Guardian* called it “funny, self-aware and

tense – an astonishing balancing act”.

We start with an atomic mushroom cloud obliterating 1950s America, then fast-forward (very fast and very forward) two centuries to life inside a bunker. Harmony reigns... until we see the horrors on the surface.

All this is drawn from a video game universe, created by Tim Cain and Leonard Boyarsky, that has expanded over the past 20 years and offers a huge reservoir of material for further TV series. Series two is filming now. Walton Goggins, who returns as the nasally-challenged Ghoul, has said: “Season one was extraordinary – but this blows it out of the water.”

Bringing such stories from bedroom console to front-room TV set has long been seen as a way for TV to woo vanishing younger viewers. Recent months have brought much hand-wringing about Gen Z: they don’t like work, don’t support democracy... and don’t even watch TV! Wardle comments: “*TLOU* succeeded not by bringing over the Gen Z audience but by expanding the game’s story world to connect with older audiences.”

Opie is ready with facts and figures about what young people *do* want: “Gen Z loves video games: 90% of them play regularly. Among Gen Alpha



HBO

this month for *A Minecraft Movie*. Netflix is also joining the fray with a TV series based on the world's bestselling game.

Clients of Bronagh Monahan's agency include popular YouTubers who boast millions of viewers for their *Minecraft* content. She says: "*Minecraft* fans are a unique breed. They're fiercely loyal but also deeply protective. The movie and TV show will need to capture that sense of wonder – not just turn it into a generic blocky adventure."

Wardle is the father of young children and says they can't wait to see the movie. But the jury is still out: "I don't think the transition is all upside – if the film turns out to be bad, it could make my kids see the game as less cool. Instead of adding to the experience, it could actually diminish it."

Rather than cherry-picking video games for "the next big adaptation", many in both industries realise that the future is one of convergence between the two platforms.

First, though, the TV industry must shape up, says Monahan:

"Its relationship with gaming can often

feel like a parent trying to impress their kids' mates: they're getting better, but there's still the occasional condescending pat on the head.

"The success of shows like *TLOU* has certainly forced some recalibration, but let's not pretend the snobbery has evaporated entirely."

The TV industry might also do well to tap into the raw creativity of the likes of Jon Wardle's games students at

the NFTS. He says: "Game engine tools like Unreal are now widely used in film and TV, driving the rise of virtual production. As a result, the skills and expertise my game students have are in high demand on virtual production stages across the country. But, in general, many game students are surprisingly indifferent to the opportunity.

"They got into games to create games, not just to serve as a resource for film and TV production."

He sees the future like this: "The holy grail is the ability to build once and deploy across multiple formats. So if you create the *Death Star*, for example, it can seamlessly exist as an environment in a game, a TV series and feature film – without remaking it each time.

"We haven't seen this fully realised yet, but I think that we're not far off."

'THE HOLY GRAIL IS TO BUILD ONCE AND DEPLOY OVER MULTIPLE FORMATS'

Monahan adds: "It's not about the graphics, it's about the feeling and the connection. Gaming is immersive, interactive and deeply personal. If TV can capture a fraction of that

magic, it'll be on to a winner." First, though, it must "stop assuming every gamer is a 14-year-old boy. I'd have hoped we've moved on from that".

Lisa Opie cites a tweet last year from OpenAI boss Sam Altman: "Movies are going to become video games and video games are going to become something unimaginably better."

She adds: "The opportunities for transmedia are only just emerging. Imagine a world where TV and games worked together – where you could watch an episode on TV that deepened the connection you'd made in a game, by creating a richer backstory – or showing you the future of the character you become.

"Imagine entering a world in a game that you knew how to navigate because you'd already seen it in a film or series."

She concludes: "I'm excited by the creative opportunities that bring us closer together. There is so much that TV and video games can learn from each other."

So, for anyone concerned about the future, the answer would seem to be... console yourself! ■

[born in 2010 or after], the number is even higher. In the UK, Gen Alpha gamers are especially engaged, with 62% playing for over five hours a week, compared with only 17% of Gen Z gamers.

Why are they hooked? "Video games fulfil so many more 'need states' than TV. Yes, they're offering entertainment, but they're also toys, puzzles and places to hang out."

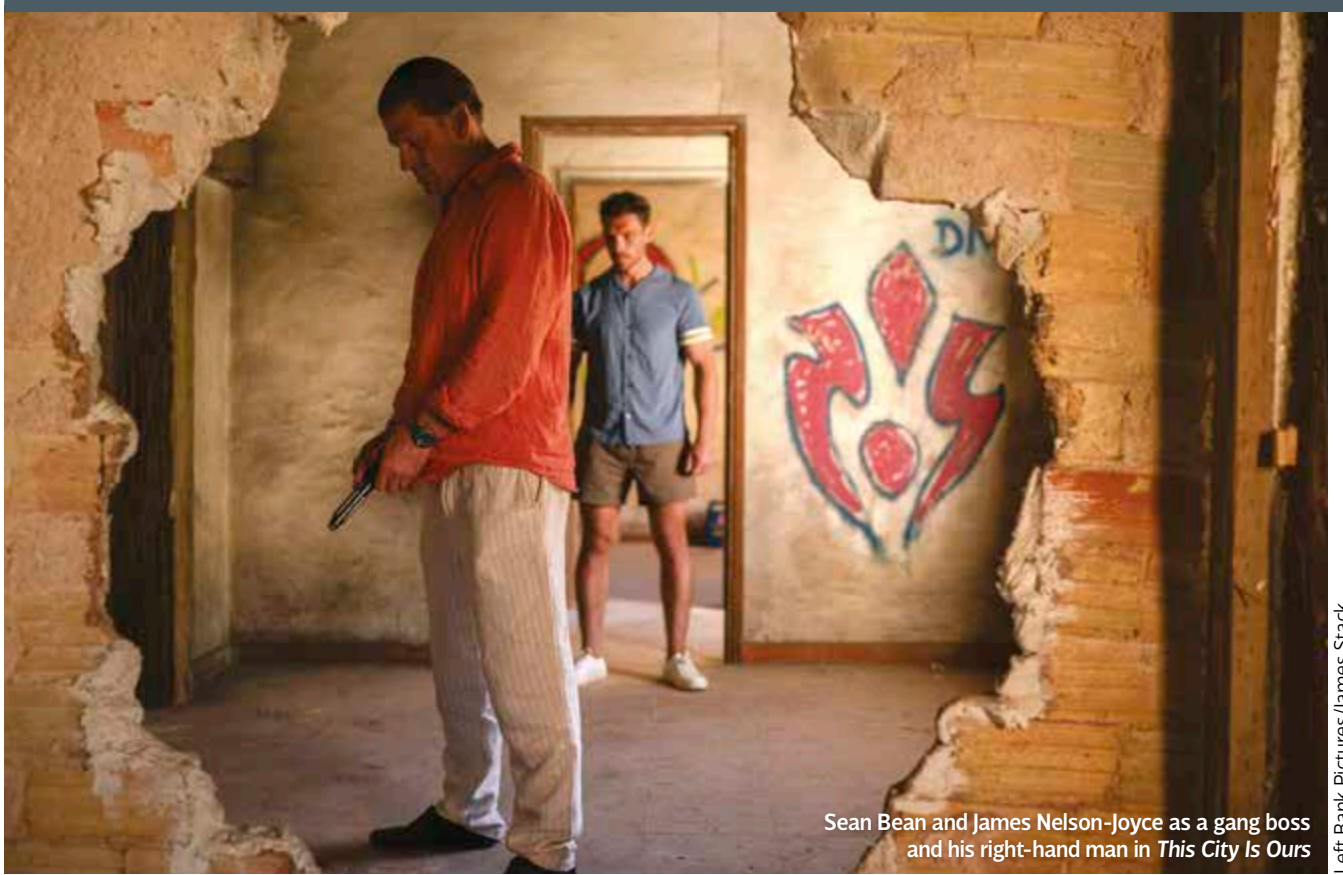
Talking of Gen Alpha, many of its members will be storming multiplexes



Game, movie and future TV show: *Minecraft*

Alarmy

Series two of The Last of Us will air on Sky Atlantic and NOW from 14 April.



Sean Bean and James Nelson-Joyce as a gang boss and his right-hand man in *This City Is Ours*

Left Bank Pictures/James Stack

The Scouse Sopranos

All gas, no brakes: that's how actor Kevin Harvey describes the wild ride of filming *This City Is Ours*, a gripping, new high-stakes crime drama from Left Bank Pictures.

Harvey, who plays gang member Bobby Duffy, was talking at an RTS North West screening of the BBC One series in Liverpool last month. The drama stars Sean Bean as Ronnie Phelan, boss of a Liverpool crime gang. Phelan got rich by importing cocaine with help from Colombian "amigos", based in Spain, and his younger right-hand man, Michael Kavanagh, played by James Nelson-Joyce, who recently starred in *A Thousand Blows*.

Kavanagh has been groomed to take over from Phelan, who plans to retire after one last consignment. But after falling in love with "outsider" Diana Williams (Hannah Onslow), the younger man sees a different kind of life opening up. Meanwhile, Phelan's wife, Elaine (Julie Graham), is the power behind the throne and has her own king-maker ambitions.

Organised crime in Liverpool takes centre stage in a new thriller from Left Bank. **Carole Solazzo** spills the beans

When that last consignment goes missing, Phelan's son, Jamie (Jack McMullen), demands action while Kavanagh is conflicted between the loyalty he owes the gang, and love for Diana and the family he longs to have.

Filming on the eight-part series began with a six-week shoot in Spain. Vital to lead director Saul Dibb's preparation were the locations, including the Phelans' villa. "It was like choosing a castle for a period film about a king and his court. That's the power dynamic," said Dibb the week after the screening. "It's a big character-driven piece like *The Sopranos*."

"You've got corridors inside and outside. Bedrooms. Round the pool, where everyone's got this public face," he said. "But they've all got secrets.

And you can see everyone but not necessarily hear them."

After beginning his career in documentary, realism is fundamental for Dibb. But we're not talking *Cathy Come Home*-style British 1960s realism. This is, after all, the Costa del Crime.

"Authenticity is the starting point for me," Dibb said. "We scouted a restaurant for a place where our family would meet the Colombians. Every time we went there, there was a group on a table who looked like gangsters."

Filming in Spain worked in the actors' favour too. "It's a real ensemble piece," McMullen told the screening audience. "It was good for us not to go home to our families. It gave us a chance to bond." Darci Shaw, who plays McMullen's partner, Melissa, agreed: "It felt like a proper family and made the characters real."

Stephen Butchard, writer and creator of the show, was working on the remaining five episodes while the first three were shot. "I began to see [the characters] as people, and that informed the writing," he told the audience. Onslow laughed: "The crew

ran a sweepstake on how everyone thought the series would end.”

“I won it!” said the writer.

Butchard had nothing but praise for the actors: “As we were going through the casting process, they were ticking all the right boxes. As soon as we started filming, they *were* the people [they played].”

Dibb described how the “chemistry test” in casting worked. “If you’re casting a couple, it’s important to see how they feel together. If you’re down to a shortlist, you’ll try different combinations of actors to see how they work. When these two people say these

‘IT’S A LOVE LETTER TO LIVERPOOL. I’M PROUD TO BE A PART OF IT’

words to each other, do you believe it?

“I make it as informal and intimate as possible, with no one else in the room. [For Onslow and Nelson-Joyce] we used a powerful, emotional scene from episode three.”

Butchard batted away potential criticism about linking Liverpool with crime yet again. Because it reflects Merseyside and its people, the series has a lot of humour: “It stems from the characters – they’re smart and witty. These are characters we have in Liverpool.” Nelson-Joyce agreed: “It’s a love letter to Liverpool. I’m so proud to be a part of it. The architecture is beautiful. You’ve got the river, and Crosby beach... I could go on for ever. But it’s the people who make this city.”

Butchard insisted that *This City Is Ours* is more than just a crime drama; “It’s exciting, first and foremost,” he said.



HBO

Edie Falco as Carmela Soprano...



... and Julie Graham as Elaine Phelan

Left Bank Pictures/james Stack

Married to the mob

‘Would “enabler” be an accurate job description for you? Or “accomplice”?’ This question, asked of Carmela Soprano by her therapist, could just as easily be addressed to Elaine Phelan in *This City Is Ours*. But Julie Graham believes her character is more complicated than that.

Unlike Carmela, who starts off in complete denial, setting herself up as the moral, dutiful wife, Graham said: ‘[Elaine] comes from a normal working-class background, and she meets Ronnie. She knows who he is and what he does right from the beginning.

‘[Initially], she’s very much the matriarch – happy to sit back and let everything happen around her, although she’s very aware of what’s going on within the family business. She wants Ronnie to step back, and she wants her son to take over.’

But things take a darker turn. ‘Through a series of events,’ Graham told *Television*, ‘Elaine is forced to take a front seat in the family business.’

No wonder the actor – who has portrayed every type of character, from self-absorbed lesbian-next-door in comedy drama *At Home with the Braithwaites* to *Shetland*’s strait-laced Kelly, to hard-as-nails prisoner

Harkness in *Time* – was immediately attracted to the role.

‘It was the writing. I expected big things from Stephen Butchard – he’s such a brilliant writer for women. And the way my character was sold to me. I was gripped from the beginning.’

In *The Sopranos*, mob wives tend to be enablers, and other women are either mistresses or prostitutes, but Butchard’s women in *This City Is Ours* have far more agency. ‘Rachel, played by Laura Aikman, is our niece,’ Graham said. “Together with Elaine, she runs the money-laundering side of the business. But Rachel has her own ambitions to rise up through the ranks and take more of a lead in the business.

‘Darci Shaw’s character, Melissa, is essentially Elaine’s daughter-in-law. She’s pulling strings in the background. And Cheryl Crawford (Saoirse-Monica Jackson), who starts off as a bit of an outsider, turns into a time bomb waiting to go off and blow holes in the whole organisation. It’s so different from all the other gangster stuff I’ve seen.’

All of which shows that, despite the obvious parallels between *This City Is Ours* and *The Sopranos*, these Merseyside women are a world away from Carmela and co in New Jersey.



Left Bank Pictures/james Stack

Troubled waters: Saul Dibb directs a poolside scene at the Spanish villa

“But there are nuances. A *Macbeth* stroke to it – a family falling apart. It’s about greed and love. The love story with James’s character is a big part of it. When you get down to it, these are not nice people. But I’m hoping the audience will fall in love with them.” ■

All episodes of *This City Is Ours* are available now on BBC iPlayer and airing each Sunday on BBC One. The screening and Q&A, hosted by Jay Hynd, were held at Liverpool’s FACT centre on 13 March, and produced for RTS North West by Beautiful Productions.

A knight in front of the telly

As the BBC attempts to turn chess into a ratings winner, **Mark Lawson** rewinds a century of quirky sports on TV

Your move: Anya Taylor-Joy stars in Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*

Although much broadcasting has changed beyond recognition over time, one constant is a popular pastime. The earliest experimental wireless broadcasts listed on the Television & Radio Database (tvrdb.com, warmly recommended to anyone interested in the media) include 1925 talks by Mr CG Butcher on “The Origin Of Chess” and Mr Brian Hanley on “Chess: The Queen’s Gambit Declined”.

Now, 100 years on, BBC Two launches *Chess Masters: The Endgame*, in which, promises presenter Sue Perkins, “12 rising stars of the growing UK chess community will battle it out!”

That the game can be the subject of popular entertainment should not be a surprise: *Chess*, a 1986 musical by Tim Rice and Abba’s Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson, will be revived on Broadway later this year, and *The Queen’s Gambit*, a 2020 Netflix series about a chess grandmistress, is cited by one of the younger participants in *Chess Masters* as her inspiration.

The BBC’s renewed interest seems partly to result from seeking formats to attract viewers of the successful brain-game *The Traitors*. These contestants meet in a grand Welsh setting where they seek to outwit each other in matches and puzzles that Perkins describes as “war on a board”.

There is also, though, an innuendo element from one of the host’s former shows, *The Great British Bake Off*. One round is called “The Bashing Bishop” and – for viewers unfamiliar with the schoolboy euphemism for self-abuse – Perkins later refers to a male contestant “whipping out his bishop”.

But, beyond the search for

THE BBC TOOK ALL THE SPORT IT COULD GET, SO ITV GAVE US BIG DADDY AND GIANT HAYSTACKS

Traitors-like brainy entertainment with a side order of smut (how long before Perkins does a “soft pawn” gag?), chess again joins the list of unlikely broadcast sports. Others have included, at various times, barrel jumping, bass and tuna fishing, tenpin bowling, ice speedway and lacrosse.

With the range of games available across channels today, it seems extraordinary that sporting authorities were initially so resistant to cameras. *Competition: 1955-1974*, Asa Briggs’s fifth volume in the history of British broadcasting, records that a parliamentary restriction meant that, from 1955-57, the result of the Derby could be broadcast only over a still picture of the finish. In 1958 and 1959, BBC cameras were allowed to film the event – but only for use in news bulletins. Even when the whole race was recorded, it was at first not permitted to be screened in full until 21 days after the winner passed the post.

With horse racing, there is likely to have been a vestigial Victorian fear about encouraging gambling, but the

broader concern that shaped the early decades of broadcast sport was that, if people could watch at home, they wouldn't turn out in the cold. For a long time after its launch in 1964, *Match of the Day* was not allowed to print in TV listings the match (or, later, matches) to be covered. Growing up in Leeds, I remember the excited rumour on the school playground that BBC vans had been seen at Elland Road.

This fear of TV stealing fans had the effect of making sports with smaller followings more willing to take the risk. But the fact that they were initially more likely to be seen on ITV resulted from another development in the rights fights. When the big players – football, cricket, rugby, tennis, horse racing, golf – became more willing to deal with television, the BBC, as a deliberate strategy, bought up every available contest.

These prestige events were not always suited to broadcast. In cricket, the ball is in play for only a few minutes each hour, especially if fast bowlers are operating. TV filled the gaps initially with punditry and then, as technology allowed, slow-motion replays. BBC Radio's *Test Match Special* made the absence of action an advantage by foregrounding listeners' letters and the detailed tasting of cakes sent in by the audience.

The progress of televised sport was also restricted by technology, with the ambition to broadcast or record events initially running ahead of available cameras and video recorders. Briggs's history notes that the BBC Sports division had to "fight hard" for the teleprinters that made possible the desired quick results service; older generations remember learning of football results – and, for many in those days, the possible profitability of their pools coupon – from a device that resembled a cross between a giant typewriter and a player piano.

However, whatever the problems, the BBC took all the sport it could get. There was a joke in the 1970s that the reason ITV showed so much wrestling was that



Bullseye: darts champion Luke Littler.
Below: Chess Masters host Sue Perkins

Alamy

the BBC was buying up events in alphabetical order.

It was certainly true that ITV had a very short list to choose from. Whereas *Grandstand* (BBC, 1958–2007) cut between various finals, tests and opens, its rival, *World of Sport* (ITV, 1965–85), led on wrestling (making Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks famous) and almost anything vaguely athletic for which pictures were on sale.

"World" in the title reflected the areas the Beeb chequebook was unlikely to have reached. Having to scrape the barrel, *World of Sport* did indeed broadcast the World Barrel Jumping Championships, as well as Nascar racing and US-led varieties of bowling (such as tenpin), while the BBC inevitably had the lawn variety tied up in its series *Top Crown*.

That show had started in 1968 at a time when the manicured turf was seen as telegenic for colour television, introduced the year before in Britain. The first colour transmission boasted another game played on grass – tennis from Wimbledon.

As David Attenborough, then controller of BBC Two, acknowledges in his memoirs, one now popular sport initially regarded as eccentric viewing was also launched as a showcase for the new spectrum: snooker's palette incorporated not just deep green but also multi-coloured balls – perfect for the 1969 debut of *Pot Black*.

Darts, a further early-70s addition to the broadcast sports roster, was also

partly driven by its suitability for cameras: an early effective use of split-screen was the sharing of the shot between the thrower and a close-up of the board. But there was also a demographic motive. Throughout its history, television has sought to attract resistant audiences, and darts was a predominantly male working-class hobby.

So it also featured in one of the most bizarre TV sports shows, *The Indoor League* (ITV, 1973–78), in which former England fast-bowler Fred Trueman, pint and pipe in hand, presided over a feast of Northern proletarian games, including cribbage, shove ha'penny and bar billiards, as well as darts.

A further advantage for ITV was that, even at its most imperial, the BBC never coveted pub games – apart from darts, in which it did take an increasing interest.

Chess Masters represents a reversal of the trend that first drove TV sport. The BBC has progressively lost prize events – live cricket and football, motor racing, rugby, boxing – to Sky, ITV and, now, Amazon Prime.

The Hundred, a short-form cricket competition that began in England in 2021, has the distinction (or, for cricket traditionalists, disgrace) of having been created specifically for the BBC to buy: a match of 200 balls (40 shorter than the existing Twenty20 format, shown by Sky), it is brief enough not to disrupt too much a general-purpose network such as BBC Two.

So the BBC can play with that (for as long as it lasts, having been accused of destroying the long-form county game) – and also with *Chess Masters* – using a sport in the public domain.

Just don't tell Sue Perkins that a grandmaster was recently accused of cheating by means of wireless vibrating anal beads! ■



Phone a friend? Chris Tarrant
in *Millionaire* mode

Chris almighty

ITV

Chris Tarrant has been a TV face for five decades, graduating from the anarchy of fabled children's show *Tiswas* to become the host of

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? Away from the cameras, his easy charm made his Capital breakfast show one of the most popular radio programmes of its era.

At the end of last year, he announced his retirement from television. But before fleeing the limelight, Tarrant looked back over his career, anecdotes at the ready, in the company of Sangeeta Bhabra, presenter of ITV regional news programme *Meridian*, for an RTS event in Southampton.

The way the self-deprecating Tarrant tells it, his TV career was accidental. After leaving Birmingham University with an English degree, he tried teaching for a year and did a succession of odd jobs. One of those took him to the showground in Kenilworth, where he saw a TV reporter plying his trade.

"I remember thinking, 'That's not a bad gig.' It didn't look difficult. And I'll be honest... it's *not* difficult," he said.

The young Tarrant wrote to lots of TV companies. "It was a dreadful

letter... very brash. It included this phrase: 'I am the face of the 70s – this is your last chance to snap me up!'"

Two ITV regional companies, Yorkshire Television and ATV in Birmingham, saw potential and offered him a start. Tarrant remained unenthused: "I was living in Dorset and fishing just about every day of the week – I loved it. I didn't really want to [leave]."

Apparently, Tarrant put off the opportunity for months, making excuse after excuse. When he finally did take up ATV's offer, he soon found himself in a full-time job, working for the news team. Clearly, he was better than he remembers, although he was having none of it. "I wasn't very good," he maintained. "I was interviewing shop stewards, mayors, politicians, local councillors, and I disliked them all. Their lips were moving and I just knew they were lying."

"I think [ATV] would have got rid of me because I really was a waste of

space. I didn't enjoy it at all. Luckily for me, they gave me, as a try-out, lighter items, and I was in heaven. Every night, some lunatic would come in, and I interviewed them."

This included a man who did charity walks with ferrets down his trousers. A couple of years later, Tarrant was chosen to co-host a new children's programme, *Tiswas*. "It became a legendary show and it changed my life," he told the RTS audience, many of whom were local students.

The cool kids watched the manic, anarchic *Tiswas* – which started out as an ATV Midlands show and was then taken up by ITV regions around the country – rather than the staid, Noel Edmonds-fronted *Multi-Coloured Swap Shop* on BBC.

Tiswas featured slapstick from the Phantom Flan Flinger, sketches (Lenny Henry as Trevor McDoughnut, spoofing the newsreader) and Bob Carolgees' unhinged puppet, Spit the Dog, who

did little other than spit. Parents were put in cages and drenched; pop stars were covered in gunge.

Tarrant, who hosted the show from 1974 to 1981 and also produced some series, recalled: "It was such a laugh, so much fun, unscripted, chaotic. It became a real cult thing – we were like rock stars everywhere we went."

The show made his name, although

'TISWAS WAS UNSCRIPTED, AND CHAOTIC. IT BECAME A REAL CULT THING'



For cool kids:
Tarrant on *Tiswas*

Alamy

OTT, a late-night adult version of *Tiswas* for ITV, proved less successful and only lasted one series.

Tarrant moved to Capital Radio in 1984 and stayed for two decades, the last 17 years of those as host of the breakfast show. "It was the best fun; it was such a laugh. I met so many of my heroes," said Tarrant.

At Capital, Tarrant's breakfast show was initially produced by David Briggs, who also devised most of its games and quizzes. After leaving Capital, Briggs concentrated on creating quizzes and – with Mike Whitehill and

Steven Knight (who would go on to create *Peaky Blinders* and *SAS Rogue Heroes*) – devised *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Busy with his radio show and *Tarrant on TV*, a long-running ITV series featuring clips from bizarre TV shows, Tarrant recalled "not wanting to do this programme at all". But he agreed to host a pilot, and that changed his mind. Tarrant himself came up with its most enduring catchphrase – "But we don't want to give you that" – and the trademark long pauses designed to rack up the tension.

Millionaire was a TV phenomenon

for ITV from its first episodes in September 1998, attracting audiences of more than 19 million in its early days and becoming a big seller internationally. Tarrant hosted the quiz for almost 600 episodes before leaving in 2014.

Fittingly, for a man who professes to prefer the rod and line to TV, one of his final TV shows was Channel 5's *Chris Tarrant Goes Fishing*. ■

Report by Matthew Bell. 'An evening in conversation with Chris Tarrant' was held at Southampton Solent University on 19 March and produced by RTS Southern.

Is that your final (cough, cough) answer?

Major Charles Ingram, who did and then didn't win the £1m jackpot in 2001, is *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*'s most infamous contestant. Ingram's prize money was withheld over suspicions that his answers were assisted by helpful coughs from the audience, largely by a college lecturer, Tecwen Whittock, but also by his wife Diana Ingram.

Almost two decades later, his story was told in James Graham's play and subsequent ITV drama, *Quiz*, with Michael Sheen (pictured right) as a note-perfect Chris Tarrant. At the RTS event, Tarrant recalled that Ingram 'came into rehearsal and was just hopeless – he was all over the place. He was convinced that Rupert Murdoch was South African. He seemed a nice enough bloke but we didn't think he was going to go very far.

'He was on over two nights, Sunday and Monday. [On Sunday,] he had one lifeline left. That is not how

million-pound winners [perform]. Most of them get to about £250,000 before they pause for breath, but he was really struggling.

'The next night, he came in and he seemed very confident, considering how badly he'd done. He went up to £8,000, £16,000, £32,000. Forget about what happened afterwards – it was the most exciting television programme I've ever hosted. It got to £500,000. I've said to probably a dozen or so people over



the years: "Now look, you've got 500 grand. If you go to the next question and get it right, and I hope you do, you win a million quid. But if you get it wrong, you lose £468,000". The only one who didn't flinch and said "Let's play" was the major, because he knew he was going to answer the next question, and he knew he was going to win a million quid. '[Later that night, the producers] sat through the whole show: basically, with every question up to £1m, there was this cough, which is quite extraordinary. Then they rang the police...'

Soon enough, Ingram had swapped the *Millionaire* chair for a seat in the dock. 'The judge was obviously a fan of the show. [After I answered a question,] he leaned over to me and said: "Mr Tarrant, is that your final answer?"'

Both Charles and Diana Ingram along with Whittock were found guilty of cheating (in legal language: 'procuring the execution of a valuable security by deception') and received a suspended sentence and fine.

ITV

Life after Technicolor

Two of the UK's big six visual effects houses fell with the global giant. So where next for Britain's VFX sector? **Simon Bucks** reports

Amid the glitz and glamour of the Oscars, the Visual Effects award is rarely high profile. Not this year. Coming soon after the collapse of Technicolor, which cost thousands of jobs globally, the future of the VFX industry was under scrutiny.

Paul Lambert, VFX supervisor on *Dune: Part Two*, led the team to collect their reward for a remarkable creative and technical achievement. Slipped into his acceptance speech was a brief credit for one of the VFX collaborators, “the incredible MPC”. The audience understood: it was a heartfelt tribute to one of Technicolor’s British casualties.

What went wrong has been extensively rehearsed and debated: Covid, Hollywood strikes, Brexit, the bursting of the post-Covid bubble – all common to the entire industry. Plus, in the case of Technicolor, an under-bidding strategy to win business.

These were multiple perfect storms,

according to Neil Hatton, Chief Executive of the UK Screen Alliance, which represents 190 UK post-production firms, many in visual effects. “2022 was peak year for VFX,” says Hatton. “The streamers were driving for subscriber growth, fuelled through original shows. Then, in 2023, Wall Street said, ‘What really turns us on is a bit of profit’. So they had to throttle back on production.

“Technicolor is a tale of woe, of a corporate culture coming in and taking over creative businesses. People close to the industry knew it was in the last-chance saloon; the only surprise was that it took so long.”

The collapse was a seminal moment for the UK’s Soho-based visual effects industry, says Hatton. Suddenly, two of the country’s “big six” VFX houses, MPC and The Mill – both part of the Technicolor stable – were gone.

VFX is ubiquitous in film and TV, not just in sci-fi and fantasy, though that is where it is most evident. *Wicked*



Wardour Street, Soho, traditional home of Britain's VFX sector

had more than 2,000 visual effects shots. Warner Bros. responded to anti-CGI sentiment by claiming that *Barbie* was mainly done with in-camera practical effects... but experts spotted 1,300 VFX shots.

“It doesn’t have to be dragons and mermaids,” says Hatton. “Imagine recreating the frontage of Buckingham Palace. There may be an actual archway done on set, in a back lot, and the rest of the palace will be digitally created and blended into the shot. Most people wouldn’t have any idea.”

Visual effects are present in 80% of productions, says Hatton. Often it is simple “rotoscoping”: drawing round and cutting out an unwanted image, such as a stray cable. And Britain is a world leader in the craft. “In the 90s, visual effects in Britain was a cottage industry,” says Will Cohen, a VFX executive with credits including *Doctor Who*.

“It was people working in the evening, in downtime, to experiment with compositing and colour technology. All this science, art and tech, trying to find a way to get these things done as part of a digital revolution.

“Then we had a decade of *Harry*



Global giant Technicolor collapsed in February



All photographs: Alamy

Potter in the UK, and what came out the other side was a centre of excellence to rival the US West Coast.”

Cohen, a former MD of The Mill and ex-CEO of Milk, says that VFX today is especially challenging, partly because it needs so many people. “Labour is the biggest cost to a visual effects house. It’s also difficult to accurately cost a project. So it’s a tough business, even when times are good.”

Despite hitting the headlines after Technicolor’s collapse, visual effects can be a Cinderella industry – doing brilliant, vital work yet often barely noticed. “It’s because we are at the end of the line. We are treated like a service provider,” says Cohen. “It sits in budgets under post-production, which come last in the credits, even though it might involve 500 people who made the show come to life.”

And there’s the rub. In a production timeline, visual effects’ backend position has often seen it lose out in the tax credit stakes. With 80% of production costs eligible, producers have tended to shoot in the UK while doing VFX in countries with better tax benefits.

By the time you read this, that

‘THINGS ARE PICKING UP SLIGHTLY. THERE ARE SIGNS OF RECOVERY’

should be changing. After a campaign run by the UK Screen Alliance, the Government is legislating to remove the 80% cap for visual effects so that 100% of VFX costs will be eligible for tax credits.

Will that help? “It has prompted sales enquiries – much more than there were last year,” says Hatton. Once the switch is confirmed, he expects it to convert to tangible bookings worth up to £175m this year. “If we hadn’t got this change, we would be in an awful position because other parts of the world are offering very competitive tax credits.”

How can VFX in the UK reinvent itself post-Technicolor? Joseph Steel, co-founder of Visualskies, which has worked on films including *Paddington in Peru* and *Napoleon*, sees answers.

“Historically, visual effects happened after the shoot, with post-production finishing the shots,” says Steel.

“The trend now is towards ‘final pixel’, when the director points the camera at the subject and background, and the visual effects are all done in camera at point of capture. A show like *The Mandalorian* or *House of the Dragon* is shot against an LED volume wall – basically a huge high-end TV – behind the actors, with the content on the screen created in advance by 3D artists.”

Steel says this method is good for VFX in the UK because it is harder to shift the work abroad. Now, with a government innovation grant, he is developing an AI evolution of the process, allowing the director and DoP to see the finished shot on their monitors in real time.

AI will also help Steel streamline the process of creating “digital twins” – virtual versions of actors to populate crowd scenes or allow the character to float in space, for example. “We are working with Bournemouth University to do it with 12 cameras, instead of the 120 it takes now.”

Steel’s message, widely shared, is the need for VFX companies to be nimbler, selling their skills and technology wherever there is demand. As well as TV, film and adverts, Visualskies has done surveys for Glastonbury and the Houses of Parliament restoration project. “Being agile in this modern landscape seems to be the way to go. It’s certainly the future for us.”

The health of VFX, though, remains inextricably linked to the state of TV and film, and some are seeing encouraging indicators. “In terms of the production sector, things are picking up slightly. There are signs of shoots of recovery,” says Gill Hind, COO and Director of TV at Enders Analysis.

“But the high-end peak has gone, because the streamers and some big US broadcasters flooded it. It was never sustainable. I think we’ll get back to stuff that’s not as expensive to make.”

That may not be good news for costly VFX, but Hatton remains optimistic. “Yes, we’ll see change, but the big blockbusters are still coming out, like the next *Mission Impossible*. And the *Harry Potter* TV series – that’s 10 years of work.

“London is holding its own for a really good reason: we are damned good at it.” ■

Where there's a will

When a big-name tycoon is found dead under suspicious circumstances, it looks like we're in for a classic whodunnit. But things change quickly. By the end of episode one of *I, Jack Wright*, the show has expanded into an explosive family feud involving a legal battle, as Jack Wright's will is read, revealing that key family members have been frozen out.

The creator of the series, Chris Lang (*Unforgotten* and *The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe*), says: "You know it's going to lead to bun fights for the next 10 years". UKTV's Head of Drama, Helen Perry, adds: "The one person who can put the arguments to rest is the very person who can't because he's dead."

Airing on U&Alibi, UKTV's crime channel, the six-part series stars Trevor Eve (*Shoestring*, *Unforgotten*) as the patriarch and Nikki Amuka-Bird as his disinherited wife. John Simm plays the wayward son from a former marriage

Family feuds drive a gripping new UKTV thriller. **Shilpa Ganatra** hears how *Unforgotten* writer Chris Lang fashioned a tale of greed and mistrust

who is counting on his inheritance to keep his music label running. Daniel Rigby is the son primed to take over as CEO of Wright's business.

Inheritance is a theme propelling many dramas involving warring families, whether set in corporate America like *Succession*, on a ranch (*Yellowstone*) or in the realms of fantasy, like *Game of Thrones*. But what sets *I, Jack Wright* apart are the mysteries and idiosyncrasies that often feature in wills.

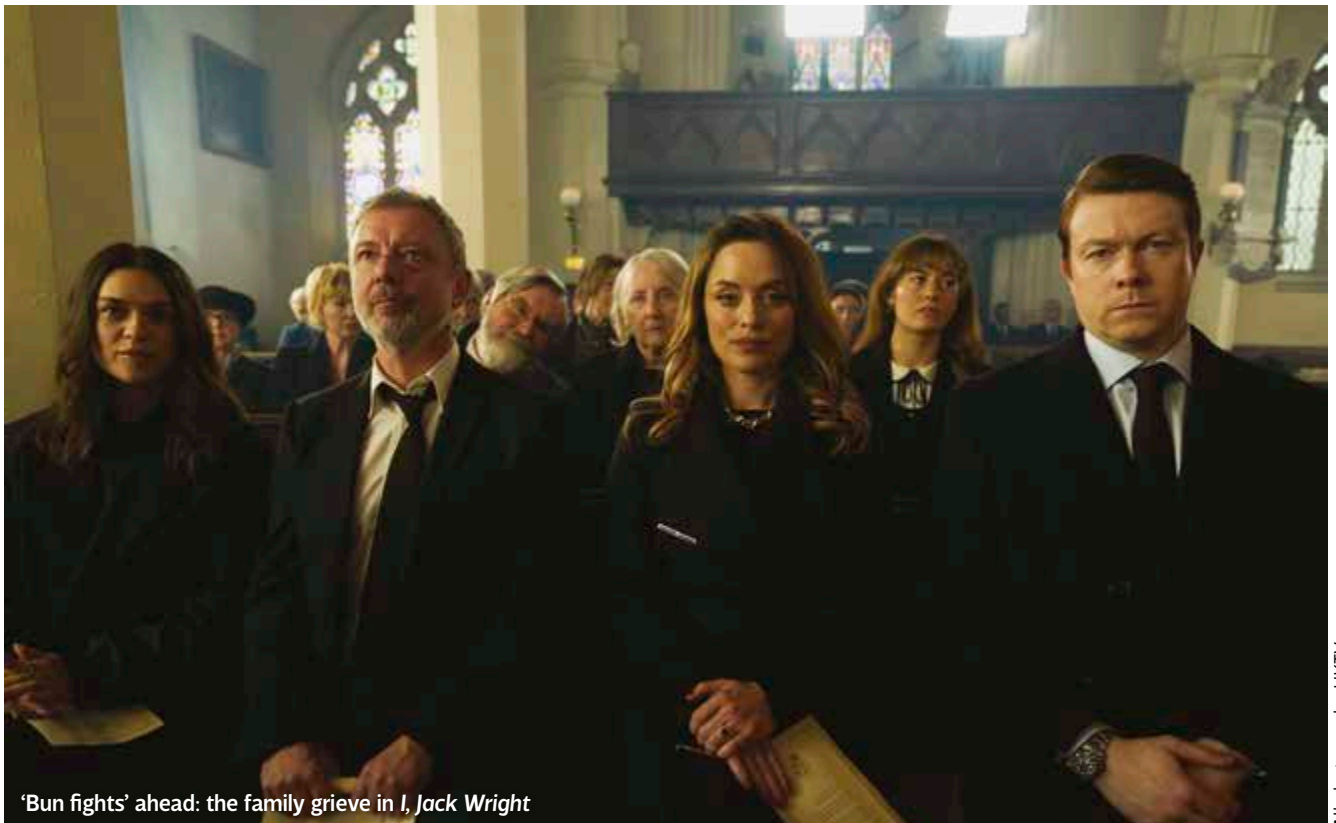
"Everybody has a will story," says Lang. "Friends I've spoken to have experiences of either getting less or more than expected. Wills are about

money, but they also represent love or the perceived lack of it. *I, Jack Wright* is about the legacy of a toxic patriarch and intergenerational trauma, using wills as a device because they're one of the most potent expressions of that."

Judging by the first episode, the fresh, contemporary characters and lavish world they live in will help reel in viewers, with dramatic momentum maintained by glimpses of the future and the clues they provide. The trick is to "end every scene with a question, and every episode with a bigger question", says Lang.

"Charles Dickens wasn't a thriller writer, but he was a brilliant novelist. His mantra was: 'Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait'. Whodunnits are the quintessence of delayed gratification."

Which current TV writers does Lang feel are doing notable work? He cites Mike White in the US (the creative force behind *The White Lotus*) and Sally Wainwright (*Happy Valley*), Sarah Phelps (Agatha Christie's TV adaptations) and



'Bun fights' ahead: the family grieve in *I, Jack Wright*

All photographs UKTV

Jed Mercurio (*Line of Duty*) in the UK. “I appreciate when the writer’s vision is fully realised across every discipline. It elevates a show when every department is working at its best to execute that vision,” Lang says. “So many factors must align to make a great show. The score is crucial, as are lighting and cinematography.”

“But there are less-celebrated elements, like location scouting. A strong location does 30% of the work for the director and cinematographer by providing a naturally compelling frame. That’s why we prioritise finding

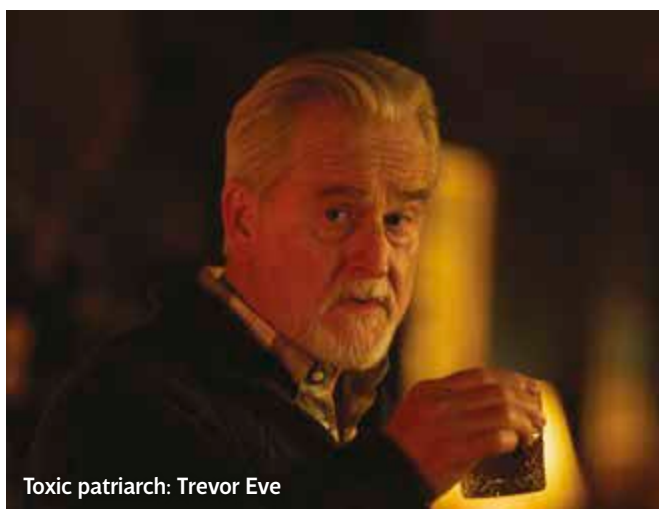
The wider cast includes high-calibre actors such as Rakhee Thakrar and James Fleet. “You want to leave enough room for the subsidiary characters to move into the foreground,” explains Lang, who has already plotted a second and third series of the show.

A complicated funding model involved Scandinavian public broadcasters YLE, DR, NRK, SVT and the Belgian public broadcaster RTBF, as well as UKTV. Even this didn’t quite reach the target. That’s why Federation brought in BritBox in the US, and the BBC, UKTV’s owner. In the UK, UKTV

was much more complicated than the creative part.”

Perry says: “We are willing collaborators. We want to make brilliant, prestige drama, and it’s vital to find new ways to partner up and to get things made.”

I, Jack Wright slots in nicely with UKTV’s growing ambition to make original drama. Perry recalls that last year, her first year in the role after moving from ITV: “We had six productions shooting at the same time. Before that, we made around two original dramas every 18 months. We’ll



Toxic patriarch: Trevor Eve



Wayward son: John Slmm

the right locations early in production.

“Production design is equally vital. In *Unforgotten*, our designer played a key role in shaping the series’ environments. For *I, Jack Wright*, we had to create a world that reflected a character who had already died – his country house, London apartment and Parisian residence all told a story about him. A character’s home can reveal as much about them as their dialogue.”

Overseen by Federation Stories (the UK arm of French production company Federation Studios), the show was filmed at multiple sites in London, Paris, and in and around Watford. Filming began in February 2024 and lasted around three months, with Tom Vaughan (*The Singapore Grip*, *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*) directing.

Federation Stories MD and executive producer Polly Williams had a similar ambition for the series as Lang. “The will is the central driver in a family drama,” she says. “And there are big investigative and legal strands, and a large ensemble cast featuring such different characters.”

has exclusive rights for a year, leaving the BBC free to show the series.

“It’s a challenging time in TV,” says Williams. “Budgets keep shrinking and commissioners want to say no. It has been a real puzzle to put together [the funding], but it worked out.”

The mix of partners also created a pre-production challenge. Williams says: “This strange model didn’t subscribe to the standard deals for actors’ packages and clearances. So we had to do bespoke deals – all with a large ensemble cast, which was stressful

“Now I know the impact of having an efficient paper trail, and a dedicated person managing all the legal and financial documents. That part

always be a boutique broadcaster by dint of our size, but I hope the calibre of programmes shows we’re ambitious in this space.

“With every original drama, [we need] to not only speak to the audience we’ve got, but to stretch it. With *I, Jack Wright*, we’re serving the audience who love the intrigue of an investigation, but I hope the family drama element will broaden the audience, too.”

Only the first series has been greenlit, but there is hope that the Wrights’ story will continue for the three series Lang has planned. “The great thing about wills is that there’s always another one, so you have an organic narrative motor,” he says.

“I’d compare the second and third series to a Rubik’s Cube: everything shifts, and the characters find themselves next to different family members, forming new alliances and enemies. By the end, there’s total resolution.”

A neat ending is difficult to imagine, given the explosive start. But where there’s a will, there’s a way. ■

‘IT HAS BEEN A REAL PUZZLE TO PUT TOGETHER THE FUNDING, BUT IT WORKED OUT’

Inside television's mental health crisis



Marcus Ryder, Dr Paul Litchfield, Tacita Small, Michelle White, Torne Levi and Jude Spencer at the RTS event

Belatedly, television seems to be waking up to the mental health crisis in the industry. Progress is being made but there is still a huge amount of work to do. Even leading campaigners recognise that improving mental health is no easy task, not least in facing up to personal circumstances.

Marcus Ryder, CEO of the Film and TV Charity, arrived at the last possible moment for the RTS National Event on duty of care last month, apologising to the event organisers for oversleeping after leaving work feeling ill. This, he admitted to the audience, was a lie.

In fact, he had been visiting his therapist and was delayed by a late train. “Even in this [safe] environment, my initial reaction was to hide that I’d gone to my therapist, which I do every week,” he said. Recalling his time in BBC current affairs, he added: “I have experienced bullying... and often those people were promoted – rewarded for their bad behaviour in typical large organisational fashion.

“We’re in a crisis,” said Ryder, citing the Film and TV Charity’s latest

Depression and anxiety are very real problems for many in the industry. How can we create a healthier culture?

Looking Glass Survey (see box) on mental health. Progress was “glacial”, he said, but “there are constructive things we can do”.

Jude Spencer is the founder of Dolly Mental Health and co-founder of the new Film and TV Welfare Association, which is trying to bring consistency to mental health support and practices in the industry. The latter was launched in the wake of the suicide of freelance true crime producer John Balson.

Spencer recalled her own period of anxiety and depression: “I found it hard to recognise what I was going through when I was having those experiences. I know what it’s like being on a production – desperate to prove yourself and wanting to impress your bosses and peers, to secure the

next job, and feeling so overwhelmed. Although I had a really supportive manager, who was kind and compassionate, he didn’t know what to do or say, or how to support me.”

Line managers, said Dr Paul Litchfield, are crucial “in creating a healthy culture in an organisation”. People look to them to set an example, and “they are the person they listen and talk to if they have problems. The first and main criterion in appointing someone to a management position is that they understand how to manage people. If you do that, the rest will follow.”

Litchfield is an occupational physician who specialises in the interaction between work and health. He is Independent Chief Medical Advisor to ITV. Over a 40-year career, he also worked for BT and advised the World Health Organization and UK Government.

People in TV think their industry is different, said Litchfield. “Every industry says that – the reality is that there are far more similarities.”

He explained that, across all economic sectors, there are six main factors that can put people under stress: demands such as workload; the

control a person has over their work; relationships; support; their role; and organisational change.

These risks are enshrined in the Health and Safety Executive management standards, and all organisations must assess the risk of causing harm to the people they work with against these standards. “The first thing to do is a risk assessment; it’s not a big, complicated thing,” said Litchfield. “From that, you can work out, largely using common sense, how to prevent harm or mitigate the effects of it.”

The Film and TV Charity’s online Whole Picture Toolkit helps organisations carry out a risk assessment.

Production companies need help, said Tacita Small, who founded the Small HR Company in 2019 to modernise TV, film and theatre’s HR practices. Earlier in her career she had been HR Manager on ITV flagship police procedural *The Bill*.

Creative people, she explained, have an idea, win a commission from a broadcaster and find themselves making a show with a crew of 100-plus, yet they may “have no people skills”. This, continued Small, “leads to poor working practice [rather] than a culture on the production that ensures it’s safe for people to work”.

Spencer added: “Even the biggest productions struggle with [finding the] time needed to do training and create psychological safety, which is so essential for everyone to feel safe on a production and for harm to be avoided.”

Tome Levi, the founder of the Injury Prevention Consultancy (IPC) and a former conditioning coach at the Royal Ballet School, said there was a link



The Film and TV Charity

A scene from the Film and TV Charity’s *Break the Cycle* film on mental health

between physical injuries on set and mental health problems. “Anxiety increases the risk of human error, which increases the risk of injury,” said Levi, adding that performers need to

‘THEY NEVER
SAW THEIR
FAMILIES
BECAUSE THEY
WORKED TILL
NINE O’CLOCK’

feel psychologically safe to raise issues about physical risk. “People are afraid of damaging their professional reputations if they voice safety concerns... and afraid of not being rehired.”

The IPC’s report in March, “The

show must go on safely”, found that only 7% of people working across film, TV and theatre always feel able to voice safety concerns that directly impact them.

Yet, as Ryder stressed, TV shows can be made without working excessive, stressful hours. Having put in “mad hours” for the BBC in London, Ryder moved to Glasgow to run BBC Scotland’s current affairs programmes. “People were going home at 5.30,” he recalled. “They were fantastic; I worked there for eight years and we won tons of awards.

“They were married, had families, as opposed to my colleagues in London who, if they were married, their marriage was falling apart. They never saw their families because they were working until eight, nine o’clock.”

Other industries, added Litchfield, have put their house in order. Construction – like television, an overwhelmingly freelance sector – has been cleaned up by “the big companies realising they must act ethically... and that means treating not just the people who are on their payroll but also everyone else who works for them as proper human beings.

“Training managers in how to be human beings is the first thing – [construction] has done it, [television] is doing it. I’ve seen it.” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS National Event ‘How to do: good duty of care for staff and crew’ was held at the Cavendish Conference Centre, central London, on 18 March. It was hosted by the psychologist Michelle White, Co-Director of 6ft from the Spotlight, and produced by Sally Quick and Harriet Humphries.

‘A bleak picture’

In February, the Film and TV Charity published its latest Looking Glass Survey on the mental health of behind-the-scenes talent in the UK. The report, based on responses from more than 4,300 film and TV workers, ‘paints a bleak picture’, but also offers grounds for optimism: ‘Concerted efforts over the last five years to improve industry culture and conditions are starting to pay dividends.’

- 64% are considering leaving the industry due to concerns about mental health, with 32% having taken first steps to do so
- 30% reported having thoughts of taking their own life in the past 12 months
- 30% often felt lonely, up from 24% in 2022 and far above a national average of 8%
- 63% said their work in the industry has a negative effect on their mental health. Only 12% of respondents said the industry is a mentally healthy place to work, but this rose to 25% among respondents who had worked on a programme using the Whole Picture Toolkit, the charity’s free online resource to improve mental health on productions.

Source: The Film and TV Charity’s Looking Glass Survey 2024

RTS Programme Awards 2025

Hosted by **Tom Allen**, the awards were presented on 25 March at the JW Marriott Grosvenor House, London, in partnership with Cast & Crew



Alma's Not Normal Comedy Drama,
Comedy Performance – Female,
Writer – Comedy



Josh Tedeku
Breakthrough Award

Arts

My Sexual Abuse: The Sitcom

Swan Films for Channel 4
'A profoundly compelling, challenging and genuinely innovative piece of work.'

Nominees

► **In My Own Words: Alison Lapper**

Chalk Productions for BBC

► **Camden** Lightbox in association with Day One Pictures and Radical22 Productions for Disney+

Breakthrough Award

Josh Tedeku – Boarders

Studio Lambert for BBC

'The winner has all the hallmarks of a huge future star – with a brilliant range instantly drawing in the viewer.'

Nominees

► **Michelle de Swarte – Spent**

Various Artists Limited for BBC

► **Bethany Asher – Sherwood**

House Productions for BBC

Children's Programme

Quentin Blake's Box of Treasures

Eagle Eye Productions for BBC

'A clever, engaging piece of children's television produced to absolute perfection.'

Nominees

► **Dodo** Wildseed Studios, Toonz,

Telegael for Sky Kids

► **BMX All Stars** Big Deal Films for BBC

Comedy Drama

Alma's Not Normal

Expectation for BBC

'Alma's *Not Normal* navigates between drama and comedy effortlessly, with a refreshing and unique voice.'

Nominees

► **Boarders** Studio Lambert for BBC

► **Ludwig** Big Talk Studios and That

Mitchell & Webb Company for BBC

Comedy Entertainment

Junior Taskmaster

Avalon UK for Channel 4

'Slick, fun and produced with great confidence and flair.'

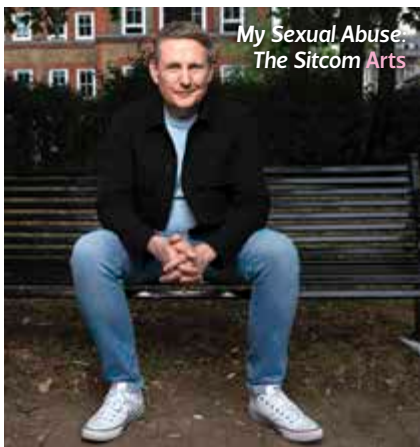
Nominees

► **Have I Got News For You**

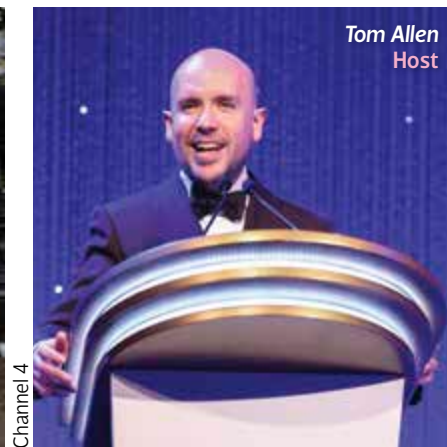
Hat Trick Productions for BBC

► **Sorry, I Didn't Know**

TriForce Productions for ITV1



My Sexual Abuse:
The Sitcom Arts



Tom Allen
Host



Junior Taskmaster
Comedy Entertainment



Quentin Blake's Box of Treasures
Children's Programme

BBC

Richard Kendal

Channel 4

BBC

Comedy Performance – Female

Sophie Willan – *Alma's Not Normal*

Expectation for BBC

'Triumphant on so many levels...

Sophie Willan has true star quality.'

Nominees

▶ **Aimee Lou Wood – *Daddy Issues***

Fudge Park Productions for BBC

▶ **Michelle de Swarte – *Spent***

Various Artists Limited for BBC

Comedy Performance – Male

Oliver Savell – *Changing Ends*

Baby Cow Productions for ITV1

'A perfect performance of real

nuance... Oliver Savell has great

timing!'

Nominees

▶ **Jim Howick – *Here We Go*** BBC Studios

Comedy Productions for BBC

▶ **Nabhaan Rizwan – *Kaos***

Sister for Netflix

Daytime Programme

Loose Women

ITV Studios Daytime for ITV1

'Highly informative, sensitively

produced and with real respect for

its audience.'

Nominees

▶ **Clive Myrie's *Caribbean Adventure***

Alleycats for BBC

▶ **BBC Breakfast**

BBC Breakfast for BBC

Documentary Series

The Push: *Murder on the Cliff*

Candour Productions for Channel 4

'A deftly handled work that brought

emotional power to the story.'

Nominees

▶ **To Catch a Copper**

Story Films for Channel 4

▶ **On Thin Ice: *Putin v Greenpeace***

Curve Media Ltd for BBC

Drama Series

Industry

Bad Wolf for BBC in association with HBO

'Feature film production values and

brilliant performances: every story

detail had purpose.'

Nominees

▶ **Wolf Hall: *The Mirror and the Light***

Playground Entertainment and Company

Pictures for BBC and Masterpiece

▶ **Supacell** Netflix



Industry
Drama Series

BBC



Oliver Savell – *Changing Ends*
Comedy Performance – Male



The Traitors
Entertainment

BBC



Loose Women
Daytime Programme

Richard Kendal



Sophie Willan – *Alma's Not Normal*
Comedy Performance – Female,
Comedy Drama, Writer – Comedy



The Push: *Murder on the Cliff*
Documentary Series

Richard Kendal

Richard Kendal



Freddie Flintoff's *Field of Dreams on Tour* Formatted Popular Factual

BBC

Entertainment

The Traitors

Studio Lambert Scotland for BBC
‘Genius executed flawlessly.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway**
Lifted Entertainment (Part of ITV Studios)
in co-production with Mitre Studios for ITV1
- ▶ **RuPaul's Drag Race UK**
World of Wonder for BBC

Entertainment Performance

Anthony McPartlin and Declan Donnelly – *Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway*

Lifted Entertainment (Part of ITV Studios)
in co-production with Mitre Studios for ITV1
‘Polished, inclusive and with complete commitment to material and audience.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Steven Frayne – Miracles**
Expectation & Seventeen 17 for Sky Max
- ▶ **Claudia Winkleman – The Traitors**
Studio Lambert Scotland for BBC



Anthony McPartlin and Declan Donnelly – *Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway* Entertainment Performance

ITV

Formatted Popular Factual

Freddie Flintoff's *Field of Dreams on Tour*

South Shore Productions for BBC
‘Audacious, ambitious and masterfully accomplished.’

Nominees

- ▶ **The Jury: Murder Trial**
ScreenDog Productions for Channel 4
- ▶ **The Martin Lewis Money Show Live – Budget Special** MultiStory for ITV1

History

Atomic People

Minnow Films for BBC
‘Beautifully crafted with intensely powerful interviews.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Miners' Strike 1984: The Battle for Britain** Swan Films for Channel 4
- ▶ **Helmand: Tour of Duty**
Passion Pictures & Kailash Films for BBC



Atomic People History

Richard Kendal



Anna Maxwell Martin – *Until I Kill You* Leading Actor – Female

Richard Kendal

Leading Actor – Female

Anna Maxwell Martin – *Until I Kill You*

World Productions for ITV1
‘A compelling, perfectly pitched performance in a genuinely challenging role.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Ambika Mod – One Day** Drama
Republic with Universal International Studios and Focus Features for Netflix
- ▶ **Monica Dolan – Mr Bates vs the Post Office** ITV Studios and Little Gem for ITV1

Leading Actor – Male

Lennie James – *Mr Loverman*

Fable Pictures for BBC

‘An epic performance. What a masterclass Lennie gave in his craft.’

Nominees

▶ **Adeel Akhtar – *Showtrial***

World Productions for BBC

▶ **Ben Whishaw – *Black Doves***

Sister & Noisy Bear for Netflix

Limited Series and Single Drama

This Town

Kudos, Nebulastar, co-produced with Mercury Studios, in association with Stigma Films for BBC

‘Like nothing else on television. A multilayered drama, supremely well executed.’

Nominees

▶ **Mr Bates vs the Post Office**

ITV Studios and Little Gem for ITV1

▶ **Breathtaking** HTM Television for ITV1

Live Event

D-Day 80: Tribute to the Fallen

BBC Studios Event Productions for BBC

‘Got everything just right. Assured, high-calibre television.’

Nominees

▶ **Coldplay at Glastonbury 2024**

BBC Studios Music Productions for BBC

▶ **The Martin Lewis Money Show Live – Budget Special** MultiStory for ITV1

Presenter

Liz Carr – *Better Off Dead?*

Burning Bright Productions co-produced with the OU for BBC

‘Liz Carr showed tremendous candour and humour, immersing the viewer into her world.’

Nominees

▶ **Joe Tracini – *Me and the Voice in My Head***, Hungry Bear Media for Channel 4

▶ **Zuhair Hassan – *Big Zuu Goes to Mecca***

Acme TV for BBC

Science and The Natural World

Billy & Molly: An Otter Love Story

Silverback Films for National Geographic and Disney+

‘Mesmerising television, successfully combining epic scale with a sense of intimacy.’

Nominees

▶ **Silverback** Off the Fence & France

Télévisions in association with Featuristic Films for BBC

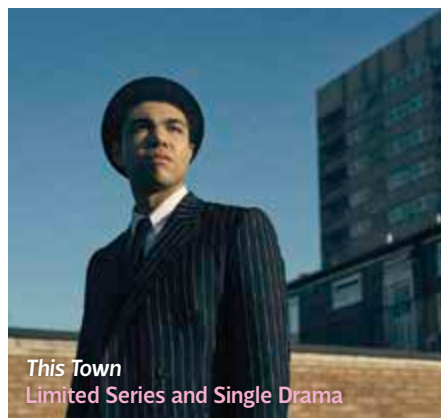
▶ **Living With Leopards**

Wild Space in association with Natural History Film Unit Botswana and Freeborne Media for Netflix



Lennie James – *Mr Loverman*
Leading Actor – Male

BBC



This Town
Limited Series and Single Drama

BBC



Richard Curtis

Richard Kendal



D-Day 80: Tribute to the Fallen
Live Event

BBC



Liz Carr – *Better Off Dead?*
Presenter

BBC

Judges' Award

James Corden and Ruth Jones

Presented by screenwriter, producer and director Richard Curtis

'Gavin & Stacey is one of the great British sitcoms, and it reached its epic climax on Christmas Day last year. The received wisdom is that when sitcoms stray from their normal, gorgeous half-hour length, they can get very woolly indeed – often featuring a holiday to Ibiza – but this Christmas special kept, and ratcheted up, everything that has been wonderful about the show that the public have loved since 2007.

'Ruth and James, what a thing you have made. Always so many funny lines, big, chunky comedy set pieces and such an epic range of characters; all funny and true and utterly memorable. And this Christmas you completed everyone's long, satisfying emotional story curve – even Chinese Alan got his moment. It's one of the best acted and cast shows I've ever seen, and two of the most brilliant performances were yours. But



Richard Kendal

you also wrote the whole damn thing – and it feels like the work of really funny friends. James from London, Ruth from Wales – you combined those two cultures so perfectly, so adversarially, so comically.

'I like comedies with romance at their hearts and *Gavin & Stacey* is not only a great British sitcom, it is the greatest British romantic comedy of all time. And it's an education in acceptance, kindness, loyalty – and the importance of Indian takeaways.

'It's also lasted 17 years. How did

you do that? Stay friends, stay funny and end up with such a blissful bang?

'In the competitive world we live in, a lot of us sometimes forget to celebrate our basic job – which is to make people interested or exhilarated or just plain happy. So when the *Gavin & Stacey* finale went out, you and your team gave people in the UK more than 27 million happy hours. That's a huge thing: so much happiness, so many merry Christmas Days hyper-charged and so many ghastly Christmas Days fixed right at the end.'

Outstanding Achievement Award

Claudia Winkleman

'The Outstanding Achievement Award is presented to someone who has captured our hearts with an effortless warmth, wit and, let's be honest, a level of charm that makes the rest of us feel like we've shown up to a black-tie event in our gardening pyjamas – Claudia Winkleman.

'We all know Claudia, or think we know her. She's the host of *The Traitors*, a show that mixes mystery, deception and betrayal with the kind of emotional depth that has you questioning your entire social circle. Then, of course, there's *Strictly Come Dancing*, where she's been a dazzling fixture for over 15 years, bringing joy to millions on Saturday nights. But Claudia didn't just land on our screens like some sort of magical TV fairy. She worked her way up, quietly



Richard Kendal

crafting a career that is as varied as it is impressive. She's appeared on everything from *This Morning* to *Talking Telephone Numbers* to *Liquid News* and my favourite, *God's Gift*. She's hosted *Sport Relief*, *Comic Relief*, even *The Great British Sewing Bee*. She's covered the Oscars, been the nation's film critic when she slipped effortlessly into Barry Norman and Jonathan Ross's shoes. Over the past 30 years we've all come to rely on her unique voice and perspective.

'Through it all, there's been a

consistency to Claudia's presence. It's not only her effortless charm, wit or ability to make every moment seem like it's full of possibility. It's the way she connects with people, understanding that the best TV isn't about being the loudest or the flashiest – it's about being real. She makes the audience feel like they're part of the conversation, like we've all just been invited into her living room. And she makes the participants in shows feel safe – her off-camera care and attention for cast and crew equally as important as her work onscreen.

'And then, of course, there's that fringe – a brilliant metaphor for the way Claudia herself exists in the world: effortlessly stylish, undeniably iconic, but always with just enough mystery to keep you intrigued.

'But more than anything, Claudia's charm lies in her ability to take the work seriously without ever taking herself too seriously. She's willing to laugh at herself, hide her deep intelligence. She has that rare ability to make us laugh and think, to entertain and move us, all at the same time.'

Scripted Comedy

Things You Should Have Done

Roughcut TV for BBC

‘Fresh, distinctive and very funny.’

Nominees

► **We Are Lady Parts** Working Title Television, part of Universal International Studios, for Channel 4

► **Gavin & Stacey: The Finale** Fulwell 73 Productions and Tidy Productions for BBC

Single Documentary

Hell Jumper

Expectation for BBC

‘An unforgettable journey through brilliant, immersive storytelling.’

Nominees

► **Undercover: Exposing the Far Right** Marking Films Inc and Tigerlily Productions for Channel 4

► **Tell Them You Love Me** Mindhouse Productions for Sky Documentaries

Soap and Continuing Drama

Casualty

BBC Studios Drama Productions for BBC

‘Casualty has its own visual style and tells stories with beautiful pace and emotional impact.’

Nominees

► **EastEnders**

BBC Studios Drama Productions for BBC

► **Hollyoaks**

Lime Pictures for Channel 4

Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit

Rose Ayling-Ellis and Clare Balding – Paris 2024 Paralympics

Whisper for Channel 4

‘An incredible level of consummate professionalism with unique insight.’

Nominees

► **Ian Wright – Euro 2024**

ITV Sport for ITV

► **Michael Johnson – Paris 2024 Olympics**

BBC Sport for BBC

Sports Programme

Paris 2024 Paralympics

Whisper for Channel 4

‘Innovative, inspirational and extraordinary coverage.’

Nominees

► **Paris 2024 Olympics**

BBC Sport for BBC

► **London Marathon 2024**

BBC Sport for BBC

RTS Television Journalism Awards – Special Award

Journalists in Gaza

‘For news organisations, the Middle East crisis poses an incredibly complex and fast-moving challenge.’

‘With international journalists unable to operate in Gaza, covering this important news story has fallen to the local media teams based there. These individuals often face extraordinary danger

reporting on events as they unfold.’

‘This award is not dedicated to one person, one team or even a single news organisation, but recognises the courage and commitment of journalists risking their lives every day. Therefore, the Society would like to make the RTS Special Award for News and Journalism to Journalists in Gaza.’



Jessica Gunning – *Baby Reindeer*
Supporting Actor – Female

Netflix



Danny Dyer – *Rivals*
Supporting Actor – Male



Laura Wade and Dominic Treadwell-Collins – *Rivals*
Writer – Drama

Richard Kendal

Richard Kendal



Clare Balding and Rose Ayling-Ellis – *Paris 2024 Paralympics*
Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit

Channel 4



Billy & Molly: An Otter Love Story
Science and The Natural World

Disney+

Supporting Actor – Female

Jessica Gunning – *Baby Reindeer*
Clerkenwell Films for Netflix
'A spectacular tour-de-force that stays with the viewer a long time.'

Nominees

- ▶ **Monica Dolan – *Sherwood***
House Productions for BBC
- ▶ **Katherine Parkinson – *Rivals***
Happy Prince, part of ITV Studios, for Disney+

Supporting Actor – Male

Danny Dyer – *Rivals*
Happy Prince, part of ITV Studios, for Disney+

'A captivating performance of both real heart and vulnerability.'

Nominees

- ▶ **McKinley Belcher III – *Eric***
Sister for Netflix
- ▶ **Sonny Walker – *The Gathering***
World Productions for Channel 4



Paris 2024 Paralympics
Sports Programme

Channel 4

Writer – Comedy

Sophie Willan – *Alma's Not Normal*
Expectation for BBC
'Laugh-out-loud funny and richly written, with comedy in the smallest details.'

Nominees

- ▶ **Writing Team – *Cunk on Life***
Broke and Bones for BBC and Netflix
- ▶ **Nida Manzoor – *We Are Lady Parts***
Working Title Television, part of Universal International Studios, for Channel 4



Hell Jumper
Single Documentary

BBC

Writer – Drama

Dominic Treadwell-Collins and Laura Wade – *Rivals*
Happy Prince, part of ITV Studios, for Disney+

'Bold and totally assured writing in its very distinctive tone and style.'

Nominees

- ▶ **Will Smith – *Slow Horses***
See-Saw Films in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **Peter Straughan – *Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light***
Playground Entertainment & Company Pictures for BBC and Masterpiece



Things You Should Have Done
Scripted Comedy

Richard Kendal



Casualty
Soap and Continuing Drama

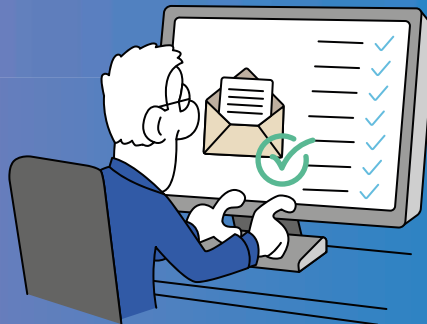
Richard Kendal

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It sounds like a dream TV job, filming on an idyllic Caribbean island known for its golden beaches, waterfalls and rum distilleries. As *Death in Paradise* executive producer Tim Key says: “It’s the job for which people have the least sympathy in the world, quite rightly. It’s a lovely place to work, but it is hard work. It’s not all cocktails and sunsets.”

He took a thrilled RTS Midlands audience through the challenges of making the hit BBC One drama on Guadeloupe, from the intense heat and volcanic ridge, which makes it tricky to get around, to coming up with an ingenious puzzle to solve for each episode.

The event was held to celebrate the Midlands talent on *Death in Paradise*: new lead detective Don Gilet is from Walsall and Key is from Bewdley in Worcestershire. Key was joined on the night by Don Warrington, who has played Commissioner Selwyn Patterson in all 14 series.

Death in Paradise, in which a misfit British police detective figures out murders on the fictional island of Saint Marie, attracts more than 7 million viewers in the UK, has sold to 230 territories and spawned two spin-offs.

The series finale at the end of last month was screened on the same night as *Beyond Paradise* began its third season, in which former Saint Marie sleuth DI Humphrey Goodman (Kris Marshall) solves crimes in Devon. In development is a second series of the Australian spin-off *Return to Paradise*.

Key, executive producer since 2014, explained the working conditions for *Death in Paradise*: “We shoot on a British schedule – no concessions to the heat. Our original detective, Ben Miller,



Death in Paradise:
Don Gilet, Don Warrington
and Élizabéth Bourguine

BBC

It’s a tough job, but...

RTS Midlands Roz Laws hears that shooting the BBC’s long-running drama *Death in Paradise* is ‘not all cocktails and sunsets’

really struggled in a suit. We cut the back out of his shirt to make it cooler. He would ask, ‘Can I take my jacket off in this scene?’ We’d say no, because his character never would. We nearly killed him.”

Warrington added: “We had a tent at the back of the set with full air conditioning where Ben would retire at every opportunity. I wear a full, heavy suit – but I can bear it.”

Key described his role: “My job is to make sure that the show is always what everyone expects, but also to keep it fresh. Every episode can’t be the same.

“The puzzles are incredibly hard to come up with. Everyone thinks they can do it, but lots of writers have not

been able to get through the process. We’re proud to build on classics of the genre like Agatha Christie and especially *Murder, She Wrote*. We go back to that most often. We don’t steal but we are inspired.”

As well as the location, cast and ingenious plots, Key said a crucial part of the series’ success is the music. “Magnus Fiennes, Ralph’s brother, has composed the music from the start. He chose and arranged the theme tune, *You’re Wondering Now*, and composes all the subtle cues that set the tone. He also introduced us to the band Bellowhead for *Beyond Paradise*. He’s an enormous part of the show.”

And so is Warrington, Key said. “It’s amazing working

with Don and watching the effect he has on people. One year, we met a family on La Perle beach, on holiday for the mum’s 50th birthday because she was a huge fan.

“When Don came out, this family went crazy, including the husband, who hadn’t been that bothered. He said Don was one of the first people he had seen on TV, in the 70s sitcom *Rising Damp*, who wasn’t white – and it had had a profound effect on him. It was so unusual then, to see someone of colour who was educated, charming and lusted after.” ■

The *Death in Paradise* event was held on 13 March at Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham. It was produced by Jayne Rae.

Crucial advice for new entrants to an “industry in flux” was provided by a wide range of industry professionals at this year’s RTS North West networking day.

RTS award-winning broadcaster Lucy Meacock, Chancellor of Salford University, kicked off proceedings using the acronym SALFORD.

“Stand out,” she said. “You don’t need to be the most confident [person], just make sure you have good ideas.

Adapt and Listen came next: “Have conversations... You’ll get your best ideas from that real person – and networking is also about creating supportive *friendships*.”

Completing the acronym, Meacock advised being *outward-looking, resilient and determined*. “The power is with you,” she concluded. “You are the future.”

The panellists discussing “AI, immersive technologies and creativity” gave students an encouraging glimpse into TV’s future. “We’re hearing how the industry is collapsing,” said freelance development executive Andrew Oldbury. “Yet when you look at the viewing figures... consumption is through the roof.”

The key is how audiences consume content, and new entrants can capitalise on this, he explained, because “when you look at immersive tech, social media and how gaming is changing, there aren’t the same ‘grammar’, rules and formats [as in traditional TV]. People are still figuring out how it works.

“You have a supercomputer in your pocket,” he added. “There’s nothing stopping you [from] creating those shows.”

Richard Wormwell, Head of Product Innovation at Dock10 Studios, agreed: “Entry to market is easier – [there’s] no need to wait for a broadcaster to give you money. Distribution is easier



ER Photography

Reasons to be cheerful

RTS North West Carole Solazzo hears encouraging advice at Media City in Salford for students aiming at a career in television

– you can post things on YouTube for free.”

Sam Hunt, Chief Creative Officer at AIX Live, explained how the immersive content specialists are using tech to create and enhance people’s social experiences.

“There’s been this huge trend over many years of separating individual human beings through wearables like headsets,” he said. “We’re interested in people in a space enjoying themselves, [and how] that can be enhanced by linking to other people enjoying the same thing in other spaces.”

Hunt explained how AIX Live “set up a private 5G network between Salford and Dundee, linking LED volumes, lights, audio and an audience app [using] the Six Nations Wales vs Scotland rugby match as a test.

“People say appointment-view is dead, yet there are

big national moments when people want to be together.”

Echoing advice on creating content, BBC journalist Claire Harris said the objective was to “stand out in a field of 30,000 applicants for 200 trainee places”.

In the session “Finding opportunities in challenging times”, she advised: “Bring ‘you’ into what you’re making. So if you’re a deaf, disabled or neurodivergent person, how does that reflect in how you’re telling the story?”

Home Manchester producer Isobel Glenton advised students to look locally, pointing to micro-funding from Film Hub North and Home’s Young Film Collective programme.

Elli Metcalfe, Crew and Facilities Manager at Screen Manchester, urged students to seek work wherever they can, since television roles demand many different

skills. “I worked as a bartender and in a shoe shop,” she said. “Those jobs gave me transferable skills which are all-important to getting your next job in television. See it as a positive.”

4Skills Project Manager Fanny Kerekes added: “It’s good to have long-term goals... but don’t be choosy [about specific roles] when you’re starting out.”

Creative Access CEO Mel Rodrigues flipped the script. “The industry needs you. You have insights, perspectives, experiences that [older] execs don’t know about,” she insisted. “You are the key to them getting content commissioned.” ■

The ‘RTS North West Student & Industry Networking Day 2025’ was held on 12 March and produced by Beautiful Productions in association with Dock10, University of Salford and AIX Live.

A team of students from Nottingham Trent University took home the Sir Lenny Henry Award for best overall film with *Chords of Conflict* at the RTS Midlands Student Television Awards.

Henry said: "They are all great films and I congratulate you all. You are knocking it out of the park. *Chords of Conflict* was really nicely shot, funny, well acted and had a lot of heart."

Chords of Conflict also triumphed in the Entertainment and Comedy Drama category, and won Tom Holden the Writing prize.

Nottingham Trent enjoyed a successful night at the March ceremony, which was held at the Mockingbird Cinema in Birmingham: the Animation award went to Ryan Leung's film, *See You Soon!* and the Editing prize to Samuel Burke for *Helix*.

Warwick University and Birmingham's MetFilm School entered the RTS Midlands awards for the first time, with the latter scooping two prizes: Drama for *Last December* and Camerawork for *Night Dreaming*, which was shot by Luke Lawrence.



The team from Nottingham Trent University behind *Chords of Conflict*

Vivienne Bailey

Trent strikes a chord

RTS Midlands Matthew Bell reports on the centre's Student Awards, while, below, Roz Laws listens in at an industry roadshow

RTS Midlands Student Television Awards winners

Sir Lenny Henry Award - *Chords of Conflict* - Tom Holden, Brett Bernstein, Joe Styles, Luca Vukovich, Seanan Glynn, Mack Buckley, Josh Drake, Ruby Phillips, Morgan Davies, El Higgins and Darni Abass, Nottingham Trent University

Animation - *See You Soon!* - Ryan Leung, Nottingham Trent University

Drama - *Last December* - Lewis Anthony Smith, Matthew Pate, Anna

Piggott-Reeves, Raziel Rehman, Oliver Butler, Orlando Wade, Rohan Pittman, Ivars Lelis, Mirium Bibi, Harrison Newball-Underwood, Thomas Gee and Josh Rasco, MetFilm School

Entertainment and Comedy Drama - *Chords of Conflict* - Nottingham Trent University

Factual - *Long Form - ScreenTime: The Normalised Addiction* - Thomas Aliwell and Kerry Bibb, Birmingham City University

Factual - *Short Form - Win* - Kyle Adams,

University of Staffordshire

Craft Skills: Camera - *Night Dreaming* - Luke Lawrence, MetFilm School

Craft Skills: Editing - *Helix* - Samuel Burke, Nottingham Trent University

Craft Skills: Production Design - *Lonely in Time* - James Wilson, Coventry University

Craft Skills: Sound - *iAy, Marta!* - Owen Williams, University of Derby

Craft Skills: Writing - *Chords of Conflict* - Tom Holden, Nottingham Trent University

'Help and opportunities are there'

■ Don't overlook the simple things when trying to break into TV was the clear message to nominees at the awards. Speakers at an industry roadshow highlighted the need to watch a lot of TV and to check emails while job hunting.

Martin Simms from Create Central said: 'I can't tell you how many opportunities people have missed by not checking their email.'

Perjit Aujla said: 'Watch loads and loads of TV and be able to talk about why you're passionate about it. Isn't that

the best job in the world? Research the production company you're interested in by watching their programmes.'

Aujla, an executive producer, discussed navigating freelancing in TV. She said: 'You are unlikely to have a job with a pension and sick pay, so you'll have to get used to the hustle. The people who survive have a diversified career. They monetise their existing skills and develop new ones.'

'Make a list of all your experiences and skills. There will probably be more there than

you expect. I was a waitress, which shows great communication, collaboration, patience and presentation. Working in a call centre is a brilliant thing - it shows you know how to talk to people on the phone.'

Simms talked about the 'positive journey' the industry is on in the West Midlands and said there were 'exciting high-profile incoming productions in the early stages of development.'

'Sign up to newsletters to stay updated with industry news. Attend events, and utilise social media and LinkedIn.

Networking can sound daunting but every time you meet someone, you are networking.'

Sam Rifkin of Filming in England urged people to download its just-launched New Entrant Starter Pack and to sign up for the National Crew Directory, even if they have no credits: both are free.

'The starter pack has information on apprenticeships and training schemes and two CV templates. With CVs, be concise, demonstrate your versatility, be honest about your skills and exclude your photo or birthdate to reduce unconscious bias in hiring. The help and opportunities are there, it's knowing where to look.'

Leeds Arts do a treble

RTS Yorkshire Leeds Arts University film-makers took home three of the principal trophies from the RTS Yorkshire Student Awards last month.

The Animation award went to *A Perfect Meal*, which the judges said was “TV ready” and featured a “brilliant use of graphics”. Leeds Arts University students also won the Factual: Short Form prize for the “engaging and funny” *Clucked* and the Saving the Planet category for the “thought-provoking and



Leeds Arts University students collect the Animation award for *A Perfect Meal*

Andy Garbutt

informative” *Go Fish!*. University of Leeds scooped two prizes: Drama for *Disclosure*, which had a “great script with real jeopardy and tension”, and Journalism for *Grassroots Rugby*, which boasted “strong journalistic instincts” and “great access to important interviewees”. Sheffield Hallam

University took home the Entertainment and Comedy Drama award for the “gloriously silly” *Tandem P.I.* and the University of York was awarded the Factual: Long Form prize for *Hunt*, “one of the best entries” the judges had ever seen.

The awards ceremony was held at York St John University

RTS Yorkshire Student Television Awards winners

Animation - *A Perfect Meal* - Karina Young, Vikrant Dyal, Sami Alam and Gabrielle Mosquita, Leeds Arts University

Drama - *Disclosure* - Matthew Gowland, Lana Cruickshank, Alex Petch and Anna Collins, University of Leeds

Entertainment and Comedy Drama - *Tandem P.I.* - George Allen, Emma Whight, Jayne Palmer, Kaitlyn Taylor, Loui McCormac and Jess Dale, Sheffield Hallam University

Factual: Long Form - *Hunt* - Thalia Saleh, David Merritt, Ed Shaw, Charlie Ord and Alex Weir, University of York

Factual: Short Form - *Clucked* - Dean Hamami and Drin Rrahmani, Leeds Arts University

Journalism - *Grassroots Rugby* - Christian Morante, University of Leeds

Saving the Planet - *Go Fish!* - Kara Harvey-Hill, Annalena Ulvee and Sophia Vypalova-Simon, Leeds Arts University

and hosted by satirical comedy duo Larry & Paul. Also presented on the night were 18 Craft awards.

Matthew Bell

Falmouth take home a bumper film haul

Devon & Cornwall Three Falmouth University films scooped more than half the prizes on offer at the Devon and Cornwall Student Television Awards, which received a record number of entries.

Sub Rosa, which addresses the harsh treatment of women pregnant out of marriage from the 1950s through to the mid-70s, was named Best Drama. The judges could “almost smell the lino flooring – with strong imagery and narrative, we were suitably impressed”. Jeannie Malcolm also won the Production Design award for her work on the film.

Gnomegeddon, a “brilliant watch” that “blended contemporary social media styles

with old school bedtime stories” took home the Entertainment and Comedy Drama award. The Editing prize was awarded to *Cosmo Bawler*.

The Saving the Planet award went to *Green Ocean Gold*, a film that boasted “high production values” and was “well-constructed with a very clear narrative, as well as some beautiful cinematic imagery”. *Green Ocean Gold* also won the Camerawork award for Ollie Gambie and Sterenn Collett.

The ceremony at the Barbican Theatre, Plymouth, was hosted by Victoria Graham, one of the presenters of BBC South West regional news programme *Spotlight*.

Matthew Bell



Gnomegeddon: Falmouth University students celebrate their success

Ian McCarthy, Agora Photography

RTS Devon and Cornwall Student Television Awards winners

Animation - *Weird Cops* - Faith Evans and Dylan Pierce, Falmouth University

Drama - *Sub Rosa* - Isabel Hall, Robin Irvine, Becks Bouron, Zen Traynor, Talia Martin, Jeannie Malcolm and Justine Robertson, Falmouth University

Entertainment and Comedy Drama - *Gnomegeddon* - Cosmo Bawler, Jack Horder and Tom Chawner, Falmouth University

Factual: Short Form - *Sea Change* - Anna Comellas, Thalia Stinton and Theo Russell, University of Plymouth

Journalism - *Finding Your Internal Garden* - Ari Poole, Coco Bond, George

Whitmore, Tanya Harris and Anna Hind, University of Plymouth

Saving the Planet - *Green Ocean Gold* - Olaf Lawrence, Charlie Greaves, Ollie Gambie and Sterenn Collett, Falmouth University

Craft Skills: Camerawork - *Green Ocean Gold* - Ollie Gambie and Sterenn Collett, Falmouth University

Craft Skills: Editing - *Gnomegeddon* - Cosmo Bawler, Falmouth University

Craft Skills: Production Design - *Sub Rosa* - Jeannie Malcolm, Falmouth University

Craft Skills: Sound - *Breathe* - Olin Quigley Daly, Tom Onslow and Zane Burton, Plymouth University

Craft Skills: Writing - *Bin Glitter* - Bridget Bowers, Falmouth University

Dundalk scoop Dublin awards

Republic of
Ireland

Dundalk Institute of Technology were the big winners at the RTS Republic of Ireland Student Awards, held at RTE's *Late Late Show* studio in Dublin in early March. It took home seven of the nine trophies on offer; students from Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education and IADT Dun Laoghaire won the other two.

Echo, “an ambitious story, dealing with themes of mirrors and reflections” won the Drama prize, while the “brave and funny” *My Life with Brian*, a tale of two sisters and one strange boyfriend at a dinner, was named Best Entertainment and Comedy Drama.

The Factual: Short Form prize went to *People You'd Know*.

In the main categories, the Dundalk IT stranglehold was broken by Coláiste Dhúlaigh's Colin Reddin, whose film *Going Nuts* won the Animation prize. This story about a squirrel trying unsuccessfully to hibernate is a homage to the golden age of cartoons.

“We cannot give everyone a trophy, but if you have a great idea, have scripted, funded, cast, shot, directed and edited it, then that it is already a major achievement – you are already a winner,” said Agnes Cogan, Centre Chair and Chair of the Awards Jury.
Matthew Bell



Colin Reddin

Animation winner: *Going Nuts*

RTS Republic of Ireland Student Television Awards winners

Animation - *Going Nuts* - Colin Reddin, Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education

Drama - *Echo* - Cora Hogan, John Brady, Lauren Corlett and Martin Závacky, Dundalk IT

Entertainment and Comedy

Drama - *My Life with Brian* - Sarah Connolly, Mollie Newman, Rafaella Crepaldi and team, Dundalk IT

Factual: Short Form - *People You'd*

Know - Hannah Meehan, Cora Hogan, Tom Johnson and Cian Stanley, Dundalk IT

Craft Skills: Camerawork - *Echo* - Martin Závacky, Dundalk IT

Craft Skills: Editing - *People You'd Know* - Cian Stanley, Dundalk IT

Craft Skills: Production Design - *Borrowed Time* - Kieran Tyrrell and Jasmine Badrick, Dundalk IT

Craft Skills: Sound - *My Sister's Nature* - Fionn Hibbert and Arthur Gray, IADT Dun Laoghaire

Craft Skills: Writing - *My Life with Brian* - Mollie Newman, Dundalk IT

Tasty treat leaves judges wanting more

University of Hertfordshire



Drama winner: *Amuse-Bouche*

RTS
East

Amuse-Bouche scored a hat-trick at the RTS East Student Awards, held at the Old Divinity School, Cambridge, in early March.

The University of Hertfordshire film was named Best Drama, and also won the Craft Camerawork and Editing awards. “A polished piece of directing and a memorable film – there is emotional truth to the writing and the performances,” said the judges.

The Animation prize went

to pseudonymous Norwich University of the Arts student Jim EdLee for *Clubulon*, a film “full of wit and imagination... skilful animation, amusingly voiced with some wacky characters”. India Riley of City College Norwich took home the Factual: Short Form award for *Discovering Davina*, “a sad, brave and moving film”.

“We had some pretty heavyweight judges: top commissioning editors at the main channels, multi-award-winning directors and actors who are household names. All agreed the nominees had produced work of a highly professional standard – and a number asked to be put in touch with the film-makers with a view to exploring future ideas,” said Head of Judges Brian Woods.

Matthew Bell

RTS East Student Television Awards winners

Animation - *Clubulon* - Jim EdLee, Norwich University of the Arts

Drama - *Amuse-Bouche* - Matthew Turner, Maximilian Sitwell, Libby Glover and Alvaro Rios Barco, University of Hertfordshire

Factual: Short Form - *Discovering*

Davina - India Riley, City College Norwich

Craft Skills: Camerawork - *Amuse-Bouche* - Matthew Turner, Maximilian Sitwell, Libby Glover and Alvaro Rios Barco, University of Hertfordshire

Craft Skills: Editing - *Amuse-Bouche* - Matthew Turner, Maximilian Sitwell, Libby Glover and Alvaro Rios Barco, University of Hertfordshire

Craft Skills: Production Design - *Smorgasbord* - Luna Cherrington, Bartolomé Bulos Touzard, Winsome Chu and Marta Teixeira, University of Hertfordshire

Craft Skills: Sound - *The Maze* - Melissa Misket, Mia Golden, Lucy Raffey and Megan Selhani, City College Norwich

Craft Skills: Writing - *As We Were* - Christian Wong, Madison Marshall, Bradley Leathers and Ryan Stainsby, University of Hertfordshire

RTS news IN BRIEF

RTS bursaries expand in scope

The Society's bursary schemes are accepting applications until 24 June. For 2025, the RTS is expanding its Digital Innovation bursary to include students interested in a career in digital media content production and distribution, including social media, streaming and branded content. Alongside existing sponsors Apple TV+ and STV, digital media charity the Andy Taylor Foundation will be supporting two scholars.

Cambridge hosts creative forum

More than 80 film-makers and creatives from East Anglia attended an RTS East event, "Cambridge film people", in collaboration with Vine FX and chaired by True Vision's Brian Woods. Speakers included Cambridge City Council's Ben Hallworth and Frances Alderton, discussing a potential film office; Anglia Ruskin University graduates Guilherme Pires and Yegor Chmylewsky, who talked about their RTS-winning short, *Why Don't You Stay for Tonight*; and Ivan Mactaggart, who discussed the Oscar-nominated *Loving Vincent*.

RTS backs Belfast WorkWise event

Marcus Ryder, CEO of the Film and TV Charity, spoke at an RTS Northern Ireland-supported event in Belfast, "WorkWise for screen", last month. Other topics in the inaugural WorkWise sessions included: recruitment and fair selection; contracts and legal compliance; and team management, motivation and skills.



RTS Bursary Scholar
Elaysha Smith

'If you can see it, you can be it'

Relatable role models are essential if more women are to find work in Stem jobs. **Steve Clarke reports**

One million women work in Stem – science, technology, engineering and maths – occupations in the UK but, according to government statistics, this translates to only 29% of the overall Stem workforce.

Institution of Engineering and Technology research in 2024 revealed that one of the main reasons for this disparity is that women are not encouraged to think about Stem careers at school. They are also put off by how male-dominated the industry is.

The panellists at an RTS Technology online event, held on the eve of International Women's Day, agreed that role models were essential. "If you can see it, you

can be it," stressed the host, Kim Rowell, Managing Editor of News Production at ITN, and a board member of gender equality campaigners UN Women UK.

"It's important that we as Stem women are role models to attract a pipeline of people into Stem," said the Co-Chair of the BBC's Women in Stem network, Lalita Taylor.

"We're active in being role models. It's not only about attracting a pipeline of women but also encouraging them to stay in Stem roles."

RTS Bursary Scholar and journalism student Elaysha Smith was asked if she thought young people were encouraged to consider Stem careers. "As a journalism student, it's extremely hard

to find opportunities in media itself," she replied.

It was challenging to find internships or work experience, although she had landed two – one at the community newspaper the *Brixton Bugle* and another with a leading PR consultancy.

Smith added: "When considering Stem, it's even more difficult. It's not as promoted as other topics, such as fashion or sports. Science journalism is not pushed to journalism students."

Melanie Gray, the newly appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University for the Creative Arts, said it was vital to encourage all students, especially women, to study subjects they might not have considered, such as gaming or film and TV production.

She said: "We have to introduce Stem into all of our subjects and embed Stem into everything we do. Also, we need to think about how you bring AI into film production courses."

Ceramics is popular at the University for the Creative Arts, so embedding Stem subjects like AI and other digital media into courses like this was key. "This way, students get the right IT skills implicitly and probably more than they realise," said Gray.

"On other courses, like gaming, those skills are much more explicit. It's about coding and embracing technology. We have massive gaming labs which all our students can use.

"They're open until late at night. Females need to feel they're safe being there, which isn't something males probably consider. Male students are not going to think about getting home safely late at night." ■

'Beyond the numbers: women in Stem shaping the media landscape' was held on 6 March. Kim Rowell hosted and produced.

Over a quarter of a century, *Bargain Hunt* has become a TV institution, offering 45 minutes of endearing eccentricity and entertainment before stark reality intervenes in the form of the BBC lunchtime news.

At an RTS Cymru Wales event, talent from behind and in front of the camera discussed the show's enduring success over almost 1,900 episodes. Executive Producer Paul Tucker stressed the "subtle changes" over the years: "Don't ruin what's good but at the same time you have to keep changing things to keep it relevant."

"The daytime audience, particularly during Covid, changed. Before, most people at home were either shift workers, unemployed, retired workers or housewives. Covid brought in a new audience, which we have to reflect."

A strong production team helps, as does continuity. Ben Hewish has worked on the show for 21 years, moving from runner to director, including helming last month's anniversary special, *25 Years of Bargain Hunt*.

Bargain Hunt, made by BBC Studios in Cardiff, regularly attracts 2 million viewers, enjoying a 35–40% share of the TV audience. "There is a lot of love for this programme," said BBC Commissioning Editor Lindsay



Bargain Hunt presenter
Danny Sebastian

BBC Studios

Riding high at the antique fair

Cymru Wales Matthew Bell celebrates 25 years of BBC daytime show *Bargain Hunt*

Bradbury. "People feel guilty watching daytime TV – you feel you should be doing something else, the ironing, the shopping or working. [But] when you start watching *Bargain Hunt*, you get sucked in... it's very good company."

The show made its debut on 13 March 2000, with David Dickinson presenting. Tim Wonnacott followed, but since 2016 it has had a roster of hosts, including Danny

Sebastian, who moved from show expert to presenter.

"Each presenter has a different personality and we can play to their strengths – it gives variety to the show," said Tucker. "Ninety-six episodes a year would be a lot for one person."

Sebastian is a good fit for a show that mixes entertainment and antique knowhow. "It was an honour to be part of such an iconic show. I'm at what is classed the bottom end of antiques. I like the vintage, the retro... but I was well received," he said, adding: "There's a big fun factor with the show – that's what makes it keep on going."

Sebastian has supplied much of the fun. Memorably, his trousers once split while performing the trademark *Bargain Hunt* kick at the end of the show. As well as this clip, the Cardiff audience saw Sebastian receive an etiquette lesson on how to drink tea – "Pinkie down,

elbow down, keeping our head up, we take a sip"

Expert Kate Bliss recalled the first and last *Bargain Hunt* Christmas panto in 2002, in which she was Snow White. "We filmed the pantomime in the evening, in a hotel room just off the A1," she recalled.

Bliss said finding treasures that could turn a profit could be a "minefield – there are fakes, forgeries and reproductions". Once she picked "an antique tray, a lovely thing, sure to make a profit" that turned out to be a dog's bowl.

Novice collectors getting one over the experts is one of the joys of the show. Auctioneer Richard Winterton once described a knight's rusty armour as a "a bit of nonsense", predicting it would make £20 at auction – it sold for £520.

Like all long-running TV shows, *Bargain Hunt* boasts a simple format – two teams of antique amateurs, the "reds" and "blues", compete to turn the greatest profit from three items on a budget of just £300.

Contestants can keep any (usually tiny) profit they make; if they make money on all three items, they take home a "golden gavel" lapel badge – "something money cannot buy", says Sebastian.

The show is about the glory of winning, although there is the occasional skulduggery. In the 2018 music special, Pulp, featuring Jarvis Cocker, took on the Happy Mondays. Bez's girlfriend, in the audience, bid for the Madchester band's items – strictly forbidden by the *Bargain Hunt* rulebook. A bewildered Bez was disqualified, asked to hand back his profit, and Pulp won with a loss of £95. ■

This RTS Cymru Wales event, supported by Screen Alliance Wales and the Welsh Government via Creative Wales, was held on 6 March at the Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff. BBC Wales presenter Lucy Owen hosted.



BBC Wales' Lucy Owen with *Bargain Hunt*'s Danny Sebastian and Kate Bliss in Cardiff

BBC Studios

RTS Southern

More than 130 students came together to listen to and network with 14 media professionals from across the Southern region in late February.

“Meet the professionals” is an annual event run by RTS Southern and hosted at Bournemouth University, with support from Isabel Forrest, Senior Lecturer In Media Production.

A panel of professionals, chaired by Gordon Cooper from the RTS, discussed how they started and built careers in TV, before meeting the students informally in groups.

RTS Southern committee member Stephanie Farmer said: “We work hard to get a wide a range of professionals. This year, we had professionals in post-production, producing, camera, programme development, music video, the charity sector, online and media agency from Ricochet, Woodcut Media, Black List, Potato, Mambo Media and many more.”



Bournemouth graduate Jemma Wood works on ITV's *Love Island*

From uni to Love Island

At the event, the students also heard from recent graduate Jemma Wood, who left Bournemouth University in 2020 and initially worked in archive. Now she has secured an assistant producer job on

ITV reality show *Love Island*. Wood said: “As a Bournemouth student, I found the ‘Meet the professionals’ event to be an invaluable opportunity to start building my network before graduating.

It provided the perfect platform to connect with alumni already working in the industry. Now, it’s an honour to have the chance to give back and support current students in the same way.”



Curtis salutes a tidy triumph

Let’s hear it for James Corden and Ruth Jones, winners of this year’s Judges’ Award at the RTS Programme Awards, presented by that doyen of British comedy, Richard Curtis. Hailing their sitcom *Gavin & Stacey* as “the greatest British romantic comedy of all time”, the *Vicar of Dibley* creator and *Blackadder* co-creator described it as “simply the best-cast show in comedy”.

Corden highlighted the show’s longevity – some 17 years – and how BBC Three backed the series even

though he and Jones were then first-time writers. “We have incredible storytellers in this country,” he said.

“The BBC and the National Theatre are the bedrock of our creativity. We must protect them.” Too true.

Sophie makes it magnificent

One of the evening’s unexpected highlights was the star and creator of *Alma’s Not Normal*, Sophie Willan, winning both the Female Comedy Performance and Comedy Writer awards. To complete the hat-trick, the show also won the Comedy Drama prize. Sophie’s joy was evident as she strutted onstage to Blondie’s *Atomic*, truly – as the song says – making the night magnificent. The Upside hopes that

the producers of *Strictly* were paying attention.

Top job, Tom

For a fourth year, the high priest of irreverence, Tom Allen, was MC. He didn’t miss a beat, ensuring that all “31 million” awards were presented by a little after 11pm. Well done, Tom.

On a serious note, the host of *The Apprentice: You’re Fired* called for government support in challenging times for “an industry that is second none”. To applause, he added: “If we invest in new work, we’ll be fine.”

Breaking through

Talking of bright new talent, one of the most popular wins of the night was the Break-through Award for Josh Tedeku, who plays Jaheim in

the comedy-drama *Boarders*. Josh spoke of the power of black storytelling, and said that working on *Boarders* had made him a better actor and a better man.

Hail Danny Dyer, the ‘Disney star’

It was a good night for the BBC, which took 16 of the 29 competitive categories, and also for Disney+, which won two awards for *Rivals*. Dominic Treadwell-Collins and playwright Laura Wade jointly scooped the Drama Writer prize against strong competition from *Slow Horses* screenwriter Will Smith.

Banging the drum for working-class actors, *Rivals* cast member Danny Dyer, who won Supporting Actor (Male), announced: “I’m a Disney star now.” ■



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