

Television

January 2019



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George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is now in its 19th year.

Application procedure

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by Friday **29 March 2019** on the official application form.

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From the CEO



As 2019 begins, I'd like to thank everyone who has helped make the past year such a stand-out one for the RTS. The Society could not do all the

great things it does without our tremendous, hard-working staff in London, or the fantastic goodwill of everyone who does so much for us in the nations and regions.

It's been an incredible 2018. I can't thank everyone enough for making it all happen.

Our January issue contains some New Year treats for you to enjoy. Peter Bazalgette's look back at some of the main events of last year from a television perspective is a joy to read.

Also, do read Helen Scott's warm reflections on how her home city, Leeds, is set to benefit from Channel 4's

decision to locate its new out-of-London headquarters there.

I was thrilled that Michael Grade could be a panel member at our December early-evening event, "A TV Christmas Carol". Michael's revealing anecdotes came thick and fast. He recounted how he'd helped shape and schedule some of the classic moments from festive TV. The two Kates (BBC Entertainment's Kate Phillips and *Click*'s Kate Russell) were fantastic, too.

On an evening of high drama at Westminster – in the Commons, the Government suffered three consecutive defeats in the Brexit debate – the RTS hosted its latest APPG event, "The future of TV journalism in an age of fake news and disinformation", at Portcullis House.

A stellar panel got to grips with a subject that is close to all our hearts.

A massive thanks to them and to our peerless host, Damian Collins MP, chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Full reports of both evenings are in this issue.

January's cover story by Pippa Shawley is a timely piece on the rise and rise of the dance genre on TV. Saturday evenings won't be quite the same minus *Strictly*.

The good news is that another glamorous dance series, *The Greatest Dancer*, is coming soon. Judged by the trailers, we're in for another glossy, prime-time treat. I, for one, can't wait.

Finally, a very Happy New Year to all our members and readers.

Theresa

Theresa Wise

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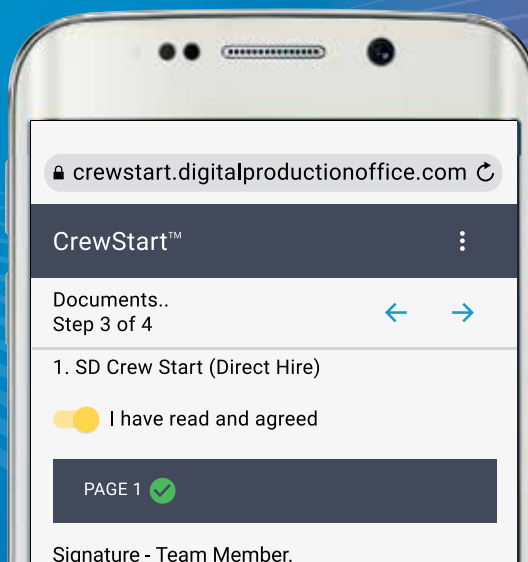
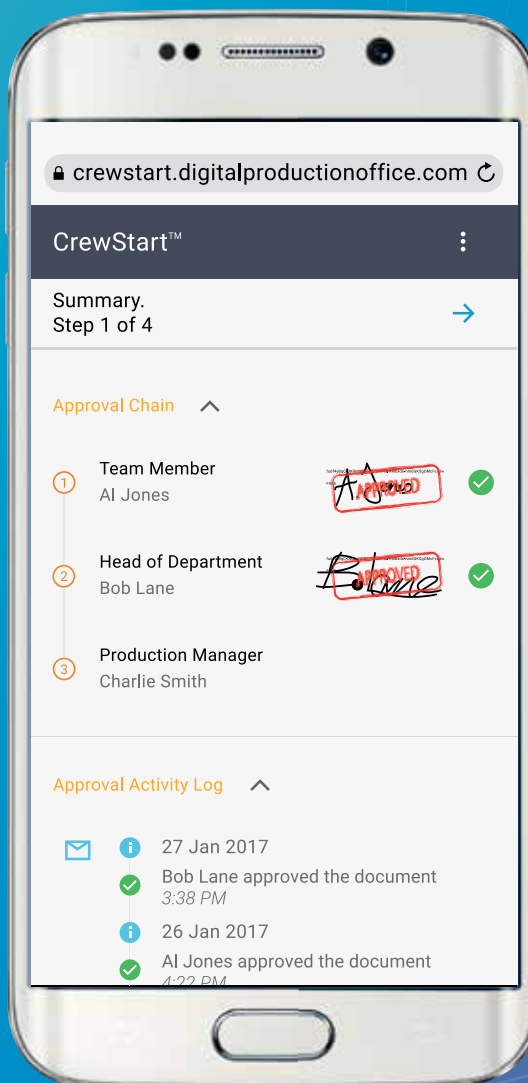
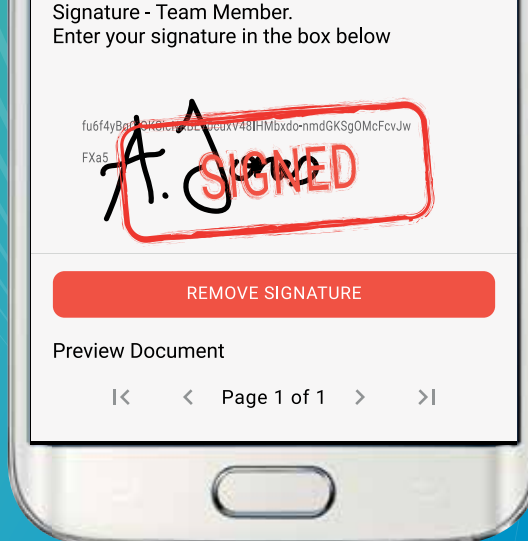
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National events

RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Wednesday 23 January

RTS screening of 4 Blocks

Joint event with TNT Serie/Turner and the RTS. Screening of the season 2 opener plus a Q&A with executive producers Hannes Heylmann and Anke Greifeneder from TNT Serie, Quirin Berg from Wiedemann & Berg and director Özgür Yildirim. 5:30pm for 6:30pm screening

Venue: Curzon Soho, 99 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1D 5DY

RTS FUTURES

Wednesday 30 January

RTS Futures Television Careers Fair 2019

Tips, tricks and practical advice to help you land that all-important first job in TV. Take part in our interview masterclasses, get your CV tweaked by professionals, learn about the different jobs and schemes out there and network with the most influential creatives in the business!

Exhibiting companies include: BBC, BECTU, Call Time, Channel 4, Connect2TVCoaching, Edinburgh Festival, Endemol Shine UK, Finecast, FremantleMedia UK, IBM, IMG, ITN, ITV, ITV Studios, Mama Youth Project, Media Trust, Milk VFX, Molinare, NBC, NFTS, Presenter Promotions, RDF, RTS Membership/Bursaries, Sara Putt Associates, Searchlight, ScreenSkills, Shooting Partners, Sky Content Services, Sky QC&A, Sony, Studio Lambert, Think Bigger, UKTV and WBITVP

Venue: Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, London N1 0QH

RTS AWARDS

Wednesday 27 February

RTS Television Journalism Awards 2019

Sponsored by Guestbooker.com
Venue: London Hilton on Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

RTS AWARDS

Tuesday 19 March

RTS Programme Awards 2019

In partnership with Audio Network
Venue: Grosvenor House Hotel, 86-90 Park Lane, London W1K 7TN

RTS AWARDS

Friday 28 June

RTS Student Television Awards 2019

Sponsored by Motion Content Group
Venue: BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT

RTS CONFERENCE

18-20 September

RTS Cambridge Convention 2019

Venue: King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST

Local events

DEVON AND CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson
■ RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

EAST

Thursday 14 March

RTS East Awards 2019

Venue: TBC
■ Nikki O'Donnell
■ nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk

LONDON

■ Daniel Cherowbrier
■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585
■ RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

Saturday 23 February

RTS North East & the Border Awards 2019

6:00pm onwards
Venue: Hilton Newcastle Gateshead Hotel, Bottle Bank, Gateshead NE8 2AR
■ Jill Graham
■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk



Amazon

NORTH WEST

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639
■ RPinkney@rts.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tuesday 26 March

RTS Northern Ireland Student Television Awards 2019

Venue: TBC
■ John Mitchell
■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092
■ byrnecc@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

Wednesday 16 January

RTS Scotland AGM

6:30pm. Refreshments after
Venue: STV, Pacific Quay, Glasgow G51 1PQ

Thursday 7 February

Campbell Swinton Lecture with BBC Scotland director Donalda MacKinnon

You are advised to book early, as this event is expected to sell out. Refreshments available.
6:00pm for 6:30pm
Venue: BBC Scotland, 40 Pacific Quay, Glasgow G51 1DA

Tuesday 16 April

RTS Scotland Student Television Awards 2019

The awards are supported by STV, which will film the awards ceremony and show the event and the winning films on its digital platform. 6:00pm
Venue: Argyle Street Arches, 253 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8DL

Wednesday 12 June

RTS Scotland Television Awards 2019

Venue: The Old Fruitmarket, Candleriggs, Glasgow G1 1NQ
■ Jane Muirhead
■ scotlandchair@rts.org.uk

SOUTHERN

■ Stephanie Farmer
■ SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

THAMES VALLEY

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YORKSHIRE

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280
■ lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk



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TV diary

Alex Horne, creator of comedy hit *Taskmaster*, receives an unusual delivery and consults his children for advice



My working life was turned on its head nine years ago, the summer after I became a father. Presumably out of panic, I began two projects that were meant to run alongside my normal stand-up comedy, but these now dominate the working week.

My three children seem not to mind both ventures – for now, at least – and actually help on occasion.

■ We are currently filming the bulk of the eighth and ninth series of *Taskmaster*. What started as a one-night stand at the Edinburgh Fringe took on a life of its own – and took over mine.

I spend more time at the *Taskmaster* house, by the Thames, when we are in full swing than I do at home, but it's only fun. We think up tasks for my comedy heroes to tackle. One by one, they come and do whatever is asked of them.

Sure, they bicker and berate me. Many force me into situations that I'd never wish on others. But I am constantly surprised by the unending inventiveness of their brains. It turns out that comedians are funny people.

■ If I'm not adjudicating at the *Taskmaster* house, I'm adjudicating from mine. I foolishly invited the public to take part themselves through a

Taskmaster book, which involves as much work for me as the reader. Many of the tasks are interactive.

Throughout the week, I receive amazing and alarming correspondence. Yesterday, I came home to a message from my neighbour, who'd had to take delivery of a pallet of peanut butter for me (in response to a "Send me something unusual" task). There are many perks to what I do.

■ Even more recklessly, I vowed to dish out a task on Twitter every day throughout Advent, unaware that a daunting number of people were lying in wait for just such an opportunity.

I can't back out now, so any spare time is spent answering questions from the confused and trying to decide who's won every day. It's a job that Greg Davies was born for but which makes me sweat.

This, though, is the heart of the show. Nine years ago, I sent my first tasks to 20 of my friends over the internet. Now, thousands are taking part. I can see how cult leaders get carried away with themselves.

■ Thankfully, my other children – the members of my band, The Horne Section – are consistently excellent and always diligent at putting me in my place.

We meet at least once a week for a chaotic live show, ideally somewhere within two hours' travel from home, or for a rambling podcast in the saxophonist's basement.

■ I seldom do stand-up alone any more, so this is my only chance to do what used to be my job.

Doing it with friends (I went to primary school with two of the band and know the others more intimately than is healthy) is immeasurably more pleasurable than the solo world of endless journeys, silent dressing rooms and soulless service stations. Although, to be fair, I still love these islands.

If I ever need to write something, I head to Teddington or Beaconsfield and plant myself in the middle of the very worst café to get inspired.

■ This week, we recorded with Tim Key, Rufus Hound and Sir Chris Hoy. I didn't expect I'd be saying that when we booked 10 nights at the Pleasance back in 2010.

We never had a plan – and still don't – but, again, better comedians and friends such as Tim have always been there to muck around with us. And it's a happy surprise that the likes of Hoy and Hound are so willing to join in.

■ At home, the kids suggest their own tasks and solutions. I try to get them to practise their saxophones, because I still wish I was a real musician.

My wife is a saint for putting up with it all.

Alex Horne is a comedian, musician and writer.

TV and dance

Perfect partners

Can BBC One's new show *The Greatest Dancer* sparkle like *Strictly*? Pippa Shawley takes to the floor

When the BBC spiced up one of TV's oldest formats to create *Strictly Come Dancing*, few thought it

would create the holy grail of TV – a genuine pop-culture phenomenon that glued all ages to the box.

That was almost 15 years ago. *Come Dancing*, the show that inspired *Strictly*, first appeared in 1950, surviving in all its flouncy glory until 1998. It remains to be seen if even *Strictly* can last that long.

Remarkably, despite the departure of key dance master and catchphrase king Bruce Forsyth, who hung up his shiny shoes in 2014, *Strictly* chalked up its most successful season ever last year.

"In a way, it's owned by the public," says Kate Phillips, the BBC's entertainment controller. Viewers have become armchair experts in the paso doble and Viennese waltz. The *Strictly* team work hard to cast celebrities who will appeal to all ages.

Despite the annual grumbles about some members of the cast being more obscure than others, by the end of the competition the show has made household names of its contestants.

"We cast a mixed bag," Phillips explains. "We want to cast [some] people who are complete novices, some who have a bit of dance knowledge and some who will surprise us."

The show has hit a winning formula with its mix of fabulous costumes, fiery judges and outstanding professional dancers. It's not something that's messed with. "People just love what they know," Phillips believes. Instead of



The Greatest Dancer
presenter Jordan Banjo

playing around with the format, each year the show pushes for bigger, more impressive dances that continue to thrill and inspire the nation.

Now Phillips is launching what she hopes will become another entertainment behemoth. Inspired by the music video for Justin Timberlake's *Can't Stop the Feeling*, which showed amateur dancers busting their moves in car parks, diners and supermarket aisles, Phillips wanted a show that featured "real people".

The result is *The Greatest Dancer*, an eight-part talent show in which amateur dancers of all ages show off their passion for dance, from ballet to Bollywood.

Singer and former *X Factor* judge Cheryl (no surname these days), *Glee* star Matthew Morrison and *Strictly* professional Oti Mabuse serve as "dance captains". They will mentor the contestants.

The series is produced by Syco Entertainment, Simon Cowell's production company, best known for ITV hits *Britain's Got Talent* and *The X Factor*. It is the first show the BBC has ordered from the company.

"I didn't realise it was such a big deal," laughs Phillips, who put the idea for an amateur dance show out to tender.

"The pilot from Syco was just glorious and full of energy," she recalls. She hasn't met Cowell, but Syco's track record of delivering Saturday-night ratings winners for ITV for the past 14 years won't have hurt.

Consisting of four pre-recorded episodes, followed by a further four live shows, *The Greatest Dancer* won't compete with *Strictly*, but will nod to its older sister, with the winner receiving £50,000 in cash and a slot performing on the next series of *Strictly*.

"Obviously, everyone wants the cash, but [performing on *Strictly*] is a really big deal for them," says Phillips.

"A lot of the younger performers, the 16- and 17-year-olds, have watched *Strictly* almost their entire lives, and grown up with it."

The New Year will be a good time for shareholders in sequin-manufacturers. ITV's winter extravaganza *Dancing on Ice* returns with its own celebrity line-up, including *Towie* star Gemma Collins and actor Richard Blackwood.

The show's creative director, Katie Rawcliffe, isn't worried about the new competition. "The whole of the TV industry is looking for the next big entertainment show, and there's room

for more than one," she insists. *Dancing on Ice* returned in 2018 after a four-year hiatus. It was felt that the show had come to the end of the road, and coaches Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean wanted a break.

"People genuinely missed it," says Rawcliffe. "We did a lot of research [and] they missed that sort of glitz and glam in cold January on a Sunday night." That nothing else had performed as well in that slot helped, too. An average audience of 7.8 million tuned in for the rebooted series.

Like *Strictly*, the audience switches on to see skidding celebrities transform into majestic figure skaters – but the jeopardy of being on the ice also helps.

IT'S EVENT TELLY YOU NEED TO BE THERE WATCHING IT AS IT PLAYS OUT

Notable accidents include Jennifer Ellison drawing blood when she hit herself on the head with her skate blade, and professional skater Mark Hanretty dislocating his shoulder live on air.

"We found quite quickly that people loved to watch the celebrities pull off the dances and the routines and learn their skills," shares Rawcliffe, "but equally, if there was a slip, a slide, a fall, a trip, they loved that as well."

For modern audiences, being able to tweet about those trips and falls (or impressive scorpion kicks) is part of the fun. When the return of *Dancing on Ice* was mooted, the team debated whether it could be pre-recorded.

"We've always felt that, with this show and shows that are similar, it's event telly.... You need to be there, watching it as it plays out," reckons Rawcliffe. "When someone does slip or trip, it makes it much more of a 'moment.'"

Phillips agrees: "Amazon and Netflix are coming, and they're strong competition... but I think that's where the linear channels endure – we have those live appointments on TV."

"Even with *Love Island* on a digital platform, people were coming to watch it live every night, because they want to be part of the conversation at that

moment, and the next morning in school and in the office."

With this in mind, former *Love Island* winner Kem Cetinay has been recruited as the new social reporter for *Dancing on Ice*, producing content for social-media platforms. As a previous *Dancing on Ice* competitor, Cetinay knows what it takes to participate in the competition, but he is also popular among younger viewers.

The 2019 series will feature more themed nights, following the success of last year's fairytale episode, which appealed to both the show's younger viewers and its nostalgic older audience.

The accessibility of dance is the key to the success of shiny floor shows such as *Strictly* and *Dancing on Ice*, but for Emma Cahusac, the BBC's dance commissioner, dance also plays an important role in tapping into the zeitgeist: "Dance is a very useful way of looking at us at that moment, at our culture, at our history."

She is keen to work with dance companies that are not only innovative in their performances, but also mark a "moment". BBC Four's 2018 Dance Season included *Choreographing History*, which looked at the artistic process behind Shobana Jeyasingh's *Contagion*, inspired by the 1918 flu epidemic. *Prejudice and Passion*, also part of the season, followed choreographer Carlos Pons Guerra as he prepared a children's production that told the true story of a baby penguin raised by two male penguins.

Cahusac is currently working on a show that uses the prism of dance to explore the social history of the 1970s and 1980s.

Watching beautifully produced, well-rehearsed routines provides some much-needed escapism, too, believes Kate Phillips. Last year, *Strictly* received its highest ratings ever. "I'm not going to get political, but there is a sense that formats often reflect the climate, and I think we're in unstable times at the moment.... People just love what they know, and they will keep coming to it as long as it's still at the top of its game."

Launching a new prime-time entertainment show is no mean feat, but Phillips hopes that the dance-loving public will warm to the amateur competitors on *The Greatest Dancer* in the same way they have to *Britain's Got Talent* contestants and *Strictly*'s superstars – and that the new format will provide another dollop of glamorous escapism for viewers. ■

A storyteller for our times



Drama

Mark Lawson hears how **James Graham** aims to make sense of our divided nation in *Brexit: The Uncivil War*

'I THINK THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PEOPLE BEING DISILLUSIONED BY POLITICS AND UNINTERESTED'

My interview with dramatist James Graham regarding his Channel 4 drama *Brexit: The Uncivil War* takes place slightly later than planned for an appropriate reason. We have both been transfixed by coverage on the BBC Parliament channel of Theresa May suffering three Commons defeats in close succession at the start of the debate on her EU withdrawal deal.

One mark of a distinctive playwright is that life starts to feel like their scripts. And the events in Westminster resemble a scene from Graham's 2012 hit stage play, *This House*, concerning the fall of the Labour minority government of 1976–79.

That success made Graham the go-to fictional chronicler of British politics. It led to further stage plays, including *Labour of Love* (2017), the story of a centrist Labour MP who falls in love with a Corbynista assistant. It also set up Channel 4's 2015 drama *Coalition*. This RTS Single Drama award winner foregrounded the power-sharing

negotiations, in 2010, between Bertie Carvel's Nick Clegg and Mark Dexter's David Cameron.

As Cameron is now thought by some only to have promised the EU referendum in the belief that it would never happen (because he expected to lose the 2015 election or enter another coalition with Clegg, who would have blocked a plebiscite on Europe), there is a link between *Coalition* and *Brexit: The Uncivil War*, which seems certain to be one of the first TV hits of 2019.

And, as Graham also dramatised the 2015 election in *The Vote* (a Donmar Warehouse stage play screened live on More4 on polling night), I suggest to him that he now has an accidental trilogy, dramatising all the major political events of this decade.

"Yes," agrees the 36-year-old who comes from Mansfield. "Although my feeling is that it won't stop at a trilogy. It will be an anthology that will never stop. Without sounding too worthy or romantic about the role of culture in these unprecedented, chaotic times, I think, alongside journalism and political debate online, drama needs to

insert itself into these events – to consider them on a narrative, dramatic, character level.

“There are clearly such divisions – and it’s so toxic – that storytelling needs to come into this space to try to give some sense of what’s going on.”

At the start of Graham’s career, it was common for producers in theatre and TV to say that politics was boring. “Yeah. I sort of miss ‘boring’ politics. I really do. But I don’t think it was ever true. When TV commissioning editors said there was no audience for politics, I never believed them. I think there’s a difference between people being disillusioned by politics and uninterested. I don’t think that most people are uninterested. The great surprise of my – and my colleagues’ – creative life was that *This House* found not just an audience at the National Theatre, but that it went on to find one in the West End and on tour over the past five years.

“So there is an appetite for stories about the political condition – to be entertained by it, horrified by it, and informed by it.”

While Graham will doubtless, eventually, write – for stage or TV or both – *That House*, about the parliamentary debate over Brexit, he has no worries about *Brexit: The Uncivil War* now seeming dated, in focusing on the fight between the Leave and Remain teams in 2016.

“The reason we go back to the very recent past is to make sense of where we are now and where we are going,” he says. Watching the “chaos and carnage” of the parliamentary debates on May’s deal was, for Graham, a “reminder of the validity of exploring the origins of some of the actions that are now having consequences”.

With calls for a second referendum growing louder at the time we speak, he also feels that “if we’re going to do it again, then, Jesus Christ, we need to learn the lessons of the last one”.

Brexit: The Uncivil War is based on two books on the referendum: *All Out War*, by *Sunday Times* political editor Tim Shipman, and *Unleashing Demons* by Craig Oliver, who was Cameron’s director of communications.

Whereas, in *Coalition*, the main characters were well-known public figures (Paddy Ashdown reportedly complained that he was played by an actor who looked too old), in *Brexit*, they are largely the unknown puppet-masters. Rory Kinnear plays Oliver, with Benedict Cumberbatch as Dominic



James Graham

Curtis Brown

‘THE MAIN CHARACTERS WERE UNKNOWN TO ME BEFORE I STARTED WORK ON IT’

Cummings, the eccentric and contentious visionary who ran the main Leave campaign.

“The main characters were unknown to me before I started work on it,” admits Graham. “It’s a great privilege as a writer to be able to pull back the curtain and see all these invisible people pulling levers. We’re very familiar with the public-facing politicians, the Michael Goves and Boris Johnsons.

“But Johnson didn’t come up with the £350m a week for the NHS claim that was on the side of the bus. Michael Gove didn’t design the targeted advertising that appeared on people’s Facebook feeds. This drama is about the people who did.”

Graham’s policy with his biographical dramas is to seek to speak to the living participants in the events. For the stage play *Ink* (2017) – about Rupert Murdoch’s 1969 recreation of the *Sun* as a Tory, breast-baring tabloid – he even requested an interview with the elusive tycoon. He refused but eventually came to see one of the final West End performances, meeting the cast and

writer afterwards. “It was a slightly surreal moment,” Graham recalls. “It’s a bit of a blur because I couldn’t really believe he was there in front of me. He was very engaging and asked lots of questions about who I spoke to. He was very keen on a sequence that showed the old ‘hot metal’ method of printing newspapers. He spoke about his memories of the romance of that.”

For *Brexit*, Graham spoke at length to Oliver and Cummings: “For whatever reason, people seem happy to meet playwrights and talk to them in a different way than they would to journalists. I’m not going to lie: Dominic Cummings had a lot of questions about engaging at first, realising that something like this had the potential to be a stitch-up. So he met me a couple of times and spent time with Benedict.”

After the research process, Graham begins by reducing the story to its essentials: “I’m a great believer in applying to the random sprawling mess of history quite a rigid, traditional structure. I often ask myself, if this were a Pixar movie, what would the Pixar version be?”

“Or, in the musical version, what would the second song be? And, once you apply those principles to it, you start to tame the mass of information and make sense of it. But, once you’ve done that, you can be inventive and playful with the form or whatever. But you have to get the story straight first.”

Theatres have no statutory obligation of impartiality, and biographical dramas for that medium also benefit, Graham thinks, from the fact that “stage plays have an abstraction and sense of illusion that encourage viewers not to think they are seeing reality”. But, he acknowledges, “TV is a much more literal medium, and that comes with responsibilities. Especially with something as recent and controversial as Brexit. So, yes, I do think that you have to apply different standards to the representation of real people on television than you would on stage.”

Because of internal and external codes of conduct, TV editorial and legal departments carefully scrutinise bias, accuracy, libel, and privacy.

“I found it really hard to tread that line of impartiality,” Graham says. “I sought advice constantly from colleagues. But I really enjoy the part of writing that is to play devil’s advocate with your own possible prejudices.”

Across his work for stage and screen, Graham’s reputation is for being ►



Benedict Cumberbatch
as Dominic Cummings in
Brexit: The Uncivil War

Channel 4

› even-handed. Is that a result of temperament or policy? “It was a very conscious decision. I’m not dogmatic about it. I think that there should be different approaches: TV can sustain work that is polemical or didactic.

“But, for me, I just find it dramatically inert to come down explicitly on one side. Especially with *Brexit* – which is pretty much 50–50 in the country, whatever people in the media industries might have thought – you want people to access the work without feeling pre-judged.

“But I think that, while doing that, you can still pursue an argument, which isn’t tribal or Leave/Remain. And, in this case, the question for me is how healthy this referendum was: did we rise to the occasion and present the best version of ourselves?

“I don’t think anyone believes that we did. I think it was an awful campaign – on all sides – politics at its lowest.”

Because those behaving (allegedly) lowly do not always see it that way themselves, Graham also admits that he has “spoken to so many lawyers. I don’t want to sound accidentally cavalier or boastful about it. But I genuinely think that, if I wrote something like this, and I wasn’t immediately phoned by a cabal of worried lawyers, then I wouldn’t have done my job.

“The scripts came back marked: ‘What’s your source for this?’, ‘Can we say this?’ And that’s great. And exciting. Because a piece like this should feel dangerous.”

Brexit begins with the standard disclaimer that some scenes and dialogue have been created for dramatic purposes. “My general rule,” Graham says, “is that, if someone is standing in front of a microphone or a dispatch box, they have to say as near as dammit what they really said. But, once they’re behind closed doors, they’re mine.

“And I think audiences are familiar with that convention: the joy of shows such as *The Crown* is that the audience enjoys being taken into the private world while being aware that they are watching a fictionalisation.

“We know that, at the end of each episode of *The Crown*, people jump on to Wikipedia and ask: ‘Is that true?’ I’d like that to happen with *Brexit*. It should be a primer.”

For me, Peter Morgan, screenwriter of *The Crown*, takes more liberties with history than Graham does, but the younger dramatist’s response to this suggestion allows Morgan the excuse of dealing with duller material: “Well, with *Brexit*, why make anything up, because the reality is so extraordinary?”

The liberties Graham took in *Brexit* extended to telescoping four meetings into one, or putting in the room someone who was, in reality, on the phone from a train. He also created a framing device in which Cummings is interviewed by a Hutton- or Leveson-like inquiry into the conduct and funding of the referendum campaigns; there has never been such an inquiry, although some have called for one.

A striking aspect of recent TV drama has been the recruitment of theatre writers: Mike Bartlett (*Doctor Foster*, *Press*), Jack Thorne (*This is England*, *National Treasure*) and Phoebe Waller-Bridge (*Fleabag*, *Killing Eve*) were all to be found alongside Graham in the theatre listings at the time he started writing.

“We’re in a very exciting time,” says Graham. “I remember a view among playwrights – which, in my view, was unfair and unfounded – that television was a lesser art form than theatre. And broadcasters were sometimes reluctant to employ theatre writers.

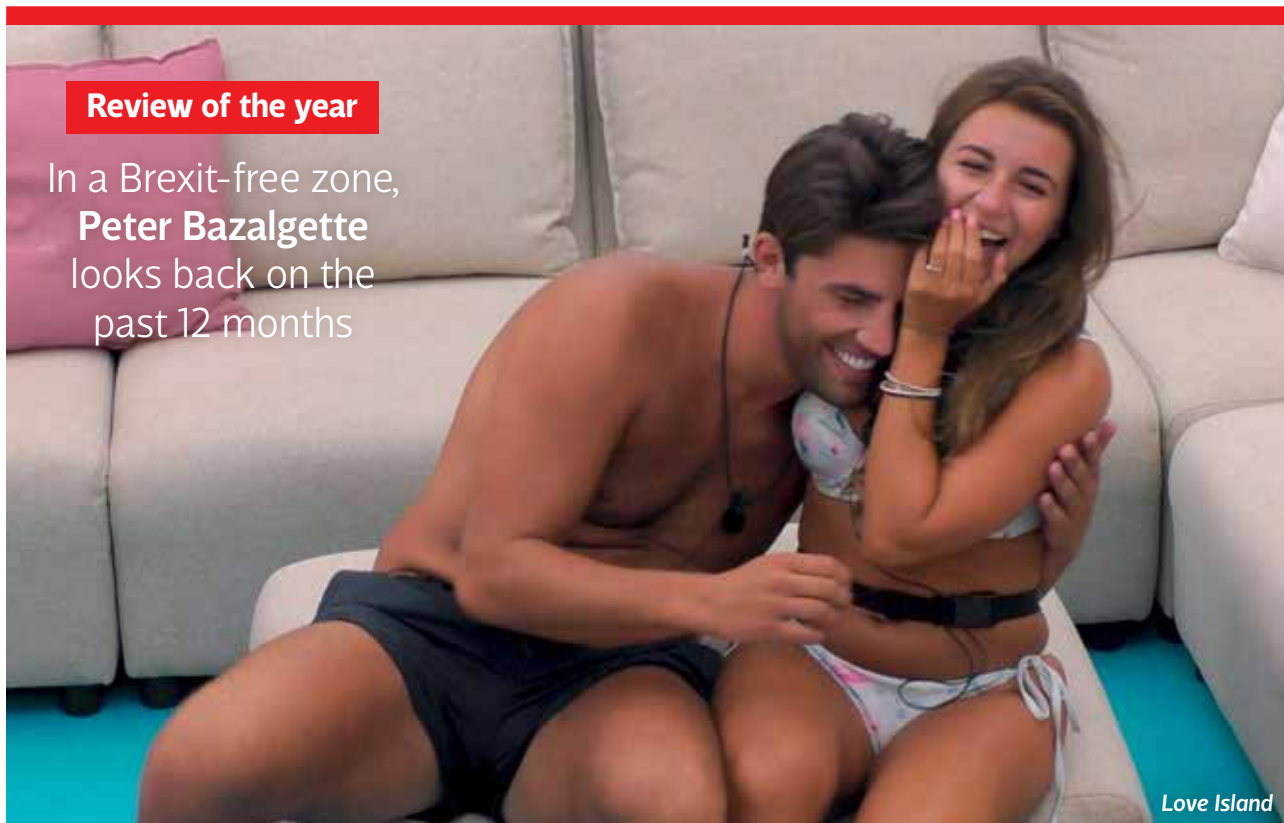
“But those two perceptions have now gone. If you look at Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s *Killing Eve*, it’s so extraordinary and authored. I don’t know how they write the hours they do. I’m in awe of the amount that Mike Bartlett and Jack Thorne write for TV. I write a single film and then have to lie down.”

He loves television, though, having grown up watching “that ITV/Granada tradition of muscular northern drama – *Cracker*, *Band of Gold*. Also, anything by Sally Wainwright, Alan Bleasdale, Paul Abbott – dramas that put the human at the heart of the story but were set against very real, urgent socio-political background. I loved that contest of the political and the personal.”

He hopes to continue the screen story that begins with *Brexit: The Uncivil War*. “I already have the next three or four films in my head, and would love to do them.” ■

Review of the year

In a Brexit-free zone,
Peter Bazalgette
looks back on the
past 12 months



Royals, reboots and revelations

JANUARY

ITV's much-anticipated new Chief Executive, Carolyn McCall, finally arrives on the South Bank. The press chitter-chatter mentions her previous media experience at the *Guardian*. True, but few write about why we really wanted her: her brilliant curation of the customer relationship at EasyJet. All broadcasters now have to perfect their direct-to-consumer skills – from one-to-one online relationships to data-rich advertising.

Within days, we host television industry royalty in the tower. The RTS wants them to meet some Windsor royalty. First the Society's Patron, HRH Prince Charles, with the Duchess of Cornwall in support, tours *This Morning* for a taste of mutton stew and an encounter with apprentice guide dogs. Digby distinguishes himself by biting a fluffy sound boom and wrestling it to the ground. It's bravely rescued by Prince Charles and the

tabs have their story. Later, the party meets the impressive young talent coming through the RTS's important bursary programmes.

Fantastic drama on Channel 4 this month: *Kiri*, with the incomparable Sarah Lancashire. Always good to see *Coronation Street* alumni prosper.

FEBRUARY

Speculation mounts that the Weinstein Company will file for bankruptcy, following a shocking catalogue of revelations. Extraordinary to think that Harvey was trying to flog his TV arm as recently as 2016. A problem for anyone taking his proposition seriously was his difficulty in presenting a set of discrete accounts for that division.

A bigger problem was the legendary charm of Harvey. When he realised this was an issue, I'm told that he said he really was a lovely guy to work with and, if you didn't believe him, to call Barack Obama at the White House for a reference. We can just

imagine the call: "White House switchboard... I'm sorry, the President does not take unsolicited calls... and Harvey who?"

MARCH

ITV, in common with other employers, publishes its gender pay gap. Of the bewildering array of statistics, our top-line 11.9% compares well with a national average of 18%. But it shows that we have work to do.

As I've pointed out in these pages before, the gender pay gap is consistently misunderstood. It reveals a lack of senior women in an organisation. It does not denote that men and women are paid differently for doing the same job – equal pay has been mandatory since the 1970s. Throughout the year, I hear senior journalists in all media completely confuse the two. Read my lips....

Boards have to set an example and, as we approach spring, ITV's is heading for a 50/50 gender balance. I have ➤

to say that we've had no problem finding women of talent in finance, strategy and governance.

The Government announces a sector deal for the creative industries as part of its industrial strategy. It includes an investment in creative clusters, which I strongly recommended in my independent review in 2017. More of this later.

APRIL

Coinciding with Her Majesty's 92nd birthday, we transmit *The Queen's Green Planet*, in which two national treasures take a leisurely turn around Buck House's garden. Yes, it's Sir David Attenborough and Her Majesty in a brilliant confection, masterminded by Chris Shaw for ITN Productions.

My guess is that they only had 90 minutes' access, but their picturesque progress around some noble oaks and ashes provides the spine for a worldwide arboreal dissertation. What do the royals do wherever they go? Plant a tree, that's what. So, no shortage of relevant archive!

Gratifyingly, it gets 6.4 million viewers. And, at a Palace launch a few days earlier, the Woodland Trust gives us each a tiny hazel sapling. I plant mine in our Italian garden. How's it doing? Well, I might get it its own webcam so you can track its progress to maturity. Slow TV is now the zeitgeist.

MAY

Who Wants To Be a Millionaire? successfully returns to the schedules. This confirms a trend I've noted: that the channels are currently reviving recognised entertainment brands with some success – *Dancing on Ice*, *The Crystal Maze*, *The Gen Game* (possibly). It contrasts with the period between 1995 and 2005, when non-fiction telly was revolutionised with new genres and formats. But a bit quiet since then.

The making, distribution and consumption of drama is where all the innovation is now. Soaring production quality, via CGI and drone cameras, box-set availability and the drug of seamless online binge viewing.... Netflix and Amazon pioneered this, but only because the competition authority bone-headedly prevented a British service nine years ago. A plague of kangaroos on whoever took that foolish decision.

JUNE

Yes, my friends, that cultural icon *Love Island* returns to ITV2. This has

become the philosopher's stone of broadcast TV: a massive young audience, lots of live viewers for the schedule, just as many catching up on ITV Hub and Hub+, 360° brand exploitation and sales around the world.

For those of you of a certain age who have resisted it thus far, feeling linguistically challenged, here's a handy glossary: got a text = the producer is communicating with me; pied = dumped; peng sort = fit guy; mugged off = being deceived or disrespected; co-ord = apparel; 100% = I agree with you; crack on = indulge in romantic pursuits. It reminds us that language remains wonderfully dynamic. Ah, Shakespeare, thou shouldst still be living at this hour...

JULY

The dating show that is the content industries these days rolls on: 21st Century Fox shareholders yield to Disney's blandishments. And, in the wooing of Sky, Fox is also cleared for a takeover of Sky. But, is that the handsome Comcast hovering into view? We could do with Cilla to sort all this out.

This is the context for Carolyn to unveil her strategy to the markets. It's entitled "More than TV", a consumer-aimed offer referring to all the services beyond the

schedule – AVoD, SVoD, live events and so on. But also to the magic social glue of PSB (witness 10 million watching the Lost Voice Guy win *BGT* in June). "More than TV" also works for brand advertisers who can expect programmatic buying, targeting and ambitious creative solutions going forward.

Just about my favourite drama at the moment, *Unforgotten*, commences a successful third series. But the extraordinary ratings for England's unlikely run in the World Cup, on both BBC and ITV, rather drowns out the rest of the schedule.

Would we have said, at the turn of the century, that the PSBs would still be getting audiences of more than 20 million a couple of decades later?

AUGUST

The holiday month kicks off with a powerful piece in the *Guardian* by Damian Collins MP, the Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Damian is taking an admirable lead on the way that Silicon Valley, for all its benefits, is hollowing out civil society.

We could talk about abuse of privacy or IP, dodgy commercial impacts, failure to pay proper tax or extreme porn. But, on this occasion, Damian is concerned with fake news and democracy.

He proposes fining the likes of Facebook when they're guilty of promoting campaigns of disinformation. It pulls the values of public-service news into sharp focus, arguably more important today than in the pre-internet era.

Preserving a funding model for trusted and reliable news must be a political priority, as well as guaranteeing its prominence.

SEPTEMBER

BBC One enjoys an extraordinary breakout hit with *Bodyguard*. Its finale consolidates with 17.1 million (the sort of TV audience which

That's



HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall

Paul Hampfoursounian



Life! was winning back in 1978, when I worked as a researcher for the blessed Esther). I admit this smothers our rival in the schedule, *Vanity Fair*, which meets its Waterloo, so to speak.

But it gradually gets appreciated in the public prints that there's a silver lining for ITV. Of course, Jed Mercurio's creation is made by World Productions, part of the ITV Studios family. It underlines for me how those old rivals, the BBC and ITV, must now become the best of friends in order to prosper in our brave new world.

In other news, the BBC's highly original *Killing Eve* is the cult hit of the month. And Comcast gets Sky for a lorra, lorra money, as Cilla would have observed.

OCTOBER

The last day of the month brings the announcement of Channel 4's relocations (and plaudits to Alex Mahon for defusing a row with the Government, where the politicians seemed to have a point).

The second HQ will be Leeds, an excellent choice, where ITV already has a substantial news and production centre, not to mention the Woolpack watering hole for *Emmerdale*'s thirsty residents. Bristol and Glasgow will also get a boosted Channel 4 presence.

This follows hard on the heels of news of nine creative clusters to receive investment via the Arts & Humanities Research Council.

Two of them, led by local universities, are in Leeds and Bristol/Bath. This

'THE BBC AND ITV, MUST NOW BECOME THE BEST OF FRIENDS IN ORDER TO PROSPER IN OUR BRAVE NEW WORLD'

makes the Channel 4 decision even more valuable.

The creative industries are now worth £100bn a year to our economy and are growing much faster than most other sectors. They'll also create jobs while AI destroys entire occupations elsewhere. The point of the clusters is to drive forward innovation in the likes of immersive tech and 5G. And it does, indeed, require a coherent and determined industrial strategy.

NOVEMBER

Crossrail's opening is postponed for a year... curses! It was going to be my new mode of transport from west London into work. This year, ITV has moved to new offices in Holborn after five decades on the South Bank. The tower became a bit of a sick building (when the lifts broke, we had to buy the spares on eBay) and the site will now be redeveloped.

This means my obvious route to ITV

is the Central Line. But, in this hottest of hot summers, it became an even more sadistic sauna than ever. I have to ask myself: your career started at BBC News as an act of aspiration; you were later lucky enough to have a bit of inspiration (well, a couple of hits, anyway); but must it all end with you drowning in perspiration?

DECEMBER

I'm writing in early December and I'm not into making predictions... so a brief reflection that last month saw the last edition of *Big Brother* on Channel 5. As a result, I'm invited on to (it seems) everything from Russia Today to Shetlands Radio. I decline, since I prefer to look forward not back (and I've got time off for good behaviour, having not seen the show since 2007).

Back in 2000, it was innovative in many ways. But most intriguing was how it enfranchised and educated the audience by streaming, and thus broadcasting, its rushes. Everyone had a view on how "fair" or "unfair" the nightly edits were. Thus demonstrating that the hallowed documentary-maker's art was always entirely the subjective view of the director.

Can't a channel (Channel 4 perhaps?) ask two directors to edit the same material and broadcast both shows? I bet you that the narratives would be entertainingly different.

There, I didn't mention the B-word once... a happy new year to all our readers. ■

Gently does it

The Billen profile

Andrew Billen talks to *Killing Eve* producer Sally Woodward Gentle about the obstacles to a work-life balance

Through the glass of Sally Woodward Gentle's office in Fitzrovia, the founder of Sid Gentle Films looks out on to a large space filled with hard-working media types. Only a modest nine of them work for her, however. The rest are social-media people and TV-commercial producers. Sid Gentle may be one of television's most creative young indies, but it is not, at a time of rising drama costs, wasting its money on an F-off HQ.

During our 70-minute conversation, Woodward Gentle's team gets two visitors, each, in their way, illustrating the twin challenges of their boss's career: excellence, and the trade-off between excellence and family life.

The first visitor is her daughter, Ella, who has popped in from the graphics company around the corner where she works. Despite what her mother says later about her parenting skills, it looks to me as if things have turned out

pretty well. The pair lunch together. They also run marathons side by side.

The second arrival, minutes later, is Colin Wratten, the producer of Sid Gentle's clever Saturday-night hit, *Killing Eve*. He has brought with him the two gongs that the series won at the previous night's C21 International Drama Awards: Best English-Language Drama Series and, for Jodie Comer, Best Female Performance in a Drama Series. There is a small round of applause.

Killing Eve last year gave the lie to those who warn against overestimating television audiences. A funny, gory thriller about a psychopathic female assassin, it was both cynical and warm, its performances minutely nuanced but larger than life.

It was heightened drama, yet rooted in the reality of the story's exotic locations – which really were shot, with the exception of Moscow, where the over-loud captions said they were.

Written by *Fleabag*'s Phoebe

Waller-Bridge but based on Luke Jennings's *Villanelle* stories, it was truly original and has begat a second season.

"We thought of ourselves as quite subversive and a bit risqué and a bit funny," says Woodward Gentle, "but, actually, it has found a very mainstream audience as well as a really cool audience. On BBC America, I think it was the first show for 10 years whose viewing figures grew every week. I think that was word of mouth, people liking to discover something and feel ownership of it."

In the US, where it was shown in the spring, the series could be sampled on lifestyle and women-orientated platforms, an improbable demographic gamble that paid off. In the UK, when it landed in the early autumn, the whole box set was available online on BBC Three. "I think it was great foresight," she says of the BBC, "to get into box sets and for BBC Three only to be available online." As well as skewing young, I say, *Killing Eve*'s audience



The Durrells

seems to include more than its fair share of enthusiastic LGBT viewers.

"I think so. Even though there's very little sex in the show, I think it feels quite sexy and it feels quite charged."

Sid Gentle happens to be behind one of my other current favourite dramas, *The Durrells*. While definitely pre-watershed stuff, it has a nose-thumb-ing, anti-genre quality that distinguishes it from the usual heart-warming, early-Sunday-night ITV shows.

"I love doing something that the whole family enjoys but Simon [Nye, the writer] is such a genius, he has also made it slightly subversive and a bit naughty. It doesn't feel too saccharine. It's not soppy, and any kind of soppy moments that come along are undercut."

The series, and not just its fourth season, is, as we speak in November, about to wrap, which will mean fewer visits to Corfu for Woodward Gentle, although I suspect that she will holiday there for ever. Keeley Hawes, who

plays Mrs Durrell was no longer "on an option" for series 4 but, apparently, could not resist rejoining the family one last time.

"They do adore each other," Woodward Gentle says of the cast. "They have little fights and little spats but they genuinely adore each other. Given that none of them had met each other before, it's a miracle."

If there is a cloud hovering above the Ionian's azure skies, it is the familiar one: money. Since the referendum, British producers have taken a hit from dollar-pound fluctuations and the euro exchange rate. In addition, the drama boom has meant creatives are in demand and more expensive to hire.

"There's so much drama going on, it naturally becomes inflationary. There is massive demand for directors, writers and producers. And now there is this tax credit where you have got to have a budget of at least £1m per hour to qualify. That immediately had an inflationary effect. A lot of crew rates had been flat for a very, very long time, and then rates jumped."

We marvel at the production values of Matthew Weiner's *The Romanoffs* on Amazon but also of the British-made *The Crown* on Netflix.

"*The Crown* money is in just a different stratosphere in comparison with what most human beings have got to cope on. It's great, though. It's not like they've wasted it."

It is a very different television world from the one Sally Woodward was born into 54 years ago. She was brought up in Teddington, where, for years, Thames Television had studios. Her father, Stan Woodward, was a production designer at the company (he retuned the family TV so that, when switched on, it showed ITV not BBC One).

Her mother, Lorna, was a fashion designer – whose influence can surely be seen in her extremely stylish daughter. The old studios are now riverside apartments, but Teddington was, she says, a creative hub in the 1970s, filled with TV folk. *George and Mildred's* house was there, and *Love Thy Neighbour's*. Benny Hill was chased around the bushes of Normansfield psychiatric hospital.

She became an ITV rent-a-child. "We'd get a phone call: 'Can you come down to *Magpie* and taste Easter eggs?' My dad worked on *Rainbow*, so we were always the children on it picking the apples or playing with puppies." >



Getty

Ninja Turtles to Killing Eve

Sally Woodward Gentle, CEO and founder of Sid Gentle Films

Born: 6 February 1964 in Chatham. Brought up in Teddington.

Parents: Stan Woodward, production designer, and Lorna Woodward, fashion designer

Married: Henry Gentle, picture restorer; two sons, one daughter, all in their twenties

Education: Twickenham Girls' School; Goldsmiths College, London University (BA Hons English and drama)

1986 Assistant administrator, Chelsea Arts Club

1988 Limelight Films, rising to head of television

1995 Executive producer, Kudos Productions

1996 Managing Director, Kudos Productions

2000 Joins BBC, becomes creative director of in-house drama

2007 Creative director, Carnival Films

2013 Founds Sid Gentle Films

Hits: *Tipping the Velvet*, *Waking the Dead*, *Whitechapel*, *The Durrells*, *Killing Eve*

Near miss: SS-GB

Watching: *This Country*, *Succession*, *Transparent*, *Game of Thrones*

What's on her bedside table? 'A load of unfinished books. I can only really relax reading something if I know the rights have gone.'

Hobbies: Barefoot running and marathons with her daughter

➤ She watched television a lot, too, and loved it (it always surprises me that so many of my profile subjects harbour few strong feelings about the programmes of their childhoods).

Her ambition was to direct, however, rather than act. Directing was quickly superseded by the fun of bringing talents together as a producer.

After studying English and drama at Goldsmiths' College, she took her first job on the periphery of show business, as an assistant administrator at the Chelsea Arts Club. Her duties included cashing up, chucking out, and cleaning the vomit from the urinals.

On the plus side, it was there, alongside Quentin Crisp, Laurie Lee and Francis Bacon, that she met a clumsy barman, supplementing his earnings as an apprentice picture restorer, called Henry Gentle. They have been together ever since, marrying after the second of their three children was born.

From there, she finally got a foothold in television, working as a floor assistant and in the costumes department at Thames, before joining Lime-light Films, where she started as Steve Barron's assistant (he now directs *The Durrells*), following him to North Carolina to make *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. "People would go, 'What's that?' And I'd go, 'I promise you: you will hear of it.'"

She rose to head of TV at Lime-light and then moved to Kudos, where she brought in Jane Featherstone. For seven years, from 2000, she worked high up in the BBC drama department under Jane Tranter, just as reality television began to challenge the orthodoxies about what made prime-time television. "I remember having those conversations about the experience those shows gave people that drama was not currently giving them."

In 2007, she left to become creative director of Carnival Films, shortly before *Downton Abbey* came along.

In 2013, she founded Sid Gentle, "because I thought it was time to try and do it by myself and be self-determining".

Was she fed up with bosses saying no? "A little bit of that. Actually, I was given enormous free rein but I wanted

to be able to say, 'I want to do a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I don't mind this one being a loss leader.'"

Here, she has made Neil Gaiman's *Likely Stories* for Sky Arts (the loss leader), *SS-GB* and, of course, *The Durrells* and *Killing Eve*.

Her hit rate over the years has been extraordinary, from *Tipping the Velvet* through *Any Human Heart* (she knew the book's author, William Boyd, from Chelsea) to *Whitechapel*, but she volunteers that it has been at a cost to her children. "I had three under the age of four at one point."

And she was working throughout?

"Yeah. I was a bad mother. It was hell on earth. Well, I didn't take any jobs that took me abroad, so I stayed here, but I worked very long hours. I think that women overcompensate when they become mothers. They make themselves more available because they don't want to be seen as not being available. And that is so bad."

So it's back to women having to be better than men doing the same job? "I think it is. I think men are

thought heroic for putting their family first, and women get penalised for it."

In fact, she says, her early bosses in the independent sector were sympathetic to her domestic obligations. As a name, Sid Gentle (christened after her dog) may not sound as feminist as Jane Featherstone's company, Sister Pictures, but women narrowly outnumber men on its staff and she ensures equal opportunity for the mothers among them. Her head of development, Henrietta Colvin, who has twins, works two days in the office and one at home.

"When I worked at the BBC with Jane Tranter, I did a four-day week. She was amazing. She said, 'Listen, don't even think about it for a minute because I know the hours that you put in and I know that on the fifth day you're thinking about it, on the sixth day you're thinking about it, and on the seventh day.'"

On her mind now are future Sid Gentle projects. She sees no reason why *Killing Eve*, about to reach post-production on its second series, should not run for as long as the writers want it to. The company is adapting Nicole J Georges's graphic novel *Fetch!*, which will be filmed in the US. There may even be, she reveals, a new series from Simon Nye to fill the hole that will be left by *The Durrells*.

Can she tell me about it? "Might be Durrells, but not necessarily. There's been no commitment from ITV, yet."

Durrells? From a book by another Durrell?

"Maybe what the Durrells did later on. We're just going to start that pretty soon, actually."

First, however, the long goodbye to *The Durrells* itself continues. She is off to Twickenham, where the drama's interiors are filmed, to see Josh O'Connor, who plays Larry, do his final scene. We shall see him next as Prince Charles in *The Crown*. Like Sid Gentle, he is going places. ■



Killing Eve

BBC

OUR FRIEND IN LEEDS

The announcement that Channel 4 will be coming to Leeds literally lit up the city. Social media went mad. Leeds City Region's #4Sparks campaign had prevailed, and Leeds University floodlit its iconic Parkinson Building in celebration.

Friends and neighbours with no connection to the media were talking about it as a good thing. A new wave of prosperity, jobs and creative pride was on the way.

Moreover, we had been the underdog and beaten off the challenge from the two Andies (mayors Andy Street, heading the Birmingham bid, and Andy Burnham, in Manchester).

More than a decade ago, I was here when the tide went out. As controller of factual programmes at Yorkshire Television, I presided over a department hit by wave after wave of internal policy changes in the ITV system.

Externally, broadcasters' strategies ended up denuding the eastern side of the country – with the honourable exception of *Emmerdale* – of any meaningful production. My department was eventually closed down.

Talent, nurtured by us, left. Gradually, YTV retrenched to local news. Network opportunities at the BBC shrank and the once-vibrant city's production hub was left to reinvent itself.

In truth, though, Leeds never lost its creative mojo. It just needed to be different. Without the backing of a big broadcaster, the indies became its focus. True North became a significant producer (and employer), Screen Yorkshire attracted big-hitting dramas to film in the region and writers such as Kay Mellor steadfastly stuck to their made-and-written-in-Yorkshire mantra.

**Helen Scott
celebrates
Channel 4's
impending
move to her
home city**



Paul Hampartsoumian

With two new studios on Kirkstall Road, and Daisybeck expanding due to a slate of returning series from Channel 5, critical mass has been on its way back up.

Add more than a thousand tech companies in the region, a young and diverse demographic – and Yorkshire grit that persuaded Channel 4 to make the right decision – and we're back in business.

Channel 4's arrival could lead a transformation with benefits far beyond the city limits.

But there are huge challenges ahead. How do we grow the talent base from its current size, around 200, to become a creative community capable of both supporting indigenous production and also making shows that play on the global stage?

How do we attract the super-indies

without trampling on the smaller production companies? How do we roll out the benefits to other cities east of the Pennines, such as Sheffield, Nottingham and Newcastle, so that they can rival Glasgow, Salford and Bristol in the cultural industries sector?

How best do we represent the wonderfully diverse communities around us and give them a voice? It will require vision and partnerships, involving Leeds City Region, Channel 4 and the production sector, but already there's a palpable sense of excitement and a feeling that the tide is turning.

Last year, one of the RTS bursary students I'm associated with was offered a few weeks' internship at The Garden production company in London. He turned it down because he couldn't afford to live in the capital while working for free. Now The Garden is rumoured to be considering bringing its juggernaut production *24 Hours in A&E* to Leeds.

Two new production companies, Wise Owl Films and Endemol Shine North, rebranded as Workerbee, have set up in recent weeks. They're headed by talent who already live in – and believe in – the region. UKTV has announced that it is basing a technology arm here.

The universities are gearing up, with new industry-standard production facilities and a mission to make their media students the best in the country.

There's so much to look forward to.

When I walk out of the station and see one of Leeds' iconic buildings with a bloody great figure four outside it, I'll know we're on our way. ■

Helen Scott is a media consultant who lives in Leeds. She regularly produces events for the RTS and sits on its Education Committee.

March of the ten-per-centers



Entourage

This begins with a true story. I have withheld the real names, as I still want to do a little business, and certainly have lunch now and again, in LA. Some years ago, I went to see some senior executives at one of the major US talent agencies. We chatted amiably for the first 10 minutes, as you do. The normal stuff. “How long are you in town?” “I love London... you must know my friend Jack. He lives in Liverpool. That’s kinda near, isn’t it?” “The guy who runs NBC is going to be toast by Christmas.”

In this sort of conversation, any show you say you liked somehow leads back to them. It was one of their shows – their talent, their idea and their pitch. And, certainly, their 10% of gross.

Another executive arrived late, carrying a giant bowl of popcorn and started

Dealmaking

On both sides of the Atlantic, talent agencies are increasing their role in content production.

Simon Shaps investigates

to Hoover it up. If the meeting hadn’t happened some time before *Entourage* had aired, I would have said they got their routine straight from the TV series. It was, of course, the other way round. I was the guy from Granada and the agency wanted our business; they wanted to induct us into the mysteries of Hollywood.

I mentioned that I had come straight from a pitch meeting at one of the networks. They asked a bit about the show we were selling, but were much more interested in who we had pitched it to. I gave them the name.

The popcorn eater, who was already scooping up the last dregs, said: “Don’t worry. He’s one of our clients. Leave it to us.” Not content with that, they ended the meeting by saying that they would call me every week, to persuade me that they should represent the company. They did exactly that for a year and then moved on.

There may be nothing remarkable about this experience, but it has certainly stuck with me. Today, as we contemplate a television landscape in which seismic change is the norm, the US agencies, and their much smaller counterparts in the UK, are on the march.

Like the arrival of the streamers, the super-agencies, with their fingers in every pie, threaten to disrupt the established order.

One of the most controversial figures in the development of the US super-agencies, and a founder of CAA, has just published a memoir, *Who is Michael Ovitz?*, which was reviewed in the last issue of *Television*.

Ovitz was clearly touched with genius, but the book is a curious read, a mea culpa with barely an apology in sight. Without great fanfare, he writes that, at a certain point – though it is not entirely clear when that point was – he was “able to put executives in place at the studios and then sell our projects to them, controlling both supply and demand”.

If there is a holy grail in television, it is the dream of vertical integration. This is the ability to capture production and broadcast, the supply of content and the gatekeepers who control demand – the entire value chain – within one organisation. Ovitz, like the popcorn eater, had a variant of this idea in mind.

Unable to own platforms, he wanted to represent all the talent, from directors and producers to writers and actors, together with a sprinkling of TV network and studio executives.

With restrictions in the US on agencies moving into domestic production, CAA, WME, ICM, UTA – all of those three-letter acronyms, with their tough consonants – have, nonetheless, sought to grab more of the TV value chain.

Two of the most talked-about shows of recent years, *Killing Eve* and *The Night Manager*, received significant investment from Endeavour Content, described as the content division of WME and IMG. (IMG was acquired by WME at the end of 2013.)

In the case of *Killing Eve*, the combination of broadcast on BBC America, tax breaks and investment against distribution from Endeavour Content were enough to green-light the show. BBC One's money came in later.

When Chris Rice, co-president of Endeavour Content, was interviewed by *Deadline* in May, he said he did not want to produce. Instead, he wanted to provide “support” across sales, financing and business affairs, and offer producers “whatever they need to operate their business in the most effective way”.

The statistics about the power of the major talent agencies in the US are already jaw-dropping. According to

figures collected by the Writers Guild of America, nearly 90% of all scripted TV series are packaged by talent agencies, with WME and CAA accounting for nearly 80% of shows between them. The combination of access to lots of top-tier talent and access to capital goes a very long way.

Apple's first wave of original commissions in the US is said to be almost entirely multimillion-pound packages from the major talent agencies.

Outside of the US, the agencies are less constrained. For a while, it seemed that Endeavour Content was one of the favourites to buy Endemol Shine but, in the end, the interest seemed to fizzle out. Then, in October, it announced it was backing a start-up run by Simon Maxwell, outgoing head of international drama at Channel 4.

In March, UK talent agencies United Agents and Casarotto teamed up with US-based Anonymous Content, producer of *True Detective* and the Oscar-winning *Spotlight*, to launch a production company called Chapter One.

‘NEARLY 90% OF ALL SCRIPTED TV SERIES [IN THE US] ARE PACKAGED BY TALENT AGENCIES’

But the most conspicuous move into production by a UK talent agency was Curtis Brown's decision to set up Cuba, which received investment from BBC Worldwide. Cuba's 2018 series *McMafia* certainly raised its profile as an emerging producer and is returning for a second run.

However, privately, some independent producers question the relationship between Curtis Brown's role as a talent agency and Cuba's activities as a producer. Before Cuba was set up, Curtis Brown could be said to have had a simple mission: to negotiate the best, most lucrative deals for its actors, writers and directors to work on the best shows, and make sure its authors landed the best deals for their books.

With its own production arm to feed, that conversation has become, at best, more complicated. Can there be an

arm's length negotiation between two parts of a company – the talent agency and the production company – that sit under the same roof?

As UK talent agencies weigh up the pros and cons of following Curtis Brown into production, it seems that there will soon be another chapter in the talent agency story. At least one of the UK's super-indies is currently looking hard at investing in an agency.

At its most extreme, this convergence of talent agencies and production businesses poses a clear threat. Unchecked, such companies could have a stranglehold on all the elements that are needed to create a hit drama: the strongest material, whether books or original ideas; the best scriptwriters, directors and key on-screen talent; the most seasoned producers.

At that point, the balance of power between buyers and sellers changes. The seller holds all the cards.

In the US, the power of the mega-agencies is there for all to see. Setting up companies such as Endeavour Content and investing in production businesses outside the US only strengthens their position.

The Writers Guild of America keeps a watchful eye on this activity on behalf of its members, the thousands of writers employed across hundreds of US TV series. It has been looking to update its long-standing agreement with the Association of Talent Agents, focusing on areas where it believes there are conflicts of interest.

In the meantime, UK agencies, casting an envious glance at the scale and influence of their US counterparts, are much less constrained by the talent unions.

None of this may matter if the best ideas win through in the end and the talent is properly rewarded. But the UK's ever-growing number of independent drama producers – perhaps we should start calling them “non-aligned” producers – should probably not be so blasé about it.

They may be forgiven for wondering if the increasing power, resources and involvement in production of the super-agencies will shut them out, at precisely the moment that the streamers are offering greater opportunities than ever before. ■

Simon Shaps is the founder of Simon Shaps Ltd. He also works as a TV and film consultant for the literary agency Georgina Capel Associates.

TV news

Steve Clarke is persuaded by an RTS panel that transparency will be central to content platforms maintaining trust

At roughly the same time the Prime Minister faced three consecutive defeats over Brexit in the House of Commons, across the road in Portcullis House another important discussion was taking place – an RTS All-Party Parliamentary Group debate on “The future of TV journalism in an age of fake news and disinformation”.

Of course, the stakes were hardly of the same magnitude as the pain and chaos of Brexit. For those involved in television news, however, the online era is throwing up huge challenges for news organisations and the digital platforms that are gaining popularity at the expense of traditional outlets.

In charge of proceedings was no lesser figure than Damian Collins MP, Chair of Parliament’s Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. His attempts to hold Facebook to account have made him a hero to those worried that social media may be contributing to the erosion of democracy.

On this occasion, he may not have had the elusive Mark Zuckerberg in the room, but he did have a very distinguished panel: Deborah Turness, President of NBC News International; Jamie Angus, the director of the BBC’s World Service Group; Ben McOwen Wilson, YouTube’s regional director for EMEA; and Jonathan Thompson, CEO of Digital UK, which operates Freeview.

The panellists were broadly upbeat about the future of TV news, despite changing consumption habits, different distribution models and the spectre of fake news, recently joined by “deep fake” videos as AI makes it easier still to manipulate pictures and sound to fabricate stories.

Both Turness and Angus were the



Damian Collins MP

Fighting fake news

beneficiaries of new investment – the former in Euronews (in which NBC took a 25% stake, worth a reported \$30m, in May 2017), while the World Service received a five-year injection of £289m, announced in late 2015.

And, as Angus pointed out, Sky’s new owner, Comcast, had recently given assurances that it would back Sky News for a decade.

Alongside these developments, well-resourced, state-funded news channels, including “some pernicious ones”, such as Russia Today and China’s CGTN, have made an impact. The latter will open a new hub in London next year.

The BBC World News channel was in

good shape, reported Angus. It had confounded predictions that rolling, 24-hour-news channels would become obsolete in an online world. “It’s the BBC’s single, most-watched channel,” he said.

The phenomenon that is President Trump is good for all news providers. However, the obsession with Trump in general – and particularly his spats with the likes of CNN – was diverting attention away from important stories in other places such as South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, suggested the World Service executive.

“There, people are suffering genuine threats to life and limb.... The BBC is



From left: Ben McOwen Wilson and Deborah Turness

one of the very few remaining international broadcasters to genuinely invest in news gathering in parts of the world where it is not economically viable for commercial broadcasters to have a significant presence,” Angus said.

In East Africa, the BBC has 300 journalists, a resource that privately owned news organisations would find uneconomic.

As impressive as this sounds, is common with other traditional news outfits, the BBC’s audiences are ageing as young people skip scheduled bulletins (see *Stay Tuned* box on page 25).

In the online space, news is everywhere and one of the main platforms is YouTube, where trusted suppliers play an important role.

McOwen Wilson outlined the various ways in which users could watch news content on the Google-owned platform. News clips, live streaming, mid-length reports of around 10 to 12 minutes and “many thousands of hours” of longer documentaries were all available to YouTubers. These were supplied through partnerships with a range of UK and international

broadcasters and other news organisations. He explained: “In the UK, we work with all of the news providers – the BBC, Sky, Channel 4, ITN and ITV – and with international broadcasters such as Euronews, Russia Today, Al Jazeera and others.

“Alongside this, we have strong relationships with people who provide us with video clips, such as the *Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, the *FT* and the *Economist*.

“Supplementing this, we also have a number of endemic players, such as the BuzzFeeds of this world.”

Jonathan Thompson, the CEO of Digital UK, which operates Freeview, stressed that impartial news was a vital

component of UK public service broadcasting. But, while the consumption of TV news on traditional platforms remained strong and, according to opinion polls, was the most trusted form of news in the UK, he expressed anxieties about the long-term outlook.

He worried about news’s economic sustainability, particularly in relation to the BBC licence fee, and about how younger audiences would connect to legacy news providers. Maintaining trust was also a concern.

Proper regulation of PSB services was essential. “One of the problems of today is the lack of ability to sanction online platforms for harmful content,” said Thompson.

Turness, one-time editor of *ITV News*, was able to provide a perspective from both sides of the Atlantic. She was the New York-based President of NBC News before she returned to Europe last year to take up her present role.

At Euronews, she said, “We have been very deliberate in asking, ‘How do you rebuild trust?’” She added: “We are building Europe’s town square – all voices are welcome. We invite ►

**A.I. MAKES IT
EASIER STILL TO
MANIPULATE
PICTURES
AND SOUND
TO FABRICATE
STORIES**



From left: Jonathan Thompson and Jamie Angus

Paul Hampartsoumian

► nationalists and populists to join the debate.” She added: “We look for the light, not the heat, and believe that we must engage.... To be truly impartial is to engage with a broad spectrum of political views. How else will we be trusted by the majority of audiences?”

On the vexed issue of fake news, which she said was shared six times faster than the genuine article, the NBC executive questioned whether the term itself had become debased. In the US, both pro- and anti-Trump activists make accusations of fake news according to their own political prejudices. “The term ‘fake news’ is a weapon used by everyone for their own convenience,” suggested Turness. “It’s becoming a devalued currency.”

As an aside, she pointed out that the assumption that Fox News was the most popular US news cable channel was incorrect. “It’s MSNBC, by some margin. *The Rachel Maddow Show* [fronted by a prominent Trump critic] is the number-one show at 9pm. Trump is driving huge engagement and huge ratings.”

At Euronews, Turness has overseen the introduction of The Cube news desk, staffed by “professional social journalists”. They have the verification skills to debunk fake news live on air.

“We have to say, ‘If this was in your newsfeed today and it’s not accurate,

here’s how we were able to debunk it. Don’t just ignore it because it’s fake’. It’s part of a public service, if you like, to explain that,” said Turness.

At the BBC, its Reality Check service was introduced as a permanent fixture in January 2017. The initiative was a response to the proliferation of fake news, much of it posted as clickbait on Facebook and distributed peer-to-peer on WhatsApp.

Angus said that Reality Check was a response to audience demand in the run-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum: “There was a very clear message from the audience that didn’t want the kind of reporting that said – and this is a parody – A says X, B says Y, how do you know which is right, only time will tell.”

He added: “Everyone is now doing ‘fact check’, including Russia Today. You’ve got to check which facts get checked and by whom.”

Turness said there should be a discussion to see if “an aggregation of trusted fact checking organisations” could emerge. Fact checking everything was impossible for one news provider/distributor because millions of pieces of fake news appear every day.

She continued: “We could do our own work and publish it so that it’s available to everyone else. Trusted brands could be brought together to form a whole.”

McOwen Wilson said that it was a priority for YouTube to ensure that authoritative news coverage appeared at the top of its search menu. Context was vital to help people make their own decisions regarding what they watched.

Clear labelling of news providers was important – so that users would know the BBC was publicly funded and that Russia Today was owned by the Russian state. “We’re expanding the range of labels on YouTube,” he stressed. “We need to ensure that high-quality journalism thrives in the online world.”

The YouTube executive added that news consumption from authoritative sources on the platform was up more than threefold over the past 18 months. Reliable news encouraged people to come back for more, he argued: “We are working with young people to try and help them think through what fact checking is and getting them to start looking at multiple sources.”

He added: “To fight fake news, you need to elevate genuinely reliable content, and to suppress fake content.”

McOwen Wilson explained that a minimum of four authoritative UK news sources were needed before a story would be labelled as breaking news.

Damian Collins said that, in an online world driven by algorithms,

'EVERYONE IS NOW DOING "FACT CHECK", INCLUDING RUSSIA TODAY'

technology could subvert the best intentions of news organisations and digital platforms. What could be done when the algorithm knew more about people's personal tastes than even the users themselves, inquired the MP.

"We're doing quite a lot of work at the BBC on what Tony Hall calls the public service algorithm," replied Angus.

But how do you go about building an algorithmic product that serves a public-service purpose? Would this algorithm serve you some of what it thought you wanted, but also additional public service content that you didn't know you were interested in until you got it?

"A digital Lord Reith," suggested Collins to audience laughter.

The growing popularity of voice-activated smart speakers, powered by their own influential algorithms, poses another challenge to news providers.

"Voice is an important part of privileged discoverability for PSB content in a digital world," said Angus. "We are working with voice platforms to ensure that BBC News has a strong presence globally."

But supposing you ask Alexa for the headlines and get the latest gossip on the Kardashians, rather than an important breaking news story? "We have to promote the quality end of the market over what the algorithm gives you," emphasised the World Service chief.

He continued: "If there is a critical incident, a national emergency and a need for quality public information, digital platforms need to ensure that the most accurate and more trusted news – often that is PSB content – gets to the top of the search results."

That may be easier said than done. The case for a digital Lord Reith grows stronger every day. ■

'The future of TV journalism in an age of fake news and disinformation was an RTS All-Party Parliamentary Group event held at Portcullis House, central London, on 4 December. It was chaired by Damian Collins MP, Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. The producer was Sue Robertson, with Jonathan Simon, Martin Stott and Nigel Warner.'

The case for transparency

One way to combat and call out fake news is to make the processes of video news journalism more transparent. Turness highlighted *Anatomy of a Killing*, the online film made by the BBC for its strand *Africa Eye*, as an example of transparent reporting at its finest.

In this piece of open-source journalism, the reporters used digital tools, including Google Maps and Facebook, to prove that the Cameroon government's assertion that its soldiers did not murder two women and two children was a blatant lie.

The Cameroon authorities had initially dismissed video footage of the incident as 'fake news'. In the documentary, a split screen is used to identify precise locations in the video, which are matched against the same places identified by satellite mapping.

"It's the best piece of journalism I've seen all year," said Turness. "It's absolutely critical that we continue to show our work and not only tell.... That way, we will increase trust and transparency."

'*Anatomy of a Killing* tells the story in the most transparent way. You are left in no doubt that this journalism is real and good and true. That shines the light on the path forward for us all.'

She added: "We need to find new ways to tell our stories and to communicate with our audiences that insulate us from any connection to fake news...."

"There's a big question around how we evolve and adapt in this environment. It's not just about fake news, it's also about the newish idea that there are alternative facts and that truth isn't truth.... Our job is to be more transparent and wear our journalism on the outside."

Jamie Angus said that a lot of international stories have disputed video footage at the heart of them. "We have an open-source media organisation called BBC Monitoring, which sits at the heart of our newsroom," he explained.

"Beyond that, we're also building an open-source investigations capacity in Africa, because we see more and more of these stories coming in."

TV news needs to evolve faster

In the US, NBC News has worked with Snapchat to distribute *Stay Tuned*, a news show aimed at 16- to 25-year-olds.

Deborah Turness explained: "Within a year, it has gained 8.1 million subscribers, more than the nightly news. You'd be surprised how traditional it is in its delivery, but it's got a different tone."

"Effectively, it's news videos chopped up and presented by an anchor. You've got to be smart and move your content on to social platforms that are reaching young people."

She added: "The holy grail is finding a style of news that young people will consume regularly. I am not sure anyone has cracked it."

Content had to be produced that was platform- and device-appropriate.

"If you were launching a news organisation today, you'd be mobile-first," she emphasised.

On the other hand, traditional newscasts retained their relevance, regardless of changing viewing patterns.

"From an NBCUniversal, Comcast perspective, news is incredibly valued because, unlike Netflix or HBO, news is a connector," she argued. "People turn to news in a moment of need."

Jamie Angus said: "Audiences are still robust for the BBC's main news bulletins."

He added: "Live, unscripted events are still responsible for huge amounts of TV consumption.... News ham-mocked between those events has a good future."

RTS Student Programme Masterclasses 2018

Journalism

Clive Myrie

Journalist and presenter,
BBC News

In an era of widespread concern about fake news, trusted and experienced correspondents such as the BBC's award-winning Clive Myrie are more important than ever.

He told the RTS how, during his career of 30-plus years, he had reported from many of the world's trouble spots, latterly Myanmar and Yemen.

BBC News is respected internationally for its high standards of accuracy and impartiality but this did not mean, said Myrie, that reporters should put a clamp on their own emotions.

"If you're feeling something, bring it out," he advised. "Don't let it overwhelm or dominate the story, but I don't like to see news reporters or presenters who are robots. You're a human being as well as a reporter. If you're reporting from a war zone and see a dead baby in front of you, I'd be surprised if you're not showing some emotion.

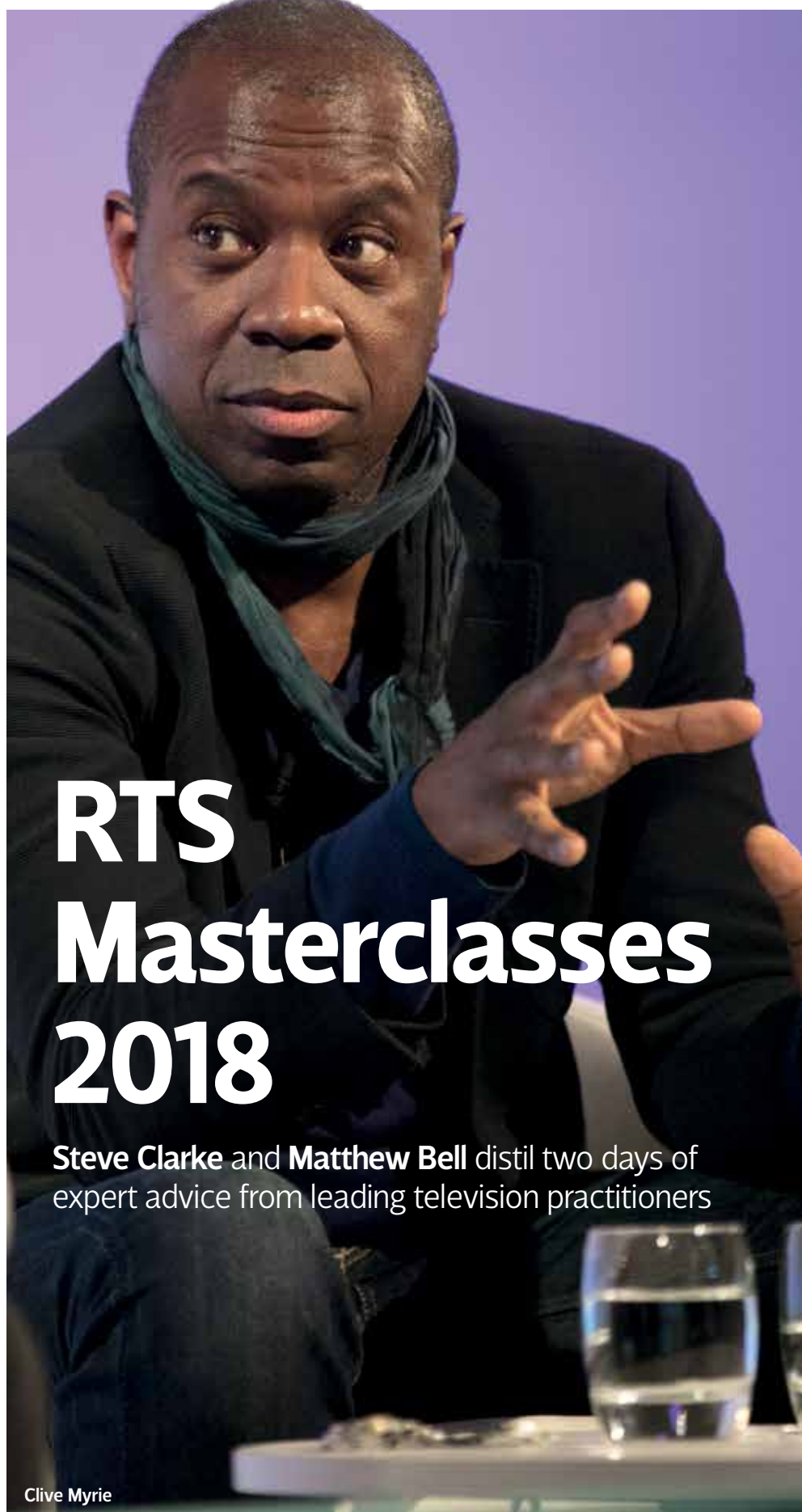
"Let your emotion inform the story. The great reporters are able to translate a story for the viewer through their own experience."

The son of Jamaican immigrants, Myrie read law at the University of Sussex. There, he started doing journalistic work for the local radio station.

As a child, he'd been inspired to consider a career as a globe-trotting foreign correspondent by watching TV.

The late Alan Whicker, a fixture on TV schedules from the 1960s to the 2000s, and, especially, Trevor McDonald were early role models.

"I'm a Northerner [he was brought up in Bolton] and didn't come from a media family... There was a guy on ITV



RTS Masterclasses 2018

Steve Clarke and **Matthew Bell** distil two days of expert advice from leading television practitioners

Clive Myrie

who looked like me and sounded a bit like me. He travelled around a lot. I thought maybe I could do what he did. He was Trevor McDonald.”

After graduating, he was accepted as a trainee barrister at Middle Temple. At the same time, he also applied to the BBC. “I chose the BBC and my parents have never forgiven me,” he recalled to laughter from the RTS audience.

Moving from BBC Radio Bristol to TV news in London required dedication and working unsocial hours.

A week’s work in the West Country would be followed by a drive up the M4 to do weekend shifts in the capital for BBC TV News.

Eventually, Myrie gained a reputation as a foreign correspondent for reporting from places such as Liberia in 1995, where reporters experienced difficulty gaining access.

Asked what personal qualities were necessary for this sort of journalism, he replied that empathy was vital: “The most important thing is to try and put yourself in someone else’s shoes and tell their story as honestly as possible. It’s not about you, the reporter, it’s about them.”

Factual entertainment

Nav Raman

Founder and creative director, Chatterbox

Collaboration is key to being a successful producer of such hit shows as *Child Genius*, *Brat Camp*, *The Unteachables* and *Bollywood Star*, all commissioned by Nav Raman when she worked at Channel 4.

Today, she co-runs the new indie Chatterbox, where she hopes to extend her winning form in factual entertainment formats.

Raman emphasised that programme ideas are unlikely to arrive fully formed and therefore need to be worked on by groups of people. “No one wakes up with a fully-formed idea,” she told the RTS students. “If you have the seed of an idea, you need to be able to explain it simply, in order to get someone else to understand it quickly.

“Keep asking yourself, what is it? It

‘PRODUCTION JOBS OF ANY KIND ARE NEVER A WASTE OF YOUR TIME’

can go on for ages as the idea is refined and distilled. Hopefully, you, as a producer, do that with a broadcaster.”

With many different content platforms operating across streaming, terrestrial and multichannel networks, it’s absolutely vital to consider the intended audience when honing an idea.

She said: “Look at the platform or broadcaster you’re thinking of pitching to and make sure that it is not already doing something similar to your idea.

“Ask yourself if the tone, sensibility and attitude chimes with a particular channel. Where will this idea sit – ‘You do this kind of show so you really need this kind of show, because it will add to what you’re trying to do.’”

Keeping an idea simple was essential: “Simplicity is the key. When I was commissioning, if I didn’t know what the show was in two or three lines, I’d tell the producer to rethink it.

“I’d sometimes get a beautifully presented five-page document and get to the end of it and think ‘So, what’s the show?’”

She added: “For me, the other big thing is purpose – what’s the point? Just because you can do it with TV cameras doesn’t mean that it’s a TV show. You should be trying to answer a question.

“At Channel 4, I commissioned *The Unteachables*, which tapped into kids who were excluded from the state education system. My question was: ‘Is there such a thing as an unteachable kid?’ My answer was ‘No.’”

Drama

Sophie Petzal

Writer

Sophie Petzal’s first original TV series, *Blood*, has recently aired to critical acclaim on Virgin Media One in Ireland and Channel 5 in the UK.

Having been accepted on to the BBC’s Production Trainee Scheme,

Petzal worked as a script editor on CBBC dramas, which, she argued, was “an invaluable way to learn about television production and writing”.

She went on to write scripts for CBBC shows, including *Wolfblood*, *The Dumping Ground* and *Danger Mouse*. “If you can turn stuff in on time, you tend to get dragged from one show to the next,” she said.

Getting a break as a new writer, admitted Petzal, was “undeniably tricky” but “children’s drama is a really good place to start”.

In fact, she told the students in the audience, “Production jobs of any kind are never a waste of your time because the relationships that you’ll make are invaluable. It’s only in the last couple of years that I’ve received offers for things from people who’ve never met me.”

Petzal graduated to writing episodes for ITV’s *Jekyll and Hyde* and BBC Two’s medieval drama *The Last Kingdom*. Writing the latter, she said, was a “great experience”, and described the episodes as “like hour-long plays, beautiful, textured, emotional pieces of writing”.

Adding another string to her bow, she took on a last-minute rewrite for the Sky Atlantic thriller *Riviera*: “These jobs are nice because, if you do relatively well, everyone thinks that you’ve saved the day; if you do terribly, people tell you that it was doomed anyway.”

Writing *Blood*, which stars Adrian Dunbar as an Irish country GP who is suspected of murdering his wife, was “massively exposing”, said Petzal. “But it was an incredible experience and I’m deeply proud of it.” ■

Documentary

Brian Woods

Founder, True Vision and

Katie Rice

Producer/director

For more than two decades, True Vision has built a reputation for making hard-hitting films that address important subjects – and, thanks to the power of television, make a difference.

“You see some really interesting >

› films at [documentary] festivals, which probably 10,000 people will see in the life of a film,” said the indie’s founder, Brian Woods. “They’re not going to have an impact on the world unless a broadcaster picks them up and shows them.”

It is not always a comfortable experience making docs such as True Vision’s multi-award-winning film about Aids orphans in South Africa, *The Orphans of Nkandla*.

“The temptation is to intervene but, if you intervene, then you change the reality,” argued Woods. “You have to let the reality play out because, if you don’t let things happen and get them in the can, then you don’t have the film that has the power to affect things, not just for these children but for hundreds of thousands of children across Africa.”

Nevertheless, film-makers have a responsibility to look after their contributors, continued Woods: “You form a relationship with them. It’s not friendship, because you are making a film about them... but you want to keep in touch [and] keep supporting them if you can.”

True Vision’s Katie Rice, who directed *Child of Mine*, a Channel 4 series examining couples affected by stillbirth, reiterated the importance of the bond between film-maker and subject: “All our films are based on really strong relationships with contributors. If they want us to stop [filming], we stop. It’s not our story – it’s theirs.”

Woods identified “sheer, bloody-minded perseverance” as the most important attribute needed to make it in TV. He recalled that he wrote “about 150 letters” before he landed his first job in TV as a researcher.

On selling an idea for a documentary, he recommended making a taster tape: “Do it on your phone – it doesn’t have to be shot on a £20,000 camera, because [commissioners] are interested in the characters and story you’ve got.” ■

Clive Myrie was interviewed by Naomi Goldsmith, media consultant and journalism trainer. Nav Raman was interviewed by Sharon Powers, creative director, Potato. Brian Woods and Katie Rice were interviewed by Alex Graham, joint CEO, Two Cities Television. And Sophie Petzal was interviewed by John Yorke, a drama producer whose credits include Wolf Hall, Life on Mars, The Street and Bodies. The producer was Helen Scott.



RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses 2018

Sound

Phil Bax

Sound recordist and

Greg Gettens

Head of broadcast factual sound, Molinare

Together, they covered the two ends of the sound spectrum. “Phil records the sound on location,” explained Greg Gettens. “We add music, effects and sound design to produce the final mix you hear on telly.” Recently, he added “explosions and bullets whizzing around people’s heads” to BBC One’s *D-Day’s Last Heroes: In Their Own Words*.

Bax experienced the high life on BBC One’s *Supersized Earth*, working at the

top of the Burj Khalifa, the world’s tallest building, to capture the sound of fear in presenter Dallas Campbell’s voice as he swayed in the wind, cleaning the skyscraper’s windows.

Specialist recordists are threatened by the increasing use of single sound/camera operators. “If you’ve got a person dedicated to each [part of the filming process], you’re going to get a better result,” argued Bax. But, added Gettens: “If [you are] in a confined space with only room for one person with a camera and microphone, that’s what you have to work with.” And, he added, “budget limitations” often militate against hiring a sound specialist.

Hitting the right note is the key to working in sound. “Over the past 15 or so years, I’ve worked on all sorts of documentary projects, but with a small cohort of the same directors, production managers and camera people. If you work together once and get on well, you work together again,” said Bax.

Gettens agreed that being personable is part of the sound mix: “A lot of the time, I’m in a dark room for 10 hours a day, five days a week with other editors – they have to get on with you. It’s not all about sounds; a lot of it is about personality.”



From left: Ruth Pitt,
Pia Di Ciaula and
Rick Barker

Paul Hampartsumian

And, added Bax, try everything: “The [BBC] put me on a gantry at a football match with a bit of rusty old equipment that didn’t work and a commentator who berated me all afternoon. I realised I didn’t want to do football matches. [But] use opportunities rather than dismissing them outright – then you find out what you want to do”.

Camerawork

Phil Mash

Director of photography

Geraint Warrington

Director of photography

Two leading directors of photography (DoPs) offered some useful pointers to the many students in the audience with their hearts set on a career behind the camera.

Mash admitted that he was “rubbish at the technical side” when he started out. He recommended stills photography as a good way to practise: “Filming

is effectively a series of still frames – composition is everything.”

Smartphones, said Geraint Warrington, “are great for trying out composition – but that’s it. They don’t teach you how to create a look on a normal camera. [You don’t] learn the full skills of photography – I’m a great believer in [learning] on a proper camera.” To practise, added Mash, “a DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) camera is the place to start”.

Mash argued that cameras can “be good or bad, depending on who’s got hold of them. [But] the lenses on the front of the camera make a huge difference.”

Warrington agreed with his fellow DoP: “Try to use the most expensive lens you can afford. I mainly shoot on the Sony F55 – it’s an amazing quality camera. It’s also quite lightweight – 90% of the stuff I do is [with the camera] on the shoulders.”

Studying for qualifications gives the would-be DoP the opportunity to get to grips with cameras and to “gain the technical knowledge on how cameras and lenses work”, said Warrington, who studied at [media and design university] Ravensbourne. But, added Mash, while “qualifications are great, you will still have to work your way up – there’s nothing like experience”.

How to get that experience? Contact camera companies, suggested Warrington: “You’ll be prepping the kit to go out on shoots, so you’ll have all this equipment in front of you to learn [from] – you could be a very useful camera [assistant] if you know how the equipment works.”

Editing

Rick Barker

Editor

Pia Di Ciaula

Editor

Although they worked in different genres – factual and drama respectively – both editors agreed that their jobs required total dedication.

“I am very passionate and work long hours,” said Pia Di Ciaula, whose recent credits include *A Very English Scandal*,

starring Hugh Grant as Jeremy Thorpe. She was recently nominated for an RTS Craft & Design Award for the series.

Di Ciaula also edited Netflix’s *The Crown*, working with director Stephen Daldry. “He likes to shoot a lot of material and expects me to send him assemblies at the end of every day.

“I would get somewhere between two and a half to six hours of material every day. They couldn’t be rough assemblies. They had to be tight and have a soundtrack. He doesn’t like looking at green screens. My assistant had to composite all those shots, so it looked like a finessed show even though it was a first assembly.”

Rick Barker, whose credits include *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Long Lost Family*, said: “I think it’s fair to say that editing can be fairly intense.

“Certainly, the current-affairs stuff that I’ve done, you find yourself in the edit suite occasionally having discussions at very late hours of the night over whether a scene is working – or if a producer or a journalist can write a very long piece of expository journalism over your beautifully crafted sequence.”

In drama, Di Ciaula told the students that the work of an editor involves pleasing the director. “Directors are kind of possessive of the editing,” she revealed. “Sometimes, they allow producers to watch assemblies, but they don’t want any comments because they want to avoid being biased by comments made early on in the process.”

For factual shows, it’s the editor who sets the agenda in the edit suite, noted Barker: “I think it’s important that the edit suite is the editor’s. We don’t have that layering that people who work in drama do. In factual, you’re there to bring a fresh pair of eyes. Your job is to try and find the story within the rushes.”

He added: “Part of what I do as an editor is manipulating emotions. In factual TV, we have long debates about how far you can go and how one is able to manipulate the truth.

“The reality is that everything we do is artifice. We create interviews, we chop up sentences and we make films.” ■

The sound masterclass was chaired by Emma Wakefield, MD of Lambent Productions; the camerawork session by Helen Scott; and the editing masterclass by Ruth Pitt, creative director of Under the Moon. The producer was Helen Scott.

Christmas ratings are not what they used to be. Many think that festive television is trading on past glories. Now it is threatened by streaming.

When bingeing on box sets is more common than keeping up with the latest from the soaps, can Christmas telly survive?

In December, an RTS early-evening event summoned up the ghosts of Christmas TV past, present and future to look back at festive classics, discuss the 2018 Christmas schedules and predict the role TV will have – if any – in Christmases to come.

Over nearly four decades, Michael, now Lord, Grade walked the corridors of power at London Weekend Television, the BBC, Channel 4 and ITV. He was director of programmes at LWT; controller of BBC One and, later, the corporation's Chairman; Chief Executive of Channel 4; Chief Executive and Executive Chairman of ITV.

No one is more qualified to discuss festive TV. He brought with him a bumper box of clips from past Christmas specials, including *EastEnders*, *Upstairs, Downstairs* and, of course, *The Morecambe & Wise Show*, in which Eric Morecambe played "all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order" with the composer André Previn.

Eric and Ernie's specials remain the British public's most memorable Christmas show, according to a BBC poll – even though their final festive special, by which time the duo had switched to ITV, was shown on Boxing Day in 1983.

Lord Grade commissioned many of the nation's favourite festive programmes, including the 1986 Christmas Day *EastEnders* in which Den issued Angie with divorce papers.

Soaps are a key part of the festive schedules. "They're familiar and the audience knows that something dramatic is going to happen on Christmas



Kate Russell

Matthew Bell is haunted by the ghosts of *Morecambe and Wise* at a Yuletide RTS event

Xmas TV

Carving up Christmas viewing

Day. Everyone will be at everyone's throats, trying to kill each other – just like at home," said Lord Grade.

"The secret of Christmas shows is that you've got to have a sense of anticipation," he continued. "You can't have a run-of-the-mill episode."

The BBC dominated the festive ratings during Lord Grade's era – and it still does. He offered a simple explanation for ITV's poor performance: "We never bothered. We didn't want to give away our crown jewels over a holiday period when there was no advertising revenue.

"We used to get murdered by the BBC, which we didn't care about because there was no revenue," he continued. "We let the BBC have it."

There is far more at stake for the corporation at Christmas. "For the BBC, it is crucially important because it's the time when the BBC can prove to the nation that it has something for everyone," he argued.

As Chief Executive at Channel 4 for almost a decade from 1988, the great scheduler adopted a different approach to the Christmas schedules.

The problem was, he recalled, "What the hell do you do at Christmas? All we could do was make trouble and try to do something that was outrageous."

In 1993, Lord Grade introduced the *Alternative Christmas Message*, which was delivered by Quentin Crisp. At the RTS event, he showed a clip of Brigitte Bardot's 1995 *Message*.

The ghost of Christmas present – BBC entertainment controller Kate Phillips – argued that festive TV should be "shared viewing". In entertainment, she said, "I want shows that the three Gs will watch – [when] three generations come together, grandparents, parents and children. That's a really hard thing to do but, at Christmas, the BBC does it really well and has done so historically."

Among the festive favourites filling the BBC's 2018 schedules were *Call the Midwife*, *Mrs Brown's Boys* and *Strictly Come Dancing*, the three highest-rating shows last Christmas. "It's the familiar titles but they're all a bit special on Christmas Day, which is what people want," said Phillips.

She added that her role was to "keep the greats great and grow the new ➤

Christmas 1936

The BBC's first Christmas Day television in 1936 – broadcast from Alexandra Palace, London, to just 400 households – offered an eclectic mix of programmes.

But, from the earliest days of TV, schedulers recognised that Christmas deserved festive-themed shows.

The Christmas Turkey: A Demonstration of Carving was the first programme of the day at 3pm, ingeniously scheduled in a post-lunch slot to demonstrate to viewers, presumably, how they should have carved their turkeys.

News Reel followed and then a talk, *A Lonely Christmas in the Arctic*; succeeded by the first Christmas special of magazine show *Picture Page*; *Christmas Carols: The Singing Boys*;



BBC

A Seasonal Tour Through the Empire; *Some Unusual Christmases*; more *News Reel*; and the final programme of the day, *Television Party*, before television closed down at 10pm.

In total, the BBC was on air for just one hour in the afternoon and one in the late evening. It was a small beginning but it marked the beginning of Christmas TV.

BBC rules the festive season ratings

Contrary to popular belief, *EastEnders*, shown in two separate parts on Christmas Day 1986, is not Christmas Day's most popular programme. The soap pulled in 30.2 million viewers; but this figure combines viewers who watched on 25 December and separate audiences for the omnibus edition on 28 December.

In reality, the honour goes to the Paul Hogan movie *Crocodile Dundee*, which secured 21.8 million viewers for BBC One on Christmas Day 1989.

Following closely behind, is the 1977 Christmas outing of *The Mike Yarwood Show* (21.4 million), which featured a bizarre sketch with then-Chancellor Denis Healey dressed as a punk (impersonated by Yarwood) and Paul McCartney (the real Macca).

For the Christmas period as a whole, *Only Fools and Horses* takes the honours, clocking up 24.4 million viewers for a single show on 29 December 1996.

Christmas Day TV ratings in 2017 were the lowest since reliable records began: the top show was *Call the Midwife*, which visited South Africa for its festive outing, with a consolidated audience of 9.2 million.

The runner-up was BBC sitcom *Mrs Brown's Boys* (9 million). The only ITV shows in the top 10 – a Christmas tradition that endures – were the veteran soaps *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*.

BBC entertainment controller Kate

Phillips, however, was optimistic about the future. 'I refuse to believe that ratings are going to keep falling each year. On Christmas Day, people do want to come together.'

Consolidated ratings, which include non-live viewing within seven days of a programme's

transmission, 'are becoming much more important now', she added.

Lord Grade, though, was dismissive about the importance of ratings, especially if they were used to influence creative decisions. 'I hate anything that leads you towards reading audience's reactions to last night's TV and making judgements about what you're going to commission on the basis of what the audience watched,' he said. 'It is the broadcasters' job to keep ahead of public taste.

'I'm always nervous about anything to do with data that points you towards some kind of predictable, formulaic [programming].'



Event chair Anita Singh

Paul Hampartsoumian



The 1971 *Morecambe & Wise Show*, featuring put-upon composer André Previn

› greats. It's a tricky balance, because we have so many titles in entertainment that are still performing well."

Lord Grade revealed that, when *Strictly Come Dancing* was first commissioned, Bruce Forsyth thought that the "show would be taking the piss out of the celebrities, which is what attracted him" to hosting the series. "He had no idea they were going to take it so seriously and be so good."

Winning promotion in 2018, from Christmas Eve to Christmas Day, was Michael McIntyre's *Big Christmas Show*. "Morecambe & Wise was brilliant but Michael McIntyre is that modern, multi-strand variety show and I think he does it brilliantly," said Phillips.

The ghost of Christmas yet to come – Kate Russell, one of the presenters of the BBC's consumer technology programme *Click* – offered an imagined story of a family Christmas with technology to the fore.

In Russell's vision of the future, the Queen gave her annual Christmas address in "holographic form" in the family's living room; artificial intelligence selected comedy sketches on the TV; and virtual assistant Alexa ordered pizzas, which were delivered by a drone to the family – who were still watching TV, in the traditional manner, huddled on the sofa.

Much of the technology mentioned in her story is "in existence now", said

Russell. "It was [the author] William Gibson who said: 'The future is already here; it's just not widely distributed yet.'"

Russell demonstrated to the audience an augmented-reality app that offered a visual lesson in how to carve a Christmas turkey. "We have this technology – it's just a question of it becoming mainstream and affordable," she said.

"Viewing habits are changing – people are watching live streaming, people want to be part of the broadcast and not passively experiencing [it]," argued Russell.

"But I hope we'll still get together on Christmas Day and watch the old films as a family," she continued. "My take on it is that audiences in 100 years' time will still have an appetite for stories, laughter and emotion – all the things that television can provide," said Lord Grade. "All that's changing is the distribution methods – the way you get it."

"Look at the amazing explosion of box-set drama," he suggested – it reflects "our hunger for stories". ■

The RTS early-evening event 'A TV Christmas Carol' was held at The Hospital Club in central London on 6 December. The event was chaired by Anita Singh, arts and entertainment editor of the Daily Telegraph, and produced by Andrew Scadding and Sue Robertson.

Modern comedy at Christmas



Lord Grade
Paul Hampartsoumian

Lord Grade: 'In the tradition of Eric and Ernie, Peter Kay – he's got different skills, of course – is the supreme artist, who has the widest possible appeal.'

'His material, as far as I've ever seen, is very clean and family-oriented. He's clever, he's funny, he's a natural clown, [and] he's a brilliant actor and writer. *Car Share* was so original and brilliant.'

Kate Phillips: 'In *Car Share* he got away with a whole [routine] about dogging.... *Mrs Brown's Boys* sails



Kate Phillips
Paul Hampartsoumian

pretty close to the wind [too] – [Brendan O'Carroll] gets away with murder and people love it.... I'd rather do stuff that people are talking about.'

Lord Grade: 'Mrs Brown's Boys is a radical show in breaking the fourth wall, which is quite revolutionary in comedy, [although] it's a traditional, *Carry On*-type sitcom.'

Kate Phillips: 'Brendan O'Carroll is a brilliant man. What works very cleverly on that show is that it's quite rude [with lots of] slapstick, but then he does this moving epilogue when he talks about family.'

'It's going right back to those brilliant *Only Fools and Horses* episodes where you had all the slapstick but there was also stuff that got you [in the heart].'



RTS Craft & Design Awards 2018

Hosted by **Tom Allen**, the awards
were presented on 26 November
at the London Hilton

The City and the City

BBC



Richard Kendal

Lifetime Achievement Award **Kathy Schultz**

Everyone in this room will know, and will have benefited from, the unwavering professionalism, passion, honesty and loyalty of the Managing Director of ITV's London Studios, Kathy Schulz.

Professionalism – with her unique understanding of the business, and her drive to be the very best.

Passion – for her genuine love and affection for this industry of ours.

Honesty – for never letting client or crew down, despite huge pressures.

Loyalty – for her desire to maintain relationships built on trust and transparency.

Although Kathy started her broadcasting career at the BBC, it was at ITV where she would make her mark. Thousands of hours of programmes, the very biggest shows. Many of you will have worked on them, and [seen] what Kathy achieved, often against the odds.

The way in which she handled the closure earlier this year with such dignity and respect underlined why she was only ever the right person for the job.

The last ever live show was *Saturday Night Takeaway*, a show that epitomised TLS and Kathy's work.

Costume Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

June Nevin – *The Windsors Royal Wedding Special*

Noho Film and Television for Channel 4 [Despite] low budgets and time pressures, the costume design was still ambitious [and] full of sensitivity and imagination.

Nominees:

Heather MacVean – *The Keith and Paddy Picture Show*, Talkback for ITV

Howard Burden – *Zapped (Series 2)*, Baby Cow Productions / Black Dog Television / Itchy Coo Productions for Dave

Costume Design – Drama

Marianne Agertoft – *The City and The City*

Mammoth Screen for BBC Two The costume design [had a] sinister yet familiar feel... achieved with skilful layering of textures and colour.

Nominees:

Fotini Dimou – *King Lear*, Playground Television (UK) / Sonia Friedman Productions for BBC Two

Joanna Eatwell – *The Miniaturist*, The Forge Entertainment for BBC One

Design – Programme Content Sequences

Axis Animation – *Kiss Me First*

Kindle Entertainment and Balloon Entertainment for Channel 4 Visually stunning and incredibly well executed.

Nominees:

Made in Colour – *Empire Windrush: Newsround Special*, CBBC Productions for CBBC

Moonraker Visual Effects Team – *One Strange Rock*, Nutopia / Protozoa Pictures and Overbrook Entertainment Production for National Geographic

Design – Titles

Sasan Roohi, Amber Sutera, Peter Aldridge and Michael Pearson – *Deep State*

Endor Productions for Fox NG (Europe and Africa)

This strong, narrative-themed sequence was beautifully executed [and] really encapsulated the mood and central character of the show.

Nominees:

Ben Hanbury, Hugo Moss, Paul McDonnell and Tamsin McGee – *Ordeal by Innocence*, Mammoth Screen for BBC One
Nic Bennis, Miki Kato, Karl Watkins and Svenja Frahm – *Philip K Dick's Electric Dreams*, Sony Pictures Television for Channel 4

Design – Trails and Packaging

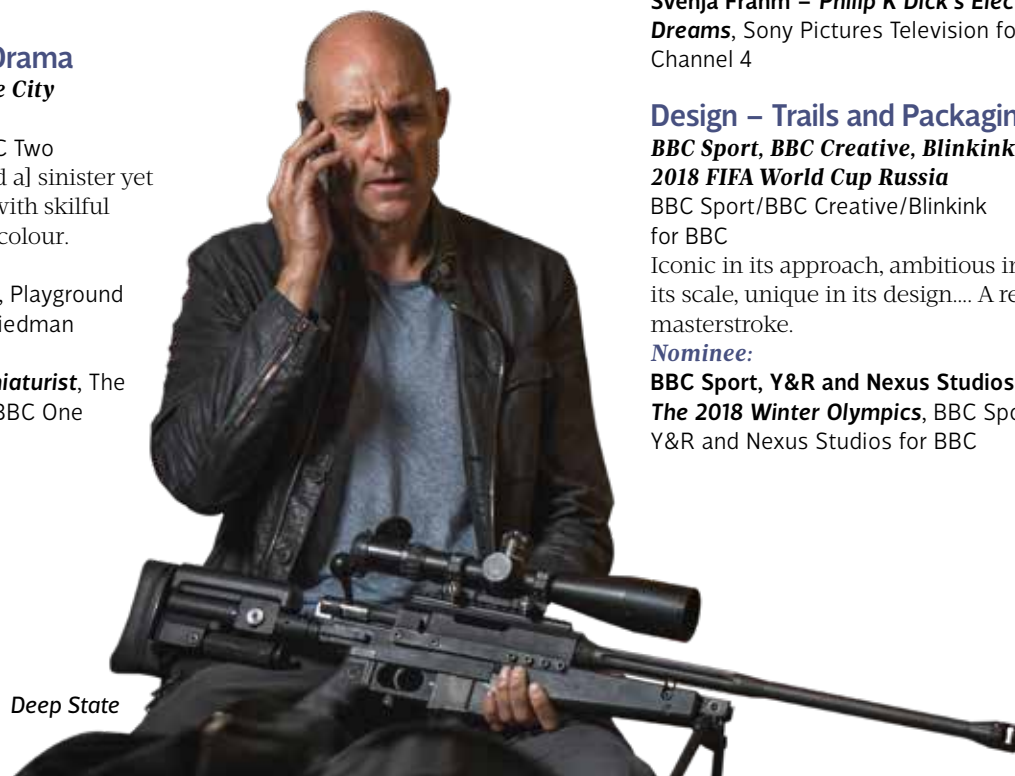
BBC Sport, BBC Creative, Blinkink – *2018 FIFA World Cup Russia*

BBC Sport/BBC Creative/Blinkink for BBC

Iconic in its approach, ambitious in its scale, unique in its design.... A real masterstroke.

Nominee:

BBC Sport, Y&R and Nexus Studios – *The 2018 Winter Olympics*, BBC Sport, Y&R and Nexus Studios for BBC



Deep State



All pictures: Richard Kendal

1 Costume Design – Entertainment and Non Drama: *The Windsors Royal Wedding Special*

4 Design – Titles: *Deep State*

7 Director – Documentary/Factual and Non Drama: *White Right: Meeting the Enemy*

2 Costume Design – Drama: *The City and the City*

5 Design – Trails and Packaging: *2018 FIFA World Cup Russia*

8 Director – Drama: *A Very English Scandal*

3 Design – Programme Content Sequences: *Kiss Me First*

6 Director – Comedy Drama/Situation Comedy: *Derry Girls*

9 Editing – Documentary/Factual: *The Detectives: Murder on the Streets*



The Windsors Royal Wedding Special

Channel 4

Director – Comedy Drama/ Situation Comedy

Michael Lennox – *Derry Girls*

Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4
The director... achieved a breathtaking combination of profoundly poignant intercut with fearfully funny moments.

Nominees:

Adam Miller – *The Windsors Royal Wedding Special*, Noho Film and Television for Channel 4

Andrew Chaplin – *GameFace*, Objective Fiction for E4

Director – Documentary/ Factual and Non Drama

Deeyah Khan – *White Right: Meeting the Enemy*

Fuuse Films for ITV
This film stood out for its fearless immediacy of approach... an exciting directing talent, brilliantly deployed in front of camera, too.

Nominees:

Francis Hanly – *Arena: Stanley and His Daughters*, A BBC Arena Co-Production with 1212 Productions for BBC Four

James Rogan Stephen – *The Murder that Changed a Nation*, On the Corner in association with Rogan Productions for BBC One

Director – Drama

Stephen Frears – *A Very English Scandal*

Blueprint Pictures for BBC One
The performances were on the nose – a masterclass in character directing. Luscious and excellent in every way.

Nominees:

Jonathan Entwistle – *The End of the F*ing World***, Clerkenwell Films and Dominic Buchanan Productions for Netflix/Channel4

Nick Murphy – *Save Me*, World Productions for Sky Atlantic

Director – Multicamera

Nikki Parsons – *Strictly Come Dancing (Series 15)*

BBC Studios for BBC One
The beautifully crafted direction conveyed every nuance of the dance perfectly to the audience.

Nominees:

David Kester – *Coronation Street*, ITV Studios for ITV

Liz Clare – *The Voice UK (Series 7)*, ITV Studios and Talpa for ITV

Editing – Documentary/Factual

Paul Carlin, Paul Dosaj and Kevin Konak – *The Detectives: Murder on the Streets*

Minnow Films for BBC Two
Astonishing imagery and beautiful editing... took observational documentary making to a new level.

Nominees:

Ben Brown – *Grenfell*, Minnow Films for BBC One

Production Team – *Blue Planet II*, BBC Studios/The Natural History Unit/The Open University/BBC America/Tencent/WDR/ France Télévisions and CCTV9 for BBC One

Editing – Drama

Adam Trotman – *Come Home*

Red Production Company for BBC One
Impactful... and very sensitive use of cutting delivered the viewer right into the emotional heart of the story.

Nominees:

Mike Jones – *The End of the F*ing World***, Clerkenwell Films & Dominic Buchanan Productions for Netflix/Channel4

Pia Di Ciaula – *A Very English Scandal*, Blueprint Pictures for BBC One



All pictures: Richard Kendal

1 Editing – Drama: *Come Home*

4 Effects: *The Crown*

7 Make-Up Design – Entertainment and Non Drama: *The Dali and the Cooper: Urban Myths*

2 Editing – Entertainment and Comedy: *The Windsors Royal Wedding Special*

5 Lighting for Multicamera: *Upstart Crow*

8 Multicamera Work: *The Royal Wedding: Prince Harry and Meghan Markle*

3 Editing – Sport: *Champions League Final Liverpool vs Real Madrid opening music sequence*

6 Make-Up Design – Drama: *King Lear*

9 Multicamera Work – Sport: *The London Marathon*

Editing – Entertainment and Comedy

Mark Williams – *The Windsors Royal Wedding Special*

Noho Film and Television for Channel 4
One of the funniest satirical shows on TV... impeccable pacing and comic timing throughout the editing process.

Nominees:

Charlie Fawcett – *GameFace*, Objective Fiction for E4

Lucien Clayton – *Derry Girls*, Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4

Editing – Sport

Ian Grech, Mike Carter and Kevin Evans – *Champions League Final Liverpool vs Real Madrid opening music sequence*

BT Sport

As much a skilful music edit as it was a sport piece [it] told the story very well. All in all, it was a joy to watch!

Nominees:

Nicholas Perry, David Bouchard and John Nicholson – *Winter Olympics*, BBC Sport for BBC

Scott Ferry-Collins, Jim Wiseman and Tim Hampel – *Monaco Grand Prix Feature/ Formula 1 2018*, Whisper Films for Channel 4

Effects

One of Us, Chris Reynolds – *The Crown*
Left Bank Pictures for Netflix
Breathtaking in its scale, ambition and achievement.... Seamless, flawless and beautifully crafted.

Nominees:

Moonraker Visual Effects Team – *One Strange Rock*, Nutopia/Protozoa Pictures and Overbrook Entertainment Production for National Geographic

Tanvir Hanif, Fifth Wall VFX and Becci Blood – *Katy*, CBBC Productions for CBBC

Lighting for Multicamera

Martin Kempton – *Upstart Crow (Series 2)*

BBC Studios for BBC Two
Each shot was expertly crafted, capturing the essence of “old masters”... and, being comedy, it was careful not to miss any facial expressions.

Nominees:

Dave Davey – *Britain’s Got Talent*, Thames/Sycro for ITV

Nigel Catmur – *Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance*, BBC Studios for BBC One

Make-Up Design – Drama

Naomi Donne – *King Lear*

Playground Television (UK)/Sonia Friedman Productions for BBC Two
Each character was delivered with a skilled but gentle simplicity, raising the visual pathos while allowing the tragedy of the story to play out.

Nominees:

Daniel Phillips – *A Very English Scandal*, Blueprint Pictures for BBC One

Sjaan Gillings – *Flowers (Series 2)*, Hootenanny and Sister Pictures for Channel 4

Make-Up Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Vanessa White – *The Dali and the Cooper: Urban Myths*

Me and You Productions for Sky Arts
The combination of great skill and sheer bonkersness won through here... a fantastic recreation of two iconic characters.

Nominees:

Lulu Hall – *The Windsors Royal Wedding Special*, Noho Film and Television for Channel 4

Vanessa White, Floris Schuller and Neill Gorton – *Tracey Breaks the News*, BBC Studios and Allan McKeown presents for BBC One

Multicamera Work

Camera Team – *The Royal Wedding: Prince Harry and Meghan Markle*
BBC Studios for BBC One

A monumental task realised with feeling.... Perfect depth of field in the close-ups, and stunning wide shots.

Nominees:

Nick Wood and the Camera Team – *Not Going Out*, Avalon for BBC One
Richard Boden, Barbara Hicks and Tony Keene – *Upstart Crow (Series 2)*, BBC Studios for BBC Two

Multicamera Work – Sport

Micky Payne – *The London Marathon*
BBC TV Sport Production for BBC
Good use of technology, with helicopters and radio cams on bikes.

Nominee:

Simon Wheeler – *BDO World Darts Championships*, IMG Productions for Channel 4

Music – Original Score

Murray Gold – *A Very English Scandal*
Blueprint Pictures for BBC One

A simply brilliant score that perfectly pitched the humour and pomp... cool, catchy and very charismatic.

Nominees:

Graham Coxon – *The End of the F*ing World***, Clerkenwell Films and Dominic Buchanan Productions for Netflix/Channel4

Tandis Jenhudson – *Civilisations*, Nutopia for BBC Two

Music – Original Title

Oli Julian – *Motherland*
Delightful Industries for BBC Two

The title score was cool, fun, bold and brassy. A high-tempo introduction that grabbed you and made you want to watch!

Nominees:

Murray Gold – *Come Home*, Red Production Company for BBC One
Tandis Jenhudson – *Civilisations*, Nutopia for BBC Two



A Very English Scandal



All pictures: Richard Kendal

1 Music – Original Score: *A Very English Scandal*

4 Picture Enhancement: *The UN Sex Abuse Scandal*

7 Sound – Drama: *Bodyguard*

2 Music – Original Title: *Motherland*

5 Production Design – Drama: *The City and the City*

8 Sound – Entertainment and Non Drama: *Retreat: Meditations from a Monastery*

3 Photography – Documentary/Factual and Non Drama: *Retreat: Meditations from a Monastery*

6 Production Design – Entertainment and Non Drama: *Britain's Got Talent*

9 Host: Tom Allen

Photography – Documentary/ Factual and Non Drama

Andrew Muggleton – *Retreat: Meditations from a Monastery*

Tigerlily Productions / BBC Four
Sensitive and evocative photography... both formative and indispensable.

Nominees:

Camera Team – *Blue Planet II*, BBC Studios/The Natural History Unit/The Open University/BBC America/Tencent/WDR/ France Télévisions and CCTV9 for BBC One

Glen Milner – *Handmade in Hull*, BBC Studios / Pacific Quay Productions for BBC Four

Photography – Drama and Comedy

Justin Brown – *The End of the F*ing World***

Clerkenwell Films and Dominic Buchanan Productions for Netflix/ Channel4

Outstandingly fresh in vision and execution, and sleight-of-hand clever in its creation of an immersive and compulsively watchable world.

Nominees:

Cathal Watters – *Peaky Blinders (Series 4)*,

Caryn Mandabach Productions/Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Two

Stuart Biddlecombe – *Hidden*, A Severn Screen Production in association with All3Media International for BBC Wales and S4C

Picture Enhancement

Adam Dolniak – *The UN Sex Abuse Scandal*

Ronachan Films for Channel 4
The... grade was cinematic and beautiful. Astounding work. Powerful, stand-out and with huge impact.

Nominees:

Dan Coles – *Flowers (Series 2)*, Hootenanny and Sister Pictures for Channel 4

Gareth Spensley – *King Lear*, Playground Television (UK)/Sonia Friedman Productions for BBC Two

Production Design – Drama

Simon Rogers – *The City and the City*
Mammoth Screen for BBC Two
Bold, atmospheric and confident designs that were very well executed.

Nominees:

Grant Montgomery – *Gunpowder*, Kudos in association with Thriker Films for BBC One

Martin Childs and Alison Harvey – *The Crown*, Left Bank Pictures for Netflix



The Crown

Netflix

Production Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Peter Bingemann – *Britain's Got Talent*

Thames/Syco for ITV

A beautifully executed transformation of this existing location, with the flexibility to change looks for each performance over many weeks.

Nominees:

Dave Ferris – *Zapped (Series 2)*, Baby Cow Productions / Black Dog Productions/Itchy Coo Productions for Dave

Production Design Team – *Love Island (Series 4)*, ITV Studios Ltd/Motion Content Group for ITV2

Sound – Drama

Dan Johnson, Simon Farmer, Jamie Caple and Marc Lawes – *Bodyguard*
World Productions/BBC

The sound was dramatic, visceral and seamlessly mixed.

Nominees:

Dylan Voigt, Nigel Edwards, Ben Norrington and Seb Shorter – *Deep State*, Endor Productions for Fox NG (Europe and Africa)

Nigel Squibbs, John Mooney, Filipa Principe and Tony Gibson – *Patrick Melrose*, Little Island Productions/Two Cities and SunnyMarch for Showtime/ Sky Atlantic

Sound – Entertainment and Non Drama

Doug Dreger, Greg Gettens and Kim Tae Hak – *Retreat: Meditations from a Monastery*

Tigerlily Productions for BBC Four
Fantastic sound, comprehensively captured and creatively mixed.

Nominees:

Andy Hodges, Sam Staples and Renato Ferrari – *Top Gear (Series 25)*, Envy Post Production / BBC Studios for BBC Two

The Sound Alliance – *BBC Proms 2018*, BBC Studios for BBC Two and Four



Come Home

BBC

Director travels back in time

RTS
London

Doctor Who's longest-serving director, Graeme Harper, discussed his TV career with the British Film Institute's Justin Johnson at an RTS London event in early November. Harper worked as a floor assistant on the BBC One sci-fi classic in the 1960s – before directing episodes in the 1980s and again in the 2000s after new showrunner Russell T Davies regenerated the Doctor.

Harper started young in show business, attending the Italia Conti stage school and paying his way by taking on acting roles. After leaving school, a driving job at MGM Studios in Borehamwood led to a chance conversation with Stanley Kubrick. "That changed my thinking," he said. "I knew I wanted to be him – a director."

He landed a job at the BBC and, over three years as a floor assistant and eight as an assistant floor manager,



Doctor Who

BBC

learned "everything" about production". Work as a first assistant director and then a place on the BBC's director course followed, which led to him directing Peter Davison as *Doctor Who* in 1983.

He returned in 2006, directing four episodes with two of the series' greatest villains,

the Daleks and Cybermen. Harper said he loved directing action sequences but had learned the importance of storyboarding scenes, including green-screen CGI effects: "It really helps everyone on the production know exactly what they have to do – and that's a formula we stuck to

on *Doctor Who*." Harper used his action expertise to direct the tram crash in *Coronation Street* at the start of the soap's 50th anniversary week in December 2010.

He continues to direct, most recently on BBC Two comedy *Inside No 9* in 2018.

Nick Radlo

Google opens its doors to RTS London

■ Twenty years after its launch – during which time it has grown from a small start-up company to a global giant – Google invited RTS London to its Belgravia offices in late November.

Jon Brennan, Google's regional manager for broadcast, entertainment and media partnerships, said that TV is 'still central' to people's lives. The UK is 'an exceptional market', he added, that offered opportunities for Google and other

media companies to pool their resources. Earlier this year, BBC Studios' virtual-reality team and games studio Preloaded launched *BBC Earth: Life in VR* on Google's virtual-reality platform, Daydream.

YouTube is known largely as an online and mobile platform, yet content partnerships manager Dayo Olopade revealed that, thanks to the take off of smart TVs, 'our fastest-growing screen is in the living room'.

Olopade also discussed YouTube's news and sports services. The latter includes a deal with BT, which has enabled the broadcaster to live stream the Champions League football final on the platform for the past three years. YouTube is now dipping its toe into long-form drama – in November, it released sci-fi drama *Origin*, which is produced by Left Bank Pictures, maker of Netflix's *The Crown*.

Partner technology manager Manuel Weiss discussed the voice-activated Google Assistant, which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to help viewers navigate their way around the

services on their smart TVs. 'Voice is becoming the new normal,' he claimed.

Media customer engineer Melika Golkaram talked about AI, claiming it could help broadcasters target advertising and exploit their programme archives.

Android TV development manager Matthias Puschmann said 'an explosion in content' was making it 'harder for consumers to figure out what to watch and through which service'. He said that Google's operating system for smart TVs, Android TV, would help consumers find the best shows and content providers to improve their services.

Matthew Bell

Virgin Media invests in drama

Linear television is in rude health, argued Bill Malone in his RTS Dan Gilbert Memorial Lecture at the Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast. Virgin Media Television's director of programming said: "We're constantly being told linear TV is dead, but the facts actually present a different picture."

In Ireland, Virgin Media was "bucking the trend and showing continual growth in audiences" – a result, he claimed, of a "notable step up in [the] scale, ambition and quality" of programming.

Virgin Media Television bought Ireland's largest commercial free-to-air broadcaster, TV3, in 2015, renaming it Virgin Media One this year. The Dublin-based broadcaster operates two other linear channels – Virgin Media Two and Three – plus Virgin Media Sport (which has the rights to Champions League football) and on-demand video service Virgin Media Player.

Malone, who left RTÉ2 to join TV3 two years ago, argued that Virgin Media Television's growth was "rooted in the principle of putting our



RTS Northern Ireland held its awards and a series of events in a busy November

audiences first", pushing "quality Irish programming in all genres". He added: "We are doing a lot of things that commercial broadcasters don't do", including investing in news and current affairs beyond regulatory requirements.

The broadcaster's strategy,

he said, is to build "strategic partnerships across borders – local TV [is] becoming increasingly global in outlook".

The executive discussed Virgin Media One's *Blood*, a co-production involving Company Pictures in London and Dublin-based Element

Pictures. Sophie Petzal, who gave the 2018 RTS Student Masterclass in drama, wrote the thriller, which stars Adrian Dunbar and aired on Channel 5 in the UK.

"The ambition with this [type of] show is to make something of world standard, Rolls-Royce quality that will resonate with Irish audiences but also have an impact internationally," said Malone. "TV drama is, in effect, the new film industry. Projects such as *Blood* create more interest in Irish content abroad. These stories can travel like never before."

Virgin Media Television has signed partnerships with, among others, Netflix, Sky and the BBC. "International partnerships and co-funding have now become an essential part of the day-to-day business in a more global broadcasting landscape," he argued.

The lecture is given in memory of Dan Gilbert, a former radio current-affairs editor at the BBC. RTS Northern Ireland hosted the lecture as part of the Belfast Media Festival. ■

Matthew Bell

Raiding the lost archives

■ RTS Northern Ireland joined forces with Film Hub NI – part of the BFI Film Audience Network – to showcase the latest developments in TV and film archives.

"Raiders of the lost archive" discussed the wealth of digital archive material available which could be used to enhance TV and film production, as well as providing material for film exhibitors.

Ciara Chambers, head of film and screen media at University College Cork, gave a rundown of her work on the TG4 project to save century-old newsreels that document Ireland's political history.

RMC Media's Fran Rowlatt-McCormick discussed her experiences of working as an archival producer on projects such as *66 Days*, a film about Bobby Sands' hunger strike.

Warren Bell discussed the

BBC Rewind project, which plans to release 10,000 pieces of material online over the next few years.

Documentary film-maker Brian Henry Martin, from Belfast-based indie Double-Band Films, presented his work on the BBC NI *Super 8 Stories*, a series that presented 75 years of life in Northern Ireland as recorded on super 8 film home movies.

Second Chance Cinema

founders Rosie Le Garsmeur and Stuart Sloan presented the story of the documentary film specialists' evolution into Northern Ireland's most experienced film archive exhibitors. They screened a selection of some short films from the Second Chance collection.

Media lawyer Olivia O'Kane from Belfast law firm Carson McDowell also spoke at the joint RTS/Film Hub event at Queen's Film Theatre, which was held as part of BBC Digital Cities Belfast week.

Sara Gunn-Smith

Red Production Company's Belfast-set *Come Home*, took the Drama prize at the RTS Northern Ireland Programme Awards. Danny Brocklehurst's BBC One series stars Christopher Eccleston and Paula Malcomson as a couple whose marriage collapses and threatens to destroy their children's lives.

The Scripted Comedy award went to Lisa McGee's Channel 4 sitcom *Derry Girls*, which was made by Hat Trick Productions.

No Stone Unturned, which tells the story of the unsolved murders of six men in a bar in Northern Ireland during the 1994 World Cup, won the Current Affairs award for Fine Point Films. It was directed by the renowned US documentary film-maker, Alex Gibney.

Belfast production company Fine Point Films picked up a second award (with Cyprus Avenue Films) for *66 Days*, about Bobby Sands and the 1981 hunger strikes, which garnered the Documentary prize. The Specialist Factual award went to Erica Starling Productions and Ronachan Films for *Leonora Carrington: The Lost Surrealist*, about the English-born Mexican artist.



Derry Girls: on the top deck

BBC Northern Ireland's television news service, *BBC Newsline*, won the News Coverage award for Kevin Magee's investigation into paedophile hunters. BBC Northern Ireland also picked up the Interactive award for its virtual-reality film *1943 Berlin Blitz*.

"The high quality of this year's entries was truly impressive and hugely reflective of Northern Ireland's dynamic creative community," said RTS Northern Ireland Chair Kieran Doherty.

Casting director Carla

Stronge was presented with the Brian Waddell Award for her outstanding contribution to local TV and film.

Her credits include HBO's *Game of Thrones*, for which she has won two Emmys, and the recent BBC Two factual drama *Doing Money*, about slavery in the UK.

"Waddell Media was the first place I did work experience, so I am very proud to be the first recipient in the award's new name," said Stronge.

Jannine Waddell, Chair of the awards committee, gave "special congratulations" to

Stronge for winning the Brian Waddell Award, re-named in memory of her father, who founded the Belfast indie Waddell Media.

The RTS Northern Ireland Awards were held at the Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast, and hosted by Bronagh Waugh, who recently starred in the ITV drama *Unforgotten*.

Matthew Bell

Belfast welcomes students

■ A sold-out session on the work of the art department of HBO fantasy drama *Game of Thrones* was the highlight of RTS Futures Northern Ireland's careers day at Queen's University Belfast.

Supervising art director

Paul Ghirardani – who brought one of his Emmys with him – was joined by artist Daniel Blackmore and draughtsman Owen Black at the session, which was jointly hosted by Belfast Design Week. The trio discussed their roles in the art department, before an 80-strong audience.

Belfast's Titanic Studios has been the main studio and post-production facility for all eight series of *Game of Thrones*.

The careers day began

with a CV masterclass, featuring former BBC lead talent manager Helen Thompson.

The "Ultimate careers panel discussion" featured: director John Strickland (BBC One thriller *Line of Duty*); BBC NI head of content Eddie Doyle; Stellify Media development producer Maeve McLoughlin; Creative Skill-set's Margaret Burgin; and NI Screen's Christine Morrow.

The RTS Futures NI careers day was part of BBC Digital Cities Week Belfast 2018.

Stacey Burns

Northern Ireland winners

Brian Waddell Award - Carla Stronge

Drama - *Come Home* - Red Production Company for BBC One

Scripted Comedy - *Derry Girls* - Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4

Entertainment - *What Makes You Tic?* - Nice One Productions and Hindsight Productions for BBC Three

Factual Entertainment/Features - *Rachel Allen: A Cook's Adventure* - Big Mountain Productions for Channel 4

Specialist Factual - *Leonora Carrington: The Lost Surrealist* - Erica Starling Productions/Ronachan Films for BBC Four

Documentary - *66 Days* - Cyprus Avenue Films/Fine Point Films for BBC Two

News Coverage - *BBC Newsline: Paedophile Hunter Investigation* - BBC NI

Current Affairs - *No Stone Unturned* - Fine Point Films

Children's/Animation - *Joe All Alone: Home Alone* - Zodiac Kids Studios for CBBC

Interactive - *1943 Berlin Blitz* - BBC NI

Original Music Score - *Rocky Ros Muc* - Below the Radar for BBC NI

Observational documentaries have offered audiences some of their most cherished memories over the years, from Michael Apted's *Up* series, to Molly Dineen's *The Ark* to Rowan Deacon's *How to Die: Simon's Choice*.

At an RTS Futures event in November, National Film and Television School head of docs Peter Dale chaired a debate on what it takes to be a great film-maker.

One of the panel, Lizzie Kempton, was the associate producer on the Grierson Award-winning BBC Two film, *How to Die: Simon's Choice*, which tells the story of a man with an aggressive form of motor neurone disease who chooses to end his life.

She studied journalism at university, working as a runner at ITV in Manchester during her holidays. After graduating, Kempton tried her hand at current affairs (*Tonight with Trevor McDonald*) and factual (*Long Lost Family*) TV, but she was set on making observational docs.

She got in touch with director Vanessa Engle and landed a job as an assistant producer on Engle's BBC Two doc *Welcome to the World of Weight Loss*. "She has a very clear, distinctive style and I



Havana Marking: Afghan Star

Zeitgeist Films

Letting the camera linger

RTS Futures Matthew Bell takes a seat as the experts discuss how they shoot observational documentaries

respected her as a film-maker," Kempton told Dale, Channel 4's ex-head of docs.

As a producer, Kempton worked "with some really brilliant directors for a few years. I was able to observe how [they practise] their craft."

BBC Three film *Manchester Bomb: Our Story* gave Kempton, who had secured a place on the BBC's documentary directors initiative, her first director's role. She is currently working for Minnow Films on a film about a woman, Sally

Challen, who is appealing a murder sentence on the grounds that her husband was psychologically abusive.

Another panel member, Peter Beard, who directed Channel 4's Bafta-winning doc *My Son the Jihadi*, had wanted to be a movie director. But a work placement on the *Harry Potter* set, "emptying the bins", gave the teenager a dose of realism: "I realised there were about 500 people between me and the director."

Beard shot short films and won a place on a researcher training programme at Channel 4. His break came as an assistant producer on Bruce Fletcher's BBC Three doc about a man with Down's Syndrome, *Otto: Love, Lust and Las Vegas*. "I absolutely loved that type of observational film-making, in which you get time to get to know character[s] and get under their skin."

To shoot or not to shoot?

■ The panellists held differing views on the need for directors to shoot their own films.

"It's something I enjoyed as soon as I started making films as a teenager," recalled Peter Beard. But, as an employer of crews at his indie, Story Films, he admitted that it is 'more problematic' to employ a non-shooting director together with 'a really strong assistant producer who can shoot'.

"When I was a producer, I didn't shoot because I was

petrified I wouldn't be good enough," said Lizzie Kempton. However, when she was admitted to the BBC's documentary directors scheme, she threw herself into it 'and absolutely loved it'. Self-shooting, she argued, gives a director 'more freedom' and 'an intimacy' with contributors.

Havana Marking can shoot but chooses not to. "It's really important to know how to shoot, how to cover a scene and what your camera person

is going to do. But, if you don't enjoy it or find it's distracting you from having emotional engagement [in the film], you shouldn't do it," she argued. "If you've got a really skilled camera person, who is really good at blending into the background, then you can have just as much intimacy – in fact, more."

Peter Dale, the chair of the Futures event and head of documentaries at the National Film and Television School, said: "There aren't enough women shooters. We're trying to address the dearth of female, talented shooters."

Beard “raced” to become a director and was commissioned to direct a film for Channel 4’s *First Cut* doc strand, but “felt entirely out of my depth”.

He took a step back and, like Kempton, learnt from observing other directors while producing. “Directing is not a gift – it’s a craft that you learn,” he said.

Beard produced Channel 4 series *Bedlam*, which was directed by David Nath with whom he later founded the indie, Story Films. “That was a massive lesson,” Beard recalled. “It took me from being a point-and-shoot director to someone who thinks a lot about how the story is being put together.”

Havana Marking, the third panel member and director of *Afghan Star*, which follows the lives of contestants on an *X Factor*-style show in Kabul, worked on a newspaper in Dorset before becoming a researcher on Channel 4’s *Escape to River Cottage*. “I loved the combination of the visual and the storytelling components [of the show],” she recalled.

Marking moved to London, but discovered its streets weren’t paved with TV gold. A job on ITV reality show *Holiday Showdown* was “awful”. Marking had been told it was a “banging holiday show” but, in reality, it was “car-crash television”.

She left “mainstream TV”, vowing “to make films about the things that I want to make”, and directed her first doc about a troupe of disabled male strippers, *The Crippendales*, after winning a Channel 4 pitching scheme for new talent.

Marking followed her debut with the Sundance Film Festival award-winning *Afghan Star*, which was supported by the BritDoc Foundation and More4 – the Channel 4 offshoot conceived and launched by Peter Dale. ■



Black Roses: The Killing of Sophie Lancaster

BBC

‘This life can be for you’

Carole Solazzo is persuaded by actor Julie Hesmondhalgh’s passionate words

One of the highlights of the North West calendar took place at The Lowry, Salford, in November, where the audience was treated to an evening of wit and warmth from Julie Hesmondhalgh. The actor, who has won two RTS North West awards for her work in ITV soap *Coronation Street* and BBC Two factual drama *Black Roses: The Killing of Sophie Lancaster*, was giving this year’s Anthony H Wilson Memorial Lecture.

In conversation with actor and director Noreen Kershaw, Hesmondhalgh proved to be the embodiment of the words of the late *Granada Reports* anchor and music impresario, Wilson, who memorably summed up his

city: “This is Manchester: we do things differently here.”

The antithesis of the “luv-vie” actor, Hesmondhalgh spoke about her background, education – “a product of the state” – her career and social campaigning. She emphasised the importance of being told, as a young, Northern, working-class woman, that “this [artist’s] life can be for you”.

She also impressed on the audience her gratitude at being “supported by grants and benefits”, which are no longer available to new artists, and discussed her work with organisations such as youth charity Arts Emergency.

“The opportunity, not to change people’s minds but to open them,” said Hesmondhalgh, meant that when she was chosen to play trans character Hayley Cropper in *Coronation Street*, she thoroughly researched the experiences of trans people.

In particular, she used those of “a shy, young lady from Aberdeen” and, in the spirit of “never pulling up the

ladder behind me”, encouraged her ambitions. That young lady became *Hollyoaks* star Annie Wallace.

Hesmondhalgh said “how proud” she is of *Corrie* for bringing issues such as the right to end one’s own life “into people’s front rooms. We have a responsibility to do [these issues] justice for those going through [them].”

She praised Russell T Davies, who gave the inaugural Anthony H Wilson Lecture in 2007, for using her character in Channel 4 drama *Cucumber* to discuss the effects of pornography on young people. She also praised ITV’s *Broadchurch*, in which she played “an ordinary middle-aged woman” who is raped, for not portraying a clichéd rape victim – a “naked young woman running through woods”.

Kershaw concluded with a surprise for Hesmondhalgh: filmed tributes from *Corrie* co-stars and fellow *Broadchurch* actor and new *Doctor Who* Jodie Whittaker.

The hugely popular BBC One sitcom *Peter Kay's Car Share* picked up two top prizes for its last-ever outing on television at the RTS North West Awards in Manchester.

Peter Kay's Car Share: The Finale won the Comedy Programme award, while Kay's co-star, Sian Gibson, was named Comedy Performer for her appearance in the Goodnight Vienna Productions' show.

The other acting awards at the ceremony went to: Jack P Shepherd (Performance in a Continuing Drama), who plays David Platt in ITV soap *Coronation Street*; Rob Edwards for his performance in BBC Four's *Men Who Sleep in Cars*, a single drama, written entirely in verse by Michael Symmons Roberts; and Jodhi May, who starred in an episode of the long-running anthology drama series *Moving On*, created by Jimmy McGovern.

May wrote the same *Moving On* episode, *Invisible*, about a mother confronting the teacher who abused her at school many years before. *Moving On*, which is made by LA Productions for BBC One, was also took the award for Daytime Series.

Big Talk Productions drama *Cold Feet*, which returned to ITV in 2016 after a gap of 13 years, received the Drama award. Topical Television's *The £1 Houses: Britain's Cheapest Street* for Channel 4 scooped the Factual Series prize, while BBC Two's long-running business ideas show, *Dragons' Den*, picked up the Factual Entertainment Programme award.

The Single Documentary award went to Blakeway North for its BBC One film *Manchester Bomb: Our Story*, which was directed by Lizzie Kempton. The terrorist attack on the Manchester Arena in May 2017, following a concert by Ariana Grande, was also



Peter Kay's Car Share: The Finale

Car Share fills its boot

the subject of Title Role Productions' *Manchester Terror Attack: In Their Own Words* for Channel 5, which won the Regional Story award.

The former Managing Director of ITV Granada, Susan Woodward, received the RTS Judges Award for founding the Sharp Project, which is home to 60 creative

digital businesses in Newton Heath, and Space Studios, Manchester's facility for high-end television and film production in West Gorton.

"Sue hugely deserves this recognition. She's a dynamic, inspiring and visionary leader who has transformed the television industry in the North West," said the Chair of

the North West Centre, Cat Lewis.

Cold Feet actor John Thomson hosted the RTS North West Awards at the Hilton Deansgate in November, in front of a star-studded audience that included Shayne Ward, Fay Ripley and Johnny Vegas.

Matthew Bell

RTS North West winners

Judges Award • Susan Woodward

Single Drama or Series • *Cold Feet* • Big Talk Productions for ITV

Performance in a Single Drama or Series – Male • Rob Edwards: *Men Who Sleep in Cars* • BBC Studios for BBC Four

Performance in a Single Drama or Series – Female • Jodhi May: *Moving On* • LA Productions for BBC One

Scriptwriter • Danny Brockleshurst: *Come Home* • Red Production Company for BBC One

Performance in a Continuing Drama • Jack P Shepherd: *Coronation Street* • ITV Studios for ITV

Continuing Drama Storyline • *Coronation Street: The Rape of David Platt* • ITV Studios for ITV

Comedy • *Peter Kay's Car Share: The Finale* • Goodnight Vienna for BBC One

Performance in a Comedy • Sian Gibson, *Peter Kay's Car Share: The Finale* • Goodnight Vienna for BBC One

Entertainment • Jane McDonald and *Friends* • Elephant House Studios for Channel 5

Single Documentary • *Manchester Bomb: Our Story* • Blakeway North for BBC One

Factual Series • *The £1 Houses: Britain's Cheapest Street* • Topical Television for Channel 4

Factual Entertainment • *Dragons' Den* • BBC Studios for BBC Two

Regional News Journalist • Daniel Hewitt • Granada Reports for ITV

Regional News • *Granada Reports Compilation* • ITV

Regional Story • *Manchester Terror Attack: In Their Own Words* • Title Role Productions for Channel 5

Current Affairs • *Judge Rinder's Crime*

Stories • ITV Studios for ITV

Daytime Series • *Moving On* • LA Productions for BBC One

Sports • Alan Shearer: *Dementia, Football and Me* • BBC Sport for BBC One

Breakthrough Talent • Chloe Lea, Katy • CBBC

Animation/Puppetry • *Go Jetties: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch* • CBeebies

Children's – Pre-School • *Raa Raa the Noisy Lion: Raa Raa and the Funniest Laugh* • Mackinnon and Saunders for CBeebies

Children's – School Age • *My Life: Hike to Happiness* • Nine Lives Media for CBBC

Digital Content • *Hollyoaks: #DontFilterFeelings* • Lime Pictures for Channel 4

Production – Craft • *Twirlywoos: More About Cleaning* • Mackinnon and Saunders/Ragdoll Productions for CBeebies

Post-production – Craft • *Safe (audio)* • Porcupine Media Services for Netflix

Comedians were the big winners at the RTS Midlands Awards – West Bromwich-born Frank Skinner received the Baird Medal in recognition of his contribution to TV, while Coventry's Guz Khan claimed three prizes for BBC Three sitcom *Man Like Mobeen*.

Khan won the Acting (Male) and Outstanding New Talent awards, and shared the Writer prize with the co-writer of *Man Like Mobeen*, Andy Milligan.

More than 300 people attended the awards ceremony, which was hosted by television presenter Trish Adudu, at Birmingham Town Hall in November.

ITV News Central bagged a hat trick of awards for News Programme of the Year, Journalist of the Year for Balvinder Sidhu and Digital Creativity.

BBC Birmingham also won three awards at the ceremony, for the documentary feature *How the NHS Changed Our World: Birmingham Children's Hospital*; *The One Show* film *Richie Anderson Coming Out* (Short Form); and Laura Rollins for long-running BBC One drama *Doctors* (Acting Performance – Female).

The BBC Two single drama *The Boy with the Topknot*, made by Kudos with Parti Productions, secured the Drama award. The film is an adaptation of journalist Sathnam Sanghera's memoir of growing up in Wolverhampton.

The BBC's *Inside Out East Midlands* was named Current Affairs Programme of the Year, while North One Television's *Travel Man: 48 Hours In...* series won the Factual Entertainment prize for the second year running.

Actor Mark Williams picked up the On-screen Personality award for *Civilisations Stories* in which he uncovers the radical world of Georgian Birmingham.

"The range of programming being made in the Midlands is

Guz Khan scores hat trick of wins



BBC

Man Like Mobeen

outstanding and tonight's nominees and winners showed the region at its best," said RTS Midlands Chair Caren Davies.

The centre is grateful to

BBC Midlands, Channel 4, Creative England, Film Birmingham and the University of Worcester for supporting the RTS Midlands Awards.

Matthew Bell

RTS Midlands winners

Baird Medal • Frank Skinner

Drama • *The Boy with the Topknot* • Kudos in association with Parti Productions for BBC Two

Writer • Guz Khan and Andy Milligan, *Man Like Mobeen* • Cave Bear and Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Three

Acting (Female) • Laura Rollins, *Doctors* • BBC Studios for BBC One

Acting (Male) • Guz Khan, *Man Like Mobeen* • Cave Bear and Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Three

On-screen Personality • Mark Williams, *Civilisations Stories* • Zebra Digital for BBC One West Midlands

Outstanding New Talent • Guz Khan, *Man Like Mobeen* • Cave Bear and Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Three

Factual Entertainment • *Travel Man: 48 Hours in ... Hong Kong* • North One Television for Channel 4

Specialist Factual • *Hospital* • Label Television for BBC Two

Documentary • *How the NHS Changed Our World: Birmingham Children's Hospital* • BBC Birmingham for BBC One West Midlands

Current Affairs • *Inside Out East Midlands* • BBC

Journalist of the Year • Balvinder Sidhu • ITV News Central

News Programme • *Glenfield Children's Heart Unit Reprieve* • ITV News Central

Children's • Jamie Johnson • Short Form Film for CBBC

Digital Creativity • ITV News Central

Short Form • *Richie Anderson Coming Out, The One Show* • BBC Birmingham for BBC One

Excellence in Post-production Craft Skills • *Rugby School* • Affixius Films

Excellence in Production Craft Skills • *All Is Not Lost* • Affixius Films

ONLINE at the RTS

■ In November, we celebrated Britain's behind-the-scenes TV talent at the RTS Craft & Design Awards. Comedian Tom Allen was the witty compère, elegantly rattling through a ceremony that saw Stephen Frears pick up the Director – Drama award for Jeremy Thorpe drama *A Very English Scandal*. The Lifetime Achievement award went to former ITV Studios MD Kathy Schultz. You can watch backstage interviews on our website (www.rts.org.uk/CD2018).

■ The awards demonstrated the impact good craft skills have on TV production. Earlier in November, the RTS Student Craft Skills masterclasses helped to unpack what it takes to make a great show. In the camerawork session, directors of photography Phil Mash and Geraint Warrington explained that there is no substitute for experience, and that stills photography is a good way to practise composition. You can watch the session at www.rts.org.uk/Camerawork18.

■ Editors Pia Di Ciaula and Rick Barker discussed the differences between editing drama and factual programmes. In drama, the director likes to be present in the edit suite, Di Ciaula explained, while Barker said that in factual it is the editor's domain (www.rts.org.uk/Editing18).

■ Sound, though vital to programme-making, can often be a bit of a mystery to outsiders. Molinaire's head of broadcast factual sound, Greg Gettens, and sound recordist Phil Bax helped to unravel the mystery, and described how a job in sound can take you from an edit suite to the world's highest building (www.rts.org.uk/Sound2018).

Pippa Shawley

RTS events
IN BRIEF

Scotland launches writer award

RTS Scotland launched its 2019 awards in November. Chair of judges and head of Lion TV in Scotland Lisa Hazlehurst unveiled the criteria and categories, including a new category for writers. Ben Philip, who received the Young Journalist award in 2018, and Duncan Cowles, whose film *Taking Stock* won the Short Form Content award last year, shared their experiences. The awards will take place in Glasgow on 12 June.

Ireland celebrates Brendan Behan

RTS Republic of Ireland hosted a screening of Birgitta Pierre's 1970 documentary *A Jar with Brendan Behan* in November at RTÉ in Dublin. The film was shot by Godfrey Graham, who revealed that Pierre, a Swedish researcher at RTÉ Television, had become fascinated by the Irish writer. Behan is portrayed by Niall Tóibín, who also appeared in a stage adaptation of Behan's *Borstal Boy* on Broadway.

Centres celebrate with quizzes

Three RTS centres held Christmas quizzes. *BBC Look North* in Leeds lifted Yorkshire's trophy, answering questions set by TV writer Lisa Holdsworth. Bristol factual and natural history specialists Offspring Films were crowned champions at the West of England quiz, which was hosted by *BBC Points West* presenters Alex Lovell and Sabet Choudhury. ITV Wales presenter Ruth Wignall hosted the RTS Wales quiz, which was won by a combined Sugar Films/BBC Studios team.

Students and freelances study in Southampton

Southern Centre Two hundred locally based journalism students attended the Southern Centre's fifth annual "Working in journalism" event at Solent University in mid-November.

It is one of the best forums for students to meet working journalists to discuss current opportunities and career development – three of the 15 journalists at the event had attended as students in the past two years. Indeed, one gained her job with Sky News as a result of the contact she made as a student in 2017.

The professionals included on-screen and online staff from BBC South, ITV Meridian and Sky News, as well as

reporters from BBC Radio Solent and *The News*, which is based in Portsmouth.

There were also sports journalists working as communications officers for GB Wheelchair Rugby and Brighton and Hove Albion FC.

There was much talk about journalists dealing with "fake news". One of the visiting professionals said that good journalism relies on individual integrity and the ability to "sift through the speculative and embellished to get the real story".

■ Later that month, Southern Centre held its second Freelance Fair. More than 50 professionals from film, editing, camera, sound, kit hire,

engineering, acting, locations and TV companies gathered to discuss their current projects at the Vestry in Southampton.

Working as a freelance television professional can be challenging, especially for those who are new to the region, so the fair provides a platform for people from different sectors of the industry to meet and connect.

"Once again, this event has proved to be very popular," said Southern Centre Chair Stephanie Farmer. "It shows that there is a role for the RTS to support the growing band of creative freelance professionals in our region."

Gordon Cooper and Katharine Duchesne

Raising a laugh in Plymouth

■ RTS Devon and Cornwall's annual 'Breaking into media' event featured its largest ever 'Getting in and getting on' panel, which boasted an army of TV talent.

Sam Smith represented the BBC, while Kate Haskell and Sam Blackledge spoke for ITV West Country and Dan Willers for animation studio Yellow Mouse.

Beagle Media, Silverstream TV and the TwoFour Group brought their heads of department Harry Anscombe, Rob Davey and Rick Horne, together with some of their young talent – Hannah, Kirsty,

Craig and Ingrid. All recent graduates, they offered inspiration and insight to an audience of more than 160 school, college and university students from across Devon and Cornwall at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, in November.

The second half of 'Breaking into media' featured comedy producers Izzy Mant and James Dean, who discussed their journey into television, and offered advice on how to develop and deliver a comedy series for broadcast.

Their talk was illustrated by clips from: their Sky series *This*

is Jinsy and *Living the Dream*, their Channel 4 series *The Windsors* and *Badults*; and the BBC's *Ruddy Hell! It's Harry & Paul*, for which Mant won a Bafta award.

Kingsley Marshall



Ruddy Hell! It's Harry & Paul

BBC

Yorkshire Centre More than 100 students picked up valuable tips on making factual TV during Yorkshire's careers day at Leeds College of Music in November.

At two masterclasses and three mini "Anatomy of a hit" sessions, the students learned from some of the region's leading television practitioners.

The first masterclass featured Channel 5 commissioning editor Greg Barnett; True North creative director Jess Fowle and producer Hayley Raper; Daisybeck Studios production executive Hannah Melia; and Andrew White, the presenter and producer of *Walks Around Britain*. The execs offered advice on how to make the most of a work placement.

The second featured speakers in the early stages of their careers: True Vision Yorkshire production trainee Harry Lock; Daisybeck Studios researcher Hannah McDonagh; Air TV production manager Holly Pywell; and True North production co-ordinator Ravelle Thomas and development researcher Eleanor Wight.

The careers day ended with a look at three factual TV hits made in the region. Greg Barnett returned to the stage with Daisybeck Studios MD



Leeds reveals factual secrets

Paul Stead and *The Yorkshire Vet*'s vet, Julian Norton, to discuss the Channel 5 show.

Representing high-octane medical series *Helicopter ER* (UKTV channel Really) were Matt Richards from Air TV and Dr Andy Pountney, one of the Yorkshire Air Ambulance medics on the show.

Anna Hall from True Vision Yorkshire talked about her RTS Yorkshire award-winning series for Channel 4, *Catching a Killer*. The panellists spoke about the work that went into making programmes involving real people, and how vital it was to build up trust.

Lisa Holdsworth

Bursaries safeguard TV's future

The RTS has announced the recipients of its 2018 undergraduate bursaries. The scheme, which aims to improve access to the TV industry, supports talented students from lower-income

backgrounds. It offers 25 bursaries for TV production and broadcast journalism students, and seven for those studying computing and engineering. The Steve Hewlett Scholarship, for students pursuing a career in current affairs journalism or documentary production, was awarded to Georgia May Keetch and Liam Warden. It was set up to honour the late TV executive and journalist

"Television needs a broader pool of young people to enter the industry and flourish," said

RTS CEO Theresa Wise. "Our first two years of graduates are doing us proud and we look forward to supporting our new first years into their future careers."

During their studies, each recipient receives £1,000 a year to assist with their expenses. In their final year of study, the RTS aims to set up mentoring opportunities with senior industry figures.

The Steve Hewlett scholarship is worth £2,000 a year to each of the two recipients.

Matthew Bell

Bristol hosts sold-out youth event

West of England The Watershed in Bristol was full with emerging TV talent when it hosted the RTS West of England's Futures Festival in late November.

The RTS centre – in partnership with ScreenSkills, the industry body for the UK's screen-based creative industries – put on the event during the BBC Academy-run Digital Cities Bristol.

Sixteen companies from the creative community in the region were on hand to offer advice and discuss opportunities. Indies in attendance included Keo Films, Wall to Wall West, Icon Films and Plimsoll Productions, alongside *ITV News West Country* and post-production facilities Doghouse, Evolutions and Films at 59, which brought along camera kit for students to try out.

Digital influencer Amrit Singh explained how to create successful digital campaigns and build brands, while Marble Films' Jane Zurakowski talked about production management, revealing that it doesn't involve just paperwork and budgets, but can be creative, too.

Series director George Pagliero (BBC One's *Earth's Natural Wonders*) gave a guide to self-shooting, while ScreenSkills provided an overview of its Trainee Finder scheme, which helps place trainees on feature films and high-end TV drama across the UK.

Students also attended ScreenSkills' "show and tell sessions" on film and TV lighting, make-up, production and editing.

Suzy Lambert

OFF MESSAGE

Well, that was the year that was. Another golden 12 months

for TV, as everyone was treated to a succession of brilliant drama series. In no particular pecking order, a New Year toast to some of TV's choicest cuts of 2018 – *Killing Eve*, *Bodyguard*, *Patrick Melrose*, *A Very English Scandal*, *My Brilliant Friend* and *The Marvellous Mrs Maisel*.

There were also encouraging trends behind the screen, as more women seemed to be working in positions of power and influence. This year, British TV can salute the impressive starts that Carolyn McCall and Alex Mahon has each made during challenging times at ITV and Channel 4, respectively.

At ITV, the recent ratings success of *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* is a tribute to the resilience of a truly great format – and television's unique power to ignite national conversations.

Not only did the programme achieve its highest-ever launch audience – the consolidated viewing figures were 13.7 million – the show's finale peaked at an extraordinary 12.1 million.

Well done, ITV, and well done to the gallant Harry Redknapp for cheering up the dark winter nights.

Meanwhile, a reinvigorated Channel 4 looks forward to 2019 with a clear vision, as it positions itself to be a regional broadcaster of genuine scale.

■ Talking of Channel 4, Off Message would like to extend huge thanks to Dan Brooke, an RTS stalwart and assiduous Chair of the Early-Evening Events Committee.

He is quitting his job as Channel 4's chief marketing and communications officer to set up his own company.

Dan is unlikely to be short of clients. Known for his calm authority, he is

also a great champion of diversity. During his tenure, Channel 4 was voted Britain's Best Diverse Company. His award-winning "superhumans" campaign for Channel 4's coverage of the 2012 London Paralympics represented truly groundbreaking work.

Off Message wishes him well in his new venture.

■ As the awards season gains momentum, hosts capable of making these nights fly by are at a premium.

If comedian Tom Allen isn't fully booked to hand out the prizes, then he should be. Anyone who attended the RTS's recent Craft & Design Awards will know that the acerbic Allen is in a league of his own as an awards presenter.

Memorably describing himself as "Kirstie Allsopp trapped inside Phil Spencer", he made light and rapid work of announcing the winners of some 28 awards.

■ Good to see Ofcom's CEO, Sharon White, giving another impressive defence of public service broadcasting at Digital UK's "Outside the box" conference in November.

Once again, she urged further collaboration between the PSBs as they contemplate the competition from the streamers and other tech behemoths. The Ofcom chief was candid when she said that she thought the BBC had acted too quickly to switch BBC Three to an online-only operation.

Talking of BBC Three, it will be fascinating to see who is appointed to succeed its controller, Damian Kavanagh, who is leaving, after a four-year stint, to run Tiger Aspect.

■ There had been speculation in the specialist sports press that Comcast's new ownership of Sky might mean the end of the company's sponsorship of the all-conquering Team Sky.

And so it turned out to be. French cycling fans will be rejoicing. They hated the way that the deep-pocketed team exerted total and utter dominance over the Tour de France.

Who would have thought, when Sky's distinctive and luxuriously appointed black bus first appeared at the race in 2009, that their cyclists would go on to win six editions of the Tour. In the process, Bradley Wiggins, Chris Froome and Geraint Thomas became household names.

As Sky's CEO, Jeremy Darroch, said when it was announced that his company was ending its backing: "After more than a decade of involvement, I couldn't be prouder of what we've achieved with Team Sky and our long-standing partners at British Cycling"

Off Message hopes that Sky's Ocean Rescue campaign, which aims to reduce the role that single-use plastics play in our lives, is as successful.

■ And finally, congratulations to the RTS Fellows presented with their awards at November's Patron Dinner: Gary Franes, late of sports producer Sunset+Vine, and Peter Fincham and Janice Hadlow, who have both held big jobs at the BBC. It's easy to forget that, as controller of BBC Two, Hadlow was responsible for introducing *The Great British Bake Off* to the nation.

Handing out the fellowships, RTS Vice-Chair Simon Pitts, who once worked alongside Fincham at ITV, couldn't resist teasing the man who helped bring *Downton Abbey* to the screen. Not only did he call out the ex-Talkback man's sartorial weakness for upmarket knitwear, he also highlighted his apparent reluctance to travel by Tube.

At which point the ever-resourceful co-founder of Expectation Entertainment flourished his Oyster card for all to see.



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