

July/August 2023

Television



The lure of Italy

Why TV can't get
enough of it

STREAMING SOCIAL BIG MOBILE SCREENS

TOO MUCH TO WATCH

RTS Cambridge
Convention 2023

20 - 21 September

Chaired by:

Alex Mahon, CEO, Channel 4

Speakers include:

Mike Fries, CEO and Vice Chairman, Liberty Global

Shay Segev, CEO, DAZN

Bryan Lourd, Co-Chairman, Creative Artists Agency (CAA)

Debbie Weinstein, VP & MD, Google UK & Ireland

Evan Shapiro, Media Cartographer

Ajaz Ahmed, CEO, AKQA

Jordan Schwarzenberger, Co-Founder,
Arcade Media, The Sidemen

Returning speakers:

Tim Davie, Director-General, BBC

Carolyn McCall, CEO, ITV

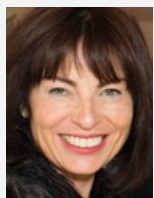
Dana Strong, Group CEO, Sky

Maria Kyriacou, President, Broadcast & Studios,
International Markets, Paramount Global

Stephen van Rooyen, CEO, Sky UK & Ireland and
Chief Commercial Officer, Sky Group



From the CEO



Ever since the days of the grand tour, us Brits have been in love with the idea of Italy. Nowadays, thanks to the likes of Stanley Tucci, we don't even have to leave the comfort of our homes to enjoy all things Italian.

Simply turn on the TV and savour the magic of Italy, its cuisine, culture, and cutting-edge design. Carole Solazzo's piece on the lure of Italy for programme-makers, this month's cover story, is our summertime treat.

The recent RTS Student Television Awards showcased the amazing talent reservoir that broadcasters and streamers will be drawing on in the

years to come. Details of all the winners are inside. Congratulations to them and to all the nominees.

The economic crisis rumbles on, so we look at its impact on the UK content sector and TV advertising. As work dries up, freelancers who work on unscripted shows are feeling the squeeze. Tara Conlan talks to some of those at the sharp end and asks what can be done to help them. Meanwhile, Pippa Considine takes the temperature of the TV ad market and discovers a mixed picture.

For a complete contrast, read Caitlin Danaher's profile of Jesse Armstrong and find out about the man who created the toxic characters we love to hate in *Succession* and *Peep Show*.

It may be the summer, but our events programme has been busy. The "Anatomy of a hit" on the BBC's breakout hit *The Traitors* was hugely illuminating. We also looked at how AI is already impacting newsrooms and how broadcasters and streamers are searching for film-makers who can serve engaging documentaries to young, diverse British audiences.

I am thrilled that our TV diarist is 5 News anchor Dan Walker, whose empathy for viewers makes him one of our outstanding broadcasters.

Theresa Wise

Contents

Cover: Clive Myrie's *Italian Road Trip* (BBC)

- 5 Dan Walker's TV diary**
5 News is that rare beast – a terrestrial news show that is adding viewers. Dan Walker can't believe his luck
- 6 Comfort Classic: This Is England '86**
Harrowing and hilarious, the lovingly recreated fashions, music and décor underline how timeless this story of fierce friendship is, says Matthew Bell
- 7 Ear Candy: Call Jonathan Pie**
Harry Bennett tunes in to Jonathan Pie, the absolute spit of a genuine hack at the end of his tether
- 8 Working Lives: Comedy writer**
The creator of *Count Abdulla*, Kaamil Shah, tells Matthew Bell how progress can be measured in cups of tea
- 10 TV's Italian job**
Superb food, stupendous scenery and treasure troves of art and architecture. No wonder TV is in love with Italy. Carole Solazzo reports
- 12 From boom to bust?**
Freelancers are struggling to find work as the demand for factual TV dries up. Tara Conlan investigates
- 14 Venom-spitting nice guy**
Caitlin Danaher profiles Jesse Armstrong who, despite writing some of the foulest dialogue on TV, is nothing like his toxic characters
- 16 Where next for TV ad revenue?**
UK TV advertising is said to be in the doldrums. But the real picture is more nuanced. Pippa Considine runs the numbers
- 18 Wink Murder on steroids**
The RTS hears how *The Traitors* has become a huge hit for the BBC
- 21 Our Friend in the North East**
Graeme Thompson urges the BBC to rethink its approach to English local radio
- 22 Wanted: dox that appeal to Gen Z**
An RTS panel reveals how new documentary makers are unearthing subjects geared to young, diverse British audiences
- 24 AI: opportunity knocks for news?**
RTS panellists examine the improvements and challenges that machine learning can bring to news organisations
- 27 RTS Student Television Awards 2023**
The ceremony at BFI Southbank on 23 June was hosted by TV and radio presenter Will Njobvu and the awards were presented by Sinéad Rocks
- 34 RTS news and events**
Reports of the Society's seminars, events and awards ceremonies from around the UK and Ireland



exceptional *music at your*

**Discover exceptional
music in every genre
and mood imaginable,
licensed worldwide,
forever.**

Whatever your project,
we've got the perfect
soundtrack.

fingertips

audionetwork.com/discover

SEND US YOUR BRIEF
musicsearch@audionetwork.com

audio network 

TV diary

Isn't it odd how quickly time goes sometimes? Apparently, I have been at Channel 5 for over a year – which I can't get my head around. When I first met the boss, Ben Frow, he told me he wanted me to anchor the news but also make loads of other programmes for them and he has been true to his word.

■ We have made a series about archaeology, a series about missing people called *Vanished*, which is coming back later in the year, and I'm in the middle of filming a travelogue with Helen Skelton, which I'm aware doesn't sound like work at all – we are travelling around the Peninsines visiting some amazing places and talking to incredible people.

■ There are all sorts of other shows I would love to make at Channel 5 but our news programme remains my biggest focus. One of Ben's targets when I started was to increase the audience by 20% in the first year... we have managed to add 30%, which the team is rightly proud of.

■ We go out of our way to make our style as conversational as possible. We think that news should never be a lecture and, at a time when trust has never been more important, we try and put honesty, integrity and accuracy at the heart of what we do. We try to be distinctive and it's lovely to see that reflected in the way people talk about the programme.

■ TV is a brilliant industry to work in and it gives you the opportunity to be creative and constantly think



ITN/Channel 5

5 News is that rare beast – a terrestrial news show that is adding viewers. Dan Walker can't believe his luck

about new ways of doing things. We have added some new features to the show this year to give the audience a sense of familiarity.

At 5:30pm, we do the 5 Things You Need to Know, and Around the World in Three Stories a little later in the show, which allows us to hoover up international news in a punchy format.

■ There are many things we are still working on, but the team is fantastic, and we have our new editor, Debbie Ramsey, starting after the summer so that should be exciting.

Cait FitzSimons has led the troops brilliantly for five years but is moving on to pastures new so there is a wonderful opportunity for Debbie to come in with a clean pair of eyes and fresh ideas and take the reins of a

rare beast in TV... a terrestrial news programme with a growing audience.

Channel 5 is a station that doesn't mind taking risks, thinking differently and standing out in a saturated market. We intend to embrace that in our news coverage, too, so watch this space.

■ Let me give you an example of that attitude. A week last Wednesday, I got a phone call from Ian Rumsey, Managing Director of Content at ITN, asking me if I was free the following evening. Channel 5 was going to commission a "news special" on the Titan sub, produced by ITN Productions.

I got a message later that day to say it was going ahead between 7:00pm and 8:00pm on the Thursday night. At about 5:00pm the next day, the US Coastguard announced it would be giving a live update on the situation at 8:00pm our time.

When I walked into the office at 6:00pm, Ben Frow was saying he wanted another 15 minutes on the show and that *Puzzling*, the channel's new quiz with Lucy Worsley, would start at 8:15pm instead. It is incredibly rare for TV execs to show that degree of flexibility.

Ben took a huge risk but was rewarded with an audience pushing 2 million. Most importantly for me, we got the tone of the programme right and covered a developing story with the same honesty, integrity and accuracy we try and apply to everything we do.

I can't wait to see what the next year brings.

Dan Walker is lead anchor of 5 News on Channel 5.

COMFORT CLASSIC



Channel 4

Harrowing and hilarious, the lovingly recreated fashions, music and décor underline how timeless this story of fierce friendship is, says **Matthew Bell**

Hilarious, ribald and ridiculous but also achingly bleak and sad. *This Is England '86* is all these things but, more than anything, what it has in spades is humanity.

The 2010 Channel 4 drama features a gang of largely unemployed misfits in an unnamed, impoverished East Midlands coastal town, following England's progress at Maradona's "Hand of God" World Cup in Mexico.

The gang comes in all ages, shapes and sizes, sporting the worst 1980s haircuts. There's no fake tan, fancy nails or gym bodies on show, as you fear there would be in a contemporary version.

The four-part series was a spin-off from Shane Meadows' multi-award-winning movie *This Is England* and

features largely the same cast. In the film, which is set in 1983, Shaun (Thomas Turgoose), Lol (Vicky McClure, later to find fame in *Line of Duty*) and Woody (Joe Gilgun, *Brassic*) are skinheads, in thrall to ska and soul, whose world is turned upside down by Combo (Stephen Graham), a charismatic but racist skinhead newly released from prison.

When Channel 4 commissioned the series, Meadows said: "I had a wealth of material and unused ideas that I felt very keen to take further.... Not only did I want to take the story of the gang broader and deeper, I also saw in the experiences of the young in 1986 many resonances to now – recession, lack of jobs, a sense of the world at a turning point."

Meadows wrote *This Is England '86*

Ear candy

with Jack Thorne, then at the start of his career with a few episodes of *Skins* and one of *Shameless* behind him. Thorne also has a small role in the series, playing estate oddball Carrotbum. He cheerfully admitted that he was cast as he was “the weird kid at the back of the class... the token nerd on the show.”

In lesser hands, *This Is England '86* could have become a mishmash of polemic and farce. In one episode, joyous scenes in the pub as England beat Poland are bookended by harrowing news footage from the Falklands war and a brutal rape.

The same episode also includes a comic sex scene (one of the gang is forced to cultivate a Clark Gable moustache and dress like the film idol by his older lover), a life-affirming family reconciliation and a violent assault by a father on his daughter. *This Is England '86* is not an easy watch, but the best drama rarely is.

Meadows and Thorne went on to pen two follow-up series, *This Is England '88* and *This Is England '90*. They extended their writing partnership with the RTS award-winning *The Virtues*.

Currently, both writers have their own much-praised dramas on the BBC. On the surface, they couldn't be more different from *This Is England*, although there is the welcome presence of Thomas Turgoose and Michael Socha (Harvey in *This Is England '86*) in Meadows' new work, *The Gallows Pole*.

Thorne's heart-rending drama *Best Interests* is about a parent's fight to stop hospital treatment being withdrawn from her severely disabled daughter. It's a big-issue drama. Like *This Is England*, *Best Interests* is imbued with an intense humanity.

The Gallows Pole is an adaptation of Benjamin Myers' fictional account of the brutal exploits of a gang of 18th-century coin counterfeiters.

In truth, it's not so far removed from *This Is England*. As Lucy Mangan noted in *The Guardian*: “Every [character] feels as fresh and completely convincing as Lol, Combo, Harvey or Shaun. Real people, just... in the past.” ■

This is England '86 is available on Channel 4.



BBC

You could say that Jonathan Pie prophesied the exodus of talent from the BBC. Tom Walker's inspiration for the character, essentially a politically charged Alan Partridge, was his assumption that newsreaders must be frustrated having to stick so rigidly and impartially to the agenda. Especially when covering the dire state of modern politics.

I'm not saying that the likes of Emily Maitlis, Jon Sopel and Andrew Marr dreamed of exorcising their frustration by going off on one of Pie's shouty and swearsy monologues, but they did all leave for less impartial pastures.

Speaking of the “traitors” (Pie's word not mine), all three get a mention in the first episode of Walker's new comedy podcast, *Call Jonathan Pie*, in which Pie is handed the reins of a fictional BBC Radio phone-in show as a last resort.

The producers fail to find a better replacement for its regular presenter, who's “gone down with a bad case of touching up sixth formers in the

1990s”, because, as Pie puts it, “even *Doctor Who's* fucked off to Disney.”

And so begins the self-roasting. It seems the BBC is in on the joke. The show is broadcast on Radio 4. But the actual phone-in segments lead to the kind of humiliating shtick that will be familiar to anyone who's tuned in to another station, as Pie verbally batters one soft-headed caller after another like he's James O'Brien on LBC.

There's not a lot of nuance, then, but, as with the best of Pie's YouTube rants, there are cathartic laughs to be had at ignorance of all stripes.

This includes Brexiteers such as “Gavin”, who calls in to complain about the weakness of the blue British passports on the Henley Passport Index. The problem isn't Brexit, he reckons, but the colour blue itself.

Cue Pie's putdown, albeit with the caveat that he's not allowed to mention the “B word” in a negative way without “giving Nigel Farage a full episode of *Newsnight* to guest present, all in the name of balance”.

That's the sound of Maitlis laughing in agreement. ■

Harry Bennett

Kaamil Shah's debut series, comedy horror *Count Abdulla*, dropped on ITVX in June. The writer has plans for many more, including a British Bollywood extravaganza, a Kenya-set thriller – and even a medieval comedy about a Palestinian joustier.

Did you always want to be a writer?

I wanted to be a director when, aged seven, I saw the behind-the-scenes *Lord of the Rings* documentaries. It was fascinating to see Peter Jackson running around and I thought, “That’s what I want to do.”

Life gets in the way and you’re pulled in other directions but, at Cambridge University, where I was studying history, there was a talk by the film screenwriter Jay Basu. I went away buzzing from that talk and, since then, everything I’ve done has been working towards being a screenwriter.

Did you do any training?

I went to the London Film School to study screenwriting. It was a great course; I wrote a lot, including the first draft of *Count Abdulla*. That script got me my agent and on to a lot of writing schemes; it’s been my calling card in the industry.

How did you get your TV break?

I looked at websites with screenwriting schemes – the BBC Writersroom is very useful – and applied for every single one of them. I didn’t get into 90%, but the few that I did were really useful. The first was for a one-minute short for the BBC Writersroom, in collaboration with the BBC Asian Network.

After film school I took a job in advertising, but I kept working on scripts in the evenings and at weekends until I was able to take the jump and become a full-time writer.

Where did the idea for *Count Abdulla* come from?

A joke – “How could a Muslim vampire exist if the blood isn’t *hala!*?” – was the jumping-off point. A lot of it was drawn from my own life; I’m not a doctor or a vampire but I do resonate with a lot of the things Abdulla’s going through – at that point in my life, I couldn’t figure out where I stood in relationship to British or Pakistani culture, either.

A lot of the characters are based on people in my life: Bushra is very much like my mum; she’s often smothering but really sweet; Shafi is an amalgamation of a few of my cousins; and Amrita

WORKING LIVES

Comedy writer



ITVX

Count Abdulla

is based on my best friend. I think the best comedy is drawn from a real place and a place you know inside out. I've never struggled to write jokes for these characters.

How do you write comedy?

It all starts with the idea. Before I wrote *Count Abdulla*, I didn't consider myself a comedy writer, but I came up with this idea that was begging to be a comedy – it's difficult to think of a Muslim vampire drama.

I'd written a pilot script and my agent sent that out and Fudge Park, the producer of *The Inbetweeners*, took it on. We worked on developing the script, making it quite a bit funnier probably, and then sent it out to broadcasters.

Once ITV picked it up I wrote the rest of the episodes, working closely with my executive producer, Phil Gilbert, to find a story for the season but also keep the gag rate up.

Is that the end of the writer's role?

No. I sat in on the auditions and helped with casting the main characters and, when we went into production, I was available on set to talk about any changes people wanted to make. I was also in the edit.

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm already thinking about series 2, if it were to get recommissioned.

I'm also working with BBC Comedy on developing a musical comedy-drama called *Southall Story*. My parents are from nearby Hounslow and it is based on their life but set in the modern day – my mum is from a Muslim background and my dad from a Hindu background.

Interfaith and intercultural relationships are very common in Southall, Hounslow and the British Asian community in general. *Southall Story* is a real celebration of that, a sort of British Bollywood musical.

I'm also in a writers room for a BBC series and have a first-look deal with Paramount, working on a thriller set in Kenya, where my dad was born. And I'm writing a medieval comedy show about a Palestinian champion joust.

What makes a good comedy writer?

It's all about creating characters that are funny naturally, rather than shoe-horning in jokes.

Your character has to have flaws that will inevitably lead to jokes and

pratfalls. I've had a great education watching so many great British comedies over the years.

What are your favourites?

I'm a huge fan of *The Inbetweeners* but my all-time favourite is *Peep Show*; it's so dark and horrible. From the US, HBO series *Barry*; you're really gripped by the plot but it never loses sight of the gags.



What does a typical writing day look like?

My routine is set by cups of tea. When I get to a point where I can't write any more, I make a cup of tea. That settles the mind; I drink the tea, look out the window, do a bit of thinking and get back to it – and rinse and repeat for the rest of the day.

Where do you write?

Mostly at home and in peace – I don't listen to music when writing. At times, on the sofa in front of football on mute and occasionally in cafés.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best is watching actors, people you've seen in so many other things, say your lines; the worst is the rejection.

Are there any tricks of the writing trade you can share with us?

I write really detailed outlines so I have a clear map of where I want to go with a script. And don't force yourself to write something if it's not

working – write something else as a palette cleanser.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to write for TV?

Everyone has a different route but, for me, doing the screenwriting course was really useful because it gave me a year to focus solely on writing.

There are also a lot of good books: the one I like best is *Into the Woods: How*

Stories Work and Why We Tell Them by TV producer John Yorke.

We need to do a better job of bringing writers through, especially those from more challenging backgrounds. More writers rooms would help.

What would be your dream writing gig?

A period drama from the British Asian perspective. We make so many great period dramas but I find it crazy that we set so many shows in the Victorian period when the British Empire was at its height and, particularly in India, and yet we've had almost nothing about that relationship.

Memorably, you appeared on *University Challenge* in a leather vest. Do you have an exhibitionist streak?

I've always been a bit of a showboater, I think. I couldn't let the opportunity of being in front of Jeremy Paxman go by with just a woolly jumper. A lot of my career since then has been spent trying to escape the vest. ■

Kaamil Shah was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

TV's Italian job



Superb food, stupendous scenery and treasure troves of art and architecture. No wonder TV is in love with Italy. **Carole Solazzo** reports

Stanley Tucci: *Searching for Italy*

BBC

In June, historian Greg Jenner created a Twitter storm. “Far be it from me to say there are no new ideas in TV, but... Stanley Tucci, James May and Clive Myrie have all made this programme in the past year!” he complained in a tweet. This was in response to an announcement by the BBC that barrister and presenter Rob “Judge” Rinder, and TV personality Rylan are to “follow in the footsteps of 19th-century romantic poet Lord Byron and other grand tourists [in Italy], immersing themselves in the art, culture, bad behaviour and life-changing exploits”.

Add to Jenner’s list *Amanda & Alan’s Italian Job* (BBC One), shot in Sicily at the same time as filming was taking place on *Absolutely Dyer: Danny and Dani Do Italy* for Channel 4.

Then there’s *Anton & Giovanni’s Adventures in Sicily* (BBC One again), *Joanna Lumley’s Great Cities of the World* (ITVX and Prime) and Lawrence Dallaglio et al in *Live Italian* on Prime, *Chef’s Table* on Netflix, *Gordon, Gino & Fred’s Road Trip* for ITVX...

Stick a pin in *Radio Times* and a pound to a euro you’d skewer a listing for a show set in Italy. Some of these do more than skim the surface of what

is a complex society once famous for its uniquely unstable governments and creaky institutions. Tucci is a gourmet of Italian heritage. The Calabria episode of *Searching for Italy*, where he finds out about his immigrant grandfather and speaks to a farmer living in the shadow of the pervasive, powerful crime syndicate the ‘Ndrangheta, is extremely moving.

James May is seeking *la dolce vita* while Myrie is on a quest “to discover the bits [of Italy] the Italians keep to themselves”. Amanda Holden and Alan Carr renovate a house she bought for one euro to sell to raise money for charity.

Actor Danny Dyer, who turns on a sixpence from the world’s sweariest geezer into the world’s sweetest dad, is on a mission to introduce his daughter to new food and culture.

Whereas Giovanni Pernice (*Strictly Come Dancing* professional dancer) wants to repay Anton Du Beke (*Strictly* pro dancer and his mentor) for kindness shown to him when he first came to the UK by introducing Anton to his homeland.

Likewise, Gino D’Acampo gives Gordon Ramsay and Fred Sirieix the “Italian experience”.

But can it be a true “Italian experience” if you buzz around on your Vespa wearing your crash helmet on your head instead of your elbow? Or have a seat belt in the rear of your motorhome?

Actually, Frenchman Sirieix’s judgement on that one is wholly justified, as D’Acampo scoots (yes, it turns out that some Italians can scoot in a motorhome) around chaotic Naples streets, knocking chunks off the chassis.

So, if Jenner is wrong about the shows’ content, is he right about Italy? Tucci, Pernice and D’Acampo belong, but why does everyone else flock there to film? What’s so unique?

“British people have this special connection with Italy, going back to the grand tour,” says Emily Hammond, travel writer and Italy consultant on BBC Two’s *Clive Myrie’s Italian Road Trip*.

She is referring, of course, to the grand tour, whereby rich, young British gentry, between the mid-17th and mid-19th centuries, would complete their education, and add to their parents’ collections of paintings, sculptures and Venetian glass, by visiting the great cities of the ancient Romans and the Renaissance. Most of which, of course, are in Italy.

“People have this romantic idea of Italy,” Hammond continues. “Just sitting outside a trattoria over your pasta, the sun shining, maybe looking at the boats bobbing up and down, and sipping your wine. Life doesn’t get much finer.”

Yes, there’s definitely that.

She adds: “Everyone has their own Italy.... Some go for the football; you can go there for the opera, a beach holiday or skiing or mountain climbing in the Alps... to enjoy the food; learn about the wine...”

grandma’s [trattoria] where she makes the most amazing lasagne.” This is Alison Ercolani, Italy-based fixer and field producer, who has worked with people as diverse as chef D’Acampo, adventurer Bear Grylls, historian Mary Beard and comic character Philomena Cunk.

“Each region is very different,” she says. “In the south, you go to the beach, but the beach is so much more. You see the fisherman come back with the fish, the old lady cleaning it. You can grab a fish and cook it. You can make a scene

a drone [operated by a local] which stayed up until after dark, which is very unusual.”

Robson adds: “Italy looks so different to the UK. You’ve got a pinkish light. Maybe it’s the light kicking off the rocks or the soil, but everything has a pink tinge to it. Plus that haze from having day after day of hot weather. It’s an amazing place to film.”

“Filming in August [the only free month in Danny Dyer’s busy schedule], with the heat and with everyone,



Absolutely Dyer:
Danny and Dani
Do Italy

Channel 4

“I’m Italian on both sides,” declares Tucci in the intro to each episode of *Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy*, originally made for CNN. “And I’m travelling across Italy to discover how the food in each of this county’s 20 regions is as unique as the people and their past.”

Is variety the secret? Before Italy was unified, a mere 152 years ago, different areas of the country had been ruled by everyone around the Med from the French to the Phoenicians, and everyone from the Austrians to the Arabs beyond it.

Italy’s geography and weather provide food as varied as the white truffles and risotto rice of sultry Piedmont to the prickly pears, figs and olives of sun-soaked Puglia. Conquering nations – and, of course, the Catholic church based at the Vatican in Rome – have all had a big influence on the art, architecture, sport, language, culture and cuisine.

“You can film in two churches, then see [a famous] painting, then go to a really high-end restaurant, then to a

out of that... every moment is a scene.”

Steve Robson, cinematographer on *Absolutely Dyer*, testifies to that: “Everywhere you point a camera is a shot.” On Stromboli island, just off Sicily, he “walked backwards up Mount Stromboli [one of Italy’s active volcanoes] in

‘ITALY LOOKS SO DIFFERENT TO THE UK... IT’S AN AMAZING PLACE TO FILM’

the heat of the day, getting shots as we went.”

From there, the action was about as different as you can get: night fishing, where even the squid are characters. “The squid came in thick and fast.... A big squid... covered me and the lens in squid juice!” he laughed. “And we had

including Italians, all on holiday,” says Robson, “wasn’t easy.” And sometimes getting hold of the people you need for the shots can be hard. “The fishermen live out at sea,” notes Ercolani. “They’re not the type of people to set up a Zoom call. So we might have to leave messages with their auntie.”

“For me, one of the key attractions of Italy is the Italian people,” says Hammond. “The people are responsible for upholding traditions and the culture, but they’re so warm, so welcoming, so interesting, so hospitable... Their pride in their countryside and their get-up-and-go, creating new initiatives... makes [Italy] so appealing to watch on television.”

Robson sums it up: “Brits just love Italy. We love to holiday there and, if we can’t, we love to watch someone who is there.”

Finally, to rebut Jenner’s tweet and ruin a perfectly decent *Monty Python* sketch: what has Italy ever given British television? Well, pretty much everything you could possibly wish for. ■



Shutterstock

Welcome to the precariat:
from skilled freelance camera
operator to courier or cleaner

From boom to bust?

Freelancers are struggling to find work as the demand for factual TV dries up. **Tara Conlan** investigates

Alarm bells are ringing in the unscripted world. Concern for the health of the sector has soared following two recent events: Channel 4's decision to axe a number of shows and a survey by broadcasting union Bectu revealing that nearly half of UK freelancers working regularly in unscripted TV are now unemployed.

The Channel 4 casualties included the cancellation of *Four Weddings* and Andrew Neil's Sunday-night political show being put on hold.

Other broadcasters have also shelved so-called "bread and butter" access shows. ITV has confirmed that "there are no current plans" for *Heathrow*:

Britain's Biggest Airport to return.

Such has been the concern that broadcasters have met Bectu to try and help the situation. But how has it come to this? A year ago, there was such high demand for freelancers that some were walking off jobs for higher fees elsewhere and ScreenSkills was struggling to keep up with the demand for new entrants.

Things are so bad that some freelancers are doing other jobs, such as cleaning windows, to keep afloat financially while established producers are applying for grants to help with plumbing costs and other essential outgoings.

Since Covid, there has been a boom in content, fuelled by the expansion of

streaming platforms competing for the best content – what one executive calls an "unsustainable glut". He says: "There are only so many eyeballs on the planet. To say it's a state of emergency is quite alarmist. But there is no doubt that there is a massive slow-down... and it's not just unscripted. I think it's exactly the same in scripted – if not worse, actually, but there is a longer lead time for drama.

"It's down to a perfect storm of the streamers changing their measure of success from the number of subscribers to profitability... plus the [result of] a kind of arms race that was going on to try and win more subscribers, which obscured the fact that all of them were spending more money than they were

making. I believe Netflix is in profit, but none of the rest are.”

The executive adds that big players such as Disney are not buying much and the bubble “has somewhat burst”. Alongside that, free-to-air broadcasters are “genuinely struggling with the advertising downturn, so they have less to spend. And then, obviously, the price of production went up when we came out of Covid.”

With “the Netflixes of this world sort of inflating rates”, the costs on some shows have risen by between 5% and 10% over the past year.

The slowdown has come as a shock because it is not in commissioners’ interests to tell producers they are not buying as they still want the best ideas – so they put shows in development to hold on to them until the money is released. “So they... don’t often own up to it. I think Channel 4’s problem was that it was a bit too honest,” says one.

According to the go-to place for many freelancers, The Talent Manager, the number of jobs posted is down about 40% year on year. However, as parent company DV Talent’s Managing Director Matt Born points out, that was from “a big, big peak”.

He says the number of jobs advertised was “down 11% for the first five months of the year compared with 2021” and “down on 2019, before the pandemic, so it’s been quite a significant drop off... I think the thing that’s affected is that sort of mid-market, Channel 4, Channel 5 factual stuff – all the stuff that keeps most people’s body and soul together.”

There are some regional variations: freelancers say London has been affected more because broadcasters are trying to maintain regional quotas. For those in work, rates have gone down by around 10% in the past 12 months.

One producer who has worked on numerous high-profile BBC shows says he recently applied for a job that had 800 other applicants. He is thinking of leaving the industry after having had to dip into his savings.

He notes that observational documentaries have been hit hardest by the cutbacks, alongside factual entertainment. “The big-budget shows tend to be reality programmes such as *Love Island*, *Big Brother* and dating shows.

‘NEARLY HALF OF UK FREELANCERS WORKING REGULARLY IN UNSCRIPTED TV ARE NOW UNEMPLOYED’

They get commissioned first because they give guaranteed viewing figures... and they take up a lot of the budget. Observational documentary and factual entertainment freelancers often have to make programmes on very small budgets with whatever’s left.”

He adds that work on access documentaries seems to have dried up: “I am at a point where I am going to start having to look at leaving the industry or doing something different if it doesn’t pick up soon.

“I think the channels need to take responsibility,” he continues. “We work very hard for them, and they do very well... and then they abandon us when times get tough.”

Another producer, with 30 years’ experience, says she is taking any work she can to survive, having spent her savings during Covid and been given support towards house maintenance by her local council. She explains: “I need another contract to start in September. I don’t know what’s happening to the shows that I applied for – some have been pulled.” She points out that freelancers are often told to keep themselves free for jobs, only to have them fall through at the last minute.

Another issue chipping away at freelancers’ pay is “sneaky cuts” in benefits: “When your meal rates go from £20 a day to a fiver or your travel day is cut by 50%, only people who are a lot more privileged than I am can cope

‘NO ONE REALLY THINKS ABOUT THE FREELANCE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE’

with that,” she says. “We work really long hours, the skills are very specialist and it’s often very stressful on big shows. The thing that upsets me is the lack of communication. I think there needs to be a collective voice.”

A spokesman for The Film & TV Charity says the top priority for those contacting it is the cost of living crisis. Over the past couple of months, “we have been seeing a real influx of people applying for our stopgap grants”. Also, whenever it does a piece of research asking for feedback, freelancers “are the first group to respond” as they “feel the impact more than anyone else”.

So what are the solutions?

Better communication would help, argues Pact Chief Executive John McVay. He says the broadcasters need to be engaged, be open and “tell us what it’s going to look like”.

The “genie is out of the bottle” in terms of returning to the old model of having more people on staff, thinks freelance series producer and Co-Chair of Bectu’s Unscripted TV branch, James Taylor. As another executive points out, many of the big media companies such as Warner Bros. Discovery are making cuts of their own.

He suggests initiatives such as broadcasters “effectively sponsoring” or affiliating particular freelancers so they “can move between different projects” for the channel, plus “a bit more joined-up thinking”. Currently, “it’s isolated and sort of siloed between broadcasters or indies and no one really thinks about the freelance community as a whole.

“It’s the boiling frog analogy. You put a frog in a boiling pot of water [and] it will jump straight out, whereas if you slowly heat it up, it’ll just sit there until it dies. And I think that’s what’s happening in this industry.”

Freelance production executive and Co-Chair of Bectu’s Unscripted TV branch, Viki Carter, adds: “I’m totally sympathetic to the commercial pressures, and the drop in advertising revenue [but] I think retention is a huge problem. [We need] a long-term strategy, and getting all the stakeholders together and saying how we can stop this ‘feast or famine’ nature of the industry.” ■

Venom-spitting nice guy



Cult creations:
Succession
(centre) and
Peep Show

Just a fortnight after a universally acclaimed finale brought *Succession* to a triumphant conclusion, one might have expected the showrunner of HBO's mega hit to be enjoying some well-earned R&R, perhaps chartering a yacht in the French Riviera, or retreating to a mansion in the Hollywood hills.

Instead, Jesse Armstrong could be found attending a rally in arguably the least relaxing place on Earth, plonked, during a heatwave, between M&M's, Wetherspoons and the giant Odeon in the visceral nightmare that is Leicester Square.

Having spent the past eight years painting an eviscerating portrait of the depravity and emotional agony in the lives of the 1% in *Succession*, the British writer's refusal to be seduced by the extravagances of the super-rich comes as no great surprise.

Caitlin Danaher profiles Jesse Armstrong who, despite writing some of the foulest dialogue on TV, is nothing like his toxic characters

If anyone has earned a bit of a break, it's surely Armstrong. Instead, gathered around a statue of William Shakespeare, Armstrong joined his fellow scribes in a show of solidarity for their American counterparts taking part in the WGA writers' strike.

The following day, he takes to the stage of a relatively small lecture theatre to talk politics and drama at the Orwell Festival, held at UCL's Euston campus. Despite being the brains behind some of Britain's sharpest and

most beloved comedies, from the cult cringe *Peep Show*, created with his long-standing writing partner Sam Bain, to writing on Armando Iannucci's scathing political satire *The Thick of It*, he seems unable to comprehend that the crowd of fascinated listeners have come to hear about his life, rather than that of George Orwell.

Indeed, when hosts Geoff Lloyd and Sara Barron ask the audience to stand up if they've ever seen *Succession*, Armstrong's response to the fully upstanding room is one of suspicion: "Some of you could be lying?"

Over the course of the hour-long discussion, the writer shares details of his idyllic upbringing in the Shropshire countryside with his "hippy tolerant" parents. "They'd hate to be described as hippies," he says. Growing up on the Welsh border, where a countercultural influence flourished, the vegetarian Armstrongs lived with a certain level

of self-sufficiency: think home-grown vegetables and eggs from pet, formerly factory hens.

It was worlds away from the toxic, dysfunctional dynamics of his invented Roy family. His father, David Armstrong, a teacher turned crime novelist, recently described Armstrong as “a sterling fellow” on BBC Radio 4’s *Profile*, saying that he “couldn’t be blessed with a lovelier son”.

It’s not just his own dad singing his praises. Such warmth is echoed by those who worked with Armstrong in the *Succession* writers room. “I always say that Jesse is a brilliant writer and an even better person,” says Jamie Carragher, who began his journey on *Succession* as writer’s assistant to Armstrong, before being promoted to staff writer and story editor.

As Armstrong’s right-hand man, Carragher worked closely with the showrunner for five years, and claims his only vice is his split allegiance between Manchester United and Fulham football clubs, like a human half-and-half scarf. The only whiff of tyr-

anny came when Armstrong banned any discussion of the Beatles documentary series *Get Back*, because his room of writers could not stop talking about it.

As for asserting his “very highfalutin, elitist taste”, the showrunner was not afraid to urge his fellow writers to watch Michael McIntyre’s gameshow *The Wheel*. “He’s a very positive, content person,” Carragher says. “I’m reluctant to ascribe a Buddha-like happiness to him if that’s not what he would claim, but I just know how he led the room, which was always with a lot of fairness and a lot of generosity to all the writers.”

Armstrong’s ability to write lines for some of the nastiest, venom-spitting narcissists committed to screen is as much a shock to his frequent collaborators as it is us.

“He looks quite respectable, so I’m always surprised when he comes up with something that is like the foulest thing you’ve ever heard,” says Armando Iannucci, who picked Armstrong to join his team of writers on *The Thick of It*.

While *Peep Show* saw Armstrong and Bain explore modern masculinity through the hilariously awkward, odd-ball male friendship between flatmates

Mark and Jez, played by David Mitchell and Robert Webb, *The Thick of It* saw Armstrong join forces with Iannucci, Simon Blackwell and Tony Roche to create a world of profanity-laden failing politicians and hapless advisors, who valued presentation over policy.

“There’s something about [Armstrong’s] scenes that seem very real and very natural and, yet, instantly funny. While you’re reading them, you’re



Jesse Armstrong

Getty Images

already picturing the scene happening in your head,” Iannucci says. “The dialogue is so natural and flowing, it has a rhythm and a pace to it, and it just becomes infectiously funny.”

Unbeknown to Iannucci, Armstrong had real-life experience in politics, having worked as a researcher for the Labour Party in the late 1990s. Yet the writer is the first to admit that his lack of interest in gossip and hatred of networking meant he was not suited for the political arena.

His one and only encounter with anyone of real influence occurred when he accidentally rounded a corner and bumped into a track-suited Prime Minister at the 1996 Labour Conference. “My only interchange with high-level power was thinking Tony Blair was a bit like Tony Soprano,” he quipped at the Orwell Festival.

Years later and another collaboration with Iannucci saw Armstrong working with the actual Tony Soprano, James Gandolfini, who played the anti-war Lt General Miller in the cinematic *Thick of It* spin-off, *In the Loop*. Iannucci recalls how one of the film’s most iconic scenes, where Miller uses a kid’s toy in a child’s bedroom to morbidly

calculate that 12,000 troops will likely become casualties of war, was in the very first draft of Armstrong’s script.

“He has a kind of sure touch that means it just arrives kind of done,” Iannucci says. *In the Loop* saw Iannucci, Armstrong, Roche and Blackwell gain an Academy Award nomination for Adapted Screenplay. Iannucci described their fish-out-of-water experience at the Oscars as hilarious: “It was that incredibly British thing of being like, ‘should we really be here?’ I remember going to the Oscars in this big stretch limo with our wives and girlfriends, laughing away, thinking this is hilarious, and then realising no, this is what people book stretch limos to pretend that they’re doing. Except that we were doing it, you know, which made it all the funnier.”

Iannucci reflects that Armstrong’s sitcom origins perhaps provided a perfect training ground for writing *Succession*. “Comedy is hard, because there’s one test and one test only: is it funny?”

It’s a really good discipline, it’s really good on economy, forcing you to pare it right down to the absolute bare minimum that will make that moment funny,” Iannucci explains. “With something like *Succession*, which is both funny and a drama, you can see the experience of being put through that discipline, of [Armstrong having] been trained into making each moment work and have an effect.”

Indeed, *Succession*’s story editor Carragher likens the electric moments of magic in the writers room to a really good improv troop. “When everyone’s ‘yes, and-ing’ and coming up with loads of possibilities, the day goes a hell of a lot quicker when that lightning strikes,” he says.

So, perhaps it is no surprise that, despite *Succession*’s induction to the pantheon of prestige TV dramas, Armstrong tells the crowd at the Orwell Festival that he still thinks of himself primarily as a comedy writer.

As for what lies ahead for Armstrong, the answer is anyone’s guess. “He knows his voice and he’s always been very smart with what he wants to do,” Iannucci says. “I’m sure the next thing he does will be the thing you least expect.” ■

Ad-supported channels are looking forward to a potentially profitable Women's Football World Cup



Where next for TV ad revenue?

UK TV advertising is said to be in the doldrums. But the real picture is more nuanced. **Pippa Considine** runs the numbers

The downturn in UK TV advertising revenue is beyond dispute, with marked declines in the first half of 2023. But what is the full picture and when might we see a recovery?

Channel 4, reliant on ad revenue to fund its content, has paused most commissioning, dropped productions and reduced episode counts for shows in the pipeline. With characteristic sensationalism, *The Mail on Sunday* reported on 10 June that Channel 4 staff had branded the situation a “bloodbath”.

ITV, as the largest single advertiser-supported, free-to-air broadcaster in the UK, is a bellwether for the industry. In the first three months of the year, while digital advertising grew by 30%, compared with a year earlier, it

reported that total ad revenues had fallen by around 10%. It forecast that the three months to the end of June would be down by 12%, compared with 2022.

This drop needs to be put in context. First, it is a return to the activity levels seen for the same quarter in 2019, pre-pandemic. Second, this fall follows a robust year in 2022, which was the second highest year ever for TV advertising revenue in the UK – 2021 was the highest, when the total ad market grew by 24% to £5.46bn.

ITV’s Director of Commercial Sales and Partnerships, Mark Trinder, says that advertisers were rattled at the end of 2022, “but not in a way that they were reducing numbers significantly in their marketing plans.” For retailers and FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) advertisers, he describes 2023

as “a game of two halves”, with a first half of see-how-we-go.

He reports that “organisations are making decisions almost when they are in the quarter”. But, looking ahead, there are reasons to be optimistic: “We are seeing a lot more positive client sentiment going into the second half of the year.”

ITV is already seeing a growth in partnership deals. The end of the year is traditionally strong for ad revenue, and the coming months include the potentially lucrative Women’s Football World Cup and the Rugby World Cup, plus *Love Island* and the launch of the revamped *Big Brother*.

“The majority of people certainly are saying their businesses and their categories are doing better than expected,” says Trinder. “And I think what we’re

just starting to see now is that uptick of positivity, which hopefully will bring more activity.”

Reaching audiences via TV has got cheaper. “Since January, for most major audiences, there has been deflation in the airtime market,” notes Trinder. “Brands are probably starting to latch on to that to a greater degree as we go to the second half of the year.”

At Enders Analysis, the prognosis from the beginning of the year has been a 5% fall in TV ad spend in 2023 compared with last year. The Advertising Association and Warc (World Advertising Research Center) have recently adjusted their 2023 forecast for UK TV advertising to predict a 2% fall for this year. Enders Head of Research Alice Enders feels that is “over-optimistic”, however.

Channel 4 says that its current ad revenue declines are in line with the wider market and its competitors. In a recent letter to producers, Channel 4 Chief Content Officer Ian Katz described “the challenging commercial environment”. He said that ad revenues were down further than the predictions used by the channel to calculate content budgets.

During this summer, Channel 4 is continuing to develop shows but only commissioning for current affairs and digital. Series in the pipeline that have been cut include reality show *Four Weddings* and *Kirstie’s Handmade Christmas*. It has reduced *The Last Leg* from nine to seven episodes.

The downturn might be harder than predicted, but it was clearly coming. “This is not surprising news to the broadcasters in that they expected it and largely budgeted for it,” notes Lindsey Clay, Chief Executive at commercial TV marketing body Thinkbox.

ITV’s diversified business model makes it less reliant on advertising: while revenue at its media and entertainment business fell 9% to £495m, compared with the same period a year earlier, revenue at its production arm, ITV Studios, was broadly flat at £457m.

The broadcaster is still expected to grow its production budget by 5% this year, to around £1.3bn, as it funds new output for ITVX.

Channel 5 remains unruffled. “We typically commission less over the summer months as we are already well stocked,” says a spokesperson for the broadcaster. “But we have the same number of hours in production as last year.”

There are many factors underlying the fall in ad revenue: the pandemic still has a distorting effect; the cost of living crisis, brought on by the huge hike in fuel and energy prices, has forced advertisers to look at their marketing budgets; inflation and rising interest rates are squeezing profit margins.

Nick Waters, CEO of media investment analysts Ebiquity, says that advertiser caution has grown from the end of last year: “What we have seen is advertisers planning with a great degree of caution because of the expectation that the consumer market would collapse.”

He adds that, in a cautious market, with advertisers looking for shorter-term investment, “typically, the way

it did post-pandemic,” argues Clay.

In the short term, Waters at Ebiquity is sticking with caution: “I think budgets across the piece will be under pressure, not just in television, through the course of 2023. The only thing that will change that is if inflation comes down and the Bank of England pauses interest-rate increases.”

While noting “encouraging signs around ITVX”, Waters forecasts that 2023 will, overall, be a challenging year for free-to-air broadcasters.

The trend away from linear to digital advertising is steady, with BVOD (broadcaster video-on-demand) channels growing their revenues. New ad-supported streamer services, such as



Channel 4/Heathrow Airport Holdings

to do that is to allocate more to performance media”, where payment is linked to results.

“There doesn’t seem to be a consistent pattern of behaviour in advertisers,” says Clay at Thinkbox. “When you ask them, or agencies, about the reasons behind clients cutting their spend, the reasons are many and varied.”

The UK has so far avoided a recession, but growth has been negligible and there are widespread warnings that more interest-rate hikes could tip the balance. “I have referred to the state of the economy for over a year as a zombie,” says Enders.

The broadcasters are still widely hopeful that ad revenues will recover or at least stabilise later this year. “Once the economic pressures start to ease, TV will bounce back very quickly – just as

those offered by Netflix and Disney+, have yet to make a significant impact. “I’m not sure that those streaming services are going to help advertisers reach audiences very much more,” says Waters. For now, the big TV ad revenue remains in linear.

As we get into 2024, Enders predicts “a very mild economic recovery.... Real household consumption will remain impaired, relative to 2019, until 2025.”

The Bank of England and the Office for Budget Responsibility anticipate an increasing recourse to credit. The impending general election may well provoke government policies to stoke spending. Margin compression may be alleviated. All of which feeds into her view that “there could be a sort of modest recovery in TV advertising next year”. ■

It all seems so obvious now. Put 22 ordinary people in a spooky Scottish castle, divide them into Traitors – whose job it is to murder the others – and Faithfuls, whose job it is to work out who the Traitors are and banish them. It's Wink Murder on steroids. Put the effervescent Claudia Winkleman at the helm, and let the viewers come.

And they did. To date, the show has received 34 million views on iPlayer, making it the biggest new series of all BBC content for younger audiences. Two RTS and two Bafta awards have followed, in each case rewarding the show itself and Winkleman's performance. A second series is already in production.

Mike Cotton, executive producer of the show for Studio Lambert, told an RTS event in mid-June how the format, already successful in the Netherlands, came the company's way. It arrived via the international arm of Studio Lambert's owner, All3Media, and, from the start, hooked Cotton and his colleagues.

"It's totally different to what we've seen on TV recently," he said. "There's been a glut of dating shows, entertainment shows, talent shows, but this spoke to trust, deception and human nature."

Simultaneously, the BBC, which "hadn't had a big reality show for several decades", according to Neil McCallum, its Commissioning Editor for Daytime and Entertainment, was seeking such an idea, and was already in talks with NBC.

When Studio Lambert appeared with its idea for a UK *Traitors*, the stars aligned in all sorts of ways: the commissioning of a US version offered the producers more money to spend; the BBC had a commissioning editor based in Glasgow; and even the timing, which meant the NBC version went into production just before the British one.

Asked who was easier to work with, NBC or the BBC, Cotton's fellow executive producer Sarah Fay was suitably diplomatic: "They're both wonderful in their different ways."

What were the different elements that contributed to such a massive hit? For a start, the cast – "We don't call them contestants, they're playing a game, so they're players," explained Cotton.

Whereas the original Dutch version of *The Traitors* had been filled with celebrities and the NBC version a mix of celebs and non-celebs, the BBC show



became the first to feature only ordinary people. And what a cast it was: 22 people varying in age, background and disability, but all rich in personality.

McCallum reflected: "As tempting as it is to have the poster full of well-known celebs – and that can bring viewers to a show – we realised that people are more likely to throw themselves into it if they don't have a [known] image. It was a rare opportunity to cast 50 years of life experience in 22 different personalities. It's not a *Love Island* cast."

Welsh estate agent Amanda Lovett, whose chatty, instantly confiding audition reel showed immediately the qualities the producers wanted for the

show, explained that she had spotted an ad on social media and liked the fact it was "open to us oldies as well". And she revealed: "After I'd had a few gins, I thought, that sounds all right, I'll apply for that and hope for the best."

Her fellow Traitor Wilf Webster remembered spotting a similar ad, "This is something I think I can play. It was adventure, a psychological game-show. I thought it would be a lot easier than it was."

As viewers will know, both Lovett and Webster became Traitors, their selection made by producers, but also by Winkleman, who became fully committed to the game the day she signed up. At the team's first meeting,

she told producers she'd been up until 4:00am the previous morning watching the Dutch version.

Winkleman's contribution, all agreed, was key to the show's success. Fay recalled: "We wanted Claudia to feel like the lady of the manor, part of the castle and part of the drama. We knew she'd bring the warmth and wittiness, but we also wanted some brutality – she struggled with that initially."

Lovett revealed that Winkleman had become so invested in the players' fortunes that she sent each of them a letter to be opened when they got home: "She

let them go. It was terrifying but also really exciting," remembered Cotton. "Making the show, you can't have producers constantly pulling people away, so how do you do it? We wanted to shoot every episode in a day, so it was a constant cycle.

"Within it, there were rituals: the same way of everyone arriving for breakfast; then, when it was time for the roundtables, we always played the same music; at night, when it was time for the players to retire, we played some loud bongs to symbolise that. It's not like training puppies, but..."

Post show, Cotton reflected: "We had no idea the show was going to be such a success, and the press that would come with it." He said psychologists remained on hand for any contestants to refer to as each episode was shown.

McCallum reported, too, that, ahead of filming, each member of the cast was sent footage of the original Dutch version of the show, "just so they understood the grammar of what a round table was. Second time around, we're filming now, and it's very different."

That's right: even as the producers



From left: Panellists Wilf Webster, Rick Edwards, Sarah Fay, Amanda Lovett and Mike Cotton and chair Neil McCallum

Paul Hampartsoumian

didn't have to do that. So lovely."

Viewers will remember Winkleman yelling from the sidelines as the Traitors and Faithfuls teamed up for a series of spookily themed missions to build up the prize money. These missions were separate from the central mystery-game, something Cotton said was deliberate: "The missions are the one time when the Traitors and Faithfuls come together to build the prize money. It's a break from the central game. It's not so intense. Then they have to go back to the castle and start banishing and murdering each other again. That underpins the missions."

When Studio Lambert visited the Dutch show, producers there instilled in them the mantra, "It's not a reality show, it's a game." That helped the British team keep a firm but light touch on proceedings once filming started.

"You set up the rules and then you

Webster recounted the terror he felt every night when those bongs sounded throughout the castle. The producers acknowledged the setting contributed to something of a psychological pressure chamber for the cast, who all showed their emotions and stress levels on screen.

Fay discussed the duty of care to these individuals which came with that: "We didn't shy away from knowing this was a psychological game, and we had a three-pronged approach.

"Pre-filming, we referred our contestants to psychologists, to check that anyone coming to the show was robust enough to deal with the game. That continued the whole time we were in Scotland, where we had our psychologists with us and who the contestants would see every other day, and we kept those members of staff consistent for each contestant to build trust."

and commissioners continue to celebrate the ratings and awards that have come with this stunning debut, the wheels are already turning on season 2.

Cotton explained that the second series is a different beast to the first: "We're in production now, we've started casting. They all come, thinking they know how to play it, so that will be interesting.

"The core game is so strong, we're not going to change the format. But it's a murder-mystery, so there will be twists and turns." He paused, before adding, unsurprisingly, "What they are, we're definitely not going to say." ■

Report by: Caroline Frost. 'Anatomy of a hit: The Traitors' was an RTS National Event held on 13 June at London's Cavendish Conference Centre. The producers were Becky Cadman, Terry Marsh and Tom Popay.

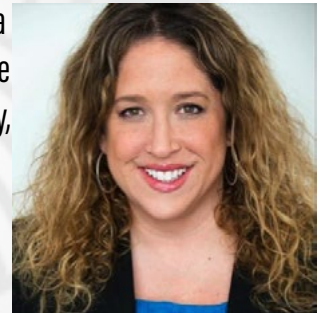
Chris Coelen, the Emmy nominated founder/CEO of Kinetic Content, formed a joint venture in Los Angeles in 2020 focused on developing high-end scripted TV series with global appeal for the US marketplace. Melissa Myers was recruited from WME to head the new company, tapping into her international scripted content knowledge, as well as Coelen's existing relationships. The creative aim of the company is elevating content globally by working with gifted creators, and discovering new voices/worlds for premium high-end, English-language scripted TV series with both domestic and international appeal. Kinetic scripted will also lean into its hit marriage, relationship and social experiment brands tremendous reach to create content for the international and US scripted market. Their first scripted series SUMMER LOVE premiered in 2022 for ABC Australia. Kinetic Scripted currently has projects in development with platform partners such as Apple TV, Netflix, Amazon, Fox, and Roku.



Chris Coelen's Kinetic Content slate includes the Emmy Nominated, Netflix smash hit, LOVE IS BLIND, the Netflix hit series THE ULTIMATUM and Netflix new series PERFECT MATCH. He also produces the

professional bull riding series THE RIDE for AMAZON and CLAIM TO FAME for Hulu. Chris has produced series in every non-scripted genre: from groundbreaking social experiments like MARRIED AT FIRST SIGHT (Lifetime), THE SPOUSE HOUSE (TLC); highly-rated docuseries LITTLE WOMEN: LA, LITTLE WOMEN: ATLANTA and LITTLE WOMEN: DALLAS; to cooking competitions THE TASTE (ABC), hidden-camera hit BETTY WHITE'S OFF THEIR ROCKERS (NBC), weight-loss competition MY DIET IS BETTER THAN YOURS (ABC) to game shows with GEEKS WHO DRINK (Syfy) and YOU DESERVE IT (ABC). Coelen has longtime international ties. As a partner at UTA, he created and ran the Alternative and International TV Departments. He left UTA to become the founding CEO of the North American arm of British production company RDF Media, which ultimately was bought by Banijay, where he produced WIFE SWAP, SECRET MILLIONAIRE and DON'T FORGET THE LYRICS. In 2010, Coelen founded Kinetic Content, subsequently acquired by Peter Chernin's North Road Co in 2022.

Melissa Myers, previously a partner at WME, spent more than 20 years at the agency, spearheading the International Scripted Department while building a renowned TV roster



of writers, directors and talent while specializing in packaging global content. Her clients at WME included British production outfits Left Bank Pictures (THE CROWN, OUTLANDER), Big Talk Productions (CRASHING, FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER), Riff Raff Productions (JUDE LAW), Red Productions (YEARS & YEARS, HAPPY VALLEY) etc, while representing international artists including SJ Clarkson (ANATOMY OF A SCANDAL, SUCCESSION, JESSICA JONES), Anthony Byrne (PEAKY BLINDERS), Ben Taylor (SEX EDUCATION, CATASTROPHE), Francesca Gardiner (SUCCESSION), Sally Wainwright (GENTLEMAN JACK, HAPPY VALLEY), Toby Haynes (UTOPIA, BLACK MIRROR), Jane Fallon (TEACHERS) and many more.



OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH EAST

One of my summer highlights this year is the garden party to mark BBC Radio York's 40th birthday. I began my BBC career with the station and can't wait to catch up with fellow Yorkies.

Local radio was and remains such an important springboard for talent. I look back at that production office of 1983 and see so many people who've gone on to glittering careers. Back in those heady days, station chief John Jefferson brought together an eclectic mix of talents ranging from Chris Choi (now best known as consumer editor for *ITV News*) to the late, lamented humourist Victor Lewis-Smith, who had his own anarchic weekend show, *Snooze Button*.

My fellow local radio trainees, schooled at the old Langham in London, included the likes of Alex Crawford, Jon Sopel and Fran Unsworth. Every one of us was grateful for our start on local stations. So, of course, I'm saddened the BBC is choosing to further prune its English local radio output by insisting on so much shared programming across stations that have little in common.

If I learned anything during my time at the BBC and ITV, it is that people enjoy network programmes and output about where they live. But they can spot other people's local content a mile off and they switch off.

The BBC has already severely depleted its local TV output but, to give it credit, is investing in commissioning more network programmes to be made in areas such as North East England. It's on target to exceed the £25m it initially committed to producing content from a region



University of Sunderland

Graeme Thompson urges the BBC to rethink its approach to English local radio

stretching from the Scottish Borders to the North York Moors.

Despite my misgivings about its approach to local broadcasting, it is impossible to overestimate the impact that the corporation's investment is having here. Not just in the raft of new shows, such as *Robson Green's Weekend Escapes* and *24/7 Pet Hospital*, but the opportunity for production staff and crew to find work closer to home.

The investment also encouraged the 12 local authorities in the North East to establish a £12m skills and production fund, which has already resulted in a host of production companies switching their operations to the region.

Fulwell 73 is so taken with its base in Sunderland that it has partnered with the city council and Cain International to develop a £400m high-end TV and film studio complex on the banks of the River Wear.

Production powerhouses such as

Nicola Shindler's Quay Street Productions has begun filming its new drama, *The Red King*, in Northumberland. The new screen agency, North East Screen, has joined forces with colleagues in Screen Yorkshire, Liverpool Film Office and Screen Manchester in a BFI-funded alliance to identify and train the skilled workforce required to meet the demand for content across the North.

It's a proper, joined-up approach to developing clearer pathways to long-term employment in film and TV production.

Persuading school and college leavers from Hexham or Stokesley that there are viable careers to be had in the screen sector is, of course, easier said than done. They probably don't know anyone making a living in TV and film.

Although the creative industries continue to be a vital cog in the UK economy, they, along with their parents and teachers, can't fail to be swayed by media commentators and politicians questioning the value of humanities studies and creative careers.

Fortunately, people such as the energetic Leo Pearlman, the Sunderland-born boss of Fulwell 73, are on a mission to talk to businesses, universities, schools and colleges to alert them to the massive opportunities opening up outside London.

So, I'll be raising a glass to our treasured Beeb at York's summer party but urging it to think again about throwing its commitment to local out with the bathwater. ■

Graeme Thompson is Chair of the RTS Education Committee and Visiting Professor in Creative Industries at the University of Sunderland.

Wanted: dox that appeal to Gen Z



Channel 5

Uncovering remarkable stories, surfacing subcultures and recovering forgotten voices are what British documentaries excel at. It's a crowded market at the top tier, where the likes of Louis Theroux and Stacey Dooley front mainstream documentary series.

In the more niche parts of the business, however, you have to keep your ear close to the ground to discover timely, youth-skewing subjects.

That is why broadcasters, streamers and production companies are on the lookout for industry newcomers ready with a killer idea. And they are looking particularly in the spaces created for emerging and diverse talent, with initiatives such as: Channel 4's youth news strand *Untold*; Paramount's black British wing, Black Entertainment Television (BET) UK; Sky Arts' *Unearthed Narratives* series; Warner Bros. Discovery's *Black Britain Unspoken* and Netflix's Documentary Talent Fund.

An RTS panel reveals how new documentary makers are unearthing subjects geared to young, diverse British audiences

But what is the best way to find an unreported topic to put before a young British audience? An RTS panel came together to tackle this in "Discovering new voices and stories in documentaries", chaired by producer, director and inclusion leader Jasmine Dotiwala.

"We live in a world where sometimes you're just telling a story in a few seconds," noted panellist Debbie Ramsay, commissioning editor for Channel 4's *Untold*. "It's important that we don't just gloss over things, and we go in-depth sometimes. That's what a documentary allows you to do."

Often, she added, people assume

that "this age group doesn't watch longer-form content, but they do. That's what *Untold* taps into – those stories that young people identify with and are rooted in youth culture but are also saying something new or revealing for that audience."

A case in point was the five-part series *The Evolution of Black British Music*, winner of the Arts prize at the RTS Programme Awards 2023. It documents the emergence of Jungle, Grime and Garage in the UK. The series was conceived by film-makers – and panellists – Nicky "Slimting" Walker (who has a background in acting and music) and Femi Oyeniran (who began his TV and film career in the seminal *Kidulthood*). Together, they formed the production company Fan Studios and came to the attention of fellow panellist Cicelia Deane soon after she started her job as Editorial and Commissioning Executive at BET UK in 2021.

Deane recalled: "I was introduced to Nicky and Femi via another commissioner at Paramount because they'd

made a series called *Drunk History: Black Stories*. Nicky and Femi pitched loads of ideas and we got on like a house on fire.”

Her remit is to commission for black British audiences and tease out stories that haven't been told. “And there are so many, unfortunately,” she said. “*The Evolution of Black British Music* should have been made a long time ago.”

How does she decide which ideas are green-lit? “My slate is broad. I don't

telling you, they're telling it for the good [of the documentary]. They're in that space, and they understand what's best for the channel.”

He added: “Both [Deane and Ramsay] were open to listening to our voices. They never made us do anything. We put our case forward, they put their case forward, and we always met in the middle. It's like a marriage: you work with each other, you have

into these communities is that they don't trust you. You've got to be completely upfront with them. We're journalists and we've got a story to tell.

And we are going to be challenging with them, it's not a PR film. But, on the flip side, we will give them a fair hearing. Although we'll ask difficult questions, we will allow them to answer and faithfully represent their story,” he said. “Once you've got that out of the way, I think it's refreshing for them, because they're like, ‘I get where I stand now’”

There are more mundane issues involved when making documentaries for major broadcasters. Oyeniran and Walker explained that, while documentaries destined for YouTube have a lot of flexibility regarding using archive footage and sound, it's a totally different situation when working with broadcasters.

Expect a lot of form-filling and permission-seeking if working on a music documentary. “It was insane. It took months and months,” said Walker, recalling his experience on *The Evolution of Black British Music*.

Oyeniran added: “We had a situation where the episode was supposed to go out, but it couldn't because we hadn't cleared a song. In order for it to go out we had to contact [Grime performer] Skepta's manager, but they were doing a show in Ibiza for the whole week. These guys are in a club in Ibiza, Nicky's harassing one person, I'm harassing the other person, and this person's texting that person. Then randomly, we got an email the night before the show was supposed to go out, saying ‘Here it is’”

Finally, Dotiwala asked the panellists if they had any advice for those taking their first steps in documentary-making. Walker said: “Put yourself around like-minded people. Try to get as much work experience as possible, even if you start off as a runner. Immerse yourself in that arena. Be open-minded. Shadow people. Really be passionate about what you're doing because it's a long journey and there are loads of people who want to do it. Everyone's special in their own unique way, but you have to go the extra mile to be noticed.” ■

Report by Shilpa Ganatra. The RTS event ‘Discovering new voices and stories in documentaries’ was held on 3 July. It was produced by Jasmine Dotiwala, Elaine Okyere and Ethel Mercedes.



From left: RTS award winners Nicky Walker, Cielia Deane and Femi Oyeniran

Richard Kendall

have a huge commissioning budget. When I meet with people, it's quite instinctive,” she said. “The buck doesn't stop with me. I have to then pitch it to my seniors, so it has to be something I'm passionate about.

“Because I don't have a lot of money to commission with, on the brief I send out [to producers] I'll always include a list of what I'm not looking for. That's normally because I've just commissioned something in that area.”

Like all good producer-commissioner relationships, the process of shaping *The Evolution of Black British Music* was symbiotic. Walker, who's made documentaries for both Deane and Ramsay, explained: “It was important that the commissioners respected us as filmmakers, gave us that freedom and didn't undermine us. If they felt something wasn't right, they articulated it in a way that we were able to digest.

“You have to respect what they're saying because they've got the experience, and they're giving you that opportunity as well. Whatever they're

bad days, you have good days, it goes back and forth.”

That give and take is key to the success of a documentary-maker, agreed fellow panellist Charlie Mole, a self-shooting director who has produced programmes for *Untold*, *Panorama*, *Dispatches* and *Unreported World*. “Every role is a cog in a machine,” he said. “If you're freelance, you also need to promote yourself because you need to get work, but don't let that impact on how you work in a team.”

Equally, “in terms of getting the story and speaking to contributors, it's not about you, it's about the bigger picture. Put your ego to one side, and work with people, just be friendly and kind and nice and be willing to work hard.”

That was certainly the case when he was making *Untold's* *The Secret World of Incels*, where, unsurprisingly, the trickiest part was finding contributors. More than 100 potential participants were contacted and 25 meetings were held to get three people to appear on screen.

“The crucial thing when you're going



Reuters

AI: opportunity knocks for news?

If you thought that AI is not yet having an impact on news organisations, think again. As panellist and data journalism pioneer Gary Rogers reminded this absorbing RTS discussion, “AI: the new frontier for journalism”, the Press Association’s Radar service – which he set up – has been using machine learning to create news stories for the past five years. Radar says it generates around 150,000 stories utilising local data journalism each year for clients across the UK.

“There are very good, well-trusted tools out there,” said Rogers. “You can use AI tools to enable journalists to do jobs they can’t do by human effort alone.” It was helpful to regard AI as “an assistant, not a replacement for journalism”.

He added: “There is an opportunity for news companies here. If it becomes more difficult to discern what’s true and what’s not, then people need to turn to trusted brands and people they

An RTS panel examines the improvements and challenges that machine learning can bring to news organisations

can rely on. They will turn to big broadcasters and big news brands, which will further your reputation and trust and win some things back.”

One of those big news brands was represented by Tami Hoffman, ITN’s Director of News Distribution and Commercial Innovation. She was more sceptical of the benefits that AI – in particular, generative AI – could provide for broadcast journalists and for ITN as a commercial organisation.

Her boss, ITN CEO Rachel Corp, recently urged the Government to take a “proactive stance” to protect journalism from the impact of AI in the

run-up to national elections due to be held in the UK and US next year.

Reassuringly, the CEO said at the time that, “AI will never be able to replicate the work of journalists who gather information and contextualise it by building relationships and being eyewitnesses to events as they occur”. But AI could take some of the grunt work out of journalism.

Let’s hope she’s right but, as this discussion made clear, there is concern around the impact AI is likely to have on broadcast news, most of which prides itself on being accurate and impartial.

Hoffman was worried on several counts, starting with the fear that AI might infringe ITN’s copyrights. She wanted strict rules on licensing ITN content in connection with AI (ITN’s news archive goes back to 1955) and for the Government to get its act together on regulating AI.

She warned: “More safety checks are involved in creating a toilet cleaner or a lipstick than unleashing a generative

AI model on the public and our children.... It's frightening that products of this kind are being unleashed without the checks we expect. Government [routinely] asks companies to ensure their products are safe; it has been very remiss in that this is being launched without any safety checks at all."

Hoffman said that journalists needed to be more sceptical than ever, and staff needed educating on AI. She reminded the RTS that "we still don't have legislation to control social media and we're 20 years on from that. The Digital Media Bill is still going through

from, or what biases it has or the political weighting."

So much for having an informed democracy. Data scraping could also have a detrimental impact on the financial stability of ITN and its peers, noted Hoffman, who emphasised: "If machines are being taught using our material, we want a licence [payment] for that in the way we would expect a licence for anything."

Rogers explained that successful deployment of any AI technology was completely dependent on humans: "Unless your people know what they

designed into your system. You can't just hope that the machine will get things right."

So, could regulators help? Ali-Abbas Ali, Director of Broadcasting Competition at Ofcom, said that, "in the first instance, the onus is on the newsroom. If you hold a broadcast licence, you have an ongoing responsibility to comply with the broadcasting code. We expect you to protect audiences from harm and to maintain high levels of trust in broadcast news."

He continued: "We're looking for broadcasters to unleash the creativity and efficiency of AI but to do it responsibly. That means investing in the people who understand how the tools work and ensuring you have bulletproof contracts in place with suppliers."

That may prove easier said than done. Ali said the audience needed to be educated in terms of media literacy and to develop the critical faculties to be able to realise when things were fake.

Grown-ups were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than teenagers if the experience of his family was anything to go by: "The younger generation are developing that critical understanding. I get more fake memes from my uncle than I do from my daughter."

Then there are the biases inherent in AI searches and their impact on the way minorities are depicted in the results. Ali said ethnic-minority groups know they will be under-represented, considering the stock of text and images being used to train AI. That text will also contain tropes with racial stereotypes and "be rife with homophobia".

He added: "The Equalities Act still applies when you are using AI. When you use these tools, you've got to understand what your responsibilities are under the law.

"You are not relieved of those responsibilities when you use a tool that you don't understand properly. The investment everybody needs to make in their ability to understand the tools is significant. I think that will be a challenge because [of the very small] number of people who understand the tools.... There are not that many people like Gary Rogers out there." ■

Report by Steve Clarke. 'AI: the new frontier for journalism' was an RTS National Event held on 29 June. It was chaired by Symeon Brown, Channel 4 News correspondent and host of AI Watch. The producers were Ashling O'Connor and Lisa Campbell.



Ali-Abbas Ali



Symeon Brown



Gary Rogers



Tami Hoffman

Parliament. In Denmark, they're introducing a cultural tax on streamers."

She suggested that a levy be introduced on companies that benefit from data scraping, the process whereby machines extract huge amounts of text and images from online sources.

Hoffman used the example of people seeking information on the failed Russian mutiny on 24 June to illustrate how the public and news organisations such as ITN could lose out from this practice.

"If you want to read about what happened in Russia that weekend, ask Google and you will get a selection of different stories from different sites, which you can then go to, and the traffic registers on those sites," she explained. "But put it into Bard or ChatGPT and they will scrape together various stories from the internet and provide a three-line summary.

"If that's all you want, you might not go further. You won't know where that three-line summary has been pulled

are doing, it's never going to work. You can't rely on the machine. If you put rubbish in, you'll get rubbish out.

"Data needs to be clean and correct, otherwise we're not going to be able to do anything with it. You can't rely on the machine, you have to check everything. At some point, anything you're planning to put in front of an audience needs to go through a human filter. Think of it as a colleague who can occasionally be unreliable. Checks and balances need to be in place and be

'IT'S FRIGHTENING THAT PRODUCTS OF THIS KIND ARE BEING UNLEASHED WITHOUT THE CHECKS THAT WE EXPECT'



Join the ROYAL TELEVISION SOCIETY and play your part.

As a member of the Royal Television Society you become part of an exciting and creative community, who share a common passion for the art and science of television. Membership opens up a world of networking, educational, and professional opportunities, as well as contributing towards bursaries and educational events for young people that want to study TV related subjects.

Membership
from just

£75

per year


Our members can also enjoy:

- **Networking events**
- **Lectures, masterclasses and workshops**
- **Annual awards ceremonies**
- **Early access to the RTS magazine Television**
- **Access to private members' clubs in London and Bristol**
- **Impressive discounts for shopping, restaurants, hotels & business services**

To join and for full details of all member benefits, visit our website

www.rts.org.uk

Tremolo, Postgraduate Drama,
Postgraduate Craft Skills – Editing and
Postgraduate Craft Skills – Writing



RTS Student Television Awards 2023

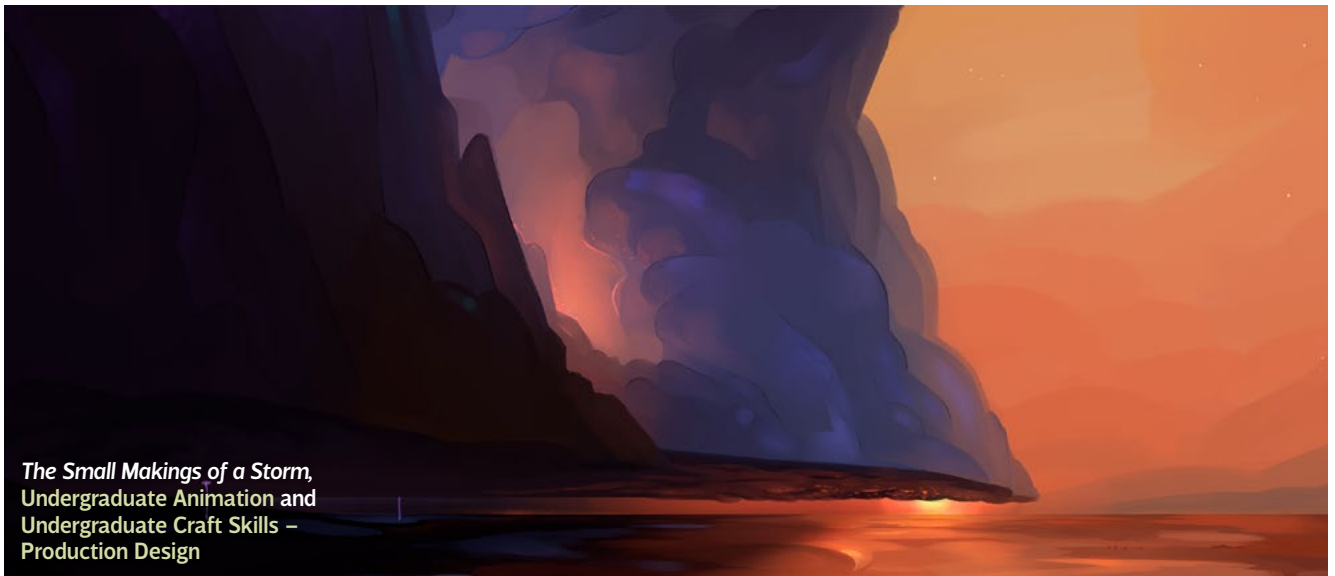
Sponsored by



KINETIC
CONTENT

The ceremony at BFI Southbank on 23 June was hosted by TV and radio presenter **Will Njobvu** and the awards were presented by **Sinéad Rocks**

NFTS



The Small Makings of a Storm,
Undergraduate Animation and
Undergraduate Craft Skills –
Production Design



Tremolo, Postgraduate Drama,
Postgraduate Craft Skills –
Editing and Postgraduate
Craft Skills – Writing



Will Njobvu, Host

Postgraduate Animation

Curiosa

Tessa Moulton-Milewska, Sychelle-Kristina Yanda, Giorgia Zarantonello, Rob O’Kelly and Team, National Film and Television School

‘Skillfully utilises a mix of techniques, bold lighting and captivating sound design to enhance the themes of this stylish, witty and thought-provoking film.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Dead Silent**, Miriam Fox, Elena Valeri, Shaun Kobrak, Osian Pearson and Team, National Film and Television School
- ▶ **Death of the Gods**, Leto Meade, Karima Sammout-Kanellopoulou, Hipatia Arguero Mendoza, Jack Haggerty and Team, National Film and Television School

Undergraduate Animation

The Small Makings of a Storm

Avery Angle, Samantha Sack, Bróna Nic Gabhann and Team, National Film School at IADT

‘This film beautifully marries an enticing visual style with elevating sound design to create a narrative that enchants from the very first frame’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Carrot**, Zoe Wang and Jamie Jiang, Kingston School of Art
- ▶ **Offerlamm**, Tova Persson, University of the West of England, Bristol

Postgraduate Drama

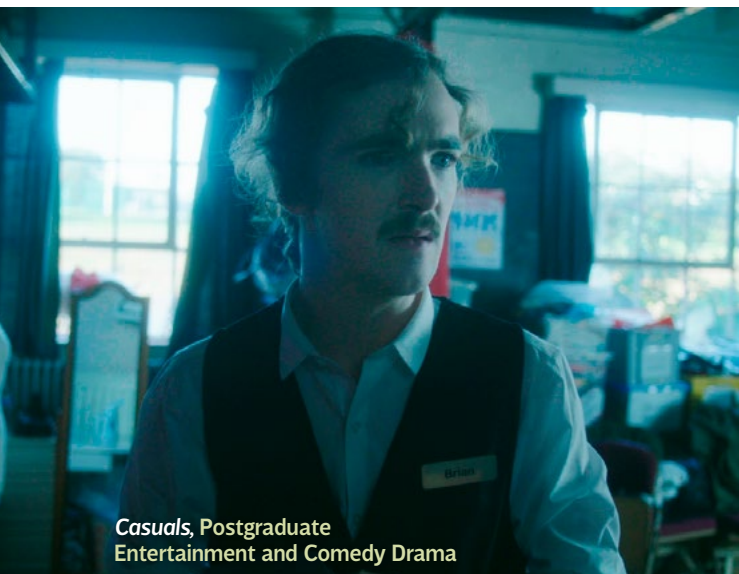
Tremolo

Jade Li, Thijme Grol, Martyna Jakimowska, Noa Margalit and Team, National Film and Television School

‘From start to finish, this film excels in all areas. The storytelling engages and captivates; immensely impressive technical skill enhances the story.’

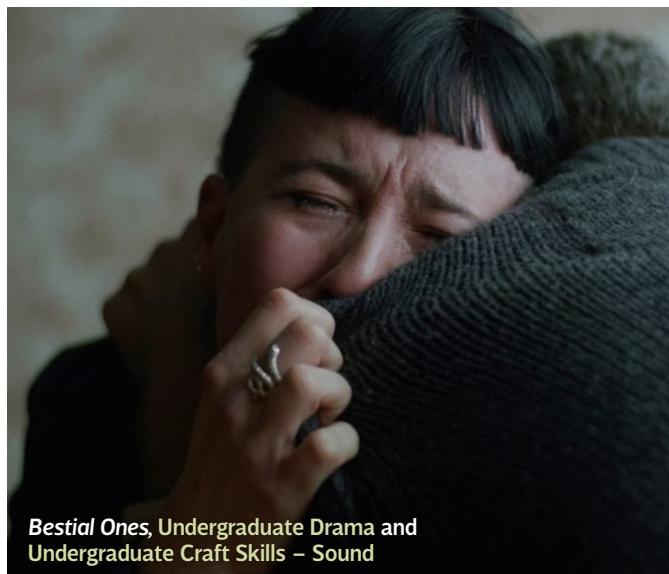
Nominees:

- ▶ **Birds**, Tyro Heath, Federica Omodei, Stephane Ugeux and Team, Goldsmiths, University of London
- ▶ **Whiteboy**, Matty Crawford, Karima Sammout-Kanellopoulou, Jack Edwards, Sehar Kidwai and Team, National Film and Television School



Casuals, Postgraduate Entertainment and Comedy Drama

NFTS



Bestial Ones, Undergraduate Drama and Undergraduate Craft Skills – Sound

National Film School at IADT



Robbie Wrecked the Band, Undergraduate Entertainment and Comedy Drama and Undergraduate Craft Skills – Editing

University of the West of England, Bristol

Undergraduate Drama

Bestial Ones

Miles Davis Murphy, Michael Largey, Fiachra Gallagher Lawson and Sophie Brassil, National Film School at IADT
‘A mature and accomplished piece of film-making with an authentic, heart-felt narrative and captivating performances. An immersive and intimate visual style, and a strong sense of place further elevates this beautiful piece of work.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Bird**, Maya Kotecha, Grace St George, Liam Bitton, Malise Rowland and Team, London Screen Academy
- ▶ **Small**, Jonathan Payne, Sophie MacDonald, Laura Wiggett and Team, University of Edinburgh

Postgraduate Entertainment and Comedy Drama

Casuals

Harry Lee, Paul Carey, Aaliyah Yaqub, Jack Cotter and Team, National Film and Television School
‘A well-rounded, highly entertaining entry with standout production values.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Not For Sale**, Miriam, Alejandro Sanchez Porras, Santiago Espéron and Team, Screen Academy Scotland
- ▶ **Straight Face**, Tristan Davis, Niamh Farrelly and Team, National Film and Television School

Undergraduate Entertainment and Comedy Drama

Robbie Wrecked the Band

Chloe Ireland, Patrick Whinder-Montague, Sam Schöttner, Indigo Knox Thompson and Team, University of the West of England, Bristol
‘Beautifully done. A standout piece judged against the performances, pacing, sensitivity of the subject matter and clever narrative.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Double Yellows**, Joseph Macaulay, Callum Atherton, Phoenix Thompson, Thomas Settle and Team, University of Salford
- ▶ **Tell Tyler**, Frankie Gommon, Jenny Richards, Jamie Oliver Lai, Joseph Elsen and Team, London South Bank University

Postgraduate Environment and Sustainability

Sagebrush Gold

Marcus Widger, Tommaso Di Paola, Mathilde Koechlin and Diego Hernández España Cadena, National Film and Television School

‘An atmospheric and beautifully executed film that balances the difficult dilemma of supposedly green energies and their impact on the natural world. It brings balance and incredible visuals to an important story.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Finding Solo**, Myles Storey, University of the West of England, Bristol
- ▶ **True Places Never Are**, Jeff Young, University of the West of England, Bristol

NFTS



Sagebrush Gold,
Postgraduate
Environment and
Sustainability

Undergraduate Environment and Sustainability

For a New Age

Emily Cooney, Natalie Phillips, Isaac Ellis, Innas Faidz and Animesh Raval, University of Surrey

‘A beautifully crafted film about foraging and its place in our industrialised world. Informative and visually compelling, with great camerawork and an important message that everyone can put into practice.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Blind Spot**, Olly Blower, Amber Fitzwilliam, Cal Hagen, Solomon Bowyer and Team, University of the West of England, Bristol
- ▶ **Six Feet Under (2022)**, Ruby Browne, Scott Highmoor, Jo Savage, Erazem Martinjak and Team, University of Westminster

Richard Kendal



Curiosa,
Postgraduate
Animation and
Postgraduate Craft
Skills – Sound



Tales from the
Dales – Overcoming
Remoteness
in Yorkshire’s
Countryside,
Undergraduate
Journalism

University of Salford

Postgraduate Factual

This Tree Is Hostile

Hugh Clegg, Jean de Wilde d’Estmael, Jón Atli Gudjónsson, Aaron King and Team, National Film and Television School

‘A wonderfully warm, charming and engrossing film; a visually strong and intriguing piece [with] a playful and beautiful approach to the contemporary issue of loneliness.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **3 Promises**, Mohamed Shalaby, Giorgia Zarantonello, Dan Hibbert, Sam Rapley and Team, National Film and Television School
- ▶ **And So It Was**, Niall MacRae and Tabita Knoblauch, University of the West of Scotland

Richard Kendal



This Tree
Is Hostile,
Postgraduate
Factual



For a New Age, Undergraduate Environment and Sustainability

Richard Kendal



Fighting for Fatherhood, Postgraduate Journalism

Richard Kendal

Undergraduate Factual

Under the Blanket

Tanicha Toro-Oloto, Raphaela Dowding-Green, Kate McCourt, Billy Bramwell and Team, Norwich University of the Arts
‘A raw, unsentimental and compelling portrait of a dysfunctional but supportive family, capturing how it responds to the fallout of a violent crime.’

Nominees:

► **P Is for Paradise**, Rosie Wright, Nina Caprice and Élisou Bartolomeu, Arts University Bournemouth

► **To Challah on the Table**, Olivia Barnett-Brown, Newcastle University

Postgraduate Journalism

Fighting for Fatherhood

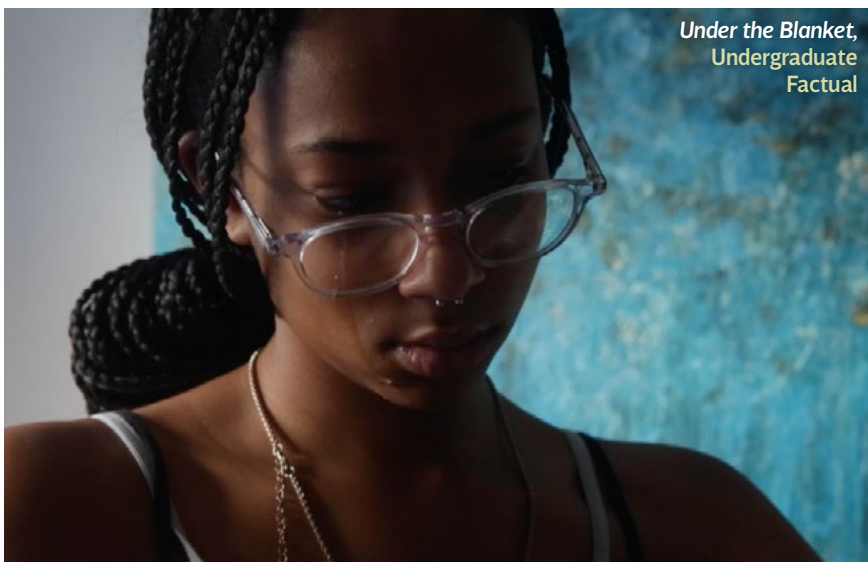
Monica Walton, Goldsmiths, University of London

‘A brilliant watch from start to finish, beautifully shot with fascinating case studies. The film navigates a complex issue well and makes us really care about the contributors.’

Nominees:

► **‘Sidelined’: The Question of Transgender Inclusion in Sport**, Luke Cullen, Alicia Leech and Lily Carter, City, University of London

► **Vaginismus: When Sex Hurts**, Maya Bowles and Mariella Bevan-Gibbins, City, University of London



Under the Blanket, Undergraduate Factual

Norwich University of the Arts

Undergraduate Journalism

Tales from the Dales – Overcoming Remoteness in Yorkshire’s Countryside

Marcus Smith, University of Salford

‘This stylish film contains three fascinating stories that are presented with real flair. The drone shots add extra impetus to the storytelling.’

Nominees:

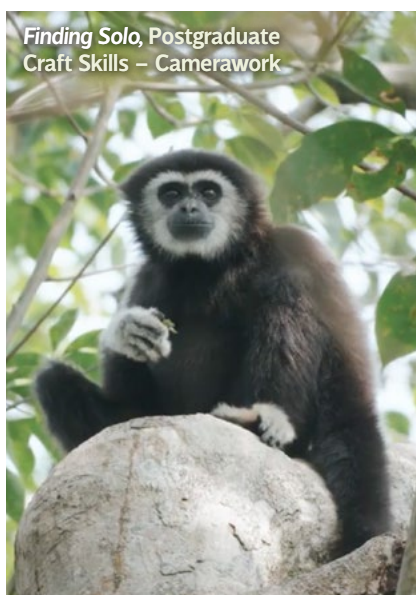
► **Spiked**, Athene George, Daniel Spiers, Max Gilbert, Jack Warren and Abbie Heptinstall, University of the West of England, Bristol

► **Thousands of Homes but Nowhere to Live**, Grace Donaghy, University of Leeds



Bestial Ones, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork, Undergraduate Drama and Undergraduate Craft Skills – Sound

Richard Kendal



Finding Solo, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

University of the West of England, Bristol

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

Finding Solo

Myles Storey, University of the West of England, Bristol

‘Breathtaking aerials that put you at the heart of this documentary. The photography was beautifully executed and wouldn’t look out of place in a David Attenborough documentary. All this on an extremely low budget, a lone camera operator and [low] carbon footprint.’

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

Bestial Ones

Fiachra Gallagher Lawson, National Film School at IADT

‘This film is beautifully put together, with great camerawork and a perfect solution for every scene. The shots are bold and ambitious, even in difficult lighting conditions. An astounding bit of film-making; feature-film standard.’

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Editing

Tremolo

Giorgia Zarantonello, National Film and Television School

‘A beautiful film complemented by some carefully crafted edits. A great sense of pace and the editor gets to the heart of the characters’ emotions.’



Tremolo, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Editing, Postgraduate Drama and Postgraduate Craft Skills – Writing

Richard Kendal

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Editing

Robbie Wrecked the Band

Chloe Ireland, Patrick Whinder-Montague, Sam Schöttner, Indigo Knox Thompson and Team, University of the West of England, Bristol

‘A standout piece of editing. The opening sequence was brilliant in tone and timing, and this standard continues throughout, with great variation and cutting of shots. A really immersive piece of film-making.’

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

Whiteboy

Sehar Kidwai, National Film and Television School

‘A stunning film with exceptional attention to detail that makes you feel you’re right in the thick of the action. The art direction is seamless when transitioning from a story taking place in one country and flipping into another. You truly believe the crew went out to shoot specific scenes in the Philippines – when in fact it was Beaconsfield!’



Robbie Wrecked the Band, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Editing and Undergraduate Entertainment and Comedy Drama

Richard Kendal



The Small Makings of a Storm, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Production Design and Undergraduate Animation

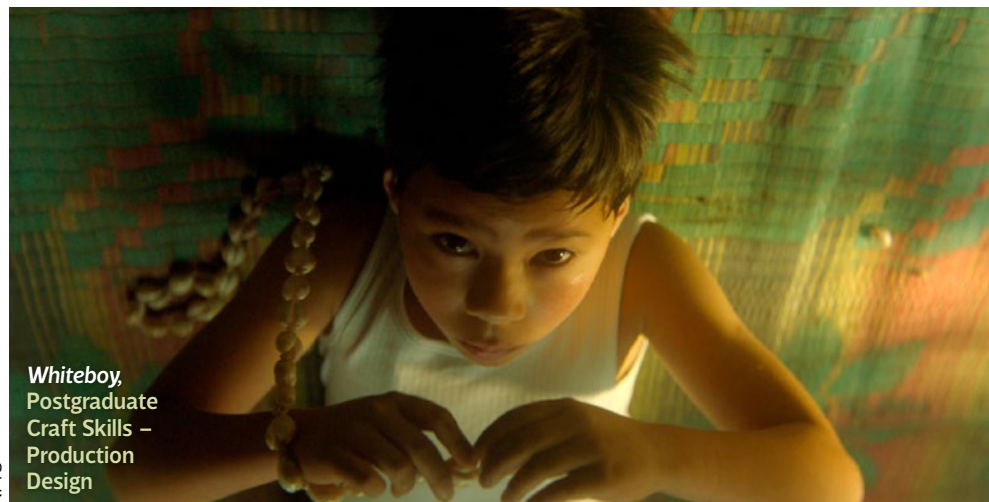
Richard Kendal

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

The Small Makings of a Storm

Avery Angle, National Film School at IADT

‘This film feels very different, with its own life and its own rules. The world is imagined beautifully, with sequences so stunning that you could take still images, print them out and hang them on a wall. The film evokes a real sense of the power and scale of nature – jaw-dropping.’



Whiteboy, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

NFTS



Curiosa, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Sound and Postgraduate Animation

NFTS

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Sound

Curiosa

Alexander Hübner, National Film and Television School
 ‘The multiple layers of voices, sound effects and music helped deliver exceptional [results]. A very creative soundscape helps this story fulfil its true potential.’

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Sound

Bestial Ones

Sam Bannon, National Film School at IADT
 ‘Right from the opening sequence this film is so evocative and clearly a huge amount of thought has gone into the sound craft. The soundscapes brilliantly complement the beautiful pictures... a real masterclass in sound.’

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Writing

Tremolo

Jade Li, National Film and Television School
 ‘A very well-written film that fully allows the character development to evolve and for the audience to fully grasp the dog-eat-dog world of music performance. The storyline keeps you invested until the final climax.’

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Writing

Offerlamm

Tova Persson, University of the West of England, Bristol
 ‘Simple but beautiful – storytelling at its finest. The writing is lyrical, creating a moving story with dark humour and overtones of folk horror. It is unflinching and poignant, with emotional notes that move the viewer. Really excellent.’ ■



Sinéad Rocks, Chair of the RTS Student Television Awards

Richard Kendal



Tremolo, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Writing, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Editing and Postgraduate Drama

Richard Kendal



Offerlamm, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Writing

University of the West of England, Bristol

The RTS Student Television Awards 2023 reward outstanding work produced during the 2021/22 academic year. Undergraduate entries were first judged at a regional level by their local RTS centre in the winter of 2022. The winning films from each RTS centre, along with all postgraduate entries, were then judged nationally in April 2023. The Craft Skills awards in Camera-work, Editing, Production Design, Sound and Writing were made at the discretion of the judges.

RTS NEWS

East Centre The BBC Two film *Two Daughters* picked up two prizes at the RTS East Awards in Norwich in June: Factual – Documentary and On-Screen Personality for its presenter, Stacey Dooley, and its subject, Mina Smallman.

In the film, which was made by True Vision East and Little Dooley, the presenter spent close to a year with Smallman, whose daughters Bibaa and Nicole were murdered in a north London park.

The *Guardian* called it “a raw and devastating film about grief, and an astonishing testament to resilience and the power of faith”.

Dooley and Smallman were unable to attend the ceremony, but recorded acceptance speeches.

“It was such a privilege to be involved.... It’s Mina’s film and Mina’s story and it’s about her girls but, more broadly, I suppose, it’s about violence against women and how we can make a very necessary contribution.... This is for Bibaa and Nicole – thank you,” said Dooley.

Smallman added: “Thank you so much; thank you for



Two Daughters: Stacey Dooley and Mina Smallman

BBC

Two Daughters double

hearing our story.... I chose Stacey for a reason. She’s real; she enabled us to be ourselves.... The [RTS] selecting us keeps the story alive.”

The Factual – Specialist award went to *Sensationalists: The Bad Girls and Boys of British*

Art. Made by Bohemia Films for BBC Two, the series tells the story of the Young British Artists movement, which included Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst and which took on art’s old guard in the 90s.

The Scripted Feature award was won by Joanna Hogg’s highly regarded film *The Souvenir: Part II*, produced by Element Pictures. It was largely shot in a former RAF hangar near King’s Lynn, Norfolk.

In the news categories, *BBC Look East* senior reporter Zoie O’Brien took the News and

Current Affairs Journalist award, while *Harbar 8*’s investigation for Channel 4’s *Dispatches, Hospital Undercover: Are Our Wards Safe?*, was named as the year’s News and Current Affairs Story.

The awards ceremony was held at Yalm in the Royal Arcade, Norwich, and hosted by the comedy writer Karl Minns, whose work includes *Have I Got News For You*.

Anglia Ruskin University, Jarrod Training and Wensum Print sponsored the awards.

Matthew Bell



Hannah Walker

Journalist award winner Zoie O'Brien

RTS East Television Awards winners

Scripted – Feature•*The Souvenir: Part II*•Element Pictures

Factual – Documentary•*Two Daughters*•True Vision East/Little Dooley for BBC Two

Factual – Specialist•*Sensationalists: The Bad Girls and Boys of British Art*•Bohemia Films for BBC Two

News and Current Affairs Story•*Dispatches: Hospital Undercover: Are*

Our Wards Safe?•Harbar 8 for Channel 4

News and Current Affairs Journalist•Zoie O’Brien, BBC Look East

On-screen Personality•Mina Smallman and Stacey Dooley, *Two Daughters*•True Vision East/Little Dooley for BBC Two

Promotional Film•POSCA•Box River Studios

Post-production•*War of the Worlds, Season 3*•Urban Myth Films/Vine FX for Star

Production•Maximus•SubMotion Productions

Two leading lights of Scottish television – Alan Cumming and Margaret Scott – were honoured at the RTS Scotland Awards in June.

Cumming received the RTS Scotland Special Award 2023 in recognition of his achievements across a long and varied career, which has taken in beloved Scottish shows *Take the High Road* and *The High Life*, award-winning US series *The Good Wife* and, currently, Apple TV+'s musical comedy *Schmigadoon!*.

"I owe my whole career to Scotland. I made my first film here when I was 20. I got my first of many roles on Scottish Television when I was 21 and my first film was a Scottish co-production with a Scottish writer/director," he said.

Scott, the recently retired Managing Director of Glasgow-based training provider TRC Media, received the Outstanding Contribution Award in recognition of her commitment to Scotland's creative sector.

She said: "The TV industry in Scotland has changed beyond recognition since I joined more than 30 years ago



Alan Cumming

Kirsty Anderson

Cumming wins home honour

and so many wonderful, passionate and talented people have driven and contributed to that change. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to play a small part."

BBC Scotland enjoyed a successful night, picking up four scripted awards. The acting awards went to Tony Curran for heart-wrenching

drama *Mayflies* and Shauna Macdonald for the reality show spoof *The Scotts*.

Scot Squad, a mockumentary series about a fictional Scottish police force, took the Comedy prize. Scottish soap *River City*'s 20th anniversary episode won the Drama award. Rob Williams was presented with the Writer

award for Channel 4's prison drama *Screw*.

Scottish wildlife filmmaker and presenter Gordon Buchanan bagged two prizes: On-screen Personality and a share of the Camera award, both for *Snow Dogs: Into the World*. The BBC Scotland programme also picked up the Sound prize.

The ceremony was held at The Old Fruitmarket, Glasgow, and hosted by the TV presenter Shereen Cutkelvin and the actor and comedian Sanjeev Kohli.

RTS Scotland Chair Stephen O'Donnell said: "When you see all this talent together in the one room, it's clear to see that Scotland's creative community punches above its weight. These awards are so important to recognise the incredible TV talent we have here in Scotland, not only to celebrate their achievements but also to inspire the next generation."

The awards were sponsored by ScreenSkills High-end TV Skills Fund, Channel 4, BBC Studios, Arteus Post Production, KR Management and The Nerve.

Matthew Bell



Tony Curran

Kirsty Anderson

RTS Scotland Television Awards winners

The RTS Scotland Special Award 2023-
Alan Cumming

Outstanding Contribution Award-
Margaret Scott

Drama - River City: 20th Anniversary Episode- BBC Studios for BBC Scotland

Actor - Male - Tony Curran, Mayflies- Synchronicity Films for BBC Scotland

Actor - Female - Shauna Macdonald, The Scotts- The Comedy Unit for BBC Scotland

Director - Dr Marco J Federici, Rico: The Richard Demarco Story- MLC Productions and Federici Films

Writer - Rob Williams, Screw- STV Studios for Channel 4

On-screen Personality - Gordon Buchanan, Snow Dogs: Into the Wild- Hello Halo Productions/Oak Island Films for BBC Scotland

Comedy - Scot Squad- The Comedy Unit for BBC Scotland

Entertainment and Features - Martin Compston's Scottish Fling- Tern TV for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Long Live My Happy Head- Melt the Fly for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Arts - Stolen: Catching the Art Thieves- Lion Television Scotland for BBC Two

Documentary and Specialist Factual - History - The Mystery of Anthrax Island- Indelible Telly for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Science and Natural History - The Secret Genius of Modern Life- BBC Studios: Science Unit for BBC Two

News - Reporting Scotland- BBC Scotland News and Current Affairs for BBC Scotland

Young Journalist - Morgan Spence- BBC Scotland

Current Affairs - Disclosure: The Great Ferries Scandal- BBC Scotland

Live Event - World Pipe Bands Championship 2022- BBC Scotland Productions for BBC Scotland

Daytime - The Travelling Auctioneers- STV Studios for BBC One

Sport - Fight at the Fort- Amped Pictures for BBC Scotland

Children's - Triùir Aig Tri- Sorbier Productions for BBC Alba

Short Form - When We Were Famous: Scotland 72- Studio Something

Animation and VFX - The World Cup 2022 Title Sequence: Here We Go! Studio Something for BBC Sport

Camera - Gordon Buchanan, Jack Warrender and Keith Partidge, Snow Dogs: Into the Wild- Hello Halo Productions/Oak Island Films for BBC Scotland

Editing - Dave Clark, The Last Stone- Tern TV for BBC Scotland

Post-production - Motion Design and Animation (Individual and Small Team) - Iron Sail- Revenant

Sound - Adam Wood and Jamie Hartland for Serious Facilities, Snow Dogs: Into the Wild- Hello Halo Productions/Oak Island Films for BBC Scotland

Student Television Award - Small, Jonathan Payne, Sophie MacDonald and Laura Wiggett- The University of Edinburgh

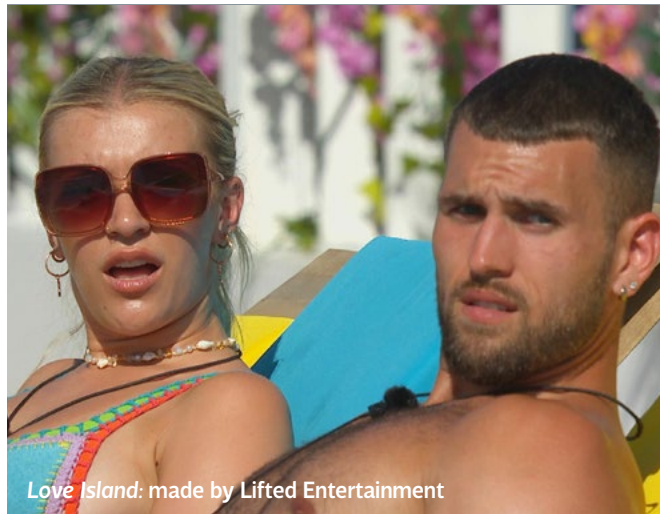
How to get a start in television

RTS Futures

An RTS Futures event in June offered tons of tips – covering CVs, training schemes and interview technique – for new talent hoping to make their mark in TV.

Kicking off the online event, Edi Smockum, MD of recruitment specialist Think-Bigger!, whose clients include Channel 4, said the aim of a CV was to “get a clear and positive account of what you have to offer”.

She said a CV can run to up two pages, “but never be embarrassed if you’re a new entrant – one page is absolutely fine”. It should, she said: “stress achievements and skills”; “get your key messages across quickly and strongly at the very beginning”; and



“keep the presentation simple”.

Smockum added a few more CV staples: “Tell me who you are and what you want to do”; “tell me the story of your career – I don’t mind if you’ve just left university or worked in hospitality”; and “check your spelling and grammar again and again”.

Daniell Morrissey, who runs the BBC’s apprenticeship and trainee schemes, outlined the

types of schemes and bursaries operating across the industry. “There’s something for everyone and at every level of experience,” he said.

“Our entrance-level schemes at the BBC are all about potential, so we’re not looking for lots of experience, but we are looking for passion.” For journalism or production apprenticeships, Morrissey advised that blogs, films on social media or

work on a school or university newspaper offer evidence of commitment. To find information on schemes, he recommended looking at the websites of broadcasters, indies, ScreenSkills and RTS Futures.

Stern & Wild talent agent Natalie Spanier advised: “Watch lots of telly – work out what you like... and do your research. Find out who the production companies are that make those shows, look up the people on the credits and start making a strategic list of those companies and people.”

“Do your research” before an interview, said talent exec Lauren Evans, who works for Lifted Entertainment, which is part of ITV Studios. During an interview, she added, “Show passion, enthusiasm for the role, a willingness and eagerness to learn”.

The online RTS Futures event, “The ultimate guide to getting a job in TV” was held on 8 June.

Matthew Bell

The UPSIDE

Sky reaps Bazball rewards from Ashes

The great British summer of sport is in full swing. There are seasonable downpours but no shortage of great entertainment. The Ashes are giving us gripping live coverage on Sky Sports.

Following the example of Gareth Southgate, England captain Ben Stokes’s positive mindset and his adoption of “Bazball” have provided cricket fans with great summer entertainment. The captain’s innings of 155 runs from 214 balls at Lords was, by common consent, “one of

the great Test match innings”.

Sky Sports’ Nasser Hussain couldn’t think of “any English batter, in this generation or mine, who I would rather have in the middle than him”.

All this and Wimbledon, too, with the redoubtable Clare Balding succeeding Sue Barker in the commentary box. Let’s hope the Lionesses don’t let us down in the Women’s World Cup.

Ramsay seeks to punch harder at 5

Congratulations to Debbie Ramsay, the new Editor of 5 News, who joins from Channel 4, where she is Commissioning Editor for News and Current Affairs.

“5 News already punches well above its weight; this is a fantastic opportunity to work

with an exceptional team to punch harder,” she says. “The programme has incredible reach out of London and with women. I hope to tap into my experience of working with harder-to-reach viewers to boost that further.”

Ex-Sky and BBC chiefs take the knee

Two TV luminaries were knighted in the King’s first birthday honours list. Arise Sir Jeremy Darroch and Sir Mark Thompson.

Jeremy, former CEO of Sky, received a knighthood for making the company “the most valuable British start-up company created in the past 30 years when he oversaw its acquisition by Comcast for £31bn in 2018.”

Mark is, of course, a former

Panorama editor who went on to become CEO of Channel 4 before being appointed BBC Director-General.

Beeb casts the net wide for new Chair

Some clues as to who the next BBC Chair might be from Acting Chair Dame Elan Closs Stephens.

In a recent Q&A with BBC presenter Tina Daheley, Dame Elan said the search “should be as wide as possible, as diverse a field as possible and there should be some really very strong candidates from all walks of life”.

She also revealed that she was the first person from her school to win a scholarship to Oxford and that she is a passionate believer in the BBC’s apprenticeship schemes. ■



RTS PATRONS

RTS Principal Patrons

BBC

Channel 4

ITV

Sky

RTS International Patrons

A+E Networks International
Apple TV+
Kinetic Content
Liberty Global
NBCUniversal International
Netflix

Paramount
Spencer Stuart
The Walt Disney Company
Warner Bros Discovery
YouTube

RTS Major Patrons

Accenture
All3Media
Audio Network
Banijay UK
Boston Consulting Group
Channel 5
Deloitte
Enders Analysis

Entertainment One
Fremantle
GB News
IMG Studios
ITN
NTT Data
OC&C
Prime Video
Roku

S4C
Sargent-Disc
STV Group
The Trade Desk
UKTV
Virgin Media O2
YouView

RTS Patrons

FLB Accountants
Lumina Search

Mission Bay
MPC Episodic

PricewaterhouseCoopers

Raidió Teilifís Éireann

Who's who at the RTS

Patron

The former Prince of Wales

Vice-Presidents

David Abraham
Dawn Airey
Sir David Attenborough OM
CH CVO CBE FRS
Baroness Floella
Benjamin OBE
Mike Darcey
Gary Davey
Greg Dyke
Lord Hall of Birkenhead
Lorraine Heggessey
Armando Iannucci OBE
Ian Jones
Baroness Lawrence of
Clarendon OBE
David Lynn
Ken MacQuarrie
Sir Trevor McDonald OBE
Gavin Patterson
Trevor Phillips OBE
Stewart Purvis CBE
Brandon Riegg
Sir Howard Stringer

Chair of RTS Trustees

Jane Turton

Honorary Secretary

Simon Bucks

Honorary Treasurer

Mike Green

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Lynn Barlow
Julian Bellamy
Simon Bucks
Mike Green
Yasmina Hadded
Kate Phillips
Simon Pitts
Sinéad Rocks
Sarah Rose
Jane Turton
Rob Woodward

EXECUTIVE

Chief Executive
Theresa Wise

CENTRES COUNCIL

Lynn Barlow
Phil Barnes
Fiona Campbell
Agnes Cogan
Stephanie Farmer
Lisa Holdsworth
Kully Khaila
Joanna Makepeace-Woods
Jennie Marwick-Evans
Stephen O'Donnell
Jon Quayle
Cameron Roach
Siobhan Robbie-James
Edward Russell
Rachel Watson

SPECIALIST GROUP

CHAIRS
Diversity
TBA

National Events

Clare Laycock

Education

Graeme Thompson

RTS Futures

Alex Wootten

RTS Digital Innovation

Bursary

Simon Pitts

AWARDS COMMITTEE

CHAIRS

Awards Policy

Simon Bucks

Craft & Design Awards

Ade Rawcliffe

Programme Awards

Kenton Allen

Student Television

Awards

Sinéad Rocks

Television Journalism

Awards

Simon Bucks

Young Technologist

Award

Terry Marsh