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Television

**Keeping
our
creative
edge**

RTS London
Convention
2024 issue





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From the CEO



Last month's RTS London Convention was a truly memorable day. Kings Place was packed, and every session sparkled.

Massive thanks to our generous sponsors, Netflix, and brilliant convention Chair, Anna Mallett, Vice-President Production EMEA/UK, Netflix. Anna also did a great job chairing Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy's RTS debut. Thanks to all our fantastic speakers, session chairs and producers.

This month's bumper *Television*

contains full reports of all 12 sessions, which are available to watch online on the RTS's YouTube channel. I think everyone who attended left inspired and proud that the UK is such a powerhouse for creating and producing some of the world's best television.

Earlier in September I was thrilled to launch our new Mini MBA in Television and Streaming Media at the International Broadcasting Convention.

There was sad news with the death of Simon Albury, the RTS's former CEO. Inside, we publish an obituary of a man who lived a remarkable life and

consistently campaigned for greater diversity in our sector. He made it part of his mission to help young people of colour to establish careers in TV.

This month's TV Diary is written by Joanna Abeyie, who I'm delighted to say has agreed to be the Society's new lead on inclusion.

Also, don't miss Siobhan Kennedy's Our Friend column from Washington where election fever is intensifying.

Theresa Wise

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TV diary



Something I haven't quite mastered is closing the countless tabs running in my mind. But do I truly want to? My weeks are a blend of managing my consultancy, Blue Moon & Partners, alongside my various non-executive director and trustee roles. These include being a Civil Service Commissioner and a City of London Common Councillor. While a portfolio career can feel chaotic to some, I've designed mine to share my expertise in equity, people and culture across multiple industries.

■ Yet, like most people, I need moments that are just for me. That's reformer pilates four times a week and a hack through the woods with the horses I ride regularly - Tom, Celt or Myles. It's during this time of personal reflection that I recharge and refocus. I'm writing this after my Friday night pilates session, which is always a bit different. Imagine club classics, disco lights and a room full of people using the last of their weekly energy to invest in their well-being. It's a moment of joy before the weekend sweeps in and flies by.

■ My weeks are always productive, but never the same. I recently visited the mental health charity Mind in Tower Hamlets, Newham and Redbridge to explore how I could support them in their vital work. It was moving, and I'm excited about the opportunities we discussed.

■ Later I had lunch with Marcus Ryder, CEO of the Film and TV

Joanna Abeyie, the new Chair of the RTS's inclusion committee, balances promising new work ventures with some relaxing 'me' time

Charity. We talked about ways to honour the legacy of my dear friend Simon Albury, who passed away last month [read our appreciation of the former RTS CEO on pages 40-41]. He was a special man, and his absence is deeply felt. Marcus and I exchanged ideas on how to preserve Simon's profound contributions to broadcasting and equality.

■ After an emotional day, I shifted gears at a meeting with JP Morgan Chase. We finalised plans for an equity and inclusion initiative that I'm delivering through Blue Moon. Then I headed to the *Telegraph* newspaper to conclude some executive coaching work I'd been doing and discuss the next steps. It has been rewarding to witness progress in this space.

■ Earlier this year, I contributed to the Lenny Henry Centre for Media

Diversity's review of the BBC's £112m diversity commitment. As the former Head of Creative Diversity at the BBC, I'm proud of the work we did. The review's publication provided valuable insights for the industry, although it's important to note that the BBC's new financial commitment, announced the same day, wasn't co-designed with our team.

■ Just as I thought the day was winding down, I received a LinkedIn message announcing that the Labour government had recognised the Creative Diversity All-Party Parliamentary Group's report as essential reading. This was a huge win for me and my team, and our group chat quickly lit up with celebratory messages. I then jumped on a call with the founder of SkillStack, a Dublin-based agency I've been working with to develop inclusive hiring content. We reviewed some feedback and were thrilled to learn that Nasa is using the content we created.

■ As the new Chair of the RTS's IDEA Committee [Inclusion, Diversity, Equality and Accessibility], I'm excited about the work ahead. RTS Futures was instrumental in my early career, helping me understand and learn about TV when I was new to the industry. I am pleased to be able to contribute formally to a charity that is dedicated to making a difference.

Dr Joanna Abeyie MBE is the founder and CEO of Blue Moon & Partners, author of Inclusion Needs You, RTS IDEA Committee Chair and a Civil Service Commissioner.

COMFORT CLASSIC



The Cops, with PC Mel Draper, left, and PC Roy Bramwell, centre

BBC

This summer, a quarter of a century after it first aired, BBC Four re-ran the first series of an unjustly forgotten British cop show. *The Cops* rarely makes the lists of best ever policiers, yet it's as groundbreaking as *The Sweeney*, *Prime Suspect*, *Between the Lines* and *Line of Duty*.

Perhaps the lack of recognition is down to the absence of star names or its focus on uniformed officers – the PC Plods of the force, rather than maverick detectives. Shot in *cinéma-vérité* style, *The Cops* is a warts-and-all portrayal of policing in the fictional Greater Manchester town of Stanton. The criminals, ground down by poverty, are a motley bunch, by turns violent and pathetic; the police behave little better, often worse.

Matthew Bell revels in a gritty warts-and-all police drama. And these Plods have warts to spare...

Dramas are frequently labelled “raw” and “uncompromising”, but *The Cops* is the real deal. The first episode begins with PC Mel Draper (Katy Cavanagh) snorting speed in a night-club toilet before jumping in a cab to start her shift, eyeballs on stalks – just like the TV viewers who were instantly hooked on the BBC Two series.

Some of Draper's colleagues are guided by community policing principles; others are cynical, hard bastards. Old-school constable Roy Bramwell

(John Henshaw) is one of the latter. Disgusted by the “scrotes” on the Skeetsmoor estate he is charged with policing, he rages: “Look at them, breeding like rabbits. I'm sick of them all, the dirty, lying, thieving scumbags.”

The Cops was made by World Productions, with the indie's founder and legendary TV producer Tony Garnett overseeing the show. Garnett had made his name in the 1960s producing the social-realist classics *Cathy Come Home* and *Kes*; at World, he had executive-produced the superlative police corruption series *Between the Lines* and zeitgeist legal drama *This Life*.

In an interview with Bafta in 2000, Garnett revealed the thinking behind the show: “I knew that if I went to a broadcaster and said, ‘Can I do a series set on the Skeetsmoor estate?’... then I

might be shown the door. But if I said, 'Could I do a cop show?' I might be given the money.

"So this was a cop show but also *not* a cop show. It was a way of exploring experiences in this country."

Garnett wanted to move beyond the clichés of the police procedural genre and make a show about uniformed officers: "That straitjacket of detective stories in which the narrative is predictable because you start with a crime and a dead body and the story is about who did it.... I thought that, if we did a show about uniforms, we could get away from that and find the human beings behind the ranks."

The Cops was created and written by Jimmy Gardner, Robert Jones and Anita Pandolfo. Before his untimely death in 2010, Gardner recalled the meticulous research that went into the series: "We spent three weeks in Blackburn, shadowing the police. We had access all areas. What really struck

THIS SHOW HELPED US GET TO KNOW THE BRITISH BOBBY A BIT BETTER

us was the futility of it. Most of the villains were just hopeless."

The Cops struck a chord with audiences and critics – series 1, which aired in autumn 1998, won a Bafta for best drama series. Irked by its portrayals of police brutality, Greater Manchester Police withdrew its cooperation for the second series. Yet *The Cops* continued in its same uncompromising vein for a further two series, picking up an RTS award and a second Bafta, both for best drama series.

With the recent success of the excellent *Blue Lights* and *The Responder*, uniformed officers are now all the rage on British police shows. *The Cops* got there first ... and maybe helped us get to know the British bobby a bit better. ■

The Cops is on BBC iPlayer.

Ear candy

Rylan: How to Be in the Spotlight

A celeb-on-celeb podcast is a hard sell, and even harder when it's two celebrities confiding in one another about the plight of celebrity, all for the lowly ears of us non-celebrities.

After sensitively tackling the crisis of masculinity in *How to Be a Man*, Rylan is now asking his guests *How to Be in the Spotlight*. And despite our exposure to a lot of very public breakdowns, including Rylan's own, it can be hard to empathise when the spotlight also brings with it such enviable perks: his first guest, the actor Daisy May Cooper, boasts: "You can get your Sofology delivery within a week when you normally wait 13 weeks."

But I was soon snapped out of my cynicism by Rylan, who's nothing if not sincere as he gently draws out his interviewees and elicits some candid conversations about the highs and lows of fame.

Cooper is hilariously frank and has an amazing story about the first time she was recognised in public. This involves her local pharmacist, her brother and *This Country* co-star, Charlie, and his unfortunate case of threadworms. But she goes on to reveal how surprisingly flat she felt when racking up the awards for their comedy, and her consequent alcoholism and depression. "It's like scoring the goal and you go past the goalposts and there's just fog."

From overnight reality show stars to veteran TV chefs, there's a great variety

of guests in the 12-episode series, and they've all dealt with fame with varying degrees of success. I was glad to hear that Ainsley Harriott is happily adapting to life as an internet meme. "I don't feel embarrassed," he says, "because it brings people joy."

My favourite episode features Francis Bourgeois (aka TikTok's "train guy"). Bourgeois, real name Luke Nicolson, has been accused of playing a trainspotting character for social media clout, based on nothing but hearsay and a few pictures from his time at secondary school.



But that already flimsy basis collapses under the weight of his testimony here, when he tells of how he was bullied into rebuilding his personality from the ground up, which inevitably involved burying his love of locomotives. With every TikTok post,

he says, he is recapturing the joy he felt as a child that was stifled, as so many of our passions are, by the petty game of adolescent conformity.

Bourgeois' redemption arc provides a nice happy ending to the series. But after all the cautionary tales told here, I'm left with the overwhelming impression that nobody actually knows how to be in the spotlight. Especially at a time when, because of the impact of social media, that spotlight never turns off.

In that sense, I agree with the actor and activist Jameela Jamil's conclusion, from episode 4, that "no one can exist at the altitude of that pedestal, healthily. Apart from Emma Thompson." ■

Harrison Bennett

WORKING LIVES



Football commentator

John Roder prepares for another match

John Roder has worked at seven World Cups for FIFA TV and was in Paris this summer for Olympic Broadcasting Services. This is his 21st season of commentating for the BBC's *Match of the Day* while also working on the English Football League, European leagues and much besides.

Football has taken you around the world. Is it a good life?

I've worked on all five continents and I love it. But you need the work to keep coming in. Like many in the TV industry, I'm freelance and have been for 30 years. Covid, when there was no live sport for five months, was a challenging time financially.

How did you get started in TV?

I started on the Sky News sports desk in 1994, having worked in local radio and what was then BBC Radio 5.

What was the first match you commentated on for TV?

Coventry vs Newcastle in 1995 – a feed for pubs and clubs in the north-east. My first radio commentary was in

1987: Everton 1, Coventry City 2 for Mercia Sound in Coventry.

Did you always want to commentate?

I found my niche at university. It was the mid-80s, and I wanted to be like David Jensen and John Peel, the "rhythm twins" on Radio 1. On college radio, I played bands like Joy Division and Echo and the Bunnymen. I did end up on Radio 1 though – doing the sport on the breakfast show with Chris Evans and Mark and Lard. It was a job-share with Clare Balding.

Do you always work live from the ground?

For *Match of the Day* and FIFA TV, we're always at the stadium. Probably 60% of my other work is done off a television. That isn't new – when I worked for Channel 4's *Football Italia Mezzanotte* in the late 1990s, we did it that way. I've done probably 1,000 matches from Italy and been there once to do a game.

Does the viewer lose anything?

Yes, I only see what the viewer sees. If

something happens off-camera, I don't see it, so I can't commentate on it.

What was your best game?

The 2015 Women's World Cup final in Vancouver – the United States beat Japan 5-2, and doing the world feed for FIFA TV was special. It was 4-1 at half-time and Carli Lloyd scored a hat-trick with her third from the halfway line. It was one of those days when everything was right.

What do you bring to work with you?

An open mind, my notes, glasses (and spare glasses), press pass and an iPad.

How vital is pre-match research?

Commentary is a weird thing – it's 90 minutes of unscripted telly. It could be the greatest entertainment ever or a snoresfest. You've got to prepare for every eventuality. But I don't like watching a match where the commentator has researched *everything* and is determined to tell you it all. In reality, you should only need 10 to 15% of what you've researched, because for me silence

is golden in a commentary – and it’s disappearing from sports coverage. There’s too much chat.

Listen to Martin Tyler’s “Agüero moment” when Manchester City won the Premier League in 2012. He screams “Agüeroooooo” ... and then doesn’t talk. It’s great; the shots that follow of the frenetic celebrations say it all. TV is not like radio commentary where you can go off at a tangent. A good commentator is like a good referee – you shouldn’t notice them.

But even the most exhaustive research can’t cover every eventuality?

No. You can get a cut-away of people in the crowd, and you haven’t got a clue who they are. Clive Tyldesley has a line, which I’ve nicked. If I’m doing, say, a Champions League game in Turkey and the camera lingers on people I don’t recognise in the executive seats. I’d say: “Anyone who is anyone in Turkish football is here tonight.” Or if there’s a shot of a celebrity and I can’t put a name to them: “Some famous faces in the crowd here.”

Are there any other tricks of the commentary trade you can share?

Hold back on the goal scorer’s name until you’re sure who it is. If a commentator has doubts, you’ll hear something like: “What a time for Rovers to score, just before half-time... And what a goal to bring them back on equal terms... and it’s Smith who’s got it”

Do you get nervous before a game?

Everyone in live TV has moments of doubt before they go on air. Then you remember you’ve done it before and can do it again. I commentate on about 100 games each season.

Have you made any verbal gaffes?

Yes, I said: “His legs couldn’t keep up with the rest of his body.” I knew what I meant to say; it just came out wrong. It went into *Private Eye*’s “Colemanballs” column.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best is meeting up with people on the circuit – you make lots of friends and there’s a bit of gossip too. There isn’t a downside, to be honest.

What qualities do you need to be a commentator?

The secret to being a good freelance commentator is to turn up, do the job well, and don’t be a diva. You’re a team player; you just happen to be the person on air. Be a nice person – there are always people coming up who want to take your place.

What advice would you give to an aspiring commentator?

Get some experience. With the explosion of social media and YouTube, many more non-league clubs now have commentaries on their own games. The route I followed – local radio, national radio, Sky,

regional ITV, national TV, international TV – doesn’t exist any more. Practise and practise off the TV at home, but be yourself. You don’t want to copy people like Peter Drury or Guy Mowbray – but watch and listen to them and learn, and try to incorporate what you like in your own style.

You’re active in the RTS in Devon and Cornwall...

As a region, we’re a bit detached from the rest of the country. We’re trying to bring TV people in Devon and Cornwall together because, apart from Twofour, we haven’t got big companies based here. We also want to show students, such as those I teach as a visiting lecturer on the journalism course at Plymouth Marjon University, that they don’t have to leave the region to have a worthwhile career in TV. It’s easy to zip up from Devon to London for work.

Who’s your favourite commentator?

The late Brian Moore. As a boy, when I wasn’t allowed to stay up for *Match of the Day*, I watched ITV’s *The Big Match* religiously on Sunday afternoon.

Do you have any commentating ambitions left?

Just to keep going, and keep enjoying what I do. I’m a very lucky person to be able to do this for a living. ■

John Roder was interviewed by Matthew Bell.



Roder’s best-ever game: the US vs Japan in the 2015 Women’s World Cup final

Alamy



Shonda Rhimes

Just add UK sauce!

What makes Britain so creative... and how can it stay that way?
We asked stars of screen, stage, music and fashion for the secret

The vastly influential show-runner Shonda Rhimes may be American ... but she knows a lot about the British way of life. You need only watch her TV blockbuster *Bridgerton* to prove that point.

As for Britain's creative edge – the theme of this year's RTS London Convention – Rhimes puts it down to a mysterious “secret sauce”.

She says: “It's no secret that the UK has one of the world's leading film and TV industries and is undoubtedly a source of iconic entertainment. From Bond to Monty Python, *Sherlock* to *The Crown*, the UK's renowned tradition of creative brilliance, craftsmanship and highly skilled crews is what makes it an amazing place for storytelling.

“For me, this is the special combination. The winning secret sauce. And

that is what makes the UK unique.” For ITV's *This Morning* presenter Dermot O'Leary, the “secret” is more ... elemental. “I think it has a lot to do with the rain and the moistness in the air. Because we spend so much time having to run indoors. I mean it!

“For a country as small as we are, and one so brilliantly diverse, it always amazes me how much we punch above our weight.”

Co-presenter Alison Hammond

‘THE UK HAS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING FILM AND TV INDUSTRIES’

agrees: “We've got such creative people: great writers, great producers.” She cites *Mr Bates vs the Post Office*: “Incredible! And *Baby Reindeer*. And *Bake Off* – what a great show!”

In the music world, veteran musician Nile Rodgers, of Chic fame has a huge soft spot for Britain. “What makes the UK great, as far as I'm concerned, is it seems like there's been a tradition of exposing the public to all sorts of music,” he says. “I noticed that when I first started working here. The artists were all very familiar with American music of all forms – jazz, R&B, rock'n'roll – and it made it much more comfortable for me because, whatever projects I got involved in, it was just artistically satisfying.”

“Artistic satisfaction” is also music to the ears of one of Britain's finest actors, David Tennant, who is cast in

Netflix's adaptation of Richard Osman's bestselling crime caper *The Thursday Murder Club*. Tennant says: "Theatre, film and television feed each other in this country, and people flit between the three mediums very happily and energetically. That creates a nice creative circle."

"It makes us all very proud that our industry has such a powerful creative hub in the UK and that so much is made here. It's a country, obviously, with a great theatrical tradition that a lot of people have come up through – directors, writers and actors."

"That's something we do very well in this country. It's something we need to protect, to be careful of. We need to treat it as precious."

Tennant's co-star in *The Thursday Murder Club*, Tom Ellis, feels that the UK has one vital advantage over Hollywood: "The biggest difference I've found from being on a set in the UK and in America is that the feeling of 'a company' is very much in our DNA here," he says.

"Most British actors have started in the theatre, and when you do that, it's all about everyone being equal: we are a company, working together to achieve one thing. There's not really the star system that's in place in Hollywood. That's something I've really felt on this show."

The world of fashion also plays its part, constantly feeding into the hub of UK creativity. Christopher Kane, the Scottish fashion

designer based in London, says: "Fashion, music, art, TV ... they're the best in the world. People look to us for leading the trends. People will always look to the UK for imagination, the best ideas, and breaking the boundaries."

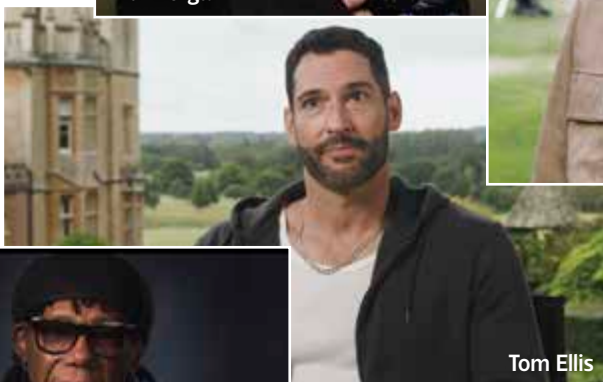
"That's what it's all about. Being creative means not being stagnant. It's about pushing barriers and just being explosive. Explosions all around!"

Welsh playwright and screenwriter Abi Morgan thinks there's something special in the UK's island mentality. "There's a kind of containment to that

'WE ARE AN OPEN-DOOR ISLAND WITH A MULTITUDE OF VOICES'



Abi Morgan



Tom Ellis



Nile Rodgers

output but also what that means economically for our country."

Speaking from the set of *The Thursday Murder Club*, he points to "productions like this, being shot in the UK, a British product, full of British stars, from a novel by a British writer. But it's an international piece of work, and I think we do that very well. We just need to make sure we can keep doing it in future."

Kane says: "How do we retain the creative edge? From the roots up. It's all about giving children freedom of expression and never holding back. We need to bring art and music and all



David Tennant

those things back into schools. The creative industry – TV, film and music – it's real industry. It's real jobs out there.

"We have this punk attitude that sets us apart. People

look to us for that, and hopefully they always will. I think the future's very bright for the industry."

Rhimes has no doubts about what would be lost if that bright future is squandered: "Generations of experienced and talented artists have honed their crafts to become the best in their field, and so many of them are right here in the UK. Whether it's the set designers, the costume artists or prop-makers, the UK has created and cultivated an extraordinary ecosystem to help bring ideas to life." ■

All of the above were speaking in footage filmed for the RTS London Convention Report by James Bennett.

But it's also an open-door island, I like to think, so it's the multitude of different voices that we have in the UK that have both a British

identity but also a global identity."

Morgan cites the UK's long and rich literary history and its vibrant theatre scene. "That's been a hotbed – new writers, new directors, new actors, and so much has fed into the wider creative platform of TV and film."

So the UK is creatively brilliant, no argument. But how can it stay that way? Tennant says: "You have to keep looking after the conveyor belt, as it were. We have to protect arts funding, which has done very well for this country, both in terms of creative

Full convention coverage begins overleaf...



International keynote Ted Sarandos

The Netflix chief lauds the UK's creativity and its part in the growth of the streaming giant

Netflix Co-CEO Ted Sarandos opened the RTS London Convention with a generous address that highlighted the role British TV has played in the US streamer's rise to global dominance.

Emphasising Netflix's many UK productions and its heavy investment in studios, he said: "We couldn't be more excited to be here – and, believe me, we're not going anywhere."

The RTS, said Sarandos, holds "a special place in my heart", recalling that at the 2016 London Convention he premiered a trailer for the first season



All photographs by Tim Whitby

the UK than any other country outside the United States. Since 2020, we've invested \$6bn in the UK creative community — and worked with more than 30,000 cast and crew. Today we have over 100 productions active in the UK.”

The Netflix chief went on to pinpoint the reasons that made the UK — one of 190 countries around the world in which the streamer operates — the most attractive of production partners. “You have great public service broadcasters and institutions that nurture British talent and creativity.... You've consistently supported regulations that encourage creativity, innovation and long-term thinking.

“You invested in education and training in the creative arts at every level, as well as investing in your amazing facilities. All of which have been supported by highly competitive tax incentives which make the UK an even more attractive place for anyone looking to make a film or show.”

With the audience of British broadcasting executives almost audibly purring, Sarandos offered a succinct analysis of the lessons he had learned since Netflix moved outside the US and into every major TV territory worldwide. “To succeed, we need to put the audience first — and that means embracing change,” he said.

“Today, choice and control are the price of admission in modern entertainment. It's streaming that consumers want. And it's how our industry stays relevant — and grows — in the face of intense competition from all directions.”

Sarandos admitted that Netflix has had its own struggles in adapting to the ever-changing media landscape. “When we first started streaming, the technology was not great and neither was the content. We had two big competitors: piracy, which let people stream for free, and our own DVD business,” he said.

“We knew to succeed in streaming that we had to create something better than free — and we also knew we had to let our DVD business go. Because as

[former Apple CEO] Steve Jobs said: ‘If you don't cannibalise your business, somebody else will.’

“So it was painful to split the company in half. We even told our DVD employees they could no longer attend company meetings, so in a sense saying: ‘You are a part of the past, not the future.’” But it was the reason that we were able to adapt and grow.

“Today, our members can watch a world of entertainment for a fraction of the price of a DVD box set of *The Sopranos* in 2007. And they don't have to wait two months for all those episodes to come out, or for a film to finish its theatrical release.”

TV windows, rights, distribution and technology, Sarandos maintained, though important, are distractions compared with the prime objective of giving audiences what they want — and that is “variety and quality”;

‘OUR MEMBERS CAN WATCH A WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT FOR FAR LESS THAN THE COST OF A DVD BOXSET’

namely, prestige dramas, indie films, true crime, romantic comedies, standup, documentaries and reality TV.

He argued: “People have such different and eclectic tastes that you can't afford to programme for just one sensibility....

It's no surprise, for example, that those people who loved *Beckham* also loved *Drive to Survive*, that's pretty clear.

“Now what *may* surprise you, though, is that people who love *The Crown* also like *Dolly Parton's Heartstrings*. Now, I guess Dolly is royalty in her own right, but that's again how diverse people's tastes are.”

Sarandos's next lesson, one hard won over the years, was the primacy of local programming. “When you try to make something for everyone, you typically end up making something that appeals to no one,” he said.

“It's why when we greenlight a series or film in the UK, Mexico or Korea, we do it because we think our British, our Mexican and our Korean audiences will love it. When you make something authentic, something that appeals to certain people in certain places, it tends to appeal to a lot of people in a lot of places. Take *Supacell*, a story ▶

of *The Crown*, “a show that stood conventional wisdom on its head”.

Warming to the theme, Sarandos added: “Peter Morgan's pitch was for a six-season show with a rotating cast, a show that would take 10 years to produce. It was something no one had ever tried before and that most people thought would never work.

“*The Crown* is a perfect example of why Britain remains one of the best places for TV and film. You have some of the best writers, directors, producers, actors, crafts, crew and locations anywhere in the world.”

The proof is in the pudding. He revealed: “Netflix invests more here in

▶ about five superpowered south Londoners that became a huge hit in America. Or *Baby Reindeer*, which was No 1 in the Netflix Top 10 in 79 countries... or *Heartstopper*, which spoke to a whole new generation of viewers from Brazil to Japan, or *The Gentlemen*.”

All these shows, he emphasised, were “authentically British, made in the UK for UK audiences by UK creators with UK casts and crews. The other thing these shows all have in common is they were commissioned by a UK team, based here in London, and led by a remarkable Brit herself, Anne Mensah.”

Sarandos admitted that, to a degree, data can guide commissioning choices, but he said that “programming is far more art than science”, adding: “If it were as simple as gathering more data or building the best algorithms, we’d never have a flop. And yet we do – TV and film are subject to hot hands and cold streaks like every other human endeavour.”

He continued: “There’s so much potential in TV today. So much of the fandom right now is driven by younger audiences. We see it in the videos that they create on TikTok... this generation loves stories as much as we ever have – maybe more. We just have to find the right ways to connect with them.

“I know there’s a lot of anxiety in our industry right now – there’s concern about falling investment, there’s the threat of AI and there’s competition from platforms like YouTube and TikTok.”

The Netflix chief acknowledged these hazards but remained optimistic about the future of television: “Every day, people come up to me and want to talk about a new show or film they just watched and loved.

“If we can focus on the audience, embrace change and remain fearless in the stories that we’re telling, I know we’re going to look back 20 years from now and say we really were just getting started.” ■

Session 1: ‘International keynote: Ted Sarandos’: The Co-CEO, Netflix, was in conversation with journalist and writer Kirsty Wark. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Matthew Bell.



QUESTION & ANSWER

Q Kirsty Wark You spend more in the UK than in any other territory [outside the US], but you still only have 10% of viewing. Is that a problem?

A Ted Sarandos The 10% that we have is growing...

Q Kirsty Wark So, at this point in two years’ time, do you want to be taking 25%?

A Ted Sarandos I don’t think there’s any reason that we couldn’t as long as we continue to do the things [we’ve] just talked about, which is that you really have to keep the audience upfront.

Q Kirsty Wark Looking back, did you need a stronger editorial grip on *Baby Reindeer* – it’s called a ‘true story’, but whose truth?

A Ted Sarandos We are facilitating storytellers to tell their stories – this is Richard’s [Gadd] true story... It’s not a documentary and there are elements of the story that are dramatised. We’re watching it performed by actors on television. It’s a fairly uniquely British debate; this debate is not happening anywhere else in the world.

Q Kirsty Wark You want to do more live television. Why?

A Ted Sarandos There’s nothing like those moments when the world comes together at the same time, watches [TV] and goes through an experience together.

Q Kirsty Wark More sport?

A Ted Sarandos Some. We did a deal recently to bring two NFL football games to Netflix around the world on Christmas Day this year ... we’ve got this Mike Tyson v [YouTuber] Jake Paul fight coming up around the world – those are events people love.

Q Kirsty Wark would you ever have a political debate show?

A Ted Sarandos The challenge for our company is to entertain the world; political debate is a form of entertainment but we tend to try to give people some refuge from the political discourse.

Q Kirsty Wark You say you’re going to put the price up. Where’s the justification for that?

A Ted Sarandos I’m not saying we’re going to be putting the price up... we have to bring [viewers] more value for the dollar and then, every once in a while, we have to come back to you and say, ‘We’d like to have a little more money’ so we can keep putting into this virtuous circle of constant improvement... If you don’t think you’re getting value for the dollar at Netflix, it’s a ‘one-click cancel’.

‘WE HAVE TO BRING VIEWERS VALUE. IF YOU DON’T THINK THAT YOU’RE GETTING VALUE AT NETFLIX, IT’S A ONE-CLICK CANCEL’



Win an audience... and keep it

Executives from four of the biggest global media houses wrestle with the eternal challenge of how to attract viewers

It's a harder task than it once was: audiences are more fickle than ever and there's more choice from many more outlets, whether they are broadcasters or streamers. But there were many potential answers – among them, authentic local programming, sport, live shows, brand recognition and greater consumer choice – offered by the panellists in an informative session.

“The world's fragmenting,” said Sky's Cécile Frot-Coutaz. And that, she explained, changes the way a broadcaster commissions and

acquires programmes. “Increasingly we have tribes. If you try to do things that work for everybody, you end up not finding anybody.”

**‘IF YOU TRY TO
DO THINGS
THAT WORK FOR
EVERYBODY,
YOU END UP
NOT FINDING
ANYBODY’**

Analysing data “only goes so far”, Frot-Coutaz added. “At the end of the day, you're backing creative people who you believe have something to say that will do it authentically.”

The session chair, *Financial Times* journalist John Gapper, asked Disney's Nami Patel how her company bundles content as a means of attracting viewers. “Bundling does offer more choice to the consumer,” she said.

When Disney+ launched in the UK in 2020, its programming revolved around global brands such as Disney, Pixar and National Geographic; since then, it has added entertainment ▶



Andrew Georgiou



Cécile Frot-Coutaz



John Gapper

► shows from the likes of FX and ABC, and now original local content.

“We’ve constantly evolved and wanted to cater for all audiences on... Disney+,” said Patel. “People are often surprised to find that half our consumers are households without kids.”

Last November, Disney launched multiple price plans, giving “choice to consumers [and] more flexibility, more value for money”, she added.

In the opening session, Netflix Co-CEO Ted Sarandos had said he wouldn’t want to run a legacy TV business; Channel 5’s Sarah Rose took a different view: “I’m proud to be a legacy business; I don’t see it as a pejorative term at all – I see it as heritage.

“The audience don’t think of us as legacy media – they just turn the telly on. That’s why the Media Act is so important for us, so when they turn the telly on, they find us because we don’t have the deep pockets to pay for that prominence. But whether they watch something live or on-demand, whether they watch a piece of content

of ours on someone else’s platform or on our own, it doesn’t matter, as long as they find it. What does matter is the brand you exploit it under.”

She went on to define the Channel 5 brand: “It’s accessible, unpretentious; it’s very British, it’s regional.”

“Is it cheap?” asked Gapper? “No,” replied Rose, “it’s not cheap; it is down to earth though... I don’t know what cheap is; all I know is that we know what we’re about editorially.”

Like many speakers during the day, Rose pinpointed local programming as the key to winning audiences. “Channel 5 is truly local – Ted [Sarandos] caters for 190 countries; I cater for one. If that content ends up having a life in

other territories... brilliant, but our job is to reach the outer regions and the broad base of the UK.”

Warner Bros. Discovery’s Andrew Georgiou agreed, adding: “Our commissioning team thinks local first. If we go through a greenlight process, then the decision is made based on the home market. You’ve got to think about the audience you’re trying to tell the story for, then – and I think Ted said it really well – you hope it travels internationally.

“If you ask Netflix, I’m sure they would say they tried to recreate *Squid Game* a thousand times but you just can’t – it’s a genuinely local story that found a global audience.”

Frot-Coutaz added: “The fact that local works better is not a new insight – it’s always been the case. At one point, because of the advent of global streamers, the debate got a little muddled.” Sky’s most-watched shows tended to be original and local, such as *Brassic* and *Gangs of London*.

The UK’s indies and studios are

‘THE AUDIENCE
DON’T SEE US AS
LEGACY MEDIA.
THEY JUST TURN
THE TELLY ON’



All photographs by Tim Whitby



Nami Patel



Sarah Rose

Olympics was a winner for Warner Bros.

Andrew Georgiou ‘Paris hosted a fabulous Olympic Games – and one that I think the Olympic movement needed after quite a tough few cycles. We broadcast the Olympics in 47 markets in 19 different languages, so 3,000 people pulling together, over 12,000 commentary sessions. It was a huge logistical, operational challenge for us but it outperformed all our expectations on almost every one of our platforms... Having it in the time zone of Europe certainly helped.

‘If you take our streaming platform, Max, which was launched in Europe in 25 markets just before the start of the Olympics, we’ve had a huge uplift in audiences, and also on Discovery+ in the markets where we haven’t launched Max yet.

‘We surpassed our total subscriber numbers after day four [of the Olympics], compared with... the entirety of the Tokyo games... On linear... in the UK, for example, we had 100% growth in linear audiences...

‘The challenge, of course, is keeping the customers. The good news for us... is that what we’ve seen on Max in particular when compared to something like Discovery+, which is a completely different proposition, is that those customers who’ve come on [to the platform] to watch the Olympics... have watched twice as much [other] content on Max as they have on Discovery+, with, of course, *House of the Dragon* leading that across Europe. As a result, we are retaining twice as many as we are across Discovery+.’
John Gapper ‘That’s [demonstrating the importance] of sport or live [shows]?’

Andrew Georgiou ‘Live does attract audiences... like no other content. The shift of entertainment content to VoD viewing is a well-trodden path... but there are moments like the Olympics that focus a global population on a single event, and what that creates in terms of a cultural impact, I think, only live [coverage] can really achieve.’

currently under pressure as commissioning has dipped, but Patel argued that the “market is still very buoyant in terms of attracting investment”. Disney plans to invest \$1bn a year over the next five years in the UK and Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA).

Frot-Coutaz said:

“A couple of years ago, the mood music was, ‘We need more studio space in the UK’ – that is not true any more... As an owner of studio space at Sky, we’re not pessimistic, but for now we’re cautious.”

She called on the Government to continue supporting the production ecosystem through “tax breaks and relief on business rates”.

“We’re a little bit more optimistic than that,” said Georgiou. Warner Bros. Discovery was continuing to invest in Leavesden Studios “because we believe over the long period of time that the competitive nature of the UK market will continue to attract more and more productions. I don’t think we should underestimate the price advantage of producing content in the UK, especially versus the US.”

Channel 5’s Rose was unconvinced: “I don’t think it’s that rosy and we have to be careful not to tell ourselves it is.”

High-end drama may be attracting strong investment but Rose’s channel operates on a different scale, tending to work with small production companies, many of which are struggling. “There is a freelance crisis at the moment... we have to keep the grass

roots [of the industry] in work so it can grow into working on the bigger productions,” she added.

Frot-Coutaz agreed: “The independent production community has been suffering in the last 18 months. The reason the UK has this creative edge is

that there is this community that does absolutely incredible work, sustained and created historically through the public service broadcasters. It needs to be... protected.”

For Patel, Disney’s success lay in

the combination of its “beloved global brands and franchises” and “fantastic local stories”. Both parts were underpinned by “authentic storytelling that connects minds and hearts”.

Patel concluded: “We’re completely embedded in the local ecology in every market, and, for us, partnering with the broadcasters and helping sustain [these] ecologies is critical.” ■

Session Two: ‘How to win audiences and influence them’ was chaired by Financial Times Chief UK Business Columnist, John Gapper. Panellists were: Cécile Frot-Coutaz, CEO, Sky Studios and Chief Content Officer, Sky; Andrew Georgiou, President and MD, Warner Bros. Discovery UK & Ireland and Warner Bros. Discovery Sports Europe; Nami Patel, Senior Vice President, Strategy and Business Development, The Walt Disney Company EMEA; and Sarah Rose, President, Channel 5 and UK Regional Lead, Paramount. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Matthew Bell.

‘WE HAVE TO KEEP THE GRASS ROOTS IN WORK SO IT CAN GROW INTO BIGGER PRODUCTIONS’

The triumph of iPlayer is one of the bright spots for the BBC boss this year. Elsewhere, there are fires to fight...

The BBC Director-General took to the RTS London Convention stage the day after former BBC news presenter Huw Edwards received a six-month sentence, suspended for two years, for accessing indecent photographs of children as young as seven.

Q Amol Rajan How badly damaged is the BBC by the crimes of Huw Edwards?

A Tim Davie There's no doubt that an affair like this impacts our reputation, and I don't know yet in terms of the direct impact on trust... People's trust in the BBC is absolutely essential, and I hope we do the right things. I don't think the public are stupid; they can see when we're taking the right actions, acting in good faith and trying to get through things in a calm and fair manner.

Q Amol Rajan Will Huw Edwards work for the BBC again?

A Tim Davie This man has just been convicted of appalling crimes... I can't see him working at the BBC again.

Q Amol Rajan There's a huge amount of Edwards in the BBC archives: what is going to happen to that?

A Tim Davie I would never say never – there may be a documentary, a contextual piece, where we see images of people who are no longer working with us and have been, frankly, disgraced.

Q Amol Rajan Why did the BBC Board and/or you decide to continue paying Edwards' salary after you were informed in November that he had been arrested for potentially category A, B or C [sexual/indecency] offences?

A Tim Davie It wasn't the BBC Board. It was myself and the senior team. We wrestled with it... It was a very difficult call but we decided



UK keynote Tim Davie

that pay continues until someone is charged. No one knew that gap was going to be so long.

Q Amol Rajan Was that the right decision?

A Tim Davie I think it was the right decision based on the [BBC's] policies. We acted totally in good faith.

Q Amol Rajan Have you asked for the [£200,000 salary] back?

A Tim Davie We want the money back. We've asked for it back... There are discussions between legal teams, I believe, but that's as far as we can go at this point.

Q Amol Rajan When will you report on the findings of the review over Amanda Abbington's allegations about *Strictly* [Come Dancing]?

A Tim Davie We're pretty close...

Q Amol Rajan Wouldn't it have been useful to report before the new *Strictly* series started? Did the senior executives at *Strictly* take their eye off the ball when there was a culture of bullying underneath them?

A Tim Davie We need to do the work on the review and see before I start opining....

Q Amol Rajan There are lots of people in this industry who say one of the big challenges is the idea that talent gets indulged and excused...

A Tim Davie It's a constant work in progress.... I am optimistic that the place is changing.... The environment is different – this is why it hurts so much when these things happen. But we're now as good as our actions.



Amol Rajan quizzes Tim Davie on stage

'WE ARE REPURPOSING THE INDUSTRY, AND I THINK THAT'S AMAZING'

Q Amol Rajan In the last decade, according to Ofcom, daily broadcast TV viewing for 16-to-24-year-olds fell by 78%. What are you doing to get [this group] not just engaging with BBC content but paying a licence fee?

A Tim Davie The iPlayer is up 20% year on year. We are fully reshaping the BBC. The biggest number I get every morning is how many people went online... We are repurposing the industry, and I think that is amazing.

Q Amol Rajan What are you doing to offset the licence fee decline, to stop the... BBC from getting smaller?

A Tim Davie We're still fighting for a universal service, and that's the binary question.... [I'm] trying to bring everyone in – 71% of 16-34s come to us every week; we're not out of the game... Our numbers are really good. It's not rocket science: if you [have]... big titles [such as] *Race Across the World*, *Traitors*, *Gladiators*... you get young audiences.

Q Amol Rajan What are the pros and cons of a mutual model for the BBC?

A Tim Davie I am intrigued by [the idea of] a more participative BBC... If you look around the world,

you can see where institutions are being weaponised; I think it is a much more toxic, difficult environment. So [I like] the idea of maintaining our independence and having people participate in the BBC – the BBC is for you. It's here for everyone. I'm very much of the mindset that we're here to serve, not talk down to people.

Q Amol Rajan Does the BBC have the money to continue funding the World Service?

A Tim Davie I've been clear: the World Service needs to be funded outside the licence fee... We will continue to support the World Service at the level it's at, and the Government put in £104m as well, so you're nearly at £300m [in total]. That is enough to sustain [the service]... I think the Government and us have a real choice [to make] around [using] soft power and [boosting] the UK's mojo abroad.

Q Amol Rajan Half the BBC Board and the Chair are appointed by the Government. Do you think the BBC Board should appoint the next Chair, independent of Government?

A Tim Davie I'll leave that to others... But the independence of the BBC, without fear or favour, is essential. We should be accountable to the public through the mechanisms of parliament but we should be utterly independent editorially. We need an independent BBC, and we need to fight for that.

Q Amol Rajan Lisa Nandy [Culture Secretary] is here on the stage later: what's your message to her?

A Tim Davie We've got the skills ... But it's about money. You've got to make the money work – that's really important... We are in a tough spot; I go through the UK, and more and more medium and small indies are coming up to me and going: "We're desperate to keep the BBC in business because [we're] feeling the pressure, there's less [commissioning] coming through, we've got a lot of [spare] studio space." But long-term, beyond that, I'm very optimistic because of the quality of the skills, thinking and storytelling here. ■

Session Three, 'UK keynote': Tim Davie'
The BBC Director-General, was interviewed by journalist and presenter Amol Rajan. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Matthew Bell.

All photographs by Tim Whitby

TV's Knight errant

The *Peaky Blinders* creator, Steven Knight, discusses his new Birmingham studio

All you need to be a writer, according to Leonard Cohen, is “arrogance and inexperience”. Quoting this from the RTS Convention stage, Steven Knight, added: “It’s so true. Arrogance, you need. Inexperience? You don’t know what you shouldn’t be doing, and it’s good to *not* find out.”

BBC News’s Katie Razzall asked him: “You must have learned things along the way?”

“I try not to,” he replied.

This seems unlikely, given that Knight has risen to become one of the UK’s premier creative talents: a director, creator and producer of TV and film, co-devising the global hit *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, penning the Oscar-nominated *Dirty Pretty Things* and best known for conjuring up the criminal world of Tommy Shelby and co in the cultural phenomenon that is *Peaky Blinders*.

Knight’s newest venture is Digbeth Loc, a studio hub in Birmingham that is housing the forthcoming *Peaky Blinders* film. His recent BBC series *This Town* was the first major drama to shoot there earlier this year. The hub is expected to create more than 700 jobs and add £30m to the local economy.

Given the fragile state of the screen industry, Knight accepts that it is a precarious time to launch a new studio. “Yes, there’s overcapacity of studios at the moment. But you don’t



then knock them all down. Because, when things pick up again, it will be the same as it was before.”

Creating a studio base away from the M25 came with challenges – the project was eight years in the making – but Knight said there’s more than a levelling up appeal to Digbeth Loc. “It’s near to the city centre, right next to HS2. People who work in the industry know it’s long hours and brutal work – we try and put everything on campus to create an environment where they can have physical comfort, so they don’t have to get into a car at two in the morning, go to a little hotel and come back.

“People can feel they’re in a truly creative environment, with big productions and small productions feeding into each other. We’ve got the National Youth Theatre moving in. We’ve got the Royal Shakespeare Company coming. We want to do theatre, arts – all of that.”

Knight said that disused buildings are of little use to other industries “but they’re gold dust to us”. He cited the Banana Warehouse in Digbeth, “sitting there like an old lady falling apart”, which has been turned into the new *MasterChef* studio. “We can be a fitting catalyst for change in challenged areas. Not just because it’s a good thing to do, but because what we want is there,” said Knight.

Affordable housing and improving skills in the local workforce is part of the Digbeth Loc plan too. “We’re not landing it like a spaceship and putting barbed wire around it. We’re making it part of the community,” Knight said.

With its significant ripple effect, he called on Lisa Nandy, the new Culture Secretary, to consider a regional variation to filming tax breaks. “So if it’s 20%, you could have 21% in a particular area. People would howl a bit about that and it could be temporary, but it could stimulate the industry in particular regions.” Nandy, speaking later that day at the RTS Convention, lauded Knight for the “huge difference” he had made to Birmingham, so he certainly has her ear.

Knight also called on the Government to invest in the creative industries more broadly, reiterating the phrase “not



Steven Knight with Katie Razzall

All photographs by Tim Whitby

‘WE CAN BE A CATALYST FOR CHANGE IN CHALLENGED AREAS’

because it’s a good thing to do”, but, he said, “because it makes a lot of money for the country. This isn’t making washing machines – this is making stuff that goes out into the world and becomes how the world sees us.”

Peaky Blinders is a case in point. The series was picked up by Netflix in 2014, rolling out to the world that Brummie accent and flat-cap style. Snoop Dogg, Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise are now among its fans.

On the topic of how local stories can go global, a constant feature of the day’s sessions, Knight said: “I don’t like that word ‘local’. The upset and passion of someone in Rotherham is the same as the upset and passion of someone anywhere else in the world. If you can depict that honestly, then other people will recognise it, no matter where it’s set.”

Undoubtedly, *Peaky Blinders* has found its biggest success at home, where it topped BBC iPlayer’s most watched list in 2022 for its sixth and final series. Things could have been very different. Knight revealed that he first pitched the idea to Channel 4 when he started out as a screenwriter in the 1980s. “I’m glad it didn’t happen. Not because it was Channel 4 – I chose it because that was a good place to go – but the technology wasn’t right to

depict a period drama like that properly. So then I started making movies and that was great, then television started to emerge again.”

Given the breadth of talent Knight has worked with in his 40-plus years in the business, and with the Huw Edwards scandal hanging over the TV industry, Razzall asked if TV has a culture problem, and if he called out bad behaviour when he saw it.

While pointing out that the word “talent” is problematic because it enables a different category of treatment, he replied: “Bad behaviour, like taking advantage of one’s position and slowing things down in the production, is unforgivable. Bad behaviour in terms of good and bad and morality, it’s not my position to pass comment on that, unless it’s a specific thing in a specific environment.”

Knight is now preparing for the *Peaky Blinders* movie, with *Saltburn* star Barry Keoghan and *Dune*’s Rebecca Ferguson joining lead actor Cillian Murphy in the cast. He is also working on his next project, for Netflix, about the rise of the Guinness dynasty in Dublin and New York in the 19th century. It’s called *House of Guinness*, but, said Knight: “I’m calling it *The Crown* with beer!” ■

Session Four: ‘In conversation With Steven Knight’. The writer, executive producer and director was in conversation with Katie Razzall, Culture and Media Editor, BBC News. The producer was Diana Muir. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.

UK keynote Alex Mahon

The Channel 4 CEO discusses indies,
digital growth, advertising and hit shows

Now that the threat of privatisation is no longer looming, Alex Mahon can focus on other items in the Channel 4 in-tray: recovering from the economic downturn; accelerating its digital strategy; and coming up with new hits.

In a wide-ranging interview that covered everything from company culture to the channel's relationship with government and industry partners, Mahon first addressed the struggles of the UK's indie sector.

"Last year was horrendous for independent producers and this year hasn't been much better," she said. This was due not only to the US strikes in the screen industry but also to the downturn in the advertising market and the pressure on the BBC to reduce costs.

"But there are green shoots. The ad market is recovering and we've started to buy bigger again," she said. "I don't think we'll get back to the boom times because streamers also have become more disciplined as their business model has settled down."

Producers of mid-budget titles will be hardest hit, she warned, because viewing preferences have changed. "There's a desire for live, daytime shows that... feel

familiar. Then they want high-end, streamable bingeing. But consumers aren't coming as much to the middle, where lots of producers have diligently built their business over time. That means that some businesses are finding it hard to survive. Our job is to try to be clear about what we want to buy and make sure that we brief that out."

The relationship with indies has been further tested by this year's Media Act, which will allow Channel 4 to make and own some of its content. When pressed about its plans by her interviewer, the journalist Amol Rajan, Mahon tried to reassure producers: "I don't want to [do] it in a way that damages the indie sector, especially with what they've been through.

"It's going to take about a year until the Government actually enacts it. It will then grow slowly after that. There are multiple ways that we could do it, not just by starting an indie. And we won't be buying massive indies, so [the Act] won't make a dramatic difference for some time."

A broader and more immediate focus is Channel 4's Fast Forward strategy, which has three central strands: accelerating digital growth; diversifying the way it makes money to become less reliant on advertising; and

'THERE ARE GREEN SHOOTS. THE AD MARKET IS RECOVERING AND WE'VE STARTED TO BUY BIGGER AGAIN'

reducing costs, including moving out of linear.

Focusing on the move from linear to digital, Mahon said that, this year, 30% of income will come from digital advertising. "Last year, it would have been 27%, and the average across commercial broadcasters abroad is about 11%, so it's way ahead of [the] market."

To diversify its revenue streams, the channel is working on free ad-supported streaming channels and e-commerce, and has already launched Channel 4+, an ad-free subscription service.

But the plan isn't to lean into a subscription model. "When viewers are really into *Married at First Sight*, they



Tim Whitby

evidence. In the end, there wasn't the data or the facts [for privatisation]."

Looking to the future of Channel 4, Mahon said the move from London to Leeds had brought a new energy to the broadcaster. Ninety per cent of the people whose jobs were moving to Leeds declined relocation. Now, she said: "Forty-two per cent of our staff have been in Channel 4 less than three years. That's a massive amount of churn and change but, with that, you also get a new channel. You get people who've got new enthusiasm, new knowledge, new learnings from elsewhere."

Rajan used the RTS stage to give Mahon the right of reply to Richard Osman's comments in an episode of the podcast *The Rest Is Entertainment*, "How do you save Channel 4?". But Rajan didn't realise until too late that Osman and co-host, Marina Hyde, were in the audience. "This is going to be really awkward, because I'm now going to read out the rude things that he said... but fuck it," said Rajan.

Osman had questioned the health of Channel 4's relationship with independent producers. Mahon told Rajan: "It was really rocky. We cut money last year and it hit indies hard, and it hit them first, because we're the biggest commissioner of indies. The phrase is: 'When Channel 4 catches a cold, everyone else does,'" she said.

Osman's other point concerned Channel 4's "trouble creating hits", said Rajan. "*Married at First Sight* is massive. We've just reformed *Hollyoaks* and it had its biggest-ever streaming episode last week. *The Piano* is a huge home-grown hit that came out in the last couple of years. *Merseyside Detectives* was a massive hit this summer.

"So there are hits. Maybe he's not watching them all," Mahon said with a smile, "but I'm happy to send him some links!" ■

Session Five: 'UK Keynote: Alex Mahon'
The CEO of Channel 4 was in conversation with Amol Rajan, journalist and presenter. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.

want to pay to watch as much of it as possible without advertising. Fair enough. But that's not our core business model. It's not even 5% of our business," Mahon said.

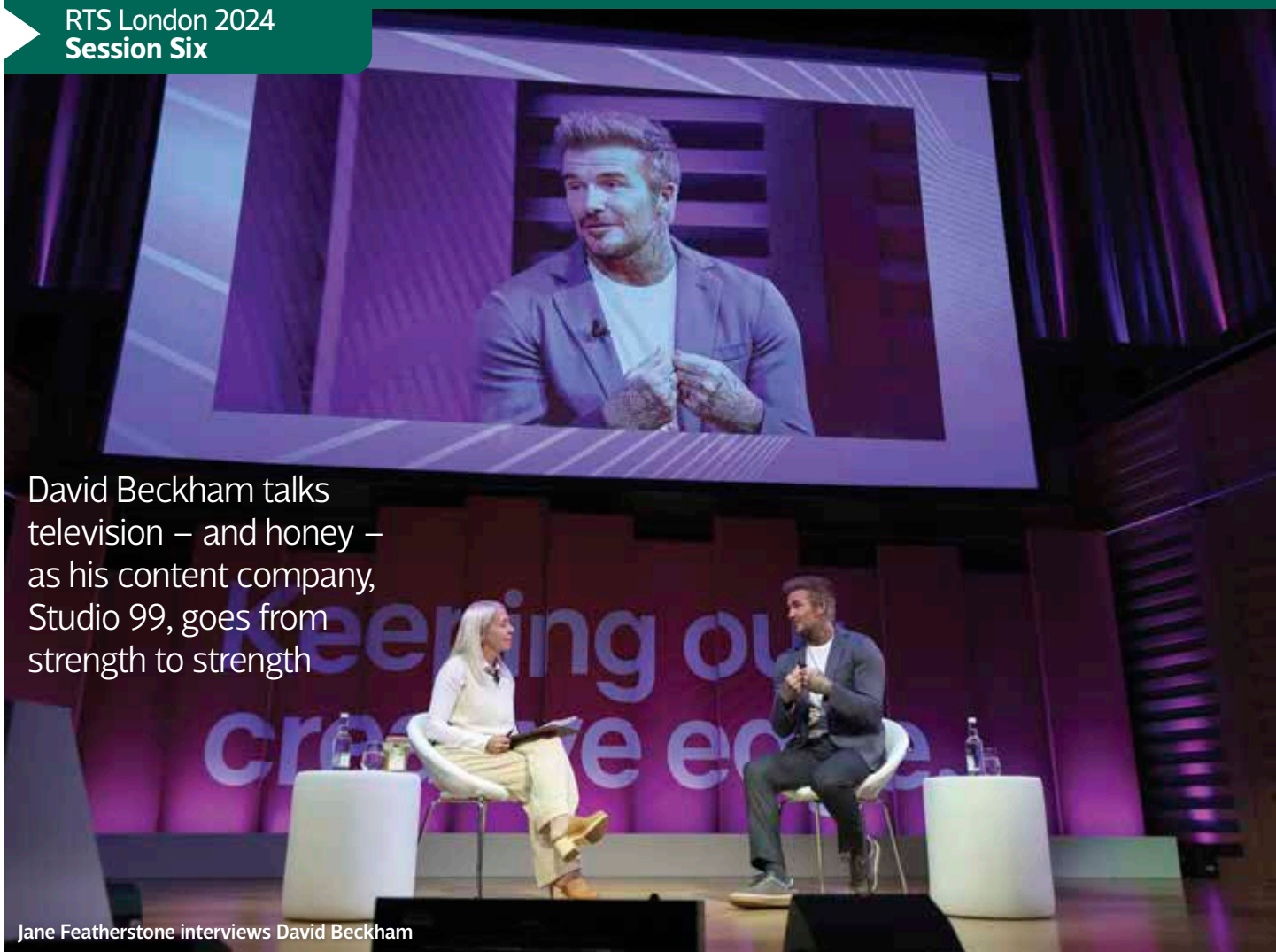
Rajan asked whether a digital eyeball is worth as much as a linear eyeball. A similar question at the last RTS London Convention in 2022 elicited the answer that they were "the same". Now, two years later, Mahon's answer was that "it was worth more", a sentiment echoed by ITV CEO Carolyn McCall during her session later in the day.

This change had come about "because advertisers want to put money into digital, but they want their advertising alongside content that is

high quality, that consumers are very engaged in. And they want a way they can measure it." Mahon said that while digital content made up 18% of Channel 4's viewing, it represented 30% of its advertising revenue.

Talk turned to the abandoned plans to privatise Channel 4. Rajan asked whether, given the fast turnaround in culture secretaries in recent years, Mahon's strategy was to delay the decision until there was a change at the top. "I wish it had felt like that," she said. "I did go in for a meeting and realised it was my 10th Secretary of State. There has been a lot of change.

"The strategy wasn't delay, delay, delay. It was focused on data, facts,



David Beckham talks television – and honey – as his content company, Studio 99, goes from strength to strength

Jane Featherstone interviews David Beckham

Renaissance man

Since retiring from football in 2013, David Beckham has proved himself as nimble and canny in business as he once was on the pitch. The style icon arrived onstage at the convention bearing a gift of his own brand of honey, named Sticky Vicky, which he handed to his interviewer, Jane Featherstone.

Elsewhere in his business empire, he has a stake in the electric car industry. He is co-owner of lower-league Salford City FC and Inter Miami CF, Lionel Messi's current team. And he is a brand himself, with more than 200 million social media followers across all platforms, and partnership deals with Adidas, Maserati, Nespresso and more.

He joined this year's convention to discuss another venture: Studio 99, a content studio offering commercial

and editorial production. Since its launch in 2019, with Nicola Howson and David Gardner as co-owners, Studio 99 has become known for producing sport documentaries including 99 – about the treble-winning season that year of his former team Manchester United – and *Ronnie O'Sullivan: The Edge of Everything*.

The studio's crowning glory, though, is Netflix's *Beckham*, the documentary directed by Fisher Stevens and lauded for its never-before-seen insight into Beckham and his wife, Victoria. He joined the RTS Convention days after it won an Emmy for Outstanding Documentary or Nonfiction Series.

Beckham told the London audience: "I'm very honoured to be here today. To be part of the TV industry, especially in this country, makes me very proud."

The idea to expand his professional

interests to include production came after 25 years of shooting commercials with partner brands, and two post-retirement documentaries of which he was the subject.

His time in the US also inspired him. As Featherstone pointed out, it is more usual for talent to own production companies there than it is here. For Beckham, it was former basketball player Michael Jordan's venture, Outlier Society, that was particularly influential. "I spent so much time there, and I look up to people like Michael Jordan. I've seen him go from his [sporting] career to an entrepreneur, to an owner of a team. I knew I wanted to do that if I ever had that opportunity – and we had the opportunity."

Though the pandemic saw Studio 99 get off to a tricky start, the company soon found its stride. "The shows that

we made, early doors, all came from what I like to watch. Making *99* about Manchester United was such a special moment for us as United fans and the United players,” he said.

Soon came the Disney+ series *Save Our Squad with David Beckham*, a co-production with Twenty Twenty Productions in which he coaches a young football team in the East End of London. “I loved making it because I was working with these young kids who are from where I grew up. I got to know them, and go into their homes and be cooked dinner by their mums,” he said.

Discussing the documentary about legendary snooker player Ronnie O’Sullivan, Beckham said: “I knew people would be interested, not just because he’s the best [player who] ever lived but because he’s a working-class kid who grew up to be exceptional.”

Yet it took time before Beckham was ready to put himself at the centre of a documentary as revealing as his Netflix series. The four-parter gave viewers exclusive access into the highs and lows of his football career, his psyche, and his home life with Victoria.

Beckham revealed: “When I retired, I wasn’t ready to talk about my career and what happened over that time. But coming up to the 10-year anniversary of my retirement from football, I thought maybe this is the right time.

“It worried me, and it made me nervous. It made Victoria nervous. We don’t really let those doors open to our house.” He added: “I hated probably almost every moment of making it,” before correcting himself: “I wouldn’t say I hated it, but it was very difficult.”

He thanked Howson and Gardner for “having his back”, and then addressed the question of authenticity in a project where he was production company owner *and* subject. The key, he explained, was to find the right director, and he found that in Stevens.

“Fisher made me feel uncomfortable from the moment we sat down to talk to the moment I finished. And that’s why I really needed him,” Beckham said. “Everyone kind of knows my career and my life, so I needed someone like him to bring something different out of me.”



Dwight Yorke in a scene from the Manchester United film, *99*

Amazon MGM Studios



David and Victoria with celebrity friends in the Netflix documentary *Beckham*

Netflix

Beckham stayed away from the editing process, and “never saw anything until the moment I watched it at the premiere.

“It was quite emotional, but it was one of those things I knew I was going to make [only] once, and I was going to do it in the way it really should be done. And we loved the results.”

The experience has prompted Victoria Beckham to step forward as the subject of Studio 99’s next documentary series for Netflix. Featherstone asked Beckham if he would give his wife notes. “Do you know my wife? Give my wife notes!” he replied.

‘MY WIFE IS STRONG, DRIVEN AND PASSIONATE. I WANT PEOPLE TO SEE THAT’

“Actually, I’m really excited about this, because she is a strong, driven, passionate person who has gone from being a Spice Girl, as you all know. To be respected in this industry is very tough, and she’s worked hard for the last 17-18 years on her [fashion and beauty] business.

“No one sees the amount of work she puts in it. She’s over everything, from where people sit at the show to what they wear. She’s over every single piece. And I want people to see that.

“It was hard to convince her to do this, but she’d been such a big part of the process with Netflix, and she loved the people and the way they worked. So it’s an exciting time. I think she’s going to do something very special.” ■

Session Six: ‘In conversation with David Beckham’ The Co-founder of Studio 99, was interviewed by Jane Featherstone, Co-founder and CCO, Sister. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Shilpa Ganatra.

Tim Whitby



How to deliver a hit

It is the holy grail of television: launching a guaranteed, solid-gold, ratings winner. But how to do it? There were plenty of insights when Curve Media CEO Camilla Lewis questioned Andy Wilman, executive producer of *Clarkson's Farm* and *The Grand Tour*, and Nicola Shindler, founder of Quay Street Productions. "If anyone knows how to make a hit programme it is these two," said Lewis.

Shindler's many hits include *Happy Valley*, *Last Tango in Halifax* and *Fool Me Once*, the last with 92 million viewers on Netflix. Her main ingredients for success include "brilliant stories" and that "the people I collaborate with are passionate about television and want to make really good, popular shows".

She namechecked Russell T Davies,

Two of the UK's most successful producers share tips on what makes a must-see show

having worked with him on hits such as *It's a Sin*: "He started out storylining on soaps and instinctively knows how to keep an audience, how to pull an audience and how to set up a story. It's an art, but it's a bit of a science as well."

Wilman's long-term collaborator is his old schoolfriend, Jeremy Clarkson; their synergy created the popular second iteration of the BBC's *Top Gear*.

Part of *Top Gear's* success was ensuring it was left alone, said Wilman.

"I think we used to make the [office] a

bit horrible because I wanted to be left alone from execs, I didn't want notes."

But he said one of the keys to the collaboration was Clarkson's background in print: "First and foremost, he's a tabloid print journalist. He trained on the *Rotherham Advertiser* and that element never left him.

"The print journalist thing has gone through everything we do, which in an unscripted world keeps you on track."

Another reason for their success, he said, was: "We're very coalface... Jeremy and I are like a couple of old blokes who started a baker's shop [*Top Gear*] and then it becomes the size of Selfridges and then we're like, 'Oh fuck! I'll go and run haberdashery, and you stay and do the bread and the shoes.' And it got bigger and bigger, and we could not delegate to save our lives."

Andy Wilman,
Camilla Lewis (centre) and
Nicola Shindler



He added: "I would say the coalface element is really important, because I'd die if I got into a position where you go into an edit to just give some notes about something."

"The storytelling, maybe it's personal to me and it can't be transferable, but I grew up with story, story, story. I was really ill when I was about five years old. I had to spend a year in hospital,

immobilised. So all we had were our minds, but we had a kids' society of five- or six-year-olds only. We couldn't move [but] we had gangs, we had arguments. We got into trouble with the adults."

Wilman also credits an affinity with a northern "natural ability to tell a story with dark humour" and said that *Top Gear* was "a vehicle for cars", but also a taste of Friday-night entertainment on Sunday evenings.

He added: "There's been an organic development of each show. We never sat down and planned a hit because I don't think we were clever enough."

Lewis suggested to Shindler that a factor in her success is that she watches the rushes of all her shows. "I don't think there's a different way of doing it really," said Shindler.

"From the very beginning, when something's an idea and it becomes a script, my job was to make sure it's told in the best possible way.

"As soon as a production team comes on board and there's a director, I have to see that the story and what the writer wanted, the authored voice, is translated to screen. So I can see quite quickly whether we

are achieving what we set out to achieve, or whether something better's been added to it by the production team."

Wilman asked: "How can you tell what a good script is? Because those words are so flat on a page."

"It's taste, it's instinct," explained Shindler. She said she looks for "a story that grips me" that is "amusing

because even in the darkest stories I've done, there's that sense of humour, because that keeps an audience.

"I'm constantly thinking about what people want to watch [and]... my job is to make sure something is constantly surprising."

She went on: "I've always watched masses of television. I grew up with soaps on the whole time. I think that's such a brilliant education and that's sometimes put into a category of low-brow television. To me, that's just television."

Lewis said there is often a snobbery around some shows, particularly when they draw large audiences. Shindler said she "would much prefer to have 92 million people watching" her shows and enjoying them, "than have a good review in *The Guardian*. The point of it is that people watch it, the point of it is not to get patted on the back."

Lewis said that many within the sector are scared of failure: "I think

running a company as producers, not being scared, is what you [both] do really well."

Was Wilman ever scared while working on *Top Gear* and *The Grand Tour*? "Richard [Hammond's] first big crash was a real wake-up," he said.

"I remember driving up the M1 and thinking, 'Fuck me, it's a TV show.' I'd just rung the hospital, and they [said] he's in intensive care and we don't know if he's going to make it.

"We'd done everything, so you're not thinking about who's to blame or anything like that, because everything was in place.

"You just think, 'He's got a wife and two children, what are you doing?'"

Wilman said that the first series of *Clarkson's Farm* was the only show that he and Clarkson worked on where they thought, "Fuck, can we really pull this off? Amazon's scared. Jeremy's scared... we were just scared that it would be boring." ■

'I'D MUCH RATHER HAVE 92 MILLION PEOPLE SEEING MY SHOW THAN A GOOD REVIEW IN THE GUARDIAN'



Camilla Lewis (left)
with Nicola Shindler

All photographs by Tim Whitby

Session Seven: 'The Hitmakers': Nicola Shindler, Executive Producer and CEO, Quay Street Productions, and Andy Wilman, television producer and writer, were interviewed by Camilla Lewis, CEO, Curve Media. The producer was Diana Muir. Report by Tara Conlan.

How do we value our industry?

As more consolidation looms in the independent sector, our panel discusses a rapidly evolving market

Financial and cultural value were discussed in an illuminating session that offered insights from what panel chair, *The Telegraph's* audio director Kamal Ahmed, called “three titans in the area”.

Jane Featherstone, co-founder and CCO of Sister, commented on the current climate affecting the valuation of companies. “We’re in a state of change,” she said. “Budgets have risen, largely driven by getting movie talent in above the line,” she said. The feeling was that what was wanted wasn’t really TV any more, but long movies. This, she said, “pushed all the costs up”.

The past few months had been particularly difficult for indies, said Featherstone: “Some have closed down and people are losing their jobs. So, it’s hard to sit here and talk about value, but we have to find the green shoots. Producers like me are trying to navigate how we have a mixed ecology.”

“The market’s evolving. The risks are that we lose storytelling at the edges, that we’re unable to tell the stories regionally and... give voice to those people who need to tell their stories.”

Ahmed said that Stephen Lambert, founder of Studio Lambert, “has

spoken about a kind of top tier of maybe 12 or so big players” in future, with the rest of the market comprised of smaller-scale companies. Did Featherstone think the market would evolve in this way?

“Any business you value, it’s about the talent involved,” she said. “Those companies that have bandwidth, strength [and] investment will be able to survive these storms more easily. There’s no question about it. But then it’s our responsibility to partner with those newer companies... we have to actively protect that and make sure that ecosystem survives.”

Harry Hampson, JP Morgan’s Global Chairman, EMEA, was an advisor on the sale of All3Media to RedBird IMI.

He told the audience: “I’m aware of how difficult things are at the moment but I have to say, in general, that markets are

becoming more optimistic.

“So, although I’m very sensitive to the current situation, I would be optimistic if I were all of you, because what we found with All3 was there was a lot of interest... [there were] 15 parties who were serious. Not just Americans; a lot of international parties... were interested.”

‘ALL OF YOU ARE IN AN INDUSTRY THAT IS INCREDIBLY DYNAMIC AND ATTRACTIVE TO INVESTORS’



He said: “It’s like selling your home. You’ve got to get numerous buyers interested. And we were able, with the team at All3, to create a very competitive auction, because, fundamentally, there was a lot of attraction to the business and in being invested in this sector.”

“All of you are involved in an industry that is incredibly dynamic and still incredibly attractive to investors.”

Consolidation was a way of creating a sustainable business because of economies of scale, said Hampson. He predicted “fewer linear broadcasters in the future”, and said it was likely that streaming services would “rationalise, in some ways, in terms of who they’re



Harry Hampson



Jane Featherstone



Kamal Ahmed



Richard Sharp

‘BUSINESSES WITH IP WILL BE VALUED MORE HIGHLY THAN THOSE JUST DOING IT AT A MARGIN’

the future because you own the rights and you know that those rights are likely to continue to yield value in the years ahead.”

Hampson went on: “So those businesses with IP, typically in production, are going to be valued more highly than those who are just doing it at a margin.”

Breadth of customer base is another factor – so the company is not reliant on just a couple of suppliers – plus talent. He revealed that All3 and Shine, which he also sold, got about the same multiple, “roughly 12 times EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation). “But like selling anything, it’s to do with the competition, and those people who are actually in the auction room at the end.”

Hampson was also involved in the previous government’s attempt to sell Channel 4: “I was very optimistic that we could not only achieve a good price for the government but: also impose on the buyers conditions that would have allowed many of the things to survive that Channel 4, and all of you, hold dear.”

He was asked if BBC Studios could be valued and sold. “I don’t think it’s too difficult. Clearly there’s a relationship with the BBC that would need to be carefully set out... I believe that [it] could be sold. I’m not saying whether it *should* be sold [but] it always strikes me as odd that a publicly funded vehicle is competing in a commercial market.” ■

Session Eight: ‘How do we value our industry?’ Kamal Ahmed, Director of Audio, The Telegraph, interviewed Jane Featherstone, Co-Founder and CCO, Sister, Harry Hampson, Global Chairman – Investment Banking/Corporate & Investment Bank EMEA, JP Morgan, and Richard Sharp, Partner, SW7 and former Chair, BBC. The producer was Helen Scott. Report by Tara Conlan.

All photographs by Tim Whitby

targeting”. He also foresaw “further moves in consolidation in the production industry in the... next 12 months”.

Richard Sharp, a partner at investment house SW7 and a former BBC Chair, pointed to Netflix and its sky-high share price, noting “how much wealth has been created there”. He said: “The good news... if you’re thinking strategically, is more money is going to come into the industry globally. The question for all of you is: ‘What is the ecosystem that capitalises on the UK’s competitive advantage and will continue to ensure that we don’t get hollowed out in terms of our capabilities?’”

The sector had some advantages, he

noted, including artificial intelligence, the English language and the spending power of the BBC. But while he was optimistic, Sharp warned that UK plc as a whole faced risks. “Will we be hollowed out or will we have enterprise value here?” he asked.

Where do you start when you are valuing a business, Ahmed asked Hampson. The banker replied that it is similar to any other company: “You look at the future rather than the past. The past is evidence of what you could potentially create in the future, but it’s all about your future plans and how reliable and predictable it is.

“One of the things about IP ownership is that it obviously underpins

A photograph of Carolyn McCall, CEO of ITV, speaking at a conference. She is wearing a dark green blazer and has her hands raised in a gesture while speaking. The background is a blurred red wall with some white text.

UK keynote Carolyn McCall

ITVX is on a roll and advertising is recovering... but the broadcaster's CEO is not resting on her laurels

TV's digital transformation. The ever-changing nature of advertising. The ethics of Ed Balls interviewing his wife, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, on *Good Morning Britain*: these were some of the topics discussed when Amol Rajan interviewed ITV CEO Carolyn McCall.

Two years ago, the pair were on the same stage, discussing the then soon-to-be launched streaming service, ITVX; this year, McCall reported viewer growth for the platform at 26%, with 1.5bn streams and monthly users up by 3m to 15m. She said: "ITVX has been a success. For me, the most important thing is that we're getting more frequency, so more people are coming more often to ITVX... 90% of people that come will go on and watch something else.

"The market is better. But more

importantly, I think we have really transformed the business. And we've got so much more to do – we're only 30% to 40% of the way in."

Yet things have not been easy in the past two years. "It has been tough," said McCall, especially for independents and free-to-air broadcasters such as ITV. She does not like the term "market correction" to describe 2023 – a year hit by the US writers' and actors' strikes, and European broadcasters "commissioning less content because they were looking at protecting their profits, because they had to".

"But, actually, 2023 was still a higher year in terms of revenue than 2019 for production," she pointed out.

ITV was also affected by the cost-of-living crisis. McCall said: "Linear advertising is deeply tied to the economy and it is cyclical." As the economy

has improved so has the market: "This year is still not easy – nothing is easy – but the ad market has recovered. Talking to a lot of my counterparts in Europe – TF1, RTL all of them – they're finding it much easier, and they're all talking about commissioning."

ITV has diversified to make itself less dependent on advertising. McCall said: "By 2026, we're pretty confident that two-thirds" of ITV's revenue "will come from digital and studios".

"It has been a marked shift... this was all about strategically ensuring we were not wholly dependent on linear advertising. Our whole strategy [is] to diversify away from that, expand studios, get the right kinds of companies into the portfolio of studios and, obviously, digital businesses."

Has the story been sufficiently appreciated by the stock market, asked

'WE WANT TO THRIVE FOR THE NEXT 70 YEARS. BUT IF WE STAY AS WE ARE, WE'RE NOT GOING TO DO THAT'

Rajan. It is tough for UK-based consumer businesses in the City, McCall replied: "We're a bellwether... because we take so much money from advertising. Our shareholders believe the story... but sometimes the market is impatient."

"Everyone wants transformation to happen in about five days. Actually, it takes much longer than that."

Part of the transformation has included efficiencies and "headlines about how you've cut 200 roles earlier this year", said Rajan, to which McCall responded: "That is because we're facing into the future and we're having to look at everything we do."

"We want to be around for the next 70 years and thriving. If we stay as we are, we're not going to do that. We have to look at everything all the time."

Rajan asked McCall: "You shut

CITV... Are you currently looking at shutting down any other channels?"

McCall said the children's channel "just didn't make sense... with a lot of stuff being done online", adding: "I don't have an answer. We are not planning to shut any [more channels] but we're going to have to keep that under review."

Some channels might not rate highly but "they might be doing something different for us. That's fine... it's very important we don't only do things for profit [though] we are a commercial PSB... We don't get a cheque at the beginning of the year," she said, looking pointedly – to audience laughter – at the BBC presenter.

Rajan wondered, after Ofcom received 16,000 complaints about Balls co-interviewing Cooper on *GMB* in early August: "How can anyone take ITV seriously on impartiality when you've got a former Labour cabinet minister interviewing his wife?"

McCall said the Home Secretary unexpectedly agreed to appear on the show at short notice due to the summer riots in Britain. She said Ofcom was not pursuing viewers' complaints.

"Would we do it again? No. But was it impartial, fair and balanced and did they behave professionally? Yes."

Rajan asked about the impact for ITV of the Government's ban on adverts for junk food before 9pm from October 2025. McCall replied: "Ninety-five per cent of adults watch ITV, kids are on YouTube... the demographic trends are that TV doesn't attract kids [aged] 16-to-25, they're not on TV much. They will come for the odd shows, [but] you can't have it both ways."

"We've done loads of research that says this is not going to make a dent in

childhood obesity. But it is a political thing, so we're going to have to mitigate it in any way we can."

Its impact will cost ITV "millions and millions of pounds" which "might affect the content market and the way we do some other things, including events."

Mr Bates vs the Post Office has given ITV its biggest hit since McCall arrived. This year it won three National TV Awards. But because of its UK-centric subject, it's unlikely to be a global moneyspinner, said Rajan.

This prompted a discussion about how advertising is changing in the context of ratings for catch-up and on-demand services.

McCall explained: "*Mr Bates* started at 4 million and ended at 15 million per episode. And every single one of our top dramas... were around 4 million on the overnights ... and they all tripled or doubled in size in 28 days."

"And you can monetise that now. It's not just about on linear. It's also about what you are going to get on VoD. I think the way to look at ratings should be very different, both from the production industry, and obviously with advertisers."

"Advertisers have got to start changing quite dramatically the way they actually look at how they pay for that. They shouldn't just be paying for C7 [the first seven days]. It means you look at 28 days [as] people are [still] watching it... you're still giving them audience, you're still giving them great context." ■

Session Nine: 'UK keynote, Carolyn McCall'
The ITV CEO was interviewed by journalist and presenter Amol Rajan. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Tara Conlan.



All photographs by Tim Whitby



All photographs by Tim Whitby

How safe is our news?

The uneasy relationship between traditional TV news organisations and big tech was explored in this session. To start the discussion, the session Chair, Sky News presenter Barbara Serra, heard a warning from Canada via video, where the Online News Act passed last year tried to force the likes of Meta and Google to pay news companies for using their content online.

Professor Aengus Bridgman from McGill University told RTS delegates that a Government-backed attempt to get tech outfits to compensate news providers had backfired. “The idea was to support local journalism,” said Bridgman. “Google agreed to pay \$100m but Meta decided to cut all news from its flagship social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram.

“This has had a huge impact on the Canadian news industry because there was a 43% drop in news engagement

Current affairs audiences are increasingly going online, posing a serious threat to the business of TV news providers

across social media platforms. On Facebook and Instagram, it was about 90%. We estimated this amounted to a million fewer views a day to original reporting,” Bridgman said.

Was there a lesson here for UK news organisations? Bridgman replied: “When news providers have a mediated relationship with their audiences on social media via their algorithms, they are very vulnerable to decisions by Meta and the political classes.

“For news providers, there is a need to cultivate a one-to-one relationship with audiences”

Should regulators act to protect

news providers? Madhav Chinnappa, from Human Native AI, said there was a series of questions to be asked before regulatory intervention: What’s the problem you’re trying to address? Is the mechanism you’re using appropriate? And does it deliver the desired outcomes?

He added: “The problem we’re all trying to address is that there’s a market sustainability problem in news.”

As an aside, Serra revealed that Meta had been invited to appear on the panel but had declined.

Rachel Corp, CEO of ITN, said the theme of the convention was audiences, and the Canadian experience showed they had lost out. “They’re not getting that breadth of content they used to. When it comes to regulation in the UK, there are things to watch... Ofcom’s recent research showed that UK audiences value trusted, impartial PSB journalism, which needs protecting.” Corp added: “The discussion over

sustainable funding is a lot bigger than trying to get tech to pay for certain bits of content on certain platforms.

“At ITN, we welcome the Media Act and the idea of what prominence is going to look like for PSBs. We’ve innovated and taken news to where our audiences are – during the election, across all our services, we saw a lot of content on TikTok and YouTube.

“We can do that because we have the relative stability of contracts with broadcasters. We need to hold on to that and know that in the next 10 years we can keep up that level of quality journalism, even as the business models of our clients change.”

Ofcom CEO Melanie Dawes said the regulator’s latest news consumption survey showed a tipping point in how people watch news; 71% of adults said they access news online. She said: “Only a year ago, 75% of adults said they got their news from TV regulated by Ofcom. That has now fallen to 70%, and it’s lower than social media. For young people, it’s already less than half because they’re ahead of the overall trend.”

Online news may be in the ascendant, yet most people, including young people, don’t trust what they read or

Where does YouTube stand on all this? “News really matters to YouTube,” said Iain Bundred, representing the company. “It matters to us as a business, but most of all it matters to our audiences. The core of that is the public service ecosystem, which is critical to trust in British content and quality journalism that we want on our platform. When there’s a breaking story, it’s high-quality journalists (pointing to Corp) like yours who are reporting quickly and putting out the most accurate information.”

This was all well and good, said the ITN CEO, but there remained a lack of transparency. “Yes, on a big [news] day, it’s brilliant to see our content getting to the top of what’s trending on YouTube, but that’s one day, and we don’t necessarily know how it gets there on another day.

“Another issue is that our television content must comply with Ofcom standards. We don’t have to do that for digital content, but we chose to...

reporting on mpox that “disappeared on TikTok”. At the end of the day, it’s users who suffer, said Corp.

Bundred agreed that YouTube had to get age-appropriate experiences right. Regarding transparency, trending only told you so much, he noted. “It’s indicative rather than following the audience’s journey.” A key factor was sharing data with the likes of ITN so

that both parties understood what content was working.

YouTube data showed which pockets of the UK were watching a particular video and if they completed their view-

ing of the clip. “Hopefully, that can feed back into the editorial loop,” Bundred said. “Of course, we can always do more but it’s important to remind people here just how much data is there.”

Corp urged YouTube to pass on its good practice to other platforms.

Dawes said that, under the Online Safety Act, big online platforms are obliged to say how they deal with “content of democratic importance”. The Ofcom CEO stressed: “Transparency is so important. Until now, you’ve had global community guidelines. We now have UK and European laws...

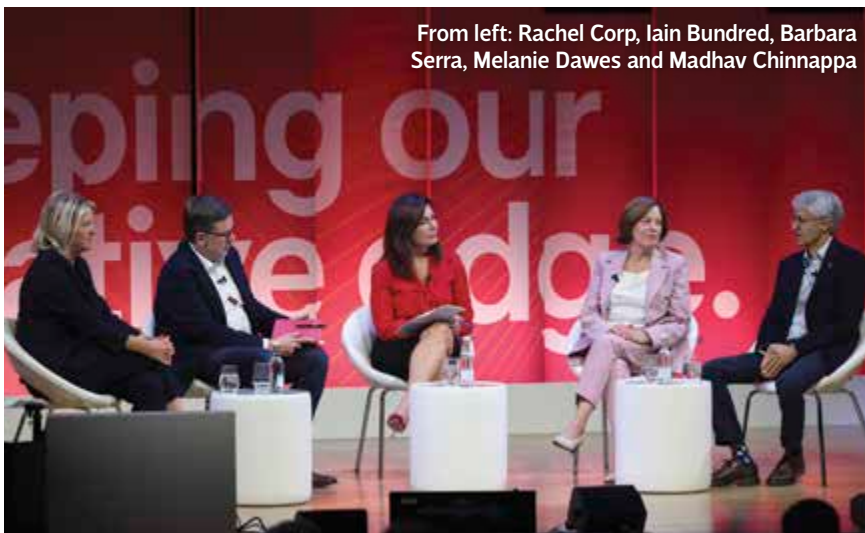
“This stuff is complex. On one level, you have a regulated product that is fine to show before the watershed. Tiny children are not going to be watching *Channel 4 News* unsupervised by their parents. (But) they may well be watching YouTube on an iPad unsupervised.”

Did ITN feel vulnerable because news audiences are increasingly moving online? “I don’t know about vulnerable. I think we feel stretched because we have to put content everywhere,” replied Corp. “It comes back to making sure that collectively – we, regulators and the Government – get the whole PSB landscape right.

“That is what will give us seven more decades of important journalism. If we get that right, I’m optimistic.” ■

Session Ten: ‘How Safe is Our News?’
Barbara Serra, Sky News Presenter, interviewed Iain Bundred, Head of Public Policy for UK and Northern Europe, YouTube, Madhav Chinnappa, VP, Partnerships, Human Native AI, Rachel Corp, CEO, ITN, and Melanie Dawes, CEO, Ofcom. The producer was Diana Muir. Report by Steve Clarke.

‘PEOPLE ARE GOING DOWN A RABBIT HOLE WHERE THEY’RE UNABLE TO SPOT FAKE NEWS’



From left: Rachel Corp, Iain Bundred, Barbara Serra, Melanie Dawes and Madhav Chinnappa

watch on social media. Dawes said: “People are choosing to spend their time on a more diverse range of platforms than ever before. Our research shows that, if you do get your news from social media, you’re more likely to go down a rabbit hole of being unable to spot fake news and not seeing a range of different opinions.

“Your own opinion is played back to you all the time. That starts to be a concern for our democracy.”

“For example, we have found that some of our content on difficult stories, such as some of the *Channel 4 News* reporting from Gaza containing some very harrowing eyewitness reporting, fell foul of the age rating because you have to be over 18 to watch it.”

For ITN, the positive point is that the news organisation and YouTube are talking – unlike some other digital platforms “where our content just disappears”. An example was some



Secretary of State keynote

Culture Secretary **Lisa Nandy** talks tough on the duty of broadcasters and producers to reflect our entire national story

For the first time in 15 years, a Labour Culture Secretary took to the stage at an RTS convention. Lisa Nandy, appointed in early July, mounted a

passionate defence of public service broadcasting, telling broadcasters and streamers to be less London-centric – and giving a shout-out to beloved CBBC puppet Hacker T Dog, who hails from her own Wigan constituency.

She praised children’s TV for being “one of the things your industry and our country is brilliant at”.

Changing technology had led to a media revolution since Labour was last in power in 2010. “There is a choice ahead of us. Whether we choose to be the last guardians of this chapter, or the first pioneers of the next,” said the Culture Secretary.

“So today I’m laying out how our new Government will go about helping to create the conditions for this new era... And being clear about the change we need from you in return.”

There was praise for Channel 4 opening a regional HQ in Leeds, which had been “a gamechanger for West Yorkshire”, and the BBC’s move to Salford. But more needed to be done, she said, as she urged convention delegates to up their game in terms of their regional responsibilities and employing local people:

“For all the efforts made by many of you in this room, it should shame us all that television is one of the most centralised and exclusive industries in the

UK, because who tells the story determines the story told.

“If you aren’t commissioning content from every part of the country – towns and villages as well as major cities – why not?”

“If you bus people in rather than recruit locally, stop it. Talent is everywhere. Opportunity is not.

“And if you’ve moved jobs and people and content, but the heads of departments and commissioners are all still in an office in London, do something about it...”

Echoing James Graham’s much admired recent MacTaggart Lecture, in which the writer of *Sherwood* and *Quiz* called for greater working-class representation in British TV, Nandy highlighted the fact that only 8% of people who work in UK television are working class.

The Secretary of State praised *Peaky Blinders* creator Steven Knight’s determination to provide local youngsters in Birmingham with opportunities to work in the screen sector and recruit people from the most deprived communities and build affordable housing. That way they can walk to work.

For him this is not just a passion, she said, it’s good business sense. Knight’s local workforce was an asset that attracts people. The Government was considering what more it can do to help “these incredible projects to succeed”.

“He was at pains to tell me how much he benefits from the wider broadcasting ecosystem, particularly ▶

Tim Whitby

► the BBC, whose investment in skills underpins so much that others are able to do,” she added.

The BBC’s future was the “most fundamental question facing us”. Its role in our national life cannot be filled elsewhere. “Every TV project I’ve visited as Culture Secretary has a contribution from the BBC behind it somewhere along the line, whether it’s content, training or commissioning.”

She continued: “For too long the BBC has been caught between the state and the market – with obligations that create an unlevel playing field but increasingly reliant on commercial income.”

On the key question of the licence fee’s future, Nandy said the government was committed to retaining it at a very minimum for the rest of this charter period, but acknowledged this method of funding the corporation was “increasingly challenging”.

“It’s my view that for too long ministers have patched this up, with pressure to commercialise sitting uneasily alongside the BBC’s ability to provide content for all audiences. And I believe that this is untenable.

“And that the importance of the obligations placed on the BBC – especially when it comes to the World Service – shows the vital need for sustainable public funding.

‘WE WILL DO
ALL WE CAN TO
PUT ROCKET
BOOSTERS
UNDER YOUR
EFFORTS’

“The next charter review has to ensure the BBC doesn’t just survive but thrives for decades to come.”

In recent weeks, she has raised the idea of the BBC being recast as a mutually owned entity on the lines of the original building societies and hinted at this idea in the following: “As part of that, the most important consideration is how to ensure the public feel ownership of their national broadcaster. That it belongs to and is responsive to them. That it enriches their lives, wherever they live and whatever their background.

“A truly national broadcaster in which all of us have a stake.”

Regarding UK public service broadcasting per se, the new minister was unequivocally positive and contrasted her view with recent Conservative administrations.

“We believe in public service broadcasting. For too long, the Tories came to conferences like this and talked about recognising the value of public service broadcasters, while undermining trust, assaulting credibility and sowing uncertainty. Our Government will be different.”

But public service involved reflecting all parts of the UK. “Frankly, if you don’t know why the film industry is so attracted to the beauty of Sunderland, or why the arts sector is buzzing in



Bradford, or the potential to TV of the Welsh valleys, it’s most likely because you’ve never been there,” stressed Nandy. “And you have no right to call yourself a public service broadcaster. Because public service means serving the whole people, recognising their contribution and reflecting them in our national story.”

Nandy’s mother was Head of News at Granada Television, working under her maiden name, Luise Byers. Her stepfather was RTS award-winning investigative journalist Ray Fitzwalter. But today’s news environment could not be more different from her parents’ era with the increasing dominance of social media platforms.

“Profound changes to how and where people get their news matter,” she noted. “When warring political tribes with separate news sources and information feeds construct their own realities it costs us dear, it costs us the ability to understand one another.

“We’ve seen how pernicious, unchecked disinformation fanned the flames of violence this summer in our towns and cities.”

If trust in the media was to be restored, broadcasters needed to be truthful, not neutral, she said,



Nandy praised Steven Knight, creator of *Peaky Blinders*

BBC

QUESTION & ANSWER

Q Anna Mallett Has your family background in news and current affairs affected your perception of the industry?

A Lisa Nandy Very much, but the industry has changed hugely since my mum and dad were at Granada TV. My dad [Dipak Nandy] was a member of the Annan Committee that set up Channel 4. That has certainly shaped my belief in the power of television.

People in this room are storytellers and they tell the story of our country. That's why I passionately believe that everyone in our country, regardless of background or geography, has to see themselves and their lives and communities reflected...

My dad [stepfather Ray Fitzwalter] made groundbreaking documentaries such as *Who Bombed Birmingham?*, instrumental in exposing the miscarriage of justice around the Birmingham Six.

I'll never forget Hillsborough. We'd gone to Manchester to get our hair cut. People at Granada's Quay Street office were shouting to my mum [then Head of News at Granada] to come on up...

My sister and I spent the entire night in the newsroom sleeping under a desk. From my recollection, she was the only woman in the newsroom and the only person who had to think about childcare.

Q Anna Mallett Labour has come to power with a national mission for economic growth. Where do you see the potential for growth?

A Lisa Nandy The growth in the creative industries is incredibly exciting. There are some amazing projects all over the country... I want to reiterate the importance we place on the tax credit system introduced by Gordon Brown.

We're already working with the Education Secretary on making sure the apprentice levy is fit for purpose. And we've kicked off a curriculum review that puts creative education back at the centre of the curriculum.



Lisa Nandy with Anna Mallett

Tim Whitby

referencing CNN's awarding-winning reporter Christiane Amanpour. "That is not just your right, but your duty. It is crucial to whether this country succeeds.

"Because without the ability to speak truth to power, to hold up a mirror to the way government operates, we will never remedy the catastrophic collapse of trust in politics itself, the only tool that working-class people in our country have ever had to create change," said Nandy.

She highlighted the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's work tackling incitement and disinformation through the Online Safety Act.

The Media Act, passed during Rishi Sunak's last days in power, brought important reforms to the regulation of television and radio services. This would ensure that, as the way we consume media changes, the landscape changes with them. Ofcom, set up by Tony Blair in 2002, would start implementing the Act immediately.

The regulator's review of the video on demand market had also begun. This would lay the ground for a more level playing field for all mainstream services, with VoD services regulated to the same standards as traditional

broadcasters. Crucially, the prominence of public service content would be maintained.

"I know it isn't easy," concluded the Culture Secretary. "The costs are short term, the payoff is long term. In Westminster, there are still people who grumble about Media City – even after all these years and so much success.

"But there is so much at stake, and it's my belief that an industry that belongs to the nation is an industry that will not just survive but thrive. That is what I want to see. We will do everything we can to put rocket boosters under your efforts, but that effort in the first place belongs to you all.

"And just think what we will create through us doing our bit and you doing yours. With a new relationship based on respect for one another. A television industry that leads the world and is the pride of all of Britain. Thriving well into the latter half of this century. That is what we will build, together." ■

Session Eleven: 'Secretary of State Keynote: 'A new era for British Broadcasting'; was a speech given by Lisa Nandy, MP. She was interviewed by Anna Mallett, Vice President, EMEA/UK, Netflix. The producer was Sue Robertson. Report by Steve Clarke.

The Rest Is Television

After 11 compelling sessions featuring British TV royalty, not forgetting the charming David Beckham and Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy's maiden voyage at an RTS event, it was time to spool back on some of the convention's most memorable moments.

Who better to sum up a day of high-powered TV talk than the hosts of the must-listen media podcast *The Rest Is Entertainment*, Marina Hyde and Richard Osman?

The dynamic duo began at the beginning. Their verdict on Ted Sarandos's opening session? "He loves Britain, he wants to look after Britain," pronounced Hyde.

"That was reassuring," chipped in Osman, the *Pointless* creator and erstwhile Endemol executive. "We've all been in the business a long time. By and large, we don't know what we're doing, but he [Sarandos] knows how to turn 10% of viewing into 25%."

Osman said Sarandos seemed reluctant to discuss the controversy over the streamer's Emmy award-winning *Baby Reindeer*, a subject debated more than once on *The Rest Is Entertainment*.

He maintained there was a "duty of care" issue involved. Had the show

Podcast hosts Marina Hyde and Richard Osman cast an irreverent eye over the day's proceedings

been broadcast on the BBC, he thought it would have carried the warning "some of it has been made up". To audience laughter, he added: "Had Tim Davie put out *Baby Reindeer* he probably would have been fired."

Osman's favourite bit of the Netflix chief's appearance? Yes, you guessed it: Sarandos name-checking *The Thursday Murder Club*, written by... Richard Osman, and now a Netflix production. No reason, then, not to bite the hand that feeds you.

**'HAD TIM DAVIE
PUT OUT
BABY REINDEER,
HE PROBABLY
WOULD HAVE
BEEN FIRED'**

And so the banter continued, barbs coming thick and fast, many of them unprintable. But credit to Netflix for giving these two mischief-makers a platform.

Moving to Session Three, in which Amol Rajan grilled Tim Davie, Osman advised: "Leave the guy alone." If only, the *Daily Mail* and its allies could dial down their BBC-bashing.

Marina Hyde's take on the BBC Director-General's encounter with the *Today* presenter was this: "I would really like it if the BBC was *not* making so much news." Wouldn't we all!

As an aside, Hyde asked Osman if he'd been invited to appear on the new season of *Strictly*. (Were he to join the BBC entertainment flagship, his height might make finding a suitable partner challenging.) He said that he had – and not for the first time. "I always say I don't have time to do all the training and have the affair."

Cue audience laughter, and the in-jokes didn't let up. Pact chief John McVay, renowned for asking questions at RTS Conferences, didn't escape. Osman called out: "Strepsils for John McVay – you've put in a shift!"

Next came the duo's verdict on the session spotlighting *Peaky Blinders* creator Steven Knight. "I very much enjoyed hearing all about his plans,"



Richard Osman quips...



Marina Hyde jests...



Ted Sarandos cracks up!

All photographs by Tim Whitby



said Hyde. “He was very cool,” agreed Osman. “Imagine inventing *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and not even mentioning it.” Imagine.

“He likened the creative process to dreaming,” noted Hyde. “No one in a dream comes in and gives you a big line of exposition.”

The pair turned their attention to the sensitive topic of Rajan’s interview with Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon. One point of discussion was Osman’s no-holds-barred criticism of Channel 4 in an edition of *The Rest Is Entertainment*.

“Our podcast got a special mention,” Hyde purred. “I enjoyed Amol using you as a stick to beat Channel 4. For your own protection, I’m going to move you on to another session.”

That was “The Hitmakers”. “I loved Nicola (Shindler) and Andy (Wilman). They were brilliant,” said Hyde. “I want Jeremy Clarkson to buy a newspaper [Wilman is Clarkson’s producer]. *The Observer* is for sale.”

Osman: “What is it, £2.20?”

He added: “I tell you who could buy *The Observer*. The banker Harry Hampson [a panellist on Session Eight: ‘How

‘THERE WERE A FEW NOTES OF OPTIMISM BUT EVERY ONE CAME FROM SOMEBODY WHO OWNS THEIR OWN YACHT’

do we value our industry?’]. He was my favourite speaker of the whole day.”

“He will price you up anything,” said Hyde to guffaws from the audience. “The BBC, a prize fowl. You stick it on the block, and he’ll tell how much it’s worth. I loved him.”

Osman quipped: “There were a few notes of optimism today, but I noticed every single one was from somebody who owns their own yacht.”

Hyde countered: “I’ve heard so much optimism here today that it wouldn’t surprise me if we go outside and the world is on fire.” Osman continued the fire theme: “The optimism always

came from people who are used to buying fire-damaged goods.”

Time was running out as delegates turned their thoughts to a well-earned post-convention drink. Glasses of Pimms were already being lined up at the bar, where two masked *Squid Game* guards stood sentry.

Was there one last word from the titanic twosome? Of course there was. “Lisa Nandy believes in public service broadcasting. I got the vibe that she wants everybody to move out of London,” said Hyde.

“If she loves Media City that much, she’s very welcome to come on to *House of Games*,” was (almost) Osman’s final comment.

“That felt really quick,” he concluded. “When you think how long some of those other sessions were.” ■

Session Twelve: ‘The Rest Is Television’ featured Marina Hyde, columnist and writer, and Richard Osman, author, producer and television presenter, hosts of The Rest Is Entertainment podcast. The producers were Marina Hyde and Richard Osman. Report by Steve Clarke.

There can't be many funerals where poems by such radically different poets as Gerard Manley Hopkins, an English Jesuit priest, and Allen Ginsberg, the Beat Buddhist whose verse influenced Bob Dylan, are read as part of the service. But Simon Albury, the former CEO of the RTS, who has died aged 80, was one of a kind and someone who possessed eclectic tastes and passions.

He lived his life in many different circles, drawing from a remarkably diverse group of people to enjoy it with. I was fortunate enough to attend Simon's 80th birthday in February and was struck by the remarkable variety of the guests' backgrounds.

They encompassed everyone from the rich and the famous to the secretaries who had worked for him during a career that saw him hobnob with Cabinet ministers and make films about John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and Millie Jackson, and arresting *World in Action* documentaries on such difficult subjects as nuclear war and the 1978-1979 "winter of discontent".

Few can claim to have changed the course of British broadcasting history, but that was what he did when, in 1989, he set up the Campaign for Quality Television. He was concerned that Margaret Thatcher's plans for selling the licences for regional ITV franchises to the highest bidder risked destroying a carefully calibrated television ecology. This had enabled companies such as Thames, Yorkshire and Granada, particularly Granada, to beat the BBC at its own game.

In a letter published in the *Financial Times*, Simon wrote: "Money to the Treasury is the Government's overriding concern; and viewers will be offered programmes of lower quality and narrower range."

Simon persuaded the Thatcher Government to water down its scheme by ensuring that bidders had to pass a quality threshold before the size of their bids was considered. One consequence was that Granada retained its licence despite a higher bid from a rival that failed to pass the quality test.

"He had the heart and soul of a public service broadcaster," says Peter Bazalgette, the erstwhile ITV Chair who, when he was the RTS President, worked closely with Simon at the Society. "Simon understood what public service values were, and he

'An electric current'



That was how his friend Michael Palin described Simon Albury. **Steve Clarke** recalls an extraordinary life lived at full throttle

wanted to take those values into the 21st century. He carried on working for them after he left the RTS, with his work on diversity, which he cared very deeply about.

"He was always on the BBC's case, [and] sometimes he irritated people. In retrospect, I think they realised he was exerting a positive force.... Simon was a

mensch, an absolute mensch." In other words, a person of integrity and honour.

Simon was born in Birmingham to Eileen (nee Lloyd-Jones) and Cyril Albury. His father, who was Jewish, was a jeweller. Those who knew his mother said it was from Eileen that Simon got his flamboyant personality. "She was like Sophie Tucker, a huge

character,” recalls one of Simon’s oldest friends.

When Simon was 12, Cyril told his son that, because he was Jewish, he was banned from joining the local golf club. This dark revelation had a profound impact on Simon, who began to see the world in a different light.

He boarded happily in a Jewish house at Clifton College in Bristol. He read sociology at Nottingham and Sussex universities, respectively gaining a BA and MA in the subject. However, it was living in the US in the early 1960s – having won a scholarship to Brandeis University, Massachusetts – that was to have a profound and lasting impact on him.

He loved the energy and culture that the US offered but despised the racism and segregation. In 1963, he joined Martin Luther King Jr’s seminal civil rights march on Washington. It was at Brandeis that he became a close friend of Ginsberg. He was “a great inspiration, as a writer, as a performer and an activist,” Simon told Andrew Billen for a profile in this magazine.

Later, when Simon had returned to England and was married with a son, David, the scion of the beat generation and confidant of rock royalty would often visit the Albury family home. As Ginsberg encouraged David to write his own verse, David came to regard the elderly poet as a surrogate grandfather.

Simon’s first job in TV came in 1969 when he joined the Granada *World in Action* team. The same year, he was offered a job at BBC current affairs working on *Man Alive* and *24 Hours*, the precursor to *Newsnight*. In those days, the department was a deeply competitive place, bristling with machismo.

“At *24 Hours*, I had a bottle of kaolin and morph in the filing cabinet... I was a very anxious person,” he confessed to Billen. “I used to think of myself as an average producer on above-average programmes. I now think I was a slightly above-average producer working with incredible producers.”

At the BBC, he made friendships that would last a lifetime, including with such heavyweights as BBC TV reporters Tom Mangold and Tom Bower, later to become a successful biographer.

Rejoining Granada in 1974, he again worked on *World In Action* and also produced *What the Papers Say* – essential viewing for anyone fascinated by media. While working as a TV producer, Simon moonlighted as alter ego

Sam Smith, hosting Britain’s first black-American gospel music show for London’s Capital Radio.

Simon had always been passionate about music, whether it was opera, jazz, soul, blues or gospel. At Granada, he tried to book Aretha Franklin, who rarely appeared on television and was known to suffer from stage fright. Simon succeeded in getting the Queen of Soul on the phone, but not even his charm could persuade her to record a few songs for British television.

In 1991, Simon was appointed Director of Public Affairs at Meridian, the South of England ITV company that had unseated incumbent TVS in the 1990 franchise round. Simon was key to Meridian’s bid, which made that of TVS look out of date. At one press launch, Meridian was astute enough to have a signer on stage for those in the audiences who were deaf.

due to fears about the safety of flying across the Atlantic. However, Simon decided that, 9/11 or not, Cambridge would go ahead despite the absence of two of its star speakers.

For some time, the Society knew that more needed to be done to engage the under-35s in its activities. In 2007, Simon launched RTS Futures, aimed at new graduates and those in the early stages of their career. Today, RTS Futures remains a vital part of the RTS.

Crucially, Simon ensured that promoting diversity in television was a key part of the Society’s remit. He enrolled Lenny Henry, among others, to spearhead the RTS in promoting a representative UK television sector.

Simon was a keen amateur photographer and could often be seen at RTS events, taking the pictures that would be published in this magazine.

Those who knew him will need no



Phillida, Simon and David with the screen and stage star Marsha Hunt

Photographs by Paul Hampartsoumian

He succeeded Michael Bunce as CEO of the RTS in 2000. Over the next decade, he brought a new energy, enthusiasm and vision to the Society. The biannual RTS Cambridge Convention grew in stature, and a new conference, the London Convention, held in the years when Cambridge didn’t take place, was launched.

As well as his prodigious networking and diplomatic skills, Simon brought an international dimension to the RTS as global media players such as Paramount’s Sumner Redstone were booked as speakers at RTS dinners.

For the 2001 Cambridge Convention, Simon promised delegates a mouth-watering lineup of Rupert Murdoch and his arch-rival John Malone. Alas, 9/11 intervened, and both withdrew

reminder of his abundant kindness. “Personally, he touched a lot of people,” said RTS CEO Theresa Wise. “Many people will say that he helped them in their careers. He was very interested in people and would always look to support them.”

One of Simon’s closest friends was Michael Palin. He encouraged the actor and TV presenter to publish his diaries – and got Palin to talk about them at an RTS event. Speaking at Simon’s funeral, Palin said he was “like an electric current whose default setting was euphoria”.

He is survived by his wife, Phillida, their son, David, and his brother, Robert.

Simon Albury: 9 February 1944 – 2 September 2024

The human factor

More than 45,000 visitors from 170 countries joined 1,350 exhibitors in Amsterdam last month for the 2024 International Broadcasting Convention.

Many of those attending wanted to find out more about how the latest technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), can help solve the challenges faced by the media and entertainment industry.

Michael Crimp, IBC's Chief Executive, said: "This year's show addressed soaring interest in trends such as AI's leap from theory to real-world applications, how the industry is fighting disinformation in news, and the need to foster talent and diversity across media, entertainment and technology."

The show began with IBC's inaugural World Skills Cafe, bringing together executives from major media companies to discuss recruitment and training. Discussions about talent ran through the IBC schedule. Media cartographer Evan Shapiro talked to RTS chief executive Theresa Wise about his map of the UK TV ecosystem, which was drawn up to inform the RTS's new

AI created the biggest buzz at IBC, reports **Pippa Considine**, but face-to-face contact remains vital

Mini MBA in television and streaming media. And, for the first time, the convention included a talent programme, starting with a networking breakfast and hearing from organisations that are inspiring a diverse range of people to join the industry.

The subject creating the biggest buzz across the four-day event, though, was AI. IBC's Accelerator Media Innovation Programme supports collaborative projects and aims to solve some of the industry's most complex and pressing challenges.

An AI Media Production Lab project featured three of those challenges. The first looked at creating multiple AI-driven personas to represent a diverse audience, the aim being to help prevent bias and involve consumers in the development process.

Another looked at AI as a production tool for live sports and events, enabling real-time enhanced viewing with innovations such as personalised commentators and localisation. ErinRose Widner, Global Head of Business Strategy, Emerging and Creative Technologies, M&E at Verizon, said the project team, which included several technology partners, set out to "create an authentic sports companion, someone who can interact with you, get to know you as a person, and then deliver to you a personalised highlight reel".

The third challenge was to tackle the fight against fakery, involving a project titled Design Your Weapons in the Fight Against Disinformation. Michelle Munson, CEO and Co-founder of Eluvio, showed the IBC audience a video from a trusted source: PBS footage of President Joe Biden's address after the attempted assassination in July of Donald Trump.

Then she showed a fake that had been posted on X with the audio changed. Using AI-based technology, Munson showed how it was possible to see evidence of manipulation. Though AI was used to create the problem it could also be part of the solution.



This year's Olympic torch relay was covered in innovative style by French TV

Alamy



RTS CEO Theresa Wise with media cartographer Evan Shapiro

IBC

and maintaining extensive on-premises infrastructure and backups. For Killeen, a big advantage is making global connections within the ITV Studios Group. A project might move to another territory to capitalise on tax breaks, while brands such as *Come Dine With Me* can connect with production teams in other countries. If the media is accessible from anywhere, it offers a way to diversify the talent pool. It is also becoming increasingly clear that while Cloud workflows still use significant amounts of energy, in many places they are contributing to more sustainable solutions.

Although detection tools, AI-based but using other technologies too, don't quite do the job, they are used as an aid to the human validation of content.

The vision of the Accelerator project is to allow consumers to prove the provenance of the content's source and inspect the public metadata. One suggestion was to tag content with "pop" (proof of provenance). The project champions are the BBC and Paramount Global, with CBS News. Other organisations supporting it include the European Broadcasting Union, ITN, Channel 4 and Associated Press.

"We have to do this as an industry," said Claudia Milne, Senior Vice-President Standards and Practices for CBS News. "This is an external threat. In some ways, the greatest achievement of the Accelerator is that we brought everybody together, putting aside competition... sharing information, getting on the same page, doing it together. If we have a fractured solution [with] different organisations using different solutions, that's going to confuse the audience, and reinforce the lack of confidence."

As well as using AI as an analysis tool, which can also track intellectual property from creators, there was a focus on how it can make production processes and broadcaster workflows more efficient.

Informing the products on show and the solutions discussed was the need for platforms to cut costs, be it in production, distribution or at any point in the journey of content from capture to screen and beyond.

At the IBC Showcase Theatre, Helen Killeen, Director of Production Unscripted UK at ITV Studios, which has 60 labels in 12 territories, talked about the "rapid and seismic shift in viewer behaviour which has driven

'HUMAN CONNECTION IS THE BIGGEST VALUE WE HAVE'

a lack of commissioning and a nervousness around commissioning".

The reality is that platforms want more for less. Killeen said: "Budgets are only going to get smaller....The only way to change is to look at technology and how we do things differently in production to drive efficiencies."

Killeen has been working with Amazon Web Services Edit in the Cloud and Adobe to shift production to the Cloud. While AI is taking on mundane jobs and shortening the production schedule with tools such as AI-enabled text-based editing, workflows in the Cloud already offer significant savings, avoiding high upfront costs of building

For the torch relay, in the run-up to this year's Olympics, France Télévisions worked with Obvios, TDF and TVU Networks to broadcast up to 10 hours of live coverage daily, using the first hyper-compact moving private 5G network along its 1,625km journey.

The project took one of IBC's five Innovation Awards. The 100% glass-to-glass Cloud production (from capture through a lens to final display) reduced CO₂ emissions by more than 600 tonnes and delivered huge cost savings.

The IBC's top honour, the International Honour for Excellence, went to Pulitzer prize-winning AP journalist and filmmaker Mstyslav Chernov, whose PBS Frontline documentary *20 Days in Mariupol* won this year's Oscar and Bafta for best documentary.

Accepting the prize, he reflected on the value of the IBC and meeting in person in an era when fake news and the use of information as a weapon causes people to doubt content. "Probably the only way for humanity to deal with this is to meet face to face – human connection is the biggest value we have," he said. ■



A scene from Mstyslav Chernov's prize-winning *20 Days in Mariupol*

AP

OUR FRIEND IN WASHINGTON

We always knew that American presidential debates could make or break a candidate. It's the primetime moment to shine or - in Joe Biden's case - spectacularly evaporate.

Poor Joe. To this day the thought of his incoherent mumbling still makes me wince with embarrassment.

I was there in the journalists' watch room that night in Atlanta, and I can tell you that on multiple occasions the air fell silent. Reporters stared at each other in stunned disbelief while others blocked their ears.

One friend from a German broadcaster got up and walked out, slamming his fist on the table. "That's it! It's over!" he declared. "Biden is finished!" It seemed a tad dramatic at the time, but he had rightly called it within the first five minutes.

It was over for Joe Biden. He just didn't know it yet.

Fast-forward to Philadelphia, and it was an altogether different feeling. Ripples of laughter filled the air as Kamala Harris got into her stride, relentlessly poking at Donald Trump, willing him to take the bait, which he invariably did: "People don't go to her rallies!" he snapped belligerently at one point. But this, surely, was the soundbite of the night: "In Springfield, they're eating the dogs," Trump declared of the Haitian migrants who live there. "They're eating the cats! They're eating the pets!" Harris threw back her head and laughed.

The contrast could not have been clearer. Harris was as coherent as Biden was confused - as smooth as he was stupefied. But let's be honest, the bar was astonishingly low.

The mere serving up of words in



Channel 4

With American voters going to the polls in less than a month, **Siobhan Kennedy** tells of a close encounter with Donald Trump

the correct order was a step up. The relief in the room was palpable that we were witnessing an actual debate, with questions and answers.

As was the sense that Harris had won. This time the spin room belonged to the Democrats to boss. No more cowering in the corner, spouting lines for Biden: lines that, clearly, even they didn't believe.

Harris had delivered for them a performance that had Gavin Newsom, the slick-haired Governor of California, giddy with excitement. Even his pearly white teeth appeared to sparkle that little bit brighter.

I was in the middle of interviewing Newsom when my producer alerted me that Trump himself had entered the building. The press pack immediately swarmed like excited bees to a drizzling honey pot. And there he was, holding court right in the centre

- his favourite spot - with cameras craning for a glimpse and reporters yelling questions, willing the news gods to let theirs be the one that he would answer.

But on that night, the news gods chose to smile on your friend from Washington. After the Trump scrum was broken up, our keen-eyed cameraman, Ben, spotted the former president disappearing, like the Wizard of Oz, behind a giant black curtain and scurrying round the back.

We rightly guessed that he would pop up at Fox News, where we were waiting, ready to pounce.

"President Trump, did you win the debate tonight?" I asked as he was being mic'd up for his interview.

"I think we did great," he told me.

"Did you feel you won?"

"I felt I won by a lot," Trump said.

But had Harris rattled him, I asked.

"No, not at all", came his reply.

"You seemed a bit rattled," I suggested. And with a dismissive wave of the hand, he turned away.

It was vintage Trump: turn up to spin for yourself and declare that you won, even when most people believe you didn't.

It was a TV spectacle, just like the debates themselves.

But is that all these debates are? Do they matter? For Biden they did. But for Trump, the reality TV president, seemingly less so.

The critics and pundits all had Harris as the clear winner. And yet, since the dust settled, recent polls have still put her neck-and-neck with Trump, or slightly ahead but within the margin of error.

Tune in this November as the American people write the next chapter of the presidential election show. ■

Siobhan Kennedy is Washington Correspondent at Channel 4 News.

Richard Armitage likened the progress in his acting career to learning to drive, when he delivered his RTS Midlands Baird Lecture last month. He talked about the “ridiculous amounts of preparation” he put in to his one line on *Boon* and three lines in *Casualty*, but these put him in good stead for later roles.

He explained: “Learning to drive a banger is not such a bad thing because when you get behind the wheel of a Ferrari, you know what to do.

“I’ve always prepared every job as if it was a leading role. So when I got to the set of *The Hobbit*, with 500 people looking at me with that ‘Come on, what have you got?’ expression, I knew what to do, because I’d learned to drive in a banger.”

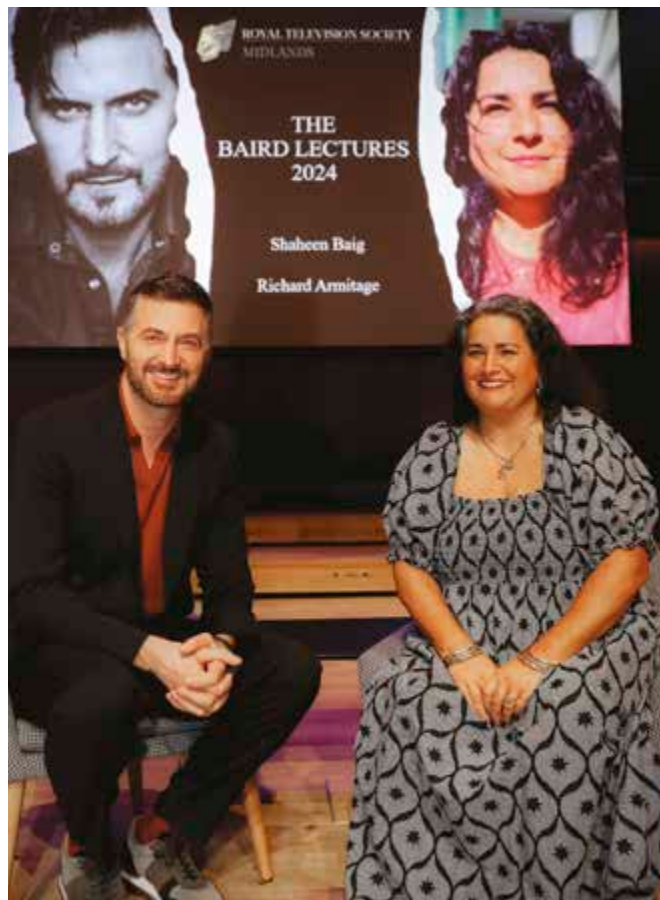
His preparation has included planting 200 trees in Tring for the Chekhov play *Uncle Vanya* and being water-boarded for *Spooks* because: “I just didn’t want to pretend what it was like. I wanted to experience it, if only for a few seconds.”

He was talking at the Baird Lectures, held to hear insights from the two talents, on and off screen, to whom RTS Midlands has awarded the prestigious Baird Medal.

The current holders are Armitage, who has starred in *Red Eye*, *Obsession* and *Strike Back*, and casting director Shaheen Baig.

RTS Midlands Chair Kully Khaila described them as “titans of television with an amazing body of work”, while Armitage called himself and Baig “two working-class local kids made good”.

Armitage grew up in Leicestershire “as a timid, introverted kid and I still am – I’m faking my confidence. Acting still terrifies me. I always think it could be my



Vivienne Bailey

‘Working-class kids made good’

National Event Roz Laws hears two of the Midlands’ finest deliver their Baird Lectures

last job and even now I squirrel away every penny.”

He added that he wants to audition to feel as if he has earned a role, although the exception seems to be the Harlan Coben thrillers adapted for Netflix. He has already starred in *The Stranger*, *Stay Close* and *Fool Me Once* and *Missing You* is out next year.

“When I was asked to do the second one, I didn’t even

read the script, I just said yes. I described myself as the team’s lucky underpants, but writer Danny Brocklehurst said I’m the Sid James to the *Carry On* films.

“Harlan has taught me a huge amount about building plots,” said the author of two thrillers, *Geneva* and *The Cut*.

“They need to be as watertight as possible. On my first season of *Spooks* we had all the scripts, but by the third

we started with only a page. I was running up a staircase with Hermione Norris, saying: ‘We don’t know why we’re running.’ We were told: ‘There might be a helicopter on the roof, we’re not sure yet.’”

Birmingham-born Baig has cast everything from *Peaky Blinders*, *Sherwood* and *Girl/Haji* to episodes of *Black Mirror* and *Boiling Point*. She talked about being very conscious in the industry of her “class, heritage and regionality”, but is working to create opportunities and increase representation.

She told the RTS: “I care deeply about finding stories I can connect with, stories with integrity, film-makers and actors that warrant nurturing and championing. Ultimately, the power of casting is with those who have the money. It’s my job to bring people into the room, to challenge and to keep suggesting people.

“I think the role of casting director has changed; we now come on to projects much earlier, sometimes when it’s still a synopsis. We’re almost like a producer, because by casting a certain actor we might greenlight a project and get it made.”

Baig raised the biggest laugh of the evening when she revealed her guilty TV pleasure was the “completely ridiculous” *Emily in Paris*. She explained: “I often work on quite heavy projects so I just want to watch stuff where I don’t have to use my brain. I watch a lot of *Gone Fishing*, *Race Across the World* – and *Pingu*.” ■

The Baird Lectures were held at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire on 20 September. They were hosted by Nikki Bedi and produced by Kully Khaila and Jayne Rae.



Current *Crimewatch* presenters Michelle Ackerley and Rav Wilding

BBC

‘Don’t have nightmares’

RTS Cymru Wales Alison Jones celebrates the 40th anniversary of *Crimewatch* in Cardiff

Crimewatch has been helping the police catch criminals for 40 years, and production staff and presenters past and present gathered at an RTS Cymru Wales event to celebrate the enduring success of this unusual partnership.

Since it began in 1984, with the idea of getting the public involved in solving crimes by staging reconstructions to jog the memories of witnesses, *Crimewatch* has made more than 700 programmes and 7,000 appeals on behalf of police forces around the UK.

Joe Mather, Creative Director for documentaries at BBC Studios, said the biggest hurdle producers faced when it launched was getting the police to trust them. “It was groundbreaking, a programme with this direct connection with an audience and an overarching purpose of solving crimes,” he recalled.

“It seems like a no-brainer today that the police would want to get behind it because it offers so much to them, particularly on difficult cases they’ve struggled to resolve, but only two or three forces initially agreed to take part.

“The police have to hand over an awful lot of details the public aren’t privy to in order for the team to build an accurate reconstruction or appeal. That’s a big step for them to give that trust over. Understandably, they were reluctant to do that, because what was *Crimewatch* at the time? Did it have a genuine purpose behind it?”

“After that first show they had calls and I think the appeal ultimately got a result. The proof was in the pudding and it ran from there.”

Alex Loughran, the former *Crimewatch* editor charged with refreshing the series when she joined in 2006,

said that after that hesitant start *Crimewatch* became a vital tool for detectives. “We did training for the police... in how to use the media to try to help. We could have filled an hour’s programme every night with the appeals they came to us with.

“The difficult part was choosing the cases... [The question] was which ones we could make a real difference with. When that call comes in, the feeling is incredible.”

The programme was first hosted by Nick Ross and Sue Cook, with Ross’s sign-off “Don’t have nightmares”, becoming a catchphrase.

It left a lasting impression on current presenter Rav Wilding, who was a serving police officer when he first appeared on the show in 2004. “As a child, it was the only programme I was allowed to stay up late to watch. I was scared until Nick said: ‘Don’t have nightmares,’” he said. “Walking on to the set in my mid-twenties was incredible, and to still be part of it 20 years later and getting results, that’s what I am passionate about.”

Hiring Wilding as a presenter added to the show’s credibility with the police, and he could also empathise with the detectives’ feelings of relief when they finally got

a break in a case after a reconstruction aired.

“I’ve been there with seasoned detectives who’ve broken down in tears when they got those calls. Yes, it means everything to us on *Crimewatch*, but they’ve worked with the families for years and tried everything to get some justice for them. Then they get that call and know, finally, they’ve got that person.”

Originally made in London, *Crimewatch* relocated to Cardiff in 2011. It had a number of spin-offs and is now *Crimewatch Live*. “The upside is we do 30 programmes a year instead of eight,” said Mather. “We do a lot more appeals.” A new series, *Crimewatch Caught*, will look at how police investigate and solve crimes.

“*Crimewatch* is a public service,” said Loughran. “Even in my time we were bounced around the schedules, but millions still tuned in to watch. The appetite is there for crime programming. We are all armchair detectives at the end of the day.” ■

‘40 years of *Crimewatch*’ was held at the Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, on 25 September. It was hosted by BBC Wales news presenter Jennifer Jones and produced by Tom Dix and Alexia Barrett for RTS Cymru Wales and Juliet Piper for BBC Studios.



Rav Wilding and former *Crimewatch* presenter Matthew Amroliwala at the RTS event

Hywel William

Ben Richards' legal drama *Showtrial* makes a welcome return to BBC One this month, offering viewers more state-of-the-nation musings, fizzing, witty dialogue and meaty acting.

First time around, in 2021, a wealthy female student was in the dock; now it's cocky PC Justin Mitchell, played with real verve by Michael Socha, who is accused of the hit-and-run death of a climate activist.

Defending him is anxiety-ridden lawyer Sam Malik, portrayed by RTS award winner Adeel Akhtar (*Sherwood*); the prosecutor is Leila Hasoun-Kenny (Nathalie Armin, *Home*). All three were at the RTS premiere of the five-part *Showtrial*'s first episode.

Showtrial is an anthology show, so the cast for series 2 is entirely different from series 1. "It was an all or nothing thing... another case in another town, different lawyers," said Richards, the show's creator and writer. "You've just got to kill 'em and move on."

He continued: "Trials are a great way of bringing in all kinds of other issues – you can use the courtroom to explore [them]. Rather than being prescriptive, the BBC gave Richards licence to bring his irreverence into the courtroom.

"It's such a brilliant format to allow you to explore character and to have fun with the characters as well."

Socha, who made his breakthrough in Shane Meadows' film *This Is England*, was attracted to the role by the accused officer's "ups and downs, and vulnerability. He can be cocky and arrogant, but there are reasons for the behaviour."

He "really enjoyed working with Adeel" and this shows in their scenes together with the two actors "riffing" off each other. "We had so much fun



Hero or villain? You can judge

National Event The hard-hitting and irreverent legal drama returns. **Matthew Bell** reports

doing them," said Akhtar. "Obviously we had our lines, but how Michael delivered them was so unexpected... and if you're riding the wave of good writing, it becomes more than the sum of its parts and something really special."

Executive producer Simon Heath, from World Productions, welcomed the hot-button topics *Showtrial* addresses, such as climate activism and police

corruption. "We pride ourselves on being a bit provocative and upsetting people. I don't think we're doing our job if we're not," he said.

"The worry with climate change is that people think you're going to do something a bit worthy, a bit wholemeal bread and a bit woke. What Ben has done, as the best drama should, is he's not taken a position; he's put in

all the voices and then let the audience decide."

Showtrial is largely shot in Belfast, with some scenes filmed in Brighton where the drama is set. It begins with a huge demonstration, set up so realistically by producer Ken Horn (*Line of Duty*) that it fooled some Belfast locals.

Heath said: "We weren't able to achieve total crowd control and a couple of passers-by started having a go at our climate protesters... it was pretty authentic."

"You can always tell with a Ben script what he got pissed off about in the news the day before," said Emma Luffingham, who also executive produces for World Productions.

Richards said: "There is a lot to be angry and upset about in the world... not from [taking] any side in the culture war – and I'm going to sound ridiculous now – but from the point of view of basic morality."

The tone of the drama, though, is far from didactic. Richards said his intention was to "try not to wag fingers at people or lecture people, and see the humour and humanity in situations.

"The internet is such a horrible place, full of people screaming at and abusing each other, and I always think that in the real world people tend to have much more relaxed and humorous conversations."

Richards added: "The trick is always to not just show the police as a bunch of corrupt, lying murderous bastards"

He admitted, though, that he has "lists of things I hate, just like Sam. Two-factor verification codes – they drive me fucking crazy." ■

Showtrial starts on 6 October on BBC One and iPlayer. The RTS event at the Curzon Bloomsbury, London, on 23 September was hosted by Heat magazine's Boyd Hilton and produced by BBC Drama.

Television's least wholesome drama returned to BBC One early this month, offering more backstabbing, boozing, sex, snorting and frankly incomprehensible financial jargon.

Series 3 of *Industry* sees Pierpoint, in stark contrast to the behaviour of its employees, repositioning itself as an ethical investment bank when it takes on a new client, the green energy start-up Lumi. This is run by an aristocrat turned tech-bro, the aptly named Sir Henry Muck, and played with brio by Kit Harington, best known as *Game of Thrones'* Jon Snow.

Harington joins cast regulars Marisa Abela (Yasmin), Harry Lawtey (Robert), Ken Leung (Eric), Myha'la (Harper), Sagar Radia (Rishi), Conor MacNeill (Kenny) and Sarah Parish (Nicole).

At an RTS London event late last month, the show's creators and writers, TV first-timers Mickey Down and Konrad Kay, discussed how the HBO/BBC co-production, made by Cardiff indie Bad Wolf, has developed since its TV debut in November 2020.

"When we look back at the actors we cast [in season 1], they won't mind us saying that they were fresh out of drama school – they were baby-faced ingenues. We were effectively watching all of these people grow up on screen," said Kay. "We've grown with them as creators."

Down added: "We had the base of two seasons of character development... You'd seen [them at the start of their careers] get salad orders and be sexually harassed by their bosses... so when we got to the second and third seasons, we could expand and raise the stakes, and it would feel totally organic."

By the final episode of season 3, said Kay, "they are totally unrecognisable from the people who first started



Industry: Kit Harington (Sir Henry Muck) and Marisa Abela (Yasmin Kara-Hanani)

BBC

A true guilty pleasure

Matthew Bell welcomes back *Industry*, the HBO/BBC banking drama that gives its audience a vicarious thrill

the show". The "sweet spot", said Down, who has been friends with Kay since their late teens, is "showing people a world which feels... authentic and realistic but having enough sensationalism to actually drive drama".

Kay added: "There's the aspirational side of it, which

if I didn't feel them within myself sometimes."

Their behaviour, he said, "scratches a reptilian part of [the audience's] brain".

Industry and another HBO hit, *Succession*, argued Bad Wolf executive producer Jane Tranter, though very different shows, have a similar appeal.

"They would say: 'He's got to atone or she has to be seen to have a heart as well...' but HBO are like, 'Unleash hell!'"

So, expect the unexpected in season 3. "The idea of making a character as heinous as possible and then making you feel that they have a heart, pulling the rug from under the audience emotionally is something Konrad and I love doing," said Down, hinting at one of the bombshells in the first episode of the new series.

In fact, there are three "what the fuck moments" alone in the series opener, added Down.

Viewer, you have been warned. ■

'Industry screening and Q&A' was held at the Everyman King's Cross on 30 September. It was hosted by Simon Harkness and produced by Phil Barnes and Ian Johnson.

'THEY'RE THE WORST, MOST SOCIOPATHIC, BORDERLINE PSYCHOPATHIC PEOPLE'

is the wealth porn stuff – this is how the 0.01% live, let's have a look at it.

"[But] with our characters, because they're played with such naturalism by the cast... you can also project yourself into these people. You're like: 'These are the worst, most sociopathic, borderline psychopathic people but, some of their instincts, I'd be lying

Both "peer down a microscope at the lives of a group of people that you don't normally get to look at, combined with the fun and horror of outrageously poor behaviour, combined with a surprising feeling of relatability to these crazy fuck-ups".

Many broadcasters, she added, would demand that their characters were softened.

Growing up, Philippa Lowthorpe never expected to work in television: “I didn’t think [it] was possible because I grew up in a small village outside Lincoln... all my relations and people I knew were farmers, so I had no clue that somebody like me could ever work in television.”

The director was talking at an RTS event in Bristol’s Watershed cinema, celebrating her huge contribution to TV. In conversation with RTS West of England Chair, Lynn Barlow, Lowthorpe retraced her journey into television, where she has moved from making groundbreaking documentaries to award-winning dramas such as *Five Daughters* and *Three Girls*.

Her life in TV began with a researcher role at Yorkshire Television on the 1980s medical show *Where There’s Life*. Lowthorpe was inspired by the department next door working on the documentary strand *First Tuesday*.

“It was watching what those blokes were doing in *First Tuesday* and those hard-hitting programmes that they were making that made me think... ‘I want to do that,’” Lowthorpe said.

“It was a very hierarchical, patriarchal time,” she said, with “no women directors at



Liv Hill, Molly Windsor and Ria Zmitrowicz in *Three Girls*

BBC

‘Stuck on real stories’

RTS West of England Seraphina Allard-Bridge hears director Philippa Lowthorpe discuss a career that has moved from docs into drama

all” in TV. But, despite the odds being stacked against her, Lowthorpe was soon directing, moving to Bristol to make documentaries for the BBC.

Discussing her film-making style, Lowthorpe said that she never wanted to be unkind to her subjects: “I was much more interested in the psychology of people and those lifelong existential truths that you try to discover when you talk to somebody... and I think that’s what led me to want to go and do drama.”

Even when directing drama, however, Lowthorpe found herself drawn to true stories: “I’m... attracted to telling them by accident,” she said. “I’ve sort of got myself stuck on real stories.”

Lowthorpe was the launch director of *Call the Midwife*, and brought her trademark documentary style to the series. Along with the dramatic birth scenes, this initially proved to be a

controversial choice. “When we had the screening for the BBC execs, they said, ‘Oh God, no one’s going to watch this,’” Lowthorpe said.

In fact, the first series in 2012 enjoyed an average audience of more than 10 million and was immediately recommissioned.

Throughout her career, Lowthorpe has championed women. Her early drama-doc series *A Skirt Through History* painted portraits of women’s lives, including that of Anne Lister, the inspiration behind Sally Wainwright’s drama *Gentleman Jack*.

However, Lowthorpe didn’t see herself as a feminist director: “I only look back now and think that, because when you’re just doing it, it’s the stories that you’re attracted to.”

One such story was a Rochdale sex-trafficking case which became the multi-award-winning drama *Three Girls*. It held Greater Manchester police to account

and, just last month, a grooming gang in Plymouth was jailed after one of their victims had contacted police after watching the series.

On the impact of *Three Girls*, Lowthorpe said: “You want it to make change but you also want to tell stories for people who have no voice. Those girls had absolutely no voice, so to have the honour of being able to tell their story is even more important.”

The RTS event concluded with the presentation of the Sir Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award to Lowthorpe for her outstanding contribution to TV in the West of England.

Documentary film-maker and producer Peter Symes, credited by Lowthorpe as an instrumental figure in her career, presented the award, praising her expertise.

Symes said: “Hardly anyone I know has this extraordinary ability to grab a story and then roll it out in front of you in a way that’s completely original.” ■



Philippa Lowthorpe at the RTS event

Justin Yockney

You don't have to get a tattoo honouring your favourite production company if you want to get into TV... but it might help.

An audience member at RTS Cymru Wales's event "How to write a TV drama" revealed that he wrote his master's dissertation on the Bad Wolf theme in *Doctor Who*. It was his "absolute dream" to work for the production company, also called Bad Wolf, that makes the show, he declared. And to prove it, he said he had a tattoo on his left arm showing the Tardis graffitied with "Bad Wolf".

"Flattery goes a long way," replied a laughing Bad Wolf CEO, Jane Tranter, and doing your homework by watching television and reading the trade press was also helpful in showing dedication to your future career, she said.

The event was partly to promote Bad Wolf's Blaidd Writers Programme, a six-month paid scheme for three Welsh writers to be mentored by celebrated screenwriters Marnie Dickens, Jack Thorne and Russell T Davies. Dickens, who created *Wilderness*, *Gold Digger* and *Thirteen*, was on the panel.

She got her foot in the TV door by working as a runner on the Kudos shows *Spooks* and *Law & Order: UK*, before setting out to write. "I read a lot of screenplay books and found them quite depressing, as they felt really schematic," she said. "I had to find my own voice. To get ideas in the real world, I scoured the internet, looked at newspapers and listened to people's conversations in cafes.

"Someone told me to write a 45-minute crime drama because that's what ITV liked, but my attempt wasn't very good. You can get caught up in thinking what the commissioners want when 'What do I want to



Jenna Coleman stars in *Wilderness*, written by Marnie Dickens

Amazon Prime Video

Written by.. you!

RTS Cymru Wales Roz Laws learns how to pen TV drama from *Wilderness* creator Marnie Dickens and *Doctor Who* maker Bad Wolf

write about?' is more important. Find what you're interested in. For me, it was a 1920s girl gang."

Emma Obank, Bad Wolf's Creative and Commercial Affairs Executive, was once a screenwriters' agent and stressed the importance of that role. "Most production companies won't accept unsolicited scripts – they come through agents. It can take time to get an agent, so you have to be tenacious. If you don't hear back, chase.

"Sell yourself to them. Say why you've picked them and plug anything you've done. Send a sample script of your best work and have more ideas to talk about if you get a meeting."

Dickens emphasised the

importance of keeping your day job and writing in your spare time, even when you have screen credits, as "it can take a while to get paid".

And it can be a "huge advantage" to learn on a soap or continuing drama, as she did on *Hollyoaks*.

"There's a lot of snobbery surrounding them but some of the greatest acting, directing and writing talent has come through soaps: Suranne Jones, Russell T Davies, Sally Wainwright. It's an incredible training ground, you work quickly and really collaboratively."

Another way into the business is to "write about your lived experience", said Tranter. That's why she recruited the newcomers

Mickey Down and Konrad Kay to create the BBC/HBO drama *Industry*, since they had worked at US banks in London. "We gave them the chance as they had the authentic voice of the world that we were bringing to the screen."

She added: "Don't overthink the idea. I'd much rather read work that's messy round the edges but has an honest voice. You can be helped with structure. And no one cares about qualifications – you can't weigh and measure talent." ■

'How to write a TV drama' was held on 9 September at the University of South Wales in Cardiff and produced by Liam Jones from IJPR.

Ellie Green is the winner of this year's Shiers Trust Award. The adventure film-maker receives £5,000 to fund *Filming the Impossible*, which charts the technological advances in filming equipment that have helped bring the world's remotest locations closer to TV and film audiences.

"It's a celebration of the people who go to these remote places, capture fantastic content and bring it back to a wide audience," said Green, the founder and director of adventure and environmental film production company Summit Fever Media.

"With equipment becoming so much cheaper and more accessible, doors are opening to an industry which, when I was growing up, didn't feel like an area you could work in," she said. "It's still difficult to make a living in adventure film-making but it's becoming more possible.

"I would like my film to show people that there are



Ellie Green

Summit Fever Media

Shiers to fund mountain film

opportunities available, no matter where you come from or who you are."

The film's title comes from a book Green discovered in a charity shop by the

award-winning British film-maker and adventurer, Leo Dickinson. In it, he writes about his groundbreaking films, including one detailing an ascent of the notoriously difficult north face of the Eiger.

Filming the Impossible focuses on pioneering women, including Gwen Moffat, who filmed on the Idwal Slabs in Wales in 1957, and, more recently, Megan Hine, who has worked as a safety/survival consultant on many Bear Grylls shows.

Green is aiming to finish *Filming the Impossible* before the end of the year. It will be available on a free-to-view online channel; see summitfevermedia.com for details when available.

The Shiers Trust Award, which is funded by a bequest from the US TV historian and RTS member George Shiers, offers a grant of up to £5,000 for a project about the history of television.

Matthew Bell

Eisteddfod revives 'flawless' comedy

"Well-nigh flawless" was how film historian Dave Berry described the Ealing-style comedy, *Rhosyn a Rhith*, screened by RTS Cymru Wales in August at Sinemaes, a pop-up cinema on the National Eisteddfod field, held this year in Pontypridd.

Produced by Red Rooster Films for S4C, the film is set in South Wales in the aftermath of the miners' strike in the mid-80s. Adapted by Urien Wiliam from Ruth Carter's original script, *Coming Up Roses*, it was the first Welsh language film to receive a UK theatrical release when it

was screened (with English subtitles) in 1987.

Rhosyn a Rhith was described as "sweetly daffy" by the *New York Times* and a "funny observant film" by *Observer* film critic Philip French.

Starring some of Wales's leading actors, it tells how a cinema has to close, making the projectionist (Dafydd Hywel) and ice-cream attendant (Iola Gregory) redundant. In the weeks before closure, they devise a bizarre scheme to grow mushrooms in the cinema's damp dark interior to pay off the debts.

The film's location was Aberdare's Rex Cinema, a

Iola Gregory and Dafydd Hywel in *Rhosyn a Rhith*

few miles from Pontypridd, which had already closed.

In a panel discussion before the screening, chaired by Swansea University lecturer Dr Elaine Price, Mari Emlyn, who played June, described the never-ending rain during the shoot and how the film's US director, Stephen Bayly,

had suggested that she watched Gregory "very carefully as the camera loves her".

Fellow panellist, S4C Drama Commissioner Gwenllian Gravelle, revealed how the broadcaster is working with Ffilm Cymru and Creative Wales to develop film projects.

Hywel Wiliam

RTS West of England

“Before I joined the channel, I did make a couple of productions for Nat Geo, and even then I didn’t... really understand the system,” Sarah Peat told Wildscreen Chief Executive Lucie Muir at the RTS centre’s annual “Meet the commissioner” event at Bristol’s Watershed last month.

Peat worked as a producer at several Bristol-based indies before moving to National Geographic, where she is now Commissioning Executive Producer at Nat Geo International Channel.

“Once I joined the channel and got inside it was a little bit Kafkaesque, because it’s a really big organisation and there are a lot of departments.”

A couple of years later and Peat is well versed in the channel’s workings and was able to shed light on the inner workings of the company.

She explained the various pathways at National Geographic to the RTS audience, before highlighting the key genres that are commissioned for Nat Geo International, including the Second World War and ancient history.

“Our audience loves something that resonates,” Peat said. “This is, I think, why a lot of Second World War content is still so popular on International; people remember the stories of their fathers and grandfathers.”

One of the key challenges



World War II: Secrets from Above

National Geographic

Nat Geo: from above

the channel faces is how to keep things fresh. Peat explained, with reference to the disaster genre, that they often come back to the phrase, “Old wine, new bottles.”

“We do stand by that. We know what our audience loves.... If they love disaster and want to see it, the challenge is, what’s the new vessel to present that in?”

There is also the task of adapting to changing viewing habits. “We’re keen, like everybody else, to make sure that we can attract a new

audience,” Peat said, explaining that its current audience skews male, in the upper end of the 25–55 age group. “We haven’t quite figured out the magic solution yet for appealing to the core audience... and drawing in that younger audience, but that’s the goal.”

When it comes to pitching, Peat said: “There’s no need to produce a massive glossy document or sizzle.... If you want to send a paragraph... telling us what the idea is, we can get back to you quite quickly.”

But clarity is essential: “One thing that’s always really important to do... is to be really clear what the story is. What is the series that you want to make with us?”

Talent also plays a big part in the shows that Nat Geo commission, and Peat explained what stands out in their presenters: “It’s that ability to entertain and also educate. You’re not aware that somebody is giving you facts because they are just such good storytellers.”

Peat highlighted rising stars such as construction businessman Daniel Ashville and wildlife film-maker/biologist Dan O’Neill, who are both fronting shows for Nat Geo International.

As well as emerging talent, Peat welcomes the opportunity to work with new indies.

“We know a good idea can come from anywhere – it can come from an individual, a new company, an established company – so we do just want the best content, and we want the best ideas.”

Seraphina Allard-Bridge

Alan Meacham 1939–2024

Alan Meacham, an RTS Member for 60 years, died during the summer. His career spanned roles at the BBC, Rank Taylor Hobson, DigiVision and De Montfort University, where he shared his love for technology and innovation.

Alan became a member of the Society in 1964, and

served as a committee member for the East Midlands, and Nottingham and East Midlands centres, contributing significantly to the field of television and broadcasting.

He supported black-and-white 405-line television, the roll-out of colour TV at BBC Two, travelled the world

supporting zoom lenses, then managed audio, video and animation studios at De Montfort. He earned the nickname ‘Mr Fix It’ thanks to his ability to repair anything.

Leicester-born Alan studied natural philosophy at the University of St Andrews.

Richard Meacham

From the beginning, when I got on board, I didn't want anyone from the channel or production company to be like, 'Great, we've got a gay, disabled woman hosting – now we've got free range to fill it with white, straight, non-disabled men.'

Comedian, writer and actor Rosie Jones was discussing at an RTS event the return of the joyful *Out of Order*, the Comedy Central show she presents.

She added: "The fact that we could see that range of diversity at every point in the production made it such a positive and amazing show. When you represent life in such a great and lovely way, people are so much more open and keen to make the best show they can – and we really, really did."

Out of Order, which is made by Rumpus Media, had its screen debut in February, going on to win the Gamechanger Programme of the Year at the Broadcast Digital Awards. Series 2 began last month, again hosted by Jones, with Katherine Ryan and Judi Love returning as team captains.

In the show, celebrities have to show their judgement by deciding who, from a lineup of members of the public, has, say, the most tattoos or has been dumped the most.

The great appeal of *Out of Order* is that it embodies the maxim "don't judge a book by its cover", said Jones, who is currently competing on Channel 4 hit comedy *Taskmaster*. "As a gay, disabled woman, I get judged all day, every day."

But *Out of Order*, she said, is a "celebration of everyone's differences. You might make a snap judgement about somebody, but you're probably wrong.

"For me, the show [is] about bringing everyone along for



The joy of inclusion

National Event Host Rosie Jones tells how an all-embracing philosophy feeds into comedy hit *Out of Order*. **Matthew Bell** reports

the ride and going: 'Look, we're all having fun – you judge me and I'll judge you.'

Series producer Hannah Duncombe put the show's success down to the "combination of format and host".

She added: "It's so joyful and there's never a point in

brilliant and [are now] making their careers in television," said Duncombe, who met Jones nearly a decade ago when she was an assistant producer and Jones – before she found success as a stand-up – was starting out in TV as a researcher.

previous life – back when I was a normal person with a normal job, God forbid – I got into TV via a Channel 4 disability trainee scheme."

When she is the only disabled or gay person on a set, Jones said she "feels a lot of pressure to represent this entire group of people; whereas on this show, when I'm surrounded by uber-women, uber-queer people and uber-disabled people, it not only makes me feel less alone, but it gives me the freedom not to speak for disabled people or queer people.

"It just means that I'm speaking for Rosie, and that is a much more brilliant thing to do, especially when you're creating comedy." ■

'Rosie Jones: Out of Order Part B Q&A' was an online RTS event on 16 September. It was hosted by comedian Ashley Storrie and produced by Multitude Media.

'AS A GAY, DISABLED WOMAN, I GET JUDGED ALL DAY, EVERY DAY'

the show where you feel bad at laughing at anything that's happening. Everyone's having a good time together, and I do think that comes from what Rosie brings to what is already a fun format."

Rumpus Media ran a behind-the-camera trainee scheme on *Out of Order* for two people with disabilities. "They were both completely

"It's a really tough industry to crack," said Duncombe. "At the moment, there are not a lot of jobs and people are finding things very hard."

Jones, who has cerebral palsy, added: "I wanted diversity to go on screen... in the crew and production team. For me, having a disability trainee scheme was so important because in a



Tim Whitby/Instagram

The UPSIDE

Ted's excellent adventure...

Netflix Co-CEO Ted Sarandos recalled at the RTS London Convention that his career in media started at the coalface – working in a video store recommending films to the punters. “As a teenager, I was watching movies all day and serving customers all night,” he said. “Back then, I could remember lines from movies and nearly every actor in every film and TV show ever made. I loved recommending something new or unexpected to our members.”

So that's one reason why he has the Midas touch.

Gentlemen and scholars

Good to see the Netflix chief, joined by none other than David Beckham, another convention speaker, meeting and greeting RTS Bursary Scholars at the event.

Sarandos clearly loved the experience, posting a picture (above) on his Instagram.

Credit to our bold scholars for cutting right to the chase, asking what his commissioners at Netflix are looking for. They also got to hear how to brand it like Beckham, straight from the horse's mouth. Rounding things off, Sarandos was asked what Netflix project he was most proud of. Beckham added: “Other than mine.”

Couture, pants and a sexy old cycle

For the eagle-eyed, Netflix props were strategically placed around the corridors of the convention venue, Kings Place in King's Cross. Fashionistas – and fans of the recent Guy Ritchie series, *The Gentlemen* – were treated to a classic suit worn by Susie Glass (played by Kaya Scodelario): a stylish grey ensemble set off by an eye-catching black velvet collar.

Robbie Williams' black Versace underpants, no less, served as a not-so-subtle reminder of the streamer's no-holds-barred four-part documentary, *Robbie Williams*.

As a cyclist, the Upside's favourite prop was a vintage

red Raleigh 10-speed racing bike ridden by none other than Otis in *Sex Education*.

Honey makes the world go round

Back inside the convention hall, delegates were treated to some classy speakers and brilliant session chairs. Hats off to the *FT*'s donnish John Gapper, the thoughtful Kamal Ahmed, Director of Audio at *The Telegraph*, and Sister co-founder CCO, Jane Featherstone. Kirsty Wark, Camilla Lewis, Barbara Serra and Katie Razzall were all on top form too.

In Featherstone's compelling encounter with Beckham, she reminded delegates that she once worked as Paul Gascoigne's secretary. How's that for football cred? And wasn't it great to see the former England captain give her a jar of Sticky Vicky honey, named for his wife, Victoria.

Amol puts Duracell bunny to shame

Talking of superlative chairs, the BBC's action man, Amol Rajan, hosted three

convention sessions, grilling in turn Tim Davie, Alex Mahon and Carolyn McCall. That evening he didn't go home and have a lie down, but gave a speech on social mobility. And he still found the energy to get to Broadcasting House before dawn to co-host the following day's Radio 4 *Today* programme. Incidentally, if you haven't seen Rajan's recent TV interview with Tony Blair, do catch it on iPlayer.

Let's end on a natural high

Finally, to return to Ted Sarandos. Former *Newsnight* anchor Kirsty Wark asked him which genres we can expect to see more of on the streamer, suggesting natural history shows.

Remember that Netflix had a huge hit some years ago with the series *David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet*? The streamer's Co-CEO has his own theory on why the genre remains so popular. “I think that there's some direct connection between the use of marijuana and nature shows,” he opined.

The Upside couldn't possibly comment. ■



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