

November 2020

Television



Steve McQueen's
Small
Axe

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From the CEO



The nights are drawing in and opportunities for socialising are, to put it mildly, limited. What better time to watch some standout shows?

This month's cover story is *Small Axe*, Steve McQueen's series of films looking at the experience of London's West Indian community in the second half of the 20th century. The collaboration between the BBC and Amazon looks like being one of the year's most compelling television dramas.

TV travelogues have come into their own during lockdown, arguably none more so than those by the matchless Michael Palin. He makes travelling in

even the most inhospitable places look tempting and his empathy towards those he meets shines through the screen. Matthew Bell's *Comfort Classic* celebrates his epic *Pole to Pole* trek, first shown in 1992.

Few figures in lockdown have been as inspirational as Captain Tom Moore, now Captain Sir Tom Moore. We share how *ITV News Anglia* reporter Rebecca Haworth broke the story of his heroic charity walks (see page 35).

At the RTS Student Masterclasses, we enjoyed two days of inspirational creators discussing careers across a range of disciplines and programme genres, and offering advice on how to succeed in TV. Catch the full masterclasses online: bit.ly/RTSmaster.

We report on two excellent events in the ongoing RTS Digital Convention 2020. The first featured ITV's CEO, Carolyn McCall. The second saw two leading surgeons, Dr Alan Karthikesalingam and Professor Lord Darzi, discuss the potential impact of artificial intelligence in healthcare.

Finally, I'm proud to announce 40 new RTS bursary scholars. We aim to widen participation in, and access to, the media industry by supporting talented students from lower-income backgrounds who are pursuing careers in television.

Theresa Wise

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Television distils two days of expert advice from leading television and film practitioners at the RTS Student Masterclasses 2020

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TV diary

Warwick Davis may be locked down but he's as busy as ever



All my days have been starting the same way this year – like much of the country, I have spent most of them at home. I usually get up early, as I like the quiet tranquillity of the early morning.

After breakfast, the peace dissipates into the usual busyness of the day, when the phone starts ringing and emails start pinging. A cue for me to head to my home office.

■ One of my current projects is the animation *Master Moley*, for which I voice the title character and am an executive producer.

Master Moley is introduced to audiences through a 30-minute special, *Master Moley: By Royal Invitation*, which toured the world in short-film festivals before going to Boomerang this month.

The show also has a full series order, which is incredibly exciting.

Master Moley is a slightly naive but big-hearted mole, who lives in the amazing world of MoleTown – it feels a bit like *The Simpsons* or *The Flintstones*, but with moles. In the special, my character has to save the town from a wicked gardener, who is voiced by Richard E Grant – it's a great, comedic adventure.

■ My involvement with *Master Moley* started back in 2017 with a very short animation presented to investors. I had no idea *Moley* would become a household name. Well, that's the hope, anyway.

Master Moley creator James Reatchlous, producer Tony Nottage, director Leon Joosen and I bounced ideas off each other and developed the character. I get to see all the scripts and animatics as they are developed.

■ Pre-Covid, most of the sessions were recorded in a London studio. For the special, we were able to do some recording with fellow cast members. Gemma Arterton and I recorded a lot of our lines together, which was a joy.

Fortunately, I have my own recording studio, which enables me to record remotely from home. Today is largely consumed by a voice recording session, so I connect directly to the studio and engineer in London.

The audio recording is the same quality as if I were in the studio with them. The whole set-up is seamless and has worked perfectly every time.

■ I usually record for around three to four hours. Once my recording session has completed, I turn my attention to some of my other projects. I am set to reprise my role of Willow

Ufgood in the Disney+ sequel to Ron Howard's 1988 film *Willow*. I've been asked many times over the years if *Willow* will return, and I'm thrilled to tell people that he will indeed.

I have prep that I'm doing to get back into character, so I find a quiet spot – which can be challenging in a house in lockdown with children.

■ My work with Little People, the charity I co-founded that provides support to people with dwarfism and their families, is hugely important to me, and part of my afternoon is dedicated to it. I usually round off my working day with preparing any scripts for tomorrow.

I keep my working day to regular hours. Once 6:00pm comes around, I'll usually cook dinner for the family to give us a proper chance to sit down with each other without the distraction of work, phones and TV.

But afterwards, as we're all big film and TV fans, we take the evening to delve into a couple of episodes of our favourite series – *Prison Break*, *Stranger Things*, *Only Fools and Horses* and *Columbo* – before I head to bed for another early night.

Warwick Davis is an actor, writer, director and producer. Master Moley: By Royal Invitation is on Boomerang from 28 November at 9:00am.

COMFORT CLASSIC

Michael Palin's most ambitious trek is still a benchmark for the TV travelogue. **Matthew Bell** celebrates a master broadcaster

Seen again, almost three decades on, with the world at a virtual standstill due to Covid-19, *Pole to Pole* can induce mixed reactions. Michael Palin's most adventurous trek is a delight. It overflows with the presenter's love of travel and discovery, which, frustratingly, is precisely what we are missing right now.... Our only option is to soak up the sights and hope that, one day soon, we will be able to follow in Palin's footsteps.

In *Pole to Pole*, which was first broadcast on BBC One in 1992, Palin undertakes a "hare-brained migration from north to south". The eight-part series begins when he plants a pole into the Arctic ice, and ends, five and half months later, at the South Pole.

TV, though, is an untrustworthy medium: as Palin happily admits, he actually finished his journey back at the North Pole, after the rest of *Pole to Pole* was in the can. When the series started filming in July 1991, the summer Arctic ice was too thin for a plane to land there safely.

Having travelled through the Arctic circle and Scandinavia, Palin arrives in what is still the Soviet Union at a fortuitous time. Communism is on its last legs and the country is suffering from shortages of pretty much everything, except the spirit of its people. Palin – a generous, empathetic presenter, who is always interested in the people he meets – marvels at the resolve of the Russians and Ukrainians.

At a distance of almost 30 years, *Pole to Pole* shows how much of the world



has changed – and how much remains, depressingly, the same. In Egypt, Palin navigates the Nile as part of a virtually empty tourist cruise. Tourism has collapsed in the wake of the first Gulf war and the boat, forebodingly, given the horrors to come, is called *Isis*.

Palin moves south in his usual quirky manner – travelling on the roof of a snail-slow train, visiting Emperor Haile Selassie’s pet lion and battling a mosquito net – before he leaves for the Antarctic, which proves a huge anti-climax.

He had begun his globe-trotting four years earlier, in *Around the World in 80 Days*, following the route described by Jules Verne in his book. It almost didn’t happen, as Palin revealed a few years ago in his RTS Christmas Lecture. TV broadcaster Alan Whicker, journalist Miles Kington, Clive James and even Noel Edmonds had already turned down the job, before Palin accepted without hesitation.

After *Pole to Pole*, he continued his adventures in *Full Circle with Michael Palin* in 1997, then onwards to the Sahara (2002), the Himalayas (2004), Eastern Europe (2007), Brazil (2012) and North Korea (2018).

Travel had been a childhood dream. As a young boy in Sheffield, he told the RTS, “I wanted to travel and see all the parts of the world that were as dramatic as the Peak District, and more so.” But the furthest Palin went as a child was the Player’s factory in Nottingham on a school trip: “Can you imagine that – an 11-year-old boy taken to a place which produces thousands of fags? At the end, they gave us 50 cigarettes for our parents and we all got ashtrays.”

Before the BBC offered him the chance to travel, Palin wrote for *The Ken Dodd Show* and *The Frost Report*. The matchless *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* followed, and then a Hollywood film career with roles in *Brazil* and *A Fish Called Wanda*. He still acts: recently, Palin gave memorable performances in Armando Iannucci’s *The Death of Stalin* and ITV’s *Vanity Fair*.

But, arguably, the Python is now best known as TV’s premier traveller. Plenty of other famous faces have followed in his wake and some, notably his fellow national treasure, the fabulous Joanna Lumley, have excelled. But nobody does it quite like Palin. ■

Pole to Pole is available on BBC iPlayer. ■ Michael Palin and Sir David Attenborough discuss their working lives at a 2004 RTS event: bit.ly/RTS-Palin.

Ear candy



It’s the only series that makes you shout at your screen: “That’s not how I would do it.” Or, “That will never work!” – before debating with your household exactly how you’d catapult a shoe into a bath using a home-made contraption.

Taskmaster has returned to our screens on its new home, Channel 4, bringing some much-needed joy to Thursday evenings, with a new companion, *Taskmaster: The Podcast*.

Hosted by series 9 *Taskmaster* champion Ed Gamble, the weekly podcast welcomes past and present contestants to unpack the most recent programme and relive some iconic *Taskmaster* moments.

In a safe space beyond the watchful glare of *Taskmaster* Greg Davies, Gamble’s first guest is Little Alex Horne – the series creator, task-maker and

the *Taskmaster*’s loyal assistant, who reveals behind-the-scenes secrets.

We learn the mystery of Mawaan Rizwan’s impressive cow disappearing act and the notorious cake sitting from series 6.

Enjoy Jo Brand’s signature snarky approach to each task, Nish Kumar’s surprisingly good *Taskonbury* song, and Paul Chowdhry’s unpredictable response to the “Spread your clothes” task.

They also share their thoughts on the latest comedians competing for the coveted *Taskmaster* Trophy. As Brand warns: “You don’t know what level of humiliation is waiting for you...”

Taskmaster: The Podcast offers the perfect blend of some of the show’s best-kept secrets, laugh-out-loud anecdotes and in-depth task discussions to satisfy fans old and new. ■

Kate Holman

WORKING LIVES



Clockwise: An *Episodes* set constructed in Surrey; *The League of Gentlemen* local shop; and pre-production sketch for the pub in *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*



BBC/Grenville Horner



Production designer

Emma and RTS award-winning production designer Grenville Horner has been adding style to television programmes for the past four decades. Most recently, he brought his quirky aesthetic to *Adult Material*, Channel 4's drama set in the porn industry.

What is the production designer's job? Visualising the script and creating a world for the story to take place in. I set the mood and the tone for the look. The production designer is responsible for everything you see on screen, from a

table dressing to the choice of landscape and everything in between: rooms, vehicles, special effects and stunts.

So, everything starts with the script? I have to be excited by a script – with a lot of scripts I don't get past the first five pages. Sometimes, though, projects come up like Channel 4's drama *The End of the F***ing World*. I read a synopsis by the director and thought it was fantastic.

When are you brought on board? I'm pretty much one of the first people employed. Normally, it is the director who chooses the production designer

but sometimes I'm employed even before the director.

What's your first step? Initially, I produce a series of images – they could be paintings, stills or sketches I've made. These are not designs for the programmes, but they establish its mood. For *Adult Material*, the hub of the piece is [porn star] Jolene's family home, so I put some images together for the type of house I thought she might live in and also for the [porn] studio.

Who do you work with closely? The production designer heads the art

department, which, depending on the scale of the job, can be from three to 10 or so people. On a feature film, it could be 40 or more. Your right hand is the art director and your left is the set decorator, who is responsible for the set dressing and the props.

How did you become a production designer?

I always drew as a kid and went to art college: one year's art foundation course; a three-year degree; and then a three-year master's at the Royal College of Art in environmental design and architecture. That was seven years of art college – in those days, on a grant, which was fantastic. That time has gone, unfortunately.

I got a job with the BBC design department, initially on a six-month contract. At the time, it was a huge operation and a fantastic breeding ground for creativity.

What was your first work?

Designing a sedan chair for a period drama. As an assistant, I was working with a group of designers across lots of projects and genres – it was a great apprenticeship. I really loved working on the parodies of films such as *Gone with the Wind* and *The Sound of Music* for the *French and Saunders* sketch show.

What do you bring to work with you?

An A4 plain hardback notebook, 4B pencils, an A2 drawing board, scaled rulers, a table tennis set and my guitar.

Music or art?

My first solo design job was on the kids show *Multi-Coloured Swap Shop*, with Noel Edmunds. The live programme went out on a Saturday morning but, during the week, in a small studio, they'd record pop bands such as Blondie and The Pretenders, and I would design the set.

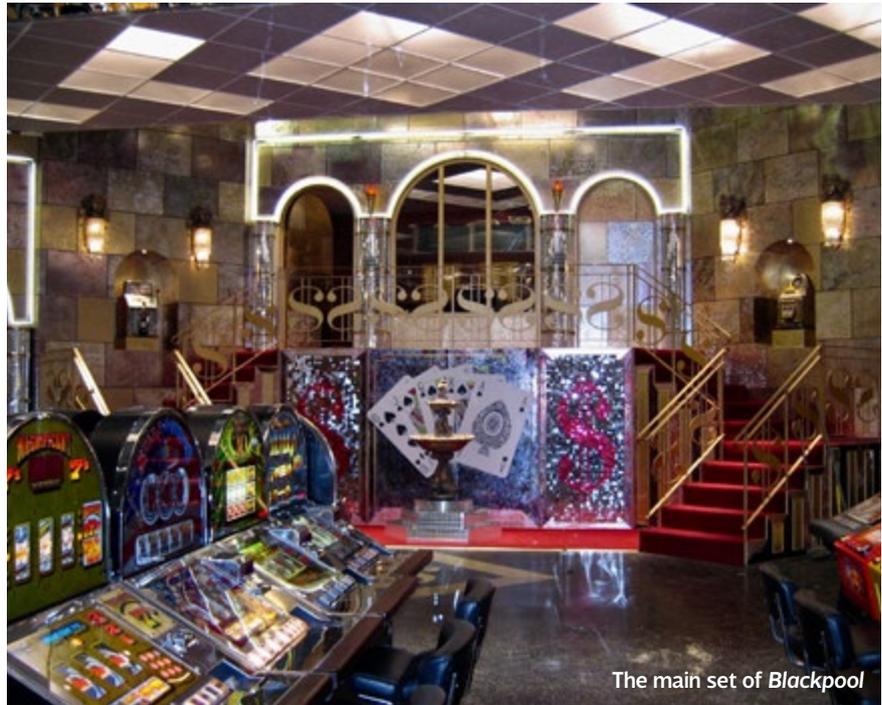
At the time, I was playing in a band, The Cut-Outs, with a mate from college. One week there was no band booked so the show's producer asked us to play. We weren't very good, but we did two numbers on *Swap Shop* – and we got a two-single deal with EMI and even an offer to go on tour with Dave Stewart and Annie Lennox's band, The Tourists. We were too scared to go! For me, it was music or art, but the art really took off. I've played in several bands, though, and still do.

Which work are you most proud of?

A few things stand out. *Blackpool*, starring David Morrissey and David Tennant – I designed and created an arcade, using the skills I learned on BBC variety shows. The Patrick Hamilton adaptation *Twenty Thousand Streets*

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

The BBC's Hollywood-set sitcom *Episodes* was shot in Surrey. I designed sets with lots of green screen so we could drop in shots of Los Angeles during post-production. I remember



The main set of *Blackpool*

BBC

Under the Sky is set in a pub, The Midnight Bell, which we built from scratch. And the local shop in Royston Vasey for *The League of Gentlemen* [for which Horner won an RTS Award].

What makes a good production designer?

You need to be able to communicate your vision, be open to other people's ideas and lead a team. The job is about more than just design: you have to make decisions and control budgets. You learn these things on the job, not in college.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

I love the preparation, where you're imagining and shaping the world of the programme. It's like a jigsaw when you start, which you have to piece together. The worst is when the resources aren't made available to the art department to realise a programme's ambition. While scripts are becoming more ambitious, time and budgets are being cut.

one review that criticised the BBC for funding a jolly in LA.

What is your advice for someone who wants to work in production design?

Get as much experience as you can. You have to start at the bottom, learn your craft and understand every aspect of film-making. Watch and understand other departments – absorb everything.

Has the job changed over time?

There's less time for preparation, which can be a problem given the increasing ambition of scripts. We also work more on location and build fewer sets.

Is there any programme you'd love to work on?

I've been happy with my choices; I don't think I've missed out. I've loved moving from genre to genre, which keeps the job interesting – it's great to go from *Jane Eyre* [for which he won an Emmy] to *The End of the F***ing World*. ■

Production designer Grenville Horner was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

In 2010, Tracey Scoffield, co-founder of Turbine Studios and executive producer of the Emmy-winning movie *The Gathering Storm*, received an email that would change not only the course of her next 10 years, but the boundaries of television drama.

It was from Steve McQueen's agent. At the time, the London-born director had just made a name for himself with his debut feature film, *Hunger*, the story of Bobby Sands and the IRA hunger strikes.

McQueen and the BBC were interested in creating a drama series depicting the experiences of first-generation West Indians living in London. "Their lifetimes were spent during an era of real struggle with authorities like the police, and also the system," recalls Scoffield. "But this generation was starting to die without their stories having been told or recorded."

So began *Small Axe*, a reference to a Bob Marley song based on an African proverb – "So if you are the big tree/ We are the small axe/Ready to cut you down." The films are about to air on BBC One as five standalone cinematic episodes, varying from just under an hour to just over two hours in length.

The five stories are: *Mangrove*, the story of the so-called Mangrove Nine, whose trial was the first judicial acknowledgement of behaviour motivated by racism in the Metropolitan police; *Lovers Rock*, a romantic drama set in unofficial blues clubs, where youngsters would go to dance the night away; *Red, White and Blue*, focusing on the trail-blazing black policeman Leroy Logan; *Alex Wheatle*, the coming-of-age story of writer Alex Wheatle, and *Education*, highlighting racial segregation in our schools.

For McQueen, the 10 years between then and now, of course, weren't solidly spent bringing these films to life: after *Hunger*, he went on to shake the film industry with movies such as *Shame* and triple-Oscar winner *12 Years a Slave*, in the process earning an OBE, CBE and a knighthood. Meanwhile, Helen Bart, a former West Indian BBC News journalist was busy uncovering the stories of everyday people in the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

"She conducted some 126 interviews, which we then read, listened to and filtered to the point where, four years ago, we put together a writers room," says Scoffield, *Small Axe*'s executive producer. "It was only at that point that

The real Black British experience

Steve McQueen's five films under the umbrella title of *Small Axe* are a television first. Shilpa Ganatra examines the project's genesis



BBC

Small Axe episode 4: Alex Wheatle

it became clear that we were going to tell the true stories rather than creating fictional versions. Because, as Steve said, “You couldn’t make it up!”

Working with co-writers Alastair Siddons and Courttia Newland, McQueen steered the scripts into shape. By accident more than design, the timing was impeccable. Filming was almost completed by the end of 2019, which meant that the spring lockdown had little impact on production.

The result is that McQueen’s first television work comes at the tail end of a year in which the Black Lives Matter movement has achieved new prominence. *Mangrove*, the series opener, is particularly prescient. With McQueen’s accessible, gripping storytelling technique, it depicts the same power imbalance between the police and the black community that led to the murder of George Floyd in May.

“For non-black audiences who want to educate themselves, it provides the stories to understand everything that’s been going on over the past year or so. For black audiences, it’s their story being told and what they’ve always known,” says Scofield.

From the moment the project was conceived, McQueen was insistent that the events depicted in *Small Axe* would be recreated with painstaking accuracy. It helped that factual dramas are Scofield’s field of expertise. Her credits include *The Special Relationship*, detailing the relationship between Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, and *Muhammad Ali’s Greatest Fight*, examining the background to the boxer’s refusal to join the US Army to fight in Vietnam.

“I’ve always felt that, if you’re telling a factual story, it should be as authentic as possible, because otherwise it has no value as a historical account,” she says. “We stuck closely with the Mangrove story, especially as much of it unfolded in the courtroom. *Lover’s Rock* is fiction, but based on authentic information about blues parties, which were a popular feature of that period. And we worked closely with Leroy Logan and Alex Wheatle on their episodes.”

Costume designer Sinéad Kida, who worked on two of the five episodes, collaborated with Logan to track down his original tailor from the 1970s so that he could help with the outfits.

In an age in which audiences expect cinema-style production values in TV series, *Small Axe*’s high-end visuals are as much to do with McQueen’s way of

working as they are with the project’s budget – though it helps that Amazon, which has licensed the film in the US, is a co-producer.

“We didn’t have a budget that was five times a feature film – it was a generous, high-end BBC One contribution,” says Scofield. “Fortunately for us, Steve is a very, very fast director. He doesn’t go over time, and he knows exactly what he wants each shot to do, so he doesn’t mess around.”

To acknowledge the subject matter, great effort was made to hire BAME cast and crew. John Boyega (*Star Wars*, *Detroit*) and Letitia Wright (*Black Panther*, *Avengers*) lead the cast, and are two obvious choices who clearly prioritised this project. “How we got them was very simple: they wanted to work with Steve. Every actor wants to work with Steve. It was a combination of that, and

drama, while also learning on the job. The diversity helped to deliver authentic perspectives on *Small Axe*. Cast your mind back to the 2017 Sky series *Guerilla*, which similarly covered British race relations in the 1970s, but was accused of ignoring the role of black women in the struggle (the female lead was played by Freida Pinto). Yet, on *Small Axe*, black women play a pivotal role. Other demographics – such as white allies and the similarly victimised South Asian community – are represented sensitively.

“These are the first London-based films Steve has ever made and they’re very personal to him,” says Scofield. “I think it’s one reason why he was always nervous about plunging in. He knew that he would have to wrestle with everything that was personal to him.

“But there is no one I’ve ever worked



Small Axe episode 2: *Lovers Rock*

BBC

the importance of these stories, which haven’t had the degree of exposure that they should have,” says Scofield.

As for the crew, within the London-based production, BAME (mainly West Indian) representation reached 33%, which was a good effort, given the lack of available people.

“It was hard, as there aren’t enough people with those backgrounds working in the industry,” says Scofield. “You just have to go the extra mile to find people, but we did.”

To alleviate the issue in the future, they appointed a BAME trainee in every department. This gave them the experience of contributing to a high-end TV

with who does the job as thoroughly and professionally. On top of that, he has a creative genius that most directors don’t have, in my experience.”

The end result is monumental television, which has built on McQueen’s forte of telling true stories with passion and quality, but also stretched the storytelling capabilities of television drama. With those safe hands and those rich stories, it was clear it was always going to be something special, even back when the first email dropped into Scofield’s inbox a decade ago. ■

***Small Axe* runs on BBC One from 15 November.**



Andrew Neil

Enter the disruptors

A question – who wrote: “There are three structural things that the right needs to happen in terms of communications... 1) the undermining of the BBC’s credibility; 2) the creation of a Fox News equivalent / talk radio shows / bloggers, etc, to shift the centre of gravity; 3) the end of the ban on TV political advertising”?

The answer: Dominic Cummings (or at least his think tank, the New Frontiers Foundation), in 2004. Let’s start with point two. The talk radio shows are here, so are the bloggers. And coming soon, not one but two TV channels on a disruptive mission to challenge the established news broadcasters.

GB News is heralded as a right-of-centre news channel, launching early next year. It won’t do rolling news – a model it thinks has been supplanted by social media – and instead promises

Two news services that aim to challenge traditional UK news providers are waiting in the wings. **Simon Bucks** investigates

“programming built around strong presenters, which becomes an appointment to view.”

Andrew Neil, the Chair and main anchor, says it will “champion robust, balanced debate”. However, the venture’s political orientation is evident from the names involved. Apart from Neil, the team includes Sir Robbie Gibb (his BBC producer and, later, Theresa May’s spin doctor). The CEO is Angelos Frangopoulos, former boss of Sky News Australia, which prospered after he

“Foxified” it with a right-wing opinion schedule. One of the co-founders, Andrew Cole, a director of Liberty Global, is, according to *The Guardian*, on record as wanting the BBC “broken up”. Outspoken radio pundits Nick Ferrari and Julia Hartley-Brewer are reported, but not confirmed, to be among the on-screen talent.

There are fewer details of the Murdochs’ News UK venture. It is expected to focus partly on entertainment and celebrity news, mainly online but also on TV during part of the day. Recruiters have been busy tapping up big names (reportedly, Piers Morgan and Lord Sugar) and young tabloid reporters who can turn in scoops. It is worth recalling that Rupert Murdoch, never a fan of regulation, disparagingly described Sky News as “BBC lite”, even when he owned it.

The advent of new channels should be a welcome boost for the industry,

‘THE ADVENT OF NEW CHANNELS SHOULD BE A WELCOME BOOST FOR THE INDUSTRY’

especially in the wake of the Covid-19 advertising slump and Comcast’s decision to ditch its planned international rolling-news rival to CNN. Two new channels would certainly add to the diversity of entries for the RTS Television Journalism Awards.

But the prospect of American-style opinion TV, like Fox News and MSNBC, in Britain is sounding alarm bells with traditional news broadcasters. Richard Sambrook, the former BBC News supremo, recently recalled to advise on Twitter use by the corporation’s journalists, warns that polarised opinion TV risks fusing news and views in the minds of audiences.

“People have lost sight of the importance of facts. It’s exacerbated by social media, when sensational clips are pulled out of interviews and posted,” he says.

Sambrook fears that opinion channels represent a slippery slope away from conventional reporting where facts are presented straight for viewers to make up their own minds.

Ultimately, says Sambrook, it will come down to Ofcom. It seems probable that GB News and the Murdoch channel will adopt LBC and TalkRadio’s strategy of interpreting Ofcom’s “due impartiality” rules by achieving balance across the schedule, rather than inside a single programme or segment. This arrangement, which the regulator seems to have tacitly approved, was forged in the crucible of Brexit – James O’Brien’s Remain to Nigel Farage’s Leave – to exploit both sides’ visceral and mutual antipathy.

In the opposite corner, Iain Dale, the (Conservative) LBC presenter, believes there is undoubtedly room for a right-of-centre TV channel to counterbalance a perceived liberal, left-leaning bias among the mainstream broadcasters. Dale argues that, during the Brexit campaign, panel discussions on mainstream TV were routinely dominated by Remainers.

“People are fed up with being ignored and talked down to,” he says. Dale rejects the idea that opinion channels confuse news and comment in the viewers’ minds: “People in the BBC

underestimate the intellect of the audience they serve.”

A more fundamental question is: should there be a wider re-evaluation of Ofcom’s impartiality code? Dale thinks so. “The whole of broadcasting regulation needs overhauling,” he contends. “There is no reason why you shouldn’t have right-wing channels or left-wing channels” – though not, he insists, ones advocating extreme ideas such as Nazism.

David Graham, the former *Panorama* producer who co-founded Diverse Production, believes the impartiality rule discourages genuine journalistic inquiry. “It hands the agenda to the Westminster parties. It’s in the interest of MPs because it guarantees them an appearance.” Moreover, Graham says, the public service broadcasters would always retain a degree of impartiality anyway, because unadulterated facts are what viewers want.

Nic Newman, senior research associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, argues the mainstream broadcasters have already been forced by Brexit and the climate change debate to abandon the balance of “false equivalents” and to focus more on the evidence. “He said/she said impartiality is being replaced by a more nuanced approach.”

The crucial question is: will these new insurgent channels win viewers and make money? Outside the US, with its colossal market, western news channels are not profitable. They rely on subsidies from corporations, governments, licence fees or wealthy individuals. Comcast puts an estimated £40m a year into Sky News.

Even though GB News is not planning a full-scale news gathering machine, Newman is sceptical: “The spike in news viewing at the start of the pandemic was because people

wanted facts and television remains the most trusted medium, at least in Europe,” he says.

“But, in the long run, it won’t halt the trend away from linear-TV to digital platforms, especially among younger people.”

This shift is highlighted in the Reuters Institute’s 2020 *Digital News Report*, which found that 90% of under-35s use the internet, including social media, to get news, against just 57% who use TV. The figures are echoed by Ofcom’s latest research and underlined by the revelation that YouTube is now Britain’s third-biggest video channel after BBC One and ITV.

Newman thinks GB News may struggle because, he says, the numbers really interested in politics are limited. He is more optimistic for the Murdoch channel, if it can create a lively hybrid model with a 24/7 presence online and in social media to amplify the TV programmes. “The key is to keep costs down while maximising eyeballs on a lot of different platforms.”

And so, back to Dominic Cummings. Unsurprisingly, Sambrook doesn’t agree that new right-wing channels are needed to even things up against liberal-biased established broadcasters. “I don’t think the British media, as a whole, is riotously left-wing, even if you can point to small parts of it.

“GB News won’t threaten the BBC and Sky News rolling channels because it couldn’t afford the comprehensive news services they provide. But it will undermine them by further confusing facts and opinion.”

Which leaves Cummings and Co’s third ambition: the end of the ban on political TV advertising. Could that be the next logical step? And if so, would the entire package represent welcome and overdue progress towards more media plurality, equality and freedom? Or a further descent into a dystopian nightmare, where eventually you’ll be hard put to distinguish between British and American television? ■

Simon Bucks is Chair of the RTS Television Journalism Awards.

A pledge to transform inclusivity

Ade Rawcliffe has been promoted to drive ITV's new set of diversity initiatives. She speaks to Caroline Frost



In September, when dance troupe Diversity took to the stage for prime-time TV's most controversial four minutes of 2020, one woman was watching especially intently – Ade Rawcliffe, ITV's freshly promoted group director of diversity and inclusion.

"I was told they were going to do the dance. I thought it was incredibly moving, a wonderful creative expression," she says of the group's routine inspired by some of the year's seminal events, not least the global Black Lives Matter protests.

"I was incredibly proud to work for ITV that night. I interpreted it as the story of lockdown, of Covid, George Floyd, lots of things. By the end, they were trying to say something optimistic about the future."

The performance generated nearly 25,000 complaints. However, Ofcom concluded that Diversity's performance was not inappropriately political but "a call for social cohesion and unity", something that Rawcliffe supports wholeheartedly.

"For me, I don't think the pandemic and black equality are political. I interpret the BLM movement as being about equality, although some other people want to position it slightly differently," she says. "As a public service broadcaster, we should be allowing our creative talents to say something about the world and their response to something so big in our lifetime. It's really important to me that people can have their opinions, though, even if they are counter to mine."

ITV's public support for Diversity's performance came just weeks after Rawcliffe's promotion to its board was announced. Her job is a newly created role where she will co-ordinate all of ITV's diversity and inclusion activities.

She believes the move is evidence of the broadcaster's commitment to making sweeping changes across the organisation: "We've been on a journey already, but, since the tragedy of George Floyd, there's been a quickening of pace, with people asking, 'What are we going to do to create more equality, be more accountable?'"

"My job on the board came about as a result of that need. And just being in the room changes the nature of the conversation, seeing how many things interconnect with diversity and inclusion.

"Everyone's been receptive and open. ITV is a nice place to work. We

have a good culture, and we just want to make it better.”

Rawcliffe, whose first jobs in TV included working as a runner on *Stars in their Eyes* and researching for *Ready Steady Cook*, has no delusions about the significance of her new role. “I feel the weight of responsibility because I’m there to represent so many other people,” she reflects. “It’s not just about me, but who comes up behind me. If it ends with me, I’ve been a dismal failure.”

“It’s a huge opportunity for me personally, but it’s a responsibility I take very seriously. I hope I’m up to the task.”

Rawcliffe’s promotion is one aspect of ITV’s new, five-point plan for diversity, announced in July in support of its pledge to increase the number of opportunities for minority-ethnic and under-represented groups across its business and on-screen.

Other moves include more representation in its highest-profile shows, supporting talent from BAME backgrounds to help them secure lead roles in drama. Additionally, there is the “Step Up 60” scheme to provide 60 people with their first production jobs, and mandatory race training for all staff.

“We wanted something to address the top, the middle and the bottom,” explains Rawcliffe. “Often, we’ve concentrated too much just on getting people in, but we were really keen to help people develop their careers, giving them opportunities to get to senior positions in the industry. It’s hard to bring about cultural change, so you have to attack it from different places.”

“I have strategic oversight, but I don’t do everything. Other people have a role to play. If I was head of sustainability and I was the only person recycling, it would make no difference to the organisation. It’s about everybody doing it, and that’s how you bring about change.”

Of course, for many industry observers, a lot of these good intentions will seem only too familiar to similar initiatives announced before, a point that Rawcliffe is ready to acknowledge: “It’s fair to say that, as an industry, we haven’t progressed as quickly as we

should have done. We’d all like to see an industry where everyone is getting equal opportunities, and I don’t think we’re there yet.

“But, in 2020, the world has changed in a way that has been seismic. My friends who are teachers have pupils telling them, ‘We’re not coming back to



‘WE WILL BE JUDGED BY WHAT WE DO, NOT WHAT WE SAY’

school if this curriculum isn’t changed by Monday’. People are right to feel impatient.

“We talk a lot about this internally, that we will be judged by what we do, not what we say we’ll do. So our plan has become a diversity acceleration plan. If this were a race, we would be nowhere near the finishing line, but we’ve set off.”

She adds: “We need to see a measurable change within a year and be able to report publicly on what we’re doing.”

For Rawcliffe, the case for inclusion is as much commercial as it is ethical: “Netflix is doing it brilliantly, not because it’s a charity but because it can see the commercial case. At ITV, we’ve just done Black History Month.

“You can feel a buzz about the place about us doing something in a different way to before. Of course, we’re proud to be a PSB but there’s a commercial and creative case for it as well. For me, diversity, inclusion, creativity and innovation are all interlinked.”

Writing in *Television* in July, diversity campaigner Marcus Ryder wrote that, “for black and brown people, the UK media industry is a toxic place to

work”. The following month, historian and presenter David Olusoga used his MacTaggart Lecture to describe feeling “patronised and marginalised” during his career. He also referred to a “lost generation” of talent, whose voices and stories were obliterated.

Of Ryder’s indictment, Rawcliffe says,

“I know him really well, and I wouldn’t question his experience at all. If that’s his perception, I would say we need to do more so that it isn’t the case.”

Regarding her own experience in the industry, she explains: “It’s only when you connect with others that you realise the things you’ve internalised. I suspect [that’s true of] experiences I’ve had, but there are lots of people who have had a lot worse time than me.

“Plus, it’s important to acknowledge the people who came before me, and made it possible for me to do what I do.”

Olusoga’s words cut deep for her: “I found his speech devastating and upsetting.

I don’t want to see another person having to give that lecture. His point about the lost generation, that we have lost talent, when talent is the lifeblood of our industry, I found heartbreaking.”

For Rawcliffe, who grew up watching shows such as *Blind Date*, *Grange Hill* and *Diff’rent Strokes*, and whose most recent binges during lockdown have included *Quiz*, *Succession* and *Sanditon*, content remains key to finally getting diversity right.

“It’s all about who’s making the shows, the writers, the directors, producers. The issue that most addresses that is Step Up 60, and that’s where we have most to do.”

Finally, what will success look like? Two things, says Rawcliffe. “First, I would like to be able to say that the data tells us we are representing the population. Second, that we have created a genuinely inclusive culture, where people feel their voices are heard, that they feel they belong and they feel protected.”

She smiles before concluding: “I always said that I wanted to work myself out of a job. I wouldn’t mind if there wasn’t a need to have my job on the board.” ■

OUR FRIEND IN GUADELOUPE

This is the fourth version of this piece that I've written. I scrapped the previous three as "the news" made them immediately out of date. I'm going to plough on with this one, although I fear that, by the time it is published, it will be entirely irrelevant thanks to world events, but hey ho. Like everyone, I'm resigned to the fact that there's no way of predicting anything this year...

Apart from one thing, and that's the passion and resilience of everyone in the creative industries. I know about this first hand, as I've had the privilege of working with a team of people this year who have been determined to get our particular show on the road again, in spite of the huge challenges that Covid-19 has thrown at us.

A disclaimer first of all – at *Death in Paradise* we are luckier than many. We had good insurance in place, our show is as Covid-friendly as one can be (no sex scenes, no huge crowd scenes, lots of outdoor filming, no public transport, etc, etc) and we were working to the French, rather than the British, guidelines, meaning social distancing of one, rather than two, metres. And the country we film in, Guadeloupe, has been very supportive and keen for us to get going.

But things have been extremely difficult. We've wrestled with the practicalities of filming during a pandemic – logistical, creative and moral. We were – and still are – determined to deliver the show to the BBC to hit its

Passion and resilience help **Tim Key's** team overcome the challenges of filming in a pandemic



Red Planet Pictures

usual transmission in January. Which means a ludicrous post-production schedule, given that filming started nearly four months late.

Getting to the end of the shoot is in no way guaranteed – new lockdowns in the UK and France add further complications to a production that has not been short of complications.

Over the past decade, we've become pretty used to navigating "complications", from hurricanes to the boat carrying our gear breaking down in the Atlantic and arriving four weeks late. With our friends in Guadeloupe, we thought we could cope with pretty much anything.

And it was our 10th year – we had big plans, our creative focus very much about rewarding long-term viewers while also driving the show forward. We were feeling buoyant as we approached the start of our shoot. And then we had to stand down and send our team home while we worked out what on earth we were going to do.

We are now about two-thirds of our way through the 22-week shoot. I think we're going to make it to the end, just before Christmas, but I'm not taking anything for granted. I also think we will get the show on air as usual.

But our industry is in real trouble at the moment, and my friends (and family) who work in theatre and live events have it even tougher. The arts are so vital to the creative, financial and mental health of a country and I've no idea what the next 12 months will hold.

I am confident that the audience who love *Death in Paradise* will be able to tune in for a slice of intriguing, light-hearted, joyful, Caribbean escapism at the start of 2021 and I am extremely proud of – and grateful to – the wonderful team who have made that happen.

As the TV and film industry starts to bounce back, I pray that theatre and live events won't be far behind. I feel privileged to be part of this wonderful, challenging, frustrating, joyous, ridiculous, rewarding and vital industry. Now, I'll just put the news on and see what's occurring. Oh... ■

Tim Key is executive producer of *Death in Paradise* for Red Planet Pictures.



RTS/YouTube

Flying the flag for PSB

Carolyn McCall offered a robust defence of public service broadcasting during the course of a revealing and wide-ranging interview at the RTS Digital Convention 2020. ITV's CEO – who was probed by *ITV News London* and *Loose Women* presenter Charlene White – also discussed the Black Lives Matter movement, BritBox, ITV's digital strategy and its response to the coronavirus epidemic.

McCall said that the first Covid-19 lockdown had “brought home to a lot of people” the importance of having “a trusted [TV] source, [with no] disinformation”.

But, she argued, there are many other benefits to the UK's public service broadcasting ecosystem that the public doesn't necessarily know about. “Eighty per cent of independent production comes from the public

ITV Chief Executive Carolyn McCall explains why UK public service broadcasters need prominence on all platforms

service broadcasters [PSBs], so we keep the creative economy healthy. We spend a huge amount of money out of London. We are required to do that as part of our remit. Most other operators don't do that; they are very M25-centric.”

And McCall warned: “A lot of the stuff that goes on air would not be made if it wasn't for the fact that there are PSBs.”

She called for public service broadcasting, which is being reviewed by both media regulator Ofcom and the

DCMS, to be treated fairly. After delays caused by the Covid-19 epidemic, both reviews are expected to be published soon: Ofcom's report is due before the end of the year, while the DCMS is expected to publish by early 2021 at the latest.

“If [a PSB doesn't] have prominence, its content will not be found in this new digital world with platforms that can exclude you,” said McCall. “If you don't come to terms with a smart-TV manufacturer, they can just leave you off.”

“We spend a lot of money making content [and] we need to see fair value for that. In the linear world, there is a framework for how that operates: you have to have prominence and be on the EPG. But in a title-based world, you can give prominence to the highest bidder and then you won't find PSB content.”

“It's a skewed market; it's not fair or reasonable,” continued McCall. “We >

BritBox hits its milestones

BritBox has 'done brilliantly in the US and Canada – the international model is a very robust one', said Carolyn McCall. '[A launch in] Australia is imminent and then we'll start rolling it out from there. The BBC and ITV are totally aligned about that.'

She said BritBox 'is meeting all its targets but it is a very different product here because we all have our own services, our iPlayers and Hubs, so it's more tricky, [and there are also] rights issues. It is the go-to place for multi-series box sets with British originated content.'

The return of *Spitting Image*, released on BritBox last month after an absence of more than two decades, 'is a big step in making it a very distinctive service. It has had widespread coverage and a lot of subscriber interest.'

She added: 'If we think [a show] is going to do well on BritBox and in international territories, we can co-produce it with the international division and that obviously brings down the cost for BritBox. *Spitting Image* is a good example of that because it crosses boundaries very well. I think you'll see more of that to come.'

BritBox, which was created by the BBC and ITV, also features programmes from Channel 4 and Channel 5. McCall held up the service as 'a great example of the public service broadcasters coming together'.

She welcomed this 'collaboration' but added that, with the BBC, 'there'll always be competitive tension and I think that's good and healthy – it keeps the creative output [in the UK] very high'.



Charlene White

RTS/YouTube

› have to make returns for our shareholders, so what we need is a level playing field – we're not asking for special favours."

McCall claimed that the 2003 Communications Act had reached its sell-by date: "The Act... regulates us highly [and] is not appropriate any more because the whole world has changed – we're not monopolies or the dominant [broadcasters] any more. There are other dominant players and, if this continues, I don't think PSBs will exist in the shape they are in today."

McCall went on to outline a future for ITV that combined the old and the new, but with the latter taking the lead: "We have to be a digitally-led media and entertainment business."

"We've got this amazing channel, ITV, which has huge audiences. We want to keep those big audiences and we do that through major-event TV, and I think that has many years to run."

"I don't think ITV has to change what it's doing on its mass, simultaneous-reach platform, ITV1... We're the only place where you can get those really big

audiences, and that's partly because we do so many family entertainment shows and we do them so well."

But, McCall added: "One of the things we have to do is engage the 16-34s... in a different way, and that [means] being agnostic about where we put our content."

"People under 35, particularly, are watching things on-demand all the time... We want to do on-demand in a bigger, better way. ITV Hub, personalisation, recommendation... and BritBox are very much part of [our] future."

ITV Hub, she said, "has changed dramatically – we've invested a lot in Hub, it's one of our key priorities".

One recent success had been true-crime drama *Des*, starring David Tennant as serial killer Dennis Nilsen. "It has consolidated at around 12 million as a series average, which is unbelievable... 2 million of that 12 million was on ITV Hub. That is a big number – 80% of 16-34s are registered on Hub and 30 million people [in total]."

Did that mean that ITV would start to commission programmes to go

straight on the Hub, asked White. McCall replied that ITV's strategy "has to continue to evolve because everything is changing all the time. Definitely, you will see commissions that are geared to the Hub audience."

One week after McCall appeared at the RTS Digital Convention, ITV announced a restructuring of its business to reflect the nation's changing viewing habits. A new Media and Entertainment Division will have two business units, broadcast and on-demand. The latter will include Hub, Hub+ (the ad-free version) and BritBox.

The current director of television, Kevin Lygo, will become MD of the Media and Entertainment Division and will run the broadcast business unit, with chief marketing officer Rufus Radcliffe heading the on-demand side.

McCall, ITV's CEO since 2018, recalled the devastating impact of the coronavirus lockdown on the broadcaster in March.

"We decided we would test working from home before it became a necessity and so we actually locked down five days earlier. Our IT systems worked seamlessly," she said. "Most of us thought it would be four to five weeks and we'd all be back in. Most people left their stuff at work. I realised [the situation] was really, really serious when all our productions stopped – we went from about 280 productions worldwide to virtually zero."

The broadcaster's focus, said McCall, had been to "conserve our cash and look after our people". Essentially, this meant getting production up and running again.

"We were still producing 10 hours of live programming, which was a lifeline for people in Britain. I think the value of public service broadcasting, if it was not known by the public, became extremely well known over that period of time," she emphasised.

At the time, White was on maternity leave. She recalled: "Seeing those daytime shows staying on air made me feel, 'I think we're going to be all right.'"

Good Morning Britain and *This Morning* continued to be made in the studio, demonstrating that television could be

produced safely during the epidemic. "We learnt a lot of what we would later implement in terms of our safety protocols from how [to do] it live." ITV's daytime programming, said McCall, "was entertaining, informative and reassuring. You can't get a better

description of what public service broadcasting should be about".

Production has now returned to near-normal. The CEO denied there had been a slowdown in commissioning: "Our programme budget went down this year because we weren't putting things on air or we couldn't produce certain shows we had intended to produce

– that's the reason the budget went down. A lot of that is going to go back in next year.

"The only way you can compete is through your content... you have to invest in content."

She continued: "The advertising market has been hugely impacted by that awful three months of lockdown. The good news is that the advertising market has come back; everyone's talking about Christmas campaigns.

"We have to continue to be careful about our cash, because the only way to deal with this kind of uncertainty economically is to make sure you've got a strong balance sheet.

"[But] the one unassailable fact is that people are going to be watching a lot of content and that's great for us. We have to keep producing that [with] the quality and engagement that we do... We need to keep our productions going safely – that's a priority."

Covid-19 has not affected ITV's longer-term plans. "Strategically, it doesn't change the direction of travel. The fact that we are putting more resources behind what we call on-demand, whether that's ITV Hub, Hub+ or BritBox... that's not going to change. Nurturing ITVI? That's not going to change." ■

Report by Matthew Bell. ITV Chief Executive Carolyn McCall was in conversation with Charlene White as part of the RTS Digital Convention 2020, sponsored by YouTube, on 13 October. The producer was Helen Scott.

'WE WANT TO DO ON-DEMAND IN A BIGGER, BETTER WAY'

Black Lives Matter at ITV

Carolyn McCall talked about ITV's much-praised anti-racist advertisement published in response to the Black Lives Matter routine performed by dance troupe Diversity on *Britain's Got Talent* in early September.

Ofcom received some 24,500 complaints about the routine, but ITV stood by the show. 'Within seconds of people seeing the ad, I had so many emails and text messages from people internally, from every part of the company,' she recalled.

McCall discussed ITV's efforts to improve diversity within the company: 'We realised that all the actions we'd taken – and we'd done some really good stuff – had not really gone into something substantive enough... I think it was partly because we were doing it incrementally.'

The broadcaster launched its Diversity Acceleration Plan in July to promote inclusion on-screen and across ITV. The following month, it promoted Ade Rawcliffe group to director of diversity and inclusion.

McCall said the broadcaster was committed to 'making change at every level in the organisation. That's why we've created jobs in middle management, we've doubled our apprentice scheme and we've put a director of diversity and inclusion on the Management Board.'

■ For more on ITV's Diversity Acceleration Plan see the interview with Ade Rawcliffe on page 14.



BSIP

Two distinguished surgeons discuss technology's role in unlocking the future of healthcare

Data-driven diagnostics

To “intervene earlier and prevent folks from getting sick before they do” is the grand hope of Dr Alan Karthikesalingam, a surgeon scientist and research lead at Google Health UK. His aspirational vision “may take a long time”, he conceded.

As part of the RTS Digital Convention 2020, he was in conversation with Professor Lord (Ara) Darzi, President of the British Science Association. The two surgeons quickly set the tone as they discussed the difficulties confronting them during the pandemic.

Darzi shared his recent experience of working in an intensive care unit and how it was “very, very painful” to see a ward usually occupied by patients

suffering from a variety of conditions suddenly dominated by those ill with Covid-19.

This was where Karthikesalingam offered a potentially impactful tool not only in the fight against the virus, but to aid healthcare as a whole: artificial intelligence (AI). Typically, AI is defined as machine intelligence that processes data to help maximise the chance of achieving its goals based on what it learns. AI can even predict outcomes by using machine-learning algorithms to spot patterns.

“A few years ago, it was being used to do things such as play chess. The same systems are now being used to predict the protein structure of this virus,” explained Karthikesalingam. He has led studies into the use of AI in healthcare

and knows how important it can be.

But, as the race to develop a Covid-19 vaccine intensifies, one key technological cog in the AI machine is needed more than ever – data. Google has used information collected from individuals and agencies to assist in several ways. Karthikesalingam told the RTS how Google Maps, for example, “is now showing accurate and live information about some 14,000 Covid test sites in more than 20 different countries”.

Darzi complimented Google on this work before asking whether it “might play a role in discovering some new therapeutics” as we endure a second coronavirus wave.

Karthikesalingam pointed out that pharmaceutical companies were using “machine learning to try and make their selection of promising drug candidates more efficient”. But he admitted that, “because it’s such a new virus, the kind of clinical data about which treatments work – and which treatments don’t work – is so new that it is probably too [soon] for artificial intelligence to help at this end of the scale.”

In light of this, Darzi took a step back and widened the discussion to other areas of research that Google and its AI subsidiary, DeepMind, have ventured into. Karthikesalingam highlighted work on breast cancer screening and how the data gathered by big national breast screening programmes had

Prof Lord Darzi



Dr Alan Karthikesalingam



RTS/YouTube

been used to train the algorithm to make maximum use of X-rays.

“I think an average radiologist will look at more than 10 million images in their career, and most of them tend to get better over time. In the same way, we can train these machine-learning systems to interpret X-rays,” said Karthikesalingam. He went on to claim that Google’s system had the “same level of accuracy as expert radiologists”.

This led Darzi to ask if, “at the end of the day, a radiologist would sign reports [jointly with the company providing the AI]”. Karthikesalingam looked on AI as a tool that could complement doctors rather than replace them – at least for now: “Most people are looking at machine learning in healthcare as a tool that assists experts to be more efficient and to be able to do their job.”

At what point might AI become so good that it could theoretically replace a human, wondered Darzi: if a machine processed more than the rough average of 10 million images that a radiologist saw in a lifetime, would the machine become “better” than a human?

Karthikesalingam said it was not as simple as that. For one thing, the quality of the image was crucial: “Imagine taking a photo of a number of cats from a distance. If you’re standing very, very far away, then it doesn’t matter how good you are at counting cats, because the photograph might be

too blurry [for you] to see.”

However, there was potentially more to see in an image than many humans could currently detect, Karthikesalingam added. Referring to his collaboration with London’s Moorfields Eye Hospital on identifying diseases that can lead to blindness, he described research that Google has conducted. By “looking at these images of the back of the eye, machine-learning systems can [reveal] predictive information about the rest of the body’s health. For example, about how likely people are to have heart attacks or strokes in the five or 10 years following [these images].”

He added: “That’s very early-stage research. But... we might uncover new things in these images that we couldn’t see before.”

Ultimately, both surgeons agreed on one thing that was of the utmost importance – patient care. Darzi recalled an incident some 20 years previously, when he “commissioned a robotic system in the operating theatre”. Subsequently, a patient was very upset “to hear that it was a robot that was going to operate on them”.

Although Darzi assured the patient that it was “just a tool”, it was a seminal moment because it raised the question of how the public would react to advanced technology playing a part in their healthcare.

Karthikesalingam pointed out that,

in his research, he had found that including patients in projects from the beginning, “guarantees that you build the systems in ways that are more acceptable to patients and the public”.

But who those patients were was equally important, noted Karthikesalingam, because machine learning could be undermined by biased data. Some AI medical systems had been inconsistent in processing people from ethnic minorities in the US and Europe because they “learnt” from datasets comprised largely of one – white – ethnic group.

When bias existed in the way that data was collected, the process of “repeatedly training pattern-recognition systems using this data [could] build in these biases in a way that makes them permanent – or even amplify them – when we turn them into tools and technologies”.

Throughout the discussion, data and how it drove technology was the central theme. Advanced technologies such as AI might be exciting but simpler things, such as video calls, could sometimes be more effective.

The extent to which virtual medical consultations had become commonplace had taken Darzi by surprise. He made the point that “if you’d asked me about a year ago how many patients would you be doing a remote consultation with, I would have said zero... We’ve moved from nothing to millions of remote consultations – in other words, sitting down in front of a television and having a discussion with the patient.”

He believed that “a lot of that will remain with us, because it’s good, it’s efficient”.

Karthikesalingam’s hope was that, “over the next 10 or 20 years, we will start to see much more digitisation of our wellbeing and our health” to process and unlock new insights.

It is this data-driven dream that may help realise his hope that we can, one day, “intervene earlier and prevent folks from getting sick before they do”. ■

Report by Omar Mehtab, who is a journalist on the BBC technology show Click. ‘In conversation with Professor Lord Darzi and Dr Alan Karthikesalingam’ on 20 October was part of the RTS Digital Convention 2020, sponsored by YouTube. The producer was Jon Brennan, manager, EMEA broadcast, entertainment and media partnerships at Google.

Freeview comes of age



When Broadcasting House was opened in 1932, the front of the building was likened to the prow of a ship. With a commanding view that befitted the vessel's bridge was the grandest office. It belonged to John Reith, the first Director-General. But the office above his, acknowledged as the second-grandest in the building, with equally magnificent wood paneling and an even loftier view down Langham Place, was that of the chief engineer.

Without an engineer, the captain would remain in dock; with an engineer, he could travel the world. Reith did his travelling from his office, while, on the roof, a few floors above, a flag was emblazoned with the BBC's coat of arms and its now-familiar motto, "Nation shall speak peace unto nation".

In the beginning, the chief engineer was central. The BBC's output was conceived as a way to sell radios (and then televisions). But, while the chief engineer moved the technology forward, the DG understood the

As the digital platform marks its 18th birthday, **Caroline Thomson** dissects the crucial role it plays in fostering a common culture

extraordinary power of the medium, reaching as it did very quickly into every home in the country. This was just too important to trust to the market.

Broadcasting in the UK would come to be defined by its public purpose. Although we were united with the US by a common language, our approach to television was very different.

The advent of ITV, and then Channel 4 – commercial, but within the public service family – increased programme choice and diversity. But technological advance was limited – most significantly, black and white became colour and, in radio, FM took over from medium wave. Engineers were no longer on the bridge.

But the dawn of the 21st century

brought us full circle. Digital terrestrial transmission allowed a huge increase in the number of channels. Importantly for government, it freed up valuable spectrum to be auctioned at high prices.

While Sky's satellites had already brought us an attractive pay-TV offer, Britain now needed to move the whole population, including those who didn't want to – or couldn't – pay, on to digital. Satellite, on its own, wouldn't do this.

Engineers once again came to the fore. The public service broadcasters (PSBs) could leap from single to multiple channels, audiences were better served and spectrum, essential for mobile services, could be freed up and sold.

The platform that delivered this transformation – a piece of technology now so ubiquitous that it is "just telly" – was Freeview, which celebrated its 18th birthday on 30 October. Its genesis was Greg Dyke's ambition to give everyone in the country a "digibox".

As Freeview reaches adulthood, the UK can be proud of a free service carrying 85 TV channels and, through the PSBs alone, reaching 98.5% of British households.

It is our biggest television platform:

it is used, day in, day out, by almost 18 million households – two-thirds of the country. A truly unique and powerful collaboration between its partners.

I say powerful because a public service platform with that degree of reach into the lives of a country's citizens is a staggeringly useful (cynics might say "staggeringly dangerous") tool for informing and educating Britons as well as entertaining them.

The importance of Freeview is enormous. That is because this technology is both extraordinarily simple and highly sophisticated. On the one hand, you need no more than a good aerial to get access to Freeview and the wonderful panoply of information and entertainment that it carries. It does what it says on the tin – it's free.

On the other, it has within it the capacity to drive the next technological revolution – and to drive it with public service values at its heart. We are coming full circle, in the best Reithian tradition. As we move towards an increasingly connected world, it is all too easy for the "metropolitan elite" to take it for granted that everyone has access to broadband that carries television content free of charge.

But not only is broadband not free, it is not used by anywhere near as high a proportion of the population as TV is. Research presented to Parliament earlier this year showed that 11.9 million people in this country have no, or limited, access to the internet. Covid-19 has brought these inequities into stark and scandalous relief.

Freeview cannot remove the charge for broadband, but it can democratise it. Freeview Play shows that a smart user experience is not the exclusive preserve of streamers or only available to users who can afford to pay their subscriptions. Its power comes from its developers, the PSBs and Arqiva, collaborating to produce high-quality technology solutions.

However, the argument for Freeview is not just about offering free access, important as that is. It is about the country we live in and the sense of a common culture. The true "water-cooler" moments of our past – the murder of Dirty Den, the Olympics opening ceremony or Super Saturday in the 2012 athletics, or the Queen's address to the nation during the spring lockdown – were all available to everyone.



Caroline Thomson

Freeview

**'FREEVIEW
CANNOT
REMOVE THE
CHARGE FOR
BROADBAND,
BUT IT CAN
DEMOCRATISE IT'**

Will they be in the future if, in order to guarantee access to those shared cultural moments, you need a subscription to whichever service it is played on? And will those moments be genuinely British and genuinely uniting if the authors, producers and distributors of them see the UK as just another "territory" in which to market their global content?

The importance of Freeview, approaching adulthood in a scary world, where giant platforms set the rules of the market and intimidate those without power and money, is that it allows us to answer those questions confidently with a Yes.

So, as Ofcom begins to gather evidence for its PSB review and the Government assembles a panel that has the freedom to discuss whether we even need such a thing as public service broadcasting (and, if we do, what shape it should take), let us remember what we have had in the past, what we have now and imagine what we will need in the future.

All in all, we enjoy a broadcasting ecology that is the envy of the world: high-class original content, great creativity and impartial news available to all; free at the point of use, live and on-demand; enjoyed and valued by the vast majority of British viewers week in, week out. This is a tribute to the extraordinary mix of public and commercial funding underpinned by regulatory protections.

It is a peculiarly British mix of the market and the state working hand in hand to the advantage of citizens. The Freeview collaboration has been an essential ingredient of that success.

But, as the UK's biggest TV platform comes of age, you could change it all. You could decide that universality and free are no longer fundamental principles that underpin the provision of public service broadcasting in the UK. You could risk leaving the market to deliver the depth and breadth of content British audiences are privileged to have access to.

You could diminish the PSB engine and lose the significant role that UK broadcasting plays on the world stage.

But the real question is: why would you want to? ■

Caroline Thomson is Chair of Digital UK, which runs Freeview, and a former chief operating officer of the BBC.



Line of Duty

An accidental career

Line of Duty creator Jed Mercurio decided he probably should learn to write – after he’d already penned a hit BBC drama series. “I did it backwards,” the former medic told the RTS Midlands Careers Fair 2020. Mercurio had been a junior doctor working in Birmingham hospitals when he replied to an advert in the *British Medical Journal*. It had been placed by a production company looking for drama ideas.

This led to him writing *Cardiac Arrest*, the pioneering 1994 BBC One series. Unusually for a TV drama set in the world of medicine, the series depicted the staff as flawed, accident-prone cynics, rather than the idealised depiction of angels in white coats that had characterised hospital drama since the dawn of television.

Mercurio, of course, went on to become one of the UK’s most successful TV writers and showrunners. His much-acclaimed work includes *Bodies*, another dark medical saga, and *Bodyguard*, one of BBC TV’s most popular scripted shows of the past 20 years.

While Mercurio is most at home in hospitals and police stations, he has embraced other genres, ranging from comedy (*The Grimleys*, starring Noddy

Jed Mercurio, acclaimed for creating *Line of Duty*, headlines the RTS Midlands Careers Fair

Holder and Amanda Holden) and period drama (*Lady Chatterley’s Lover*) to sci-fi, with *Frankenstein* and *Invasion: Earth*.

“I had no plans to work in TV,” he admitted during his Careers Fair conversation with William Gallagher, deputy chair of the Writers’ Guild. “When *Cardiac Arrest* was recommissioned, which kind of took me by surprise because I didn’t expect it would have a future, I thought maybe I ought to learn a bit more about writing.

“I read books and I did some weekend workshops on story structure. I think they can be useful to give you ideas, but I believe there is no overall perfect model for writing. A lot of those structure gurus claim there is and they are wrong.”

Mercurio was *Cardiac Arrest*’s on-set medical advisor on series 2. The experience allowed him to learn how programmes are made and to get involved in production and direction.

“I think it’s odd that some writers

don’t want to be on set,” he told the RTS session, one of the highlights of four days of popular online events. “If you’ve written something, you have a vision about how it’s going to be realised and you can be of help to people who are taking that vision on.

“Even if it’s just being able to clarify what a line means or what an important point is in a scene, that’s so valuable to the production.

“I understand how something has to be filmed and that informs my approach to the writing. The fact is, you can imagine whatever you want, but if you want someone to perform and film it, it has to be physically possible within a time frame and budget.

“As you gain experience, you start thinking more about that. The more film-friendly your writing is, the more your scripts will appeal to people.”

Mercurio was speaking on the set of series 6 of *Line of Duty*, the police corruption drama that has grown from a low-key start on BBC Two to win a global fan base and seven RTS awards. It also came third in a *Radio Times* poll of the best British crime dramas of all time.

“There was an ambition from the very beginning with *Line of Duty*, but you just don’t know,” Mercurio said. “You cross your fingers that it’s going



Doctors

to be a success, then you can begin to plan.

“I’ve had ups and downs in my career, times where I’ve started to look ahead and then the broadcaster has decided not to recommission. What series should have continued? Pretty much all of them.

“None of the series I’ve worked on have come to an end because any of the creative people didn’t want to continue. It’s always been a decision that has come from the broadcaster and almost always because of a change of personnel.

“The head of drama or head of the channel has left and someone new has come in. They’re a new broom and they drop a lot of things from the schedule to make room for their own commissions.”

And he teased his fans: “Yes, I do know how *Line of Duty* will end. I have it planned out as an overview but not the detail yet.”

Last year, more than 900 people attended the RTS Midlands Careers Fair at Edgbaston Stadium, but this year’s event was even more ambitious, with up to four and a half hours of

live-streamed sessions and workshops each day.

RTS Midlands Chair Caren Davies said: “We’re delighted with the positive reaction the Careers Fair received. Going online meant that we could involve even more top broadcasters from across the country and reach an even wider audience.”

The line-up of on- and off-screen talent included director of BBC Sport Barbara Slater, presenter Jacqui Oatley, BBC Three boss Fiona Campbell, Chris Stark from *That Peter Crouch Podcast*, Channel 4 continuity announcer Corie Brown and Martin Dougan from *Newsround*.

Sessions included help with CVs, an animation workshop and panels on digital effects, working on location, filming with your smartphone, TV news and post-production. The fair also paid a live visit to the Birmingham set of BBC One’s award-winning soap *Doctors* to see how it was made. Actor Dex Lee led a guided tour and questioned crew members, from the third assistant director to those involved in post-production.

One of the most inspiring sessions was *The One Show*’s Richie Anderson in conversation with BBC Three controller Fiona Campbell. She had a mine of useful tips on how to get into television and, specifically, to work on her channel.

Speaking from her Belfast attic, she said: “Firstly, watch TV! It’s amazing the number of people who don’t watch the content. You have to be able to talk about what we make.

“Have ideas and show me a wee bit of something to get me interested. You can film things on your phone and have your own Instagram or YouTube channel.

“If an idea can work on BBC One or Two or Channel 4, it’s not for us. We try to have content that is very separate from those channels, for the 25-and-under audience from all over the UK.

“If people ask if you can do something, say yes. Don’t go, ‘Well, I can have a go’.

“Don’t be snooty about content. If you get offered a job making films about broken washing machines, which I did when I worked for *Watchdog*, that’s great, because it really matters to people.

“If you can work in social media for anything, even your local garage, just bloody do it. If you can demonstrate to me how you can get an audience to that garage, that interests me. Think about volunteering for anyone who you can help to grow their social media audience.

“Degrees where you learn how to shoot and edit are really good. A degree in a language is always good. But only do a degree because you’re passionate about what you want to study, don’t just do it for the sake of it.

“Send in your CV and ideas and follow up two weeks later. Don’t make it a blanket one you’ve sent to 10 people. If you’re chasing someone, email them every six to eight weeks. If they send you an abrupt email, you’re getting annoying. But eventually something will stick.

“Emails without ideas don’t get answered, so have endless ideas and a good title for your programme – that’s really important.

“It’s a test of tenacity and persistence. Remain positive, keep picking yourself up and keep going.” ■

Report by Roz Laws. The RTS Midlands Careers Fair 2020 was held 12-15 October.



Why we love... reality TV

An RTS panel discovers the secret of the genre's continuing success

Reality TV is arguably bigger than ever. The term was first coined in the 1990s, as producers turned unscripted “real-life” situations into compulsive viewing with shows such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. More than 25 years later, the genre is ubiquitous across linear and streamed TV.

Consider the channel-defining success of ITV's *Love Island*, Netflix's *Too Hot To Handle* or the huge popularity of the latest series of Channel 4's *The Great British Bake Off*.

The new run of *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me*

Out of Here! was forced by the pandemic to relocate from Australia's tropical rainforest to a chilly, windswept castle in North Wales. Expectations are riding high that the series will be one of its most successful ever.

An RTS panel attempted to tease out the ingredients of a successful reality show in “Why we love... reality TV”, chaired by a former *Celebrity Big Brother* winner, the charismatic Rylan Clark-Neal. There was a consensus that creating and sustaining a long-running reality hit is far from straightforward.

The potential rewards, however, are massive: global franchises such as *Big*

Brother have made TV legends of the likes of John de Mol, inventor of *Big Brother* and *The Voice*.

The challenge of getting a reality show to “stick” is even greater in the age of streaming, when viewers' decisions about what to watch – especially for the younger demographic drawn to reality TV – are measured in seconds, not minutes.

“With the saturation of reality TV, what's the USP, what's the tone that's different? People are flicking through shows and taking four seconds to decide what to watch. We need to think about how we are going to make an impression in those four seconds,” said Craig Orr, VP, original content and development, youth and entertainment for international at ViacomCBS.

Richard Cowles, director of entertainment at ITV Studios, told the RTS that it was vital to have reality shows that made “more noise than all the other ones”.

Audiences for reality TV were sophisticated and responded well to shows that moved the genre on with originality and an element of surprise.

“That's why it's so difficult to create new formats... otherwise, we'd just be churning them out,” said Cowles, who is overseeing the production of *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* from its new base in Wales (see box, page 27).

He said that, to succeed, a reality series needed “twists and turns, dilemmas and relatable characters who people can get behind and love”.

Katy Manley, MD of Initial TV, which produces *Big Brother*, stressed that reality shows have evolved: the genre's roots were deep, going back to shows such as *Candid Camera*, first shown in the US in 1948 and on air until 2014.

“Saying that it is real people doing real things is an over-simplification,” she added. “What is produced to look real is also evolving now. The people might be real, but the situations may be becoming a bit less real.”

She said the time and effort that went into producing reality TV was misunderstood. It involved a lot more from the production team than pointing a camera at a group of people and filming them.

“If it were that simple, we'd all be out of a job,” she said. “Even in the purest of formats, we're generating everything.”

“The genre appeals to a young demographic and to a cross-section of society. People enjoy the soap-opera



The Bridge

Channel 4

Covid-secure Celebrity tips

Moving *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* from Australia to Gwrych Castle in North Wales posed challenges for the production team but 'opens up a whole new range of opportunities', said ITV's Richard Cowles.

A new location had to be built 'in a fraction of the time it would normally take... We've got a great team, who are adapting and evolving.'

He added: 'It isn't easy, but the good thing about reality shows is that you can put the cast in a bubble, where they are reasonably sealed off from the outside world.'

'In the US and Germany, *Love Island* managed to produce over the summer... The key thing is we create the safest possible workplace for crew, cast and our hosts.'

'There's a real energy among the whole team,' stressed Cowles, as he outlined how technology had helped to get *I'm a Celebrity...* up and running in Wales. 'Everyone wears proximity monitors to safeguard social distancing. The castle was mapped remotely, allowing camera positions to be done off site.'

The set was built remotely in London and transported to Wales. Editing will be done in London to minimise the number of people travelling to Wales and to keep numbers down on set.

element of reality TV. Like soaps, reality generates loyalty, as viewers come back again and again," said Rick Murray, MD of Manchester-based Workerbee, the maker of Channel 4's new reality show *The Bridge*, which is based on a Spanish format.

Manley, too, saw parallels between reality TV and soap opera: "You want to see drama, conflict, humour and poignant moments where people open up and talk about their lives.

"You want to see all those beats you'd expect to see in a drama series or a film that can evoke the human emotions that everyone can relate to."

The advent of social-media platforms such as Twitter had transformed reality TV, agreed the panellists.

"Social media has changed the game for reality TV in terms of getting closer to cast members and fans talking to one another to keep the conversation going. All reality shows need to have a social-media footprint," said Orr.

"Social media shapes the show as much as you want it to," noted Manley. "You can embrace it and use it during the show to influence events, because it's real-time audience reaction.

"It also influences things when people are voted out. It's a completely different world in terms of trolling and bullying to when reality TV first started in the 1990s."

This, of course, could exert extreme psychological pressure on those contestants who were abused online. So it

was vital that those who appeared in reality shows were given the right support by broadcasters and producers, agreed the programme-makers.

Diverse casting was crucial and helped to encourage acceptance of minority groups and broadened viewers' horizons. "The more diverse the cast, the richer the stories that we can tell," said Orr. "Our viewers want to see themselves represented. They want to learn about other people. It does change people's minds."

Manley agreed: "I passionately believe that having diverse contestants can have a positive effect on society. It is not a coincidence that so many diverse housemates on *Big Brother* have won the hearts of viewers and have gone on to win in their series.

"On *Big Brother*, we've helped to move things on. The more audiences are exposed to different types of people the more accepted they are."

So was reality TV here to stay? "Twenty years ago, everyone thought reality TV was a flash in the pan, but it's become a fixed item on traditional TV channels and on-demand services like Netflix," said Murray. "Reality TV will be here in 50 years' time – playing on a platform that none of us have yet heard of." ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS event 'Why we love...reality TV' was held on 19 October. The producers were Sarah Booth and Tessa Matchett.

Television distils two days of expert advice from leading TV practitioners at the RTS Student Masterclasses 2020

TV skills and thrills



The Island with Bear Grylls

Channel 4

RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses

The craft masterclasses demonstrated television's huge variety of creative roles. The cinematography session offered two experts from opposite ends of the shooting spectrum. Georgina Kiedrowski is frequently embedded with the cast on reality shows such as Channel 4's *The Island with Bear Grylls*. "I have to concentrate on the editorial as well as [the

shooting]," said the self-shooting producer.

Living with the cast 24 hours a day means that she is "forced to experience their discomfort... so I can truly tell the story". *The Island*, Kiedrowski added, was "one of the most difficult jobs I've ever done. After six weeks of barely eating, even picking up a Go-Pro becomes difficult."

Cinematographer Nicola Daley works at cinematography's glossier end, shooting high-end dramas. After leaving film school, she worked in documentaries and film before landing her first TV

drama, series 2 of Netflix's Australian comedy *The Letdown*. "It suddenly said Netflix on my CV and that meant, even though my showreel hadn't changed, [that] more doors opened," said Daley, who recently shot BBC Two's *Harlots*.

Despite their differences, the two cinematographers appreciated each other's craft. Daley said: "It's incredible – you're doing five people's jobs at once." Kiedrowski responded: "I could not make it look like you do, Nicola."

Sound supervisor Kate Hopkins, who has scooped RTS, Bafta and Emmy awards, and Hong Kong-based location sound recordist Mark Roberts specialise in natural history.

For the BBC's *Frozen Planet: On Thin Ice*, Roberts made a memorable trip to an ice cap to capture the sounds inside a moulin, a vertical shaft within an ice sheet. A clip at the masterclass showed the recordist "dangling [from a rope] out of shot, mixing and sending audio".

From the warmth and safety of the post-production studio, Hopkins mixed Roberts' sounds: "I added a few things but it was lovely to have the real stuff from [location]. It sounded different to normal rivers and waterfalls."

The editing session brought together factual specialist Rahim Mastafa and drama editor Celia Haining. Initially, Haining worked on horror movies: "It was great fun, doing horror films is so creative – it taught me tons... They say that comedians are all depressives; well, horror-film people are so sweet and lovely."

Mastafa moved from editing corporate videos to *Doctor Who* spin-offs to documentary. Recently, he edited *The Real 'Des': The Dennis Nilsen Story*, a companion doc to ITV's factual drama *Des*. "It was a career highlight," said Mastafa. "There's lots of elements I had to throw in – the archive, the exclusive content [of Nilsen] and the people who have been interviewed. You have to try to make it fit."

Drama editors work to a script, but Haining "identified with a lot things that [Rahim] said". She illustrated her craft with a clip from Netflix drama *The Crown*.

So, what does it take to be an editor? Patience, reckoned Mastafa, who added: "I'm not precious about the stuff I cut... I'm there to make the [director's] vision." Haining agreed: "You can't be a control freak."

Russell Dodgson discussed the visual effects (VFX) that his company, Frame-store, created for *His Dark Materials*. The

VFX supervisor, who has a craft Bafta for the BBC One drama's effects, is creative director of television at the VFX and animation studio.

"[VFX] is storytelling," he said. "There is a huge bank of technology but all technology [does is] make the tools that allow artists to be artists."

Echoing the theme of the other masterclasses, Dodgson said there was a huge variety of roles in VFX: "Traditionally, you either work in 2D or 3D" – 2D offered roles in rotoscoping and compositing; but, in 3D, VFX specialists "explode out into a million routes... It's such a vast world." ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS Student Craft Skills Masterclasses were held 4-5 November and chaired by Emma Read (cinematography session), Andrew Sheldon (sound) and Helen Scott (editing and VFX).

RTS Student Programme Masterclasses

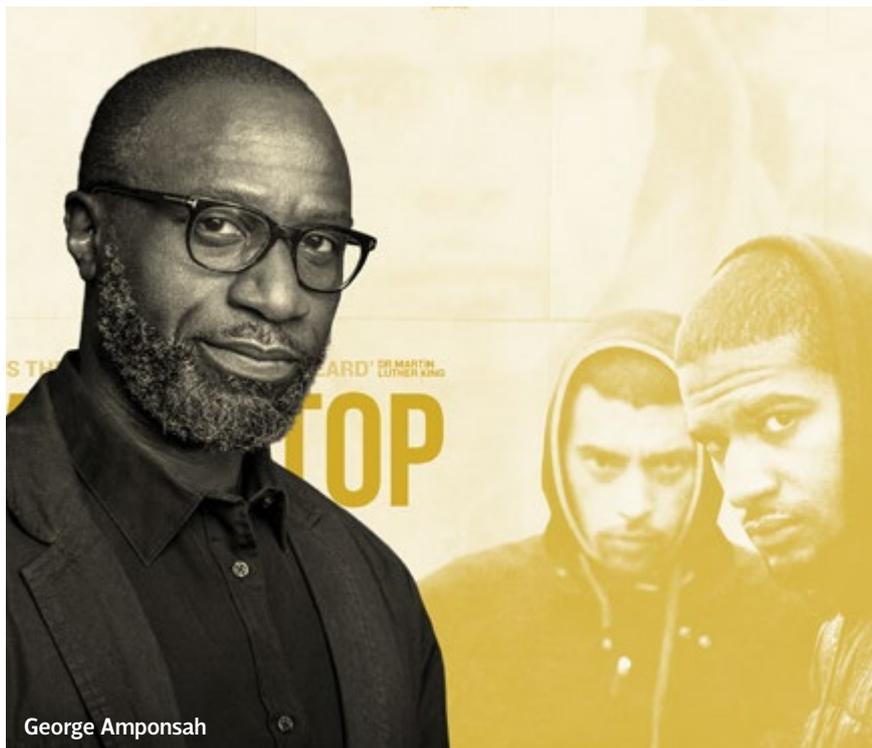
If you want to forge a career in TV, learn how to be tactful and tenacious. That was one of the main takeaways from four TV RTS Student Programme Masterclasses, in documentary, journalism, drama and daytime/entertainment.

Award-winning documentary-maker George Amponsah recalled how he often worked in the evenings and at weekends. Once, when he was at film school, he collected some camera equipment on Christmas Day.

His films include *The Hard Stop*, which examined the lives of two friends of Mark Duggan, whose shooting by police sparked riots in the UK in 2011.

He stressed that the start of his career had not been "quick and easy". When he finally got a break in TV, he won his employers over by bringing enthusiasm to even the most menial of tasks. "I worked for a company called Espresso TV that made the kind of films you'd find tucked away in the DVD shelves at WH Smith, films about Second World War fighter planes," said Amponsah. "I wasn't even a runner. Finally, I did my first shoot, when I filmed a Spitfire taking off and landing."

Journalist Mobeen Azhar, a regular



on BBC Three and whose film *Hunting for Prince's Vault* was a worldwide hit, told the RTS how he'd learnt a lot about the foot slog of investigative journalism from the great Peter Taylor, a specialist in reporting on terrorism.

"There's a lot of knocking on doors and waiting at 2:00am in car parks when it's raining," he said. "You have to be prepared for how unglamorous it all is. You do it for the love of it."

In common with Amponsah, he identified the importance of gaining access to sources and interviewees in order to make successful factual films. Gaining people's trust had been vital to the kind of journalism he had pursued, which put the spotlight on drug dealers and men who work in the sex trade.

The ability to get on with people was also stressed by screenwriter Lisa Holdsworth. She began her working life writing an episode of ITV's *Fat Friends*, having been employed by the series' creator, Kay Mellor, as her PA. "You have to be strong and pushy, but don't be a dick," she advised. Learning to deal with rejection was essential: "Learn to take no for an answer and move on."

When Holdsworth presented Mellor with one of her first scripts, before she was invited to write for *Fat Friends*, Mellor was critical of Holdsworth's work. It was another year before she completed another script that she considered worth putting forward.

She encouraged would-be

screenwriters to never send a first draft to a producer: "Don't even begin to think it's finished until you've done a fourth or fifth draft."

The world of daytime TV may look very different to factual and drama but Emma Gormley, MD, daytime, ITV Studios, echoed the other masterclass speakers by highlighting the need for tact, tenacity and trust in building relationships with colleagues and programme contributors.

Daytime TV offered rich pickings as a training ground for those wanting to work in TV. There were opportunities to work in current affairs, researching and booking celebrities, location filming, legal and technical roles.

Gormley told the RTS she had always wanted to work in daytime TV. At the beginning of her career, she took work experience wherever it was available, including a stint freelancing for Radio Norfolk.

On *Good Morning Britain*, some staff work through the night, putting in a 12-hour-plus shift from 9.00pm-9.30am, going live from 6:00am-9:00am. "I've always loved the unpredictability of it all," said Gormley. ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS Student Programme Masterclasses were held 4-5 November and chaired by Alan Hayling (documentary session), Ruth Pitt (journalism), Carolyn Reynolds (drama) and Matt Pritchard (daytime and entertainment).

Paul Marc Mitchell/Metrodome Distribution

Republic of Ireland

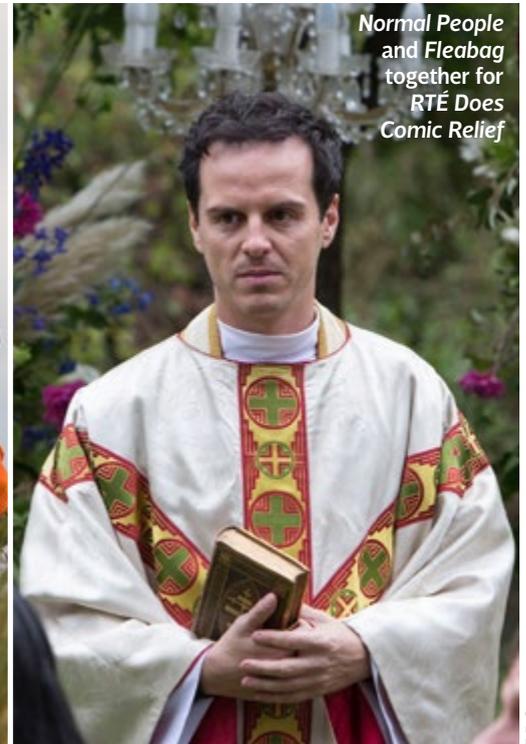
RTÉ Does Comic Relief was a huge undertaking, not least because it was put together rapidly during the global Covid-19 pandemic.

An RTS Republic of Ireland event in late October, “Laughter in a time of lockdown”, looked at how the June fundraiser brought stars, including *Normal People*’s Marianne and Connell and *Fleabag*’s Hot Priest to the small screen.

RTÉ entertainment producers Clare Hughes and Michael Hughes (they are not related) were given just six weeks to get the show ready for transmission on 26 June.

“What was meant to be a two-and-a-half-hour programme ended up being four hours of live TV – an absolute whopper,” said Clare Hughes. “It just kept growing and growing. We ended up with 38 VTs [short films], which was a huge amount of work... there was something in there for everyone. We had some of Ireland’s most loved and respected comedians and performers.”

Dara Ó Briain, Saoirse



Normal People and Fleabag together for RTÉ Does Comic Relief

BBC

RTÉ hosts Comic Relief

Ronan, the cast of *Derry Girls* and Chris O’Dowd appeared, as well as Andrew Scott from *Fleabag* and *Normal People*

actors Daisy Edgar-Jones and Paul Mescal.

For the *Normal People*/Hot Priest sketch, RTÉ built a “socially distanced confession booth”, explained Michael Hughes. *Normal People* director Lenny Abrahamson directed the sketch, which was shot in London, remotely, via FaceTime.

The producers spoke to Richard Curtis and Emma Freud of Comic Relief, who offered advice on the programme’s running order.

“They said that, after a comedy sketch, you should play a song to allow people time to take out their credit cards and donate. We had the running order done at that point, so we had to redo it to include more music,” recalled Michael Hughes.

Safe-shooting protocols and, in particular, remote

working, complicated the production of *RTÉ Does Comic Relief*. “Everything was taking twice as long... and [it was] more laboured. With so many things going on at the same time, it would have been a lot easier if we’d been in the one building at the one time,” said Clare Hughes.

However, the Covid-19 epidemic did have one positive side effect. “Because people were locked down, they were free,” said Michael Hughes. “[That was one of] the reasons why we had one and half hours’ more content than we’d bargained for.”

“We knew there was a lot of interest from the talent, so we felt comfortable that we would be able to pull something out, but we didn’t expect it to be as big a success as it was,” added Clare Hughes.

Matthew Bell

Film-makers answer call

RTS Film Contest

An RTS short-film competition has attracted an impressive 26 entries from almost 100 people. The Futures 48 Film Challenge was launched at an event in early October. Film-makers were given the title of a three-minute film, *Tomorrow*, and then had to create, shoot, edit and submit their film in just two days.

The idea for the competition came from actor and director Daymon Britton, who is also a member of the RTS

North East and the Border Committee. ‘The challenge gives a focus, a deadline, and an incredible platform,’ he said. ‘I am hoping to see an outpouring of creativity from those 48 hours in October.’

The competition was open to aspiring UK film-makers with no broadcast credits. The winning film will receive an RTS award at a ceremony in December. Nominated films will be showcased on the RTS YouTube Channel.

Matthew Bell

The latest in RTS Yorkshire's series of interviews with leading regional figures threw a spotlight on TLC reality show *Say Yes to the Dress Lancashire*.

Production has begun on series 3 of the programme in which fashion expert Gok Wan helps brides find their dream wedding dress. "We've got all sorts of [safety] protocols in place," said Jo Haddock, development executive at programme-maker True North. "We're hoping to make 10 episodes leading up to Christmas."

Covid-19 is having an effect on filming, in particular with trying on and redesigning dresses, which involves close-contact work. "We have a really strict testing regime, so we can feel confident that any contact we need can be done safely," said Haddock, who was talking to RTS Yorkshire Chair Fiona Thompson.

Say Yes to the Dress Lancashire is a spin-off of Discovery channel TLC's US series. "Everyone was feeling the love for anything with Yorkshire in the title and [Discovery] thought there would be a way to create something



True North show dazzles

homegrown from our region," recalled Haddock.

In the event, True North filmed at the Ava Rose Hamilton bridal boutique in Colne,

Lancashire, rather than at its Yorkshire sister shop. The Colne outlet "is a ready-made location, on three floors, and really big and beautifully

styled. We don't have to do anything to make it more of a set, except to add a few lights and block out a few windows," said Haddock.

Gok Wan's name was a great advantage in casting the series. "He has a huge following. Clearly, having a brand that's already known [also helped]... so it wasn't like starting a new series from scratch, which is always hard," said Haddock, who worked with Gok Wan as series producer on the first run of *How to Look Good Naked* for Channel 4 in 2006.

"We were looking for incredible northern families who were open to telling us their stories. Yes, it's about a dress... but we aren't only doing one thing when we make a show.

"Gok Wan has an amazing ability to give women space to tell their stories. He gives people a sense of confidence [and] a sense that it's going to be a positive experience, that it's not going to be about conflict, negativity and criticism."

The full interview with Haddock can be viewed at: bit.ly/RTSdress.

Matthew Bell

Williams backs Welsh indies

Rhodri Williams gave strong support to independent Welsh producers at an RTS Cymru Wales event in October. The Chair of Welsh-language broadcaster S4C, who has been in post for six months, was talking to BBC Cymru Wales's arts and media correspondent, Huw Thomas.

"The sector is full of creative people... I want to see S4C being a home for [bold] ideas," said Williams. "We

want to work with large, stable companies that can provide certainty to us with regards to programming, but we also want to work with smaller companies and even individuals who haven't produced for anyone in the past."

Discussing the TV licence settlement for 2022, Williams said: "The Welsh-language sector within the creative industries is completely dependent on public funding"

He pledged "to ensure that the bid we will be submitting to the Government for that financial settlement... will be credible and... make sure we have the financial resources to... safeguard our services."

Recently, Williams met new BBC Director-General Tim Davie. "I was pleasantly surprised," he said. "I could see that the BBC values us... and has an open mind with regards to how we could improve our creative

relationship. I have always believed that S4C has more to gain from being in partnership with the BBC than seeing it as a competitor or a threat."

Williams was part of the campaign in the 1970s for a Welsh channel: "The presence of the Welsh language on TV back then was key... to ensure [it] flourished. My opinion hasn't changed.

"Creating S4C in 1982 was essential to changing people's attitudes... to the Welsh language."

The RTS event was broadcast in Welsh with a simultaneous English translation.

Matthew Bell

Peter Fiddick, who has died aged 81, was one of an influential group of journalists who wrote seriously about television as a cultural force during the late 20th century, when the medium was undergoing radical change.

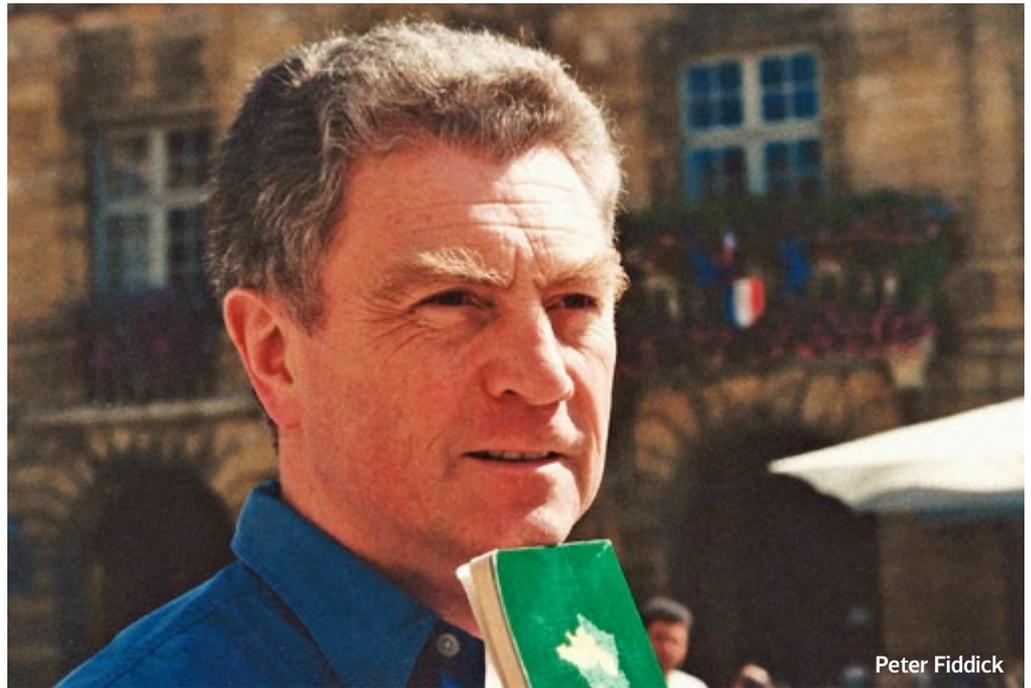
He was also a frequent broadcaster. Following a distinguished career at *The Guardian*, where he edited Fleet Street's first media section, Peter went on to edit *The Listener*, at the time regarded as the equal of the *New Statesman* and *The Spectator*, and the RTS's magazine, *Television*, which he edited from 1991 to 2001.

Dapper and almost invariably wearing a bow tie, Peter was a familiar face at RTS events and other media gatherings. His wry humour and expression of bemused mischief brightened up many a press conference and industry dinner. His contacts were second to none and he was able to write authoritatively on broadcasting policy and politics. Peter was proud of coining the phrase "the ecology of broadcasting" and was a stout defender of the importance of public service broadcasting.

He was born in Malta in 1938, the son of a serving RAF officer. When war broke out, he was sent back to England with his mother via the Atlantic to avoid German torpedoes. He spent his early years being looked after by her and his aunts in the West Country.

When the family was reunited, the Fiddicks settled near Epsom, in Surrey. Peter attended the local grammar school. When his father was posted to Germany, he boarded at Reading School, where he played a lot of sport, especially rugby, and enjoyed performing in school plays.

Peter did National Service in the RAF, based in Germany, in air traffic control. He went on to read English at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he



Peter Fiddick

Peter Fiddick 1938–2020

Steve Clarke looks back over the life and career of the former editor of *Television* magazine

met his future wife, Jane. The couple had two children, Harriet and Edmund, both of whom became lawyers.

Peter's first job was as a trainee journalist at the *Liverpool Daily Post*. He was recruited by the paper's owner during a trawl of undergraduates at Oxford.

His contemporaries at the *Post* included Michael Billington, who, like him, became a high-profile journalist on *The Guardian*, in his case as a theatre reviewer.

Later, Peter worked for Westminster Press, owner of a chain of local and regional newspapers, writing leaders from the company's London office. His columns were syndicated across the company's newspapers, including *The Northern Echo*.

His first job at the *Guardian* was as a general reporter. Peter was part of the paper's

team that covered the Aberfan disaster in 1966. Subsequently working as a feature writer, he was a regular theatre reviewer and began reviewing television, alongside *The Guardian's* full-time TV critic, the brilliant and spiky Nancy Banks-Smith.

In 1973, Peter became Chair of the Broadcasting Press Guild, a group of journalists then exclusively made up of TV reviewers. It held lunches to which TV executives were invited and held an informal annual awards ceremony in a Fleet Street wine bar.

Eleven years later, Peter became *The Guardian's* first media editor. On the 25th anniversary of *The Guardian's* media pages, he wrote: "The editor wants a proposal for a media page," said the then-features editor, Richard Gott.

"I had been writing a broadcasting column since

1971 and knocked out a one-page treatment. The editor, Peter Preston, put it to the board and a few weeks later, we were the first dedicated media section. And me, for what it's worth, the first ever media editor. 'The title may help in the sectors I'm not yet known in,' I said to Preston. 'OK,' he said, 'so long as you don't want the money.'

"We had a good line-up for the first page – Paul Fox, Derek Jameson, Nick Higham."

As a broadcaster, Peter reviewed the papers for the BBC's *Breakfast Time* and made educational series about TV for both Yorkshire Television and Television South West.

Peter's passions were food and music, and he spent a certain amount of his retirement at his second home in France. He is survived by Jane, his two children and five grandchildren. ■

Unit manager Guy Bishop, whose work includes Sky One thriller *Bulletproof* and the movie *Maleficent*, described locations as the “Cinderella department”, full of people who are “jacks of all trades”.

Bishop, together with assistant studio manager Elliot Sansom and production co-ordinator Kerry Matthews came together for an RTS Futures event in October to discuss working in the locations department of a film or TV production.

The department is involved from pre-production right through to post-production. Bishop described its role as one of translating a script into a physical place. “The role requires a lot of communication and working together,” he explained. “You need to be agile and malleable [and] the people who stand out are those who don’t see the problem but come up with the solution.”

Working in the locations department means sometimes knowing when to say no, revealed Elliot Sansom who has worked on blockbusters such as *Spider-Man: Far from Home* and *Wonder Woman 1984*.

“I’ve been asked to stop an entire 500-person construction site next door, which just couldn’t be done. If



Bulletproof Sky

Location, location, location

something is physically impossible, you need to explain why... you have to be calm, cool and collected,” said Sansom.

Getting a job in locations can be tricky, said Kerry Matthews, who has worked on *Solo: A Star Wars Story* and Sky Atlantic’s *Gangs of London*. She encouraged the Futures audience to “ask people how they got involved in the industry and ask for CV

advice as a way of getting [their CV] in front of people”.

Bishop said he got a lot of work through recommendations. He loved the job and described it as “like working in Neverland. We are all just boys and girls who don’t want to grow up.”

Finding the right location is only part of the job – “we also need to look after the set, the community and environment around us... at the end of the day, every-

thing needs to be put back how it was,” said Bishop.

Sansom’s advice for would-be location specialists was to “network, network, network, be charismatic, and be ready to work and be flexible”.

“Getting started in the TV locations department” was held on 21 October and produced by Jude Winstanley.

Imani Cottrell

Forty new RTS bursary scholars

The Society has announced 40 recipients of its 2020 undergraduate scholarships. These bursaries support talented students from lower-income backgrounds and are aimed at broadening access to the media industry.

TV production and journalism bursaries have been awarded to 30 undergraduates,

nine of whom were sponsored by STV, with one provided by the Steve Hewlett Memorial Fund. Ten technology bursaries were also presented, including one sponsored by STV and one by YouView. Bursary scholars receive £1,000 a year to assist with their expenses and living costs. In each scholar’s final year of study, the RTS

aims to set up mentoring opportunities with one of its industry members.

BBC presenter Ashley John-Baptiste, who was appointed RTS bursary ambassador earlier this year, said: “With students starting their studies during such difficult and unique circumstances, supporting them is more crucial than ever.”

The scholarship scheme was launched by the RTS in 2014. STV became a partner in 2019 and supports students in Scotland.

STV Chief Executive Simon Pitts said: “As a public service broadcaster, it’s vital that we improve diversity and inclusion within the media industry, and this scheme is a further step towards ensuring that Scottish media truly reflect the audiences they serve.”

Matthew Bell

RTS
London

Netflix and Amazon are hugely successful, but they are not the only templates for a successful streamer, as an RTS London event discovered in late October.

Over the past year, SVoD services such as Disney+, HBO Max, Peacock (NBCUniversal) and Apple TV+ have come on stream, joining the likes of Netflix and Amazon. Alan Wolk, co-founder of media consultancy TV[R]EV, speaking from New Jersey, dubbed the streaming boom a “flixcopocalypse”. He said two more – Paramount+ and Discovery+ – were due to launch soon.

Success is not guaranteed. The short-form streamer Quibi, launched by ex-Disney executive Jeffrey Katzenberg, collapsed last month after only half a year in business.

But Wolk predicted: “There is room for most of them to survive. They need to figure out what they’re going to be when they grow up. Right now, they’re trying to be all things to all people.”

Wolk argued that many of the large streamers would operate three-tier platforms: a free advertiser-supported service, as well as subscription



Pluto TV

Streaming rivals set to disrupt TV

ad-supported and subscription ad-free services.

Following the Netflix model, the streamers would expand internationally. “This will prove very disruptive to the entire television industry around the world,” he said.

Pluto TV, a free, advertising-supported linear-TV service, offered a contrast to the SVoD model, explained Olivier Jollet, senior VP, emerging business, for ViacomCBS Networks, which owns the channel. Pluto launched in

the US in 2014 and is now available in more than 20 countries.

Speaking from Berlin, Jollet said: “We believed from day one that a well-curated linear channel would be appealing as TV moved to the internet. People are creatures of habit and don’t want to spend 20 minutes looking to find a piece of on-demand content every time they want to be entertained.

“We’re offering a new way of watching linear content,” Jollet added.

Daniel Berg, co-founder of NextUp Comedy, an SVoD service offering live comedy, joined the event from London and explained the rationale of the niche start-up: “Comedy fans weren’t getting served, on-demand, the comedy [they] saw winning awards, selling out and gaining critical acclaim.

“Stand-up costs an absolute fraction of traditional genres, around 3%, we estimate, so it is an incredibly cost-effective genre for us to fill.”

“How to survive in streaming” was chaired by journalist Nadine Dereza. It can be viewed at: bit.ly/RTSstream.

Matthew Bell

IBC fast-tracks innovation

■ A joint RTS London/Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) event looked at one of the centrepieces of IBC’s Virtual Showcase: the IBC Accelerator Media Innovation Programme. The IBC conference and trade show, normally held in Amsterdam, moved its events online due to the pandemic this year.

Accelerators are fast-track, collaborative innovation projects that address complex technology challenges. There were eight IBC projects this year, running for around five

months. Programme leads Muki Kulhan and Mark Smith chaired the RTS/IET session.

Sandy Macintyre, Associated Press vice-president for news, discussed ‘AI-automated video shotlisting’ in live content moderation, particularly with extreme violence, to ‘predict what might happen later in [a] video... we’ve been able to create a green/amber/red traffic-light system’. Kulhan discussed the role of IBC Accelerator in ‘virtual and interactive live-music talent shows’, which aims to create a ‘safe

and accessible’ place for real-time user-generated content.

‘5G remote production’, led by BBC R&D’s Ian Wagdin, has been timely. Initial research into networks and AI cameras has developed into a highly complex ‘proof of concept’ set-up across Amsterdam and London to prove that the ecosystem works.

‘Animation production: XR (extended reality) immersive and real-time workflows’ can immerse designers in their own created world, consultant

Rafi Nizam explained. It enables them to animate content in real time, in their normal environment. ‘Every artist can have a render farm in their own computer,’ said IT project manager Mladen Djukic.

The ‘TV delivered as objects’ project was described by ITV principal architect Tim Davis as a way to ‘take what we consider to be TV services, break them down into their constituent parts... then re-combine them much closer to the user’.

Another international project, led by MovieLabs, is aiming to create a usable visual-effects archive for 3D components.

Carol Owens

The story of a lockdown star

East
Centre

ITV News Anglia reporter Rebecca Haworth revealed how she broke lockdown's biggest

good news story – Captain Tom's charity walk – at an RTS East event in November.

In April, Haworth was the first TV journalist to interview Captain Tom Moore, the Second World War veteran who walked around his garden to raise money for the NHS.

"We were right at the beginning of the lockdown and there was really grim news coming out about the virus," she recalled. "At Anglia, we were always trying to find good news stories to lift the audience's spirits – [Captain Tom] was just perfect.

"It's really draining reporting on the pandemic because

you're living and breathing it, so it was really nice to have [a positive story] to report."

Haworth's piece went out and, "a few days later, it became huge and everyone picked up on it".

Hannah Ingram-Moore, Captain Tom's daughter, had sent a press release about her father's fundraising walk to the local press, which *ITV News Anglia* picked up.

"Rebecca clicked with my father and we thought, 'What a lovely thing – if nothing else happens, this is still amazing.'"

In fact, Captain Tom went on to raise more than £32m for NHS charities and was knighted by the Queen.

"It wasn't always easy, there were times when, undoubtedly, it felt a little bit



ITV
Captain Sir Tom Moore

overwhelming," said Ingram-Moore. "There was never an intent to chase fame or glory. We realised that, when we spoke, people donated... if we stop talking, they wouldn't donate.

"He became this global beacon of hope."

Looking back, Haworth said: "It was such a privilege; it's not often that a regional news story would get that big. To be there from the very

beginning was wonderful. [Tom] is what you see on TV... Sometimes, when these stories get so big, people change, but in no way has that happened with Tom. He's just the same lovely bloke I met that first day [in April]."

"Captain Tom: The inside story of a lockdown mega-star" was hosted by *ITV News Anglia* presenter Becky Jago and held on 3 November.

Matthew Bell

The UPSIDE

No cause for panic: we are in control...

Even if you've had your fill of US politics in recent days, do catch Oscar-winning documentary-maker Alex Gibney's *Totally Under Control: Trump and Covid-19*.

Co-directed by Ophelia Harutyunyan and Suzanne Hillinger, it provides a fascinating insight into the US response to the pandemic. After debuting on Hulu, *Totally Under Control* is now on the BBC iPlayer.

Remarkably, it was made entirely in lockdown and provides a heartening example of film-making ingenuity.

Physical production in a virtual studio

Congratulations to Anna Mallett, whose upward trajectory continues: after nearly two years as CEO of ITN, she is joining Netflix.

The former BBC Studios boss takes up the London-based job of VP of physical production at the streaming behemoth in the New Year. Mallett will oversee Netflix's production in the UK, plus much local-language output elsewhere outside of the US.

The Crown relives a dramatic decade

In this month of lockdowns what could be a better TV treat than series 4 of Netflix's sumptuous *The Crown*, which begins in 1979, with a newly elected PM, and ends with her exit in 1990.

The Upside is especially looking forward to seeing Gillian Anderson playing Margaret Thatcher – rumoured to be an award-winning performance.

Between the PM's rise and fall, Princes Charles meets and marries Diana, played in *The Crown* by rising star Emma Corrin.

All in all, something to brighten up the long November nights.

A TV apprentice's guide to breaking in

Finally, Katie Bryson writes to thank the RTS for helping her to get on to the TV ladder. She attended an RTS Careers Fair in 2017, which helped her to secure a BBC apprenticeship.

Her blog about her experience as a broadcast operator apprentice working at MediaCity UK in Salford is at: bit.ly/Bryson-BBC.

Allen to chair RTS awards

Big Talk Productions CEO Kenton Allen is the new RTS Programme Awards Chair. The awards include a new Comedy Entertainment prize for panel or talk shows, humour-led variety or clip shows.

"The television industry has shown incredible innovation, adaptability and resilience in what has been a very challenging year. I look forward to celebrating a fantastic array of programming," said Allen.

Entries will be accepted for shows broadcast from 1 November 2019 to 31 December 2020. The awards will take place on 16 March 2021.



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