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Television



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From the CEO



It has been another extraordinary year for television, as we saw at the RTS Craft & Design Awards this month. Congratulations to all the nominees and winners.

And the gems keep on coming. *I Hate Suzie Too*, created by Lucy Prebble and Billie Piper for Sky, and ITV's *Litvinenko*, starring David Tennant – both featured in this issue – are must-watches, as is our cover story, the eagerly awaited third series of *Happy Valley*.

I was fortunate to attend both the

recent RTS Midlands Awards and RTS North West Awards, which reminded me of the depth and geographical spread of extraordinary talent our screen sector enjoys.

It was also wonderful to see so many of you at our sold-out breakfast with Tim Davie.

For its smooth running, the RTS relies on the largely unsung efforts of many people. Over many years, as Honorary Secretary, David Lowen has been responsible for the Society's governance. My debt to David, who is standing down after more than 30 years of service to the RTS, is incalculable. At

head office and beyond, we will all miss him. A huge thank you, David.

His successor is Simon Bucks, who has been ably chairing our Television Journalism Awards for the past three years. Simon, CEO of BFBS, is an outstanding broadcast journalist who knows the Society well. I look forward to working with him.

I wish all our readers a very happy Christmas and New Year.

Theresa Wise

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Do you need £5,000 for a history of television project?

The Shiers Trust can make a grant of up to £5,000 towards publishing work on any aspect of TV history

Grants will be given to assist in the completion of new or unfinished projects, work or literature specific to the objectives of the Trust.

George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is in its 22nd year.

Application procedure

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by **30 April 2023** on the official application form. Applicants must read all the conditions

**[www.rts.org.uk/
shiers-trust-award](http://www.rts.org.uk/shiers-trust-award)**



TV diary

Being the editor of a national newsroom is one of the most fun and most challenging jobs around. And the run-up to Christmas heightens it all. After months of relentless agenda-shaping stories, we've finally returned to what feels like more normal times for news. A breakthrough drug for Alzheimer's gives us the chance of a more positive lead on the programme – we jump on it.

Times are tough, so finding stories that lift some of the gloom can make all the difference. We want *5 News at 5* to be more than a simple news bulletin. After all, people can get headlines on their phones 24/7.

An hour of news, in a programme that understands the stresses and strains of life, with a bit of light as well as shade, gives Channel 5 viewers that bit more.

■ **Our newest presenter, Dan Walker, gets that. It's remarkable how swiftly he's slotted into the newsroom and built up a fantastic relationship on air with Claudia-Liza Vanderpuije and the whole team behind the scenes.**

He's full of ideas and always up for trying things out – the latest experiment is our new Top 5 strand. It's a fresh take on the headlines, marking the halfway point in the programme and one that works so well with the programme's tone. He's such a good operator, he's inspired us all to raise our game.

■ Part of the reason Dan is so great at *5 News* is his focus on the viewers.



After a relentless news year, Cait FitzSimons welcomes the festive season and reveals how Dan Walker is benefiting *5 News*

We want to know what people at home are thinking – and the *5 Phone* gives them a direct line to us. In the run-up to Christmas, the cost-of-living crisis is always on the agenda at our editorial meetings.

We've heard so many stories from people struggling to get by. It's shown the scale of the challenge being faced by families across the UK, and we plan to feature even more of these stories in the year ahead.

Finding ways to make people feel connected to the stories we tell is more important than ever.

■ ***5 News* doesn't do a lot of sport coverage, but we always make space for the World Cup. Our correspondent Peter Lane and camera operator Adam Boyle have quite a few footy tournaments under their belts now,**

but Qatar has been so different – not least watching it all unfold just before Christmas.

It's been a challenging story to cover but I think we are delivering a good mix of sport, people and the politics in a way that helps our viewers get a good grasp of what's at stake.

■ But it's not just about the stories we cover – sometimes ITN gets to be centre stage and I joined colleagues to see our CEO Rachel Corp unveil our new brand – the first major update to our logo since the 1970s.

It's been fascinating to watch how the staff have contributed their ideas and thoughts about what we do and why – and to see that filtered and focused into a brand that encompasses everything from *5 News* to the World Athletics to passengers on British Airways flights being able to watch live coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's funeral.

I've been reminded of the heritage of ITN and inspired about all the ways we are shaping its brilliant future. All with a lovely new logo to go with it.

■ **Like everyone in news, I'm looking forward to a break from what's been a gruelling agenda, so a tinsel-covered stately home, *Christmas at Castle Howard*, sounds like perfect viewing.**

I've just finished watching *Andor*, a brilliant mix of *Star Wars* and politics, and *The White Lotus* is lined up to be next. I'm lucky enough to have some time off over Christmas, so there'll be time for that, as well as some country walks while I unwind with family in Ireland.

Cait FitzSimons is editor of 5 News.

COMFORT CLASSIC

Matthew Bell salutes the writer and actors who brought breadline Britain to on-screen life in a painfully sharp comedy

British TV viewers had never seen anything like Manchester's Chatsworth Estate and its most infamous residents, the Gallagher family. Until Channel 4 premiered *Shameless* in 2004, working-class dramas had generally been po-faced, bleak and irritatingly worthy.

Paul Abbott's comedy-drama was different, unashamedly offering a picture of a vibrant, joyous, warts-and-all culture. In the very first episode, the drama nailed its colours to the mast with an exhilarating montage of scenes, cut at breakneck pace: an estate party around a burning car; a blow job offered in return for help with homework; gay porn; a nightclub robbery and violence; drugs and sex on the kitchen floor – and all before the first ad break.

And then, which is the genius of Abbott, there is the post-party come down, as the alcoholic Frank Gallagher (David Threlfall) makes his entrance, carried into his house unconscious by a couple of coppers.

The mood changes abruptly. Fiona (Anne-Marie Duff) – Frank's eldest daughter, who parents her six siblings in her father's absence – has had her night out with middle-class Steve (James McAvoy) ended by Frank's arrival, and is mortified. In just one look from Duff, the viewer sees what Fiona is feeling – that her life, scrimping and slaving to hold together a wildly dysfunctional family, is incompatible with any future with Steve.

Of course, we soon discover that Steve is a failed medical student who has turned to stealing cars, and is not such a fish out of water on the Chatsworth Estate.

The multi-RTS-award-winner Abbott, who had already made his



Shameless

Channel 4

David Threlfall as Frank Gallagher in *Shameless*

mark penning scripts for *Cracker*, and creating *Clocking Off* and *State of Play*, was writing from experience.

Born into a large Burnley family, he was deserted by both parents and brought up by his oldest sister, just like the fictional Gallagher family. During his childhood, Abbott attempted suicide and spent time in a mental hospital.

He told *The Guardian*'s Stuart Jeffries in 2005, following the huge critical success of the first series: "The stories I tell in *Shameless* are accurate to what I know. I can point to the source of every single story."

The right hated *Shameless* for its acceptance of criminality, glorification of excess and, most of all, for its lack of so-called "family values". "Feckless Frank" Gallagher, in particular, became a *bête noire*, for his "*Shameless*-style parenting". Had they bothered to watch the series, Tory politicians couldn't have failed to notice that *Shameless* actually celebrated the idea of family – the Gallaghers are a close, loving and indestructible unit.

Frank Gallagher is a comic monster, prone to frequent self-justification: "So what if I'm not an astronaut or the prime minister or a football player, I am Vernon Francis Gallagher, I came, I saw, I drunk the fucking lot."

He is dissolute, selfish, self-pitying and violent – in one shocking scene early in the series, he headbutts his teenage son Ian (Gerard Kearns) – but, thanks to Abbott's writing and Threlfall's portrayal, Frank is oddly likeable.

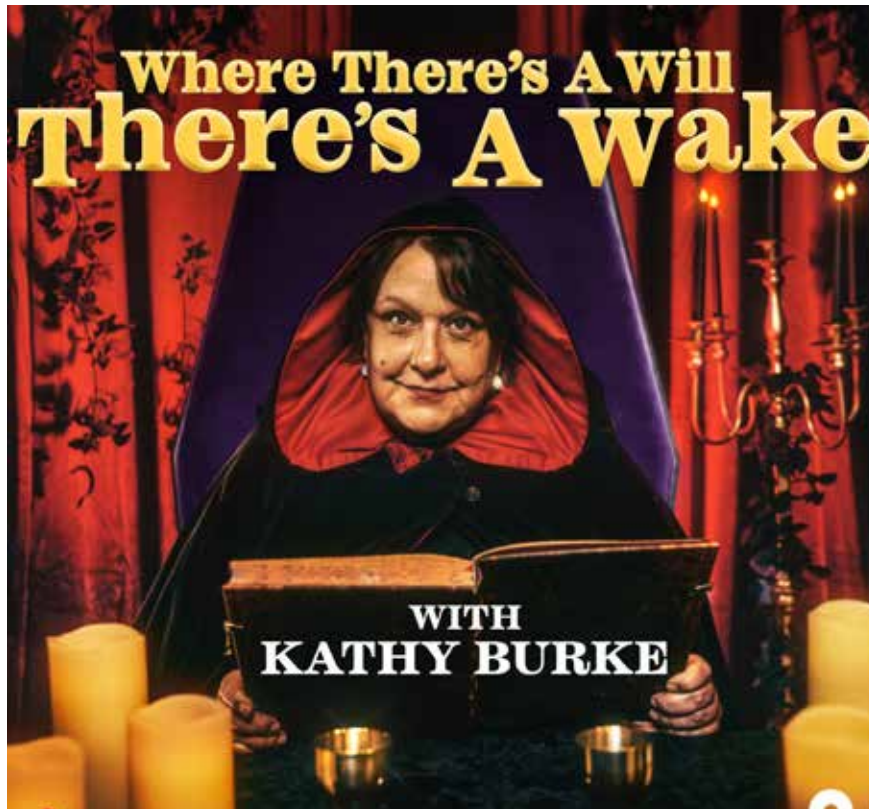
Shameless spawned a highly successful US version with William H Macy as Frank Gallagher, which ran for 11 consistently strong seasons until 2021.

The British original ran for the same number of series until its swansong in 2013, but it had run out of steam years earlier. Frank remained ever present, but Duff and McAvoy left after series 2. The Gallaghers' riotous neighbours Kev and Veronica (Dean Lennox Kelly and Maxine Peake) departed at the start of series 4 and were rapidly followed by Frank's agoraphobic and daytime-TV- and sex-obsessed girlfriend, Sheila (Maggie O'Neill).

For the remainder of its run, the Maguire family became the focus of the show, which became more of a soap, less of a drama. The first few series of *Shameless*, though, are as good as British TV drama gets. ■

The first seven series of *Shameless* are available on All 4.

Ear candy



SomethingElse

In her new podcast, national treasure and bullshit caller Kathy Burke turns her potty mouth to the biggest taboo of them all. In a welcome shake-up of the celebrity-on-celebrity interview format, each episode sees Burke invite a famous friend to bring their best gallows banter and fantasise about their deaths.

She has described it as her "fantasy football" version of death and funeral planning. The likes of James Acaster, Jamali Maddix and Stewart Lee are on the line-up. But the draw is undoubtedly Burke herself, and it's as swearsy and smutty a podcast as you could hope for from her.

Having said that, in Dawn French she finds the perfect first guest and one who barely needs prompting. The two are long-term pals and they share the same raunchy streak, so it's not long before the laughs come flowing.

They cover all the circumstances of French's death, the funeral service, her will and any other business she'd like to finish as a ghost. Her answers are

both hilariously thorough and thoroughly hilarious. Especially when describing her plans for the service.

She wants her hearse to be trailed by a procession made up of her previous lovers (who would then be thrown on the funeral pyre). The coffin itself would be solid gold with a Perspex front, and be raised upright on the Tamar bridge. To top it off, "the front would have two holes with my tits coming through and, if you want, you can rub them for luck as you enter Cornwall."

After her guest is dead and buried, says Burke, "I'm one of those wankers that's got bonus content, too." She plans to record a series of follow-up episodes entitled *6 Feet Under*, reading out her listeners' funeral yarns and posing any questions they have to the resident undertaker (and author) Ru Callender.

It's a riot, but, beyond all the laughs, it might also go some way toward helping you embrace what Burke reminds us is "the only thing that's definitely gonna happen". ■

Harry Bennett

WORKING LIVES



ITV *The Chase*

Line producer

Caroline Sale is the line producer of ITV's hugely popular quiz shows hosted by Bradley Walsh, *The Chase*, *Celebrity Chase* and *Beat the Chasers*. She works for Potato TV, which is part of ITV Studios.

What does the job involve?

I oversee the production budget and scheduling, as well as the day-to-day aspects of a production. This involves ensuring that filming is done safely, on time and on budget. I'm also the go-between, between the crew and the producers.

How do you differ from a producer?

A producer works on the editorial side; a line producer is on the production side of a TV show.

How did you get your break in telly?

I started with work experience, thanks to a family friend in the industry, and

then landed a job as a production co-ordinator at Endemol Shine UK.

I worked on a variety of shows across entertainment, factual entertainment and reality, including live shows, both in studios and on location.

I wanted to gain as much experience as possible so, when I progressed to production management, I had a good all-round view of TV.

How did you become a line producer?

I became a line producer four years ago, starting out on *Beat the Chasers*. Working your way up through the production management route, from secretary to co-ordinator to manager to line producer is the normal way to go.

What comes next?

Ultimately, head of production.

Where do you work?

Working on *The Chase*, I'm in the studio

as much as the office. We film three daytime shows – two shows a day if it's *Celebrity Chase* or *Beat the Chasers*. It keeps me busy.

When are you brought on to a production?

At the very beginning, to find a studio or location, bring the heads of department on board and work with the producers to build a team. I remain there, through post-production, until the delivery of the programme at the end.

What makes a good line producer?

You need to be calm under pressure, possess good communication skills, have the ability to work collaboratively and be able to multitask. A sense of humour helps.

What are the job's biggest challenges?

Marrying the editorial ambition of a show with the actual budget you have.

It's harder on a new show, when you're starting from scratch.

We made *Cannonball* for ITV, which was shot abroad – the minute you go abroad, your budget shrinks because you have to get everyone out of the country and on to the set. We also wanted to build huge structures and inflatable games on water, and then throw people down them – the health and safety demands on that show were incredible.

Is it becoming less acceptable to film abroad now for environmental reasons?

Yes – if we were making *Cannonball* again, we would be looking to use a local team, rather than flying crew out. We try not to use any internal flights on UK shows now – we get people across the country in a much more environmentally friendly way.

Who do you work closely with?

A show's executive producers; I work with two particularly talented ones on *The Chase* and *Ninja Warrior UK: Race for Glory*, Potato TV's Martin Scott and Helen Tumbridge. They work on the creative side – I make their ideas work logistically. I also work closely with the production team who are crucial to any production.

Working with the head of production is a big part of the job, keeping them up to date with the schedules, costings and raising any production red flags. A line producer and their production team are often the first on site and the last off.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

Getting from an empty studio to a huge, built set, and the first day of filming when you see everyone's hard work come to fruition. There are no worst parts – I love the shows I work on. *The Chase* is my all-time favourite: a family show made by a family.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to be a line producer?

You don't need any particular qualifications or an accounting background, but you do need strong organisational skills, as well as passion, drive and perseverance.



You learn a lot of the job as you work your way up the ladder. My advice to someone starting out would be to do as many different roles as you can – through work experience and as a runner – so you learn how TV works.

As a line producer, you are an all-rounder, and you have to understand what people do in the studio and why they do it.

Is there a shortage of line producers?

The industry is booming and there's a huge shortage of production staff in general. People are moving up the ladder a lot quicker these days.

Have there been other big changes since you started?

Studio technology has developed hugely – you have to move with the times as a line producer. Every new show you do teaches you something new.

Does it help to specialise in one genre?

You can move around – early in my career, I was doing all sorts of different shows, such as *MasterChef*, *Big Brother*, *Bad Lads Army*, *The Cube* and *The Super-sizers Eat...*

In fact, it's very useful to work across the factual and entertainment genre – that's how you learn the job. It would be more difficult to move into scripted, where the role of a line producer is slightly different, but, if you persevered, you could make that leap.

What other types of TV series would you like to work on?

I'd love to do live telly again – years ago, I worked on Channel 4's T4 youth slot. Live TV is very stressful but, once it's done, it's done. There's no going back. ■

Caroline Sale was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

Sarah Lancashire as Catherine Cawood in *Happy Valley*



A cop on the edge

BBC

As *Happy Valley*'s uncompromising Sergeant Catherine Cawood returns, **Caitlin Danaher** celebrates a crime classic that transcends the genre

Human bones, a barrel, the bottom of a reservoir. As far as bleak British crime dramas go, this seems like a textbook set-up.

Thank goodness, then, that the uniformed officer trudging through the mud to identify the dismembered body is Sergeant Catherine Cawood, played by the endlessly watchable Sarah Lancashire and a sign that what we're about to embark on could not be further from a formulaic police procedural.

It's been a long, near-seven years' wait for *Happy Valley*'s third series. Writer Sally Wainwright wastes no time revealing that Sergeant Cawood hasn't softened with age. "Sarah really owns Catherine. She's just brought so much to that part. She's so vulnerable and she's tough. It's just a fabulous balance that she's found with this character," Wainwright says.

In the rollicking opening sequence, Cawood is met with a series of withering remarks from the attending senior detectives as she shares her observations on the uncovered reservoir bones. "We'll let the pathologist decide that, shall we," smirks Vincent Franklin's Detective Superintendent Andy Shepherd.

What follows next is a verbal evisceration so composed, rhythmic and characteristically Catherine that it could pass as poetry. Within minutes, Cawood has identified the victim as a local lad she's had run-ins with years before. The detectives are rendered speechless. Viewers are left slack-jawed in admiration. "Anyway, I'll leave it with you," she says as she turns away. "Twats."

Mixing strength with radical vulnerability, Lancashire's humane

'EVERYTHING'S GOING TO POT. HOW CAN WE COPE WITHOUT PEOPLE LIKE HER?'

performance in the first two series of *Happy Valley* left us spellbound, and even provided us with laughs amid the show's grimly realistic portrayal of crimes that otherwise might have been too brutal to bear.

Despite the prolonged hiatus, few will forget what made *Happy Valley* a

masterpiece when it first aired in 2014. Against the backdrop of a drug-troubled town in West Yorkshire, the series followed a police officer's attempts to hold her grief-stricken family together after the man she holds responsible for her daughter's suicide, the rapist Tommy Lee Royce (played by James Norton), is released from prison.

With a dead child, an ex-husband, another child refusing to speak to her, Catherine navigated the most gruelling situations that middle-age could throw at her, all the while raising a grandson with her ex-addict sister.

"[Catherine] is very vulnerable and she's very flawed, and she has a temper, and she has a passion that sometimes takes her in the wrong direction. She's extraordinarily complex," says Nicola Shindler, executive producer of the first two series of *Happy Valley*, the second of which aired in 2016.

"What Sally is brilliant at is seeing the heroic in the ordinary," she adds. "It's a job. You get up and you go to work. It just so happens that the work you're doing is sometimes life and death and really important. Sometimes though, it's really mundane.... It was that element that made it feel very real."

Series 2 concluded with Catherine

fearing that nature might overcome nurture in the case of her grandson, Ryan (Rhys Connah), whose violent outbursts at primary school appear to be a sign of his innate capacity for evil, inherited from his father, Tommy Lee Royce.

With her grandson now 16, Catherine must reckon with the fact that she can no longer control whether Ryan wants his father to be part of his life. “One of the reasons we wanted to wait a while to do the third series was so that Ryan was old enough to be making his own decisions about things, to be more mentally able and astute and inquisitive about his own life in a way that he now has some agency,” says Wainwright.

Catherine’s sister, Clare, is often left to pick up the pieces. A former heroin addict, Clare’s relationship with her older sister is one wrought with pain, dependency and past trauma. “That relationship gets tested more than ever. It’s a massive part of the story,” Wainwright discloses. “They do have a really distressing falling out.”

At work, Catherine and her team are still trying to curb the Valley’s chronic drugs problem. The new series will see the force crack down on the illegal supply of prescription drugs, which are proving to be more prevalent and more destructive than Class As.

“Catherine always feels like she’s mopping things up and the bigger problem never gets dealt with. But, in this series, we get a bit closer to the problem and meet some of the bigger players who are supplying drugs in the area,” Wainwright reveals.

After 30 years in the force, Catherine is heading towards retirement and a life off duty, in her own words: “Code 11 – job done”. Having long found work an escape from her chaotic home life, how will she cope without it? “Oh, I think she’s quite happy,” says Wainwright.

Of course, the real question isn’t whether Catherine will cope without work, but whether we will cope in her absence. “The biggest thing for me was worrying about, if Catherine retires, will everything break down?” Wainwright explains.

“A friend of mine said to me the other day, ‘You do realise we’re watching the breakdown of civil society at the minute, don’t you’, and I was like, ‘Oh my God, yes, we are’. It does feel like Catherine retiring is a reflection of that,” she continues. “Everything’s going to pot and how can we cope without people like her?”

Despite her occasional missteps, at work Catherine is driven by a strong moral code. With the police mired in scandals, public confidence in the service has plummeted since *Happy Valley* last aired.

As the horrifying reports of misogyny, racism and sexual impropriety within the force appear to be increasingly symptomatic of a rot at the top, rather than the work of a few bad apples, Wainwright found herself grappling

inappropriately recruited into the police is mind-blowing.”

Talking to *Happy Valley*’s police consultants Lisa Farrand and Janet Hudson, Wainwright discovered that misogyny persists in the force. “They both said to me, you’d like to think things have got better, but they haven’t,” she says. Still, through her discussions with both women, she was reassured that goodness prevails. “I see that [Farrand and Hudson] care enough to have seen out



James Norton as Tommy Lee Royce in *Happy Valley*

BBC

with how her presentation of the police might be received.

“I do worry that I am quite soft on the police in shows like *Happy Valley*,” says Wainwright. “There’s a problem with TV in general, where we like cop shows, and we tend to present cops as

‘I DO WORRY THAT I AM QUITE SOFT ON THE POLICE IN SHOWS LIKE HAPPY VALLEY’

the heroes –and, obviously, I do with Catherine. Catherine is meant to be a really good police officer.

“And then we hear all these terrible reports of what’s going on in the Met and other constabularies...”

“Some of the stuff that’s been in the press recently about people who are

their careers in the police. You know that they do care because of the way they talk about the job; they have done extraordinary things with true responsibility,” she says.

As Catherine prepares to hang up her hat, it’s been confirmed that the third series will be *Happy Valley*’s final. While the show was initially written as a one-off, after Wainwright decided to return to Catherine and her story with series 2, the writer always had a clear idea of how the drama would end.

“I wanted there to be some sort of big final confrontation between Tommy and Catherine. That’s always been the plan to conclude the story, to find a way to give some kind of resolution, one way or the other,” she teases. “We couldn’t have avoided it. I don’t think the drama would have been satisfying if they didn’t have a big explosive showdown.” ■

Happy Valley’s third and final series starts on BBC One and iPlayer on New Year’s Day at 9:00pm; series 1 and 2 are on iPlayer now.



ITV

Riches

Feuding in style

You could practically hear the eye roll of black actor Steve Toussaint, Lord Velaryon in *House of the Dragon*, when he responded to the backlash about his casting in the role earlier this year. “They are happy with a dragon flying. They’re happy with white hair and violet-coloured eyes, but a rich, black guy? That’s beyond the pale,” he sighed.

Certainly, while society sees people of all colours straddle all classes, including the higher echelons, British television has been slower, across the board, to peel away from stereotypes.

Here to change that in fine style is *Riches*, a glitzy series about the wealthy

ITVX drama *Riches* breaks new ground by putting female Black British creatives to the fore, reports **Shilpa Ganatra**

family behind a hair and beauty empire, who are left reeling after the sudden death of their patriarch and CEO, Stephen Richards (Hugh Quarshie). When he includes his New York-based daughter Nina (Deborah Ayorinde) and son Simon (Emmanuel Imani) from a former relationship in his will, it causes ructions with the wife, Claudia (Sarah Niles), and children of his present family.

Airing on ITVX in December before its linear-TV showing next year, it is quickly evident that the innovations it makes in character and context – it also speaks to themes of black beauty and blended families – take second place to the drama of it all.

Writer Abby Ajayi (*Inventing Anna*,

‘THE UK IS... BEHIND THE US IN ITS PORTRAYALS OF... PEOPLE OF MARGINALISED GROUPS’

Four Weddings and a Funeral) says: “I’ve always been fascinated by family dramas, both fictional and real-life ones – whether you’re talking about the Royal Family, the Kardashians, the Guccis, the Murdochs. It’s so interesting how murky and muddy things get when money and family mix.”

The series revolves around Nina, who is left to save the company, but has to do so while grappling with her own abandonment issues. Along the way, she makes startling discoveries about the business. Will the different factions of the family come together to save the company, or will their thirst for power rip it apart?

The series was brought to life by Ajayi with Nadine Marsh-Edwards and Amanda Jenks at Greenacre Films (*Been So Long, Unsaid Stories*), who quickly found interest from ITV. “But because this is a story that’s set in the world of rich people, we needed more finance,” explains Marsh-Edwards. “And because of our connections in the US, we had to pitch to American companies. We were thrilled that Amazon Studios came on board and allowed us to make the series in the way we wanted to make it.”

Even then, “it wasn’t a massive budget at all, so we had to be resourceful,” continues Jenks. “We had to have big chats and storyboard with all the directors to establish how we were going to do it on our budget. We didn’t go to New York, for instance – hopefully, no one will notice that when they watch the show.”

“Music was important in creating atmosphere, and we found a few undiscovered bands. It was important for us to be as creative as possible, so no one is thinking anything other than, ‘Wow, that looks amazing,’ when watching the show.”

Casting proved a challenge, as the actors not only had to prove their talent, but they also needed to gel as an ▶



Abby Ajayi



Deborah Ayorinde

The UK’s box-ticking habit

While Abby Ajayi and Deborah Ayorinde have had very different transatlantic journeys to arrive at their current success, both have come to similar conclusions about inequality of opportunity in the British television industry.

Ayorinde says that the UK is, ‘unfortunately, behind the US in its portrayals of different people, especially people of marginalised groups. There is performative diversity and inclusion, but I would like to see more genuine diversity and inclusion.’

Ajayi’s career path, in particular, is clear evidence of performative inclusion in the UK. She explains: ‘I had that opportunity where you get to do one episode of *EastEnders* and then an episode of *Hollyoaks*. You were never invited back, it was very much “a box has been ticked now”, and that was no way to build a career.’

Eventually, she went for broke and moved to the US for a final push at a TV writing career. Within weeks, she landed a job as a writer with Shonda Rhimes’s production powerhouse Shondaland, maker of *Bridgerton* and *How to Get Away with Murder*, which Ajayi was hired for. ‘That immediately

validated me. It showed I was capable, even though I had spent a decade trying to get in the door.

‘I’ve since stayed in the States because the professional opportunities there are significantly more interesting.’

To improve the situation, both feel that having an open mind and trust, towards black women especially, will help foster change. ‘There’s a long way to go in terms of letting more people not only have a seat at the table, but having a voice at the table,’ says Ayorinde.

Schemes to promote inclusivity need to be carefully considered, says Ajayi. Because, ultimately, many don’t lead to meaningful opportunities, marginalised creatives spend their limited time and energy going down cul-de-sacs, which disadvantages them further.

‘It makes people feel like they’re ticking boxes and spending their diversity money, but it has to be about actually greenlighting work,’ she says. ‘It’s a slightly depressing indictment of the British industry if black actors, black directors and black writers have to leave home to get the opportunity and the skills and utilise their talent, only to then be welcomed back.’



ITV

► ensemble of family members. “Aisha Bywaters was a great casting director because she knows everyone,” says Marsh-Edwards. “What didn’t help was that all the auditions were done by Zoom, because it was done during Covid. Abby or one of the directors was in the room after having Covid tests, and the rest of the execs watched via video. But, once we all got in a room with them, we could see that it worked.”

Adds Jenks: “We’re proud that we’ve found some fantastic actors who are not necessarily known to audiences. We’ve found some stars of the future, and they’re held [together] by experienced actors such as Hugh Quarshie and Sarah Niles.

“It was great to offer interesting non-lead roles to Brendan Coyle (*Downton Abbey*) and Hermione Norris (*Spooks*, *Cold Feet*) because they’re big stars and you think, ‘They’re not just going to play the lawyer and the secretary’, but they do,” she recounts. “But nothing is as it seems in *Riches*, and the plots do change rapidly.”

Once the actors were in place, it allowed Ajayi to add the finishing touches to the characters. “Emmanuel speaks fluent Yoruba, for instance, and has such incredible comedic timing, so I’d write to that. And Sarah brought this real gravitas, so I’d try a different line, like a zinger one-liner,

‘WE LOOK FABULOUS WHILE DOING BAD THINGS’

because I knew she could deliver it,” says Ajayi.

For Ayorinde (*Girls Trip*, *Luke Cage*), who had just completed a lead part in the Amazon series *Them*, stepping into the central role of Nina was serendipitous. Like her character, she was returning to London after spending most of her life in America. Plus, there was the allure of a production that showed a blended black family in a new light.

“We’re not a monolith, and it’s unfair to represent a group of people like that,” she says. “In *Riches*, there’s diversity even in a small pocket of people. You see different types of black people: from the UK, Africans, Caribbeans and Americans. And different types of wealth: there’s generational wealth; Nina and Simon are self-made; and Alesha [played by Adeyinka Akinrinade] is self-made in the context of also having generational wealth.”

As the main character in an ensemble piece, Ayorinde felt the responsibility of leading the actors. “The cast

are the only department that doesn’t have a head and so, as a lead, you’re kind of the head of department,” she says. “It’s not just about doing great work on camera, it’s also about the fact that when I come in, I have a lot to do with the energy on set.

“If I’m having a shitty day and I don’t go through the proper channels of handling that shitty day, that can affect the entire thing. I tried to help the cast by advising them on how to handle certain challenges, and how to advocate for yourself and your character and your work, by finding a way to be a strong support system for them while also not abandoning myself.”

And, of course, there is plenty of glam. As Ayorinde says, “We look fabulous while doing bad things”.

Although warring families on TV are hardly original – *Succession* comes to mind as a recent example – the cultural specifics of a high-class Black British family, arguably, make it as a compelling watch. As Jenks points out, “There aren’t many shows in the British landscape made by an all-female company with diversity at its heart, that’s written by a black woman, directed by black directors, two of whom are women. And that brings an energy of its own.” ■

Riches will be released on ITVX from 22 December.



A Spy Among Friends

ITV

A new era for ITV

The final quarter of 2022 is likely to go down as one of the most significant periods in the long and remarkable TV career of Kevin Lygo, ITV's Managing Director of media and entertainment.

For starters, there's been one of the most successful ever series of the entertainment flagship *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, not forgetting ITV1's high-profile coverage of the Qatar World Cup, with plaudits for the irascible studio pundit Roy Keane and, crucially, the overdue launch of the broadcaster's shiny and heavily marketed new streaming service, ITVX.

"It's an exciting time here," muses Lygo. "It was inevitable that ITV would step full stride into the world of streaming. Soon, I think, streaming as a separate thing will vanish. Everything will be streamed. ITVX is us creating a destination for viewers to go to when they're looking for things to watch. Remember, within it, is everything we're currently doing"

Lygo is an unusual media luminary:

Kevin Lygo explains to **Steve Clarke** what makes streaming service ITVX unique

early on in his life in TV, in the 1990s, he gave it all up for several years to sell Islamic art in London and Paris. But if he is in any way stressed at the thought of being the front man for the launch of ITVX, it doesn't show.

Having turned 65 in September, he no longer has anything to prove – but ITV most certainly does, as the ITVX service replaces ITV Hub, which consistently punched below its weight.

As Lygo sets out X's stall, it seems ITV is leaving little to chance: it is ploughing £160m into new commissions for the service, which has been some 18 months in the planning.

The aim is for ITVX to take its place alongside the mighty BBC iPlayer and the deeply inventoried All 4 – and compete with the US streamers. It is an admission that ITV needs to extend

its reach beyond the loyal and ageing audiences who regularly tune in for staples such as *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale* and the frequently outstanding *News at Ten*. Famously, Lygo is a devoted fan of the *Street* and never misses an episode.

"For ITV, it's terribly important that we appeal to a wider audience than we do through linear-TV. With linear, just with the soaps, we're hitting 6 million people every night but, largely speaking, they are the same 6 million people," Lygo explains. "That's our bread and butter. The sales boys go, 'Yeah, we've banked them.' But what about those hard-to-reach people, younger people, light viewers.

"We've identified many different cohorts, vast numbers of people to target across the range of genres, from drama to factual and acquired." At its launch on 8 December, ITVX provided 10,000 hours of content and, tellingly, promises at least one new exclusive show will drop every week.

ITV aims to get the service off to a powerful start with several high-end dramas. These include the six-part ▶

► cold war thriller *A Spy Among Friends*, starring Damian Lewis and Guy Pearce, the new teen drama *Tell Me Everything*, period drama *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*, starring Karla-Simone Spence, Sophie Cookson and Patrick Martins, and *Plebs: Soldiers of Rome*, a feature-length special.

"I'm not sure we would have done *A Spy Among Friends* if we only had the main ITV channel," says Lygo. "We might have thought 'Is it a bit BBC One and a half? Is it a sort of *Tinker, Tailor* world?' But, for us, that's the sweet spot of ABC1s, maybe more male. We'll see. But it feels like a drama that a lot of people who wouldn't necessarily go to *Trigger Point* would love."

Similarly, *Tell Me Everything* – the whole cast is under 21 – "would not have been commissioned by the main channel because it's niche. If we're lucky and it all works, it could be like *Skins* back in the day.

"The range of what we can commission now is extended and, with it, the range of audiences that we can approach should reflect that," Lygo emphasises. "The commercial side of the business goes, 'Great, our reach is extending. We're getting targeted viewers. We're getting different sorts of viewers and it's all additional.'

"The content has got to speak louder, be sharper, better and have a bit more surprise about it. It lends itself more, although not exclusively, to the continuing story. Thrillers are obviously the stalwart. But it's not only that: if you look at which streaming dramas are successful, they are thrillers."

Intriguingly, ITVX is even including a section devoted to hundreds of hours of anime, not the kind of thing you'd automatically associate with ITV. "Even if the audience is very small," Lygo explains, "it's very good for us to approach a group of people who maybe never come to ITV except for the odd entertainment show or sports match."

One new ITVX show defines what Lygo hopes will be part of X's appeal, *Litvinenko*, starring David Tennant as the Russian defector. Among the tens of thousands of hours of archive material available on X is *Des*, in which Tennant plays serial killer Dennis Nilsen, first shown by ITV in 2020 with an accompanying documentary. "A lot of people haven't seen *Des*," says Lygo. "If you come in for *Litvinenko*, next to it will be an icon saying, 'If you like this, you might like *Des*,' so, with luck, *Des* gets another lease of life."



Kevin Lygo

'SOON, STREAMING AS A SEPARATE THING WILL VANISH. EVERYTHING WILL BE STREAMED'

Seven new comedies have been commissioned for ITVX. The genre is notoriously difficult to get right and is expensive. "Of late, ITV has slightly stepped away from making comedies," he says. "ITVX gives us an opportunity to make some comedies because there isn't the pressure to get an overnight audience of 4 million viewers."

He promises a range of comedies: "Mainly scripted but we've also got a sketch show using deep-fake technology alongside some more traditional but spiky sitcoms." Lygo adds: "We can be a bit more relaxed about language," and be unfazed if the classic, mainstream, older ITV audience doesn't flock to it. "It's OK if it doesn't deliver big figures but is watched by light ITV viewers."

While the US streamers have infinitely deeper pockets than ITV and can afford to spend more freely on

high-end shows, Lygo highlights ITVX's Britishness and how the hope is that UK audiences will respond to a familiar landscape populated by familiar actors, presenters, and other well-known celebrities; for example, Stephen Fry is fronting a natural history documentary, *A Year on Planet Earth*, which launches later in December.

"If we've got a new drama starring Damian Lewis or Vicky McClure you're going to go, 'I like this, I know where I am'. I think to see something new yet familiar is quite compelling in a massively fractured and overwhelming marketplace.

"For us, the balance in commissioning is about whether we have got enough that's new that draws you in. I'm very confident that our recent library, drawn from over the past few years, will still feel fresh. It's only a repeat if you've seen it before."

The fact that it is free provides another advantage, contends Lygo. "For us, the trump card is that it's free. During a cost-of-living crisis, and people cancelling their subscriptions, all of this will be available for free, with ads, of course." To watch ad-free costs £5.99 a month, including BritBox.

He expects the first year of ITVX to be a learning curve as the company



ITV

discovers what people are coming to the service for, what they watch a lot of and what is likely to keep them on the platform.

The hope is that movies will turn out to be a big draw. At launch, ITVX has 250 films ranging from Hollywood blockbusters like *Wonder Woman* to older classics such as *Reservoir Dogs*. “On a main channel, feature films don’t play that well anymore, but they perform well on digital channels like ITV2 and 4,” Lygo explains.

“On a streaming service, we want to attract new people, so we want our MAUs (monthly active users) to double over the next three or four years. We want people to spend more time on ITVX than they did on the Hub.

“Things like movies are great because, if you’re in, you’re in for two hours. As a result, we get the consumption hours up. If you’re watching a big movie, we can tell you what else you might like on the service.” The idea is that word-of-mouth will drive a lot of viewing to ITVX.

On ITV1 (recently rebranded again for the launch of ITVX), the challenge to find cut-through content doesn’t get any easier, which makes the recent triumphant series of *I’m a Celebrity... all the more impressive.*

‘CONTENT HAS GOT TO SPEAK LOUDER, BE SHARPER AND BE BETTER’

Was even Lygo taken aback by its success? Normally, ratings dip during the series. This didn’t happen, something he attributes to the Matt factor: “People have come back to it after not watching it for years. Or maybe they’ve never watched it, but they heard Matt Hancock was on and he drew them in.”

As for the decision to cast the former health secretary, “You use your gut instinct and years of knowing the show inside out.... Ultimately, why wouldn’t you want a big, controversial, confusing, fascinating figure of the moment in the show?”

“It’s not only what the viewers think but how the rest of the cast reacted, which is partly why he went in late. Establish them all together and then chuck him in.”

Whether the *Big Brother* reboot, due on ITV2 next autumn, can prove to be another reality juggernaut for ITV

remains to be seen. “I’ve only had positive responses. I’m thrilled it’s back,” says Lygo. “It is one of the most extraordinary shows ever made. It could be a very important show for driving audiences for us.”

What, then, of his personal viewing favourites, the *Street* aside? Is there a show on a rival that he covets? If there is, he isn’t saying, although he does confess to enjoying HBO’s *Hacks* and finally caught up with *Call My Agent* earlier this year. He also enjoys watching subtitled Scandi noir “because I can detach from it being a work thing”.

Season 1 aside, he doesn’t watch *The Crown*. “You’ve got to remember, I’ve got to watch a lot of ITV and, because I do adore *Coronation Street*, that’s three hours a week. When *I’m a Celebrity... is on, my life’s over.*”

Piers Morgan’s show on TalkTV is another programme he avoids: “Eight o’clock at night? Really? With everything that’s ever been made available and a new show every day from one of the streamers that’s cost \$20m an hour.

“And with what we’re putting out and the BBC is putting out.... It’s not surprising it’s doing what it’s doing. I sometimes wonder if they should have just done ‘Podcast with Piers’. It would be a lot cheaper.” ■



Tim Davie

The urgent case for change

Tim Davie, the BBC's Director-General, has called for urgent action to ensure that British media can prosper into the 2030s. He said the BBC must work together with politicians, policymakers, regulators, and other parts of the sector to secure the future of a world-leading UK media market.

He was speaking at an RTS event attended by the former BBC Director-General John Birt, academics and BBC Chair Richard Sharp, who recently claimed the corporation was guilty of "liberal bias", which it was fighting against. Davie made an impassioned case for why a newly capitalised BBC should be at the centre of a thriving domestic media characterised by "public service growth".

He said: "Today, I want to make a case for growth, and the choices, as the UK, to own it. Too much of this debate is painfully 'small'. In BBC terms, we understandably fret about domestic issues, political spats and the latest headlines. And, because people care,

BBC Director-General Tim Davie outlines the action he wants to see to future-proof UK media entering an all-online era

we keep busy on a joyous treadmill of flare-ups and debates.

"But, beyond the day-to-day, we urgently need to spend more time agreeing what we want to create that best serves our audiences, the economy and society." The aim should be "to create a bigger creative sector supported by strong public service media and a thriving BBC".

To achieve this, he identified four essential requirements:

- Ensure that the UK is fully connected so that everyone can receive their TV and radio via the internet. A positive plan is needed to ensure that UK businesses and audiences get maximum benefit, no one is left behind,

and content remains universal and affordable – and not at the behest of rich, overseas companies acting as gatekeepers.

- Champion a clear, market-leading role for the BBC in the digital age. No one in the world has created a digitally led public service media company at scale. There is an opportunity to put the BBC at the heart of the UK's media future. There is a plan for how an internet-only version of the BBC will operate, focused around a simple, single brand in the UK and abroad, the BBC.

- Invest in the BBC. The BBC is one of the world's most powerful and recognised brands. "We are open-minded about future funding mechanics, but we are clear that it is critical we have a universal solution that fuels UK public service growth – not stifles it – while offering audiences outstanding value for money."

- Move faster to regulate for future success. "The UK's legal and regulatory environment has not kept pace with the market. We need rules for the prominence, availability and inclusion of PSB content on new platforms, in video and

audio.” And “a regulatory framework that is proactive, agile, and responds to obvious harm when it occurs – allowing innovation and growth across the industry, alongside the necessary and appropriate safeguards.

“Today, the BBC reaches nearly half a billion people weekly, a number that has been growing.”

The corporation is “the best-known British cultural export – that’s quite

said, is the right time to ask: do we let the global market simply take its course or should we intervene to shape the UK market?

Nearly 90% of adults, and 75% of 16–34s use the BBC every week; and every month, nearly every adult uses the BBC in the UK. “More than 30 million browsers in the UK used the BBC online yesterday, the only online UK brand to really mix it with global players,” Davie

over the past five years, delivering a stretching target of more than £1.2bn in returns and growing profits 70%,” said Davie.

At the same time, the corporation has stepped up its commitment to a highly efficient BBC, reducing overheads to within 5% of total costs. “We cut more than 1,000 public service roles last year. All our senior managers are assessed, and we are stripping



something, when you consider the competition, from music to monarchy”. In India, BBC services reach 70 million people in nine local languages. In the US, the BBC is now the most trusted news brand. When BBC News’s Russia editor, Steve Rosenberg, interviewed Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov, the recording received “7 million views inside Russia”.

Despite this, Davie said, “We are in a period of real jeopardy. A life-threatening challenge to our local media and the cultural and social benefits it provides.”

This is not an immediate crisis for audiences: “The choice of high-quality TV and audio has never been better. The threat is not about whether there is choice, it is about the scope of future choice and what factors shape it. Do we want a US-style media market, or do we want to fight to grow something different, based on our vision?”

Broadcasting, as opposed to streaming, will continue to shrink as a proportion of people’s TV and radio consumption across all age groups. TikTok is now bigger than the BBC in video for 16–24s in the UK. Today, he

‘THE BBC REMAINS BIGGER THAN NETFLIX, AMAZON AND DISNEY+ COMBINED FOR HOURS OF VIDEO WATCHED [HERE]’

stressed. “When it comes to hours of video watched in the UK, the BBC remains bigger than Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney+ combined.”

Award-winning shows, from *Time to Motherland*, have proliferated: “Nine million watched the launch of *Frozen Planet II*, while a peak audience of 17 million watched the Women’s Euros final; the BBC delivered 42 million streams of Glastonbury; and the coverage of Queen Elizabeth II’s funeral showed what only the BBC can do.”

The numbers of people who say the BBC provides impartial news has held firm. “BBC Studios has grown rapidly

away bureaucracy as we create a world-class culture,” Davie continued.

He said the time when the broadcast signal will be switched off, bringing “infinite choice”, is not that far away; the BBC needs to start planning for this now.

In this online-only world, the BBC will have an opportunity to harness the potential of an interactive digital landscape to increase public value and stimulate the UK media market. Internet-only distribution will represent a chance to connect more deeply with audiences and to provide them with better services and choice than broadcast has allowed. There will be significant editorial opportunities.

He urged the Government to speed up broadband roll-out. Forecasts suggest that, by 2030, about 2 million UK homes will still not be using fixed-line broadband; and, even in a few years, 5% of the UK landmass may not be covered by 5G or 4G to provide content on the move.

In this digital future, the BBC will provide universally delivered, differentiated content and nurture an informed ▶

QUESTION & ANSWER

Q Theresa Wise: What would an internet-only BBC look like?

A Tim Davie: Live linear-TV is here for the long term. The online BBC is not trying to replicate Netflix or Spotify...

We've got to get an algorithm where you get the right degree of personalisation. But I want to know what the BBC newsroom thinks the main story is and not be wholly driven by algorithms.

Q Regarding funding, you've got a flat licence-fee settlement and huge media inflation. I don't know if that means you will have to do less in an internet world?

A Well, it's tough. You can look at it through different lenses. We're privileged to have the certainty of the licence fee until 2027-28 – two years flat, four years of CPI. There are commercial businesses that would sign off on that in terms of the overall revenue of the core business.

But there is no doubt that there are enormous pressures. Obviously, there's inflation. The market's booming, which is driving up prices. Critically, our competitors are putting up their prices...

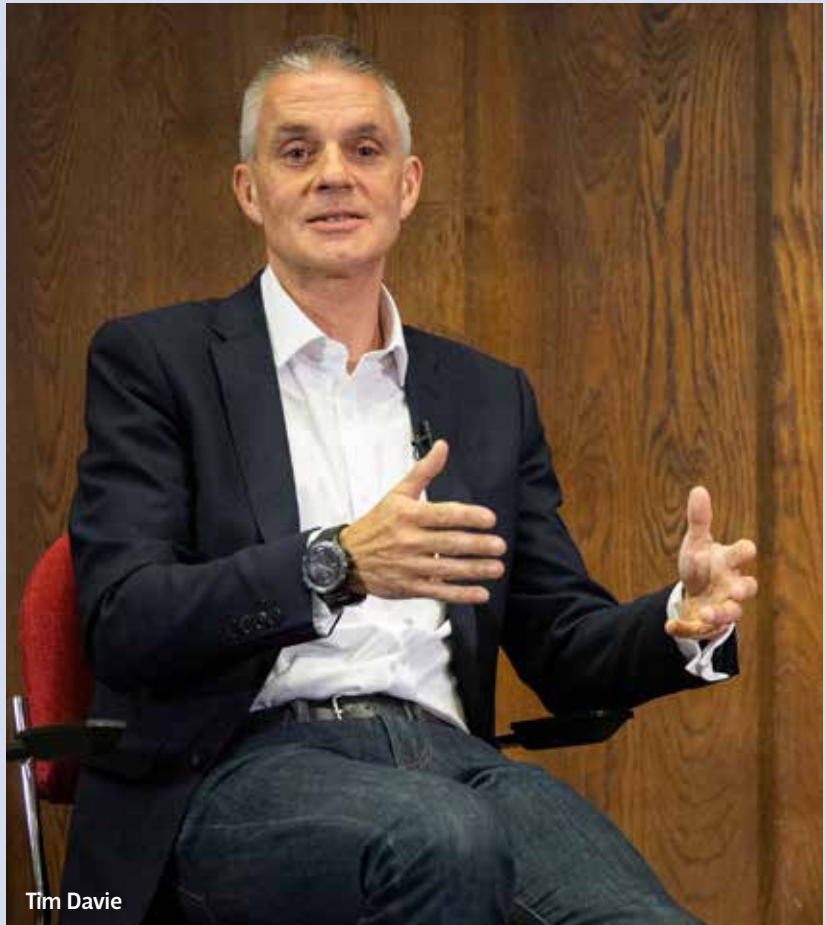
Our job at the BBC is not simply to get the licence fee – or whatever the funding mechanism is – up, but to offer great value.

Q Is your preferred funding model the German-style 'household levy' that [BBC Chair] Richard Sharp referred to in his recent interview in *The Sunday Times*?

A Beyond 2027-28, we need to be open. But we need to be very clear about the principles and we need a mechanic that delivers against those principles. These include universality and independence from political interference on a day-to-day basis. That's sacrosanct and non-negotiable.

It's utterly critical to us that we can report without fear or favour. We make hard choices around impartiality. That's non-negotiable...

The funding mechanism has to offer fair value to all audiences, and sustainable funding.



Tim Davie

Paul Hampartsoumian

Q How big is the risk that US-based companies will end up dominating the UK media landscape?

A We're not there to beat Netflix. I like and respect these companies. We are not going to have everyone's media time. Some of the debate about so-called young people's media time is ridiculous; I am quite happy if somebody spends a lot of their time gaming, so long as they spend enough time with the BBC.

In the future, I'm thinking we could be providing BBC News in games. I see us working alongside these companies. My speech was not about restricting their ability to operate, it was about intervening on behalf of the UK and protecting our IP.

There is a difference between having studio facilities and owning IP.

How much IP does the UK own? Who owns the IP is a bigger question than who's operating the most effective shed. Those sheds are brilliant at delivering jobs, skills and apprenticeships but they are not going to underpin the creative industry. It's about who owns the IP.

Q Angela Ferreira, MD, Douglas Road Productions (speaking from the floor): Over the years, the

BBC has cut or vastly reduced the Community Programmes Unit, the Disability Programmes Unit, the Asian Programmes Unit, the African and Caribbean Unit, along with the lack of original commissioning for BBC Four and, recently, the cuts to local radio, particularly in the evening. How will some of those underserved audiences be served in the future?

A I'm very proud of our record in terms of how we commission from a very diverse base, much more than any commercial organisation.

Regarding local radio, we are in consultation and, as a result of that consultation, I don't want to see big reductions in the areas we are talking about...

Look at the special funds we've put into investing in different kinds of content run by diverse leaders...

You have to look at the core output, the core drama and major strands, and who is making them. That is when we'll know if we're a more diverse, inclusive broadcaster...

Bluntly, the BBC Four issue is about funding. It's not designed to affect minority audiences. Everyone is equally affected by that.



► society through impartial, trusted news and information. “Over time,” he said, “this will mean fewer linear-TV broadcast services and a more tailored, joined-up online offer.”

“As examples, we will double down on the latest work in BBC News on disinformation and accelerate the drive to ensure that network drama is sourced from across the UK, which differentiates us from others.”

Davie emphasised: “In the future, we will need to transform the BBC faster to deliver a compelling online offer.”

“We are working on how an IP [internet protocol] BBC could be the best version of the BBC, shaped around people’s interests and needs. A daily partner to your life, bringing the BBC together in a single offer with personalised combinations. A world in which local news, areas of interest and hidden gems can be found more easily... imagine news reimagined for iPlayer.”

The BBC will be a world-leading pioneer in this. “No one in the world has created a digitally led public service media company of scale, and the global opportunity for us is there for the taking,” Davie predicted.

To achieve this will require significant change: “We will have fewer brands overall, and consolidate actively behind a simple, single brand in the UK – the BBC. You’ll see this globally,

‘WE ARE OPEN-MINDED ABOUT A FUTURE FUNDING MECHANISM [BUT IT MUST] FUEL PUBLIC SERVICE GROWTH’

as well. We will also simplify sub-brands such as BBC News. You can see a first step in our bringing together of the BBC News Channel and BBC World News as one brand: BBC News.”

The BBC will require investment to achieve this: “Any transition of a legacy broadcast organisation to a digital future needs capital. As the owners of even the biggest companies are finding out, it is not for the faint-hearted. Moving to digital is not the challenge in and of itself: moving to digital while not losing most of your audience and burning millions of pounds unnecessarily is the challenge.”

The DG added: “As we look to the 2030s, we are open-minded about a future funding mechanism. But we are clear that it is critical that we need a universal solution that fuels UK public service growth, not stifles it, while

offering audiences outstanding value for money.

“Of course, the latest settlement did include the increased debt facility for BBC Studios, which was welcome, and we are ambitious about its prospects. Alongside commercial plans, we will keep cutting costs to invest and attract more partner investment, such as the latest deal we announced with Disney on *Doctor Who*. [Even] under the most ambitious scenarios, this will not change the need for serious public service investment.”

More money will be required for the World Service to avoid further cuts at a time when “the Russians and Chinese are investing hundreds of millions in state-backed services”.

Lastly, Davie said, “We need to regulate for success at speed.” The Digital Markets Act plus the Online Safety Bill, Data Protection and Digital Information Bill and Media Bill, planned for this Parliament, were all essential legislative changes. “We need a regulatory framework that is proactive. It must be agile – able to respond without endless consultation and process. I am pleased that Ofcom is working in this area.” ■

Report by Steve Clarke. Tim Davie spoke to the RTS at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, on 7 December. The Q&A session was chaired by RTS CEO Theresa Wise.

An anti-Christmas special



Sky *I Hate Suzie Too*

I Hate Suzie Too confronts the grotesque price of female celebrity as it careers through the chaotic backstory of Suzie Pickles. **Harry Bennett** reports

Open your Christmas TV guide this year and, amid all the wholesome dramas, jolly comedies and gooey romcoms, you'll find a glaring anomaly.

I Hate Suzie, Lucy Prebble and Billie Piper's brutally frank and funny 2020 tragicomedy about the undoing of an actor named Suzie Pickles (played by Piper), is getting the Christmas treatment on Sky Atlantic.

It picks up Suzie's story with her still floundering in the fallout of leaked photos of an affair. With her career, marriage and family life dragged through the mud, any festivities and happy-ever-afters are unlikely. As per its tagline, *I Hate Suzie Too* is an "anti-Christmas special".

It comes as no surprise, then, that Prebble has mixed feelings about this so-called "most wonderful time of the year". As well as some ideas for reform.

"I think I do like it," she says, "but I think it should be every four years, instead of yearly – like an election or the World Cup."

Her ambivalence is understandable given that, "women, particularly, feel a

lot of pressure and chaos around this time. It's supposed to be a holiday but for parents – and for mothers, particularly – it's another extremely pressured and expensive performance they have to deliver. They have to make sure it's 'happy' and 'fun' enough."

The season therefore provides the perfect backdrop for *I Hate Suzie Too*. As well as satirising stardom, the show has always interrogated gender. From the very first episode, when Suzie discovers that her phone has been hacked just before her house is invaded by a film crew for a photoshoot, it puts you in the shoes of a woman overexposed.

As well as being a celebrity, she is a

wife to her husband, Cob (Daniel Ings), and a mother to her son, Frank (Matthew Jordan-Caws). As she struggles to live up to the demands of all three, it forces us to recognise that our notions of the roles of women are at once restrictive and excessive.

It's a character study that Prebble conceived in tandem with Piper. The two have been best friends and creative partners since working on *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* (2007). Their obvious chemistry showed in how easily Piper inhabited Prebble's writing, capturing all of Suzie's imperfections and contradictions.

But, because Piper was in every scene, many of which demanded an extraordinary range and commitment, it amounted to "a very gruelling schedule", says Prebble, and one that they didn't want to repeat.

This time, they've gone for "something shorter but more substantial", a three-parter that starts a few months on from the first series. Suzie is now crashing at her sister's flat and racking up legal fees in her divorce proceedings. So she turns to a reality show called *Dance Crazee* in a desperate

'THE INSPIRATION IS [FIGURES] WHO HAVE FACED HUMILIATION IN EXTREMELY PUBLIC SCANDALS'

attempt to save herself from financial and reputational ruin.

The show, which Prebble describes as “*Strictly Come Dancing* meets *Love Island*”, is very much the backbone of this series, which follows Suzie through the competition from her first dance to the final.

First things first, though. The format needed fine tuning, and Prebble went so far as to consult ex-*Pointless* host and game-show guru Richard Osman. A key feature of *Dance Crazee* is that the contestants can swap partners, which throws up all sorts of difficulties. But

of publicity. There is only a moment’s respite before we cut back six months to Suzie in the throes of having an abortion.

Prebble thought it was important to detail this episode, especially after the overturning in June by the US Supreme Court of *Roe vs Wade* and other attacks on women’s rights.

“The conversation around understanding pregnancy, miscarriage and abortion is so embarrassingly myopic and patriarchal, particularly in the US, that it’s an absolute scandal of misogyny, ignorance, and horror,” she

something to do with her office. “I wrote the show in a cheap, small hotel room in New York. I only understood why it was so cheap at 3:00pm on the first day, when I realised it sat right next to the Holland tunnel, a road leading out of the city. From 3:00pm until 9:00pm every single day it was jammed with traffic, endlessly beeping in unison for hours. I feel like that sound of angry frustration runs under the show.”

Ultimately, though, the chaos is carefully calibrated. A case in point is that, when it came to plotting the finale, Prebble handmade a “rudimentary little



Osman’s mind, says Prebble, “can work out all those sort of things really quickly; he was useful and gave me a sense of structure. But, of course, we also took liberties. I’m sure he’ll be furious.”

As for whether appearances on reality TV have an impact on perceptions of public figures, “That’s one to ask Matt Hancock,” she says, referring to the disgraced former health secretary, who recently made the final of *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*

I Hate Suzie Too quickly launches into the action, with Suzie nailing a first dance that is so fiercely choreographed it feels as if she is literally wrestling back control of her narrative. But it is soon followed by a sequence as anxiety-inducing as any that have come before. Her private life comes crashing in and she realises just how far she’s fallen while under the glare



Lucy Prebble

argues. “Any truthful, thoughtful representation of an experience of abortion is valuable.”

Coupled with the ruthless divorce and child custody negotiations, and the ongoing drama with her best friend and former agent, Naomi (Leila Farzad), it all makes for a series that is arguably even more chaotic than the first.

Prebble says that it might have

model theatre” to keep track of where everyone was in the *Dance Crazee* studio, both onstage and backstage, with paperclips for people.

What exactly inspired such a chaotic trajectory for Suzie in this series? Prebble replies that it was the real-life stories of such cultural figures as Britney Spears and Amber Heard, figures who have faced humiliation in extremely public scandals.

She explains: “We lack backstory and context for women’s lives in the way we have for men’s. So women get branded ‘crazy’ for behaviour that would make rational sense if you followed them through their lives up to that moment”

In other words, *I Hate Suzie Too* is the backstory we’ve been lacking. ■

***I Hate Suzie Too* premieres on Sky Atlantic and Now TV on 20 December.**

Are you living your best life?



BBC

Mayflies

Few novels have excited as much love and devotion as Andrew O'Hagan's *Mayflies*, a funny, tender but heart-rending tale of male friendship. Now, only two years after its publication, an adaptation is coming to the BBC, an astonishingly quick turnaround for television drama.

Claire Mundell, MD of Glasgow indie Synchronicity Films and *Mayflies*' executive producer, has been a fan of O'Hagan's writing since his first book, *The Missing*. "When I heard [*Mayflies*] was coming out I managed to get the manuscript very early doors, read it, and made an offer right away. I couldn't have coped if anyone else had got it," she told the RTS in mid-December.

"It is genuinely a classic – the quality of the writing, the tenderness of the story, [its] relevance... for a contemporary audience living in the world we are in now," she continued.

The RTS hears how Andrew O'Hagan's vibrant, heartbreaking novel *Mayflies* was adapted for TV

As the cost-of-living crisis grips, the similarities between contemporary Scotland and 1986, the year the first half of the novel is set, are increasingly striking. "The two [lead] characters grew up amid the terrible economic devastation of... working-class Scotland – that affects people's aspirations, their hopes and dreams," added Mundell.

Having recently left school in a small Scottish town, Tully and Jimmy enjoy a magical weekend in Manchester, taking in *The Fall* and *The Smiths*, and a night at the legendary Hacienda club. Ecstatic, they make a vow to live life

differently. The second half of O'Hagan's novel is set three decades later: Jimmy's phone rings and Tully has terrible news, and a request that will truly test their friendship.

Mayflies has been adapted in two one-hour parts by Andrea Gibb, who wrote the screenplay for the RTS award-winning BBC drama *Elizabeth Is Missing*, starring Glenda Jackson.

Her adaptation doesn't mirror the structure of O'Hagan's book; instead, it takes a non-linear approach, with extensive use of flashbacks. Earlier this year, Gibb said: "Adapting [this] magnificent novel has been one of the highlights of my career. Andrew tells his story of enduring male friendship with love, truth, tenderness and a searing humanity. There's not an ounce of sentimentality. It's very funny and deeply moving."

Her script for the first of the two episodes convinced the BBC, in June, to commission the drama for an

end-of-year slot. “Andrew’s an acclaimed Scottish author who speaks to a very wide readership [of all] generations – it was sort of a no-brainer for the BBC,” recalled Mundell.

Line of Duty’s Martin Compston, who plays the older Jimmy, had nothing but praise for Gibb and O’Hagan: “It can be quite a scary thing for an author to let

don’t want to get attached to pieces because you have to play the truth of the script; Andrea’s version is what we had to be loyal to.”

By contrast, Tracy Ifeachor (*Showtrial*), who plays Jimmy’s wife, Iona, did read the novel. “I look for the essence of the piece, and then read the script and hope the essence has been

Mayflies also stars Ashley Jensen as Tully’s wife, Anna, Tom Glynn-Carney as the young Tully and Rian Gordon as the young Jimmy. The director was Peter Mackie Burns.

A 27-day shoot, featuring 57 locations around Glasgow and Ayrshire, followed by a rapid edit, ensured the drama would be ready for its BBC



you adapt their book and then, as a screenwriter, to let actors play with your words, but they were great collaborators and listened to all our opinions.

“When you start playing the characters you get a feel for [the drama] and you want to put your own spin on it at times, and especially so playing Jimmy. He’s a version of Andrew, and that could have been quite intimidating as an actor, but Andrew said, ‘Look, I’m here for whatever you need – ask me anything.’ He was there when you needed him but also hands off to let you get on with it. It felt from the start that we had nothing but support as a cast.”

Neither Compston nor Tony Curran, who portrays the older Tully, read the novel before the shoot; both actors prefer working to a script. “I was in *Filth*, and [the novel] by Irvine Welsh is one of my favourite books,” explained Compston. “There are bits in the book that I loved and I couldn’t understand why they were not in the film. So, you

captured... Andrea did such a great job,” she said.

Curran and Compston have known each other for years; both starred in Andrea Arnold’s 2006 multi-award-winning thriller *Red Road*.

Did their friendship help them play on-screen best friends? “Hugely, and hopefully it comes across on the screen,” replied Compston. “It’s always an advantage when you work with someone you trust and love... but when it’s [a drama] like this... it’s probably the most emotionally present I’ve been in a job... it felt very real.”

Curran, he continued, is “a ball of energy... and I couldn’t imagine anyone better to play the part [of Tully] – that’s just Tony. Everyone loves being around him: he lights up a room, [he’s] very, very funny, very naive in love at times – he kind of loves everyone around him. He’s a fantastic big guy to be around and I think that just seeps into [his portrayal of] Tully.”

One and BBC Scotland transmission on 28 December.

But what can audiences expect? Like the book, it will offer love, laughter and tears, lots of tears. “Yes, it’s about cancer, yes, it’s about euthanasia but, ultimately... it’s life-affirming and human,” said Curran.

The essence of *Mayflies*, said Compston, is “friendship” and “love”, while Curran offered: “Humanity, staying in the present and being kind to each other.” For Ifeachor, the drama asks: “Are you living your best life?”

Compston hopes the drama can also achieve a wider aim: “We don’t take a side... but it’s really important that we contribute to a conversation on the subject of assisted dying, to get it going.” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The joint RTS HQ/RTS Scotland event was held on 14 December, chaired by the journalist and broadcaster Paul English, and produced by the BBC’s Harriet Wilson.

OUR FRIEND IN THE EAST

The east of England is so endlessly flat that there's nothing between Cambridge and Siberia but Ely Cathedral. That's why it gets so icy

cold in the winter, I was told when I moved to the region to work as a BBC news producer and first experienced the freezing Fens.

At this time of year, Ely Cathedral soars from the surrounding levels towards big skies that are bright, bold and stone-cold blue. The light and the landscape are stunning, and it can be very attractive to film-makers.

Last month, I went to Ely Cathedral to visit the set of *Maestro*, Bradley Cooper's biopic of Leonard Bernstein. The American composer conducted the London Symphony Orchestra here in 1974, and Cooper and his team were recreating the scene with today's LSO.

I'm new to films – a live drone shot on a multi-camera outside broadcast is about as exciting as it gets in regional news – so I was in awe of the scale of it all, as much as the Californian producer I was with was in awe of the size and drama of the medieval cathedral we found ourselves in.

Ely Cathedral is a popular stand-in for other monuments in film and television: it doubled as Westminster Abbey in the Netflix series *The Crown* and featured in *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The King's Speech*.

Film and television productions are also drawn to other landscapes in this region: Apple TV+'s *The Essex Serpent*

Rachel Watson says the TV and film sector is missing out by not investing in East Anglia's more remote areas



Rachel Watson

was filmed largely in and around Maldon in Essex, and *The Dig* – about the Sutton Hoo treasures – shot in many Suffolk locations.

Further north, Screen Norfolk tells me that, in the past two years, it has had 120 enquiries about filming in the county.

But locations aside, the eastern edges of our region still lack substantial studio facilities. Over in Hertfordshire, we've got large production complexes: Warner Brothers, Elstree Studios and the BBC are all well-established. And, earlier this summer, planning permission was granted for the new Sunset Waltham Cross Studios in Broxbourne, where a £700m studio complex should open by 2025.

Hertfordshire is close to London

and has good transport connections. It's an ideal place for big studio investment. But as you travel east and the land flattens, so do the opportunities. There are some fabulous smaller studio spaces in Norfolk and elsewhere but, sadly, this summer one of the larger ones, Raynham Hangar Studios, closed down.

Sky Atlantic's *This England* was shot there, as was *The Souvenir* and *The Souvenir: Part II*. John Travolta was spotted out and about in a Fakenham supermarket in April this year ("I bumped into John Travolta in the biscuit aisle," as the local BBC reported) when he was filming his short film *The Shepherd* there.

After I visited the *Maestro* set, my friend in Ely was very excited to tell me that her daughter had spotted Bradley Cooper in their local pub. It's so fabulous to hear that Hollywood stars are making the most of their stays in the east. Bradley propped up our bar! John Travolta was at the check out!

But the truth is, these visits are such a huge deal here because they don't happen very often. It's a shame because, across the region, we have so much to offer in terms of location and talent.

Maybe, one day, the saying will be: did you know, there's nothing between Cambridge and Siberia but that vast multi-studio production hub in the middle of the Fens? Oh, and a beautiful cathedral at Ely. ■

Rachel Watson is Chair of RTS East.

Xmas quiz

Small-screen sage or telly tenderfoot? Test your knowledge of TV trivia

Have I got TV news for you

Filmed on faux-cation: Can you identify the fictional places in which these shows are set?

- 1 Grange Hill**
A Wylesly
B Northam
C Gristleford
D Costington
- 2 Fireman Sam**
A Pintyponty
B Pandypootle
C Puntypanto
D Pontypandy
- 3 Footballers' Wives**
A Grestley
B Burstall
C Earls Park
D Park End
- 4 Home and Away**
A Summer Bay
B Sunshine Cove
C Sunnydale
D Sun Valley
- 5 Thomas the Tank Engine**
A Sodley
B Sodor
C Sodom
D Gomorrah

Can you spot the fake Channel 4 show?

- 6 The Man with a Penis on his Arm...** does what it says on the tin – there's a bloke and on his arm is a penis
- 7 London's Sexiest Landlord...** follows some of the capital's dreamiest property moguls as they explain why vital plumbing work can wait
- 8 Carjackers...** people arrange to have cars belonging to their friends and family stolen in order to give them shocking makeovers



Dennis Waterman

ITV

- 9 The Boy Who Can Talk to Cheese...**
Steve Jones spends a week with 11-year-old Maxwell from Denver, Colorado, who claims he can communicate with cheese
- 10 Meat the Family...** a family of meat eaters has to look after an animal for a week and then decide whether to a) eat their new pet or b) send it to a sanctuary and never eat meat again

Whose life is it anyway?

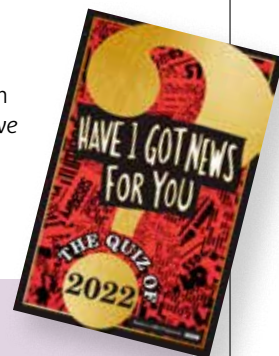
Whose autobiographies are these?

- 11 Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing: A Memoir**
A Matthew Perry
B Lisa Kudrow
C Matt LeBlanc
D Courteney Cox
- 12 The People's Game: A View from a Front Seat in Football**
A Martin Tyler
B John Motson
C Gary Neville
D Guy Mowbray
- 13 Calling the Shots: My Autobiography**
A Clare Balding
B Sue Barker
C Gabby Logan
D Ant McPartlin
- 14 Ten: The Decade that Changed My Future**
A Joey Essex
B Scarlett Moffatt
C Rylan Clark
D Gemma Collins
- 15 Keep Talking: A Broadcasting Life**
A David Dimbleby
B Michael Parkinson
C Fiona Bruce
D Jonathan Ross

Television in 2022

- 16** In May, it was confirmed that Jodie Whittaker would hand the keys of the Tardis to *Sex Education* star Ncuti Gatwa. Which of the following actors have not played the Doctor?
A Paul McGann
B Patrick Troughton
C Richard Hurndall
D Richard Briers
- 17** Ahead of the second series of Netflix period drama *Bridgerton*, which unusual prop was revealed as the secret behind the show's numerous sex scenes?
A A netball
B A teddy bear
C A pin cushion
D A vacuum cleaner
- 18** While standing in for Richard Madeley on *Good Morning Britain*, Ed Balls was presented with a 'luxury merchandise package' from which TV show after admitting he is a huge fan?
A *Love Island*
B *Loose Women*
C *Dancing on Ice*
D *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*
- 19** When *Minder* actor Dennis Waterman died in May, who did Kay Burley accidentally pay tribute to on Twitter?
A Rick Wakeman
B Gary Numan
C Pete Waterman
D Steve McManaman
- 20** On 29 June, which show – described by *The Guardian* as 'the most puerile show on TV' – was cancelled after 14 years?
A *Mrs Brown's Boys*
B *Russell Howard's Good News*
C *Celebrity Juice*
D *Naked Attraction*

All questions are taken from the excellent *Have I Got News for You: The Quiz of 2022*, published by Sphere (hardback, £14.99). ■



The answers

1B; 2D; 3C; 4A; 5B; 6 real; 7 fake; 8 real; 9 fake; 10 real; 11A; 12C; 13B; 14C; 15A; 16C (Hurndall played the Doctor in 1983's *The Five Doctors*, taking on the role of the first Doctor, originally played by William Hartnell); 17A (a half-deflated netball, as it allowed just enough of a barrier between the, erm... moving parts); 18A (the *Love Island* suitcase included spray tan, fake eyelashes and sexually transmitted infection test kits); 19C; 20C



David Tennant in *Litvinenko*

ITV

The search for justice

‘I’d like to report a murder,’ says Alexander “Sasha” Litvinenko, played by David Tennant, in ITV drama series *Litvinenko*. Detective Inspector Brent Hyatt (Neil Maskell) asks whose murder. “Mine,” he replies. And so begins the dramatisation of one of the most politically charged murder investigations in Metropolitan Police history.

Litvinenko, a former Russian Federal Security Service and KGB officer, was poisoned with Polonium-210 in London in 2006. Knowing that he would die, he was able to deliver the details of who was behind his murder to the police. But it took more than a decade for his claims to be confirmed.

The four-part series is produced by ITV Studios, Tiger Aspect Productions and Nordic Entertainment Group (Nent Group) in association with Livedrop Media and will premiere on the new streaming service ITVX on 15 December.

It focuses on the search for justice of

Marina Litvinenko tells the RTS how her fight to uncover the details of her husband’s murder inspired an ITV drama

his grieving widow, Marina Litvinenko, and the efforts of the Met to uncover the truth behind his assassination. It also casts a light on the UK’s unwillingness to implicate the Russian government in the murder because of repercussions this could have on the world stage.

This high drama was ripe for the screen from the get-go. At an RTS screening and Q&A in London, which also featured co-producer Richard Kerbjaj and director Jim Field Smith on the panel, Marina Litvinenko explained that the story had been picked up by Hollywood early on. “I believed it

would be very important to do, to make it as a memory; it would be kind of justice for me. But it didn’t happen, and I can’t say I was disappointed,” she said.

When Kerbjaj, who produced Channel 4’s 2017 documentary on Litvinenko’s murder, *Hunting the KGB Killers*, approached her to turn her story into a drama, she kept her expectations low. But this time, with the support of ITV, it came to fruition.

Field Smith said: “Drama commissioning and film-making can sometimes feel a little glacial, but ITV has been behind this project from the start and has supported it wholeheartedly. It’s not an easy story to tell and, despite being a very well-known story, it’s a hard one to get right.

“It was originally commissioned as a three-part series, and then George [Kay, the screenwriter] was very keen to tell a fourth part, which is the fourth episode that follows Marina as she continues to push for an inquiry. ITV

supported that and it supported us through what ended up being three pushes because of Covid. It was not hard to get commissioned, but quite hard to get made.”

“When it was finally safe to start, I realised it would be very good to remind people what happened 16 years ago,” said Marina. “Our son, Anatoly, was 12 when his dad died in front of him. This was another way

countries viewed their understanding of Moscow – they realised that it was not a friend and it needed to be watched... and that’s still the case. That was a turning point, geopolitically, in the way that the intelligence services in the West and, in particular, the UK, viewed the Kremlin.”

Is the Kremlin aware of the series? Field Smith answered: “Certainly, Andrei Lugovoy [the suspect in the

recreated those places. That was really important to us because, once you’ve nailed down those details, you can allow the story to take place around it,” said Field Smith.

“We shot throughout central London in the height of the pandemic. We went to the Royal Courts of Justice. You won’t be surprised to hear we didn’t go to Moscow. We filmed Moscow in and around east London,” he said, to titters from the crowd. “Our [art] department did an incredible job at recreating Moscow within the UK.”

While the tactics of the Russian government are now well-known, the series will still be viewed as controversial because it doesn’t shy away from showing the UK’s part in appeasing Moscow.

Said Smith Field: “As proud as the Metropolitan Police did the Litvinenko family... I don’t think the UK government comes across particularly well in the show. And, as much as the Russian state is responsible for so much of the atrocities that you see in the show and we’ve seen since, the UK state has a huge case to answer for how, over the years, it appeased that regime.”

“That’s something you and George [Kay] really wanted to bring out and it does come through in the episodes,” added Kerbaj. “It’s a very important point.”

With all eyes back on Alexander’s assassination with this high-profile drama, the final audience question of the evening was about what Marina would consider the end of her quest.

“I think everything might be finished for me when, one day, I will be free to go to Russia and to feel safe and feel the country is back to a normal, civilised world,” she said, adding that she was well aware of the consequences when she took on this battle for justice.

“Sometimes I think, was it right or was it not right? But at the end, I see it as not only my story. When people approach me and say, thank you very much for what you’re doing, I say ‘OK, I can do it. And sometimes, if you can feel you can do it, you have to.’” ■

Report by Shilpa Ganatra. The RTS London event, ‘Litvinenko screening and Q&A’, was held on 22 November at the British Museum. It was chaired by Boyd Hilton and produced by ITV’s Natasha Bayford.



Media24 Photography

Marina Litvinenko

just to show to him who his father was, and not just forget and say, ‘it’s the past.’”

Indeed, she added, today, “with what is happening in Ukraine, we have no other words for Putin [than that he is] a terrorist and murderer”.

Kerbaj agreed that the messages teased out in the series have direct relevance to today’s global landscape. “There are so many correlations between the way that the Kremlin shows a complete disregard for international law [and] the geopolitics of it all,” he said.

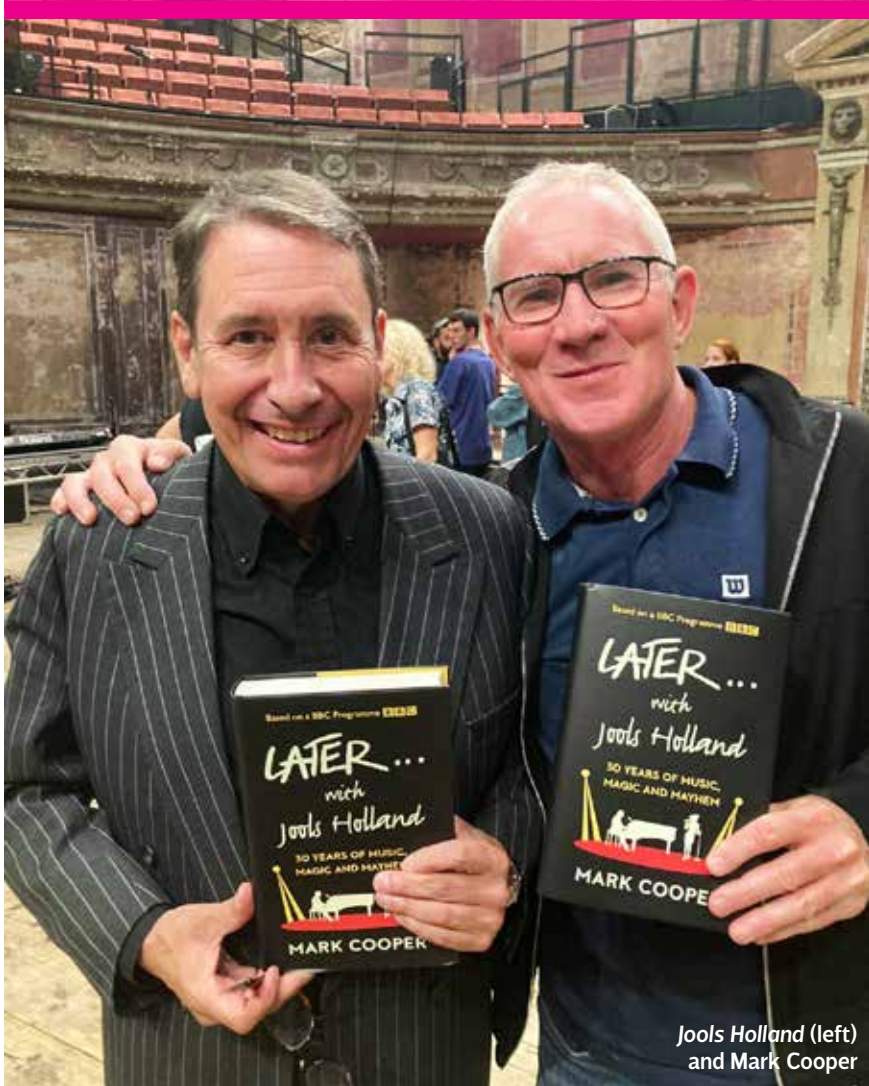
“When Putin came to power in the late 1990s, he gave the impression that he was a friend of the West; he even gave the impression that, if Russia was invited to join Nato, it might do so. He was very much brought into the fold [after the collapse] of the Soviet Union.

“The reason why the Litvinenko case is so crucial to the relationship between the West and Moscow is that it became a turning point in the way that Western

murder investigation, and a high-profile Russian politician] made a statement about it when we announced the show. This is a man who is not shy of publicity. I’m glad they have an awareness of the show, that’s one of the whole points that I was making here. The show is truthful and honourable, and, I think, as much as it can be, it is unbiased.”

The contribution of those involved in what happened to the Litvinenkos helped to bolster the accuracy of the drama. In addition to Marina’s input (she is played by Margarita Levieva), the police inspectors Clive Timmons (played by Mark Bonnar), Hyatt and KC Ben Emmerson helped bring the story to life. “It was fascinating seeing the actors interacting with the contributors,” said Kerbaj.

To add to the story’s authenticity, many of the film’s locations were the places where the real events unfolded. “Without being obsessed with it, we tried to be fastidious about how we



Jools Holland (left) and Mark Cooper

jools holland.com

Music, magic and mayhem

Steve Clarke talks to Mark Cooper, co-creator of *Later... with Jools Holland*, and learns the secret of its longevity

For 26 years, Mark Cooper attended every single recording of *Later... with Jools Holland* and its spin-off New Year's Eve show, *Jools' Annual Hootenanny*.

The only time he nearly missed one was when he was holidaying with his family in Portugal. But, much to his wife's annoyance, he flew back to be in the studio before returning to

the beach once his work was done.

"I'm a sad bastard," he reflects. "There's a point you get to when you've done so many that the idea of missing one would be heartbreaking and numerically sad."

Now, after leaving his job as head of music television, BBC Studios, where he led BBC TV's coverage of Glastonbury and executive produced more than 250 music documentaries, Cooper has

written a book, *Later... with Jools Holland: 30 Years of Music, Magic and Mayhem*. It takes us behind the screen from the beginnings of *Later...* as a segment in BBC Two's arts and media showcase *The Late Show*, to its latest incarnation, which is recorded in its new home at Alexandra Palace.

Reading the book, one learns right away that Cooper is a man who has lived his life immersed in music. He is equally at home writing about Johnny Cash as he is about Jay-Z or a more left-field performer such as Oumou Sangaré, the Grammy-award winning Malian singer and composer.

Of course, this eclecticism is what has made *Later...* what it is, less a TV show than a BBC institution, a place where music legends such as Van Morrison can hang out in the same studio as a new artist who has still to make their first recording. Icon or newbie, the performer is likely to receive the same welcoming patter from Jools Holland, whose mix of nonchalance and enthusiasm puts even the biggest egos at ease.

To what, then, does Cooper ascribe *Later's* longevity? "The secret of the show is its aesthetic. It found – and finds – a way to bring out the best in musicians on TV.

"It doesn't try to be too cool for school and isn't a trend show or a generational show and isn't aimed at a particular demographic.

"In some ways, it's more BBC than the BBC. As Jools says in the forward to the book, *Later...* informs, educates and entertains. Those values are at the heart of *Later...* The show brings out the best in musicians, where they feel they've escaped... the genre they started in. American musicians feel this particularly.

"It's quite an idealistic and democratic proposition."

Cooper co-created *Later...* with director Janet Fraser Crook, whose idea it was to film the show in the round, itself something of a revolution in studio craft. "Ultimately, TV is what you do with it. It's a tool – the studio, the cameras, the lights. What really matters is what you want to say with them..."

"Janet's aesthetic of shooting in the round was very hard to realise. As a director, she had to grow into that, and the crew had to learn how to do *Later...*

“As a single-shot proposition, with things shot from the inside out, that really bonds that crew. They all love the music, but they’ve also learnt to do something in a very clever but simple way. It’s quite hard.”

Later... celebrated its 30th anniversary on 8 October. Across three decades on BBC Two, and more recently on iPlayer as well, it has, of course evolved – changing studios, running times, transmission time and, for a while, was even broadcast live. During lockdown, the show abandoned its traditional format in which musicians gather in the same studio in front of an audience and became a more intimate affair in which Holland interviewed a single guest and drew on *Later’s* considerable archive.

Regardless of these changes, Cooper is convinced that it’s the BBC that has kept *Later...* honest. He recalls how, in the late 1980s, he was working on the Channel 4 music show *Wired*, where he was struck by the pressure to get big acts on all the time. The thinking was that these names would generate ratings and help international sales.

By contrast, *Later’s* approach is based on appealing to “the musically curious” and building its aesthetic on “taste”. This determination not to chase a particular audience or a particular cultural moment has, he argues, helped it to endure over the decades.

“Early on in the show’s evolution, the musicians themselves loved it. They loved the way they looked, the way they sounded and the mixture of musicians they were on with. Back in the day, a new artist such as Travis might be on with, say, Lionel Richie or Sting. The older artist liked being on with the younger artists who made them feel current, while the younger artists liked being on with the legends they’d grown up on. I think that’s remained a constant.”

Cooper, who left the BBC in 2020, sees *Later...* as part of a BBC tradition of music-making going back to the 1960s and *Late Night Line-Up* via *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. “I can’t quite imagine a BBC without some live music performance,” he says. *The Late Show*, which ran from 1988 to 1995, was itself part of this tradition.

After working as a music journalist from the late 1970s, Cooper joined *The*

Late Show as the programme’s music researcher in 1990. “*The Late Show* was perhaps a fantastic playground, if that isn’t too light a word. It was an opportunity for a generation of young TV producers to learn their skills and have their say,” he recalls. “Ultimately, TV is what you do with it.”

The Late Show, shown four nights a week, enabled Cooper to feature different styles of music – perhaps a rapper, a jazz legend or a rising star

good attitude for a music show, because I think there’s something about music that wants something a bit looser than most TV, which is usually trying to keep a perfect surface.

“Jools doesn’t do that. He’s quite bumbly, often very funny, and sometimes a bit awkward. He humanises that environment, which I think is well suited to a music show.”

Later’s New Year’s Eve spin-off show, *Hootenanny*, back this year as a big-ticket



Later... 25 with Jools Holland being filmed at the Royal Albert Hall in 2017

BBC

– in an informal setting, away from the more formal context of, say, a shiny floor show.

The idea then occurred to him that perhaps it would make sense to put all these different styles of performance in one room and film them. Enter Jools Holland, famous in the UK as the co-presenter of Channel 4’s influential music show *The Tube*. Encouraged by his boss, Michael Jackson, *The Late Show’s* first editor, to host what became *Later...* Cooper set up a meeting with Holland. Both agreed that the artists should play live in the studio. Holland like the idea of roaming round the studio with his piano as his base. The rest is history.

“Jools doesn’t have that desire to be perfect or to be completely in control,” he says. “In fact, he rather likes it when things go slightly wrong. That’s a very

item for the first time since 2019, came together, like its progenitor, as much by opportunity as by design. In 1994, *Later...* was on hiatus, so why not do a New Year’s Eve special? “*Hootenanny* is more of an entertainment show,” explains Cooper. “The music serves the occasion, whereas, with *Later...*, the music is the occasion.”

What, then, does the future hold for *Later...*? The consumption of music has changed radically since 1992. Recognising this, the BBC makes *Later...* clips available online.

Is the TV music show an endangered species? “Traditionally, they don’t rate very well,” notes Cooper. “Most music shows are the opposite of *Later...* It’s not a TV show but, rather, an event that’s captured by cameras. That’s quite an unusual transposition of what normally happens.” ■



Predators

Leading film-makers discuss how to make natural history more sustainable

Sky

Greening wildlife TV

The irony of natural history enjoying a TV golden age while the wildlife it features enters a dark age was not lost on the panel at an RTS event on sustainable film-making in early December.

Natural history is “making huge amounts of money while its subject matter goes extinct” was the succinct summary of Tom Mustill, a producer/director and owner of Gripping Films, which makes campaigning, low-carbon films about the environment.

Doug Allan, an award-winning natural history photographer, documentary film-maker and diver, said it was important to “distinguish between conservation and climate change”. He explained: “If we don’t control climate change, all the conservation in the world will be irrelevant.”

And, as a genre, natural history is a high emitter of carbon dioxide. In 2021, Albert carbon calculator data revealed that the average hour of TV contributed 5.7t CO₂e (equivalent to 5.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide). In comparison, the average hour of wildlife TV contributed almost nine times as much: 49.5t CO₂e.

Allan called for “sustainability within programme-making” and for “a much more powerful message coming out of the programmes to move the needle, not preaching to the converted but to get other people on board”.

The genre is booming, with the streamers joining established natural history broadcasters such as the BBC and Discovery. But, argued Wendy Darke, founder and CEO of True to Nature, big landmark series are reducing their carbon footprints.

Sky/Netflix co-production *Predators*, made by True to Nature, used a huge number of local camera operators, rather than flying in specialists from the UK. “Working with in-country camera ops is a massive step forwards,” said Darke.

And, she added: “With *Predators*, the conservation message is there from the get-go.”

“There are lots of things that are quite hard for an individual company to do,” argued Kristina Turner, the co-founder of Filmmakers for Future: Wildlife, which encourages collaboration among producers to make natural history production greener.

Working together, she said, producers could set up kit hubs, which

would reduce freight transport and hence the carbon footprint of wildlife programmes. Travel and transport of people and kit make up more than 85% of natural history productions’ emissions, according to Albert.

“Our industry is so competitive – you fight for commissions, you fight for awards, you fight for exclusive access to shoots – and that’s the antithesis of trying to solve problems together,” added Mustill.

“We’ve got mountains of beautiful footage but the big problem is that we don’t want to share them in case someone else makes money.”

For Allan, however, “the big changes are only going to get made by politics and big businesses – they are the only things capable of making changes at the scale we need.”

Rather than the “wistfulness” typical of wildlife films, Allan called for “anger” and “emotion” in film-making.

Mustill wanted natural history shows to be shot more like documentaries: “We [need to] film what takes place in front of us, where we’re given the permission of our commissioners to go on location and respond to the story as it happens... then the stories would be more interesting and real.

“At the moment, we’re limited by our imaginations and, if it’s the same people’s imaginations every time, they end up shooting the same thing.”

From discussions with members of her forum, however, Turner found grounds for optimism. She called on film-makers to demand more from their commissioners: “We don’t ask enough. Getting content seen where it’s made can have such a positive impact, and it’s actually really rare for that to happen.

“One of our [community] did a deal with their commissioner to get the content seen on a local TV channel in Kenya and in a mobile cinema, and that had such a positive impact on human-wildlife conflict situations.” ■

■ Gripping Films: www.grippingfilms.co.uk/thank-you-sea and www.grippingfilms.co.uk/imaginefor1minute

■ Filmmakers for Future: Wildlife. See: ffwildlife.org/ffw-stand-in-solidarity/ and ffwildlife.org/from-crisis-to-collaboration/

Report by Matthew Bell. ‘Sustainable TV production at home and abroad: Is TV overheating the planet?’ was held in central London on 6 December. It was chaired by wildlife broadcaster Liz Bonnin and produced by Victoria Fairclough.

RTS Craft & Design Awards 2022

Sponsored by



Platinum Party at the Palace,
Director – Multicamera and
Lighting for Multicamera

The awards were hosted by journalist and TV presenter **Ranvir Singh** on 5 December at the London Hilton on Park Lane

BBC

Casting Award

Daniel Edwards – Heartstopper

See-Saw Films for Netflix

‘Beloved across the board. This piece showcased fresh, vital and exciting casting, and was faithful to the source material.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Aisha Bywaters, *The Baby***, Sister in association with Proverbial Pictures for Sky Atlantic
- ▶ **Rachel Sheridan, *In My Skin***, Expectation for BBC

Costume Design – Drama

Alison McCosh – *Peaky Blinders Series 6*

Caryn Mandabach Productions/Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC

‘A strong identity perfectly balancing the sumptuous and the believable – it has the wow factor.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Tom Pye and Nadine Clifford-Davern, *Gentleman Jack 2***, Lookout Point for BBC and HBO
- ▶ **Orla Smyth-Mill, *Sherwood***, House Productions for BBC

Costume Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Plunge Creations and Bandicoot

Scotland – *The Masked Singer Series 3*

Bandicoot Scotland for ITV/STV

‘Such a phenomenon, a visual treat that is all about costume. Exemplary.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Shereen Shimmin, *Ant & Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway Series 18***, Lifted Entertainment (part of ITV Studios) in co-production with Mitre Studios for ITV
- ▶ **Zaldy and Eve Collins, *RuPaul’s Drag Race UK Season 3***, World of Wonder for BBC



Made in Colour – Empire & Me: A Newsround Special, Design – Programme Content Sequences

BBC



Platinum Party at the Palace, Director – Multicamera and Lighting for Multicamera

Richard Kendal



The Masked Singer, Costume Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

ITV



Heartstopper, Casting Award

Richard Kendal

Design – Programme Content Sequences

Made in Colour – Empire & Me: A Newsround Special

Made in Colour for BBC and CBBC
‘A difficult topic that was executed impeccably for a children’s audience. Even more impressive with the time and budget restraints.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **MPC Team, Prehistoric Planet**, BBC Studios in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **Production Team, AIDS: The Unheard Tapes**, Wall to Wall for BBC/iPlayer and Open University

Design – Titles

yU+co – The Essex Serpent

See-Saw Films in association with Apple for Apple TV+

‘An incredibly well-thought-out, designed and animated title sequence. Each transition was perfect.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Paul McDonnell, Hugo Moss, Ben Hanbury and Tamsin McGee, Around the World in 80 Days**, Slim Film+Television, Federation Entertainment and Peacock Communications for BBC
- ▶ **BBC Creative/BBC Sport/BlinkInk and Gas Music, Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics**, BBC Creative/Blink Ink and Gas Music for BBC

Director – Comedy Drama/ Situation Comedy

Andrew Chaplin – Alma’s Not Normal Expectation for BBC

‘The winner honed a very funny comedy with stellar performances, without smoothing over the raw edges of the material.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Jim Archer, Big Boys**, Roughcut TV for Channel 4
- ▶ **Ben Taylor, Sex Education Series 3**, Eleven Film for Netflix ▶

Claire Popplewell
and the BBC Studios
Events Team,
RTS Outstanding
Contribution Award



RTS Outstanding Contribution Award

Claire Popplewell and the BBC Studios Events Team

'This year's RTS Outstanding Contribution Award goes to a team and its inspirational leader, who harnessed the great power of live television to bring people together to witness some of the most important events in history.

Responsible for the planning and

execution of all royal, ceremonial and commemorative programming, they have delivered global events such as Live 8, the funeral of Nelson Mandela, the international broadcast of the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, as well as other events including: *World War One Remembered: Passchendaele* and, most recently, Queen Elizabeth II's funeral, a nine-hour event, with 213 cameras, which was broadcast to more than 200 countries.

The team is headed by a brilliant

creative director whose CV reads like a list of some of the most important events of the 20th and 21st centuries.

There are no second takes, resulting in coverage of the absolute highest craft and standard, that is often described as "flawless" and "public service broadcasting at its very best".

In the year that the BBC turns 100, this team and its remarkable leader – though they haven't been at the BBC quite that long – are undoubtedly extremely deserving winners of this award.'

Director – Documentary/ Factual and Non Drama

Sarah Collinson – *Fearless: The Women Fighting Putin*

Hardcash Productions and The Economist for ITV

'Audacious and fearless in every way – with stunning access to three brave women in Putin's Russia, taking their lives into their hands to speak truth to power. The camera follows them even in the most extreme, impossible situations.'

Nominees:

▶ **Kira Phillips, *Jeremy Kyle Show: Death on Daytime***, Blast! Films for Channel 4

▶ **Jane McMullen, *Big Oil Vs the World: Denial***, Mongoose for BBC and PBS Frontline

Director – Drama

Lucy Forbes – *This is Going to Hurt*

Sister in association with Terrible Productions for BBC and AMC

'Visually distinctive, urgent, truthful, and brilliantly crafted direction with outstanding performances. Great energy while tackling an important subject in an original way.'

Nominees:

▶ **Will Sharpe, *Landscapers***, Sister in association with South of the River Pictures for Sky Atlantic

▶ **Marc Munden, *Help***, The Forge/One Shoe Films for Channel 4

Director – Multicamera

Julia Knowles – *Platinum Party at the Palace*

BBC Studios Events Productions for BBC

'Groundbreaking and truly memorable. The confidence to use a variety of angles, lenses and shots for different segments of the show can only be done by someone at the very top of their game – which they undoubtedly are.'

Nominees:

▶ **Julia Knowles, *The Earthshot Prize 2021***, BBC Studios Events Productions for BBC

▶ **Liz Clare, *An Audience with Adele***, Fulwell 73/Onward/Sony/Columbia for ITV

BBC

Editing – Documentary/Factual

Bruce Law, David Pearson and Bumble Bee Post Team – 9/11: Life Under Attack

Brook Lapping Productions for ITV
‘9/11 may be the most documented event in world history, so the fact that this feature felt brand new is testament to the skill of the editing team.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Alec Rossiter and John McNamee, Bling Ring: Hollywood Heist**, Double Act Productions for Channel 4 and Netflix
- ▶ **Kazeem Manzur, Terms & Conditions: Deeper Than Drill**, Century Films for YouTube Originals



BBC

Cheaters, Editing – Entertainment and Comedy

Editing – Drama

Lucien Clayton – Derry Girls Series 3

Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4
‘Masterful editing technique from start to finish. A seamless and epic final episode, with the final sequence as the ultimate climax of emotion and character.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Simon Reglar, Marriage**, The Forge/The Money Men for BBC
- ▶ **Kim Gaster, Anne**, World Productions for ITV

Editing – Entertainment and Comedy

Paul Dingwall – Cheaters

Clerkenwell Films for BBC
‘Pacy, whip-smart editing with a willingness to mesh funny and shocking moments together. Not a frame was wasted.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **David Webb, Steve Ackroyd, Phil Hignett and Izabella Curry, Sex Education Series 3**, Eleven for Netflix
- ▶ **Robin Nurse, Top Gear Series 31**, BBC Studios Factual Entertainment for BBC

Editing – Sport

Nicholas Perry and Philip Hughes – Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony Opener – Our Birmingham: A Brummie Story

BBC Sport for BBC
‘A huge amount of research went into filming and selecting the clips both before and during the edit. The sound design was exceptional.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Scott Ferry-Collins and Whisper, The Tokyo 2020 Paralympics: Beatbox Film**, Whisper for Channel 4
- ▶ **Nicholas Perry, Alex Ewing, Lucy Adams and BBC Sport Production Team, Wimbledon 2022 – Women’s Final Opening Film**, BBC Sport for BBC ▶



Richard Kendal

This is Going to Hurt, Director – Drama



Richard Kendal

Strictly Come Dancing, Make-Up Design – Entertainment and Non Drama



ITV

Fearless: The Women Fighting Putin, Director – Documentary/Factual and Non Drama



Richard Kendal

Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony Opener – A Brummie Story, Editing – Sport



Richard Kendal

Derry Girls Series 3, Editing – Drama



Landscapers, Photography
– Drama and Comedy;
Picture Enhancement; and
Production Design – Drama

Sky

Effects

Vine FX and Real SFX – The Lazarus Project

Urban Myth Films for Sky
‘Impressive breadth and variety of VFX craftsmanship across the series. It was of a consistently high quality.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **MPC Team, Prehistoric Planet**, BBC Studios in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **Jim Solan, Ant Campbell, Chris Powell and Luke Wenmouth – VFX (dock10), Dodger**, Universal International Studios, a division of Universal Studio Group for CBBC/BBC

Lighting for Multicamera

Nigel Catmur – Platinum Party at the Palace

BBC Studios Events Productions for BBC
‘British events coverage at its best, epic but beautifully detailed at the same time. An incredible achievement.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Tom Sutherland, The Brit Awards**, Brits TV for ITV
- ▶ **Tim Routledge, Concert for Ukraine**, Livewire Pictures for ITV

Make-Up Design – Drama

Lin Davie, Sue Newbould and Laura Flynn – Gentleman Jack 2

Lookout Point for BBC and HBO
‘Spot on every time, never over the top – beautiful without being over-styled or theatrical.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Julie Kendrick, Landscapers**, Sister in association with South of the River Pictures for Sky Atlantic
- ▶ **Nadia El-Saffar, Sherwood**, House Productions for BBC

Make-Up Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Lisa Armstrong and Lisa Davey – Strictly Come Dancing Series 19

BBC Studios Entertainment for BBC
‘Astonishing stuff, phenomenal and amazing – no mean feat.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **David Petruschin, Julie Cooper and Sam Greenwood, RuPaul’s Drag Race Vs The World Season 1**, World of Wonder for BBC
- ▶ **Nicola Coleman, Inside No 9**, BBC Studios Comedy Productions for BBC ▶



Alma’s Not Normal, Director – Comedy Drama/Situation Comedy

BBC



9/11: Life Under Attack, Editing – Documentary/Factual

Richard Kendall



Peaky Blinders, Costume Design – Drama,

BBC



The Essex Serpent, Design – Titles

Apple TV+



Surian Fletcher-Jones

We Are Lady Parts

RTS Special Award

Surian Fletcher-Jones

'This year's RTS Special Award goes to someone who has built a slate of critically acclaimed television series that have broken new ground, championed diverse voices, created meaningful impact on global audiences and have been celebrated by the industry.'

We Are Lady Parts, which was created, written and directed by Nida

Manzoor, captured the hearts and minds of many as an irreverent comedy about an all-female Muslim punk band.

'Certified 100% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes and heralded by critics for its uncompromised originality, the series was nominated for nine RTS awards and won five for Editing, Make-Up Design, Production Design, Comedy Performance and Writer.'

We Are Lady Parts also won a prestigious Peabody Award and picked up wins at the Bafta Awards and Rockie Awards.

'Surian Fletcher-Jones was also the executive producer on the BBC hit adaptation of Dolly Alderton's best-selling memoir, *Everything I Know About Love*, which has been described by critics as "warm, funny and wincingly accurate" (*The Times*).

'Surian's passion for telling authentic and daring stories is evident throughout her work and her mission to discover and nurture diverse voices permeates everything she creates.'

Channel 4/Richard Kendal

Multicamera Work

Chris Power and the Camera Team – Michael McIntyre's *The Wheel*

Hungry McBear for BBC

'Stunning format, with incredibly complex coverage brilliantly executed. Not an easy format to cover, the results make it look easy.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Camera Team, SAS: Who Dares Wins Series 7**, Minnow Films for Channel 4
- ▶ **Liz Clare, Nat Hill, Dan Studley and Camera Team, An Audience with Adele**, Fulwell 73/Onward/Sony/Columbia for ITV

Music – Original Score

Nicòle Lecky and Bryan Senti – *Mood*

Bonafide Films for BBC

'Innovative and a winning fusion of musical theatre and scripted drama, with huge creative investment by Nicòle Lecky.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Lucrecia Dalt, The Baby**, Sister in association with Proverbial Pictures for Sky Atlantic
- ▶ **Tim Phillips and PJ Harvey, Bad Sisters**, Merman/ABC Signature in association with Apple for Apple TV+

Music – Original Title

Carly Paradis – *The Rising*

Sky Studios for Sky Max

'This was a beautifully crafted piece of music, delicately balancing tension with a very prominent and distinctive melody. Brilliant and well executed.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Mick Jagger and Daniel Pemberton, Slow Horses**, See-Saw Films in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **Tim Phillips and PJ Harvey, Bad Sisters**, Merman/ABC Signature in association with Apple for Apple TV+ ▶



The Rising,
Music – Original Title

BskyB



Michael McIntyre's *The Wheel*,
Multicamera Work

BBC

Photography – Documentary/ Factual and Non Drama

Tim Shepherd, Todd Kewley, Oliver Mueller and Camera Team – *The Green Planet*

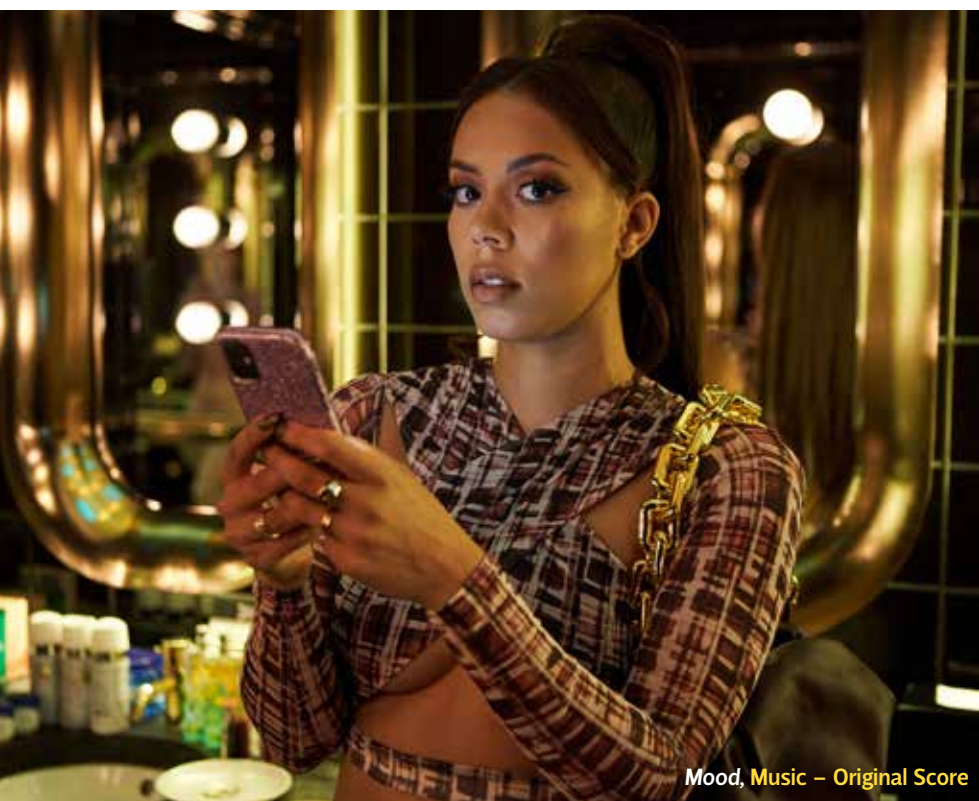
BBC Studios Natural History Unit/PBS/bilibili/ZDF/China Media Group CCTV9/France Télévisions/The Open University for BBC and iPlayer

'Innovative, clever, technically impressive work. Beautifully shot to an incredibly high standard, it lets you see the world differently – at a moment in time when we should be thinking about the planet.'

Nominees:

▶ **Tom Barrow, *Murder in the Valleys***, Five Mile Films for Sky Crime

▶ **John Shier, *Dynasties II – Puma***, BBC Studios Natural History Unit for BBC and BBC America



Mood, Music – Original Score

BBC

Photography – Drama and Comedy

Erik Wilson BSC – *Landscapers*

Sister in association with South of the River Pictures for Sky Atlantic

'Unusual and experimental, this was a brilliantly executed piece; the cinematographer finessed the style to the max and showed inventiveness throughout.'

Nominees:

▶ **Ben Wheeler BSC, *The Tourist***, Two Brothers Pictures for BBC

▶ **Adolpho Veloso, *Becoming Elizabeth***, The Forge for Starz

Picture Enhancement

Thomas Urbye – *Landscapers*

Sister in association with South of the River Pictures for Sky Atlantic

'Viewers respond particularly to the traditional analogue quality of the submission and to the transitions between sequences.'

Nominees:

▶ **Dan Coles, *The Tourist***, Two Brothers Pictures for BBC

▶ **Dan Gill and James Beynon, *Our Great National Parks***, Wild Space Productions/Freeborne Media/Higher Ground Productions for Netflix ▶



Gentleman Jack 2,
Make-Up Design – Drama

BBC



The Lazarus Project, Effects

BskyB

Production Design – Drama

Cristina Casali, Robert Wischhusen-Hayes and Fabrice Spelta – Landscapers

Sister in association with South of the River Pictures for Sky Atlantic ‘Clever, sophisticated, visually arresting, incredible attention to detail and brilliantly inventive production design in this drama of truths and untruths.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Nicola Moroney, Derry Girls Series 3**, Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4
- ▶ **Dominic Hyman, The Last Kingdom Series 5**, Carnival Films for Netflix

Production Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Catherine Land – Ant & Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway, Production Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Lifted Entertainment (part of ITV Studios) in co-production with Mitre Studios for ITV ‘The sheer scale and feat of a live show constantly reinventing itself with uplifting and vibrant production design is impressive.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **John Jobe Reynolds, The Bangers: Murder at the Farm**, Mindhouse Productions for Sky
- ▶ **MPC Team, Prehistoric Planet**, BBC Studios in association with Apple for Apple TV+

Production Management Award

Laura Djanogly, Jen Bollom and Mei Ye Li – Concert For Ukraine

Livewire Pictures for ITV

‘This new category highlighted the range, diversity, skill and utter brilliance of a small production management team that set up and helped deliver this live event in just three and a half weeks with little funding. Their ambition and determination kept them going against all odds – to find venues, hire crews, book facilities and even do music clearance, ticket pricing, sponsor liaison, accreditation, security and find 400 live sunflowers for the staging. This unique event raised £13.4m.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Production Team, The Essex Serpent**, See-Saw Films in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **Production Management Team, Then Barbara Met Alan**, Dragonfly Film and Television / One Shoe Films for BBC and Netflix ▶



Richard Kendal

Ant & Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway, Production Design – Entertainment and Non Drama



BBC

This is Going to Hurt, Sound – Drama



BSkyB

Chernobyl: The Lost Tapes, Sound – Entertainment and Non Drama



BBC

The Green Planet, Photography – Documentary/Factual and Non Drama



Concert For Ukraine,
Production Management Award

TV



Landscapers,
Production Design – Drama

Richard Kendal



Landscapers,
Picture Enhancement

Richard Kendal



Landscapers,
Photography – Drama and Comedy

Richard Kendal

Sound – Drama

Nina Rice, Steve Browell, Jamie Selway and Adam Horley – *This is Going to Hurt* Sister in association with Terrible Productions for BBC One and AMC
‘A very realistic mix that made you think you were there. Nice transitions. And an outstanding wake-up sequence.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Paul Cotterell, Paul Carter, Des Kennally and Kasper Pedersen, *The Tourist***, Two Brothers Pictures for BBC
- ▶ **Sound Team, *A Discovery of Witches Season 3***, Bad Wolf for Sky

Sound – Entertainment and Non Drama

Nick Fry, James Spooner and James Jones – *Chernobyl: The Lost Tapes* Top Hat Productions for Sky Documentaries and HBO Max
‘Captivating sound design created an engaging, authentic environment, and was consistent with excellent use of Foley and music.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Nas Parkash, Will Chapman, Tristan Powell and Claire Ellis, *Trainwreck: Woodstock '99***, Molinare/Raw TV for Netflix
- ▶ **David Lascelles, Jamie Selway, Maria Kelly and Oscar Bloomfield-Crowe, *Trying Season 3***, BBC Studios for Apple TV+ ■



Watch the full video of the RTS Craft & Design Awards 2022, at: bit.ly/rts-CD22

North East & the Border

An event hosted by the RTS showcased the latest investment from the BBC in North East daytime TV. The corporation is bringing £25m to the region over five years, including spending on new programming and talent.

Production companies have been encouraged to pitch, putting the North East at the heart of their concepts. Representatives from successful commissions sat on the RTS panel, alongside the BBC commissioning editor Helen Munson.

Munson said: “These are network programmes that we’re making, and they absolutely stand up with the other programmes that we have on BBC daytime. There is no denying the quality is here.”

Among the winners were: Andrew Eastel, creative director at Middlechild Productions; Antonia Hurford-Jones, MD of Twenty Six 03; and Gareth Deighan, creative director at Signpost Productions. They discussed how their commissions hit the brief, and how they found the production crew in the region to make them happen.

Deighan said local talent was the key to screen success,



BBC daytime series from the North East *Northern Justice*

Middlechild

Lift for indies in North East

adding: “It’s more about your attitude and how hard you work than anything else. You can have all the qualifications in the world, but it might not fit. We want people to love it, go for it and that will get you further in work.”

Hurford-Jones wanted to

establish the region as a hub for creative talent: “We’re all helping each other. It’s up to us to work together, think bigger, and to be optimistic for the North East.”

Munson added: “We need to make sure that, if companies are coming into the

region, they are making things from the region with people from the region.”

Eastel, whose production company, Middlechild, is opening a permanent North East office following the commission of its 10-part series *Northern Justice* said: “If we [want to] get other companies to move from the South to the North East, they need a reason to do that.

“It’s about making the foundations encouraging and attractive for other production companies to come, then they will bring hours of television, jobs and money.”

Learning from these successful commissions is the first step to growing a sustainable TV sector in the region. “This is a great start and if everyone... continues to have ambition and drive to make it happen, then we’re in a good place. It’s up to us, it’s not going to come overnight,” said Deighan.

“Carpe diem: seizing the daytime”, celebrating local skills and uniting North East industry professionals, was held in November at The Biscuit Factory, Newcastle, and hosted by journalist and TV presenter Chris Jackson.

Megan West

Tips from behind the lens

RTS Scotland

ScreenSkills hosted a virtual Industry Insight session, “Behind the camera with RTS Scotland”, in November, which offered expert views from freelancers working in the camera department.

Asked about her choice of career, director of photography Mari Yamamura revealed: “I was studying to be a painter; I hadn’t thought of video as a fine art medium.

“I decided to study film instead of painting, which I can do in my own time, but I always find painting and lighting to be the same process. I get the image from reading a script and then I want to express that image on the set – that’s what I’ve been trying to do and that’s what gives me joy.”

Camera trainee Eilidh Kellaway had three tips for getting on in the industry:

“As a trainee, you’re automatically considered bad at your job. There is a sort of triangle of traits that you need to keep working in the industry: the first one is be a good person, the [next] is be good at your job and the last is turn up on time.”

Camera operator Hazel Palmer, one of an all-female panel, discussed the barriers women face in the industry. She said: “It’s changed more

recently and is a lot better, but [there are still] assumptions about what a camera operator is. I’ve been told to stop trying to be one of the boys when I’m lifting something heavy, just doing my job.

“A lot of people are putting women in roles thinking they’ve ticked the diversity box. So there’s a lot more than that to be done.”

The RTS Scotland event was one of a series of online employability training sessions provided by ScreenSkills.

Beth Watt

There have been many ups and downs during the BBC's first 100 years but, so far, it has managed to survive and fend off government attacks from both left and right. An RTS London event in late November asked two BBC old-hands whether it can survive much longer.

Both Jean Seaton, official historian of the BBC and a professor of media history, and former Director-General Greg Dyke were adamant that the BBC was far from redundant.

"We are now living in a very, very corrupted information system, driven by algorithms [and] where division is accelerated," argued Seaton. "One of the things that protects a society, in particular a democracy, [and] makes its people resilient... is having a public service broadcaster."

The BBC, she added, "can embody good values – think of *Strictly [Come Dancing]*, it's not cruel, it's kind, [and] think of the brilliant writing in *SAS Rogue Heroes*."

"[The BBC] reflects us, it reflects our culture, our society, and that's why it matters," said Dyke. He was Director-General from 2000 to 2004 but resigned in the wake of the Hutton Report into the death of Dr David Kelly, a former UN weapons inspector in Iraq. It cleared the Blair Government of wrongdoing but criticised the BBC.

The ex-DG declared himself a "big fan of public service broadcasting", adding: "What has always worried me is that, one day, a government will get elected and will destroy it. I think we were quite close, actually."

"I don't think we are now, because this Government has got enough problems without taking on the BBC."

The danger, he said, has



Andrew Eborn, Jean Seaton and Greg Dyke

Alex Duffill

The BBC: 100 not out

RTS London As the corporation celebrates its centenary, **Matthew Bell** discovers there is optimism about the future of the BBC

been greater with the Conservatives "and the hard right who hated the idea of the way it was funded – they have had a period in the ascendancy, but I think that's coming to an end".

The licence fee has survived since its introduction in 1946, despite many attempts by governments over the years to replace it. "No one would invent the licence fee now, would they?" admitted Dyke. "I personally always found it a difficult tax to justify."

He continued: "At some stage, we are going to have to come up with another way of financing the BBC."

Preserving the BBC's independence from government was key, and Dyke spoke

from personal experience of dealing with Tony Blair's spin doctor, Alastair Campbell. "He would phone up some poor producer in news, but what you had to do was make sure they had the confidence to tell him to 'bugger off,'" he recalled.

The alternatives to the licence fee, though, are flawed, said Seaton. She rejected subscription, largely because it would end the principle of universality – the corporation's services are available to the whole country – that underpins the BBC: "There is absolutely no compelling logic. The people who are in favour of subscription are enormously devious."

She called for a "proper

public commission... that comes up with a proper set of argued reasons about how you can keep this institution going and properly funded".

Looking to the future, Dyke said he was "quite optimistic", adding: "I don't think the Nadine Dorries view of the BBC will sustain." The former culture secretary has been one of the corporation's arch opponents.

Offering advice to the current Director-General, Tim Davie, Seaton said: "[Don't] be frightened... and believe in the institution."

Dyke added: "Be braver... politicians come and go in the end... Second, look again at local news... make it more local." ■

'The BBC: Beyond the centenary' was an RTS London event, held at the Everyman Kings Cross on 24 November. It was chaired by the lawyer and broadcaster Andrew Eborn and produced by Phil Barnes.

'WE MUST COME UP WITH ANOTHER WAY OF FINANCING THE BBC'

‘You really are at the top of your game,” said Kate Phillips, praising the production sector in Northern Ireland. The BBC’s director of unscripted, who was giving the Dan Gilbert Memorial Lecture at the Belfast Media Festival in mid-November, went on to namecheck recent popular programmes *The Fast and the Farmer-ish*, *The Hotel People* and *The Road to Partition*.

She said: “Something really exciting is happening in Northern Ireland at the moment – local independents and local talent have pushed themselves into pole position in winning BBC network commissions across all genres.

“I am well aware that there have been previous false dawns for the Northern Irish sector. We want to build a sustainable production base here that can continue to grow and influence on a network stage.”

The annual Dan Gilbert Memorial Lecture is given in memory of Gilbert, who was a major figure in Northern Ireland current affairs broadcasting. It is organised by RTS Northern Ireland.

Elsewhere in her lecture, Phillips noted that the UK is “living through hard times”, referencing international problems and the cost-of-living crisis.

She said: “As a public service broadcaster, we have two main duties here. Through our factual, news and day-time programming, we can shine a spotlight on what is happening, help people with essential advice and hold people in power around the globe to account.

“But we also know that over half our audiences watch TV simply to escape reality, to take their minds off daily life – giving our viewers essential information and escapist entertainment is what we need to do.”



Kate Phillips

Aimee Buckley

NI telly is at the top of its game

Northern Ireland Matthew Bell reports on the BBC unscripted chief’s Belfast lecture

With the rising cost of producing drama, Phillips noted that the big US streamers were now moving into the unscripted genre. “This demand will lead to new innovation in the unscripted area – I see ambitious social experiments becoming a really big trend again,” she said.

At the BBC, Phillips is at the forefront of a new “digital

first” policy. She explained: “Instead of commissioning purely for linear-TV and using iPlayer as a catch-up service, we now use linear as our shop window for iPlayer.”

Phillips added: “While big events still bring big audiences together – there were massive numbers for Euro-vision, for the Jubilee, for *Strictly [Come Dancing]* at the moment... linear is in decline

‘HALF OUR AUDIENCES WATCH TV SIMPLY TO ESCAPE REALITY’

and for the BBC to be an essential service for future generations we need to keep building on the increases that we are seeing on iPlayer.

“How we feed this iPlayer beast, while still keeping linear strong, is one of our major challenges at the BBC, especially as production costs increase rapidly while our licence fee is currently being held flat.”

After her lecture, Phillips was interviewed by UTV journalist Eden Wilson, who probed her about the balance between linear-TV and iPlayer. Phillips responded: “We don’t want to dismiss linear-TV – you still see big numbers on linear for certain shows.” As examples, she mentioned *Countryfile*, *Antiques Roadshow*, *The One Show* and *The Apprentice*.

But she added: “The iPlayer is the most important area going forward.”

Overnight audience figures are becoming less important, continued Phillips: “When we’re looking at recommissioning shows, it’s about the consolidated [ratings] – we’re looking at a window over a month.”

Asked about her career highlights, Phillips replied: “*Strictly* has been a wonderful show to be involved with over the years.”

She added that it will be “an honour” to host the Eurovision Song Contest, as a replacement for Ukraine, in Liverpool next year. “It’s so exciting... We picked the set design last week and it’s going to be epic.”

■ RTS Northern Ireland hosted another session at the Belfast Media Festival, which saw centre Chair and BBC Three controller Fiona Campbell interview Ryan J Brown, the creator and writer of her channel’s comedy horror series *Wreck*, and its executive producer, Noemi Spanos, from Euston Films.

Writers and stars Laurence Rickard and Ben Willbond of *Ghosts* and *Horrible Histories* fame took part in an RTS preview and Q&A for their latest comedy, *We Are Not Alone*. In the November session, they touched on the joy of creative freedom, resisting the temptation to cast themselves in plum roles, and shooting during the pandemic.

Set six weeks after Gu'un aliens have invaded and conquered Earth, *We Are Not Alone* portrays the culture clash between humankind and its new extraterrestrial masters, who are trying to make sense of a planet so confusing and idiotic that its inhabitants can't even agree on which side of the road to drive.

Declan Baxter stars as hapless Clitheroe resident Stewart tasked by aliens Trater (Vicki Pepperdine), Gordan (Mike Wozniak) and Greggs (Joe Thomas) with persuading humankind to rub along with their new masters – yet secretly helping a growing human resistance movement. And there is love and grief, too.

Rickard and Willbond were delighted and surprised in equal measure when their script for a 30-minute sitcom came back from UKTV's head of scripted, Pete Thornton, with the message that the broadcaster wanted more. They were given total creative freedom to explore and write.

"To have something where someone says, 'We love the thing you did with your freedom, would you like some more freedom,' is unusual for writers," said Rickard.

Penning a 90-minute story is a whole different ballgame in terms of structure, Willbond told the audience, after a screening of the first 60 minutes of an hour-and-a-half comedy special that



We Are Not Alone:
Laurence Rickard, Lolly
Adefope and Ben Willbond

Paul Hampartsourmian

Out of this world

RTS Futures Stuart Kemp watches aliens conquer Earth in UKTV's feature-length comedy *We Are Not Alone*. Incompetently

aired on Dave at the end of November.

The post-screening Q&A was hosted by stand-up comedian and actor Lolly Adefope, best known as Kitty, the spectre of a Georgian noblewoman in BBC One comedy *Ghosts*.

With tongue firmly in cheek, she wondered aloud if the writers had ever created a 90-minute project before. (Adefope missed out on a part in their well-reviewed feature-length family comedy about Shakespeare's formative years, *Bill*.) She moved on quickly amid gales of laughter.

The duo described how *We Are Not Alone* was co-written via Zoom – normally, Willbond would travel to Brighton to work with Rickard – before a fraught, Covid-hit shoot. "The way we'd write together changed because of the whole pandemic thing,"

said Rickard. "He'd sit opposite me in my office in Brighton and we'd get nothing done because I'd just make faces all the time. We switched to Zoom and it was much more productive."

He and Willbond said a lot of credit had to go to director Fergal Costello. "There were days where we had to stop and rejig the schedule to work around people's availability, because people were going down with Covid. But no one felt like it was a toil," Rickard added.

Casting was a relatively long process. Willbond explained the hard part was getting people in to read who hadn't worked together before and getting them working together quickly.

They cast themselves as guards. "It wasn't our acting project," said Willbond. "We wanted to write it and exec produce it. But we couldn't

resist popping up in a little cameo."

Commissioned by Thornton and ordered by Dave channel director Cherie Cunningham, the comedy feature was produced by Philip Leach (*The Bay*). The executive producers, under the production banner of Big Talk, were Kenton Allen, Matthew Justice and Victoria Grew.

Thornton said that if the 90-minute special played well with audiences and critics, UKTV would look to turn it into a series. Judging by the audience guffaws, there will be nothing alien about its prospects of a return. ■

RTS Futures and UKTV hosted a preview of *We Are Not Alone* and an exclusive Q&A with writers and stars Laurence Rickard and Ben Willbond at the Curzon Hoxton in London on 15 November.

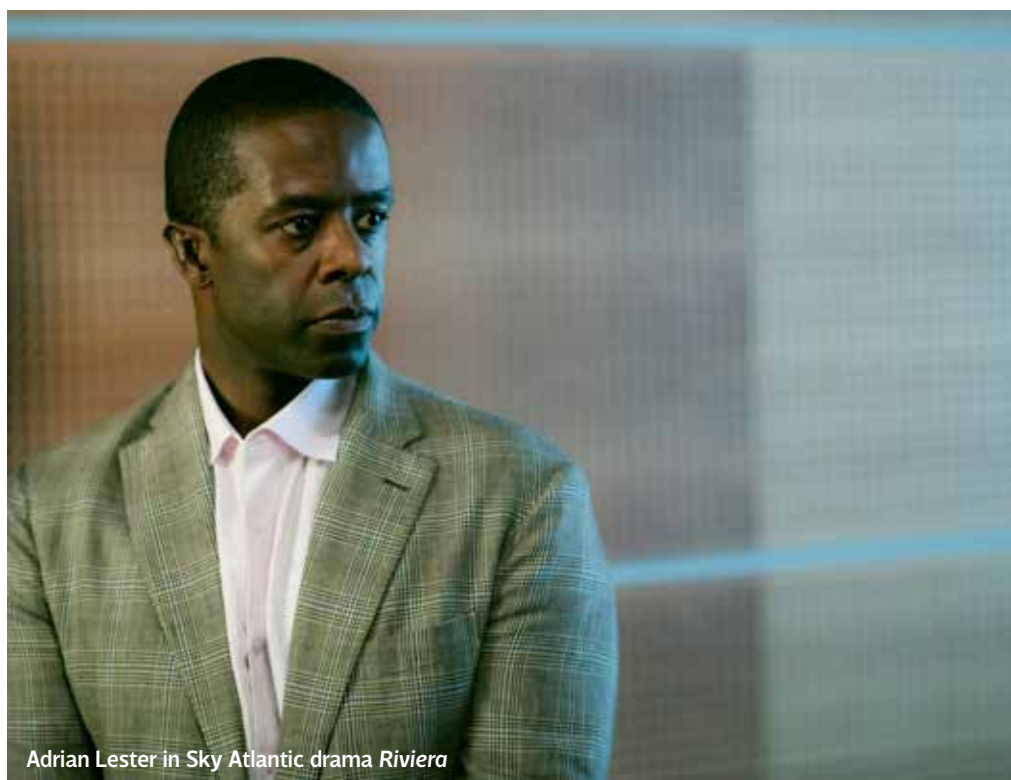
RTS Midlands Actor Adrian Lester and BBC producer Will Trotter were honoured with Baird Medals for their exemplary work in television at the RTS Midlands Awards in late November.

The Birmingham-born Lester, the star of *Hustle* and *Riviera*, was unable to attend the awards because of filming commitments. He was awarded the medal before the ceremony by RTS Midlands Chair Kully Khaila in London for his “wonderful screen work”.

Lester said he was a “product of Birmingham”, and thanked the places that had shaped him, including the Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham Youth Theatre and the Birmingham Rep.

“Without that access, I wouldn’t be standing here holding this [medal],” he continued, asking the city’s institutions to “keep your doors open, keep those young people who have nothing in their pockets and nothing in their minds but interest... keep giving them the experience. Without welcoming the young people, these forms of artistry won’t survive.”

Trotter, as the executive producer of the BBC’s Drama Village in Birmingham, is responsible for dramas including *Doctors*, *Father Brown* and *Shakespeare & Hathaway*. His award was presented by Father Brown



Adrian Lester in Sky Atlantic drama *Riviera*

Sky

Brum actor wins Baird

himself, Mark Williams.

Three of Trotter’s shows were recognised at the ceremony. Claire Bennett won the Writer award for her scripts for the BBC daytime drama *Doctors*, while the Breakthrough On-screen award was made to Ruby-May Martinwood for her performance in *Father Brown*.

Costume designer Claire Collins from BBC Birmingham drama took home the

Craft Production award for another Trotter show, *Sister Boniface Mysteries*.

DI Ray, made by Jed Mercurio’s production company HTM Television, picked up two prizes on the night: Scripted and Acting Performance for Parminder Nagra, who played the title role in the ITV cop drama.

Comic Joe Lycett was named On-screen Personality for Channel 4’s *Travel Man*,

which is made by Birmingham indie North One.

Phoebe Frances Brown from Rural Media was awarded the Breakthrough Off-screen award posthumously.

The news prizes were split between the BBC and ITV. David Gregory-Kumar from *BBC Midlands Today* was named Journalist of the Year, while ITV News Central won the award for News Programme of the Year with its special investigation into whether services for children with mental health problems are fit for purpose, *Children in Crisis: Are We Failing Young Minds?*.

The first in-person RTS Midlands Awards for three years was hosted by broadcast journalist Suzanne Virdee and radio and TV presenter Ed James at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham.

Matthew Bell

RTS Midlands Television Awards winners

Baird Medal - Adrian Lester and Will Trotter

Scripted - *DI Ray* - HTM Television for ITV

Acting - Parminder Nagra, *DI Ray* - HTM Television for ITV

Writer - Claire Bennett, *Doctors* - BBC Studios for BBC One

Documentary - *2Tone: The Sound of Coventry* - Full Fat TV for BBC One

Factual - *A Musical Family Christmas with the Kanneh Masons* - MacLarty Brown Media for BBC Two

Factual Entertainment - Richard Hammond’s *Crazy Contraptions* - Optomen Television for Channel 4

News Programme - *Children in Crisis: Are We Failing Young Minds?* - ITV News Central

Journalist of the Year - David Gregory-Kumar, *BBC Midlands Today* - BBC One

On-screen Personality - Joe Lycett, *Travel Man* - North One TV for Channel 4

Breakthrough (Off-screen) - Phoebe Frances Brown - Rural Media

Breakthrough (On-screen) - Ruby-May Martinwood, *Father Brown* - BBC Studios for BBC One

Animation - *The Flood* - Second Home Studios for BBC New Creatives

Short Form - *Irish, Blacks & Dogs* - Press Record Films

Creative Community - *Worcester Voices* - Worcester Mela

Diversity Champion - *We Are England: Midlands* - BBC for BBC One

Promotional Content - *Dear Brum* - HDY Agency

Craft - Production - Claire Collins, *Sister Boniface Mysteries* - BBC Studios for BritBox

Craft - Post-production - Kiran - BlueBell Films

Old Trafford Cricket Ground in Manchester welcomed 560 guests to the RTS North West Television Awards in late November to see screen-writer and children's novelist Frank Cottrell-Boyce collect the Judges' Award.

Bootle-born Cottrell-Boyce has written for the soaps *Brookside* and *Coronation Street*. His film scripts include *24 Hour Party People* about Manchester legend Tony Wilson, Factory Records and the 1970s and 1980s music scene.

The judges said: "His creativity is as diverse as it is prolific, having written soap operas, children's novels, movies and, in 2012, the London Olympics opening ceremony, which gave Britain the sense of optimism and national pride it so sorely needs a decade later.

"As a writer, Frank puts his faith firmly in the future and his heart in the right place, while deploying a sensitive soul, sharp mind and very fine funny bones."

The scripted awards went to: Channel 4's *Help*, in which Jodie Comer cared for Stephen Graham during the Covid-19 pandemic (Single Drama); ITV's *Anne*, which starred Maxine Peake as Hillsborough campaigner Anne Williams (Drama); and Sky One's *Brassic* (Comedy).



ER Event Photography/RTS NW

RTS honours leading writer

RTS North West Television Awards winners

Judges' Award - Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Single Drama - *Help* - The Forge in association with One Shoe Films for Channel 4

Drama Series - *Anne* - World Productions for ITV

Best Performance - Adeel Akhtar, *Sherwood* - House Productions for BBC One

Writer - Tony Schumacher, *The Responder* - Dancing Ledge Productions for BBC One

Continuing Drama Storyline - *Coronation Street*, *Abi's Baby Battle* - ITV Studios for ITV

Performance in a Continuing Drama - Sally Carman-Duttine, *Coronation Street* - ITV Studios for ITV

Comedy - *Brassic* - Clerkenwell Films for Sky One

Performance in a Comedy - Allan 'Seapa' Mustafa, *Peacock* - Big Talk Productions for BBC Three

Entertainment - *The Voice Kids* - Lifted Entertainment for ITV

Factual Entertainment - *Blue Peter* - BBC Studios for BBC

Factual - *Nail Bar Boys* - LA Productions for BBC Three

Single Documentary - *Robbie Savage: Making Macclesfield FC* - BBC Sport for iPlayer

Current Affairs Programme - *Dame Deborah James: The Last Dance* - BBC for BBC One

Regional Presenter - Chris Hall, *ITV Granada Reports* - ITV Granada

Regional Programme - *ITV Granada Reports* - ITV Granada

Best Journalist North West - Mel Barham, *ITV Granada Reports* - ITV Granada

Best Breakthrough Talent - Adelayo Adedayo, *The Responder* - Dancing Ledge Productions for BBC One

School-age Children's Programme - *Dodger* - Universal International for CBBC

Pre-School Children's Programme - *Grace's Amazing Machines: Mobility Machines* - BBC Studios for CBeebies

Daytime - *Heaven Made* - Purple Productions for BBC One

Sports programme - *Peter Crouch: Save Our Beautiful Game* - Workerbee for Discovery+

Digital Creativity - *Hollyoaks IRL* - Lime Pictures

Audio Post-production - *Sherwood*, *Mark Briscoe*, *Formosa Group*, *Mark Ryder*, *Picture Shop* - House Productions for BBC One

Visual Post-production - *Jamie Parry*, *Dock 10*, *Stay Close* - Red Production Company for Netflix

Adeel Akhtar took the Best Performance award for his performance in BBC One crime drama *Sherwood*; Allan "Seapa" Mustafa won the Comedy Performance prize for BBC Three's *Peacock*; while Sally Carman-Duttine, who plays Abi Franklin in *Coronation Street*, gave the best Performance in a Continuing Drama.

Former police officer Tony Schumacher secured the Writer prize for the BBC One drama *The Responder*, which starred Martin Freeman as a troubled cop patrolling the night-time streets of Liverpool. Adelayo Adedayo, who played the rookie officer paired with Freeman, was presented with the Breakthrough Talent award.

ITV achieved a clean sweep in the news categories. *ITV Granada Reports* took the Regional Programme prize; Chris Hall won Regional Presenter; and Mel Barham won the Journalist North West award.

The BBC took home the Current Affairs Programme award for *Dame Deborah James: The Last Dance*.

The BBC dominated the entertainment and factual categories, with *Blue Peter* triumphing in Factual Entertainment, *Nail Bar Boys* securing the Factual prize and *Robbie Savage: Making Macclesfield FC* winning the Single Documentary award. The Entertainment prize went to ITV's *The Voice Kids*.

RTS North West Chair Cameron Roach said 2022 had been "a historic year for many reasons, and it's thrilling to once again have the opportunity to celebrate all of the incredible television that our region has produced over the past year".

Waterloo Road and *Emmerdale* actor Adam Thomas and TV presenter Jenny Powell hosted the Awards at The Point, Old Trafford.

Matthew Bell

RTS Thames Valley

The Thames Valley is attracting huge investment in TV and film studios and facilities, but it needs to find and train the talent to crew them. This was the conclusion of an RTS panel in November, which agreed that this could not be left to happy accident, as happened in California in the early days of the film industry.

The UK film and TV industry is predicted to attract investment of more than £7bn in 2023, but it is also forecast to be 21,000 crew short. “We’ve got the talent, we’ve got the ability to train up the next generation. It’s just making sure that we don’t lose our lead advantage to other territories, which will eat our lunch if we’re not careful,” said Robert Laycock, CEO of Marlow Film Studios.

The question of how to provide training divided the panel. Roger Morris, Group MD at Stage Fifty, which builds professional sound stages, said: “It is impossible for professionals who are working to have students on set for a number of reasons – they’re working on a very expensive product, insurance, legal issues.” Laycock



The RTS Thames Valley panel

Chris Forsey, Marlow Film Studios

Studios need trained talent

disagreed, suggesting that “a kind of traineeship on set is a really important thing”.

There was general consensus that university technical colleges, the National Film and Television School, the

BFI, ScreenSkills and others, together with apprenticeships, could help to fill the skills gap, together with the industry big players “putting their hands in their pockets”, added a member of the audience.

Abhi Arumbakkam, project manager at Slough-based Resource Productions, which aims to diversify the creative sector, said: “There is an issue with diversity, equity and inclusion in the industry, but it is being addressed at the studio planning application stage with the section 106 provision, which includes provisions that show commitment to the community.”

Government needs to recognise that film and TV is one of the few growth industries, argued the panel. “We have to convince politicians we’re not a flaky industry, that we’re a proper commercial industry that makes an awful lot of money,” said Morris.

The Thames Valley event, “Hollywood on Thames”, was held at audio post-production facility Pip Studios in Wokingham and chaired by Christina Nowak, director of virtual production at broadcast tech company Anna Valley. The other panellists were Mark Sheffield, co-founder of Pip Studios, and Berkshire Film Office manager Lilly Hudson.

The event can be watched at: <https://bit.ly/RTS-Hollywood>.

Stephen Stewart

Bristol pros meet the future

RTS West of England

The sixth RTS West of England Futures Festival – aimed at those wanting to find out more about the TV industry – was a lively event, with 20 companies and just under 200 young people attending.

Attendees at the November event, held at the M Shed in Bristol, had a chance to have a go on a remote edit crate, courtesy of Evolutions, and get their hands on some camera kit, thanks to Films at 59. Alongside the informal

networking, there was also a series of short talks.

‘What to expect... working in post-production’ featured engineer Sam Stafford from Evolutions and grading assistant Sinead Cooper from Picture Shop, who discussed: their first impressions of post houses; the need to be inquisitive, positive and kind, to make connections and shadow people, and pursue the area that interests you.

In ‘What to expect... working in production’, Plimsoll

Productions researcher Afua Owusu-Ansah and Hasna Hassan, production runner for *The Lazarus Project*, pulled no punches about the realities of fast-paced production, but really inspired the audience with their enthusiasm for their jobs.

Sas Bonser, BBC Studios Natural History Unit talent executive, divulged some excellent, practical advice in a CV workshop.

■ A week later, BBC Studios Bristol hosted a joint ScreenSkills and RTS West of England

event on disabled representation in TV. An interactive workshop led by Edi Smockum from training consultancy thinkBigger! outlined the state of disabled representation on- and off-screen, and highlighted how companies can do better.

Jack Maddox, a production co-ordinator at BBC Studios Natural History Unit, and Ethan Blake-Brooks, a shooting assistant producer at Drummer TV, shared their experiences of working in the TV industry as disabled off-screen talent. They discussed accessibility, the interviewing process and how they have benefited from the Access to Work scheme.

Suzy Lambert

BBC One and HBO fantasy drama *His Dark Materials* returns for a third and final series before Christmas, but RTS Cymru Wales offered a screening of episode 1 a month earlier at the University of South Wales in Cardiff.

It was a fitting premiere for a series that is made in Cardiff by Bad Wolf, the production company formed by former BBC execs Julie Gardner and Jane Tranter in 2015. Other Bad Wolf dramas include *A Discovery of Witches* and *I Hate Suzie*.

Following the screening, RTS Cymru Wales Chair Edward Russell discussed job opportunities in South Wales for local talent with Bad Wolf executive producer Kate Crowther and Allison Dowzell, Managing Director of Screen Alliance Wales.

Crowther joined Bad Wolf in 2020, having produced such award-winning dramas as *Doctor Foster* and *Raised by Wolves*. She said: "That we've got this really high-end TV [production] out of Wales now is incredible – Bad Wolf has changed the landscape.

"I had to move out of Wales about 10 years into my career to go and work on high-end stuff because it didn't exist here then. Now there's no need for talent to leave if they don't want to."



His Dark Materials

BBC

Drama boom in Cardiff

Bad Wolf built Wolf Studios Wales in Cardiff and set up the education and training scheme Screen Alliance Wales to train production crews. It is supported by, among others, S4C and HBO.

Dowzell said: "When [Bad Wolf] rooted itself in Cardiff in that studio, [its ambition was] that... everyone would have an opportunity to work in production; there would be no nepotism."

She added: "There has been a dearth of people coming

into the industry but now it's really building – the amount of production in South Wales is phenomenal."

Over three series of *His Dark Materials*, Dowzell revealed that there had been "over 2,000 opportunities" for new talent. One person who has benefited is University of South Wales graduate Razvan Rotaru of Painting Practice, which is based at Wolf Studios Wales and contributed visual effects to *His Dark Materials*.

Rotaru, a production assistant, worked on the third series. He is part of the Screen Alliance Wales scheme and wants to work in VFX.

He said: "It's basically like a family... once you finish a project, you can, at any time, go back to Screen Alliance Wales and ask them if there's anything out there they can help you with. Every time, they have helped me."

His Dark Materials starts on BBC One on 18 December.
Matthew Bell

Boost for Southern students

The RTS held two events in the region in November: the Freelancers Fair in Southampton; and a student-only session in Bournemouth with BBC Three commissioner Yasemin Rashit, "The changing future of BBC production".

The Freelancers Fair was attended by producers from

throughout the region, such as ITV, the BBC, local companies Topical Television and Woodcut Media, talent placement agency Gritty Talent and content supplier Southpoint Films.

Attending were a mixture of seasoned programme-makers and newcomers looking for their first jobs. CVs, LinkedIn and Talent

Manager profiles were shared, offering a great opportunity to celebrate the local talent in the region.

Rashit spoke at a joint RTS/Bournemouth University event, held as part of the BBC 100 celebrations. In conversation with RTS Southern's Gordon Cooper, she discussed her career and outlined the challenges her

channel has in finding content for 16- to 35-year-olds who don't watch much TV.

"We were delighted that Yasemin was able to come and speak to the students in our region. Our young programme-makers were eager to learn how they might pitch content and get their careers started with BBC Three, and learn about the career journey Yasemin has been on herself," said RTS Southern Chair Stephanie Farmer.

Alison Martin and Stephanie Farmer



Sky News wins in the reign of Ryley

Sky News without its charismatic editor, John Ryley, is a bit like BBC News without Huw Edwards.

But all good things come to an end. Next spring, following 17 years at the helm, John will stand down. He began his career as a BBC graduate news trainee, going on to programme edit ITV's *News at Ten* before joining Sky in 1995 as an output editor.

He said editing Sky News had been "exhilarating" but acknowledged there had been challenging moments: "I can't pretend there haven't been tricky days!"

The RTS Television Journalism Awards won't be the same without him. In February, Sky News won News Channel of the Year for the fifth consecutive year. John received the Society's Outstanding Contribution Award in 2021, with jurors noting that he had "effected genuine change in our industry". Too true.

Macandrew circles back to TV land

A welcome back to media for the BBC's new corporate affairs director, Alice Macandrew, who starts her job early in 2023.

Having begun her career as a reporter on *Broadcast* and once worked as an advisor to James Murdoch – and led Sky's corporate communications department 2012-15 – Alice is no stranger to TV.

Latterly, she was corporate affairs director at Primark

and, before that, Thomas Cook. At the BBC, Alice will sit on the Executive Committee and manage relations with government and Ofcom.

Writing for auteurs, kids – and bears

Congratulations to Frank Cottrell-Boyce for winning the Judges' Award at the RTS North West Television Awards.

One of Liverpool's literary luminaries, Frank began his working life as a TV critic for *Living Marxism*, before writing for *Coronation Street* and *Brookside*. He juggles a career as a children's writer alongside penning screenplays for such top British directing talent as Danny Boyle and Michael Winterbottom.

Frank co-wrote the charming Platinum Jubilee sketch in which the late Queen Elizabeth II famously took tea with Paddington Bear. In dark

times, Frank's work is genuinely life-enhancing.

Rocking soundtrack that bigs up Brum

Scenes of serious fun were had at the recent RTS Midlands Awards, the centre's first in-person ceremony for three years. As a thriving production hub, Birmingham and the surrounding area has much to celebrate.

The prolific Stephen Knight's latest series, *SAS Rogue Heroes*, was one of the autumn's surprise hits, and recently name checked by Tim Davie when he spoke to the RTS in early December.

Dubbed by some as "Khaki Blinders" (Stephen, of course, created *Peaky Blinders*), the anachronistic soundtrack featuring classics from the likes of AC/DC and Black Sabbath is on the Upside's Christmas list. ■

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