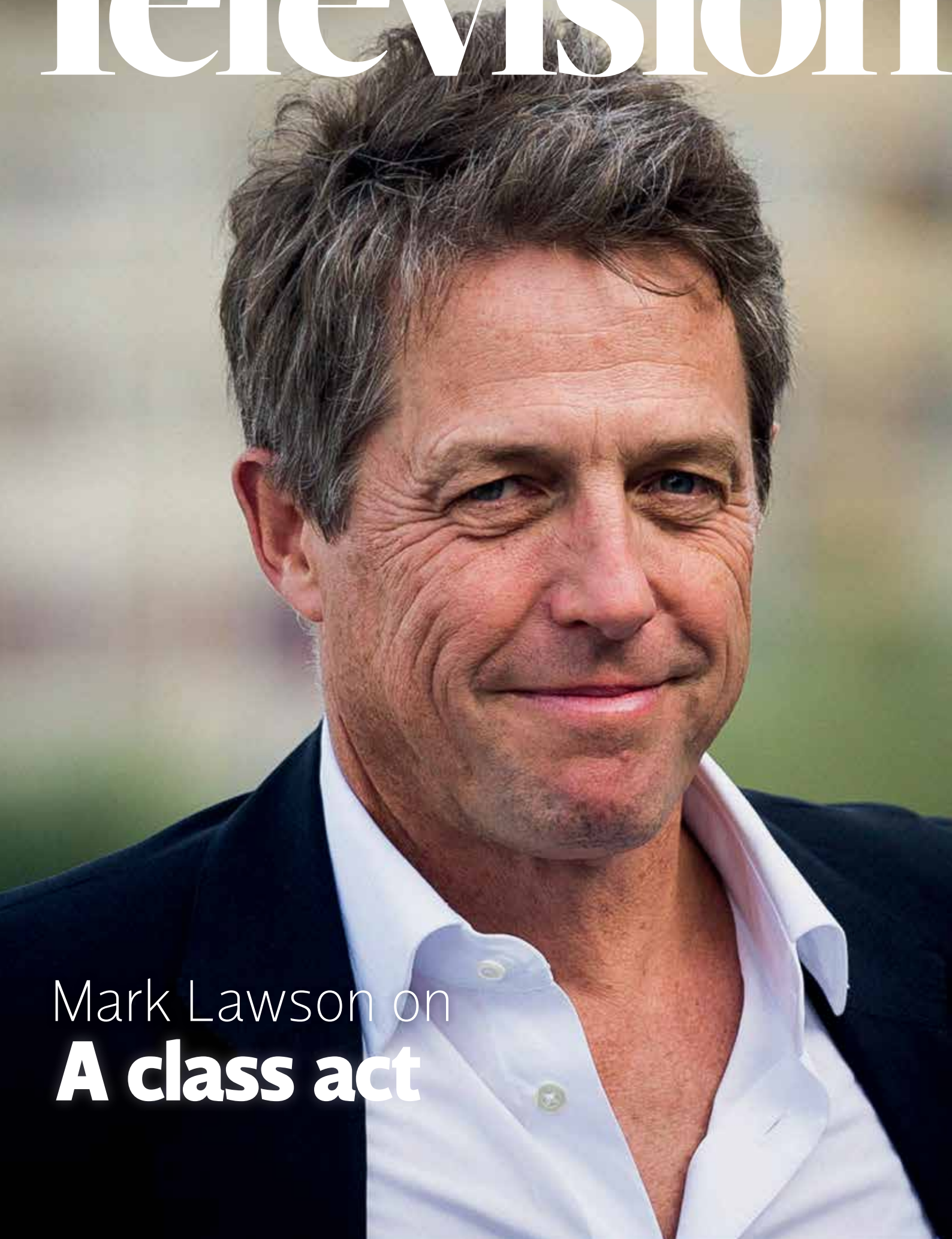


# Television

July/August 2018



Mark Lawson on  
**A class act**





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## From the CEO



The RTS Student Television Awards are one of the highlights of the Society's year. Last month's ceremony, held once again at BFI Southbank, was the

biggest ever, with 700 entries representing 90 colleges across the UK and Ireland. Congratulations to all the winners and a big thank you to the afternoon's host, Jayde Adams, and to Sky's head of comedy, Jon Mountague, who was master of ceremonies at the awards. Thanks, too, for all the hard work put in by the juries.

It was thrilling to see such a variety of young, emerging talent across a wide range of genres. This speaks volumes about the future health of our creative industries.

In this edition of *Television*, Mark Lawson examines Hugh Grant's

transformation from floppy-haired romcom star in Richard Curtis films to playing the Machiavellian Jeremy Thorpe in BBC One's sensational *A Very English Scandal*.

I am delighted that Mathew Horsman could give us his take on the rival bids from Comcast and Disney for Rupert Murdoch's entertainment empire. As you'd expect, Mathew provides a penetrating analysis of a complex and intriguing situation with high stakes.

The meaty topic of media consolidation is one of the big themes of this September's RTS London Conference, "Is bigger better?" Do book to hear our industry's major players ponder the cultural, economic, strategic and creative issues stemming from scale-building deals. We are honoured to have some stellar speakers, including Viacom's Bob Bakish, Carolyn McCall,

Tony Hall, Alex Mahon and Sharon White, among many others.

Mental health is a topic close to all of our hearts. Pippa Shawley's piece looks at how TV is trying to make the workplace a better, more caring environment for its employees.

Did anyone mention the World Cup? It's a great pleasure to have the brilliant Ashley John-Baptiste writing from Moscow. Ashley, as you might know, has been deployed as a BBC roving reporter based in Russia for the duration of the competition.

I wish all our readers a great summer, with good weather and a wonderful season of TV sport.

*Theresa*

Theresa Wise

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Cover: AP

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## National events

### RTS CONFERENCE

**Tuesday 18 September**

**RTS London Conference 2018:  
Is bigger better? Will 'the  
consolidation game' help tip the  
scales against the tech giants?**

Sponsored by Viacom. Co-chaired by David Lynn, President, Viacom International Media Networks (VIMN) and James Currell, President, VIMN, UK, Northern and Eastern Europe. Confirmed speakers include: Bob Bakish, CEO of Viacom Inc; Zai Bennett, Director of Programmes, Sky Entertainment UK and Ireland; Tony Hall, Director-General of the BBC; Ian Katz, Director of Programmes, Channel 4; Carolyn McCall, CEO of ITV; Alex Mahon, CEO of Channel 4; Stephen van Rooyen, CEO, Sky UK & Rol; and Sharon White, CEO of Ofcom

Venue: Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9AG

### STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2018

**Thursday 11 October**

**Charlotte Moore, Director of Content, BBC**

Joint RTS and Media Society event. Tickets £10. All net profits will go to the Steve Hewlett Bursary Fund. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: The University of Westminster, 4-12 Little Titchfield Street, London W1W 7BY

### RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

**Wednesday 24 October**

**Who's watching? The challenge of digital TV measurement**

Speakers: Rich Astley, chief product officer, Finecast; Matt Hill, research and planning director, Thinkbox; John Litster, MD, Sky Media; Sarah Rose, director of consumer insight, Channel 4; and Justin Sampson, CEO, Barb. Chair: Kate Bulkley, journalist. 6:30pm for 6:45pm  
Venue: The Hospital Club, 24 Endell Street, London WC2H 9HQ

### RTS MASTERCLASSES

**Tuesday 13 November**

**RTS Student Programme Masterclasses**

Venue: IET London, 2 Savoy Place, London WC2R 0BL

**Wednesday 14 November**

**RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses**

Venue: IET London, 2 Savoy Place, London WC2R 0BL

### RTS AWARDS

**Monday 26 November**

**RTS Craft & Design Awards 2018**

London Hilton on Park Lane, 22 Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

## Local events

### DEVON AND CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson

■ RTSDevonandCornwall  
@rts.org.uk

### EAST

**Thursday 20 September**

**TV quiz night**

Quizmaster: BBC Inside Out's David Whiteley. Please email [rtseast@rts.org.uk](mailto:rtseast@rts.org.uk) for an entry form. Tickets: £10 per team of four or five.

Venue: The Lamb Inn, Lamb Yard, Orford Place, Norwich NR1 3RU

■ Nikki O'Donnell

■ [nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk](mailto:nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk)

### LONDON

■ Daniel Cherowbrier

■ [daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk](mailto:daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk)

### MIDLANDS

**Tuesday 20 November**

**RTS Midlands Awards 2018**

Venue: Town Hall, Victoria Square, Birmingham B3 3DQ

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ [RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk)

### NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

■ Jill Graham

■ [jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk)

### NORTH WEST

**Saturday 10 November**

**RTS North West Awards 2018**

Venue: Hilton Deansgate, 303

## STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2018

**11 October**

University of Westminster  
6:30pm

A joint RTS and  
Media Society event

Tickets: [www.rts.org.uk](http://www.rts.org.uk)



**Charlotte Moore**  
Director of Content, BBC

Deansgate, Manchester M3 4LQ

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ [RPinkney@rts.org.uk](mailto:RPinkney@rts.org.uk)

### NORTHERN IRELAND

**Thursday 15 November**

**RTS NI Programme Awards**

Venue: TBC

■ John Mitchell

■ [mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com](mailto:mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com)

### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ [byrneecd@iol.ie](mailto:byrneecd@iol.ie)

### SCOTLAND

■ Jane Muirhead

■ [scotlandchair@rts.org.uk](mailto:scotlandchair@rts.org.uk)

### SOUTHERN

■ Stephanie Farmer

■ [SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk)

### THAMES VALLEY

**Friday 23 November**

**2018 Winter Ball**

Venue: De Vere Wokefield Estate, Goodboys Lane, Reading RG7 3AE

■ Tony Orme

■ [RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk)

### WALES

**Monday 6 August**

**Comedy on TV**

Panellists: Barry Jones (Cwmni Da), Elen Rhys (S4C) and Daniel Glyn (Made in Cardiff). Chair: Sioned Wiliam (BBC Radio 4). In Welsh, with simultaneous English translation. 2:30pm-4:00pm

**Saturday 11 August**

**Dal: Yma/Nawr**

Screening and Q&A, chaired by Heledd Hardy, with director Marc Evans and producer Ynyr Williams. 2:30pm-4:30pm

Venue: Sinemaes (Pop-Up Cinema), National Eisteddfod, Cardiff Bay

■ Hywel Wiliam 07980 007841

■ [hywel@aim.uk.com](mailto:hywel@aim.uk.com)

### WEST OF ENGLAND

■ Belinda Biggam

■ [belindabiggam@hotmail.com](mailto:belindabiggam@hotmail.com)

### YORKSHIRE

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280

■ [lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk](mailto:lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk)

# TV diary

**Andrew Billen** is impressed when he meets the adaptor of *Poldark*



**A**s an interviewer, you get used to – after 30 years, I have had to get used to – being reminded that we are an unequal species. The ability gap between an interviewer and interviewee is a given.

Recently, however, I keep confronting multiply talented subjects. Lennie James, whom I spoke to for this magazine, is an actor and a screenwriter. Melvyn Bragg, impudently grilled by me in the *Times*, is not merely our top arts broadcaster, he is a prolific novelist.

Graham Norton met me to discuss his new novel. It's his second, and both are very good. Most impressively of all, perhaps, Debbie Horsfield, the *Poldark* adaptor, has not only also written stage plays but successfully brought up four children, whom she chose to home tutor. Would it have been expecting too much for natural selection to distribute outstanding talent on a one-per-person basis?

■ Opening my own paper today, I find a letter saying that, far from Eddie Mair's pay needing to be cut by the BBC, it should – on account of his talent – have been doubled. Then I read his *Radio Times* column, in which Mair reveals that he was willing to lop his salary all along.

He is off to LBC for the heck of it.

That he was not a remunerative correctness refusenik is a disappointment, however. You would have to be deaf to think all *PM* presenters deserve to be considered equal.

■ At the time of writing, we do not know LBC's plans for Mair. The question for me is whether we will now learn his politics, as we do the rest of the station's argumentative presenter roster.

His almost divine command of irony suggested that Mair was above opinions, amused only by the weaknesses in them all. The man he won't, alas, be succeeding on *Question Time* is equally inscrutable. Charles Moore in the *Spectator* said he assumed, on account of his wealth and lifelong attachment to the BBC, that David Dimbleby was of the left.

As a former (minor) newspaper baron, who faced union problems in the 1980s, he might equally be the precise opposite. Dimbleby ensured his impartiality, of course, not with irony but with authority.

■ Peter Firmin has died, the visual half of the partnership behind *Noggin the Nog*, *Ivor the Engine*, *The Clangers* and *Bagpuss*. A few years ago, I interviewed him. The night before, I read a book about his career, its pages beautifully illustrated with his art.

In the early hours, I woke up

screaming: "It's a [expletive deleted] outrage." This was the crisis in a dream in which I got worked up at the injustice that, while Disney, Hanna and Barbera, Matt Groening et al became millionaires, Firmin made virtually nothing from his genius, even sending out knitting patterns so parents could make, rather than buy, toy *Clangers*.

Firmin was mystified when I said this. He was comfortably off, had his family and was happy. I am arguing against myself now, but, for some people, money really does not come into it.

■ One of the best surprises of late fatherhood is having children who enjoy ITV's *Thunderbirds Are Go* at more or less exactly the same age that my brother and I did the original *Thunderbirds*. The series has been taken off, mid-run, for the summer – the World Cup, I assume.

Joy awaits, however. In London this autumn, a show called *Thunderbirds: Beyond the Horizon* promises an immersive theatrical experience in which we can board Thunderbird 2 and embark on an international rescue. Where to, however? The caves of Thailand? The Hawaii volcano? Or the BBC salary review committee?

*Andrew Billen is a feature writer and former TV critic on the Times.*



Halfway through 2018, it already seems clear who some of the leading contenders will be in the actor categories of next year's Bafta and RTS awards: Benedict Cumberbatch and Anthony Hopkins for their title roles in *Patrick Melrose* and *King Lear*, and Ben Whishaw and Hugh Grant as Norman Scott and Jeremy Thorpe in *A Very English Scandal*.

Grant would be most tipsters' pick to take home the trophies. This is a remarkable achievement. While Cumberbatch, Hopkins and Whishaw are often the names inside the gilded envelopes ripped open at TV award ceremonies, Grant's last big British TV role, before taking on the role of the allegedly homicidal Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe in *A Very English Scandal*, was over 25 years ago. In 1993, he appeared in a production of Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling*, in the BBC theatre-on-TV series *Performance*.

The reason for Grant's quarter-century absence from the medium was his movie-star career, especially as Richard Curtis's preferred lead man in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Notting Hill* and *Love Actually*.

But, whereas some screen stars who take a TV role – such as Frances McDormand in *Olive Kitteridge* or Matthew McConaughey in *True Detective* – merely fancy the chance to do classy, long-form material in between Hollywood projects, Grant was widely perceived to be in trouble cinematically.

His movie work in the past decade had suggested someone now too old and cynical to lead romcoms such as *Music and Lyrics* (2007) and *The Rewrite* (2014), but still too associated with stuttering lovers to be taken seriously when playing five roles in the postmodern sci-fi mega-flop *Cloud Atlas* (2012). So, his performance as Thorpe is a total reputational turnaround, one of the finest ever achieved by an actor.

The transformation was achieved through a combination of reanimated talent and lookalike luck. In a screen industry ever more dominated by biodramas, an actor's face and physique can suddenly become their fortune.

Hugh Grant  
as Jeremy  
Thorpe in *A  
Very English  
Scandal*

# Hugh Grant's class act

Talent

**Mark Lawson** considers the actor's career-transforming role as Jeremy Thorpe in *A Very English Scandal*

## ‘GRANT CONVINCINGLY SUGGESTS A MAN WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN CAPABLE OF ALMOST ANYTHING’

For example, Toby Jones is a great screen actor but would require unfeasible cosmetic and camera trickery to convince as Thorpe.

However, as soon as it was reported that Grant would play Thorpe, the casting immediately made sense. They shared not only Oxford-educated voices and the same tall, thin build (the men's ectomorphic frames and long faces brought even closer by dieting and make-up), but psychology, too.

The events that led to Grant being charged with lewd behaviour with a sex worker on Sunset Boulevard in 1995 are now far past the statute of limitations for any effect they should have on the actor's profession and reputation.

However, I mention the incident because there must be a suspicion that having once jeopardised his career for a sex act was a useful reference point for an actor playing Thorpe.

His covert encounters with men – at a time when gay sex was first illegal and then merely unpalatable to much of the electorate – resulted in allegations that, in order to protect his parliamentary career, he had conspired to have his former lover Norman Scott murdered. It was an accusation that an Old Bailey jury, firmly nudged in that direction by the judge, rejected in 1979 – but which most viewers of *A Very English Scandal* are likely to have concluded to be true.

The relevance of Grant's own sexual risk-taking is that it reveals a darker streak in his personality, one that is more interesting than he has generally been allowed to appear on screen.

As is often the case, the persona that made the actor famous – the bumbling public school boy in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Notting Hill* – turns out not to be the best use of his talent.

Grant is best when dark, and not even necessarily in films aimed at grown-ups.

The remarkable renaissance that *A Very English Scandal* represents was, in retrospect, signalled by his previous role, an enjoyable turn in *Paddington 2* as Phoenix Buchanan, a vain and villainous actor.

As Grant's cinematic part before that was St Clair Bayfield, a failed

Shakespearean actor, in *Florence Foster Jenkins*, there was reason to fear that his screen career may have been dwindling to knowing, self-parodic cameos.

But these usefully highlighted a different side of his style, which Stephen Frears, the director of *Florence Foster Jenkins* as well as *A Very English Scandal*, utilised fully as Thorpe, another strange theatrical of sorts, though one minus an Equity card. One of Thorpe's former lovers described him, in Michael Bloch's 2014 biography, as a “ham actor”. This suggests that Grant's rediscovery as a good actor has now, paradoxically, featured a trio of bad ones.

The biggest tribute to Grant's performance in *A Very English Scandal* is that the obligatory coda, in which news footage of the real figure is shown, does not have the usual deflationary effect.

The actor perfectly reproduces every vocal and physical tic, down to the wave – and what follows it. Both arms are raised and then suddenly crossed. This was a gesture Thorpe curiously shared with another disgraced leader of the 1970s, President Richard Nixon.

For an actor, that is just “living Tussaud's” stuff. The greatness of the portrayal is the transmission of the calculations and contradictions happening inside Thorpe's head.

Russell T Davies's scripts for *A Very English Scandal* often sought to position the protagonist as a victim of historical discrimination against homosexuals, forced into two “lavender marriages”. Expression of his true sexuality

## ‘ONE OF THE MOST TOTAL REPUTATIONAL TURNAROUNDS EVER ACHIEVED BY AN ACTOR’

would have wrecked his high political ambitions.

Davies gives Thorpe a line about how he will consummate his marriages “through gritted teeth” and subsequently plead tiredness at bedtime.

This is a reasonable reading, especially from the writer of *Queer as Folk*, but biographies and contemporary reports of Thorpe's life suggest the alternative possibility that he was an enthusiastic bisexual, who enjoyed the risk created by satisfying both sides of his libido.

And the suggestion in Bloch's biography that Thorpe may have ordered the murder of another man who knew too much – a former lover, Henry Upton, who mysteriously disappeared at sea in 1957 – raises the possibility that he was psychotic. Grant convincingly suggests a man who would have been capable of almost anything in pursuit of his sexual desires and political ambitions.

A late-career role that fits an actor exactly can sometimes be an opening that closes off options: Nigel Hawthorne and F Murray Abraham were often hard to cast after the perfection of their work as Sir Humphrey in *Yes Minister* and Salieri in *Amadeus*.

It seems different in Grant's case, though, because this is a second breakthrough and represents an escape from earlier typecasting. He surely couldn't go back to playing the posh love interest in Richard Curtis films, but most would see that as a good thing. If that interesting quintet of performances in *Cloud Atlas* were premiered now, it would, perhaps, be better received.

A well-known screen director, who declines to be named for making a negative comparison with another actor, says: “Watching Grant in *A Very English Scandal*, I kept imagining him in the part played by Hugh Laurie in *The Night Manager*. I think he'd have been much more convincing as that satanic figure.

“Grant wouldn't have been thought of for that part two years ago, but now he would be. So, the big change will be in the range of what he can do.”

Before that, he should ensure he has a clean tuxedo for the TV awards season. ■



# Size unlocks the prize

Rupert Murdoch

## Consolidation

As Comcast and Disney vie to buy the Murdoch entertainment empire, **Mathew Horsman** assesses the likely outcomes

**H**owever it ends, the battle royal for the right to own most of the assets of 21st Century Fox, and all of Sky, reflects deep and significant trends in global media. The resolution (in favour of suitors Disney, Comcast or both) may end up being less important than what the outcome tells us about market dynamics.

This battle is about the response of legacy media to accelerating shifts in consumer behaviour and to the threats posed by the big digital disruptors. In a market where content and distribution are increasingly intermingled and global, size unlocks the prize.

For those who haven't been following, here is the recap: Fox, a range of mostly traditional media assets, owned in part by the Murdoch Family Trust, agreed to sell key components (film and TV production, pay-TV channels, Star India and 39% of pay-TV operator Sky) to content giant Disney in December last year for \$52bn in Disney shares.

That agreed deal followed the latest (and separate) bid by Fox to buy the shares in Sky it doesn't already own for £10.75 a share (£19bn), which remained mired in regulatory molasses for months thereafter.

The idea was for Fox to buy all of Sky, and then sell those assets and the other Fox film, TV and channels operations to Disney. The Murdochs would end up with a small but valuable stake in the enlarged Disney.

Upsetting that narrative, US cable and broadband operator Comcast took advantage of the long, drawn-out regulatory process around ownership of Sky. The concerns are around media plurality in respect of Murdoch's ownership of UK newspapers and indirect ownership of Sky News.

Comcast's bid valued Sky at £12.50 a share (£22bn), with the clear aim of wrong-footing Disney.

Not content with the spoiler move on Sky, Comcast followed up with a premium bid for Fox (\$65bn in cash), saying that it wanted the same assets that Disney had agreed to buy.

Disney then raised its bid for Fox to



well above Comcast's offer (\$71bn). This time, it offered cash or shares and again secured the support of the Fox board; Murdoch, for tax reasons, prefers shares to cash. In late June, Disney's bid was cleared by the US Department of Justice.

On this side of the Atlantic, Fox's bid for Sky is in the process of winning final approval, following an agreement with the Government that Fox will ensure Sky News is owned by Disney directly in the event that Fox succeeds in buying the rest of Sky. Comcast's bid for Sky has already been waved through by regulators. Now shareholders have to decide.

At the time of writing, the markets were awaiting Comcast's comeback on Fox and Disney's latest response on Sky.

There are delightful personality clashes at work here that make the story even better. Bob Iger, Disney's Chief Executive, has crossed swords several times with Comcast's Brian Roberts and his senior TV executive Steve Burke. Indeed, Comcast tried in vain in 2004 to buy Disney, criticising the company's TV network performance. At the time, Disney-owned ABC was chaired by Iger. Comcast went on to buy NBCUniversal instead.

Comcast also approached Fox in 2017, eager to pre-empt any tie-up between Disney and Fox. Its offer was deemed to be too difficult to achieve from a regulatory perspective, even if it was willing to bid more than Disney.

The decision, a few weeks ago, by a US court to allow the acquisition of Time Warner by AT&T signalled that vertical mergers might be acceptable after all, and emboldened Comcast to re-enter the fray.

Personalities aside, the main issue here is global scale – for content and distribution. The business models for network and pay-TV alike have been seriously disrupted by the emergence and fast growth of challengers such as Netflix and Amazon. These services are now in tens of millions of households worldwide. They are spending freely on original and acquired content in competition with broadcasters and pay-TV operators.

Google is building its long-form video presence and Facebook and Apple are

dipping their toes into content waters. The old model – big bundles of pay-TV offered at ever higher prices to consumers and mass-market TV shows funded by advertising – is in decline. In its place: lower-priced access to content where and when consumers want it.

The response of companies with legacy assets (studios, cable and satellite networks, TV channels) is to sell out (Murdoch) or to double down (Disney, Comcast). Being in between simply doesn't work. That Rupert Murdoch is a seller not a buyer of media assets speaks volumes about the extent of the challenges. His judgement is that it is

## IN ALL SCENARIOS, MURDOCH PÈRE CASHES IN ON A LIFETIME'S WORK

time to cash in his chips.

For its part, Disney has already placed multiple bets on content, buying Pixar (animation), Lucasfilm (*Star Wars*) and Marvel (superheroes) to add to its already big studio operations.

It now wants to fold in Fox's studio assets (such as *X-Men* and *Avatar*), together with an array of pay-TV channels. The local TV licences, regional sports networks and local sports channels stay with Fox shareholders.

Disney will then take the next, confrontational step toward no-holds-barred combat with the new entrants: removing its content from Netflix and competing toe to toe in the direct-to-consumer market by offering its own, enhanced SVoD proposition.

Comcast, owner of NBCU, also subscribes to the notion that scale in content ownership is crucial. It wants those same Fox assets for itself. It also appears to covet the international assets that come with Fox: Star India and the 39% stake in Sky. The latter operates in the UK, Ireland, Austria, Germany and Italy and owns the over-the-top challenger brand Now TV.

Both Disney and Comcast will be mindful of another prize – control of the third-largest US SVoD service, Hulu. Fox, Disney and Comcast each have 30% stakes in the service, while Time Warner's HBO has 10%. Propositions such as Netflix and Hulu are growing, while pay-TV subscriptions (Comcast's core business) are not.

It is an irony that a bidding war for a range of assets thought by many to be in decline, or at the very least severely challenged, has erupted just as Netflix, the poster boy of new media models, saw its market capitalisation exceed that of Disney. Is the market not overvaluing yesterday's winners at tomorrow's prices?

It is a safe bet that, over the course of the summer, a victor for Fox will be declared, perhaps as early as July. Neither Comcast nor Disney wants to lose. But Comcast has the bigger challenge of staying the course financially: its balance sheet carries more debt and its share price is trading significantly below the levels of early 2018. This is one of the reasons that its bid for Fox is in cash. Moreover, given its head start, Disney is ahead on the regulatory timetable in the US.

There are many potential sidetracks, deviations and wrong turns. But there are three likely outcomes.

Disney wins both Fox and Sky. Comcast does so. Or, perhaps less likely given the high stakes, there is a split decision, with Disney taking the Fox assets and Comcast winning the battle for Sky.

In all scenarios, Murdoch père cashes in on a lifetime's work.

In any event, very little will change from a UK perspective. One big US-based shareholder will be replaced by another (with all the implications of global content and distribution trends inescapably present). The only big difference: no Murdoch at Sky for the first time in its history.

Losing out on Fox will be a bitter blow for one of the two parties. The impact might be softened by the knowledge, perhaps, that the winner paid too much. ■

**Mathew Horsman is director of the consultancy Mediatique.**



# TV's mental health challenge

**W**orking in TV can mean realising a dream. From meeting interesting people to attending glitzy award ceremonies, the television industry is, undoubtedly, an exciting place to work. But, amid shrinking budgets, long hours and a largely freelance working culture, what once looked like a fulfilling career can turn out to involve an unbearable toll on our mental health.

A recent report by Ulster University and the wellbeing charity Inspire found that people working in Northern Ireland's creative industries were three times more likely to suffer from mental ill-health than the general population. Anxiety and depression were the most commonly diagnosed disorders.

A similar study conducted in Australia in 2015 showed that 44% of people working in the country's entertainment industry had moderate to severe

## Workforce wellbeing

People who work in TV are particularly prone to work-related anxiety. **Pippa Shawley** examines what is being done to help

anxiety, a figure 10 times higher than for the general population. The number of people experiencing depression was five times higher than the national average.

While the UK television industry has not been surveyed to the same extent, the findings of the Australian report galvanised the Film & Television Charity to launch a dedicated helpline earlier this year. It offers support for those experiencing depression, anxiety,

bullying, harassment and debt problems, among other issues.

"I think the majority of people who work in the industry absolutely love [it] because it's so creative and energetic," says Rachel Hillman, the charity's director of grants and programme development. "But, at the same time, we very much get the message that it can be very tough and very lonely. And I think this is exacerbated by an increasing freelance culture, so that there aren't the kind of support systems that more often tend to be present in paid employment, especially in larger organisations."

The line, which is run by trained staff, received around 150 calls in its first month. The majority of callers used it as a sounding board for a particular problem. Where appropriate, callers may be offered therapy, financial aid or other forms of support.

According to Ofcom estimates, 30,000 freelancers work across the UK's television industry. For those not



in permanent roles, this can mean the absence of benefits such as sick pay and pensions, as well as less job security, minimal management and irregular working hours.

In an already competitive industry, it can feel difficult to talk to an employer about a mental health issue or a negative experience. "You have a fear that you're going to be [seen as] this absolute problem child, and that no producer's ever going to want to work with you again because you're kicking up a fuss all the time," admits writer, comedian and presenter Jack Rooke.

"There's nothing more depressing than being told 'take it or leave it,'" adds Paul Evans, assistant national secretary of industry trade union Bectu. "A lot of people in this industry spend all of their lives structuring them so that they never get put into a position where someone says 'take it or leave it'"

The union's Eyes Half Shut campaign is currently lobbying the film and television industries to end the culture of long working hours, which can be harmful to both mental and physical health.

Those experiencing mental ill-health should seek professional advice, but, when it comes to wellbeing, there are some simple steps that everyone can follow. Mental health campaigner Natasha Devon admits that being a self-employed "chronic overworker" means she finds it hard to stop. "I delegated my working hours to my partner and if it was, say, 10:00pm and he could see that I was still working, he could say to me: 'Enough now, you've finished.'"

She's now campaigning for mental health first aid training to become mandatory in all workplaces to help freelancers, as well as employees, enjoy a healthier working environment.

For Jack Rooke, having regular conversations with commissioners and producers has helped iron out situations where the comedian has felt anxious. He's also benefited from having agents whose job it is to look out for him. "If I ever have any issues on a job, they are my first port of call because that's my HR manager, that's my confidant," he explains.

Looking after the mental health of employees is good business practice. Last year, the Prime Minister commissioned an independent review into how employers can better support the mental health of all people currently in employment.

The report found that poor mental

health costs the British economy up to £99bn each year. The cost to employers was between £32bn and £42bn. Over half of this cost comes from 'presenteeism' – where individuals are less productive due to mental ill-health while in work.

A further review by Deloitte found that the return on investment of workplace mental-health interventions was "overwhelmingly positive". The average return on each £1 spent was £4.20.

For small production companies, the idea of creating a healthy working environment might seem daunting, given the external pressures. But for Jonathan Stadlen, Managing Director of indie Knickerbockerglory, the solution was simple. "TV can be very pressured, very bullying and there are not a lot of options for talking about how you feel. I've tried to do the opposite of that."

Before setting up the business, Stadlen was ready to quit TV. "I was having a pretty horrible time, and the working environment was challenging, to say the least." He toyed with the idea of becoming a vicar – "to which my wife said: 'Absolutely no fucking way.'" His business plan to rent sailing boats had already been accepted when the opportunity arose for him to start his own company.

He used his negative experiences to build a new working culture, where people would look forward to coming to work. At Knickerbockerglory, which *Broadcast* last year crowned the best place to work in TV, staff benefit from an open-plan office where talking is encouraged, and parents are offered flexible working hours. There are also regular social activities, including barbeques, a company choir, annual sailing trips abroad and parties. A health insurance policy allows staff to access therapy should they need it.

While it's harder to offer the same opportunities to freelancers, Stadlen has developed a unique scheme where end-of-year profits are split between staff, freelancers and charities. Having worked with almost 300 freelancers last year, it isn't possible to base bonuses on performance reviews. Instead, every freelancer is rewarded based on the length of time they have spent with the company, regardless of their role.

"So, at the end of the financial year, if you're a runner or series producer, and you'd been with us for the whole of last year, you'd have got £2,500, which I think is quite good."

Whether that helps the company produce better programmes is hard to quantify, but Stadlen says it has certainly had an impact on people wanting to work on the programmes.

"We're probably doing as well as other people [making programmes]," he suggests, "but the most important thing is that you wake up in the morning happy, not thinking, 'Shit, I can't go to work.' Then, we wouldn't have any programmes at all." ■

## Thriving at work

The 'Thriving at Work' report recommends that employers implement 'mental health core standards' to achieve a healthier working environment:

- Producing, implementing and communicating a 'mental health at work' plan
- Developing mental health awareness among employees
- Encouraging open conversations about mental health and the support available to employees who are struggling
- Ensuring employees have a healthy work/life balance, opportunities to develop and good working conditions
- Encouraging good people management
- Routinely monitoring the mental health and wellbeing of employees.

## Resources and support

- **The Film & Television Charity's** free and confidential support line is open 24/7: 0800 054 00 00
- **Mental Health First Aid England** provides training on how to spot the early signs of poor mental health, as well as how to speak to colleagues and how to recommend further support: [mhfaengland.org.uk](http://mhfaengland.org.uk)
- Mental health charity **Mind** has a range of advice for employers and employees on encouraging wellbeing in the workplace: [mind.org.uk/workplace/](http://mind.org.uk/workplace/)
- If you are struggling you can call **Samaritans** at any time for free on 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

While the BBC expands in Scotland, **Simon Pitts**, appointed CEO of STV last August, is pursuing his own growth strategy. **Tara Conlan** reports

# New visions for TV in Scotland

**S**TV's new drama *The Victim*, a legal thriller set in Scotland and made for BBC One, is told through the eyes of both plaintiff and accused. All stories have two sides to them. The narrative concerning the changes going on in Scottish broadcasting is no different.

Glasgow-based STV has a new Chief Executive, Simon Pitts, formerly ITV's director of transformation and strategy. His new strategy has gone down well in the city and with some producers, but less so with certain journalists and politicians.

Meanwhile, the BBC is about to launch its long-awaited new Scottish channel, having gained approval last month from the regulator, Ofcom.

Pitts hit the headlines in May, when he unveiled his three-year plan to grow the company by closing STV2, its loss making local-TV station, with the loss of 59 jobs. Over the next three years, £15m from these savings will be reinvested in new content, partnerships and the STV Player. At the time, he said that the closure of STV2 was the "result of the challenging economics of local-TV and anticipated increased competition from BBC Scotland".

The new BBC channel should see more of the licence fee raised in Scotland spent there. The corporation admits that, in recent years, it has returned just 55% to the Scottish creative economy, compared with 95% in Wales. Ofcom says the corporation should spend the same ratio in each nation.

The new BBC Scottish station has an annual budget of £32m and will offer a new 9:00pm news bulletin. The regulator believes the channel will

"broaden the options available to viewers in Scotland, provide a greater Scottish focus in its news coverage and deliver more content designed to reflect the lives of people in Scotland".

To add to the mix, Channel 4 and the BBC are increasing their spending, and Glasgow is on the shortlist of sites for Channel 4's new outside-London HQ. Ofcom has specified that at least 8% of BBC network programming budget must now be spent in Scotland. Channel 4 is upping the proportion of its content budget that it spends in the UK nations and regions from the current quota of 35% to a new voluntary target of 50% by 2023.

The STV Chief Executive says that the changes he is introducing will "put Scottish TV production back on the map" by "investing in new programming and in digital and simplifying the organisation to set us up for growth". The company's output include the veteran BBC series *Antiques Road Trip* but he wants STV and other Scotland-based production companies to expand their number of returning series.

He also wants to stop the brain drain of talent to London and the US caused by insufficient local TV work.

"Like any business, we're having to make some tough choices to fund that new investment, but I'm confident we've got the right strategy," says Pitts.

He was grilled by MSPs about those "tough choices" – and about a one-off payment to compensate him for having to give up his ITV shares. "Quite rightly, questions are asked when you make changes leading to job cuts, which is very hard. Those decisions aren't taken lightly," he insists.

Although "we're very proud of STV's news, which performs fantastically well on the main channel", Pitts acknowledges that "news consumption is changing fast" – many people get their news on social media.

He wants STV to adapt by introducing more multimedia journalists and new technology, but the station will remain "as committed as ever to local Scottish news". He adds: "We're also fully committed to being Scotland's public service broadcaster. We haven't, in delivering this new strategy, sought to change a single clause of our PSB licences across STV North or STV Central. We're briefing Ofcom fully that we are not seeking to amend any of our obligations."

Critics have voiced fears that the pursuit of returnable shows and formats could lead to less news and current affairs. Pitts disagrees: "We will still be spending more than twice as much money on news and current affairs than on any other genres put together."

Closing STV2 "hasn't been an easy decision" but "the truth is that the audience isn't there for this service at the moment, despite our best efforts".

He points out that the 5:00pm magazine show was attracting 2,100 viewers, while the 7:00pm bulletin got only 1,800.

**'THIS IS NOT  
IN ANY WAY  
A STRATEGY  
TO PREPARE  
STV FOR SALE  
TO ITV OR TO  
ANYONE ELSE'**





Simon Pitts

STV

"It's just not right to ask our teams to make programmes that no one is watching. The economics of local TV are very tough and the expected launch of BBC Scotland will make those economics even tougher. We have made a cumulative loss of more than £3m on local-TV since we started four years ago."

Pitts says he has "no Scottish ancestry [but] a love of the country". He will be moving to Glasgow later this year. There is a perception that his arrival, along with another former ITV colleague, David Bergh, as a non-executive director, hints that STV is heading for a sale to ITV. This would, in turn, make ITV more attractive to buyers.

Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said recently that this "is not a move I would wish to see". Pitts was quizzed by MSPs regarding STV shareholder Crystal Amber, the activist fund whose investments have a history of being sold.

So, can Pitts see why people are making assumptions about a sale? "It's the wrong assumption. This is not in any way a strategy to prepare STV for sale to ITV or to anyone else. That's not what we are doing... my job is to put in place a compelling growth strategy, not just for digital but for broadcast and production, and to deliver across the company."

One of his priorities is attracting more young viewers by making shows for STV Player. The broadcaster also has a

deal with children's video app Hopster. And the new partnerships include a tie-up with Elaine Collins, producer of *Vera* and *Shetland*, who is developing her next drama with STV. "We have big ambitions for STV Productions," says Pitts. "We're already developing ideas for the likes of Facebook, YouTube Premium, Netflix and Amazon."

These initiatives do not enjoy universal support. SNP culture spokesperson Hannah Bardell MP, who once worked at STV, worries that the changes might lead to a "homogenous" company: "STV's been a significant part of our landscape and ecosystem. I hope that will not change. Its distinct nature... is important. I wrote to Simon to express concern because I had spoken to people at the company. There was a level of concern that STV was being teed up to be sold on to ITV."

She paid tribute to Pitts's predecessor, Rob Woodward, and ex-STV Productions Managing Director Alan Clements, for "a huge amount of work to make sure that STV kept its branding and its identity". She recognises "that there were challenges with STV2 [but] why not turn that around and do something different? It's hugely disappointing."

With Brexit looming, Bardell wants STV and other broadcasters in Scotland to ensure that "they have journalists all across the country". She adds that it is "a shame Simon sees the BBC channel

as competition: he should see it as an opportunity that will drive more content to people".

Although she believes the new BBC channel's budget is "reasonable", the MP has "concerns that it maybe doesn't have enough to do what some of us would like to see it do".

Ofcom, however, appears sanguine: "Some stakeholders have questioned whether the budget allocated to the channel would be sufficient for the BBC to deliver on its plans, and have called for additional investment or a different focus for the channel. While no full details on the channel's schedule are available yet, we are satisfied that the proposal as it is will deliver public value."

"There's more opportunity than ever," says Pact CEO John McVay of the changes occurring in Scotland. "If Simon Pitts gets it right and generates better-quality production coming out of Scotland, that's good for the Scottish community," he said. McVay adds that producers should "look for the creative opportunities coming down the line" as new money flows into Scotland from both Channel 4 and the BBC.

Clements, who is setting up his own production company, says that increased spending represents a shift from "the wind in our face to the wind being behind us, and suddenly doors are opening". ■



## Regulation

In the wake of the Skripal affair, **Stewart Purvis** analyses Ofcom's attitude to the Putin-backed broadcaster RT

# Ofcom's dilemma

**A** newly appointed boss is addressing journalists in the newsroom. They know him only as an outspoken TV presenter with strong links to their government. He tells them: "The time of detached, unbiased journalism is over. Objectivity is a myth forced upon us. Editorial policy will be based on the love of our country."

When a journalist in the audience tries to differentiate between "country" and "government", his new boss tells him, with more than a hint of menace: "Let me give you some advice. If you are planning any subversive activities, I can tell you now that it goes right against my plan."

Such is the state of the world that you can imagine this happening in many countries, including, extraordinarily, the US. The least surprising explanation is that this scene unfolded in Moscow, shot by a journalist on his phone in 2013. It is now part of a documentary, *Our New President*, which premiered in the UK at the recent Sheffield Doc/Fest.

Dmitry Kiselyov took up his new role when Vladimir Putin merged the

Kremlin's news agency and radio station into a company called Rossiya Segodnya, which translates as "Russia Today". Its sister news organisation is the other Russia Today, the TV news channel now known as RT, and they share an editor-in-chief, Margarita Simonyan.

So, what does a British regulator make of a TV channel that transmits across the UK being openly owned by the same state that, according to the British Prime Minister, poisoned Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury? And how does "objectivity is a myth" fit with the British requirement for "due impartiality and due accuracy"?

The answers, based on the past few months, are that these are particularly difficult areas for Ofcom to navigate.

On 13 March, when Theresa May gave Vladimir Putin until midnight to explain how the former spy had been poisoned, Ofcom said that, "should the UK investigating authorities determine that there was an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the UK, we would consider this relevant to our ongoing duty to be satisfied that RT is fit and proper" to hold its broadcasting licence.

The UK Government did, subsequently, decide that there was "an

unlawful use of force" by Russia. But, a month later, the UK regulator had gone decidedly cool on linking a state's actions with its ownership of an Ofcom licence.

"It would be inappropriate for Ofcom always to place decisive weight" on any act that a state committed, said the regulator. It was "not possible or appropriate for us to seek to reach an independent determination on the events in Salisbury". Instead, Ofcom preferred to consider RT's "broadcasting conduct" and was "intensively" monitoring RT's output. And, as it happened, seven new investigations into due impartiality were ready to begin.

"Since the events in Salisbury we have observed a significant increase in the number of programmes on the RT service that warrant investigation," said Ofcom. Another three investigations commenced the following month.

This made a total of 11 standards cases, if you include one, started last year, regarding the use on air of allegedly fake tweets.

What Ofcom has done is to get out of the row about who did what to whom in Salisbury and focus instead on what RT broadcast about it.





Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin interviewed on RT in June 2013

The Ofcom statement had one particularly curious line about TV-Novosti, the Russian Federation-owned company that holds RT's licence: "Until recently, TV Novosti's overall compliance record had not been materially out of line with other broadcasters."

My own examination of the available data on cases of due impartiality, due accuracy and related offences shows that RT has had 10 breaches recorded against it since 2010. In other words, more than twice as many as any other broadcaster.

Quite why Ofcom would frame the comparison with other broadcasters on "overall compliance", including adherence to non-editorial regulations, such as advertising minutes, is unclear.

Its own figures show that "the majority of the breaches, and both of the more serious breaches, were in programming relating to Russia's foreign policy and related to the requirement for due impartiality".

The breaches related to programmes about Libya (2011 and 2012), Syria (2012, 2013 and 2014), Ukraine (2014), Turkey (2016) and Nato (2016).

The regulatory requirement goes back to the Television Act 1954, which

set up ITV. Section 3 (c) tasked the then-regulator, the ITA, with ensuring that "any news given in the programmes (in whatever form) is presented with due accuracy and impartiality".

When asked what due impartiality meant, the government of the day replied that it was whatever the regulator deemed it to be.

The rule was later extended to the BBC and Channel 4. Previously secret Downing Street papers released in 2016 show that, back in 1990, the Prime Minister's political secretary, John Whittingdale, told Margaret Thatcher that the BBC and Channel 4 had "consistently abused" the impartiality requirements.

As it has turned out, the broadcasters that have found "due impartiality" a useful wedge are those from outside the UK, such as Fox News and RT, which bring a very particular point of view into the country.

The limitations and qualifications that Ofcom has to take into account in enforcing "due impartiality" were listed by the Competition and Markets Authority in the context of its review of the proposed acquisition of Sky by 21st Century Fox.

The CMA concluded that "broadcasters are, to some extent, able to adapt their own approach to the presentation of news and current affairs more generally".

The qualifications that create this situation include recognising the importance of freedom of expression, taking account of the context of the broadcast and "the expectation of the audience".

As the Ofcom executive responsible for enforcing impartiality for two and a half years, I was sometimes heard to mutter that "audience expectation" was another way of saying: "What else would viewers expect from a right-wing American TV station or one owned by the Kremlin?"

Ofcom says that it will make the outcome of its investigations public as soon as possible. The process that the RT cases are going through is carefully observed by Ofcom's legal team, led by

its redoubtable general counsel, Polly Weitzman, who has been at Ofcom since its creation.

If breaches are recorded against RT/TV-Novosti the Ofcom lawyers will highlight the importance of precedent and past performance in determining if a sanction is appropriate and what that sanction should be.

In 2012, Ofcom revoked the licence of the Iranian news channel Press TV, which, as a result, has no longer been able to broadcast in the UK.

The state-funded broadcaster's English-language service had breached several rules over editorial control and had refused to pay a fine. It seemed that Tehran – which condemned "a clear example of censorship" by "the media arm of the Royal Family" –

rather enjoyed the fight and has continued broadcasting online.

The broadcasting battles between Britain and Iran continue to this day, with BBC World recently deploring what it called Tehran's "targeted attack" on BBC Persian staff, in which it froze their assets.

Could it just be that, in 2018, it might suit RT's owners in Moscow to be able to accuse Britain of censorship and retaliate in some way against the BBC?

Which brings us back to the sayings of Kremlin news boss Dmitry Kiselyov. When, in 2016, the BBC's Moscow correspondent, Steve Rosenberg, asked Kiselyov if he was the Kremlin's chief propagandist, he replied: "If I make propaganda, then you make it, too. But if you're not doing propaganda, if you're just doing your job, that applies to me, too. We're doing the same thing, we're colleagues."

So, if "tit-for-tat" or "colleague for colleague" would be the likely retaliation for any Ofcom sanction that directly impacts on RT's transmissions, perhaps a large fine would be the most appropriate outcome in all the circumstances. ■

**Stewart Purvis was Ofcom's partner for content and standards (2007-10). He is a non-executive director at Channel 4 and writes here in a personal capacity.**

## 'THE TIME OF DETACHED, UNBIASED JOURNALISM IS OVER... EDITORIAL POLICY WILL BE BASED ON THE LOVE OF OUR COUNTRY'

# A tale of two cities



Sky

One of the standout drama launches of the year is unquestionably Sky Atlantic's *Patrick Melrose*. The five-parter memorably opens in London with a heroin-addled Melrose, played magisterially by Benedict Cumberbatch, receiving news of his abusive father's death in New York. Melrose then travels there to bring home his father's ashes. While in Manhattan, he embarks on an epic drugs binge. Expect the erstwhile *Sherlock* star to win multiple awards for this astonishing performance.

Heroin aside, *Patrick Melrose's* opening scenes neatly reflect the transatlantic nature of *Two Cities*, the production company behind the serial.

*Two Cities* is run by two of the best-known executives in British TV – the former BBC One and BBC Two controller, Channel 4 boss and Chair of Universal Television Michael Jackson (who

## Production

**Tim Dams** talks to the high-profile founders of the production company responsible for the acclaimed drama *Patrick Melrose*

now lives in New York), and Wall to Wall founder and ex-CEO Alex Graham.

The pair have known one another for a long time. Jackson hired Graham in the late 1980s as a consultant on his seminal Channel 4 series *The Media Show*. They have been in regular contact ever since.

In 2014, Jackson approached Graham about working together, soon after Graham had left his *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *New Tricks* indie following its 2010 sale to Warner Bros.

Jackson's proposition was simple: they should set up a drama-focused production company. "Alex had been in drama quite successfully at Wall to Wall. These things are better with two heads rather than one," he says.

Jackson wanted to concentrate on drama because it was something new to him as a producer, and also because "drama feels like the richest and most interesting part of television at the moment".



## 'THERE ARE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO DO INTERESTING WORK THAN AT ANY TIME I CAN REMEMBER'

He cites the “explosion” of streaming services, such as Netflix, Amazon and Hulu, which has opened up new categories of business for producers. Shows can be successful with much smaller audiences, which means that companies like his can win a rich and diverse range of commissions. Meanwhile, increasingly sophisticated audience measurement systems suggest that broadcasters understand how valuable niche shows can be to them.

Initially, Graham wavered. He’d just come out of 25 years at Wall to Wall. “My first reaction was: ‘I’m not sure. I need a year to decompress.’”

But, 12 months later, the idea of working together still resonated. “Instinctively, I agreed with Michael,” says Graham. “We are in a golden age of risk-taking. It is competitive, but there are more opportunities to do interesting work than at any time I can remember.”

*Patrick Melrose* is Two Cities’ first production to air. It is very much Jackson’s project and, clearly, the show has been a time-consuming job to assemble. Originally developed by Channel 4, it was finally co-produced by Sky Atlantic and Showtime.

Talking in Two Cities’ Somerset House office in London, Jackson and Graham make it clear that *Patrick Melrose* is just the beginning of a journey for Two Cities. Backed by BBC Worldwide, which has a 25% stake, the indie last year hired BBC Northern Ireland drama head Stephen Wright (*Line of Duty*, *The Fall*) as creative director to help build a slate along with development executive Janet Tyler.

Two Cities now has half a dozen projects in script development with traditional broadcasters and streamers, and a similar number in unpaid development. The projects range from “boutique” dramas, such as *Patrick Melrose*, to “good, popular and long-running television series and serials”.

Jackson stresses the transatlantic nature of the company: “Because I am in New York and Alex and the team are here, we very much want to work out of both the UK and the US.”

But that doesn’t mean producing bland, mid-Atlantic drama – the

reputation in the past for most international co-productions. Graham says the emergence of “niche-global” programming – bold and innovative shows possessing a real clarity of purpose – has swept away old preconceptions of co-produced drama.

He cites *Patrick Melrose* as an example: “It is *Brideshead Revisited* meets *Trainspotting*. It is not an easy watch and is the antithesis of what we used to talk about as mid-Atlantic fare.”

One of Two Cities’ upcoming projects is certain to create huge waves on both sides of the Atlantic when it is shown. Jackson is executive producing *Fire and Fury*, based on Michael Wolff’s controversial book examining the first year of Donald Trump’s presidency.

Jackson knows Wolff well. Nine months ago, he helped to sell the project to Amazon Studios – only for it to be dropped following a management overhaul at the online giant. “The new management were very afraid of it. Maybe not afraid, but they didn’t know what to do with it,” says the one-time Channel 4 CEO.

Shortly afterwards, Endeavor Content “wrote a cheque for \$1m” for the TV and film rights, with Two Cities attached as producer. In an inspired appointment for a drama depicting Donald Trump, Jay Roach (*Game Change*, *Austin Powers*) has been named as director; a writer is still in the process of being hired.

The Endeavor deal neatly illustrates both the opportunities and the challenges facing smaller producers such as Two Cities operating in an increasingly global and consolidated industry. It is getting harder to hold on to IP.

“One of the things that we have learned quite quickly is that we have to be smarter in the range of deals that we do. We have to be cleverer about

packaging deals,” says Graham. “*Fire and Fury* is a good example of that. Michael’s relationship with the other Michael positioned us.

“But we couldn’t afford to take that book off the market. When Endeavor turned up, and was willing to write a cheque, we had to go along with that. But, because we built relationships and commitments, we were able to partner with Endeavor.”

Graham says that Two Cities probably won’t end up with any ownership of the project. “But we will be creatively involved and will, hopefully, be well paid for our involvement. You have to be more flexible and fleet of foot now.”

That said, Graham believes that the industry offers a much better environment for independent producers than when he launched Wall to Wall. He notes that, back then, there was just one buyer for ideas – Channel 4.

Competition among a legion of new drama indies may be tough, but so, too, is it among broadcasters and streamers. Jackson says that top talent is “being sucked into the orbit of the streamers,” citing Netflix’s *The Crown* as an example.

But he doesn’t seem convinced by the argument, advanced by BBC Director-General Tony Hall, that the UK broadcasting industry is in danger of being taken over by US tech firms.

“There is always material [that the streamers] will find hard to get, such as *Happy Valley* or *Ackley Bridge* or *Line of Duty*... I think that British buyers still have quite a lot of commissioning power. And they should do, as they are closer to the ground. They will probably have to be faster, and will have to take more risks with younger, less established talent.”

Given their background, one would have thought that two well-connected and experienced executives such as Jackson and Graham would be among the first in line to pick up commissions of this type.

Their track record is helpful, acknowledges Jackson: “It might get you in the room or get your email answered. But you still have to have a good project.” ■

# OUR FRIEND IN MOSCOW

**I**t was late March when BBC Newsgathering offered me a lifetime opportunity – to report from Russia during the World Cup. My response? Heck, yes! It was a no-brainer. Only hours after the initial buzz faded and I had spoken with mates did concerns arise.

Would I experience racial abuse in Russia? Would I be able to hack the cultural and language barriers while consistently providing quality reports? I knew without a doubt that this would be a step up from the domestic reporting that I was used to.

The more I thought about it, the more I fixated on the potential pitfalls of being in Russia as a mixed-race, British journalist. Nevertheless, my curiosity and sense of adventure prevailed. Here I am, writing from Moscow, watching Uruguay butcher Portugal.

So, how's it going? Cool, I think.

That said, I am aware that anything I experience of Russia during the World Cup isn't the most accurate reflection of normal life here.

Thousands of fans from across the globe are colouring the streets of Moscow and the other host cities; every corner turned presents a new, glittering display of fandom. It's clear that the Russian police and authorities are doing their utmost to show an inclusive, cosmopolitan veneer.

As a deployable reporter in Russia for BBC News, I've been given the brilliant job of finding stories that are a bit more offbeat than the sports headlines and Fifa updates.

My first few days in Russia saw me follow a group of Nigerian fans who'd flown in from Lagos. I reported on

Reporting from  
Russia on the  
World Cup, **Ashley  
John-Baptiste** finds  
that the vibe is  
surprisingly inclusive



Vitae Photography

their experiences of Russian culture and how they felt perceived by white Russians. To my surprise, they were remarkably positive.

I even attended a fan party they invited me to. There, I met some black Russians and found myself listening to Afrobeat and hip-hop while eating jollof rice... all in Moscow. That night definitely felt like a night out in Brixton.

Other stories I've covered include the Iranian women who came to Russia to watch the footy in stadiums (something that they have been banned from doing back home), the experiences of disabled fans, and an interracial couple in St Petersburg who are using the World Cup as an oppor-

tunity to introduce Russians to reggae music. With them, I got to witness how many young, white Russians are embracing reggae music and Jamaican culture with enthusiasm. This was something I didn't expect.

In the lead-up to the World Cup, of course, Brits received continual updates on the Skripal poisoning and the accompanying tensions in British-Russian diplomatic relations. And then there was Danny Rose's warning to his family: avoid visiting Russia because of concerns over racism.

I admit that these headlines seasoned my already sceptical view of race relations in Russia and how Russians see British people.

It's against this backdrop that you can see why I was bowled over and delighted by the Nigerians' experience, and that of the reggae duo.

Of course, in my bid for impartiality I reflected that, for many people in Russia, racism and discrimination are still very present.

Despite all of these great cultural encounters, something happened to me on a train last week. A drunk Russian called me a nigger as I was queuing for the train stop.

When I told staff on the train, they simply said to me, via my translator, that it was not their duty to solve conflict. I felt violated, but I am choosing to see it as an insignificant blip in what has been an incredible trip so far.

The incident won't override the many positive cultural encounters I have had. If any of the World Cup dust can leave its mark on Russia, the future looks promising here.

**Ashley John-Baptiste is a reporter with BBC News.**





# The fine art of the reboot

Over the past few years, *Love Island*, *Dancing on Ice* and *Blind Date* have been dusted down and put back on public display, bringing audiences to broadcasters and profits to producers.

If it were always so simple, broadcasters would now be planning the return of *At Home with the Eubanks* and *Young, Dumb and Living off Mum*, and everything in between.

It isn't. Rebooting shows successfully is a complicated art, as the audience discovered at an RTS event in June, when a panel of top TV execs discussed how to breathe new life into old formats.

"Making shows great again" took place a day after the triumphant

## Content

If you think it's easy to relaunch a hit format, think again, hears **Matthew Bell**

return of ITV2's *Love Island*, which attracted a peak audience of 3.4 million during its series opener. It averaged 2.95 million viewers, more than double the audience for the previous year's first episode.

The format first surfaced in 2005 as *Celebrity Love Island* on ITV, was refitted as *Love Island* for a further series and then scrapped. It returned in 2015 on ITV2. "When it came back, it

managed to find a young, fresh, genuinely new audience for something that still brought an original fan base," said Ella Umansky, head of formats support at ITV Studios, which makes the reality show in partnership with the Motion Content Group.

"Having that kernel of the original brand to latch on to gave ITV2 a little bit of confidence that there would be some press pick-up and a few original fans who wanted to come back to it," she said. "But [then we needed to] modernise it – you can't just copy and paste it for a new generation."

"We took a risk to de-format the format and allow the producers to make the show that is coming through organically and follow those stories that are coming out from the contestants. ►



## QUESTION & ANSWER

**Q** What do you look for in potential Love Islanders?

**A** **Ella Umansky:** It's all about personality.... You're asking people to bare their souls... so, you've got to have contestant welfare at heart. You've got to feel that someone is going to cope well over six weeks of having the nation's eyes on them....

We also want to know what makes them tick, because so much of the format is about trying to pair people up. We are trying to find people who are going to surprise you....

Casting is an area where you really can take risks and push the boundaries.

**Q** Where are the black, female hosts of Saturday-night shows?

**A** **Camilla Lewis:** Every single channel is obsessed about diverse talent and has been for a

long time – it is not news in the industry.... If we don't have diverse talent, we're not representing Britain. [But] I don't do Saturday-night shows, so you might well be right.

**Q** Are old shows being brought back because commissioners are too risk-averse to green-light original ideas?

**A** **Camilla Lewis:** Commissioners are anxious [about] taking a risk on something new.... Trying to persuade commissioners is really hard and what you need is real confidence....

It's a really insecure market... for certain channels more than others. Channel 5 is pretty robust in terms of how it approaches commissioning, because it has a leader [Ben Frow] with a very clear [view] on what he wants to do.

**A** **Sean Doyle:** *Blind Date* was risky for us, more so because we don't do entertainment.... I didn't feel like it was an easy [option].

**A** **Richard McKerrow:** Risks are still being taken. It's our responsibility as producers to persuade [commissioners] to take risks.

*Bake Off* was a massive risk – it took me four years to persuade them....

[At Channel 4, CEO] Alex Mahon appointing Ian Katz as director of programmes is a risk. What Ian is starting to do is exciting – he commissioned a fast-turnaround documentary [*Mo Salah: A Football Fairy Tale*] that was made in 12 days.... It's too easy sometimes to blame broadcasters and commissioners.

**Q** How do you make shows travel globally?

**A** **Ella Umansky:** Listen to what the market is asking for.... It's about walking the fine line between maintaining your brand and saying, "No, that is not *Love Island* or *Come Dine With Me* – you can't do that," and listening to people when they say, "That's not going to work here."

We represent *Hell's Kitchen*, which everyone thinks they know as a big, bad, shouty show with Gordon Ramsay, where he swears at everybody, which, in some countries, it is. [But] we have a female chef in Brazil, which gives the show a different [feel]. And in Bulgaria, it's a stripped show, three or four nights a week.

## New talent in an old recipe

In 2017, *The Great British Bake Off* swapped channels to Channel 4 and shed most of its presenters and judges – but it has remained hugely popular with critics and viewers alike.

At the RTS early-evening event, Love Productions co-founder Richard McKerrow discussed the transfer of his indie's hit show from the BBC. 'It was to protect the format,' he said, adding: 'It wasn't all about the money, as had been reported.'

'Ultimately, we felt that the format was under threat remaining at the BBC – it wasn't something that we wanted to do; it was something we felt impelled to do.'

'Channel 4 felt the safest place for [*Bake Off*], because it is a public service broadcaster. If you look at the history of our productions, nearly all our programmes have been for the BBC or Channel 4, a few for ITV. Essentially, we're a public service producer.'

Post-transfer – with original judge Paul Hollywood joined by Prue Leith and two new hosts, Sandi Toksvig and Noel Fielding – *The Great British Bake Off* remains the same show. 'That's because the format was the heart and soul,' explained McKerrow. 'We had a saying, which goes back to [the first series in] 2010, "Love the bakers; love the baking." And that is still absolutely the case.'

McKerrow described *Bake Off* as Love's most 'radical' programme. 'It doesn't look radical,' he said. 'But it's possibly one of the most all-inclusive, multicultural [shows], with cakes and baking skills from all over the world, characters that are from anywhere and everywhere.'

He added that *Bake Off* cast people who are passionate about baking, not 'about being on telly'.

Add these ingredients to the new presenters – the co-founder of the Women's Equality Party (Toksvig) and a 'gothic rock 'n' roller' (Fielding) – and the show, he said, became the 'all-inclusive story of Britain'.

› "Then, you get something that feels 100% new and modern."

Huge numbers of people applied to star in the latest season of *Love Island*. "We are very careful to make sure it has a diverse [cast]," said Umansky. "It's not just young hot things with hot bods. It is that, to a degree, but also they are people who you can see yourself in, who have got real characters."

Richard McKerrow, the co-founder of Love Productions, which makes *The Great British Bake Off*, said: "I'm not interested in what's been done before." He argued that the popularity of *Love Island* had nothing to do with it being a rebooted old format.

Rather, it is enjoying success because "it's bloody good and really, really well made. And because it's doing something different and distinct that hasn't been done somewhere else."

"That's the real test – has it ever been done before? That is what drove us with *Bake Off*."

He added: "A lot of the best ideas are big and simple – and can be explained in 30 seconds."

ITV brought *Dancing on Ice*, last seen on screens in 2014, out of the deep freeze this year. "When everybody knows what the show is, you can move it on a lot easier because you don't have to remind people [about] the basic show. You can develop a new look and feel to it," argued Umansky.

*Blind Date*, which originally ran on ITV from 1985 to 2003, was revived by Channel 5 last year, with Paul O'Grady replacing one of his great friends, the late Cilla Black, as host.

Channel 5 commissioning editor Sean Doyle described the dating show as the antithesis of programmes that are "too cool and too modern". *Blind Date*, he said, was "sweet and warm".

The first series of the returning show, said Doyle, was "very respectful of the format". With the second series, which began in June, he revealed that the production team has moved beyond the original format, taking more risks with the casting. "It's more free," he added. "Paul's gone rogue in a big way."

One other major change to the boy-meets-girl formula of the original

is that *Blind Date* now welcomes LGBTQ participants.

*Escape to the Country*, which has been on air since 2002, is one of many formats that Camilla Lewis, now the joint CEO of Curve Media, has worked on over the years.

When she was head of factual features at TalkbackThames, she helped to save the house-hunting show from the BBC axe. "It's still on air and still one of the greatest hit shows that BBC Two has ever had," said Lewis. "What's at the heart of a [successful format] is good storytelling."

*The Great British Bake Off*, *Blind Date* and *Love Island*, argued Lewis, are beneficiaries of a new "niceness" in broadcasting. "Television has woken up in the past couple of years and [decided to] do nice stuff," she suggested. "*Love Island* might tease, but it's not mean and nasty. *Blind Date* is a total warm bath."

"Viewers don't want to see meanness and spite," agreed Sean Doyle. "They want warmth and kindness, which is really what we wanted to [capture] on *Blind Date*."

Umansky said that "all of the big brands that last or keep coming back, they've all got something at heart that is universal. They all come down to love, food, and money – something you can really identify with."

Hosts, too, are important. Doyle said that securing O'Grady to front *Blind Date* was instrumental to its success.

"*Top Gear* is a really good example of a great format, which had super hosts," pointed out Lewis. "[On the BBC,] the format has floundered without the great hosts." These hosts – Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May – launched a new show, *The Grand Tour*, on Amazon in late 2016.

"The hosts have floundered a bit without the format," she argued, adding: "There's no one algorithm; if there was, we'd all be multimillionaires." ■

***The RTS early-evening event 'Making shows great again' was held at the Cavendish Conference Centre in central London on 5 June. It was chaired by entertainment journalist Caroline Frost and produced by Martin Stott and Dan Korn.***



Jayde Adams hosted an inspirational ceremony on 22 June at BFI Southbank

# RTS Student Television Awards 2018

Undergraduate Animation and Judges' Award: *Laymun*

## UNDERGRADUATE AWARDS

### Undergraduate Animation

#### *Laymun*

Catherine Prowse and Hannah Quinn, Kingston University

'Beautifully executed and showing great use of animation, this is almost the perfect short film. Visually and narratively accomplished, *Laymun* deals with a complex concept on a human level.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Consent**, Aoife Moisselle and Tara Woods, The National Film School, Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Dún Laoghaire
- **Liv**, Sunniva Fluge Hole, Laura Perkins and Team, Arts University Bournemouth

### Undergraduate Comedy and Entertainment

#### **Best Men**

Andrew Ashworth, Edinburgh College of Art

'Good storytelling, visually appealing and funny. Well-paced and spot on with the characters. Nicely edited for comedy.'

#### **Nominee:**

- **Potty the Plant**, Aeddan Sussex and Taliah Lamont, Middlesex University

### Undergraduate Drama

#### *Pernicio*

Dave Fox, Laura Gaynor, Alfie Hollingsworth and Conor Donoghue, The National Film School, IADT, Dún Laoghaire

'Highly ambitious and humorous, with a clever script and excellent production values, this film felt real and incredibly well balanced. Featuring accomplished and complete performances from the actors, this drama felt like a finished product.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Antonio**, Alison Still, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
- **Lost in Loss**, Gaius Brown, Jake River Parker, Heather Davenport and Jodie Horne, University of Central Lancashire ►



**1 Undergraduate Craft Skills – Editing:**  
*Taraash*

**2 Undergraduate Short Feature:**  
*Mm-hmm*

**3 Undergraduate Comedy and Entertainment:** *Best Men*

**4 Undergraduate Factual:**  
*Hear Me Now*

**5 Undergraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork:** *Lost in Loss*

**6 Host:** *Jayde Adams*

**7 Undergraduate Drama:** *Pernicio*

The RTS Student Television Awards 2018 reward outstanding work produced during the 2016/17 academic year. Undergraduate entries were first

judged at a regional level by their local RTS Centre in the winter of 2017. The winning films from each RTS Centre, along with all postgraduate

entries, were then judged nationally in April 2018. No nominations are accepted for the Judges' Award.

All pictures: Richard Kendal



## Undergraduate Factual

### **Hear Me Now**

Maria Craig, Josefin Dahlin, Hannah McKelvie and Joel Rock, University of Stirling  
'Fantastic insight into a very sensitive and moving story... beautifully told.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Fallen Angels**, Kathryn Berry, University of Bolton
- **Taraash**, Ishan Siddiqui, Hugh Clegg, Carlotta Grimaldi and Charlotte Field, University of Leeds

## Undergraduate News

### **Music on Prescription**

Anna Butler, Nottingham Trent University  
'Featuring lots of different strong voices and characters, this uplifting film was very well told and technically accomplished. It was ready for broadcast and showed a sharp eye for storytelling.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Craig's Story**, Megan Levers, University of Sheffield
- **Life in Europe**, Martina Moscariello, University of Salford

## Undergraduate Short Feature

### **Mm-hmm**

Martha Halliday and Hannah McNally, Kingston University  
'Well styled and natural, featuring great animation, this film was incredibly moving and emotive, a powerful piece of work.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Morris by Himself**, Ryan Morris, Chris Norman, Adam Waugh and David Kelly, University for the Creative Arts
- **#Jumpfrompaper**, Giorgia Perini, Staffordshire University

## Undergraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

### **Gaius Brown – Lost in Loss**

University of Central Lancashire  
'Good lighting with excellent operating, the camerawork in this film really stood out and showcased the director of photography's eye for a shot.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Adam Waugh – Morris by Himself**, University for the Creative Arts
- **Hugh Clegg – Taraash**, University of Leeds

## Undergraduate Craft Skills – Editing

### **Charlotte Field and Hugh Clegg – Taraash**

University of Leeds  
'Great pacing, interesting cuts and techniques showcased the skill and talent of the editor.'



Undergraduate News: *Music on Prescription*

Richard Kendal

#### **Nominees:**

- **Chris Norman – Morris by Himself**, University for the Creative Arts
- **Conor Donoghue – Pernicio**, National Film School, IADT, Dún Laoghaire

## Undergraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

**Sunniva Fluge Hole, Laura Perkins, Lara Frank and Ching Apple Toh – Liv**  
Arts University Bournemouth

'Beautiful and well made. The look and feel of the film were incredibly well thought out and executed.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Gaius Brown and Jake River Parker – Lost in Loss**, University of Central Lancashire
- **Fiona Mitchell – Pernicio**, National Film School, IADT, Dún Laoghaire

## Undergraduate Craft Skills – Sound

**Max Ellis and Lulu Ladd – Liv**  
Arts University Bournemouth

'Very creative use of sound helped to tell the story beautifully.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Aeddan Sussex, David Lee Stothard and Baden Jack Burns – Potty the Plant**, Middlesex University
- **Charlotte Field and Hugh Clegg – Taraash**, University of Leeds

## POSTGRADUATE AWARDS

### Postgraduate Animation

#### **Hilal ('Crescent')**

Hakim Ismail, Chourouk Zarkaoui, Sofia El Khyari, Elena Magee and Team, Royal College of Art

'A disconcerting, uncomfortable film that tells a powerful story with great poignancy and impact. Particularly strong use of sound and distinctive design.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Poles Apart**, Paloma Baeza, Ser En Low, Jon Muschamp, Paula Gimenez and Team, National Film and Television School
- **Snow White Cologne**, Amanda Eliasson, Royal College of Art

### Postgraduate Comedy and Entertainment

#### **Saving Faith**

Alex Dizer, John Higgins, SORCHA BRADFORD, Sashko Micevski and Team, National Film and Television School

'The whole thing was brilliant. It was fresh, original and stand-out. Casting was gold. It had a touch of *Bake Off* and felt like a postcard of the world.'

#### **Nominees:**

- **Against All Odds**, Lucy Smith, Jamie Minty and Team, National Film and Television School
- **Comeback Kid**, Ian Robertson, Nathan Craig, Sam Steiner and Team, National Film and Television School ►





All pictures: Richard Kendal

**1** Postgraduate Comedy and Entertainment: *Saving Faith*

**2** Postgraduate Drama: *Wild Horses*

**3** Postgraduate News: *Social Media Shaming*

**4** Postgraduate Craft Skills – Production Design: *Poles Apart*

**5** Postgraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork: *Comeback Kid*

**6** Postgraduate Factual: *Acta Non Verba*

**7** Postgraduate Animation: *Hilal ('Crescent')*

**8** Postgraduate Short Feature: *Cupid*

## Postgraduate Drama

### **Wild Horses**

Rory Alexander Stewart, Rebecca Smith, Samira Oberberg, Celestria Kimmins and Team, National Film and Television School

‘Enjoyable, well-shot and funny with a strong female character. This accomplished film took a risk [and] pulled it off with a lot of heart and imagination.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Come Out of the Woods**, Jonny Blair, Holly Carrington, Shane Crowley and Anna MacDonald and Team, National Film and Television School

► **Léo**, Julian Alexander, Pilar Cartró Benavides, Luis Zarzo Escabias, Milda Baginskaite and Team, The Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University

## Postgraduate Factual

### **Acta Non Verba**

Yvann Yagchi, Fawzia Mahmood, Aurora Vögeli and Team, National Film and Television School

‘A very brave and compelling film, which draw you into the story. Featuring great access, this was a strong and authentic film told in a very natural and impressive way.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **A Secrets Act: The Double Life of Ian MacKintosh**, Andrew Tullis, Ross Lepard, Samira Oberberg, Sam Boulton and Team, National Film and Television School

► **Love Thy Neighbour**, Irene Carter, University College London

## Postgraduate News

### **Social Media Shaming**

Kath Paddison, University of Central Lancashire

‘Featuring different voices, this ambitious piece got under the skin of a topical subject in a distinctive way.’

#### **Nominee:**

► **National Maternity Hospital**, Hannah Lemass, Dublin Institute of Technology

## Postgraduate Short Feature

### **Cupid**

Ian Robertson, Athena Sammy, Alex McArdle and Team, National Film and Television School

‘Well-shot, featuring strong performances from the actors. The jury loved the humour in the film.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Cabbie**, Charlotte Wells, Bangor University

► **Christmas Tree**, Meg Campbell, Andrew Oldbury, Donna Wade, Fiona Brands and Team, National Film and Television School



Richard Kendal

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Sound: Hilal (‘Crescent’)

## Postgraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

### **Jon Muschamp – Comeback Kid**

National Film and Television School

‘This was shot as though by professionals who had been around the industry for a while. We appreciated the... production values in camera movement.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Charlotte Wells – Cabbie**, Bangor University

► **Jon Muschamp – Poles Apart**, National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Craft Skills – Editing

### **Zsófia Tálas – Poles Apart**

National Film and Television School

‘Brilliant edit... the story was excellent and very well conceived. A truly professional job.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Charlotte Wells – Cabbie**, Bangor University

► **Zsófia Tálas – Comeback Kid**, National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

### **Paula Gimenez – Poles Apart**

National Film and Television School

‘A classic piece of work and the detail was second to none.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Tom Coxon – Come Out of the Woods**, National Film and Television School

► **Ana Martínez Fernández – Comeback Kid**, National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Craft Skills – Sound

### **Hakim Ismail – Hilal (‘Crescent’)**

Royal College of Art

‘The use of sound was very effective on this project and... and executed at a very professional level.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Michalianna Theofanopoulou – Comeback Kid**, National Film and Television School

► **Morgan Muse – Poles Apart**, National Film and Television School

## Judges’ Award

### **Laymun**

Catherine Prowse and Hannah Quinn, Kingston University ■



## Stanton hits half-century



Midlands  
Centre

Terry Stanton's sterling 50 years of service on the RTS Midlands Committee was recognised by the centre in early June. The TV veteran received a certificate from Midlands Vice-Chair Dorothy Hobson. "I hope to remain active to at least 2036, when it is my aspiration to

organise a lecture for the RTS entitled 'Television: the first 100 years,'" he said.

Terry Stanton's interest in TV began at an early age when, in 1952, his father bought a Marconi set to watch the funeral of King George VI.

His first job at Alpha gave him a good grounding in television engineering and

he went on to found Second City Broadcast Facilities, which provided technical services to the BBC and ITV for programmes such as *The Sky at Night*.

"Fifty years ago, the television set was a box in the corner of the room; it had horizontal and vertical hold, and was probably showing black and white programmes," said RTS honorary secretary David Lowen.

"There's been an enormous change in our industry in those 50 years and Terry has been at the forefront of it

In 1992, Stanton received RTS Midlands' Baird Medal to mark his outstanding contribution to television. He also served four years as Chair of the centre.

In recent years, he has been responsible for organising joint lectures with the Institution of Engineering and Technology in Birmingham.

**Matthew Bell**

Jenny Wilkes

## ONLINE at the RTS

■ The first half of 2018 has been a busy time for the digital team. Over the next few months, we will improve our offering, from launching a new video platform on the RTS website and creating an app for the RTS London Conference, to bolstering our education and training pages. Before we launch a season of new content, here are three of our most popular pages from the first half of the year.

■ Historical drama *Versailles* is known for its raunchy storylines, but there's a lot of other stuff going on, as Ed Gove discovered when he updated his guide to the show's characters ahead of the final series. The guide is the most visited page on the website, with users coming from as far away as Brazil, Argentina and Australia ([www.rts.org.uk/Versailles](http://www.rts.org.uk/Versailles)).

■ If you've watched the RTS award-winning comedy *This Country*, you'll know why so many people logged on to read our interview with Charlie Cooper, one half of the sibling duo who created and starred in the mockumentary. Charlie and Daisy May say the support they received from their parents was key to its success: 'They're massive believers in pursuing your dreams, especially creative things,' he says ([www.rts.org.uk/ThisCountry](http://www.rts.org.uk/ThisCountry)).

■ BBC correspondent Nawal Al-Maghafi was named Young Talent of the Year at the Television Journalism Awards for her reporting on the conflict in Yemen. Kate Holman caught up with her to hear why she felt the need to hold Major-General Ahmed al-Asiri, the leader of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, to account ([www.rts.org.uk/NawalAlMaghafi](http://www.rts.org.uk/NawalAlMaghafi)).

**Pippa Shawley**

## Mystery unravelled in Reading

Thames  
Valley

The Interoperable Master Format (IMF) – a thing of dark mystery or one of simple beauty? This was the question debated at an early June event at Pincents Manor, Reading.

RTS Thames Valley, the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) and the Digital Production Partnership hosted the well-attended event, which heard presentations from: Bruce Devlin, VP for standards at SMPTE; Steve Fish, VP of media and technology

architecture at Turner Broadcasting; and Andy Lampard, head of R&D at Motion Picture Solutions.

IMF addresses the increasing need for a true global exchange format for video and audio content, as it is moved, packaged, repackaged, localised, versioned and expensively stored to meet increasing multi-format demand around the world.

As the number of potential versions of a title increases, the need for a more efficient way of managing and

creating these versions, or compositions, has become urgent. The three speakers provided the audience with a clear introduction to the technical aspects of IMF and then discussed the benefits it could bring to media businesses around the world.

Many companies and organisations have contributed to SMPTE's work and the IMF user group to decide specifications and requirements. These are now close to being finalised.

**Penny Westlake**



# Roger Gage

## 1928-2018

**R**oger Gage was a presenter, producer and director with the BBC and the ITV companies Anglia and Westward Television. He was a Fellow of the RTS, winner of the Society's Pilgrim Award, and Chair and honorary secretary of the Devon and Cornwall Centre.

Following a successful stage acting career, including a spell with the Old Vic company, Roger found his first job in TV, hosting Anglia's lunch-time show alongside the actor Susan Hampshire.

He decided to move behind the camera and was selected for the BBC's directors course.

He was the first to put Dudley Moore on screen, directed Michael Bentine in the comedy series *It's a Square*

*World*, and worked often with Spike Milligan.

Roger moved to Plymouth's ITV station in 1962 to produce and direct a wider range of programming. He commissioned a TV play, *Time and Again*, from ITN newscaster Gordon Honeycombe, which won an award at the International Film and TV Festival in New York.

His 1965 documentary, *Wyvern at War*, which followed West Country soldiers from the Normandy landings to VE Day, won an Emmy – a first for any ITV region.

Roger joined the RTS in 1962. He was Chair of the Devon and Cornwall Centre from 1976 to 1980 and 1996 to 1999. He was its honorary secretary in the intervening years. Roger was also a prime mover in the creation of the



Roger Gage receiving his Emmy

RTS Student Television Awards and became their first Chair in 1995.

I worked with Roger when I was head of news at Westward TV in Plymouth, and together we created and produced a new politics show. It was recorded in London, which meant a long journey, part of which was in Roger's luxurious but

incredibly slow Mercedes. However, we never missed the London train.

He was a fine violinist (with six violins tucked under his bed in later years), a strong singer in concerts and choirs, and an ebullient and regular Widow Twankey in pantomime in Modbury, South Devon.

**David Lowen**

## RTS hosts Writers' Guild

**Midlands Centre** RTS Midlands welcomed the Writers' Guild of Great Britain to Birmingham's Colmore Club in June to network with RTS members and producers from the region.

RTS Midlands Vice-Chair Dorothy Hobson discussed the centre's work and William Gallagher, Writers' Guild Deputy Chair and an RTS committee member, urged the creative people at the reception to share ideas. "The event was a great success," said Hobson. "We hope that many collaborative creations will result from the evening."

## Indie given free rein

**North West Centre** Teen coming-of-age adventure series *Free Rein* – winner of two Emmys – was in the spotlight as a prime example of how to make drama for global audiences at an RTS North West event in mid-June, hosted by TV presenter Helen Skelton.

Made for Netflix by Liverpool's Lime Pictures – and created by two alumni of stablemate *Hollyoaks*, Anna McCleery and Vicki Lutas – *Free Rein* airs in 192 countries. Series 2 was set to launch in early July, and the indie is gearing up to shoot series 3.

Joint MD of Lime Kate Little described how the process began when, 'off the back of hugely successful shows *House of Anubis* [Nickelodeon] and *The Evermoor Chronicles* [Disney]', the indie approached Netflix with the idea for *Free Rein*. Having grown up with *Black Beauty*, Claire Poyser, Lime's other Joint MD, said they felt they had the 'next iteration: modern, funny, witty, original'.

Girls-and-ponies plus idyllic English countryside and beaches – the show is filmed in Cheshire and Anglesey – argued producer Angelo Abela,

is 'how the world sees Britain, part of the "sell" of the show'.

Freddy Carter, who plays stable boy Pin, said the show has a 'fiercely loyal audience in all these countries' because it is about 'universal themes: friendship; staying true to yourself; right and wrong'.

Poyser claimed that a Netflix commission benefits producers. '[With] a terrestrial broadcaster,' she said, 'there'd be a number of people involved and the likelihood of everyone feeling the same way about a project is tough to achieve.'

'The beauty of partnering

Comedian Lee Mack, best known for his studio sitcom *Not Going Out* and comedy panel show *Would I Lie to You?*, celebrated an early birthday at the Lowry Theatre, Salford, in late June.

As he approached 50, Mack reflected on his career in discussion with Shane Allen, the BBC's controller of comedy commissioning, at an RTS North West event.

Allen introduced Mack as "a natural comedy brain" and there is a good reason for this: Mack is currently writing his 10th series of *Not Going Out* – and he let on that he is in talks with Allen to make a further two.

With the current series taking the sitcom to 79 episodes, the team is only one show behind *Dad's Army*, and that's clearly a big deal for Mack, who joked that success is in "quantity not quality".

Throughout the evening, Mack kept the gags flowing as he reflected a career in comedy inspired by a Les Dawson gig he saw as a boy in the 1970s. "I discovered you could



Not Going Out

BBC

## Mack goes out in Salford

mess around on stage and get paid for it," he said.

Despite battling self-doubt and a lack of confidence when performing in front of an audience, Mack persisted with stand-up. He revealed

that he didn't know the "rules" and thought you couldn't make up tales – instead, he stuck to telling honest stories of what had happened that day. A combination of innocence and

perseverance took him from his bedroom, via Pontins holiday camps, to his first competition, the UK's influential stand-up comedy tournament, *So You Think You're Funny*, which he won in 1995.

Mack forgot to raise his brief stint hosting BBC One sport-based panel show *They Think It's All Over* and laughed when Allen brought it up. "I do that a lot – I never mention it," he said.

*Not Going Out* was born out of Mack's love of *Frasier* and *Seinfeld*, and the show became a British studio sitcom that skipped the tea and biscuits and cut straight to the jokes. "I didn't get bogged down with realism," he said.

Mack admitted that he wasn't aware that British sitcoms had been declared "dead" by the media the night before filming the pilot show.

In the future, he hopes to work in a different comedy genre – one between the graft of writing a sitcom and starring in it, and the ease of a comedy panel show.

**Laura FitzPatrick**



Free Rein

Netflix

with a platform with the scale of Netflix, [which is] prepared to back you creatively and commercially, meant we could deliver what we wanted to in terms of our ambition.'

Abela said Netflix was as ambitious as Lime. 'They told us: "Make the show you want to make."' When the production team struggled to get one episode down to 22 minutes

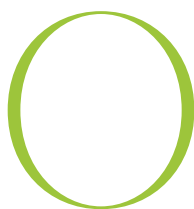
30 seconds, Netflix's response, said Poyser, was simply: 'How long does it need to be?'

Abela added: 'Netflix is rigorous in wanting the best cast.' Little said that this vigour extends to dubbed versions, for which Netflix holds a 'proper casting process to get the right voices and authentic dialects for territories, so it doesn't work against what we have created'.

Asked if making the show outside London was problematic, Poyser replied: 'The craft base in the North West is the best in the business. That's a huge magnet for companies like Netflix and Disney, which don't care where a programme is made as long as it's good.'

**Carole Solazzo**

# OFF MESSAGE



ff Message makes no apologies for, er, kicking off with the beautiful game. This column is not

immune to the sweet taste of England's first World Cup success at the knockout stage of an international competition since 2002.

As we went to press, England had beaten Colombia. Everyone knows that the victory ended the jinx of the team's failure to win on penalty shoot-outs.

Less well known is that the triumph ended the ITV curse. Until now, of the World Cup games ITV has broadcast over the past 20 years, England had chalked up one solitary win – 2-0 against Trinidad and Tobago in 2006.

England has a far better record of winning when games are shown on the BBC.

By the time you read this, Gareth Southgate's players may be heading for even bigger things – with broadcasters benefiting from huge audiences. Don't forget that ITV's audience peaked at an astonishing 24.48 million during the England vs Colombia game. More than 3 million watched online via ITV Hub.

Let's hear it for the power of thrilling live content, smartly distributed.

■ Here's another statistic to savour. It's calculated that the total sum spent by Sky, BT and new entrant Amazon on the recent Premier

League auction decreased by around 10% on the £1.55bn per season forked out at the previous auction.

But even this figure, as Enders Analysis points out, is not far off the BBC's total content budget.

■ From *Z Cars* to *Prime Suspect* – not, of course, forgetting *Broadchurch* – crime dramas is written into the DNA of TV. Interesting, then, to see *Radio Times* poll readers on the 50 greatest British crime dramas.

No surprise to see that the matchless *Inspector Morse* occupies pole position. The world-weary, whisky-drinking detective, played to perfection by John Thaw, lives on via various streaming services, not least BritBox.

Good to see Jed Mercurio's *Line of Duty* not only making the Top 10, but sitting very pretty in third place.

Incidentally, the poll was old school in the extreme. Voters had to fill out a voting slip and put it in the post.

Had the vote been conducted online, it's likely the results would have been very different.

■ Eddie Mair's decision to leave *Radio 4* flagship, *PM*, following 20 years at the helm, is being interpreted as a blow for the BBC.

Few could disagree.

He is one of the corporation's very best interviewers, empathetic when appropriate and, as Boris Johnson once found to his cost, capable of being a ferocious attack dog.

Congratulations to LBC for secur-

ing the great man's services. This column, for one, will be tuning in.

Off Message isn't alone in thinking that Mair, once described by a colleague as being "famously stropky but also annoyingly good", would have made a brilliant presenter of *Newsnight*.

■ Talking of which, *Newsnight*'s Emily Maitlis and Kirsty Wark are emerging as favourites to succeed David Dimbleby as the presenter of *Question Time*. Also being tipped is Kirsty Young.

Their chances of landing the gig were helped, perhaps, by culture minister Matt Hancock telling MPs that it was "about time" the BBC One show was hosted by a woman.

If either Wark or Maitlis exits *Newsnight*, expect the charismatic Emma Barnett to do more work for the show. Anyone who heard her *Woman's Hour* car-crash encounter with Jeremy Corbyn during last year's general election campaign knows that Barnett is adept at putting politicians on the spot.

■ James Corden's talents seem boundless. It was a total treat to see him duet alongside Paul McCartney on *Carpool Karaoke*.

The co-writer of *Gavin & Stacey* couldn't stop himself from shedding a tear as the pair tenderly sang *Let It Be*. Corden recalled how the song was one of his grandad's favourites.

He later tweeted that it was "possibly the best #CarpoolKaraoke we've done so far". Who could possibly disagree?





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