

July/August 2020

Television



Is TV just painting
over the cracks?



audio network 

an eOne company

MODERN ORCHESTRAL

CLASSIC TECHNIQUE MEETS CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTION

HOW DO WE CREATE MODERN ORCHESTRAL MUSIC?

We fuse a classical approach with modern production techniques – from epic, panoramic and inspirational to bold new hybrid soundscapes.

From big screen to small, tell incredible stories with Modern Orchestral music.

Find out more

Naomi Koh

n.koh@audionetwork.com | +44 (0)207 566 1441



From the CEO



Diversity and inclusion are back at the forefront of the political agenda. Everyone who works in the media business is doing some soul-searching. Broadcasters and platform owners have responded to the new impetus of the Black Lives Matter movement by announcing fresh initiatives in order to tackle what remains a serious structural problem in the UK TV sector.

Our cover story is by veteran diversity campaigner Marcus Ryder and provides a valuable and passionate contribution to the diversity debate. We will be returning to this topic in

the coming months and look forward to hearing other perspectives on this hugely important issue.

It may be summer, and we are only just emerging from lockdown, but it's been another frantic period for RTS events. Our national and regional centres have excelled by putting on some extraordinary webinars and virtual events, some of which have made a splash internationally and attracted large audiences. Huge thanks to all of you who have been involved in these events, especially the panellists and producers.

At HQ, we've had another month of must-watch lunchtime events. I'm thrilled that Fran Unsworth could find

the time to talk to the RTS at a very demanding time for anyone running a news operation. Thanks, too, to Stewart Purvis for chairing this session.

Also outstanding was the "Back in production" event in which John Whiston explained to the RTS how ITV successfully restarted filming its two super soaps, *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*.

Finally, congratulations to all the winners of the RTS Student Television Awards 2020.

Theresa Wise

Contents

5 Emma Scott's TV Diary

Emma Scott realises that she does not want to swap TV for teaching – and succeeds in Hollywood via Zoom

6 Working Lives: stunt co-ordinator

Gangs of London stunt co-ordinator Jude Poyer is interviewed by Matthew Bell

8 Comfort Classic: Father Ted

'Fathers... finish your breakfast and come outside for your daily punishment.' Steve Clarke applauds a comedy gem

9 Ear Candy: Talking Sopranos

Steve Schirripa and Michael Imperioli's podcast is perfect for bingeing on *The Sopranos*, says Kate Holman

10 Why black lives have to matter more

Commitment at the top is vital if ethnic minorities are to achieve equality in the TV sector, insists Marcus Ryder

12 An opportunity for change

The BBC's new Director-General, Tim Davie, needs to be bold, argues Roger Mosey

14 Keep it safe, keep it simple

The RTS takes a detailed look at the new working methods getting programmes back into production

16 No compromise on impartiality

BBC news chief Fran Unsworth says the corporation must hold those in power to account – without editorialising

18 The trouble with experts

Dr Charlie Easmon casts a sceptical eye at the TV pundits proffering their expertise during the pandemic

20 The joy of difference

An RTS event unlocks the secrets that made BBC One drama *The A Word* such a success

22 The real cost of lockdown

Television's freelance workforce is suffering mentally and financially from the impact of the pandemic

24 Mining for TV gold

BBC One's *The Luminaries* brings a subversive edge to period drama. Caroline Frost learns how it was done

26 Why we love property shows

Series that hook into viewers' obsession with their homes are here to stay, says an expert RTS panel

28 Lockdown winners

Viewing of linear channels has surged, but not as much as it has for on-demand services such as Netflix

30 Our Friend in Leeds

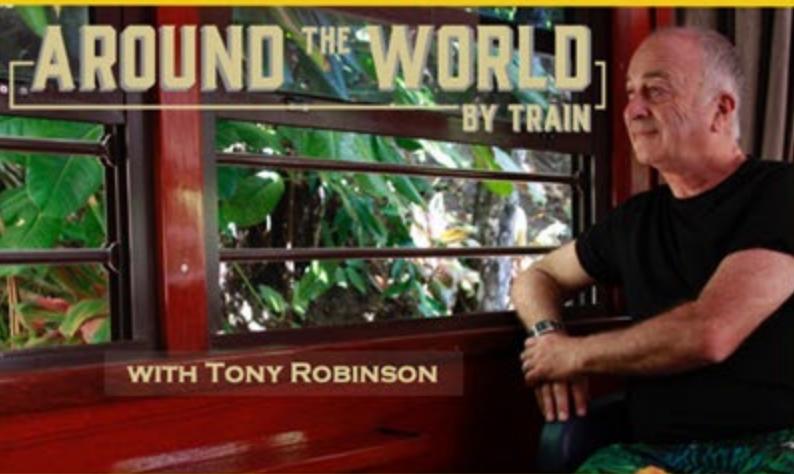
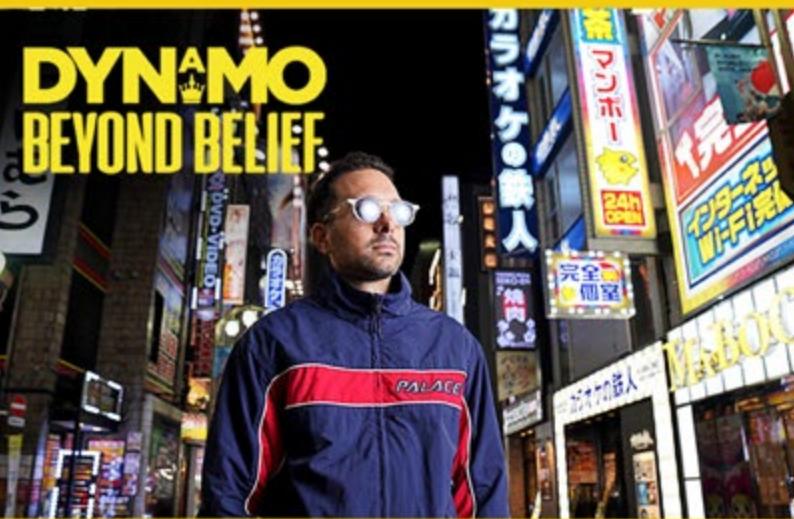
John Whiston hails a TV doctor like no other – and still finds time to dance the coronavirus two-step

31 RTS Student Television Awards 2020

Matt Richardson and Siobhan Greene hosted a virtual ceremony sponsored by Motion Content Group



Proud sponsors of the RTS Student Television Awards



TV diary

Emma Scott realises that she doesn't want to swap TV for teaching – and finds that Zoom helps her to succeed in Hollywood



It's the end of an era. The country is slowly easing out of lockdown. Against the odds, we've delivered a show to the BBC and become surprising best mates with the Bank of England, and I'm leaving the *Beano* for new adventures.

Our brilliant *Beano* team adapted to lockdown at lightning speed, despite some becoming quite poorly with Covid-19 symptoms. We mobilised everyone to work from home early and we've kept all content production across TV, digital and the comic on track. Endless innovation, creativity and cheer has shone through.

■ At home, my two teenage daughters somewhat reluctantly adjusted to me being around a lot more. Funnily enough, I quickly discovered I was never destined to be a teacher. Home schooling is officially a nightmare. Give me working in telly any day.

■ Mark Talbot has powered away. He joined us from Hat Trick Productions to head up our teen/young adult slate based on the comic archive.

In March, he told me that you can't do a writer's room by Zoom. "Rubbish," I said, and then, of course, he totally nailed it: the Beanoverse came alive.

Suddenly, writers are at even more of a premium, but you can get the attention of directors and on-screen talent because they're not stuck on a set. As a result, our projects now have additional quality creative talent attached.

■ Pitching our slate to Hollywood executives via Zoom wasn't part of the plan.

I soon discovered that all pretence and poker face go out the window on Zoom.

We've encountered many LA-based kids, cats, dogs and a truly disastrous exploding coffee cup. Not forgetting the behind-the-scenes hysteria in my home and total bans on streaming anything in case it messed with the wi-fi.

These glitches and travails of tech have, ironically, brought levity, warmth and greater acceptance. After all, we are all in this together.

And did I mention it? We even managed to sell two shows.

■ Over on the kids' side of the business, I've seen the sheer ingenuity and hard graft that go into keeping our production of *Dennis & Gnasher: Unleashed!* on schedule for CBBC this month. *Beano* Studios producers Tim Searle, Karina Stanford-Smith and Louise Condie, along with the BBC's Jo Allen, have created a really fun, witty show.

Working with our fantastic animation producers, Jellyfish, they have kept the show on track. Before lockdown Jellyfish managed to move a team of 250, including 57 artists and 30 animators, to work from home. Their work is outstanding.

We are on air in mid-July. I could not be happier that we're delivering a dose of much-needed joy and laughs to kids and families.

■ During lockdown, the power of the revitalised *Beano* brand reached new heights. The comic production line kept going and delivered each week, just as it did in the Second World War.

My most delightful and bizarre lockdown moment was being quoted alongside Andrew Bailey, the Governor of the Bank of England, on the front page of the *Financial Times*.

We had been working with the bank to produce *Beano*-inspired learning materials to help kids better understand money.

The launch was brought forward to help teachers with home learning. The press exploded with joy at the prospect of Dennis and Minnie helping kids to understand interest rates.

A skill we all may need in the coming months and years....

■ And then, amid all the madness, I decided it was time for me to leave *Beano* Studios.

After five and half years, I want to do something new.

Taking an old and iconic comic and turning it into a digital-first entertainment business has been a rollercoaster ride. I'm really proud of what we've achieved.

I will be cheering from the sidelines, looking out for the commissions, while lying down in a darkened room for a little while.

Emma Scott is the outgoing CEO of *Beano* Studios.

WORKING LIVES



Gangs of London

Sky

Stunt co-ordinator

Jude Poyer is responsible for the high-octane action sequences and bone-crunching but balletic fights of Sky Atlantic's hit crime thriller *Gangs of London*.

What does the job involve?

There are two sides to the job: safety and creativity. We identify scenes that are potentially hazardous and, where possible, remove those risks, or reduce them to an acceptable level. That may involve using a stunt double instead of an actor or using safety equipment, such as elbow pads under costumes, out-of-shot crash mats or complex wire-rigging. Creatively, we could be

choreographing fight sequences or staging shoot-outs.

How did you become a stunt co-ordinator?

Growing up, my passions were film, drama and martial arts. In 1996, when I was 18, I moved to Hong Kong, where a lot of martial arts action movies were made, to pursue a career in film and TV. I stayed for eight years, working as a stunt performer and then taking my first steps in co-ordinating stunts and action directing.

What was your first major TV job in the UK?

The BBC children's series *Spirit Warriors*.

I read that the BBC was making a fantasy martial arts show, heavily influenced by Hong Kong films and Chinese folklore. I wanted to be involved, emailed the producers and got the job. I was credited as the show's choreographer because there was no contact in the fight scenes as they involved children.

What makes a good stunt co-ordinator?

You have to have performed a variety of stunts and observed other performers and co-ordinators on set. There's very little that hasn't been done before, so you need to draw on a full range of experience. A creative and visual mind helps. And you need humility. You



Combined physical choreography and visual effects in *Gangs of London*

make something totally safe. Stunts are inherently risky, but it's the job of a co-ordinator to carry out risk assessments and mitigate the risks.

Have you refused to do a stunt?

If there's something beyond my expertise, I wouldn't do it. But, usually, there will be a way to make a stunt safe – often by employing visual effects.

Can you share a trick of the trade?

On *Gangs of London* we used pre-vis [pre-visualisation] for a lot of the action sequences. I spent three months with my team, Gareth and the cinematographer, Matt Flannery, in a rehearsal space and we built the sets out of cardboard and shot low-tech versions of the fight sequences and set pieces.

When it came to the shoot, we followed the pre-vis sequences, shot for shot. This saved time and money. In the US, it's been common for more than a decade; in the UK, there's resistance to pre-vis. We should embrace it.

Has the job changed over time?

We have a more safety-conscious culture now, which is a good thing. As a result, we take more time to assess risk and plan sequences. We are also making progress in being more inclusive.

Is digital technology a threat to the stunt co-ordinator?

I welcome advances in technology. We use it to paint out wires and crash mats, which makes stunts more realistic. Long ago, if a person was flying on a cable, the hope was that the cable was thin enough that it wouldn't be picked up on camera. But sometimes those cables broke.... Now, people hang on ropes that can hold enormous weight but, using visual effects, we remove them from the shot. Knowledge of visual effects is part of the stunt co-ordinator's arsenal. I don't see a time when we won't be needed.

What advice would you give to a would-be stunt co-ordinator?

Get lots of years under your belt performing, and study action cinema and TV, old and new, from all over the world. You have to know more than how to throw a fake punch or land safely; you need to be a film-maker. ■

Stunt co-ordinator Jude Poyer was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

shouldn't pretend you know it all – seek the advice of experienced co-ordinators.

Are there specialists?

There are specialists in, say, vehicle or horse stunts. In the UK, most stunt professionals have more than one skill, including, usually, some experience with fighting. Fight scenes are my strongest suit, but I also do a variety of stunts, including fire and wire work.

Who do you work with?

Primarily, the director and cinematographer, but also with other heads of department, including special effects, armoury, production design, costume and visual effects. Together, we are working to realise the director's vision.

When are you brought on to a production?

On an action-heavy show such as *Gangs of London*, the stunt co-ordinator is brought in early. There's lots of planning, even down to the material the costumes are made of – if we're doing stunts with fire, we want [non-flammable] natural fibres to be worn. For a fight, we might request long sleeves so elbow pads can be hidden. We sometimes scout locations for

stunts or train cast members for fight sequences. Alternatively, on a sitcom or soap with only the odd stunt, we might turn up on the day to, for example, teach an actor to fall safely.

What stunts are you most proud of?

I'm very happy with how *Gangs of London* has turned out. Series creator Gareth Evans is a fantastic director of action but also very collaborative, so we worked together to design the sequences. It has been gratifying to see the positive response of audiences. The series is stylised, so action scenes are heavily choreographed, like a dance sequence. We actually had professional stunt performers playing some roles.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

Stunt people are well paid and we get to see the world – it's a privilege. It doesn't feel like a job – films and fight choreography are my hobby – and, if it all comes together, I love seeing the end result. Occasionally, you encounter the odd director or actor with an ego problem, or someone who doesn't value safety on set highly enough.

Are stunts always safe?

It would be arrogant to say you can

COMFORT CLASSIC

Channel 4



Father Ted

Father Ted is one of TV's greatest British sitcoms – up there with other giants of the genre such as *Fawlty Towers*, *Gavin and Stacey* and *The Thick of It*. It is plain loopy – daft, surreal, edgy in its debunking of the Church and blessed by four timeless characters.

This quartet were delivered to the small screen fully realised in the first episode shown on Channel 4 in 1995: the utterly gormless Father Dougal McGuire; the debauched Father Jack Hackett; the obsequious housekeeper from hell (sort of), Mrs Doyle; and the eponymous Father Ted Crilly, vain and hapless.

Ahead of its time, *Father Ted* is no cosy, suburban sitcom poking gentle fun at well-meaning vicars fond of a

'Fathers... finish your breakfast and come outside for your daily punishment.'
Steve Clarke applauds a comic gem

pre-dinner nip of sherry. Father Jack is a sex-obsessed, uber-sozzled priest, an alcoholic sometimes in the full grip of delirium tremens. He rarely says anything apart from: "Drink! Feck! Arse! Girls!"

There is a lot of the anarchy of *The Young Ones* in Graham Linehan and Arthur Mathews' comic masterpiece. The show's reckless attitude to the

Catholic Church would have been unthinkable in the wake of the child abuse scandals that have rocked the institution in recent years.

Slapstick is often a vital ingredient in comedy. In *Father Ted*, made by comedy powerhouse Hat Trick, slapstick is given a surreal edge in, say, the episode (the writers' favourite) in which Ted kicks the pompous and tyrannical Bishop Brennan in the arse.

Or as the insanely clumsy Mrs Doyle again falls out of a window or lurches into a door, the contents of her tea trolley scattering across the cluttered and moth-eaten sitting room.

The set itself is a joy, shabbier even than its occupants.

All great sitcoms are based on characters that jump out of the screen. Father Crilly, scheming, always on the

Ear candy

make and yet ultimately kind-hearted, is brilliantly portrayed by Dermot Morgan, who was a celebrity in Ireland but largely unknown in the UK until Linehan and Mathews came knocking at his door.

Crilly is another sitcom lovable rogue, but this time a wayward priest whose innocent love of money is set at odds with the teaching of the institution that employs him. He has been banished to Craggy Island, the show's windswept, rain-sodden location, for "financial irregularities".

Father Ted's sidekick, Father Dougal, zestfully played by the Irish stand-up Ardal O'Hanlon (spotted by the writers performing Shakespeare) is empty-headed in the extreme, a dunce's dunce.

As for Pauline McLynn's matchless portrayal of Mrs Doyle, let's just say it's comic heaven when she appears in the sitting room brandishing yet another pile of sandwiches higher than a baptismal font. "Go on, go on, go on," she urges, pressing the food on her unholy employers.

With *Father Ted*, less was more. Sadly, the show ran for only three series, leaving audiences wanting more. Ever since, the 25 episodes have been on more or less permanent repeat, a staple of UK Gold and latterly shown by All 4 and BritBox.

The series' demise was caused by the untimely death of Morgan, perfectly cast as the eternally put-upon Father Ted. He died from a heart attack, aged 45, the day after recording the final episode of series 3. Twenty-five years later, his legacy as the Catholic priest with a dodgy past is secure.

All this plus a cast of minor characters who, in a lesser show, would have received star billing. There's boring priest Father Paul Stone, who can't stop talking, the alcoholic and self-regarding TV presenter Henry Sellers, and hyper Father Noel Furlong, played by a man who would go on to become one of TV's biggest stars, Graham Norton.

Even when coronavirus is beaten, *Father Ted* will still be making us all laugh. A tonic for tough times. ■

Father Ted is on Channel 4 and also available on All 4 and BritBox.



Steve Schirripa (left) and Michael Imperioli

Now TV

Talking Sopranos

The ground-breaking US crime drama *The Sopranos*, from HBO, is often ranked as one of the greatest television series of all time. During its six seasons, it won numerous accolades.

Thirteen years after the dramatic finale, co-stars Michael Imperioli and Steve Schirripa have reunited for *Talking Sopranos*, a new re-watch podcast that takes fans through each episode from the very beginning.

The pair recount behind-the-scenes stories, their favourite memories from filming and some surprising facts about the real mob lifestyle they portray on screen.

The friends give fans an insight into their own lives and friendship. They discuss their experiences in the TV industry and the intriguing characters

they've met on their journeys to stardom.

The pair reveal in-depth details of the characters they play in *The Sopranos* and share candid comments about what some of their fellow actors in the series were really like.

The podcast also treats fans to an exclusive reading of a new lockdown *Sopranos* script, written by creator David Chase.

Joining Imperioli and Schirripa are the show's producers, writers, crew and special guests, including fellow cast members Michael Rispoli, Robert Iler, Jamie-Lynn Sigler and Edie Falco.

Whether it's for a nostalgic trip down memory lane or an introduction to an iconic series, this podcast is essential listening. For a real binge, watch *The Sopranos* on Now TV alongside the podcast. ■

Kate Holman



Director Steve McQueen on the set of BBC One's forthcoming 1970s drama *Small Axe*

BBC

Why black lives have to matter more

Commitment at the top is vital if people from ethnic minorities are to achieve a breakthrough in the TV sector, insists **Marcus Ryder**

Another day, another Black Lives Matter protest. Another day, another testimony by a black figure in the industry about all the direct and systemic racism they have faced working in the industry. Another day, another statement by a British broadcaster about how it is responding to the current crisis.

When I was first approached by *Television* to write this piece, the brief was simple: go through recent events, assess the different policy initiatives the industry has announced and offer a prediction as to whether this would lead to lasting change.

And so I started to do just that. On 8 June, Sky announced a £30m

racial injustice fund over the next three years. It will create a diversity action group and invest in programmes that highlight racial injustice. And it will redouble its efforts to increase black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) representation both on-screen and behind the camera.

A day later, Channel 4 announced its commitment to be an “anti-racist” organisation, setting out a six-point plan to “be a driver of anti-racism in the industry and improve black and minority ethnic representation”.

The broadcaster reaffirmed previous diversity commitments as well as adding a few new ones, such as doubling “the number of BAME-led independent producers that we commission from by 2023” and launching “a new

mentoring programme for our diverse staff in 2020”.

Two weeks later, on 22 June, the BBC caused a minor earthquake, in the way only the BBC can, by announcing it would commit “£100m of its content spend on diverse productions and talent” over the next three years.

I have highlighted three of the bigger announcements of the past few weeks but they are far from isolated cases. Bafta is consulting on how it can address failings around race (my words not theirs). Netflix has a new “Black Lives Matter” category. And there are a host of additional initiatives and programming by other broadcasters and industry stakeholders.

This has all happened against a background of almost daily examples of

black people working in the industry giving public accounts of their experiences.

These include Oscar-winning director Steve McQueen calling out parts of the British film industry for “its blatant racism”, accusations of racism on the set of Channel 4’s *Hollyoaks* and thousands of media professionals signing an open letter addressed to the UK’s major broadcasters calling for substantial changes to “reshape our industry into one whose words are supported by action”.

It would be possible to go through each announcement made by every broadcaster and dissect whether it will really lead to substantial long-term change. Or go through each statement by a high-profile person of colour in the industry and ask, “what do they really mean” and what will be the repercussions of the statements? But, for me, that is missing the far larger and more important picture.

Taken collectively, what has come to the surface in recent weeks is the acknowledgement that, for black and brown people, the UK media industry is a toxic place to work.

Privately, black and brown people have thought this for decades (for as long as I have worked in the industry) and the research bears this out.

According to *The Looking Glass* report – commissioned by The Film and TV Charity and conducted by Lancaster University Management School – black African, Caribbean or black British men are almost 40% more likely to have been bullied in comparison to men overall working in the industry.

The same report said: “BAME women are most likely to report that their ability to speak out about working practices or the working environment was negatively affecting their wellbeing”. And, possibly most importantly of all, “three-quarters of mid-career BAME women have contemplated a career change to protect their wellbeing”.

To their credit, the broadcasters seem to be implicitly and explicitly acknowledging the scale of the problem and have not defensively tried to counter the testimony of black and brown people working in the media.

They are at least talking about policies that may address some of these issues.

But the bigger question must be: how could an industry toxic for non-white people have been allowed to be

‘FOR BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE, THE UK MEDIA INDUSTRY IS A TOXIC PLACE TO WORK’

created and sustained for so long? And to answer that question we must look beyond the broadcasters’ individual statements and new policy initiatives and look at who regulates the industry.

If there is a long-term, systemic problem across the entire sector we must ask ourselves what has the industry regulator, Ofcom, been doing over the past two decades or, in the case of the BBC, the BBC Trust and then Ofcom?

When an entire industry seems to be suffering from an issue it is not good enough to simply ask whether Channel 4 will be successful in implementing its anti-racist policy. Or whether the BBC will be able to start doing a better job with its £100m commitment.

It is the very reason we have an industry regulator – to solve industry wide-issues and for it to put conditions within the broadcasters’ licences to rectify market failures.

Interestingly, as far as I can tell, Ofcom is one of the few major industry stakeholders that has not commented on the racial issues that are currently raging through the very industry it regulates.

The obvious question is: how did the industry regulator not spot this huge issue in the industry? Or, to the extent that it did, why did it fail to put sufficient conditions within licence agreements to make sure the issue was addressed to a satisfactory degree?

The answer lies in the structure of Ofcom. The regulator has several

‘HOW DID THE INDUSTRY REGULATOR NOT SPOT THIS HUGE ISSUE IN THE INDUSTRY?’

advisory boards and subcommittees to represent different groups, raise important issues and give Ofcom focus and direction.

There is the Content Board, which represents the “interest of the viewer, the listener and citizen”. There is a Consumer Panel to “maintain effective arrangements for consultation with consumers”. And there are four advisory boards to represent “interests and opinions” specific to people living in the four UK nations.

The nations’ boards are crucial to “provide specific advice... on matters relating to television, radio and other content on services regulated by Ofcom” in the respective nations they represent.

Despite the UK’s BAME population accounting for 14% of the entire population and therefore being roughly the same size as all the nations outside of England combined (16%), there is no board dedicated to the interests of the country’s ethnic minority communities.

Recent events have surely proved that Ofcom has failed, since its inception in 2003, to give sufficient attention to the task of policing the industry when it comes to ethnic diversity. When four different chairs (and innumerable changes in personnel) over nearly two decades have failed at a specific task it is naive to attribute this to one person’s failings. We must look instead at structural solutions.

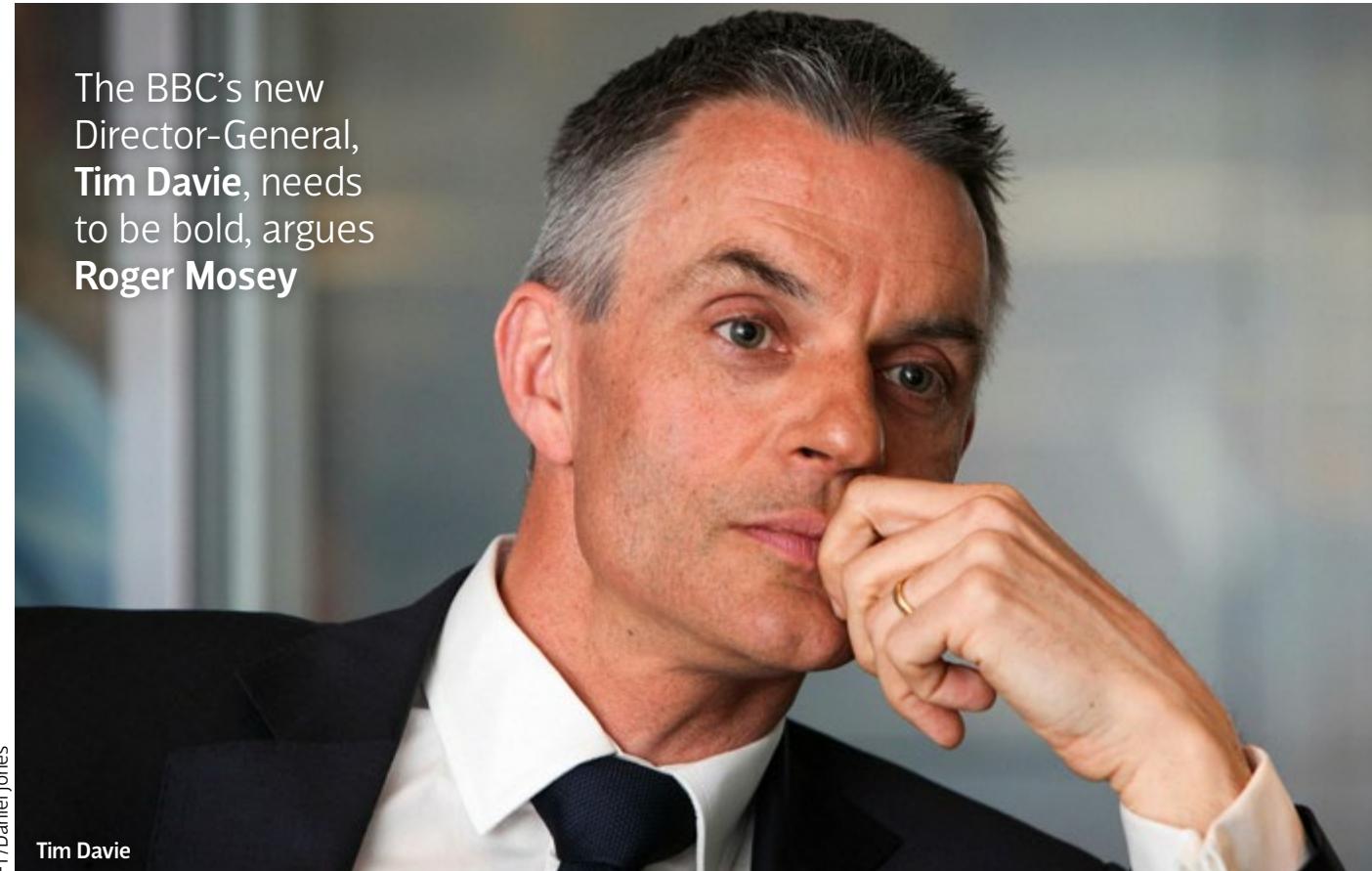
The time has surely come for a new board to be established on the same level as the four nations, with the specific remit of looking at the issue of diversity in general and the BAME communities in particular.

To use the Latin phrase *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* (Who guards the guards?): if we want the regulators to do a better job at making sure our industry is a better place for all of us to work, we need to look at the diversity of those advising, overseeing and even judging them.

We have a unique opportunity to change the industry we all love. And that means we cannot just look at the broadcasters.

We must look at the regulators who should have ensured we never reached this position. ■

Marcus Ryder is the Acting Chair of the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity and an executive producer at Chinese financial media group Caixin Global Media.



FT/Daniel Jones

Tim Davie

The BBC's new Director-General, **Tim Davie**, needs to be bold, argues **Roger Mosey**

An opportunity for change

Some BBC director-generals are a reaction to their predecessor. After the remorseless strategising of the John Birt years, Greg Dyke was chosen to bring the human touch to staff who felt unloved. When Dyke turned out to be a little too populist and freewheeling for some, the governors opted for a more cerebral traditionalist in the form of Mark Thompson.

But, now, we appear to have a continuity candidate: Tim Davie is one of Tony Hall's key lieutenants, supported by many senior colleagues and representing a known quantity, with 15 years of BBC board experience. The truth, though, is that he may have to be a revolutionary: the external and internal

pressures on the BBC mean that "no change" is no longer an option.

BBC executives are fond of Lord Hall, but many have been bothered by his avoidance of the tougher strategic decisions that they believe are overdue. "I think Tony himself accepts that it is time for something different," murmurs one. These decisions cannot be avoided, because the financial outlook is bleak.

It isn't known whether Hall plans to emulate the Labour politician Liam Byrne MP and leave a letter behind saying, "There is no more money", but there is certainly no magic money tree outside New Broadcasting House.

The financial worries include: the long-running issue of free licences for over-75s, which has been costing the BBC an extra £40m a month during

the coronavirus crisis; the worry that decriminalising non-payment could cost hundreds of millions; an absence of dividends from BBC Studios, as a further consequence of the pandemic; and undelivered savings from the last budget round after Hall withdrew controversial plans to cut BBC News.

Further politically toxic savings need to be made in the nations and regions. "They are royally screwed," says one corporation finance expert.

This would be a grim picture even without the likely long-term trends. The BBC has come into its own during the pandemic as an institution that can bring the nation together, and it has been buoyed by increased consumption levels even among younger audiences.

'THE CONTINUITY CANDIDATE... MAY [BE FORCED] TO BE A REVOLUTIONARY'

But it seems improbable that those will endure. Consent for the licence fee will remain shaky if the media habits of the young resume their regular pattern. That, in turn, feeds the bloodlust of the Tory right, who see a way to diminish the corporation by extolling the virtues of drama and entertainment on YouTube, Netflix and the rest.

One well-placed corporation figure notes that two reviews are looming – the 2022–23 licence fee negotiation and the Charter mid-point review – and that “time is short to make a compelling case, and to get the BBC seen as a critical investment”. The national and international economic meltdown makes that task even tougher.

And yet... the BBC still has a much bigger budget and a more guaranteed income stream than its UK commercial rivals. ITV or Channel 4 can only dream of £5bn a year coming into their bank accounts.

One critic says the financial crisis in the BBC is partly self-inflicted: “It created an inherently unstable economic model in the digital era, cemented by the BBC’s inability to stop doing things while it continued to add more and more.”

The question for Davie, then, is whether he can get the size and shape of the organisation right, and match that to its core funding, in a way that has eluded his predecessors.

One former senior television executive outlines a possible approach. “BBC drama has stayed in the game despite being outspent tenfold by its competitors,” he says, citing shows from *The Night Manager* to *Normal People*, “because the quality of commissioning and production has stayed up to par. But what the BBC doesn’t need is three or four terrestrial channels to spread its drama across.”

Another figure with experience of running BBC budgets concurs: “If ever ‘fewer, bigger, better’ should apply, it’s now.” The corporate strategists will, of course, be reluctant to saw off limbs if

this undermines the commitment to universality. But that may be forced upon them, and it could even be an ultimatum that the corporation needs.

Which parts of the BBC’s output should, in future, be funded by the state for the good of the state – and which might be discarded or be paid for directly by new financial models? A seasoned observer suggests: “Tim getting on the front foot with this kind of initiative could change the weather.”

Also at the top of the Davie in-tray will be the future of BBC News. He, himself, is not a journalist, but it is a curiosity of the Hall regime that the outgoing DG – a very effective director of news under John Birt – has not seemed sure-footed as editor-in-chief, from his unfathomable defence of the Cliff Richard coverage to persistent crises about impartiality.

Trust ratings are still high, but being eroded; and one of Hall’s colleagues who is normally stout in the defence of the BBC describes the current position on employees’ use of social media as being “like the Wild West”, with an urgent need for management control.

The particular problem for the BBC is that many of its staff’s Twitterings reveal the metropolitan, “Remainer”, liberal bias that its critics have always suspected; and there is a battle ahead, too, to counter that perception about the mainstream output. It is fine for the BBC to be a liberal organisation internally, and it still needs to do more to increase the diversity of its staff. But it is not acceptable for the BBC on air to morph into a news organisation like

PRESSURES ON THE BBC MEAN THAT “NO CHANGE” IS NO LONGER AN OPTION

MSNBC in the US, which is open about its left-of-centre position.

Recent research by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford finds that there is still a public demand in the UK – 76% of those surveyed – for news to be “neutral”. Davie should stick on his wall Matthew Syed’s recent piece in *The Sunday Times*, which argued that any corrosion of the BBC’s reputation for impartiality “is of unusually grave importance.... This could yet destroy the BBC itself, turning a great organisation into a facet of polarisation rather than a bulwark against it.”

Related to that is the imperative to make devolution real, and to reflect the whole of the UK. The BBC has been good at moving staff into the nations and regions, but much less effective at giving them real power. Almost all the top decision-makers still sit in a small piece of real estate in W1A. It is time to give authority and budgets to the likes of Glasgow and Salford in a way that can allow them to overrule a London view, rather than the other way round.

There are, of course, many more pages in Davie’s “to do” list. Much of it about regulation and distribution and influencing legislation: the kind of stuff that is a hard slog but vital if public service broadcasting is to retain its prominence in a digital era.

And he will have to cope with the usual storms that accompany any DG. One current executive notes that we should never underestimate how difficult the job can be and how much firefighting is involved. He cites the amount of management time spent on the equal-pay debacle.

Davie will, therefore, need luck. But he also has the opportunity in his early days to set an agenda and seize control of events. He will, I hope, do that.

Change is coming – like it or not. ■

Roger Mosey is a former head of BBC Television News and is now the Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge.



Coronation Street

Unprecedented times demand creative thinking. An RTS webinar heard that shows as different as ITV's *Coronation Street*, the BBC's *Top Gear* and Channel 4's *Sunday Brunch* have all learnt how to adapt their production routines to keep cast and crew safe in the age of Covid-19.

The so-called pope of soap, John Whiston, managing director of continuing drama at ITV Studios, explained how *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* have streamlined their filming schedules. In the process, they have complied with Government-approved producers' guidelines on social distancing and hygiene protocols.

Four key phrases have been introduced: "Keep your distance", "Keep in groups", "Keep it simple" and "Keep away". Film units are kept in their own studio spaces, avoiding shared areas. "The only people who move around are the actors," said Whiston.

The number of people involved in filming is kept to a minimum. Camera

The RTS takes a detailed look at the new working methods that have got programmes back into production

assistants and other crew members' assistants are banned; cast members aged 70 or over and children (because they come with tutors and chaperones) are excluded from the soaps' storylines.

Location filming is out. If a court room is needed for a plot, the soaps' carpenters can make one. As *Corrie* gears up for its 60th anniversary in December, expect fewer pyrotechnics than usual for an anniversary special. "Normally, we blow everything up," said Whiston. "We will be doing something, but it won't be quite on the scale that audiences are used to."

Scripts (paper scripts are no longer allowed on set) have been simplified. Rather than the normal 21 scenes per episode, 16 or 17 is the new norm. "We

can no longer have half the cast fighting at a wedding. We've been reduced to the essence of soaps – fantastic scripts and great performances," stressed Whiston.

As for sex, a steamy romp is left to the imagination. "A lot has to be done with smouldering eyes rather than touching," said the executive. He hoped that *Corrie* would be back to its full six episodes per week by autumn.

For *Top Gear*, a show famous for its spectacular stunts filmed in exotic climes, executive producer Clare Pizey told the RTS that Bolton was the new Bogotá. Half of the footage – including sequences filmed overseas – for the next series of *Top Gear* was already in the can before lockdown. But filming had to resume in the UK.

"It's a huge change that we can no longer go abroad," admitted Pizey. "But, sometimes, when you forced into a constraint, it makes you think differently. One of the films we're doing is a direct result of having to think more creatively."

Following a difficult patch, critics

agree that *Top Gear*, being promoted from BBC Two to BBC One for its 29th series, has got its mojo back, thanks to the chemistry between presenters Freddie Flintoff, Chris Harris and Paddy McGuinness.

"With Paddy, Freddie and Chris, we know what we're aiming for and the performances we're looking for. All we do is set up a playground and off they go," said the executive producer.

Money that would have been spent on travel has been diverted to enhancing production values.

"We've done a film in Bolton that

would give *Top Gear* a sense of scale but, as with every other production, costs are spiralling," she said. With luck, the new one metre-plus rule may help.

For studio-bound series *Sunday Brunch* – three hours of live TV, transmitted 52 weeks a year – Susan King, head of production at the show's producer, Remarkable, explained how they had kept going throughout lockdown. "We did the show remotely for about eight weeks, while working on a plan to return to the studio as quickly as possible," she said.

using public transport in London and other big cities. We're spending more money – we [consider using] private transport to travel to productions – to ensure people are comfortable."

Pact CEO John McVay said that, on average, extra costs, including medical checks and longer production schedules, have added between 10% and 30% to budgets.

He said: "Indies, where margins were already slim, [when] trying to soak up those additional costs [face] a bit of a challenge. That may change with new health and safety guidance,



Top Gear

BBC

I would argue is one of the funniest films we've ever made," said Pizey. For one item, to ensure social distancing and avoid having two people sat in a car, one person was strapped to the top of the vehicle.

Even before the health crisis, health and safety were, according to Pizey, "on speed dial", since men driving fast cars is inherently dangerous. Coping with the threat of coronavirus, therefore, does not require huge changes to filming. "They're quite often two metres apart in normal times," she noted.

But the logistics of accommodating and feeding 35 people on location is more challenging. "At the moment, we're in a hotel in York – but if key workers need the beds, we have to get out."

Travel, too, is something of a headache, with spaces in minibuses being left empty and cars accommodating only one person.

The studio part of the show is, inevitably, more problematic than filming outside. Pizey conceded that having 700 people indoors was impossible. "We've got a couple of ideas that

Pre-lockdown, *Sunday Brunch* depended on having guests remain in the studio throughout the broadcast.

That was no longer possible. The number of guests and the size of the crew have been scaled back, but presenters Tim Lovejoy and Simon Rimmer have returned to the studio, albeit with only one guest present at a time.

Video calls have become commonplace and have given *Sunday Brunch* access to guests who would have been unlikely to agree to appear on the show in person.

Whiston said that one of the biggest barriers to resuming production was overcoming his staff's fear of contracting the virus. King agreed that this had been a problem: "A lot of people are desperate to get back to work – it is important for everyone's wellbeing – but, interestingly, some people are still very nervous.

"People are happy once they get to the office. They know the office is going to be very well set up, with all sorts of measures and protocols in place. But they are nervous about

but that is what the initial analysis is looking like."

For many freelancers working in TV, the crisis has been a severe setback. However, there was some hope from King. She said that, so far, Remarkable had no plans to employ fewer freelancers in future: "We'll be working really hard to ensure we're able to employ people as much as we were before [the lockdown] at level market rates."

Pizey added: "As long as we're making *Top Gear*, we'll be using freelancers. One difficulty is that some of our directors make car ads. The bottom has fallen out of that market."

"It's really tough. We can supply work, but there's not the same amount of work out there." ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS webinar 'Back in production – unlocking the TV production industry in a Covid-19 world' was held on 17 June. It was chaired by Broadcast deputy editor Alex Farber. The producers were Tessa Matchett, head of press, ITV Studios, and Sarah Booth, director of communications, Endemol Shine UK.

No compromise on impartiality

BBC news chief **Fran Unsworth** explains why the broadcaster needs to hold those in power to account – without editorialising

Fran Unsworth used her recent conversation with the RTS to support incoming Director-General Tim Davie's statement of 5 June, when he stressed the need for impartiality across the organisation, regardless of whatever battles between the BBC and government might be going on behind the scenes. "The more valuable we are to audiences, the greater our standing is going to be with the Government," the BBC's director of news and current affairs said firmly.

This came as the news chief continued to perform a high-wire act, providing a platform for the Government's crucial health messaging while simultaneously holding it to account.

Interviewed by former ITN CEO and editor-in-chief Stewart Purvis, she defended her journalists' challenging of ministers in the daily coronavirus briefings (which ended in late June), even if viewers did not always support this approach.

"When this first happened, there was a sense in the UK of, 'We're all in this together, everybody's got to pull together,'" she said. "The political response became contested over the past 10 weeks, and it's the job of journalists to ask questions and highlight that, even if the public don't like it."

This situation followed a period in which ministers had boycotted other BBC news programmes. Unsworth said she was pleased to see them back on Radio 4's *Today*, *The World at One* and *PM*, at least for now. "This is an opportunity to speak to 8 million listeners a week. I wish they would put themselves up more widely."

Still citing impartiality, she didn't hesitate to double down on her



Fran Unsworth

BBC

criticism of *Newsnight* in late May, which she said, failed BBC guidelines in its presentation of Government advisor Dominic Cummings' controversial trip to Durham.

On 26 May, Emily Maitlis introduced the programme with the words, "Dominic Cummings broke the rules. The country can see that and it is shocked that the Government cannot."

Unsworth said the very next day that this script "did not meet our standards of due impartiality".

"Emily's comment was rooted in evidence but the problem was the language in which it was put – it belonged more to the op-ed of a newspaper page than to the introduction of a BBC broadcast programme," maintained the head of news.

She expanded on why she immediately criticised the approach without waiting for an official internal inquiry. "I didn't need to wait for some complaints

process to take its course," she explained. "Our guidelines had been crossed in terms of attributing motivation to the public, to the Prime Minister."

Unsworth stressed that nobody on the *Newsnight* team was disciplined – "We had a robust discussion" – and emphasised that the programme had had a "brilliant run during this pandemic. They got to the care homes first. We did some great stuff on an Italian hospital. That is the totality of what *Newsnight* is all about."

Inevitably, her judgement faced criticism from both sides, leading to accusations that she was bowing to Government pressure. "There was no question of us being cowed by the Government over this," she insisted.

But was it further proof that BBC presenters could no longer be relied upon to be impartial? "I think it just shows how difficult my job is," she said with a wry smile.

Another challenge is the corporation's use of social media, now used by so many people as their main source of news. Unsworth cited a recent *Africa Eye* story, *Anatomy of a Killing*, that reached an online audience of millions across the world.

"Social media is a force for good," she said. "It's a way of getting information out to particular sections of the audience who now make it their main source of information, but it has its limitations. It lacks context. A limited number of characters makes it quite difficult to fulfil BBC editorial values."

A running controversy is to what extent BBC News presenters and journalists can comment freely on social media, while adhering to editorial guidelines in their day jobs. The issue is so contentious that former BBC News chief Richard Sambrook has



South West News Service

Black Lives Matter demonstration in Bristol

been commissioned by the corporation to conduct a review.

Given the example of BBC world affairs editor John Simpson, who runs his own YouTube channel, in which he is far more opinionated than BBC impartiality guidelines would allow, Unsworth agreed that it was complicated, particularly as Simpson and others were freelance employees. “What licence they have to express their views elsewhere is something we’ve got to look at,” she said.

The coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests was another balancing act for Unsworth, as she strove to navigate a path between the clear moral cause sustaining the movement and covering the protests in all their complexity.

“You can say, ‘I believe black lives matter’ – it’s a statement of fact – but does the BBC sign up to #BlackLivesMatter? The BBC didn’t endorse Black Lives Matter because it’s a campaign. It can endorse the sentiments behind it.”

She was speaking four days after protests in Bristol culminated in the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston, slave trader and city philanthropist. She called the coverage of the protests a complex area for her staff. “The BBC’s not impartial about racism,

and that [the killing of George Floyd] was very bad, but there are areas where it goes into matters of public policy, which we have to treat impartially – what shall we do with statues? What shall we do with the education system?”

Telling the story of the pandemic has provided unique challenges, such as when medical correspondent Fergus Walsh filmed inside intensive care units at London’s University College Hospital.

“It was clearly a really important part of the story, how hospitals were coping,” said Unsworth. “There are so many things you have to think about – the safety of your people, the perception issues, because Fergus had to go in full PPE, at a time when it was in short supply. A lot of viewers were saying we’d used up some PPE there, which, actually, we donated. It’s important to show audiences what is happening.”

How BBC News has responded to the pandemic will clearly have implications for the department’s future. But Unsworth confirmed that cuts first announced in January – some 450 jobs to save £80m by 2022 – would go ahead.

With 90% of BBC staff working from home, she predicted that high numbers of staff may prefer to remain in their

home offices once New Broadcasting House is back to normal.

Meanwhile, on screen, audiences have become used to seeing guests contribute via Zoom. “What this has shown is that the audience is more tolerant of things [that are] not of high broadcast quality. That’s a lesson we can apply going forward.”

Lockdown has brought audiences back to the delights of linear-television news bulletins and 16- to 35-year-olds have been tuning in. “We thought they were a lost audience for linear-TV news bulletins, but they haven’t been. But to be honest, there is a question mark over the longevity of that.”

Does this give pause to her focus on a digital strategy? Unsworth hesitated to use the behaviour of the captive audience of the past few months as a long-term guide. She said: “It’s difficult to make a judgement at this stage. It doesn’t make you reverse your strategy, it makes you take stock and consider.” ■

Report by Caroline Frost. *Fran Unsworth, director of news and current affairs at the BBC, was in conversation with Stewart Purvis for an RTS webinar held on 11 June. The producers were Sue Robertson and Martin Stott.*

My idea of heaven is *Monty Python's Whicker's World* spoof, Whicker Island, where our hero wistfully waters whisky while wantonly waxing words with W. For me, hell would be a post-lockdown lock-in in a dodgy pub full of TV pundits.

Brexit and football have taught me not only to distrust these people, but to despise them as they fling unsubstantiated opinions around like the proverbial brown stuff hitting the fan. It is messy, unpleasant and the odour stays with you for ages.

Football managers are famous for having opinions on everything, but it took a steely German, responsible for guiding Liverpool to their crushing Premier League championship win, to bring some sense to the coronavirus pandemic.

The wise words of Jürgen Klopp should be on permanent loop in every town centre, as he told a journalist that his opinion did not matter and they should instead go and ask the experts.

However, history has shown us that everyone, from Mao Zedong to Michael Gove, can hate experts. Mao was a tad harsher than Gove and killed quite a few experts. Latterly, Gove has had to recant as he claimed the Government had been "following the science".

In the eyes of many, that phrase has become to be synonymous with following the lead lemming off a cliff as tens of thousands of our fellow citizens and loved ones have died.

But who are the experts in this pandemic and how do they differ from pundits? Who gets wheeled out when, and whose voices get heard and whose get silenced?

Listening back to specialists in virology, infection, epidemiology and public health, these experts tend to fare well if they stick to what they know, but, like everyone else, start to look a tad less credible when asked to speculate. Doctors David Lipkin, Anthony Fauci and Peter Piot are all still much quoted on TV networks.

When they do appear on TV, experts are often shunted aside by a popular creature of modern fiction that the 19-year-old Mary Shelley would have recognised. The modern Frankenstein's monster is the popular TV doctor who is made up of the following parts: a conventional level of attractiveness; well-groomed hair, if they

Dr Charlie Easmon casts a sceptical eye at the TV pundits proffering their expertise during the pandemic

The trouble with experts



US medical commentator Dr Mehmet Öz has said he 'misspoke' after suggesting on Fox News that it might be 'worth the trade-off' to reopen schools despite potentially increasing the coronavirus death toll

Getty Images/Roger Kisby

have any; reassuring smile; and, finally, the ability as a generalist to comment on specialist subjects knowledgeably after hurriedly jotting down a few notes before going on air.

The US has Dr Phil and Dr Öz (judged to be as “reliable as the Wizard of Oz” by one commentator). One with no hair and the other with a legendary barnet. Both have come credibility croppers as the pandemic has rolled on. The great saying that, “You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time”, is superbly reflected in the comments sections in YouTube. If you need a laugh in these troubled times, the sharp wit of some of these spears the interlocutors’ arrogance and some of it is, of course, plain old-fashioned mean.

Mad magazine has a gap-toothed cover star called Alfred E Neuman. Alfred’s satirical byline is: “What, me worry?”. But I have found it sad to see supposedly serious TV personality medics take this same approach, and often delivered in a patronising manner.

Many lessons can be learned from watching the World Health Organization’s first press conference on Covid-19. For such a large institution, it is strange that those involved appeared to have received such poor media training.

Dr Tedros Adhanom, the WHO’s Director-General, comes across as amiable but obsessed with trying to raise cash. He is the parish priest less interested in saving your damned soul than in saving the damned church roof.

Many experts disagreed with WHO consultant and former Imperial College academic Dr Maria Van Kerkhove’s 8 June comment that “it still seems to be rare that an asymptomatic person transmits onward to a secondary individual”. This was jumped on by doctors and those parts of the media that disliked the idea of social distancing.

“That has not aged well” is my favourite comment under a four-month-old YouTube clip from early February when there had been only 300 deaths worldwide. The video has not one but three medical experts talking on Al Jazeera’s *Inside Story* about the early stages of the pandemic. I suspect all three now wish it could be erased for ever. You can watch it here: bit.ly/Ajinside.

The culprits are in the public domain and so can be named. Dr Mark Parrish, who works for International SOS,



Dr Charlie Easmon

‘THERE HAS BEEN AN OVEREMPHASIS ON “CALM DOWN, DEAR” SCIENCE VS COMMON SENSE’

praises China’s response to the crisis (“it’s been contained and managed very well”) and rebuts each sensible question posed by the journalist (one commentator says that Parrish treats every question “like a hostile witness”).

Professor Sanjaya Senanayake, an infectious diseases specialist based in Canberra, Australia, plays down the threat of coronavirus, while Dr Nicholas Thomas (in Hong Kong) aligns with groupthink, claiming: “There is not a lot to be worried about.”

Astute comments from the public on YouTube include the telling view that the “comments section is giving better information than the actual video”. Others observed: “I must be living in a parallel universe to these experts!”; “I came here to get an update – these people obviously don’t have a clue”; and “They don’t build four hospitals in four days for flu”.

TV medics get wheeled in, dropped in, dumped and ultimately yanked off the media stage. Experts get as much right as they get wrong but, regrettably, few public-health or social-sciences experts are given decent airtime. The smarter members of the public can work things out for themselves.

Looking back on the past three months, there has been an overemphasis on “calm down, dear” science vs common sense. The public use of masks and face coverings is a good example. Of course, there was scant definitive scientific research on the use of these because no one had thought it important enough to conduct the studies.

That, however, doesn’t stop any sensible person working out that the fewer droplets you spread in the environment, the better the outcome for all concerned.

Experts and media-friendly doctors can give you some idea, but it is always best to get a range of views. From that, you can then try to work out what makes sense in any disease situation. No matter how adorable they seem on TV, no one person is infallible, not even me. ■

Dr Charlie Easmon MBBS MRCP MSc Public Health DTM&H DOccMed is: medical director of Your Excellent Health Service; president of the International Association of Physicians for the Overseas Services (www.iapos.co.uk); co-founder of YEHS We Care; and co-founder of Global Health Action, Strategies & Solutions (www.ghass.co.uk).

The joy of difference

An RTS event unlocks the secrets that made BBC One drama *The A Word* such a success



Max Vento plays Joe in *The A Word*

Over three series, *The A Word* has been widely praised for its honest portrayal of autism and the tensions this unleashes on a family. But *The A Word* is also laugh-out-loud funny and joyful – and, given its Lake District setting, beautiful to look at.

The BBC One drama, which finished its third series in early June, tells the story of Joe, a young boy with autism, and his fractious, larger-than-life extended family.

At an online event hosted by RTS North West, BBC North and MediaCity UK, *BBC Breakfast's* Naga Munchetty spoke to its writer, Peter Bowker, and two of its stars, Christopher Eccleston and Pooky Quesnel.

Stockport-born Bowker taught children with severe learning disabilities, many of whom had autism, for 12 years before his writing career took off. He was spurred into action by the Israeli series *Yellow Peppers*, which provides the template for *The A Word* – “a dysfunctional family with, at its centre, a young boy who’s on the autism spectrum.

“It felt like I was being given permission to write about my own material and understanding of it. As the series has gone on, it’s moved further and further away from the original.”

Max Vento, who is not autistic, plays the drama’s central character, Joe. “We decided that it was too much to ask of a child of five on the autism spectrum to play another child on the spectrum. When we’ve cast older characters with autism, we’ve always insisted the actor is someone on the spectrum.

“Max was pretty much everyone’s first choice from the moment we saw him. I remember seeing Max and saying that he looks like a chubby Ian Curtis [from Joy Division]. For me, that fulfilled the criteria, given that his musical tastes are, bizarrely, the taste of a 61-year-old man from Manchester.”

Music is a prominent feature of the programme, with Joe playing post-punk classics through the headphones almost permanently clamped to his head. “I’ve been Stalinist about this: it’s entirely my iTunes [collection]. Max hates my musical taste,” said Bowker.

Quesnel – who, like Eccleston, was born and brought up in the Salford area – plays Louise, the mother of Ralph, who has Down’s syndrome, as does the actor who plays him, Leon

BBC



Series 3 ends with the marriage of Ralph and Katie (played by Leon Harrop and Sarah Gordy)

Harrop. "Her whole life has narrowed down to championing Ralph," she said. "She is a tiger mum." Fiercely protective, when she feels Ralph is threatened she turns on people, even her boyfriend, Maurice.

Eccleston plays Maurice, Joe's grandad, who, when the series starts, has entirely unreconstructed views about disability and a vocabulary that is decades out of date. It is a fantastic role that the *Our Friends in the North* actor and former Doctor Who makes the most of it. "There's nothing more glorious in a PC world to play somebody non-PC," he says.

Now, the actor says he is "a fully paid-up member" of the "PC brigade", adding: "I used negative terms for people with learning difficulties as a child and as a young person. Coming to London, going to drama school, changed me."

"It's the stuff of drama: whenever we present a character who is fully rounded, we all switch off. The [best] characters in drama are the ones that make mistakes."

"You have a responsibility," said Bowker, "to be authentic without celebrating that [pejorative] language [about disability] and making it respectable again. I don't like dramas that rub your nose in it, that say, 'Look how daring I am as a writer.'"

Writers, Bowker added, who make a subject "so repellent and difficult" don't engage the audience. Rather, they "invite [viewers] to celebrate the ego of the writer who's brave enough to use these terms".

TV viewers embrace the realism of Bowker's writing, even if Maurice can make them feel uncomfortable. "People always say, 'Thank God, you've not soapboxed or been po-faced about it.' Maurice is the key to that," said Eccleston.

The actor is familiar with both Bowker and the theme of autism. They worked together on the 2002 BBC Two drama *Flesh and Blood*, which won each of them RTS awards, for Writer and Actor. Eccleston plays a man, adopted at birth, who finds out that his birth parents have learning disabilities. In March, the duo discussed *Flesh and Blood* at another RTS North West event (see *Television*, April 2020).

Bowker has also bagged RTS Writer awards for *Occupation* and *Eric & Ernie*.

To get inside the character of Maurice for *The A Word*, Eccleston drew on his own father's life. "There's something about him that's desperate to connect to his family and to life. I got that from my father, who had a rudimentary education to the age of 14, when he was kicked out into the world."

"It's based very much on my dad's beautiful, beautiful heart but lack of

confidence with medical terminology. But my dad had the nobility to see a human being for what they were and... try to connect.

"My dad, my brothers, a lot of the men I grew up with, felt trapped in the machismo, but, when really needed, the feminine and the tenderness could come out."

Quesnel added: "We can all see so many different aspects of our true selves, across many of the characters, male or female. Pete gets to the authenticity of how people think and feel."

In series 3, Harrop – who has also appeared in north-west-set dramas *Moving On* and *Brassic* – takes centre stage, as Ralph's romance with Katie blossoms. She is played by Sarah Gordy, who also has Down's syndrome.

Eccleston explained how working with Harrop had forced him to reassess his craft: "You have to up your game. The thing we've all done for 20, 30 years is reinvigorated by Leon's presence and working methods.

"He taught me to relax, he taught me to have more fun. Leon unabashedly loves acting and performing. He has insecurities and he'll have a chat with his dad about whether he's done it right or wrong but, basically, he's free of a lot of the neurosis that I carry about the impact of my performance."

"He's completely unselfconscious," said Quesnel. "He's such a spontaneous and very, very funny person. He's got this incredible sense of comic timing."

"He's got all the technique but [also] the joy on top of it," added Eccleston.

Series 3 ends with the jubilant marriage of Ralph and Katie. Will there be more? "Towards the end of each series I've thought I was written out, I didn't know where we could go," said Bowker. "But then something grows in these characters and I can think of other journeys to take them on."

"Never say never again. I wanted something that would be satisfactory [to end on] if this was the last time we did it, but the door's open from my point of view."

Report by Matthew Bell. 'Spotlight on... BBC One's *The A Word*: The secrets of its success' was held on 8 June, produced by Rachel Pinkney and supported by the University of Salford's media production team. All three series of *The A Word* are available on BBC iPlayer.



Raw Pixel

The real cost of lockdown

The coronavirus outbreak has left much of the television workforce idle, with most TV production suspended since March. Freelancers, who account for 100,000 of the total TV and film workforce of 180,000, have been dealt the rawest of deals.

They have been hit hardest by the lockdown – 93% are out of work, according to The Film and TV Charity.

Worse, according to the charity's CEO, Alex Pumfrey: "Three-quarters of freelancers working within the television sector have been unable to access the Government's employment and self-employment support schemes."

Financial woes have exacerbated the mental-health problems that were already known to affect so many TV workers before the pandemic. Mental

Television's freelance workforce is suffering mentally and financially from the impact of the pandemic

ill health is widespread. The Film and TV Charity says almost nine in every 10 people in the industry have experienced problems, compared with 65% in the UK population as a whole.

Covid-19 has made a bad situation worse. "Research done across the UK has shown a huge spike in anxiety and depression around 24 March," revealed Pumfrey. She was one of the panellists at an online event, hosted by the RTS and The Film and TV Charity in June, which asked whether the industry has

been doing enough to keep its people safe and well.

The prospects for young people trying to break into television appear particularly bleak, certainly in the short term.

RTS bursary student Charlie McMorine, who had finished university and was awaiting his results, said the Covid-19 crisis had been extremely stressful: "For us, as graduates, we don't know when we will be able to make our break into the industry. We don't know how to move forward."

The Film and TV Charity unveiled some sobering research at the event. The most common words used by freelancers to describe their treatment by the industry, said Pumfrey, were "disposable" and "expendable".

Bullying, she noted, was still "incredibly prevalent". Partly, this reflected the

culture of an industry that valued “toughness” and praised people for “earning their stripes”. She added: “This idea that you should tough it out when you are being badly treated is very commonplace.”

Worst of all, Pumfrey claimed that “more than half of people working in the industry have considered taking their own life”.

Philippa Childs, head of broadcasting union Bectu, said the charity’s research was “shocking”, but added: “I can’t say I’m surprised by these findings.

“We know that there were real problems prior to Covid-19 and we all know that those problems are only going to be exacerbated in the current situation.

“From our research, lots of people have had to rely on loans and borrowing from family; they’ve lost their homes... because they simply haven’t had the financial support.

“There is a great deal of anger out there [among] the freelance workforce.”

Lisa Opie, MD of UK production at BBC Studios, found grounds for optimism, however, as the industry prepared to resume full production.

“What I’ve been really encouraged by is that I’ve seen more collaboration and joined-up thinking across our industry than ever before... on how to return to work safely,” she said.

“We are in an industry that is built on insecurity, with freelancers working from project to project,” admitted Kelly Webb-Lamb, deputy director of programmes at Channel 4. “That, in itself, is a very difficult way to work and has always meant that certain people are better able to access the industry than others.”

Like Opie, though, Webb-Lamb saw a brighter future. The coronavirus crisis, she said, had highlighted structural problems within the industry and was bringing it “together to tackle [them]”.

The “informality of the industry” she said, held some people back because advancement was “so much based on who you know. That informality has gone as a result of this virus, because we are all talking to each other like this [via Zoom], and you can’t go for lunch or drinks.

“We can use the [crisis] as a catalyst for change.

“We have to question whether expecting young people to sidle up to powerful people at drinks events is the right way to help them get into the industry. I don’t think that’s the way that we’re going to get an industry

that’s diverse and representative, and young, exciting, vibrant and creative.”

Charlie McMorine agreed, adding that meeting industry execs in person could be “daunting” for university students. “Sessions like this are really helping build connections for people like myself,” he said.

Discussing the return to making TV, Opie said that while, in the short term, “there might be fewer people involved”, in the longer-term, “the production sector will continue to be vibrant”.

BBC Studios, she said, had “paused” 82 productions in March, but had

from fast-turnaround shows to big reality shows.

“The protocols we are using for the shows that go into production or restart production this year will be robust enough to continue whatever happens with the virus, so we don’t end up having to stop everything again.”

Bectu’s Childs called for “a new deal for freelancers”. She emphasised: “We don’t just want to return to things as they were before the crisis.”

RTS bursary student McMorine said he and his fellow graduates needed “more knowledge about what happens



Getty Images

continued working on 28. “Hold the faith: we will return to production – not as fast as I’d like, but we will.”

Coronavirus hit Channel 4 harder than other broadcasters. TV advertising, which sustains the channel, collapsed when the UK went into lockdown in late March.

“We lost hundreds of hours of content overnight and have taken a £150m cut to our content budget, along with huge cuts across the rest of the channel. We’ve also had to draw down on £75m of borrowing,” said Webb-Lamb. “We’ve faced a pretty stark year.”

“The very best thing we can do for freelancers and the industry is to continue to commission. Despite the challenges we are facing, we have ring-fenced money to continue to commission this year.”

Programme tariffs were lower, she admitted, but “we still have the same number of hours on telly. We are working out how to fill our schedule with a significantly lower budget this year.”

“We need to get back to work. And we need to work out how we can make a full range of shows, starting as soon as possible, to ensure we can get people back to work across the industry, from scripted to unscripted,

next. A lot of people coming out of university are terrified at the thought of freelancing. Now, they have been put off it completely because of Covid and having seen what’s happened to freelancers in the industry during this time.”

He wanted “more information, more conversation with industry experts”.

The Film and TV Charity’s Pumfrey said that, as well as the obvious health benefits, there was also a business case for looking after people’s mental health. “This isn’t a cost,” she insisted, highlighting research from Deloitte earlier this year, which found that “there is a £5 return for every £1 you invest in mental health”.

“[TV] budgets will be constrained, but that cannot be at the expense of the welfare of our people. In fact, that should be at the top of the list.” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. ‘Are you staying safe and well? Mental wellbeing in the TV industry during Covid-19 and beyond’ was hosted by the RTS and The Film and TV Charity on 9 June. Paul Robinson, director of the consultancy Creative Media Partners, chaired the online event, which was produced by Terry Marsh and Jonathan Simon.

Mining for TV gold



Eva Green as Lydia Wells in *The Luminaries*

BBC One's adaptation of *The Luminaries* brings a subversive edge to period drama. Caroline Frost learns how it was done

It is a brave screenwriter who takes on the task of squeezing a Booker-prizewinning doorstopper of a novel into six hours of television, even if that writer is the book's author herself. It took Eleanor Catton seven years to adapt her 2013 novel *The Luminaries* for the screen (after a relatively brief five years writing the book), and plenty of playing with both form and story that another writer might not have dared.

"If Eleanor hadn't been involved, I doubt we could have been so subversive," reflects director Claire McCarthy on filming the 832-page tome, which tells the story of the 1866 gold rush in New Zealand's South Island, complete with betrayal, brothels and a murder mystery, as well as an "astrological love affair" at its centre.

The first episode of the six-part series led to complaints from viewers who struggled with its opening scenes, shot in near darkness and with little explanation of where they fitted into the complicated timeframe of the story.

But *The Luminaries* is well worth sticking with – not least for its rich production, stellar performances and the way it avoids many of the clichés of period drama and brings a refreshing, feminist take to what is often portrayed as a macho world.

"Eleanor had to honour the characters, be faithful to historical detail and bring the characters off the page but also to streamline, so that it didn't feel literary or ponderous," says McCarthy. "There were lots of things to show, so we had to dance a fine line between playing with narrative and bringing a lot of archetypal ideas, then turning them on their head and asking what they mean to a TV audience."

Producer Lisa Chatfield agrees that the challenge was immense: "There are jumps in time in the book as well, but it starts with 12 men meeting in a bar. They know a crime has happened and they're trying to figure out if they are culpable."

BBC



The Hokitika town set of *The Luminaries*

character, explaining: "He's off-stage, but he's guiding her. He's someone who follows his heart. He thinks he's doing the right thing, then it leads to something tragic and he has to deal with the consequences of that."

"I wanted to know what that does to someone, whether it hardens him, or makes him resolve to do what he does in the end, which perhaps looks like a grand folly from the outside."

Without giving too much away, the series' final set piece takes place in a courtroom, with an epic speech from Emery lasting five pages of script and taking days to film. Patel thanks Eleanor Catton's words for guiding him through. "When lines are easy to remember, it's a credit to the writer who makes it feel natural. It was a joy to do."

The Luminaries' ending is as ambiguous as its beginning for both Emery and Anna, something Patel applauds. "We don't have a backstory for either of them. I like the fact that we don't really know who they are, other than this journey we're going on with them. It was probably true of a lot of people who travelled at that time, leaving something behind."

Perhaps the show's greatest, most mysterious character of all is New Zealand itself, from Dunedin on South Island's east coast to the gold fields of Hokitika on the west. The lack of remaining period architecture in the country meant the whole set had to be built from scratch on farmland outside Auckland with reference to thousands of historical pictures and museum artefacts – and, most treasured of all by McCarthy, visits to Hokitika and a welcome by the local Maori community.

"It felt very important for us to go there, to be in that sacred place with its one river. We wanted to involve people from that community in terms of the tattooing, the carving, the greenstone we used in the film. Then, we had to figure out how to create that world, which is such a part of the story."

Along with its many other themes, *The Luminaries* is clearly a love letter to New Zealand from all concerned, something brought home to Patel on his very last day of filming with Maori actor Richard Te Are, who plays greenstone hunter Te Rau.

"Richard did a haka at the end of the shoot. You could tell what it meant to him to be doing that. It was one of the most moving moments of my life. It's a truly holy place." ■

"But, as well as being a great writer, Eleanor is an avid, very passionate viewer of television. She realised that the story needed to be told through a key character."

Enter Anna Wetherell, a mysterious young woman, seemingly drawn straight from the pages of Victorian gothic novels, but brought up to date by the script and relative newcomer Eve Hewson's rich portrayal.

"She's not an innocent," explains McCarthy. "She comes with a past. We may not know all her secrets but we know that she comes to get her hands dirty. She seems like the perfect character to take us into the New Zealand of this era, and be the one to guide us through the mystery of those timelines."

For Chatfield, keeping Anna's mystery in both her past history and present decisions was key to avoiding the clichés of every 19th-century fictional courtesan, particularly after Anna falls on hard times. "When she first arrives, Anna is asked, 'Sent for or sent away?' and she answers, 'I sent myself.' It was a clear decision not to give Anna's backstory, to have her living in the moment, without context."

The same goes for the choices we see Anna make, such as her early decision to keep quiet when she realises that her purse has been stolen by her new friend Lydia Wells, played with customary brooding charisma by Eva Green.

"Some people find that really challenging," agrees Chatfield. "Why doesn't Anna take her money back and go? But

her choices are made of character not plot, without justification. She has no background or context."

This crucial, demanding role – 17 weeks of shooting, with only five days not on the call sheet – went to Hewson (previously seen in *The Knick*) after an international trawl.

Chatfield explains what the producers saw: "We met lots of people, with a real mixture of variety and talent. Some brought innocence to it, but Eve really captured the depth."

At the centre of the adapted tale is Anna's relationship with Emery Staines, a man she first encounters as they arrive by the same boat in New Zealand. Later, they discover they are "astral twins", something explained by the spooky Lydia as: "If two people were born at the exact same instance and very near to one another, they would share a destiny."

For the actor who plays Emery, Himesh Patel – best known for his long-time role of Tamwar Masood in *EastEnders* before finding new fans in the lead role of Danny Boyle and Richard Curtis's Beatles big-screen rom-com, *Yesterday* – this presented the challenge of playing a character who is extremely important but often absent.

As Chatfield puts it, "Emery is like the male embodiment of a traditional girlfriend role. He spends a lot of time away. It's a tricky role, balancing their romance and connection, but without becoming completely soppy."

Patel embraced the positivity of his



Why we love property shows

Property shows have long been an essential part of many broadcasters' schedules. They're ubiquitous in both day-time and peak time and have made celebrities of presenters such as the seriously posh Kirstie Allsopp and her charming *Location, Location, Location* co-host, Phil Spencer.

But what is the secret of their success and how do they endure while other factual fare is more ephemeral? Is it our guilty pleasure in seeing beyond other people's front doors, the relationship between the programme presenters, our obsession with property prices – or something loftier, such as an interest in the rich variety of British architecture?

According to an RTS webinar, it's probably a mix of all these factors plus something less tangible to do with escapism.

Series that hook into viewers' obsession with their homes are here to stay, says an expert RTS panel

Allsopp, who first co-hosted *Location, Location, Location* back in 2000, pinpointed the "human stories" that exist at the centre of her show, which aims to find dream homes for house hunters with the minimum of heartache. "We invest so much in where we live and how we live. We use our homes to say something about ourselves. We're fascinated by people's stories. There's an intrinsic nosiness that we all have."

So what about the R factor? That's R for her relationship with Phil Spencer – described as "one of the great TV relationships" by her fellow panellist

Nick Knowles, the presenter, producer and writer whose credits include BBC One's *DIY SOS*.

What did she think? "Someone once said about Phil and I that we're very different personalities but very similar characters. I am genuinely fond of Phil. We are a unit.... But I do find it strange that people think it's all about our relationship. I've acknowledged that's true, but I think it's important that Phil and I don't think it's about us.

"If we became too obsessed with that, it would wreck everything. It has to be about your relationship with those people who you're helping to find a home."

Extraordinarily, *Location, Location, Location* is 34 series old and has undergone at least one big revamp. *DIY SOS* has knocked up 30 series.

Strictly speaking, it's a different kind of show to *Location, Location, Location*. As Knowles suggested, the roots of *DIY SOS* lie in a more innocent, less

consumerist age – that of TV's first Mr Makeover, Barry Bucknell, the BBC's DIY guru of the 1950s, when make do and mend was for many people a way of life rather than a leisure pursuit.

"It's part of the human condition that you want to make the space you live in a nicer place to be," said Knowles. "For the past 20 years or so, we've become obsessed with increasing the value of our homes. Our homes have become a commodity. From early cave paintings onwards, people were painting things on their walls to make them a little bit more homely and interesting."

"A show like *DIY SOS* evolves over time. At the end of each series, the producer and I sit down and think about where it's going to go next – unlike, say, *Changing Rooms*, which never really changed."

Kitty Walshe, Co-Managing Director of Remarkable, the production company responsible for such shows as *Your Home Made Perfect*, *The House That £100k Built* and *Restoration Home*, opined that, for a property show to last, it needed to be "useful" and, of course, entertaining. "Even with *DIY SOS*, there's a lot of take-out in that show. You learn about what you may be able to do in your own home," she said.

Over the years, Channel 4 has become synonymous with shows based on property. Four years ago, it was reckoned that the network broadcast no fewer than 12 programmes built on the P word.

"Often, these shows are more about people than property," acknowledged Deborah Dunnett, commissioning editor for popular factual at Channel 4. "That's what keeps them fresh and why every episode doesn't feel derivative."

What impact would the pandemic have on this much-loved TV staple? As the UK experienced an economic downturn of unprecedented swiftness, would property shows feel the pinch?

There was consensus that audiences were likely to see more shows encouraging homeowners to improve what they had than programmes helping them to find new homes.

"Perhaps it's less about how to make money from your property than actually to find a home you want to live in for the long term," said Walshe. "That is the zeitgeist. I spend all this money on stamp duty, removal costs. You know what, I could just refigure what I've got, rather than move."

Allsopp said that, during lockdown, many people had changed their



Nick Knowles
in *DIY SOS*

BBC

relationship with their homes and neighbourhoods: "They've discovered attractions on their doorstep that they weren't previously interested in."

Knowles agreed that people were rethinking these things. In the past 20 years, UK homes had been seen too much as investments and not enough as places where people wanted to live, he suggested. "My quality of life is about the place I live in now," he said. "Because of the lockdown, people are thinking more like this than, 'What is my house worth if I sell it?'"

Property as a commodity was likely to become less important as homeowners became more connected to their homes and local communities.

"People are going to try and improve the space in which they live for the purpose of living in it, rather than for profit," added Knowles.

"That hangover from the property boom of the 1990s is something we're moving on from," agreed Damion Burrows, architect and presenter, whose property show credits include *Grand Designs: House of the Year* and *Your Home Made Perfect*.

In the new normal, people would need to think hard about having workspaces at home and dedicated areas for kids. Burrows said: "How can I do more with what I've got, with small additions and cleverly reworking the space so that I can enjoy being here more? People are seeing their house in a different light – they're seeing it [every] afternoon."

Allsopp made the point that people were realising that they had been

expanding their properties and filling them with stuff they didn't need and that failed to make them happy.

Knowles told the RTS how he had downsized to a small country cottage from a large Georgian house and, as a result, become more content. "You don't always have to get bigger to be happier," he said.

Would people's changing attitudes towards their homes and local areas affect the kind of property shows that Channel 4 commissioned, asked the webinar's host, Boyd Hilton, entertainment director of *Heat* magazine.

Dunnett said she thought it would. "During lockdown, a lot of our best programmes have said: 'We know how you're feeling at home right now. Let us be useful or transport you somewhere else.' You really get that connection to your audience that you didn't have before."

Allsopp said she was desperate to get back to work, enabling would-be purchasers to find their perfect home. But she conceded that the coronavirus had changed everything: "Do they want now what they wanted before? Have they lost their job, have they changed their job?..."

"I'm champing at the bit to get out there in this new market and to get on with our job, which is helping people." ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS webinar 'Why we love... property shows' was held on 2 June. The producer was Sarah Booth, director of communications at Endemol Shine UK.



Lockdown winners

Celebrity Gogglebox

Gifted a captive audience, television has seen its ratings soar during the coronavirus crisis. “People are spending much longer in front of TV sets,” Justin Sampson, CEO of ratings body Barb, told an RTS Zoom event in June. During the first nine weeks of the lockdown, people spent an average of five hours seven minutes in front of the box, a third more than during the same period in 2019.

Audiences are at “the kind of levels you’d normally see at Christmas”, added Sampson, who was one of a four-strong panel discussing TV viewing during the lockdown.

It is unsurprising that – confined to their homes – audiences have turned to TV for both news about the coronavirus crisis and respite from it. But, delve a little deeper into the stats, and far more interesting changes in viewing habits emerge.

Traditional TV is doing well – and perhaps better than many expected. A snap poll of the RTS webinar audience revealed that almost two-thirds thought that the most surprising viewing story to come out of lockdown was the rediscovery of linear TV.

Yet, viewing of Barb-reported channels, which includes the public service

Viewing of linear channels has surged in recent months, but the biggest victors are on-demand services such as Netflix

broadcasters but not “unidentified viewing” – the likes of Netflix and other SVoDs, gaming, YouTube and overseas satellite channels – has risen by only 18%.

Unidentified viewing, however, has increased to almost 30% of all TV set usage during the lockdown. “This is a significant step change in what was an increasing trend anyway,” said Sampson. Among younger viewers, unidentified viewing accounts for more than half of all their TV watching during lockdown.

Sampson said the rise in unidentified viewing had been “more significant than I would have estimated. From the data we’re starting to see, we think the SVoD services are instrumental in that.”

Given both the severity and novelty of a global pandemic, it is scarcely surprising that viewers have been glued to the news. “There’s an enormous amount of viewing of news programmes among

older people,” said Sampson, “but there are some very encouraging growth figures in younger audiences.”

Coronavirus has brought back younger viewers to traditional TV, an audience that many media pundits thought had abandoned it for good. Digital UK, the organisation that runs Freeview, carried out a survey into attitudes to broadcasting a month into lockdown. “TV is still seen as the most important medium for information by all [age] groups,” said its CEO, Jonathan Thompson.

Public service broadcasting is highly valued, the survey found. “There had been this narrative emerging that anyone under 30 was completely disengaged with PSBs, but both the viewing behaviour during the lockdown and the attitudinal evidence we’re seeing in our research highlight that this is not true.”

Among 16- to 34-year-olds, he added, “two-thirds are saying that they are relying on the PSBs for news and information, and that they trust them much more than other providers”. The same group also values universality, with 90% supporting a “free TV service”.

“At the start of lockdown, people wanted trustworthy news sources,” said Martin Greenbank, head of advertising research and development at Channel 4. This view was “pretty much



Netflix's *Tiger King*

uniform" in a survey of some 1,200 people carried out by the broadcaster.

Greenbank revealed that "90% of the adult sample put TV as their number-one [source]. Newspapers were also important, but, way down the list, were Facebook and the social platforms."

More than 50% of the young people surveyed said they "were aware of fake news stories circulating, predominately on social platforms. That is one of the reasons they [come back] to the PSBs."

Greenbank said that *Channel 4 News* had "gone pretty much through the roof for all audiences". In the 16-34 age group, he said, "it has doubled its reach".

"Established" shows, he added, were doing particularly well: "*Gogglebox* is doing the biggest numbers it's ever done, both on overnight and consolidated [figures]." Other programmes proving popular during the lockdown include *The Great Celebrity Bake Off* and *Friday Night Dinner*.

"At the BBC, we're seeing record audiences in linear and across iPlayer," said Rachel Shaw, the corporation's head of content portfolio and audiences. "Since lockdown, we've seen 1 billion iPlayer requests," she added. Initially, this was driven by people's thirst for news; now drama is the spur, with *Killing Eve* and *Normal People* the most popular series.

'AUDIENCES ARE AT THE KIND OF LEVELS YOU'D NORMALLY SEE AT CHRISTMAS'

People are watching TV in groups during the lockdown, said Shaw; previously, "co-viewing" was the preserve of big sporting events and entertainment show finales. Now, this extends to programmes "across the board", including *The Repair Shop* and *Normal People*.

As with most industries, when the UK went into lockdown, TV production ground to a halt. With new programming at a premium, the number of repeats has grown steadily. The danger for the linear broadcasters is that, faced with reruns of shows they may not have much liked the first time around, viewers may switch off. The BBC's Shaw admitted that scheduling was "going to be a tricky balancing act".

A second poll of the RTS webinar audience asked which of the lockdown viewing trends would persist. The rise of the SVoD companies was thought most likely to continue, while the

popularity of co-viewing was judged the least likely.

Looking to the post-lockdown broadcasting landscape, Barb's Sampson hoped that young audiences would continue "relying on public service broadcasters for news".

"For us, it's a massive opportunity," said Shaw. "Young people are coming back to the BBC in enormous numbers. It's beholden on us to... offer them content that is meaningful to them."

Channel 4's Greenbank predicted a "period of consolidation" for SVoDs, arguing that consumers would not sign up for the all the new streamers coming on to the market. He predicted that they were more likely to "follow the content", buying subscriptions to "dip into content" and cancelling them when they've watched it. "Businesses such as Netflix, that were built on a debt mountain, rely on the debt being serviceable in the longer term. I'm not sure the global economics of this are going to support some of these businesses."

Digital UK's Thompson added: "SVoD is not going away – it's going to become a permanent feature of the market, but that was the case before the coronavirus crisis. It's probably been nudged forward." However, he argued that PSBs had natural advantages, such as offering live TV. "Linear is absolutely vital to its health, because [live TV] is the thing that Netflix doesn't have."

"I hope all the PSBs remind themselves of the importance of their organisations to viewers.... One of the things they've done brilliantly is to respond quickly to events, to feel live and connected and part of the community, which is very hard for a Netflix to do as a global broadcaster."

But it was easy to get carried away by the notion of a connected nation, keeping in touch via Zoom and binging on Netflix during the lockdown. Thompson pointed out that "20% of this country barely use the internet. For them, the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 are their main means of communication with the outside world, particularly at a time like this."

The notion of "universality", of "free, equal access" to television, he added, had "never been more important". ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS online event 'Lockdown viewing', held on 4 June, was chaired by the media commentator Kate Bulkley. The producers were Liz Reynolds and Keith Underwood.

OUR FRIEND IN LEEDS

I have had a few cool titles in my time – head of youth, head of the north, the pope of soap. But none quite compare with that of Dr Paul Litchfield, formerly titled surgeon commander, in charge of Royal Navy nuclear, biological and chemical defence.

He's now an independent medical adviser to ITV and a great guy to have on your side – or, indeed, on a Zoom call during a pandemic. That's exactly what the discussions needed: level-headed rationality to chart a way through all the lockdown fear caused by the nightly news beat and to get the soap teams back to work.

In a way, the infrastructure changes were the easy bit. Once ITV's health and safety gurus had plotted out a set of guidelines, together with other broadcasters, Pact, the unions and the Government, we just had to apply them.

Luckily, we are good at making things. We have amazing construction shops, which can whip up a court-room or a hotel bar if we need one.

Making a few Perspex screens and inventing a see-through camera shield and separating our buildings into colour-co-ordinated zones was a breeze. Our gallery partition screens are now much in demand all over ITV, not least for their clean, aesthetically pleasing lines – Covid cool, if you will.

We also have brilliant editorial teams and writers. Adapting our storylines to take out all our clinically vulnerable cast (the over-seventies) and the kids (too many add-ons, such as chaperones and tutors), and all the snogs and slaps, and yet still have

John Whiston hails a TV doctor like no other – and still finds time to dance the coronavirus two-step



Paul Hampartsoumian

scripts that crackled with the usual levels of high tension was hard work. But achievable with the application of some serious creative thought.

It was satisfying to be getting on with stuff when, all around, the country seemed to be moribund with despond. We knew that, once in the studio, our directors and crews would throw themselves into plotting out scenes where the characters could do the two-metre anti-mating dance around each other – the coronavirus two-step – without it seeming weird or unnatural.

With such clever staging and crafty lens work, my real fear was that we'd get complaints from the audience

that our actors didn't look like they were properly two metres apart. The social-distance poles helped. Some people are born to wield a two-metre pole. In another age, they would have been a samurai warrior or a merry man of Sherwood. These days, they are called cohort managers and they ward off evil spirits.

When you are used to making nearly two feature films' worth of drama a week on both soaps (*Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*), you would expect us to have a well-oiled and adaptive production machine.

Which is why the toughest challenge was overcoming our collective anxiety about going back. This was early May and that invisible, deadly enemy was very much out there. And in here, lurking in our minds as much as in the air.

That's where Dr Litchfield came in. In Zoom call after Zoom call, he listened patiently to the concerns of over 500 soap cast and crew, all in different places on their Covid journey. And, like the GPs of your TV youth, Dr Finlay or Dr Cameron, calmly and sensibly talked through the risks and the mitigations.

We may all have worked on medical dramas, but it turns out that we aren't actually doctors. Having one of those to deliver impartial reassurance and hard-and-fast advice is a producer's secret weapon against both fear and complacency. Get yourself one before you start up again. The longer the title, the better. ■

John Whiston is managing director, continuing drama, and head of ITV in the north, ITV Studios.



RTS Student Television Awards 2020

Sponsored by



Matt Richardson and Siobhan Greene
hosted a virtual ceremony that was
streamed on 26 June

Biggy, Undergraduate Comedy and Entertainment

Undergraduate Animation

Margin of Terror

Kieran McLister, University of Edinburgh
'Strong acting and performances... and an amazing attention to detail. Lots of in-jokes and strong, rich touches.'

Nominees:

- **Ctrl + Alt + Z**, Holly Keating, Conor Leech, Ciara O'Shaughnessy and Kai Munroa, Ballyfermot College of Further Education
- **You're Fit**, Lydia Reid, Kingston University

Postgraduate Animation

Heatwave

Fokion Xenos, Priya K Dosanjh, Brendan Freedman, Stella Heath Keir, Kevin Langhamer and Team, National Film and Television School

'Very accomplished and hugely enjoyable. Very playful and colourful, with brilliant production design. The ambitious crowd shot view blew us all away.'

Nominees:

- **Almost There**, Nelly Michenaud, Tim Dees, Nathanael Baring, Kate Phibbs and Team, National Film and Television School
- **In Her Boots**, Kathrin Steinbacher, Royal College of Art

Undergraduate Comedy and Entertainment

Biggy

Henry Oliver, Jordi Estapé Montserrat and Liam Morgan, Ravensbourne University

'Brilliantly shot, with impeccable detail throughout, and a first-class edit. The song is a hit and Biggy is a star.'

Nominees:

- **FLIT**, Jack Allen, Elías Nader, Ina Morken, Laurence Jenkins and Carey Melanie Osborne, University of Edinburgh
- **Holiday!**, Toby Matthews, Amy Lindley and Charles Power, Falmouth University

Postgraduate Comedy and Entertainment

Lucy

Menghan Zhu, Gwennaëlle Counson, Lia Monguzzi, Ziyu Qiu, Elliot Barker and Ruojing Yang, Goldsmiths, University of London

'A very unusual concept. A work that wasn't afraid to be bold.'

Nominee:

- **Go for Alanya**, Anna Castelaz, Arianne Smith, Madeleine Quarm, Daniela Velasco, Olga Lagun and Jessica Halee, Goldsmiths, University of London

Undergraduate Drama

Starry Night

Emma Smith, Caoilinn Handley, Rachel Moloney, Lori Stacey, Anna Heisterkamp and Team, IADT Dún Laoghaire

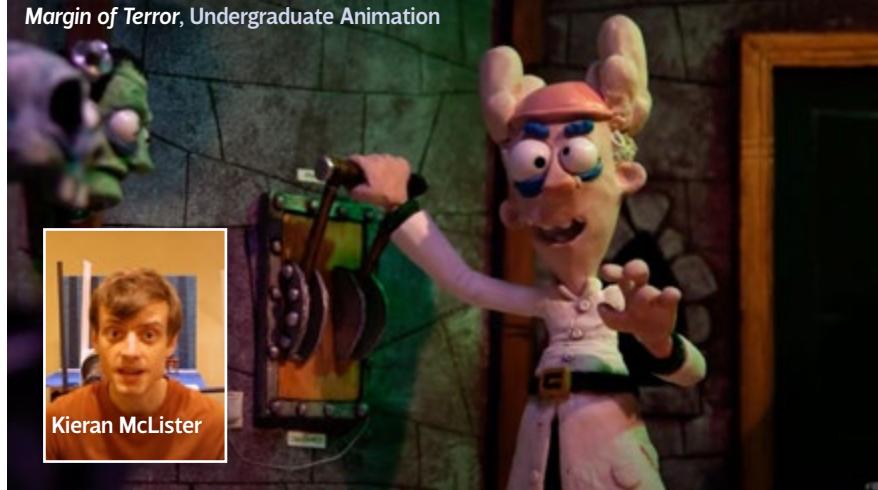
'Wonderful playfulness, strong performances, with a compelling non-linear narrative that really stood out.'

Nominees:

► **A Dead Canary**, James Davis, Elle Ralph, Charlotte Murphy, Rachel Neill and David Richards, University of Gloucestershire

► **Sealskin**, Anna Venuto, Lara Karam and Daisy Leigh Phippard, Arts University Bournemouth

Margin of Terror, Undergraduate Animation



Postgraduate Drama

Ufo

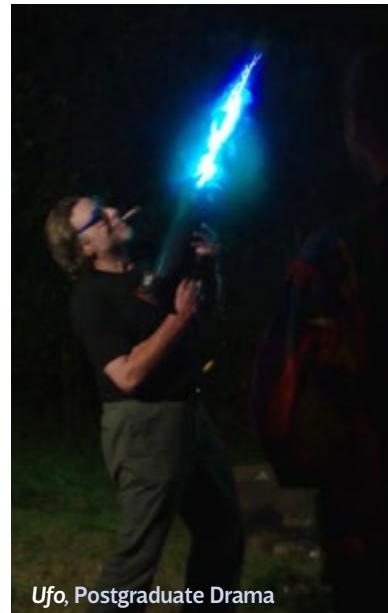
Harvey Gardner, Reece Steel and Luca Michelli, University of the West of Scotland

'A moving and poignant story, told with real visual boldness and wit.'

Nominees:

► **Azaar**, Myriam Raja, Nathanael Baring and Team, National Film and Television School

► **November 1st**, Charlie Manton, Teodora Shaleva, Molly Manning-Walker, Theo Boswell, Celina Øier and Team, National Film and Television School



Ufo, Postgraduate Drama

Undergraduate Factual

Building Bridges

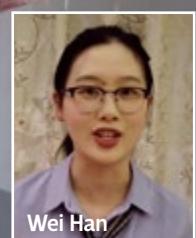
Josephine Cressy, Guillermo Quintanilla-Pinto, Maximilian Wilson, Pierre Niyongira and Luke Denton (University of the West of England, Bristol)

'Very moving, honest [and] brave [with] the storyline cleverly woven throughout the story.'

Nominees:

► **The Curiosity of Edward Pratt**, Thomas Sandler, Oscar Godfrey and Alex Gordon, University of York

► **Women Uprooted**, Dominique de Villiers, Fran Brotherton-Cottrell, Ellie Price, Grace Mosley and Andrea Stensholm Klæboe, Falmouth University



Wei Han

Postgraduate Factual

Separation

Wei Han, UCL

'Perfectly told, [with] lyrical power worthy of a feature film. It left you caring deeply for the young girl at its heart.'

Nominees:

► **Carrying Myself**, Matea Petrović, University of Salford

► **Green and Grey**, Lucia Amoroso, UCL



The RTS Student Television Awards 2020 reward outstanding work produced during the 2018/19 academic year. Undergraduate entries were first judged at a regional level by their local RTS Centre in the winter of 2019. The winning films from each RTS

Centre, along with all postgraduate entries, were then judged nationally in April 2020.

 You can see a selection of the students' films at [rts.org.uk/article/watch-films-rts-student-television-awards-2020](https://www.rts.org.uk/article/watch-films-rts-student-television-awards-2020)

Undergraduate News

It Takes All Sorts

Katya Fowler, University of Leeds
‘Consumer journalism [that] was cleverly storyboarded and creatively filmed and edited.’

Nominees:

► **A Roof Over Our Heads**, Pien Meulensteen, University of Salford

► **Linked**, Alex Bridgewood, University of Derby

Postgraduate News

Host or Hostile?

Issa Farfour, Cardiff University
‘A powerful story packed with suspense and drama. A stand-out piece of first-person journalism.’

Nominees:

► **Tarred by the Brush of Modern Slavery**, Huong Nguyen, Nottingham Trent University

► **The Decline of the Great British Bee**, Adam Smith, University of Sheffield

Undergraduate Short Form

Night Hopper

Lauren Burnham, Staffordshire University
‘With some beautiful shots... this film felt visceral and inventive and was very accomplished.’

Nominees:

► **Looking For**, Cian Desmond, Caolinn Handley, Jack Desmond and Lori Stacey, IADT Dún Laoghaire

► **Tia**, Jamie Walsh, University of Central Lancashire

Postgraduate Short Form

Rough Hands

Fabio Mota, Lily Grimes, Francesco Cibati, Beatriz Honório, Malika Ruzmetova and Team, National Film and Television School
‘Had a great story at its heart... looked great and [was] very well executed.’

Nominees:

► **Hungry Mobsters**, Francis Corby Ceschin, Paola Gonzalez Camarero, Said Englund, Ava Isak, Fabio Mota and Team, National Film and Television School

► **Timing is Everything**, Michele Vicenti, Twan Peeters and Team, National Film and Television School

Undergraduate Camerawork

Starry Night

Anna Heisterkamp, IADT Dún Laoghaire
 ‘Nice lighting, good camerawork and good story. It flowed well.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Looking For**, Jack Desmond, IADT Dún Laoghaire
- ▶ **Biggy**, Liam Morgan, Ravensbourne University London



Postgraduate Camerawork

Azaar

Michael Filocamo, National Film and Television School
 ‘Beautifully shot... to create a brilliant atmosphere. Simple but effective.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Heatwave**, Brendan Freedman, National Film and Television School
- ▶ **November 1st**, Molly Manning-Walker, National Film and Television School

Undergraduate Editing

Women Uprooted

Grace Mosley, Falmouth University
 ‘Good sound design and a great edit. A well-told piece.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **The Curiosity of Edward Pratt**, Thomas Sandler, University of York
- ▶ **Biggy**, Henry Oliver and Justin Grange-Bennett, Ravensbourne University London



Postgraduate Editing

Separation

Wei Han, UCL

‘Exceptional film-making. The way the narrative unfolds is captivating and thought provoking.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **November 1st**, Celina Øier, National Film and Television School
- ▶ **Heatwave**, Stella Heath Keir, National Film and Television School

Undergraduate Production Design

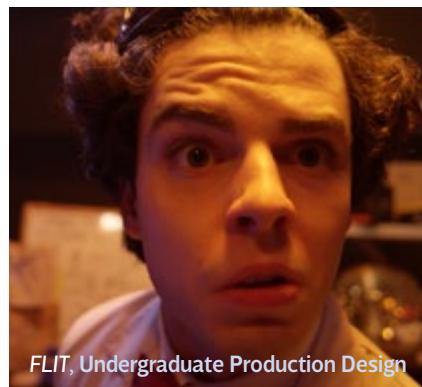
FLIT

Ina Morken and Jack Allen, University of Edinburgh

‘Great production design and art department; good colours and lighting [and] great detail in the set.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Margin of Terror**, Kieran McLister, University of Edinburgh
- ▶ **A Dead Canary**, Rachel Neill, University of Gloucestershire





Azaar, Postgraduate Camerawork and Postgraduate Production Design

Postgraduate Production Design *Azaar*

Lauren Taylor, National Film and Television School

'The strong use of the red elements in the costumes, curtains, doors and blood... brought everything together.'

Nominees:

► **Heatwave**, Antonio Niculae, National Film and Television School

► **November 1st**, Theo Boswell, National Film and Television School

Undergraduate Sound

Ctrl + Alt + Z

Rose Connolly, Ballyfermot College of Further Education

'Very good animation, well told, [with] good, stylish use of foley and a good soundtrack.'

Nominees:

► **Building Bridges**, Luke Denton, University of the West of England, Bristol

► **Margin of Terror**, Kieran McLister and Mike Meurs, University of Edinburgh

Postgraduate Sound

Heatwave

Kevin Langhamer, National Film and Television School

'An excellent-sounding animation. We loved the bouzouki strum for toe-testing the sea's temperature.'

Nominees:

► **Almost There**, Ioannis Spanos, National Film and Television School

► **November 1st**, Edward Guy, National Film and Television School

Undergraduate Writing

Starry Night

Rachel Moloney, IADT Dún Laoghaire

'A well-thought-out script that allowed you to feel the story.'

Nominees:

► **Building Bridges**, Josephine Cressy, University of the West of England, Bristol

► **Biggy**, Henry Oliver, Ravensbourne University London

Postgraduate Writing

November 1st

Charlie Manton, National Film and Television School

'Great dialogue. Powerful subject matter dealt with expertly. Brilliantly written.'

Nominees:

► **Azaar**, Myriam Raja, National Film and Television School

► **Separation**, Wei Han, UCL ■



Heatwave,
Postgraduate
Animation and
Postgraduate
Sound



Ctrl + Alt + Z, Undergraduate Sound

RTS West of England

"The media sector has not done enough," said Grant Mansfield, discussing its attempts to improve diversity. "[It] is changing for the better, but we are where we are because lots of people have talked about stuff and not enough people have done anything."

The Plimsoll Productions CEO added: "We're trying to appeal to broad audiences. How on earth can we do that if it's all being seen through the prism of a bunch of middle-class white people? They should be part of the group, not the whole bloody group."

Mansfield was part of a panel assembled for an RTS West of England webinar, chaired by the centre's Chair, Lynn Barlow, in late June to discuss the health of the region's TV production.

Coronavirus has hit the South West hard, as it has the whole country. The Creative Industries Federation forecasts that the region could lose almost a third of its creative jobs, 43,000 in total.

Mike Jenkins, co-founder of Blak Wave Productions, had his first commission cancelled when lockdown came. With the Black Lives Matter protests, "things have



The Shadow of Slavery

Diversity: more action, less talk

really started to pick up" for the new black-owned indie.

Jenkins filmed the Bristol protest, which saw the statue of slave owner Edward Colston thrown into the harbour: "We managed to capture history. We were in the right place at the right time."

He approached Sacha Mirzoeff, head of Channel 4 in Bristol, who commissioned

the indie to make *The Shadow of Slavery* for its series of short films in response to the killing of George Floyd, *Take Your Knee Off My Neck*.

"We've battled through. I think we've done some positive commissioning during Covid, with fast-turnaround shows that have been extraordinarily reflective of the nation," said Mirzoeff.

"There are challenges but we've adapted and we feel far more fleet of foot. There's lots to be excited about, particularly in the West and Wales."

"What's on the shelf is pretty bare. Broadcasters are going to need programmes to be made.... I know it's tough... but we can look forward to some exciting times ahead."

Natural history specialist True to Nature continued to shoot in the UK, although, with overseas travel coming to a standstill, filming on the second series of *Expedition with Steve Backshall* was suspended.

The indie hopes to film abroad in the autumn. "We're looking, where possible, to work with camera people who live... where we want to film," said CEO Wendy Darke.

Mansfield added: "We need to be able to get on planes and get into other countries. The response and competence of our Government is pretty significant [here]: there are certain countries where we want to film at the moment, where we've been told explicitly... that, if you form a queue of people that they want in the country after coronavirus, the Brits would be at the back."

Matthew Bell

Looking forward to better pictures

RTS London

A panel of experts discussed current and future TV technology at a joint RTS London/Digital Television Group (DTG) event in June.

Looking forward over the next decade, the panellists highlighted the technologies that would most improve the TV-watching experience.

"Mass-market adoption of high dynamic range [HDR]" would be the big thing, said

Simon Gauntlett, director of imaging standards and technology at Dolby Laboratories. HDR improves both contrast and colour, giving brighter colours and greater depth. "A wider adoption of HDR in more content genres is the thing that people will notice at home."

"HD [adoption] was very patchy initially, then it burst forward. Now, if you don't watch a channel in HD, it's

not really worth watching in my humble opinion," said Chris Johns, chief engineer, broadcast strategy at Sky.

"I think UHD [ultra-high definition] will be very similar. At the moment, it's very niche and there's a very limited amount of content available. As people start to produce this content, especially in a cost-effective way, and incorporate the HDR element in it, that will become the norm."

Johns added that virtual reality will give the consumer something different: "It's not mass market but it is something that people can dip their toes into."

DTG strategic technologist Yvonne Thomas agreed HDR would prosper, because it offered a "great image quality at a lower bandwidth than you would have with a high resolution or high frame rate".

RTS Fellow and DTG Chair Simon Fell chaired the event, and Phil Barnes and Georgina Wilks-Wiffen produced it.

Matthew Bell

We're all bored of Zoom and ready for some gloss and high production values," Lindsay Bradbury told an RTS Midlands webinar in June.

The BBC daytime and early peak commissioning editor was one of a panel of three factual TV experts discussing production as it emerges from its coronavirus-imposed hibernation.

During the lockdown, Bradbury has enjoyed watching the Sally Rooney adaptation *Normal People*, and CBBC's *Malory Towers*, which "took me to a happy place, pretending I was 12 again", and Channel 4's *First Dates Hotel*.

"I haven't enjoyed any of the specific lockdown stuff. If lots of commissioners had their time again, they wouldn't have commissioned half as much of the Zoom-related content as they did," said Optomen TV executive producer Sarah Eglin. She argued that much of the programming that "reflected people being stuck in their houses" wasn't "very watchable".

Production executive Sabrina Ferro found the Zoom programmes "so awkward". They "have not been funny when they have supposed to have been funny. This is a time when everyone has wanted to escape because – speaking on my own behalf – we have become obsessed with checking the news. We have... to give everyone something entertaining and positive."

Eglin is planning to start filming the new series of BBC Two's *Great British Menu* in September. "I'm hoping to do [it] without coronavirus being too much in your face."

But filming will be more complicated and time-consuming than usual.



BBC

Gloss it, don't Zoom it

RTS
Midlands

Matthew Bell hears how the industry is getting ready for the return of television production in the Midlands

"In *Great British Menu*, we taste the food and that normally involves everybody crowding around a plate – clearly, we can't do that," said Eglin. "What will probably happen is that the chefs will plate up... and, through the magic of television, it will [appear on separate plates to taste, scattered around the kitchen.]

"There's so much practical stuff that the audience won't see that we will be doing, like full cleans twice a day."

Bradbury said: "People in TV don't take no for an answer – they want to carry on working and there's lots of creative ways of working within government guidelines."

Production budgets have been under pressure during lockdown and this is unlikely

to change. Freelancers have been worst hit, said Eglin: "So many colleagues have not benefited from government schemes at all and have had to live on savings or take breaks from paying their mortgages.

"One of the things that really motivates me at the moment to get my productions back up and filming is to give work to people.

"The sooner we get out filming, the better. Who knows if there's a second wave coming? If we all sit around waiting to see what happens, then we risk being in a worse position."

"I remember having to ring [people] and tell them that we were going into lockdown, abandoning filming and that they didn't have

jobs. There's no way I'm going to wait to help those people pay their mortgage."

"People are chomping at the bit to get out there and [film]," added Bradbury. "You can work around the two-metre rule if you are creative." Using two cameras, she explained, "you can cut between them so you don't notice there's a huge gap [between people]."

Ferro has experience of working during the lockdown on Channel 4's *Coronavirus: How Clean Is Your House*. "We've learned a lot from the last 10 to 12 weeks. It can be done sensibly."

"The world is opening up again and we're more informed now," she said. "Best foot forward and let's crack on." ■

'PEOPLE ARE CHOMPING AT THE BIT TO GET OUT THERE AND FILM'

'Emerging out of lockdown and beyond' was held on 10 June, and produced by Becky Jones-Owen and Perjeet Aujla, who also chaired the event.

**Steve Clarke,
Matthew Bell
& Imani Cottrell**
report on another
busy month of
webinars for TV
newcomers

People from BAME backgrounds who feel “they don’t fit in” should “keep on banging on the door” if they want to work in TV, recommended Ade Adepitan, the BBC and Channel 4 presenter.

The disabled basketball Paralympic medallist said he had got into TV by luck: “I didn’t go to uni, I went to the university of life.” His first job in TV was working for a cable station, which, in the early 1990s, was looking for a wheelchair-using basketball player to appear on screen.

Initially he declined their invitation but, when the station offered him £250 for the gig, he seized the chance.

The presenter said it was easier today for newbies to acquire the skills to become a TV presenter thanks to smartphones: “You can practise your skills on social media and live-stream, as I’ve been doing during lockdown.”

Adepitan has never looked back. Forging a life as a presenter, as he and his fellow panellists made clear, requires resilience and determination. “There’s no set path to getting into TV,” he said. “The main thing today is passion.” His BBC Two series *Africa with Ade Adepitan* took almost two decades to get on air. Commissioners were reluctant to order a series that defied the stereotypes of a continent too often defined by poverty, corruption and conflict.

Jackie Long, Channel 4’s social affairs editor, said that those considering working in



BBC

On-screen stardust

TV should remain true to themselves – and to avoid doing what she did at the start of her career. “Don’t feel grateful for the opportunities you are given,” advised Long. “Don’t try to be someone else. Be proud of who you are.”

All the contributors agreed that successful presenters had an authentic voice and were themselves in front of the camera.

Anita Rani, a regular presenter of BBC One’s *Countryfile*, said she had begun her career as a 14-year-old by working part-time for a local radio station. “I was there at weekends and school holidays,” she recalled. “Find your own voice, your own tone and make it look effortless, even though you’ve done loads of preparation and are dependent on a team.”

Radio presenter Anna O’Neill, who works as a reporter for BBC London,

said an essential quality for being a successful journalist was the ability to spot a story.

“Stories are everywhere – your friends and neighbours have them,” said O’Neill, whose first degree was in Italian and Arabic. “You can have all the technical skills, but you still need to be able to spot a story, tell a case history.”

She emphasised the importance of tenacity – and told the RTS how she got her first break as a student journalist on Radio 4’s *You and Yours*. This was despite the programme’s reluctance to agree to work with her on a story she’d found involving the loss of hundreds of passports. “At first, they said, ‘We’ll give you £50 for your contacts and we’ll do the rest.’ Persistence paid off and she did the story for *You and Yours*.

The Grenfell fire was the most powerful story she had covered: “It was like a war

zone. I was there for three months. Listening to all that tragedy and grief was traumatic. “I’m still in touch with the contacts I made at Grenfell. It’s important to keep your contacts close to you.”

Rani said she would never forget reporting from India, where she had met some of the poorest people on earth. “I can’t express how that makes you feel,” she said. “It alters your perspective on life.”

For Adepitan, encountering war victims in Vietnam poisoned as children by the US use of chemical agents, and meeting gay and transgender people in Jamaica forced to live in a storm drain, have both left lasting impressions on him. “I think about that every day,” he said. ■

Report by Steve Clarke. ‘The life of a presenter’, was held on 9 June, and chaired and produced by Jasmine Dotiwala.

From drafting to making models to dressing sets, the TV art department offers a wealth of opportunity to the creative person. For an RTS Futures webinar in June, a panel of art directors and assistants talked art and design. All had graduated from university with a range of arts degrees, but they also stressed the need for more practical skills.

"The most basic skill is to be able to cut in a straight line," said art director Maddie Flint, who studied performance design. "You don't have to have a TV course background but something creative definitely helps."

"If you want to be a set dresser... then you don't necessarily have to have technical skills, [but] it helps," added art director Lizzie Chambers. She studied interior design at university and has worked on ITV2's *Love Island* for the past five years.

The panellists discussed the make-up of the art department. On ITV's *Britain's Got Talent*, Flint's team includes two assistants and two runners, a buyer, and a crew to build and decorate sets. "It's a huge show, with lots of cogs, but on other shows it could just be me, or me and an assistant," she said.



directors, their assistants, set decorators and builders, buyers and a draughtsperson.

Ruby Asare is at the start of her career. After studying interior design, she secured a place on the ScreenSkills Trainee Finder entry-level placement scheme, which matches trainees with productions. She worked as an art department trainee on the movie *Supernova*, which stars Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci. "A lot of my job entailed picking things up from suppliers or sourcing things," she recalled. "I also helped the art directors with measuring and drafting on location."

The basic requirement of an art assistant, said Olivia Hodder, who studied fine art and works with Maddie Flint, "is to always be on time and do what your art director tells you". The job is unpredictable. On *Britain's Got Talent*, she said: "We have a general plan at the beginning of the day but... by 4:00pm, everything has turned on its head. We could be [hurriedly] making massive foam bubbles that need to float in the air." ■

A job for TV's true artists

"Generally speaking, you've either got a dressing job where it's just you and maybe a runner or an assistant, or a bigger job such as *Love Island*... with three or four art directors," added Chambers.

In drama, said Emma Ryder, budget dictates the size of the team. The assistant

art director studied TV and film design, before landing a job storyboarding a crash scene in ITV soap *Emmerdale*. She has since worked on Netflix drama *Sex Education*.

On a big movie, the art department can grow to 100 people but, on a TV drama, it typically includes a supervising art director, art

Report by Matthew Bell. 'Working in the TV art department' was held on 16 June, chaired by Alex Wootten, and produced by Alex Wootten and Jude Winstanley.

More freedom to film

■ With so many people having access to a smartphone, creating high-quality TV reports and packages has never been easier.

For BBC News video journalist Dougal Shaw, capturing stories alone is a lot easier with just a phone: 'You're not very nimble with a normal camera and all the equipment... and, with news output, people don't know the difference between footage filmed on a phone and on a camera.'

He added that interviewing people with a big camera could be intimidating, whereas a smartphone felt more natural.

Reporter Vivien Morgan, who has worked on BBC current affairs programme *Panorama*, said it was important to plan a script: 'Storytelling is about getting things right.'

'Your story needs to be watertight... think about how the words and pictures go together.'

Freelance journalist Toby

Sadler, whose outlets include *ITV News*, said filming with a phone allowed him to be 'immediate and spontaneous'. He offered tips: ensure you have a spare battery and enough phone storage; make shots long enough so they can be edited; and don't use the zoom facility because the image will pixelate.

He suggested using a variety of shots 'to make a sequence more interesting.... You can do so much with LED lighting

– it raises the quality of your footage.'

And filming is not the only skill video journalists require. 'Learn both filming and editing – the two skills reinforce each other,' said Shaw, who recommended Final Cut Pro for editing.

Mobile journalism, said Morgan, is 'a wonderful, creative process and you'll get better as you repeat it'.

Report by Imani Cottrell. 'An introduction to mobile phone journalism' was held on 4 June, and chaired and produced by Ed Gove.

Huw Rossiter
listens in as
TV chiefs in
Wales discuss the
effect of Covid-19
on broadcasting

The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated the value of public service broadcasting at a time of unprecedented national crisis. But the economic fallout from the lockdown leaves PSBs facing a fight to sustain high-quality programmes and services.

This stark message was delivered during an RTS Cymru Wales webinar featuring a panel of the heads of the country's broadcasting organisations.

Taking part, were: Rhodri Talfan Davies, director of BBC Cymru Wales; Phil Henfrey, head of news and programmes at ITV Cymru Wales; and Owen Evans, CEO of S4C. The session was hosted by Sian Morgan Lloyd from Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Culture.

Davies said the logistical challenge of moving some 240 journalists out of their offices into a home-working environment within 48 hours was "a tribute to the level of focus and the clarity of thinking" in the newsroom and the technical and operational teams at BBC Wales.

Looking to the future, he warned that current pressures on BBC funding and the prospect of an economic recession meant that all public service broadcasters would "inevitably need to look at their cost base", with implications for jobs.

"It's fantastic that audiences have seen the value of public service media in all its forms in recent months," he said. "But we're going to face



RTS vis Zoom

PSBs come to the fore

a fight to sustain the breadth and richness of what we currently have."

Henfrey described the pandemic as one of the most challenging news stories *ITV News Wales* had covered. "But on another level, it's among our proudest achievements," he said. "Our first priority was to keep people safe.... That was counterbalanced by the need to stay on air and that was a huge challenge.

"We were able to keep a comprehensive news and current affairs service on the air, as well as upscaling the amount of content produced online – underscoring the value of PSB in Wales."

Evans said the pandemic

saw viewing of S4C's daily news programme *Newyddion* (made by BBC Wales) rise by 40%, with a 130% jump in consumption of its digital services. "On top of what the BBC and ITV are making for us in news and current affairs, we developed a daily digital service around Covid. We

also moved our current affairs programmes into peak-time slots," he said.

The participants said that current commissions were "on pause" rather than cancelled. "It's all about cash

flow and maintaining the development and commissioning process," said Davies. "The key thing is that the Welsh broadcasters have not

pulled up the drawbridge."

Evans said a priority for S4C was to bring security to Wales's independents: "One of the first things we did was to have commissioning rounds, so that we could keep things going. But I'm concerned about what will happen when the furlough period finishes."

Henfrey said that, as a global producer, ITV would learn from other countries in terms of restarting production.

A significant aspect of the crisis has been the divergent approaches adopted by governments in the devolved nations and the role of the broadcasters in explaining those differences. "This will be seen as one of the defining moments in the development of devolution in Wales," said Davies. ■

**'WE FACE
A FIGHT TO
SUSTAIN
BREADTH
AND
RICHNESS'**

The webinar was held on 15 June and produced by Edward Russell.

Picture perfect

Matthew Bell
hears how Sky Arts has tuned into people's creativity during the lockdown

Sky Arts reinvented *Portrait Artist of the Year* as a global, live, paint-along show for a lockdown audience, streamed free on its Facebook page. Celebrity sitters, including comedian Noel Fielding, posed in their homes for each four-hour Sunday episode.

During an RTS London webinar, the show's producers and talent explained how they created *Portrait Artist of the Week*. Sam Richards, an executive producer at Storyvault Films, which makes both series, describes the parent show as "the *Bake-Off* of art – it's not a niche art programme".

"It's warm, inclusive and multi-generational, but it can also be 'shout at the telly'. It's very competitive and people root for artists."

Richards' fellow Storyvault Films exec Danielle Graham explained the thinking behind the new weekly programme: "It became clear that lots of people were being creative. I realised our programme was made for lockdown – we're all at home with more time on our hands."

Making the show, she added, "was the steepest learning curve ever but it has been incredibly rewarding."

"I don't know any other format that puts two creative people together for four hours



Artist Kimberly Klauss painting Noel Fielding

and you just listen to their conversation."

Regular presenter Joan Bakewell hosts *Portrait Artist of the Week*: "Because of my age, I'm in an isolated group, so I welcomed anything that would challenge me to use my wits and keep my spirits up.

"I thought it was a great idea. Of course, [I thought] it would be impossible, but I decided to give it a go – I like a new challenge and a new format. Throughout my career, I've followed all the different forms that television has taken and, it seems to me, that this is a form that won't go away – we've discovered something rather special here. We can speak across nations to each other and, immediately, get a response."

The artists featured in the series include *Portrait Artist of the Year* semi-finalist Kimberly Klauss, who joined the RTS webinar from Munich. "It was both exhilarating and completely petrifying," recalled Klauss, who painted Fielding. "My stomach was in knots."

Sky Production Services

studio manager Ben Burdon explained how, once the lockdown had started, he was still able to facilitate programme-making, "and not just put out archive material. We tried to work out a platform at home that would be accessible to all of the contributors, our technical teams and our content-makers," he explained. It would have taken too long to configure broadcast equipment, so he came up with a solution, "*Blue Peter fashion*", to grab bits of kit around the house – "iPads, laptops, tablets – and, remarkably, make television".

Sky Production Services director Adam Noble said *Portrait Artist of the Week* threw up "lots of issues you wouldn't get in a traditional gallery".

And it made huge demands on the portrait painters, who had to set up their studios for filming and work with alien technology. Noble added: "They had to take all of that on board, and then paint and talk. My biggest challenge was making them feel comfortable with the technology."

Portrait Artist of the Week proved a hit. Audiences built steadily, week by week, said director of Sky Arts Phil Edgar-Jones – episode 1 generated 70,000 views; episode 6 passed 210,000. "With most TV," he said, "a lot of people come to episode 1 and then it tails off quite dramatically."

The show's run was extended from four to eight episodes, with TV historian Mary Beard as the final sitter.

"There was a lot of love for it," said Graham. "We realised that, unlike *Portrait Artist of the Year*, this was more about community than competition. More and more people were saying, 'It's keeping me going'. Without wanting to sound too grandiose, it was really helping people's mental health."

"It felt like we were doing something really lovely for people at an awful time." ■

The webinar 'Production focus: Portrait Artist of the Week' was held on 11 June, chaired by Aradhna Tayal and produced by Phil Barnes.

TV Centre celebrates 60 years

RTS London BBC Television Centre is the “perfect TV building”. So said TV presenter Phillip Schofield during a special RTS London programme marking the 60th anniversary of the official opening of the BBC’s White City HQ.

The architect, Graham Dawbarn, based his design on a question mark he’d doodled on the back of an envelope, revealed head of BBC history Robert Seatter. “He realised, in a eureka moment, that he had found the perfect shape for Television Centre.

“It [has] a circuit in the middle for offices and managerial



BBC Television Centre

Schofield first came across TV Centre as a child, when he was given a Ladybird Book, *How It Works – Television*, which contained an illustration of the BBC’s home. “I studied that map – I knew it better than the inside of my house,” he recalled.

Years later, working as a BBC children’s presenter, Schofield found himself “working in the building that I’d studied”. In 2013, when the BBC closed TV Centre, Schofield appeared in a show celebrating its history, *Goodbye Television Centre*.

But that was not the end of the story. In 2018, he returned to a renovated, but smaller, TV Centre, when it became home to ITV’s *This Morning*. “It was such a perfect full circle... going back was sublime.”

TVC 60: Birthday of a Building premiered on 29 June. Watch it at: rts.org.uk/event/tvc-60.

Matthew Bell

people and, around the back, a canopy of different access points for all the paraphernalia of television, the cameramen, the engineers, the scenery builders and the talent.”

“It was a vision of the future,” said former studio

cameraman Roger Bunce: “If Dan Dare had a headquarters, I’m almost certain it would look exactly like TV Centre.

“It’s a lovely piece of architecture and the public got to know it because it appeared in so many programmes.”

Newbies offer advice

RTS bursary scheme The flourishing RTS bursary scheme held three webinars in June for young people set on a career in television.

Paula Ugochukwu and Richard Walker have both started to climb the TV ladder. Walker left the University of Gloucestershire in 2017 with a degree in TV production. During his final year, he attended the RTS Futures Careers Fair and introduced himself to production companies. Having moved to London, he got a job as a runner for RDF and is now a shooting researcher.

Ugochukwu, originally from London, graduated with a degree in journalism studies from the University of Sheffield in 2019 and chose to stay put. She had made

connections in the north and observed that media companies were moving north, including Channel 4 to Leeds.

She now has a full-time job in learning and development, and is also a freelance digital content creator, hosts her own podcast, creates content for brands on social media and makes videos for her YouTube channel.

The next stop on the RTS Bursary virtual tour was further north, with alumni Emma Duncan and Colin MacRae selling the Scottish dream. Both said Scotland had a lot to offer, from BBC Scotland to STV to the wealth of production houses based in Film City Glasgow.

Duncan graduated from Glasgow Caledonian University in 2018 with a degree in

multimedia journalism and now works for the *East Lothian Courier*.

MacRae left Edinburgh Napier University in 2018 with a degree in television. He then completed a masters in film-making at the University of the West of Scotland. His documentary *Walking in My Shoes* won an award at Ukraine’s Kaniv International Film Festival.

The pair offered some practical advice. “Do as many work experiences and placements as you can while at uni,” said Duncan.

MacRae seconded her, recalling paid work experience as a location marshal, extra, runner and assistant on blockbuster films while he was at university.

Earlier in June, Dave Castell,

general manager of inventory and partnerships at global tech company The Trade Desk, talked to students.

He said there was value in specialism – honing one’s knowledge in a particular field – but also in bridging the gap between the creative and technical sides of TV.

“Don’t view the role of a runner as simply being a runner,” he said. “Think of all the experience and conversations you can have – assisting that exec producer, talking to that camera operator.”

Castell advised students to talk to people working in roles they aspire to and work their hardest to get there: “It’s all about having courage, optimism and little bit of creative licence.” He put a positive spin on the pandemic, arguing that now was the time to explore opportunities: “Read those books. Do that research. Start that podcast.”

Megan Fellows

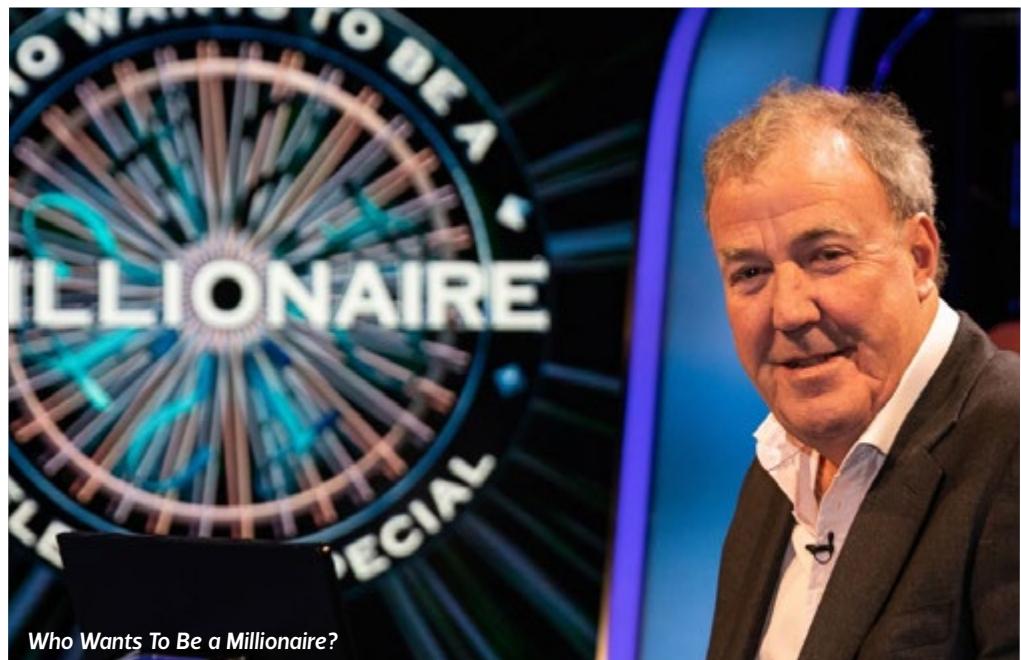
Tony Orme tunes in to two webinars looking at new ways of making TV

Social-distancing restrictions have had an enormous impact on productions with studio audiences, explained an RTS Thames Valley Zoom event in late June.

The audience is an integral part of hit ITV quiz *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*? “The production has to be so sharp now without the audience giving it that extra lift,” said comedy and entertainment producer Adeel Amini, who has worked on the show. “Sometimes, the studio can feel a bit cavernous without the audience.”

“There are few art forms that rely on that live audience aspect as much as comedy,” said Mark O’Sullivan, who co-wrote and starred in Channel 4 comedy series *Lee and Dean*. “What this has demonstrated is how adaptable and flexible the existing comedy formats are and just how much innovation there is.

“It’s been fascinating watching shows such as *The Last Leg*, *The Mash Report*, *The Ranganation* and *Have I Got News For You* making these



ITV

TV without an audience

lockdown versions and, mostly, to my mind, quite successfully.”

TV psychologist Honey Langcaster-James, who has worked on the Channel 4 version of *Big Brother*, said: “What we have to think about is that the audience hasn’t gone away; they’re still there, just not in the room.

“What is key is that the relationship between the production and the audience is going to change.”

BT Sport COO Jamie

Hindhaugh said the broadcaster had completely deconstructed its studio operations so that people could work from home: “The gallery operations are driven from people’s homes – the gallery is still there, but the physical interfaces are all across the UK in people’s houses.”

Michael Geissler, founder of Mo-Sys Engineering, which specialises in camera robotics and virtual technology, argued: “It’s a creative and exciting time.

“What I observe [with] our technology is that, before, it was niche, very complex and expensive. But it is suddenly becoming more mainstream and a more affordable way of adding virtual and augmented reality elements to images.” ■

Report by Tony Orme. The webinar ‘The future of the TV studio audience’ was held on 25 June and chaired by Professor Lyndsay Duthie from the University for the Creative Arts.

How to make news with your phone

■ The BBC Academy’s Marc Settle showed the RTS how to turn a smartphone into a complete newsgathering solution.

Mobile phones are designed largely for the consumer market, so they don’t have some of the features professionals take for granted on broadcast kit. Settle said: ‘You can never

have enough memory space or battery capacity. Filming is one of the most battery-draining things you can do, so always make sure you have your batteries charged or take a battery pack with you.’

He demonstrated the difference between using external and built-in microphones. Both

quality and clarity are greatly improved when lapel mics with windshields are used. One other tip – keep the lens clean!

Settle reviewed apps to edit video and audio, as well as teleprompters, and automated subtitle and graphics generators: ‘You can stay simple and use the apps installed on your

iPhone or you can have many different apps. Or, as I recommend, have a few apps, learn how to use them and get good at those.’

Report by Tony Orme. The RTS Thames Valley webinar ‘Get your mojo working!’ was held on 28 May.

How to create sound for drama

Republic of Ireland BBC One's adaptation of Sally Rooney's book *Normal People* was a huge hit during lockdown. In a late-June webinar, RTS Republic of Ireland put the spotlight on the sound of the drama, made by Dublin indie Element Pictures.

Niall O'Sullivan recorded the location sound, which Steve Fanagan mixed in post-production – along with added dialogue, Foley sounds, music and sound effects – to create the final sound. Fanagan described his task as one of “creating a world, soundwise, that feels truthful to the world portrayed on screen”.

Two clips illustrated the work of the sound specialists.



Normal People: Connell and Marianne

location. There was no bad acoustics in the room – [it was] carpeted and warm.”

Fanagan's job was to “follow the picture. The closeness and intimacy established by the performances, direction, shooting and editing all suggest that we're in that room with them. The sound had to reflect that we feel we're right up close with them.”

A clip of a party offered a contrasting challenge. “Part of my job was to build up the sound,” recalled Fanagan. This involved using the chatter of the extras recorded on set, crowd sounds recorded by actors at a later date and sound from an effects library. **Matthew Bell**

The first – Marianne and Connell's first romantic encounter in the former's family home – was recorded by O'Sullivan with two boom microphones. “There's such

life to this scene – it's really beautiful,” he said. “My job is to capture the acoustic integrity of a performance. This is the perfect example.

“It was such a lovely

And for a real belly laugh, don't miss Michael McIntyre's YouTube fortune teller: bit.ly/YT-McIntyre

The lads give their all at lawn footie

Premier League football is very much back with us, thanks to Project Restart. But there is consensus that the action is better watched augmented by pre-recorded crowd noise than with no crowd noise at all.

It's an odd experience minus the sound of fans – however fake – as audiences hear the real, though muffled, voices of players and their managers.

Indeed, play in deserted stadiums sounds more like a tennis match than a game of football.

Video conference in your dreams

Back to Zoom. During a recent RTS webinar, ‘Back in production – unlocking the TV production

industry in a Covid-19 world’, panellist Pact CEO John McVay's Zoom feed started misbehaving.

We're used to freezes and audio delays but, in mid-session, John's Zoom link unaccountably started playing funk classic *Dream On Dreamer* by the Brand New Heavies in his earphones.

Another unexpected benefit of working from home, perhaps – though the Upside prefers Steely Dan to the Brand New Heavies.

Graphics say it louder than words

The Upside is no stranger to lengthy acceptance speeches given at awards ceremonies.

But at the live-streamed RTS Student Television Awards, the winners not only kept their thank yous crisp and to the point, two of the students enhanced their gratitude by adding some very creative on-screen graphics.

Once again, lockdown is the mother of invention.

Indie shoots doc in a day

“We made it on Zoom and WhatsApp – we were never in the same room as a production team, thinking and talking about what we were going to do.” Candour Productions creative director Anna Hall was talking about making Channel 4 film *A Day in the Life of Coronavirus Britain* at an RTS Yorkshire webinar in June.

The team planned the doc in two and a half weeks – and shot and edited it in just three days. It was a “flying by the seat of your pants experience”, recalled Hall. “We had nine people shooting across the country and... people sitting in their pyjamas at their kitchen tables producing.”

There was an army watching the footage sent in by the public and six editors piecing it together: “It was an incredible collaborative experience.” **Matthew Bell**

The UPSIDE

Zoom it again, but with more feeling

For most of us, the lockdown may be easing but the inventiveness of TV to respond to those long days of quarantine continues to delight audiences.

The standout iPlayer comedy-drama *Staged*, starring Michael Sheen and David Tennant, is innovative and hilarious. The two actors play inflated and occasionally exasperated versions of themselves as they try to rehearse a stage play via Zoom.

The six episodes of *Staged* are short – between 15 and 20 minutes long – but the script fizzes as the two actors struggle with domestic interruptions.

If you enjoyed Sky One's *The Trip*, starring Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan, *Staged* is certain to bring a smile to your face.



RTS PATRONS

RTS Principal Patrons	BBC	Channel 4	ITV	Sky
--------------------------------------	-----	-----------	-----	-----

RTS International Patrons	A+E Networks International Discovery Networks Facebook Liberty Global NBCUniversal International	Netflix The Walt Disney Company Viacom International Media Networks WarnerMedia YouTube
--	--	---

RTS Major Patrons	Accenture All3Media Amazon Video Audio Network Avid Boston Consulting Group BT Channel 5 Deloitte	EndemolShine Enders Analysis Entertainment One Finecast Freeview Fremantle Gravity Media IBM IMG Studios ITN	KPMG Motion Content Group netgem.tv NTT Data OC&C Pinewood TV Studios S4C Sargent-Disc	Spencer Stuart STV Group The Trade Desk UKTV Vice Virgin Media YouView
----------------------------------	---	---	---	--

RTS Patrons	Autocue Digital Television Group	Grass Valley Isle of Media	Lumina Search Mission Bay	PricewaterhouseCoopers Raidió Teilifís Éireann
------------------------	-------------------------------------	-------------------------------	------------------------------	---

Who's who at the RTS	<p>Patron HRH The Prince of Wales</p> <p>Vice-Presidents David Abraham Dawn Airey Sir David Attenborough OM CH CVO CBE FRS Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE Mike Darcey Gary Davey Greg Dyke Lord Hall of Birkenhead Lorraine Heggessey Armando Iannucci OBE Ian Jones Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE David Lynn Sir Trevor McDonald OBE Ken MacQuarrie Gavin Patterson Trevor Phillips OBE Stewart Purvis CBE Sir Howard Stringer</p>	<p>Chair of RTS Trustees Jane Turton</p> <p>Honorary Secretary David Lowen</p> <p>Honorary Treasurer Mike Green</p> <p>BOARD OF TRUSTEES Lynn Barlow Julian Bellamy Tim Davie Mike Green David Lowen Anne Mensah Jane Millichip Simon Pitts Sarah Rose Jane Turton Rob Woodward</p> <p>EXECUTIVE Chief Executive Theresa Wise</p> <p>Bursaries Manager Anne Dawson</p>	<p>CENTRES COUNCIL Lynn Barlow Phil Barnes Tony Campbell April Chamberlain Agnes Cogan Caren Davies Stephanie Farmer Richard Frediani Rick Horne Will Nicholson Tony Orme Edward Russell Vikkie Taggart Fiona Thompson Michael Wilson</p> <p>SPECIALIST GROUP CHAIRS Archives Dale Grayson</p> <p>Diversity Angela Ferreira</p> <p>Early Evening Events Keith Underwood</p>	<p>Education Graeme Thompson</p> <p>RTS Futures Alex Wootten</p> <p>RTS Technology Bursaries Simon Pitts</p> <p>AWARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS Awards & Fellowship Policy David Lowen</p> <p>Craft & Design Awards Anne Mensah</p> <p>Programme Awards Wayne Garvie</p> <p>Student Television Awards Siobhan Greene</p> <p>Television Journalism Awards Simon Bucks</p>
---------------------------------	---	---	--	---

This page is blank