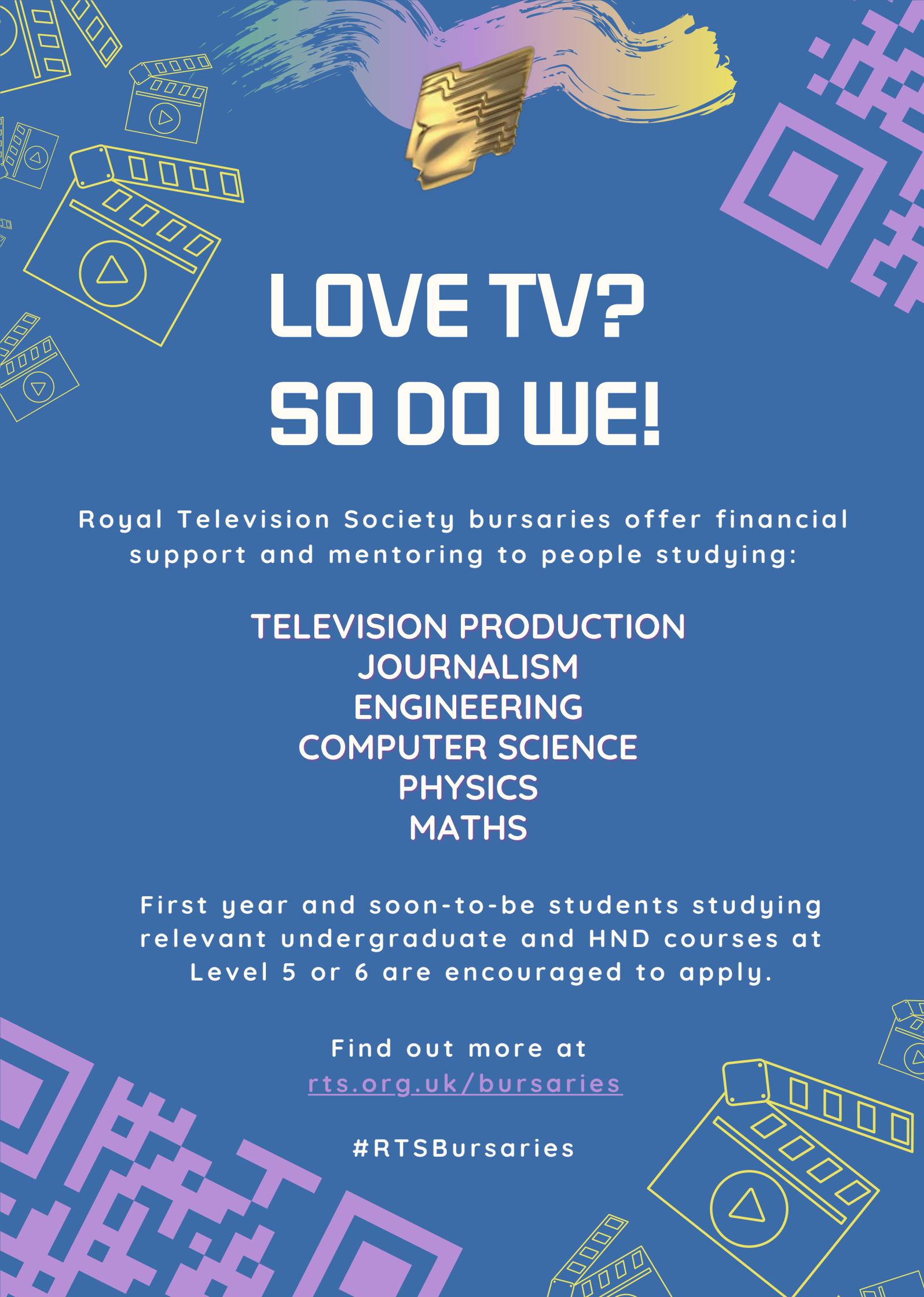


July/August 2021

# Television



**Comedy's  
feelgood  
revival**



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## From the CEO



The emotion of the Euros has affected many of us. It's certainly provided some real sparkle to the British summer. Three cheers for our brilliant football teams and the entertainment they've given us.

I am delighted that the RTS's biennial Cambridge Convention will be going ahead as a physical event this September. Bookings are open, with an early-bird rate available. I can't wait to see everybody there and to welcome the industry back safely.

The July/August edition of *Television*

is full of great reads. Caroline Frost's report on the return of the feelgood factor in comedy is essential reading.

A big shout-out to the four RTS bursary scholars featured in this issue. They survived lockdown and are thriving in their early careers.

Young talent was much in evidence at the RTS Student Television Awards, held in late June. Congratulations to all the winners and nominees, and thanks to our brilliant awards jury Chair, Siobhan Greene. Siobhan, who is standing down, has been an absolute joy to work with. The RTS really appreciates all the hard work she has put into this role.

When the history of coronavirus in

the UK is eventually written, don't be surprised if there's a chapter devoted to the phenomenon of lockdown puppies. Shilpa Ganatra looks at how pet dogs have always been a magnet for programme-makers.

As the content sector re-emerges, Tara Conlan reports on the severe shortages affecting British producers. The heartening conclusion is that this demonstrates how much content is being made in the UK.

Do enjoy the summer and stay safe.

*Theresa*

Theresa Wise

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**MONDAY**

# TV diary

**T**he wonderful thing about juggling a tonne of jobs is that every day really is different. My week can swing between discussing a £3,000

Balenciaga coat that looks like a high-vis jacket on *Loose Women* to explaining the latest Covid infection rates on *ITV News*. Or travelling across the UK working on my latest long-form programme.

Many hats, many pies but – as my school form teacher would probably still agree – me keeping busy is the best way to stay out of trouble!

■ June kicks off in style, with lunch and a catch-up with Ade Rawcliffe, group director of diversity and inclusion and board member at ITV. We've known each other for years but a combination of maternity leave and the pandemic mean that we haven't met face-to-face since summer 2019.

Career-wise, so much has changed for both of us in that time. It is good to talk it all over and have a chat about where the industry has and hasn't changed since *Black Lives Matter* took hold here last year.

■ It has also been an interesting year for my cousin Nadine White, who is now the race correspondent at the *Independent* (she formerly worked at *HuffPo*). June marks the first time the two of us have been interviewed together for a magazine feature – not only that, we are to be the front-cover stars.

A pretty epic moment for the both of us. I'm super proud of everything



**Charlene White** celebrates her birthday and the success of her cousin Nadine, who's got an important job to do at the *Independent*

she's achieved thus far. Her star will just keep on rising – trust me.

■ This month also sees the start of filming for my next long-form project, with probably the most diverse team of talented production folk I've worked with since my days at BBC Radio 1Xtra News. That's pretty special.

I'm still new to long-form and have got a lot to learn, but I'm thoroughly enjoying the experience, which is taking me around the UK – and hopefully further afield if restrictions allow. I won't say much more about it, but it'll be a good 'un...

■ But what I will shout about from the rooftops is what a lovely afternoon I have interviewing Fearné

Cotton for *Stella Live*. I'm a huge admirer of Fearné. I think she's just wonderful.

Just to sit and chat with her about mental health struggles, life and readjusting to life post-lockdown is a dream. I'm so so happy to say that she was as beautiful a soul as I'd hoped she would be. And, yes, I'm massively fan-girling here!

■ This month also involves taking part in a brilliant event for Women in Journalism about returning to work after time off for maternity leave. The fantastic panel of journalists includes *Sun* editor Victoria Newton.

Navigating work after you've had a kid can be really tricky. I'm a big fan of being honest about how hard it can be and sharing tips to try and ease the pressure. It's about time all parents were valued in the workplace, and for businesses to work with parents rather than against them. Especially mothers.

■ This month, I also squeeze in my 41st birthday and take the kids to Legoland. And we bury yet another family member. Thankfully, this time the cause of death is not Covid, though sadly the funeral is held under lockdown restrictions.

I'm so proud of what my family has achieved despite these limits. But after well over a year of having to say goodbye to loved ones from afar, and having to grieve at a distance, I'm yearning for a good old Caribbean celebration of life.

*Charlene White is a presenter on Loose Women and ITV News.*

# COMFORT CLASSIC



BBC

**W**hen it arrived on our screens in 2002, *Spooks* was truly revolutionary. British telly had mastered the cerebral spy thriller – most notably with the BBC’s revered adaptation of John le Carré’s *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, starring Alec Guinness as master spy George Smiley – but *Spooks* was different.

Action, not behind-the-scenes skulduggery, was to the fore, as MI5’s finest tackled fanatics and terrorist threats, from left to right, from Libya to Northern Ireland to Russia and beyond. It was high-octane fare, although the traditional tropes of spy story deceit and betrayal were ever-present, as was

**Matthew Bell** hails the glossy spy thriller *Spooks*, which was more Bond on a budget than John le Carré

the toll that living a secret life exacts on personal relationships.

It was a show of its time; scripts were being penned at the time of the 9/11 attacks on the US by al-Qaida. Looking back almost two decades in an interview with *Radio Times* last year, the programme’s creator, David Wolstencroft, said that the show was “like a lens” on real-world events. *Spooks’* storylines, taking the fight against

terrorism to the street, didn’t appear too fanciful.

London was the show’s set, with the action – gun battles, explosions, car chases and all – played out in the capital, and filmed with real vim and imagination by lead director Bharat Nalluri. The show didn’t have the money available to Bond films but, by the standards of TV drama, the budget was fat.

You may wonder whether *Spooks* qualifies as a “Comfort Classic” but, having watched all 86 episodes during the first lockdown, I can assure you that it provided much-needed solace to this writer.

This was despite an escalating body count that, series by series, robbed the programme of many of its much-loved characters.

# Ear candy

*Spooks* started as it meant to continue. In only the second episode, Helen Flynn (Lisa Faulkner, who was better known than most of the cast) was brutally tortured and killed – *Line of Duty* was not the first drama to kill off its stars unexpectedly early. Her horrific death, at the hands of a fanatical racist, who plunged her head into a deep-fat fryer, drew the most complaints from TV viewers during the year.

*Spooks* called on some of the country's best emerging acting talent. Of the first series main cast, only Peter Firth as spy chief Sir Harry Pearce and Jenny Agutter (Pearce's treacherous rival) were well known to TV audiences.

The spies in the field, Matthew Macfadyen, Keeley Hawes and David Oyelowo, as well as intelligence boffin Nicola Walker, were then at the start of what were to become stellar careers. And, as *Spooks* ran to 10 series, Rupert Penry-Jones, Miranda Raison, Hermione Norris, Gemma Jones and Richard Armitage, joined and left the service.

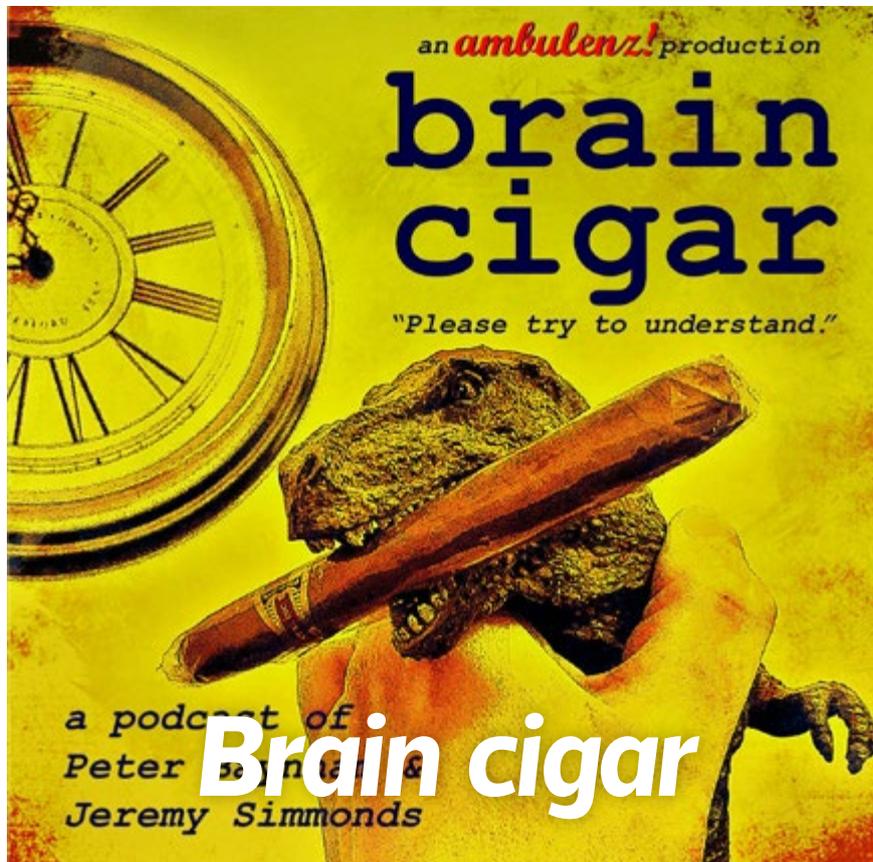
Not everyone was convinced about the accuracy of its depiction of life in Her Majesty's Secret Service. Former MI5 chief Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller sniffed that the series showed "a complete disregard for the law; we are very careful about the law", which, of course, was why audiences flocked to it.

Series 1 attracted an average of 7.5 million viewers per episode. And, over its 10 series, *Spooks* scooped multiple RTS and Bafta awards. Audiences dipped latterly and, although the BBC was apparently happy to continue commissioning, the show's producer, Kudos, took the decision to "kill it off in its prime" in 2011. An example other producers of long-running dramas might do well to follow.

A spin-off movie, *Spooks: The Greater Good*, followed four years later, with Peter Firth and Hugh Simon, as MI5 analyst Malcolm, the only regular actors from the TV series.

Famously, the programme's tag line proclaimed that *Spooks* was "MI5, not 9 to 5". And one would hope so – never has a day in the office proved so risky. ■

**Spooks is available on BritBox and BBC iPlayer.**



**D**id a "tragic server crash" really claim the first six episodes of Peter Baynham and Jeremy Simmonds' new podcast, *Brain Cigar*? Just like the world events and cultural moments the writers imagine in the series, it may never have happened.

Either way, it doesn't matter. The podcast picks up where episode 6 would probably have left off – lost and confused in their realm of glorious nonsense.

The duo abandon logic and linearity to present a hotchpotch of ludicrous stories with the utmost seriousness. Think Baynham and Chris Morris's surrealist satires such as *The Day Today* and *Brass Eye*.

Just moments into the first episode and Simmonds extols the virtues of an "upstairs basement flat" he has found when house hunting: "You get the benefit of natural light but the security

of being underground... I think it's for people with very serious emotional problems."

Or very serious memory problems, as both go on to reminisce about all sorts of events and products that never existed. So clearly do they remember "Bowie Dinners" (David Bowie's early 1990s range of microwaveable meals), they can even quote the advert: "After a tough day in the studio, I need something quick."

Joining them are cameos just as hilarious and cognitively challenged, such as Julia Davis's Heather Woodley. Heather goes on air to promote her charity Loneliness Action UK only to reveal that she allowed her own father to suffer from loneliness to the point of suicide, despite living three doors down the road from him.

So why not tune in, turn off your brain, and have a riotous wander around the "upstairs basement" that is *Brain Cigar*. ■  
**Harry Bennett**

# WORKING LIVES



BBC

Line of Duty

## Casting director

**Kate Rhodes James** has cast some of the most-loved British drama series of the past 25 years, including *Cold Feet*, *Sherlock* and *Line of Duty*.

### What does the job involve?

I have to keep on top of the talent and be knowledgeable about not just their abilities but also where they are in their working lives.

You need to know when an actor is trying to change their trajectory and doesn't want to be sent the same scripts. I present my casting ideas to the creative team, usually the director, producer, executive producers and broadcaster.

### Do you offer an opinion?

Yes, I see my role as one of challenging preconceptions. A cast makes a story come alive; our job as casting directors is to push for original choices that produce inspired moments in drama.

### Is good casting a collaborative process?

Yes. I cast all six series of *Line of Duty*,

the last three with my colleague Daniel Edwards. The show's creator, Jed Mercurio, is one of the most collaborative and supportive people I've worked with in the industry.

I have the same experience with Steven Moffat and Sue Vertue on their projects. We've always had brilliant conversations about casting. To be truly creative, you need a collaborative working environment. If it's not, you don't have the opportunity to fully discuss and challenge perceptions.

### Which people do you work with closely when casting a series?

The relationship with the director is paramount. Sometimes it doesn't work – because we all have individual tastes or maybe our personalities don't match – but that's fine.

### Is it easy to persuade actors to take on new challenges?

If they don't want to do it, actors will say no. But if you bring them in for an

audition and it does work, it could prove to be a stroke of genius.

### How do you keep tabs on actors, given the huge amount of drama on TV?

I spent my entire childhood watching television and I still love it – it's my passion. So, it's not exactly a hardship.

When I first started as an assistant 30 years ago, I'd catch up on something every other week. Now, it's every day, and we have to divide up series among the people in the office. Even then, we can't watch everything.

### How did you become a casting director?

I went to drama school in the late 1980s. I soon discovered that I didn't want the life of an actor – I was surrounded by so many talented people and knew I didn't have what it takes.

But being at drama school allowed me to understand what makes a great actor. I acted for about three years before giving it all up.

My first job was assisting Bond

casting director Debbie McWilliams on *GoldenEye*, Pierce Brosnan's first outing as 007 – it was unbelievable fun. I then started to work for Janey Fothergill as well, which took me into television.

### Is acting the ideal training for becoming a casting director?

One hundred per cent. I know exactly what to do when I'm auditioning an actor and how to help them. You never forget how uncomfortable an audition is and so I make sure actors feel welcome.

### What was the first TV programme you cast?

I was sent a script for a pilot by a young producer at ITV and asked to cast it – I was petrified. It was broadcast to little fanfare and then nothing happened, so I went back to assisting Debbie. ITV then entered it for the Montreux Television Festival and it won the Silver Rose for Humour.

That programme was *Cold Feet*, which starred James Nesbitt, Helen Baxendale, John Thomson, Fay Ripley, Hermione Norris and Robert Bathurst, all then at the start of their careers. The next drama I cast was Jimmy McGovern's BBC One drama *The Lakes*, which starred John Simm in his first high-profile role.

### What makes a good casting director?

You have to be really confident about your taste and able to stand up for your choices. Our job is not to say "yes" to everything – it's to push a little bit further to achieve something more interesting or daring.

### What shows are you most proud of casting?

There are so many shows I've loved casting but I'm immensely proud of *Bleak House*, which Andrew Davies adapted for the BBC in half-hour episodes. People were really negative about it while we were making it, but the response when it aired was astonishing. AMC's *The Terror* is another fantastic piece – it was criminally undersold but, when people found it, how they loved it. Jared Harris starred with Ciarán Hinds and Tobias Menzies, and a selection of some of the finest British character actors, such as Ian Hart and Paul Ready.

### What do you bring to work with you?

I have a trolley, containing a camera, tripod, the script, computer and



charger, pens and pencils, lots of Post-it notes – and endless snacks to get me through the day.

### What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best is when you read a script, identify the ideal actor, they're available, they do a brilliant reading and then get the job. It's even better if the actor is new to the director. The worst is when you can't make the deal or get dates to work and you lose an actor.

### What advice would you give to someone wanting to become a casting director?

Watch television and makes notes of the people you like and why. You have to be able to articulate why someone is right for a role and fight for them.

### Is casting becoming more diverse?

Yes – and rightly so. I was just looking at the BBC's drama slate and there's a fantastic range of different voices. I

don't want to watch white, middle-class women like myself all the time.

### Can casting be too prescriptive?

Yes. Actors are being asked to reveal too many aspects of their personal life, which I do not agree with. I think the most important thing an actor can achieve is a level of mystery. They are actors and need to be supported in what they do and not allow politics to dictate choices.

### Do you have any unrealised ambitions?

Besides becoming a French starlet, I guess it would be to work more in Europe. I've worked with European directors such as Dome Karukoski on BritBox's first original drama, *The Beast Must Die*, and Edward Berger on *The Terror*, and they come with a completely different perspective. They all really enjoy the process of casting. ■

*Casting director Kate Rhodes James was interviewed by Matthew Bell.*

# Feelgood is back in fashion



Friends: The Reunion

HBO Max

Almost exactly two years ago, I was invited by this magazine to muse on what was then a wave of “sad-coms” or “dram- edies”, those shows playing not quite for laughs but more for wry, sympathetic chuckles at the vicissitudes of life. The success of *Detectorists*, *Back to Life*, *Don't Forget the Driver*, Ricky Gervais's *After Life*, *Mum* and *This Country* served to prove that small-screen gags would, from now on, be accompanied by gulps in the throat.

Twenty-four months later, the world has changed beyond all prediction and, so it seems, has TV comedy. In place of those titles has come a string of upbeat shows such as *Motherland* and *Starstruck* on the BBC, Sky's *Breeders*, *We Are Lady Parts* and *Back* on Channel 4, plus *Trying* and *Ted Lasso* on Apple TV+ – shows with equally strong characters facing everyday problems, but with a bigger laugh-out-loud ratio and challenges mostly resolved in 22 neat minutes.

While lockdown has meant that all types of TV have received 18 months of

**Caroline Frost soaks up the warm glow of comfort comedy personified by the *Friends* reunion and BBC Three's *Starstruck***

## Lockdown comforters

**Andy Wolton:**  
*Time*, *This Is Us*

**Tanya Moodie:**  
*Call My Agent!*  
Cookery shows on YouTube

**Simon Blackwell:**  
*Gardeners' World*  
*Springwatch*

**Jon Thoday:**  
*Schitt's Creek*,  
*Sunderland 'Til I Die*

huge appreciation from viewers, it seems the feelgood funnies are experiencing a particularly bountiful renaissance. Even the romcom has risen from the ashes, with *Starstruck* following the same narrative arc as the 1999 film *Notting Hill*. What's behind the change?

“People are looking around for ways to cope with our real-life predicament,” offers Andy Wolton, creator and writer of *Trying*, the first British scripted original on the Apple TV+ platform. His comedy stars Esther Smith and Rafe Spall as Nikki and Jason, a young couple going through the process of adopting a child. Nikki and Jason could be anyone's neighbours, and the frictions between them are real but conquerable.

Wolton is delighted but not surprised by the success of his show, already recommissioned. “It's a relief turning on the TV, seeing nice, flawed people being funny, doing their best to overcome things in their lives.”

Veteran comedy writer Simon Blackwell (*The Thick of It*, *Veep*) explores similar territory with *Breeders*, his Sky One show that sees another married couple Ally and Paul (Daisy Haggard

and Martin Freeman) overtaxed by the challenges of bringing up young children. “There’s a universality to the experience,” muses Blackwell. “We all know that you would die for your children, but sometimes you want to kill them. We’re all in a community of falling short but doing our best, and hopefully we’ll get there in the end.”

Although the first series of *Breeders* was filmed pre-Covid, the serendipity of the show’s themes is not lost on him. “We weren’t to know to what extent it would echo people’s real lives,” he says. “We knew about the frustration of kids, but suddenly being with them 24/7... people were relating to the show in a way we could not have predicted.”

Blackwell says he received a message from one viewer: “He wrote, ‘When did you hide your cameras in my house?’” He adds: “I think it’s comforting for viewers to see it on screen, to know that other people are experiencing the same thing.”

The same could be said for his Channel 4 show *Back*, focusing on a family whose smooth running of a pub is thrown into chaos by the return of a long-lost foster brother. While the chemistry of its co-stars David Mitchell and Robert Webb lends an enigmatic edge to the comedy, the show nevertheless offers a similarly comforting setting and lightness that Blackwell explains he purposely focuses on in his writing.

“Some bleak stuff happens, but I try to make even the bleak stuff warm. I want people to take away something warm from watching.”

He’s clearly managed it, judging by one viewer’s reaction to the motley crew propping up the family’s bar. “They got in touch to tell me how much they’d like to live there, in the pub,” reports Blackwell. “They were drawn to that sense of real community – a community of flawed people, like all good sitcoms.”

Fans have been equally quick to identify with the competitive mothers – and father – gathered around the school gate in the BBC’s *Motherland*. “People are constantly contacting me to say ‘I’m Liz’ or ‘I’m Amanda’ or ‘I’ve got a friend who is exactly Kevin,’” says Tanya Moodie, who plays Meg in the show. “It’s nice, finding out you’re not

alone in the weird, awful things you do – whether it’s gnarly relations in your loveless marriage, looking after your elderly parent or having to improvise a costume at the gate when you’ve forgotten it’s World Book Day.”

Do these characters really have a bond or are they just forced together through circumstance? “They would never normally hang out, they’re united by this arbitrary connection, as we all are with different things,” says



Schitt's Creek

Netflix

Moodie. “Then something tests us [series 3 saw Meg facing a cancer diagnosis] and you realise, ‘This person’s actually my friend now.’ Sometimes, it takes hard times to find out. And those are the turning points...”

That sense of belonging, of knowing other characters may mock, joke and compete but ultimately have each other’s back, is something that runs through all of these hit shows.

This is present in lockdown’s biggest global hit, *Schitt’s Creek*, and, of course, almost defines the evergreen *Friends*, still one of Netflix’s biggest global shows, nearly two decades after it finished, and whose reunion brought Sky a record audience in May.

It is clearly no coincidence that, at a time of confusion, forced solitude for so many, fear for the future and sometimes even despair, such titles have so many millions tuning in, often for repeated viewings.

“These kinds of shows are all providing a comfortable, cosy world that I would want to live in,” says Andy Wolton. “There’s a tiny bit of sadness, because you need some adversity for a

story, but ultimately things come good. We can invest in these stories without fear of going away unfulfilled. They bring us the happy ending we don’t always get in real life.”

For Moodie, who lost her father to Covid, these comedies have provided a particularly sweet alternate universe over the past year and a half: “In their world, it hasn’t happened. It’s not even a pre-Covid world where we were sick and didn’t realise. So we’re not looking at that world with the pressure of the clock ticking – instead, we can engage with a parallel universe where it hasn’t happened and it’s not going to.

“It’s soothing and reassuring to look at a rose-tinted world that hasn’t been sick and doesn’t have to heal!”

“People have definitely had enough of the Zoom chats and all the miserable news,” reflects Jon Thoday, executive producer of *Starstruck*, the timeless tale of “boy meets girl, boy just happens to be a famous film star” given a breath of fresh air in the hands of Kiwi comedian Rose Matafeo, who writes and stars. I hoped the one upside of lockdown

could be that we could bring comedy to slightly different audiences from normal, with people just wanting a laugh.”

As the boss of Avalon, Thoday naturally hopes that the huge success of these shows will lead to commissioners investing more money in the genre and creating some prime-time, pre-watershed hits, as in days of old.

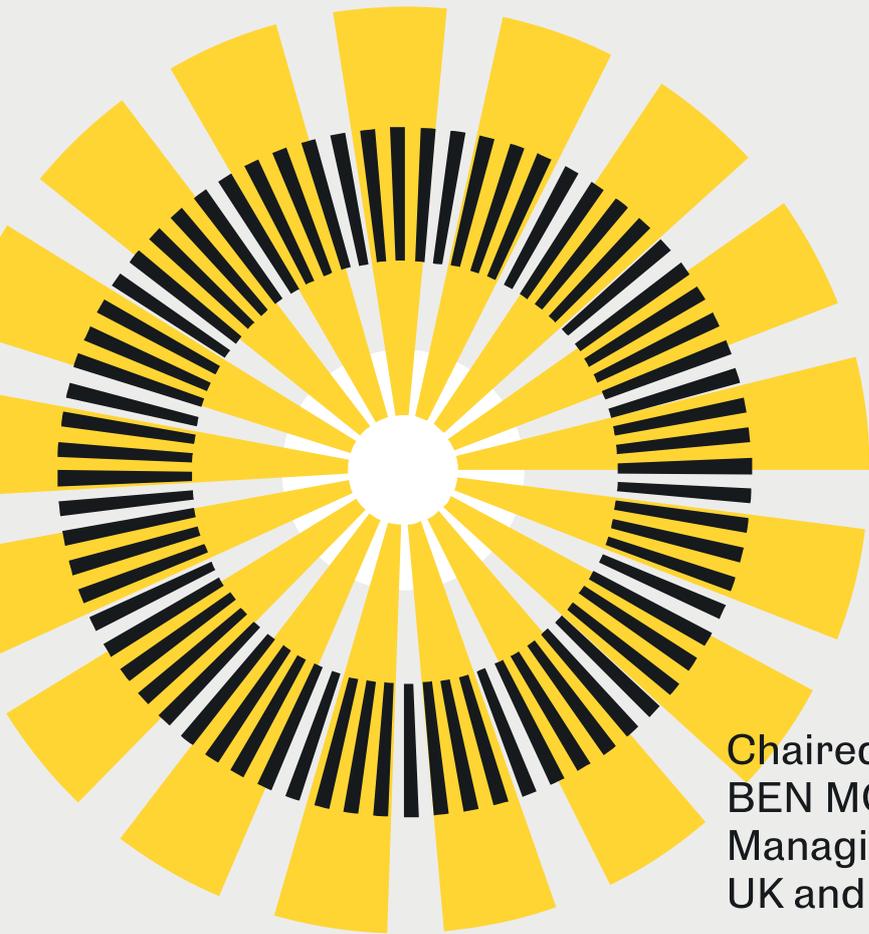
“Comedy’s always in evolution, it’s become more niche over the years, but the success of *Starstruck* and other shows such as *Taskmaster* show that audiences are hungry for it.”

After lockdown, he has a strong case. There’s no doubt that during this uniquely upsetting and challenging period, TV comedy has provided comfort and temporary respite.

“If you’re being told a good story and it’s making you laugh, then, for 22 minutes, life’s just that little bit easier,” suggests Simon Blackwell. “And there’s a particular joy in laughing along with other people and seeing their smiling faces... even if they are the same faces you’ve been staring at for months.” ■

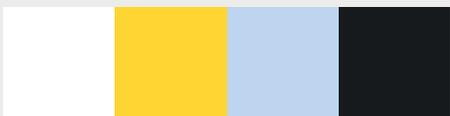
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# Merger mania sweeps TV

From Discovery merging with WarnerMedia to All3Media acquiring more producers, media companies are scaling up, reports **Kate Bulkley**

Sky

**T**here is a media consolidation bonanza under way, with no let-up in sight. The boom is sucking in big legacy media companies, including Hollywood studios such as Warner Bros and MGM, as well as broadcasters, production companies and global tech platforms. With its world-class creative talent, the UK is not immune, and the rush by companies to scale up and secure access to premium content is happening worldwide.

The stakes could not be higher and, in some cases, are literally existential. “When you look at the entertainment war for attention and you realise that there are seven trillion-dollar Death Stars – Amazon, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, Tencent and Alibaba – all with unlimited resources and

diversified revenue models, you understand why scale is the most important thing,” says Evan Shapiro, producer, media commentator and creator of the Media Universe Map.

WarnerMedia’s merger with Discovery, announced in May, is a clear scale play. It creates the second-largest media company after Disney by revenue, with the aim of competing against Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime in the streaming market.

In late May, Amazon slapped down \$8.45bn to buy the MGM film and TV library, stunning many. The move secured access to a treasure trove of properties, from James Bond to *Legally Blonde*. “There are so many opportunities for remakes and spin-offs, with titles across 50-odd years,” says Tom Manwaring, partner at Helion, a media mergers and acquisitions specialist.

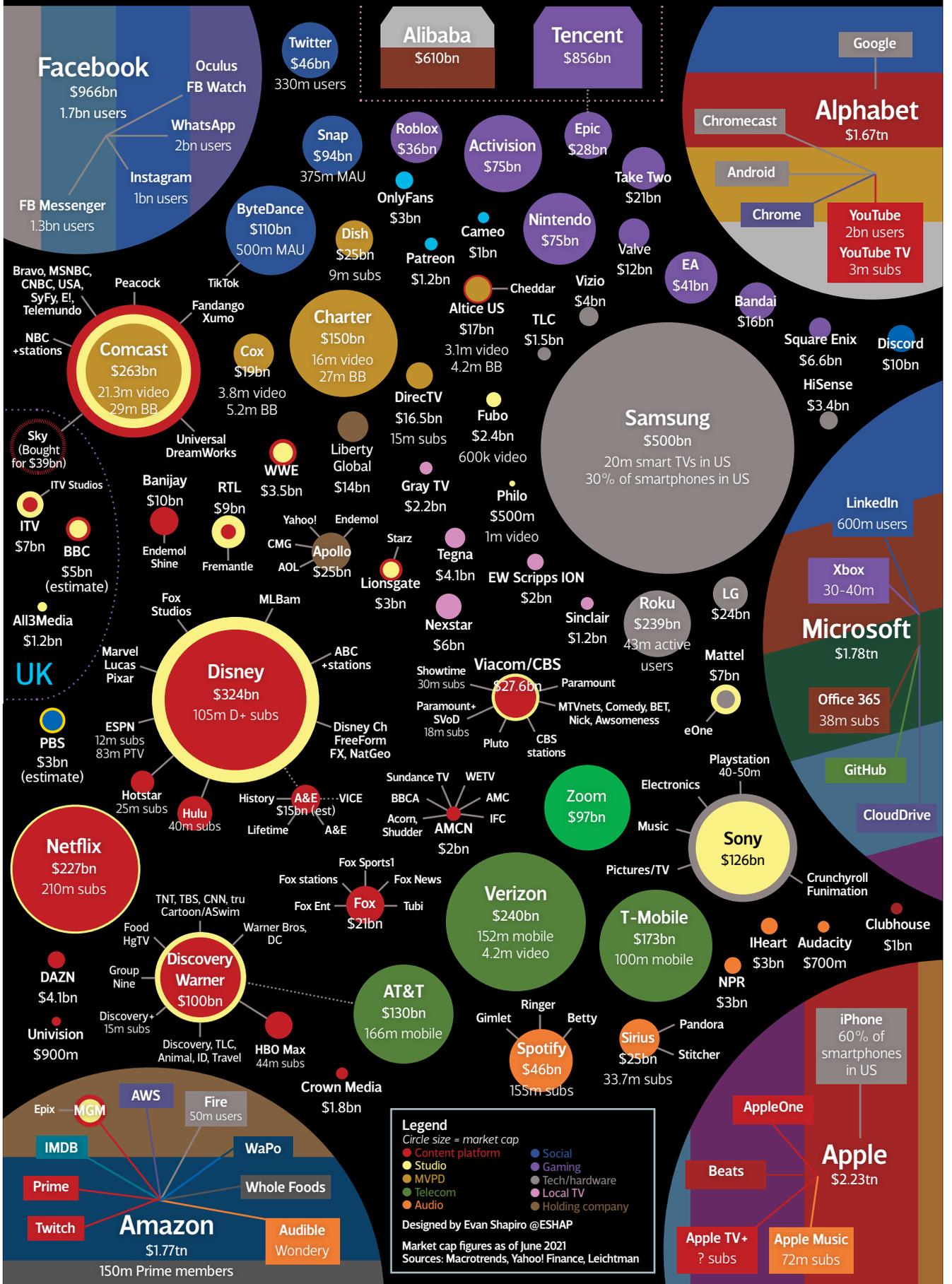
At the recent virtual Banff World Media Festival, Netflix’s chief content officer, Ted Sarandos, indicated that the streamer is looking to buy production companies. Indeed, Netflix has reportedly made offers to several. But a big stumbling block for sellers is that Netflix wants to lock in exclusive access.

“This ‘exclusive to Netflix’ clause has made potential deals fail,” says one executive familiar with the situation. “If Netflix can get an output deal and get access to content supply that way, it will do that first, for sure.”

In Europe, France’s two biggest commercial broadcasters, TF1 and RTL Group-owned M6, are planning to merge in a move that would create a player responsible for 70% of the French TV advertising market.

The proposal will certainly be the subject of a competition review in >

# THE 2021 MEDIA UNIVERSE (SEEN FROM THE US) by Evan Shapiro



France but, in a media business increasingly dominated by global players such as Facebook and Google, traditional competition rules look increasingly irrelevant.

Weeks after the TF1-M6 announcement, RTL announced a separate deal that would see it merge its Dutch businesses with *Big Brother* producer John de Mol's Talpa Networks. The deal will create a broadcasting and production group boasting a combined annual content spend of €400m and joint revenues of €909m.

"The new cross-media group will have the size, resources and creativity to compete with global tech platforms in the Netherlands when it comes to investing in premium content, offering the most advanced addressable advertising opportunities, and expanding Videoland, the leading national streaming service for Dutch viewers," says RTL Group CEO Thomas Rabe.

In early July, it emerged that European production giant Mediawan & Leonine Studios had taken a majority stake in UK indie Drama Republic. The French and German outfit, formed last year as a joint venture by Mediawan and Leonine, has acquired a 51% share in Drama Republic, producer of *Doctor Foster*, sold in more than 100 territories, and *The Honourable Woman*.

The shift of audiences and advertisers to streaming services has undermined commercial broadcasters' business models. This makes them more vulnerable to being bought, which is why European broadcasters want to partner or merge to scale up their businesses.

In the UK, All3Media has also been in buying mode again. It recently completed the acquisition of Nordic Entertainment Group's Nent Studios UK, producer of the Connie Nielsen and Christopher Eccleston drama *Close to Me*.

Nent Studios UK was formerly known as DRG and has 10,000 hours of content, including the licensing rights to *Doc Martin* and *Catchphrase*. All3Media CEO Jane Turton says: "There has never been more demand for high-quality IP."

Similarly, the tech platforms are continuing to look for opportunities to secure the content they need to stand out in the increasingly competitive streaming business.

Not only that, but most of the tech players are seeking to diversify their revenue streams. Google and Facebook face tightening regulations over how they control user data and targeted



Evan Shapiro

## 92% CHANCE OF APPLE OR NETFLIX BUYING LIONSGATE

Evan Shapiro

advertising, the core of their current business models.

In the UK, Google, Amazon and Samsung are facing a regulatory overhaul that will guarantee the prominence of public service broadcasters (the BBC, ITV and Channels 4 and 5) on smart televisions and devices.

This rule change should strengthen the broadcasters' power in their negotiations with platform operators and device makers in a key battleground for attracting audiences.

Clearly, a crucial driver of value and kudos for production companies these days is how many successful shows they have on the big streamers. Bristol-based natural history producer Silverback Films was purchased by All3Media in late 2020 at an enhanced value. The success of the Netflix series *Our Planet*, narrated by Sir David Attenborough, was a crucial factor.

Streaming success may be driving values but UK indie producers are keen to talk to potential partners or acquirers based in Europe.

Since Brexit there has been a big question mark over whether British productions will continue to be considered "European works" and thus retain access to European production funding.

A case in point is *Death in Paradise* producer Red Planet Pictures. It sold a

majority stake to private-equity-backed Asacha Media in late June. The deal will allow the indie, chaired by show-runner and writer Tony Jordan, to access Paris-based Asacha's network of European producers for local adaptations and co-productions. These include companies in the Middle East and eastern Europe – Jordan created the drama *Besa* for Serbian channel Prva and the soap *Al Mirath* for MBC.

The race to scale up and to secure access to premium content is far from over, and has thrown up some surprising plays. In January, Apple paid a whopping \$25m for the worldwide rights to *CODA*, a much-anticipated remake of the award-winning 2014 French film *La Famille Bélier*. Speculation surrounds the iPhone maker's acquisition strategy – might it bid for gaming company Electronic Arts or sports network DAZN?

While many media businesses envy Netflix's high market capitalisation, it would be difficult to imagine Comcast's CEO, Brian Roberts, AMC boss Josh Sapan or Warner Bros Discovery's CEO, David Zaslav, embracing such a debt-heavy, loss-making business model.

Indeed, Disney is the outlier among the legacy media giants, and has taken big risks and incurred the losses needed to pivot so quickly to a streaming model.

Shapiro has ranked the probability of the next 10 big media mergers/acquisitions. The top ones are those with content assets. He rates *Twilight* and *Mad Men* producer Lionsgate as a buy for either Apple or Netflix, with a 91.7% probability.

Disney buying what it doesn't already own of producer/broadcaster A&E Networks is given an 88.9% probability, while Shapiro predicts that Spanish-language broadcaster Univision has an 85.7% chance of being sold to either Disney, Apple or, perhaps, Google.

"The acquisition of Lionsgate by Apple makes a lot of sense because it would get *Twilight* and *Mad Men*, and the Starz streaming service has 15 million subscribers," says Shapiro. "Apple has been in the television business for as long as Disney but has a fraction of the subscribers because it has a fraction of the content."

Even online TV platform and device company Roku has been touted as an acquisition target. Speculation rose after the service posted an unexpected profit in the first quarter, driven by a 35% year-on-year jump in subscriptions.

Expect the deal-making season to continue for the foreseeable future. ■

One year after UK broadcasters announced their new diversity initiatives, **Marcus Ryder** gives his verdict on their impact

**W**hen *Television* approached me to assess the success, or otherwise, of the British TV industry policy announcements related to diversity over the past 12 months, I was going to resort to a standard journalistic approach: pick a few of the big announcements, look at what they promised to deliver and then conveniently conclude by saying something like “...but careers take longer than 12 months to build and systemic racism cannot be dismantled in a year. So, it is still a case of ‘wait and see.’”

But as I looked through them, I realised that there were two key points I wanted to get across: we need clearer policies and a more grown-up conversation around diversity. Let me explain.

In the past 12 months, after the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests, British television broadcasters have rightly announced a number of promises and policies. Here are four of the most prominent:

- Sky announced a £30m racial injustice fund, and a “redoubling” of efforts to increase black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) representation, both on-screen and behind the camera;

- Channel 4 committed to being an “anti-racist” organisation, doubling “the number of BAME-led independent producers that we commission from by 2023”, and announced “Black to Front”, a day dedicated to black representation on both sides of the camera;

- ITV made various commitments, including increasing general diversity at management level, increasing the diversity both behind and in front of the camera, and creating a more inclusive culture that better understood issues around racism;

- The BBC announced it would be “investing £100m of its TV budget over a three-year period to produce ‘diverse and inclusive content’”. And that “the



Misan Harriman

# Making black lives matter

BBC has set itself a mandatory target – 20% of off-screen talent must come from under-represented groups” in the next three to five years.

At the time, I and many others welcomed these announcements, especially since they were going beyond the usual “we’re rolling out more unconscious-bias training” or “we’re introducing a new mentorship scheme”.

However, we all were a little cautious, because nearly all the announcements had two points in common: a lack of detail over programme finances being used to address the lack of diversity, and a lack of specificity about whom they were targeted at.

So, how has this played out, you ask? Let’s take the first commonality – programme financing.



Small Axe: Mangrove

meet the criteria of “diverse and inclusive content”? We have no idea.

Will the £100m be in addition to the current amount that is already invested in “diverse and inclusive content” or will it include existing commissions? We simply do not know.

The bottom line is: what is the additivity of this new investment?

The BBC is still not clear, despite the announcement having been made more than a year ago.

By way of contrast, here is an example of what a clear, grown-up commitment involving programme finance looks like. Just a year earlier, in February 2019, the BBC launched the BBC Scotland digital channel to address specific concerns around regional diversity.

In the press materials proceeding the launch, the corporation said the Scottish channel would have a budget of £32m a year. Approximately £13m would be taken from the BBC Scotland division’s existing budgets and £19m would be additional funding.

Surprisingly, “grown-up” conversations are incredibly easy to understand compared with conversations at the “children’s table”.

And there was a complete lack of any mention of programme finances in ITV’s statements around its Diversity Acceleration Plan, published on 9 July 2020, at the height of the Black Lives Matter protests.

If someone asked me how much the BBC values increasing its Scottish programming, I could have answered very easily: £19m a year more than it did previously for the indefinite future.

There is the possibility that the BBC’s £100m diverse content fund over three years might be the equivalent of an additional £33.3m a year. But it may literally mean the equivalent of zero extra funding. I suspect the answer is somewhere between zero and £33.3m, but, for a publicly accountable organisation, it has been incredibly opaque about where the real number lies. >

As someone who has worked in both addressing regional diversity and ethnic diversity, the difference in approach is stark. When it comes to money, it feels as if the conversation around finances and ethnic diversity is relegated to the “children’s table”, while discussions around regional diversity take place between “grown-ups”.

To illustrate why this matters let’s take the BBC’s announcements, because they really were the ones that elicited the most excitement in the industry, due to the potential scale involved.

While the £100m “diverse content” fund may sound impressive, in reality it has remained very difficult to work out what this policy really means in practice.

For instance, Ofcom, in its annual diversity report, said that the BBC had “ring-fenced” £100m over three years,

implying that programme funds had been separated from other commissioning funds for exclusive use on diverse-content programming. But this is not accurate.

Why? Well, I had the opportunity to publicly ask the BBC’s head of creative diversity, Miranda Wayland, about the £100m at the Edinburgh International Television Festival in August 2020. Her response – the BBC’s corporate response – was unequivocal; “This is not ring-fenced money”.

So what does “investing” money mean if it is not “ring-fencing”? We currently have no idea. And, having had multiple private conversations thereafter with other industry insiders, I am still none the wiser.

And this lack of clarity leads to some fundamental questions: how much of the BBC’s existing productions currently

► The BBC is far from being the only broadcaster that is less than clear about its programme finance commitment in its policy announcements following the global Black Lives Matter protests.

For example, while Channel 4 said it would double the number of diverse-led indies it commissions from, it gave no indication as to whether there would be a doubling in programme spend on the diverse-led indies. Whether you have made the cake bigger or are simply dividing the original cake up among more people is important (as my five-year-old son would point out from the children's table).

And there was a complete lack of any mention of programme finances in ITV's statements around its Diversity Acceleration Plan, published on 9 July 2020, at the height of the Black Lives Matter protests.

Now to the second commonality – and the other reason to be cautious about the announcements – they were not specifically targeted at black people. George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests had a very specific focus; anti-black racism. These were not protests about inequality in general, or even general racism. And yet, while all the broadcasters acknowledged the importance of the reaction to George Floyd's death, in instigating their policy announcements they did not seem to recognise this central point.

We see this in Sky's policy announcements, for example. All of its three stated policy goals – to improve black and minority ethnic representation at all levels, to make a difference in communities impacted by racism, and to use the power of Sky's voice and platform to highlight racial injustice – address issues broader than anti-black racism and black under-representation.

Similarly, the BBC's £100m fund was not targeted at addressing anti-black



BlackStageUK

under-representation. Productions are able to be classified as “diverse content” if they meet criteria around socio-economic diversity, disability and non-white representation (of which black is obviously just a part).

This means that it would be possible for all the production companies to meet the criteria set out by the BBC for “diverse content” without employing a single black person – for instance, by meeting socio-economic diversity behind the camera. Again, while this is as unlikely as the £100m fund meaning zero additional funding going into additional diverse content, it serves to highlight the wooliness around the policies.

It also seems to highlight the broadcasters' lack of understanding of what the 2020 protests were really about. And it reflects the current dissatisfaction that many black people have

**‘WHETHER YOU HAVE MADE THE CAKE BIGGER OR ARE SIMPLY DIVIDING IT UP AMONG MORE PEOPLE IS IMPORTANT’**

around the term BAME, as it enables companies to enact policies that do not address their specific concerns while at the same time announcing that they are fighting racism.

The only exception was Channel 4's “Black to Front” day, about which I should confess a vested interest. As the head of external consultancies for the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, I advised Channel 4 on its Black to Front day and recommended that it focus on black representation, as opposed to broader “BAME” diversity, in response to Black Lives Matter.

So, how do I answer *Television's* seemingly simple question: How effective have the broadcasters' responses to the Black Lives Matter protests been over the past 12 months?

It would be churlish of me not to recognise and applaud the fact that the vast majority of them rolled out new policies. There seems to be a genuine desire to shift the dial when it comes to diversity in general, and there has been a substantive change in the level of conversation around diversity.

However, most of the policies have been unclear about the most important aspect of the television industry – programme finance. And the policies are not focused on the fundamental issue raised by the protests – anti-black racism.

So, I guess I will need to resort to the journalistic cliché of “we will have to wait and see” after all, because I hope this coming year will see the wooliness removed, the grown-up conversations begin, and clarity provided.

Only then can these policies begin to be effective in ensuring what the press releases purported they would be – making sure Black Lives Matter. ■

**Marcus Ryder is the head of external consultancies at the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity and Chair of RADA.**



# **Do you need £4,000 for a history of television project?**

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George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a

long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is now in its 21st year.

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# Bouncing back from lockdown

Four RTS bursary scholars recount how their careers have taken off after being derailed by the pandemic



**‘THE JOB WAS AN ABSOLUTE DREAM’**

## Charly Humphreys

**F**ifteen months ago, if someone had told me I'd be working in Mallorca on one of the world's biggest reality shows, I'd have rolled my eyes and said, "You've got to be kidding!"

In my final year studying live events and television production at the University of the Arts London, and with Covid-19 still rearing its ugly head, I told myself to stop worrying too much about the future and focus instead on my degree. The virus had imbued me with a strong sense of how unpredictable life could be.

Then, a couple of months ago, I received an offer to work on *Love Island*. My mentor, the brilliant Lauren Evans at ITV, had passed on my CV to the team that makes *Love Island*. Lauren is the talent manager at ITV Entertainment.

I was thrilled and ecstatic, to say the

least! The day after I submitted my final assignment, I jumped on a plane to the location for one of my favourite shows. I was so excited to see the secrets of its success from the inside.

Initially, I was one of a team of chaperones at a beautiful resort in Mallorca, looking after two wonderful contributors. Inevitably, things were different this year due to the Covid restrictions. I was responsible not only for supporting the contributors' general well-being but also for making sure that coronavirus guidelines were adhered to at all times.

The job was an absolute dream after my old student life in London, where I'd spent so much time isolating since the start of the pandemic. Travelling and meeting new people are two of my favourite things. It's been such a positive feeling to experience that part of life again.

Soon after beginning my chaperone gig, I switched roles and moved to the production base to assist with admin,

production and location duties. I worked closely with the production co-ordinator, from whom I learned so much about what it takes to make *Love Island* the show we love.

I acted as the line of communication across departments. This suited me down to the ground. I met and made friends with a lot of the Spanish and English production staff.

I thrive in busy environments buzzing with lots of people and felt completely in my element. This role gave me such an in-depth insight into how each department operates – and how much collaboration goes into making factual entertainment shows such as *Love Island*.

I feel very fortunate to have been able to experience working on *Love Island*. I've watched every series and never missed a single episode.

My involvement has provided me with an incredible footing for whatever my next job is, and made me much more confident in my ability to succeed in TV.

I owe huge thanks to my mentors and to the RTS for supporting my journey, and for all the invaluable advice, tips and guidance that has got me to this point.

Coming from a small town near Birmingham, with no creative connections whatsoever, I might not have had the opportunities or confidence to allow me to begin my postgraduate career with a such a bang.

I have no doubt whatsoever that all of the workshops, networking events, panel discussions and peer catch-ups that the RTS bursary scheme opened the door to have all encouraged me to recognise my strengths. I'm so excited to see what comes next.

**Charly Humphreys worked on *Love Island* this summer.**



## Mahnoor Akhlaq

Once they've completed university, every student's biggest worry is "What's next?". I experienced that feeling but, coincidentally, my interview for the BBC Len Tingle placement – a two-month paid internship at BBC Yorkshire – took place on the same day I handed in my final assignment.

Tingle was BBC Yorkshire's political editor for 17 years until he died, aged 63, in 2018.

I was really hoping I would get the placement as it was the perfect step after completing my journalism degree at the University of Leeds. Subject to Covid-19, I still hope to be studying abroad in September, which is why I didn't apply for any graduate jobs this year.

It was the third time I had applied for the placement, so I had high hopes. During my first year at uni, I made it through to the interview stage. I didn't get the placement, but I was told to apply again the following year. Which I did but, due to the pandemic, the placement was cancelled.

When I received the phone call to tell me I'd been accepted I almost couldn't believe what I was hearing. I was over the moon!

Without the Royal Television Society's support, I probably wouldn't be in the position I'm in today. The RTS has supported me in so many different ways.

I can't put into words how grateful and lucky I am. The bursary helped me to pay for equipment, such as a laptop, camera and microphone. It also supported me while I undertook unpaid work experience.



## 'I'M PASSIONATE ABOUT SHARING LOCAL STORIES'

The networking opportunities helped me to build my confidence, contacts and gain a better understanding of how the industry works. I also met my mentor, the BBC journalist Mobeen Azhar, who has been amazing and supportive throughout my final year and gave me invaluable advice for my interview for the placement.

I chose journalism as a career because it allowed me to combine my creative skills with my interest in current affairs. I was also more driven after I learnt about the lack of diversity in the industry, which needs to change.

I am a Pakistani woman born and raised in Bradford, a city that does not always get the best representation in the media. I want to help change that narrative. I think it is important that cities such as Bradford keep talent in the city, which is why I do not want to relocate after I graduate.

I am lucky to be joining the industry at a time when more opportunities are emerging in the North. I am excited to be working in regional news in Yorkshire as I am passionate about sharing local stories about the place where I live.

Due to the pandemic, half my degree took place virtually. As a result, I did not gain the same practical experience. Being able to work across TV, digital and radio, with an amazing team, will help me brush up and develop these skills. I will be making the most of the next eight weeks.

**Mahnoor Akhlaq is on the Len Tingle journalism placement at BBC Yorkshire.**



BBC Sport studio

BBC

assumed they were referring to the financial side of the bursary. True, that was a massive part of it, but it was not the main support that was given to me.

In my three years of study and after graduating, the RTS has supported me with various opportunities to peek into an industry that, frankly, would otherwise have been unattainable for someone like me.

I was invited to attend an RTS Patrons' dinner and meet the movers and shakers of the TV world. I was invited to the Cambridge Convention, where I listened to panels discuss the latest developments in the TV sector in the UK and overseas. I was given a mentor in the industry who was amazing at giving me career advice. Shout-out to Margaret Emsley!

All these opportunities contributed in ways both small and large to my career progression, but it was as a guest judge at the RTS Yorkshire Programme Awards that I made a key connection.

As a student studying news, to say I had a case of imposter syndrome was an understatement as I sat and debated the merits of actual TV news alongside people who had been doing it for years.

But I gave my honest views and was lucky enough to meet Ruth Pitt, one of the masterminds behind bringing Channel 4 to Leeds. We kept in touch. A year or so after I'd graduated, she gave me a place on her mentorship scheme, Under the Moon.

The programme matches "rising stars" with commissioners. Once again, I had to fight off the imposter syndrome as I sat at a table with the other mentees. They just happened to be executive producers, directors and every other kind of person who could have been my boss's boss.

I got Channel 4's head of sport, Pete Andrews, as my mentor. Months later, he would coach me through the process of applying and interviewing for a staff role at BBC Sport, my dream job.

This easily distracted adult is eternally grateful for the leg-up the RTS has given him. My message to both current and future bursary scholars – and young people in general – has and will always be: the RTS will unlock the doors for you, but you have to walk through them yourselves. Take every chance you can get, and never forget where you've come from.

**Kyle Shiels is working as a researcher at BBC Sport.**

## Kyle Shiels

In the middle of summer 2014, in the living room of a modest two-bedroom house in the north of Leeds, an easily distracted 18-year-old was trying his hardest to concentrate while his little brother gamed on his PlayStation.

At any other time, he'd have given up on what he was doing and joined in the shooting game, but today he decided to stick with it and move his stuff up to his room where he could work undistracted.

Almost seven years later to the day, that was the first step towards him achieving his dream.

I'm sure it's obvious by now that it was me who was the easily distracted teen. I'm happy to report that I'm now an easily distracted adult.

The reason that day was so significant was because I managed to finish my work. The work? Putting together a last-minute application for an initiative I'd been sent that closed that night: the RTS bursary scheme. The next few years would fly by. I was accepted on to the scheme, which allowed me to attend university and study broadcast journalism.

As everyone involved in making the scheme possible told me, the RTS would support me throughout my time at uni and beyond. At the time, I



**'THE RTS WILL UNLOCK THE DOORS FOR YOU, BUT YOU HAVE TO WALK THROUGH THEM YOURSELVES'**



Bangers and Cash

UKTV

## Jake Smith

I study film-making at the Northern Film School and live in Barnsley, South Yorkshire. I was introduced to film and TV production at Barnsley Sixth Form College. It was this course, together with my love of all things 1980s and a little magic from the RTS, that led to me having a paid post this summer as a technical assistant at Air TV.

When I applied for the RTS bursary, I did not in a million years expect it to open the doors it did for me. Like many students, I took a while to settle into full-time study, but lockdown gave me plenty of time to think and reflect on my future.

I gave myself a talking to and decided to make the best use of the time I had while everything was on hold. The RTS was a huge part of this renaissance in my life; I got a fantastic mentor, Fergal McGrath, who gave me the confidence to push myself into the industry.

I have a fascination with classic cars, old cameras and have been described as an old man in young man's clothing. I became interested in production design while working on a short cop film of my own, set in the 1980s.

I developed a liking for all things retro through helping my dad restore old cars. Unfortunately, he broke his back and, although he still does what he can, he



**'I AM SO PLEASED TO ... GAIN SUCH BRILLIANT HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE'**

can't manage the same type of projects. From there, I became interested in old cameras. Gradually, I acquired a number of 35mm film cameras on eBay, and started to play around with them to see how they worked. I bought a roll of film and shot it (it cost me nine quid to develop, but I really enjoyed it).

Coincidentally, I had just accepted a role as set designer at uni, when the RTS organised a webinar with production designer Duncan Howell. Thinking of my new role and my film based in the South Yorkshire of the 1980s miners' strikes, I asked Duncan if people were generally willing to move their cars for a period film to be more credible.

The combination of 1980s cars, set design, Yorkshire and RTS connections could only lead to one place. Something clicked in the mind of RTS bursaries manager Anne Dawson. A few emails later I was talking to Andy Joynson, director of Air TV and executive producer of *Bangers and Cash*.

He invited me to meet the team at their head office and have a look around. I thought I would, at best, be offered some work experience but, amazingly, I was offered a paid post over the summer. I am so pleased to have this opportunity to gain such brilliant hands-on experience. I now work at Air on *Bangers and Cash* as a technical assistant. The people at Air have been extremely warm and welcoming, I cannot thank them enough.

It's fantastic to have a foot in the door before my second year has finished. I am proud of myself for making the most of my opportunities – and for that little touch of magic the RTS provided.

**Jake Smith is working as a technical assistant on *Bangers and Cash*.**

# Here we go again



Channel 4

Privatising Channel 4 is once more on the Government's agenda. But this time it feels different and the momentum is quickening, says **Torin Douglas**

**O**n 18 November 1996, Hansard noted a parliamentary question from John Whittingdale, MP for Maldon: "Will my Hon Friend congratulate Channel 4 on its success in avoiding recourse to the 'safety net' and on making a profit last year of £128m? Does that not demonstrate that it is possible for Channel 4 to meet its remit and to operate commercially? Will he therefore consider its privatisation at the first opportunity?"

Fast forward 25 years to 30 June 2021, and Whittingdale, now the minister in charge of broadcasting, is still on the same subject, addressing members of Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV), which represents citizen interests in broadcasting. "The Government has made it clear that we are minded to move to an alternative ownership model because we are very conscious of the constraints that public ownership places on Channel 4," he said.

Whittingdale was not the first to suggest privatising Channel 4, which is owned by the state through Ofcom but commercially funded. Nor is he alone: the move has been mooted half a dozen times by ministers – and fought off every time. But he is the most persistent, and the last attempt occurred on his watch as Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Little wonder that Enders Analysis headed its analysts' report last month "Here we go again" and *The Economist* wrote, "Viewers who moan about repeats on television must have rolled their eyes". But this time, it feels different and the momentum is quickening.

A public consultation on the sale of Channel 4 was launched on 6 July, ahead of a white paper on the future of broadcasting in the autumn. Unlike previous privatisation proposals, little mention is made of the money the Government might raise from the sale. Instead, it focuses first on the threat from Netflix and other VoD streamers:

"With a fast-evolving media landscape, increasing competition and changing audience habits... moving Channel 4 into private ownership and changing its remit could help secure its future as a successful and sustainable public service," said the Government in a press release. "More than 90% of Channel 4's revenue comes from advertising and this makes it particularly vulnerable to market fluctuations and the decline in linear-TV advertising spend".

Options for the new ownership structure could include a flotation, a sale to a private buyer, the sale of a minority stake or a mutual ownership model. But opponents of privatisation point out that Channel 4 holds few or no ownership rights over its hit shows, such as *The Great British Bake Off* and *Gogglebox*, and that its remit "to be different" would prevent it from making significant profits. If that were changed or it were allowed to make its own programmes, it could damage the many independent production

companies that are responsible for making them.

A VLV questioner asked the minister: “Are there any existing red lines in the remit that couldn’t be changed by a new owner?” He replied: “The remit is part of the consultation and there is no question in my mind of abandoning the remit – indeed, we may strengthen it in some areas.”

So what would be the benefit of a sale? Public ownership “prevents Channel 4 from having access to the markets to borrow money”, Whittingdale said. “It doesn’t have an owner that is likely to be in a position to invest in it and it is entirely dependent on advertising revenue, which is very limited.” He said the move was “to strengthen Channel 4”, prompting one sceptic to recall a quote from Ronald Reagan: “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: ‘I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help.’”

Critics of the plans have been quick to point out that, far from needing help, the company delivered a healthy financial surplus of £74m at the end of 2020, including significant digital growth.

Publishing Channel 4’s annual report, its Chief Executive, Alex Mahon, said: “We’ve always got to be careful of doing anything that might be irreversible, that could damage some of those things that we do for the sector and for the UK. At the moment, we don’t seek to make a profit, so all of that advertising money we take is ploughed back into the creative sector. We don’t make a profit but the profit is made by many, many small and medium-sized businesses across the UK – and we’re helping them to deliver profits and growth and to flourish. If we were under a different structure – and I’ve run commercial businesses – we would normally have different priorities.”

Some have suggested that the Government may have more political motives. Tory MP Craig Mackinlay told the *MailOnline* website that Channel 4 had “sealed its own fate” with years of “one-sided” news coverage. Tom Harrington of Enders Analysis said the proposal was “potentially spiteful”. *The Guardian* cited two possible factors: a MacTaggart lecture by former Channel 4 head of news Dorothy Byrne, in which she publicly called Boris Johnson a liar, and the channel’s decision, in a TV debate on climate change, to replace the Prime Minister with a melting ice sculpture.

One of Channel 4’s biggest recent

hits – creatively, digitally and in terms of its remit to be different – was *It’s a Sin*, the drama about a group of gay friends growing up during the HIV/Aids crisis. The proposal was turned down by other public service broadcasters but became Channel 4’s biggest drama launch and drove its streaming service All 4 to record growth.

Speaking at the Banff World Media Festival last month, its creator, Russell T Davies, said that privatising Channel 4 would be “a great crime” that would



Channel 4

result in series like his not being made. The channel’s remit “which is to make shows like *It’s a Sin*” would change if it were to be sold. “Come back in 10 years and you’ll see,” he said.

But others agree with Whittingdale and his boss, culture secretary Oliver Dowden, that the media landscape is changing too fast for Channel 4, and the other UK PSBs, to remain as they are.

Former Channel 4 CEO Michael Grade came out in favour of privatisation in 2015, as Maggie Brown records in the second volume of her history of Channel 4: “Hosting a Broadcasting Press Guild lunch at Pinewood film studios, he said the channel had been a brilliant experiment, but it needed to be freed up: ‘What you would gain from privatisation is you could build a really big media business around Channel 4. I think the channel needs to be freed up really to move ahead. The fact is, the world has changed dramatically.’”

Andrew Griffith MP, a former Sky Group chief operating officer, told Radio 4’s *Today* that the UK broadcasting industry looked “a little bit fragmented” when there were “huge tech giants on the doorstep”. He said: “I

looked at the regional newspaper industry, which was not allowed to consolidate and was swept away by the internet, and I don’t want that for our broadcasters.

“I think you can have the best of both worlds in private ownership, as with Royal Mail and BT, which have social responsibilities and licence conditions but can operate and consolidate in the private sector.”

This view was countered by Stewart Purvis, a former CEO of ITN and

Ofcom official who edited *Channel 4 News* and was a Channel 4 board member: “After a most demanding year, Channel 4 has come through with a record surplus, so clearly it is sustainable. And my experience is that it is not only resilient but innovative. The model is constantly being flexed and new ideas are being brought in, so it is actually across all the new developments.”

Both sides are now flexing their muscles ahead of the consultation. At the VLV event, John McVay of Pact asked whether a market impact assessment would be published. He was told that this would not happen until the Government had reached a conclusion. VLV Chair Colin Browne said: “Surely this should be made available before the favoured option is decided, rather than afterwards?”

Whittingdale was asked whether the status quo remained an option. “We think there is a strong case for an alternative ownership model but that does not mean we have absolutely decided,” he said. “Otherwise, we wouldn’t be having a consultation.”

It’s going to be a busy summer and autumn. ■



The Dog House

Channel 4

# Pooch perfect

**Shilpa Ganatra** leads us through TV's obsession with man's best friend

If television's role is, in part, to reflect social trends, it has certainly risen to the challenge when it comes to dog shows. It will surprise absolutely no one to learn that dog ownership has surged over the pandemic. Estimates suggest there are now 12 million pet dogs in the UK, up about 3 million in 12 months – and programmes about our four-legged friends have also become more “pup-ular”.

“It's totally clear that over the past

year, we've become more obsessed with dogs in the UK,” says Daniel Pearl, VP, commissioning editor, Channel 5, whose shows include *The Dog Rescuers*. “We've been looking to them for comfort, love and a distraction at this difficult time. And walking your dog has become almost the only thing we're all allowed to do. So there has definitely been an amplification of our national pastime.”

Damon Pattison, creative director at Beyond Productions and producer of

the BBC's *Pooch Perfect*, which tests the talents of dog groomers, agrees: “Lock-down certainly put more focus on how important dogs were in people's lives, and there are plenty of lovely shows about that. *The Dog House* on Channel 4 is almost *First Dates* for dogs – it's a heart-warming series.”

Dog shows have long been a staple of TV schedules. The BBC first broadcast Crufts in 1950 and was still screening the competition in 2008. But today's programmes devoted to man's best friend are much influenced by tropes that originated in other types of popular factual TV.

And many programmes that have aired in the current cluster were commissioned long before the pandemic. *Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs* on ITV, which sees the presenter go behind the scenes at Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, began in 2012. Channel 5's *The Dog Rescuers* is in its tenth series. But these shows, and others like them, have managed to pull in solid audiences despite intense competition for fans of canine capers.

*Pooch Perfect*, a kind of *Bake Off* for dog groomers hosted by Sheridan Smith, brought in an average of 2.5 million viewers on BBC One when it launched earlier this year.

*12 Puppies and Us*, which follows the first few months of families and their new pets, pulled in an average audience of 1.3 million over six episodes on BBC Two. This puts it on a par with its previous incarnation, *10 Puppies and Us* (with 1.7 million, but across four episodes in 2017).

On Channel 5, *Dogs Behaving (Very) Badly* averaged 1.8 million across eight episodes of the last series (up 13% on the slot average), while *The Dog Rescuers* averaged 2.5 million for the three episodes that have aired to date.

This suggests that, however many dog programmes are on television, there's a strong audience of loyal dog lovers ready to lap them up.

It's understandable: we have a vested interest in dogs' welfare and root for them as steps are taken to better their lives – or their looks. Many programmes also give dog owners tips about training. And don't forget the cuteness overload that makes pups extremely watchable.

With the trend in full flow, a key question is whether the market for dog programmes is saturated. Pearl believes it is not, thanks to each show's unique approach.



Dogs Behaving (Very) Badly

Channel 5

“They all feel slightly different, and it’s important that they do feel different in tone and in feel,” he says. “For example, the core of *The Dog Rescuers* is following RSPCA rescuers and officers. That gives the stories a dynamic, beating heart. That doesn’t mean any of the other ideas are worse – it’s just the show’s USP.”

As heartening as these programmes can be, they often have important points to convey, says Jane Williams, secretary of the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC), which represents animal trainers. “Anything that raises awareness of the issues around being a responsible pet owner is welcome,” she says. “And then there are lots of things that we’re lobbying government for, in order to make change for the better. Television is a good vehicle for that.”

However, with that power comes responsibility to give the best advice available, and that is where some programmes can fall down, she suggests. “So many people are new to dog owning that programme-makers have a huge responsibility not to put out unrealistic messages right now. There’s not a lot about how much it costs, or how we go about selecting a suitable puppy to suit the owner’s lifestyle.”

Williams says that for advice and training methods that do make it to air, the approach should follow industry standards. “Many do, but some programmes don’t look into the ethics of the advice they’re giving, so they’re delivering messages that are potentially damaging to the welfare of animals,” she says.

An example is when programmes suggest that puppies can be kept out of their owner’s bedroom at night and left to cry until they get used to it.

“That isn’t helpful – the puppies are not doing it because they’re being bloody-minded, they’re just terrified of being left. We suggest that this process happens gradually, because moving into a new home is traumatic enough for a puppy.”

When it comes to duty of care on *The Dog Rescuers*, Pearl says: “It is about the duty of care towards dogs. Obviously, dogs don’t consent in the same way as human beings, but we consider it in terms of taste and being respectful towards other sentient animals.

“The other side is about the people who are losing their dogs. Sometimes we identify them, sometimes we don’t. Sometimes people are being prosecuted and there’s a public interest element, but, if someone’s having a

mental-health crisis and may lose their pet, it wouldn’t feel right showing that unless they gave you consent. We have to be mindful when we film, and think through the impact it will have on those people’s lives.”

Doggie programmes have proved popular during the pandemic, but it is anyone’s guess what the long-term future may be for these shows.

Pearl, for one, is confident that the trend will outlast the health crisis: “We know people like watching shows about dogs. And we know that more people are dog owners than ever before. They have a lifetime of dog ‘parenting’ ahead of them – I don’t see anything changing.”

Pattison, however, feels we may see a dip before another resurgence. “Certainly, now is a rich time for dogs, and I know Channel 4 has a couple of dog programmes in development, but subject matter in television is fairly cyclical. In a year’s time, will there still be so many dog shows? I don’t know. But then they will rise up again in a couple of years’ time.”

The show business adage may be to never work with children or animals, but the reality is that our four-legged friends are too appealing to stay off television. So don’t expect a “paws” in their popularity for too long. ■



Wall and ceiling-mounted LED screens provide a virtual forest

ARRI

# This revolution will be televised

**T**echnologies have always been central to the evolution of the programme-making process, but we have a revolution on our hands with the advent of virtual production.

Virtual production is the ability to augment TV and film sets with walls of LED displays that show a virtual location, whether that's faraway planets (used in *The Mandalorian*) or the tennis courts of Wimbledon 2021 (apparently overlooked by the BBC's virtual studio).

However, virtual production is vastly more than an upgrade of the familiar green or blue screens that have long been used to capture live action that can later be combined with location footage or computer-generated imagery. The screen imagery can match the camera's viewpoint in real time and also provide suitable lighting for the real-world set.

The all-encompassing experience of the LED surround screens has a big impact on many aspects of the production process, as a panel of

**An RTS panel predicts that virtual production will have a profound impact on how TV shows are made**

industry-leading practitioners discussed at a recent RTS event.

"We've all seen things that claimed to be a revolution but, in fact, they just made one department's life a lot better," said Ian Milham, the virtual production supervisor at Industrial Light & Magic. The company helped to make Disney+'s *The Mandalorian*, a pioneering programme in this field.

"This is one of those [developments] where, if it is used correctly, it's a win for everyone," he said. "For anyone who has done green-screen or blue-screen work, you don't realise how much work you've been doing on what I've been calling the 'imagination tax'. In many ways, having everything really be present is just a tremendous relief

for everyone." Milham's "imagination tax" becomes evident when the cameras roll in a studio set surrounded by wall of LED screens as opposed to one hung with an inert fabric green screen.

Now, actors can see, moment by moment, what they are interacting with, and lighting directors do not have to guess exactly where the light sources in a scene should be.

Milham added: "We're currently doing a show with Ewan McGregor, who is reprising [the role of] Obi-Wan Kenobi, whom he played on a big blue-screen set nearly two decades ago. Now he's playing him again on one of these [virtual] sets.

"You can see his joy in the comparison: he has already talked about how much better [the virtual set] is for him. For special effects, you can actually add fog and smoke. Lighters can add real light. With costumes, [in the past] maybe they'd want to avoid something reflective. Now: go for it. If anything, it makes the whole thing better."

The reflective armour of *The Mandalorian*'s central character naturally

picked up real reflections from the images on the surrounding video wall. But in a green-screen studio, his armour would have picked up green patches that would have needed laborious post-production work to prevent the background leaking through.

Milham described the collaboration needed from all departments as a “sea change”, because, “rather than input virtual effects at the end of the process, it’s [done] right at the start, and each department can influence the look and feel of the production”.

The technology began life in the computer games industry, where development and game-play platforms such as Unreal Engine and Unity matured until they were ready to be repurposed for the film and television industry. Now, stepping into a “volume” – the programmable space in which filming takes place – is akin to stepping out on location, but with a fraction of the effort.

Neil Graham, head of virtual production at Sky Studios, said the new technology supported a number of strategic goals set by Sky Studios, such as financially de-risking projects by planning ahead, reducing their carbon footprint, improving efficiency on set, and allowing the previsualisation stage to happen in real time, and collaboratively. “So it gets [us] away from [the traditional] linear process, and that drives innovation,” he said.

Previsualisation allows the various departments to understand a director’s intent well before principal photography starts. But the possibility of being able to stand inside a variety of virtual locations or “sets” before any construction takes place now allows the director and department heads to discuss the implications of each others’ creative ideas at a very early stage.

There is a cost-saving aspect as well. “Part of our metric for success is that we need to be able to bring the location to the stage cheaper than to take the crew to the location,” said Milham. “There’s physical construction, less moving in. We’ve seen the same crew get up to 30% faster on a volume stage than on a traditional stage.”

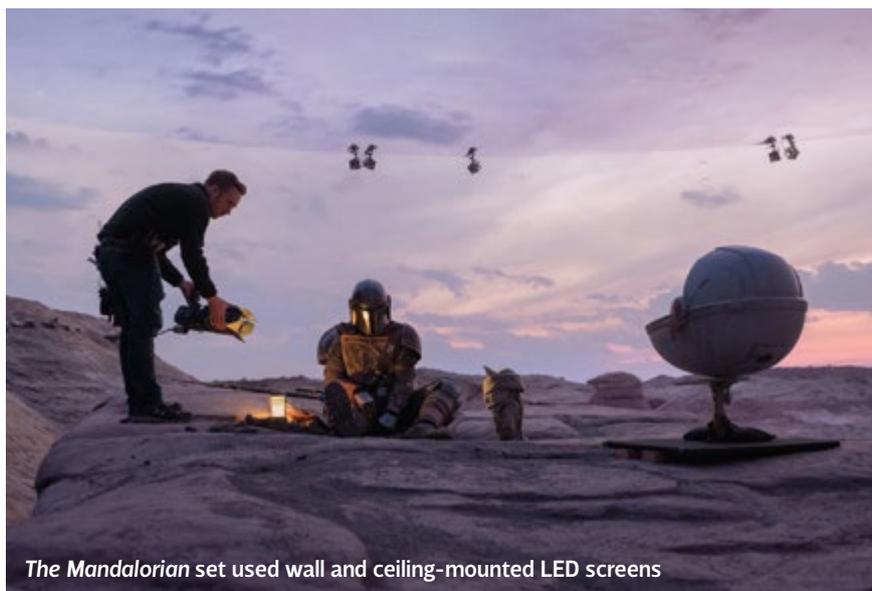
Steve Jelley, co-founder of Dimension, a cutting-edge virtual production studio, gave an example of how it works in practice. It recently filmed *Fireworks*, a new indie short from two-time Oscar-winning VFX Supervisor Paul Franklin, who won for *Inception* (2010) and *Interstellar* (2014).

“You can use its benefits for drama at any budget. It is still expensive to rent a large volume, or certainly to build one, but, when you start to combine it with other virtual production techniques, it works pretty well,” he said. “For example, I’m looking at doing the big wide shots on blue screen using SimulCam [which superimposes real world actors and objects onto a virtual world].

“Then I’m flying in LED panels for the medium close-up work. So you can use this stuff in combination. Well

of its success. “Everyone that goes on that set, and everyone that I know that’s ever worked on a digital transformation, is doing so for the benefit of their customers, the business, or that particular piece of beautiful creativity. So, yeah, we’re humans and make things messy. But at the same time, humans can come together and make great things.”

Looking to the impact it will have in the future, Sky Studios is focusing the application of virtual production on its drama slate, before moving on to



Disney+

planned, it can be faster and better, and you can make it stack up.”

The elephant in the Zoom room was addressed: does this mean crew are at risk of losing their jobs?

“I think the fear is the disruption and change, which is undeniable. It doesn’t really change the core thing we’re doing,” said Milham. “If you’re a gaffer or someone who is used to working on a set, [you might think,] ‘Here comes this guy with his computers who thinks he’s going to take over’. Well, we are still dealing with the physics, emotion and craft of lighting something.

“You might be lighting with an iPad instead of a physical instrument, but we also still use physical instruments. There are all kinds of exciting possibilities, so someone who can navigate the tricky waters of that change can find a version of their job that they like more.”

Kate Gray, the head of product management at NTT Data (“part of NTT, which is most likely the largest tech company that no one’s ever heard of”), explained that, with all tech developments, human adoption is at the heart

comedy, entertainment and the arts.

Its potential will grow as the technology continues to develop and the range of already-created volumes increases, which is likely to make rental prices more affordable. “It feels to me like virtual production is still in its infancy. There’s been amazing work over the past couple of years but the tools are getting better all the time,” Graham said. “So it does feel like that impact will grow exponentially.”

The best news is that, as far as tech goes, it is easy to dip your toe into it and explore the possibilities. “You can literally replicate the brain bar [the informal term for the virtual production team on a project] by using Unreal Engine, a PC and some TVs,” said Jelley. “It’s very accessible, much more so than most film-making equipment... There’s really no barrier to entry.” ■

**Report by Shilpa Ganatra. The RTS event ‘TV’s production revolution: The rise and rise of virtual production’ was held on 28 June. It was chaired by journalist Kate Russell.**



# Wanted: more staff, studios and gear

**Tara Conlan** investigates how the pandemic and the demand for content have led to acute shortages hitting UK TV production

‘**F**ist fight” and “a perfect storm” are how producers are describing the current scarcity of crew, kit, studio space and talent in the British TV industry. The situation has arisen primarily due to the pre-Covid-19 content boom driven by the expanding streaming market and the post-lockdown rush back to production. And it is putting production schedules under strain.

As BBC Studios Productions’ acting COO, Sonia Magris, says, while this “is great news for TV content makers, the sector is undoubtedly feeling the pressure that comes with it, and BBC Studios Productions is not immune to this.

“One of the biggest challenges is that there are not enough people in the market to supply the current demand, which means our production teams are working harder than ever. This is in addition to the added pressure they

have ensuring rigorous Covid protocols are in place.”

Magris adds: “There’s also cost inflation and logistical challenges. Encouragingly, out of the hundreds of titles we deliver each year, only a handful are experiencing minimal delays. We’re proactively managing the situation and working closely with our commissioners to mitigate these risks.”

ITV head of entertainment commissioner Katie Rawcliffe says she has noticed “a lack of experienced show runners as the bigger shows for the

autumn and the start of 2022 come back into production”.

Her team has been helping production companies ensure they have the right teams for shows: “It may mean tweaking, sharing of personnel and making some calls ourselves... but it usually works out.”

Although ITV successfully aired big shows, such as *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, last year despite the pandemic, Rawcliffe says that this year has not been as easy as some had expected. *The Masked Dancer* producer Bandicoot (which also makes *The Masked Singer*) had to quickly find a different studio because its usual one was already occupied by a new ITV show, *Starstruck*. But for Rawcliffe, “our biggest battle is still Covid... we had an international shoot halted this week due to overseas guidelines”.

According to a recent survey of employers by the TV industry training

**‘SOME PEOPLE WALK OFF MID-SHOOT BECAUSE THEY’VE HAD A BETTER OFFER’**

body ScreenSkills, 82% say recruitment is a problem while two-thirds believe the health crisis has exacerbated it.

Nicky Ball, the senior high-end TV new entrant manager for ScreenSkills, says part of the reason is that former production managers or co-ordinators have moved into the newly created roles of Covid supervisors. “The demand is phenomenal. I’ve never known anything like it,” she says.

Bandicoot’s parent company, Argonon, also owns Leopard Pictures, which is currently shooting *Worzel Gummidge*. Argonon CEO James Burstall says: “At the moment, it is a perfect storm.... There is a massive and chronic shortage of talent, space and studios. To be honest, it’s a complete fist fight really for people to get their hands on the best talent and studios, and the best product, budgets, schedules and teams.

“It’s a good problem to have... because we are this hub of expert talent in the UK, but it does mean that budgets are being squeezed. Costs are going up enormously. We’re having to start pre-production a lot earlier.”

He notes that big streamers such as Netflix and Amazon have been putting studios and talent on retainers, “which is great for talent but, at the same time, it means the marketplace is now overstretched. It’s impossible to go into production quickly on high-end shows.”

According to DV Talent Managing Director Matt Born, job postings aimed at freelancers on *The Talent Manager* website are running at almost double their usual level. This year, searches on the site are up 75% on the same period last year, to 140,000.

He says: “A lot of people are struggling to find production managers and co-ordinators. There’s this boom in productions but you need people who can run them properly, especially with tighter budgets and more complicated schedules thanks to Covid.”

Born believes many production managers have left the industry due to stress and lack of flexibility. Rawcliffe calls them “unsung” heroes because, on top of their normal workload, they have had “to navigate their way through guidelines, innovating and implementing safe practice, and balancing that with the financial fall-out”.

Kit is an issue, too. Born says DV Talent’s subsidiary The Kit Room has



“virtually everything out... and for 20 weeks. Those big, long-running juggernaut series such as *Reported Missing* are back and taking stuff as they need to plan and have two crews working in isolation, etc.”

The Kit Room’s manager, Robin Weaser, explains that there have been delays in getting new kit due to the lack of computer chips from Chinese factories closed because of Covid. “Added to that, there’s the complications caused by Brexit” – equipment that could previously be ordered from Germany with next-day delivery, can now take two weeks to arrive as it is held up at borders or in warehouses.

Momentum Television, which makes BBC One comedy *Ghosts*, has just started filming *Murder in Provence* for BritBox, starring Roger Allam. Some filming is needed in France and, hopefully, will be happening towards the end of its schedule once travel restrictions are relaxed.

Co-executive producer Alison Carpenter describes the situation as “a sort of Wild West. Rates have gone up. Luckily, it hasn’t happened to us yet but [some] people [have been] walking off mid-prep or mid-shoot because they’ve had a better offer. Which is sort of understandable because people lost such a chunk of their income last year.”

Carpenter highlights the problem of shows that were budgeted and financed pre-pandemic now having to film on

the same budget while carrying extra Covid-related costs. She says broadcasters have been sympathetic but often “they are tightening their belts, so you’re trying to achieve the same kind of creative ambition while everything costs more – and it’s not just crew, it’s facilities, it’s equipment. People are saying, ‘There are no dollies until October’, and having to find a way around it.”

Burstall agrees that “there’s a massive national and international scramble for equipment. We’ve been bringing equipment from Liverpool down to London... from Northern Ireland to Manchester... That does cost money. At some point, we’re going to have to pay for these things.

“Therefore there are difficult, ongoing conversations with commissioners – who are being pragmatic – about how these things are going to cost more money. As an industry, we’re going to have to come up with solutions.”

Part of that is recruitment. Recently, BBC Studios launched a film\* called *Inside the Screen* on BBC Bitesize to show children the range of behind-the-camera TV careers available. Argonon is also encouraging children from different backgrounds to look at TV careers via the charity Speakers for Schools.

With help from the High End TV Skills Fund – which drama, comedy and factual productions pay into – ScreenSkills has also been recruiting new people at every level via the First Break, Trainee Finder and Make A Move schemes. Last year Ball was worried about getting enough work for trainees, but 116 productions are using her people: “It’s fantastic... but we need to make sure we really support and nurture those individuals, whether they be new entrants or [those] stepping into a more senior role.”

One bonus is that the drive to get more people into TV may be boosting diversity. Searches on DV Talent’s diversity search engine are up 594%, compared with the previous year to date.

Carpenter argues that there is also an opportunity to address industry-wide work culture issues: “One of the things I’m proud of is that crews come back to us saying they’ve had a lovely time working with us. That feels really important, not just in terms of retention but at a time when we’re all talking about bullying in the industry.” ■

\* [www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z6x67yc](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z6x67yc)

# OUR FRIEND IN THE EAST

It's no secret that Norfolk has hosted many well-known TV and film titles over the years. Think of classic British shows such as *Dad's Army*, blockbusters *Shakespeare in Love*, *Jack the Giant Slayer*, *Stardust* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and British features *45 Years*, *Yesterday*, *The Souvenir* (1 and 2) and *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa*.

The region boasts the most wonderful, diverse landscapes – from breathtaking beaches, beautiful big skies and gorgeous stately homes to a medieval city, outstanding market towns, world-class architecture and miles of waterways.

While you may not see Iron Man or Thor wandering around Norfolk, what you will find is a stunning variety of some of the best backdrops for filming in the UK. Increasingly, this unspoilt county gem is recognised not only for its incredible locations but as a growing creative powerhouse of talent, services and facilities. These include several built spaces and studios, such as the recently expanded Raynham Hangar Studios (4,600m<sup>2</sup>) and Epic Studios (930m<sup>2</sup>).

To help spotlight the region's production infrastructure, Norfolk Screen was established by development director Craig Higgins and myself last November. Our aim is to provide a one-stop, screen-friendly service showcasing Norfolk's locations, talent, services and facilities, and to supply an information and advisory service to those considering or intending to shoot here. This includes helping link productions with local authorities to make it easier to organise film permits.

This year we have already welcomed an array of A-listers working on

A-listers are heading to Norfolk for both films and TV series. **Claire Chapman** explains the appeal of Nelson's county to producers



Norfolk Screen

high-profile productions such as: *Spencer*, starring Kristen Stewart as Diana, Princess of Wales; the comedy drama *Good Luck to You Leo Grande*, starring Emma Thompson as a widow seeking sex; and Sky's *This Sceptred Isle*, starring Kenneth Branagh as Boris Johnson.

*Spencer*'s UK producer, Paul Webster, says: "Filming in Norfolk was such a wonderful experience. Norfolk Screen was instrumental in helping us source our local crew who worked tirelessly and with unending enthusiasm.

"Everywhere we went, we were supported and made to feel so welcome. We also had excellent access to world-class, unspoilt locations – from winding country roads to the stunning North Norfolk coast.

"Watching the sun rise on the sands

of Hunstanton beach made the early starts that much easier. I am already looking out for an excuse to return."

Our Norfolk Screen service also hosts an online directory, where locally based creatives and companies involved in film and TV production can register their services for free.

In our first year we are thrilled that the not-for-profit Norfolk Screen has received endorsements from such industry bodies as the British Film Commission, ScreenSkills and the BFI. We are also a Creative England: Filming in England partner.

Our advisory board includes such luminaries as Golden Globe-winning producer Debra Hayward, RTS award-winning director Julian Jarrold and producer Hilary Bevan Jones, the recipient of Emmy, RTS and Bafta awards.

Norfolk is a unique county that has much to offer any production. Who could sum it up better than Norfolk legend Stephen Fry, who says: "It's not just the glorious vistas, the famous skies, the coastline, the market towns, and the sheer variety of landscape and location that the county of Norfolk offers – it's something else, something to do with the authentic continuity of character and difference that has run through the people and the place that lends Norfolk its uniqueness, charm, quirkiness, beauty and grandeur.

"I'm prejudiced because I grew up here and live here still, but I'm more prejudiced because I've filmed here and I know that there's no experience like it." ■

**Claire Chapman is Managing Director of Norfolk Screen ([www.norfolkscreen.co.uk](http://www.norfolkscreen.co.uk)).**



**Vick Hope and Siobhan Greene** hosted the awards ceremony streamed on 25 June



Host Vick Hope and (inset) Awards Chair Siobhan Greene

RTS

# RTS Student Television Awards 2021

Sponsored by



## Undergraduate Animation

### ***My Favourite Hill***

Chris Childs, UWE Bristol

'The dialogue was hilariously delivered and crafted. An interesting and enjoyable commentary on working life, as well as a lovely tribute.'

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ **Husky**, Darragh Scott, The National Film School, IADT
- ▶ **Last Week**, Jamie Walsh, University of Central Lancashire
- ▶ **Spellbound**, Amelia Parker, Beth Ryan and Team, Arts University Bournemouth

## Undergraduate Non-Scripted

### ***Man, Beast and the Heart to Win***

Hal Bartlett, Will Eastwick-Field, Dave Jones, Ross Charette, Jamie Doughty and Peter Dixon, Falmouth University  
'A beautifully shot documentary imbued with... personality and compelling storytelling.'

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ **Canada's Keepers**, Mia Frank, Monica Athnasious, Seila Lalou, Minori Iwahashi and Karyan Au-Yeung, University of Leeds
- ▶ **Staying Sane (During a Global Pandemic)**, Dorothea Scarleta Sterian, University of Salford

## Undergraduate Scripted

### ***Paper Round Boy***

George Stickley, Anastasija Pcelinceva, Ted Box, Millie Bennett, Richard Skull and Brandon Thompson, University of Gloucestershire

'A sweet, big-hearted film, with a witty and original script. Beautifully shot and designed, with a wonderfully nostalgic, almost retro tone.'

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ **Cease**, Aisling O'Regan Sargent, Philip Emo, Dylan Keenan, Cormac Campbell and Keen Murphy, The National Film School, IADT ▶

► **Future for Our Children**, Cameron Jones, Iulia Nistor, Christos Panagiotou, Harry Tye, Amer Hasan, Aislin Plaistow and Jessica Mistry, Sheffield Hallam University

► **Yard Kings**, Billy King and Vasco Sancho, Middlesex University

## Undergraduate Camerawork

### **Paper Round Boy**

Ted Box, University of Gloucestershire  
‘Nice lighting and framing really helped to bring this story to life. Very well shot.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Man, Beast and the Heart to Win**, Dave Jones, Falmouth University

► **Yard Kings**, Jakub Rogala, Middlesex University

## Undergraduate Editing

### **Staying Sane (During a Global Pandemic)**

Dorothea Scarleta Sterian, University of Salford

‘There wasn’t a wasted shot. The editing was incredibly tight and very accomplished.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Spellbound**, Olesia Sizikova, Arts University Bournemouth

► **Yard Kings**, Aiden Tobin, Middlesex University

## Undergraduate Production Design

### **Paper Round Boy**

George Stickley and Richard Skull, University of Gloucestershire

‘Great costumes combined with the art department [to make] a very impressive-looking film.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Spellbound**, Amelia Parker and Beth Ryan, Arts University Bournemouth

► **Yard Kings**, Miriam Abdulameer, Middlesex University

## Undergraduate Sound

### **Yard Kings**

Zazanna Pencak, Middlesex University  
‘This on-location sound recording was very impressive. A compliment to the skill of the designer.’

#### **Nominees:**

► **Husky**, Darragh Scott, Geoffrey Perrin and Rhyss Davies, The National Film School, IADT

► **Staying Sane (During a Global Pandemic)**, Dorothea Scarleta Sterian, University of Salford



University of Gloucestershire

*Paper Round Boy*, Undergraduate Scripted, Undergraduate Camerawork and Undergraduate Production Design



UWE Bristol

*My Favourite Hill*, Undergraduate Animation

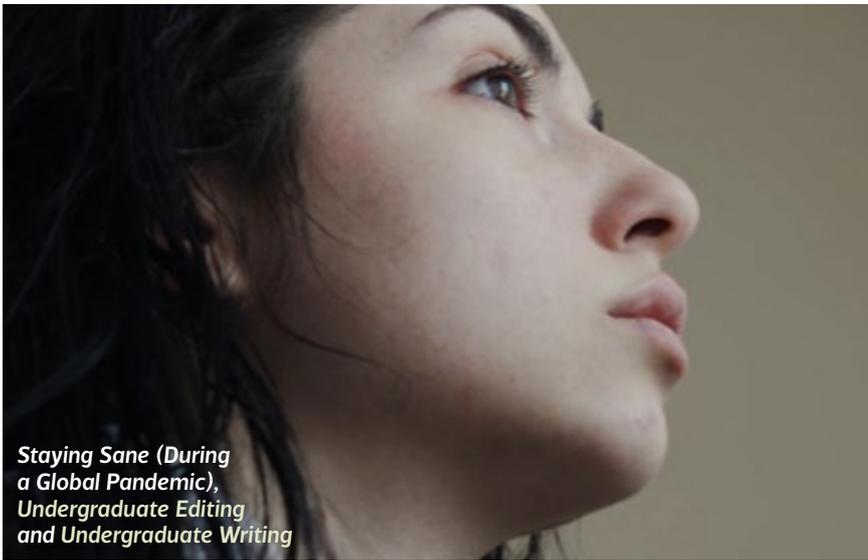


Middlesex University

*Yard Kings*, Undergraduate Sound



**Man, Beast and the Heart to Win,**  
Undergraduate  
Non-Scripted



**Staying Sane (During  
a Global Pandemic),**  
Undergraduate Editing  
and Undergraduate Writing



**The Song of a Lost  
Boy,** Postgraduate  
Animation and  
Postgraduate  
Production Design

The RTS Student Television Awards 2021 reward outstanding work produced during the 2019/20 academic year. Undergraduate entries were first judged at a regional level by their local RTS centre in the winter of 2020.

The winning films from each RTS centre, along with all postgraduate entries, were then judged nationally in April 2021.



You can see a selection of the students' films at [bit.ly/xxxx](https://bit.ly/xxxx)

## Undergraduate Writing

### **Staying Sane (During a Global Pandemic)**

Dorothea Scarleta Sterian (University of Salford)

'A very impressive bit of screenwriting behind a very challenging and intriguing film.'

#### **Nominees:**

► **Canada's Keepers**, Mia Frank, University of Leeds

► **Paper Round Boy**, George Stickley, University of Gloucestershire

## Postgraduate Animation

### **The Song of a Lost Boy**

Daniel Quirke, Jamie MacDonald, Brid Arnstein, Emma Langguth and Team, National Film and Television School

'This film [had a] unique style and its message of acceptance [was] told in such an interesting and original way. A lot of deep thought had gone into the design and materials chosen.'

#### **Nominees:**

► **Between Us**, Niancao Yang, Lite Zhu, Tim Steemson and Yali Shen, London College of Communication at the University of the Arts London

► **Something Borrowed**, Micky Wozny, Nathan Hardisty, Andrew St Maur, Twan Peeters and Gabe Robertson, National Film and Television School

► **The Fire Next Time**, Renaldho Pelle, Kerry Jade Kolbe, Yangling Wang, Fabio Mota, Robin Whalley and Team, National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Entertainment

### **Other Nature**

Alex Cartlidge, Olympia Christofinis and Team, National Film and Television School

'A rounded story that had viewers hooked from the start. It was well cast, well acted and very well done.'

#### **Nominees:**

► **What's in a Name**, Nathalie Maher, Harriet Erskine Still and Leni Jaeger, Goldsmiths, University of London

► **Who Murdered the Maid?**, Wendy Yee Man Wong, George Burns, Alix Li, Wilson Foo Yong Sheng, Benjamyn Bird and Guy Dowsett, Arts University Bournemouth

► **Wild Cooks**, Rohit Karan Baidya, Sebastien Duchateau and Team, National Film and Television School ►

## Postgraduate Natural History

### ***Secrets of the Salamanders***

Madelaine Westwood, Nathan Small, Walteri Vanhanen and Constance Brannick and Team, National Film and Television School

‘Strong visuals [and] a great use of archive footage, with a great voice and tone. A strong opening captured your attention and great photography throughout kept it.’

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ ***Life on the Rocks***, George Pretty, Oli Bauer, Will Turner, Andrea Lo Priore, Breen Turner and Team, National Film and Television School
- ▶ ***Red or Dead***, Archie Wilson, University of the West of England
- ▶ ***Wild Therapy***, Bobby Hardy, University of the West of England

## Postgraduate News

### ***The Reproduction Revolution***

Freya Chappell, University of Salford  
‘An excellent reporter-led portfolio of films, [which] showed great technical flair [and a] range of voices presented in a balanced and informed way.’

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ ***Rugby Union: The Invisible Injury***, Matthew Leon, Cardiff Metropolitan University
- ▶ ***The Currency of Culture***, Nabil Mehdinejad, City, University of London
- ▶ ***When Sex Games Go Wrong***, Caitlin Kelly, Katie Dennison and Victoria Hudson-Grant, City, University of London

## Postgraduate Non-Scripted

### ***Zágon***

Mateo Villanueva Brandt, Luke Kulkundis, Vincent Zágon, Zack Bottoni, Amy Douglas-Morris, Gabriel Ware and Martyn Ware, London College of Communication at the University of the Arts London  
‘Brilliant, beautiful, clever, incredibly positive.... The way the art forms intertwined was captivating.’

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ ***Bringing Home the Blubber***, Molly Adams, Ujuunnguaq Heinrich, Maalat Heinrich, Aili H Platou and Joel Jørgensen, London College of Communication at the University of the Arts London
- ▶ ***Inside a Marriage***, Ben Cheetham, Margred Pryce, Ed Rousseau, Adam Speck and Team, National Film and Television School
- ▶ ***Short-Term Sister***, Philipp Lippert, Maximilian Schürmann, Alina Kay Kolosova and Zak Allum, Goldsmiths, University of London



**Zágon,**  
**Postgraduate**  
**Non-Scripted**

London College of Communication



**Secrets of the**  
**Salamanders,**  
**Postgraduate**  
**Natural History**

National Film and Television School



**Other Nature,**  
**Postgraduate**  
**Entertainment**

National Film and Television School



Who Goes There?,  
Postgraduate Scripted

National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Scripted

### Who Goes There?

Astrid Thorvaldsen, Leah Bethany Jones, William Gillies, Graham Boonzaaier, Armiliah Aripin and Team, National Film and Television School

'Who Goes There?' felt big and cinematic [and] genuinely scary! Everything from costume to production design was impressive.'

### Nominees:

► **City of Lost Children**, Misha Vertkin, Jesse Romain, Brid Arnstein, Pep Bosch and Team, National Film and Television School

► **One for the Road**, Eileen Tracey, Milena Bolouri and Julia Sander, Goldsmiths, University of London

► **Stratum Deep**, Lian Meng Rose, James Bowsher, Nathan Hardisty, Nathalie Pitters, Andrew Merrison and Team, National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Camerawork

### Life on the Rocks

George Pretty, National Film and Television School

'The style of camerawork significantly contributed to the success of the film. The sense of loneliness... and the bleak environment were captured wonderfully and contrasted superbly with the interviews. A triumph.'

### Nominees:

► **City of Lost Children**, Pep Bosch i Calvo, National Film and Television School

► **Who Goes There?**, Graham Boonzaaier, National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Editing

### Short-Term Sister

Philipp Lippert, Goldsmiths, University of London

'The excellent standard of the editing massively contributed to, and embellished, the production of a very sensitive subject.'

### Nominees:

► **City of Lost Children**, Edward Coltman, National Film and Television School

► **Who Goes There?**, Armiliah Aripin, National Film and Television School >

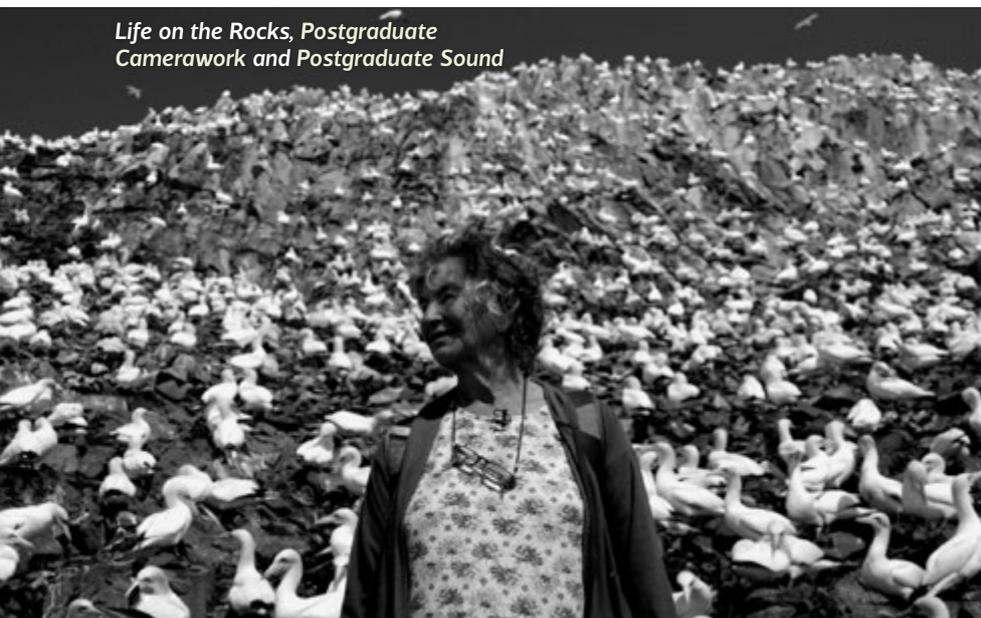
RTS

National Film and Television School

**Award recipients:** 1 Peter Dixon, 2 Astrid Thorvaldsen, 3 Olympia Christofinis, 4 Max Tobin, 5 Madelaine Westwood, 6 Millie Bennett, 7 Freya Chappell, 8 Daniel Quirke



Life on the Rocks, Postgraduate  
Camerawork and Postgraduate Sound



## Postgraduate Production Design

### ***The Song of a Lost Boy***

Steven X Haber, National Film and Television School

‘The sense of fun really came through the production design and provided a visceral visual experience.’

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ ***City of Lost Children***, Anna Wołoszczuk, National Film and Television School
- ▶ ***Who Goes There?***, Peter Coulthard, National Film and Television School

## Postgraduate Sound

### ***Life on the Rocks***

Breen Turner, National Film and Television School

‘The sounds of the environment were captured brilliantly.... The film used the sound design to breathe, which really contributed to the success of the piece.’

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ ***The Fire Next Time***, Jose Pablo Ramirez Leiva, National Film and Television School
- ▶ ***Who Murdered the Maid?***, Guy Dowsett, Arts University Bournemouth

## Postgraduate Writing

### ***Short-Term Sister***

Philipp Lippert, Goldsmiths, University of London

‘Guiding the viewer through a story so close to the narrator’s heart cannot have been easy, yet the writing allowed the viewer to be taken on a real journey from start to finish. Brilliant.’

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ ***One for the Road***, Liam Lemkin Anderson, Imogen Radwan and Eileen Tracey, Goldsmiths, University of London
- ▶ ***Something Borrowed***, Nathan Hardisty, National Film and Television School

## Young Filmmaker Award

### ***I Will Despise You***

Max Tobin, Ed Whyte, Joe Luk, Oli Thomas and Almir Dattoo

‘An impressively made and ambitious short drama. The script was a triumph and the comedic elements worked well. The film showed great planning and vision in terms of creating the look and feel, using multiple locations and filming under extremely challenging conditions.’

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ ***Badgirl\$ – ‘Next Up II’***, Krishan Sharda, Nathaniel Turner Caralho, Courtney Bennett, Sam Holding and music by Badgirl\$
- ▶ ***Three Hikers***, Cian Desmond and Jack Desmond ■



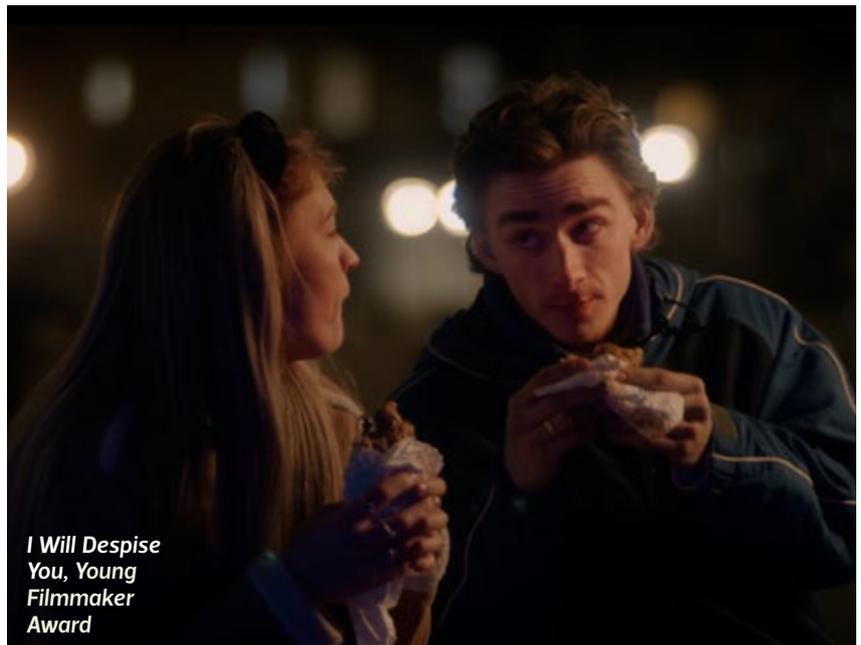
***Short-Term Sister***,  
Postgraduate  
Editing and  
Postgraduate  
Writing

Goldsmiths, University of London



***The Reproduction Revolution***,  
Postgraduate News

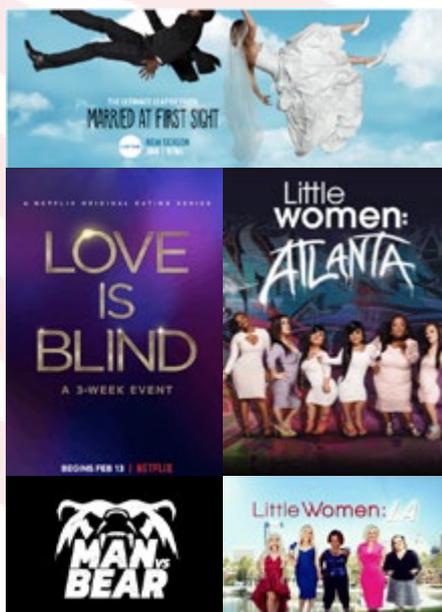
University of Salford



***I Will Despise You***,  
Young  
Filmmaker  
Award

Shoot The Messenger

# Kinetic Content sponsored the RTS Student Television Awards 2021



In August 2020, Chris Coelen, the Emmy nominated founder/CEO of Kinetic Content, and German/UK based Red Arrow Studios, announced a new joint venture in Los Angeles focusing on developing high-end scripted TV series with global appeal for the US marketplace. Melissa Myers was recruited from WME to head the new company, tapping into her international scripted content knowledge, as well as Coelen's and Red Arrow Studios' existing relationships.

The creative aim of the company is working with gifted creators and discovering new voices/worlds to focus on premium high-end, English-language scripted TV series with both domestic and international appeal - as well as leaning into our parent companies strengths: Kinetics' hit marriage, relationship and social experiment brand, serving the US scripted market while utilizing Red Arrow Studios' tremendous international reach.



**Chris Coelen's** Kinetic Content slate includes the Emmy Nominated, Netflix smash hit, LOVE IS BLIND, as well as shows in every non-scripted genre: ground-breaking social experiments like MARRIED AT FIRST SIGHT (Lifetime), THE SPOUSE HOUSE (TLC); highly-rated docu-series LITTLE WOMEN: LA, LITTLE WOMEN: ATLANTA and LITTLE WOMEN: DALLAS; cooking competitions THE TASTE (ABC), hidden-camera hit BETTY WHITE'S OFF THEIR ROCKERS (NBC), weight-loss competition MY DIET IS BETTER THAN YOURS (ABC) and game shows GEEKS WHO DRINK (SyFy) and YOU DESERVE IT (ABC). Coelen has longtime international ties. As a partner at UTA, he created and ran the Alternative and International TV Departments. He left UTA to become the founding CEO of the North American arm of British production company RDF Media, which ultimately was bought by Banijay, where he produced WIFE SWAP, SECRET MILLIONAIRE and DON'T FORGET THE LYRICS. In 2010, Coelen founded Kinetic Content, subsequently acquired by Red Arrow Studios.



**Melissa Myers**, previously a partner at WME, spent more than 20 years at the agency, spearheading the International Scripted Department while building a renowned TV roster of writers, directors and talent while specializing in packaging global content. Her clients at WME included British production outfits Left Bank Pictures (THE CROWN, OUTLANDER), Big Talk Productions (CRASHING, FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER), Riff Raff Productions (JUDE LAW), Red Productions (YEARS & YEARS, HAPPY VALLEY) etc, while representing international artists including SJ Clarkson (ANATOMY OF A SCANDAL, SUCCESSION, JESSICA JONES), Anthony Byrne (PEAKY BLINDERS), Ben Taylor (SEX EDUCATION, CATASTROPHE), Francesca Gardiner (SUCCESSION), Sally Wainwright (GENTLEMAN JACK, HAPPY VALLEY), Toby Haynes (UTOPIA, BLACK MIRROR), Jane Fallon (TEACHERS), and many more.





BBC

## Role models on screen

RTS  
Scotland

Steve Clarke learns there is no shortage of diverse television and film talent north of the border

The importance of positive role models to create a genuinely inclusive workforce, whether those are people of colour or those who are disabled, was emphasised during an RTS event in June, “The future of off-screen production diversity in Scotland”.

Black Scottish director and producer Stewart Kyasimire, MD of Create Anything, said there was no shortage of diverse TV and film talent. It was, however, important to approach workers sensitively and for people from BAME backgrounds to see people like themselves working on both sides of the camera.

“Sometimes,” he said, “when you have white people contacting people of colour who want to get into TV, it

can come across as a bit jarring... It feels a bit more like a tick-box exercise. But when I’m contacting them, I am more interested in the stories they want to tell and what they want to create. I can also relate to them as I’m from an ethnic minority background.”

The Bafta-nominated filmmaker, who made *Black and Scottish*, set up Scotland’s first all-BAME indie. His latest film, *Bash the Entertainer: Behind the Smile*, also for BBC Scotland, tackles social media, racism and mental health.

He told the RTS that he was amazed at the response he received when he advertised for staff; he was sent more than 500 CVs in three days: “They came from all walks of life and from across the UK.”

He and a fellow panellist,

writer and performer Robert Florence, both said their experiences of working in theatre had been much more supportive than they’d found on the average TV set.

“TV production can sometimes be a wee bit cold,” said Florence. “Often, you start as strangers... and quite often you stay strangers throughout the course of the production.”

He said broadcasters and indies should rely less on hiring people they’ve worked with before: “Low-budget shows are an opportunity to throw caution to the wind and hire new people, and give people from diverse backgrounds a proper opportunity. Diversity has to be aggressively pursued...”

“BBC Scotland is great at supporting people online,

especially via short films. These help people obtain new skills, but it’s nothing like getting that half hour on telly, which is a huge psychological leap.”

Executive producer and training manager Sara Harkins said that many people in Scotland didn’t regard TV as a potential career. To overcome this, it was important for TV people to get into schools, primary as well as secondary, so students, teachers, parents and carers learnt about the sector “as a proper job”.

She added: “People not only don’t know about it, they’re also nervous because they don’t know or see people in the industry like them... We need to get across that it’s a proper job that people can make a career from.”

Discussing disability, the panellists stressed the importance of emphasising skills and abilities, not disabilities. They referenced the work of the Ability Academy, formed by Nigel G Honey, who was told he would never become an editor because of his disability, but went on to edit successful films.

Raise the Roof Productions talent manager Jeannot Hutcheson praised a recent Channel 4 disability networking event: “We didn’t have conversations about people’s disabilities but about their skills and abilities. I came away with five new people. Where can I find them a job?”

There was optimism that attitudes to minorities were changing in Scottish TV, but a more caring and flexible attitude was needed so that successful and long-lasting careers could be forged.

“Black Lives Matter has been a kick up the backside to everyone,” said Harkins. “It’s galvanised people to think, ‘We need to stop talking about it and get on with it.’” ■

Leading football commentators and reporters offered their inside track on their trade at an RTS Cymru Wales event in early June.

“The evolution of the football reporter” was part of “Expo’r Wal Goch” (“The Red Wall Expo”), an online festival exploring Welsh football’s social, cultural and political impact. It offered two panels: one in English (hosted by sports broadcaster/producer Steffan Garrero) and one in Welsh (chaired by S4C commentator Nic Parry).

BBC Radio Wales sports presenter Ian Hunt told Garrero that he began as a print news journalist but, having stepped in for a sick colleague at the *Western Mail* to cover Swansea City, realised “there was no going back to the bread and butter news stuff”.

Freelance broadcaster Abigail Davies took a very different route into broadcasting. For her, football offered an escape. “I was a 15- or 16-year-old girl in an in-patient eating disorder unit with a very bleak outlook on life,” she recalled. “My uncle took me to a football match and, from there... I saw football as my route out.” A decade or so later, Davies is reporting on matches for Sky Sports.

At university, freelance reporter Naz Premji, who can often be seen on the BBC’s *Final Score*, was studying financial services when he entered a local radio competition to find a new sports reporter. He didn’t win, but did land behind-the-scenes production work at the station, and, after graduating, was offered a trainee news and sport job.

Bryn Law, who worked at Sky Sports for two decades, said there was “no tried and tested route” into broadcasting. “I decided at the age of



## From fan to professional

**Cymru Wales** Matthew Bell discovers how football commentators and reporters turned their passion into a job

nine that I wanted to be a football commentator. I wasn’t good enough at football so, if I couldn’t play it, I was going to talk about it.”

Law began as a teenage commentator on hospital radio covering Wrexham. “[It was] a brilliant training ground – no one was listening... you could make mistakes without any real repercussions.”

Jordan Jones founded the local football website Y Clwb Pêl-Droed. “The mainstream media weren’t doing enough to cover domestic Welsh football; [it] was always about Cardiff City and Swansea City and understandably, because they have massive fan bases,” he explained. “Our website has prompted the mainstream media to do more coverage.”

It should go without saying that football commentators love the game, but do their club affiliations ever affect their objectivity?

“I don’t hide the fact that

I’m a Sheffield Wednesday fan,” said Premji. “I have covered Sheffield Wednesday so much on Five Live and *Final Score*, and even when they’re getting absolutely battered, which was quite a lot this season, I have to keep it together, even though inside I’m cursing every away goal that’s going in. You have to be ultra-professional [to avoid bias] – your emotions have to be in check.”

Law is currently working for Leeds United channel LUTV and pointed out that “Leeds fans don’t want a neutral commentary”.

He recalled commentating on a crucial game at Swansea when Leeds scored in the 89th minute: “It was the goal that was probably going to send Leeds back to the Premier League after 16 years out of it, so it got the sort of commentary treatment... that it deserved – I went mad, basically.”

Laura Kenyon, assistant editor at BBC Sport in Cardiff, who also reports for *Final Score* and *Match of the Day Wales*, offered some advice to youngsters hoping to break into commentary and reporting. Increasingly, she sends all-rounders to matches, so that they can write reports, shoot video, cover press conferences and commentate: “Accumulate as many skills as you possibly can.”

Davies suggested: “Volunteer at your local football club.” She gained experience at Cardiff Metropolitan University FC, learning to self-shoot and edit, and interviewing players and managers.

“We all start at the lowest level,” said Premji, “but the buzz and the joy is exactly the same as long as I’m at a game, whether I’m down the parks or... at Molineux – I did the final game of [last] season, Wolves against Manchester United.” ■

**Thames Valley** It can be a lengthy and labyrinthine process, with the vast majority of ideas failing to last the course, but thousands of TV programmes still make it to air every year. At an RTS event in June, “From idea to screen”, co-hosted by The Production Guild of Great Britain, production experts offered the inside track.

Chloe Seddon, head of development at factual indie Parable, which made *Our Baby: A Modern Miracle* for Channel 4, advised: “You need to think like a broadcaster; know what’s on telly, what’s doing well, where the gaps are and what audiences aren’t being served.”

Talent or “access to an interesting place” can help to get a programme commissioned. However, she added: “You do need the stars to align [even]... for a standout idea. You’ve got to keep plugging away and eventually something will come off.”

Bianca Gavin, head of production at Pulse Films, which makes Sky Atlantic’s *Gangs of London*, looks at “budgets, schedule and talent packaging” when a project looks like it could be commissioned.

Karen Redfern was post-production supervisor on *To Olivia*, a British film about writer Roald Dahl and movie star Patricia Neal. Despite her job title, “normally we come [on board] in pre-production, to [work out] budgets and



## Piloting ideas to the screen

workflow. Even when they’re shooting, you need editors in place.”

Dee Allen, a visual effects expert based in New York, where he is vice-president for artists and client relations at Company 3/Method Studios, said: “Visual storytelling has changed so much” over two decades in the business. “We create environments, characters and worlds that complement the story... we’re there to support the

director’s vision. In order to do that, to the best of our ability, we have to get involved upfront early.”

Previsualisation – the visualising of complex scenes before filming – “is a key part for a lot of projects, not just film, but TV now”. He added: “Directors who you’d see in film are now switching to TV, but what they’re bringing with them is that [film] sensibility.

“There’s so much involved in VFX, but there’s always

going to be a negotiation between the creative, the budget and schedule.”

Lyndsay Duthie, CEO of The Production Guild of Great Britain, who chaired the event, asked the panelists to pick the most fulfilling parts of their jobs.

“The excitement of a brainstorm... when you [realise] an idea is great,” said Seddon. “Turning a creative idea into a reality,” added Gavin, while Redfern identified “seeing the finished product”.

“The future is the best part,” said Allen. “The way that technology changes, it just lends itself to what we do for storytelling to get better and better.”

**Matthew Bell**

**RTS Futures** Empowerment coach Pamella Bisson offered the experience of her 20-plus years working across the media industry at an RTS Futures advice session in June. The CEO of training company Boss Your Life covered emotional intelligence, dealing with challenging people and building career opportunities during her presentation.

Emotional intelligence, she

## Boss your own life

said, “is a skill that you must continue to develop” to get on in the TV industry – and in life. It will help a person to “communicate assertively and be able to address conflict” in an industry where work can be stressful.

On networking, Bisson advised: “Keep building and

nurturing relationships. At an industry event... small talk is good. Don’t go straight into your elevator pitch.... Use your emotional intelligence to read the room and ask [people] questions – find out why they’re here and what interests them.... When you naturally get to work, ask what

exciting projects they’re working on... give the conversation time to develop.”

Bisson concluded: “Continue to develop yourself – don’t stop, don’t stagnate.” But, she added: “Never compromise your well-being. If anything doesn’t make you feel good... you don’t have to stay there. Bossing your life means that you are working on your terms.”

**Matthew Bell**

# Terry Stanton

## 1940–2021

Long-standing RTS Midlands committee member Terry Stanton has died at the age of 80. In 1992, Terry was awarded the RTS Midlands' Baird Medal to mark his outstanding contribution to television. He also served as Chair of the centre for four years.

Terry's 50 years' service to the committee was recognised in June 2018, when he was presented with a certificate from (then) Midlands Vice-Chair Dorothy Hobson.

At the time of the presentation, RTS Honorary Secretary David Lowen said: "50 years ago, television was a box in the corner of the room; it had horizontal and vertical hold, and was probably showing black and white programmes. There's been an enormous change in our industry in

those 50 years and Terry has been at the forefront of it."

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

His first job at Alpha gave him a good grounding in television engineering and he went on to found Second City Broadcast Facilities in Birmingham, which provided technical services to the BBC and ITV for programmes that included *The Sky at Night*.

Paul Davies, MD of Vyka (formerly Television Junction), recalled working with him when Terry was at Second City: "My small independent, Television Junction, like many others, relied on his expertise to get 'old-fashioned' tape formats converted to modern



Terry Stanton (right) was honoured in 2018 for 50 years' service

Jenny Wilkes

analogue or digital. There was not a video reel or ancient video cassette that didn't spark a smile when yet another, seemingly impossible-to-retrieve format landed in his lap

"Terry never said no, and always made time to explain his craft. He was known throughout the region as the go-to expert on 40 years of TV gold-dust – material that, without him, may never have been seen again."

Terry organised many of the technical lectures for RTS Midlands, ensuring the centre enjoyed speakers from the cutting edge of technology.

In recent years, Terry organised events with the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) in Birmingham. He was a regular attendee at IBC Amsterdam and shared his experiences with the RTS Midlands committee.

**Matthew Bell**



Vikkie Taggart

Stellify Media

## Make your mark in interviews

**RTS NI Futures** A two-part session featuring Stellify Media director of operations Vikkie Taggart and leadership communications coach Sheila Robinson offered useful advice on how to stand out in interviews.

"In your working life, whoever you are and at whatever stage it is, things will go against you and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it," said Robinson at the RTS Futures Northern Ireland event, "Getting ahead: Making your own luck and making your mark".

But, she added: "There are

things that you can do that will make your own luck."

The first is, "you can take control of more than you think". Second, Robinson suggested, "It's helpful to think of an interview in a broader way – it's about making professional contacts.... It could be that they say, 'You're not right for this job, but I know somebody who needs somebody just like you'.

"Talking about yourself can be quite difficult," she added, urging practice.

Taggart offered stories, good and bad, about interviews she had conducted. "Be careful

not to over-prepare," she said. "Especially for junior and entry positions, people tend to give me the answers they think I want to hear."

She added: "Don't over-talk in an interview or talk over the interviewer.

"Your application has got you to the interview. What we're doing in the interview [is assessing] you as a person.... let your personality shine through... That's what's going to win you the job."

Outlining who she looks to recruit, Taggart said: "Somebody who is motivated, enthusiastic and has a passion for the role." The person, she added, "has to be interested in the role, not after any job, and somebody who is a team player – it takes a team to build a company".

**Matthew Bell**

Northern Ireland is back open for the business of making TV and film. That was the overriding message from an RTS discussion, “2021 and beyond: Next steps for production”, last month.

Since reopening in June 2020, after the Covid-19-induced shutdown, 117 projects across all genres, including Irish-language shows, TV drama and large-scale films – with three of them being made by major US studios – have been shot in the province, according to Northern Ireland Screen.

“We’ve bounced back bigger and harder than anybody was expecting,” said Andrew Reid, the organisation’s head of production.

“It feels really exciting that people are making stuff,” said Jo Street, Channel 4’s head of daytime and features. She encouraged producers in Northern Ireland to develop ideas for specific Channel 4 slots, rather than recycling ideas already pitched to rival outfits.

“At the moment, we have a



## Open again for business

lot of property. I’m never not going to take a property pitch but it’s going to have to stand out,” she explained.

“We have to encourage people to innovate round the edges. In daytime and features we never fully reinvent the wheel. We tinker and super-size something.”

An essential requirement was to provide audiences with shows that were different to those offered by other

channels and the streamers. “I don’t want ‘me-too’ programmes,” stressed Street. “I want to have the show that gets imitated elsewhere.... We all have to be a bit braver.

“Where are the next trends? The power of developing in Northern Ireland [instead] of London, the influences are different.... The life experiences are different. The trends are different... “Family looks and feels very

different in Northern Ireland than if you live in Shepherd’s Bush. It’s those tonal qualities that are interesting.”

“It’s very much full steam ahead,” echoed Simon Clemison, head of news and programmes at UTV. “We’re filming, shooting and producing in a Covid-secure way. Safety was the number-one priority.” There were opportunities to pitch, particularly for 2022. He was “wide open” to ideas of broad appeal to “old, young, families”.

He explained: “We want to bring everyone together and enjoy shared stories and things that are in and of a place. I am interested in what celebrates and connects to Northern Ireland.” All genres, except drama and soaps, would be considered.

The controller of BBC Three, Fiona Campbell, who chaired the event, revealed the channel’s partnership with Northern Ireland Screen had led to *The Fast and the Farmer(ish)*, a tractor-racing competition filming this summer.

**Steve Clarke**

## The UPSIDE

### Hoarse supporters leap for Lions then...

The great TV summer of sport just keeps on getting better and better.

Thank you, Gareth Southgate’s magnificent Young Lions, for cheering up the nation after 16 months of wretched Covid restrictions.

If you didn’t catch Gary Lineker, Alan Shearer and Rio Ferdinand celebrating in the studio as Raheem Sterling scored for England against Germany, check it out on

YouTube. The sheer uninhibited joy of these normally straight-faced men was genuinely the stuff of great live TV.

Also, good to see more females involved in the broadcasts. On ITV, Emma Hayes, manager of Chelsea Women, has won widespread praise for her insight and analysis.

### ... go back to being armchair athletes

Bring on the Olympics – and the Paralympics, where Channel 4 is again pushing the envelope. It is hosting over 300 hours of round-the-clock Paralympics coverage from Tokyo, Leeds and London.

Seventy per cent of the presenting team are disabled and, in a smart move, for the duration of the competition More 4 will become a dedicated team sports channel.

Meanwhile, the broadcaster’s Paralympics microsite is to feature 16 live streams and over 1,000 hours of action.

### Inspiring wildlife sagas on a budget

The RTS Student Television Awards are always a heart-warming event, where new talent is celebrated.

It was particularly good to see them encouraging innovative takes on the natural history genre, with the

inaugural Postgraduate Natural History Award. Everyone loves expensively shot and expertly narrated wildlife shows but the films nominated for this award demonstrated that there is another, more cost-effective way to produce fare of this kind. And all without compromising the conservation message.

### The coronavirus creative dividend

Staying with the student awards, the ebullient jury Chair, Siobhan Greene, was on fine form. This year, she said, Covid had made the students’ achievements all the more impressive. Hear, hear.



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