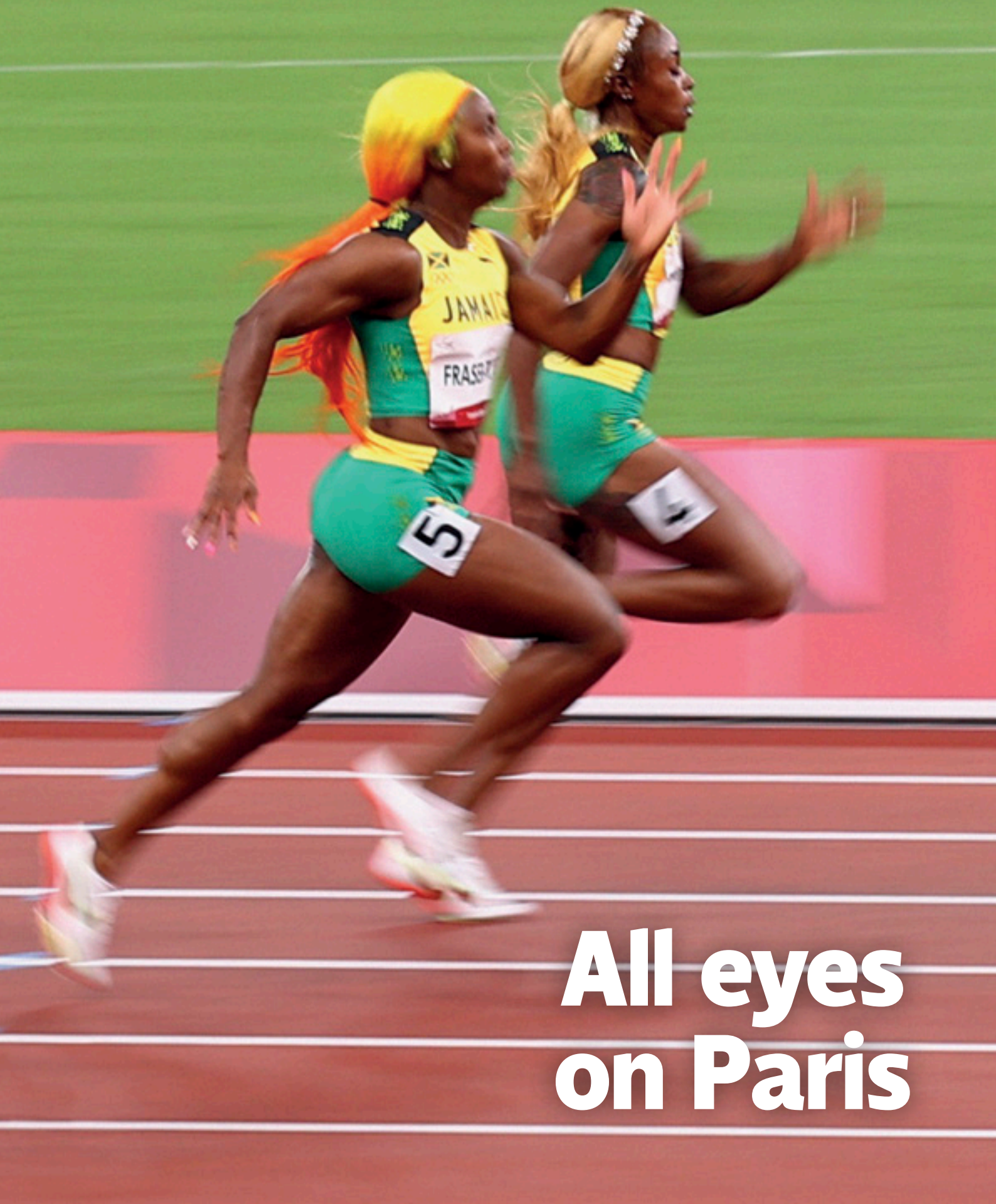


July/August 2024

Television



**All eyes
on Paris**

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From the CEO



For the UK's creative economy to continue flourishing, it needs a pipeline of young screen talent. The standard of the entries to this year's RTS

Student Television Awards should leave no one in any doubt that the flow is strong across all genres.

To quote the RTS's Honorary Secretary, Simon Bucks, who oversees all the Society's Awards, the standard of entries at last month's student awards was "spectacular"; jurors were "blown

away" as they assessed a total of 673 entries from across the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

My congratulations to all the winners and nominees, who are listed in this issue. Also, huge thanks to the awards host, the brilliant and witty Guvna B.

This month's cover story is the Paris Olympics, a feast of TV sport that kicks off on 24 July. Do read Matthew Bell's insightful feature. And giving an insider's report on the run-up to the Games is Our Friend in Paris, Sky Sports Correspondent Rob Harris.

Also this month, Shilpa Ganatra

talks to some of the people behind the amazing soundtracks that grace so many of the shows we love.

We bid farewell to ITV flagship detective series *Vera*, and preview a new ITV comedy, *Piglets*.

Our TV diary is by one of the UK's most talented drama producers, Andy Harries.

Enjoy the rest of the summer.

Theresa Wise

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TV diary



Left Bank Pictures

I leave Corfu airport (a week's holiday sailing around the coast with pals) for Düsseldorf and England's opening match in the Euros against Serbia. James Graham and I are guests of the FA, all part of the research for *Dear England 2.0*, a four-part BBC series adapted from his hit play, which we will shoot in 2025 with Rupert Goold directing and Joe Fiennes reprising his alter ego England manager Gareth Southgate.

James intends to update the play to include the story of this Euros campaign for the final ep. The question is, will Gareth finally get the triumphant win in a major tournament he so craves and cement his place in English soccer history?

■ I am up early to fly to Edinburgh to visit the *Department Q* set at Leith Studios. It's the final week of a six-month shoot for this new Netflix show. Loosely adapted from a Jussi Adler-Olsen novel, the eight-parter is written and directed by the American creative dynamo Scott Frank (*Godless*, *The Queen's Gambit*).

It features Matthew Goode as a smart but bad-tempered English detective digging into a very cold case. A high-profile Edinburgh female prosecutor has been missing (presumed dead) for several years.

Scott is a great man, charming, collaborative and properly obsessive about every detail of the shoot. He has fashioned a very original and atmospheric detective show for us and it's a joy to ride sidesaddle with one of the real legends of our business. Dinner in a tapas bar off the Royal Mile with our commissioners

Andy Harries attends the Euros with playwright James Graham – all part of researching a TV adaptation of *Dear England*

Manda and Mona. They are very happy. *Dep Q* should hit Netflix in the early summer of 2025.

■ Another early flight but, before I set off for London, I manage to do a weights session in the Kimpton Charlotte Square hotel. For the past year or so I have made myself do a minimum of 30 minutes a day, every day without fail before breakfast and often with the motivation of one of my regular trainers.

I have several and they "Zoom" in wherever I am. On Tuesdays, it's Ryan, a super fit Māori who works out of Chiswick. It's so easy with a phone, some Apple AirPods and a decent gym. Fitness keeps me focused, calm and helps me to sleep.

■ London City airport (which I love for its speed and efficiency) and the tube to our offices off Leicester Square and then a working lunch;

always the same tuna and salmon sashimi from the Japan Centre below the office.

A series of meetings including a Zoom with writer Veena Sud in LA to discuss her trip to Europe to research the reboot of *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, a long-standing project we are developing with Amazon US.

■ Early-evening drinks at Sophie Turner Laing's house on the way home. It's a get together to meet fellow members of the National Film and Television School board, which I have just joined. I think the NFTS is a fabulous school. Many of the recent graduates came to work on *The Crown*.

It's run by the excellent Jon Wardle, who has made it an important creative powerhouse for new talent. I am a long-standing supporter of the NFTS. The next generation needs our support to keep the UK at the forefront of the global TV business.

Home, at last, to Chiswick and to my wife, Rebecca; supper in the oven. Lovely.

■ It's Film London's 20th anniversary. I am Chair of the Executive Task Force and on hand in The Standard, London hotel's The Rooftop bar for the breakfast celebration.

It's a fancy title but all the real work is done by the lovely and unsung Adrian Wootton. He and his team have cut through the crap to make London easier and more efficient to film in. Film London is a big success and the city is now one of the most popular film sets in the world.

Andy Harries is CEO of Left Bank Pictures.

COMFORT CLASSIC



Rik Mayall (left) and Ade Edmondson

BBC

Bottom

It is neither subtle nor sophisticated but what would you expect from a sitcom written by and starring Ade Edmondson and Rik Mayall? Particularly one called *Bottom* and featuring Eddie Hitler, Spudgun and Dave Hedgehog as characters?

Bottom is childish and crude but also laugh-out-loud funny – and it’s the apogee of the famed Edmondson and Mayall double act. The pair met at Manchester University as drama students in 1975 and clicked immediately.

As the live act 20th Century Coyote, they mined vulgarity and violence at London’s iconic Comedy Store. They soon morphed into the Dangerous Brothers and brought their trademark surrealism, silliness and slapstick to

Matthew Bell finds both belly laughs and existential angst in this 1990s sitcom

the telly, briefly in 1981 and then weekly in sketch form on Channel 4’s *Saturday Live* a few years later. Eyes were gouged; heads butted; goolies scrunched, blow-torched and blown up. By then, Edmondson and Mayall had become household names thanks to the groundbreaking BBC Two sitcom *The Young Ones*.

Bottom is the Dangerous Brothers opened out into a sitcom. The title is apt: unemployed Eddie Hitler

(Edmondson) and Richard “Richie” Richard (Mayall) are at the bottom of the heap.

In fact, they had tried to call the show “My Bottom”. “We wanted people to say at the bus stop the following day, ‘Did you see My Bottom on television last night?’” Edmondson recalls in the excellent recent UKTV Gold doc *Bottom: Exposed*. BBC Two boss and aesthete Alan Yentob apparently vetoed the idea.

Bottom is more than a succession of knob gags, though there are a fair number. One inspiration was *Steptoe and Son*, as melancholic as it was funny; another was Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, a play the duo had bonded over at university and even took to the West End. Edmondson

recalls: “We [found] bleak and despair very funny.... [A] kind of sense of despair permeates the entire series... I think that, strangely, is what people enjoy more than the slapstick.”

This desperate exchange is an Edmondson favourite –

Richie: “Why can’t we ever bloody win anything?”

Eddie: “Oh, don’t be stupid, Richie. People like us are not meant to win things.”

Richie: “What are we meant to do then?”

Eddie: “You get born, you keep your head down and then you die. If you’re lucky.”

If the Beckettian existential despair wears thin, there’s always some Laurel and Hardy slapstick or eye-watering violence around the corner; Eddie and Richie with mousetraps attached to their nadgers, perhaps?

The first episode, *Smells*, in which Richie tries and fails to lose his virginity, aired in September 1991. Critics hated it. “Gives lavatorial humour a bad name”, said *The Observer*; “Witless tosh”, pronounced *The Mail on Sunday*.

But audiences lapped it up. *Bottom* had a life beyond its three TV series: there were five successful theatre tours and a so-so film spin-off, *Guest House Paradiso*, shot only months after Mayall’s near-fatal quad bike accident in 1998.

During the final *Bottom* tour in 2003, Edmondson felt the quality had dipped: “They weren’t as much fun... it had come to a natural end.”

Looking back, Edmondson rates *Bottom* as the high point of his comedy career, and the time writing it with Mayall, who died in 2014, as “the most joy I’ve ever had in my life, making each other laugh, properly laugh, big guffawing belly laughs.... It’s very rare that you get a relationship like that with someone.”

And the joy shows on screen. Like *Steptoe and Son*’s Harold and Albert, Stan and Ollie or even Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, Richie and Eddie love each other. Even when they’re beating seven shades of shit out of each other with frying pans. ■

Bottom is available on UKTV Gold.

Ear candy

To Catch a Scorpion

Migrants are condemned to a numerical existence. They are dollar signs to rapacious people smugglers; intimidatingly huge figures in scaremongering headlines; and

points to be scored against political opponents.

As if on cue, as I write this, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is launching the Conservative manifesto, and he has just pledged to “halve migration as we have halved inflation”. And all the big parties in the general election are busy advocating their own policies to “stop the boats”.

How timely it is, then, to have a podcast air on BBC Sounds that so rigorously and compellingly dissects the smuggling trade.

In *To Catch a Scorpion*, intrepid journalist Sue Mitchell and former British soldier turned aid worker Rob Lawrie attempt to track down one of the biggest players in the trade: Barzan Majeed, codenamed “Scorpion”.

Majeed entered the business in 2015, a year during which conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea displaced more than 12 million people. Smugglers charge up to £12,000 for a Channel crossing on a crowded inflatable dinghy, so there is a lot of money to be made if you have no scruples whatsoever.

Sue and Rob each have their own mics to record their investigation as it unfolds. It’s a simple but ingenious way of broadening their coverage, and the result is a podcast that is almost cinematic in its dynamism.

In an early scene, the pair head to a nondescript corner shop in Nottingham, where Sue interrogates the manager

about its ties to a smuggling gang.

We cut to Rob, who’s parked around the corner but has asked Sue to stay on the line.

So when the line drops, he dashes to the shop, and you can hear the anxiety in his voice as he describes the four cars with blacked-out windows

pulling up around him.

As the eight parts fly by, there are many more suspenseful scenes like this: from late-night stakeouts in French lorry parks (to which smuggling gangs own “access rights”) to daring confrontations with gun-toting smugglers in Turkish cafés. It all amounts to a thrilling, globe-trotting game of cat and mouse.

But it’s a bit of a Trojan horse for the more heart-rending story about the very human cost of the smuggling trade, and a reminder of the desperate people behind the numbers. It is hard to unhear the recording of mothers howling in a gymnasium, having identified the bodies of their children who died in a yacht destroyed just metres from the Italian shore. ■

Harrison Bennett





Boiling Point
BBC

Samantha Beddoe is co-founder, with director Philip Barantini, of *It's All Made Up Productions*. She hopes the indie's debut – hit BBC One drama *Boiling Point* – is the first of many TV and film successes.

Why did you set up an indie together?

Phil and I were introduced in 2019. It was a coincidence that we are both from Liverpool and have similar backgrounds. Neither of us knew anyone in the industry – we fought our way in and built these careers for ourselves, and we both have very similar goals. So we decided to work together.

The 2023 Netflix thriller *Accused* was our test project before we set up *It's All Made Up*. We found we loved working together – Phil is so creative and I come from a production finance background, so we fit together really well.

What does the job involve?

Every day is different; it could include working on the financial/legal side of a production; finding and developing projects; talking to writers, directors, commissioners and journalists; or

meeting agents and people from other production companies.

It's very varied, depending on where projects are in their life cycle, which is what I love. In this job, I get to work on a project from beginning to end. It's hard, but the highs so outweigh the lows.

Is it tough getting an indie off the ground?

Phil and I had something to show people – the *Boiling Point* short and film, and *Accused* – and we already knew how to work together. It is tricky but it would be harder without a track record.

You can set up a business at *Companies House*; that's not hard – the hard bit is getting people to take you seriously and believe that you can make their project, and commissioners to trust you with their money. I used to work in production finance, so I speak that language and Phil speaks the creative language.

What was *It's All Made Up's* first production?

Last year's BBC One drama *Boiling Point*, a sequel to the film. We're very proud of

it and hopefully we get to make a second series. The short, film and TV series show what a brilliant film-maker Phil is. It felt like everything came together, a perfect marriage of creativity and performance. It's not often that happens.

What other projects do you have in the pipeline?

We're executive producing a feature, the prison thriller *Wasteman*, with Agile Films and we also have a number of feature and television projects in development, which I can't talk about yet.

Is there a tension between the creative and commercial sides of the business?

Yes, you have to figure out what the commercial hits will be, then you can indulge yourself in more arty, thought-provoking pieces.

That's a balance that most production companies who care about their output have to find. We want to make films and programmes that people think about long after they watch them.

How did you get started in the industry?

I always wanted to be a teacher because

I loved school – my life was school when I was younger. I did a degree in chartered surveying, needed a job and found myself working in finance. I worked with a production co-ordinator who was temping as a receptionist and she told me about working in film and telly – I realised it wasn't just for people in London and America.

I didn't like my job, so I emailed lots of production accountants and, six months later, I got a job on ITV2 drama *Trinity*. Being on a set was the most magical thing in the world; I had come from working on a Liverpool industrial estate looking out the window at HGVs.

What else did you work on in the accounts department?

Loads of stuff. In film, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Beauty and the Beast*, a re-make of *Papillon* and *Emma*; in TV, the first series of *Death in Paradise*, which took me to Guadeloupe, *Top Gear*, *Baptiste* and *Star Wars: The Acolyte*.

Is starting out in the accounting department still a good route into TV?

Accountants have a really good overall view of a production. I understood what people did and knew what they needed to do their job well. I had to answer to the HMRC, auditors, studios, producers – I had to keep a lot of people happy.

Now, as a producer, I understand how important these relationships are. It's also a department that gets massively overlooked – people don't understand how many accountants work on shows and how important they are.

Do you have an accountancy qualification?

I went to night school to get an Association of Accounting Technicians qualification but now you probably don't need a qualification. When I started, accountancy teams were small; now, with tax breaks – which are brilliant – and bigger productions, the teams have grown to accommodate that, giving the opportunity for on-the-job training.

You can start right at the bottom as a clerk without finance qualifications. The downside is that there are fewer opportunities to go on set – no one is paid in cash any more, no one physically signs a piece of paper.



Netflix

What do you bring to work with you?

I work from our offices in Oxford Street, London. In my bag, I've got a laptop, two notebooks, my diary and whatever book I'm reading on the train – we're always looking at books to adapt.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

When a commissioner gets the idea and wants to work with us is always a real high because I worry when I'm working hard on a project, "Is it just me who loves this?". The lows are when people don't get it.

Pitching projects must be hell?

No, because I only pitch things I genuinely love, which I know we could do justice to; I think that comes across when I pitch. We've got 18 projects on our slate at the moment and I could talk passionately about every one of them.

What qualities do you need to do your job?

Determination, the ability to plan and

troubleshoot, and be good with people. This job would exhaust you if you didn't enjoy talking.

What is your career highlight?

I loved working on FX series *Atlanta*, which was one of my favourite TV shows, but *Accused* has a special place in my heart because it was my debut as a producer. I think Phil and I did something really great with a very small budget.

Is there a TV series you'd love to make?

Anything to do with music – I'm obsessed.

How do you see the company in 10 years' time?

Bigger, and making film and TV to a high level. Look at what A24 [the US-based independent producer] is doing – it is setting the standard for indie film-making. To be a mini-studio, offering finance to other film-makers and distributing would be amazing. ■

Samantha Beddoe was interviewed by Matthew Bell.



Adam Peaty: hoping to complete a hat-trick of Olympic 100m breast-stroke titles in Paris

On y va!

Viewers already groaning under a surfeit of TV sport this summer ain't seen nothin' yet – the Paris Olympics is a whole different ball game. Or, more accurately, 329 different medal events, from traditional athletics, cycling and swimming to newfangled climbing and skateboarding.

And they can watch every minute of it live – 3,800 hours in 19 days – across Warner Bros. Discovery's (WBD) outlets, whether that's Discovery+, the revamped streaming platform Max (elsewhere in Europe) or linear channels Eurosport 1 and 2. And don't forget the BBC, the UK's long-term Olympic broadcaster, which is also offering wall-to-wall coverage.

As the Olympics rights holder and distributor, WBD has sublicensed rights to public service broadcasters around Europe, including the BBC, which can

The Paris Olympics are a showcase for Warner Bros. Discovery and the event's long-term partner, the BBC. **Matthew Bell** reports

show two live events at one time. At peak Olympics, the global media and entertainment company estimates it will be offering 54 concurrent streams, from athletics to wrestling.

For a broadcaster, covering Paris 2024 is a truly Herculean task, although cleaning the Augean stables in a day or capturing Cerberus are not yet Olympic sports. The responsibility at WBD Sports Europe falls on Scott Young, Group Senior Vice-President

for Content, Production and Business Operations. At the Australian's disposal are 3,000-plus people worldwide working on the Games, including 800 crew in Paris, and 420 commentators across Europe offering expert opinion in 19 languages.

Is he anxious? "No, I'm not nervous," he maintains. "It's an extraordinary privilege to be able to work on live sport in general, but particularly the Olympic Games."

WBD's coverage has been three years in the planning since the Tokyo Games of 2021, which were delayed a year by the pandemic.

The US media giant has worked closely with the host broadcaster, Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS), which provides pictures and sound to rights holders. "The modern-day era of sports broadcasting has small cameras, and microphones... and a more

immersive technology offering that allows us to get closer to the field of play. All of that is in use by OBS for these Games, which will take people closer to the competition... than we've ever been before," says Young.

WBD's role, he continues, "is to bring to life the achievements of the 10,500 athletes who will descend on France, and particularly Paris, in a matter of weeks. Telling those stories is the most important thing [we're] focused on.

"We will have more live sport than you are possibly able to consume, but, whatever your favourite sport, you'll be able to find it across all platforms."

The BBC is on a similar mission, albeit on a much smaller scale. "Having a Games for the first time in our own air time [since London] is absolutely brilliant – it's going to feel a lot like 2012... with another wonderful, iconic city as the backdrop," reckons Ron Chakraborty. The Head of Major Events and General Sport at BBC Sport will be marking his seventh summer Olympics.

Chakraborty is talking to *Television* shortly before "heading down to the Wimbledon bunker.... These are my last few days as a free man this summer."

He adds: "The combination of [not having] a time difference or Covid is going to make a massive difference to how we do the Games. Usually, if we've got a

Games on the other side of the world, we don't tend to invest as much."

This was especially so at Tokyo 2021, where the studio and commentators were holed up at BBC Sport's Salford HQ. "We had a minimal crew on the ground in Tokyo," he says. "It was a tough one to get through – as well as all the [Covid] procedures; you were watching the men's 100m final, normally this great moment, in an empty stadium."

"In Paris, we're back with full crowds; it's a Games in our air time so we can really invest in it because we know the audience is there."

The BBC will be presenting the action, which starts on 24 July, from a studio overlooking the Eiffel Tower with a team that includes Gabby Logan, Clare Balding, JJ Chalmers, Isa Guha, Hazel Irvine, Mark Chapman and Jeanette Kwakye.

A dozen or so commentary lineups will be based in Paris; as will news gathering, radio and social media teams, and a few broadcast engineers at the International Broadcast Centre in the city. The BBC's production galleries, however, will remain in the UK. "We've got more used since Covid to remote production.... It was the natural step to do the Olympics [remotely]," says Chakraborty.

Editorially, he says, the BBC will be focusing on "medal moments, especially [for] Great Britain – they're the moments that bring the nation together. They're obviously our priority. If there are great stories elsewhere, whether it's international stars or human interest stories, you try to reflect them in the coverage as well."

The most popular events – swimming, athletics and gymnastics – will be the centrepiece of the BBC's prime-time coverage, but not to the exclusion of smaller sports. "It's about reflecting all the fun of the fair with the Olympics and making sure you get around as many sports as possible," he explains.

Unlike London, Paris doesn't have an Olympic park; it is spreading events around the city, making the most of iconic locations – equestrian events are at the Palace of Versailles, beach volleyball is in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, skate-

boarding is at Place de la Concorde and the opening ceremony is on the Seine.

What would be a successful Games for the two broadcasters? "It's not about the BBC. The stars of the Games are the athletes.... If we've told their stories, made people cheer and cry, and brought the nation together, that's our job. If we've done that well, I'll be very happy," says Chakraborty.

Similarly for Young: "Success for us is to capture the story of the Olympic Games... not just the [athletes'] story, but also the story of Paris hosting the Olympics... in a country that genuinely does love live sport."

He adds: "The Milano Cortina [Winter Olympics] are just 18 months after the closing ceremony, so... we're already in the planning stages, as is every other Olympic broadcaster. We roll on." ■

'SUCCESS FOR US IS TO CAPTURE THE STORY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES'

QUESTION & ANSWER

Q Which events are you most looking forward to?

A Scott Young, Warner Bros. Discovery: The initial days of



Olympic Games broadcasting are always the most challenging.... As an Australian, I always love watching swimming at the Olympics, so

I'll try to get out to the swimming centre.

A Ron Chakraborty, BBC: After [the hectic] first week, I hope to visit the commentary teams and also Place de la Concorde for skateboarding, BMX freestyle, 3x3 basketball and the breaking [breakdancing]. That's going to be a great atmosphere and, if I can get out to the athletics... Great Britain have got a few great medal chances.

Q What's your favourite Olympic memory?

A Scott Young: It would be hard to move past the Sydney Olympics. I was privileged enough to be in the arena when Cathy Freeman won her gold medal. Watching a proud nation stand up and celebrate [her] for everything that she had achieved, with the weight of the country on her shoulders, was quite a remarkable event.

A Ron Chakraborty: I should go for 2012 – I was in the stadium for 'Super Saturday', which was amazing – but I'm still blown away by going to Sydney for my first Olympics.



I was working on a local paper in Slough a year before and suddenly I've gone to the other side of the world to cover the Olympics for the BBC. It was a brilliant Games.

Warner Bros. Discovery

BBC

TV turns up the election heat



Beth Rigby interviewing Sir Keir Starmer on Sky's *Battle for Number 10*

Sky

Rishi Sunak's announcement that we would have a general election on 4 July was a big surprise to voters, journalists and even his own MPs. A high-stakes gamble. Though not a surprise for some insiders who are alleged to have bet on the timing.

In TV newsrooms that May morning most eyes had been on an earlier scandal – watching former Post Office CEO Paula Venells finally, for the first time, give her tearful, tight-lipped evidence to the public inquiry. A searing watch on a rainy day.

The rain didn't deter Sunak. In a sodden suit he proclaimed this was "the moment for Britain to choose its future". The soggy announcement outside Downing Street was the first in a series of spectacular own goals by the Conservatives.

Much of TV news executives' focus is on results night, its successes and failures: the exit poll moment, the toppling

John Ryley identifies key moments in a campaign psychodrama punctuated by spectacular own goals by the Conservatives

of cabinet ministers and the race to be first to call the winner. After all, they have spent millions of pounds on the night's coverage, which can make or break TV careers, on screen and off.

But the campaigns are forgotten. So, let's select three telling moments of the TV news coverage from this long campaign ahead of the first British July election since the end of the Second World War.

Day 15: A missed story

Thursday 6 June was the turning point of the 2024 election, 80 years after

D-Day. We all know it was the turning point of the 2024 election. That afternoon was the moment the Prime Minister dropped his party into the maw of a restless electorate.

Yet turning points don't always get spotted as they are occurring.

The non-stop news channels beamed live pictures showing US President Biden, Germany's Chancellor Scholz and France's President Macron with Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton, the Foreign Secretary, standing shoulder to shoulder on the beach at Omaha to pay their respects to old soldiers and square up to a new dictator. Where was Sunak?

The BBC didn't report that the Prime Minister had left early, not even on its flagship *BBC News at Ten*. Sky News did not mention it. But *ITV News at Ten* bonged it with a report from its Europe Editor.

It took a tabloid newspaper, the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror*, to splash the blunder on its front page:

“PM ditches D-Day” and ignite the election news agenda.

Sunak had to apologise more than once, most acutely in a pre-arranged TV interview the following morning. His aides thought Sam Coates of Sky would ask questions on a range of topics. Coates had only one target in his sights: D-Day.

This penetrating interview exposed Sunak, because his words didn't match his body language. It's how you apologise that matters.

Unusually, apparently, there was near total silence after the interview ended. Once Sunak walked off there was only the shuffle of the camera-woman picking up the kit. The election was over for the Conservatives – game, set and match, all testament to the power of pictures.

Day 21: The debates

The debates are those rare occasions in a campaign when the prime-time audience can watch how the party leaders interact with voters. Sky's *Battle for Number 10* debate programme, held in Grimsby, demonstrated how potent these events can be in corroding electors' views of party leaders, particularly when the latter are handling hostile questions from cross voters.

Grimsby offered up a moment of pure television gold, that revealed so much about Keir Starmer's leadership capability and his lack of agility under pressure. It lasted only a second or two. A question was put to the Labour leader from an audience member called Kayman. He asked: “Over the last year you've formed into being more of a politician than the person I would have voted for to run the country. You seem more like a political robot. How are you going to get others like me to vote for you?”

It was a question that goes to the heart of contemporary politics. The question startled stolid Starmer. He didn't know whether to play off the back foot or front foot. His nervous laugh made clear he didn't know what to say. His demeanour gave him away. For a moment he struggled. But Starmer is a lawyer, a former boss of the Crown Prosecution Service; he dug out an answer. He is, though, a lawyer for a judge not a jury.

Sky's format at Grimsby was different to the head-to-head debates. The two leaders were interviewed separately in depth by Political Editor Beth Rigby before answering questions from

a studio audience. The format works well, giving the voters at home the opportunity to hear the leaders discuss policy at length.

The BBC's *Question Time Leaders' Special*, with a similar format, was also successful in holding the politicians to account. An audience – a live, angry audience in York – questioned the leaders of the Liberal Democrats, the SNP, Labour and Conservatives for half



an hour each. The Leader of the Opposition again struggled when asked, not for the first time, why he'd said Jeremy Corbyn would make a “great prime minister” and when challenged on an issue that has caused him acute political discomfort, transgender rights.

BBC One's bad-tempered, head-to-head showdown – the last of the campaign – was the closest to the vision of the original 2010 debate. This had more time and fewer rules, allowing the two leaders, Sunak and Starmer, to debate their policy differences on immigration, taxation and welfare.

The 26 June debate will be remembered for a question from audience member Robert, who challenged both leaders: “Are you two really the best we've got to be the next prime minister of our great country?”

GB News billed itself as “Britain's election channel”, yet failed to secure a televised event with both Starmer and Sunak taking part.

Instead, its hardworking Political

Editor, Christopher Hope, got to interview Starmer on his own.

The start-up news organisation has been without its star turn, Nigel Farage, who belatedly announced he was taking over as leader of Reform UK and, for the eighth time, was trying to get elected as an MP, this time for Clacton-on-Sea in Essex. GB News missed him.

On the day Reform launched its party manifesto, GB News presenter Patrick Christys questioned the party's fiscal plan by asking at the start of his programme, “Does Reform's manifesto actually add up?”. During the campaign the channel looked like it was minding its Ofcom “Ps and Qs”.

Day 27: The betting scandal

The BBC's broadcast exclusive of alleged illegal betting on the date of the election was an old-fashioned scoop that, unlike other political tales, cuts through with the voters. Every voter understands insider dealing: one rule for them, one rule for us, as Michael Gove put it.

The BBC's Political Editor, Chris Mason, broke two stories in one evening; a double whammy. First, at 6:00pm, he reported that he had been tipped off that one of the PM's close protection police officers had been suspended and arrested over alleged bets on the election timing.


Then, on *BBC News at Ten*, Mason revealed that a Conservative candidate, Laura Saunders, was being investigated by the Gambling Commission.

The coverage was a throwback to a linear world of journalism 25 years ago, with phrases like “as we go on air” and “tip off”, and a short package comprised only of stills and “graphicsised” statements from the betting regulator. Hard news reporting. This scandal had legs.

Conservative Central Office managed to put a spinning roulette wheel into a campaign video, then zapped it. The Director of Campaigns for the Conservative party, Saunders's husband, took “a leave of absence”. They deny wrongdoing. All this after the PM's close parliamentary aide, the Tory candidate in Montgomeryshire, admitted having a “flutter” on the election date.

The Election 2024 box set will be a psychodrama like no other, best approached as a sequel to the 1984 film *This Is Spinal Tap* – neither comedy nor reality, but a corker. ■

John Ryley is a former Editor-in-Chief of Sky News.



Head to head for high stakes

Steve Clarke reveals how co-operation between broadcasters in 2010 led to today's leaders' debates

ITV's leaders' debate on 4 June 2024

In the UK, television coverage of general elections came into its own in the 1960s. It would take another 50 years before leaders' debates finally made their debut on the nation's TV screens. Even then, they almost didn't happen.

"It literally fell into place as the election campaign started but it was very, very close. There was a very difficult moment at the end of the process where it looked as if it would fall apart," recalls Sue English, former BBC Head of Political Programmes and a key figure in ensuring that live debates became part of British political media culture.

Before 2010, the closest anyone had come to getting leaders' debates over the line was 1997, but then-Labour leader Tony Blair was not keen. During the 14 years since the first, in April 2010, when Prime Minister Gordon Brown battled it out with Conservative leader David Cameron and his Liberal

Democrat counterpart, Nick Clegg, the leaders' debates have become a vital part of UK general election coverage. They are almost as eagerly anticipated as the 10:00pm exit poll delivered on election night itself.

Spool forward to 2024 and live TV debates are back with a vengeance. An electrifying ITV confrontation between Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer lit up our screens on 4 June.

Since then, the BBC, Sky News and Channel 4 have all entered the debates fray, helping to set the political weather during the six-week election campaign. Mishal Husain hosted the final TV clash between Starmer and Sunak for the BBC on 26 June.

Why, then, did it take so long for leaders' debates to become part of Britain's political media landscape? What are the challenges of staging them for broadcasters and presenters? And can they have any impact on

voting intentions in the TikTok era, when many voters get their news via social media?

"Before 2010, it had not been possible to get the broadcasters and the political parties to agree to it," says English, who masterminded the leaders' debates for the BBC in 2015 as well as 2010. "In 2009, the BBC, ITV and Sky News decided to have a united front in their negotiations with the three main political parties. We were not going to allow ourselves to be split and do individual deals with the politicians. That made it much easier for all three of us to agree a clear set of guidelines and principles, which we then negotiated with the Lib Dems, the Tories and Labour."

Even so, it took many meetings between political spin doctors and news and current affairs chiefs representing the three broadcasters over the course of eight months before they got

the green light. It also helped that, in 2010, the leaders Gordon Brown, David Cameron, and Nick Clegg were all willing to participate, particularly Brown. He was significantly behind in the polls, so had everything to gain from a strong showing in a TV debate – not unlike Rishi Sunak in 2024.

“Peter Mandelson convinced Brown

Political Editor Adam Boulton and Westminster chief Jonathan Levy, to press hard for the introduction of live leaders’ debates.

As parliamentarians’ stock had fallen to a new low in the wake of the expenses revelations, Ryley reasoned that MPs now had a strong incentive to reconnect with the electorate and to

first was decided on the toss of a coin. Each debate had a theme – home affairs, foreign affairs and the economy.

In the 2015 general election, with David Cameron hoping to win an outright majority, the Conservatives made it impossible for broadcasters to replicate the 2010 debates. “Basically, Cameron didn’t want to do it,” says English.



BBC leaders’ debate on 29 April 2010 with (from left) David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown

that he should do it,” says English. “He did better than anyone expected him to do.” But not well enough to prevent Cameron and Clegg forming a coalition government after the election. Arguably, Clegg’s remarkably assured showing on TV – which generated so-called “Cleggmania” – paved the way for his party to become the junior partner in the Cameron administration, with Clegg serving as Deputy PM.

Another prime mover in ensuring what, at their best, can make for thrilling and possibly influential live television was the then-Head of Sky News, John Ryley. He had been part of the campaign to get party leaders to agree to live, prime-time TV debates. “At the time,” says Ryley, “there was a lack of will between the broadcasters and the political parties to hold these debates.”

It was the *Daily Telegraph’s* incendiary scoop on MPs’ expenses that motivated Ryley and two Sky News colleagues,

put policy, rather than scandal, at the heart of the political debate. A live TV election debate should provide the ideal platform.

Initially, says Ryley, the BBC and ITV were less than enthusiastic about the idea of involving Sky: “They were a bit sniffy about it.” At that time, Sky News was still regarded as an outsider and Ryley was concerned that its establishment rivals would squeeze it out of any negotiations over the debates.

However, agreement was reached, though it still took a lot of work to nail the parties down.

“In order to get them off the ground, we had to have a very thorough plan. We did it that way to break the impasse,” says English. “Nowadays, the broadcasters make their arrangements individually, whereas in 2010 it was done collectively and there was no leeway about how the programmes were structured.” Which broadcaster should go

It would not be until the November 2019 battle between Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson that viewers were able to watch another leaders’ TV set-to. Prime Minister Theresa May had declined broadcasters’ requests to take part in the proposed 2017 debates, a move she subsequently regretted.

Commentators concluded that not participating made May look “frit”. “I think the Conservatives realised there was a cost to not doing them,” says English. “That was quite an interesting moment. As a result, it became harder for party leaders to decline to take part.”

May returned the Tories to power but without a majority.

Leaders’ debates have become part of the fabric of TV, but they remain challenging to execute. For even the most experienced of producers, there is a lot to organise and to think about on the day.

This was especially true in 2010 ▶

Mishal Husain chaired the BBC's 2024 leaders' debate



BBC

► when, aside from a low-key 1997 BBC TV debate between the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Ken Clarke, and his Labour shadow, Gordon Brown, British broadcasters were stepping into the unknown.

For the broadcasters, they are expensive, complex events to stage. Security must be watertight and selecting a politically representative audience requires time. Both eat into production budgets. “Getting an audience that matches the UK’s political demographic is hard. That can be quite problematic, and the parties are rightly hot on it. Inevitably, people pull out the day before transmission,” says Ryley. “I think Sky spent about £1m on the 2010 Bristol debate.”

As for moderating these events, even the most seasoned of news anchors can be forgiven for feeling a shade intimidated at the thought of trying to prevent senior politicians from behaving badly. “It’s sometimes overlooked that the presenter is a key player in the debate,” says English. “They can determine how successful a debate is.”

Watching *ITV News*’s Julie Etchingham trying to hold the ring in the first debate between Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak on 4 June during the 2024 election campaign was a reminder of how challenging these occasions are for presenters.

“You’ve got to stop the politicians talking over each other and interrupting each other,” says English. “You’ve got to ensure they have equal time. There will be someone in the control room running a stopwatch on both participants. No one wants to end up in a situation in which one of the leaders says, ‘You gave them two minutes more than me!’”

“Some presenters worry that they won’t be able to control the politicians,” says Ryley. “Keeping control of passionate politicians is hard. You’ve got to be really on your wits. They’ve got one chance to make their point and they don’t always play by the rules; they go over their allotted time.”

Fronted by Sky’s then-Political Editor, Adam Boulton, Sky News screened the second of the 2010 leaders’ debates, an occasion Ryley regards

as a watershed in Sky News’s history. “We were no longer the upstart, we’d joined the club,” he says.

“As well as being a big political event, [a debate] is a big, big broadcasting event,” says English. “They are huge programmes that the broadcaster has to get right.”

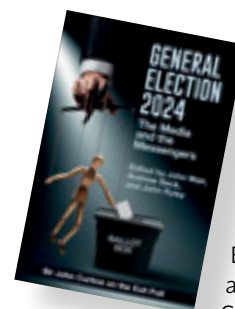
Ultimately, can leaders’ debates help pave the way to victory at the ballot box? “The honest answer is that we don’t know. But, in 2010, Nick Clegg used the debates to address the nation at home,” says Ryley. “He went on to win through and become part of the coalition government for five years. In that sense, you could say they did make a difference.”

Some think that Labour leader Ed Miliband’s misstep on speaking about the economy during a leaders’ debate in 2015 led to his party losing votes. He was asked to apologise for Labour crashing the economy during Brown’s premiership and fluffed his answer.

English notes that “the view of post-programme research in 2010 is

that viewers said the debates had been helpful to them in deciding who to vote for. It had certainly energised the younger sections of the audience in a way that was very cheering for the BBC. It’s usually older viewers who switch on to watch election coverage.”

She adds: “2010 was a major change for politicians and broadcasters in election coverage. We’re never going to repeat that wow factor of 2010, but live leaders’ debates remain exciting programmes. They’re dangerous, really dangerous, because the stakes are so high if someone screws it up.” ■



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OUR FRIEND IN PARIS

The waiting cruise boat on the Seine could be seen clearly but, perplexingly, there was no obvious route down to board it from the embankment by the Eiffel Tower.

This was not for a Sky News team's Champagne-fuelled sightseeing tour. We were attempting to show how, in July, a floating parade of athletes would be part of the most ambitious opening ceremony conceived by an Olympic city.

The concept is spectacular, but the scale of the security operation is daunting. And on this day back in March the biggest threat to a ceremony being held on water seemed to be... flooding. The quays were submerged and, it soon became apparent, inaccessible.

Little indicates this is an Olympics racing to the finish line, as the last of the permanent venues was completed months in advance.

On one recent visit we joined a final inspection of the Olympic Village in the Saint-Denis district. A peek under the beds confirmed that they really are made from cardboard – but they survived my weight for a demo video.

Everything comes back to protecting the athletes who will be sleeping in them; the Seine flows through the Olympic Village, where they will board more than 80 boats for the opening ceremony.

In our interview with Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi came a rare admission of alternative options for the ceremony they are so determined to preserve: "Plan B is reducing, adjusting."



Sky News's Rob Harris detects last-minute nerves as the French capital prepares to host the Olympics

It is an issue we would revisit on further trips, particularly after France raised its terror threat to the highest level. In April, the French Government went public with concerns about a purported IS-linked threat to Champions League games.

Outside Paris Saint-Germain, we spoke to Patrice Evra, a former captain of the French football team. "I don't think it's only about Paris," he said. "I think this world is unsafe." It was an impromptu plea not to be scared off coming to the French capital for the Olympics – and realism about the threat.

With 100 days to go, we heard from the Team GB boss. Andy Anson went beyond the predictable, generic comments of sports administrators: he was "clearly concerned" about

managing the risks to keep athletes safe.

It is not unusual to dwell this much on terror ahead of an Olympics and Paralympics, although Tokyo was more focused on health and safety. Gangs and guns were the Rio worry.

But the Paris Games will be staged in more dangerous times, with war raging in Ukraine – leading to Russia being banned from competing – and in the Middle East.

While many Parisians we encountered during reporting trips talked of fleeing the city to avoid the congestion and chaos during the Games, watching an extravaganza of sport is a welcome distraction for so many.

Attending the Team GB kit launch in Paris – and hearing from medal hopefuls about their Olympic dreams – reminded us why France is willing to expose itself to significant risks to stage the games for the third time.

Much of the world will focus on Paris for a few weeks, enjoying a spectacular platform for the passion of thousands of athletes. But be braced for political protests across venues, putting commentators on alert.

And there will be vocal groans from Parisians about gridlocked roads and, potentially, soaring heat rather than water levels on the Seine. How the turmoil is navigated will determine the success of the Olympics and Paralympics for Paris.

For Team GB, however, it will all come down to the place on the medals' table. They only have to focus on reaching the podiums rather than ensuring that the pageantry on the Seine is smooth sailing. ■

Rob Harris is Sky News's Sports Correspondent.



Piglets: in the centre, Mark Heap and Sarah Parish

Bringing home the bacon

New ITV sitcom *Piglets* ramps up the gag count and restores the silliness to comedy. Belly laughs, not navel gazing, are its stock in trade. “That’s all we really want to do, make people laugh – we’re not out to change the world,” says Victoria Pile of *Smack the Pony* and *Green Wing* fame, who co-writes, directs and produces.

The idea for the six-part series, set in a police training college, came to Pile while walking in her local park. “A bunch of youths rushed past and I was thinking, ‘What’s going down?’. Then I heard their walkie-talkies – they were the cops, not the hoolies. I thought they looked literally 12. I went home and we all had a laugh about the pigs being piglets these days,” she recalls.

ITV Head of Scripted Comedy Nana Hughes was immediately hooked: “First and foremost, it was a very funny script; that’s what sold it – it was all on the page and laugh-out-loud funny. I was a big fan of *Green Wing* and *Smack*

ITV hopes that its new comedy *Piglets* can bring the laughs back to Saturday night, reports **Matthew Bell**

the Pony – there’s top-tier comedy talent behind them.”

Sarah Parish, currently starring in Netflix drama *Geek Girl*, and Mark Heap, another veteran of *Green Wing* and brilliant in *Friday Night Dinner*, star as no-nonsense Superintendent Julie Spry and dithery Superintendent Bob Weekes, who run the training centre.

“We needed some grown-ups in there who had good comedy track records. I’ll always attempt to get Mark in everything but I’d never worked with Sarah before. But, oh my God, what a joy,” says Pile.

Parish, who usually dazzles on screen, is almost unrecognisable as a frumpy police officer, sporting terrible teeth

and hair. “I had a very positive reservation about Sarah, which was that she is so beautiful. How could we put her in this role? She just went for it – you wouldn’t recognise her. What a trouper!

“Sarah and Mark had a really good chemistry on screen and all the youngsters just loved working with them.”

The young cast includes actors with no experience (or next to none) of TV, including Sam Pote (Leggo), Abdul Sessay (Dev) and Jamie Bisping (Paul).

Piglets, which is made by Monicker Pictures, reunites writers from Channel 4 shows *Green Wing* and *Campus*: Pile, Robert Harley, James Henry, Oriane Messina, Richard Preddy and Fay Rusling. “Obviously, it’s tried and tested having the same group and it’s got huge benefits for us, but there are limitations. We were very keen on a show like this to reflect what’s going on in society.”

The sitcom therefore bloods new writers, principally Omar Khan [see sidebar] who joined the writers room through the ITV Comedy Writers Initiative, a scheme aimed at writers

under-represented in comedy such as people of colour.

Trainee police, Pile continues, “are mostly in their early twenties and have very different experiences and diverse backgrounds... that’s why we expanded our [writing] team.... We absorbed Omar into our little gang.

“He has these slightly offbeat, off-kilter, whacko thoughts, which are hard to find. That’s what I’ve always made my living out of, having a group of people who are slightly weird and eccentric and have this surreal take on things. Omar was a lovely fit.”

Although Pile knew Khan before *Piglets*, he had to apply via the ITV initiative; there was no favouritism at play. A further four writers were chosen to join an annexe to the writers room and also contributed to the series.

“This is a brilliant initiative,” says Pile. “I feel we’ve made contact with some people who are going to have some really interesting careers.”

Piglets is part of a double bill, following series 2 of Alan Carr sitcom *Changing Ends*, in a new ITV1 comedy hour from 9:00pm to 10:00pm on Saturday. Hughes says: “[We’re] trying to find a home for comedy on ITV where people go, ‘That’s the comedy slot!’”

Hughes is on a mission to locate the nation’s funny bone. She’s already had success with *Changing Ends* and school-kid sitcom *GWed*, and is hoping *Piglets* makes it a hat-trick of hits.

“They’re funny shows, crammed with jokes,” says Hughes, who joined the broadcaster in 2020. “I learnt early on that the ITV audience likes a lot of jokes.”

TV comedy has been lacking laughs, she argues. “*Fleabag* – love it or hate it, and I think it’s great – is tonally a different kind of comedy. All of a sudden, every comedian wanted to write their version of that, so we had to get that out of our system and then get back to... writing good jokes.”

The ITV audience is “quite conservative”, says Hughes. “*Piglets* is an interesting trial – it could go either way. The characters are quite broad and it’s also quite silly in its comedy, but you could say, ‘Maybe it feels a little bit too quirky?’. Fingers crossed... that people will love it. I really hope so because I think it’s fantastic: Mark Heap and Sarah Parish are awesome and the piglets are great. ■

Piglets is due to air on ITV1 from 20 July; the whole series will be available on ITVX from the same day.



Omar Khan

United Agents

Omar Khan’s big break

Young east Londoner Omar Khan was chosen from more than 300 applicants to join the *Piglets* writers room as part of the ITV Comedy Writers Initiative.

Recalling the experience, the engaging and enthusiastic writer/actor says: ‘It was really insightful and educational because I hadn’t written as part of a team before, let alone a team of such legends.

‘The comedy initiative took a punt on new young writers – that’s the kind of opportunity people on the periphery of the industry are starving for. It’s hard; there are not that many opportunities for new writers – [the industry] feels very gated. But schemes like this help young people take the next step in their career.’

Khan was inspired to write after a catastrophic performance in school exams. ‘I got 10 As for my GCSEs – I was one of those little wankers who didn’t even try,’ he recalls. ‘Then, in my first year of A-levels, I got D, U, D, U and completely failed.

‘I always liked writing – I grew up reading novels, so I decided to write a sitcom about it, to make something good of it, called *The Resit*, which I did when I was 19, 20.’

Khan made it to university, studying psychology at Westminster University,

and graduated in 2019. Then Covid hit. ‘I wrote so much, honing my craft by myself,’ he says. ‘I was watching films and TV series. I had no formal education in writing; I just really enjoyed storytelling.’

Then his career started to take off. In 2022, Khan wrote and acted in an award-winning short film funded by Netflix, *Queen of Diamonds*. Handily, *Piglets* writer/producer/director Victoria Pile and National Youth Theatre Artistic Director Paul Roseby attended a screening, and both were impressed.

Last year, Khan won an Emmy, the Sir Peter Ustinov Award for an unaired drama pilot by non-American writers under 30, with *Pocket Man*. ‘I submitted a script and, two months later, I was sitting in New York with Jesse Armstrong and some of the biggest writers in the world,’ he says.

In August, his play, the comic revenge thriller *Blue Kimera*, in which Khan also stars, is being performed by the National Youth Theatre. He is also in discussions about developing *Pocket Man*.

‘Writing and performing is all I think about,’ he admits, but it has ‘led to the career I’m currently having and the places I aspire to go to’.



Emma Myers in *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*

BBC

Teenage crime buster

On paper, *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* has all the hallmarks of a top-tier series. Originally published in 2019, Holly Jackson's young adult novel is a cultural phenomenon, going viral on TikTok, winning the British Book Awards' Children's Fiction Book of the Year in 2020, and the hearts of its two million readers.

As well as being known intellectual property, it feeds into the thirst for TV crime drama, and for young adult shows in the vein of *Heartstopper* and *Sex Education*.

It tells the story of 17-year-old Pip Fitz-Amobi – in the series, played by Emma Myers, famed for starring alongside Jenna Ortega in Netflix's *Wednesday* – who lives in the idyllic English countryside. Except, five years ago, fellow schoolgirl Andie Bell (India Lillie Davies) was murdered, and everyone believes it was local boy Sal (Rahul Pattni) who did it.

Pip is unconvinced and launches her own investigation, helped by Sal's brother Ravi (Zain Iqbal), but much to the chagrin of the community. "You're

Shilpa Ganatra gets the inside track on how Holly Jackson's *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* was adapted for BBC Three

totally happy to fuck everyone's lives up just so you can carry on playing detective?" asks her best friend Cara (Asha Banks). "I'm not playing," replies the steely eyed Pip.

It helps that the six-part series has attracted a stellar cast, including *Motherland's* Anna Maxwell Martin as Pip's mum and *Ghosts'* Mathew Baynton as Cara's dad.

When the manuscript of the soon-to-be-published book landed on the desk of executive producer Florence Walker at Moonage Pictures more than five years ago, it was the story that piqued her interest.

Says Moonage's founder Frith Tiplady: "We're very proud of Florence for spotting it. The book's success was a real

plus point, but she was really drawn to the book because there is a great young protagonist, there's a strong plot and, in keeping with young adult [fiction], it's based around relationships. Audiences love crime drama. We thought, why shouldn't we deliver that kind of a story to a younger audience?"

The incredible success of the book since Moonage's acquisition – it has been translated into 33 languages and Jackson has become Britain's top female crime writer – means that there is an audience-in-waiting, albeit one with high expectations.

The job of scriptwriting went to Poppy Cogan (*The Fold*, *Red Rose*, *Chloe*), currently developing *Come Again*, the debut novel from *Peep Show's* Robert Webb, and *Three*, by Israeli crime writer Dror Mishani.

"I get quite a lot of books sent to me. Often, it's hard to know which ones to go for because most of them have some strengths, but this was a complete no-brainer," says Cogan. "It had a central character who was really fresh.

"Sometimes, in the teen world, the characters can be taken to dark places and ruined a bit, like in *Euphoria* (Sam

Levinson's HBO show). Pip is taken to dark places, too, but her character is allowed to remain wholesome. It's not about her becoming a bad girl and doing a *Grease* makeover.

"Plus, there was a humour that appealed to me because I'm quite silly. To me, it felt like a really fun teen show that I could see quite clearly."

To make the book a good fit for TV, Cogan and the writers room "closed the book for a while and reworked the plot so it fitted into the right shape",

says Cogan. "On screen, you have to think carefully how this 17-year-old is going around asking people pressing questions about their potential involvement in a murder. So, we needed to give her more challenges."

Another shift from the book was replotting to escalate the sense of threat in the storytelling. Cogan says: "The book can move between clues quite a lot – you can leave them hanging and come back to them. In the TV show we needed to propel it forwards,

and actor in Sky Living's *Doll & Em* alongside Emily Mortimer, took the director's chair. *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* marks her TV directorial debut, but her acting background gave her a strong foundation.

"Being an actor for 25 years means you understand how directors should speak to actors to get them where they need to be," she says. "Also, from being on the other side, I know that you want assurance that your director has a handle on things. For me, it was an



A Good Girl's Guide to Murder

BBC

she says. In other words, six 45-minute episodes (a commercial hour for international broadcasters).

Core aspects, including the main plot twists and turns, remained. As did the culturally diverse characters. They make the story feel contemporary, even if it's also a little timeless and placeless.

Cogan explains: "The diversity is like it was in the book, and that was something we thought quite a lot about. Sal, being a South Asian boy in a white world, is a part of the story – it partly explains what happens to him."

Whenever the writing team made changes, they consulted with Jackson, who is an executive producer on the series. Tiplady says: "She's got a very direct relationship with the core fan base, so it was a constant part of the process that, if we had to move away and reinvent aspects, we'd check if we went too far, and made sure we still honoured the characters."

One change was reimagining Pip's investigation to make it feel realistic on screen. "The book has quite a graphic feel to it – there are Post-it Notes and interview transcripts scattered around,"

'WE NEEDED... EACH REVEAL TO LEAD TO AN ACTION. THAT WAS TRICKY'

so each reveal led to an action. That was tricky."

Although a US version of the book is set in Connecticut, the team decided to stick to the original English location, not least because England and cosy crime dramas go hand in hand.

Helped by the historic picture postcard location of Axbridge, Somerset, the series begins as cosy crime. It then neatly unfurls to reveal darker secrets about the town. Cogan says: "We knew we had to cover things like date rape and murder, so it goes dark, but keeps its warm heart."

Tiplady adds: "A 13-year-old can watch it. It's not that it's scary to watch, it's more what the story uncovers."

Dolly Wells, best known as writer

exercise in being as calm as possible, so that no one else panics."

The result is a series primed for international success. Early on, German public service broadcaster ZDF came onboard as a co-producer, and later, Netflix joined as the US co-producer.

BBC Three partnered as the UK broadcaster because *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* appealed to a young but potentially broader audience, as with previous BBC Three breakout shows such as *Normal People* and *Fleabag*.

These deals "helped [international distributors] BBC Studios breathe, but it doesn't mean a bigger budget – it just pays off an advance," says Tiplady. "It also means other territories are going to buy it, and also increases the likelihood of a returning series."

Indeed, with three more stories already written as part of the book series, there should be an expanding audience ready to see where Pip's sleuthing adventures will take her next. ■

All episodes of *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* are on BBC iPlayer from 1 July.



Rising production values across TV drama have been matched by more imaginative soundscapes. **Shilpa Ganatra** is all ears

Slow Horses

Apple TV+

Sound and vision

Listen with even half an ear and it's obvious that TV music soundtracks have upped their game in recent times. This year alone, Hans Zimmer's score for *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and Federico Jusid's work on *A Gentleman in Moscow* jostle other worthy contenders to show how music can significantly elevate a series.

A lot of thought is being given to music in our favourite shows. The approach ranges from well-picked playlists of existing songs that hit the right tone (for, say, *I May Destroy You* and *Sex Education*), to crafting bold and innovative soundtracks that reflect the USP of a series such as *Bridgerton*, the Netflix drama that reworks contemporary songs as classical pieces.

This era of soundtrack-making arguably began in 2013 with Cristobal Tapia de Veer's work for Channel 4's cult thriller *Utopia*.

With an experimental soundscape and unconventional instruments made



Strange Game theme song co-creator and singer Mick Jagger

Creative Commons by Raph PH

with human bones and rhino turd – yes, rhino turd – it won that year's RTS Craft & Design Award for Original Score and raised the bar for the industry.

"It was a game-changer," says composer Daniel Pemberton, who co-wrote the RTS award-nominated *Slow Horses*

theme, *Strange Game*, with Mick Jagger.

Simon Russell, the award-winning composer for documentaries *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland* and *Once Upon a Time in Iraq*, says that, in recent years, "Music in TV has changed to be more about tone and mood, and less about melodies".

In addition to underpinning an atmosphere, music can create a unique identity, cue up critical moments or even provide a counterpoint to on-screen action. Certainly, the adage that "a good TV soundtrack is one you don't notice" no longer applies.

Lindsay Wright, who composed the RTS-nominated *Black Ops* soundtrack with frequent collaborator and alternative-soul singer Tawiah, explains: "It can go either way: you don't notice it because it's part of the fabric of the show, or you notice it because it's so awesome, different and unique."

The decision on who commissions or chooses a TV soundtrack is ultimately that of the director or show-runner. However, a music supervisor is

often brought in for their expertise and to pull together all the music a programme requires.

Music supervisor Sarah Bridge, who has worked on *Landscapers*, *The Crown* and Nat Geo documentary *Queens*, moved across from advertising 11 years ago, when music supervisors were generally found only on feature films. “A rise in production values in television has meant we’ve become much more widely used,” she says. “And a boom in soundtracks has followed.”

Her role involves everything from sourcing a composer to finding and clearing existing songs to organising on-screen musical performances.

“It’s a really exciting time to be in the field of music supervision,” she says. “There’s a call for a greater diversity of composers. Lots of new composers are breaking through.

“At the same time, established artists such as Labrinth (who scored HBO series *Euphoria*) and PJ Harvey (who created original songs for *The Virtues* and did the *Bad Sisters* soundtrack with Tim Phillips) – the type of artists who are protective of their music – are now moving to TV.”

Jagger is another example. *Strange Game* began when Pemberton discussed possible collaborators for the theme tune with *Slow Horses*’ director James Hawes. “James put Mick Jagger at No 1. I wasn’t sure it would be worth even trying,” he recalls.

But the project caught Jagger’s attention thanks to a few connections and Pemberton’s Oscar-nominated single with Celeste, *Hear My Voice*, from the film *The Trial of the Chicago 7*.

“He could have just sent me anything and I would have been happy, but he really worked with me to make it as good as it could be,” says Pemberton. “We did it in a couple of months over the winter, when he was holidaying at his villa in Mustique. I remember that his studio there wasn’t working, so he went to a back-up studio on a neighbouring island to send me more vocals. He really cared about the artistry of making a great track.”

Cynics might wonder whether using popular artists or songs is simply smart marketing for the show and the artist. A case in point: Kate Bush’s *Running Up That Hill* topped the UK singles chart 37 years after its release when it was featured on *Stranger Things*.

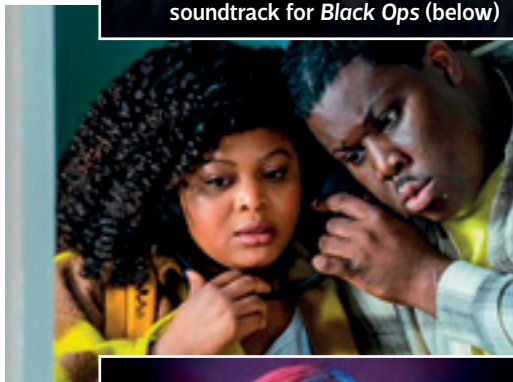
“Every time I write an original song, I connect it to the score, so it feels in sync,” says Pemberton. “In *Slow Horses*, you catch elements of *Strange Game* within the soundtrack, whether that’s just the riff or a little sound. That way, it feels like one piece, rather than something bolted on at the last minute.”

As well as joining the musical pieces to create a singular identity (for which, listen to Nicholas Britell’s evocative work on *Succession*), there is wide-



Tawiah, co-creator of the soundtrack for *Black Ops* (below)

Studio Myrrh



BBC



Lindsay Wright, co-creator of the *Black Ops* soundtrack

Lindsay Wright

spread agreement that the hallmark of a successful score is that the music steps in only at key points.

Speak to veteran composer and broadcaster Neil Brand, and he insists that “music should be used in a discrete, clever way where it has a job to do in that moment, such as underscore a change.

“When I watch TV dramas, I wonder why so much pressure has been put on the music to maintain the sense of tension when it’s already all there. For example, in *Line of Duty*, you knew exactly where you were, you knew exactly what the mood was going to be. The scripts were fantastic, the performances were fantastic. And yet, still, there was almost wall-to-wall music in that series, which you didn’t need.”

That said, often music does earn its place. In the documentary *Mariupol: The People’s Story* (winner of an International Emmy for its music), Russell filled it with compositions. “The documentary was a hard watch, so I think it needed the music to level it out,” he says.

How will this purple patch of music in TV develop in the years ahead? There are concerns that AI will eventually take over and Wright worries that “a lot of the ways in which people make a living from this job might not exist in 10 years or so”.

The good news, she suggests, is that, as tech becomes better and cheaper: “There are going to be so many more people who have unique ideas and different ways of making music, so there will be more soundtracks that aren’t just symphony orchestras.”

But, as purse strings tighten, the main concern is whether the right conditions will persist to execute top-tier soundtracks. For composers, the intensity at which television works means there’s constant chopping and changing. Brand says: “Today’s deadlines mean a composer can be sent a cut on one day, they work on it the following morning, then they’re sent another cut at lunchtime, which their music no longer fits. I know composers who have had to rework 90% of the material they’ve supplied within three or four weeks of doing so.”

Financial concerns mean there can be pressure for composers and music supervisors to deliver ambitious Ennio Morricone-style soundtracks for music library budgets.

Brand says: “I really hope that every now and then in the future, I will see something on TV that is spectacular in every possible way, where as much craftsmanship has gone into the score as has gone into the direction, the design, the performances and the script.”

That would be music to our ears, too. ■

ITV's maverick detective Vera is closing her TV casebook. **Graeme Thompson** hails the show's legacy for the North East's screen sector

Her final bow



Brenda Blethyn (DCI Vera Stanhope) in *Vera*

Brenda Blethyn first pulled on the distinctive fishing hat, scarf and gabardine coat back in 2010, when episode 1 of *Vera* started filming in the North East for ITV. Now, after 14 years and more than 50 episodes, the award-winning actor has confirmed that she is stepping down

from the role of DCI Vera Stanhope, after filming for her final two shows wrapped in May.

It's the end of an era. Big-budget returning dramas are the holy grail of the TV world. And, with its consistently high viewing figures and global sales, *Vera* is one of the UK's most successful crime franchises.

At the latest count, the show has

been sold to 178 territories, making Vera one of the most recognisable TV detectives on the planet.

Fans of the show have been taking to social media to express their dismay that the production is ending. But the creator of *Vera*, North East crime writer Ann Cleeves (see box), is more philosophical: "I'm sad, obviously, that season 14 will be the last – but we've had such a good run."

While *Vera*'s small-screen adventures are drawing to a close, the Vera Stanhope novels are still going strong; Cleeves' latest mystery, *The Dark Wives*, is published in August. In fact, Cleeves and Blethyn, who are friends, will be on the road together talking about their creation at literary festivals in the autumn – including one in Iceland.

The show has launched the careers of countless actors, crew and production staff. And some were there from day one, including the Newcastle actor David Leon who plays Vera's detective sidekick, Joe Ashworth.

He left the show in 2014, only to return a couple of years later as a director. He's now back as an actor following his character's promotion to detective inspector.

Fahima Chowdhury is another whose career has sky-rocketed thanks to *Vera*. She started in the production office and is now a co-producer on the show.

Says executive producer Will Nicholson: "It is an honour to work with great people on such an iconic show. The welcome and support we have been given at every location, town and village across the North East has undoubtedly contributed to the show's worldwide success.

"Brenda, Ann and the *Vera* family have created and trained a generation of industry professionals – and there'll be more exciting opportunities on the horizon for the region's screen sector."

North East Screen describes *Vera* as the trailblazer for returning drama in the region. It has paved the way for other big-budget dramas to locate there. *The Red King*, a crime series from the producer of *Happy Valley*, made its debut on the Alibi channel in April. The show was filmed in Northumberland and there are hopes for a second series.

North East Screen is confident that its £3.8m production fund will encourage more film and TV projects to head north to take advantage of the region's distinctive mix of castles and coastline alongside the cityscapes of its three major riverside conurbations.

Vera's other great legacy is the visitor economy. Earlier this year at the North East England Tourism Awards, the show received an Outstanding Contribution trophy for its role in attracting tourists to visit locations featured in the series.

Producer Silverprint has filmed in countless locations, from Tees Valley and North Yorkshire in the south to the Scottish border, taking in cities such as Durham, Sunderland and Newcastle. *Vera* tours can be booked in Northumberland and County Durham. Self-guided trips are available online to *Vera* hotspots in places such as Holy Island, Whitley Bay and Amble. And, of course, there's the growing trend of dressing children as *Vera* on World Book Day.

Over the years, Blethyn and fellow cast members and crew have been a welcome fixture at the annual RTS North East and the Border Awards. They have regularly picked up programme, technical and performance trophies.

Guests and fellow nominees report that Blethyn and Team *Vera* are always generous with their time and proud of the role they've played in putting the region on the TV map.

That map is about to get significantly bigger. The production company Fulwell 73 says preparations for its ambitious Crown Works Studios on the banks of the River Wear in Sunderland are at an advanced stage.

Work on the site is due to begin within weeks. The first phase of the £450m complex should be completed by 2026. By the time the site is fully developed, it is expected to create 8,000 jobs.

Meanwhile, fans can look forward to seeing *Vera's* final TV outing in the new year. And with repeats virtually guaranteed in perpetuity on ITV3, plus more *Vera* novels in the pipeline, the legacy of Northumberland and City Police force's most unconventional detective seems assured. ■

Ann Cleeves: from book to screen

Uniquely on British TV, bestselling North East crime writer Ann Cleeves has seen three of her detectives starring in their own series. Vera Stanhope first appeared on ITV in 2011; Jimmy Perez from the *Shetland* books arrived on BBC One, played by Douglas Henshall, in 2013 and, more recently, her Devon detective Matthew Venn (Ben Aldridge) featured in the ITV adaptation of *The Long Call* in 2021.

Cleeves' books have been translated into 20 languages and the TV shows based on her characters are screened all over the world. She is particularly proud that the *Vera* books and TV adaptations have showcased North East England, where she lives on the coast.

She admits the performance of Brenda Blethyn and their long friendship has influenced her writing. Cleeves' latest *Vera* novel, *The Dark Wives*, is rumoured to be the basis for Blethyn's



Ann Cleeves

Pan Macmillan

swansong in the role. Meanwhile, the BBC has commissioned two further seasons of *Shetland*, with Ashley Jensen as Detective Inspector Ruth Calder, for filming this year and in 2025.

Riley Jones: 14 years in the force



Riley Jones (Mark Edwards) in *Vera*

ITV

Riley Jones had just completed a performing arts course in Newcastle when he auditioned to appear in the pilot episode of *Vera* in 2010. He went after several parts and was eventually cast in a minor role as rookie police officer Mark Edwards in the final episode of season 1.

Producers liked him and he stayed. 'Being in the show for this long is the result of lots of tiny little inconsequential moments,' he says. 'I'll always remember being on set for the first time and just wanting to take everything in. We were filming in the middle of nowhere at 1:00am in the freezing cold North East winter.'

'I'd finished filming but it was a really interesting scene and I asked if I could stay and watch. I think they thought I was mad! But they let me hang around and I just took in as much as possible. Little did I know, the then-producer Elaine Collins was also on set that day and could see how passionate and interested in the industry I was. I was asked to return the following year and I've never looked back.'

'I've met some of the best people and made lifelong friends. I'm gutted it's coming to an end as I could do this job for ever. But I'm so fortunate to have had the opportunity to work on such an incredible show for 14 years – especially when I was only supposed to be in one scene!'

In a packed cinema in London's Leicester Square, devoted fans gathered to bid an emotional farewell to one of the most original and inventive British comedies of recent years.

After nine stellar series, the RTS-award winning *Inside No 9* went out in style, as RTS London hosted a screening of the finale alongside creators Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith.

Among those in attendance were a troupe of former *Inside No 9* stars: Katherine Parkinson, Tim Key, Sian Gibson, Amanda Abbington, Jason Watkins, Monica Dolan and Matthew Kelly to name a few... for reasons that would soon become clear.

In their typically macabre way, Pemberton and Shearsmith compared the event to attending their own funeral. "It's like we're being embalmed live," said Shearsmith.

With questions from host and *Heat* Entertainment Director Boyd Hilton, the comedy duo reflected on 10 years of their genre-defying television genius.

Like many iconic British shows that preceded it, *Inside No 9's* genesis can be traced back to belt tightening at the BBC. Pemberton and Shearsmith wanted to make a new series of their ambitious show *Psychoville* but, with the comedy department strapped for cash, producer Jon Plowman suggested an episode set in one room and featuring just three characters.

"We baulked at the idea but, once we thought about it, we loved having those constraints to work with. Not going outside of the room, and thinking: how do we move this story on? How do we keep it fresh?," said Pemberton.

And so *Inside No 9* was born. From train carriages to wardrobes, police cars to referees' changing rooms, the series delighted in finding new ways to tell stories within a confined space. Inspired by classic TV anthologies such as *Tales of the Unexpected*, the dark comedy specialised in horror-inducing twists.

"That's always the biggest joke at the end of something like *The Trolley Problem*. The BBC Comedy credit comes up at the end, and you've just seen an immolated man and a child buried alive," Pemberton said, referring to a particularly grisly episode in the final series.

"It was exciting. Each week a clean

Inside No 9: Reece Shearsmith (left) and Steve Pemberton



An all-star send off

An RTS audience and special guests gather for the final bow of the cult macabre comedy *Inside No 9*

slate, and you can have great highs and people can all die at the end and then you can start again next week,” Shearsmith adds.

The anthology format enabled the duo to do whatever experimentation took their fancy within 30 minutes. Episodes ranged from a Shakespearean comedy written entirely in iambic pentameter in *Zanzibar* to a burglary heist carried out almost entirely in silence in *A Quiet Night In*.

“What I always liked about it was it was hugely risky. You didn’t know what you were going to get. And so, we just went with it,” said executive producer Jon Plowman.

The series delighted in wrong-footing its audience. In the 2018 Halloween

The audience was utterly dumb-founded. “We were getting messages saying, ‘So sorry it’s gone wrong!’ We were thinking, great, we got you,” Shearsmith grinned. “Kudos to the BBC for letting us do it. It’s such a risk,” Pemberton added.

“We had to tell so many lies to get that made,” Pemberton said. “They gave us the freedom to do that and now it’s so rare, and we’re so grateful to the BBC.”

As the series progressed, British actors were champing at the bit to be cast in *Inside No 9*. “We’d get people telling us that they’d love to be in it, and we’d get people writing to Tracey [Gillham, casting director] and asking, ‘Is there anything for me?’” Shearsmith recalled.

Despite this, the pair never wrote

were not expecting that of us, and it became an absolute touchstone for people. The reaction to it was jaw-dropping. People were really moved by it,” he adds.

“Sheridan was incredible in that role. Filming that last scene, there was a tension in the air and there was a sense that we had something special,” Pemberton said. “When we first saw the edits, I remember two things. I remember everyone tearing up, and Jon Plowman going, ‘You can’t put that music on the end. It’s so mawkish!’”

The song, *Time to Say Goodbye* by Andrea Bocelli and Sarah Brightman, would receive another airing in the season finale, along with a host of references to previous episodes, much to the delight of fans who have followed the show for a decade.

The episode, set in the toilets of a fictional *Inside No 9* wrap party, brought back more than 55 former cast members, including the previously mentioned actors attending the screening. “It is a love letter. Every line is an echo of something,” Shearsmith said.

With no story thread to effectively conclude the anthology, the finale – in which the duo played themselves arguing what do next after *Inside No 9* – allowed the show to have a proper goodbye. “We were worried that it might have been slightly self-indulgent... we were worried about the weight of expectation,” said Pemberton.

“When we saw that it just had such an amazing quality to it and such a warmth, how could we not finish with that? It’s a perfect sign off.”

With a West End stage show of *Inside No 9* in the works, the pair are taking a moment to admire the fruits of their labour.

“It’s just been such an amazing achievement and we’re just so pleased to have had the opportunity and so proud of what we’ve been able to do,” said Pemberton.

He added, with characteristic black humour: “We need to let this all sink in and, you know... let it die its death.” ■

Report by Caitlin Danaher. *Inside No 9: The end is ni9h* was an RTS London Centre event held at the Vue West End cinema in London on 12 June. The producers were Phil Barnes, Susan Collins, Terry Marsh and Adam Tandy.



Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton with Boyd Hilton

Ruth Roxanne Board/Plank PR

special, *Dead Line*, the pair pulled a stunt so convincing that a fifth of viewers turned off mid-episode.

The show, broadcast live on BBC Two, was pegged as a graveyard thriller set at the supposedly haunted Granada Studios. The pair had carried out an elaborate hoax, including misleading the media with fake press packs in the run-up to transmission. They even got an unwitting Gabby Logan on *The One Show* to ask them a seeded question on whether they believed in ghosts.

Part-way through the episode, a BBC Two “transmission breakdown” alert deceived audiences into thinking the live show was experiencing technical difficulties. What followed was a mosaic of archive footage, fixed cameras and CCTV that descended into gory horror.

scripts for specific actors – with one exception, which turned out to be a standout episode.

The emotionally devastating masterpiece, *The 12 Days of Christine* starring Sheridan Smith, is viewed by fans and critics alike as *Inside No 9*’s *pièce de résistance*. From relationships to child-birth to grief, the episode told the story of Christine’s life through a day of each month of the year. An astonishing feat of dramatic storytelling, the episode ended with a heartbreaking sucker punch of a twist.

“It was sort of smuggled in, in comedy, but it was something you would get in any drama. You felt like you really lived a life with [Christine] and you cared about her,” Shearsmith said.

“I think it worked because people



Libby, Are You Home Yet?

Docs that do justice to the facts

Awriter friend of mine defines a gripping documentary as “great drama” telling “a compelling story with a character we can root for”. There’s no doubt that mass audiences are there for documentaries, but what are the storytelling techniques that keep them hooked?

We’re living in an age when documentaries are everywhere, shown across broadcasters and streamers. From science to survival, travel to true crime, the storytelling techniques are now more sophisticated than they have ever been.

Take true crime. On BBC iPlayer alone, I found 40 films and series under that wide-ranging umbrella. One of the most successful in 2023 was Sky Crime’s three-part,

Carole Solazzo dissects the art of good factual storytelling

multi-award-winning *Libby, Are You Home Yet?*, about student Libby Squire, who was murdered in Hull in 2019.

Chief Creative Officer of Candour Productions, Anna Hall, produced and directed the show: She says: “In the pre-title, in two and a half minutes, we’ve totally captured Libby’s character and relationship with her mum.”

Using photos, video, audio, favourite music and friends’ anecdotes, Hall sets up and makes us “fall in love with” our hero, infers a dangerous villain, and creates tension and suspense: will her killer be found?

John Yorke is a narrative consultant

and former Head of Drama at Channel 4 and Controller of BBC Drama Production. He says: “Stories were used historically to transmit information quickly to your tribe. When you’re exposed to new information, almost immediately you will search for a hero and a villain, whether it’s fiction or [factual].”

In *The Push: Murder on the Cliff*, Candour’s two-part Channel 4 documentary about the murder of Leeds lawyer Fawziyah Javed, we get to know Javed, then follow her mother Yasmin’s fight for justice for her daughter, using the trail of evidence Javed left behind. Will she get justice? We keep watching because we need to know.

Director Sara Hardy says of BBC One’s *Gentleman Jack Changed My Life*: “It’s about people coming out, learning for the first time who they are and sharing that with family and friends.”

The jeopardy for one protagonist, Chichi, is: 'Will my grandparents still love me when they know the truth?'

These storytelling techniques are clearly valid for other documentaries covering diverse topics. Sport, for instance, or natural history – where the jeopardy is often “will these creatures survive?”.

“One dramatic storytelling technique I use is to mention something early on, then later reveal another aspect of that,” says producer/director Ben Southwell. He filmed a wildlife documentary for BBC One about the

“There are always stakes. In the Nick Knowles adventure series, it's not ‘Will I survive?’... but it doesn't have to be. Because you're still inviting the viewers to take that journey with you. The antagonist can be lots of things [in the process of] getting through the journey.”

Implicit are questions that we want answers to or promises we're eager should be kept.

In Southwell's *Rick Stein's Road to Mexico*, shown on BBC Two, Stein retraces the steps he took in the 1960s when he travelled to Mexico with a little money his father left him. The

tributary and swept out into the Humber. We had a massive task to show how vast the estuary was, and how almost impossible it was that Libby would be found.”

To create the Humber as antagonist, “we shot on widescreen to convey a massive sense of space. I shot day, night, rain, sun, dusk, dawn – every single weather condition and different time of day. And I had a sound recordist record authentic river sounds.”

Later, the antagonist river turns into an ally. Near the end of the documentary, it gives up the young woman's body just hours before she would have been swept away into the North Sea and lost for ever.

Yorke insists that “a good storyteller understands how to structure a story to make it engaging and entertaining and carry the message they want to get across”. Hall adds: “When you're making a box set, you have to think about where to break the story so that the audience comes back.”

Libby, Are You Home Yet? is the fastest-binged box set in Sky Crime history, which proves that she got it right.

“Story structure mimics the process of perception,” Yorke says. “The child goes out into the world, touches a lit match, and then returns changed.” Or, in other words: set-up, conflict, resolution.

Sara Hardy puts it like this: “What's the reality now? What's happening? What's the struggle? How are you going to resolve it? What's the new reality?”

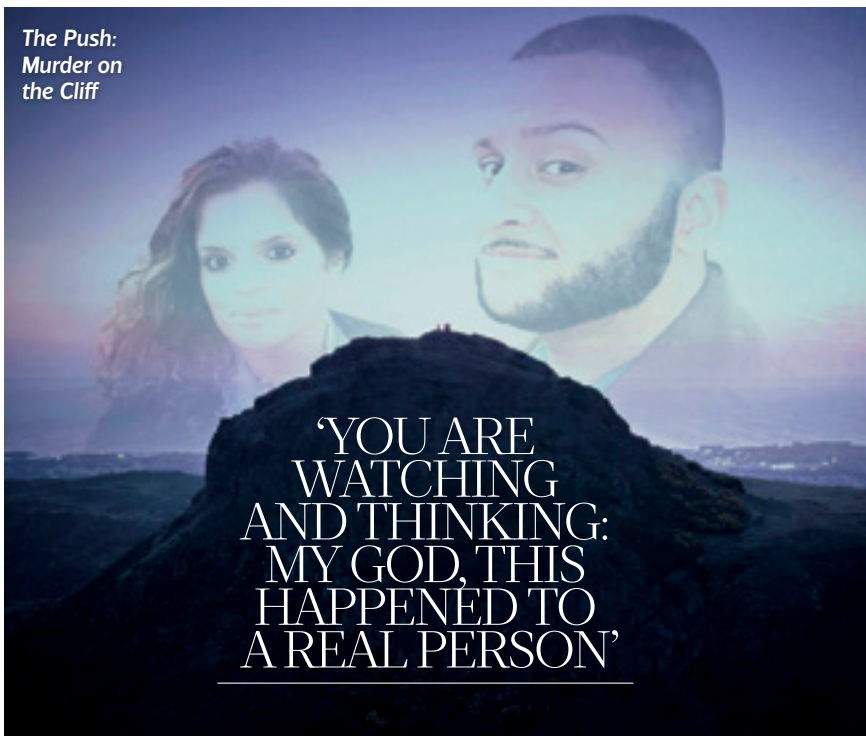
“But documentaries are unpredictable,” she admits. “We filmed over six months with an idea of what the story would be: how watching the drama *Gentleman Jack* [about the life and loves of 19th-century lesbian Anne Lister] emboldened contemporary women of all ages to come out.”

But how can tension and suspense be maintained in companion documentaries such as ITVX's *Mr Bates vs the Post Office: The Real Story*, when the outcome is already known from watching the drama?

Hall has the answer. “What the drama did was condense this very difficult story and turn it into a human story,” she says. “What documentary can do is show you Fawziyah's mum and Libby's mum. You're watching them, thinking, ‘My God, this has happened to a real person.’

“We use all the storytelling techniques at our disposal to help the audience understand what the story is – and to care.” ■

The Push: Murder on the Cliff



Channel 4

setting up of a sanctuary for orphan chimpanzees, “featuring a cute chimp called Nkuumwa. Near the end, we revealed that ‘Nkuumwa’ means ‘I am protected’. You realise this whole story is entirely about protection. You get that fantastic pay-off, that warm glow.”

But what about history documentaries? BBC Two's recent *Pompeii: The New Dig* begins like an episode of *Silent Witness*, with the gentle unearthing by archaeologist Dr Valeria Amoretti of a woman's skeletal remains. We ask: “Can our protagonist successfully unearth the remains? Can she find out who this woman was? What happened to her?”

In these documentaries, the narrator journeys afar, like bards of old, returning with stories of distant places, historical events, heroes long gone.

“Even in the gentlest factual, those things are there,” Southwell explains.

series asks: “Can I recapture the experiences of my youth? Will it mean as much to me now as it did then?”

In bushcraft expert Ray Mears's series, the promise is this: “Come with me, and I'll change the way you look at the natural world for ever.”

According to Yorke, identification with the protagonist is a key factor. “The scientific explanation is that your mirror neurons kick in [these brain cells fire when you perform an action or you watch someone else perform that action]. Your brainwaves start to behave as if you are the protagonist. The more you identify with the protagonist, and the more you hate the antagonist, then the more engrossed you become.”

To return to *Libby, Are You Home Yet?*, Anna Hall recalls: “The River Humber played an enormous part in [Libby's] story because she was dumped into a

RTS Student Television Awards 2024

Sponsored by 

The ceremony at the IET in central London on 21 June was hosted by rapper, author and broadcaster **Guvna B** and the awards were presented by **Simon Bucks**



Jellyfish and Lobster,
Postgraduate
Drama and
Postgraduate
Craft Skills –
Writing

UNDERGRADUATE CATEGORIES

Undergraduate Animation

Sketchbook

James Watt, Nyah Deamer, Marta Smielewski and Steven Watt, Manchester Metropolitan University
‘The poignancy of the story was well matched by the beautiful and ambitious animation.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Doggerland**, Michael Blake and Martin To, University of the West of England, Bristol
- ▶ **The Curse of Dracular**, Jack Paterson, Norwich University of the Arts

Undergraduate Drama

Skive

Corinna Elleschild, Ellis Cate, Louis Barron-Forde, Charlie Guy-Jones and Team, University of the West of England, Bristol
‘An authentic and relatable story, told with an irresistible life force, wit and energy. Clever visual storytelling, music and humour augmented the piece.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Care**, Jagoda Tlok, Jess Kelly, Euan Farmer, Juno Glover and Team, Screen Academy Scotland, Edinburgh Napier University
- ▶ **Night Light**, Oscar Bell, Thomas Ellison and Madeleine Reddy, Staffordshire University

Undergraduate Entertainment and Comedy Drama

The Other Half

Alina Ilin and Benjamin Bogdan-Hodgson, Middlesex University
‘A beautifully shot, quirky and wonderful storyline; a bonkers, weird and wonderful, visually amazing film.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Lulu’s Zoo**, Sarah Baker, University of Salford
- ▶ **Worst Thing**, Jayme Bartlett, Bobby Donaldson, Hayley Louise McGuire, Petra Crace and Team, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland



Guvna B, Host



Richard Kendal

Sketchbook,
Undergraduate Animation

Manchester Metropolitan University



Walking the Labyrinth,
Undergraduate Factual – Long Form

Dundalk Institute of Technology



The Other Half,
Undergraduate
Entertainment and
Comedy Drama

Richard Kendal

Undergraduate Factual – Long Form

Walking the Labyrinth

Jessica Doherty, Conor Farrelly, Megan Hughes, Kim Stewart and Team, Dundalk Institute of Technology

'This quietly compelling film was technically superb. Poetic, hypnotic, charming: a simple story, beautifully told.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Simme Tutt'uno**, Alice Franchi, Yasmin Boxall, Freddie Logan and Alice Sacco, University of Westminster
- ▶ **Thank you, Final Fantasy VII**, Mark Stiles, University of Sunderland

Undergraduate Factual – Short Form

Strongwoman

Kyla Miller, Ewan Patrick, Jodie McMail, Katrina McEwan and Remi Peron, University of Stirling

'The pacing of the storytelling mixed with the intimacy of the shooting created a very engaging and moving film.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Beyond Borders: Mo's Story**, Oliver Burke, Searus Aynsley and Max Clibbon, Sheffield Hallam University
- ▶ **Dragons**, Tyrese Shipp, Sophie Taylor, Harry Orr and Alex Chiles, Bath Spa University

Undergraduate Journalism

I'll Just Have Cats

Kay Proctor and Team, University of Gloucestershire

'A really compelling story, with brilliant case studies and outstanding production values. Inclusive in every sense of the word.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Angle News Final Newsday**, Kaleigh Pritchard, Aoife Harkin, Meg Griffiths, Isaac Lewis and Team, University of Gloucestershire
- ▶ **Bruised**, Carla Basu, Lauren Fitzpatrick and Adam Millar, University of the West of Scotland

Undergraduate Saving the Planet

Tails of Cumbrian Heritage

Georgia Costin and Abbey Wilkinson, University of Cumbria

‘A clear and powerful film, making an impassioned argument for not losing touch with your roots.’

Nominees:

► **Fibres, The Roots of Industrial Hemp**, Matthew Tyler-Howells, Vic Kolbe and Emily Hogg, Aberystwyth University

► **Forgotten Fibre**, Tristan Patrick Sherfield, Alex Stevenson, Maurice A Wren, Robert Loud and Team, University of the West of England, Bristol

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

Simme Tutt'uno

Freddie Logan, University of Westminster

‘The confident and creative camera-work propelled the story and allowed the stunning visuals and original story to capture our minds.’

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Editing

Doggerland

Michael Blake, University of the West of England, Bristol

‘Beautiful, confident editing in its rawest form. A brilliantly eloquent and creative film.’

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

The Curse of Dracular

Jack Paterson, Norwich University of the Arts

‘What a stunning piece of work! The attention to detail in terms of storytelling, likeness and humour was at the heart of this wonderfully creative film.’

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Sound

Worst Thing

Erin Williamson, Megan Daly and Jayme Bartlett, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

‘Very evocative, with its multilayered use of sound. A story with sound design front and centre, as the spine of the film.’

Undergraduate Craft Skills – Writing

Care

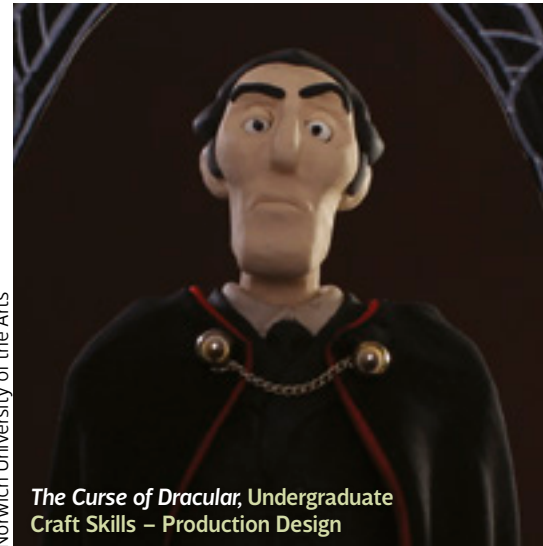
Jagoda Tlok, Screen Academy Scotland, Edinburgh Napier University

‘The brilliantly composed key relationship in this film has the exquisite, subtle and genuinely funny script to thank.’



Richard Kendal

Doggerland, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Editing



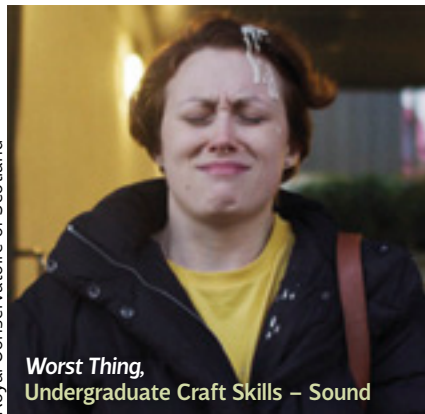
Norwich University of the Arts

The Curse of Dracular, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Production Design



University of Westminster

Simme Tutt'uno, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork



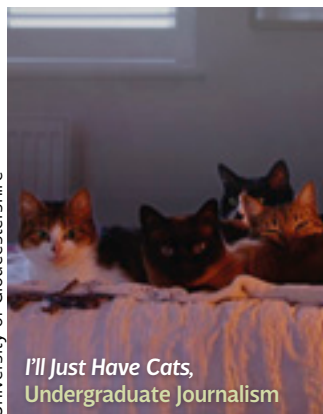
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Worst Thing, Undergraduate Craft Skills – Sound



Richard Kendal

Strongwoman, Undergraduate Factual – Short Form



University of Gloucestershire

I'll Just Have Cats, Undergraduate Journalism



University of Cumbria

Tails of Cumbrian Heritage, Undergraduate Saving the Planet

POSTGRADUATE CATEGORIES

Why Don't You Stay for Tonight,
Postgraduate Entertainment
and Comedy Drama



Richard Kendal

Postgraduate Animation

Crab Day

Ross Stringer, Aleksandra Sykulak, Bartosz Stanislawek and Donya Maguire, National Film and Television School
'A fresh take on a coming-of-age story told with humor and poignancy [and a] beautiful and deceptively simple animation style. Captivating.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Mum's Spaghetti**, Lisa Kenney, Emma Grazette, Martina Buendia Silva, Jack Maraghy and Team, National Film and Television School
- ▶ **Singularity**, Conor Mullin, Alexander Leeming Froudakis, Joe Flowers, Pip Denning and Team, University of the West of England, Bristol

With Woman, Postgraduate Factual
– Long Form and Postgraduate
Craft Skills – Editing



NFTS

Postgraduate Drama

Jellyfish and Lobster

Elizabeth Rufai, Yasmin Afifi, Linda Wu, Max Reynolds and Team, National Film and Television School
'A powerful and emotional story in which the... challenging subject matter was handled with levity... to achieve a poignant emotional effect.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Killing Boris Johnson**, Musa Alderson-Clarke, Solomon Golding and Team, National Film and Television School
- ▶ **MaoMao**, Siqin Qu, Yifei Yue, Xianglong Zhang and Shengshuo Hou, University of York

Skive, Undergraduate Drama



Richard Kendal

Crab Day, Postgraduate Animation and
Postgraduate Craft Skills – Sound



Richard Kendal

Postgraduate Entertainment and Comedy Drama

Why Don't You Stay for Tonight

Guilherme Pires, Yegor Chmilewsky, El Hakim and Gundham Onorati, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge Campus
'A wild card entry that paid off! A visually arresting, surreal and compelling watch – a real show-stopper.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **7 Day Expert**, Julia Waller, Hannah Dodge and Team, National Film and Television School
- ▶ **Tastes of the Past**, Shu Wang, Anastasia Adruzova, Marcin Mazurek and Fleur Capocci, National Film and Television School



Care, Undergraduate
Craft Skills – Writing

Screen Academy Scotland

Postgraduate Factual – Long Form

With Woman

Mia Harvey, Yu-Pu Pon, Luke Barnfather, Diana Duah and Team, National Film and Television School

‘Beautiful and warm with a perfect level of intimacy... the music and sound made for a cinematic experience.’

Nominees:

▶ **Cadáver**, Benjamin Kodboel, Frederik Ribergaard, Itzel Gonzalez Estrada, Jack McCartney and Team, National Film and Television School

▶ **Lettre à Elie (Letter to Elie)**, Alexis Grigorieff, Louise Bernard Pallas, Harry Foster, Ciara McKenna and Team, National Film and Television School

Postgraduate Factual – Short Form

Death at Sea

Sara Pipernos, Mikey Sneddon and Nyal Mueenuddin, University of the West of England, Bristol

‘Genuinely eye-opening, powerful and important original journalism that... shone a light on a massive injustice.’

Nominees:

▶ **My Dad and the Volcano**, Gavin Reid and Brendan Swift, The University of the West of Scotland

▶ **My Mum Rita**, Qiqi Hou, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London

Postgraduate Journalism

Charlton Upbeats Football Fundraiser

Lili Sheppard and Shivansh Gupta, City, University of London

‘High production values [that] wouldn’t have been out of place on a news magazine programme.’

Nominees:

▶ **Ukranian cafe**, Lili Sheppard and Tiffany Muthee, City, University of London

▶ **Under the Sky: The Homeless of Calcutta**, Rini Ghosh, Nottingham Trent University

Postgraduate Saving the Planet

Cowboys vs Prairie Dogs

Alexander Crisp, University of the West of England, Bristol

‘A deftly made film that moves assuredly between light and dark tones, with impressive camerawork.’

Nominees:

▶ **Forgotten Forests**, Robyn Dean, Lauren Wynter, Siim Skepast, Jack McCartney and Team, National Film and Television School

▶ **Grasping the Nettle**, Mairi Eyres, Leo Alexander, Mikey Sneddon, Ningjing Wang and Team, University of the West of England, Bristol

University of the West of England, Bristol



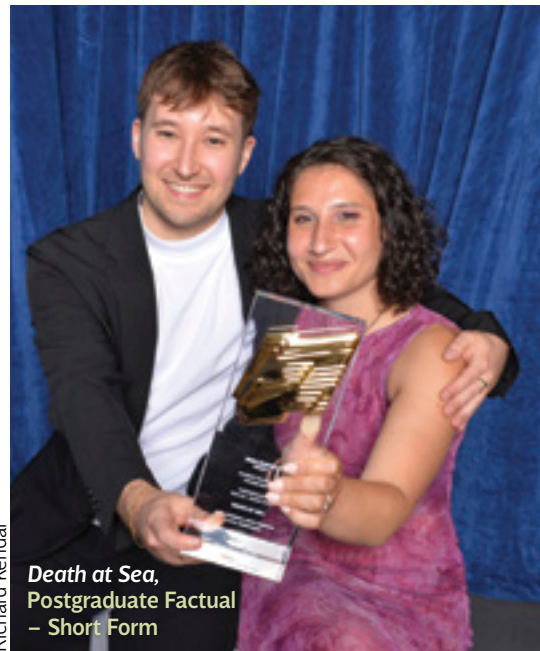
*Cowboys vs Prairie Dogs,
Postgraduate Saving the Planet*

Richard Kendal



With Woman, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Editing and Postgraduate Factual – Long Form

Richard Kendal

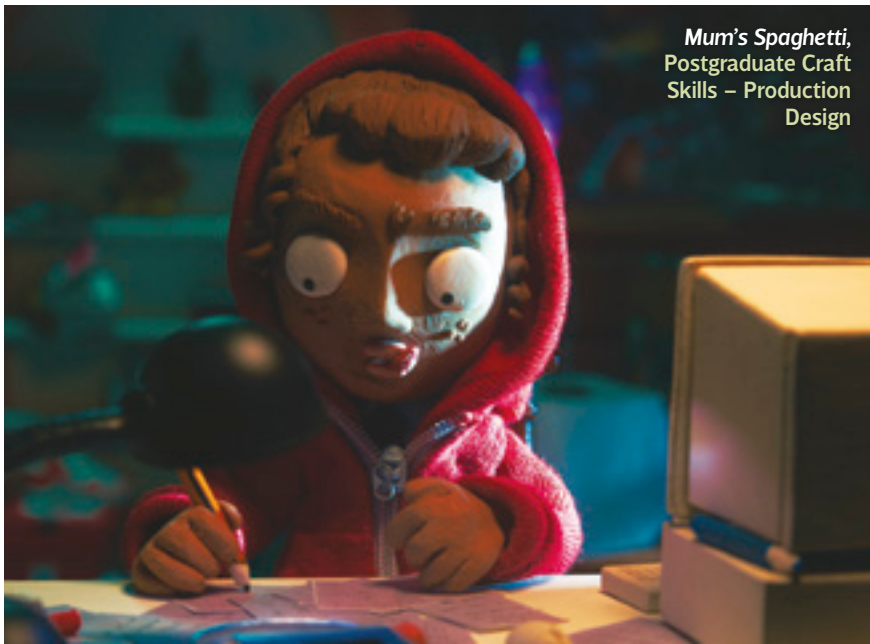


Death at Sea, Postgraduate Factual – Short Form

City, University of London



Charlton Upbeats Football Fundraiser, Postgraduate Journalism



Mum's Spaghetti, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

Cadáver

Benjamin Kodboel, National Film and Television School
 ‘The camera was sensitive in capturing the story by not being intrusive and wasn’t shy about the darker moments that helped bring this film to life.’

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Editing

With Woman

Yu-Pu Pon, National Film and Television School
 ‘The use of black and white was a bold move that played off handsomely; the pacing and rhythm of the editing drive the scenes and help the film breathe.’

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Production Design

Mum’s Spaghetti

Luke Stronach, National Film and Television School
 ‘A great production designer is worth their weight in gold and this one certainly is. The attention to detail and variety of design was truly stunning.’

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Sound

Crab Day

Simon Panayi, National Film and Television School
 ‘Exceptional. It was a challenging feat to bring a minimalist world to life, especially when sound was the driving force behind the plot and characters.’



Jellyfish and Lobster, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Writing and Postgraduate Drama

Richard Kendall



Crab Day, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Sound and Postgraduate Animation

Richard Kendall

Postgraduate Craft Skills – Writing

Jellyfish and Lobster

Yasmin Afifi, National Film and Television School
 ‘Showed a true talent for writing... to bring in light and shade with some comedic moments... against the backdrop of the two residents living in a care home.’ ■



Cadáver, Postgraduate Craft Skills – Camerawork

NFTS

The RTS Student Television Awards 2024 reward outstanding work produced during the 2022/23 academic year. Undergraduate entries were first judged at a regional level by their local RTS centre in early 2024. The winning films from each RTS centre, along with all postgraduate entries, were then judged nationally in April 2024. The Craft Skills awards were made at the discretion of the judges.

A recent RTS roundtable on newsroom diversity highlighted several initiatives to make TV newsrooms more representative of the UK population.

Opening the discussion, ITN CEO Rachel Corp said diversifying ITN had been hugely important for many years. She explained: “There are some great initiatives going on. I think everyone would agree that our newsrooms and our content are unrecognisable compared with not very long ago. But, clearly, there is stuff that needs to change.”

RTS Honorary Secretary Simon Bucks, a former ITN and Sky News journalist, said that “it may be fair to say that things haven’t changed dramatically enough. People who were at this year’s RTS Television Journalism Awards will know that a large proportion of the people in the room were white.”

STV News Editor Nichola Kane stressed that the Glasgow-based broadcaster’s Expert Voices scheme had led to news programmes having a greater diversity of voices from on-screen contributors.

STV had gone out into more diverse communities to find stories and build up a network of contacts. News programmes were monitored for how many people of colour appeared on them. If monthly targets were not met, questions were asked.

“We felt that we had to make some changes that were concrete,” said Kane. “We can see the changes, although there is still a lot of work to be done.”

Regarding recruiting more people of colour to join the newsroom, STV discovered that Scottish universities were experiencing the same

National Event Broadcasters and news providers aim to attract more senior staff of colour, says Steve Clarke

Newsrooms still too white



problem, so STV worked with local higher education institutions to target a more diverse potential workforce.

Kane said: “We’re going into areas [with] more diverse populations and getting people from an early age. We’ve found that, by the time they go to university, it might be too late because people haven’t chosen to think about TV as a career.”

Andrew Dagnell, ITV News’s Editor of Network News, highlighted the Rising

Stars initiative, which aims to provide future leaders from ethnic backgrounds with support to boost their careers. “After 18 months to two years of being on that scheme, the aspiration is that those taking part would look to be promoted,” he said.

Sky News Managing Director Jonathan Levy outlined a difficulty with hiring specialist staff: “We’re all recruiting at the top of the pyramid, a very narrow group of people, most of whom are from

very similar backgrounds.

“It’s very hard if you want to go out and recruit a head of foreign news. It’s quite a specialist job. There aren’t that many candidates.”

Associated Press’s Amanda Barrett, Vice-President of Standards and Inclusion, drew attention to an in-house programme designed to train future leaders and “give different kinds of people opportunities to learn more about the company”.

For the Paris Olympics, AP has broken with tradition by inviting staff to apply to be part of its coverage, rather than saying who will attend.

At Reuters, Joanna Webster, Global Managing Editor, Visuals (Video and Photography), said that, “in the picture space”, Reuters had made “huge progress by deliberately rebalancing our contractors”.

Progress in other areas was slower, despite the introduction of more diverse representation on job interview panels and the creation of diverse shortlists. In Africa and Asia, Reuters had introduced diversity acceleration programmes.

ITN Editorial Diversity Partner and Senior Correspondent, *ITV News London*, Ronke Phillips, said she was encouraged to see so many senior people at the roundtable.

She said: “My job is about getting people into meetings where they can make a difference. It’s ethnic diversity, of course, but it’s also gender diversity and geographical diversity, which I am very passionate about.”

The group also discussed options for the RTS Television Journalism Awards, which will be reviewed by the Society. ■

The ‘RTS Newsroom Diversity Roundtable’ was held at ITN in London on 5 June.

Life-and-death medical series are hugely popular on British TV but tricky and emotionally draining to make. Winning the trust of hospitals and patients is only part of the story, crews also have to work with sensitivity and face heartbreak and loss.

BBC Studios Creative Director, Factual Entertainment Adeline Ramage Rooney executive produced new Channel 5 series *The Hospital: Life on the Line*, which is set in the UK's busiest heart transplant unit, at the Golden Jubilee National Hospital in Clydebank.

She wanted to find a "warmer way" of telling the stories of people receiving transplants. Surgery at the hospital is elective, not emergency, which denied the programme-makers instant drama but afforded them the opportunity to "get to know people... [We decided] to come at this show through the lens of love," she explained.

"We [wanted] to create this lovely, warm, appealing, story-driven programme that is about loved ones getting back to doing what they want to be doing... after having major operations and heart transplants."

BBC Two's *Surgeons: At the Edge of Life* recently completed its sixth series. It takes cameras into operating theatres and "tells the story of operations in real detail", said Ros Ponder, Director of Programmes at Dragonfly and the show's executive producer.

"What you get is a hard-core, specialist factual deep dive into the science; the geekier, the nerdier, the better – that's our audience.

"Instead of focusing on the patient's perspective, [we] focus on the surgeons.... They



Docs under the knife

National Event Three producers tell the RTS how they make their prime-time medical series. **Matthew Bell** reports

guide us through each story and break down very complex operations and explain their decision-making."

Super Surgeons: A Chance at Life, made by Wonderhood Studios for Channel 4, is filmed at the Royal Marsden Hospital and supported by Macmillan Cancer Support.

"It's lovely having a sponsor that editorially sits so well alongside the purpose of the show... but we have to work in product placement," explains series producer/director Sophie Stephenson-Wright.

This has to be "not only editorially relevant, but actually improve the series... and [bring] more heart and story to the series. It's not easy to do."

The current series of *Super Surgeons: A Chance at Life* features the death of a young man from testicular cancer.

"It felt really important to tell [his story] from the doctors' point of view," says Stephenson-Wright.

They need to "talk about what they perceive as failure.... It's really easy to celebrate the successes and positive stories, but the medical staff [want] to talk about it when they *don't* get to do their job the way they want to."

Sensitivity while filming is important, says Ponder. "We have a massive duty to protect the privacy of everyone in hospital – unless you're in a maternity unit, you probably don't want to be there."

Dragonfly uses a two-stage consent process: contributors are asked for their consent to film and then, later, to appear in the broadcast film.

Ponder added: "The main

rule I have is: if this was one of my loved ones, how would I want their story to be told?"

Once an episode of *The Hospital: Life on the Line* airs, contributors are called to talk through their experience of appearing on TV. "They're seeing their internal organs on the telly – it's pretty mad," says Rooney.

Is the medical doc here to stay? Yes, reckoned Rooney: "There are just no higher stakes than life or death. I think it's here for ever. It's our challenge to keep it evolving and telling stories in different ways." ■

RTS National Event 'Under the knife: Dissecting the medical format' was held on 11 June, chaired by documentary director James W Newton and produced by Wonderhood Studios.

Brighton-based indie Ricochet took home two trophies from the RTS Southern Television Awards in May.

Channel 5 show *Ben Fogle: New Lives in the Wild* (co-produced by Renegade) won the Factual Series prize, while UKTV channel Dave's *World's Most Dangerous Roads* picked up the award for Entertainment or Factual Entertainment Programme.

The ceremony, hosted by *BBC South Today* presenter David Allard and *Meridian Tonight* host Sangeeta Bhabra, took place at the Utilita Bowl, home of Hampshire Cricket.

BBC One's *Tommy Jessop Goes to Hollywood* won the Single Documentary for BBC Studios, with the *Line of Duty* actor, who has Down's syndrome, was present at the ceremony. The film follows Jessop, who is on a mission to show that people with Down's can play Hollywood heroes.

The BBC and ITV shared the spoils in the news categories. BBC South won two awards. Ben Moore's "stylistic and energetic" camerawork ensured success in the Self-shooting Journalist category, while Lewis Coombes's sport coverage earned him the Special Features Journalist award.

The Regional TV Journalist award was won by ITV Meridian's Joe Coshan. His

RTS Southern

Stuart Ray reports on the centre's industry and student awards at Hampshire's cricket ground in Southampton

Hollywood or bust



Tommy Jessop
Goes to Hollywood

BBC

colleague Jamie Green picked up the Industry Newcomer award.

The Regional News Magazine Programme award went to ITV News Channel TV, whose "on-the-day" coverage of the trail of destruction wrought by Storm Ciarán was commended for its

"marriage of incredible images and brave journalism".

Newly formed Harbourside Films' series of items for BBC One's *The One Show* were recognised in the Strand within a News or Magazine Programme category.

RTS Southern also recognised the outstanding

student work in the region at the ceremony. Bournemouth University students won two prizes (Factual and Saving the Planet), as did the University of Portsmouth (Drama plus Entertainment and Comedy Drama). The University for the Creative Arts won the Animation award. ■



Ben Fogle: *New Lives in the Wild*

Channel 5

RTS Southern Television Awards winners

Industry Categories

- **Single Documentary** - *Tommy Jessop Goes to Hollywood* - BBC Studios for BBC One
- **Factual Series** - *Ben Fogle: New Lives in the Wild* - Ricochet/Renegade for Channel 5
- **Entertainment or Factual Entertainment Programme** - *World's Most Dangerous Roads* - Ricochet for Dave
- **Regional News Magazine Programme** - *ITV News Channel TV*
- **Strand within a News or Magazine Programme** - *The One Show* - Harbourside Films for BBC One
- **Regional Television Journalist** - *Joe Coshan*, ITV Meridian

- **Special Features Journalist** - *Lewis Coombes*, BBC South
 - **Self-shooting Journalist** - *Ben Moore*, BBC South
 - **Industry Newcomer** - *Jamie Green*, ITV Meridian
 - **Short-form Content** - *What About You* - Three Thirds Films
 - **Camerawork** - *Joshua Bosley*
 - **Post-production** - *David Head*
- #### Student Categories
- **Animation** - *Fairy Ring* - University for the Creative Arts
 - **Drama** - *Frank* - University of Portsmouth
 - **Entertainment and Comedy Drama** - *Tinsel* - University of Portsmouth
 - **Factual** - *Hidden Heroes* - Bournemouth University
 - **Saving the Planet** - *Eye of the Sun* - Bournemouth University

Big-hearted BBC Scotland drama *Dog Days* took home two of the top prizes from the RTS Scotland Awards.

Conor McCarron won the Actor – Male award for his performance as the musically talented Zoso, who is living rough on the streets of Dundee. *Dog Days*, which is made by Glasgow indie Channel X Hopscotch, also took the Drama prize.

Paisley-born Phyllis Logan was presented with the Actor – Female award for her performance in the long-running BBC police series *Shetland*, which is made by Silverprint Pictures.

Neil Forsyth won in the Writer category for the third and final series of the twisty Edinburgh thriller *Guilt*.

The Special Contribution Award was presented to editor Chris Buckland, who has multiple credits including *Shetland* and *Guilt*. Buckland also won the Post-production: Editing award for his work on *Guilt*.

STV News won both the News and Young Journalist awards, with the latter presented in memory of George Sinclair to sports reporter Ronnie Charters.

The Current Affairs award went to BBC Scotland's flagship investigative series *Disclosure* for its episode *The Dog Dealers*.

The BBC's much-loved sitcom *Two Doors Down* took home the Comedy award, while the Director – Scripted prize went to Simon Hynd for his work on another BBC comedy classic, *Ghosts*.

Wildlife presenter and camera operator Hamza Yassin received the On-screen Personality award, and the CBeebies show he presents, *Ranger Hamza's Eco Quest*, won the Children's prize.

The BBC had a clean sweep in the Documentary and Specialist Factual categories, with *Loch Ness: They Created a*



Phyllis Logan (centre) with awards presenters Shereen Cutkelvin and Sanjeev Kohli

RTS/Peter Sandground

Phyllis Logan honoured

RTS Scotland Glasgow's Old Fruitmarket hosted an all-star ceremony celebrating the best of Scottish TV. **Matthew Bell** reports

RTS Scotland Television Awards winners

RTS Special Contribution Award - Chris Buckland

Impact Award - Firecrest Talent Development - Firecrest Films for BBC Scotland

Drama - Dog Days - Channel X Hopscotch for BBC Scotland

Actor - Male - Conor McCarron, Dog Days - Channel X Hopscotch for BBC Scotland

Actor - Female - Phyllis Logan, Shetland - Silverprint Pictures for BBC One

Director - Non-scripted - Stephen Bennett, Keeping it Up: The Story of Viagra - Two Rivers Media for BBC Two

Director - Scripted - Simon Hynd, Ghosts - Monumental Television in association with Them There for BBC

Writer - Neil Forsyth, Guilt - Expectation and Happy Tramp for BBC Scotland/BBC Two

On-screen Personality - Hamza Yassin

Comedy - Two Doors Down - BBC Studios Comedy Productions for BBC One

Entertainment and Features - Designing the Hebrides - DSP for BBC Two and BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Arts and History - Becoming Frida Kahlo - Rogan Scotland for BBC Two

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Loch Ness: They Created a Monster

Indelible Telly and Hopscotch Films for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Science and Natural History - Keeping It Up: The Story of Viagra - Two Rivers Media for BBC Two

News - STV News at Six (North) - STV

Young Journalist - Ronnie Charters - STV

Current Affairs - Disclosure: The Dog Dealers - BBC Scotland/Disclosure for BBC Scotland

Live Event - A Scottish Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication - BBC Scotland Productions for BBC One

Daytime - Make It at Market - Flabbergast TV for BBC One

Children's - Ranger Hamza's Eco Quest - Hello Halo Kids for CBeebies

Short Form - Hen Do - Goldie Luck Productions for BFI Player

Camera - Fergus Gill, Scotland: The New Wild - Maramedia for BBC Scotland

Post-production - Editing - Chris Buckland, Guilt - Expectation and Happy Tramp for BBC Scotland/BBC Two

Post-production - Motion Design and Animation - Future Genesis: Oakley - Revenant for Oakley

Sound - Vigil - World Productions for BBC One

Student Award - Care - Edinburgh Napier University

Monster, Becoming Frida Kahlo and *Keeping It Up: The Story of Viagra* taking the honours.

Singer and presenter Shereen Cutkelvin and actor/comedian Sanjeev Kohli presented the awards at Glasgow's Old Fruitmarket in mid-June, while TV journalist Amy Irons interviewed the winners behind the scenes.

"This year's ceremony has been an absolute blast. I'm blown away by what Scotland's TV industry has achieved in 2023," said Cutkelvin.

RTS Scotland Chair Stephen O'Donnell added: "TV is an exciting industry to work in, which brings joy, information, drama and insight to viewers across the world, and the talent and hard work that goes into creating the brilliant content that we're celebrating is nothing short of exceptional." ■

BBC factual drama *The Sixth Commandment* won two awards at the RTS East Television Awards 2024, which were hosted by *BBC Look East* presenter Mousumi Bakshi at Gonville & Caius College, University of Cambridge, at the end of June.

The four-part series – written by Sarah Phelps and starring Timothy Spall, Anne Reid and Éanna Hardwicke – explored the shocking deaths of Peter Farquhar and Ann Moore-Martin. It won the Scripted prize and also Craft – Cinematographer for Rik Zang.

Brian Wood, Executive Director of True Vision East, which made *The Sixth Commandment* with Wild Mercury Productions, said: “Peter Farquhar, who was played so brilliantly by Timothy Spall, studied English at Cambridge, so I’m sure he would have been delighted that the awards took place in the stunning venue of Gonville & Caius College.

“Screenwriter Sarah Phelps, whose brilliant and sympathetic script told Peter and Ann’s story, wrote the whole series in her home just half an hour from Cambridge. So, as well as True Vision East being based here, the entire series has strong links to the region.”

Countryfile’s Matt Baker



Double award-winner:
The Sixth Commandment

BBC

BBC drama rewarded

RTS East Matthew Bell reports on the centre’s awards, held amid the splendour of Cambridge’s Gonville & Caius College

took home the On-screen Personality award for his work on *Matt Baker’s Travels in the Country: USA* and *Travels with Mum and Dad*.

In the news categories, BBC East Health Correspondent Nikki Fox was named News Journalist of the Year, the fourth time she has

received the accolade at the RTS East Television Awards.

ITV News Anglia picked up two awards: News Story of the Year for “Send SOS”, which revealed how hundreds of children with special educational needs (Send) were being denied a school place; and News Craft Talent

for its camera operator Sean Cockrell. *Seaside Special*, German film-maker Jens Meurer’s beautifully shot and affectionate film about the Norfolk town of Cromer as it prepares for its annual end-of-pier variety show, was awarded the Factual – Documentary award. ■



Nikki Fox:
News
Journalist
of the Year

Alex Fryer

RTS East Television Awards winners

Scripted - *The Sixth Commandment* - True Vision East and Wild Mercury Productions for BBC One

Factual – Documentary - *Seaside Special* - Instant Film UG

Factual – Specialist - *Discovering the Gloucester* - Eye Film

News Story of the Year - *Send SOS*, ITV News Anglia

News Journalist of the Year - Nikki Fox, BBC East

News Craft Talent - Sean Cockrell, ITV News Anglia

On-screen Personality - Matt Baker, *Matt Baker’s Travels in the Country: USA* and *Travels with Mum and Dad*

Promotional Film - *Town Close* - Eye Film

Short-form Digital - Owen Pick: *Moving Forward*, Louis James-Parker

Craft – Cinematographer - Rik Zang, *The Sixth Commandment* - True Vision East and Wild Mercury Productions for BBC One

Craft – Director - Sarah Leigh, *Typical?* - Inclusivity Films and Bedazzle Inclusive Productions

Craft – Editor - Adam Bokey, *Grime Kids* - Mammoth Screen for BBC Three

Craft – Games and VFX (I) - Mark Backler, Rhianna Pratchett, Beck Lavender, and Luke Peek, *Lost Words: Beyond the Page* - Sketchbook Games

Craft – Games and VFX (II) - VineFX, *The Lazarus Project Series 2* - VineFX and Urban Myth Films

Craft – Sound - Bennet Maples and Andy Wisler, *The Beasts of Halloween* - Sonic Fruit and Blue Pigeon Productions

“I personally look back at my years as a runner with really fond memories.... You’re an unsung hero for the team.”

Broadcaster Jasmine Dotiwala was remembering her own start in television, as she hosted and produced the RTS Futures event “Runner to researcher” in early June.

She continued: “The secret of being a great runner is to be consistently delightful.”

The event, aimed at TV’s most junior employees, offered tips on how to move on from the runner entry level to the next stage in production, working as a researcher. It can be difficult to achieve this promotion and many young people drop out before making it.

To progress in TV, said Anu Bains, casting producer at Eureka Productions, networking with colleagues and building relationships with talent managers are key.

She added: “Always show your best side; kindness goes a long way.... Running can feel monotonous and like a thankless job, but you must not show that... embrace it... you are learning so much.”

Leian Darell John-Baptiste, an executive assistant at BBC Factual Entertainment,



African Queens: Njinga

Netflix

How to get on in telly

pinpointed displaying a good attitude, energy and empathy.

He added: “You have to be able to speak to everyone. [If you can’t], you’re really going to struggle to succeed in this industry.”

Dotiwala said: “You need to be resilient and be able to deal with rejection.”

Researchers come in all shapes and sizes. “I write a lot of briefs,” says Paula Nimaro, a researcher in documentaries at Whisper TV.

“Being a researcher, you have to be curious. I also write character biographies for the director [and] help on shoots. In post-production, I have been working on transcribing... films.”

AI hasn’t yet made that task redundant – “There are tools but you need a human to go through it,” noted Nimaro, who worked as a researcher on Netflix docu-drama *African Queens: Njinga*.

She credits the Pact Indie

Diversity Scheme, which offers placements at production companies, with helping her make the leap from runner to researcher.

What should you avoid as a runner if you want to become a researcher? No bad attitudes, said John-Baptiste.

“Treat everyone equally,” added Nimaro. And “don’t be on your phone [constantly],” said Dotiwala. “It really gives the wrong impression.”

Matthew Bell

Freelancers and indies connect in Glasgow

The “Big Connection” returned to Glasgow at the end of May with an event focusing on TV’s unscripted genre. It brought together freelancers and executives from some of Scotland’s leading production companies.

The joint RTS Scotland/ScreenSkills event, held at BBC Scotland’s Pacific Quay

base, started with a panel discussion led by RTS Scotland Vice-Chair Gavin Smith and ended with a “speed networking” session.

“There have been well-publicised financial headwinds [facing the industry],” admitted BBC Scotland Commissioning Executive Steve Allen, “but it’s not all bad news”.

Highlighting the opportunities for Scottish production companies, he said: “We do have money that we’re spending, hoping to stimulate the industry in Scotland.”

The panel discussed the importance of freelancers possessing a diversity of television skills to allow movement between genres.

Steven Little, Head of Production at Screen Scotland, said that for one recent series he had looked at “unscripted talent... they come with skills, it’s just [about] applying them to scripted production”.

Jeannot Hutcheson, Talent Executive at Glasgow’s Raise

the Roof Productions, discussed the many challenges a production company faces, pointing to the need to find opportunities in the “new world” of digital content.

ScreenSkills Training Liaison Manager Kate Efomi highlighted the support her organisation can provide for established freelancers. She said: “A lot of people might think ScreenSkills is just for getting into the industry, but we really do want to underpin the message that we’re here for everyone – and we’re here for you throughout your career.”

Kamal Aziz



Freely's friends put focus on society

The Fab Four of UK public service broadcasting were out in force late last month to launch the free streaming service Freely.

Good to see Tim Davie, Alex Mahon, Carolyn McCall and Sarah Rose, respectively in charge of the BBC, Channel 4, ITV and Channel 5, come together to highlight the benefits of PSB.

The BBC DG opined that “if you want to keep a society together, it’s having free access to these services, where prominence is not about the person who can pay the biggest cheque.”

Channel 4’s chief said that UK PSB VoD players’ growth

rates this year were “off the charts and that’s really important. It is a sign of audience demand for particularly British content.”

Freely will, for the first time, deliver live TV over broadband and is run by Freeview operator Everyone TV.

King appoints new media commanders

Heartening to see so many TV luminaries in the King’s Birthday Honours List, including two RTS Vice-Presidents, Dawn Airey and Armando Iannucci.

Dawn, Deputy Chair of Channel 4, was honoured for her theatre and charity work, while the great satirist who helped create Alan Partridge, was recognised for his services to film and TV. Each was made a CBE. Ex-BBC Head of Sport Barbara Slater also became a CBE.

The media analyst’s analyst, Claire Enders, was made

a CBE for her work in media, as was Rob Woodward, Chair of the Met Office. His previous roles include CEO of STV and Commercial Director at Channel 4. Emyr Afan, co-founder and CEO of Afanti Media, was recognised for his work in media and music in Wales with an OBE.

Mums get a shout out from the Guvna

Those attending last month’s RTS Student Television Awards were treated to a masterclass in wit and warmth from their host, rapper Guvna B.

The triple Mobo award winner struck up an immediate rapport with the audience and with RTS Honorary Secretary Simon Bucks, who was deputising for the Chair of the awards, Channel 4’s Sinead Rocks, unexpectedly detained at work.

“I’m just glad Guvna A was unavailable,” quipped Simon.

And nice to hear Guvna B singling out all the mums in the audience for supporting the work of their daughters and sons.

England supporters cheer up TV bosses

As we go to press, England’s performance in the Euros has been underwhelming. For TV networks, though, it has been a markedly upbeat story.

England’s opening game against Serbia had a peak audience of 14.92 million on BBC One, a whopping viewership by any standards.

ITVI’s coverage of England vs Slovenia, which ended in a dreary nil-nil draw, averaged 8.8 million, almost four times the slot average.

Scotland’s games also proved popular with viewers – STV netted its biggest audience of the year for the opening game against Germany, 1.79 million. ■



The Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture

With Joan Bakewell

3 October 2024



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Who's who at the RTS	<p>Patron His Majesty King Charles III</p> <p>Vice-Presidents David Abraham Dawn Airey Sir David Attenborough OM CH CVO CBE FRS Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE Mike Darcey Gary Davey Greg Dyke Lord Hall of Birkenhead Lorraine Heggessey Armando Iannucci OBE Ian Jones Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE David Lynn Ken MacQuarrie Sir Trevor McDonald OBE Gavin Patterson Sir Trevor Phillips OBE Stewart Purvis CBE Brandon Riegg Sir Howard Stringer</p>	<p>Chair of RTS Trustees Jane Turton</p> <p>Honorary Secretary Simon Bucks</p> <p>Honorary Treasurer Mike Green</p> <p>BOARD OF TRUSTEES Lynn Barlow Julian Bellamy Simon Bucks Mike Green Yasmina Hadded Tim Hincks Kate Phillips Simon Pitts Sinéad Rocks Sarah Rose Jane Turton</p> <p>EXECUTIVE Chief Executive Theresa Wise</p>	<p>CENTRES COUNCIL Lynn Barlow Phil Barnes Agnes Cogan Michael Donnelly Kully Khaila Sarah McCaffrey Joanna Makepeace-Woods Jennie Marwick-Evans Stephen O'Donnell Stuart Ray Cameron Roach Siobhan Robbie-James Edward Russell Rachel Watson</p> <p>SPECIALIST GROUP CHAIRS National Events Clare Laycock</p> <p>Education Graeme Thompson</p> <p>RTS Futures Alex Wootten</p>	<p>RTS Digital Innovation Bursary Simon Pitts</p> <p>AWARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS Awards Policy Simon Bucks</p> <p>Craft & Design Awards Ade Rawcliffe</p> <p>Programme Awards Kenton Allen</p> <p>Student Television Awards Sinéad Rocks</p> <p>Television Journalism Awards Adrian Wells</p> <p>Young Technologist Award Terry Marsh</p>
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▶ The Next Episode

Keeping our creative edge.

RTS LONDON CONVENTION

Chaired by:

Anna Mallett

Vice President, Production,
EMEA/UK, Netflix

Speakers include:

Ted Sarandos

Co-CEO, Netflix

Tim Davie

Director-General, BBC

Carolyn McCall

CEO, ITV

Alex Mahon

CEO, Channel 4



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