

Television

June 2018



Lennie James
Keeping it real



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RTS Student Television Awards 2018

22 June

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BFI Southbank, London

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#RTSawards



From the CEO



I am so pleased to have the incomparable Lennie James, interviewed by Andrew Billen, as our cover story. Anyone who has seen Lennie

in *Save Me*, which he also wrote, *The Walking Dead* or *Line of Duty* will know what an amazing and very special talent he is.

Talking of *Line of Duty*, I was thrilled to attend the RTS's recent "Anatomy of a hit" event, which gave the inside track on a truly great show.

My thanks to panellists Jed Mercurio, Adrian Dunbar, Simon Heath and Priscilla Parish, and to the evening's chair, Anne Robinson. We have a great report of the event in this issue.

It's been a prolific period for the

"Anatomy of a hit" strand. As we all top up our fake tans and reserve a place on the sofa for the widely anticipated new series of *Love Island*, our second report of an "Anatomy of a hit" is, yes, devoted to *Love Island*.

I am indebted to Caroline Flack, Angela Jain and their fellow panellists for making this such a brilliant event.

They say that all good things come in threes. For our third "Anatomy of a hit" report, we shift gear from one of the very best comedies of recent times, *This Country*. RTS Bristol put on an exceptional evening.

The audience at the city's Watershed were treated to a hilarious encounter with Charlie Cooper, one half of the two siblings who created and star in this triple RTS-award-winning show.

Staying outside London, don't miss our coverage of RTS Northern Ireland's amazing evening with Deborah Riley, production designer of the global phenomenon that is *Game of Thrones*.

I was touched that Tessa Jowell's former special advisor, Bill Bush, was able to write a piece for *Television* highlighting Tessa's huge achievements.

In common with so many people in our industry, I was very sad to hear of her recent death. Tessa's legacy in several different policy areas, not least broadcasting and content production, will be cherished for years to come.

Theresa Wise

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National events

RTS AWARDS

Friday 22 June

RTS Student Television Awards 2018

Venue: BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT

RTS CONFERENCE

Tuesday 18 September

RTS London Conference 2018

Sponsored by Viacom. Co-chaired by David Lynn, President Viacom International Media Networks (VIMN) and James Currell, President, VIMN, UK, Northern and Eastern Europe.

Confirmed speakers include: Bob Bakish, CEO of Viacom Inc; Tony Hall, Director-General of the BBC; Carolyn McCall, CEO of ITV; Alex Mahon, CEO of Channel 4; and Sharon White, CEO of Ofcom

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

STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2018

Thursday 11 October

Charlotte Moore, Director of Content, BBC.

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

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

RTS MASTERCLASSES

Tuesday 13 November

RTS Student Programme Masterclasses

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

Wednesday 14 November

RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses

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

RTS AWARDS

Monday 26 November

RTS Craft & Design Awards 2018

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

Local events

BRISTOL

- Belinda Biggam
- belindabiggam@hotmail.com

DEVON AND CORNWALL

- Jane Hudson
- RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

EAST

Thursday 20 September

TV quiz night

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

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

- Nikki O'Donnell
- nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk

LONDON

- Daniel Cherowbrier
- daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Wednesday 20 June

Summer networking event

Please book your place in advance at RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk. 7:00pm-9:00pm

Venue: The Colmore Club, 85-89 Colmore Row, Birmingham B3 2BB

Tuesday 20 November

RTS Midlands Awards 2018

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

- Jayne Greene 07792 776585
- RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

- Jill Graham
- jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

Saturday 10 November

RTS North West Awards 2018

Entries open on 25 June, and close on 20 July

Venue: Hilton Deansgate, 303 Deansgate, Manchester M3 4LQ

- Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639
- RPinkney@rts.org.uk

STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2018



11 October

Charlotte Moore

Director of Content, BBC

University of Westminster 6:30pm
A joint RTS and Media Society event
Tickets: www.rts.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Thursday 15 November

RTS NI Programme Awards

Venue: TBC

- John Mitchell
- mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

- Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092
- byrnecc@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

- Jane Muirhead
- scotlandchair@rts.org.uk

SOUTHERN

- Stephanie Farmer
- SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

THAMES VALLEY

Friday 23 November

2018 Winter Ball

7:00pm till late

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

- Tony Orme
- RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

WALES

- Hywel William 07980 007841
- hywel@aim.co.uk

YORKSHIRE

Friday 6 July

Annual Awards

Venue: TBC

- Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280
- lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk

TV diary

Huw Jones contemplates a big birthday as he considers the impact of the recent review of S4C



It's 7:00pm and RTS Wales is hosting an open session to discuss the recently published review of S4C. It's my job to present S4C's response and, alongside our CEO, Owen Evans, and the author of the review, Euryyn Ogwen Williams, to take part in Q&As.

We're coming to the end of what has been a long road in terms of reviewing S4C's remit and funding needs since our fixed funding formula was ended in 2012.

■ The review has recommended a change to our statutory remit to make it clear that we should be a digital media service and not just a 1982-style television service.

We have already taken important steps in this direction on digital, with *Cyw Tiwb* for preschool children and *Hansh* for the 16-34s, and will now press ahead with creating a more personalised relationship with our viewers. I will be announcing the allocation of £3m over three years to get this strategy under way.

■ The review emphasises the need to provide a stable funding environment for S4C, and uses the BBC's five-year funding agreement as a template. Following a 34% (real-terms) cut from 2011, the prospect of further cuts in the DCMS element of our funding has been the cause of political tension.

The review's solution is that, from 2022, the whole of S4C's funding should come from the licence fee.

The Government has made a firm commitment to S4C's independence, but this plan is likely to form an important part of discussions regarding the overall level of licence-fee funding from 2022 onwards.

■ The review recommends creating a unitary board for S4C on the BBC model, with a majority of non-execs. Too often, in the past, there has been a perception that S4C and the S4C Authority are separate bodies. We will be happy to evolve the present structure to form a shadow board while awaiting legislation.

■ One key aspect of the review amounts to a redefinition of S4C's relationship with the Welsh language. A successful channel is a central component in securing the future of the language, but the way in which this is done has always been left undefined.

With language policy being the preserve of the Welsh government, and broadcasting policy remaining a Westminster responsibility, the suggestion is that S4C should formalise a partnership with the Welsh government and other agencies.

Building on existing efforts, the obvious fields will be education, language learning, children, young people and skills.

■ Tomorrow, we will start discussing our annual report. Reach on television, both in Wales and across the UK for 2017-18 looks to be up, with digital audiences continuing to grow. We've had a great run of gripping drama series, including *Y Gwyll/Hinterland*, *Un Bore Mercher/Keeping Faith* and *Craith/Hidden* (all co-productions with BBC Wales).

These have truly opened the door for UK and international viewers to Welsh drama, and we've just heard that *Byw Celwydd* – a *Borgen*-style take on politics in the National Assembly, entirely in Welsh – has been sold to the US and Canada.

■ Sport was good for us last year, but competition for broadcasting rights is fierce. Our joint bid with the BBC for rugby's Pro14 competition lost out to a new subscription service.

Our small but experienced negotiating team reports a chance that some Welsh-language rights may still be available to us. We will follow developments with a keen interest. Sport is a key element in enabling us to keep in touch with young Welsh-speakers and less-fluent viewers.

■ Finally, Friday brings a pre-recorded interview with Dewi Llwyd on BBC Radio Cymru for his weekly "Happy Birthday" slot. Mine comes up in a week's time, with a big zero in it.

Huw Jones is Chair of the S4C Authority.

The Billen profile

Lennie James's *Save Me* is one of the year's most fêted dramas. He tells **Andrew Billen** why, as a black man, it's become easier to write successfully for TV

There is a scientific way to calculate how much a television audience appreciates a show. An “appreciation index” involves panels, scores out of 10, and demographic weighting. Now, however, there is another way: just take note how quickly an audience comes back for more.

When Sky released Lennie James's drama *Save Me* (the possessive apostrophe is because he created, wrote and starred in it) as a box set on the last day of February, it took a week for 700,000 viewers to watch all six episodes.

Within a fortnight, more than a million had done so, each hoping to the very end that James's wayward, yet authoritative, protagonist, Nelly, would track down the kidnapped daughter he barely knew. It was Sky's most greedily binged box set ever – and, I hazard, will have cost it rather less than *Riviera*, say, or *Fortitude*, neither of which received *Save Me*'s critical appreciation.

On the phone from Austin, Texas, where he is filming *Fear the Walking Dead*, for which millions more know him, James is chuffed. But he says that ratings are not the way he wanted to judge his show's success. It was about whether *Save Me* was what he intended it to be – whether, in the actors' phrase, they had left it in the room. “And I thought we left it all in the room.”

There was something special about *Save Me* beyond its bingeability. It was hinted at when James publicly responded to viewers' disappointment that Nelly's daughter was not rescued in the final episode. That, he said, would have been “the television ending”. Now, in his deep, slow, kind-yet-emphatic voice, he talks about television's new golden age, how the plethora of quality implies its own rules and shorthand, and knowingly self-references them.

“What was important for me,” he says, “was that it was a thriller set in a real place. It wasn't a thriller set in a TV version of a real place. The allowance that I was making to TV was that it was a thriller, but part of the way I wanted to tell the story was to set it in a place of reality. It wasn't like my other day job, which is on *The Walking Dead* and its spin-offs. It wasn't trying to tell a story of real human emotion in a fantastical world, or a world dealing with a fantastical event.”

For anyone who knows London, *Save Me* provided two jolts of recognition. One was the sight of its drizzly council



Universal
stories
from
unique
situations

Lennie James as Nelly in *Save Me*

estates and sticky-carpeted, south-of-the-river pubs. The other realisation was that we barely see this London on our screens.

Might the same be said of Nelly, the commanding black guy in the white pub? “*Save Me* is, on one level, the closest I’ve got to something that has everything and nothing to do with race. And if I was going to do that, then Nelly needed to be black.”

Everything and nothing? “One of the things that I believe makes the piece authentic to London is that you don’t just know guys like Nelly, you know black guys like Nelly.

“The particular black guy that Nelly is, is, for me, specific to that community: a first-generation black man who has grown up in London in a specific way. He is not part of a black community. He is part of a mixed, multiracial community in London, where he is very much in the minority but where, as far as that is concerned, he punches slightly above his weight.”

James is surely right. You see black actors playing doctors and lawyers in TV drama, and you certainly see them playing drug-dealers and pimps, but have you ever seen a Nelly before?

“I was trying to be as specific to time and place as I possibly could in order to tell a universal story,” he says.

In these interviews, I am now hearing the specific-universal paradox frequently enough to make me think that it is becoming received wisdom, but we should remember how unreceived it once was.

Consider the previous drama James wrote for television, *Storm Damage*, a one-off about the battle for a black lad’s soul. BBC Two aired it in 2000 and it won the RTS award for Single Drama. Yet, it took six years to reach the screen, and only after James resisted attempts to bury it in a mid-night slot or amputate it to 30 minutes for a schools broadcast.

He thinks it would be easier to get on today – Sky commissioned *Save Me* enthusiastically. That is partly because James is now box-office, and partly because there have been precedents in the meantime for black-youth crime stories, including BBC Films’ *Bullet Boy* and Channel 4’s *Top Boy* (both of which, like *Storm Damage*, featured Ashley Walters), but back then...

“*Storm Damage* was, again, a very specific story told about very specific people in a very specific world, but it was a universal story, too, and

convincing people that this was possible was, at that time, very hard.”

Because of the colour of the leads? “Absolutely, that was part of it. To say it wasn’t part of it would be a lie. Because, at that time, it was harder for people to get their heads around that.”

The drama ended with Ashley Walters’ character stabbed to death. Play-

‘SAVE ME’ IS... THE CLOSEST I’VE GOT TO SOMETHING THAT HAS EVERYTHING AND NOTHING TO DO WITH RACE

wright Roy Williams’ *Fallout* on Channel 4 eight years later began with a stabbing of a young black man. At the time, James, who played a detective in it, wrote an open letter to young knife users. It concluded: “Be a better man.”

Ten years on, after a cruel winter and spring of knifings, things seem only to have worsened. James is the father of three girls with his wife, the sometime actor and publicist Giselle Glasman, whom he met in youth theatre. All have gone to good universities in the US, where the family live when not in London.

“At a time when our girls are being brought up to inhabit and take ownership of the world in a way that generations before them weren’t afforded the space and opportunities, we seem to be making that passage from boyhood to manhood harder and harder for our male children,” worries James. “It’s almost like we’re culling them or allowing them to be culled.”

Some, I say, might argue that the culture of violence is not helped by shows such as *The Walking Dead* and *Fear the Walking Dead*, in which, off and on since 2010, James has starred as Morgan Jones.

He agrees that *The Walking Dead* is a violent show: “It does show violence, but I don’t believe it’s an example of irresponsibility. My character is front and centre of the argument for not killing.”

Morgan carries a staff, I say, sharpened at one end, blunt at the other.

“It’s a perfect symbol,” he agrees.

“I’m not saying Morgan is up there with Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, but he is living and existing within a violent world and he is trying to take a stand against it.”

And the staff carries connotations of Christ the shepherd? “And Moses, but I don’t want to go too far down that route or it will fall apart. After all, it is zombies.”

James was born in Nottingham 52 years ago but he, his Trinidadian mother, Phyllis, and elder brother, Kester, moved to London. After a long illness, Phyllis died when her younger son was just 10, and the boys were placed in a large, council-run home, filled with “vagabonds” in Tooting Bec. It was an experience, he has said, that was not as Dickensian as it sounds. His father, he never knew, nor was his absence explained.

And here, I say, is Nelly, an absentee father, who comes back into his daughter’s life too late. James swears it is not an “itch he needs to scratch”. “It’s a very weird thing when that kind of comes up. As a dad, I’m sure my kids couldn’t imagine the absence of me, but that’s partly because they knew me and they’ve known the role I’ve played in their lives.

“I have no memory of my father and, genuinely, have never really felt the absence of him. I might be deluding myself. I might, you know, sit down in the psychiatrist’s chair and they’ll make everything about the absence of my dad. But I have not consciously or, I think, subconsciously – although how would I know? – spent a huge amount of time in any way, shape or form, missing him.”

James wrote his first play, aged 17, within a year of a successful audition at the Cockpit Theatre in Marylebone (he has said that he was pursuing a girl there). *Trial and Error*, about the kangaroo courts convened by children in care, won a National Youth Theatre playwriting competition.

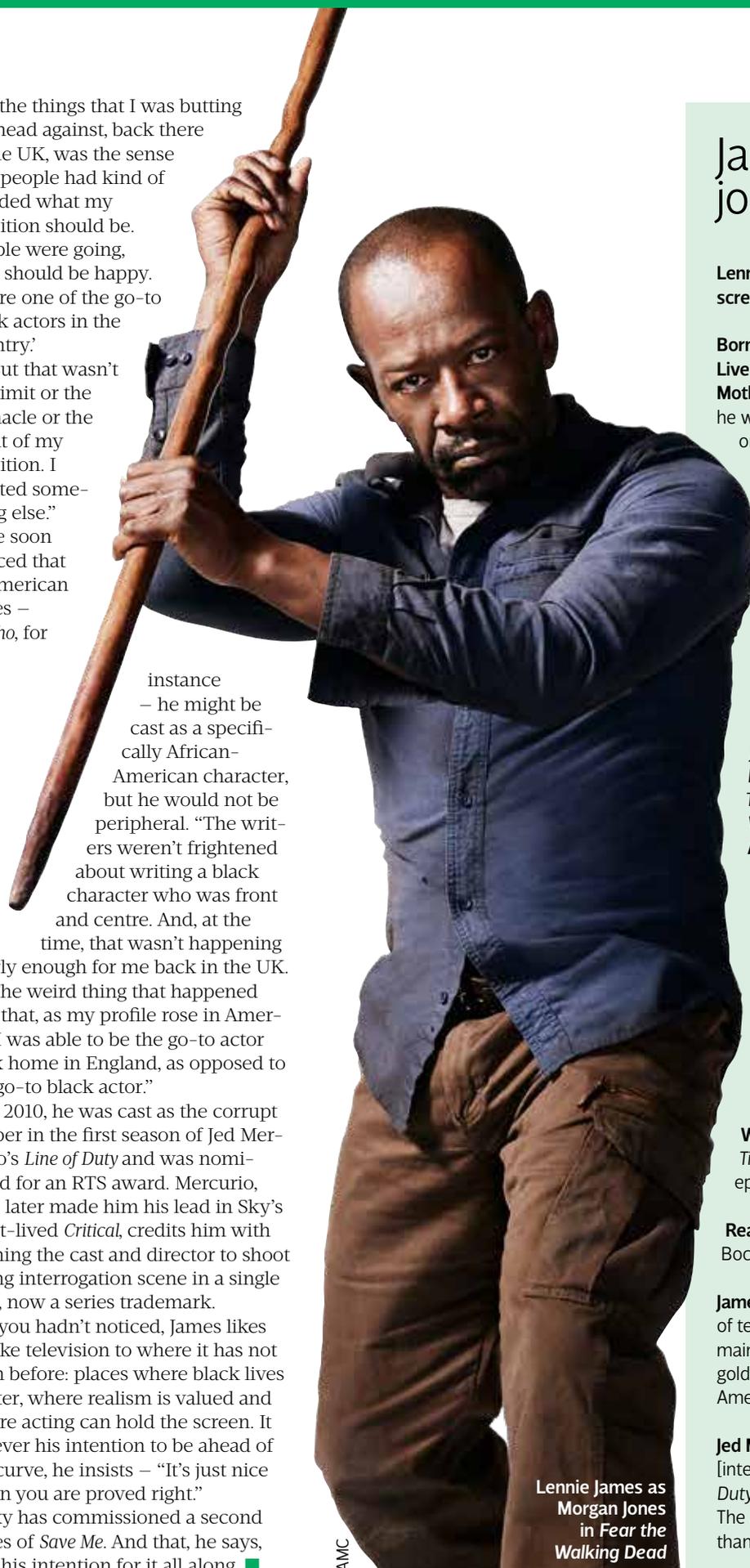
He subsequently wrote for television, but it was his acting career that took off. He appeared in everything from *Spooks* to *Cold Feet*, and in *24 Hour Party People* as the co-founder of Tony Wilson’s Factory Records. However, it was not until the 2003 Channel 4 prison drama *Buried*, that he was cast in a lead role, and, while it was admired, the show was cancelled after one series. In 2005, he left for America.

“I went because I needed a new challenge, I needed to broaden my ambitions,” says James. “I felt that one >

› of the things that I was butting my head against, back there in the UK, was the sense that people had kind of decided what my ambition should be. People were going, 'You should be happy. You're one of the go-to black actors in the country.'

"But that wasn't the limit or the pinnacle or the point of my ambition. I wanted something else."

He soon noticed that in American series – *Jericho*, for



instance – he might be cast as a specifically African-American character, but he would not be peripheral. "The writers weren't frightened about writing a black character who was front and centre. And, at the time, that wasn't happening nearly enough for me back in the UK.

"The weird thing that happened was that, as my profile rose in America, I was able to be the go-to actor back home in England, as opposed to the go-to black actor."

In 2010, he was cast as the corrupt copper in the first season of Jed Mercurio's *Line of Duty* and was nominated for an RTS award. Mercurio, who later made him his lead in Sky's short-lived *Critical*, credits him with pushing the cast and director to shoot a long interrogation scene in a single take, now a series trademark.

If you hadn't noticed, James likes to take television to where it has not been before: places where black lives matter, where realism is valued and where acting can hold the screen. It is never his intention to be ahead of the curve, he insists – "It's just nice when you are proved right."

Sky has commissioned a second series of *Save Me*. And that, he says, was his intention for it all along. ■

AMC

Lennie James as Morgan Jones in *Fear the Walking Dead*

James's journey

Lennie James, actor, playwright, screenwriter

Born 11 October 1965

Lives London and Los Angeles

Mother Phyllis James, died when he was 10; brought up in London; one brother

Family Married to Giselle Glasman, actor and then theatre PR; three daughters

Education Guildhall School of Music and Drama

As a film actor *Snatch*, *24 Hour Party People*, *Blade Runner 2049*

As a TV actor *Undercover Heart*, *Cold Feet*, *Buried*, *Jericho*, *Spooks*, *The Prisoner*, *Hung*, *Line of Duty*, *Critical*, *The Walking Dead*, *Fear the Walking Dead*, *Save Me*

As a writer *Storm Damage*, *Save Me*

Awards BFM Film and Television Awards Best Male Performance in a Film 2002, for *Lucky Break*; Online Film and Television Association Awards Best Guest Actor in a Drama 2013, for *The Walking Dead*

Watching *Peaky Blinders*; *Real Time with Bill Maher*; 'the odd episode' of *Law & Order*

Reading Walter Mosley, Steven Bochco (of *Hill Street Blues*)

James on TV 'If this is a golden age of television it is happening, in the main, in the same place that the golden age of cinema happened: America and in Hollywood.'

Jed Mercurio on James 'All the [interrogation scenes in *Line of Duty*] were shot in single takes. The actors have Lennie James to thank for leading the way.'

Line of Duty characters Steve Arnott, Ted Hastings and Kate Fleming



Top of the cops

BBC

BBC One police corruption drama *Line of Duty* has become renowned for its thrilling plot twists and guest leads. So, it was no surprise to see so many attend an RTS “Anatomy of a hit” event to hear what writer Jed Mercurio might reveal about what’s in store for the next series.

Season 5 will feature “things we haven’t done before” and “characters we haven’t seen before”, said Mercurio. He added: “That’s part of the construction of the series, the architecture that allows us to rejuvenate the format.

“Possibly, we kind of arrived at that accidentally. But it does appear now that we have this situation where the audience becomes intrigued about what we’ve got to offer based on who the guest lead is going to be, what character they are and what the fundamental premise is.”

The writer was joined by Adrian Dunbar, who plays Superintendent Ted Hastings (“at home, we call him ‘Mother of God’ now”, joked host Anne Robinson, referring to one of

Content

Tara Conlan joins an RTS audience to learn how Jed Mercurio’s *Line of Duty* set a new benchmark for the police procedural

Hastings’ catchphrases). Also present were World Productions CEO and *Line of Duty* executive producer Simon Heath and script executive Priscilla Parish.

Line of Duty regularly attracts more than 7 million viewers and has won numerous accolades, including the 2015 RTS award for Drama Series.

Robinson said that, as well as the compelling characters and “spine-chilling” drama, “what I love is the humour”. There were laughs throughout the evening, particularly when the panellists were asked

whether the series could spawn a film. “Yes! Ted’s Excellent Adventure,” exclaimed Dunbar, to which Mercurio shook his head: “No, we’re a TV programme.”

Line of Duty, which began in 2012 on BBC Two, has been commissioned for two more series. Heath paid tribute to former BBC drama boss Ben Stephenson for bankrolling the show. Remember, this was before Netflix made scripted so fashionable.

The premise grew out of discussions between Mercurio and World Productions about him creating a police drama, during which the focus shifted to police corruption. He said that the show – now noted for its complex lead characters – didn’t “arrive fully formed. The ideas of having a guest lead and having the lead investigators return were all part of a process.

“If you look at the TV landscape, it is sometimes quite difficult to sell an idea based [simply] on the fact that it is important in the real world,” said the writer to laughs. “So many police series are the drama of reassurance – where honest, tenacious cops catch >

‘SO MANY POLICE SERIES ARE THE DRAMA OF REASSURANCE – WHERE HONEST, TENACIOUS COPS CATCH BAD GUYS AND THE BAD GUYS GO TO PRISON’



From left: Simon Heath, Priscilla Parish, Adrian Dunbar, Jed Mercurio and Anne Robinson

▶ bad guys and the bad guys go to prison.”

One of *Line of Duty*'s USPs has been “the idea that we do not have out-and-out heroes and out-and-out villains,” he said, emphasising that this had been the approach from the beginning. The first lead was Tony Gates, played by Lennie James, whom he described as inhabiting a “moral grey area”. “The same applied to the investigators: that felt like it led us into a more sophisticated and mature explanation of why public servants fail to act with integrity.”

Robinson applauded the programme's ability to make audiences feel sorry for the villain through moral relativism. Mercurio replied that this was “intentional” but, “in a way, a departure from the real world”, because most corrupt people “are just greedy bastards”.

Initially, the show was turned down by BBC One. Mercurio declined to reveal the controller who rejected it

but “if anyone's got an iPhone in their pocket, it might explain”. Stephenson, however, wanted it for BBC Two because he liked the idea of interrogating an institution.

“It wasn't a great time for drama,” recalled Heath. “It was around 2008–2009.... We're here talking about the golden age of drama, and all these dramas being made by Netflix and Amazon and Sky. But then, BBC drama was seen, at best, as a loss leader by the broadcaster.”

Mercurio said: “We always felt we wanted it to be a thriller... so you had to watch the six episodes and see how it would resolve. As the script was developed, we were fortunate that a new batch of money came online for BBC Two.”

Line of Duty found its natural home on BBC Two, he thought, as it “was allowed to grow and be itself on the channel and then we were ready to move to BBC One. The first episode got

about 3.5 million viewers, the best drama series on BBC Two for years.”

While the first series was shot in Birmingham, the show is now filmed in Northern Ireland.

Northern Irishman Dunbar auditioned for the role of Hastings. He thought about the character's background from his own perspective of being a Catholic living in a Protestant area: “To me, to be the head of a unit such as AC-12, it would probably have been useful to be someone who was on the outside of things.”

Which makes the whole freemason plot line in *Line of Duty* so puzzling, said Robinson, as she inquired of his character: “Are you a mason?”

“I'm not at liberty to answer that,” said Dunbar enigmatically.

Dunbar also chose not to wear his glasses for the role, “which means I have to learn the script!”

Some fans play *Line of Duty* bingo, watching the drama and crossing off

Hastings' trademark colloquialisms, such as "fella" or "for the love of God", whenever Dunbar utters them.

Robinson wanted to know: "All those expressions of yours, like 'Mother of God', were they in the original script or have you enhanced it?"

"Jed has a great ear for street language and listening to what people are saying. These things creep in," explained the actor. "I add a little bit here and there. We tease it out between us."

Robinson asked Dunbar if he was ever worried that he would fall victim to the show's propensity for surprising viewers by killing off characters played by famous actors, such as Daniel Mays and Jason Watkins – or if Hastings would be the next "bent copper".

"Definitely, yes, that is a worry! But I don't think Jed is going to get rid of Ted just yet," insisted Dunbar.

Switching tack, Robinson wanted to know how women had been treated in *Line of Duty*. "About the same as men," Parish responded. "Lindsay [Denton] had a tough time. She was a terrific character. I loved Lindsay, because she was so intelligent."

Mercurio added: "As a writer, I'm not thinking whether that is what a woman would do, or what a man would do, I'm thinking about what anyone would do."

But is Hastings sexist, probed Robinson. Mercurio explained: "There are a lot of cop shows that still do the thing of having an overt sexist, in a way that's just so stupid – you're just going to be up in front of HR and then out of a job.

"Whereas, if you *are* a sexist, the way to do it is very subtly. [Hastings' actions] have left room for interpretation. Again, it goes back to that idea of grey areas: is he a sexist or is he someone who has a certain way of expressing himself – [but which] means a certain discrimination against women?"

"He's from a different age," put in Dunbar.

One member of the audience commented on Mercurio's reputation for overseeing a collaborative approach on set. Had there been times where the four of them had disagreed heatedly, wondered Robinson? "No, Jed's always right," quipped Dunbar.

"It's not how the process works. We discuss things and, if someone feels that something is not right, then we keep talking it through," said Mercurio. He likes to spend as much time as possible on set, so people can clarify what the writer's intention was.

For series 1, Mercurio did quite a lot

of research. Since then, he said, he has had access to advisors who are frank, dedicated police officers who hate corruption and "bent coppers" but do "not deny they exist".

When asked what surprises him about the institution, Mercurio answered: "The slackness... we had a sequence in series 4 where a police officer tampered with evidence. I'd assumed that the evidence room had security cameras in it, so that coppers couldn't fiddle with evidence.... No... they said: 'We're workers entitled to our privacy.'"

"I remember the reaction on Twitter," said Heath. "People said they'd have cameras."

"We had Adrian's character explain it, saying he had written a very strongly worded letter to the Police Federation... that was the voice of the author!" revealed Mercurio.

He added that his opinion of the police had not changed, because, "fundamentally, the evidence... is that the vast majority of police officers are dedicated public servants."

When asked whether season 5 or 6 would feature as fascinating a female lead as Denton or Roz Huntley, Mercurio would only say "maybe". But he did confirm that the new episodes would further explore the personal lives of AC-12's main characters – Hastings, Steve Arnott and Kate Fleming.

Fans hope that season 6 will not be the last. Mercurio said a lot depended on "how season 5 performs".

He explained: "If it does very well and the current regime remains as supportive as it is, there will be opportunities to discuss season 7. I think that if, for whatever reason, those situations don't apply, then, almost certainly, season 6 will be the last.... But we're really happy that it's ongoing. I don't think any of us at this point is looking to wrap it up."

Heath said: "We've never been pressured to be on air every year, so we get a break.... We can do other things and then come back to it... it feels quite fresh every time you sit down to another series."

Audiences will have to be patient and bide their time. The next instalment is not due to air until 2019. ■

The RTS event 'Anatomy of a hit: Line of Duty' was held on 15 May at Millbank Media Centre in central London. It was produced by Barney Hooper and Sally Doganis.

IF SOMEONE FEELS THAT SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT, THEN WE KEEP TALKING IT THROUGH

Interrogators pile on the heat

Executive producer Simon Heath highlighted three elements that contribute to the success of the show: the 'fresh and visceral' score, composed by Carly Paradis; the fact that it airs weekly, which allows it to be built on social media; and the amount of film that is shot during the programme's lauded long interview scenes.

'The devil is in the detail,' he added. When the show has 'Adrian [Dunbar], Martin [Compston] and Vicky [McClure], and the antagonist on the other side of the table, we've got three cameras going all the time, often turning over half-hour takes and everybody's word perfect. You need all those shots to build the sequence in the edit.'

Such takes often require a day to shoot. 'For us, it's difficult – you've got to keep up the same level of performance,' explained Dunbar. 'But for the crew, it's really difficult. We're in a glass box and the lights are on it.'

'We have done 25-minute takes – 30 pages of the script. You're not going to get that flow [with short takes], so to do it in one take is much better.'

The first lengthy scene in the first series was 12 minutes long. Doing it 'was a big decision', Heath recalled. 'It was Lennie James who said we should do it in one go.'



A look to die for

She'd worked on an Oscar-winning movie, attended the same stage school as Cate Blanchett and Mel Gibson, and, aged 26, was responsible for art directing the Sydney Olympics closing ceremony. But not even the precociously talented Deborah Riley was prepared for her first day on set in blustery Northern Ireland as the new production designer of *Game of Thrones*.

"I was absolutely petrified," she recalled at a sold-out RTS event in Belfast, entitled "Creating the visual world of *Game of Thrones*". The illustrated talk by this erstwhile Australian architecture student highlighted some of the visual wonders of Westeros she had helped fashion for TV's first global scripted blockbuster.

That initial experience of *Game of Thrones*'s Northern Irish locations

Design

Game of Thrones production designer **Deborah Riley** tells the RTS where she found inspiration for the blockbuster's style. **Steve Clarke** reports

— "some of the most beautiful I've ever seen" — took place five years ago. It included her first look at Castle Black (HQ of the Night's Watch) "built on the windiest quarry imaginable. All the timbers are real, the forge is a working forge. I thought: 'These people are

mad.'" Cue laughter from the enthusiastic RTS crowd.

Four seasons of *Game of Thrones* later, Riley's award-winning designs (see box on page 13) are integral to the phenomenal success of the show, which bows out in 2019 at the end of season 8.

"The universe of *Game of Thrones* includes many different kingdoms. It's the job of the art department to make sure that those kingdoms are separate and different from one another," Riley explained. "When that works, the audience accepts these different worlds as being real. In my head, Westeros is about as real as anywhere else."

Stressing the importance of loyalty, the production designer said: "We'd never have been able to get through the volume of work without all of us returning, year after year."

She explained that *Game of Thrones* (despite its reported budget of \$10m an



Game of Thrones season 6

SKY

Working with the top brass

Deborah Riley: ‘On *Game of Thrones*... there are a lot of cooks in the kitchen. That’s something that I wasn’t fully prepared for when I arrived.

‘On most features, you’ll have a DoP and a director, and you might have a producer who lays in from time to time. But on *Game of Thrones* – this sounds terrible – the director is a gun for hire. It is the producers who hold the power and make the creative decisions.

‘There’s a very clear balance between the producers, who have the overarching vision for the show and, at the same time, assign the director for every episode, because they know exactly what imagery they are creating, moment to moment. There’s a surprising amount of politics involved in that.

‘[What I] do is bring them reference. We always see what they respond to and what they’re interested in.

‘The wonderful thing about *Game of Thrones* is that we’re working with very bright people. They know all the cultural references. They can quote all the movies or the architecture or whatever. We have a language that gets us into the piece immediately.’

Deborah Riley’s trophy cabinet

For *Game of Thrones*:

■ Emmy for Outstanding Production Design for a Narrative Contemporary or Fantasy Program (One Hour or More), 2014, 2015 and 2016

■ Bafta Craft Award – Best Production Design, 2018

■ Art Directors Guild Excellence in Production Design Awards in Television – One-Hour Period or Fantasy Single-Camera Television Series, 2015, 2016 and 2018

For *Moulin Rouge*:

■ Art Directors Guild Excellence in Production Design Awards – Period or Fantasy Film, 2002

episode) involves a fast shooting schedule, unthinkable in the movie sector, where her credits include *The Matrix* and *Moulin Rouge*.

‘During the interview process [for the job] I had to admit to David Benioff [*Game of Thrones* executive producer and co-creator] that I’d never worked in television before. He replied, ‘But this isn’t television.’’

Nevertheless, when three different production units can, in theory, be filming simultaneously in three separate counties, the ability to work at speed is essential. Croatia, Iceland and Spain are all used as locations to complement the Irish scenery of the Causeway Coast, Cushendun Caves, Murlough Bay, Ballycastle, Castle Ward, the ruins of Inch Abbey and the surfing beach of Downhill Strand.

‘We move very, very quickly, which can be frustrating. But the great

advantage of that is we can’t muck around. Decisions have to be made, we commit to an idea and get on with it,’ she said.

Having initially studied architecture at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, she abandoned the idea of a career as an architect. (‘As my grandmother said, ‘You’re drawing too many straight lines.’’) Instead, she enrolled on a stage design course at Sydney’s famed National Institute of Dramatic Arts – ‘It accepts eight people a year and I was one of them.’

However, as was clear from her talk, Riley’s passion for buildings and her ability to remember their details has inspired several set designs in *Game of Thrones*. For the Iron Bank of Braavos, Nazi architect Albert Speer’s designs for Hitler were the starting point: ‘They are all about power, intimidation and wealth.’ >

How to get a job in Westeros

Deborah Riley: 'My agent said she had a project that I should interview for, so I interviewed for *Game of Thrones*. I had never seen [the show]. I was working on a terrible, tiny film in Louisiana.

'That weekend, I watched 13 hours of *Game of Thrones*. The people in Louisiana wouldn't release me for an interview in LA, so *Game of Thrones* were kind enough to meet me on a Saturday.

'A month later, after lot of auditions,

they supplied me with drawings... I think they sent me material, knowing that I was working at the time, to see how I would cope with the stress of it. I provided them with a lot of stuff.

'Then, one day, David Benioff Skyped me. I did exactly what people tell you not to do: I begged. I told him that, honestly, in every cell of my body, I knew that I could do this. So they took a punt on a very inexperienced person.'

Mentors get you through the door

Deborah Riley: 'I have been very lucky in my career, I have worked for a lot of female production designers. I didn't even realise that it was a rare thing.

'I was very lucky because the set decorator on *Moulin Rouge* was a production designer in her own right in Mexico. She was an extraordinary woman. She said: "Come with me, I will mentor you."

'I didn't realise how rare those words are. I went to Mexico City and worked with her. She would share her accommodation and do everything she could, just to have me around and teach me everything she knew.

'In the theatre school I went to, we were taught to hate one another. It was

an intensely competitive environment, where there were no guarantees that we'd be allowed through the doors the next day.

'That was the kind of excellence they required but, unfortunately, it also created friction among the students. So, to be shown such kindness by somebody was something I wasn't used to. I didn't even know that existed in the industry.

'I am now mentoring someone in Australia. It's a really important thing. How else do you get through the door? How else do you ask whether what you're doing is correct?

'I am very passionate about the power of people looking after one another. It's as simple as that.'

Sheer grit is an essential soft skill

Deborah Riley: 'I cannot stress this enough: if you think you can do something, and feel it in your soul that you can do it.... Just say yes to everything.

'Be enthusiastic and positive.... Be kind and people, generally... will be kind to you. A show such as *Game of Thrones* is... obviously, not all rainbows: it is very, very hard work. But that's where the grit comes in. The talent, the vision and the eye are all important, but you have to be prepared to stick it out.

'Not everyone is going to be your friend but there will be those that stand by you. Those people are more valuable than you can possibly imagine. It is [only] through the loyalty of the art department that we've been able to create so many extraordinary sets.

'We [take] the smallest amount of time that you can to actually build these things. When you see them on screen, you don't think these sets were built very quickly.

'Surround yourself with really great people and acknowledge [them] because, without them, we're nothing. It's very much a team endurance sport. Be a team player.

'Most important of all, don't give up.... Maybe an idea will come but, sometimes, you just have to force it out of yourself and it's amazing what you come up with.

'Every minute of my day for the past five years has been dedicated to the show and it's been time well spent. I don't regret any of it.'



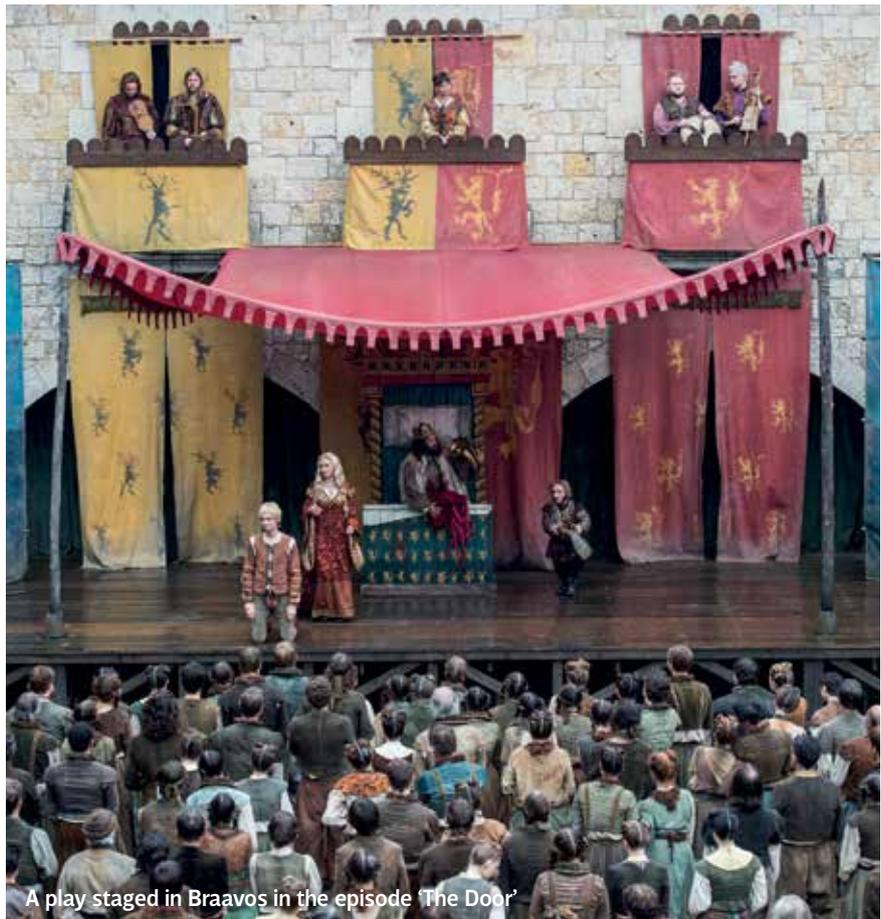
Davos Seaworth in the 'Battle of the Bastards' episode

› Frank Lloyd Wright was the inspiration for the Meereen Audience Chamber: "I was always very proud of the amount of colour, pattern and texture that we managed to put into that space." For the House of Black and White, she thought hard about the religious buildings on the banks of the Ganges at Varanasi ("I love the way the stone steps rise up out of the water"), and Hong Kong's Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery, which she had visited many years earlier.

Riley revealed how she had been hugely influenced by the "behaviour and environment studies" part of her architecture course – "essentially, the psychology of space" – something that she uses every day at work.

"Whenever we in the art department read any scene, we have to try and figure out how it would work," she elaborated, "and how we can harness the subtle cues of visual storytelling to better tell the story."

Her job begins when the art department receives an outline of the upcoming series, written by Benioff and the show's co-creator, DB Weiss. "These are an absolute joy to read," she said. "It's here that the season's creative ambitions are laid on the table."



A play staged in Braavos in the episode 'The Door'

All pictures: Sky

She then decides, in collaboration with the producers, which scenes require location filming and which can be shot on one of the stages at Belfast's Titanic Studios, the three-hectare site where she is based.

Things do not always go to plan, though. For the climactic battle in "Hardhome", the eighth episode of season 5, Riley flew to Iceland believing "there might be the perfect location waiting for us". She saw lava formations on an Icelandic beach that seemed ideal, and a fishing village was built – but, then, "logistics won out and we ended up bringing the entire sequence back to Belfast".

The logistics of making *Game of Thrones* could be challenging, she said – until season 6, she worked simultaneously with five different directing teams.

Sets are not always made from scratch, and thinking laterally helps. For instance, "The Mountain and the Viper" episode from series 4 was filmed in Dubrovnik, at a hotel abandoned in the early 1990s, during the Croatian civil war. "It was completely covered in graffiti," she recalled, "but, for us, the most important thing was that the

bones of the amphitheatre were there. After weeks of plaster, paint and rings it was completely transformed."

To film scenes in a frozen lake, you'd be forgiven for thinking the sequences should be shot in Iceland. Not so, explained Riley: "Due to the amount of stunt work and visual effects, the sequence was brought back to Belfast.

"We filmed in an abandoned quarry near Belfast, painted with a layer of snow to make it look convincing."

Picasso's masterpiece *Guernica*, painted in response to the terror bombing of civilians in the Basque town during the Spanish civil war, was the "perfect reference" for her design for the "Battle of the Bastards" (episode 9 of season 6), because it provided "an appropriate depiction of brutality and darkness", she said. "The main thing that the art department needed to provide was the body pile."

Even with *Game of Thrones* budgets, assembling such an ambitious set required careful thought. "The props department had a variety of dead horses. We had to estimate how many we would need because, at £3,000 a pop for a dead horse, we had to improvise.

"To achieve the body piles, we had to bulk it out with rostrum to make it as efficiently as possible. We also had to provide all the uniforms and saddlery for the battlefield, a massive and thankless task.

"But it was satisfying to think that we were able to capture images like this in camera, and that visual effects weren't required."

You sense that Deborah Riley – who, at 45, is certain to go on to work on many more high-profile TV and film projects – has found working on the HBO series hugely satisfying.

"The experience of *Game of Thrones*, particularly in the lead-up to the end, leaves me absolutely speechless," she said. "Creatively, it's been full of the highest highs and the greatest riches that you can possibly imagine. It's also kicked me to the ground a couple of times, as well." ■

'Creating the visual world of Game of Thrones with production designer Deborah Riley' was an RTS Northern Ireland event held on 22 May at Black Box, Belfast. Hugh Odling-Smee (Film Hub NI) hosted the Q&A. The producers were Sarah McCaffrey and Sara Gunn-Smith.

Virtual reality

Asia's VR market offers rich pickings for UK producers, says **Marcus Ryder**

The East is ready



A seasoned television producer friend of mine tells a great story about his biggest missed business opportunity. It was in the 1980s and he was at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. He wandered into a small room where two young Japanese women had set up a large television set, a small PA system and two mics.

The two Japanese women then turned on the TV and began to sing along, badly, to some rather cheesy Western pop songs he knew and a few Japanese songs he had never heard of, as the lyrics were shown on the TV set.

When the women finished, the TV producer and the few other people in the audience filed out completely bewildered by the whole experience.

He later overheard one member of the audience talking to a friend saying: "You know that is meant to be the big thing in Japan." The other replied: "Japan is very strange, singing along badly to pop music will never catch on here."

My producer friend had, of course, just witnessed one of the first examples of karaoke in the UK. A global industry now estimated to be worth \$13.5bn, and he had walked away laughing at it. Even if he had thought it would never catch on in Britain, and simply invested in Japan, he would have made millions. In Japan, the industry is now several times larger than its entire movie sector.

Are there modern equivalents? I moved to Beijing back in 2015 to find out. I now firmly believe that Asia in general, and China specifically, has a great deal to teach the UK, the rest of Europe and other established markets.

I also believe that there are huge untapped media opportunities here: opportunities for media professionals in China itself, and opportunities to take successful Chinese media models and apply them in the UK.

One example of both is augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR).

China is investing heavily in both these technologies. A recent report by Digi-Capital into the state of the industry predicted that China, in terms of revenue, will soon overtake the US in the AR/VR market.

The website *TechCrunch* describes the business “as a golden opportunity (or threat) for domestic and international players”. In just four years’ time, one out of every five dollars spent on AR/VR will be in China, and the Asian market will be worth more than the rest of the world put together.

The AR/VR revolution also has the full backing of local and central government. In March this year, the Shenzhen regional government, along with electronics company HTC, announced a new, \$158m fund to incubate AR/VR ventures.

So, the big question for UK and other non-Chinese media companies is how to take advantage of this opportunity.

As the chief international editor for China Global Television News (CGTN), I see the primary opportunity in content production. In my experience, Chinese media organisations excel in hardware production and other technological areas. But when it comes to producing content, they lack creativity and an in-depth understanding of what audiences want.

Kevin Chen, President of Shenzhen State VR Ventures –the man in charge of that \$158m government fund – echoed this sentiment in a recent interview. He said that “China is currently lagging in terms of high-quality content, which is one of the West’s major strengths”. This is also the view that an ex-Disney executive, currently working in AR/VR production, expressed to me over lunch recently. He had consulted on AR/VR projects in the US for organisations such as the *New York Times* but felt strongly that China, rather than the US, was where the big opportunities were.

However, the same former Disney man also offered a word of caution that US and European consumers were very different to those in Asia. He believes that AR/VR experiences in the US or Europe are often thought of in terms

of something you can do at home or as an “add on” to your mobile phone. In places such as China and Japan, consumers are far more likely to go to places and pay for an AR/VR experience.

This would explain why, in 2016, Japan built a simulation airplane that never takes off: people sit in their seats and “virtually” go to their destination. And it is doing really well, having been fully booked since it launched.

China recently opened the world’s first virtual-reality amusement park, covering 135 hectares. All 35 rides feature VR experiences.

But AR/VR opportunities in China are not just at the high end. Walking around Beijing, I regularly see small booths and shops charging around \$5-\$10 for a 30-minute AR/VR experience. Again, China is leading the way. There are an estimated 3,000 shops offering these.

China is also looking for strong cinematic and television AR and VR content. At this year’s International Film & TV Program Exhibition, hosted last month in Beijing for the first time in its 15-year history, VR and interactive experiences were part of the programme.

Knowing the great content that UK companies are able to produce for conventional television and film audiences around the world, it is not difficult to imagine how it could be adapted to fulfil the ravenous Chinese demand for AR/VR content.

High-quality, natural-history content that can be turned into VR safaris or scuba-diving; science-fiction and fantasy content that can be brought to life; and even world-famous tourist attractions and museums that people can visit without ever having to apply for a visa. I could go on and on. Suffice to say, these would all be very attractive to Chinese audiences.

From broadcasters such as CGTN, which is looking for documentary content, to amusement parks looking for their next big ride, the range of opportunities is considerable.

I think back to my producer friend and the missed business opportunity he experienced almost 40 years ago, when he witnessed the dawn of karaoke. If I had to pick a song to sing about AR/VR in China, it would have to be Abba’s pop classic, *The Winner Takes It All*. ■

Marcus Ryder is chief international editor of China Global Television News.

‘CHINA IS CURRENTLY LAGGING IN TERMS OF HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT, WHICH IS ONE OF THE WEST’S MAJOR STRENGTHS’

Content

Sarah Bancroft hears how the award-winning show evolved on its long road to the screen

This Country Anatomy of a hit

No one had heard of cousins Kerry and Kurtan Mucklowe 18 months ago. Now, BBC Three's mockumentary *This Country* – ostensibly about young people in modern rural Britain – which revolves around them, has garnered three Baftas, three RTS awards, rave reviews and a huge following.

The second six-part series, which finished airing in early April, has racked up more than 12 million iPlayer requests, and a third series is in the pipeline for next spring, along with an autumn “special”.

No wonder, then, that the chance to get the inside track on the comedy from producer Simon Mayhew-Archer, director Tom George and Charlie Cooper – one half of the real-life siblings who write and star in the

series – made for a sold-out RTS Bristol event last month.

Together with Daisy May Cooper, Charlie's sister, the team had snared “the elusive under-30 audience – the audience that all broadcasters die for”, noted Lynn Barlow, who chaired the evening. *This Country* was “pitch-perfect” – how had they done it? “Because we're incredibly childish,” quipped Mayhew-Archer. “Or incredibly talented,” countered Barlow.

Appropriately enough to the characters of Kerry and Kurtan, who spend large amounts of time trying to make something out of nothing, *This Country* came about only after a series of setbacks. In 2010, failing to get work as an actor, Rada-trained Daisy began writing a comedy based on life around Cirencester, where the Coopers had grown up and still live.

She roped Charlie in, initially to help

with the typing, he claimed to laughter, after he dropped out of uni (“a sports science degree – tragic!”). By 2014, working with a production company, they had made a pilot for ITV, but that nearly put paid to the project. They lost control of their creation; no one liked it.

Fortunately, Daisy was dogged: she approached Shane Allen, head of comedy at the BBC: he agreed to be their last-chance saloon. Allen commissioned four episodes from the Coopers for BBC Three and introduced them to Mayhew-Archer, a comedy producer whose previous credits included Josh Widdicombe's *Josh*.

Hating the pilot but loving a YouTube clip the Coopers had made of a Scrabble-playing Kerry screaming to her mum “Is Dave a word?”, the producer was clear: “The big thing we all wanted was that it should have the appearance of reality.”

After working up a couple of scripts with the Coopers, he was keen to get a director involved at an early stage. He found Tom George, who had a mix of comedy (including *Hank Zipzer*) and live-music experience.

The four hit it off instantly. “Obviously, we love drama and comedy, but we bonded over loving documentaries, and, right at the beginning, [Paul Watson’s] *The Family*, which was the original ob doc, about 1974,” said George.

As tight as the budget was – “and the first series was as low as they come,” said the director (“Lower!” interjected Mayhew-Archer) – they were all committed to giving the venture development time. “It had always been my ambition to be early on a production, conceiving the project together as a team, so it was an amazing opportunity,” said George.

The false start with ITV sharpened a lot of things. The four agreed that they had to go back to basics and keep things really simple. Authenticity became a watchword. After the disastrous pilot, which had included a number of well-known, small-screen faces, Daisy wanted to avoid professional actors.

The result was that three of the main characters are untrained: Kurtan (Charlie Cooper); Kerry’s dad, Martin Mucklowe (played by Paul Cooper, Daisy and Charlie’s real-life father); and “Slugs” (Michael Sleggs, a school friend of the Coopers).

While Charlie had served an apprenticeship through years of writing with Daisy, and knew the characters and inflections inside out, “our dad had no acting experience... He’s spent 40 years doing the shittiest jobs... but as soon as we got him on camera, he was so good, so natural,” said Charlie. “But, credit to Simon, most producers would be, like, ‘God, no, you can’t get a non-actor.’ It’s such a risk. But he had a lot of faith.”

The team gave themselves nearly a year together, connecting a few days each month, before formal shooting. It built trust, gave them “time to get it wrong”, as Mayhew-Archer put it – and time to make discoveries.

A day intended to experiment with equipment, looking for a grainy documentary feel that wouldn’t be “too crappy”, brought an insight about the Mucklowe cousins. As Daisy/Kerry did a test piece direct to camera, a bored Charlie, semi in character, began swinging round a basketball net in the background. “Those little moments, you go, OK, that’s a nugget that we’re

going to take,” explained the producer. “So all of the talking heads [in the series], we always like it if things interrupt them, or the fact that one of them is never listening to the other one.”

While the high level of trust between the core team of four – its “sweet spot”, as Barlow called it – was crucial, a host of other factors helped shape the award-winning production. These included finding the lesser-known, but highly talented, Paul Chahidi and Ashley McGuire to play the Rev Francis Seaton and Mandy Harris, respectively.

Another was getting Nick Martin, who had come up through documentaries before working on *Episodes*, *Peep Show* and *The Thick of It*, as DoP – “He’s very instinctive and reactive, which is really important for long takes,” said George.

Important production decisions included: choosing to keep the “reality” of less-than-ideal natural lighting or sound; guarding rehearsal time; and making room for improvisation. Above all, the focus was on character, place and heart. The outcome was a comedy of light and shade, which became steadily more complex and nuanced as the two series progressed.

The evening included five clips from the show; the final one came from the poignant closing moments of the second series, with Kerry about to confess to a crime she hadn’t committed. “Where do you go from there?” asked Lynn Barlow. “Fuck knows,” answered Charlie.

Several questions from the Watershed audience queried the series’ relationship to reality. Were the characters really based on people the Coopers knew? Where was *This Country* filmed? Where did the relationship between Kerry and Martin Mucklowe come from? The short answers were: yes, as a starting point; Northleach, about 18km from Cirencester; and from a local man with two families, each with three children, but who only ever acknowledged one, said Charlie.

“Which is sort of tragic, but, sort of, quite funny,” he added. As either Kerry or Kurtan might have commented: “Harsh.” In other words – and the audience knew this well – like *This Country*, he was being clear-sighted to the point of it being hard to hear, strangely empathetic... and funny. The audience roared again. ■

The RTS Bristol event ‘Anatomy of a hit: This Country’, was held on 17 May at Watershed, Bristol. It was chaired by Lynn Barlow and produced by Suzy Lambert.

The inside track on...

Influences

Tom George: ‘A big influence for us was [the] Vice documentary *Swansea Love Story*, which is about a teenage heroin epidemic. You’ve got these outsider characters, right on the fringes of society, who won’t be told where to go or what to do. Obviously, it’s a very tragic story, but they’ve got this energy.’

Going back to basics

Charlie Cooper: ‘The pilot became a monster: too many characters, too many scenes. [We thought] we’ve got to strip it down... make these two main characters cousins and they’re living in a village – you can’t get more simple than that. But it gives you so much room for the comedy to breathe and you’ve got so many places to go with that.’

Six instead of four

Simon Mayhew-Archer: ‘We were only commissioned for four episodes, but we over-delivered and gave them six. Because a four-episode series would just disappear: no one binges four episodes.’

Finding the right tone

Charlie Cooper: ‘[Paul Chahidi] brought so much warmth to [the role of the vicar]. We found the tone of the show, really, through him.’

Carrying on

Tom George: ‘We were really scared, coming back to the second series... We were like, can we repeat that?... We never feel like it’s done and like it’s good.’

Charlie Cooper: ‘Daisy was just crying most of that second series!’

Bill Bush celebrates the many achievements of **Tessa Jowell**, Britain's longest-serving culture secretary

An Olympic-class media minister

Tessa Jowell died on 12 May 2018, a year after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. Characteristically, she spent that year campaigning for improvements in cancer treatment, using her own experiences to make the case for changes to treatment regimes for those afflicted with this terrible disease.

Since her death, much has been made of her achievements as a health minister, notably introducing Sure Start, and then as the minister who directed the Olympic project from the very beginning.

The stunning success of London 2012 will always be seen as her outstanding political achievement. She won over a sceptical Cabinet and then spearheaded both the bid preparation and its successful campaign, before leading for government on all aspects of delivery. However, Tessa did much more than this.

Her six years in Cabinet were all served at DCMS, by some distance the longest-serving occupant of the post since its creation in 1992. She was perhaps the most influential media minister the sector has seen.

When her appointment was announced in June 2001, the insular worlds of the arts, media and sport reacted dismissively. What could this social worker from Hampstead possibly know about their intensely important worlds was the often-thought and occasionally expressed reflex reaction. They, and others in politics, felt that being "nice" was no qualification for effective leadership.

This thought gained greater currency when, to her own embarrassment, she misunderstood a technical and obscure question from the audience at RTS Cambridge in September 2001 and had to be rescued by an intervention from then BBC Director-General Greg Dyke.

In the event, culture, media and sport were well served by a woman of high intelligence, a capacity for hard work and the determination to get results. Sport got the Wembley Stadium rescue, the London Olympics and a step change in sporting performance that, at the Olympics, took the UK from amiable also-rans to hard-edged winners.

The arts benefited from better investment through the lottery, but, more importantly, by being given more freedom to pursue art for art's sake. This was a relief from the tedious instrumentalism that demanded, as the arts' first priority, that they deliver educational or economic benefits.

The media sector got the Communications Act 2003 and a steady hand on the tiller in turbulent times.

Tessa's key insight was that the

media industry in the UK had enormous strengths, despite digital disruption. Her task was to keep the best of the old world while preparing for the new.

In her first few weeks in the Cabinet, she was beset by iconoclasts, who told her that linear broadcasting was about to end and that public service broadcasting was unsustainable in a world of infinite choice.

She listened to the arm-waving and occasionally swivel-eyed prophets of the new media dawn, but decided that, while change was coming, the status quo was working well.

To prove her point, she embarked on relentless rounds of public and industry consultation before launching the Communications Bill as a draft. The idea was to publicly scrutinise the bill before it was introduced as formal legislation.

Seemingly endless consultation was a classic Tessa tactic. Endlessly patient herself, and always willing to listen to the opinions of others, she enjoyed consultations. However, its prime purpose was more akin to Muhammad Ali's "rope a dope" strategy for winning boxing matches, than a preference for genteel talking shops.

She let the combatants, including hawkish colleagues on her own side of the House, punch themselves out to the point of exhaustion and then brought the debates to her own conclusion.

The Communications Act deregulated the media market, enabled the creation of a single ITV and encouraged innovation and investment from abroad, but also modernised the rights and responsibilities of the BBC and the commercial PSBs.

TESSA'S... INSIGHT WAS THAT THE MEDIA INDUSTRY IN THE UK HAD ENORMOUS STRENGTHS, DESPITE DIGITAL DISRUPTION



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Ofcom was an inherited manifesto promise, but its final shape and scope were her work. She fought hard for it to be given the space and discretion it needed, as unimpeded by intrusive political interventions as possible.

Tessa insisted that it address people as citizens as much as consumers and, after a long debate, entrenched the principles of plurality.

Alongside the Act, she also oversaw a new BBC Charter and licence-fee settlement. She regarded it as her mission to rescue the BBC – which she regarded as a great and loved British institution – from the twin threats of its own bloated self-regard and the post-Gilligan, post-Hutton threats from politicians.

In the event, she secured a stable future for a strong and independent corporation, properly funded, but less invasive of the private sector than before, and required to lead the UK into the online world. This did not mean giving the corporation whatever it wanted. She made it clear that the BBC's proposed new digital services were too ambitious and intrusive.

She blocked the education services, which she thought would use the platform of the licence fee to foreclose the market to commercial providers.

Tessa asked that Radio 3 be stopped from becoming a clone of Classic FM, that 6 Music had to be differentiated from commercial radio, and that the proposal for BBC Three was not to be a vehicle for copycatting Channel 4 and Channel 5.

Throughout, she stressed that the BBC should emphasise UK talent and production, and new ideas.

Most dramatically, she decided that the independent production sector was treated unfairly by the commissioning oligopoly of the big broadcasters. This had to change. Lobbied by Pact's John McVay and Eileen Gallagher, she was persuaded that forcing independent producers to hand over all their rights when they were commissioned by the major broadcasters was plain wrong.

The terms of trade would be transformed. The upshot was that independent producers were allowed to keep key rights which they could then exploit themselves. The result was that the UK now has perhaps the strongest and most creative independent audio-visual sector in the world, second only to that in the US in scale.

Ofcom surveys continue to confirm >

The Labour Party

› that British audiences are probably among the best-served in the world, a tribute to Tessa's clear vision.

Being determined to bequeath a healthy media industry to her successors did not mean that Tessa lost sight of her reforming zeal as a social-policy radical. She was courageously ahead of her time on social issues and unafraid of being ridiculed.

She raised the issue of female body image and warned of the damage it was causing. She demanded that media literacy be a key part of liberalising media regulation, so that choices and voices could proliferate, but people would still have some protection from the babble of the internet. She was lampooned on both points, but how prescient she was. If only she'd used the term "fake news".

Tessa was a true reformer, on the face of it an unlikely candidate to deregulate the country's ridiculous alcohol licensing laws. But she felt that there would be huge benefits if drinking in pubs and bars could become more civilised and relaxed.

She received a vitriolic reaction from the moralising press, but she held firm. Now, we take it for granted that pubs will serve half-decent food, that it's no disgrace to ask for tea or coffee at the bar, and that children are welcome, no longer parked in some bleak, windswept garden and palmed off with a fizzy drink and a packet of crisps.

Tessa opened the way for all that to happen. The reforms also helped reduce drunkenness, make late-night drinking less wretched, and cut deaths from drink-driving. Millions of people's lives were improved by these reforms.

Her personal qualities, as much as the DCMS's formal role as the department responsible for public ceremonial, meant that Tessa became Minister for Empathy. She rescued the Diana Memorial, at the time something of an embarrassing joke.

This role became much more serious after 9/11 and then 7/7. Her empathy, combined with her decisiveness and eye for detail, meant that the public mourning and tributes to the victims, survivors, their families and the emergency services were handled with grace and decency.

Typically, she did more than empathise and organise: behind the scenes, she worked to secure much-needed improvements in disaster planning

Tessa Jowell regularly attended RTS events and conferences



Paul Hampartsoumian

and response, and reform of compensation schemes.

The 7/7 attacks were especially demanding for her, coming the very day after the London Olympic success in Singapore. Somehow, she straddled the two worlds with enormous dignity.

Much has been made about her decency. Unlike many senior politicians, she was inclusive and collegiate. However, far from being the prissy, or saintly, individual described by the media, the day-to-day Tessa was tough, resilient and, occasionally, profane.

She was certainly not dainty in the way she pushed her staff. While a party loyalist, she was also intensely factional. Tessa seemed to operate as the mother confessor for half the Cabinet, an early career in mental health making her kind and supportive but also utterly unshockable.

She was always very political. Her skill at bringing people together was not just a product of her decency. Nor was it at the price of agreeing and nodding along just for the sake of being nice.

Tessa didn't give an inch to the shouters and the table-pounders but gave them the same courtesy as everyone else. If, to achieve her objectives, she had to manage people who were dim, obstructive, or, as she saw it, wrong, then so be it.

They would find themselves tactically out-manoeuvred and charmed into agreeing with her. They might even go away from the encounter thinking she was their best friend. But she would get her own way. ■

Bill Bush was special adviser to Tessa Jowell at the DCMS from June 2001 to May 2005.

Box-set Britain

Digital media

Kate Bulkley examines how broadcasters are adapting to binge viewing – no longer the preserve of streaming services

Peaky Blinders

BBC

Box sets and an increasing tendency for audiences to binge-view entire series of programmes, especially drama, are hardly new phenomena. But binge-watching continues to impact on business models as public service broadcasters and pay-TV operators alike test new strategies for box sets.

Back in the day, box sets on VHS and DVD were a nice ancillary earner, but the arrival of Netflix and its high-end drama series changed everything.

“This is new territory and there are new rules being written about live transmissions and binge viewing,” says Lindsey Clay, CEO of Thinkbox. “There’s great scope for experimentation, and we don’t know everything yet. What we do know is that fantastic content will be watched compulsively.”

For the PSBs, the question of how to integrate box sets into the overall programming line-up is concentrating minds. This is because competitors are offering box sets as a key differentiator, and many viewers expect to be able to binge view as a matter of course.

Last Christmas, the BBC offered a wide range of box sets. These included *Wolf Hall*, the first three series of *Peaky Blinders* and all four series of *Line of Duty*. The Yuletide offer was part of a fight-back by the BBC against the streaming giants, principally Netflix.

BBC Director-General Tony Hall talked last year about developing iPlayer to make it a “must-visit destination in its own right”, beyond being just a catch-up service. And, in April, he told MPs that the BBC wanted “to strike the right balance” between the iPlayer and the returns it can get from

advertising-based VoD and on-demand subscription services – in other words, licensing the shows it owns to third-party platforms.

Tom Harrington, an analyst at Enders Analysis, says BBC box sets at Christmas created an issue for the corporation: “It brought a sizeable audience to the BBC portfolio and it skewed young.” But, because the BBC cannot monetise content on the iPlayer in the way that commercial broadcasters can by selling advertising or subscriptions, the extra cost of owning those on-demand rights can be justified only with long-term strategies such as brand-building. “There’s no immediate payoff for the BBC,” explains Harrington.

There is also the vexed question of how the BBC rewards independent producers for extending online viewing windows for their shows. They >

are concerned that the corporation's more "aggressive position on rights" will affect their revenues.

Data published in March found that 16- to 24-year-olds are now spending more time viewing Netflix than with BBC TV and iPlayer. "The iPlayer has been plateauing and even declining on mobile devices, even as it is experiencing growth on the TV set," says Harrington. "In 2017, we had the BBC at 32% of all consolidated TV viewing, but only 8% of total online viewing, which is pretty low and it's not getting any higher."

ITV is also beefing up the opportunities for its viewers to binge view. At the beginning of the year, the broadcaster expanded its 30-day catch-up window with a "series so far" offering.

Via the ITV Hub (now available on 30 platforms), all episodes of a current series are made available for 30 days after the final episode airs.

ITV has seen a 20%-30% uplift in VoD viewing on these shows. "More people are sticking with them, safe in the knowledge [that episodes] will be available from the beginning to the end," notes Paul Kanareck, ITV's Managing Director of online. "Our data also shows that these are predominantly 'lighter' ITV viewers, with many Hub user accounts being reactivated to watch them."

ITV has made box sets available by raiding its archive for shows that are relevant to a current show. When *Trauma*, starring John Simm, was on air, the broadcaster released box sets of two other shows that he starred in, *Prey* and *Code of a Killer*. This delivered both commercial and marketing benefits, says Kanareck.

Drama is the big pull for box sets, but ITV's online boss says that the first and second series of *Love Island* were the most popular among ITV's binge viewers last year.

The company's new CEO, Carolyn McCall, told the broadcaster's AGM last month that part of her "strategy refresh" would involve VoD. She hinted that a Netflix-like subscription VoD service, expanding on ITV's current £3.99-a-month, ad-free version of ITV Hub, may be on the cards. It might even appear in conjunction with a wider roll-out of the BBC and ITV's North American streaming service, BritBox, which launched in the US in 2017 and recently made its Canadian debut.

ITV Hub had an impressive first quarter: it served 374 million requests,

'YOU STILL NEED THE HOOK AT THE END OF EACH EPISODE, HOWEVER PEOPLE WATCH'

up 31% year on year, while viewing hours grew to 84 million from 64 million and revenue surged by 41%.

ITV, Channel 4 and the BBC, in conjunction with NBCUniversal, are also reportedly talking about a joint streaming service that would include box-set availability. Dubbed Kangaroo 2, after the service that was rejected by regulators in 2009, the idea is for the PSBs to somehow out-Netflix Netflix.

Given that Ofcom CEO Sharon White has been making encouraging noises about partnerships and collaboration among UK PSBs, the potential for a Kangaroo revival looks promising.

According to Barb, the number of UK households paying for at least one subscription VoD service grew 20%, to 10 million households, between 2016 and 2017.

"Content-wise, Kangaroo 2 could be excellent, something that Netflix surely knows because it has so much UK PSB content in its libraries," says Harrington at Enders Analysis. "However, it remains to be seen whether the PSBs can align their interests to get it off the ground."

At Channel 4, new CEO Alex Mahon has said that she will "rapidly accelerate digital capabilities", as part of a three-pronged strategy aimed at countering the growing challenges posed by Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google.

'WE ARE FINDING THAT PEOPLE WANT TO CONSUME ALL OF A SERIES QUICKLY WHEN IT IS CONTENT THAT THEY REALLY LOVE'

Mahon told a group of independent producers and journalists on 16 May that she will concentrate on young people, digital and culture. The focus on digital will include increased investment in the on-demand service All 4.

The intention is that all future commissions will be judged by their performance on-demand, on social and on linear. It is dubbed the "one programme, many platforms" initiative.

In many ways, Channel 4 is ahead of the game, because it has been adding to an archive of box sets over the past 10 years. There are some 150 series across all genres available on All 4.

On some days, there will be more viewing of archive box sets of *Shameless* and *Misfits* than of catch-up TV, says Richard Davidson-Houston, head of All 4: "The hot topic – what is the right windowing strategy? – is because of the dreaded word 'cannibalisation'. But, actually, we're seeing less cannibalisation than we feared."

For example, Channel 4 released *Lee and Dean*, a new comedy series about Stevenage builders, simultaneously on All 4 and Channel 4. According to Davidson-Houston, this approach yielded incrementally more viewing on-demand, with no apparent cannibalisation of the linear broadcast.

While acknowledging that Channel 4 is in a "windowing experimentation stage", he believes that offering box sets from the outset gives a series "better audience retention" across the entire series.

As for any potential revival of Kangaroo, Mahon will not be drawn, but she does believe that, in the era of the Faangs, partnerships makes sense: "Nowadays, you have to think about the big global rivals and also about what British public service is.

"My focus is on protecting PSB, regardless of whether that might be helping the BBC as well as Channel 4. For example, in terms of prominence on smart TV sets and devices, we need to be working together."

The recent Sky show *Save Me*, produced by ITV Studios-owned World Productions, is one of the latest examples of how box sets can work. The six-part crime thriller was released as a box set at the same time as its initial transmission on Sky Atlantic.

The results were impressive and surprising: 6% of the total audience across the first 28 days of availability watched all six episodes within the first 24 hours; by day seven, half of all

‘WE’RE SEEING LESS CANNIBALISATION THAN WE FEARED’



Riviera

Sky

the viewers in that initial 28-day window had viewed all six episodes.

“The game changer for us was *Riviera*, last year. We saw the same kind of speed of consumption as with *Save Me*,” says Jamie Morris, channel editor for Sky Atlantic and head of scheduling for all of Sky entertainment. “We’ve been releasing content in this way for a while. We are finding that people want to consume all of a series quickly when it is content that they really love.”

Sky is less concerned about overnight ratings because it values its subscription income over its advertising. “The majority of Sky customers are on-demand capable,” says Morris. “We merchandise across the platforms – linear, on-demand, Sky Now and Sky Go. We are agnostic about how they watch it.”

Simon Heath, CEO of World Productions, which produces *Line of Duty* for

the BBC and made *Save Me* for Sky, believes that it is about understanding the different broadcaster models.

“Serialised TV, where it’s about offering one episode a week, can build an audience. We saw this really clearly with *Line of Duty*,” he says. “The danger with a simultaneous box-set release and live transmission is that you lose word of mouth and, if the series doesn’t land with viewers, there is nowhere to go.”

“But you have to understand Sky’s model, where it’s not about overnight audiences: it’s about giving the audience what they want. In this world, the definition of a hit is different.”

For Heath, neither the linear release model nor the linear-plus-box-set release model affects the storytelling. “You still need the hook at the end of each episode, however people watch,” he argues. “We have not been in this

world long enough yet to see how, ultimately, we construct narratives.

“But my hunch is that, in an SVoD or a broadcaster VoD space, you probably do have the luxury of a slower-burn narrative, at least more than you do in the more hostile overnight environment of ITV1 and BBC One. But we’re still in the land of the hunches here.”

Some 60% of TV viewing is still occurring via linear broadcast, and this has remained fairly stable, according to research by Ampere Analysis. Watching linear broadcast TV will certainly remain strong, but consumers’ behaviour and expectations continue to shift.

According to Ampere, two out of three UK households expect to continue watching linear broadcasts in five years’ time, but they also expect them to be adding more catch-up and box sets. In other words, binge viewing is only likely to grow. ■

ITV's summer sen



Reality TV

Love Island was the surprise hit of summer 2017. **Matthew Bell** dons the sun cream to hear an RTS panel dissect the show's appeal

Last year, UK audiences enjoyed a summer fling with *Love Island* and its cast of scantily clad young men and women looking for love – and a £50,000 prize. Millions tuned in to ITV2, attracted to a show that ran the gamut of taste, from boy-meets-girl, feel-good telly to under-the-duvet sex.

Love Island launched in 2015 and performed respectably. But it was in 2017 that the programme took off, becoming one of the surprise hits of the year. Audiences for series 3

averaged 2.5 million – a huge following for a niche network – as the show made ITV2 the most popular digital channel for 16- to 34-year-olds.

In an era when young people are widely thought to shun traditional TV, this was no mean feat. “It’s a show that has drawn an audience back to linear TV,” claimed executive producer Tom Gould. “It’s social media, it’s being part of the conversation, that has drawn people to watch it live.”

“This is a real case study for all of those naysayers who claim that 16-to-34s don’t watch TV. That’s bollocks, isn’t it, because they’re watching this,” added Angela Jain, MD of ITV Studios Entertainment, which makes the show in tandem with Motion Content Group.

The critics loved it, too – *Love Island* won prizes at both this year’s RTS and Bafta awards.

It should, however, be pointed out that some commentators thought it exploitative: they argued that this was yet another reality show setting up its mainly working-class cast for a stiff dose of TV mockery.

Jain and Gould were part of a panel at an RTS early-evening event, brought together to discuss *Love Island*’s success ahead of the reality show’s 2018 series.

Having left E4 to run ITV’s digital channels in 2011, Angela Jain had been seeking a new entertainment format. As a former commissioner of *Big Brother*, she told the capacity crowd that she understood “the value of having a really chunky show and what it does to your schedules”.

She called in a few indies to pitch their ideas and gave the green light to *Love Island*. “I knew that, if we could get it right, it could be ITV2’s *Big Brother*.”

‘IT FEELS AUTHENTIC – THE 16-34 AUDIENCE IS INCREDIBLY SAVVY AND AWARE OF ANYTHING THAT FEELS FAKE’

sation



Love Island cast 2018

ITV

And, of course, last year it actually beat *Big Brother*,” she said.

It has been a remarkable turnaround for a format that first surfaced in 2005, as ITV’s *Celebrity Love Island*, survived for one more series as *Love Island*, and then sank.

“When we started to think about what the show should be in 2015, we knew it had to be something completely different – it is [the same] in name only,” explained Gould.

Caroline Flack, a hugely experienced presenter of shows such as *I’m a Celebrity... and The Xtra Factor*, signed up to host *Love Island*. She also presents the weekly spin-off programme, *Love Island: Aftersun*. “As a host, to present something you would also watch religiously – that’s the dream,” she said. “It was my perfect job.”

Nevertheless, success was elusive. “If anyone remembers the first series, that was not a hit out of the park at all. It could so easily have got cancelled,” recalled Jain. *Love Island* survived the commissioners’ cull and began to find an audience. “By the end of series 2 it was getting there, and people came >



Angela Jain

Kai Lutterodt

QUESTION & ANSWER

Q Is there an appetite for a gay *Love Island*, and could you produce one?

A **Angela Jain:** Anything is possible. It’s a show that will evolve, live and breathe and change. I hope that [*Love Island*] is going to be on telly for the next five years at the very least... who knows where it will go?

Q Has the casting process changed?

A **Tom Gould:** A lot more people applied this year than for series 1, but it’s the same process. [There’s a] conversation with the casting team on the phone, they come in for auditions and we watch the auditions if [the casters] feel they might have someone who’s suitable.... Those that we think look good on tape meet with the execs.

Q What kind of people are you looking for?

A **Tom Gould:** You need people who will stand out and engage [the audience] and give a lot of themselves. That’s the biggest thing.

We have had people in previous series who..., when they’ve got in the villa, haven’t felt that comfortable being open about how they feel and sharing their love lives. It’s

a big ask, because it’s a really intense environment.

A **Angela Jain:** We also go and look for people, with targeted casting – we don’t solely rely on applications.... With a returning series, you’re also trying to [militate] against those people who are pitching themselves as a previous islander.

Q How do you avoid casting people who are looking for fame, not love?

A **Tom Gould:** That’s the beauty of the format – the viewers, I hope, will... work out which [relationships] are real. At the heart of the format is the [question]: who’s there for love and who is playing a game.

A **Angela Jain:** The skill of the casting team comes into play here. They have to suss out whether someone is clearly a wannabe. And we don’t [necessarily] exclude somebody who is a wannabe – because there might be a legitimate reason for them to be on the show.

Q How do you use the games and challenges in the show?

A **Tom Gould:** We go into a [series] with a bank of ideas and challenges... that we think may, at some point, be the right thing to throw in.... Ultimately, everything is justified because [the show] is about testing relationships....

We tell all the people that we cast beforehand: “You will be tested. [The show] is not about sitting in a villa sunning yourselves for seven or eight weeks.”

back to series 3 and brought their friends,” noted Gould.

Getting the show to the screen was a Herculean task, which needed a crew of 200 to complete. Some 12 edit suites ran 24 hours a day, working through the pictures captured by 70 fixed cameras.

“It’s mammoth – you can’t deliver 42 episodes of the show unless you’ve got a machine making it happen,” said Jain. She denied that *Love Island* had become “too big” for ITV2. “It’s a perfectly formed show for ITV2. It hits its key demographic. It is the very biggest show on exactly the right channel.”

However, she was unable to rule out a move to ITV’s main channel: “Where it goes and who decides what they want to do with it is out of our control. It does feel like a perfect fit at the moment.”

Reflecting on *Love Island*’s appeal, Gould said: “The audience watches it and recognises scenarios on the show from their own lives – that’s a big part of it. It feels authentic – the 16–34 audience is incredibly savvy and aware of anything that feels fake.”

Gould also pointed to the show’s “unpredictability” and “constant stream of drama”, as well as the casting of its contestants, who are competing to be the last couple left in the villa in Majorca.

“At the back of your mind, you have to be thinking, ‘We are matchmaking.’ And, as with any reality show, you are



Caroline Flack hosts *Love Island*

ITV

looking for big personalities,” said Gould. “You are also looking for people who you think are going to be open and honest about their feelings, and that’s much harder than it sounds.”

Jain identified “wit, humour and Iain [Stirling’s] voiceover” as other key elements in the show’s success.

Ahead of the launch of series 4 in early June, Jain said: “We all feel confident – we sort of know what we’re doing... We want to give the viewers

more of what they’re expecting, but, equally, you don’t want to deliver the same show again.

“Having a different cast will create different stories and, of course, we’ll have some tricks up our sleeves.” ■

‘Love Island: Anatomy of a hit’ was held in the Auditorium at Foyles in central London on 23 May. The RTS event was chaired by Ria Hebden and produced by Vicky Fairclough and Sarah Booth.

Love Island’s digital strategy

Love Island has invested heavily in social media to engage and build audiences. So much so that, during series 3, it received more than 2 billion Twitter impressions.

The digital team – led by senior digital producer Kenny England – and the TV production team ran side-by-side on *Love Island*. “I’ve never worked on a show where the digital team has been so firmly embedded,” said executive producer Tom Gould.

“[They] approach [programme-making] from a different point of view, and that’s not a point of view that I have that much experience of. That dialogue between Kenny’s team and

us as a group of execs and producers is so valuable.”

The programme’s app, through which the public has its say about the competing couples on the show, is another ‘huge part of the series’, said England.

“When you’re working in social media, there’s so much noise,” he said. The app, however, puts the show in contact with its ‘super fans, who can consume everything [about the show] in the one place, undistracted, [and] vote.’

Destined to be a global brand?

The *Love Island* format has been sold around the world, including to Australia and Germany. “It can [work] for

everyone,” claimed ITV Studios head of format support Ella Umansky.

A clip from the German version was shown at the RTS event. It featured much the same tattooed beefcakes and tanned babes as the original, and demonstrated how easily the format could travel.

“It’s what you know and love about *Love Island*, but in German,” said Umansky. “It can be translated, it can be done in different locations to different budgets. It’s a very flexible format.

“We’re so lucky to have a format like this. It’s really important for ITV as a whole because, as a brand, it’s something that can really define us.

“A show like this can become your calling card.

“This is the year when we’re really going to see it, hopefully, become that global brand.”

OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH WEST

There is excitement in the air outside London. Channel 4's new leadership team, Alex Mahon and Ian Katz, have announced the shortlist of 13 cities and city regions for their new HQ and creative hubs.

Three hundred jobs are to be moved from London to three new bases. Decision day is 1 October, when we will learn the locations.

In the interim, a huge amount of work will be done by each of these places to convince Channel 4 that they are the right choice. There's a real reward at stake for the politicians behind each bid.

This is because the creative industries generate more jobs than almost any other sector. Designing strong creative clusters outside London was the main recommendation of Sir Peter Bazalgette's excellent Independent Review of the Creative Industries, published last September.

The BBC's move to MediaCity in Salford seven years ago has been a huge success. Seven thousand people work here today. That's more than when the Manchester Ship Canal's docks were in full swing.

Everyone knows that the firm grip of London-based companies on jobs is one of the biggest barriers to social mobility. It prevents UK plc from becoming a creative meritocracy.

Channel 4's opening of bases outside London is eagerly anticipated. However, if we seriously expect to see decision makers start to reverse how London-centric TV has become over the past two decades, Ofcom's definition of "made outside London" needs tightening up.

Many of TV's most talented writers have signed my recent submission to Ofcom. They include Paul Abbott, Jimmy McGovern, Sally Wainwright, Nicola Shindler, Russell T Davies,

Channel 4's move is only a start. **Cat Lewis** says Ofcom must do more to strengthen regional production



Nine Lives

David Nicholls and John Thomson. Their careers all began in cities outside London and they want these opportunities to be available for the next generation.

The current regulation allows all senior programme-makers on a show defined as "made outside London" to be from London. It also permits these shows to be edited in London. The two often go hand in hand. Once all the senior production staff are from London, economically, it makes sense for post-production to be done there, too.

Junior people from outside the M25 are employed on shoots in the nations and regions. To ensure that 50% of a production's staff are from the nations and regions, these people, including editors who live outside the M25, are often employed to work in the capital on the programmes.

They are also usually expected to pay for their own accommodation and travel costs, which adds up to

hundreds of pounds a week. Programmes made in this way leave no legacy outside London. And, crucially, they make a mockery of claims by broadcasters that more money is being spent on shows in the nations and regions.

I and many others believe this breaks the spirit of the 2003 Communications Act. That states clearly the need for public service broadcasters to: a) make a percentage of programmes outside London; b) ensure these programmes cover a range of genres; and c) ensure investment in these shows is made in a number of different production centres across the UK.

It's this third requirement that is broken when programmes made by London-based producers are edited in London.

This is why many of us are campaigning to "improve the out-of-London quotas". Copies of TV job adverts that confirm how commonplace this way of meeting the "made outside London" definition are being sent to me, and members of the Facebook group "Improve the out of London quotas", on an almost daily basis.

Why should individual programme-makers have to financially subsidise this box-ticking? Ofcom is reviewing its criteria. Let's hope it agrees to tackle this.

To help resolve this situation, I am launching a new national TV trade body, based outside London, called the Indie Club (www.indieclub.tv).

Alongside this, TV legend Phil Redmond, creator of *Grange Hill* and *Brookside*, has come up with a brilliant idea. He wants the Government to move Ofcom out of London. This would help create more jobs outside the capital and, with luck, encourage the regulator to end the present loopholes in the "made outside London" rules. ■

Cat Lewis is CEO and executive producer of Nine Lives Media.

Thirsty for talent



Sky's *Britannia*

Television can be fiendishly difficult to break into, particularly if you nurse presenting, producing or writing ambitions. Learn a technical skill, however, and opportunities open up. Visual effects (VFX) and motion graphics are booming.

There's a huge breadth to the sector, which runs from animation for promos and ads, through TV, to the stunning digitally created effects on Hollywood superhero films. Many Marvel movies are so reliant on VFX, that, without them, there would be little for audiences to watch.

TV and film VFX producer and supervisor Simon Frame told an RTS Futures event at the end of May, "U & VFX", that, when he first started working in the VFX field in 1997, there were just 350 people working in Soho – then, as now, the centre of the industry.

Two decades later, numbers have risen almost 20-fold, to around 6,500. "The market has become huge," said Frame, who has recently been working

RTS Futures

Visual effects is both a technical and a team craft, discovers **Matthew Bell**. And the sector is desperate for new creatives

on Sky Atlantic's historical fantasy *Britannia*. "There are so many ways in."

Over the same period, VFX kit has plummeted in price, which gives newcomers the opportunity to learn on the latest technology. "Software is super cheap," said Frame. "What really matters now is talent."

But new VFX artists would be well advised to move to London. "The talent is in the capital because that's where the industry fertilises," said Frame. There are small VFX outfits outside London, "but there isn't enough local work to

keep these guys going – they rely on work out of London."

Louise Hastings, VFX producer at Milk Visual Effects, whose credits include BBC One's *Doctor Who* and ITV historical drama *Victoria*, matched Frame's optimism: "It's a growth industry – there should be lots of jobs to go around.

"Netflix and Amazon are creating more and more content, with bigger and bigger budgets – we can't keep up with the amount of work we're asked to bid for at the moment," she continued. "TV is going to keep Soho very busy.

We're also getting a lot of the American films [shooting at Warner Bros Studios Leavesden, such as *Fantastic Beasts*]."

As a drama specialist in the VFX field, Frame is in the right place at the right time. He accepted that the TV drama boom is "a bubble" that could burst but, because of the length of time it takes to make series, "we are still looking at another four years of boom in production terms".

Moreover, there is no indication that the boom is ending. The order books of the large effects houses were full,



SOFTWARE IS SUPER CHEAP. WHAT REALLY MATTERS NOW IS TALENT

Frame revealed, which has led to hundreds of new start-up outfits entering the marketplace. “Boutique [companies] are a much, much better place to start and develop than the bigger companies,” he advised.

“TV is still strong, but there is a definite shift to YouTube and the digital area,” said Anthony Scott, studio operations manager at creative agency Fall of the Wall. It makes commercials and promos for clients that include Sky. Scott completed the panel at the Futures event, which was held at Channel 4’s headquarters.

Frame sounded one note of caution. “Brexit is a problem,” he admitted, because, despite lobbying, there is “no special dispensation for overseas employees. There are an awful lot of European artists in town and I don’t know if they can stay. It’s going to be a real problem for our business.” ■

The RTS Futures event, ‘U & VFX’, was chaired and produced by Alex Lawrence, the founder of digital content producer Clearhead.

What do VFX artists do all day?

‘There are two sides to what we do: one is in the back room, the guys on workstations in basements with low lighting, making the shots; the other side of it is making the film,’ explained VFX producer and supervisor Simon Frame. ‘Ultimately, though, we’re all film-makers. If you don’t like film – or image-making – you’re not going to last long, because it’s really hard [work].’

‘I have to physically go and make the film, which requires enthusiasm, energy and a massive liver; the ability to [survive] being cold, wet and hungry; being shouted at by people who are really stressed. It’s hard work, and it’s not what most people think VFX is going to be.’

‘I’m there from the very first meeting in Soho House over beers, when you get the script, right to the wire, when they’re screaming for it [to be ready] for broadcast.’

‘I have to break the scripts down, with my VFX producer and supervisor heads on, working out where effects are needed. I make a list and that goes into

the big planning mix – why we need it, how we are going to make and shoot it.

‘We do the pre-production and then go on set. We shoot it, which is like pulling teeth, and... then we spend months putting the VFX together... and deliver it.’

‘I started on [Sky Atlantic’s] *Britannia* in November 2015. We started pre-production in February 2016 and wrapped on Christmas Eve, in temperatures of -12°C in a field. We delivered the series on 28 July 2017.’

‘If I can be candid, a lot of people interested in VFX are the more geeky, computer-literate kids. Trying to drag people out of the bedroom on to the set is hard.’

‘But, whether you’re sitting at your workstation in a dark basement, doing motion graphics and VFX, or sitting on a wet hillside with Roman soldiers, they are both team games. You can have an introverted guy who’s really good at particle animation, but, if he can’t work with anyone else in his team, he’s going to be largely useless.’

Top tips from the panellists on...

Making contact

Simon Frame: ‘I say to people, “Hassle me gently.” Don’t give up; if you don’t hear back from me the first time, put a polite reminder in... Nine times out of 10, people in my position will respond positively, because we will all need someone sooner or later.’

Anthony Scott: ‘The least impressive [situations are] when someone comes in and claims to know everything and starts to talk over you... The people that impress are those that have done research, and understand the company and the work we do.’

Working for free

Simon Frame: ‘I’ll bring someone along who’s really keen and pay for their travel, and they can be with me for a couple of weeks. I’m not going to pay them, but I won’t have them lose any

money. That... will give them a good look at what we do.’

Louise Hastings: ‘It’s very rare that we take on people unpaid – if we do, it’s for a week, two maximum, to give people a window into the [job]. People wouldn’t do any work in that week; it’s more of a shadowing [exercise]. It’s not unpaid labour.’

Anthony Scott: ‘It’s about getting a taste of what studio life is about.’

Showing initiative

Simon Frame: ‘Say yes to everything... There’s nothing worse than sitting in your bedroom, hoping that someone’s going to ring you.’

‘Get out there and make stuff, work for student films. Someone’s going to get a break and, when they do, they tend to bring people with them.’

‘Never say no.’

Keeping Faith/
Un Bore Mercher



Thriller breaks language barrier

Wales Centre

The Welsh drama series *Keeping Faith/Un Bore Mercher* (left) was the very timely subject of an RTS Wales panel discussion at the Celtic Media Festival in Llanelli in May.

The series, which stars Eve Myles as a lawyer and mother of three whose husband goes missing, has been making headlines as the most downloaded non-network programme on BBC iPlayer, with more than 9 million requests, and has developed a cult following across the UK.

The S4C and BBC Wales co-commission was made in English and Welsh, and the discussion focused on the shooting of scenes in the two languages “back-to-back”.

The panel comprised four of the key creatives: Amanda Rees, creative content director for S4C; Maggie Russell, executive producer for BBC Wales; S4C executive producer Gethin Scourfield; and Adrian Bate, executive producer for the production company, Vox

Pictures. Explaining how the co-commission came about, Bate said that he first approached S4C, which commissioned scripts. BBC Wales was then invited to co-fund the series and air its own English version.

Discussing the criteria for a successful co-commission, Rees said that, above all, there have to be elements that are both universal and local, while maintaining authenticity.

Back-to-back productions are nothing new in Wales. Scourfield, who previously produced two series of the BBC Wales/S4C hit *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*, said that, although filming takes longer, the greater complexity comes in post-production, with multiple edits and different versions being delivered to varying deadlines.

Reflecting on the process, Bate said that, if he could do anything differently, it would be to have more time in the edit suite.

Judith Winnan

BBC

Digital history shows way forward

■ *The Search for Little Flanders* offered a ‘perfect example’ of digital content, argued Euryn Ogwen Williams at the Carmarthen Bay Film Festival in Llanelli, where he chaired an RTS Wales event on the project.

As the author of a recent review of S4C for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Ogwen Williams recommended that the broadcaster develop a digital content hub. ‘This is a perfect example of a community being digital and using all aspects of digital technology to create and deliver its mission,’ he said.

The digital content project

tells the story of two effigies in St Jerome’s Church in the south Pembrokeshire village of Llangwm, connected to King Henry I’s expulsion of Flemings from England to the area in 1100.

The project was led by Pam Hunt, a former RTS Wales committee member and TV producer, who retired to the area in 2006. ‘After writing two books, my low boredom threshold dragged me into the project,’ she said.

Joining her on the panel were Graham Stephens, one of the presenters of a DVD documentary made as part of the project, and ex-BBC editor



Graham Brace

and producer Heather Payton, who recorded a series of English podcasts. These were also translated into Welsh and Flemish.

To tell the story of the Flemish settlement in a small medieval church without exhibition boards or touch screens, the project commissioned a tapestry from illustrator Fran Evans, based on drawings by local schoolchildren, with six specific images that trigger different aspects of the story using an app.

The DVD, produced by Hunt, tells the story of the research and includes material shot in Flanders. ‘It has proved very popular and continues to sell well to visitors, as well as further afield,’ she said.

Hywel William

Matthew Bell hears how TV has rebooted its old games consoles

‘S’o many people game – it’s not this weird, niche thing any more,” claimed Julia Hardy at an RTS London event in early May – the first London session to be streamed live on YouTube – devoted to gaming on television. “It feels like there’s a huge lack of respect for gaming; [TV thinks] it’s still nerds in their bedrooms covered in crisps,” added the gaming presenter.

Television has had a chequered history with video games. In the 1990s, Channel 4’s *GamesMaster* became the first UK TV show dedicated to video games. Other shows followed, including CITV’s *Bad Influence!* and *T.I.G.S (Totally Interactive Game Show)*, and Sky One’s *Games World*.

“There was this big gap afterwards,” said journalist and comic Ellie Gibson, who chaired the London event. “Nothing really took off in the same way as *GamesMaster* and then nothing was made for about a decade.”

One of the few current shows that features gaming was well represented on the panel in the shape of comedians Steve McNeil and Sam Pamphilon, who created Dave comedy panel show *Dara Ó Briain’s Go 8 Bit*, and Gibson, the games expert on the show.

“*Dara Ó Briain’s Go 8 Bit* has been one of the most successful marriages of TV and games in recent years. I would argue that because I am in it,” said Gibson.

The show, which has racked up three series since its 2016 debut, features “comedians playing video games”,



TV is back in the game

according to McNeil, who, with Pamphilon, devised the format for the 2013 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

“It’s about getting hopefully funny people together, but through the prism of games,” said Pamphilon. “We’re not trying to go into

“A big part of it was getting Dara on board,” he added. “It was a great fit because Dara is the best at hosting panel shows and he’s a massive gamer.”

Julia Hardy hosts BBC Radio 1’s *The Gaming Show*, which airs on iPlayer. She

mainstream show on TV: “There are enough gamers out there who are interested in *Red Dead Redemption*, *God of War* or *FIFA*. Stick [a programme] on at 2:00am, they will find it or watch it on catch-up [TV].”

“They are desperate for TV to say it’s OK to be a gamer, because they have been marginalised for such a long time. This is why YouTube and Twitch have taken over, because gamers went out and made their own content.”

McNeil argued that TV could be “braver in representing games. *Film 2018* for games could exist. There could be things on BBC Three or E4 where YouTubers and pro-gamers mess about; there could be a thing for kids on CBBC. There are lots of shows about games that TV isn’t making and it’s a shame it’s not, because there is an audience for it.”

“Whether you play video games or sports, people like to win. It’s about finding the right game for your channel or show,” added Hardy. ■

‘IT WAS VERY HARD TO CONVINCE TELEVISION THAT VIDEO GAMES WOULD BE OK’

any huge amount of detail or depth [about games], so we [don’t] push people away.”

“It was very hard to convince television that video games would be OK [in a show],” recalled McNeil, who reflected on the three years it took to get it green-lit. DLT Entertainment picked up the TV rights and hired producer Rohan Acharya to develop the format for TV. “[Rohan] could have got it made quicker if he’d sacked us. He very kindly didn’t,” said McNeil.

explained the premise of her show. “We can’t go too deep into [the subject] because that kind of specialist coverage is available elsewhere. We tend to look at trending stories and the biggest titles as our starting point. I would really love to go super nerdy but I have to hold myself back.”

Hardy argued that “hard-core” gamers are catered for on YouTube, and video game and eSports on live streaming platform Twitch. But she said there was “a space” for a

Students learn the ropes in Bournemouth

Southern Centre In late April, Southern Centre welcomed more than 200 students from local universities to its 10th annual “Meet the professionals” event at Bournemouth University. The immediate outcome for one student was that Athena Films offered to pay her to develop some of her ideas – and to employ her on the project if it was commissioned.

Eighteen professionals from a wide range of backgrounds and career stages were on hand to meet informally with students from Bournemouth, Solent, Portsmouth and Winchester universities, to discuss current TV issues and career development.

Many were alumni from those institutions, which provided an extra resonance for those attending. Some had only just graduated, while others were in senior editorial roles.

The TV professionals discussed the impact of changing formats and fragmenting viewing patterns on programme-makers, as well as more vocational issues, such as how to continue developing skills in the workplace. This session was followed by two hours of informal contact between the professionals and students.

Commenting on the event, Southern Centre Chair Stephanie Farmer said: “Every year, [the event] provides an amazing opportunity for students to practise their networking skills, and make contacts for placements and career development. It’s become the essential ‘go-to’ event for students in the South.”

Gordon Cooper

Upbeat verdict on NAB



Las Vegas

Public domain

Thames Valley Attendance at NAB fell by 10% this year, but a panel assembled for RTS Thames Valley’s May event was largely upbeat in its assessment of the Las Vegas media technology show.

Neil Maycock, VP of global marketing at broadcasting solutions outfit Grass Valley, said clients were more interested in speaking to problem solvers in his company than looking at racks of kit.

“Vendors need to prepare well in advance to get prominent decision-makers and

influencers to their booths,” advised Jennie Marwick-Evans, MD of broadcasting PR specialist Manor Marketing. “Gone are the days when vendors can just stand and wait for passing trade.”

BBC Newsgathering operations manager Sara Shepherd reinforced the idea of planning visits efficiently, and struck a positive tone on the benefits to the BBC as an innovator of working with small companies, as well as blue-chip organisations.

Norman Rouse, client

services director at technology platform The Broadcast Bridge, was concerned that vendors’ IP knowledge ranged from outstanding to poor, with no one vendor supplying the whole production chain. He queried: “How do customers choose a range of vendors with the correct skills? And who can help then transition to IP? If, indeed, they should?”

Before looking back at NAB, the Thames Valley Centre hosted a “Diversity in the workplace” session. Kayte Burns from NEP, EditShare’s Danielle Hay and Sara Shepherd captured the attention of a mostly male audience. Chaired by Sadie Groom, MD of Bubble Agency, the all-women panel spoke of their experiences of working in the broadcast industry.

The overall narrative was positive, but one story made the audience gasp. At a recent trade show, the female marketing director of a leading company approached a group of men to attend a meeting, only for one of them to tell her that they already had their badges scanned.

Tony Orme

Indies drop in on Birmingham

Midlands Centre RTS Midlands held a “drop-in” day for independent producers from across the region in early May at the Colmore Club in Birmingham.

The networking event gave the RTS Centre the perfect opportunity to bring itself up to date on the progress of the many projects currently in production in the Midlands.

“We wanted to get a real insight into everything that is happening in the independent sector in the Midlands, so the RTS can work out how best to serve the sector,” explained RTS Midlands Chair Caren Davies.

“We’re aiming to boost the profile of television production here in the Midlands and to provide more opportunities where we can

celebrate and showcase the rich diversity of the programmes that are made here,” she added.

Production companies attending included Full Fat TV, North One and Ragdoll.

Other guests included Joe Godwin, the head of BBC Midlands, and representatives from the Producers’ Forum.

Becky Jones-Owen

BBC Scotland enjoyed a successful evening at the RTS Scotland Awards in early May, taking home four of the top production prizes on offer.

Trust Me, I'm A Doctor: Mental Health Special was named Science and Natural History winner; *Queers: The Man on the Platform* won the Drama award; *Football Abuse: The Ugly Side of the Beautiful Game* triumphed in the Current Affairs category; and CBBC's comedy panel show *The Dog Ate My Homework* was awarded the Comedy prize.

Iain Stirling also took home the On-screen Personality award for his presenting role on the CBBC panel show.

Raise the Roof Productions' *Phil Spencer: Find Me a Home* triumphed in the Factual Entertainment and Features category, while Darren Hercher Films' *Sighthill* won the overall Documentary and Specialist Factual award.

Other factual prizes went to Hopscotch Films' *Brian Cox's Russia* (History), in which the actor travels to Russia to discover stories of fellow Scots who made the country their own, and Pacific Quay Productions' *Terry Pratchett: Back in Black* (Arts), a docu-drama in which Paul Kaye plays the late author of the *Discworld* series of books.

STV News's Ben Philip won the Young Journalist award, which is presented in memory of BBC Scotland news and current affairs editor George MacFarlane Sinclair. The category is open to journalists up to the age of 30 and comes with a prize of £1,000, donated by the Sinclair family trust.

STV also enjoyed success in the News Programme category, where the award went to *STV News at 6: North*.

Biança Barker won the Director award for *Steadipix*



BBC Scotland earns its stripes

Queers:
The Man on
the Platform
BBC

RTS Scotland winners

RTS Scotland Award - Ewan Angus, BBC Scotland

Drama - *Queers: The Man on the Platform* - BBC Scotland for BBC Four

Comedy - *The Dog Ate My Homework* - BBC Scotland for CBBC

Children - *Gudrun: The Viking Princess* - Maramedia for CBeebies

On-screen Personality - Iain Stirling, *The Dog Ate My Homework* - BBC Scotland for CBBC

Director - Bianca Barker, *A Family Divided* - Steadipix Productions for BBC Two Scotland

Factual Entertainment and Features - *Phil Spencer: Find Me a Home* - Raise the Roof Productions for Channel 4

Documentary and Specialist Factual - *Sighthill* - Darren Hercher Films for BBC Two Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual

History - *Brian Cox's Russia* - Hopscotch Films for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Arts - *Terry Pratchett: Back in Black* - Pacific Quay Productions for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual - Science and Natural History - *Trust Me, I'm a Doctor: Mental Health Special* - BBC Scotland for BBC Two

Factual - Daytime - *Live at Five* - STV for STV2

News and Current Affairs - News Programme - *STV News at 6: North* - STV News for STV

Young Journalist, presented in memory of George Sinclair - Ben Philip - STV News for STV

Current Affairs - *Football Abuse: The Ugly Side of the Beautiful Game* - BBC Scotland for BBC One Scotland

Sport - Live Event - *Sky Sports: Scotland v England* - Sky Sports for Sky Sports

Productions' documentary about a family of 17 siblings scattered across Scotland, *A Family Divided*.

The RTS Scotland Award, which recognises an outstanding contribution to television in Scotland, was presented to Ewan Angus, until recently BBC Scotland's commissioning chief.

Over more than two decades at the BBC, Angus worked on shows that included *Still Game* and *Mrs Brown's Boys*.

The Student Award – chosen from the winners of the main categories at January's Scotland Student Television Awards – went to the drama *Antonio*, by Alison Still of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

"Congratulations to our winners and nominees – the range and breadth of entries for this year's awards was truly impressive and reflective of Scotland's vibrant production community," said Lisa Hazlehurst, chair of the judges for the RTS Scotland Awards 2018.

STV presenter Jennifer Reoch and stand-up comedian and radio presenter Des Clarke hosted the awards ceremony, which was held at the Old Fruitmarket in Glasgow.

Matthew Bell

Sport - Programme - *Glasgow 1967: The Lisbon Lions* - IMG Productions Scotland for BBC Scotland

Professional Excellence - Camera - *Glen Milner, Handmade in Hull* - BBC Scotland for BBC Four

Professional Excellence - Sound - *Kahl Henderson, Accidental Anarchist* - Hopscotch Films for BBC Four

Post-production - Editing - *David Arthur, Sighthill* - Darren Hercher Films for BBC Two Scotland

Post-production - Graphics and Titling - *Playdead, Trust Me, I'm a Doctor* - BBC Scotland for BBC Two

Innovation & Kidder - BBC Scotland for BBC The Social

Short Form Content - *Taking Stock* - Relative Films for Channel 4

Animation and VFX - *League of Legends* - Axis Animation, online

Student Television Award - *Antonio* - Alison Still, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

ONLINE at the RTS

■ It's been a hectic month on the digital desk. Kate Holman has been up to her neck in the archives as she reviewed the past year in the life of the RTS for its annual general meeting at the end of May. And what a year it was! A Royal visit, our most glittering awards to date and a glut of star-spangled events capturing the very best of UK television (www.rts.org.uk/bestof2017).

■ We have also had a look into the threat that social media poses to journalists working both here and abroad. Orla Guerin, from BBC News, and Stuart Ramsay, from Sky News, stand up to defend proper, honest journalism in an era of fake news and citizen journalists (www.rts.org.uk/socialmediajourno).

■ And we have some lighter fare. Comedian and writer Tom Davis, the co-creator of *Murder in Successville*, sat down for a chat about his hit (and RTS award-nominated) BBC Three show. From working as a scaffolder, via a stint as a Little Mermaid-inspired drag queen, to winning a Bafta, it's been an unlikely route to fame for the 39-year-old Croydonite (www.rts.org.uk/TomDavis).

■ And to round off a busy month online, we spoke to Sinéad Keenan about her RTS award-winning role in ITV's moving and harrowing *Little Boy Blue*. In that Liverpool-set drama, she starred as Melanie Jones, the mother of Rhys Jones, who was murdered, aged 11, in 2007. Keenan's co-star, Stephen Graham, also picked up an RTS award for his performance in the production (www.rts.org.uk/SineadKeenan).

Ed Gove

A brave new world?

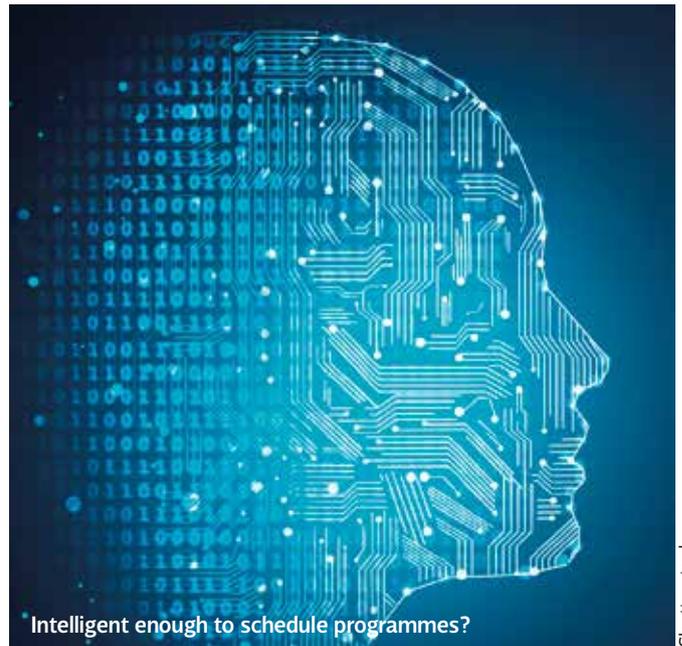
London Centre RTS London's final session at ITV Studios on the South Bank looked at how artificial intelligence (AI) could shape the future of broadcasting.

Very broadly, AI is teaching computers to "learn" from data without being programmed (rather as humans do) – so-called "machine learning".

Ian Whitfield, founder of Virtual AI and ex-ITV director of technology, explained how his company's systems enhance the automation of back-office processes that are fundamental to broadcast TV: "In channel scheduling, many of the repetitive and time-consuming tasks can be done by robots."

With a low cost of entry, he claimed that payback for a straightforward system could take less than a year.

IBM global cognitive solutions leader Doug Clark said that Watson – IBM's AI brand – is already helping to speed



Shutterstock

up many production processes. "We're analysing text, audio and video to create enhanced metadata and new ways of presenting content. [There are] opportunities to mine and monetise it, and service the content more effectively," he said.

BBC Four channel editor Cassian Harrison revealed a current project with BBC Research & Development (R&D) to use machine learning to make the most of the BBC's vast archive of audio-visual content.

"Finding the best of it is a

real challenge," he said. "Can technology help us capture content that represents the spirit of BBC Four – the kind of content that our audience will love?"

George Wright, head of internet research and future services at BBC R&D, added: "We're working on using AI to make better programmes – the current project will ask, 'What could an evening of BBC Four chosen by AI look like?' And, 'Can AI be dynamic enough to respond in real time to audience feedback?'"

Nick Radlo

Farewell to ITV Studios

■ After 17 years, 'AI in broadcasting' was the last RTS London event to be held at ITV Studios, which are due to be demolished later this year. Former London Chair **Norman Green** looks back at the centre's long relationship with the South Bank building.

"On 8 February 2001, we held our first event, "Interactive education", at London Weekend Television's (LWT) 14th-floor review theatre, with a panel of experts from the

BBC, Granada, Channel 4 and other digital broadcasters.

"The review theatre was limited to about 60 seats, so, at several events, we had people sitting on the windowsills and the stairs to the projection room, but we stayed at LWT until spring 2007, when ITV carried out a revamp of the 14th floor.

"We took up residence at the Moving Picture Company for nine months, before moving back to the newly revamped,

upmarket 14th floor of LWT, which was now called the Embankment Room.

"In 2010, we moved to the old bar area, where we have been ever since, attracting up to 200-plus audiences to our events, which have ranged across the disciplines that make up the TV industry.

"It is with great sadness that we have to leave the LWT/ITV Studios. We wish to say a big thank you for their generosity over almost two decades, during which time they have provided the London Centre with superb facilities at no charge."

This year's RTS Young People's Media Festival attracted 140 people to the University of Sunderland's David Puttnam Media Centre in May. The winners received awards and certificates from the North East and the Border Centre.

ITV Tyne Tees content editor Alex Watson hosted the festival, which included industry networking and a mini-masterclass in camera-work. Kia Pegg and Connor Lawson from CBBC show *The Dumping Ground*, which is filmed in the North East, were special guests.

The festival has been running for more than 20 years and celebrates work from students, schools and colleges. In total, this year, there were 49 entries from young filmmakers, from 13 institutions or on an individual basis.

Stratford-upon-Avon College won the Drama award for *God Save Us All* and Francesca Colpitts-Swaby was commended for *Secrets*.

In Entertainment, Durham Sixth Form Centre's Emily Taylor won for her music video *What Makes You Beautiful*.



From left: Victoria Griffin, Francesca Colpitts-Swaby, Kia Pegg and Connor Lawson

Aine Dvileviciute

Festival backs young talent

Carlisle College's Josh Doggart, Richard Dent, Hayden Leeks, Grant Lywood, Dean Brown and Luke Davidson received a commendation for the

Factual entry *Cardiac Arrest in the Workplace*.

The Professionally Supported category is for entries where young people have

received support from industry professionals. The field was smaller this year, with no entries in the Entertainment category, but the standard remained high.

Tyneside Cinema, in collaboration with BFI Fiction Film Academy and Northern Stars Documentary Academy, collected both Drama and Factual awards.

Body Burying, by Anna Emmerson Robinson, Phoebe Hay, Patrick Bell, Finn Smith Ogg and Eva Sykes, triumphed in Drama. *Still Life*, directed by Amy Jobe, with Freya Tarn-Chapman, Rebecca Burgess and Rowan Hodgson, won the Factual award.

"The festival is a fantastic opportunity to celebrate and encourage the young talent in the region. I'm very proud of the effort, enthusiasm and passion the students show," said Victoria Griffin, who took over from Tony Edwards as festival director this year.

She added: "It is a great privilege to be able to bring together the next generation of professionals with the current industry."

Matthew Bell

The filming of *Ryan's Daughter* remembered

At the end of May, RTS Republic of Ireland celebrated the late RTÉ producer/director Adrian Cronin's documentary on the making of *Ryan's Daughter*, with the help of Godfrey Graham, who worked on Cronin's film.

The arrival in 1970 of the Oscar-winning director David Lean (*The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia*) in Dingle, Co Kerry, to make *Ryan's Daughter* was big news.

The movie, set in the years after the 1916 Easter Rising, starred Robert Mitchum, Trevor Howard, John Mills and Sarah Miles.

Cronin got permission from Lean himself to shoot a documentary for RTÉ about the film. Graham was the lighting cameraman on the doc, which went behind the scenes to observe how the local community reacted to the arrival of the Hollywood stars and to talk to those with ringside seats at the biggest show in town.

Gay Byrne, the host of RTÉ's *The Late Late Show*, described Cronin, a former RTÉ head of light entertainment, as the "best and sharpest and most tasteful director of a live show".

Charles Byrne



Filming *Ryan's Daughter* (David Lean at the front)

MGM

OFF MESSAGE

There was a time when the long, light days of the merry month of May heralded a decline in viewing opportunities, especially of potentially award-winning drama. Not any more. In rapid succession, audiences have been given a trio of utterly brilliant shows: Sky Atlantic's *Patrick Melrose*, BBC One's *A Very English Scandal* and BBC Two's *King Lear*. The *Times*, not the BBC's loudest cheerleader, gave Richard Eyre's *Lear* the rare accolade of a full five-star review.

Sky has invested heavily in scripted in recent years, without always hitting the dizzy heights that rivals scale. *Patrick Melrose* surely represents the satellite broadcaster's coming of age in drama. Benedict Cumberbatch's performance is astonishing, notably in episode 1, which is, in effect, a one-man show. His depiction of the eponymous hero as upper-class junkie is destined to concentrate the minds of awards juries.

But it must be said that Hugh Grant and Anthony Hopkins gave acting masterclasses, too. Let's hope that ITV's upcoming seven-part adaptation of *Vanity Fair*, starring Olivia Cooke as Becky Sharp, matches the high standards set by these shows.

■ **Staying with TV drama based on great works of literature, Off Message is a fan of John Updike's *Rabbit* books. In the age of #MeToo, the novels' notorious lead character, womanising Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, has**

presented screenwriter Andrew Davies with a challenge – how to make him less offensive to women.

Thankfully, the production, made by Lookout Point, has a female script editor on board.

Davies recently told the Hay Festival: "We have a script editor in her mid-twenties and she's had some problems with bits of *Rabbit, Run*." He added: "We do want people, if not to love Rabbit, at least to understand him." Quite.

■ By the time you read this, the World Cup will have kicked off. We won't know if England manages to reach the knockout stage of the tournament until the end of the month.

For the BBC, the World Cup is the first time it officially broadcasts in 4K and HDR. Via the iPlayer, the Beeb is preparing to stream dozens of matches on what is being described as "a first-come, first-served basis".

A separate BBC World Cup virtual-reality experience is also in the pipeline.

Whatever the outcome of these trials, it is significant that a major sporting event is once again the launch pad for technological innovation at the BBC. As readers will know, the combination of 4K and HDR gives even more vivid colour reproduction than HD.

Having said that, Off Message sincerely hopes that Gareth Southgate's young team isn't given too many red cards, however bright they appear on screen.

■ **Mark Urban has long been regarded as one of *Newsnight*'s most**

authoritative reporters. His exclusive interviews with members of the medical team who, remarkably, saved the Skripals at Salisbury District Hospital were a genuine scoop. It gave the current-affairs flagship some positive publicity just as new editor Esme Wren prepares to take over.

Urban, a prolific author on military matters, is writing a book on the Russians' poisoning in Salisbury, which could pave the way for further *Newsnight* exclusives.

■ Discovery is moving its Chiswick-based playout centre to the US, but, a few miles further west, in Osterley, Sky has announced plans to build a 6,500m² innovation centre.

The building will house a growing number of engineers and software developers, with around 500 staff expected to be based there. It will become Sky's third technology site, operating alongside the existing bases in Leeds and Milan.

Admirably, in common with the rest of Sky's Osterley campus, the new centre will be run entirely on electricity from renewable sources.

■ **And, finally, this edition of *Television* contains a report from an event staged by the RTS's Northern Ireland Centre, with *Game of Thrones* production designer Deborah Riley.**

It was a memorable evening, not least for the *Thrones*-styled pizzas served following Deborah's talk.

Check out the pictures on Twitter @RTS_NI.

London hipsters may never want to eat pizza at Franco Manca again.



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18 September
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