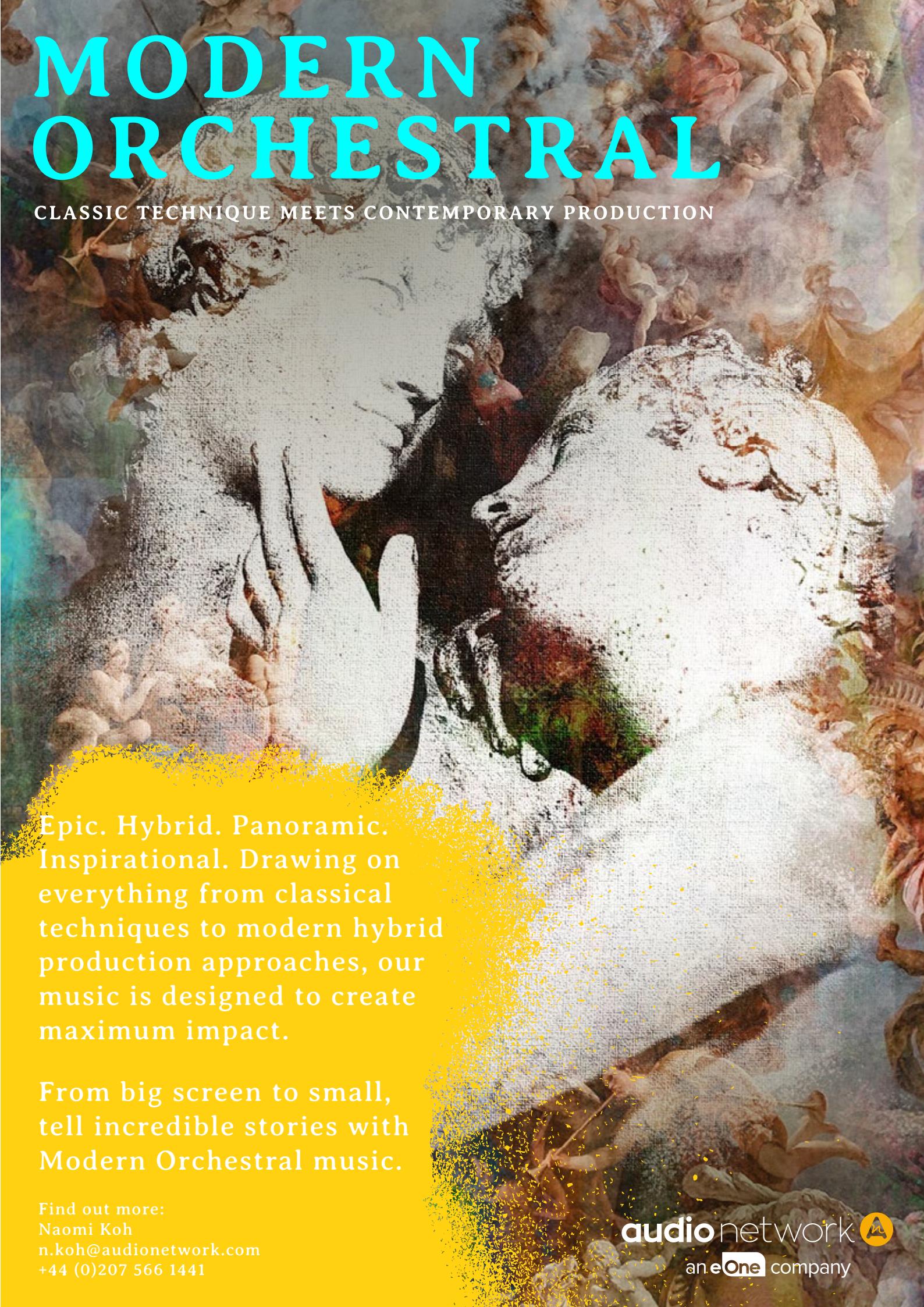


Television



Michaela Coel
Exploring consent

MODERN ORCHESTRAL



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From the CEO



It has been a busy few weeks for the RTS. We've held awards ceremonies at both ends of the UK and hosted a stellar array of digital events.

Congratulations to all the winners of the RTS Scotland Awards, whose streamed ceremony was presented by Scottish actor and comedian Karen Dunbar. Well done, too, to all the victors at the RTS Devon and Cornwall Student Television Awards.

The pandemic has had a profound impact on newsrooms everywhere, and our centres in Devon and Cornwall, the Isle of Man and Thames

Valley have each organised online discussions about how broadcasters have responded to the crisis. *Television's* news pages carry reports of these events, which emphasise the challenges of working remotely.

Last month's RTS discussion on the impact of Covid-19 on TV and related industries was stimulating and provocative. It rightly generated headlines, so a big thank you to panellists Lindsey Clay, from Thinkbox, Claire Enders, Damian Green MP and Sean McGuire, from Oliver & Ohlbaum. Don't miss the report in this issue.

Our cover story looks at the brilliant Michaela Coel's new BBC One drama, *I May Destroy You*, which explores

modern relationships and the thorny question of sexual consent.

With the lockdowns easing, global stockmarkets have been rebounding. Leo Barracough considers the most likely media mergers and acquisitions in the months ahead.

Finally, huge congratulations to Tim Davie on his new DG role. The BBC has an impressive leader familiar with commerce and public service, creativity and business, normal times and times of crisis.

Theresa Wise

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TV diary

Documentary-maker Brian Woods survives sleepless nights to create a unique portrait of coronavirus Britain

Lockdown begins five weeks early for me. Not due to Covid-19 but because, on 18 February, I become a dad. Welcome, Roscoe. I plan to avoid looking at email for the first month.

Three weeks later, on 11 March, I give in. Louisa Compton, editor of Channel 4's *Dispatches*, wants quick ideas on coronavirus. I send her a barmy notion about shooting a film in one day, editing it in a week, and broadcasting seven days after filming.

■ **It is 16 March, my 57th birthday. Louisa calls as I am driving Roscoe to hospital for a jaundice check (he turns out to be fine). C4 likes the "in-a-day" idea, but can we shoot it one day and broadcast the following night?**

Only a newscaster would ask this. Anna Hall, our creative director, and I confer – we just can't do it justice in a day, but suggest a compromise: shoot on a Friday, broadcast the following Monday.

■ On 23 March, Britain goes into lockdown, and Channel 4 commissions the film. The Monday chosen for broadcast is 6 April. We have two weeks.

Our team at Candour Productions in Leeds evacuates the building and we quickly learn out how to use Zoom, to try to figure out how to make this project happen in lockdown.

■ **We need to get three types of material: footage that we will send shooting producer-directors (PDs) to film properly; footage that people will shoot on their phones, but set up in advance, with guidance and direction from us; and all the other user-generated content (UGC) that will be a surprise – it will be whatever people send in.**

■ We bring in PDs we know and trust to work alone; they are based in Glasgow, Belfast, London, Wales, Norwich, Birmingham, Leeds and rural Yorkshire. A team of producers focuses in parallel on specific UGC sequences, while Harry Lock works through the night creating a public upload website.

■ **Friday the 3rd dawns. I film the lack of rush-hour traffic on the A4, but much of the remainder of the day is strangely quiet. After two frantic weeks, all I can do is wait.**

Someone sends in a video of *Lean on Me* – it's brilliant. We check the rights and find that Bill Withers' passing is on the lunchtime news. We send out an appeal for people to sing along to *Lean on Me*, and this becomes the last three minutes of the film.

■ Three weeks into lockdown, I feel like a naughty schoolboy driving to Leeds along deserted motorways.

We have 48 hours to cut the film, and a fantastic team of shift-working

editors. The Other Planet in Leeds has given us all its edit suites, so we can cut socially distanced. PDs watch screens in other suites on Zoom.

■ **Saturday 4 April. We're way behind schedule; Channel 4 is worried – 3,185 clips have been uploaded by the public, and every single one has to be watched.**

By the early hours of Sunday morning, we have a great part one – filmic, funny, beautiful, moving. Somehow, 30-ish hours later, the other three parts are just as good.

■ Monday 6 April, 2:00pm, I head for home. I've not slept much, but the adrenaline buzz gets me back to London safely.

Our absolute deadline is that the film has to be uploaded by 5:00pm, otherwise it will be dropped. At 5:21pm, I get a WhatsApp: "Red Bee confirms that it has a complete recording."

■ **At 8:30pm, 32 of us convene on Zoom for a pre-transmission party. Anna and I both make little speeches. Mine is to the effect that I had hoped we could pull it off, but, in the end, what we produced astonished me and is one of the best films I have ever been involved with.**

Brian Woods is founder and director of True Vision (London and Cambridge) and Candour Productions (Leeds). A Day in the Life of Coronavirus Britain is on All4.

Lily Newmark
as Ruthie in
Sex Education



Netflix

Rising star

In the limelight

Matthew Bell speaks to **Lily Newmark** – Ruthie in *Sex Education* – who has a major role in Netflix's new fantasy drama *Cursed*

Lily Newmark is increasingly hard to miss on screen, dividing her time between TV – *Sex Education*, *Temple* and *Les Misérables* – and UK film – Nick Hornby adaptation *Juliet, Naked*, the critically acclaimed *Pin Cushion* and *Misbehaviour*, set during the 1970 Miss World competition. She even had a blink-and-you-miss-it role in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*.

Since leaving the East 15 Acting School four years ago, the 26-year-old Londoner has racked up 15 credits to add to the part in NBC's *Emerald City* that she nabbed while still studying.

Newmark had acted in youth theatre, though she didn't consider "it could be my profession until the end of school". Even then, she almost

opted for theology at university, but "decided that wasn't going to make me my happiest self. It's anthropology, either way: it's studying people as an actor or studying people in terms of their religious beliefs."

She will be back on our screens shortly in one of Netflix's big summer releases, *Cursed*, a 10-part reimagination of the legend of King Arthur.

"I've been wanting to do fantasy for so long," she says, having read *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* as a teenager. "I should take it up again, especially now. It's a good time to escape into another world."

Cursed, though, is an all-too-familiar world. "[The writers] wanted to reflect the world we live in now – it has the same themes of obliteration of the natural world and senseless war. It

didn't feel too far removed from our own reality – it's just that the clothes are a bit different and it was more normal to carry a sword."

Not that Newmark got to wield a weapon, which was a serious disappointment. "My character, Pym, is not a fighter. It's a great shame because I've been wanting – not to start a fight – but to get into combat scenes and I haven't had the opportunity."

The coronavirus lockdown has been a "strange but not too unfamiliar" experience for an actor: "You find yourself in periods without work where you have to keep yourself busy." As befits a creative person, she has gone far beyond perfecting her cooking: "I built a retirement home for my cat out of some old boxes and papier mâché because his back legs aren't working so well."

Newmark should have been filming series 2 of Sky One drama *Temple*, in which she plays the daughter of Mark Strong's subterranean surgeon, who runs an illegal medical clinic beneath the eponymous London Tube station.

When it starts shooting, she hopes the actors will have the freedom to perform. "I would hate for a series to be compromised in terms of its production values or performances because of new [production] regulations. But the priority is people's health and safety and, if that means waiting longer in order to do something in a more authentic way, then we'll just have to wait."

She adds, laughing: "*Temple* is pretty much set in a sort of underground lockdown so perhaps this [crisis] could inspire performances to be more authentic."

Despite her enforced lay-off, now is a good time for young actors, rich in drama on both traditional TV and the US streamers. "There's no lack of content and it's not even as if it's filler – there's a lot of good writing, especially from England," she says, name-checking the "amazing" Laurie Nunn who penned *Sex Education*, in which Newmark played Ruthie.

"Perhaps if I'd started 10 years ago, I would have had to go to LA or New York," she says, "but I've been very happy to stay in London." She has a few projects of her own up her sleeve: "It's funny, but one of them I've been working on for a few years is about solitude and self-isolation. It feels like the moment's passed where that's something people might want to watch." ■

WORKING LIVES



Faye Tozer and
Giovanni Pernice's
Strictly Come Dancing
Halloween routine

BBC

Make-up artist

Lisa Armstrong won the RTS Craft & Design Award for Make-Up Design – Entertainment & Non Drama at the end of last year. She wowed the judges with her work on BBC One smash hit *Strictly Come Dancing*, “consistently impressing audiences and fans, never failing to entertain and constantly exhibiting an amazingly varied array of skills and techniques”.

What makes a good make-up artist?

You have to have a talent and an eye for it – a good artist pushes boundaries. But you also need confidence and

integrity – what goes on in the make-up room stays in the make-up room.

So you need personal as well as technical skills?

Yes, you need to form a personal connection and gain trust – being made up is an intimate experience. The performer might be nervous and you’re the last person they see before they go out to dance. You need to make them feel good about themselves so they can perform well.

What do you bring to work with you?

Everything you need for the job. For *Strictly*, I need three cases, full of glitter,

eyelashes, nail polish, body shimmer and lip gloss. You then adapt it as you get to know a person. So, when I work with Alan Carr, I always make sure I’ve packed my glasses cleaner.

Make-up artists always bring more than they need, so we’re always moaning about lugging suitcases about. We’re the go-to people for plasters, toothpaste, tissues and deodorant.

How big is the make-up team on *Strictly*?

Myself, five make-up artists, a hair supervisor, five hairdressers and four assistants – although, as we lose celebs during the series, the team slims down.

Lisa Armstrong
with her RTS Craft
& Design Award



Richard Kendall

Is it hard work?

On a Saturday, we start at 8:30am and wrap at 11:30pm. During the day, the celebs and their partners are constantly rehearsing and whizzing around the dance floor: the rollers are flying out, the lip-gloss is getting smudged and the eyelashes are hanging off.

Dancers, especially the boys, sweat like you wouldn't believe. The team is constantly on the go. We do the live show and then, after a break, record the results show. And then we're back in the make-up room to clean everything ready for the following week.

Which other departments do you work with?

Costume, staging and lighting. You're running up and down the corridor, talking with the costume department to ensure the dancers look just right. You work with each other, not against each other. We are a big family.

The lighting and the staging needs to highlight the make-up, as it did with Faye Tozer and Giovanni Pernice's

Halloween routine a couple of years back. She was half woman, half skeleton: from one angle, she was beautiful and, then, when she turned in her routine, you saw the gory side of her face. The routine was amazing and it was all about the make-up, costume, lighting and camera departments working together.

How has lockdown been for you?

I've not done anything for months – people are having to do their own make-up. When Piers [Morgan] did his for *Good Morning Britain*, I texted him and asked: "What the hell's happened to you?" People are now appreciating what make-up artists do.

What did you do before make-up came calling?

I was a dancer and went to the Brit School in Croydon, and then joined the pop group Deuce. We toured the country for a couple of years but, when that came to an end, I was at a loss. I was 21 and thought, "What the hell do I do now?"

How did you become a make-up artist?

I realised I had always loved make-up: I did my own make-up for dancing competitions as a kid; in the band, I wanted it all: all the colours, lip gloss, eyelashes and diamante jewellery. I went to the Glauca Rossi School of Make-Up in London and got a diploma. I knew people in the industry and found make-up work for magazines, and had a column in *Cosmopolitan Hair and Beauty* answering readers' questions.

How did you make the jump to TV?

I was doing make-up for singers as well, such as *Pop Idol* winner Michelle McManus, and then I met Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne at a shoot. Sharon's normal make-up artist had another job, so I did her make-up on *The X Factor*. That was my first TV show.

Right time, right place?

Yes, but you're only as good as your last job. I was part of the make-up team on *The X Factor*, loved it and learned so much, before becoming hair and make-up designer on *Strictly*. This will be my 13th year on the show.

What advice would you give to someone starting out now?

Go to college and then practise your craft. Even if you want to work in TV, explore every avenue – it's important to learn how to do theatre or fashion model looks, and to understand wig-making and prosthetics. Throughout your career, you will learn from the people you work with.

Are there any tricks of the trade you can share with us?

Always do the eye make-up first – we use a lot colour and textures here and I don't want it falling on to a perfect, made-up face.

What are the best and worst aspects of the job?

Strictly's the best show in TV entertainment – you can be so creative. The only downsides are the long hours and the lost weekends. But – you know what? – who cares! I love the job.

What other types of show would you love to work on?

Period drama would blow my mind – it would be way outside of my comfort zone. ■

Make-up artist Lisa Armstrong was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

COMFORT CLASSIC



The Sweeney

From a distance of close to half a century, London is almost unrecognisable. Cortinas and Consuls squeal around a semi-derelict city, pockmarked by Second World War bomb sites. Houses and shops are dilapidated, a permanent pall of smoke hangs in the boozers; people look old, even those who aren't. Everything is grey.

Everything except detective inspector Jack Regan's iconic brown suit and green kipper tie. And he was always hungry for nicking villains: "We're the Sweeney, son, and we haven't had any dinner – you've kept us waiting."

In the 1970s, the armed robber was at the top of the criminal ladder and London was at his mercy. In a city without CCTV that ran on cash, not

Matthew Bell salutes Britain's best cop show, which painted a gritty, vibrant picture of a now-vanished city

credit, banks, bookies and security vans were the targets. Trying to stop them were the Sweeney. ("Sweeney Todd" is cockney rhyming slang for the Flying Squad, a specialist police unit that tackled serious crime.) It was cops vs robbers, with both sides toolled up – ideally with a sawn-off shotgun – and ready to shoot it out.

The Sweeney was the brainchild of Ian Kennedy Martin (brother of Troy, who created the long-running BBC cop

show *Z Cars*). It ran for four series on ITV from 1975 to 1978. Two cinema spin-offs, with added sex and violence, were released towards the end of the TV run.

Regan, played by John Thaw, dishevelled, fag on the go, whisky bottle in his office top drawer, was the archetypal 1970s cop. His sidekick, detective sergeant George Carter, played by Dennis Waterman, was barely more presentable, yet – and it is one of the series' enduring mysteries – women, frequently posh ones who should have been way out of their league, fell for them.

In real life, many Flying Squad officers were bent. Indeed, while the series was on air, the squad's commander, detective chief superintendent Kenneth Drury, was convicted of corruption and imprisoned for eight years.

Regan and Carter were honest,

Ear candy

though not averse to cutting corners if it meant feeling a collar. They loved nothing more than a dust up – if they deserved it, villains were given a right hiding.

But *The Sweeney* was not a hackneyed cop show. Behind the car chases, punch-ups, birds and boozing, there was powerful drama, with beautifully drawn characters and memorable dialogue.

Regular writer Trevor Preston gave Regan, who was raging against the unfairness of a cop's life, these lines: "It's a bloody holiday camp for thieves and weirdos – all the rubbish. You age prematurely trying to sort some of them out. Try and protect the public, and all they do is call you fascist. You nail a villain and some ponced-up, pinstripe Hampstead barrister screws it up like an old fag packet on a point of procedure, then pops off for a game of squash and a glass of Madeira. He's taking home 30 grand a year, and we can just about afford 10 days in Eastbourne and a second-hand car. It's all bloody wrong, my son."

The series employed some of the best British character actors: the established – Brian Blessed, Warren Mitchell and Diana Dors – and the up-and-coming, such as Hywel Bennett and Maureen Lipman. Villains and their families were portrayed as humans rather than cartoons.

Everyone remembers Harry South's funky, brass-heavy theme that plays over *The Sweeney*'s opening credits. The poignant minor-key end theme is just as good, evoking the pathos that fills so many of the show's characters, including Regan's.

The 53rd and final episode of the series, "Jack or Knave?", sees a disillusioned Regan resign after being falsely accused of corruption: "You want me to crawl back to work and be terribly grateful that I didn't get nicked for something I didn't do. Well, you can stuff it!" Hailing a cab, he's driven away, slowly, down the Hammersmith Road, to the accompaniment of South's melancholic music. A perfect ending to British TV's greatest cop show. ■

The Sweeney is on ITV4 and also available on Amazon Prime.



BBC

Grounded with Louis Theroux

In his new podcast, documentary-maker Louis Theroux uses his trademark infectious curiosity to explore the lives of some of the world's most recognisable faces. It is his first foray into the world of celebrity since the TV series *When Louis Met...* As he and his guests navigate the new territory of remote interviewing, his signature silences could be mistaken for a Zoom glitch or a phone delay.

Theroux kicks off the series with a conversation with his professional rival, documentary-maker Jon Ronson.

They discuss their shared TV experiences and some of Ronson's notable career moments. These include trying to organise a night in a haunted house for Robbie Williams.

Theroux has since welcomed the

likes of Boy George, Helena Bonham Carter, Lenny Henry, Rose McGowan and KSI to the podcast.

The celebrities share stories from their lives and careers. We learn of McGowan's experiences of growing up in a cult, how the alternative comedy scene changed Henry's life, and why YouTuber KSI was already fully adapted to working online even before the lockdown started.

From Boy George "isolating" alone to Bonham Carter on the challenges of co-parenting, Theroux's guests offer an intimate look at their daily lives and how they have adapted to the new normal.

Don't miss Theroux's bonus "lockdown kitchen disco playlist", which includes some surprising rap entries.

Kate Holman



Michaela Coel in
I May Destroy You

Personal and provocative

Michaela doesn't skirt issues – she goes straight at them." Executive producer Roberto Troni is talking about Michaela Coel's fearless new drama *I May Destroy You*, which explores sexual consent in contemporary London.

The 12-part BBC One/HBO series is, to an extent, based on personal experience – like her character, Arabella, Coel was sexually assaulted after her drink was spiked, an experience she

Michaela Coel's new drama *I May Destroy You* is certain to provoke audiences. She tells Matthew Bell why her 'vomit drafts' have a life of their own

revealed two years ago while giving the MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh International TV Festival.

Coel found the experience of writing *I May Destroy You* cathartic and, ultimately, liberating. "Anything cathartic is hard, but it was also really glorious. It was horrible, dark and beautiful. I was able to reflect on the pain, which meant I had survived it," the London-born actor and writer tells *Television*. "To finish draft after draft and get to the end, sort of metaphorically finding my way out, was a beautiful experience."

In the series, Arabella is suffering from writer's block and unable to complete her second book. This isn't a problem that afflicts Coel, who describes her writing process as akin to producing "vomit drafts".

It was executive producer Phil Clarke's confidence in her writing – as head of comedy at Channel 4, he had commissioned her sitcom *Chewing Gum* – that led Coel to Various Artists Limited, the indie he founded in 2017 with fellow Channel 4 commissioner Roberto Troni and *Peep Show* writers Sam Bain and Jesse Armstrong.

"It's the reason I came to Phil. I did my 'vomit drafts' for season 1 of *Chewing Gum*," she recalls "and the call was made that I had to find a co-writer. I remember being in Boots and getting the call and the earth fell from beneath me – I was crying in the middle of Boots."

"Phil read it and said, 'What do you need a co-writer for?' He understands my babble."

Coel, Troni and Clarke approached Piers Wenger, controller of BBC drama commissioning, who, without a treatment, let alone a script, snapped up *I May Destroy You*.

"Amid all the dramas about consent we've been pitched in the wake of the #MeToo or Time's Up [movements], this stood out," says Wenger, who met Coel when she was making BBC Two drama *Black Earth Rising*. "Michaela's way of seeing the world is unlike anyone else's. That really comes through in the finished show: it's funny, incredibly idiosyncratic, very personal, but with so much to say about the world."

The series, adds Wenger, "constantly trips you up and challenges you".

Coel thinks the "idiosyncratic" content reflects her writing style. "When I write, I don't plan in advance where I am going," she says. "Imagine you are walking your dog and your dog is dragging you in all these directions – that's the script. Sometimes, as I'm typing, my jaw drops because I didn't know I was going to go [to a particular place]."

"I spend a lot of time alone, away from my phone, and I travel. Even if it's just a train to Kent to sit in a cheap Airbnb, it means my variables are constantly changing. I'm constantly trying to live a life that throws up things I can't predict."

Coel drafted and redrafted, using Clarke and Troni as her sounding boards. "We'd question her and talk

about different ideas and approaches. She'd go away and rewrite. And we did this process over and over again. Our function was to help Michaela tell her story," recalls Clarke.

"I was constantly whittling away, responding to their questions, understanding where I wasn't being clear,"

'I WAS ABLE TO REFLECT ON THE PAIN, WHICH MEANT I HAD SURVIVED IT'

recalls Coel, "and then going back and trying again."

While scripts were being honed, HBO came on board. The BBC and US network's versions are identical. "It's a very modern situation, working to two broadcasters – it ran very swimmingly," says Clarke. "[They] were respectful of each other; [neither] was trying to elbow their way to the front. There was literally not one bit of argy-bargy."

Julie Harkin assembled the cast, including Weruche Opia (*Sliced*) and Paapa Essiedu (*Kiri*), which reads like a who's who of up-and-coming black acting talent.

"Julie's a very established casting director but really has an eye on emerging talent. She and Michaela were talking the same names immediately," recalls Troni. "We've all worked with those casting directors who just pull out the tried and trusted."

Along with *Noughts + Crosses*, Steve McQueen's upcoming *Small Axe* and the adaptation of Vikram Seth's novel *A Suitable Boy*, *I May Destroy You* is making 2020 "an outstanding year for on-screen diversity" on the BBC, says Wenger. "It's about opening up the talent pool and showing [BAME] actors that there are opportunities in Britain and at the BBC. We need to earn their trust because I don't think that comes automatically."

Coel co-directed with Sam Miller, who helmed *Luther*. "Sam led the way; he's a very experienced director and brought visual flair to the show."

Michaela was keen to direct but realised it was going to be a learning curve for her. They formed a partnership on set and made it work; they got the best out of each other," says Clarke.

As creator, writer, star and co-director, Coel describes the task of bringing *I May Destroy You* to screen as like "creating Mount Everest and then climbing it".

"While I was learning my lines in the evening, I was also rewriting the script. I was then getting up in the morning, doing my make-up before we began shooting, and then I had to go on set and figure out how a sequence would work and what it would look like."

Coel says that, during the shoot, "memories of something that was deeply traumatic" were erased by the joyful experience of working closely with the production crew: "I imagine that when you climb Everest you feel this same overwhelming sense of love, euphoria and gratitude."

The production hired *Sex Education*'s intimacy co-ordinator, Ita O'Brien, and used closed sets to shoot scenes with explicit sex and sexual violence. It also offered therapeutic support to the cast and production crew.

"Because of the nature of the material, there was a lot of discussion with the cast, even before filming started. There were rehearsals and workshops with Ita," explains Troni. "In the old days, there were those terrible stories about people turning up on the day and being told, 'You're doing a sex scene – take your clothes off'."

"Nothing was sprung on people. There are amazing roles in *I May Destroy You*, but we didn't want to put the actors in positions that they were uncomfortable with."

I May Destroy You is powerful but also frequently disturbing. Is the BBC anxious about its reception? "There is nothing sensationalist about it; it's rooted in the everyday [world] of dating apps and hook-ups, the things you do in your twenties and thirties," replies Wenger. "It's exploring both the fun and the dark side of those experiences. It's rare that you get in one story the two extremes."

"Michaela shows how society lets down the victims of sexual assault and it feels like uncharted territory. It is strong, there is no doubt about it, but isn't that what great drama does? It allows us to see the world from fresh perspectives."

Clarke adds: "There's nothing gratuitous. If people feel uncomfortable, that's up to them, but my feeling is that the more honest and braver we are at tackling these... subjects, [the better]." ■

The economic impact of Covid-19

Independent producers are the most vulnerable to the economic carnage unleashed on the television sector by coronavirus. That was the consensus of a lively RTS webinar examining the impact of Covid-19 on the UK's TV and related content industries. However, despite this worrying situation, there was agreement that all the British broadcasters would survive the downturn.

Of the four panellists, Claire Enders, founder of Enders Analysis, used the most colourful language to describe the plight of what, a few months ago, was a thriving creative sector responsible for global hits and envied by programme-makers around the world.

She said the UK's independent production community was "on its stomach" and contrasted how its peers in the US and Europe were being treated compared with our own Government's attitude to indies.

Her primary concern was for the future of suppliers left "pitifully and badly afflicted" by the Government's response to the pandemic.

She warned that up to half of the UK creative sector, including theatres and museums as well as independent producers, risked going under.

Enders highlighted the "incomparably greater" scale of state-funded support in France, Germany and Italy. These countries had all agreed to provide a financial lifeline for their audio-visual industries. Similarly, the US was providing state funds to ensure that Hollywood survived.

The UK was "in a completely different environment", she said. "It's extraordinary that our fiscal envelope does not seem to have any material impact at all." She forecast a "great depression" in the UK once the Government's furlough scheme ended, compounded by what she thought would be a hard Brexit.

Sean McGuire, Managing Director of consultancy Oliver & Ohlbaum, said

An RTS panel examines the fallout from the crisis on TV businesses

the UK had never experienced "a downturn this deep" and predicted a "fairly profound structural shift" in the sector. He was unsure whether the TV advertising market – already down by around 50% year-on-year – would ever recover.

Even an apparently secure business such as pay-TV sport faced an uncertain future, he said: "Will people still be happy to pay out large monthly amounts for Sky Sports in the future?"

As for the TV industry receiving state aid, Damian Green MP, a member of the Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, said the sector was not high on the list of those likely to receive a subsidy.

"ITV is big enough to look after itself," maintained the MP. Nor did he share McGuire's negativity regarding the future prospects for live TV sport. He predicted huge audiences would return once live professional sport resumed.

The MP also drew attention to Chancellor Rishi Sunak's "unprecedented" Job Retention Scheme, but admitted that the broadcasting sector was not among its priorities.

"Every minister is facing calls for

'SMALLER PRODUCERS AND FREELANCERS... FACE A FUTURE THAT IS MORE FRAGILE THAN EVER'

bailouts from the entire country and the TV industry is not high on the list of [those] who tug the heartstrings, even within the DCMS sector," he said. "However, I take the point that less has been ring-fenced for the creative sector than in other countries and the [select committee] will continue to talk to the Government about this."

Lindsey Clay, CEO of Thinkbox, which represents UK commercial broadcasters, was optimistic about the future of TV advertising. She reminded everyone of its unique ability to reach mass audiences safely and its importance in driving economic activity. "It is irreplaceable," she opined. She wondered, however, if ITV was "really big enough to take care of itself".

Asked to vote on the shape of the eventual economic recovery, the webinar audience thought the most likely outcome was a W-shaped recovery. The companies that survived would be those that were vertically integrated, such as ITV and the BBC, said Enders.

The audience was also asked to vote on the likely winners and losers from the crisis. Netflix would be the biggest winner, according to 68% of those taking part in the snap poll.

Clay suggested that, as competition increased in the SVoD space, more content owners would withdraw their programmes from Netflix to enable them to show these on their own platforms. "Third-party series such as *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory* are some of Netflix's most popular shows," she said. "Once more content owners withdraw their shows, Netflix will look less attractive."

Enders disagreed. She insisted that the secret of Netflix's success was the huge sums it had invested in original series. "That is Netflix's magic sauce: \$50bn spent on content in the past eight years. Given how much Netflix spends, I'm always surprised that it's only responsible for 9% of all video viewed in the UK."



Clockwise from left:
Damian Green MP,
Kate Bulkley,
Claire Enders,
Sean McGuire
and Lindsey Clay

There was agreement that another outright winner of the pandemic would be the recently launched streaming service Disney+, which was already in 50 million homes worldwide.

The biggest loser was likely to be Channel 4, according to those participating in the webinar vote. Enders agreed that Channel 4 was vulnerable but suggested that it had options in the event of a prolonged economic crisis, such as selling its London HQ, relaxing quotas, closing some of its channels or merging with Channel 5.

Turning to the BBC, Green supported the continuation of the licence fee as a means of funding the corporation. “It shouldn’t work in theory, but it does in practice,” he said.

Enders said she was pleased that the pandemic had proved the overwhelming worth of the BBC, with the result that the debate over a subscription model for the BBC was, in effect, dead.

Green suggested that the BBC could be persuaded to commission shows from a more diverse range of suppliers in order to help independent producers: the corporation’s “firepower” could

help to safeguard the future of smaller producers and freelancers, who faced a future that was “more fragile than ever”.

“It is essential that the next Director-General builds on the move to Salford by spreading the BBC’s activity as much as possible around the UK,” he said.

Regarding news, Green said that the pandemic had led to an increased appreciation of trusted PSB news organisations, not least *Channel 4 News*, which had emerged as the most trusted news service in the UK. “The public are now more savvy about structured disinformation,” he added.

Clay said that regulators must not be allowed to be sidetracked by the coronavirus crisis from continuing their examination of how the Silicon Valley behemoths distorted the UK advertising market.

Green suggested that there should be a wide-ranging look at the existing PSB system following the crisis. “The root of it should be about applying economic and cultural theory to consider how many PSBs we need and how best to fit them within the structure that we have,” he said.

McGuire was sceptical about the current configuration of PSBs, which, he claimed, was shaped by the “considerable lobbying efforts” of the incumbents. “There was already a concern that Ofcom was going to use its PSB review to try to preserve the current ecology, but that isn’t the right question,” he argued. “We need to think about what public service broadcasting entails and what is the best structure within which to deliver it over the next decade.”

Enders praised Ofcom for delaying its PSB review. Such an investigation should wait until next year: “You do not look at the future when you’re in the eye of the storm.”

“Survival is all that matters at the moment and you won’t find a chief executive or regulator who thinks any different.” ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS webinar ‘*The industry impact of Covid-19*’ was held on 21 May and chaired by journalist and media commentator Kate Bulkley. The producers were Jonathan Simon, Keith Underwood and Nigel Warner.

ITN Chief Executive **Anna Mallett** tells Steve Clarke that her doctorate is less relevant than her people skills

Crisis shows need for quality journalism

Anna Mallett, CEO of ITN for the past 12 months, could be forgiven for looking a little wearied. Even before coronavirus struck, the news organisation was working full tilt, covering such seismic events as Brexit, the Conservative Party leadership contest and a particularly fractious pre-Christmas general election. And now this.

But Mallett, a former BBC executive who began her TV career researching Channel 4's *The Big Breakfast*'s knobs and knockers item – it was a holiday job – positively radiates energy during our 45-minute Microsoft Teams interview.

This is perhaps just as well. In common with most of ITN's peers, the company is operating with around a third fewer staff, owing to social-distancing rules and employees home isolating. Of course, audiences for ITN's daily news programmes – for ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – have soared as the UK turns to trusted sources of information during the pandemic.

Success of this kind must be a tonic to any boss, especially to one relatively new to the job. She was appointed as John Hardie's successor in December 2018, the first woman to run Britain's biggest commercial news provider. She started work the following April.

Hardie had successfully diversified ITN's business, boosting its production activities to embrace sport, TV commercials and factual programmes for a range of broadcasters, including the BBC, Channel 5 and Netflix.

Mallett recently announced rising revenues at ITN Productions: in 2019, they jumped 20% to a record £18.2m, after producing some 664 hours of content. This includes the award-winning *Channel 4 News/ITN Productions* documentary for C4 and PBS *Frontline*, *For Sama*. Crucially, new long-term news



ITN

contracts have been secured with ITV and Channel 5; the latter has also extended its deal for ITN to make the daily *Jeremy Vine* show. ITN's news-supply arrangements with ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 account for two-thirds of the company's revenue.

And if ITN didn't outperform the BBC at February's RTS Television Journalism Awards, few would deny the excellence of much of its recent output, whether on ITV during last year's general election or on Channel 4, with its coverage of Brexit and now the pandemic in its extended bulletins.

"It's that range and dynamism that makes ITN unique," says Mallett. "We're creating content every day. In this building we have three different news services, serving three different audiences." She adds: "I've always loved TV and working in content and been enthusiastic about storytelling."

A Durham University geography graduate – she did her doctorate at Oxford on John Martin, the 19th-century landscape painter and engineer – her first full-time job was working for the Boston Consulting Group, where she stayed for seven years and specialised in media and retail.

"If you're interested in understanding business, that's a great place to start your career... It's important to be logical, thoughtful and analytic, as well as having the right kind of emotional intelligence." Spotting her obvious leadership qualities, Boston sent her to Harvard Business School.

At the BBC, where she worked for 13 years, her reputation was that of a caring boss. She began her BBC career in 2006 as a strategist, initially working on an attachment in news. There, she assessed which stories might work best in a BBC One 10:00pm slot. At the time, a row was raging because the Director-General, Greg Dyke, had decided to move the *BBC Nine O'Clock News* to go head-to-head with ITN's *News at Ten*.

Subsequently, Mallett landed a permanent job in the BBC's strategy team during the Mark Thompson era. "The benefit of working in strategy is that you do see the wood from the trees and, quite quickly, begin to understand some of the big issues. You also get to meet a lot of different people across the BBC."

'KEEPING YOUR SERVICES ON AIR AND TEAM SAFE IS THE CONSTANT CHALLENGE'

Her career at the national broadcaster included a period as controller of business strategy, where she was responsible for the BBC's overall commercial strategy, as CEO of the commercial facilities operation, BBC Studios and Post Production (now BBC Studioworks) and, latterly, COO at BBC Studios, setting up the production giant with Mark Linsey, a seminal moment for the Beeb.

"I think that was the biggest change the BBC has ever made," she recalls. "That kind of transformational change really excited me. The world's changing – you've got to be agile, you've got to adapt. It was great to be part of that, although not always straightforward. Understandably, change brings a lot of concern and there was a lot to work through."

It sounds like valuable experience

Mallett on lockdown life

TV: 'I really enjoyed *Normal People*. It was done very sensitively. You really got a feeling for those characters' emotions. I haven't read the book but I'm keen to now.'

Books: 'At the moment, I'm reading *Just William* to my little boys, who are eight, 11 and 12. I'm keen that they develop a love of reading. Part of that involves me reading to them. One of them is very enthusiastic about William and all his escapades.'

Music: 'I do like classical music. I find that very relaxing, but I'll listen to anything. My eldest son sings in a rock band, so I get quite a lot of that. I like a bit of Bach. I once read that, if you listen to Bach, you become more intelligent.'

for running ITN during such challenging times. She describes her strategy at ITN as: protecting the core business – the contracts with ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – while growing the production business, where innovation is key – "Our advertising division created the world's first live ad that utilised 5G" – and delivering big events "brilliantly". "We had a few of those last year, including the Tory leadership debates and the general election," she says. "That's where ITN comes into its own. We need to make those big events count."

Her skills as a lobbyist shouldn't be underestimated, either. In a recent submission to the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee's inquiry into the future of journalism, ITN stressed that "high-quality, regulated, impartial provision from multiple sources is essential to a pluralistic news environment in delivering choice and alternative viewpoints that form part of our democratic process, and this should be protected at all costs".

"As we face a global pandemic, this review could not be more urgent," says Mallett. "All our news programmes are seeing sharp increases in viewing figures as people seek out reliable, trustworthy information."

"That audiences are turning to the established, professional sources of journalism at times of crisis serves to underline their enormous value to society and underscores a need for action to protect the public service broadcasters and quality journalism in the future."

As a response to the impact of the health emergency, Mallett has put in place a series of cost-saving measures, including a recruitment freeze, targeted restructuring and furloughing staff.

What, then, is her biggest challenge as ITN continues to navigate and report on the crisis? "Ensuring you keep your services on air and keeping your team safe. That is the constant challenge."

"Things change all the time, so, for example, with the recent relaxation in lockdown, more people will be out and about. Do we need to change anything?"

"People really want that trusted news but at all times it's our responsibility to protect our teams, whether they're going into difficult situations, such as ICU units, or travelling into and being at work." ■



BBC

Jay Blades, TV's favourite furniture restorer and the king of "make do and mend", has just surprised himself with his own skills. "I'm blown away!" he declares from his workshop near Ironbridge in Shropshire. The reason for his delight? He's thrilled to have made some home-made furniture polish.

At a time when many of us are learning new skills, Blades – best known for presenting the breakout hit and RTS award-winner *The Repair Shop* – is joining in for his new 10-part BBC One show, *Jay Blades' Home Fix*, screened every weekday morning.

We speak as he takes a break from filming *Home Fix* in his large workshop, with a lone cameraman standing four metres away and zooming in for close-ups.

Roz Laws talks to **Jay Blades**, presenter of zeitgeist show *The Repair Shop*, whose own life story offers inspiration for these troubled times

Blades is showing people basic DIY skills and learning how to make everyday things we're used to buying in the shops. He describes it as "Blue Peter meets Saturday Kitchen".

"If you can buy it, someone has made it – it hasn't just magically appeared – and there's no reason why you can't, too," he explains. "I used to

buy furniture polish, but not any more. I had to buy some ingredients. The only vinegar I had was what I put on my chips, so I had to get distilled white vinegar, but it wasn't hard.

"The show is partly about using old remedies and going back to the Second World War, when it was hard to get hold of things. And showing people how to adapt if they don't have a drill or tools. You can make some things with cardboard if you don't have timber."

"Like many people in lockdown, I've been getting around to doing DIY jobs. I've oiled all the squeaky doors in my house. I'm over the moon with my furniture polish. It smells beautiful, too, like oranges. I'm going to make dish-washer tablets next."

Blades' TV shows are tapping into the mood of the nation, with the way they help other people, champion

skills and encourage restoration, rather than a throwaway culture.

The Repair Shop offers soothing and uplifting television that seems perfect lockdown viewing, helping us navigate a new normal.

It's where damaged but cherished family heirlooms are brought back to life. We marvel at the skill and patience of craftsmen and women – furniture restorers, horologists, metalworkers, ceramicists, toy restorers and more – and are moved at the emotional stories behind the objects.

They range from musical instruments and clocks to a First World War soldier's helmet, penny farthing bike or a toy Dalek.

No wonder around 7 million have been watching *The Repair Shop* in its new, prime-time slot of 8:00pm on BBC One, making it one of the biggest quarantine hits.

"*The Repair Shop* is great for now," agrees Blades. "People tell me that they love the way it makes them feel and how it makes them remember. It takes us down memory lane, but with a modern twist. It goes back to an era when people used to fix things before this consumer society."

"It resonates with viewers during the crisis, when people are doing nice things for people they don't know. This virus has taught us to get back to being human. That's what *The Repair Shop* is about – love, kindness and community. We're working together to restore people's memories, and that's beautiful."

"I knew from early on that it was going to be something really special. Bringing so many different craftspeople together in the same building is an unusual concept, but a refreshing change."

It seems to work across all demographics, too. Celebrity fans range from Stephen Fry and Richard Osman to Leigh-Anne Pinnock from Little Mix.

The Repair Shop, which is produced by Ricochet, had a low-key start as an afternoon show on BBC Two in 2017, but was swiftly recommissioned. By series 4, in 2019, it had switched to BBC One. It won the Daytime Programme

prize at the RTS Programme Awards 2019 plus a Rose d'Or, and Best Daytime Programme at this year's Broadcast Awards. A Christmas special attracted 5.5 million viewers, which prompted schedulers to give series 6 a peak-time slot. Filming took place five days a week from last April until January this year, so there are plenty of episodes

'THE REPAIR SHOP' IS ABOUT LOVE, KINDNESS AND COMMUNITY

yet to be rolled out, at both 8:00pm and in daytime.

Blades was running a charity, Out of the Dark, teaching teenagers furniture restoration as an alternative to petty crime, when he was featured in a *Guardian* video.

He was approached to appear on the BBC's *Money for Nothing*, and then invited to present *The Repair Shop*, which was devised by Ricochet's creative director, Katy Thorogood, after she had a chair restored that was owned by her late mother. Blades still appears on *Money for Nothing*.

"When I was growing up on a council estate in Hackney, I could never believe I'd one day be on three shows on BBC One. It's unreal," he muses.

It has been a struggle to get to this point. Blades, now 50, left school at 15 with no qualifications. He worked in a sausage factory and on a building site before teaching himself furniture restoration, until his life fell apart almost four years ago.

His charity and his marriage collapsed at the same time and he ended up homeless. A friend in Wolverhampton came to his aid. He has been in the West Midlands ever since, setting up his shop and coming out of a "very dark place".

The Repair Shop has had a lot to do with that. He talks with great fondness

of his fellow craftspeople, his "location family", and their time together at the Weald and Downland Living Museum outside Chichester.

All the repairs take place in the 17th-century thatched barn except for shot blasting and sandblasting, which aren't allowed in the listed building. Repairs can take up to two weeks of full-time work.

Blades also reveals that "it may look warm in the barn but it's one of the coldest places I've ever been, unbelievably freezing. In winter, you'll notice us getting bigger, because of all the layers of clothes we wear."

"We are cheered up by our show mascot, Rocky the robin. He often flies in when people arrive with their objects and seems interested in what's going on."

Blades is known for his sharp sense of style, including his trademark flat cap, which he rarely removes other than to "take his hat off" for a particularly good transformation. "It's my brand," he chuckles. "The cap and the glasses, which I do actually need – without them, everything is blurry."

Blades' main job is to help the owners tell the touching stories of their treasured objects.

"I don't get too emotional, the things I've had to deal with in my life have made me tough," he says.

"But sometimes the stories get to me. The widower who brought in the jukebox so he could hear *Moonlight Serenade*, the song he danced to on his wedding day – that really hit me. And Albert, with his transistor radio that held precious memories of his wife. Then, there was the family whose mother brought a pump organ from Jamaica, and the man handing a barge-ware teapot down to his granddaughter after his daughter's death."

"They were particularly emotional stories, but I managed not to show my feelings. It's not about me, and the show isn't at all exploitative – we never want to milk it. I don't have a script, we want everything to be natural."

And naturally good, you might say. ■



Julie Graham

‘W hen the going gets tough, the tough get going.’ The 1980s Billy Ocean lyric,

no doubt part of the soundtrack to the teenage lives of the six menopausal women in new, Brighton-set ‘drama-with-funny-bits’ *Dun Breedin’*, could be the mantra of its creator, Julie Graham, who starred in ITV’s *Benidorm*

She and Andrew Green, a co-founder of Blonde To Black Pictures Two, made the series featuring a cast of six – plus extras – on six different sets, with no crew, just basic lighting and sound and a camera kit consisting mainly of iPhone 7s, while keeping to lockdown guidelines. And all in three weeks.

Produced by Jackie Green and Claire Baylin of Manic Butterfly Productions, *Dun Breedin’* recounts the lives, loves and losses of six friends, putting women’s sexuality, agency and worth under the spotlight.

The star-studded cast includes *EastEnders*’ Tamzin Outhwaite, Tracy-Ann Oberman and Alison Newman, alongside *Coronation Street*’s Angela Griffin and Denise Welch.

In April, Welch, with her “presenter’s hat on”, joined Graham, Griffin and *Dun Breedin’*’s Bafta-nominated director, Robin Sheppard, whose credits include *Harlots* and *Benidorm*, for a lively RTS North West online discussion. Graham said: “I was developing it as an eight-part, half-hour series when [Andrew] had this mad idea to start filming it virtually, in 10-minute chunks, and putting it out almost like tasters.”

The 12 10-minute episodes began streaming on 30 April on YouTube, landing every subsequent Thursday at 3:00pm. Viewers are encouraged to donate to the Trussell Trust, which supports food banks.

“What was wonderful was that every single person I got in touch with said yes,” said Graham. “It’s amazing that everybody wanted to put their neck on the line [in the sense that] it was an experiment and a huge learning curve.

“We just wanted to do something creative. For actors, [lockdown] has been very frustrating.... We can’t just go out into the street and start acting at people, we’d get carted away. I wanted to do something that would utilise the time in this very strange world that we’re living in.”

“I’d been playing the part of ‘Isolation Ange’ in a series called

Getting inventive in lockdown

Julie Graham shares with the RTS how she created an original online drama with a little help from some famous friends

'Lockdown," Griffin joked. "[Just before Julie's call came,] I'd decided I didn't want to be in that series any more. So, the second I got the call, I grabbed it with both hands."

Welch explained that although it was "filmed in lockdown, it's not about lockdown", which meant that Graham and Sheppard "had to be very inventive about how we brought all these characters together. There's lot of FaceTime, a lot of us on our own, or working with our families."

Sheppard outlined the concept: "The cast film in their own homes using members of their family as crew and actors. So there's no crossover of any characters in reality; and no people, no crew members, coming into those homes."

She praised the actors for embracing the slightly scary new way of working: "There's no make-up artist, wardrobe, continuity, DoP, sound recordist, no one... to put the microphones in your clothes."

The actors shot their scenes themselves. "And, for it all to cut together like a finely made Italian skirt," said Sheppard, "I gave them all a very detailed shot list, floor plans to show where the camera should be so that all the eyelines were right and... visual diagrams. I have to say, the results are spectacular."

"The FaceTime calls are actually quite complicated to film," she added. "All the eyelines need to be right so it doesn't look like people are looking in the wrong direction."

Transgressions are known as "crossing the line". Welch joked: "It's like the offside rule – no matter how many times somebody explains it, I still don't understand."

From Sheppard's perspective, "every single household is a little independent film-making unit. For instance, [Griffin's daughter] Tallulah is a budding film-maker and she's like having a mini-me on the set at Angela's house.... I find that personally really inspiring.... It's really great for the kids, because lockdown is psychologically tough, and we're keeping them busy and learning."

Griffin added that it had been an "opportunity to get involved in the technical side of things in what felt like quite a safe way", producing something that was "funny, cool and current – it's relevant".

Welch agreed. "Menopause is this taboo subject that no one likes to talk about, when it's something that all women go through." Like all taboo subjects, "if you make it funny, then



Phones play a key role in *Dun Breedin'*



Manic Butterfly

people are going to learn more about it while laughing."

That was the appeal of Graham's scripts. "A big bugbear of mine is that the menopausal woman is always the butt of a joke – the harridan or battle-axe, a figure of ridicule, usually from the male gaze – and it's not reflective of what it's actually like to be an older woman," she said. "In this industry, there aren't the opportunities for the older [female] actor. The roles don't exist.... The project was borne out of the sheer frustration of not being represented. It's a very personal project for me."

Sheppard added that "because of the way we're making this show – filming in people's homes – the intimacy you get between this bunch of women really comes across strongly on the screen.... I felt, 'Oh my God, for the first

time, I'm seeing women talk to each other in the way they do in real life!"

Welch asked Sheppard if she thought what they were doing would change the way television drama was made. "We are in the situation we are in, and what I love about this is we are being bold and brave and going out there like pioneers and finding a new way of doing things.... While we're in the 'waiting room', why not be very productive?"

She had a message for younger women as well: "Only 7% of directors are women... there's still so far to go. To all the girls out there, if you have a phone and a story to tell, go and shoot something."

Griffin agreed: "There are lots of free editing apps and you can edit it and make it look professional, add sound, and put music on."

"Making television requires such an extraordinary collaboration and it's so highly skilled. I have so much respect for crews," insisted Graham. "But this industry can be hard to break into, it can feel very daunting. So, if it inspires anyone to write, produce and direct their own vision... it's doable."

Green, who executive produced the series, said that if anyone wanted advice from him on how to further their career in film-making, they could contact him directly.

Welch wrapped up the session by stressing how important it was for Graham to use *Dun Breedin'* to raise money for the Trussell Trust.

"Unfortunately, during this terrible lockdown, this [network of food banks] has become a frontline service. It's where so many children get the hot meal that they'd ordinarily get at school," she explained. "We wanted to raise awareness of that because the show is essentially about women and families... If you can't give [Trussell Trust] money or food, you can volunteer or fundraise with your family for it." ■

Report by Carole Solazzo. *The Dun Breedin'* online event on 11 May was produced for RTS North West by Rachel Pinkney.

Steve Clarke talks to **Andrea Scrosati**, the COO of Fremantle, as he outlines the shape of the post-lockdown world for producers



Sky Italia

Andrea Scrosati

Our new normal

As one of the world's production behemoths, Fremantle – whose shows range from *Pop Idol* via *Neighbours* to *My Brilliant Friend* – is determined to think laterally as it adapts to life in the age of Covid-19.

In several countries, Fremantle continued making content throughout lockdown. "We're a truly global company, so we never actually stopped producing," says Andrea Scrosati, the firm's COO. He is normally based in London but has been based in his native Tuscany for the past two months or so.

In Australia, shooting for *Neighbours* suffered a two-week hiatus. The internationally famous soap is now back in

business, albeit in what its producers hope is a Covid-compliant way of working.

In Germany – where Fremantle's drama serial *Gute Zeiten, Schlechte Zeiten* (*Good Times, Bad Times*) is long established as an RTL staple – Scandinavia and Italy, production continued throughout the various lockdowns. "All our daily dramas, with one exception, are back on air," he says. "They are filmed in contained locations, have local casts and the scripts can be adapted so they are compliant with social distancing."

In Italy, a weekly late-night talk show, made by Fremantle for Sky Italia, quickly reinvented itself. The guests on *EPCC Live* are interviewed remotely but there is a live band in the

audience-less studio. It even features a running gag related to the two-metre social distancing rule.

Not that making TV shows in the new normal is a laughing matter. "We're focusing on the best way to produce in a Covid-compliant way," insists Scrosati. "It's not about just getting back into production, but doing it the right way. All companies need to behave responsibly."

"In future, people will remember how companies behaved during the pandemic. Decisions made by individuals make all the difference. Our culture and values are important to us as a business."

High-end drama is more problematic than soaps, involving, as it does,

international casts, global travel and painstaking and expensive location filming. Recently, Fremantle managed to complete work on the keenly anticipated six-part Danish crime series *The Investigation*, directed by the Oscar-nominated Tobias Lindholm, and which was pre-sold to the BBC, among other broadcasters.

Fremantle still plans to shoot new scripted series in Israel and Italy this summer. There is one important caveat – all these shows have casts that are either local or live in countries near to where the shows will be filmed.

One country where Fremantle seems unlikely to film new dramas any time soon is the UK, where the Government recently introduced controversial 14-day quarantine rules for people arriving from overseas by air, sea or rail. “We’re still waiting for clearer guidance,” says Scrosati.

He was hired by Fremantle two years ago, not least because of his reputation for commissioning top-notch drama at Sky Italia, including such gems as *The Young Pope* and *Gomorrah*. As a signal that Fremantle intends to do more work in this genre last year, he forged a production deal with *True Detective* producer Richard Brown, an executive producer on Hulu’s adaptation of *Catch 22*.

One of the company’s most ambitious shows currently in production is *Mosquito Coast*, an adaptation of the Paul Theroux novel by *Luther* creator Neil Cross, a commission from Apple TV+.

It is unclear how projects on this scale will be produced in a Covid-compliant way. One key issue concentrating producers’ minds across the industry is the difficulty of insuring sets against future lockdowns that might disrupt production.

Scrosati hopes that, globally, governments will step in, because insurance companies are reluctant to insure sets against the impact of coronavirus. “The precedent is 9/11 and airlines,” he says. “Another precedent was insuring homes for earthquake damage in California. Private companies wouldn’t insure domestic properties, so the state of California stepped in.”

It is vital that commissioners are prepared to shoulder some of the risks. “At the moment, there has been a mixed response,” says Scrosati. “To be fair, Netflix is willing to share more of the risks than some other companies.”

He adds: “You have to realise that, in certain territories, though not in all, governments have put in place schemes



My Brilliant Friend

Sky

that are supporting the industry.”

As for the medium-term prospects for high-end drama, Scrosati forecasts a period of up to six months when there could be a shortage of these shows. “If there is an acceleration in production, this could be reduced to two or three months,” he says.

Of course, producers thrive on being creative. Expect more CGI and other special effects in TV drama (this kind of work can be done remotely), says Scrosati. “Creators and producers need to adapt and understand that the world has changed,” he emphasises. “A lot of the projects that we were pitched before Covid were all about scale. Some of those projects are now more challenging.”

The good news for Fremantle is that, while several of its productions have been put on hold as a result of the crisis, only a few have been cancelled. “Obviously, the way we work has changed, but I am optimistic,” says the Fremantle COO. “We work in an industry that is based on ideas. As a species, we have an extraordinary capacity and resilience to overcome adversity. People want to watch content more than ever.”

One of the first lockdown shows to air in the UK was Jamie Oliver’s *Keep Cooking and Carry On*, broadcast by Channel 4 and distributed globally by Fremantle. Oliver and his family filmed the programme at home.

In Spain, the company produced *Balcony Stories*, shown by Viacom-owned channels in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The series deployed

user-generated content to portray positive stories during quarantine.

Scrosati, however, believes that audiences’ appetites have now moved on beyond this type of fare and thinks his experience at Sky Italia will prove to be vital in the weeks and months ahead. “At Sky, we were always thinking of the customer,” he recalls. “That is something I never forget here at Fremantle when we work on a new show.”

“Content will become still more customer-focused in future. Also, people’s willingness to use digital devices to conduct their lives – until the crisis my mother never bought anything online – will further boost the popularity of on-demand services.”

“I think there will be more sport on demand. In the UK, Amazon has already got into that market.”

“This does not mean that linear broadcasting doesn’t have a great future. The crisis has shown that people want to watch TV collectively, but expect linear broadcasters to invest more in their on-demand services.”

“I think we’ll see more non-scripted shows on SVoD platforms. The dating show *Too Hot To Handle*, produced by one of our UK labels, Talkback, was the most-watched show on Netflix in 20 territories for nearly two weeks during lockdown.”

“Generally, people will want shows that provide more escapism and the opportunity to relax. Pure entertainment that can be shared with friends and family will be at a premium at a time when people are restricted in meeting with them.” ■

Last Tango in Halifax



BBC

The people's writer

It is doubtful whether Sally Wainwright's writing has ever been described as inauthentic – her TV drama is populated with real people, speaking natural, colloquial English. "My imagination doesn't seem to click in if what I'm writing doesn't feel real, or if it's phoney, or if something feels a bit cheesy or sentimental," she told Endemol Shine UK COO Lucinda Hicks, who hosted an RTS webinar with the writer in May.

Discussing her work, Wainwright said: "I hope it's down to earth and feels authentic." But in her hands – unlike gloomier dramatists – authentic should not be read as dour. "I hope everything I do is funny, even when it's very dark, like *Happy Valley*. It's always important for me to entertain people," she said.

Happy Valley, which starred Sarah Lancashire as a Yorkshire police sergeant, gave Wainwright some of the best reviews of an award-laden career that began, on radio, with *The Archers* in the late 1980s and then, on television, with *Coronation Street*, in 1994.

Sally Wainwright, busy on season 2 of *Gentleman Jack*, tells the RTS why her work has to be grounded in reality

"I can't remember not writing," said Wainwright who, as a child, turned out stories and cartoon strips with her sister. In her early teens, Thames TV's musical drama *Rock Follies of '77* "had a really profound effect on me", she recalled. "I remember being so excited about the show and tangibly thinking that's what I'm going to do – I'm going to make television programmes."

Wainwright "learned a heck of a lot" as a writer from *The Archers* and *Corrie*. "Particularly on *Coronation Street*, some of those writers had been there 20, 30 years and they were very, very skilled storytellers.

"I didn't speak. I was shy – I could

write – but for the first few years I didn't contribute, which is not good for your self-esteem. But I did soak it all up."

She added: "[Soaps] are a fantastic place to start. It always makes me laugh when young people want to work in Hollywood and they believe writing soaps is a pile of junk. And you just think, '[They] don't know anything'."

Wainwright left *Corrie* when her first original series, ITV lottery comedy-drama *At Home with the Braithwaites*, starring Amanda Redman, took off. "It was a fantastic experience, but it kind of spoiled me," she admitted.

Her follow-up, BBC One's *Sparkhouse*, a modern retelling of *Wuthering Heights*, brought Wainwright back to earth: "I was really pleased with it, but nobody watched it and it got not very good reviews. I was really shocked."

"We've all written turkeys, but it is hard because you put just as much effort into things that people don't get. People say, don't take it personally, but writing is personal – you can't not take it personally."

Until she penned *Scott & Bailey*,

'I'VE GOT TONS OF WORK TO DO, BUT I'VE FOUND IT VERY HARD TO CONCENTRATE'

Wainwright admitted that she had prided herself "up until that point for not writing a cop drama, because it seemed to be such a big part of [TV drama's] output".

But, having met detective inspector Diane Taylor, who co-created the series, Wainwright realised that real-life police work was very different to its usual TV portrayal. "It's not about an inspector and his sergeant sidekick who solve everything together. A murder squad is

and I enjoyed writing the scripts, [but] I wouldn't want to repeat it."

Last Tango in Halifax, she revealed, was based on her mother's life, who – like Celia (played by Anne Reid) in the BBC drama – discovered and married a lost love after being widowed. "My mum was thrilled that I'd dramatised what had happened to her. She met someone online who she'd been at school with 60 years ago and they fell in love with each other and got

your time on your own, anyway – I could very happily be a recluse, so this isn't any real hardship for me.

Lockdown has allowed her, for the first time in years, to garden and grow vegetables. "It sounds really glib, but I've enjoyed being at home for a consistent period of time," she said. "The hardest thing [about lockdown] for me is that my mum is in a care home, so I haven't seen her for eight weeks."

Looking ahead, Wainwright wants to



Sally Wainwright and
(right) Lucinda Hicks



RTS via Zoom

a big team of 20 to 30 people. I felt I'd never seen that on telly, although, retrospectively, I thought *Prime Suspect* did that really, really well."

Scott and Bailey, played by Lesley Sharp and Suranne Jones, were the stars of the show but also part of a larger team of detectives. "We wanted [it] to reflect what solving murders is really like," continued Wainwright. "We make entertainment out of murder on TV a lot of the time – the Agatha Christie tradition of solving whodunnits, middle-class murders. Real murders aren't like that – they're very grim."

But the subject matter of the ITV drama began to weigh heavily. "By series 3, I was starting to feel quite depressed," Wainwright recalled. It lifted when she started to write *Last Tango in Halifax*: "I had this absolute buzz of delight and that made me realise that it was the nature of the [Scott & Bailey] material that [was having] an effect on me."

"It was quite relentlessly [focusing on] the real sad and dark side of human nature. I'm very proud of *Scott & Bailey*

married... She loved the show."

Sadly, the screenwriter's mother now has dementia and was unable to watch this year's fifth series. "She's always watched everything I've written. She would have given me the best feedback and wouldn't tell me something was good if it wasn't."

Wainwright is currently penning the second series of the RTS award-winning BBC drama *Gentleman Jack*, which is based on the diaries of Anne Lister, a 19th-century landowner who explored her lesbian sexuality.

Progress, however, has been slow. "I've got tons of work to do, but I've found it very hard to concentrate," admitted Wainwright. She has turned out one episode during eight weeks of lockdown, a slow pace for her.

Normally, she said, "I take my deadlines very seriously", although the coronavirus crisis has delayed filming from June to September.

Talking about her personal lockdown in rural Oxfordshire, she said: "I feel guilty for saying it's really not that bad. As a writer, you spend most of

"challenge myself, whether that's to write or direct for theatre or film". But, she added, "It's finding time. I've got about 10 projects on my books at the moment and I can only work on one at once. It's why I can't direct [*Gentleman Jack*] this time – I've got too many stories I want to tell."

Despite having received a "few offers" from the US, Wainwright is staying put: "I love British telly; I love writing in my own vernacular."

"American culture is significantly different to ours. Again, it comes down to authenticity: I'm sure I could have a crack at it and get away with it, but I wouldn't want to get away with it."

"I want to write scripts that have depth and resonance and, if you're imitating a voice, which I think I would be, I don't know that it would feel real. You can sniff it out when an English person has written an American script." ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS webinar 'In conversation with Sally Wainwright' took place on 18 May and was produced by Sarah Booth and Lucinda Hicks.



FXEmpire

Predators prepare to pounce

Leo Barraclough explains how the pandemic is an opportunity for certain media companies and other investors

Never waste a crisis,” is the oft-quoted cry in the business press of late, and those with financial muscle are getting ready to pounce on distressed stock. The pandemic has seen the price of many media shares plummet, while borrowing remains cheap, setting the scene for a demonstration of Darwinian economics.

Guy Bisson, research director at Ampere Analysis, says two factors will drive mergers and acquisition activity: “One is the impending economic collapse globally, and the other is simple disruption that was going on anyway around streaming migration.” This will drive companies to “seek scale in a storm and look for bargains” over the next year or two.

In May, the merger between Virgin

Media and O2 was announced, a deal that will create a business with revenues of £11bn and 46 million customer accounts. Underlying it are two forces that have been shaping the media landscape for some time: the drive for scale, resulting in consolidation, and convergence between the telecommunications and media sectors.

Such combinations are now commonplace, with AT&T’s support for HBO Max illustrating the benefits of such a marriage. But Sébastien Raybaud, founder of production and finance firm Anton, which has co-financed many bigger-budget TV series, such as *His Dark Materials* and *McMafia*, says “the convergence of the pipe and the content is less relevant now... and less of a necessity”. This is because media companies have started to open up direct routes to the end consumer.

As fast as companies attempt to consolidate, the market further fragments. A Deloitte report, published at the start of the year, stated that “consumers can now choose from more than 300 streaming options”.

Since then, even more services have been added, with more to come. “The [coronavirus] shutdowns have accelerated the move to direct-to-consumer digital entertainment,” says Tim Westcott, research director, channels and programming, at Omdia.

In a hyper-competitive market in which “quality is the differentiating aspect”, Raybaud says, producers of premium content hold all the cards. “The power is shifting to the producer because there are a lot of pipes now and, therefore, there is crazy competition between them to capture eyeballs,” he says.

Many of the best producers tend to be “naturally entrepreneurial and fiercely independent”, Raybaud suggests. They are inclined to resist the clutches of larger groups. “As long as these guys have access to talent and IP, given the demand there is for great content, they can thrive, and so they don’t need to be in a big group.”

Acquiring talent-centred production companies doesn’t always work for the buyers, either. A case in point was when *Black Mirror* creators Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones left their Endemol Shine-backed production house, House of Tomorrow, and promptly set up a new company, Broke and Bones.

As recession batters the ad-supported TV business, broadcasters will be forced to cut content budgets further; meanwhile, production costs will rise due to coronavirus precautions. “Big companies will probably weather the storm,” says Omdia’s Westcott. “Small production companies – which had to stop production and didn’t get paid, and those trying to sell content that hasn’t been completed – are going to have to take a massive revenue hit.”

Such inclement conditions may prompt some independent production companies to look for safe havens by affiliating with large, vertically integrated groups. “We’ll definitely see quite a lot of consolidation on the production side,” says Enders Analysis founder Claire Enders. “Companies that are vertically integrated will have fundamental competitive advantage.”

Recently, Sony Pictures Television invested in Eleven, the producer of Netflix hit *Sex Education*, and Sky Studios took a stake in The Lighthouse, which is headed by three former BBC executives.

Large production groups such as ITV Studios, Fremantle, Banijay and All3Media will also be attractive backers for independent producers.

While Raybaud doesn’t see telcos as likely to play a major role in M&A activity, he says broadcasters and pay-TV companies are natural consolidators, as they transition to a multinational SVoD model due to the squeeze on ad revenue and increased cord-cutting.

Silvio Berlusconi’s Italian broadcaster Mediaset has been targeting German broadcaster ProSiebenSat.1 recently, raising its stake in it to 24.2%. Mediaset, which also has media assets in Spain, including broadcaster Telescinco, is seeking to create a pan-European TV giant to fend off

competition from the global streamers and web giants. “The coronavirus emergency has only accelerated structural changes in the media market and we are more and more convinced of our project,” Mediaset chief financial officer Marco Giordani told analysts in early May.

Although hit hard by the collapse in advertising revenue, ITV is in a far stronger position than it was after the 2008 crash, thanks to its diversification into production, says Enders. That said,

THE CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY HAS ONLY ACCELERATED STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE MEDIA MARKET

she sees the company as a “prime target” for acquisition and, at “a certain point, there’ll be a mismatch between how the market prices the company [and its true worth].”

The most likely buyers are the US entertainment conglomerates. Despite being preoccupied with their own difficulties, they have also been raising huge funds in the capital markets – more than \$51bn since March. Eventually, they will turn their eyes to international opportunities. “They could buy every single commercial broadcaster in Europe for less than [the price of one of the US majors],” Enders points out.

On either side of the Atlantic, the strength of the dollar has exacerbated the imbalance in valuations. “When the dollar is strong, the Americans come looking,” she notes.

One factor that will drive transatlantic deals is “the inescapable logic that global models are the only ones that are prospering at this time”, says Enders.

In line with this “paradigm shift”, there will be renewed calls for Channel 4 and Viacom’s Channel 5 to merge. The steep drop in ad revenue may make Channel 4 unviable. There would be substantial savings to be derived by combining the back-office functions of the two broadcasters.

Among those that are well placed to swoop on ailing media stock are the Faangs – Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and YouTube-owner Google – whose stocks have soared this year, and who have content pipes to feed. Producers of premium shows would make a logical addition to their armoury.

Private equity firms, such as Blackstone, Carlyle and KKR, also have the reserves to snap up distressed media shares, with a record \$1.5tr in cash ready to deploy, according to data released by Prequin at the beginning of the year.

“They have been waiting for this type of market dislocation,” the head of mergers at a major Wall Street firm told CNBC recently.

KKR has already displayed an appetite for media assets. Last year, it took a 44.9% stake in German media giant Axel Springer, and acquired German producer-distributor TMG, renaming it Leonine, and then buying TV producer W&B TV, which makes *Dark* for Netflix.

In May, KKR took a 5.2% stake in ProSiebenSat.1, which it used to co-own. “We have decided to reinvest into ProSiebenSat.1 based on our belief that markets are currently undervaluing the company,” a KKR spokesman told Reuters.

A less well-known private equity firm that has also shown an interest in media stock is Silchester International Investors, set up by a group of former Morgan Stanley bankers. In April, Silchester revealed that it held 5% of German media company RTL Group, which owns Fremantle as well as broadcasters RTL in Germany, M6 in France and Antena 3 in Spain.

Among other bargain hunters are the sovereign-wealth funds, such as Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund, which recently bought nearly \$500m of shares in Disney.

Even large global groups – such as Sony Pictures, MGM, Starz-owner Lionsgate, and Discovery – will be eyed by the acquisitive. Divestments are also on the cards, with one analyst suggesting ViacomCBS should sell Showtime Networks or Paramount Pictures.

Not even Disney is off the table, with Rosenblatt Securities analyst Bernie McTernan suggesting that Apple could make a play for the entertainment giant, saying, “we believe there could be synergies from combining the two”.

Visibility in the market is low at present, but, as soon as the smoke clears, the hunt will begin. ■



The Clinton conundrum

An emotional new film provides a fresh take on the polarising figure of Hillary Clinton. Caroline Frost spoke to its director, **Nanette Burstein**

Bill came early one morning into the bedroom. He sat on the side of the bed and he said, I have to tell you something..." is how Hillary Clinton begins her excruciating personal recollection of one of the most scandalous episodes in American history, when her husband, the President, admitted to having an affair with a White House intern.

Telling her side of the story, the former First Lady remains as articulate, wry and composed as she does during the rest of the four-hour documentary series *Hillary*, charting her extraordinary path through public and private life over the past four decades.

In fact, the only time she visibly cracks is when she recalls their daughter, Chelsea, then 18 years old and in front of the world's press, taking her traumatised parents by the hand and walking between them to a waiting

helicopter on the White House lawn, back in 1998.

With a catch in her voice, Clinton recounts: "Chelsea put herself between us and held both our hands. That was not anything other than her just trying to keep us together. When she did that, I thought, 'That is just so incredible, so strong and so wise.'"

Such intimate recollections are testament to the rapport created with her subject by the series director Nanette Burstein, who conducted 35 hours of interviews for her documentary, shown by Sky Documentaries and Now TV from 11 June.

The film premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival, where it had some of the audience in tears. In March, *Hillary* debuted on Hulu in the US. *Vanity Fair* described the documentary as "enraging and essential".

Burstein, Oscar-nominated for her low-budget film *On the Ropes*, which follows three young boxers and their

trainer, says: "Her husband's infidelity was definitely the most personally challenging part for her, to sit down and discuss openly about how she felt and how she dealt with it. After 30 years, it's still emotionally fraught."

More watching through fingers is required when Bill Clinton shares his own memories of this incident, as well as other key moments of their joint history. Of that time, he reflects, "We all bring our baggage to life and sometimes we do things we shouldn't do. I have no defence. It's inexcusable what I did."

Burstein explains: "They've never sat down for these kinds of interviews before, so it was an amazing opportunity. It was essential for me that he was involved because he's been her partner her entire adult life, she has influenced him as he has influenced her. I couldn't tell her story without his perspective – the good, the bad and the ugly of it."

Barack Obama is also interviewed, reflecting on his years competing against, and then working with, Hillary Clinton. In the flesh, who is the more charismatic former President? Burstein has clearly learned some diplomatic skills along the way. "They're an equal measure," she replies.

Such intimate recollections weren't



initially what the former presidential contender signed up for. Her team had filmed hundreds of hours of behind-the-scenes footage of her 2016 presidential crusade against Donald Trump and a campaign film had been suggested. Once Burstein came on board, however, the parameters naturally widened.

"I wanted to do something far more in-depth about her life," the director explains. "The arc of the women's movement and the partisan politics in our country are things I think about constantly, and I realised Hillary's life was an opportunity to explore both."

"Those same issues are very dear to her heart, and once she felt there was a reason beyond any vanity to tell her story, not just about her legacy but about themes that matter, she became agreeable."

That momentary loss of composure aside, the four-hour series finds Clinton as articulate and reflective as you'd expect. "She was so unguarded in the recent material, I decided to interweave it with the older footage," explains Burstein. "I didn't want people to have

to wait until the fourth episode to see that side of her. I wanted them to see it from the very beginning."

Clinton's warmth is reciprocated by her clearly devoted aides, as well as her classmates sharing stories of her time at Yale Law School and her campaign surrogates – all proof of a strong band of sisterhood that one would

decision to stay in her marriage than they were of her husband's betrayal.

And the tireless effort she put in as a senator for New York and then Secretary of State (112 countries visited, 1,540,000km travelled) have done nothing to reverse their belief that she had always been in it for something other than public service.

Did Burstein get any nearer to solving the riddle of Hillary Clinton, and what it says about her and her fellow Americans? "When you are a woman trying to push the boundaries, or anyone trying to change culture, you are going to have people who love you and hate you for that reason, because you are trying to shift the way we perceive the world," she says. 'Hillary has done that throughout her entire life, particularly once she came into the national spotlight.'

"I don't think the world was quite ready for her personality, so she was a Rorschach test. She was a lightning rod. That's nothing new, but here you see it in the details of how it was played out for her time and again."

After so many hours talking together, Burstein remains impressed by Clinton's preparedness to reflect on her own actions as well as others' in assessing those challenging times.

"I was surprised by her ability to be self-analytical, self-deprecating and self-critical, not just putting the blame on others, on the culture, or this or that. She takes some responsibility that a lot of people in her position are not willing to take." Burstein chuckles. "Of course, we all have blind spots."

If Clinton gave many valuable hours to the project, so did the director. What are her hopes for how it is received in the UK? "For Hillary, I think she's been hugely important in our history, so I hope people understand her in a way they never have before."

"Also, in terms of women's history, how overt the sexism was even not very long ago – I want it to be enlightening, that we still have this unconscious bias against women in positions of leadership. If it's got better, it's partly because of people like her, people who are changing or trying to force us to reconceive our ideas of what a leader really is." ■

Hillary started on Sky Documentaries and steaming service Now TV on 11 June.

OUR FRIEND IN BELFAST

March 2020 was by far the most surreal month of my working life. For the safety of our staff, we decided to close our offices on 18 March, the day after St Patrick's Day, which usually means mass celebrations here in Belfast and one hell of a hangover. This year, it brought only an eerie silence.

I will never forget calling the staff together and telling them it was going to be our last day in the office. We all packed up, laughing and joking, but when it came to saying goodbye, the realisation hit us that we didn't know when we would all be together again.

At Stellify, we are very much a family, so this felt unbelievably emotional to us all. I'm not embarrassed to admit that I drove home that night crying.

Over the next few weeks, we set about adapting to our "new normal" lives. As a single mum, it involved home schooling my 10-year-old son, Alfie, and eight-year-old daughter, Izzy, being a full-time cook and cleaner (it still amazes me how often my kids ask for food), and maintaining my day job, running a TV production company. Also full time. My days have never been busier.

We are very much a regional indie. To maintain our success remotely, we had to learn how to create and pitch shows without being in the room to deliver the pitch.

We were fortunate that, fundamentally, our working practices didn't have to change. This gave us something of a head start. Our development team took that and ran with it.

Vikkie Taggart gives the lowdown on her new normal, running Belfast indie Stellify Media from home



Stellify Media

They have always worked at an incredible speed, but they have been turbocharged since lockdown. The sheer amount of creativity, pitch material and general craic coming from them has astonished me.

We have pitched more in the past 10 weeks than we had in the preceding six months. Part of that is due to greater access to the commissioners – diaries can be lined up much more easily for a Zoom call than for a flying visit – but, mostly, it's been about the team having their foot on the gas.

Since lockdown, we have had three series commissioned and two pots of development funding provided for early-stage ideas. So we have seven series in various stages of production.

We've paused two – our property format *Goodbye House* and *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* – until we have a better sense of how the lockdown is developing. The other shows are in pre-production and we are casting, researching and planning schedules.

One of our series, *Snoop Dogs*, is being produced during lockdown. In the show, the dogs give guided tours to the houses of their celebrity owners. This will be our first commission for Channel 4 and our first ever remote production. This is as exciting as it is daunting.

The whole sector in Northern Ireland has pulled together. We have regular calls with other indies and all share our experiences and dilemmas in what has become our new world of TV production.

Life at Stellify has continued to remain as close to normal as possible. We still have our weekly staff meetings, with everyone on video, no exceptions, even if it does include cameos from our kids.

We have our usual Friday drinks, again via video, and this helps us to feel like a unit. Everyone, from the operations and development teams down to production, myself and the two managing directors, takes part.

Staying on brand, we are currently taking turns each week during these drinks to play the *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* board game. Surprisingly, I'm in the lead, having won a whopping £125,000. Fingers crossed that, when you read this, I'll still be in pole position.

Vikkie Taggart is director of operations at Stellify Media and Chair of RTS Northern Ireland.

RTS NEWS

TV journalists and technical staff in the south-west have adapted quickly to new ways of working during the coronavirus pandemic.

Daisy Griffith, head of TV news and online at BBC South West, told an RTS Devon and Cornwall webinar in May, about her “baptism of fire”, having started in the job one week before lockdown. “A lot of people were really, really fearful,” she said. But, “little by little”, most of her staff were soon working from home. BBC South West’s Plymouth newsroom normally houses up to 80 employees. It now has nine and “it is lovely, really calm, with loads of space”.

Interviews are done via Skype – a much more cost-effective and efficient way of doing things than undertaking a 450km round road trip in a region that extends from the Isles of Scilly to west Somerset.

One of the swiftest changes was cutting the daily breakfast show to a single presenter, from two, to observe social-distancing rules.

BBC South West has become a vital point of information and reassurance for local people, especially the vulnerable. Griffith recalled how an 81-year-old man had



BBC

BBC pushes innovation

called in to say that he had been told to order his food online but did not have internet access. A member of staff stepped in and organised the delivery for him.

“I think it’s completely appropriate that the BBC should do anything it can to help people during the crisis,” she said. “It shouldn’t be limited to making programmes or putting stories on our website. The BBC is a public service.”

Audiences have shot up. Before the pandemic, one in three people in the south-west

watched the nightly news programme *Spotlight*. This has increased to 51% of the population. Younger audiences have been tuning in, too – with one in three 18- to 34-year-olds watching the show. These figures were unprecedented, said Griffith.

She added that once things started to return to normal, some of the new working methods were likely to remain, including Skype interviews and more home working.

The webinar also heard from Rick Horne, head of

facilities at Plymouth-based Twofour, and Chair of RTS Devon and Cornwall. He explained how, during the lockdown, TV is edited and compiled from home.

Twenty-four cutting rooms had been replicated in technicians’ homes. “We are all very creative, quick-thinking people and have been able to step up and make it work, but it has been challenging,” said Horne. “It’s time-consuming and involves a lot of communication. Working in isolation is not good.”

Steve Clarke

News weathers the pandemic

Two BBC News experts – Morwen Williams, head of UK operations, and Robin Pembroke, director of news products and systems – explained how they are making 24/7 news during the lockdown.

“Journalists do not need to know the in-depth technical detail, they just need to know what works and how it

works,” said Williams. “It’s about the story for our audiences and the journalists see the technology as a tool to achieve that.”

A key challenge has been social distancing, as a news story recorded in the field usually involves a journalist, a producer and camera operator working together in the back of an edit van. “We had

to design workflows based on Zoom, where people would sit in their own cars or back at home – we even had a Zoom workflow working over three continents,” said Williams.

For systems, the biggest challenge was facilitating 15,000 people working from home, which put the computer network’s external

interfaces under enormous strain. “Virtually all our technology teams are working remotely from home,” said Pembroke. “The things we had to react to the quickest were the emergency releases of software, so [that networks] would work faster with so many people accessing them remotely.”

The end-of-April webinar was hosted by RTS Thames Valley committee member Simon Morice.

Tony Orme

RTS CENTRE AWARDS

RTS Devon & Cornwall

Students from Falmouth University dominated the RTS Devon and Cornwall Student Television Awards, which were celebrating their 25th year.

The winners were announced in mid-May during a live stream – hosted by the Plymouth-based brothers and stars of E4's *Tattoo Fixers*, Pash and Uzzi Canby – on the RTS YouTube channel.

The ceremony was due to be held at the University of Plymouth in March, but this was cancelled because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Falmouth University nabbed four of the five main awards. Harriet Owles, Lydia Branham, Benjamin Evans and Edward Grant received the Drama award for *The Artisan*, which “tugged at the judges' heartstrings”. The judges were also “impressed with the attention to detail and quality of writing”.

The Comedy and Entertainment award went to Toby Matthews, Amy Lindley and Charles Power for *Holiday*, a nod to Jacques Tati's *Monsieur Hulot* films, which had “sharp visual gags – a fitting homage to a French master”.

Sophia Amatiello and Gabriella Jeary's “powerfully effective” film, *Beware of the Dark*, took the Animation award. *Women Uprooted*, by Dominique de Villiers, Fran Brotherton-Cottrell, Ellie Price, Grace Mosley and Andrea Stensholm Klæboe, was awarded the Factual prize



Falmouth University

Falmouth cleans up

for “wonderful use of high-quality imagery, and exceptional creativity and depth”.

Plymouth College of Art's Marek Kawula and Matt Atkinson broke the Falmouth University monopoly, winning the Short Form award for *Time Is the Enemy*, which boasted “professional production quality”.

Falmouth University students also won four of the five Craft Skills awards. The Writing award went to Plymouth College of Art's Lucie Eckersley for *Nut Pops*.

“Now, more than ever, it's essential that we continue to

recognise the achievements around us,” said RTS Devon and Cornwall Chair Rick Horne. “All those who made the shortlist of nominees should be extremely proud

of their work – we may be in lockdown, but our talent certainly is not.” Twofour and White Room Productions sponsored the awards.

Matthew Bell

RTS Devon and Cornwall Student Television Awards

Animation • *Beware of the Dark*.
Sophia Amatiello and Gabriella Jeary,
Falmouth University

Comedy and Entertainment • *Holiday*.
Toby Matthews, Amy Lindley and
Charles Power, Falmouth University

Drama • *The Artisan*. Harriet Owles, Lydia
Branham, Benjamin Evans and Edward
Grant, Falmouth University

Factual • *Women Uprooted*. Dominique
de Villiers, Fran Brotherton-Cottrell,
Ellie Price, Grace Mosley and Andrea

Stensholm Klæboe, Falmouth University
Short Form • *Time is the Enemy*. Marek
Kawula and Matt Atkinson, Plymouth
College of Art

Craft Skills – Camera • *Sui Generis*.
Ollie Thurley, Falmouth University

Craft Skills – Editing • *Sandstorm*. Mitchell
Kendall Smith, Falmouth University

Craft Skills – Production Design • *Our
Harmony*. Oliver Thom, Falmouth Uni.

Craft Skills – Sound • *Sandstorm*.
Gabriel Stone and Benjamin T Jackson,
Falmouth University

Craft Skills – Writing • *Nut Pops*. Lucie
Eckersley, Plymouth College of Art

Covid-19 brings news shake-up

RTS Isle of Man

RTS Isle of Man's maiden Zoom event in May brought together three of the island's leading journalists: the BBC's Alex Bell, Joshua Stokes from ITV and PMC TV correspondent Paul Moulton, all of whom attend the Manx

Government's coronavirus briefings. The panellists agreed that covering the Covid-19 crisis had revolutionised how the Isle of Man media operates.

Moulton said that, in these fractious times, journalists took “a hammering” online

for repeating questions. In their defence, he said, “doubling-up” gave clarity, as the Covid-19 situation evolved.

Bell was asked whether a “David Frost approach” of softening up an interviewee before asking a “killer question” was possible at briefings.

He said Manx journalists could not afford to make enemies, and a no-nonsense, yet cordial, approach was often the best way.

Stokes hoped that live broadcasts helped to hold politicians to account.

“Restoring trust in politicians and journalists,” said Bell, “is hopefully one of many silver linings.”

Sam Bowers

Glasgow indie Firecrest Films won three awards for its observational documentary series *Murder Case* at the RTS Scotland Awards. The BBC Scotland programme, which went behind the scenes of some of the most serious murder investigations in the country, picked up the Documentary and Specialist Factual, Director and Editing prizes.

Actor, singer and comic Karen Dunbar hosted the awards online in early June.

The inaugural Judges' Award went to BBC Scotland "to mark the extraordinary achievements in its first year". The judges continued: "Under the helm of [head of multi-platform commissioning] Steve Carson and his team, the channel has given us shows reflecting modern Scotland."

The Judges' Award will be made in years when the Society believes there is a worthy recipient that does not fit an awards category.

The RTS Scotland Award was made to Donald MacKinnon, the director of BBC Scotland, for her outstanding contribution to Scotland's television industry. Under her leadership, said the judges, "250 new jobs in Scotland have been created, including 80 new posts in journalism. An extraordinary feat in itself in the current climate.

"Since 2016, when Donald took up the exacting position she will soon relinquish, she has championed new

Guilt: BBC Scotland bagged two awards for the drama



BBC

BBC Scotland triumphs

opportunities to effect cultural change, introduced greater diversity into the workforce and is delivering increasing value to Scottish audiences."

BBC Scotland led the way at the RTS Scotland Awards, notching up 12 wins across the 26 categories. These included *Guilt*, which scooped the Drama award and the Camera prize for cinematographer Nanu Segal BCS.

The highly regarded thriller, made by Happy Tramp North and Expectation, starred Mark Bonnar and Jamie Sives

as two brothers who have to deal with the consequences of running over and killing an old man.

BBC Scotland series *Disclosure* won the Current Affairs award for the second year running, this time for *Who Killed Emma?*, an investigation into an unsolved murder.

Long-running BBC One Arts show *Imagine...* also made it two in a row with *James Graham: In the Room Where It Happens* in the Documentary and Specialist Factual: Arts category.

"Though we're not able to get together to celebrate in our usual style this year, the quality, calibre and number of entries reflects the continued growth and outstanding achievement of television production in Scotland today," said RTS Scotland Chair April Chamberlain.

The awards, held online because of the coronavirus crisis, were supported by post-production company Arteus. The ceremony can be watched at bit.ly/RTSS_20
Matthew Bell

RTS Scotland Television Awards winners

RTS Scotland Award: Donald MacKinnon

Judges' Award: BBC Scotland

Drama • *Guilt* • Happy Tramp North/Expectation for BBC Scotland

Writer • *Andrea Gibb, Elizabeth is Missing* • STV Productions for BBC One

Director • *Matt Pinder, Murder Case* • Firecrest Films for BBC Scotland

Comedy • *Burnistoun Tunes In* • The Comedy Unit for BBC Scotland

Children's • *Swashbuckle* • BBC Children's for CBeebies

On-screen Personality • *Kirstie Allsopp and Phil Spencer* • Raise the Roof Productions and IWC for Channel 4

Factual Entertainment and Features • *Rogue to Wrestler* • Firecracker Films Scotland for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual – Murder Case • Firecrest Films for BBC Scotland

Documentary and Specialist Factual – Arts • *Imagine... James Graham: In the Room Where It Happens* • BBC Studios for BBC One

Documentary and Specialist Factual – History • *The Day We Walked on the Moon* • Finestripe Productions for ITV

Documentary and Specialist Factual – Science and Natural History • *Climategate* • Red Sky Productions for BBC Four

Daytime • *Kirstie's Handmade Christmas* • Raise the Roof Productions for Channel 4

News • *STV News at Six (North)* • STV

Young Journalist • Connor Gillies • BBC Scotland

Current Affairs • *Disclosure: Who Killed Emma?* • BBC Scotland

Sport – Live Event • *Celtic vs Kilmarnock: Billy McNeill Remembered* • Sky Sports

Sport – Programme • *The Fort* • IMG Productions Scotland, BBC Scotland

Short Form • *The New Scots: Ewan Fletcher, Grace Kirkwood, Gavin Hopkins* • BBC Scotland

Animation and VFX • *Magic The Gathering: War of the Spark* • Axis Studios, online stream

Professional Excellence – Camera • *Nanu Segal, Guilt* • Happy Tramp North/Expectation for BBC Scotland

Professional Excellence – Sound

David Murrin • IWC Media for BBC Two, Channel 4, and Channel 5

Post-production – Editing

Audrey McColligan, Murder Case • Firecrest Films for BBC Scotland

Post-production – Graphics and Titling • *Nicholas Munro* • Arteus, cinema

Student Television Award • *Flit* • Jack Allen, Elias Nader and Ina Morken, University of Edinburgh

Creativity can trump the crisis

RTS Futures A bumper online events programme lifts the spirits of **Matthew Bell** and **Imani Cottrell**

The brilliant thing about this industry is that it's full of creative, resourceful people," said Natalie Spanier, who was sharing her optimism about the future of TV, despite the damage inflicted on it by the coronavirus crisis. "I've seen a ton of people in these past few weeks reinvent themselves and how they're doing things.... At Nutopia, we've been working on amazing remote-filming kits. Creative people are the most adaptable, so I'm very optimistic."

The head of talent at factual producer Nutopia was part of a panel of talent executives talking at RTS Futures' inaugural Zoom event – "Ask me anything" – in early May. Futures members had emailed questions to the panel, including asking how to stand out at an interview for an entry-level TV job.

Daniell Morrisey, the BBC's senior editorial early careers schemes manager, said: "It's probably the number-one piece of advice – do some research and know what that company makes." Interviewers, he added, "always ask, 'Which shows of ours do you like?... I can't tell you how many people are incapable of answering that question."

Caroline Carter, BBC Studios' Documentary Unit talent executive, added: "Now is a really good time to do that research. Watch, make lists,



National Geographic

work out which genres of television you'd love to work in and which companies are making that output."

"Be honest with talent managers because the truth will out," added Julia Waring, head of production talent at RDF Television. "I'm looking for people who I can progress in our company. We make factual television, so I'm not going to warm to someone who I discover really wants to work in drama."

Grab hold of any work experience, no matter how dull, urged the panel – you will get noticed. Waring recalled one office runner who left after one day, letting down the rest of his team: "It was a week of paid work and he really felt he was above doing basic office jobs."

"Office running is such a great opportunity to be seen,"

added Morrisey, "It always leads on to other work if you show willing and you're good."

Jessica Wilson, talent executive at Potato, owned by ITV Studios, outlined what she looks for in a runner: "Someone who is enthusiastic about that role and who really understands the programme they're coming to work on. I cannot stress how much it matters that you really know the show you are applying to."

Independent talent executive Susie Worster added: "In a freelance world, people will move on after they've finished a production.... Make contacts from the moment you start."

Work experience matters, even if it's not in television. "We've employed people who've worked in call centres, with refugees and in food banks. The experience of working with people and

a love of telling stories goes a long way. Even if you can't get work at the moment in your chosen field, there are other things that you can be doing to enhance your CV," said BBC Studios' Carter.

"Get in touch now," urged Nutopia's Spanier. "Just because lots of things have been frozen, doesn't mean that other [programmes] aren't starting to happen."

BBC Studios drama and comedy talent executive Carrie Britton, who hosted the RTS Futures event, concluded: "There's no right or wrong way to get into TV – keep beavering away." ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS Futures event 'Ask me anything' was held on 5 May, and produced by Carrie Britton, Caroline Carter and Daniell Morrisey.

TV is ‘such a broad church’

It will take a while for television to get back to what it was, but try to watch lots of TV while you’re off – watch all the things the UK makes really, really well. Look for opportunities in the area you want to work in,” said Edi Smockum, offering advice on how to break into TV.

The Managing Director of Think Bigger!, which runs new-entrant schemes for the independent producers association Pact and Channel 4, admitted that these schemes were highly competitive. But she urged people to apply, arguing that the process of applying would help “you understand what television is looking for”.

Smockum reckoned that, with her colleague Sam Tatlow, she read up to 1,000 applications a year for entry schemes. The key, she said, was to “find a way to make yourself stand out. Almost everyone in television is going to say they’re enthusiastic,

hard-working and passionate. So, tell me what you’re enthusiastic about.

“Show me how you’ve been hard-working. Tell me the jobs you’ve had and show you are a real graftafer.”

TV, she continued, is “such a broad church”, with opportunities for people with different attributes: those with organisational skills, who are good with people, have an eye for a good story or possess technical skills.

“These are the things that are going to sell you more than having a media or film degree, or having done all the work experience in the world.”

Many new entrants start their television careers as a runner, the production or office dogsbody.

“There are a huge number of benefits to running,” said Smockum, name-checking a few TV faces such as Dermot O’Leary, Anna Richardson and Jake Humphrey, who began at the bottom, making tea for the team.



Dermot O’Leary started out in TV as a runner

National Literacy Trust

“Running is the basis of television,” she said. “It lets you understand the industry from the bottom up. You get to see almost every aspect of a production.”

Life as a runner would also alert you to the parts of TV – the long hours and grafting – that might not appeal. But, if it did, “lots of different departments notice you. And, if they think you’re good, they’ll want you on their team.”

Smockum answered a huge number of questions

from people watching the webinar, from queries about specific TV roles to opportunities for older entrants and making connections.

She concluded: “Television is very competitive to get into, but TV loves talent and hard-working people – and it needs lots of them.” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS Futures webinar ‘How to get into TV – the basic basics’ was held on 11 May and produced by Edi Smockum and Sam Tatlow.

‘Make a good impression’

■ ‘The benefits of a cup of tea in a production office are huge – it’s a great way to introduce yourself to the team and meet new people,’ said Sam Tatlow.

The former production co-ordinator, whose credits include *The Inbetweeners* and *Misfits*, was discussing the secrets of working in a production office.

The freelance nature of the industry meant that making a good first impression was

key, Tatlow stressed. This could involve checking that the kitchen was tidy, because people noticed those things.

‘Remember, all good conversations start in the kitchen – it’s a good place to ask people questions and you never know where they may lead.’

Tatlow, talent co-ordinator at media consultancy Think Bigger!, encouraged people to connect using social media but to be aware of what they were

saying and the strength of their opinions. ‘Often, when we’re looking at people’s application schemes, we will Google them, so be aware of what can be found online,’ she said.

‘Beware of office gossip – I’d recommend not taking part in it and being neutral.’

Tatlow noted that talent was often the most expensive and essential part of the production, so it was crucial to be helpful and polite, while

not encroaching on anyone’s space.

Mistakes happened, but the bigger the mistake, the longer it took and the more money it cost to fix. ‘If you do make a mistake, apologise, be part of the solution and move on.’

‘Say yes to all opportunities because you never know what it can be a stepping stone to,’ Tatlow concluded.

Report by Imani Cottrell. ‘Working in a television production office workshop’ was held on 13 May and produced by Sam Tatlow for RTS Futures.

Megan Fellows listens in to the first of the Society's bursary scheme online events

A series of events for and by students from the RTS Bursary Scheme over the past month has offered invaluable advice and support to young people hoping to make a career in television.

Bursary alumnae Suzanne Pearson and Florence Watson – part of the inaugural 2014 cohort of the scheme and who both graduated in 2017 – offered tips on how to get a foot in the door of the industry at the end of May. From producing soap script bibles to advice on maintaining a work-life balance on 18-hour shooting days, they left no stone unturned.

The pair have come a long way since graduation: Pearson has worked as a freelance researcher/self-shooter for observational documentaries such as ITV's *Heathrow: Britain's Busiest Airport*; Watson worked her way up from runner to script editor on Channel 4 soap *Hollyoaks* and is now a script editor at hit BBC drama *Call the Midwife*.

They advised entrants to take note of their peers – not only do fellow creatives become friends and sounding boards, their help could also prove invaluable throughout a career. "Stay connected with people, as, when they climb up the ladder, they'll often take you with them," said Pearson.

In mid-May, Lydia Noakes, RTS bursary alumna and currently a production assistant at Candour Productions (formerly True Vision Yorkshire), gave bursary students the inside track on how the



Taking the first steps

indie made the Channel 4 documentary *A Day in the Life of Coronavirus Britain* in just a few days.

On 3 April, Candour asked the country to send in videos of how they were living their lives amid the Covid-19 pandemic. It received more than 3,100 clips and edited them in just three days. The film aired on 6 April. "We had a team of six, along with a couple of freelancers, going through the 3,100 clips," recalled Noakes, who helped to catalogue and shortlist potential clips to be featured.

Candour teamed up with True Vision in London to produce the film, which also included footage from shooting producer-directors, as well as the user-generated content from the general public. "People wanted to be involved, to be part of history," said Noakes. It was thanks to

the public and their smartphones that viewers saw frontline workers not going about their business as usual, but rather their "business unusual".

Noakes first met Anna Hall, creative director of Candour, when they were paired up as mentee and mentor on the RTS Bursary Scheme. After graduating from the University of Leeds with a first-class degree in journalism, Noakes was given a six-month placement at True Vision Yorkshire, which has now been extended until 2021.

On the last day of April, ITV talent manager Lauren Evans and talent co-ordinator Sacha Wells offered advice – from building career maps to creating a stand-out CV – on how to break into TV.

The pair gave an overview of a talent manager's role, which includes overseeing

talent pools that run from researcher to executive producer.

Wells highlighted the importance of knowing a company's output inside out – and understanding the difference between shows that ITV Studios creates in-house (*Love Island*) and programmes it broadcasts (*Britain's Got Talent*).

A crash course in formatting CVs advised listing practical skills, such as being adept at editing programmes, over soft skills. "Your CV is the first thing people see, and will make you stand out from the crowd, so make it personal to you," said Evans.

RTS bursary student Izzy Thompson said: "The webinar gave real insight into the different paths you can take to your desired role in the industry. I found the CV guidance particularly helpful." ■

During the coronavirus lockdown, BBC One's *Life and Birth* has taken viewers inside Birmingham's antenatal clinics, delivery suites and emergency operating theatres to witness new life coming into the world – and offer some much-needed joy.

The six-part series, though, is a rollercoaster of a ride, as not all pregnancies go to plan. According to James Jackson in *The Times*, "[it] played with your emotions like a yo-yo – trepidation turned to trauma, despair to joy".

In an RTS Futures webinar, key members of the production team discussed how they made the programme.

"Birth is still one of the greatest mysteries and we wanted to capture [its] essence," said series producer Becky Casey-Ahmed. "We wanted a balance between humour and showing the incredible medical treatments that happen in hospitals."

Series director Dan Dewsbury added: "It had to play with warmth, humour, and the ups and downs of birth."

Life and Birth was made by Dragonfly, the indie behind Channel 4's long-running documentary series *One Born Every Minute*, and shot at three of Birmingham's maternity hospitals over seven weeks.

"It was a big operation,"



Everyday miracles

according to production manager Laura Watts. "On location, at any one time, we had 45 crew members but, because we were filming 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the [total] numbers were even bigger because we had to have crew to cover."

Life and Birth uses footage from self-shooting producer-directors – both observational documentary-style film and set-piece interviews – and from fixed-rig cameras.

To bring viewers even

closer to new parents, the series shows the social media and text messages they shared. "Those messages are revealing and add a real intimacy. They are things people wouldn't necessarily say out loud – they're private," said assistant producer Rajveer Sihota.

The series was cast using Facebook and Instagram to locate pre-natal and parenting groups, and by approaching families in hospital. "We wanted families that

[audiences] would want to follow, but also women going through something medical that was out of the ordinary," said researcher Aisha Clarke.

There was a two-stage consent process: initially, women gave their consent to be filmed; later, when they fully understood the ideas behind the series, they were asked to give their consent for footage to be broadcast.

"In a hospital, when you're going through any condition, but particularly something like pregnancy, there can be a lot of anxiety because you're agreeing to be filmed but you don't know what's going to happen," said producer-director Sophie Stephenson-Wright.

"To be able to say to both families and staff that, if something unexpected happens, you have the choice to pull out, made [them] feel safer and able to take the risk of being filmed."

Assistant producer Rajveer Sihota hosted and produced "Making of *Life and Birth* masterclass" on 21 May. **Matthew Bell**

How to get behind a lens

"Be on time!" advised DoP Charlie Grainger. "I'm always half an hour early, if not more." He was talking alongside fellow industry professionals at an RTS Futures online event, "Getting started in the TV camera department".

Learn about the equipment, said cinematographer Kelvin Richard: "For entry-level [jobs], try and find ways to get

in at the ground level. Go to the rental houses, because you need to know the equipment. You can't turn up on any set and expect to learn from nothing – you have to be bringing something to that table and then developing that knowledge."

Nick Wheeler, owner of TV crewing agency MyCrew, added: "With rental houses, you'll have a chance to go on

set. That's something you can't learn from college or a book.

"It's important having that experience of working with other people, [knowing] when not to say too much."

Standing out can lead to your next job, said camera operator Jim Cemlyn-Jones. "If you're going to do a job, do it as best as you can – people will notice."

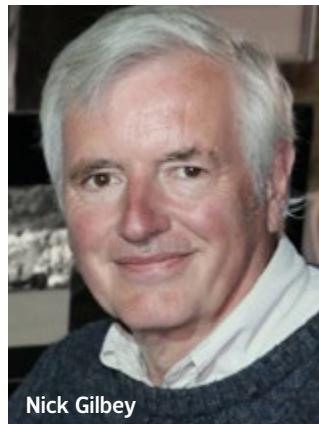
The RTS Futures webinar was held on 26 May and was chaired and produced by Jude Winstanley. **Kate Holman**

Shiers honours TV pioneer

The Shiers Trust Award 2020 – worth £4,000 – has been awarded to Nick Gilbey to research and write a tribute to the late Peter Dimmock.

The BBC head of outside broadcasts made his mark organising the coverage of the 1948 London Olympics, and went on to commentate on the Boat Race and present the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award.

Gilbey will use the award to expand the *TV Outside Broadcast History* website with a special section on Dimmock's work at the BBC. "The idea of putting together a biography on Peter Dimmock stretches back to my



Nick Gilbey

brought them all together," said Gilbey.

Under Dimmock, the BBC's outside broadcast department covered the 1953 coronation and sports events, as well as making factual programmes as diverse as *Climbing the Old Man of Hoy* and *Barry Bucknell's Do It Yourself*.

"Peter Dimmock was a colourful figure, who did a tremendous amount to gain a mass audience for the BBC," said Gilbey.

This year, the coronavirus crisis meant that the judging of the Shiers Trust Award was carried out online. "The jury was amazing and really engaged. But we look forward to judging the award

face-to-face next year," said Dale Grayson, Chair of the RTS Archive Group.

The judges were also highly impressed with a project to catalogue the work of EMI sound engineer Alan Blumlein, but felt that it didn't fully meet the award criteria. "It is a worthy cause and I hope they can find support elsewhere," said RTS archivist Clare Colvin.

The Shiers Trust Award offers a grant towards work on any aspect of television history. George Shiers, a distinguished US TV historian and member of the RTS, provided a bequest to fund the award.

Matthew Bell

The UPSIDE

Davie takes over in turbulent times

Hearty congratulations to Tim Davie, the BBC's 17th Director-General, who takes over on 1 September. He clearly has, to paraphrase BBC Chair Sir David Clementi, an enthusiasm and energy for reform, while holding dear the Beeb's core mission.

Davie knows the BBC inside out, having worked there in a variety of leadership roles since 2005, including a sure-footed spell as acting DG in 2012-13.

His appointment was widely predicted and few would doubt that he has unique expertise in both the public service and commercial sides of the Beeb.

Tony Hall said: 'Tim is a fantastic leader.... I know that the BBC is in safe hands.' He has also been a great friend to the

RTS, memorably chairing the RTS/IET Joint Lecture, not least an unforgettable evening with astronaut Tim Peake.

Unsafe sex is now a casting concern

It's a huge relief that production on scripted shows is once again gearing up. *Corrie* is back filming any day now. But how do producers cope in a socially distanced world with romantic scenes?

One solution could be to employ actors in fictional relationships who are already an item, as in, say, Keeley Hawes and Matthew Macfadyen, Imelda Staunton and Jim Carter or Helen McCrory and Damian Lewis.

Should this happen, hopefully they'll leave any domestic worries in the dressing room.

Everyone deserves a second chance

Exhausted by those endless Zoom meetings? Cheer yourself

up with the brilliant five-minute WIA lockdown special posted on YouTube last month.

In the inaugural Zoom meeting of the Covid-19 Bounceback Group, New Broadcasting House's finest debate how to fill the yawning black hole in the coronavirus-ravaged schedules.

'Every problem is a solution waiting to happen' – so why not fill the gap with an entire past year of programming, say 1976 or, better still, 2012?

See it at: youtu.be/nirr5CvseNI

A hot property in video production

These are not easy times for the RTS bursary students, so it was especially heartening to see one of the students compiling the video shown at the recent RTS webinar 'Why we love... property shows'.

Step forward Alicia Newing, studying film and TV production at the University of Hertfordshire. The crisis has derailed her plans, but expect Alicia to go far.

Effects gurus focus on a better future

In May, RTS London joined Access: VFX for a panel discussion about how visual effects specialists can advance their careers in the lockdown.

"People are hired on their skills, not which software they know," said Tom Box, Blue Zoo Animation co-founder. "Many disciplines do not require an expensive computer to practise on at home." Paul Wilkes, head of advertising talent acquisition at MPC and The Mill, added: "It's easy to focus on the negativity now. There will be opportunities for people to work in more flexible ways."

"If you're creative," said Saint John Walker, Escape Studios deputy dean, "put stuff out there, on your blog or Instagram. See what happens"

Matthew Bell



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