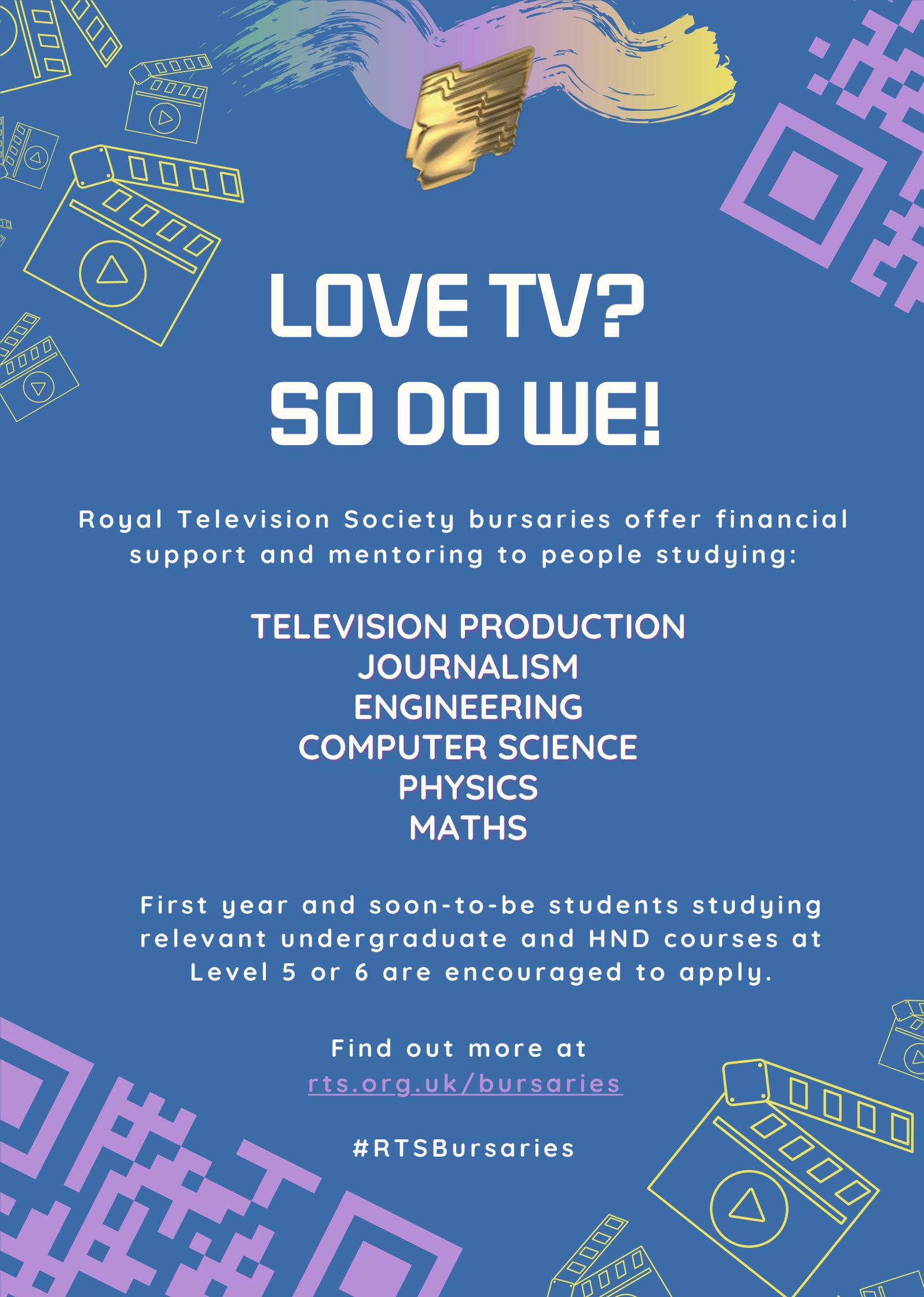


# Television

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## From the CEO



There have been many disturbing headlines of late about sexual harassment and bullying on TV and film sets. Our cover story highlights another, more widespread malpractice – the gruelling working conditions endured by young people at the start of their TV careers.

Caroline Frost speaks to a wide cross section of production workers and discovers that new recruits routinely work punishingly long hours and are frequently forced to do jobs they weren't contracted for. A better

way of working needs to emerge.

The Government's "levelling-up" agenda continues to concentrate minds. Our Friend in the North East, Graeme Thompson, uses this month's column to sound a note of optimism about the BBC's plans for the region after listening to the corporation's director of nations, Rhodri Talfan Davies, address the RTS. We carry a full report of Rhodri's interview.

After that long, cold and often wet spring, summer is finally here. I, for one, am looking forward to the great summer of TV sport, so badly missed last year. Matthew Bell's article on the Euros will get you in the mood for kick-off.

British TV may be the best in the world, but South Korea is the home of global entertainment formats – Stuart Kemp provides a rundown.

Maggie Brown's new book on Channel 4 – avidly reviewed by Narinder Minhas – reminds us that the broadcaster has never stood still. Indeed, it keeps on innovating, as Shilpa Ganatra's exploration of its fantastic new comedy *We Are Lady Parts* demonstrates.

Theresa Wise

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MOONDAY

# TV diary

After eight months working across two productions for Zinc Media, it is officially my last day here. During my time at the company, I have produced Brook Lapping's *Ian Wright: Home Truths*, a single documentary exploring the devastating impact of physical and psychological abuse in childhood, and two glitzy, feature-length episodes for Blakeway's series about Hollywood in 1939. Cue the old adage: "no two days in TV are ever..."

■ As most freelancers in our industry can attest, the reality of finishing one job, juggling work offers and moving (hopefully, quickly) on to the next always comes with mixed feelings of dread and anticipation. Although I am super nervous about what is next and when exactly that next may be, I leave the wonderful Brook Lapping greatly energised and optimistic about what is to come.

■ An article I wrote addressing both the issue and importance of diversity in our industry is published ahead of the transmission of *Ian Wright: Home Truths*.

It's funny, when it was first suggested I write the piece, I was reluctant. Other than not really wanting to rehash the (easily answerable) "why is diversity in TV important" question, I honestly did not know where to start.

I spent days staring at a blank screen, fighting over how to begin, sentence structure, paragraph length, tone, font size (erm, why?) – and, ultimately, what it was that I actually wanted to say. In the end, I was honest and wrote as freely and candidly as the word count would allow.

Writing the piece was incredibly cathartic and, based on the warm feedback I received from peers, editing and empowering for others.



Charlene Chika Osuagwu

**Charlene Chika Osuagwu** reflects on the first anniversary of George Floyd's death – and experiences what it's like to make a film that changes people's lives

■ It is the morning after *Ian Wright: Home Truths* aired. The response has been truly heartening.

Several individuals – colleagues, close friends and strangers – have been in touch to express how moved and affected they were, hearing Ian's personal story and those of the contributors. For some, the film was a vindication of their own experiences growing up in abusive homes, and, for others, an uncomfortable reminder of events and incidents that they had endured in life.

Many of the charities and organisations involved in helping with the documentary have told us that the programme has already positively affected their sector. In one note, Chantal Hughes, Chief Executive of Hampton Trust, expressed how Ian's journey had amplified the importance of perpetrator work and the very

necessary conversation around the impact of domestic abuse on children.

Following the broadcast, Hampton Trust received several calls from perpetrators seeking help.

Accounts like this act as a reminder of just how powerful and transformative our medium and industry can be.

■ New week, new lockdown rules. The country is one step closer to "freedom" – albeit with the persistent cloud of new coronavirus strains overhead. But, on the bright side, at least we get to (sensibly and cautiously) sit inside a bar this week. British weather is unforgiving.

■ Today marks the anniversary of the killing of George Floyd – a murder that was seen around the world, and one that turned the name of an ordinary man into the chant of an uprising seen, felt, and heard across the globe.

Since his death, I often reflect on this notion of martyrdom as it relates to the black experience and the exhausting need to reaffirm that black lives – our hopes, dreams and representation, as much as our struggles against injustices – do matter.

I sometimes wonder whether George Floyd would be gladdened by the renewed observance and sense of commitment to racial equality that we have seen permeate everyday conversations, news cycles and workplaces since his death. But I somberly conclude he would prefer to be alive.

A year on, his death continues to drive overdue conversations about systemic and systematic racism in every aspect of our society. This time next year, I hope the same is true and that the need to commit to and ensure racial equality remains fixed in our collective consciousness.

*Charlene Chika Osuagwu is a TV documentary producer.*

# COMFORT CLASSIC

Steve Clarke alternately giggles and squirms at a biting satire on media mendacity



Channel 4

## Drop the Dead Donkey

Sitcoms as perfectly realised and executed as Channel 4's *Drop the Dead Donkey* are exceedingly rare. That this newsroom caper, set mostly in the offices of Globelink News, was a topical satire, filmed partly the day before transmission to keep the material as up to date as possible, speaks volumes of the skills of creators Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin, the brilliant ensemble cast and its director, the energetic Liddy Oldroyd. Unusually, Oldroyd directed all six series, some 65 episodes. Tragically, she died in 2002, aged 47, four years after *Drop the Dead Donkey* ended.

Hamilton and Jenkin, who met at Cambridge, were writing partners for around a decade, predominantly at BBC radio and television, before Hamilton had the idea for what became *Drop the Dead Donkey*.

Having written for *Not the Nine O'Clock News* and *Spitting Image*, their satirical chops were well honed before they decided to transplant their humour from sketch shows to a workplace sitcom.

Unsurprisingly, they assumed the natural home for such an endeavour was the BBC, but, when the Beeb sat on the show, they decided to try Channel 4 instead. *Drop the Dead Donkey* was soon a defining show for a network

that needed to push the envelope.

Whether the gags would have been so edgy on the BBC is a moot point. Few targets seemed to be off limits as leading politicians, royals and other people in public life were routinely skewered by Globelink's disreputable and wholly dysfunctional staff.

That both Neil Kinnock and Ken Livingstone agreed to appear in the show suggests the high regard with which it was held – even by those who could be the butt of its jokes.

The character at the heart of *Drop the Dead Donkey* is editor George Dent (Jeff Rawle), a hypochondriac who dreams of better things. He is eternally harassed

and put upon by his wife, his boss – the jargon-loving Gus – and the mostly amoral hacks he is unable to control.

With exquisite irony, he falls in love with new recruit Helen, who turns out to be gay.

The macho elements in the mix are provided by the utterly unscrupulous reporter Damien (a young Stephen Tompkinson), who would sell his granny for a scoop, lecherous newsroom assistant Dave (the then largely unknown Neil Pearson) and grizzled news anchor Henry (David Swift), hopelessly vain, hard-drinking and overly fond of a flutter and young, female company.

If Henry reminds viewers of a certain age of the late, great ITN newscaster Reggie Bosanquet, so much the better. But Henry's liking for red braces and crumpled white suits might hint at other veteran British newsmen. His foil and co-anchor is the irredeemably posh and intellectually challenged Sally (Victoria Wicks). When she is told to read an item about a crisis in Kashmir, Sally initially assumes the news is referring to, you guessed it, cashmere.

*Drop the Dead Donkey* was first broadcast in 1990, a time when it seemed as if most of the UK's media would soon be owned by either Rupert Murdoch or Robert Maxwell. Globelink forms part of the empire of the Dickensian-sounding Sir Roysten Merchant. Note his initials. He is determined to take the station downmarket. The only time we ever see Sir Roysten is when he sacks Gus in the final episode – and, of course, he has no idea who Gus is.

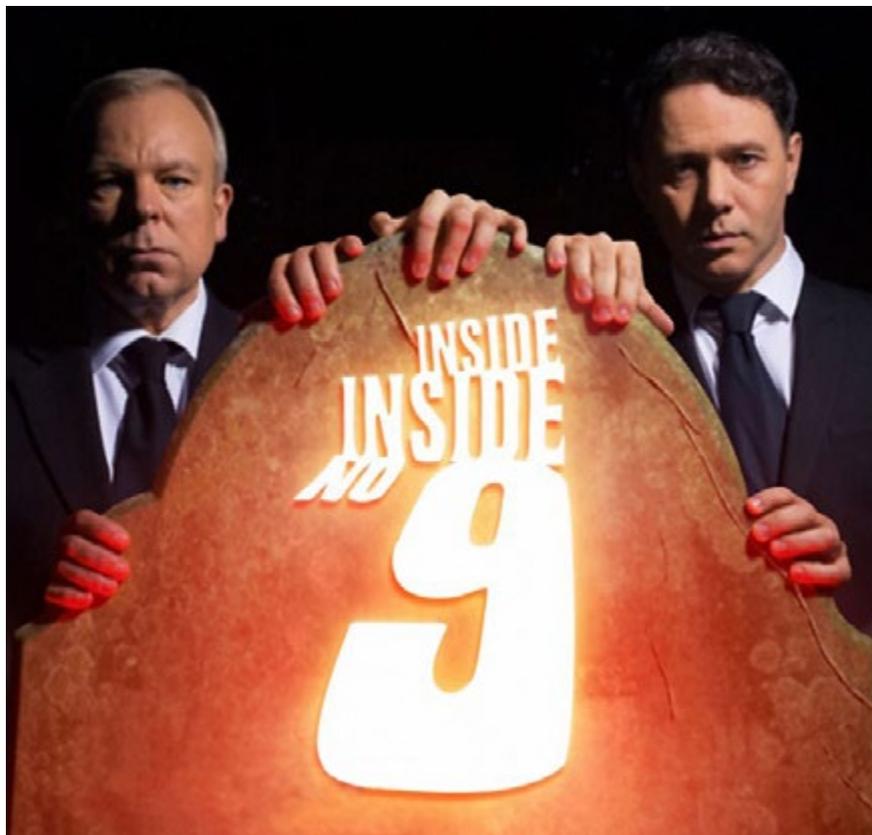
When Maxwell disappeared overboard in 1991, Hamilton and Jenkin took his unexpected exit in their stride and used the death as an opportunity for some especially mordant newsroom jokes.

As time has gone by, there have been several other great British workplace sitcoms, notably *The Office* and *WIA*. Hilarious they undoubtedly are, but what sets *Drop the Dead Donkey* apart is its humanity, the tragic vulnerabilities of its characters – and the sheer scope and incisiveness of Hamilton and Jenkin's writing. And let's not forget the show's visual elan, forged partly by clever use of handheld cameras.

In our wildly unpredictable times, viewers look in vain for a 21st-century satirical equivalent of *Drop the Dead Donkey*.

**Drop the Dead Donkey is available on BritBox and All4.**

# Ear candy



## Inside Inside No 9

**T**he comedy anthology *Inside No 9* is notoriously always one step ahead of its audience. So, if ever the fans of a TV series might have pleaded for a podcast that deconstructs each episode, *Inside Inside No 9* answers that call.

Becoming even more granular than the series itself, the two creators and stars, Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton, dissect each episode after it has aired.

Every week, the masters of misdirection are joined by a different member of the *Inside No 9* team to talk about the making of the programmes.

Series composer Christian Henson has revealed how he achieves the show's huge variety of musical tone while obeying strict rules on musical genre; Jon Plowman has explained

what the role of an executive producer involves; and guest star Kevin Bishop has shared some of the downsides of acting wearing masks in *Wuthering Heist*.

Shearsmith and Pemberton provide entertaining detail on the inspiration for each story – often a melange of real-life experiences and awkward anecdotes – and how it was produced.

Such teardowns include the uncomfortable experience of an up-and-coming actor using a family's house as a green room, depicted in *Hurry Up and Wait*.

The comedy duo give texture to the throwaway comments and small details you might have missed on TV, such as where the mysterious hare was hidden in each episode. This, of course, refers to the small Easter egg containing a statute of a hare featured in every episode. ■

**Kate Holman**

# WORKING LIVES



Kate Waters (right) rehearsing *The Sweet Science of Bruising*

## Fight director

Casarotto Ramsay

**Kate Waters** has worked on *Coronation Street* for the past decade, choreographing the conflicts that are such a staple of the ITV soap. Recently, she directed the fight scenes in the National Theatre's triumphant film *Romeo & Juliet* for Sky Arts.

### What does the job involve?

I choreograph the physical action in the story, whether it's with swords, a punch up or just a slap, ensuring that the motivation for the action lies in the story and the characters. It's not about being fancy or funky: it's about making the action the vehicle for the story, not the other way around.

### So you must work closely with the director?

It's a collaborative process: the director has a vision for the programme, as do I for the action sequences. We're on set

together and there's a discussion among the director, the actors and me.

### How do you deal with the huge variation in actors' physical abilities?

A lot of my job is about adaptability and compromise – you're always looking to get the best out of an actor, but you have to work to their strengths and within their capabilities.

You don't expect actors to have great skills in fight scenes – they might have done a bit of swordplay at drama school but they've probably never picked up a sword since.

The secret is to make them feel good about what they're doing – 90% is psychology, getting the actors in a good place and winning trust; the rest is choreography.

### Is realism the key to a fight scene?

Violence needs to come from a place

of truth – if you take a hit in the face, you don't want another one.

### So are the actors at risk?

I use soft implements for actors to hit each other with. A chair, for example, could be made from balsa wood so it breaks easily. Actors are hit on the top of the back and wear protection, never on the back of the head. Everything is choreographed to minimise the risk.

### How did you become a fight director?

I always wanted to be an actor – I acted at school and took dance classes but, following my dad and brother, I took up judo and competed at a reasonable level. I went to Middlesex University to study acting; stage combat was on the timetable and I felt I had found myself.

I qualified as a stage combat teacher and, when I left drama school, I went to teach at the Royal Welsh College of

Music & Drama, and then to work with the fight director and teacher Jonathan Howell, at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. He was my mentor and gave his time selflessly, helping me get all the qualifications I needed to get on the Equity register of fight directors.

#### Was that difficult?

When I did it, you needed a brown or black belt in a martial art, fencing qualifications and an advanced certificate in stage combat, and then you went on an assessment course where fight directors set tests. You don't have to be on the Equity register to work in the theatre and TV, but I believe in regulation.

#### Are there many women fight directors?

Twenty years ago, the Equity register was a bit of an old gentleman's club, and even now there are still only three women on the register. It needs to evolve and be less patriarchal.

#### Is physical strength an issue?

No, I've never needed my judo black belt – choreography and storytelling are the most important skills. My other sport is boxing – I've retired from competitive boxing but I'm still training and coaching – but you don't need to be an Olympic boxer to choreograph a fight with actors who almost certainly won't have that skill.

#### What was your first professional job?

*Coriolanus* at the Tobacco Factory in Bristol, and I've continued to work on stage for, among others, the RSC, Globe and National Theatre.

#### What was your first TV programme?

*Coronation Street* – choreographing a punch in the Rovers Return. It was difficult to break into TV. I got work on *Corrie* because a theatre director was directing a block of episodes on the show and gave me a break. I've since worked for other soaps, such as *Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks*.

#### Do you have a favourite memory?

I worked on the *Coronation Street* live episode in 2015. The first 15 minutes were crazy and nerve-wracking because one of the characters, drug dealer Callum Logan [Sean Ward], was killed – it was really quite violent, but brilliant to work on.

#### Has it been hard working under Covid-19 restrictions?

We have to wear masks and can't

come any closer than two metres from the actors on *Corrie*. It's unnatural demonstrating techniques from a distance, but we're making it work.

#### What makes a good fight director?

You need to leave your ego at the door and serve the story. You also need physical and mental stamina. One day

actors. The worst part? You can feel on the outside of a production as a fight director, although, on a show that you've worked on for a long time, such as *Corrie*, it's not a problem.

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

Distract the audience – take their eyes



I could be at the National Theatre, the next on the *Coronation Street* or *Emmerdale* set. In TV, you're usually on set for just a day – you have a read-through with the actors, a rehearsal, a camera rehearsal and then a take.

#### What's the most exciting fight sequence you've pulled off?

I directed Kylie Platt's death on *Coronation Street*, and I was also her stunt double because the actor [Paula Lane] was heavily pregnant – one moment I was choreographing the scene and then I had to go to costume and dress for the part.

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

Snacks – I'm always hungry – the script, my knee pads and a big bag of padding for the actors.

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

I'll never fall out of love with creating action sequences – telling the story, and collaborating with directors and

somewhere else and then you can take them by surprise with a piece of action.

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

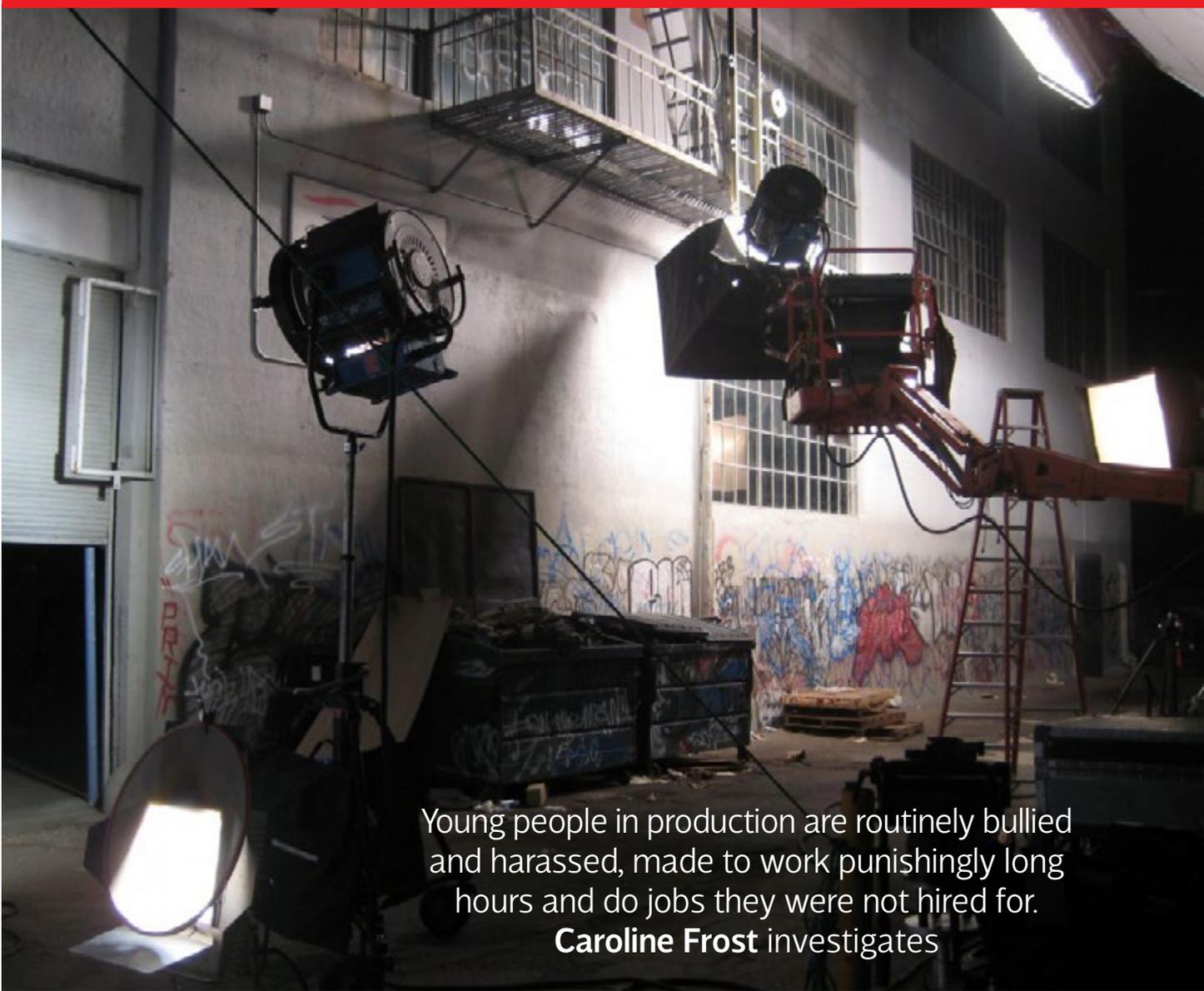
It has to be a vocation, not a sideline to an acting career. Shadow people and learn from watching them work. Then it is up to you – it takes practice and passion to choreograph a perfect fight.

#### What TV series would you love to work on?

I have just finished a few days shooting on a film for Amazon and I'm about to shoot *Death of England: Delroy*, the next National Theatre film.

Although *Killing Eve* is perhaps more stylised it still comes from a place of truth. I would also have loved to work on Steve McQueen's *Small Axe*, or something like Russell T Davies's *It's a Sin*. I just love good storytelling. ■

*Kate Waters was interviewed by Matthew Bell. The fight director is represented by Casarotto Ramsay.*



Ricardo Diaz

Young people in production are routinely bullied and harassed, made to work punishingly long hours and do jobs they were not hired for. **Caroline Frost** investigates

# TV's dirty secret

**T**elevision documentaries changed me and inspired me when I was growing up and, as an adult, I wanted to be part of that," one young researcher tells me.

"I'm from a working-class background, and working in factual TV, bringing people's stories to screen, that is no small thing. It's incredibly important to a lot of people," says another.

British television has long enjoyed a reputation for being the best in the world, and a role in this industry is the stuff of many young creative people's dreams. Unfortunately, for many, such ambitions are increasingly being

tempered or even destroyed by the reality of the day-to-day pressures and expectations across different areas of production.

While incidents of bullying and harassment are being talked about more openly in the wake of allegations against Noel Clarke and others, I discovered something less headline-grabbing but more widespread for those starting out and hoping to make their way up the ladder: the incredibly long, undocumented and thankless hours everyone is expected to work.

I interviewed a mix of male and female professionals, spread across different TV genres, in production and

post-production roles, both office and location-based. And all who spoke to me – anonymously – were emphatic that this way of working is everywhere. One told me: "You can't throw a stone in this industry without hitting somebody with a horror story to tell. It's an industry-wide epidemic."

"If you're in the production office and you're contracted 9:00am to 6:00pm, you can expect to add an hour either side of that," explains Sarah, who has worked in factual TV for a decade. "There's an etiquette of being seen to stay as late as possible. Occasionally, an email will go out at the beginning of a project, 'Don't expect to make plans

at the weekend'. But, more often, it's not explicitly said, it's just an expectation that everyone's aware of."

Location set-ups are no better, according to Miles, who's worked consistently as a runner, then researcher, on TV documentaries since graduating in 2017. He explains: "You receive your call sheet – often around 9:00pm – for the following day, and you laugh when you read the words 'Wrap 7:00pm'. You already know you'll never hit that time. To even attempt to finish by 9:00pm means going without a lunch break."

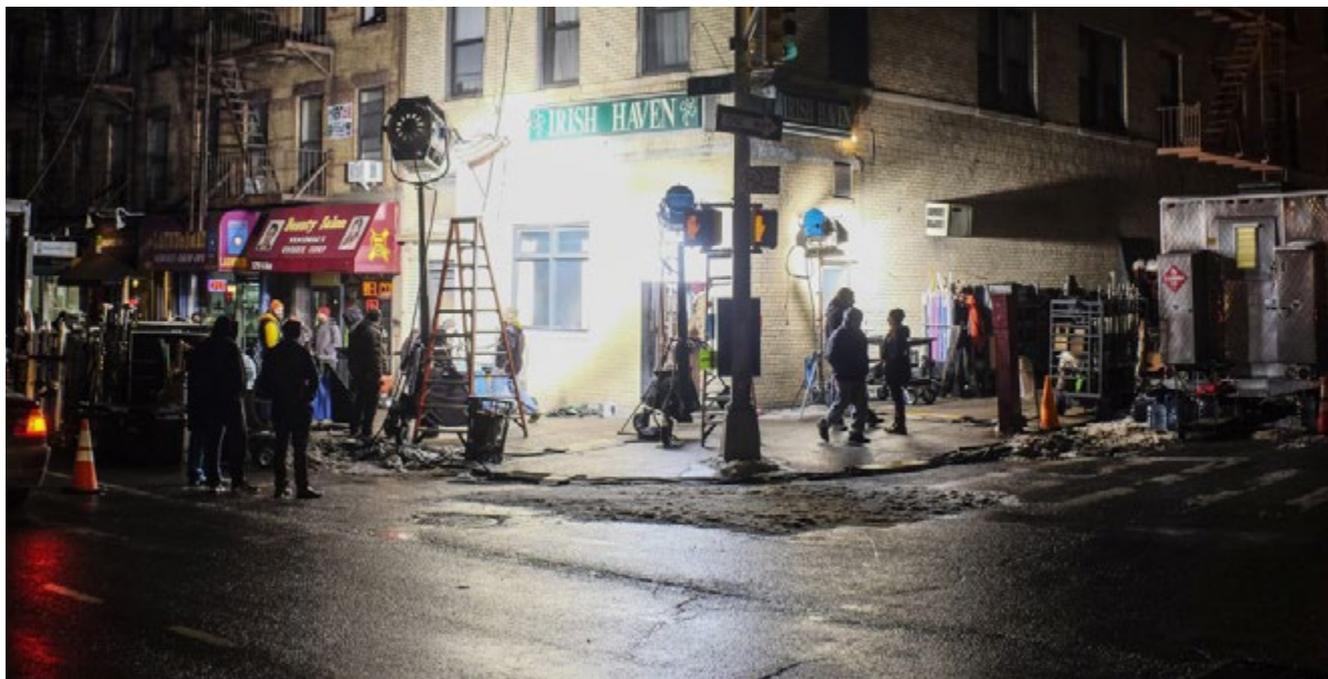
For him, the problem is in the small print of almost every freelance contract, a copy of which he shows me. It has the line: "You will be expected to work such additional hours as may be reasonably necessary for the proper performance of your duties", as well as a stipulation that the freelancer opts

**'WE DON'T EVEN WANT THE OVERTIME. WE JUST WANT TO BE ABLE TO GO TO BED'**

before – trying desperately to source and design the right branding for a police vehicle, ahead of a day's shoot costing £100,000. "They won't cancel it, so it's all resting on me, and it's not even my actual job," he explains.

This is no rare event, it seems. "I've been on productions where the showrunner has changed his mind at 7:00pm about what's required on set," he says. "That means us staying until 10:00pm and being back on set at 5:00am. No one says no to the showrunner."

What happens if someone does actually say no to the bosses? "It's a freelance world, very competitive, and, if you stand up to them, it looks like you're not committed or you can't handle it," says Sarah. "You get the tag of 'difficult person', and it means that you're less likely to get a follow-up gig with the same producers."



out of the 1998 Working Time Regulations. Apparently, "reasonably necessary" is interpreted to mean: whatever the producer wants, they get.

On the relatively low daily rates for runners and entry-level production staff, all those extra worked hours mean the hourly rate gets lower and lower, to the point where it dips below the minimum wage. Are staff offered compensation at that point? "Try having that conversation," scoffs Miles.

With specialist skills come equal amounts of pressure. When I speak to John, well established as a graphic designer, mostly in big-budget drama, he has worked until 11:00pm the night

**'YOU CAN'T THROW A STONE... WITHOUT HITTING SOMEBODY WITH A HORROR STORY TO TELL'**

"You're made to feel very guilty for even saying anything," says Miles. "And you're constantly reminded, 'This is a great opportunity for you!'"

"It's not about the money," John adds: "For most of us, we don't even want the overtime. We just want to be able to go to bed."

All this pressure can lead to outcomes worse than not getting the next gig. Everyone I speak to reports fatigue, stress, sickness and worse – one ended up missing his grandfather's funeral due to work, something he deeply regrets.

Everyone I speak to has either experienced or witnessed both bullying and harassment. One time, Sarah was >

› invited to a meeting where it was made clear she wasn't expected and someone told her to leave, saying, "Let the adults have a conversation". She still smarts at the memory. "When I spoke up about it upsetting me, I was told I'd blown it all out of proportion. They effectively gaslit me. It didn't feel particularly personal, just dismissive."

When a producer shouted at Miles on location, it was the latter who ended up being the one to say sorry. "When a colleague asked me if I wanted to complain, I refused," he remembers. "I didn't want to be someone seen to be making a fuss. I knew I'd be the one to lose my job. We were a team living on location for weeks, and I didn't want the relationships affected. I ended up apologising just to get through the next month."

Every interviewee agrees that junior female staff across the industry receive the brunt of misogynistic treatment – "literally thousands of incidents, it's just a given, you don't even bother reporting it" – and harassment – "there are loads of sex pests, we just try to warn everyone in advance who to avoid". John adds that young men and women alike are potentially on the end of more subtle bullying – what he calls "emotional manipulation". He describes one manager telling him: "I thought you were the guy for this job but clearly not."

For all these exhausted young professionals, there is no single individual villain responsible for their distress. Instead, they describe a system where TV has become a victim of its own "golden age" success. Companies, particularly those making drama, are now expected to produce up to eight hours of high-quality content in six months compared with, say, companies creating two hours of film in the same period.

John describes something he calls "miracle drift": where shooting schedules with tight deadlines and small budgets were honoured through the sheer willpower of staff – "they pulled off a miracle".

This superhuman endeavour then becomes the norm, with producers increasingly factoring in unpaid work by the least experienced of their staff. For example, if they can persuade that day's location assistant to turn data wrangler by evening, working in his hotel room until late and embracing such an "industry opportunity",

that's one less salary they have to pay.

"They rely on the fact that we're all passionate about our work, so they'll always get the hours out of us," says Sarah. She calls it "the tightening of the screw", particularly in an industry where the most elastic piece of resource is never the camera operator, the electrician or construction worker, all rightly protected by union rules, but those younger and newer, most keen to get on.

By contrast, the latter aren't as tightly unionised, their rates aren't

Sarah. "Most people are recruited through connections, without any HR procedure. If that could be formalised, it would make speaking up much easier. You'd have a point of contact from the beginning."

"Acknowledge all those extra hours," says Miles. "Remove that clause that signs away our rights and instead pay everyone overtime. Money talks."

"Build schedules over a longer time with shorter hours," says John. "There will be happier people, fewer mistakes and the end result will be better."



Public domain

## **'YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FORCED TO KEEP THEIR HEADS DOWN, WORK HARD AND HOPE FOR THE BEST'**

advertised, and some I spoke to are hesitant to spend their hard-earned cash joining a union without being sure that their rights will be protected.

For those feeling brave or desperate enough to make a complaint, who can they go to?

"You're on your own," says Sarah, particularly referring to smaller independents, where the owners are running the show, or their friends are. Another young freelancer explains: "There are rarely HR departments or people you feel comfortable talking to confidentially without it impacting your future jobs."

With all these unwritten promises, threats and codes in place, what single practice would make the biggest improvement to the working day of young people in TV?

"Transparency around hiring," offers

In the meantime, though, young people are forced to keep their heads down, work hard and hope for the best. This kind of back-breaking experience used to be seen as a rite of passage for those wanting to crawl to the top of the industry, with such trench experiences all good fodder for the pub afterwards and part of the glamour of TV.

However, it seems the production hiatus created by lockdown has given people time to reflect. "Regularly, people now get to Thursday evening and they announce, 'I'm off,'" reveals John. "They'd rather give up than carry on like this. Bad days used to be the exception, now they're the norm."

"Recently, I saw a tweet by a colleague. It just said, 'I'm broken.'" ■

*All names in this article have been changed.*

# OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH EAST

The spectacular North East coast is a popular location for TV and film. Right now, its castles, cliffs and endless sandy beaches are playing host to ITV's *Vera* and at least two Hollywood movies.

But location work – though good for the tourist trade – isn't enough to sustain the region's screen sector, which has never really recovered from two decades of successive rounds of BBC and ITV cuts.

The exodus of talent and the lack of opportunities for the next generation of crew and creatives has been highlighted in a series of conversations hosted by my university in association with the screen agency Northern Film + Media and Pinewood Studios.

The six two-hour sessions for students and early-career professionals were led by the film producer Lord Puttnam. Each one centred on the Catch 22 plight of new starters who struggle to find enough work experience or training to get them a foothold in a sector with an acknowledged skills shortage.

Some of the region's most distinguished alumni, including screenwriter Lee Hall, producer David Parfitt and director Sir Ridley Scott, spoke of their own journeys away from home.

The regretful conclusion was that, without increased production and commissioning activity to create sufficient critical mass, places such as North East England will continue to struggle to compete with the lure of production hot spots such as London, Salford and Glasgow.

But there are signs that things are about to change. In his RTS lunchtime interview earlier this month, BBC

As the BBC boosts its local activities, **Graeme Thompson** feels optimistic about the region's future as a TV production hub



University of Sunderland

nations director Rhodri Talfan Davies suggested the corporation's £700m "levelling-up" strategy would benefit this corner of the UK.

"We're missing out on the distinctive identity of the North East," he admitted. "It's about changing what we see on air. We need bigger, higher-profile projects in these areas."

BBC Group Managing Director Bob Shennan has meanwhile been talking to me and other North East partners about what increased activity might look like. We need commissions, of course – one of the reasons those communities between the Scottish border and North Yorkshire have such a low appreciation score for the BBC is that viewers don't relate to what they perceive to be its metropolitan focus.

But we also need more people with a successful track record of winning commissions and delivering content.

Only then will we start seeing a sustainable sector in which the next generation of writers, directors, performers and crew can develop ambitions and livelihoods.

The BBC has promised that a new continuing drama will be made in the North of England. We're lobbying hard for it to come to the land of the three rivers – the Tyne, the Tees and the Wear.

Manchester has *Coronation Street*, Liverpool has *Hollyoaks*, Leeds has *Emmerdale*. We can easily channel the humour of *Auf Wiedersehen Pet*, the compelling humanity of *Our Friends in the North* and the hair-raising antics of *Geordie Shore* into gripping BBC One primetime.

Alongside the BBC conversation, the University of Sunderland is talking to the makers of *The Late Late Show* and *Sunderland 'Til I Die* about opening a northern production base on campus.

Fulwell 73 – named after the famous football stand at Roker Park and Sunderland's celebrated FA Cup win of 48 years ago – wants its move to the North East to uncover new talent and tell new stories. But the group's managing partner, Leo Pearlman, is also passionate about working with the university and others to support the skills agenda.

The arrival of a successful and experienced production company alongside a BBC commitment to more content will be a transformative moment. Imagine a time when major productions can be conceived, developed, written, staffed, shot and edited here. And we can even make use of our own brilliant locations. ■

**Graeme Thompson is pro vice-chancellor for external relations at the University of Sunderland and Chair of the RTS Education Committee.**



Getty Images

Welsh captain Gareth Bale

# The beautiful game gets complicated

**T**he Euros is a football tournament like no other before it. Delayed a year by the pandemic and rerouted to multiple venues around Europe, it will be – at best – problematic, and, in some cases, impossible for fans to follow their teams.

The UK broadcasters covering the tournament – with games split between the BBC and ITV – face the same difficulties.

The tournament takes place at 11 venues – Amsterdam, Baku, Bucharest, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow (Hampden Park), London (Wembley), Munich, Rome, Seville and St Petersburg. Football governing body Uefa has stipulated that all must admit spectators, which will bring some much-needed crowd atmosphere to the TV coverage.

Anyone still harbouring any doubts about the importance of fans to live football clearly didn't see Leicester

**Matthew Bell** explains how broadcasters are covering the Euros, which kick off this month

City's boisterous supporters shout their team to FA Cup victory last month.

Back in 2012, Uefa decided to spread the tournament around Europe to alleviate the crippling financial demands on single host nations – long before coronavirus messed everything up.

BBC TV football executive producer Phil Bigwood is in charge of the corporation's Euros coverage, as he has been at every major international football tournament since the 2002 World Cup. "I've never known one like this, with all these complications and challenges – it is massively different to anything I've done before," he said, pointing

to the pan-European structure of the tournament, which multiplies "the logistical and technical" difficulties.

Last-minute changes to some venues – with Seville stepping in for Bilbao and Dublin's matches moved to Wembley and St Petersburg – and working under differing Covid-19 protocols across venues, have added extra layers of complexity.

The good news, though, is that the BBC is sending commentators and production staff to all the venues hosting the home nations: Wembley (for England), Hampden Park (Scotland) and, ambitiously, Baku (Wales).

Wales's opening two games in the Azerbaijan capital are being broadcast by the BBC, with the corporation also sending a team to preview and report on the principality's clash with Italy in Rome, which is being shown by ITV.

Commentator Steve Wilson and co-commentator Robbie Savage are flying to Baku with a small "OB-light"

production team consisting of some eight people. “Steve will also be doing some reporting and interviewing,” says Bigwood. “We’ve got to keep people travelling to a minimum because the levels of paperwork required are off the scale.”

With few direct flights to Baku – and many of the normal transit stops in countries on the UK Government’s red Covid list – even getting the team to Azerbaijan has proved problematic. A stopover in Kiev or Moscow was the current plan as *Television* went to press.

Match coverage itself comes from production teams dispatched by Uefa to each venue, with the BBC supplementing the home nations’ games with pitch-side reports and interviews. The live feed from matches is being sent to the International Broadcast Centre in Haarlem, outside Amsterdam – where the BBC will also have a small team – and then to Salford.

Thanks to Covid-19, the home nations matches aside, production will be remote from MediaCity, where the BBC has built two off-television areas to allow commentary from a big screen. Such coverage has become normal during the pandemic, but it does restrict the ability of the commentary team – who are denied a live, 360° view of the pitch – to tell the full story of a match as it unfolds.

The BBC faces a challenging first weekend. “We have to hit the ground running because we’ve got the opening game on the Friday [Italy vs Turkey], Wales on the Saturday, England on the Sunday and Scotland on Monday. We’ve got to get over that initial mad period and hope it will then start to calm down a little bit,” says Bigwood. “But we’ll get there – it’s going to be a brilliant tournament.”

ITV, which will exclusively show 27 live games, has bagged the much-anticipated England vs Scotland clash at Wembley, as well as the showdown between world champions France and Germany. It was still unsure whether it could send commentary teams to games in mainland Europe when this article was written.

“Euro 2020 is a tournament unlike any other,” says Niall Sloane, ITV director of sport. “ITV has brought together a uniquely talented team from across football that will offer viewers and fans compelling insight and entertainment that, we hope, will enrich their enjoyment of what promises to be a very special few weeks.”

Even if the quality of the football fails to shine, the Euros still have novelty value. Thanks to the pandemic, it is the first major tournament to air on British TV since 2019’s Rugby World Cup – and it will offer much-needed revenue to the commercial broadcaster. The price of a 30-second ad slot on ITV could rise to £200,000 for matches involving England, Scotland and Wales.

Big games later in the tournament

– assuming any of the home nations survive – guarantee huge audiences. England’s defeat by Croatia in the 2018 World Cup semi-final drew a peak audience of 26.5 million to ITV.

Now all the broadcasters need is one of the home nations, preferably Gareth Southgate’s team, given England’s large population, to reach the final. “Cry ‘God for Harry Kane, England, and Saint George!’” as Shakespeare almost said. ■

## It’s a game of two broadcasters

The Euros are a marathon, not a sprint, for the armchair spectator, with 51 games broadcast live over a month, beginning with the Italy vs Turkey clash in Rome on 11 June.

Away from the action on the pitch, both BBC and ITV are offering plenty of punditry and support programming. ITV’s pundits promise plenty of bite, with gnarled hard men Roy Keane, Patrick Vieira, Nigel de Jong and, on loan signings from Sky Sports, Graeme Souness and Gary Neville, giving the team a terrifying backbone.

The effervescent Ian Wright vacates his BBC *One Match of the Day* seat for the tournament, and is joined by ex-pro Eni Aluko and Chelsea women manager Emma Hayes.

Mark Pougatch and Seema Jaswal, veterans of ITV’s Russia World Cup in 2018, are the main presenters. Its commentary team, led by Sam Matherface – who replaces the long-serving Clive Tyldesley – will be assisted by Lee Dixon, Ally McCoist and John Hartson. Former ref Peter Walton, on loan from BT Sport, will explain contentious decisions.

We should be grateful for the return of McCoist, the best co-commentator at the 2018 World Cup, where his enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, all things foreign was in marked contrast to the parochialism of many ex-pros employed by TV.

For the BBC, main presenters Gary Lineker and Gabby Logan will be

managing a team of former internationals Alan Shearer, Rio Ferdinand, Alex Scott and Micah Richards (England); Ashley Williams and Mark Hughes (Wales); and James McFadden, Shelley Kerr and Charlie Adam (Scotland). Bringing some fancy continental football to the MediaCity UK studio are Thierry Henry, Cesc Fabregas and Jurgen Klinsmann.

Guy Mowbray heads the commentary team with co-comms from the familiar likes of Dion Dublin, Karen Carney, Jermaine Jenas and Robbie Savage.

The matches have been divvied up between the two broadcasters, with both showing the final from Wembley on 11 July. To fill the gaps between the live action, ITV is offering *The Euros Daily Show* and *Three Lions Raw*, which promises “no-filter access highlights” of England games.

For the corporation, *Crouchy’s Year-Late Euros* features the lanky, former England striker alongside Maya Jama and Alex (*Taskmaster*) Horne on BBC One, while BBC Three follows UK hip-hop duo Krept and Konan as they create a new England football anthem for the Euros with the help of England player and manager Gareth Southgate.

Scotland’s last appearance at a major tournament, France 1998, is celebrated by BBC One Scotland in *Mr Brown’s Boys*, while comedian Elis James presents *Football Nation* on BBC One Wales, a series covering the highs and lows of Welsh football.



Eni Aluko

ITV



Gary Lineker

BBC

# Korea's technicolour dream shows

Weird, wacky and all-conquering – **Stuart Kemp** hides his identity to enter the formats factory that gave us *The Masked Singer*



‘Crazy and cool with a K’ is a good moniker for the jaw-dropping South Korean entertainment formats delivering jaw-dropping audience figures around the world. In the UK, *The Masked Singer*, *I Can See Your Voice* and, most recently, *The Masked Dancer* have featured celebrities disguised as everything from a bee and an octopus to a sausage, good and bad singers from the great British public hiding in plain sight and dance routines from a llama, chicken and knickerbocker glory.

“We were ready to embrace something new, to do something big and bold and a bit nuts,” says Joe Mace, ITV commissioning editor for entertainment. The UK’s biggest commercial broadcaster is home to both *The Masked Singer* and *The Masked Dancer*, two of the highest-profile fresh entertainment formats to appear in the past 10 years.

*The Masked Singer* melds elements of a guessing game, singing competition, a comedy panel show, celebrities and an audience vote. All wrapped up with outrageous costumes, disguised voices and a big reveal every show.

Since debuting in January 2020, the show has sat in ITV’s Saturday night early-evening slot, one occupied by *The X Factor*. It is produced by Bandicoot, the Scottish indie commissioned to produce a UK version of what was already a high-budget, shiny-floor hit show in both its native South Korea and then the US.

Bandicoot optioned the UK format rights to *The Masked Singer* in 2018 from MBC, which broadcasts the show in South Korea. Founded by Derek McLean and Daniel Nettleton, Bandicoot is a joint venture with Argonon Group and was formed to advance the pair’s passion for wild and twisted entertainment formats.

Nettleton became obsessed with securing the UK rights after he started watching hours and hours of the Korean and Thai versions on YouTube in 2015. “We were only a little, two-year-old indie at the time. Getting the option was expensive for us – half of our development budget for a year,” he explains. “It was a bet that we felt we should and could take.”

The bet paid out handsomely when the US version of *The Masked Singer* – made by reality TV guru Craig Plestis – debuted on Fox Network in January 2019. It launched to a multi-platform consolidated audience of 17.6 million,

BBC

making it Fox's most-watched unscripted debut in 11 years, and the most-watched unscripted debut on any network for seven years.

Last year, Plestis launched another South Korean format on Fox, *I Can See Your Voice*, which became the season's number-one new entertainment show. Meanwhile, *The Masked Singer* picked up an Emmy for outstanding costumes for a variety, non-fiction or reality programme. And, with Plestis at the helm, *Masked Singer* sister show *The Masked Dancer* debuted in the US in December 2020.

"Korea seems to be unafraid to break out of the box and the formats are not derivative," says Plestis. "*The Masked Singer* was bonkers, weird and frightening for any network to take on. Fox was bold enough to do that."

*The Masked Singer* and *I Can See Your Voice* both blend different strands of format television. They are "a singing thing, and a 'guess who?' competition", says Plestis of both.

BBC entertainment director Kate Phillips shares his love of genre-bending formats. She commissioned *I Can See Your Voice* in 2019 from Fremantle's UK entertainment label Thames. It had been on her radar before Thames pitched to her.

"Korea follows the 'kiss' rule: 'Keep it simple, stupid.' That's a really good rule when you're developing formats," says Phillips. "South Korean shows always have a very clear USP at their heart. You can sell it in a sentence. They try out hundreds of ideas every year and they're very smart and very savvy."

*I Can See Your Voice* features a guest artist and a team of two contestants presented with a group of six "mystery singers" — some of them good singers, some bad.

The contestants must attempt to eliminate bad singers from the group by guessing who they are without hearing them sing. Over the course of four rounds, they receive clues and help from the show's celebrity

panellists. The winning mystery singer is revealed as good or bad by means of a duet with one of the guest artists. If they get it right, the contestants win a cash prize and the final singer can then belt out a tune.

Phillips has just commissioned a second series, and the format has been sold to 18 countries so far.

The boom in interest for Korean formats began in 2016, when travel reality show format *Grandpas over Flowers* sold to NBCUniversal in the US. It aired there as *Better Late than Never*, and secured deals for further countries, including Italy, Turkey and France.



## 'THE MASKED SINGER WAS BONKERS, WEIRD AND FRIGHTENING FOR ANY NETWORK TO TAKE ON'

Channel 4 head of entertainment Phil Harris suggests that South Korea is a hotbed of cultural creativity right now. Think boy-band phenomenon BTS and the Oscar-winning film *Parasite*. Harris is mulling pitches and considering various South Korean formats but no decisions have been finalised. It is an open secret that Channel 4 was in the running to land *The Masked Singer* before ITV swooped.

He points out that *The Masked Singer* and other Korean formats can appeal to young audiences on digital platforms. "Both *The Masked Singer* and *I Can See Your Voice* have a guessing game at the heart of the format, which can be successfully truncated for social media

platforms," Harris observes. "It's a visual truth that, if you are scrolling through social media and see a giant sausage costume and someone shouting, 'Take it off, take it off', that is going to pique your interest."

CJ ENM, the Korean corporation behind *Parasite* and the multi-territory-selling *Grandpas over Flowers* format, intends to raise its investment in entertainment content to an eye-watering \$4.4bn over the next five years. Netflix has said it will spend around \$450m in South Korea in 2021.

CJ ENM's head of format sales, Diane Min, says the company is developing fresh formats with global audiences in mind: "Last year, we had a show called *I-Land*. It was an idol-incubating format that targeted both local audiences and the global market."

She notes that international buyers are striking co-production deals in addition to snapping up format shows ad hoc. CJ ENM collaborated with California-based Bunim/Murray Productions to develop *Cash Back*, a format aimed at both the Korean and global marketplaces.

Other formats coming soon from South Korea include the dating and singing format *Love at First Song* and *300: War of United Voices*, which sees a superstar work towards a performance with 300 superfans. The latter launched in Germany last year on ProSieben-Sat.1. Then there is *Falling in Dance*, a reality dating and dance show and music competition jeopardy series *Double Casting*.

The Korea Creative Content Agency (Kocca), a government agency that oversees and co-ordinates the promotion of the local content industry, says an average of 300 new shows launch each year.

Phillips points out: "It's such a gamble, the entertainment game. What you really need is to have a lot of chips at the table so you can place a lot of bets and see what lands."

"That is exactly what they do in South Korea." ■

# Strengthening trust in the BBC



BBC

**I**t feels like remote history, but it's true: 27.1 million people watched Boris Johnson announce the first lockdown for the UK on 23 March last year. The sequel in May, announcing the path out of lockdown, attracted an even larger audience of 27.5 million, while the PM's announcement of a repeat of lockdown in January this year drew a slightly smaller audience – as repeats tend to – of “only” 25.2 million.

All three of those programmes represented mass gatherings around our TV sets. Only one event since the advent of multichannel television has surpassed them all: the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in September 1997, was watched by 32.1 million.

It's easy to think that it is only disaster that impels us to huddle around the screen, but the largest TV audience of all time in this country was in fact for a triumph (if you happen to be English). The 1966 World Cup final drew an estimated 32.3 million viewers, according to the somewhat primitive contemporary methods of measurement

Does the BBC need a new regulatory system following Lord Dyson's report into Martin Bashir's 1995 Diana interview?

**Caroline Thomson** considers the arguments

used by the BBC and ITV. The opening and closing ceremonies of the London Olympics brought together 24.4 million and 24.6 million people, respectively, in front of their television sets.

I dwell on this mass of figures to demonstrate the power of two things: trust and news. There is nothing that drives us to share an instant experience more than the coverage of live events – and nothing that drives our choice of how to watch it more than our trust in public service broadcasters.

That ability to gather people together is an immense power to rest in the hands of corporations and one of the

strongest reasons why so many nations choose to have at least one well-funded broadcaster that serves a public purpose. It is also why broadcasting should not be regarded or regulated as an industry like any other, and why it should be – as it is today – given special status for its cultural, social and cohesive value.

In each of these cases I cite, more than half, and up to three-quarters, of those audiences watched on the BBC. The proportion that watched Diana's funeral on the BBC was 60%.

It's hardly surprising that politicians should be suspicious of any organisation that wields that much potential power and influence with the people on whose votes they rely for their own ability to govern.

The BBC has always had to be aware of that suspicion and the pressure on the corporation's independence that accompanies it.

However, I am not sure the BBC has always responded in the best way, either to allay political suspicion or, by contrast, to resist threats to its special status as an organisation outside the currents of politics.

It is exceptionally good at making television shows, radio programmes, news content; it is a model for other nations around the world in the way that it helps to stimulate the broader cultural health of the UK; it is much less good at being open and accountable about its decision-making and its processes.

The trust bestowed upon the BBC by the British public is hard won and easily lost. It can never be taken for granted. To be relied upon in the future, there has to be greater transparency and accountability. The question is how to achieve this without either exposing the BBC to the perils of political manipulation – something that is happening to an alarming extent in other European countries, from the Netherlands to the Czech Republic – or damaging its ability to compete in a hardening, consolidating market.

This latter financial point has already emerged as the focus of the Government in its approach to PSB generally, and seems to miss the point of public service, but that is a subject for another day. To some extent, it is inevitable in an organisation as large and multi-faceted as the BBC that transparency and accountability can suffer when there is a sense of siege outside and uncertainty within. But that is precisely the moment when it is imperative that the processes of openness are working.

For the BBC, crises mean that its critics always reach for the governance button. I am not convinced.

There has been a suggestion of appointing an editorial committee to supervise BBC News production. My experience tells me that adding layers of bureaucracy is rarely the way to improve either function or accountability within Broadcasting House. Who would appoint this committee? What would prevent it becoming a tool of politicians and outsiders heavily influenced by the BBC's commercial enemies in the publishing industry?

Or, in the future, by other external forces that we cannot predict today? At its most basic, how do you prevent it becoming yet another tick-box exercise?

An editorial committee with any taint of political appointment, just like a politically-appointed main board, would destroy independence and rot the trust of licence-fee payers.

The BBC's governance and operational problems are, at heart cultural, rather than regulatory. Leadership by example to change that culture for the

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better and to encourage honest self-reflection and accountability is the key.

In Tim Davie, the BBC has a very strong Director-General more than capable of doing this. I think the process could be helped by the appointment of one – carefully chosen and reliably free-thinking – non-executive director. They would be a guarantor of independence, of editorial standards and of accountability and could have the added advantage of being the designated, obviously independent, recipient of whistleblowers' complaints.

This is, as we all know, a critical moment for public service broadcasting as it faces unprecedented competition and unusual political pressure. The BBC, through its governance, has a duty to maintain the trust of the British people. And, whatever our governments might think about the advantages of being able to communicate directly with voters, the existence of a trusted medium connecting mass audiences with their leaders is crucial to the strength of democracy.

It has always suffered from external attacks and thus, I think, adopted a defensive posture more often and more strongly than perhaps it might have done. This in turn promotes secrecy, rather than openness, in any organisation – another reason for putting cultural change ahead of regulation, something that independent broadcasting has had quite enough of already.

Appear on the *Today* programme, answer questions on *Feedback*, use your own airwaves to explain and make your case; but also listen and, yes, when necessary, apologise.

When David Cameron first achieved power by agreeing a coalition with Nick Clegg in 2010, the BBC cut into normal scheduling to show that democratic process in action. The audience – I am back to big numbers again – was 9 million people, 2 million more than would have watched the episode of *EastEnders* that “WestminsterEnders” replaced.

That power inherent in the BBC is the friend of government and people. Responsibly and accountably used, it is a pillar of our communal relationship. But it is a power that belongs to the people, not to parties. It is worth more, and it should be protected more thoughtfully, than the BBC's would-be reformers would have us believe. ■

*Caroline Thomson is the Chair of Digital UK. She was the BBC's chief operating officer 2006–2012.*



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# Aid for unscripted

A new training fund is aimed at workers in genres such as specialist factual who want to build careers outside London



University of Bradford

**B**efore the pandemic, the UK production sector was stretched for talent, thanks to its extended boom. Now, as the sector revs back up to full speed, the skills issue is becoming even more pressing.

With the help of people across the industry, ScreenSkills has unveiled a new Unscripted TV Skills Fund. It will draw on around £3m of investment to provide training for talent. The money will come from participating producers and broadcasters, which will make contributions each time an unscripted show is commissioned. So far, the BBC, Channel 4, Sky, A+E Networks UK and Discovery UK have signed up.

At an RTS event to launch the scheme on 1 June, some of the industry's leading lights gave their thoughts on how it could strengthen the sector.

The fund had been a long time in the making, as it required input from all areas of the industry, explained Channel 4's Managing Director for nations and regions, Sinéad Rocks. She said it had "the potential to be the game changer" and the "long-term intervention" required in unscripted.

Two Rivers Media Managing Director Alan Clements, who is on one of the fund's working parties, said it provided "really long-term planning, which is what we need", and would help people "build careers outside of London". The genres covered by the new fund include specialist factual, sport, entertainment, current affairs, arts and classical music.

Crucially, says ScreenSkills, "a minimum of 50% of beneficiaries will meet at least one industry-recognised diversity and inclusion target". At least half of the money will go to train people in the nations and regions; moreover, at least half of the training expenditure will back out-of-London trainers.

Monkey Kingdom MD Sam Lawrence argued that it would "aid all of our diversity and inclusion [initiatives]" and would "help level the playing field" for freelancers. Clements said he had lived through three waves of the industry pledging to do more in the nations and regions, but "this time it is real and, more importantly, it is irreversible".

Channel 4 has opened a national HQ in Leeds plus hubs in Bristol and Glasgow, and, over the next six years,

Director-General Tim Davie has promised that the BBC will "shift its creative and journalistic centre away from London". Rocks said that being based in costly London had long been one of TV's biggest barriers to entry.

All three panellists said the fund would offer help not just to young people entering the business, but also to unscripted production workers wanting to move up the career ladder and mature workers wanting to retrain.

Clements said that the availability of regular work in the nations and regions was tied to training: "That is the thing that's really going to change the dial." Currently, there were "shortages of everything" from production accountants to editors.

Lawrence noted that, in London, "we're all fighting over everybody at every level" and rates were being pushed up. A particular gap was in production management, and "you can't hire a production co-ordinator for love nor money".

Rocks said that CVs received from people in the regions had demonstrated how impressive those workers were, but it had also shown how broadcasters were becoming less attractive to the younger generation. They were finding alternative, more lucrative and flexible options in social media, advertising and technology companies.

In an era of short-term freelance contracts, "we need to make television more attractive again", argued Lawrence, and to "show that TV is a... long-term career with a little bit more security around it".

As Clements said, "You should be able to do what you want and to live where you want – and [enabling] that would be a measure of [the fund's] success." ■

**Report by Tara Conlan. ScreenSkills and RTS jointly presented and produced 'The future of unscripted – people, places and amazing programmes' on 1 June. It was chaired by Lynn Barlow.**



Channel 4

# Channel 4 revives its punk spirit

**P**icture the last few female Muslim characters you saw on television and you're bound to include one of the following stereotypes: a conservative mother, an oppressed adult or a woman in a burqa with no dialogue or personality.

There have been exceptions, such as the character of Iqra Ahmed in *East-Enders*, who came out as gay. But few characters have made it past the Riz test – based on actor Riz Ahmed's speech to the Houses of Commons in 2017 – which highlights how almost all Muslim characters are presented as either irrationally angry, culturally backward, a threat to western culture, misogynist (for men) or oppressed (for women), or are linked to terrorists.

Thankfully, *We Are Lady Parts*, Channel 4's recently launched sitcom about

**Shilpa Ganatra** salutes *We Are Lady Parts* for subverting stereotypes and allowing young Muslim women to be themselves

a Muslim female punk band, joyfully subverts these stereotypes.

"Early on, I was often asked to write a narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman or about forced marriages and honour killings, as though these were the norm," says the show's creator, writer and director Nida Manzoor. "That frustration ignited the idea for me to write the show. If I'm going to write a character that represents my identity, I'd want to do it fully my way."

That she did. Prompted by the punk band she started with her sisters (who contributed to the songs played in the show), the series has been praised for its distinctly fresh and realistic cast of characters, led by a punk band called Lady Parts.

Fronted by the ballsy Saira (Sarah Impey) and including black British Muslim/earth mother Bisma (Faith Omole), the intimidating drummer Ayesha (Juliette Motamed) and their wild manager Momtaz (Lucie Shorthouse), the group bring in reluctant guitarist Amina (Anjana Vasani), who joins in the hope of attracting the object of her affection, Ahsan (Zaqi Ismail). The very premise sets the non-conformist nature of the show.

For Manzoor, there were plenty of tropes ready to topple, "one of them being the idea of the overbearing Asian parent, which wasn't my experience,

although that does exist. And I wanted to show different ways of expressing one's faith, and the hybrid identities I was seeing. You're told that parts of you are in conflict, but, actually, you can be a punk and you can be Muslim. You can be a creative and also have faith."

The series joins other strong comedy dramas of recent times that offer different perspectives from marginalised communities, from *Ramy*, *Insecure* and *Shrill* in the US to *Man Like Mobeen*, *Starstruck* and *I May Destroy You* in the UK.

In an example of meaningful solidarity, Michaela Coel was on hand to offer industry advice to Manzoor.

"Michaela Coel has been someone I've looked up to, and who has been very kind and supportive of *We Are Lady Parts*," says Manzoor. "We met at a studio we were thinking of using as a location while she was making *I May Destroy You* with BBC and HBO. She was just like, 'Hey, let me know if you ever have any questions about how this all goes.' I had loads of questions, often about process, being a showrunner, and how she found working with the American broadcasters. She was very available to answer questions."

Critically, remove the Muslim-female-punk premise of *We Are Lady Parts* as one might remove the backdrop of 1990s Northern Ireland in *Derry Girls*, and it's still a mile-a-minute show with likeable characters and a high concentration of jokes. They're just funnier when they play on mainstream perceptions.

That's found in the lyrics for Lady Parts' song *Ain't No One Gonna Honour Kill My Sister But Me*, in which the justifying gripes are: "She stole my eyeliner / What a bitch / And she's been stretching my shoes out with her fucking big feet."

"Above all, it's about love, friendship and finding your people," says Laura Riseam, commissioning executive for comedy at Channel 4.

The show – whose "healthy budget" benefited from a co-production deal with US streamer Peacock – initially began in 2018 as a Channel 4 *Comedy Blap*, the broadcaster's showcase for new comedy made in bite-sized chunks.

The *Blap* was produced by Surian Fletcher-Jones (an executive producer

on the eventual series) of Working Title who was already familiar with Manzoor. "I previously worked as a commissioner in Channel 4, and we ran a Channel 4 screenwriting scheme," she recalls. "Out of all the participants from that year, Nida was the one who was giving me pitch ideas. When I joined Working Title, she was one of the first people that came to see me. *Lady Parts* was a five-page pitch, and it was there on every level, fully formed. I was sold, sold, sold."



Channel 4

Manzoor's film and TV career began with writing credits on CBBC shows *Jamillah and Aladdin* and *Dixi*. Later she was employed as a director's assistant for Stephen Poliakoff [*Perfect Strangers*, *The Lost Prince*]. She then directed the full series of BBC Three's *Enterprice*, which helped her land the job of directing two episodes of *Doctor Who*.

But *We Are Lady Parts* was always her passion project, and "once I found the right people, it was quite a nice journey".

Indeed, such a show was ripe for Channel 4. Adds Riseam: "When *We Are Lady Parts* came to us, I looked over to Fi [Fiona McDermott, head of comedy] and I was just like, 'I love it and I've got no notes and this never happens.' I thought I was having a bit of a breakdown. It was really exciting.

"It was a perfect fit for Channel 4 and it's right that we should be the ones launching Nida's career. She's

balanced the comedy and the drama beautifully. I've laughed and I've also cried and I've fallen a bit in love with them all. There have been massive movements in the past year, and I think the world is a bit more ready for these stories to be told on mainstream TV."

Finding the on-screen talent was a tricky process, made easier by casting director Aisha Bywaters. Though *It's a Sin* championed the casting of marginalised actors, most of the actors in *We Are Lady Parts* aren't Muslim, but "the show is

Nida's voice. She is Muslim, and she is running through every element of this project," explains Fletcher-Jones.

"Wouldn't it just be delightful if we get to a point where the talent pool is big enough to be able to address that issue. But also, the characters are not just defined by their religion, they're defined by all their other personality idiosyncrasies."

The show's success so far, based on strong reviews and promising audience figures (for 16- to 34-year-olds, it outperformed the slot average by 53%) is another recent example of how fresh voices can excite viewers and progress societal understanding.

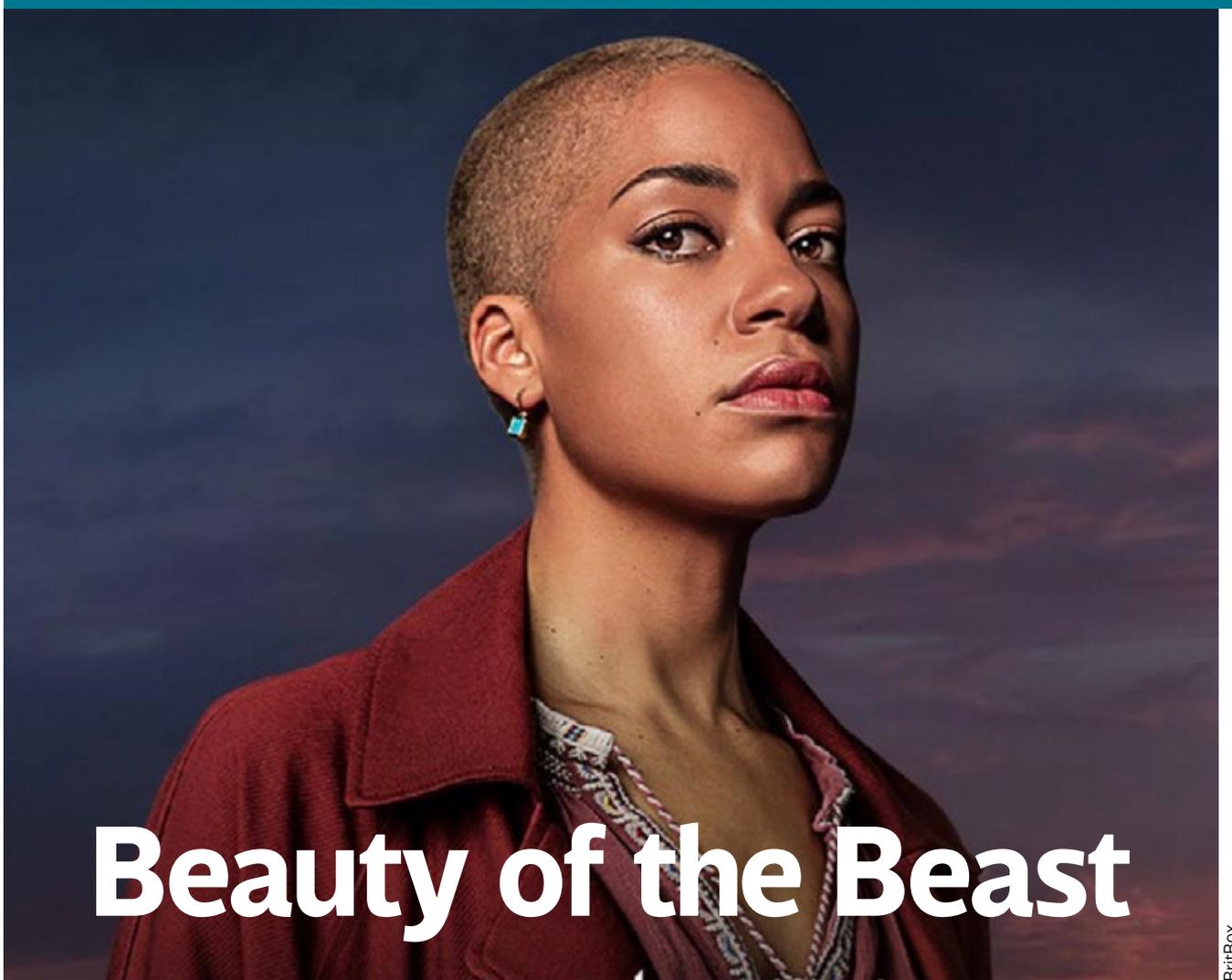
But Fletcher-Jones is mindful that an impatient rush for diverse voices may have a negative effect: "Diversity is the buzzword of the moment and everyone wants it now,

don't they? The point with *Lady Parts* is that it took time to get it right, and to give Nida the chance to come into her own.

"I just worry, with some of these flash-in-the-pan diversity initiatives, that things will be rushed to the screen before they're quite ready, or before the creative talent have found their voice and are sure of what they want to do and say. I would love to do more work in this vein, but I think we have to play the long game."

As it stands, a second series may well be in the works; Fletcher-Jones is working on a film with Manzoor. In any case, expect Nida Manzoor's career to make more noise than *Lady Parts*. And that's saying something. ■

***We Are Lady Parts* is available on All 4 and will be broadcast on Channel 4 until 24 June.**



BritBox

# Beauty of the Beast

**B**ringing a cherished project to television can take several years' hard graft; for it to take decades is much more unusual. But, thanks to BritBox, an adaptation of *The Beast Must Die* – written by Poet Laureate Cecil Day-Lewis under his crime-writer pen name, Nicholas Blake – has finally reached the TV screen.

More than 20 years ago, actor Nathaniel Parker narrated an audio version of the book. “It has always been for me the most ingenious of plots – clever, subtle, taking you by surprise at the end.... It’s a brilliant little book,” he recalled at an RTS event in late May.

A few years later, he turned out a script, sending it to Jill Balcon, Day-Lewis’s widow and mother of Oscar-winning actor Daniel. “She went, ‘Nah, that’s not a good enough script.’ Fair enough, I hadn’t written a script before so I understood completely,” he said.

Following Balcon’s death in 2009, her estate offered Parker the rights to adapt the book. The actor set up his

own company to make the series, Pull Yourself Together Productions, and found a fellow fan in Ed Rubin (now the head of New Regency Television International), who loved Claude Chabrol’s 1969 film adaptation, *Que la bête meure*.

“I didn’t like the film – we came to it from two different ways,” admitted Parker, “but we hawked it around and, luckily, BritBox was the one that bit.”

Parker appears in the five-part revenge thriller, which debuted at the end of May, but in the smaller role of Blount, therapist to Billy Howle’s troubled detective, Nigel Strangeways.

“Generally, when you see an actor who is [also] an exec producer, they are the star,” said Parker.

Writer Gaby Chiappe, who wrote the

screenplay for the terrific British comedy-drama *Their Finest*, put the kibosh on Parker’s initial plan to play Frank Cairns. “Gaby had this brilliant idea of changing Frank into Frances Cairns – that was me out of the window,” said Parker. Cairns, played by Cush Jumbo, seeks revenge when her six-year-old son is killed by a hit and run driver, and suspects the killer is businessman George Rattery (Jared Harris).

BritBox’s first original drama boasts a heavyweight cast. Few actors, following his star performances in *Chernobyl* and *The Crown*, are currently as hot as Harris. Jumbo excelled in US legal drama *The Good Fight*, while Howle won plaudits for his recent performance in *The Serpent*.

Having seen Chabrol’s film, Chiappe started to think that the role of the bereaved parent could work equally well as a woman; probably better, given that she was planning to update the book from its original 1938 setting to the modern day.

The book is “quite edgy and felt very of the moment, but it’s very hard to set

something in 1938 and not make it feel safe and a heritage [piece]," she said. "Some of the things that [Cairns] does in the book, with modern sensibilities, would make me feel quite queasy – the grooming of a young woman to get close to the person who he thinks killed his son.... The transposition of the gender of the lead character just came naturally with it being [set] now."

Another significant change sees the setting moved from Gloucestershire to the Isle of Wight. "Sailing is really important in the book and I was looking for somewhere where sailing isn't just the preserve of the very rich," explained Chiappe.

Wight had more than just locations going for it. When shooting was finally under way in autumn 2020, following months of Covid-19 delays, the island was, for a time, one of the few regions in England placed under the loosest tier 1 restrictions.

Karukoski said that working under Covid protocols made shooting "more tense and tiring", but he also identified a couple of benefits: "When we moved the shoot, it gave us additional time to work on the script with Gaby.

"I [also] love obstacles.... We put our heads together and thought, 'If we couldn't shoot something due to [the Covid] regulations, what else could [we

in the autumn. Chiappe was quick to praise the UK streamer: "It was non-interventionist in a way that is incredibly refreshing – they had thoughts and ideas but there was no micromanagement."

BritBox's arm's-length stance was particularly welcome to Parker: "I was in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, playing Gabriel Oak, and we literally had to stop shooting in the middle of a field in the Yorkshire Dales because the head of ITV, or whatever, wanted me to wear a hat – oh, for God's sake. There was none of that with BritBox."

For the actor, *The Beast Must Die* marks the achievement of a long-held ambi-



A police advisor working on the series suggested the Isle of Wight, where people "run little shitty cars just so they can keep a boat on the water".

Finnish director Dome Karukoski, who made the well-reviewed *Tolkien*, starring Nicholas Hoult as the young writer, was also drawn to the island's split character: "You have this touristy image... and a darker side; there's a lot of poverty, kids who can't afford to go to the mainland because the ferries cost too much.

"I tried to use [this] visually and aesthetically – the sunny versus the darkness in locations and lighting."

As events turned out, the Isle of

do with] the scene?' Our wonderful crew made a lot of great creative choices."

TV is awash with crime series but *The Beast Must Die* is more ambitious than most, partly thanks to its source material. Day-Lewis explored "something quite elemental about [loss] within the framework of a detective novel", said Chiappe. "You have to hit the genre marks, otherwise it doesn't work as genre, but that's not the only thing that is happening."

BritBox's cold war series *A Spy Among Friends*, starring Damian Lewis and Dominic West, is expected to air later this year. Contemporary thriller *Marlow*, starring Claire Foy, is due to shoot

tion that dates from his first TV appearance in a 1988 Battle of Britain drama, *Piece of Cake*: "From the very first day of filming on *Piece of Cake*, I've wanted to be on the other side of the lens as well, with a really good script and crew, creating a really good product and everyone having a really good time.

"That's what happened on my first ever proper exec producership – I'm thrilled to bits." ■

**Report by Matthew Bell. 'The Beast Must Die: Preview Q&A' was an RTS event held on 26 May. It was chaired by journalist Caroline Frost and produced by the RTS and Organic Publicity.**

**F**or a show that took six years and multiple knock-backs before it hit our screens, *It's a Sin* is a formidable reminder of the power of TV drama.

The series follows a group of gay friends during the Aids crisis of the 1980s, and earlier this year became All 4's biggest ever show when it was watched by 18.9 million viewers.

Viewers were drawn in by Russell T Davies's compelling story and his finely crafted characters, whom we couldn't help but feel invested in.

Crucially, its cultural impact added depth to its importance: in the first week that the series was available, which coincided with National HIV Testing Week, more than double the number of HIV tests were ordered compared with the previous National HIV Testing Week.

Davies was also responsible for the equally groundbreaking Channel 4 series *Queer as Folk*, rebooting *Doctor Who*, spinning off *Torchwood*, and the gay-related trio of *Cucumber*, *Banana* and *Tofu*.

The genesis of *It's a Sin* came when he was writing *Cucumber*, Davies explained at the RTS masterclass. "I do think every piece of work has led to another piece of work. *Cucumber* is about a middle-aged man who lived through the 1980s.

"Eight hours of drama heads towards the last line of the last scene where someone basically says, 'What's wrong with you?', and he says, 'Being gay'... That's what said to me, 'Right, next, you have to write that show, the one [that] this middle-aged gay man who lived through [the 1980s] should write.'"

The premise was a difficult sell, stressed Nicola Shindler, who developed and executive produced *It's a Sin* for Red Production. She is a long-time producer of Davies's work and recently set up Quay Street Productions.

She said: "If you say, 'I'm going to do an HIV/Aids drama', it feels like it's going to be about death, about victims, about very thin men in beds dying, which is all we've ever seen before. People couldn't see beyond that and couldn't see the joy that Russell had written into it."

However, Channel 4 commissioner Lee Mason was drawn to the script, particularly as its family dynamics had

# The sober art of sharing joy



*It's a Sin's* Russell T Davies, long-time collaborator Nicola Shindler and Channel 4 commissioner Lee Mason spell out how to create hit scripts

universal appeal. “It’s this idea that you will have people that you love, loved ones you will lose, secrets that you keep from each other,” he said. “All those things we have in family dramas, it’s all in that Pink Palace [the characters’ London residence].”

The clip played during the masterclass was the fast-paced sequence in which Ritchie [played by Olly Alexander, also frontman of the band Years & Years, not to be confused with Davies’s series of the same name] discusses the rumours surrounding this new virus over a multitude of buzzing scenes – the equivalent of *Trainspotting*’s ‘choose life’ sequence.

Here’s a snippet of the lightning-speed monologue: “They say it arrived from outer space on a comet, and they say that God created it to strike us dead. They say that it was created in the laboratory to kill us. They say it’s the Russians. They say we got it from the jungle...”

Davies explained: “It’s not just a sequence. It’s not just us having fun. It’s the entire reason I wanted to write the show. That’s me in 2015 or 2010 wanting to dramatise a period of time when it was all rumours.

“But how do I dramatise it so that it’s not two people sitting in the pub? That whole sequence would have died if it had been pub dialogue, or an argument between three friends.”

There was plenty more for aspiring writers to learn from *It’s a Sin* and those who brought it to life. For Davies, a key aspect for any writer is to have a professional approach.

“I find myself giving this advice more and more often to young writers. If you’re one of those writers who always delivers late, sort yourself out. Because there are people who have careers like that, and they don’t last. Also, if you drink too much – they might be the talk of the town for 10 years but not all writers have to be a bit mad.

“You’ll never get rid of all your mad-nesses, but if there are things in your psyche that stop you delivering scripts, it’s not going to work. And that’s a fact, because it’s very hard work.”

Mason agreed: “I have loads of scripts coming in all the time. So I could commission you to write that script, and I could be really excited about it. But the longer it takes for that script to come back to me, [the more] I

might start to lose interest, or something else might come on my desk and *that* is the 10:00pm show that I want to pitch to [Channel 4’s chief content officer] Ian Katz.”

The distinctively British story of *It’s a Sin* proved successful in countries such as the US (with co-producer HBO Max), Korea and Australia. But that does not mean that writers should be keeping one eye on the international markets they hope their shows will be sold to.

“It’s not the writer’s job,” says Shindler. “If the writer is thinking, ‘How am I going to sell internationally’, they’re thinking about the wrong thing. The writer should be thinking: what’s the best script I can write? Who’s the best character I can put on screen? How is the story told in the best way? Not, ‘Will someone in Idaho be able to understand it?’”

Mason offered his take on this: “Because we’re living in this global

Also, the strength of the writer-producer relationship helps the broadcaster have confidence in a show.

Finally, formatting matters. Checking for typos is important (“It’s amazing how bad it feels to read typos,” said Davies). As a commissioner, Mason reads scripts on the move, often on his phone, so “just give me text”, he said. “When I get scripts with all the bells, whistles and pictures, I always wonder why they needed to do that. I usually assume that the script is not as good.”

Returning to the keynote scene of *It’s a Sin* described earlier, Davies explained that a script is most effective when the look of it on the page matches how it feels. “If a sequence is fast, it should look fast on the page. You cut adverbs out of a script, you barely have full stops, instead you use dashes.

“If a scene is very slow and very ponderous, then you have big blocks of stage directions and big speeches and



streaming world, audiences are more sophisticated. People get it. The amazing show that Nicola produced, *Happy Valley* [set in Yorkshire], did great on Netflix. There’s no denying that, culturally, it’s got all the flavours of a certain region of this country. That didn’t bother audiences outside of the UK, because it’s an amazing story with amazing characters going on big emotional journeys.”

Aspiring writers also need to understand that the title of a series may change; *It’s a Sin* was originally called *Boys*. If the story is strong enough to be greenlit, that conversation can happen afterwards.

it looks dense. As Nicola always says, a script is the document that everyone on the production needs to know. It’s not the stage directions. Everything’s a scene.”

If anyone should know which scripts work best, it’s these industry heavy-weights. ■

**Report by Shilpa Ganatra. The *It’s a Sin* masterclass was held on 18 May. It was chaired by comedian and presenter Kemah Bob and featured writer Russell T Davies OBE, executive producer Nicola Shindler and Channel 4 commissioner Lee Mason (who is moving to Disney+). It was produced by Tom Popay and Rajveer Sihota.**

# Ads bounce back

TV advertising is rebounding but reforms are necessary to ensure the sector's long-term future, says **Gideon Spanier**



ITV

ITV's Love Island

**T**he obituary of TV advertising has been written many times since the 2008 financial crisis and, each time, it has confounded the doomsayers. The television ad market suffered its steepest downturn on record between April and June 2020. There were declines of close to 50% during the worst of the pandemic, yet it has bounced back.

ITV has told investors it expects its ad revenues to be up as much as 90% in June – thanks in part to the Euros, rescheduled from 2020, and the return of *Love Island*.

Rivals including Comcast, owner of Sky, and ViacomCBS, parent company of Channel 5, have also reported recovering ad revenues.

The UK's £5bn-a-year TV ad market fell about 12% in 2020 but is on course to recover all of last year's decline and return to 2019 levels or better in 2021, according to Steven Ballinger. He is

President of Amplifi, the media investment arm of Dentsu International, one of the UK's biggest agency groups, whose clients include Vodafone, Microsoft and the Co-operative Group.

During the course of the pandemic, TV has benefited from the various lockdowns because people had to spend more time at home and viewing increased, even though there was also increased competition from streaming services and other online media.

According to Christian Juhl, the global Chief Executive of GroupM – the media-buying arm of WPP, whose clients include BT, Lloyds Banking Group and Unilever – TV is “still the best place to reach people at scale and there's nothing like it” thanks to the high levels of trust and brand safety that it enjoys.

Yet many questions hang over the future of TV advertising in the UK. The threats include: the rise of ad-free streamers such as Netflix and Disney+; VoD services that carry fewer ads; and

the prospect of tighter ad restrictions on food and drink high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) advertising.

Enders Analysis published a major report in April, arguing that the UK TV ad market needed reform. It cited two long-term trading issues: “lack of effective audience measurement” across linear-TV and VoD due to a lack of common standards; and “somewhat opaque” relationships between advertisers (and their media agencies) and the big TV ad sales houses, ITV Commercial, 4Sales and Sky Media. “Both issues need resolving to underpin a healthier ecosystem overall,” said Enders.

Nevertheless, the short-term outlook for the next six to 18 months is good. Amplifi's Ballinger estimates that the TV ad market will be up 12% to 15% in 2021 and perhaps 2% to 3% in 2022, as the economy recovers.

Rising revenues allow broadcasters to increase investment in programmes, although they also found new efficiencies and saved money on cancelled

productions during the pandemic – ITV, for example, plans to achieve £30m of “permanent overhead savings” this year.

Since the start of Covid-19, one key factor that has underpinned TV advertising has been an influx of new advertisers and those that have returned following a long absence.

Some of these advertisers were attracted by cheap prices – the consequence of deflation when the world went into lockdown and demand collapsed. But many companies have invested in TV advertising for strategic, rather than tactical, reasons because of the medium’s ability to tell emotionally engaging stories and build brands.

TV offers mass, simultaneous reach and can generate fame in a way that internet search and social media struggle to deliver, despite UK brands spending around £15bn a year on online advertising. That is three times as much as on TV, according to figures from WARC (World Advertising Research Center) and the Advertising Association.

Premier Foods, owner of brands such as Ambrosia, Sharwood’s and Mr Kipling, is a good example. The FTSE-250 company has adopted a strategy that CEO Alex Whitehouse describes as a “branded growth model”, using TV advertising to drive sales growth.

It is not just established brands embracing TV. Ballinger points to Airbnb, the online holiday property rentals company, which has made a permanent shift away from data-driven digital marketing, such as paid search, in favour of broader, brand-building messaging such as TV ads.

Brian Chesky, co-founder and CEO of Airbnb, explains how the company cut what it calls digital performance marketing to zero during the pandemic. Even though travel ground to a halt, it still generated 95% of the online traffic it had a year earlier.

As a result, Airbnb switched its marketing and launched its biggest brand campaign in five years: “Made possible by hosts” saw TV ads appear in five markets, including the UK, at the start of 2021.

“Brands have realised that they can’t work only in that performance world,” says Ballinger. “They need a more broadcast, brand-building platform to talk to consumers.”

Some other new, disruptor brands

that have used digital performance to build their businesses have also woken up to the power of TV – particularly after prices fell last year. Car insurance brand By Miles, pregnancy app Peanut, business-to-business comparison site Bionic and Butternut Box, a dog-food delivery service, were just some of the

advertiser that might subsequently go on to advertise on traditional TV.

VoD and other digital revenue still remain a small part of the overall advertising revenue mix for UK broadcasters. But Channel 4 recently set a target for 30% of its ad revenues to come from digital by 2025.



new advertisers on ITV last year.

The broadcasters have learnt from the tech giants such as Google and Facebook, and have recruited ad sales staff who deal directly with advertisers, not just the agencies that buy on behalf of clients. Both 4Sales and Sky Media have recruited new ad sales chiefs from the agency sector in the past six months, as they look to get closer to advertisers.

The TV companies are also attracting new advertisers by making it easier for them to plan and buy VoD campaigns via platforms such as ITV’s Planet V and Sky’s AdSmart.

“We’re attracting hundreds of VoD-only advertisers, which wasn’t happening before,” noted Carolyn McCall, CEO of ITV, when she announced its annual results in March.

She listed brands such as Net-a-Porter, Levi’s, Monzo, Porsche, New Look, Virgin Active, Westfield, Tiffany & Co, Heinz and “loads” of higher education institutions.

“They are doing very personalised, bespoke targeted advertising through Planet V”, which has self-serve technology, allowing ads to be booked online, McCall explained. “That has definitely been a shift.”

It is an important development because, as Ballinger points out, VoD can be the entry-point for a new-to-TV

The rise of VoD is important because it allows greater flexibility. That is a big issue for advertisers because a lot of linear TV is still traded on the basis of historic deals and lengthy advanced booking deadlines – a legacy of CRR (Contract Rights Renewal, the regulation that was introduced in 2003 at the time of the ITV merger).

Enders’ warning about the need for reform of the TV ad market was timely because consumer habits have been changing rapidly, particularly with the rise of streaming services and consolidation such as the planned Warner-Media-Discovery merger.

“The challenge for the traditional broadcasters – ITV, Channel 4 and Sky – is how do they counteract people’s diversification of viewing?” Ballinger says, adding that TV advertising could face an inflation problem if audiences decline as life returns to normal and prices go up.

After the great advertising bounce-back of summer 2021, Britain’s leading commercial TV players will need to modernise and work more closely together on measurement to continue to attract advertisers in the face of global competition. ■

**Gideon Spanier is UK editor-in-chief of Campaign.**



Gogglebox

Channel 4

# TV's middle-aged wild child

**Narinder Minhas** reviews Maggie Brown's second instalment of her history of an unfailingly turbulent broadcaster

**Y**ou think that policemen/teachers/doctors look incredibly young. You become grumpy when your colleagues don't know what a VHS tape is. You join a gym after seeing yourself in the mirror as you climb out of the bath. And, God forbid, you buy truckloads of Lycra for your new-found hobby of cycling.

Recognise any of this? Sure, you do, as you fall asleep after one glass of wine, tired from a full day at the garden centre, which now counts as "splashing out". And if you prefer radio to TV, you are on the slippery slope. Welcome to middle age.

According to some dictionaries, middle age hits you between 40 and 60. But no one quite knows. What is

*Channel 4: A History: from Big Brother to The Great British Bake Off* by Maggie Brown is published by the British Film Institute, priced £19.99. ISBN: 978-1911239840



clear is that it is a moment of reflection and transformation.

As Channel 4 approaches its 40th birthday, what better time to look at its history, not just to explore the past, but also to understand the present. I can think of no one better to go on this journey with than one of Britain's top media writers, Maggie Brown.

Fizzing with insight, revelations and drama, her new book on Channel 4

(*The Story from Big Brother to The Great British Bake Off*) is a fascinating account of one of the world's most colourful and distinctive broadcasters: "a commercially funded channel with a public service remit".

Bookended by the recession of the late noughties and the current crippling pandemic, this volume – a follow-up to her book on the first 25 years of the channel – covers a hugely turbulent period, from the dysfunction of the board under Luke Johnson, via the whirlwind years of Jay Hunt, charting incredible programme innovations, right up to the modern regime of Alex Mahon and Ian Katz, bravely fighting its way to a new digital future.

It could have been a bit dry, like one of those shiny business books on display at the airport that you feel you

ought to read, but never quite enjoy. Worse still, it could have been a puff piece. The risks are always there when an institution gives access to a journalist or programme-maker.

Even though the book covers recent history, there is so much I had forgotten – another sign of middle age.

Brown doesn't shy away from reminding us about the channel's tricky periods. For example, do you remember the board trying to buy Channel 5, but losing out to Richard Desmond, a successful businessman and former porn baron, who put in a "knock-out cash bid"? Or the ill-fated attempt to move into radio? Or the "begging bowl" strategy, where the channel campaigned to top-slice the BBC licence fee?

Brown is at her very best when she goes granular. She has the eyes and ears of a documentary-maker, capturing the sights and sounds of a scene. I love the chapter on "The rise of fixed rigs": "The most significant programme development... began with an idea sparked over a plate of chilli mackerel at a Vietnamese restaurant in Shoreditch."

At the meal with two independent producers was Simon Dickson, a commissioner at Channel 4, described by Brown as a "burly, determined Scot", who was complaining, between mouthfuls of mackerel, about the dominance of *Big Brother* at programme review meetings. Dickson fumed that he "couldn't understand why so many middle-aged people were talking in glowing tones about a programme for young people".

The discussion over lunch produced one of those eureka moments that development teams dream about. Dickson was on a roll: "The futility of spending all that money on a space, then filling it with vainglorious ne'er-do-wells. Why don't we take the *Big Brother* technology and put it somewhere more interesting?"

This was the moment the rig show was born. What followed was a long trail of hugely successful factual shows, "television gold"; as they say, starting with *Going Cold Turkey* and *The Family*, and ending with all those incredible blockbusters: *Educating Yorkshire*, *One Born Every Minute* and *24 Hours in Police Custody*. There was even time for "a rigged series featuring seven dwarfs, a troupe of pantomime actors gearing up for Christmas".

One of the more revealing chapters in

the book highlights the "toxic triangle of Luke Johnson (Chair), Andy Duncan (Chief Executive) and Kevin Lygo (director of programmes) at the top of Channel 4" during 2008, culminating in the departure of Duncan.

According to Brown, the dysfunction was so bad at the time that it split the board: "Johnson wanted to remove Duncan but his deputy, David Puttnam, wanted to stop him... at least for the time being. One certainty was that

‘WE ALL NEED  
A DAN BROOKE,  
ESPECIALLY ONE  
THAT CAN OPEN  
SOME HEAVY  
DOORS’

Duncan, whose weakness was that he always saw the best in people, was in deep trouble."

What follows is the story of this exit and the power struggle at board level. Brown is in her element, painting an absorbing picture of all the key players. It has the feel of an episode of *Succession*, the HBO hit that follows the fortunes of a media family, loosely based on the Murdochs.

By the end of this topsy-turvy saga, I was exhausted with all the machinations and feeling sorry for the hapless and "rumpled polo shirt"-clad Duncan. Even the announcement of his departure didn't go to plan: "The agreement was that [it] would be announced in a dignified manner... well after the Edinburgh International Television Festival. But the sacking was leaked at Edinburgh, where Duncan looked a broken man. After bitter negotiations, he signed a compromise agreement, including a donation from Channel 4 to two of his chosen charities."

It is clear from the book that everyone in British television spoke to Brown. The access is incredible and nowhere more so than over the battle to appoint the new chief executive.

In the red corner was David Abraham, the outsider and former advertising exec, who even had his own strapline: "I am a unique hybrid, so uniquely qualified".

In the blue corner was Kevin Lygo, the insider, posh art collector, popular with

Channel 4 staff and ultra-confident. But Lygo had underestimated his rival.

On the day of the interview, Abraham was well-prepared: "He had read every speech made by the previous five chief executives [and] he presented each of the panel with a glossy brochure about himself. He was commercial, with just enough television commissioning experience and channel branding success to tick the board's boxes."

Abraham also had a secret weapon: his unofficial campaign manager, Dan Brooke, "the son of a former cabinet minister", who was well-versed in the world of politics and lobbying. By the time of the interview, and on Brooke's advice, Abraham had met all the key opinion-formers for some cosy "fire-side chats". We all need a Dan Brooke, especially one that can open some heavy doors.

Though Lygo would have been a brilliant boss, in Brown's view, it was what happened to him in the interview that proved to be decisive: "The killer, according to three members of the panel, was his response to a question about how he would deal with under-performers. [Lygo] said: 'I would withdraw my love'. A chill descended on that small room." It was probably a joke, but it backfired.

The book doesn't just shed light on some of these key appointments, which changed the course of Channel 4's history, it is also a celebration of an extraordinary brand that has survived against all the odds, produced brilliant content, working with some of the most talented and creative staff around – too many to mention here. We are very lucky in Britain to have Channel 4.

I have not even mentioned the huge array of hits generated during this period: *Gogglebox*, *The End of the F\*\*\*ing World*, Peter Kosminsky's compelling drama *The State*, *First Dates*, *Leaving Neverland*, the brilliant *Channel 4 News*, or the whole process of creative renewal in the past 10 years, or even the recent monster hit Russell T Davies's *It's a Sin*.

As Brown says, "It is impossible to capture the entirety of a broadcaster's activity in a book". Likewise, it is impossible to capture all the richness of this book in one review. And that is not me being middle-aged. ■

**Narinder Minhas is Co-Managing Director of Cardiff Productions. He worked as a commissioning editor at Channel 4 in the early 2000s.**



# Stories hiding in plain sight

Key people in the creation of BBC One's *Small Axe* share the backstory of Steve McQueen's film anthology

BBC

The benefits of assembling genuinely diverse production teams are often talked about but seldom fully realised. A notable recent exception was Steve McQueen's ground breaking *Small Axe*, the anthology of five feature films first shown on BBC One late last year, and the recent winner of five Bafta craft awards.

Four of the five films depicted the troubling experiences of first-generation West Indians living in west London during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, while the fifth, *Lovers Rock*, was a celebration of a night out at a house party in Ladbroke Grove in 1980.

An RTS production focus event last month heard how the makers of *Small Axe* were determined to accurately represent British people of Caribbean heritage and those from other ethnic groups. They also wanted to ensure

that the crews who made *Small Axe* were genuinely diverse despite high demand for production personnel.

In *Red, White and Blue* it is not only the central character, rookie police officer Leroy Logan (played by John Boyega), who is subjected to the Met's systemic racism – a more experienced British Asian policeman is also racially abused. Logan went on to form the Black Police Association, an attempt to reform the force from within.

*Red, White and Blue* was co-written by McQueen and Courttia Newland, the novelist and co-editor of the recent anthology *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*. He told the RTS about the challenge of depicting a non-fictional character in a TV drama: "I knew it was a brilliant story, but I was slightly intimidated by telling it. I'd never written about a real person before, let alone someone who was across the table from me telling me his story.

"But, throughout the process, Leroy was amazing and completely generous. He didn't ask to see the script and was completely hands-off. He trusted us."

The writer, who also collaborated with McQueen on *Lovers Rock*, stressed the importance of portraying a wide range of Londoners in these films; he himself attended a school where 127 languages were spoken.

Newland said: "With *Lovers Rock*, I leant quite heavily on my Jamaican heritage. Our dialogue coach, Hazel, came in and said, 'I'm going to mix this up a bit, put some Trinidadian here and some St Lucian there'.

"That was really great, too. It was like, 'Let's play, let's have some fun and enjoy ourselves'. I think you can feel that in the film."

He added: "I'd been waiting for this my whole life – to tell the story of black Britain on such a massive canvas, and working with someone as brilliant

as Steve. I was bowled over at the opportunity.”

*Small Axe* executive producer Tracey Scoffield, who worked for a decade at BBC Films before co-founding Turbine Studios, told the RTS that she had suffered “nightmares about having an entirely white crew standing behind the camera facing a black cast”.

She continued: “I thought, that is not going to happen, but it was a very busy time in the industry when we shot this.

inspiration for what became *Small Axe* was that McQueen had wanted to make something for his mother. He felt that she belonged to a generation of people who had come to the UK from the West Indies but “there was never anything on TV that reflected their experience. This was a generation that didn’t write things down and, between the generations, didn’t speak to each other.

“One of the most gratifying things about this project was that it started the

inciting a riot when police targeted the Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill.

*Mangrove* culminates in a searing courtroom drama, one of the most emotionally charged pieces of TV drama shown last year.

“The Mangrove story stood out,” noted Scoffield. “It was an important piece of social and cultural history, which had been swept under the carpet. As Steve said, ‘These stories are hiding in plain sight’. He said the same thing about *Hunger* and *Twelve Years a Slave*. *Mangrove* laid out the stall for the whole series. This is what this series is going to be about: collective action and communities of people coming together.”

From the beginning, the idea was to bring cinematic values to the small screen. Scoffield’s background in both TV and film – as well as working for BBC Films, she executive produced the Emmy-winning *The Gathering Storm* – made her well qualified for the job.

“A lot of TV drama is made on very tight schedules,” she said. “Steve is a film-maker obsessed with attention to detail and doesn’t believe in making any compromises unless he has to – and then they’d be very creative ones.”

Unusually for a TV drama, *Mangrove* was shot on 35mm film stock. “*Lovers Rock* was the one we had to do cheaply and shoot digitally,” said the executive producer. “Each film is very different to the others, so each time it was like starting from scratch again.”

As for the key job of casting, *Small Axe* employed casting director Gary Davy, a long-time McQueen collaborator. He had worked on *Hunger* and won an Emmy for HBO’s *Band of Brothers*, co-created by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks.

“At first, I didn’t quite realise how big it was,” recalled Davy, who started looking for actors for *Small Axe* in 2016. “Authenticity is important. As casting directors, we always want to get someone who looks like the real person. That is always in the back of our mind...”

“Steve always says he wants the right person for the part. He wants and loves good actors. We are never going to run out of good actors in this country. We could have cast this show twice over with the amount of talent that we’ve got here.” ■

**Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS London event ‘Production focus: Small Axe’ was held on 19 May. It was chaired by Aradhna Tayal, producer and consultant at Clockhouse Media. The producer was Lettija Lee.**



*Small Axe: Red, White and Blue*

BBC

The original West Indian people we’d wanted to be heads of departments were all busy, so we had to rethink it.”

To identify and develop new people, the BBC and co-producer Amazon were persuaded to contribute to a trainee scheme. This enabled Scoffield to have a trainee working in every production department. Around a third of the workforce that made *Small Axe* had Caribbean backgrounds. The head of hair and make-up, JoJo Williams, whose CV includes working with Idris Elba, was originally due to take part in the RTS production focus but had to pull out to work in South Africa.

The films had a long gestation period. McQueen’s agent originally contacted Scoffield in 2010 to see if she would be interested in working with the director, recently acclaimed for his first feature film, *Hunger*, the story of IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands.

She revealed that part of the

generations speaking to one another.”

Why did Scoffield want to get involved? “I come at these stories from a different cultural perspective, but I am a Londoner, born and bred. I was born and brought up in west London, where a lot of these stories are set. For me, anything that is about the history of London is fascinating.”

Pivotal to the project was former *Newsnight* journalist Helen Bart, an associate producer on *Small Axe*, who spent hours conducting interviews with people from London’s West Indian community. Only after she had completed her research was it decided that what became *Small Axe* should tell true, rather than fictional, stories.

Unusually for a TV series, the five films each have different lengths, ranging from 63 to 123 minutes. Arguably, the project’s bedrock was *Mangrove*, the story of the Mangrove Nine, a group of black British activists charged with

## BBC director of nations Rhodri Talfan Davies tells the RTS how the broadcaster's 'Across the UK' strategy will work in practice

It is regarded as the BBC's biggest transformation in decades, as the corporation prepares to further shift its centre of gravity away from London in favour of the likes of Birmingham and Newcastle.

In March, Director-General Tim Davie pledged to better reflect the UK's nations and regions by moving expenditure amounting to £700m by March 2028 and hundreds of jobs outside the capital as part of a new "Across the UK" strategy.

Earlier this month, the RTS interviewed the executive at the sharp end of this policy, director of nations Rhodri Talfan Davies, who took up the role in January. Davies is also director of BBC Cymru Wales and sits on the BBC's Executive Committee.

He told his interviewer, Sky News's Gillian Joseph, that, while the BBC had in recent years boosted its production presence in places such as Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow and Salford, the scale of this latest move aimed at providing better services for all licence-fee payers was of a different order.

When he joined the BBC in 1993, around 90% of network TV was made in London, and the nations and regions felt marginalised. "Since then, things have changed dramatically," Davies insisted. The new plan involved "getting much closer to communities across all four nations", "feeling utterly rooted in those communities" and "telling their stories". The latter was something that global media giants such as Netflix did not do.

As part of the move towards further decentralisation, for example, news teams specialising in climate and science would move from London to Cardiff, while those specialising in technology would relocate to Glasgow.

In TV, the objective was to shift 60% of all network budgets outside London, with more than 200 scripted shows to be produced out of the metropolis within the next three years. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the



BBC

Rhodri Talfan Davies

# A serious bid to reach past the M25

aim was to make a combined total of 20 dramas and comedies within the same time frame.

"These are big, measurable changes that will change the tone and flavour of the BBC," promised Davies. "It is about changing what we see on air. There was no sense in having all our TV news specialists based in London."

He said the success of BBC One's six-part drama *The Pact*, shot mostly in south Wales, demonstrated the appetite

for authentic depictions of parts of the UK that were neither English or metropolitan. He added: "We want to do more of this and to be able to look at the BBC in three years and feel this is a BBC that is embracing talent across scripted and unscripted, and communities in every part of the UK."

Davies gave *Breakfast News*, based in Salford, as an example of a show that added a different flavour to BBC News.

As more programmes were based

outside London, Davies said there would be a mix of recruiting locally and moving staff from London. He conceded that the latter involved “very personal choices” and that, initially, some employees might commute from their present homes to the new locations.

The Director-General, under pressure from the Government, whose ministers have criticised the BBC for “its narrow, urban outlook”, has promised to do more for those licence payers outside London who feel they

collaborations with local indies and institutions such as Sunderland University in the North East.

“We need a holistic plan [in the North East],” said Davies. “There’s enormous creative talent in the North East and we’re missing out on that if we don’t work with partners to see that region reflected on screen.”

Regarding plans for a more bespoke BBC One to reflect the North, the first step was to get the channel up and running in HD locally. The next was to

reality. Every part of the BBC had to make cost reductions,” replied Davies.

One way to drill down locally was to boost the BBC’s online journalism, particularly in those English towns overlooked by mainstream media. “At the moment, this is UK-first, then go and find your local,” he noted.

Turning to the all-important issue of public trust in BBC reporting, Joseph wondered whether the BBC’s journalistic reputation had been damaged by Lord Dyson’s report into how Martin



Forth Bridge

receive less value for their money than those who live in the capital.

“In areas such as the North East, audiences can feel more distant from the BBC,” Davies acknowledged. To help correct this, plans are being made to launch new TV soaps based in northern England and in one of the three devolved nations.

In terms of money being redeployed outside London, the nations director said that the bulk of this would be spent in England, especially in the West Midlands and the North.

“For the first time, we’ve put clear measures on the number of projects we want to deliver,” he emphasised.

So how would the BBC ensure these were felt right across the length and breadth of the UK? “There is no secret sauce here. Having spent 10 years running BBC Wales, north Wales felt very distant from Cardiff. Whatever level you go to, there is always someone who feels the level of distribution is not far enough.”

Expect more local radio programming in Bradford, Sunderland and Wolverhampton and other places, and

introduce more regional continuity announcers and more of a Northern editorial focus in production.

He denied, however, that the move towards decentralising – with power as well as people shifting from London – was a response to the Government’s “levelling up” agenda.

Commissioning teams outside London would benefit from having a much bigger say in network projects in order to reflect the nations and regions. He cited the success of *The Pact* again, and that of *Keeping Faith*, also produced in Wales, and the 2019 drama *Guilt*, commissioned by the BBC Scotland channel.

“When you get authentic regional portrayal right, it tends to work across the UK. Audiences love series that have a real sense of place,” Davies said.

Conversely, there have been many critics of the BBC’s decision last year to axe the long-running regional current affairs programme *Inside Out*. Wasn’t this counter to getting closer to audiences outside London? “That was a really tough decision... I am not here to pretend that was the ideal solution.... The whole BBC faced a financial

Bashir obtained his 1995 *Panorama* interview with Diana, Princess of Wales.

“It was a grim read... but I don’t for a moment feel that that particular series of mistakes reflects or represents the journalistic integrity that I see every day from my BBC colleagues,” said Davies. “Audiences don’t conflate that one incident with their general regard for BBC journalism.”

Would the episode be used by the Government as a stick to beat the BBC in the future? “Clearly, there are conversations around licence-fee funding and governance that routinely take place between the corporation and government.

“If we look at this objectively, this is the BBC commissioning a report that gets to the truth.... You’ve got to remember that, every second of every day, on average about 5 million people tune in to the BBC and they come to us because they trust us.” ■

**Report by Steve Clarke. Rhodri Talfan Davies was in conversation with Sky News presenter Gillian Joseph for the RTS on 3 June. The producer was Chris Jackson.**



Leigh-Anne: Race, Pop & Power

BBC

## Leigh-Anne lifts the lid

**RTS Futures** Matthew Bell discovers how Dragonfly made an illuminating film about racism in the music industry

**R**TS Futures offered a fascinating masterclass on the making of the powerful and critically well-received documentary *Leigh-Anne: Race, Pop & Power*.

The one-hour BBC Three commission, which aired on BBC One last month, follows Little Mix's Leigh-Anne Pinnock as she explores racism in the music industry and confronts her own experiences as the group's sole black member.

At the beginning of the documentary, Pinnock says: "Sometimes, I felt I was

being treated differently to my bandmates because of the colour of my skin."

Film-maker Tash Gaunt went to the same secondary school as Pinnock and the pair have remained firm friends.

"The idea for the documentary sprang from a series of conversations Leigh-Anne and I had a few years ago. She had been starting to think more about her identity as a black woman," Gaunt recalled.

She took the idea to Dragonfly, the indie that had employed her on two BBC

documentary series, first as a researcher on *Hospital* and then as part of the team of producer/directors working on *Ambulance*.

"It felt like the perfect time for Tash to step up and author her first film," said executive producer Tom Currie. "With her access to Leigh-Anne, Tash herself was an intrinsic part of the commission."

Dragonfly developed the idea and took it to BBC Three, which snapped it up.

The film was commissioned and already in pre-production when George Floyd was murdered in

Minneapolis last May, an event that, with the world-wide Black Lives Matter demonstrations that followed, greatly informed and added force to the narrative of *Leigh-Anne: Race, Pop & Power*. One of the film's key sequences sees Pinnock on the street discussing racism with protesters.

The production team also had to cope with the constraints of Covid-19 filming protocols, but, revealed producer Kandise Abiola, this did have an upside: "We had so much time with Leigh-Anne. [Normally,] she's such a busy woman with her music career... We really embedded ourselves in Leigh-Anne's life."

This presented a clear conflict of interest for the director. "It's difficult to navigate a [working] relationship with someone... who's your mate," said Gaunt. "On one of our first filming days, when it was just Leigh-Anne and I together, I said, 'I've got two hats on – my friend hat and a director's hat. When I carry this camera, sometimes I have to ask you difficult questions, but everything I do is to make us the best film we possibly can.'"

In contrast to many production teams in TV, the one assembled for the documentary was diverse.

"Many times, I've been the only person of colour in a production company, as well as on a production team. [You need] to have the confidence in yourself to speak up and to be heard," said Abiola.

"Know your craft – that enables you to speak up." ■

**The RTS Futures masterclass 'Leigh-Anne: Race, Pop & Power' was held on 21 May. It was chaired by Basma Khalifa, and produced by Rajveer Sihota and Tom Popay.**

The pandemic has seen a boom in programmes on “beautiful Britain”, with many focusing their cameras on the landscapes of the South West.

Two of the most successful have been made by regional indies: Plymouth-based TwoFour’s *Cornwall and Devon Walks with Julia Bradbury* for ITV and BBC Two’s *Cornwall with Simon Reeve*, produced by Newquay indie Beagle Media.

“There is a trend for beautiful Britain at the moment, and Devon and Cornwall is at the top of the list,” said Rachel Innes-Lumsden, TwoFour director of programmes for the west, who revealed that she is currently making three series on the region for Channel 5.

Innes-Lumsden was talking at “Devon and Cornwall: A TV success story” in late May.

TwoFour had already made a series for ITV in which Bradbury uncovered the hidden delights of the Greek islands and was planning a follow-up in Spain. At the same time, the indie was also set to do a “secret walks series” in the UK for ITV.

On the back of Channel 4’s huge success with True North documentary series *Devon and Cornwall*, ITV suggested that TwoFour make a series with Bradbury in just



Cornwall with Simon Reeve

BBC

## Filming beautiful Britain

the south-west, recalled Innes-Lumsden.

Harry Ancombe, CEO of Beagle Media, said commissioners seemed to have “an endless appetite” for series showcasing the south-west, “if the idea, access and talent are right”.

The region’s attraction, he said, was that “it is beautiful and it is nostalgic to many people who came here on holidays when they were kids or who now come here with their own kids. It’s hard to put your finger on it: it is diverse, it has got wildlife, it

has even got beavers now on Bodmin Moor.”

The recently reintroduced beavers featured in *Cornwall with Simon Reeve*. “I was [at the project] last weekend and they’ve had Michael Portillo, Rick Stein and Simon Reeve all there filming feature elements for a series.”

*Cornwall with Simon Reeve* celebrates the beauty and wildlife of the county, but it also shows its endemic pockets of poverty. “We needed the beautiful beaches and drone shots of dawn at Polzeath,” said Ancombe, to

“allow us to get into the more gritty, current-affairs stories”.

Event chair Simon Willis, from the Devon and Cornwall Centre, asked whether the boom in regional shows would last. “I’m sure the bubble will eventually burst for programming that is Devon and Cornwall per se – it’s a trend at the moment and it will go,” said Innes-Lumsden. “But in terms of there being programming made here and giving a platform to Devon and Cornwall, that’s got a long future.”

**Matthew Bell**

## Sunderland bags a hat-trick

University of Sunderland students took home three prizes at the RTS North East and the Border Student Television Awards in May.

The students triumphed in the Scripted category with *Impresença*, a film based on a true story about loss and how to overcome it.

The Craft Skills awards also went to Sunderland students: Lavie Omar for *The Lines* (Camera), a drama about a young county lines victim whose brother is a police officer, and Caitlan Ward for *Girl Power Crossfit* (Editing).

Newcastle University’s Alexander Boyd won the Non-scripted award with

*AB by AB*, while Teesside University students secured the award in the Animation category for *Otherwhere*.

The judges, with BBC North East journalist Emma Wass chairing the panel, also commended two other Teesside University films: *Mr Swaledale* and *They’ve Arrived*.

**Matthew Bell**

### RTS North East and the Border Student Television Awards winners

**Animation-Otherwhere** - Jordan-Lee Tyreman, Robert Leonard, Marmik Rana, Shaw Connor Williams and team, Teesside University

**Non-scripted-AB by AB** - Alexander Boyd, Newcastle University

**Scripted-Impresença** - Rodrigo Figueiredo, Lewis Harley, Max Woodhall and Diana Cunha Teixeira, University of Sunderland

**Craft Skills: Camera-The Lines** - Lavie Omar, University of Sunderland

**Craft Skills: Editing-Girl Power Crossfit** - Caitlan Ward, University of Sunderland

**T**elevision advertising has come a long way since ITV aired its first commercial in September 1955.

At a stimulating RTS Thames Valley event in mid-May, “Television advertising – then and now”, it was emphasised how, in today’s fragmented TV market, building brand recognition across a variety of platforms, including social media, is a complicated business that increasingly requires high-tech solutions.

We tend to take for granted the way in which TV ads seamlessly appear in commercial breaks but David Joel, head of commercial at Clearcast, reminded the RTS of the hard work involved in ensuring that TV ads comply with industry codes.

He highlighted the late Nick Kamen’s iconic 1985 Levi’s 501 ad, in which Kamen walks into a laundrette and takes off his clothes. Joel revealed that the original script would have been banned because he stripped down to his Y-fronts. By changing his underwear to boxer shorts, the commercial passed the regulatory test.

Justin Gupta, head of broadcast and entertainment, strategic partnerships at Google (UK & Ireland), outlined how, globally, the pandemic had accelerated viewing trends away from linear and towards online by “three to five years”.

This had big implications for advertisers and broadcasters’ strategies, as viewers expected more personalised content. “It has been shown that three times as much attention is paid to adverts that are relevant to me versus the average,” said Gupta.

He highlighted the growth of addressable advertising and its ability to show different ads to different viewers – and even different versions of the same ad.



Nick Kamen in the Levi’s 501 ad

BBH

## Ads spin their message

**Thames Valley** Steve Clarke finds out how television advertising is becoming ever more targeted and intelligent

Live sport had pioneered what he called “dynamic ad insertion”, allowing traditional broadcasters to add digital advertising to their coverage of, say, live football.

Gupta said that, in the not-too-distant future, advertisers would be able to use a mosaic of hi-tech messaging, including interactivity, to sell their brands.

Nikita Panchal, marketing director at Bubble Agency, said that social media enabled advertisers to “micro target” audiences, especially younger ones.

On platforms such as Facebook, individuals can be targeted via such demographic indicators as postcodes, age, interests, purchasing behaviour, religion and even relationship status. “That allows advertisers to tailor their ads to their target audience and achieve a much better return on their

investment,” said Panchal.

Philip McLauchlan, chief scientist at ad agency Mirriad, outlined how “non-interruptive” advertising – ads that are embedded in, say, a poster at a bus stop – was gaining traction. “We can reach viewers in a way we couldn’t before, by placing the ads into the content,” he explained. “We have evidence that this is a format that consumers like.”

Unlike traditional ads, advertising of this type is impossible to skip and does not disrupt content, arguably making it easier for advertisers to achieve their targets.

The final speaker, media strategist Peter Kemp, gave the RTS a potted history of the brand, beginning in 1903 with Typhoo packed tea, and the evolution of the ad agency. As brands grew, they wanted more for less, he noted.

This, in turn, had led to the

dominance of the Big Six global agencies. The days when ads could reach more than 21 million viewers during a single break in *Coronation Street* were long gone. “It was easier to do then,” said Kemp. The most recent Christmas Day episode of *Corrie* attracted 5 million viewers, a big audience in today’s hyper-fragmented landscape.

Traditional broadcasters, however, had created new ways to generate viewers across the digital space, including ITV Hub and All 4.

But the good news for ITV was that advertisers still invest most of their budgets in linear channels.

Sky’s AdSmart remains the key product in addressable advertising, which covers Channels 4 and 5, as well as Sky’s own channels. “There is a real opportunity for clients who want to use it correctly,” said Kemp. ■

# Scottish students flourish

Scotland Centre

Glasgow Clyde College, City of Glasgow College and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland shared the spoils at the RTS Scotland Student Television Awards, hosted by STV reporter Laura Boyd in May.

Animation winner *The Moon* (Glasgow Clyde) was praised for its “experimental storytelling” by the judges. *Shared Lives* (City of Glasgow), the Non-scripted winner, was “gentle, warm and lovely, telling a powerfully emotional story well”, and the judges “loved the off-kilter vibe” of *Captain Powerman* (Royal Conservatoire, Scripted).

The awards were sponsored by STV, which is showing the winning and nominated films on its STV Player. “The film-making prowess was hugely impressive, especially after



Animation winner: *The Moon*

Glasgow Clyde College

the year our students have had, although I’ve come to expect nothing less from the fiercely talented bunch who enter these awards each year,” said Simon Pitts, CEO of STV. **Matthew Bell**

## RTS Scotland Student Television Awards winners

### Animation - *The Moon*

Natalia Martiszewicz, Dagmara Pisala, Anna Koufogianni, Jamie O’Hara and team, Glasgow Clyde College

Non-scripted - *Shared Lives* - David Love

and Emma Gilchrist, City of Glasgow College

Scripted - *Captain Powerman and the Intergalactic Quest into the Twenty-first Century* - Alexander Halford, Ciara Croll, Luke Keogh, Anna Burns, Jack McLean and team, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland



## Merger mania is back in fashion

Having pulled off the media deal of the decade, the hyper-energetic David Zaslav is now master of all he surveys in Hollywood and beyond.

His \$43bn coup for Discovery – to effectively acquire WarnerMedia and then ensure that he ends up running the newly formed Warner Bros Discovery – was an utterly stunning corporate manoeuvre.

Of course, anyone who’s

attended the RTS Cambridge Convention in recent years will have witnessed Zaslav at close quarters, pulling off the smart-casual, hoodie-under-the-jacket look with aplomb.

The Upside wishes him well as he navigates a course through treacherous media waters.

## Will GB News offer us roast minister?

Coincidentally, Discovery is a backer of GB News, which has assembled an impressive line-up of presenters to take on the old guard of TV news channels.

It will be good to see the uber-experienced Alastair Stewart back on screen, and

Balvinder Sidhu, winner of Journalist of the Year at the 2018 RTS Midlands Awards, taking on a new role as the station’s West Midlands reporter. Then, of course, there is attack dog in chief, Andrew Neil, arguably the interviewer that politicians most fear to face.

The Upside will be watching GB News with interest.

## Deckchair, sunblock, TV – holiday sorted

Unlike 2020, this year’s small screens are – thankfully – awash with a great summer of TV sport. The Euros, Wimbledon and the Tour de France are all scheduled for this month, and the cricket

highlights have returned to BBC One. Here’s hoping that England, Scotland and Wales progress beyond the group stages. And, with Geraint Thomas recently showing signs of his very best form, could we have another British yellow jersey in France?

## Just the sort of fan every show wants

Finally, to return to David Zaslav. Good to see him recently namechecking *Mare of Easttown* as one of his favourite shows. By common consent, the sombre *Mare*, which stars Kate Winslet as troubled detective Mare Sheehan, is one of this year’s best TV dramas. ■



# RTS PATRONS

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