

April 2020

# Television

A young man and woman in business attire (grey shirts and ties) stand in a field, looking at each other. The background is a bright, out-of-focus yellow-green field.

**Love in  
abnormal  
times**



CLARENCE HOUSE

31<sup>st</sup> March, 2020

To Everyone at the Royal Television Society -

As we all face an unprecedented period of difficulty, disruption and intense anxiety caused by the current coronavirus crisis, I particularly wanted to write and say how much I am thinking of everyone involved with the Royal Television Society as you struggle to deal with the huge challenges that have arisen in your lives.

As your Patron, I have nothing but the greatest sympathy for the predicament you face and the many difficult decisions and circumstances that have to be managed. Above all, I am certain you will be doing your utmost to maintain the essential elements of all you do so brilliantly, and of which I am so immensely proud as your Patron. I want you to know, therefore, that I can well imagine the appalling pressures you have suddenly and unexpectedly been put under and that my heart goes out to you and your families during the coming weeks and months of such hideous uncertainty.

Mary



## From the CEO



During this difficult time *Television* is being published online only. All our lives are being affected by the crisis, as social distancing and working from home have become the new normal.

The RTS was delighted and touched to receive a letter, reproduced opposite, from its Royal Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales, expressing his concern for everyone involved in the Society as we all face “the hideous uncertainty” of the months ahead.

Ratings for news programmes and news channels have soared. This month’s TV Diary and the Our Friend column are written by two UK news executives working on the front line – the head of Sky News, John Ryley,

and Steven Ladurantaye, head of news and current affairs at STV.

Both give moving accounts from their different perspectives of what it’s like to be running television news-rooms during the pandemic. Each highlights the need for trusted, high-quality, public service news, and the demands of working in such a changed environment. The role of news broadcasters has never been more important.

Roger Mosey reinforces this point in his examination of how the BBC has risen to the challenge of becoming the voice of the nation.

All our television networks have demonstrated ingenuity in adapting their services, and Steve Clarke looks at the profound impact of the crisis across the content sector.

We need treats from our broadcasters as never before. Strong scripted shows provide vital escapism, as most of our lives now take place indoors at home. In our cover story, Matthew Bell hears how Sally Rooney’s brilliant love story *Normal People* has been adapted for TV. I, for one, can’t wait to see it.

I’d like to congratulate all the winners of the RTS Programme Awards, held behind closed doors at London’s Grosvenor House Hotel on 17 March. There are interviews with some of the winners on the RTS website.

Finally, I hope that all our readers are keeping safe and well.

Theresa Wise

# Contents

- 4 Our Friend in Scotland**  
Being inventive has become a way of life for STV’s news operation, explains Steven Ladurantaye
- 5 John Ryley’s TV Diary**  
The head of Sky News home isolates to cover the biggest story of his career
- 6 Working Lives: Quiz editor**  
Question editors Jack Waley-Cohen and David McGaughey are interviewed by Matthew Bell
- 7 Ear Candy: Plot Twist**  
Kate Holman takes a break from the big, real-life curve ball to catch up on some unexpected TV game changers
- 8 Love in abnormal times**  
Matthew Bell learns how Sally Rooney’s acclaimed Irish novel *Normal People* was reworked for the small screen
- 10 Safe hands in a crisis**  
Roger Mosey praises the BBC’s coronavirus response, and assesses the impact on the corporation’s future
- 12 Protect and survive**  
Broadcasters are finding ingenious ways to keep the nation entertained and informed, says Steve Clarke

- 14 Disney+ steps in for families**  
Leo Barraclough says that prospects for the new platform in Europe look exceptionally strong during lockdown
- 16 Real reality TV**  
Screenwriter Peter Bowker’s depictions of disabled characters in *Flesh and Blood* and *Marvellous* have captivated audiences. He tells the actor Christopher Eccleston how he does it
- 18 ITV’s jungle juggernaut**  
The RTS went behind the scenes to discover how ITV’s *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* became a global reality hit
- 20 The news breaker**  
Sky News sports reporter Martha Kelner was voted Young Talent of the Year at the RTS Television Journalism Awards. Shilpa Ganatra charts her journey
- 22 RTS Programme Awards 2020**  
Hosted by Paul Merton, the awards were streamed from behind closed doors on 17 March at the Grosvenor House Hotel, London, in partnership with Audio Network

Cover: *Normal People* (BBC)

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# OUR FRIEND IN SCOTLAND

A mid-March morning – 11 March, to be precise. Outside the boardroom window there’s rain and a howling wind. Lights flicker briefly as the meeting of *STV News* managers gets started. We’re not socially distanced – not yet.

News of the coronavirus has been rising in everyone’s consciousness, even though the outbreak still seems far away. The situation is serious in Italy, and the news from Spain is also grim. Scots consider unrestricted access to Spanish islands their vacation birthright. Things are closing in.

We play out a few scenarios, exploring the boundaries of what would be possible as the pandemic takes hold and affects our ability to get the news out. Could the digital team work from home?

We can broadcast our programme from Glasgow, Edinburgh or Dundee. What if all three studios have to be closed for health reasons?

I walk back to my desk and send an impulsive note to our digital reporting team. I can sense eyes rolling across the newsroom as the message lands. But it feels good to be doing something – anything – to get in front of the wave of sickness and isolation that was on the way.

“Let’s not wait for an emergency work-from-home situation to have an emergency work-from-home situation,” I write. “Digital news staff are hereby banished to their homes until 19 March – and possibly longer.”

The next morning brings another drastic change. “As part of our contingency planning to limit the potential impact of coronavirus, we will close the Edinburgh office as of Monday to ensure that it is clean and able to be used if the other two studios

Being inventive has become a way of life for *STV*’s news operation, explains **Steven Ladurantaye**



can’t be,” I write. These early intrusions into the daily routines of our newsrooms set the tone for the unpredictable weeks to come. Within a week, we had decided to move to one programme across all of Scotland.

We usually broadcast separate shows for the north and the central belt, and provide bespoke content for our Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen versions.

Our current affairs programme, *Scotland Tonight*, moves from four nights a week to a single prime-time slot. We’re using it for question-and-answer pieces with health experts and top-level government decision makers.

These innovations are made in a tsunami of conflicting information and confusing guidance from the world’s experts.

But they are all made with two underlying assumptions. High-quality public service news is more important than ever. And we have a moral imperative to keep staff safe as they deliver potentially life-saving information.

There’s something incredible about the way newsrooms power through big stories with a sense of invincibility. There’s a deeply ingrained belief that anything is possible if you just keep pushing as hard as you can and ignore the bags under everyone’s eyes. Most stories have a clear beginning and a clear end. This one certainly has a beginning, but no one can see an end as yet.

*STV News* is running flat out to reflect the country back to itself. We want to make sure everyone has the vital information they need to keep their families safe through what is likely to be the most terrifying period they have experienced.

Our staff are living all the journalism clichés. They’re tireless, world-weary, relentless, accurate, clever and dedicated.

Change are swift. Government-imposed restrictions push even more staff into isolation. Video calling becomes the new normal. Reporters are deployed remotely, self-shooting and editing from their kitchen tables. Our studios are running with a skeleton staff. Being inventive has become a way of life.

Our average audience has doubled. But we also need to take care of each other and collaborate with our friends across the entire media sector to deliver the trustworthy news people need and demand during this crisis.

Now more than ever, we really are all in this together. ■

**Steven Ladurantaye is head of news and current affairs at *STV*.**

# TV diary

## John Ryley home isolates to cover the biggest story of his career



**P**reparations to celebrate the life of Harriet, my wife, at a memorial service in West Oxfordshire dominated the first half of March. Peritoneum cancer. Aged 58, Harriet died at Christmas.

Honest eulogies, festoons of flowers, elaborate afternoon tea, and the wonderful choir from St Bride's, the journalists' church, were all sharply halted with only five days to go when the chief scientific advisor, Sir Patrick Vallance, made clear that all gatherings, "big or small", should not go ahead.

■ **The decision to postpone the service was painful. Hard. Sir Dave Brailsford once told me, "leadership is doing the things you don't want to do". So right. It has felt strange that Harriet and I are not watching together the effects of the killer epidemic of Covid-19 on Britain as we had with so many other big stories since the miners' strike of 1984-85.**

■ "Here, everyone dies alone," observed our chief correspondent, Stuart Ramsay, reporting from the wealthy Italian region of Lombardy at the heart of Europe's coronavirus outbreak.

His reports from the overwhelmed hospitals in Cremona and Bergamo sounded a desperate warning to other countries already struggling to cope with the virus. Stuart's powerful reporting was seen around the planet and demonstrated the value of eye-witness original journalism.

The Italian foreign minister, watching the coverage, wrote on his Facebook page: "It should make us understand that this is not a game and that there are people who are dying, and women and men who are risking their lives to save others. I repeat: 'Stay at home.'"

■ **Working from home has been a true test of character and connectivity. Chairing our daily 9:00am leadership team meeting – sometimes from work, sometimes from home via video link – has exposed my lack of technical prowess and impatience – and others' taste in decor.**

I'm very lucky to lead a capable, battle-hardened team of senior people. A "remote" day can disappear in an intense whirlpool of conference calls and emails. Everything takes longer. Relentless.

■ I've held a series of conference calls with almost every member of staff to outline our approach on safety and well-being and what is expected editorially. It's really good to have the heft of a big company supporting us.

I urged the output editors of the TV channel to take, in their entirety, the live news conferences held by the decision takers and experts. On big running news stories, these live events are the bread and butter – the *sine qua non* – of a non-stop television news channel providing news, information and context.

■ **The biggest challenge has been the absence of people. A large number**

**of staff have already followed government advice, quarantining themselves for up to two weeks.**

**We have taken steps to mitigate the impact of this, reorganising our newsgathering and production. Almost all our digital content and some of the TV schedule is produced from home. It will be transformative, shaping all of our futures, this protein molecule with its layer of fat.**

■ When the whole country first came together at 8:00pm to applaud the NHS workers a few neighbours stood on our doorsteps to clap. It was heart-warming to see a widower in his seventies take part. He's at high risk and has been told to self-isolate for 12 weeks.

We've texted one another over the past few weeks. He is not a fan of the phone call.

But I do predict the old-fashioned telephone call will fight back against social media after this crisis ends.

■ **On the first Saturday of the lockdown, I spoke at length to a dear old friend, Chris Shaw, the editorial director of ITN.**

**I first met Chris 30 years ago, working on the ITN News at 5:45 at Wells Street, its uncorporate headquarters.**

**Chris and I agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic was the biggest story of our careers – so far – and a great opportunity for independent, responsible public service journalism.**

*John Ryley is Head of Sky News.*

# WORKING LIVES

## Question editor

BBC

Only Connect

**J**ack Waley-Cohen and David McGaughey have been question editors on cult BBC Two show *Only Connect* since 2017. Over the years, they have also written questions for the fiendishly tricky quiz – and appeared, with some success, as contestants.

### What does the job involve?

You need to know how to put together good quiz rounds, balancing easier and harder questions. And, literally, you need to edit questions – rewording, reframing or even flipping them. You then have to get questions and answers verified. You also need a deep understanding of the show, so you can bring its character out in the questions.

### How did you become question editors?

We did a lot of question writing in the quiz world and put on quizzes through our company, QuizQuizQuiz, and made connections.

### What's your advice for someone wanting to become a question setter?

Learn how to write good, gettable questions – that's the hardest skill.

### What makes a good question?

Writing a question that makes people realise they know something they didn't think they knew – they grab something within themselves and find the answer. *Only Connect* is almost that by definition – you start with something in the first clue that they have no idea about and, by the end, they've cleared the forest and can see the answer.

On *Only Connect*, there is more potential ambiguity and creativity in the answers; on other, more straightforward, quiz shows, if we are writing questions with lots of potential answers, we're not doing our job properly.

### Can questions fall flat?

Occasionally, questions can totally miss the comfort zones of the contestants.

They don't know something you could have reasonably expected at least one of the six quizzers on *Only Connect* to know. It is worse when a question is too hard and also boring, so, not only can they not get the answer, they also don't care. That's dreadful when that happens, although, thankfully, it is very rare. A question can also fall flat by being too easy.

### Which question are you most proud of?

In round one, teams are given up to four clues, one by one, and have to find the connection between them.

- 1 Claudius and Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*;
- 2 Tomato and an 1893 US Supreme Court declaration;
- 3 Graham Taylor and a *Sun* front page on 24 November 1993;
- 4 Carriage at midnight and Cinderella. [The answer is on the next page.]

It's a nice example of bringing things in from everywhere: it's got classics, history, football and fairy tales. We were

really pleased with it because it seemed to sum up how, with *Only Connect*, you can bring so many things together.

#### Are there any subjects best avoided?

It's better to look at it the other way around: no matter how obscure a subject, it can be fashioned into a good question.

#### What's the secret to a good quiz?

Finding the right balance between luck and skill. Any topic can come up, from pop music to particle physics, which is where luck comes in, but the very best teams will always rise to the top because of their skill. You need people who can play; otherwise, a quiz won't work. "Play-along-ability" at home is also hugely important.

#### How important is the host?

A lot of the character of *Only Connect* is down to Victoria [Coren Mitchell]. She loves the show and puts a huge amount of preparatory work into it, which isn't the case for every host. A lot of them turn up on the day and read the questions – and that's fine, they're not meant to see the questions beforehand. But Victoria is an important part of the process of putting the show together before filming.

#### How would you two fare as contestants on *Only Connect*?

We were both contestants in the show. [Jack:] I was in the first-ever episode of series 1 in 2008 and my team reached – but lost – in the final. [David:] I was in series 5 but we had a bit of a nightmare on the wall and vowel rounds, as can happen to the best of teams. We lost, but it wasn't embarrassing. I would do better now. ■

**Question editors Jack Waley-Cohen and David McGaughey were interviewed by Matthew Bell.**

**The answer:** Each of the examples, surprisingly, becomes some kind of edible vegetable. The explanation:

- 1 *Apocolocyntosis* is a vicious satire in which the former Emperor Claudius is turned into a pumpkin on his death (*Apocolocyntosis* means 'pumpkinification').
- 2 The court declared that, for customs purposes, the tomato was a vegetable, not a fruit.
- 3 The headline 'That's yer allotment' was accompanied by an image of Taylor as a turnip after he resigned as England manager.
- 4 Cinderella's carriage turns back into a pumpkin at midnight.

# Ear candy



Kate Holman takes a break from the big real-life curve ball to catch up on some seriously unexpected TV game changers

## Plot Twist

Plot twists can make or break a TV series. They can be the reason you fall in – or out of – love with a TV show. Or force you to resurrect your Twitter account to share your shock with other viewers.

In normal times, life doesn't usually throw the same twists at you as TV frequently does. But the sudden change of direction that we are all sharing due to the coronavirus pandemic emphasises how you can very suddenly find yourself on a different journey to the one you planned. And, consequently, with more time to listen to podcasts.

Whether it is the revelation that *The Good Place* is really the Bad Place or the

cliff hanger at the end of an episode of *EastEnders* or *Hollyoaks*, a plot twist can change the dynamic of a show or take a series in an unexpected direction.

On Now TV's *Plot Twist* podcast, hosts Tom and Fran invite an eclectic mix of TV and film stars to describe their own "plot twists", where life, work and love have taken unexpected turns.

Guests have included *Bulletproof* stars Noel Clarke and Ashley Walters, comedian Karl Pilkington, *The Trip* duo Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan, and *Intelligence*'s David Schwimmer and Nick Mohammed. The famous faces touch on their most memorable plot twists on and off screen, from unconventional career shifts to their standout TV plot-twist moments. ■

# Love in abnormal times

It is no exaggeration to say that Sally Rooney is one of the biggest names in contemporary literature. Her debut novel, *Conversations with Friends*, and its follow-up, *Normal People*, have won literary prizes and been fixtures in the bestseller lists. Now *Normal People* is set to entrance TV audiences at a time when they are confined to the home and most in need of a telly treat – and facing a dearth of new, high-end drama.

In Connell and Marianne, who move from small-town Ireland to university in Dublin, falling in and out of love, Rooney has created a truly modern couple. “As a story of a first great love, it’s something that everyone can relate to, from all cultures and all backgrounds,” says Ed Guiney, co-founder of Irish producer Element Pictures, which has adapted *Normal People* for the BBC and Hulu.

Nevertheless, he adds, “there is a specificity about the place – it is absolutely set in Ireland now. When people think about Ireland, it’s often of old-fashioned things, such as the dominance of the church or maybe the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

“All these things, as a modern European country, we’ve left behind. Ireland has changed hugely in the past 20 years – it has seen massive social and legislative changes. The book is born in that world; that’s Sally’s world.”

*Normal People* marks a rare foray into television for Lenny Abrahamson, who appreciates the extra time the small screen offers a director “to go into depth and detail, and to give the audience a proper encounter with characters”.

In recent years, Abrahamson has enjoyed huge success in movies. *Room*, about a woman held captive for seven

## Drama

### Matthew Bell learns how Sally Rooney’s acclaimed Irish novel *Normal People* was reworked for the small screen

years, received Oscar nominations for best film, direction and adaptation, and won its star, Brie Larson, the 2016 Best Leading Actress award.

Despite the devotion that Rooney’s novels have generated, Abrahamson was sanguine about filming *Normal People*. He points out that *Room* was based on Emma Donoghue’s critically acclaimed and much-loved novel of the same name: “You can’t go into a project with trepidation; you have to approach it as a great opportunity. You have to believe, if you approach it honestly and with skill and sensitivity, that you will do justice to the book.

“One of the reasons Ed and I were so keen to adapt the novel is that we know this culture; it’s where we come from.”

Like Rooney – and the novel’s protagonists Marianne and Connell – Abrahamson and Guiney went to Trinity College Dublin; indeed, they knew each other before university. “We didn’t go to school together, but we were in the same sort of circles as teenagers. We’d find each other at parties and chat, very often, about films,” recalls Guiney.

The pair set up a society at university,

the Trinity Video Company, and made short films. Years later, Guiney and Andrew Lowe founded Element, which produced Abrahamson’s movies *Adam & Paul*, *Garage* and *Room*. “It’s been the most important professional relationship of my life, never mind friendship,” says Guiney.

“When I talk to other film-makers, they are always envious of this long-standing, really solid relationship with a producer of Ed’s creative ability and industry standing,” adds Abrahamson.

Guiney continues the story: “When *Normal People* came up, we were determined to get it. We felt we were the people best placed to adapt it. Luckily, we managed to convince Sally.”

Element took the book to the head of BBC Films, Rose Garnett, in spring 2018. The corporation snapped it up. “The BBC green-lit the series on the basis of the book and Lenny’s interest in making it,” recalls Guiney. “That was an absolute green light – there was no sort of conditional development process.”

The following year, Guiney, Abrahamson and Rooney pitched *Normal People* to the US broadcasters and streamers, signing a deal with Hulu.

Rooney wrote drafts for the first six episodes and then handed the baton to Alice Birch, who won Best Screenplay for *Lady Macbeth* at the 2017 British Independent Film Awards. Birch wrote all but one of the remaining parts – episode 11 was penned by Mark O’Rowe (who wrote *Boy A*).

“Every time I got on the Tube, someone was reading one of Sally’s books – I couldn’t think about it too much or I’d have been too scared to make a start on it,” says Birch.

Her approach to adapting *Normal People* was to “stay as close to the



‘THE WAY SALLY WRITES DEMANDS THAT YOU SPEND TIME WITH HER CHARACTERS’

Normal People

BBC

characters and to the feeling of reading the book as possible. There’s very little that’s invented or moves away from the novel – I imagine people would be furious if there was.”

At the end of this month, the 12-part *Normal People* (each episode is 30 minutes long) is being released in one go on the web-only BBC Three and shown in weekly instalments, in the same manner as *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve*, on BBC One. It is also being streamed on Hulu.

“Binge watching is such a huge thing and even more so now [with the coronavirus outbreak], but I was thinking more about it as half-hours, as opposed to a six-hour beast,” says Birch.

“In those half-hour episodes, [audiences] want to feel they’ve been told a complete story but also be left wondering what’s going to happen next. Equally, some people will want to eat the whole thing up, so I was also conscious of that.

“Most people I spoke to who’d read it – and that was certainly my experience – had swallowed [*Normal People*] whole.”

Casting proved a lengthy process.

“We needed the right people to play Connell and Marianne – they are two such distinct and fascinating characters,” says Abrahamson. “And then, there’s that ineffable demand for chemistry between these two people.”

Irish stage actor Paul Mescal was one of the first to audition. “He rose to the top of the list and stayed there,” recalls the director.

Eventually, after a trawl around the English-speaking acting world, Londoner Daisy Edgar-Jones (*Gentleman Jack*) landed the part of Marianne.

*Normal People* was filmed mainly in County Sligo and Dublin, with brief shoots in Italy and Sweden. Abrahamson shared directing duties with Hettie Macdonald, who helmed the 2017 BBC One adaptation of *Howards End*.

As one of the series’s executive producers (with Rooney, and Element’s Ed Guiney, Emma Norton, Andrew Lowe and Anna Ferguson), Abrahamson was involved creatively throughout the project. “The director is often brought in too late in the process, when a lot of decisions have been made, and that doesn’t make for the best adaptation or screen experience,” says Guiney. “To Lenny

and I, who come from a film-making background, it seems crazy that you don’t foreground a film-maker in the birthing of a project such as this.”

Element Pictures also holds the rights to Rooney’s first novel, *Conversations with Friends*. “The world is in a state of crisis at the moment, so it’s hard to predict anything. But, all things being equal, we’d like to start shooting it before the end of this year,” says Guiney.

Birch, too, is on board and already working on the adaptation: “[*Normal People*] was one of my happiest working environments. It feels lovely and a source of great comfort in these times to be working on *Conversations*.”

Initially, Guiney and Abrahamson saw *Conversations with Friends* as a film rather than a TV series, but the experience of making *Normal People* clarified their thinking. “The way Sally writes demands that you spend time with her characters – they really benefit from deeper exploration,” says Abrahamson.

“*Conversations* and *Normal People* are seminal Irish novels and their reputation will endure for a long time. It’s a great privilege to be part of bringing them to the screen.” ■



The BBC has promoted *Question Time* to primetime, socially distanced the panel and dispensed with an audience

# Safe hands in a crisis

**T**he UK is being tested as never before in peacetime – and in an age when communication is immediate and uncontrollable and diffuse. But, if the nation does come together and get through the challenges of Covid-19, it will have done so with the help of the most traditional forms of public service broadcasting (PSB).

This is an unexpected twist in what had seemed like an inevitable trajectory. We were witnessing a sharp decline in linear television, the rise of the global streaming companies, an erosion of trust in the old, “impartial” sources – and some within the Government were gleefully celebrating the potential end of the BBC as we knew it.

As recently as February, a Downing Street source – believed by everyone to be Dominic Cummings – briefed *The Sunday Times* about the corporation:

## PSB

As the national lockdown continues, **Roger Mosey** praises the BBC’s response, and assesses the impact it will have on the corporation’s future

“We are having a consultation, and we will whack it”.

The end of the licence fee appeared to be in sight, with the forced sell-off of many television and radio services. Even the normally emollient Nicky Morgan, at that time still culture secretary, issued a warning about PSB, saying, “we don’t want a beacon of British

values and world-class entertainment ending up like Blockbuster”, which got under the skin of BBC executives.

“There is a danger that politicians catastrophise the situation”, was the tart rejoinder from the corporate press office. “The BBC is the most-used media organisation in the UK.... You wouldn’t think that from some of the things being said today.”

Now everything has shifted. Ministers, who had been boycotting programmes from Radio 4’s *Today* to ITV’s *Good Morning Britain* – because they thought they no longer needed them – are back in the early-morning interview slots to discuss the public health emergency.

The Prime Minister’s broadcast to the nation on 23 March about the coronavirus lockdown, was viewed by around 27 million people, with a majority of those watching on the BBC. Younger audiences are rediscovering the value of live television. And hard, factual

news – across every platform – is back in fashion.

PSB, on all channels, has been overwhelmingly good and responsible; and, as the skies across the world have darkened, it has entertained us as well as kept us informed.

But the big questions remain. Which vision of the broadcasting landscape will prevail in the longer term if, as we hope, things gets back to normal? Will the PSBs be able to cement their wish to remain at the centre of our national life? Or will the forces of change continue to hack away at their foundations? There is a lull now while the Government and broadcasters are preoccupied with much greater challenges, but the debate will resume when business settles into whatever is its new pattern.

Ofcom will continue to worry away over the future of its brood of channels – the BBC, ITV1, Channel 4, Channel 5 and S4C – while Sky will again proclaim its own civic credentials. More importantly, the truce between Downing Street and the BBC will probably be a brief one – not least because some decisions, on decriminalisation of the licence fee or a settlement on payments by the elderly, must be taken.

There is cautious optimism within the BBC that ministers are listening more sympathetically. Corporation executives have noted, with relief, that Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings appear to be diverging about the licence fee, with the PM less keen on confrontation.

A shrewd observer, close to the decision-making process, told me: “I think the current crisis – and the strong performance of the PSBs, and the BBC in particular – have fundamentally shifted the debate.”

The new Secretary of State, Oliver Dowden, has confirmed that the licence fee will continue until at least 2027; and some have spotted what one calls “a developing view from government and general stakeholders that PSB is a critical part of the UK’s very successful media ecology”.

The BBC has shown phenomenal powers of survival over the decades, and this may seem like another Houdini-like

escape from a padlocked cupboard. But its most serious challenges remain.

It doesn’t have enough money to do what it wants to do, hobbled by the terrible deal it did with the Government in 2015. Younger audiences may be back with the Beeb for now, but the allure of Netflix and YouTube will reassert itself. The cry from the growing army of refuseniks will be heard again: “Why do we have to pay a compulsory fee to the BBC for something we don’t use?”

It is an easy answer to point out just how necessary the corporation is during a crisis such as the present one. If anything alone justified the licence fee, this is it. But its strengths during the health

## **‘PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING, ON ALL CHANNELS, HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY GOOD AND RESPONSIBLE’**

emergency cast into a new light its editorial weaknesses in recent years on other nation-defining issues, notably Brexit.

In this crisis, the BBC has rightly given prominence to experts and it has taken judgements on what is accurate and what is not. It hasn’t hesitated to put sober, explanatory and, frankly, old-fashioned programmes into the peak schedule. It has listened carefully to what audiences have been saying, and it has given them a voice without allowing panic and misinformation to spread.

We all know politics is different, but the PSBs went awry in their Brexit coverage by failing to understand the popular sentiments that were bubbling away across the country; and they were caught out by their own metropolitan perspectives.

More seriously, they defined impartiality as a robotic balance in which

one view was immediately countermanded by another. They also failed to explain the topics where there was an overwhelming professional consensus.

The broadcasters were swept along by the obsessions of the Westminster political and media elite, which meant that they ignored the massive issues that were sitting in plain sight – such as the Irish border.

Political coverage – which is crucial to supporting our democracy – is a prime example of how public service is crying out to be redefined. Why should we pay a licence fee, or give channels greater prominence, if what they do is the same as everyone else?

More widely, the Government, the regulators and the BBC need to agree what the corporation is there for in the 2020s. One distinguished editor speaks passionately of “the stuff everyone forgets, such as local radio stations that make lonely old people’s lives worth living; such as CBeebies and BBC Learning’s Bitesize and the BBC World Service”.

Those still inside the organisation are nervous about what one calls “too much ‘inform’ and ‘educate’, without enough ‘entertain’” – but perhaps the corporation should worry less about universality and instead stand its ground on what it alone can do and how that is essential for the nation.

By this route, it might end up being a smaller BBC but one that could experiment with different funding models. A former top executive says he believes that a new shape, with mixed-market financing, is the answer: “That’s the way that public service instincts, skills, culture and traditions could be cherished and protected.”

What is unmistakable is that, for the whole sector, amid a health emergency and the meltdown of economies, these are perilous days. But we have, at least, seen what broadcasting can do – and how a commitment to serving the public, and promoting the truth, is simply indispensable. ■

*Roger Mosey is a former head of BBC Television News and is now the Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge.*

Coronavirus is transforming the TV industry and pushing broadcasters to find ingenious ways to keep the nation entertained and informed, says Steve Clarke

# Protect and survive

**M**arch 2020 was a month like no other in television. Concern that staff might become infected by Covid-19 brought rapid changes as broadcasters cancelled filming on some of their biggest shows. For what is believed to be the first time in more than half a century, even the set of *Coronation Street* went dark.

Other high-profile suspensions in the production freeze were *Emmerdale*, *EastEnders*, *Peaky Blinders*, *Line of Duty* and *Holby City*. Schedules were upended to accommodate new programmes

weeks. News bulletins were extended as grateful millions tuned in to trusted public service broadcasters.

This year's TV calendar will have to do without such landmark occasions as Euro 2020, Eurovision, Glastonbury and the Olympics. Across the board, networks have responded with speed and ingenuity to keep the UK informed and entertained. Jamie Oliver's new show is filmed by the celebrity chef in his own home using an iPhone – and aided by his family.

Alex Mahon, CEO of Channel 4, says: "The Covid-19 outbreak presents huge challenges for broadcasters and the

Responding to the national lockdown, daytime TV is being beefed up. On Channel 4, Grayson Perry will teach a nationwide art course, while Kirstie Allsopp is fronting her own craft show.

Elsewhere in the schedules, the pandemic is generating a creative response. ITV staged a Virtual Grand National using CGI and sophisticated algorithms. For devotees of arts TV, Simon Schama is to present a virtual museum tour, part of the BBC's Culture in Quarantine initiative. Graham Norton's BBC One chat show returns on 10 April, but hosted from his home and with virtual guests; Channel 4's



Feel-good entertainment: *Outnumbered*



Practical advice: *Jamie: Keep Cooking and Carry On*

Channel 4

commissioned for the pandemic, such as Channel 4's *Jamie: Keep Cooking and Carry On*, a cookery show for an era when basics such as eggs are not always readily available. On BBC One, *Question Time* – with each panellist socially distanced – was promoted to primetime, albeit minus an audience and screened from the same location every week.

Presenters such as *Good Morning Britain*'s Susanna Reid and BBC journalist George Alagiah (who tested positive for Covid-19) self-isolated. In common with many other presenters, Reid broadcast from home for two

creative industries, and we're doing all we can to support our partners at independent production companies to help them through this.

"Together, we are at our best when we use our creativity and ingenuity to respond to challenging circumstances, and I'm incredibly grateful to them for the way that they are working with us to respond to this and help entertain and inform our audiences through these strange and unprecedented times."

Thinking outside the box is second nature to commissioners and producers, and new ways of working have already become commonplace.

new daily series *The Steph Show* was brought forward and is broadcast live from Steph McGovern's home.

Also, expect more feel-good fare in primetime following the BBC's decision to run classic comedy such as *Gavin & Stacey* and *Outnumbered* in BBC One peak time on Saturday evenings.

With most of us marooned indoors, TV audiences have increased hugely – and not only for news programmes. "The figures are amazing," says one executive. "Young people are watching linear-TV in big numbers."

On 21 March, ITV's entertainment blockbuster *Saturday Night Takeaway*

achieved its highest audience ever, as an average of 9.5 million people tuned in. Two days later, a live address by Prime Minister Boris Johnson announcing new restrictions on movement was seen by around 27 million as it was screened by BBC One, BBC News, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky News.

Once the consolidated audience is in, Johnson's speech could equal the 32.3 million viewers who watched England's World Cup victory in 1966, British TV's biggest audience of all time.

Those still going into TV production centres face many novel challenges due to social distancing rules. But it is no easier for those working from home. "In theory, it should be a lot easier but everything takes so much longer. Meetings have to be set up in advance. The pressure is incessant," says one news producer.

"Dealing with covering the virus, changing rosters, and meeting health and safety requirements is completely overwhelming," says another. "Every day is getting more challenging."

## 'WORKING FROM HOME SHOULD BE A LOT EASIER BUT EVERYTHING TAKES SO MUCH LONGER'

Financial hardship looms for workers, and production companies face a struggle to survive.

ITV announced on 23 March that it was reducing its programme budget by £100m. "We are operating in unprecedented and uncertain times, requiring us to take difficult decisions, plan carefully and act with speed," Carolyn McCall, ITV CEO, said. "Our absolute priority is to protect our people, while trying to ensure that we deliver the news and programmes our viewers value and love to watch, and to keep them informed."

logistics. Once we get the green light, it won't suddenly all kick off again."

The knock-on effect of the production freeze is that, come the autumn, a shortage of new shows, especially high-end drama, will add to the pressure to find clever solutions. The Covid-19 crisis could galvanise demand for unscripted content and help to generate a new wave of factual entertainment shows that can put a smile on viewers' faces.

"I think there's going to be a ton of opportunity for non-scripted," David George, CEO of ITV America, recently told *Deadline*. "If you go back to the last economic downturn, you saw unscripted pop out of that. And even going back to the [US] writers' strike, there was a non-scripted boom out of that."

Documentary-makers are also thinking laterally. ITV's *Coronavirus, Isolation & Me* [the working title], produced by Shine, is being filmed using self-shooting mobile technology and does not require a camera crew. The footage is downloaded to the film's editors.



Broadcasting from home: *The Steph Show*



Innovative sport: *The Virtual Grand National*

Channel 5 and ITN suspended the former's 6:30pm news from 6 April in order to concentrate on the 5:00pm flagship bulletin. Similarly, the BBC has halted its morning regional news output to concentrate on its core bulletin.

On the plus side, the BBC revealed that planned job cuts of 450 journalists, announced in January to help save £80m, would now be put on hold.

Away from the production floor, senior executives have been forced to make some tough decisions. With the UK economy at a standstill, forecasts for TV advertising make grim reading; many predict a full-blown slump.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak's measures to provide a financial lifeline for the self-employed should, in theory, help the thousands of freelancers that the UK TV sector depends on. Pact CEO John McVay says: "My heart goes out to all those freelancers who were meant to be working this summer but who now don't have work."

It is likely that the state support they have been offered, initially for three months, will need to be extended. McVay explains: "Even when we get to the point where we can physically congregate to work together, there's going to be all kinds of issues regarding

As for scripted, production may be paused, but the near-term future for drama and comedy looks bright. Commissioners and producers have already teed up screenwriters to develop ideas that, with luck, could go into production next year or earlier.

Writers are familiar with being isolated at home. They can no longer be distracted by the prospect of a restaurant lunch or a meeting with their agent at a bar.

"Everyone's got their writing teams working overtime," says a TV insider. "They're all saying, 'Just write, we'll sort it out at the other end.'" ■

## Video streaming

Leo Barraclough says that prospects for the new platform in Europe look exceptionally strong during lockdown

# Disney+ steps in for families



*The Mandalorian*

**W**hen Disney announced that its eagerly awaited streaming service, Disney+, would

launch in the UK and Western Europe in March no one knew that the service's debut would coincide with a global pandemic keeping millions of people at home.

"With much of the UK looking for entertainment while they are stuck at home, Disney+ is likely to be a big hit," said Shiv Pabari, director of media and entertainment at Simon-Kucher & Partners. "Families, in particular, will be excited by the content offered."

For Disney, having a new revenue source at a difficult time is certain to

prove very valuable to its overall business. Its theme parks in the US were closed from 16 March for only the third time in the company's history; Disneyland Paris shut its doors on 15 March.

Across the world, cinemas are closed, film and TV production has been suspended and all non-essential retail outlets are shut. People are craving home entertainment as never before and Disney+ is uniquely placed to cheer up stay-at-home families.

Disney+ has joined the Sky Q platform in the UK and will appear on Now TV in the coming months. O2 is the exclusive mobile network distributor. Brits have to pay £5.99 per month (the same as Netflix's basic service), or £59.99 per year. On launch day, 24 March, the Disney+ app for mobile

devices was downloaded 5 million times by Europeans.

Disney+ made its debut in the US, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand in November. If you want to watch the last big *Avengers* movie for the 200th time or just catch up on *The Simpsons*, Disney+ will be there, according to Kevin Mayer, Chair, direct to consumer and international at Disney. "Never before has our content been as broadly, conveniently or permanently available as it will be on Disney+," he said at the launch.

This was an impressive first step towards a target of 60 million to 90 million subs worldwide – and profitability – by 2024. Disney aims to secure two-thirds of those subs from outside the US.

However, Disney's Executive Chair,

## Disney+ 10 family treats

- **The Mandalorian** The first-ever live-action *Star Wars* series from executive producer and writer Jon Favreau
- **The World According to Jeff Goldblum** Docu-series from National Geographic, presented by actor Jeff Goldblum
- **Stargirl** A tender and offbeat coming-of-age movie
- **Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made** Movie following the humorous exploits of quirky, deadpan hero Timmy Failure
- **Lady and the Tramp** Disney's live-action retelling of the 1955 animated classic
- **High School Musical: The Musical – The Series** Ten-episode series set in East High School
- **The Imagineering Story** Documentary chronicling the history of Walt Disney Imagineering
- **Forky Asks a Question** Ten animated shorts from Pixar featuring *Toy Story 4*'s Forky
- **Be Our Chef** Cookery competition series hosted by *The Office* star Angela Kinsey
- **Togo** A Disney adventure movie set in the treacherous Alaskan tundra

Bob Iger, noted: “The interest in streaming in general in [international] markets isn’t as high as it has been in the US... So we have probably more of a marketing effort, and, I’d say, more of a challenge, to launch in those markets.”

The UK market is dissimilar in a number of respects to the US. There, a lot of attention has focused on the price differential with Netflix – Disney+ costs \$6.99 (£5.88) a month, or \$69.99 per year, whereas Netflix’s most basic service is priced at \$8.99 per month.

In the US, Disney+, has benefited from being offered as part of a bundle by broadband provider Verizon. Around 20% of subscribers have come from Verizon, and roughly 50% directly through Disneyplus.com; the rest are from a variety of other platforms.

“Having a launch partner [such as Verizon] really provides steep uptake to woo those investors and also get consumers familiar with what they are offering,” says Sarah Henschel, a senior research analyst at Omdia.

Another significant difference is that, in the US, the service can be purchased as part of a bundle with the Hulu and ESPN+ streaming services for \$12.99 a month. This combined deal offers what analysts call “four-quadrant appeal” – in other words, something for everyone in the family. In the UK, no such bundle is available.

Of course, each market that Disney+ launches in is different, but Guy Bisson, research director at Ampere Analysis, notes the similarity between the deals that were struck with Sky in the UK, Canal+ in France and Movistar+ in Spain. Netflix, he says, “has done the same, getting on board with pay-TV platforms, and that will continue to be an important part of any streamer’s strategy, so replicating the channel relationship in a way with pay-TV providers”.

He adds that such deals are “a great way to get in front of a pay-ready customer base, and there’s no reason not to do it, because it doesn’t preclude direct sale”.

By bringing services such as Disney+ on to its platform, Sky helps to dissuade customers from moving elsewhere for content. This is part of what Sky refers to as its “all in one place” offer for customers. It’s a strategy of aggregation that is becoming ever more evident in the battle against disruption.

Such aggregation by pay-TV companies hasn’t been seen in the US, says Henschel, although companies such as Roku – which manufactures digital media players – have performed that role, and may do so increasingly in the UK.

As part of its deal with Disney, Sky has negotiated continued access to stellar content. Disney movies will continue to be available on Sky and Now TV, independently of Disney+. *The Simpsons* will remain on Sky, and the new deal also brings Fox channels, the new season of *The Walking Dead*, Nat Geo shows and non-Disney+ movies to Sky Q and Now TV. The Disney Channel will continue to be available on Sky, at least in the short term.

Bisson notes: “Although Disney is all-in when it comes to its streaming strategy – possibly more so than any

other studio – you can’t go in overnight and completely cannibalise well-established and high-value businesses.” Content licensing is a complex affair, so shifting content “off the more established platforms will be gradual and will vary by market”.

The market for subscription services in the UK is strong but, to date, the choice of major subscription streamers has been limited to Netflix, Amazon and Now TV. Ampere Analysis calculates that the European average is 2.3 SVoD services per SVoD home; in the US, it is a little over three.

“We are on the verge of becoming a much more diverse landscape, with all of the studio services coming to the UK, as well as Apple, etc. We are going to break through the ceiling of the number of subscription services that people will take,” Bisson predicts.

With its launch complete, the focus at Disney+ is shifting to ensuring a steady supply of premium content. Original production is a key part of Disney’s strategy for its platform, with 26 exclusive Disney+ originals available at launch in the UK, and 58 projects in the pipeline, although some of these shows have been hit by the production freeze.

Tim Westcott, research director for channels and programming at Omdia, underlines the importance of original content, such as *Star Wars* spin-off series *The Mandalorian*. “It gets people excited, you can promote it, you can use it to drive new consumers to the service,” he says. “But then, once they’ve signed up, you also have to refresh the offer fairly regularly, particularly if it is a monthly service, where people can churn with new offers and new content.”

Despite the importance of original content, it is the evergreen theatrical movies, such as *Frozen 2*, that are the major attraction for subscribers. Iger reported in February that 50% of people who use Disney+ have watched movies on it.

Alice Enders, research director of Enders Analysis, lauds “the power of Disney to convert generation after generation into long-term fans of its franchises”. However, this comes at a price. Disney invested \$27.8bn in content last year, outspending every other Hollywood studio and digital giant by far, notes Enders: “It is a magic kingdom, but it costs money to make magic.” ■

# Real reality television

Screenwriter **Peter Bowker**'s depictions of disabled characters in *Flesh and Blood* and *Marvellous* have captivated audiences. He tells actor **Christopher Eccleston** how he does it

**P**eter Bowker doesn't "do diversity". Yet, over the past couple of decades, this RTS and Bafta award-winning screenwriter has become TV's "go-to guy" for dramas featuring people with disabilities.

A comic and compelling double act, of Bowker and his long-time collaborator the actor Christopher Eccleston, entertained the RTS North West's capacity audience at the Lowry in March. They traced the development of Bowker's work as he has, increasingly, challenged stereotypical representations of people affected by learning disabilities.

Eccleston told the audience that Bowker doesn't "do diversity" for a very good reason, and quoted his friend as having said, "People say my writing is about diversity. But, as far as I'm concerned, it is about reality. Diversity is reality – not some distortion of reality, as it's often portrayed."

The 2002 BBC Two drama *Flesh and Blood* was Bowker and Eccleston's first major project, respectively winning them a Writer and Actor award from the RTS.

In it, Eccleston plays Joe, a young man adopted at birth, who discovers that both his birth parents have learning disabilities.

Shockingly for a modern-day audience, his mother had been forced to give birth by Caesarean section under a general anaesthetic and told nothing.

Bowker spoke about the drama breaking important new ground. "The production process... was so fluid because both those cast members [Dorothy Cockin and Peter Kirby – the actors playing Joe's mum and dad] actually had severe learning disabilities."

But this decision brought unforeseen challenges, Bowker admitted: "One director didn't want to use learning-disabled actors."

He added: "Dorothy was a member of Celebrity Pig Theatre Company and was very comfortable with it all." But Peter, whom Eccleston had met at Oldham's Terence O'Grady Club, where they played pool together, had no acting experience.

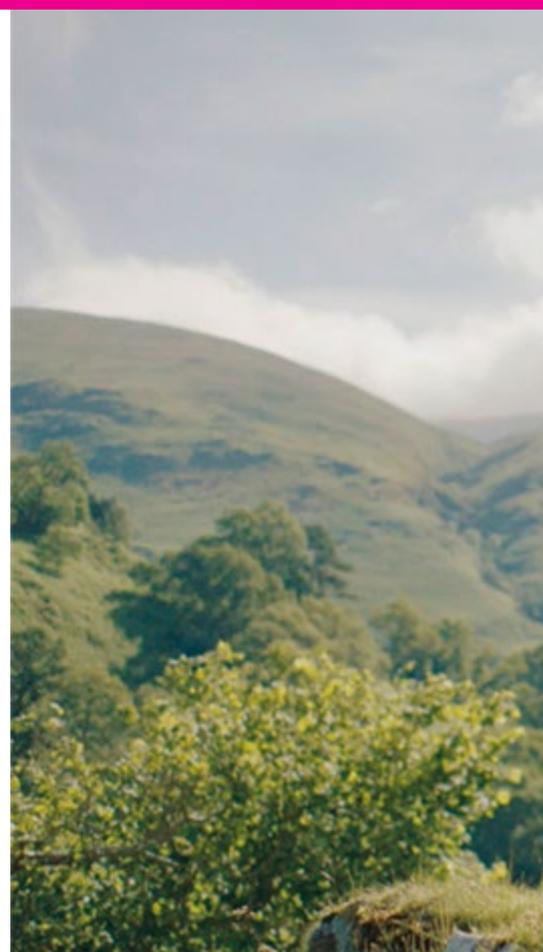
"It was a fine balance to protect [Peter]," Bowker said. Eccleston agreed. "It was about me, particularly, building trust with him", especially as Eccleston's character, Joe, is required to shout at Peter in one scene.

"I could hear you between takes," Bowker told Eccleston, "going: 'When I'm Joe, I'm angry with you, but when I'm Chris, I love you.'" Having finished the script, the writer realised that any scenes featuring Dorothy and Peter had to be left "incredibly loose... so that [Eccleston] knew how the scene had to come out, but none of us knew how we were going to get there".

Illustrating how this worked with a clip from *Flesh and Blood*, where Joe gets his birth mother to hold his baby daughter for a family snap, Bowker showed how "Dorothy's spontaneous reaction to the baby drove the whole scene".

"She touches the baby's face... it's a thing Dorothy did when she was moved," added Eccleston. "And [the director] Julian Farino, who'd... trained at Granada, up here in Manchester, in documentary, captured that."

Bowker praised the cast and crew's "willingness to be flexible", joking "it was the best-behaved cast ever, because it's very hard to play the twat if you have two cast members with learning disabilities."



*Flesh and Blood* arose because "I was a teacher of children and adults with learning disabilities for 14 years before I was a writer, working in a 'mental-handicap' hospital in Leeds," Bowker told the RTS. "And what was clear to me was that people in that hospital had sex lives, which... people were in denial about.

"[I asked myself,] 'What would happen if someone in that hospital became pregnant?' And I carried that idea round with me until it was ready to become *Flesh and Blood*."

*Flesh and Blood* "very much looks at learning disability from the outside", said Bowker. But BBC Two's widely acclaimed *Marvellous*, based on the life of Stoke City kit man and unofficial Keele University student counsellor, Neil Baldwin, played by Toby Jones, has, as Eccleston put it, "the person with the disability at the absolute centre".

"*Flesh and Blood* was a story honouring that generation," Bowker added. "Yet, parallel to those people [living in hospital], was Neil Baldwin, living this independent life of his own.... It seemed improbable until I went to meet him."

Eccleston raised an important point: "Some people questioned the ethics of having people with learning



The A Word

BBC

disabilities in drama.” Bowker responded by recounting one of his meetings with Baldwin. He asked him what the students thought when they were greeted by him on arrival at Keele. “Neil replied: ‘Ah. I may have been wearing a dog collar.’ And I thought, ‘You’re working an angle. And included in your angle is your learning disability.... This is interesting.’ Neil had used that to empower himself and create a life.”

Bowker continued: “Neil needed to be part of his own story. But he’s a performer, not an actor, so I knew he could [only] play himself. And the joy of casting Toby Jones is that Neil was a [registered circus] clown and Toby has trained in clowning, so there’s something about their physicality that’s already there.”

Taking his cue from the film *American Splendor*, where, “for a moment, the real-life man portrayed in the film walks through the set”, Bowker included several cameos in which Baldwin played himself.

“People initially didn’t know what the show was,” Bowker admitted. “[Stoke City manager] Lou Macari was very suspicious of the whole process.... He thought we were going to take the

piss – which we did, but out of Lou, not Neil....

“But it came off the back of what *Flesh and Blood* gave us: a new way of thinking about how to be inclusive.”

Series 3 of BBC One’s *The A Word* takes inclusivity several steps further. Series 1, adapted from *Yellow Peppers*, a hit Israeli drama series produced by Keshet International, is based on Joe, who is autistic. Eccleston plays Joe’s grandad Maurice. He has a loving, down-to-earth – and sometimes cack-handed approach – to being with Joe.

As the series has developed, its cast has been extended to include Maurice’s girlfriend’s son, Ralph, played by Leon Harrop, and Ralph’s girlfriend, played by Sarah Gordy. They both have Down’s syndrome.

Eccleston said that he and Harrop, with his “perfect comic timing”, have become the show’s “double act”. He acknowledged Harrop’s “attitude, humour, and sexuality, which go against the stereotype”. Of working with Cockin, Kirby and now Harrop, Eccleston said: “It’s changed my life, my approach to the work, because I’ve learnt that you have to be playful.”

Bowker added that “one of the things I’m proudest of... is the way Leon has

developed as an actor. So [spoiler alert!] in the new series... his romantic story is very much a lead story.

“I’ve gone from Neil [Baldwin] owning my story, to Leon [who is] always going to outwit [Maurice], owning his story,” he said.

Paying tribute to Gordy, he added: “I wrote it as a straight romantic drama about a young man growing up and allowed them to play it.... It works because, hopefully, it’s not patronising or sentimental!”

Series 3 of *The A Word* provides the clearest illustration yet of Bowker’s “diversity is reality” mantra.

“It makes for better drama,” he argued. “It’s not some token thing. You walk down the street, or you [meet] any family and you encounter diversity. What’s clever about any dominant ideology is that you feel marginal even when you’re not.... But the mainstream is not the mainstream.... It’s actually a minority view.” ■

**Report by Carole Solazzo. RTS North West presented ‘Real reality television: Peter Bowker in conversation with Christopher Eccleston’ at the Lowry Theatre, Salford, on 2 March. The producer was Rachel Pinkney.**

The RTS went behind the scenes to discover how ITV's *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* became a global reality hit



2018 winner Harry Redknapp

# ITV's jungle juggernaut

**S**nakes chewing through camera cables, raging bush fires and thunderstorms knocking out feeds. It seems the challenges of filming a TV show in the jungle are as tricky as any Bushtucker Trial.

Sourcing 450,000 cockroaches and convincing celebrities that there really won't be any secret pizza deliveries are some of the tasks undertaken by the producers of ITV's *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*

A panel of key creatives from the flagship entertainment show enthralled an RTS audience with behind-the-scenes secrets at a Midlands Centre "Anatomy of a hit" event in Birmingham. *I'm a Celebrity...*, due to return this year for its 20th series, is one of ITV's most successful shows and recently won the Bruce Forsyth Entertainment Award at the National Television Awards.

As co-creator and executive

producer, Richard Cowles, said: "There aren't many shows that deliver 10 million viewers every night. It's become an institution. I like the fact that someone called it the Wimbledon of entertainment."

To date, 221 people have joined the jungle club. These range from the first winner, Tony Blackburn, to current queen Jacqueline Jossa, via such surprisingly entertaining camp mates as Paul Burrell, Carol Thatcher, Martina Navratilova and George Takei.

They've all hunkered down for up to three weeks in the Australian rainforest, giving up creature comforts and undertaking eye-catching challenges, from surviving on a limited diet of rice and beans to skydiving.

The home-grown reality survival format has been sold to 10 countries, including Germany, Sweden, India, Hungary and the US. All but the first of the UK series have been shot on the same set in Australia, based in Murrumbidgee, New South Wales, close to

the Queensland border. The camp is on private land located on the edge of a national park. An old banana plantation provides the production site.

Getting the show on air involves a massive logistical operation. There are about 600, mostly Australian, crew members, including 136 from the UK. In excess of 100 cameras capture the action.

Cowles said: "*I'm a Celebrity...* is like the circus coming to town. It's a huge thing every year, which really helps the local economy.

"It's scary in there – a real jungle, full of spiders and snakes, and a tough place to live. I'll always remember standing in the camp 10 minutes before the very first celebrity arrived.

"I'd just had the talk from Medic Bob about everything that could kill you, and I spotted a deadly taipan snake. All I could think of was Bob telling me that they chase you!"

Snakes aside, Cowles recalled how he was originally concerned whether

he could make the show work. Even its famous presenters, Anthony McPartlin and Declan Donnelly – now the show's biggest fans – couldn't quite comprehend the format.

He revealed: "It was quite a hard sell to Ant and Dec. They didn't understand the title, they thought it was way too long and ridiculous. But they said they'd be annoyed if they saw anyone else presenting it.

"We didn't know we could pull it off, but TV is all about blagging. It was a bit of a gamble and ITV was willing to take a few risks. We realised that it worked from the first series, although it really took off in series 3, with Katie Price and Peter Andre."

Preparing for *I'm a Celebrity...* is almost a year-long process. Micky Van Praagh, head of on-screen talent at ITV Studios, is already thinking of celebrities she would like to cast for the next series, due later this year.

Meanwhile, producer Chris Mannion and his team are devising new trials. For inspiration, they visit escape rooms as well as adapting games from shows such as *The Cube*. Each series now has a theme: in 2018, they built a coliseum and, last year, a Wild West town.

Mannion revealed that there is a thorough testing process, with producers doing everything they ask of the celebrities. Closer to transmission, they hire local Australians to live in the camp for three days. They eat and sleep in the same conditions that the celebrities will and rehearse trials to make sure everything is in working order.

Recently, 150 people had to be evacuated from the set, where the crew was doing a dry run with stand-ins, as a bush fire came dangerously close. Line producer Pui-Man Li recalled: "It was travelling 1km every 20 minutes. I was one of the last people off the site, and it was scary.

"Storm damage is also a big thing. Snake Rock was wiped out a couple of years ago. We had to rebuild it. We've also had a satellite knocked out and snakes chewing through cables."

The snakes used in trials are pampered, though. Cowles said that they are kept in air-conditioned trucks. "And if we use toads, we give them floating platforms. It's extraordinary what happens behind the scenes with the animal handlers who look after the creatures' welfare. And we run all the trials by New South Wales RSPCA."

Making the show is a 24-hour task. When the live show goes off air at

breakfast time in Australia, a team of producers gets to work watching and logging everything in camp. As soon as something interesting happens, the footage is sent to be edited immediately.

At 7:00pm, the first executive producer arrives at the production site to start locking in the running order. Cowles starts at 11:00pm and Ant and Dec clock on at 3:00am. They watch the VTs, followed by a script meeting and then a rehearsal before the show goes live at 7:00am.

Cowles, who admitted suffering from a rat phobia that means he avoids going near any rodent trials, said: "Ant and Dec bring everything to the show. It's amazing to watch them create the comedy.

"Sometimes, they don't even talk, they just look at each other and know what they're going to do. They are constantly trying to make it better and will change something just before transmission. They make it look so easy, but they work really hard."

Of course, the mix of celebrities is also crucial to the show's success. Van Praagh said: "I'm looking for impressive names to get people excited, but we also want surprising characters, such as [presenter and actor] Joel Dommett in 2016. He wasn't known to a mainstream ITV audience but, within a couple of days, everyone loved him. No one thought Harry Redknapp [the football manager and winner in 2018] would be so much fun. We want people who are interesting, with lots of anecdotes, and who are interested in each other."

Cowles, who acknowledged he had never been able to predict the winner, added: "The biggest crime is to be boring. Don't sleep all the time. The public vote for people who go on a journey and overcome their fears. They always say they aren't going to eat this or do that, but they almost always do.

"Apart from [*Corrie* star] Helen Flanagan [in 2012]. That was most annoying, when you've spent a lot of time and money on trials and then the celebrity refuses to do it."

He concluded: "We work hard to keep the show at the top of its game. Every year, we rip it apart to look at what worked and what didn't. We don't take it for granted that people will always watch."

No doubt, but millions will be eager to tune in again in November in the expectation of seeing the next batch of camp mates chew through fish eyes and be buried beneath rats. ■

## 'EVERY YEAR, WE RIP IT APART TO LOOK AT WHAT WORKED AND WHAT DIDN'T'

**Report by Roz Laws. 'Anatomy of a hit: I'm a Celebrity...' was held at the IET in Birmingham on 11 March. It was chaired by Heart FM's Kevin Hughes and produced by Jayne Greene for RTS Midlands.**

Sky News sports reporter **Martha Kelner** was voted Young Talent of the Year at the RTS Television Journalism Awards. Shilpa Ganatra charts her journey

# The news breaker

**T**hese are strange times to be a sports reporter. All national and international fixtures and events have been cancelled. The Premier League, Euro 2020, the Masters, French Open, Grand National, Olympics, London Marathon and Wimbledon are among the events that have been affected.

But Sky Sports' Martha Kelner is taking things in her stride. "I'm going to be covering the sport developments as and when they happen, but obviously not doing European football championships or Olympics, so I will contribute to the general news coverage as and when I can be helpful," she says. "At the moment, I'm up north doing a couple of stories about how charities are affected and also how young people/adolescents are affected by the lockdown."

Journalism was always on the cards for Kelner. Even as a child growing up in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, she would "devour, cover to cover," the pile of Sunday papers bought by her father, who worked in radio. But side-stepping from her early career in print to broadcast and winning acclaim in just over a year was very far from fated. So was being declared Young Talent of the Year at the RTS Television Journalism Awards in February.

"It was unexpected. I was new to TV, so I thought the RTS judges wouldn't think I was polished enough," she says. "The two other nominated journalists [Yusra Elbagir and Ben Hunte] are renowned, so I was delighted, not just for me, but also for the people who I've worked closest with."

Those include Kelner's producers, Sarah Dawkins and Rachel Lynch, who helped her adjust to the new medium, "because it's not just like starting a new job – it's almost like starting a new career".

If that's the case, she is certainly up to speed, with her slick broadcasts and warm authority making for welcome viewing. Plus, with her bulging black book, reporter's radar and irrepressible work ethic (her first report at Sky Sports was covering the Leicester City helicopter crash, a week before she officially started), few are better at delivering a strong sports story.

After studying journalism at Sheffield University, which gave Kelner both NCTJ and BJTC accreditation, she swiftly picked up work experience on newspapers in London.

That came thanks to family contacts, a situation she makes no bones about. Her father is radio journalist Martin Kelner and her uncle is Simon Kelner, former editor of *The Independent*, who was earlier assistant sports editor of *The Observer*. "I'm grateful to have had that leg up," she says. "I know that there are a lot of talented people who struggle to get on the journalism ladder. It's hugely competitive and some can't afford it."

"People might think, 'you've only got this job because of nepotism', but I think your name only gets you so far. If you're no good, you'll quickly get found out."

Growing up, Kelner was particularly into netball, and "in most of the A-teams, but not a standout sports-woman". It was her father's keen interest in sport that made it a natural area

for her to explore. She started her working life, in 2011, as a trainee on the *Daily Mail*, and was promoted to athletics correspondent before moving to *The Guardian*, where she eventually became its chief sports reporter – the first female one, no less.

Throughout her eight years working in print, she broke major news stories. These included four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome's failed drug test in the Vuelta a España, the systematic doping of Russian athletes, and the first interview with Jess Varnish following her allegations of sexism and bullying within British cycling.

These helped Kelner win Sports Journalist of the Year at the Press Awards in 2017 and Scoop of the Year at the Sports Journalists' Association Awards. The RTS Television Journalism Awards judges said: "She gets beneath the sports headlines to underlying issues and has built an enviable track record in breaking stories, pursued with skill and energy."

Kelner says: "For me, the ultimate rush as a journalist is breaking stories and finding out things that other people don't know – that has always been my primary motivation."

It continued when she moved into broadcast in late 2018, after Sky invited her to apply for the reporter position. She clearly loves the immediacy of broadcasting and that, on TV, she can tell a story direct to an audience live from a location. "I'm at the point where I get more enjoyment at the moment telling stories for broadcast," she says.

"I like the fact that there's no hiding. You're there telling the stories as they happen. You can reflect what is happening through noise and sound, which is something you can't do in print."

"When Bury was expelled from the English Football League – and Bury wasn't just a football club, it was the

**'AT A PREMIER LEAGUE EVENT, [I WAS] THE ONLY FEMALE JOURNALIST AMONG 30 OR 40 REPORTERS'**



RTS Television Journalism Awards winner Martha Kelner

centrepiece of the community – we stood outside the stadium with hundreds of people all day. We had the cameras rolling as they were crying and mourning the loss of this major part of their lives. That felt powerful.”

Another difference between print and broadcast is the type of attention she generates on Twitter. Tweets about her Yorkshire lilt are not uncommon. Twitter’s “mute function” does the job of tackling the trolls, and she talks it

through with her family, friends and boyfriend, an acoustic engineer, “because it can get to you”.

Being a woman in what has traditionally been a man’s domain presents its own challenges. While she cites Gabby Logan and Jacqui Oatley as among those helping to break the mould, “it’s slowly changing but, in the early days... when I asked a question at a press conference, everyone would turn around, thinking, ‘who’s that woman who’s

managed to sneak in?’. Even the other week, I was at a Premier League event, and the only female journalist among 30 or 40 other reporters.”

How did it feel to be the only woman in the room? “I was never intimidated by it. A lot of my really good friends are those men now. I’ve never found it difficult to work alongside them.”

The audience reaction to female presenters seems to be slower to change. She recalls that her taxi driver from the previous day was “quite vitriolic” about female sports presenters.

“We were just chatting about coronavirus and saying how it would affect our work, and when I said I was a sports journalist, he told me, ‘I don’t feel like women should do that. When I hear a woman commentator on the radio, I switch it straight off.”

“I think that view is actually widespread. But diversity is absolutely key – whether that’s people from ethnic-minority backgrounds, a regional background, from different social [classes] or women. Because our audience is not homogenous; and, if you have a sea of the same people reporting, you miss stories because you don’t see them as stories.”

Venturing into other subject matters is a move Kelner would welcome. Approaching 30 years of age, she is open to the direction her career could take, as long as it involves “doing different things and challenging myself. I’d like to report abroad at some point, and I really like long-form journalism.”

We are seeing seismic changes in television as the pandemic unfolds, so further changes for Kelner could happen sooner than she thinks – which would be very much in keeping with her career so far. ■

Richard Kendal

# RTS Programme Awards 2020

Hosted by **Paul Merton**, the awards were presented behind closed doors on 17 March at the Grosvenor House Hotel, London, in partnership with Audio Network, and streamed to nominees and viewers at home

## Actor, Female

**Tamara Lawrance** – *The Long Song*  
Heyday Television and NBCUniversal International Studios for BBC One  
‘Captivating and full of humanity, conveying an almost unimaginable strength in the darkest of moments.’

### **Nominees:**

**Niamh Algar** – *The Virtues*, Warp Films and Big Arty Productions for Channel 4  
**Suranne Jones** – *Gentleman Jack*, A Lookout Point Production in association with HBO for BBC One

## Actor, Male

**Stephen Graham** – *The Virtues*  
Warp Films and Big Arty Productions for Channel 4  
‘Utterly mesmerising and steeped in a real rawness – we were seeing an actor discovering new places to go emotionally in his work.’

### **Nominees:**

**Jared Harris** – *Chernobyl*, Sister, The Mighty Mint and Word Games in association with HBO for Sky Atlantic  
**Micheal Ward** – *Top Boy*, Cowboy Films, Easter Partisan Films, Dream Crew and SpringHill Entertainment for Netflix

## Arts

**Bros: After The Screaming Stops**  
Fulwell 73 for BBC Four  
‘Remarkable access, and a masterful study in the tensions and triumphs of the creative process that was – at times – brutally honest, but ultimately moving.’

### **Nominees:**

**Imagine... James Graham: In the Room Where It Happens**, BBC Studios for BBC One  
**Superkids: Breaking Away from Care**, Expectation for Channel 4



### Breakthrough Award

#### **Tanya Moodie – Motherland**

Merman Television and Delightful Industries for BBC Two  
‘Genuinely, a star in the making.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Aisling Bea – This Way Up**, Merman Television for Channel 4

**Tim Renkow – Jerk**, Roughcut TV and Primal Media for BBC Three

### Children’s Programme

#### **Zog**

Magic Light Pictures for BBC One  
‘This felt special, a real piece of inclusive, quality television full of positive messages and warmth.’

#### **Nominees:**

**The Athena**, Bryncoed Productions for Sky Kids

**Step Up To the Plate**, Lion TV for CBBC

### Comedy Performance, Female

#### **Saoirse-Monica Jackson – Derry Girls**

Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4  
‘A truly standout performance in a brilliantly funny series, she confidently commits to the character despite the craziness of the world she inhabits.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Phoebe Waller-Bridge – Fleabag**, Two Brothers Pictures in association with All3Media International for BBC Three and Amazon Prime Video

**Diane Morgan – Motherland**, Merman Television and Delightful Industries for BBC Two

### Comedy Performance, Male

#### **Ncuti Gatwa – Sex Education**

Eleven Film for Netflix  
‘Perfectly balanced, combining slapstick and big comic set pieces with moments of tender emotion and great heart in a truly wonderful series.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Alex Murphy and Chris Walley – The Young Offenders**, Vico Films and Rotator for BBC Three

**Youssef Kerkour – Home**, Jantaculum and Channel X for Channel 4

### Daytime Programme

#### **The Repair Shop**

Ricochet for BBC One

‘The passion pours through the screen. Produced with great confidence and real commitment, it’s a show that feels just right for today’s audience.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Good Morning Britain**, ITV Studios Daytime for ITV

**Beat the Chef**, Twofour and Motion Content Group for Channel 4

### Documentary Series

#### **The Choir: Our School by the Tower**

Twenty Twenty Productions for BBC Two  
‘A genuine insight into lives that we rarely see captured so vividly and so carefully on television.’

#### **Nominees:**

**Hometown: A Killing**, 7 Wonder for BBC Three

**Crime and Punishment**, 72 Films for Channel 4

## Judges' Award Jane Featherstone



'Just five years ago, Jane Featherstone left the security of being Chief Executive of Kudos and Chair of Shine UK, where she'd enjoyed a great run of success. She brought to the screen hit shows such as *Broadchurch*, *Life On Mars*, *Ashes To Ashes*, *The Tunnel* and *Spooks*.

'On leaving Kudos she struck out on her own and founded Sister Pictures in a partnership with Elisabeth Murdoch and Stacey Snider. She quickly hit her stride with a deep development slate of bold, eye-catching drama. By 2019, she had five series running in the same year in peak time on British TV – all radically different pieces in content and tone, but all highly distinctive and with their own very specific voice.

'Cleaning Up on ITV; *The Split* on BBC One; *Don't Forget the Driver*, produced for BBC Two; *Giri/Haji*, also on BBC Two; and, of course, the searing dramatisation *Chernobyl* – by any measure, an exceptional slate of extraordinary work, all in a single year.

'Drama of the very highest quality, produced with passion and flair by one of the stand-out stars of British television production.'

### Drama Series

#### **Gentleman Jack**

A Lookout Point Production in association with HBO for BBC One 'Sharply written, beautifully acted and directed, and all built around relationships which genuinely caught the audience's imagination.'

#### **Nominees:**

**The Capture**, Heyday Television and NBCUniversal International Studios for BBC One

**Ackley Bridge**, The Forge Entertainment for Channel 4

### Entertainment

#### **RuPaul's Drag Race UK**

World of Wonder Productions for BBC Three

'In its own unique way, it said something rather unexpected and fun about being British, as well as being full of warmth and laughs.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Love Island**, ITV Studios Entertainment/Motion Content Group for ITV2

**Britain's Got Talent**, Thames/Syco for ITV

### Entertainment Performance

#### **London Hughes – Don't Hate the Playaz**

Monkey Kingdom for ITV2

'Authentic, witty, and with an infectious personality.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Mo Gilligan – The Lateish Show with Mo Gilligan**, Expectation and Momo G for Channel 4

**Stephen Mulhern – In for a Penny**, ITV Studios Entertainment/Mitre Television for ITV

### Formatted Popular Factual

#### **The British Tribe Next Door**

Voltage and Motion Content Group for Channel 4

'Genuinely innovative, bravely breaking new ground as a format, an idea realised and executed impeccably well.'

#### **Nominees:**

**The Circle**, Studio Lambert and Motion Content Group for Channel 4

**Celebrity Gogglebox**, Studio Lambert for Channel 4

### History

#### **Jade: The Reality Star Who Changed Britain**

Blast! Films for Channel 4

'A provocative, highly revealing piece of work, full of many challenging questions still to be answered.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Spotlight on the Troubles: A Secret History**, BBC NI for BBC Four and BBC One Northern Ireland

**The Last Survivors**, Minnow Films for BBC Two

### Live Event

#### **Stormzy at Glastonbury 2019**

BBC Studios for BBC Two

'This transcended the event to become a significant national moment, as well as an outstanding television spectacle.'

#### **Nominees:**

**The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance**, BBC Studios for BBC One

**The BRIT Awards 2019**, BRITs TV for ITV

### Mini-Series

#### **The Long Song**

Heyday Television and NBCUniversal International Studios for BBC One

'An extraordinary achievement in storytelling.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Chernobyl**, Sister, The Mighty Mint and Word Games in association with HBO for Sky Atlantic

**Years and Years**, Red Production Company for BBC One

### Presenter

#### **Mobeen Azhar – Hometown: A Killing**

7 Wonder for BBC Three

'A uniquely engaging and compelling presence on screen.'

#### **Nominees:**

**Vicky McClure – Our Dementia Choir with Vicky McClure**, Curve Media co-produced with the Open University for BBC One

**Fred Brathwaite – A Fresh Guide to Florence with Fab 5 Freddy**, BBC Studios for BBC Two



BBC

### Breakthrough Award

Tanya Moodie – Motherland



1

Channel 4



2

Netflix



3

Channel 4



4

BBC



5

BBC



6

BBC



7

BBC



8

BBC

**1 Actor, Male:** Stephen Graham – *The Virtues* **2 Comedy Performance, Male:** Ncuti Gatwa – *Sex Education* **3 Comedy Performance, Female:** Saoirse-Monica Jackson – *Derry Girls* **4 Arts:** Bros: *After The Screaming Stops* **5 Documentary Series:** *The Choir: Our School by the Tower* **6 Drama Series:** *Gentleman Jack* **7 Daytime Programme:** *The Repair Shop* **8 Children's Programme:** *Zog*

## RTS Channel of the Year

### Channel 5

'A confident broadcaster reaping the rewards of years of steady growth and development – a channel that increasingly now both surprises and delights.'

#### Nominees:

**BBC Three**

**Sky Atlantic**

## Science and Natural History

### **The Parkinson's Drug Trial: A Miracle Cure?**

Passionate Productions for BBC Two  
'Produced with immense care over a long period, it was informative, packed with drama and emotion.'

#### Nominees:

**The Planets**, A BBC Studios Production with NOVA and WGBH Boston for BBC, PBS co-produced by Tencent Penguin Pictures. A BBC Open University Partnership for BBC Two

**8 Days: To the Moon and Back**, BBC Studios, PBS & The Open University, The Science Unit for BBC Two

## Scripted Comedy

### **Fleabag**

Two Brothers Pictures in association with All3Media International for BBC Three and Amazon Prime Video  
'Beautifully accomplished, supremely well written and performed.'

#### Nominees:

**Stath Lets Flats**, Roughcut TV for Channel 4

**Derry Girls**, Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4

## Single Documentary

### **War in the Blood**

Minnow Films for BBC Two  
'A consummate piece of work... subtle and unsensational, immaculately balanced but uncompromising.'

#### Nominees:

**Undercover: Inside China's Digital Gulag**, Hardcash Productions for ITV

**David Harewood: Psychosis and Me**, Films of Record co-produced with The Open University for BBC Two



BBC



BBC



ITV



2



4



3



7



8

BBC

Channel 4

BBC

Channel 4

BBC

**1 Entertainment:** RuPaul's Drag Race UK  
**2 Science and Natural History:** The Parkinson's Drug Trial: A Miracle Cure? **3 History:** Jade: The Reality Star Who Changed Britain **4 Actor, Female:** Tamara Lawrance – The Long Song, **Mini-Series:** The Long Song **5 Live Event:** Stormzy at Glastonbury 2019 **6 Entertainment Performance:** London Hughes – Don't Hate the Playaz **7 Formatted Popular Factual:** The British Tribe Next Door **8 Presenter:** Mobeen Azhar – Hometown: A Killing



1

BBC



2

BBC



3

BBC



4

BBC

1 Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit: Alex Scott – 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup 2 Single Drama: The Left Behind 3 Writer, Comedy: Phoebe Waller-Bridge – Fleabag 3 Scripted Comedy: Fleabag 4 Single Documentary: War in the Blood 5 Soap and Continuing Drama: Casualty 6 Sports Programme: ICC Cricket World Cup Final 7 Writer, Drama: Craig Mazin – Chernobyl



5

BBC



7

BSkyB



6

BSkyB



Host: Paul Merton

Richard Kendall

## Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit

### Alex Scott – 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup

Input Media [now known as Gravity Media] and BBC Sport for BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Four and BBC iPlayer

'A former player willing to draw on immense knowledge of the game to bring confident, concise analysis in a refreshing, inspiring way.'

#### Nominees:

**Nasser Hussain – The Ashes**, Sky Sports for Sky Sports Cricket

**Gareth Thomas – 2019 Rugby World Cup**, BBC Sport for BBC One

## Sports Programme

### ICC Cricket World Cup Final

Sky Sports & Sunset+Vine for ICC TV and Sky Sports Cricket

'Spectacular... sporting history, captured brilliantly by a production team right at the top of their own game.'

#### Nominees:

**2019 Rugby World Cup**, ITV Sport for ITV

**FIFA Women's World Cup 2019 – Semi Final: England vs USA**, Input Media [now known as Gravity Media] and BBC Sport for BBC One

## Writer, Comedy

### Phoebe Waller-Bridge – Fleabag

Two Brothers Pictures in association with All3Media International for BBC Three and Amazon Prime Video

'Every now and then, a show comes along that's so unique and distinctive you know there'll never be another remotely like it... and that's the sign of a truly special creative mind.'

#### Nominees:

**Laurie Nunn – Sex Education**, Eleven Film for Netflix

**Danny Brocklehurst – Brassic**, Calamity Films for Sky One

## Writer, Drama

### Craig Mazin – Chernobyl

Sister, The Mighty Mint and Word Games in association with HBO for Sky Atlantic

'It was a complex story told with a compulsive narrative shape – profound and affecting. The writer unflinchingly presented prescient and relevant themes.'

#### Nominees:

**Roy Williams – Soon Gone: A Windrush Chronicle**, A Douglas Road and Young Vic Production for BBC Four

**Neil Forsyth – Guilt**, Happy Tramp North and Expectation for BBC Scotland and BBC Two

## Single Drama

### The Left Behind

BBC Studios for BBC Three and BBC Cymru Wales

'A smart piece that shone a light on the real state of the nation, telling multi-layered stories in an emotional and nuanced way.'

#### Nominees:

**Brexit: The Uncivil War**, House Productions in association with HBO for Channel 4

**Doing Money**, Renegade Pictures for BBC Two

## Soap and Continuing Drama

### Casualty

BBC Studios for BBC One

'Excellent central dramatic performances combined with an authentic and gripping story.'

#### Nominees:

**EastEnders**, BBC Studios for BBC One

**Coronation Street**, ITV Studios for ITV



## Snow: taking history online

TV history was where his future lay. Many series followed *Battlefield Britain*, largely for the BBC, taking in history subjects as wide-ranging as the Spanish Armada, Vikings, the East India Company and the Nazis.

In 2018, he launched History Hit TV, an online subscription channel that offers hundreds of history documentaries, interviews and short films. He used crowdfunding to get the channel up and running, raising more than £100,000. Snow is an advocate of self-shooting on phones, and uses Periscope to live-stream content. He added that he enjoys the creative control History Hit TV gives him, and the opportunity to speak directly to his fan base.

RTS Southern Chair Stephanie Farmer said: "We were delighted that Dan was able to be with us. He is passionate about his subject and a natural communicator, and showed how online streaming can be a viable and vibrant way of working."

**Southern Centre** History buffs were treated to a fascinating evening of conversation with Dan Snow – and clips from his online channel, History Hit TV – at an RTS Southern event in March at Solent University.

The event drew an audience of 60, an attendance

seriously reduced by the early effects of the coronavirus epidemic. The TV historian, who was interviewed by the centre's Alison Martin, revealed that history was in his family – as a child, he listened to his Canadian grandmother reminiscing about the Second World War.

Dan Snow presented his first history programme, on the Battle of El Alamein, almost 20 years ago, with his father, BBC journalist Peter Snow. The duo went on to front the eight-part BBC Two series *Battlefield Britain*.

Snow recalled that he was convinced, from the start, that

## Top tips for landing tech jobs

**Thames Valley** Ninety-plus students and industry professionals gathered at the University for the Creative Arts in Farnham, Surrey, for a Thames Valley event in early March to learn how to land a technical role in TV.

Jonathan Glazier, studio multicamera director on *Asia's Got Talent* and *The Million Pound Drop*, advised students to make content: "I started with a Super-8 camera, [when] filming and developing costs were very high, but now everybody has a phone camera in their pocket."

Tom Morgan, head of

client services at Envy Post Production, found the London job market hugely competitive when he was starting out, and had to retrain himself on Avid before landing the position he wanted.

Carrie Wootten, director of Rise, which promotes gender diversity in the broadcast technology sector, said she spent two years applying for jobs before landing a dream role as a script researcher on BBC soap *EastEnders*.

Claire Wilkie, founder of outside broadcast company Wilkie TV, discussed her involvement in student TV:

"At university, I thought I wanted to study music or go into radio, but then I fell into setting up a student TV station and became station manager. It was through student TV that I got my first runner job, [covering] the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012."

Sky Sports News and Sky News VT operator Tom Metcalf said: "From leaving university, I knew I always wanted to go into the industry." His advice was to take any opportunity: "I went for an induction at Sky and got a job as a quality checker. I made travel videos when

travelling and then got [another] job in Sky working in the gallery, providing replays for live sports events."

*Peaky Blinders* sound editor Adele Fletcher, who is working on the latest *Bond* film, and camera assistant Hannah Green, who is employed on the new *Batman* movie, joined the panel via a video link.

The panellists suggested the students in the audience should keep an open mind, try new roles and see where their career takes them.

Professor Lyndsay Duthie, who chaired the event, asked the panel for the qualities needed to land work in television. They replied: "Humility, tenacity, self-belief, preparation and resilience."

**Tony Orme**

London Centre

## Matthew Bell hears how digitisation is safeguarding TV's heritage

‘T here’s never been a greater demand for [archive] content – and there’s never been a greater number of places to display content, thanks to the web.’

Will Pitt, head of sport at video management specialists Imagen, was talking at an upbeat joint RTS Archive Group/RTS London event, “Protecting our TV heritage”, in early March.

He was backed by BFI head of conservation Charles Fairall, who noted that the digitisation of TV archive material has made it “instantly accessible”.

The BFI has decided to maintain its huge film archive in its physical form. “It is the most practical and economic way of saving the heritage and art that lies within it. Digitisation of film could never have been achieved in an economic and timely way,” he added.

But the preservation of video tape, the typical format of old TV shows, is more problematic. “Keeping the tapes is not the solution,” said Fairall, for reasons that include the obsolescence of playback machines. “We digitise. The BFI has a duty to preserve television... and we have been doing that in quite a volume.

“This flourishing digital world that we now live in is giving us a safe place for the preservation of fragile [programmes]; it’s giving us the ability to work in much greater volume than we ever have; and it’s giving us the ability not only to let the



Classic TV: *The Liver Birds*

# Securing classic TV for the future

programmes be seen by a wider audience through digital platforms, but also to interpret them in ways that go beyond just watching and listening to the content.”

Technology is making the digitisation of content “easier, quicker and cheaper”, added Imagen’s Pitt, whose company’s software is used by clients that include BBC Studios, ITV and BFI to manage their digital assets.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a growing influence, helping to digitise shows and to enable specific clips to be found within them.

“That is important, because digitising your archive is pointless unless you can then efficiently find content and, furthermore, do stuff with it. Otherwise, what’s the point? It’s just another mound of

stuff,” said Pitt. “[AI] speech-to-text engines take the audio that is present on the digital asset and turn [it] into text.... If you have the right technology, you are then able to search for the words that have been transcribed.”

Archived TV content is part of the country’s cultural heritage and social history. For BBC Scotland archive manager Jennifer Wilson, access is critical. “We’ve got amazing films that date back to the 1950s, socially and culturally important films that haven’t been seen since they were originally transmitted. We’re getting them out there now and our programme-makers are loving it,” she said.

Archives can also be exploited commercially. “It all comes down to rights,” explained Kay Page, co-MD

of Northbound Media Consultants and a former controller of the ITV Archive. “There is a business to make money from selling archive content, if you have the right to do so and the infrastructure to do it.”

But, she added, “a lot of people have a lot of content that they can’t do anything with [without the rights].”

Organisations can get rights from broadcasters, but it isn’t straightforward. And clearing “orphan work” – copyright-protected work where rights holders are hard to identify or contact – is more difficult still.

“With orphan work, it’s probably more trouble than it’s worth,” said Dr Clare Watson, director of the Media Archive for Central England. “The due diligence that you have to conduct is so time-consuming that you can’t afford to do it.”

The RTS London event closed with a message from Malcolm Baird – son of television pioneer John Logie Baird – who was unable to attend due to his age and residence in Canada.

He was concerned that “television history is going by the board” and “in danger of losing its collective memory as it approaches its centennial” in 2026.

The panel and audience offered a more positive view, and both the RTS Archive Group and RTS London have plans to increase awareness of TV’s history, using television’s centenary as a trigger for action. ■

**‘Protecting our TV heritage’ was held at the University of Westminster on 4 March. Sue Malden, of the RTS Archive Group, chaired the event, which was produced by Dale Grayson, also of the group, and Carol Owens, RTS London.**

## Dublin celebrates student film

**Republic of Ireland** The honours were shared by the country's leading colleges at the RTS Republic of Ireland Student Television Awards in early March at RTÉ in Dublin.

The National Film School, IADT Dún Laoghaire, notched up two wins in the main categories, taking home prizes for Drama, for *Starry Night*, and Short Form, for *Looking For*. These two films picked up further wins in the Craft Skills categories, with Jack Desmond winning the Cinematography prize (*Looking For*) and Lori Stacey the award for Editing (*Starry Night*).

Ballyfermot College of Further Education won the Animation award for *CTRL+ALT+Z*. Presenting the prize, Jenni MacNeaney, general manager of award-winning animation outfit Boulder Media, said Irish animation was going through a "golden age". She stressed the importance of mentoring for those

entering the industry. Dundalk Institute of Technology's *Ghost Estate* took home the Comedy and Entertainment award.

Brian Redmond, star judge of RTÉ One's *Dancing with the Stars*, Ireland's most successful TV show, praised the standard of the entries and the vital contribution young

programme-makers could make to the comedy and entertainment genres.

*The Wildgoose Lodge Massacre*, from Dundalk Institute of Technology, was awarded the Factual prize.

TG4 Director-General Alan Esslemont, Virgin Media director of content Bill Malone and RTÉ director of channels and marketing Adrian Lynch also awarded prizes at the ceremony.

**Matthew Bell**

### RTS Republic of Ireland Student Television Awards winners

**Animation-CTRL+ALT+Z**- Holly Keating, Ballyfermot College of Further Education  
**Comedy and Entertainment-Ghost**

**Estate**-Andy Power, Dundalk Institute of Technology

**Drama-Starry Night**-Emma Smith and Caoilinn Handley, National Film School, IADT Dún Laoghaire

**Factual-The Wildgoose Lodge Massacre**- Stephen King and Adam Martin Connolly, Dundalk Institute of Technology

**Short Form-Looking For**-Cian Desmond, National Film School, IADT Dún Laoghaire

**Craft Skills - Cinematography-Looking For**-Jack Desmond, National Film School, IADT Dún Laoghaire

**Craft Skills - Editing-Starry Night**-Lori Stacey, National Film School, IADT Dún Laoghaire

## Westminster scoops prizes

**London Centre** The University of Westminster led the way with 11 nominations and three wins at the RTS London Student Television Awards, which were announced via a live stream in March.

Middlesex University chalked up two nominations and two wins.

The awards ceremony at Channel 4 was cancelled with the onset of the coronavirus.

University of Westminster students Ralph Sansum, Ben Douglass, Kristof Szenasi, Ben Holt and Louis Holder won the Factual award for *Oh Me Lads*. The judges said it was "honest and charming - old-fashioned in a good way".

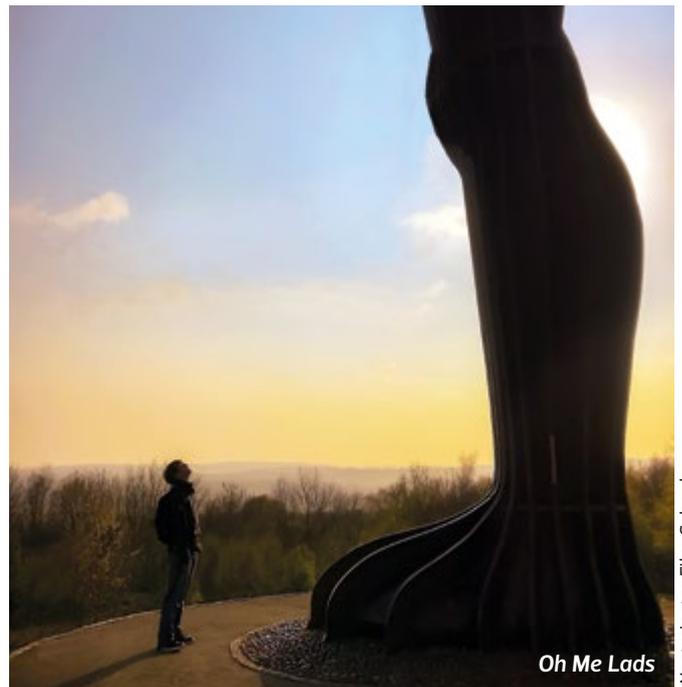
From the same university, Mishel Mirpuri took the Sound award for *Cutting*, while the Production Design prize went to Westminster's Laurie Esdale for *Mr and Mrs Bucket*.

Middlesex University's two awards came in the Drama and Writing categories. Candido Tarallo and Vinicius Rigoni's film set in Italy, *Vocazione*, said the judges, has "a confidence and maturity about it that introduced a hint of Antonioni". The Writing prize went to Rohan Reddy's film, *Nice to Meet You, Florence!*.

The other main category awards went to Kingston University (Animation), Ravensbourne University (Comedy and Entertainment) and South Bank University (Short Feature).

Jury chair Aradhna Tayal said: "I was greatly impressed by the ambition of this year's nominations, and the range of important and often under-represented topics. These awards play an important role in supporting and celebrating upcoming talent."

**Matthew Bell**



Westminster Film School

### RTS London Student Television Awards winners

**Animation-You're Fit**-Lydia Reid, Kingston University

**Comedy and Entertainment-Biggy**-Henry Oliver, Jordi Estapé Montserrat and Liam Morgan, Ravensbourne University London

**Drama-Vocazione**-Candido Tarallo and Vinicius Rigoni, Middlesex University

**Factual-Oh Me Lads**-Ralph Sansum, Ben Douglass, Kristof Szenasi, Ben Holt and Louis Holder, University of Westminster

**Short Feature-Hinterland**-Marcin Sehn and Rob Hill, London South Bank University

**Craft Skills - Camera-Moksha**-Jithin Majeed, Regent's University London

**Craft Skills - Editing-Downfall**-Bradley Cocksedge, Matias Heker and Stephen Moroz, University of Hertfordshire

**Craft Skills - Production Design-Mr and Mrs Bucket**-Laurie Esdale, University of Westminster

**Craft Skills - Sound-Cutting**-Mishel Mirpuri, University of Westminster

**Craft Skills - Writing-Nice to Meet You, Florence!**-Rohan Reddy, Middlesex Uni.

The BBC enjoyed a successful night at the RTS Southern Awards in early March, picking up six prizes in the professional categories.

BBC One's *South Today* received the Regional News Magazine award at the Winchester Guildhall ceremony. BBC South journalists also secured the Regional TV Journalist (Lewis Coombes), Regional Special Feature Journalist (Ben Moore), Sports Journalist (Tony Husband) and Regional Self-shooter (Matt Graveling) awards. Kieran Coyle from BBC South East won the Camera-work prize.

ITV Channel Television journalist Anna Geary took home the On-screen Newcomer award and the Special Event Coverage award went to ITV Meridian West for *D Day 75*, which the judges described as a "technically ambitious and wonderfully warm outside broadcast".

The award for Strand within a News or Magazine Programme was won by *Breadline Britain*, which was produced, directed and shot by Pod Films's Dave Young for *Channel 4 News*.

ITV News Meridian anchor Fred Dinenage and *South Today* presenter Sally Taylor hosted the awards, which were streamed live. The outbreak of coronavirus affected the numbers inside the Guildhall, but this was compensated for by 7,500 views of the coverage online. Total reach for the awards, including social-media posts, was 14,000 hits.

"Considering the very difficult climate we find ourselves in, we were very pleased that our awards ceremony took place," said RTS Southern Chair Stephanie Farmer. "In such challenging times it was doubly good to take time out to celebrate the great work in our region once again, from



Scrap Kings: the winning Factual Entertainment Programme

Quest/Discovery

## BBC excels in the South

professionals and students alike, who continue to amaze the judges with the quality and variety of their entries."

Local producers performed strongly at the awards. *Lost Home Movies of Nazi Germany*, made by Dorset-based Bright Button Productions, won the Factual Series prize. The judges described the BBC Four programme as "an important piece of work that effectively lays bare the extent of everyday brutality and the normalisation of mass murder".

Brighton's Back2Back Productions took home the

Factual Entertainment Programme award for *Scrap Kings*.

Bournemouth University chalked up victories in both the professional and student categories. *Indian Space Dreams*, which followed Mumbai scientists trying to launch the country's first satellite, triumphed in the Single Documentary or Factual Programme category.

A number of Bournemouth students and alumni worked on the film, which was directed and produced by the university's media production lecturer and founder of Sequoia Films, Sue

Sudbury. Bournemouth University film-makers also scooped the Student – Factual award for *On the Rise*.

Arts University Bournemouth picked up awards for Animation with *Carpe Diem* and Drama with *Sealskin*. The Comedy and Entertainment prize went to University of Portsmouth students for *Third Wheeling*.

The awards were sponsored by Bournemouth University, Arts University Bournemouth and Solent University, and supported by BBC South and ITV Meridian. **Matthew Bell**

### RTS Southern Television Awards winners

**Factual Entertainment Programme - Scrap Kings** - Back2Back Productions for Quest

**Factual Series - Lost Home Movies of Nazi Germany** - Bright Button Productions for BBC Four

**Single Documentary or Factual Programme - Indian Space Dreams** - Sequoia

**Regional News Magazine - BBC South Today** - BBC South

**Strand within a News or Magazine Programme - Breadline Britain** -

Pod Films for Channel 4

**Special Event Coverage by a Regional News Magazine Programme - D Day 75** - ITV Meridian West

**Regional TV Journalist - Lewis Coombes** - BBC South

**Regional Special Feature Journalist - Ben Moore** - BBC South

**On-screen Newcomer - Anna Geary** - ITV Channel Television

**Sports Journalist - Tony Husband** - BBC South

**Regional Self-shooter - Matt Graveling** - BBC South

**Camerawork - Kieran Coyle** - BBC South East

**Graphics/Animation - Sunny Clarke** - LoveLove Films

**Post-Production - Richard Buss** - Magic Post

**Specialised Audience Production - Rewilding Sussex Seas** - Big Wave Productions

**Student - Animation - Carpe Diem** - Arts University Bournemouth

**Student - Comedy and Entertainment - Third Wheeling** - University of Portsmouth

**Student - Drama - Sealskin** - Arts University Bournemouth

**Student - Factual - On the Rise** - Bournemouth University



BBC

White Van Gogh Man

## BBC doc makes its mark

**East Centre** Two regional news services – BBC East and ITV Anglia – enjoyed a successful night at the RTS East Awards in early March.

The BBC region triumphed in the Factual category with its documentary *Our Lives: White Van Gogh Man*, about the Norfolk artist Ruddy Muddy. He uses mud to create paintings on the side of his van and has raised thousands of pounds for local charities.

Regional BBC news programme *Look East's* health correspondent, Nikki Fox, was named best On-screen Journalist. ITV Anglia presenter Kate Prout took home the On-screen Personality prize.

Her colleague, journalist Rob Setchell, took the News and Current Affairs Feature award for his report *The Big Online Gamble*, which featured a revealing interview with Cambridge United football legend John Taylor, who was addicted to gambling.

Norwich-based Epic Studios Broadcast also secured two awards: Promotional Film for *Lilium* and Digital Content for *World of Sport Live Tour Promo*.

Video production agency Forward was awarded the Craft Skills award for its short film about the Norfolk artist Nial Adams.

SubMotion Productions took home the Short Form

prize for *Let Me Shine*, which followed eight young people with severe autism as they travelled to Abbey Road Studios to record their own song.

The ceremony at the Assembly House in Norwich was hosted by Becky Jago, the co-presenter of *ITV News Anglia*, and Stewart White, who presents *Look East*.

“It has been a great year for the creative industries in the East, and we are extremely proud of the quality of content and talent coming out of the region,” said RTS East Chair Tony Campbell. “The standard of submissions was very high this year and it was fantastic to come together to

celebrate everyone’s achievements – congratulations to all the winners.”

In the student categories, Norwich University of the Arts and Anglia Ruskin University each won two of the principal awards.

Norwich University of the Arts took home the Animation and Comedy and Entertainment prizes for *Cat Fight* and *Spotters*, respectively. *Spotters* also earned Adam Martin the Craft Skills – Production Design award.

Anglia Ruskin scooped the Drama prize for *On the Ropes* and the Factual award for *Tertiary Sound*.

*On the Ropes* helped Margarita Velentza to win the Craft Skills – Camera prize, while Jared Guy received the Craft Skills – Sound award for *Tertiary Sound*.

The University of Bedfordshire and Norwich City College also picked up awards.

**Matthew Bell**

**Two leading lights of the London Centre – Arthur Pigott and Arthur “Rick” Rickards – sadly died last month. Both were made RTS Fellows in 1987, when the Society celebrated its first 60 years.**

■ Arthur Pigott joined the Society in 1972 and was heavily involved in the work of the London Centre from the very beginning, sitting on the events committee for many years. For six years, he assisted the director of the RTS television engineering course at the IBA in Knightsbridge.

Arthur’s enthusiasm knew no bounds as he wrote illuminating, detailed critiques of each London lecture. When the centre presented its awards for the best “event” and “chairing of a panel”, it was Arthur’s critiques that formed the basis of the decision.

Arthur worked in the

### RTS East Television Awards winners

**Factual Programme** - *Our Lives: White Van Gogh Man* - BBC East for BBC One

**On-screen Journalist** - Nikki Fox - BBC Look East

**On-screen Personality** - Kate Prout - ITV Anglia

**News and Current Affairs Feature** - Rob Setchell, *The Big Online Gamble* - ITV Anglia

**Short Form** - *Priors Court/Let Me Shine* - SubMotion Productions

**Promotional Film** - *Lilium* - Epic Studios Broadcast

**Digital Content** - *World of Sport Live Tour Promo* - Epic Studios Broadcast

**Craft Skills** - Nial Adams - Forward

**Student – Animation** - *Cat Fight* - Elizabeth Fijalkowski, Ruth Bennett, Jay Ainsley, Harriette Daniels and Zoe Walker, Norwich University of the Arts

**Student – Comedy and Entertainment** - *Spotters* - Oliver Willcox, Andrius Zukas, Adam Martin and David Cisay Rule, Norwich University of the Arts

**Student – Drama** - *On the Ropes* - Jake Mounteny, Mariana Vaz, Margarita Velentza, Joshua Panes, Charlie Fairclough, Freya Blake and Ofelia Mura, Anglia Ruskin University

**Student – Factual** - *Tertiary Sound* - Solomia Dzhurovska, Luca Struijk,

Cristi-Valeria Tomsa and Jared Guy, Anglia Ruskin University

**Student Craft Skills – Camera** - *On the Ropes* - Margarita Velentza, Anglia Ruskin University

**Student Craft Skills – Editing** - *The Incomplete Guide to Everything* - Toby Pope, University of Bedfordshire

**Student Craft Skills – Production Design** - *Spotters* - Adam Martin, Norwich University of the Arts

**Student Craft Skills – Sound** - *Tertiary Sound* - Jared Guy, Anglia Ruskin University

**Student Craft Skills – Writing** - *Through These Eyes* - Andrew Prosser, Norwich City College

# TV 'better' for women now

Scotland Centre

RTS Scotland and Women in Film & Television celebrated International Women's Day at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow.

Sharing their experiences of TV were: Synchronicity Films founder Claire Mundell; Channel 4 head of daytime Jo Street, who leads the broadcaster's new hub in Glasgow; and Raise the Roof Productions MD Jane Muirhead. Wendy Rattray, MD of Glasgow indie Hello Halo, interviewed the panellists.

Conversation revolved around pay inequality, workplace mistreatment and role models. The panel argued that the TV industry had become

a more welcoming place for women. "There weren't really [many] women in media in the 1960s and 1970s. It's a better industry now because there are more women at the top," said Mundell.

But all three agreed that women and many minority groups still faced barriers. "More work is still needed to promote the industry as a realistic and accessible path early on for women and other groups," said Rattray.

Channel 4's Street offered advice to women in the audience: "Women should not undervalue themselves. Know your own worth and just try to be yourself."

**Donald Matheson**



The Cry: made by Synchronicity Films

BBC



Arthur Pigott

## Arthur Pigott 1922–2020

printing industry before serving in the RAF during the Second World War. He returned to printing and was responsible for the composition of the renowned photo-journalism magazine *Picture*



'Rick' Rickards

## Arthur Rickards 1929–2020

*Post*. In 1957, he moved into education and set up one of the first educational television studios. Before retirement, he was a senior lecturer at the London College of Printing.

"Arthur's kindness and resourceful nature greatly contributed to the success of the early years of the RTS London Centre," said Norman Green, the first centre Chair.

■ Arthur "Rick" Rickards served on the London Centre committee from its inception until 2009. He was Chair from 1985 to 1989, when he also served on the RTS Council.

In 1956, he joined EMI Broadcast Division, working on cameras. In 1959, he moved to ABC Television's engineering department, where Howard Steele was designing Teddington's mould-breaking multi-standard studios. Here, Rick designed the first transistorised video amplifiers and matrices for the complex.

He then designed all the transistorised video equipment, including the vision mixer, for the revolutionary ABC Television 1966 World

Cup outside broadcast (OB) units.

With the formation of Thames, he became responsible for installing the brand new Euston Colour Studios, which controlled the Thames programme output and it was Rick who finally got all the video systems operational.

Later, he became head of R&D at Thames, where he was involved with the design of analogue and digital component video systems. He was a founder member of the ITV body that set the technical performance standards for all ITV's studios and OB units.

"Rick was very enthusiastic about having 'engineering-based events' for London Centre members and was greatly involved in organising the early annual dinners. Once a decision was taken to implement something, he was relentless in delivering it," said Norman Green.

**Matthew Bell**

PIONEERING WOMEN, INSPIRATIONAL MUSIC

Jessica Dannheisser



## Whose story do you want to tell?

Composer Jessica Dannheisser's *Orchestral Portraits* celebrates trailblazing women, including Malala Yousafzai, Doreen Lawrence and Vesta Tilley, in music.

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