

Television



**All the
world's
a stage**

*and all the men
and women have
their channels*



LOVE TV? SO DO WE!

Royal Television Society bursaries offer financial support and mentoring to people studying:

TELEVISION PRODUCTION
JOURNALISM
ENGINEERING
COMPUTER SCIENCE
PHYSICS
MATHS

First year and soon-to-be students studying relevant undergraduate and HND courses at Level 5 or 6 are encouraged to apply.

Find out more at
rts.org.uk/bursaries

#RTSBursaries



From the CEO



Our bumper issue of *Television* highlights two international keynote speakers at this month's RTS Cambridge Convention – YouTube's Robert Kyncl and the man who master-minded Disney+, Kevin Mayer.

Both men were quick to identify and act on technology's potential to transform our industries. Robert and Kevin had the smarts to see how this would forever change the TV and wider entertainment business. Their extraordinary careers tell us a lot

about our age of disruption and innovation.

Ofcom CEO Melanie Dawes will be making her Cambridge debut. Steve Clarke profiles a woman who knows her way around Whitehall's corridors of power and who is a long-time champion for genuinely diverse workforces.

Also, don't miss Ade Adepitan's TV Diary. He is part of Channel 4's Paralympics presenting team. Ade reminds us how tough life was in lockdown, particularly for those with disabilities.

I hope to see many of you at Cambridge. In addition to industry leaders from both sides of the Atlantic, I'm

seriously looking forward to hearing what the former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and her daughter, Chelsea, have to say to us.

We have another very special guest appearing – England manager Gareth Southgate, who has distinguished himself not only by his team's outstanding performance, but by his personal leadership style and integrity.

It will be fantastic to see our industry back together again in person.

Theresa.

Theresa Wise

Contents

Cover: YouTube star KSI (Capital FM)

5 Ade Adepitan's TV Diary

Ade Adepitan on preparing for the Paralympics – and why he saw so little of the action from Tokyo

6 Comfort Classic: The Young Ones

Steve Clarke hails the cult show that radically redefined the sitcom with an avalanche of surreal, satirical slapstick

7 Ear Candy: Still Queer as Folk

Kate Holman enjoys no-holds-barred analysis of each episode of Russell T Davies's groundbreaking drama

8 Working Lives: Location manager

Demons in Swansea, witches in Caerphilly and sexologists in Caerleon – Wales has it all, testifies Gareth Skelding

10 Lampooning with latex

The team behind BritBox's reboot of *Spitting Image* explains how to make satire work for millennials

12 The Silicon Valley trailblazer

Caroline Frost charts YouTube's Robert Kyncl's progress from cross-country skier to tech pioneer

14 Breaking all medical records

As *Casualty* celebrates its 35th anniversary, Shilpa Ganatra diagnoses the secret of its longevity

16 Ofcom's diversity champion

Steve Clarke profiles the regulator's Chief Executive, Melanie Dawes, who is also a youth charity trustee

18 Why true crime pays

Matthew Bell weighs the evidence for why this specialist documentary genre is more popular than ever in the UK

20 A man ahead of the curve

Caroline Frost talks to Kevin Mayer, the Disney veteran who aims to turn DAZN into the Netflix of sport

22 Stay public – or go private?

A high-powered RTS panel draws the battle lines in the debate over Channel 4's future

24 My brilliant Korea

The RTS hears why weird and wonderful shows such as *The Masked Singer* are transforming TV entertainment

26 Watching the detectives

Shilpa Ganatra investigates a new era for crime drama at the UKTV-owned pay channel Alibi

29 Our Friend in the North

Sinead Rocks celebrates the beginning of a majestic new era in the Channel 4 story

30 King of the crescent

Sitcom *King Gary* set out to subvert masculine stereotypes. An RTS panel reveals its ambitions for series 2

32 How to nurture talent

Anne Dawson discovers how Air TV delivers long-term contracts and extensive training for its new recruits



audio network 



Hip Hop

TURN IT UP

AUDIONETWORK.COM/DISCOVER

SEND US YOUR BRIEF

MUSICSEARCH@AUDIONETWORK.COM

MOONDAY

TV diary

This will be my third time presenting the Paralympics. I was a pundit for the BBC in Beijing. In 2012 and 2016, I was a presenter in London and Rio for Channel 4.

To prepare, I have been updating my knowledge of the athletes. I still play wheelchair basketball at club level. Quite a few of the players, such as Gaz Choudhry and Helen Freeman, who are in the national team, I know well. I trained some of them as they worked to get into the team.

I get up at 5:30am and do two-hour sessions with them. I've also been speaking to my old tennis coach, Stuart Wilkins, on WhatsApp. I'm lucky that I've got direct sources to the games.

■ It's brilliant that more than 70% of Channel 4's Paralympics presenting team are disabled. The other day, Gaz Choudhry said to me, "Why is it that you so often see able-bodied people presenting Paralympic sport, but you never see people with disabilities working as presenters at the Olympics?"

JJ Chalmers was a presenter at the Tokyo Olympics, but that was the first time this has happened.

We need to see more former Paralympic athletes given the opportunity to be Olympics presenters.

■ Last year, because of Covid, the wheelchair basketball season was shut down. But now I go to a nearby park at Ravenscourt in west London, where there are outdoor basketball courts.

The team has started doing some three-on-three basketball sessions. Our club sessions have also started to



John Noel Management

Ade Adepitan on preparing for the Paralympics – and why he saw so little of the action from Tokyo

return. It's only in the past two weeks that we've been allowed to play contact basketball. Two negative Covid tests need to be sent in the previous week. The amount of admin is insane.

Once you start playing again, you realise how much you've missed it and the buzz you get from playing.

During the first lockdown, in May 2020, I got a new sports wheelchair. For seven or eight months I wasn't able to use it. It was frustrating, seeing this brand-new wheelchair sitting there gathering dust.

■ Not being able to play basketball during lockdown, I was worried about putting on weight. To keep up my fitness levels, I did a live stream on Instagram with my brother, Olu, who's a personal trainer and nutritionist, which we called FitnessFriday.

It was available to both able-bodied athletes and those with impairments. I hate it when disabled people are put in silos – it feels like segregation.

People are not disabled by their impairment, but by the barriers society puts in front of them. If you live in a town where the gym isn't accessible, your disability is the gym rather than the impairment.

If the gym has doors that are wide enough for wheelchairs and the equipment is low enough for you to use and there are ramps and accessible toilets, you no longer have a disability. We should make everything accessible to everyone.

On the subject of Instagram, I've now gathered about 17,000 followers. It's a nice community and we speak regularly. I give my followers the opportunity to ask me questions about anything they like.

■ We have a seven-month-old baby, so watching a lot of the Olympics on TV wasn't possible. It would have been really unfair to my wife to watch the telly when I should be looking after Bolla. He's a busy lad who hates to sit still.

■ Sport is an international language. I was thrilled that Tokyo was such a big success and helped to lift everybody's mood.

The Paralympics are even more important because, when times are tough, it's people with disabilities who suffer the most. To see disabled athletes competing at the top level is a massive boost to everyone's morale.

For disabled people in parts of Africa and India who are living in extreme poverty, the opportunity to see disabled people doing extraordinary things at the Paralympics is inspirational.

Ade Adepitan is presenting the Tokyo Today Paralympic Highlights show at 5:00pm on Channel 4 until 5 September.

COMFORT CLASSIC



BBC

The Young Ones

Few TV shows are held responsible for blowing apart the genre they belong to but that was the legacy of *The Young Ones*. The incendiary BBC Two sitcom redefined the parameters of comedy by making an embarrassment out of elements of the genteel English suburban sitcom, exemplified by *The Good Life* and *Ever Decreasing Circles*.

From now on, thanks to *The Young Ones*, sitcom could sit squarely at the heart of youth culture, while those tuxedoed comics who had built their routines on jokes about mothers-in-law found themselves beyond the pale.

If BBC Three had been around in 1982, when series 1 of *The Young Ones* landed, its brilliance would have defined the channel overnight. As it was, its arrival was, to paraphrase one critic, not unlike an atomic bomb going off in conventional mainstream

Steve Clarke hails the cult show that radically redefined the sitcom with an avalanche of surreal, satirical slapstick

TV comedy and entertainment.

Indeed, an early episode saw the four housemates who are the show's anti-heroes wake up to discover an atom bomb in their kitchen. Inevitably, Vyvyan (Ade Edmondson) – the flame-haired, cricket bat-wielding punk addicted to smashing anything and everything – wants to let it off. Rick (Rik Mayall), the slightly camp, arty one and self-declared Cliff Richard fan, wants to use the bomb to blackmail the detested Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

In a neat satirical sequence, there are references to *Protect and Survive*, a recently published government pamphlet with its bizarre tips on how to cope with nuclear Armageddon. This was the age of protests against US missile bases amid fears that the Iron Lady and US President Ronald Reagan might trigger a nuclear war with the Soviet Union.

The programme's insane slapstick and inspired surrealism were the proverbial blast of fresh air, as the attitudes and styles that characterised the booming stand-up circuit were imported into peak-time TV comedy.

The comedy was peppered with performances by some of the era's most popular bands – perhaps most memorably, British metal band Motörhead belting out their best-known number, *Ace of Spades*, while our four heroes rush for a train so they can appear on, of all things, *University Challenge*.

Cue more satire as Scumbag College takes on the toffs of Footlights College, Oxbridge.

Subtle or sophisticated it wasn't, but the show generated a lot of laughs as the under-35s finally had a sitcom they could call their own.

There were puppets, too, and star guests aplenty in this two-series blitz-krieg. Rising stars Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie and, yes, even Robbie Coltrane and Emma Thompson, all climbed aboard a sitcom that quickly defined and encapsulated "alternative comedy" on TV.

And let us not forget the fearsome Liverpudlian hardman and famed compère of Soho's Comedy Store, Alexei Sayle. He plays the sadistic landlord, Jerzei Balowski, as well as other members of the Balowski family.

At the heart of all great sitcoms are well-honed characters. The quartet was completed by Mike (Christopher Ryan), who wouldn't have looked out of place drinking with Del Boy in *Only Fools and Horses*, and the wondrous, dim-witted hippie, Neil (Nigel Planer). Here was a character decades ahead of his time, a put-upon pacifist, vegetarian and environmentalist suffering from what we'd today call mental health issues.

The episode in which he inhales some especially potent pot and ends up travelling in space to land on a distant planet remains hilarious. Quite what Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk would make of it is anyone's guess.

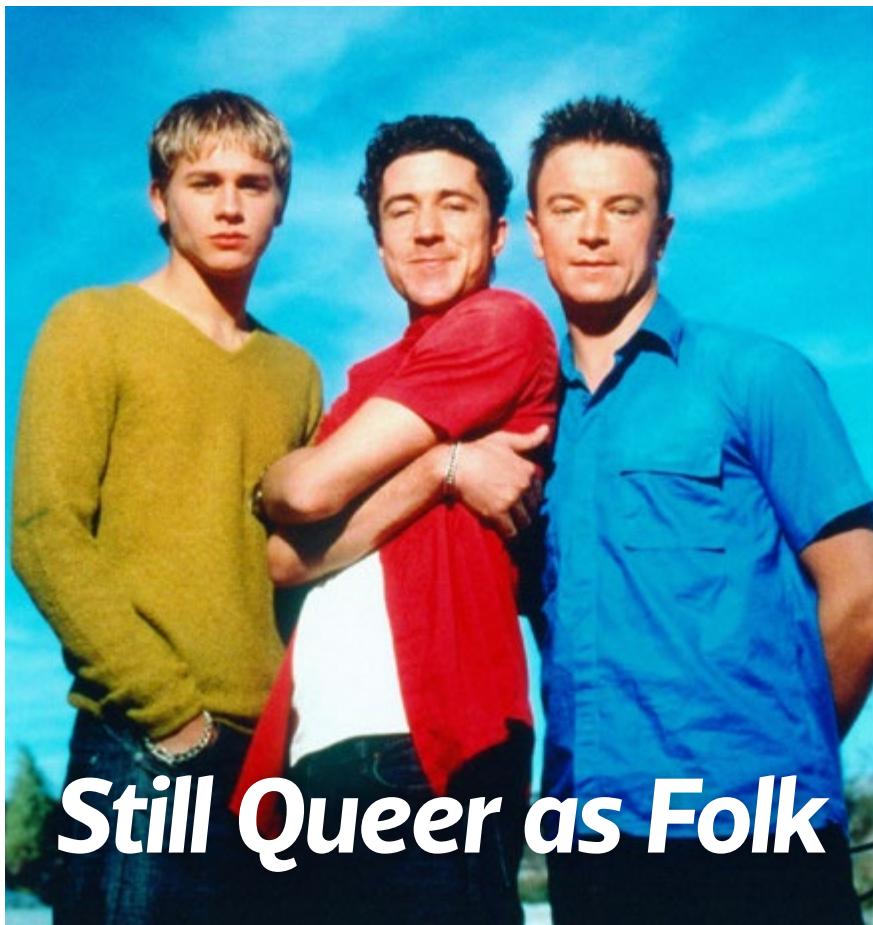
The Young Ones was written by Mayall, Ben Elton and Lise Mayer, an American-born writer who met Mayall when he was a drama student at Manchester University.

The role of the peerless producer Paul Jackson should not be underestimated. He once said: "I was lucky enough to be the conduit through which a lot of alternative comedy came to a broader audience. In the 1980s, I remember thinking the business was changing and there was a movement that hadn't yet been tapped into. I wouldn't say I had an influence, but I put on shows such as *The Young Ones* and *Saturday Live* that did."

This self-effacement belies both his contribution and the impact of *The Young Ones* and its pivotal role in changing British sitcom for good. ■

The Young Ones is available on Amazon Prime Video.

Ear candy



Channel 4

When *Queer as Folk* hit our screens in 1999, the groundbreaking series was praised for its realistic and fun depiction of young gay life in Manchester.

Twenty years on, Russell T Davies's storytelling is just as impactful as it was when it first aired on Channel 4.

Originally a podcast for the US version of the show, which spanned five series and 83 episodes in the early 2000s on Showtime, *Still Queer as Folk*'s American hosts, Patrick Randall and Matt Dominguez, return to the original UK series to give an unfiltered analysis of each episode.

The pair discuss the highs and lows of every programme, debating the more questionable storylines that haven't aged well (namely, Nathan's age), and celebrating their favourite "top"

moments, such as Vince coming out at work, and the realistic and passionate sex scenes shown throughout the series.

Often going off topic to share their own stories, the pair's tales of their experiences of going to gay clubs for the first time, cruising and finding friendships in their twenties adds to the celebration of gay culture that the original series achieved.

The characters, relationships and storylines were pivotal moments on the small screen.

And if you need an excuse to re-watch this TV classic, which is available on All 4, the *Still Queer as Folk* podcast provides it.

You can reminisce with Randall and Dominguez and share their excitement and nostalgia for a show that genuinely had a seminal impact on TV's treatment of gay culture. ■

Kate Holman

WORKING LIVES

Location manager

Sky



Da Vinci's Demons at Margam Castle

Gareth Skelding has been hunting down eye-catching locations for the biggest dramas shot in Wales over the past two decades, including *Doctor Who*, *Sherlock*, *A Discovery of Witches* and, most recently, *The Pact*.

What does the job involve?

I'm part of a production's creative team. After reading the script, I pitch my ideas for locations to the writer, producer and director, bringing my knowledge of what an area can offer. Ideally, I like to start as early as possible to have the greatest creative influence – with Little Door's recent drama for BBC One *The Pact*, I was involved three months before shooting began.

Do you work alone?

Typically, I have a core locations team of four or so people and draft more people in as and when I need them.

Is the job more than simply finding locations?

I'm the first person a location owner meets and trust is vital; for them, you are the face of the production company. Wales is a small place and, if you don't look after people's property, it soon gets around – you need to leave locations in the same condition as you found them. And I need to get location agreement contracts signed, carry out risk assessments and handle fees.

Is it hard getting permission to film?

By and large, people want to see their properties on TV and they get compensated for letting us use them. Councils are welcoming because a production brings a lot of money into an area and exposure.

How did you become a location manager?

I was a club rugby player and went to some of the weirdest and most wonderful places in Wales – my knowledge of the country expanded from the back of a rugby bus.

I was working as a runner, making the tea and coffee, which gave me a foot in the door, and I gradually moved into locations.

What was the first TV programme you worked on?

I'm a first-language Welsh speaker and I started on S4C drama *Iechyd Da* (*Good Health*). I also worked in Cornwall on the ITV cop series *Wycliffe*, but I soon realised Wales was my real strength.

What makes a good location manager?

You have to be a really good communicator and able to talk to all types of people. The job is also about problem solving and adapting to changing situations.

Do location managers normally work in a particular region?

Generally, yes. In Wales, I know what I've got on my patch. I don't want to go to London and step on the toes of other location managers.

And, of course, TV production in Wales is booming?

BBC Wales head of drama Julie Gardner revived *Doctor Who* and brought it to Cardiff in 2005, which started the boom. I worked on *Doctor Who* and then went on to *Torchwood* and *Sherlock*. It was a golden era for BBC Wales.

Then the Americans started to come in, and I worked on [Starz Italian Renaissance fantasy drama] *Da Vinci's Demons*. These productions put Wales on the map – they showed that we have the skills base here and we've certainly got the locations.

For *The Pact*, how did you unearth the fantastic forest and brewery locations?

That's what we do! For the night-time scenes in the wood, we found a forest with a pond so we could get moonlight bouncing off the water. We gave it some va-va-voom, which is not a word we use much in Wales.

Originally, the writer, Pete McGighe, wrote the workplace setting as a biscuit factory but, as Covid-19 took hold, I suggested that it might not be the best idea to take a large crew into a food factory.

We found a fantastic location called

sat in the corner of the pub or working men's clubs. Those guys know where to unearth those jewels.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best is getting people home safely from a really challenging location. The worst is that a film crew can be like sheep – when they don't listen, one goes the wrong way and they all follow.

What advice would you give to an aspiring location manager?

You need a good eye as well as an



A *Discovery of Witches* in the Brecon Beacons

Sky

So, Wales is rich in locations?

If you're based in Cardiff, within an hour's drive you can be on a world-renowned beach on the Gower Peninsula, down a mine or up a mountain. The range of locations is amazing. And you can use CGI to add to shots – I did 20-odd episodes of *Da Vinci's Demons*, all filmed out of Swansea.

What's the best location you found?

The exciting thing is pushing the boundaries and putting people where they wouldn't believe we could get them, such as at the top of a mountain in the Brecon Beacons – places you would think were completely inaccessible to a film crew of 100. We shot Sky One's *A Discovery of Witches* in the Beacons and it was so beautiful.

Is there any location too hard to film in?

It depends on the scale of the show and budget. You can do anything if you have the money, but that's not a luxury a lot of productions have.

the Rhymney Brewery in Blaenavon – the brewery became a character in itself.

So you can use locations that are in use?

It depends on the budget and the volume of work. For *The Pact*, we were able to film for a couple of weeks without disrupting work at the brewery. For the Netflix drama *Sex Education*, on a longer shoot, the producers wanted a school that was empty to film in, so they used a disused university building in Caerleon.

What do you bring to work with you?

My knowledge – the locations are all in my head, although we do have a database of location images we've collated over the years.

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

I find the best locations in the pub. If I'm looking for something weird and wonderful, then I chat to the old guy

understanding of what makes a shot interesting.

I try to take on two or three trainees a year, often from Screen Alliance Wales, on a placement. I'm keen to find people who want to be location managers and who are not using it as a foot in the door to the industry, which you find a lot.

Are there any qualifications?

You need a driving licence – the hours are unsociable and, a lot of the time, the location team are first in, last out. And there's no public transport to many of the locations.

What TV series would you love to find locations for?

A rugby-based series or a local story. There's a lovely film in the cinemas, *Dream Horse*. It's a true story and was on my patch but I was too busy to do it. ■

Gareth Skelding was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

When it emerged that BritBox was rebooting *Spitting Image*, the ITV show that ran for 18 series from 1984 to 1996 and which mercilessly lampooned the Thatcher-Reagan era, there was scepticism that the revival would work.

Could a collection of latex puppets that had helped redefine TV satire in the pre-digital age be successfully reinvented to send up today's politicians and celebs?

Many believe that our toxic times are beyond satire, riven as they are by a global health crisis, environmental disaster and a warp-speed news cycle. And that's without factoring in social media in which misinformation is commonplace or "woke" sensitivities around which comedy writers may feel the need to tread carefully.

Miraculously, *Spitting Image* mark II pulled it off, despite some complaints that the revival lacked the savage bite of the original series.

This September, season 2 arrives on BritBox. Audiences can look forward to the return of some grotesque and familiar caricatures from season 1, including Cabinet ministers Priti Patel as a blood-sucking dominatrix and Michael Gove with a face made from his own genitals.

Caricatures of footballers Harry Kane and Marcus Rashford, England manager Gareth Southgate and soccer commentator Alex Scott will make their *Spitting Image* debuts in the new series. Also expect to see rapper Lin-Manuel Miranda and BBC Director-General Tim Davie given the *Spitting Image* treatment – a typically cheeky move considering that the BBC owns half of BritBox.

"We're in the process of making Tim Davie into Boris's pet poodle. It was a lot easier to do that I'd imagined. He'll be a small lapdog that comes every time when he's called," the show's co-creator and executive producer Roger Law told an RTS Production Focus in July.

"We're levelling off the politicians on the show and bringing in people who know what they're doing, like the footballers," he added drily.

Law, now 79, is one of the original team that created the show. He is clearly relishing *Spitting Image*'s second coming and the opportunity it gives him to make mischief at the expense of those who populate our public life.

He showed the RTS a selection of



The spitting image of Priti Patel

Lampooning with latex

The team behind BritBox's reboot of *Spitting Image* explains how to make satire work for millennials

the original drawings on which some of the puppets were based, including depictions of Davie, Idris Elba, Elton John, the Queen and Taylor Swift. "As you can see, the finished puppet is almost attractive, which is unusual for *Spitting Image*," noted Law.

While the show's look is down to this veteran of the satiric arts, who began his career as a political cartoonist for *The Observer* and *Private Eye*, the person in charge of the BritBox series is showrunner Jeff Westbrook, an American whose credits include a stint on the endlessly inventive *The Simpsons*.

His brief was to ensure that the revived *Spitting Image* should have greater international appeal than the programme that, in the 1980s, helped burnish the credentials of the original producer, ITV station Central Television.

Ultimately, he decides who is featured in the show but he stressed the collective effort behind the puppets: "It's a great collaborative process because, often, the caricaturists come up with really funny ideas."

"That visual sense is a big part of the show. That's why Roger is so crucial."

Writer and voice actor Matt Forde

'WE'VE FOUND A GOOD MIDDLE GROUND THAT'S... FUNNY AND [NOT] TOO WOKE'

emphasised the team aesthetic that informs the series: "You have a lot of freedom on the show, whether you want a new puppet or you've got an idea for an existing puppet.

"As writers, we're involved at every stage. Some of it is done individually, where you talk to Jeff. There are other meetings where it's done collaboratively and ideas are knocked around, or we take existing scripts and polish them."

In *Spitting Image*'s previous incarnation, Law and his workshop made more than 1,000 latex heads. "Now, I feel like a superannuated conductor – because, you know how it works, in a workshop, everybody joins in. That is enormous fun and that's what I miss working virtually," he said.

These days everything is done via video calls, which inevitably adds to the stress levels. Making the puppets is time-consuming and takes eight to nine days. "When it works it's fun but, because there's an element of topicality, it is a hard show to get your head around and it's a lot of work," explained Law.

Each episode allots five minutes to poke fun at events that happen during the week of transmission. The very first episode of the reboot tested the team's ability to be as up to date as possible when, on the day before the show was due on air, it emerged that Donald Trump was sick with coronavirus.

"We realised we had some images of Trump tweeting, so we repurposed those so that he was sitting in bed tweeting," recalled Westbrook. "I told the writers that we needed some hilarious tweets. Within half an hour, we managed to slam some in. It was a nerve-racking and horrible experience, but a great example of teamwork."

Clearly, the speed of today's news cycle and the ubiquity of social media present fresh challenges to the reincarnated *Spitting Image*. Said Westbrook: "Often, the obvious joke has been made a lot of times on Twitter, so our job is to find a way to put it into a funny sketch



The spitting image of Greta Thunberg

BritBox

that takes advantage of the puppets and the great voice actors we have. A twist beyond the obvious take."

This is not as easy as it sounds, particularly in a "woke" world. The decision to satirise Greta Thunberg – she was depicted as a weather girl – initially led to outrage by people on social media that such a role model – and an autistic one at that – was being caricatured. However, once Thunberg gave her approval to her puppet, the criticism stopped.

"I thought that working for BritBox we'd have quite a lot of freedom and, indeed, we have had," said Law. "But trying to change – and I'm an old man... Now you've got young people working who are incredibly woke, most of which I've come round to. But it does make things difficult, because you want to make people laugh."

"You don't want to irritate them. You have to be careful. If you say one thing satirically and you mean another, there are a lot of people out there on the net who don't know the difference. But it's our problem and we're dealing with it."

"There were things *Spitting Image* could get away with in the 1980s and 1990s that we can't today," added Nana Hughes, ITV's head of scripted comedy who commissioned the show. "I didn't want to come in as the word police, saying, 'You can't do this, you can't do that.' There's been an interesting dance on what they can get away with."

"I think we've found a good middle ground that works, that's still funny, and which isn't too woke."

"I think we can push it a bit further this series. Compliance has changed massively. Basically, when *Spitting Image* first started, compliance didn't exist."

"They just went for it and apologised afterwards." ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS London Production Focus on Spitting Image was held on 22 July. It was chaired by Benji Wilson, journalist and TV critic at Private Eye. The producer was Damien Ashton-Wellman.

■ Season 2 of Spitting Image starts on 11 September on BritBox.

The Silicon Valley trailblazer



YouTube

YouTube's **Robert Kyncl** never stands still, finds Caroline Frost, as she charts his life from professional cross-country skier to tech pioneer

Los Angeles theatregoers may think they're dreaming when they turn up to a brand-new venue in Inglewood, in the heart of the city, and spot a familiar symbol on its façade – the bright red play sign of its owner, YouTube.

Why would the world's most-viewed website, and a celebrated pioneer in disruptive digital content, want to invest in something as old-school as a live theatre?

This seemingly counter-intuitive move makes a lot of sense, however, to Robert Kyncl, YouTube's chief business officer, who attended the theatre's opening on 9 August. The 6,000-seat theatre, with its two interactive digital walls and facilities for e-sports, live-streamed events and personal

appearances by YouTube's ever-growing stable of stars, is the latest in Kyncl's crusade to square the circle and transform YouTube into a beautifully curated platform for all our entertainment needs.

Kyncl oversees the channel's global content, product partnerships and platform operations. He is navigating a course that tries to serve the kaleidoscopic throng of creators and users who upload a staggering 500 hours of new footage every minute, together with the disparate demands of a global audience that is estimated to watch a billion hours of video every single day.

These very Silicon Valley challenges are a world away from the circumstances into which Kyncl was born in Czechoslovakia, where he grew up in a mountain town. Available distractions

were few and, as a youngster, he spent more hours on skis than in shoes, later describing the sport as less a hobby than a way of life. Indeed, he became so good that, before he was out of his teens, he had turned professional as a cross-country skier.

Things changed around him, though, and the fall of the Iron Curtain made Kyncl hunger for life beyond the mountains – and a career in American business. Having attended university in Prague, he moved to the US in 1992 to finish his degree in New York. He then studied for an MBA on the sunny campus of Pepperdine University in Malibu.

Like so many titans of Hollywood, Kyncl did his time in a talent agency, taking his first job as an assistant at J Michael Bloom and Associates in the mid-1990s. After a stint with a film

financing company, by 1999, Kyncl was able to put his first big company on his CV: Time Warner, where he negotiated global distribution rights for HBO. He stayed there only a year before succumbing to the lure of dot-com mania and joining a technology start-up.

But it was at Netflix, from 2003, that Kyncl really made his mark. His role as vice-president for content was instrumental in transforming the DVD-by-post rental service into a world-leading internet-delivery system. Even more significantly, and offering a taste of what he would pull off more dramatically later in his career, he demonstrated his deal-making prowess by knocking down the walls of Hollywood's biggest studios and bringing them to Netflix's table.

Just as Steve Jobs had previously successfully confounded record labels' fears of music piracy and signed them up to Apple's revolutionary iTunes, Kyncl proved an effective matchmaker between Netflix and suspicious film studios. The rewards for his efforts came in August 2010, when his company signed a reported \$1bn deal with pay-TV company Epix.

The deal secured rights to movies from Paramount, Lionsgate and MGM – bringing an estimated 1,000 new titles to Netflix's burgeoning menu and securing its enduring position as the frontrunner in the on-demand content market.

We already take the streaming of film and TV over the internet for granted, but Kyncl was key to making it happen. And he wasn't finished.

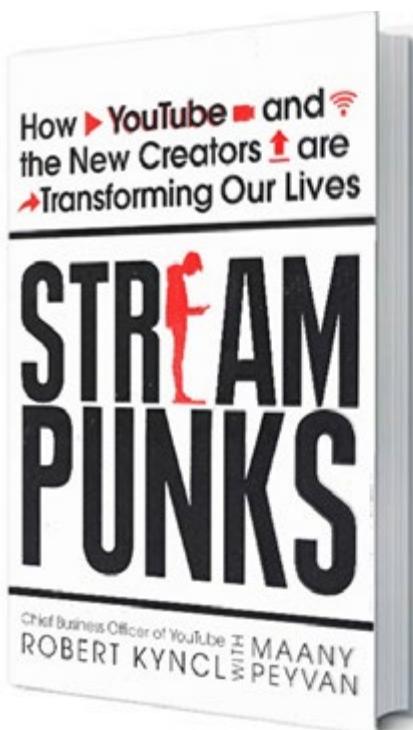
In September 2010, only a month after the Epix deal was signed, he was on his way to YouTube to become its chief business officer. His task was to work out how to turn all those billions of consumer clicks into hard cash for Google, which had bought the video platform for \$1.65bn back in 2006.

The answer, it seems, has been a three-pronged approach to curating the content according to its source: movies and TV shows; web original programming; and user-created content.

Making movies and TV shows accessible – sometimes for a fee, but not always – has seen Kyncl flexing his muscles in much the way as he did during his time at Netflix. At YouTube, he conducts what some describe as

"shuttle diplomacy" between Silicon Valley and Hollywood, aimed at convincing old-school studio execs that it is worth their signatures to use YouTube as another outlet.

And, once again, he has been successful. In his first eight months at YouTube, Kyncl triumphed where others had failed, and reached deals with Warner, Universal and Sony that added 3,000 film titles to the platform's on-demand rental service.



"We've gone from the platform that made them no money and they were suing, to the platform that is paying out massive amounts of money and lots of usage for them," is how Kyncl describes it. Steve Jobs couldn't have put it better.

YouTube's second prong targets content creators, who have enjoyed the benefit of Kyncl's transparent respect for disruptors of the entertainment ecosystem. Fifty per cent of YouTube's entire offering now consists of hundreds of thousands of self-made YouTube stars teaching viewers everything from yoga to creating a flawless soufflé or guiding us through our iPhone settings.

Kyncl has become a champion of this "creator economy", giving regular shout-outs to his favourites on social media, and even finding the time to co-author two books on the subject of

"streampunks" and how these media rebels are transforming all our lives.

His celebration of the "little guy" as a commercial mechanism finds equal force in his personal endeavours. A regular recipient of humanitarian awards, he runs a foundation with his wife, Luz, focused on supporting underserved communities, and he is a high-profile fundraiser for events in aid of the financially disadvantaged.

For the past decade, Kyncl has been a regular and rising entry in US power and influence lists released every year by publications such as *Variety*.

Meanwhile, YouTube's increased focus on original programming has seen Kyncl and his team seeking to exploit the platform's unmatched global reach. Their approach is not to compete with other providers, rather to complement traditional TV by reaching out to untapped, often niche, markets. An example is its Threadbanger channel for stylish DIY on a shoestring.

Kyncl makes no pretence of knowing it all and there have been aborted experiments and dramatic changes of direction along the way. For example, a paywall for original programming was swiftly taken down in favour of increased viewer numbers and advertising. Google continues to scratch its head when working out how best to monetise this extraordinary behemoth, which remains the world's second most viewed website (after Google itself).

But there have also been extraordinary, unpredicted triumphs, with Kyncl once again playing a key role in a cultural revolution – the creation of new stars whose fortunes and fan followings would make a Marvel action hero weep.

Kevin Paffrath was a fairly standard real-estate broker in his twenties until he started posting a daily commentary video on YouTube, advising viewers on housing stocks and improvement grants. He now has 1.6 million followers, a fortune of over \$10m and is running for Governor of California. He is doing well in the polls. If he wins, like so many other people, he will know he couldn't have got there without the work of Robert Kyncl. ■

Robert Kyncl is an international keynote speaker at the RTS Cambridge Convention 2021.



Casualty's current series, its 36th

BBC

Breaking all medical records

On a mild autumnal Saturday on 6 September 1986, the first week after the summer holidays, the nation collectively sat down in front of the telly. Viewers may have flicked between the four channels available, but most were curious about BBC One's big new drama, *Casualty*.

Since the familiar, high-intensity theme tune played out that evening, those 1980s-tastic opening credits may have evolved into something more contemporary but, at its core, *Casualty* remains the same.

Now as then, *Casualty* holds a mirror up to British society and its treatment of the vulnerable, which helps to explain its longevity. "The fact that we have an NHS that embraces everybody makes *Casualty* different from other hospital shows around the world. Any Tom, Dick and Harry can walk through those sliding doors and be treated for whatever ailment they have," says Deborah Sathe, executive producer for

As *Casualty* celebrates its 35th anniversary, **Shilpa Ganatra** diagnoses the secret of its longevity

BBC Studios, which makes the series.

"For me, it's about seeing humanity in all its glory at that moment of crisis, whether it's a mother carrying her ill child, or a pile-up on the M1. It's seeing ordinary people do extraordinary things, and extraordinary things happening to ordinary people."

"You have a collection of heroes akin to Marvel's Avengers, who have to deal, day in, day out, with these crises and develop a shorthand, a gallows humour and a banter among them that makes them irresistible to watch."

Casualty, winner of five RTS awards, was created by Jeremy Brock and Paul Unwin. They had worked together in the theatre but, remarkably, had never

before done TV – although they were fans of US shows such as *M*A*S*H* and *Hill Street Blues* with their multi-strand storylines.

They were deeply concerned about what they regarded as the Thatcherite attacks on the health service. After their own experiences as NHS patients, they wanted to tease out the friction inherent in "the frontline in the battle for the soul of the NHS", as they explained in a BBC blog published in 2011.

A decade later, the NHS is more of a political battleground than ever, but the show's approach is subtle – there are pointers to the pressure the health service faces, but not enough that you could accuse the BBC of breaking any impartiality guidelines.

For Digital Spy's soaps editor, Daniel Kilkelly, who began watching *Casualty* as a child in the 1990s, the show's initial appeal lay in its stunts. "You can always rely on that unspoken guarantee that, when you tune into *Casualty*, you're going to be in for a treat with some big on-screen spectacles," he says. "I

remember *Casualty* being part of the Saturday-night routine, alongside *Noel's House Party* and *The National Lottery Live*.

"Over the years, it has stayed true to its roots, whereas other shows have fallen into the trap of making drastic changes that can sometimes alienate the audience. And now, unusually for a continuing drama, it's a show that you can dip in and out of. With other soaps and continuing dramas, you can't do that as easily, because the ongoing storylines are a lot heavier."

"But it is possible to not watch *Casualty* for a few months and then, if you happen to be home on a Saturday, you can tune in and enjoy the self-contained stories for what they are."

Inevitably, other hospital TV dramas emerged in the years that followed *Casualty*'s launch: there was its spin-off, *Holby City*, of course, plus Stateside dramas such as *ER*, *Chicago Hope* and *Grey's Anatomy*. But *Casualty*'s MO of being a relatable medical drama that leans towards social realism – with all the high-stakes pressure, gore and personal dynamics that this entails – has helped it become the longest-running prime-time medical drama in the world.

"When *ER* came along, which was an amped-up, thrilling and beautiful show, where people like George Clooney were doctors, it made *Casualty* look like an elderly auntie. Yet *ER* stopped in 2009 and *Casualty* continued," says Jane Tranter, co-founder of Bad Wolf and a former BBC head of drama and *Casualty* script editor. "I think there's something so utterly relatable and British about *Casualty*. When an audience looked at that world, they could compare it and relate it to their world."

There's another benefit to reflecting modern society: it allows the series to evolve naturally. "We've told the stories of refugees, the story of gender identity, the story of how cultural acceptance has evolved over the years, and covered new-fangled diseases. That's what keeps the show fresh, because society is changing all the time, ergo, so does *Casualty*," says Sathe.

More examples tumble out: a recent storyline focused on emotional coercion, with a man, nurse manager Jacob, as the victim. There's a new, non-binary character filming in the studio at the time of writing. Last year's Rose d'Or-nominated episode, which focused on Jade Lovall (played by Gabriella Leon), was a particularly progressive one.

Not only did it feature a main deaf character in Jade, but it was written by



Casualty's first episode in 1986 introduced Holby ED's longest serving staffer, Charlie Fairhead

BBC

screenwriters Charlie Swinbourne and Sophie Woolley and had a director, (John Maidens), who are deaf, adding to the authenticity.

"Then, they didn't do what a lot of other shows might and ignore the fact that Jade is deaf," says Kilkelly. "The challenges that she faces appear in episodes quite regularly."

The coronavirus episode, which won the latest of the show's five Baftas, helps us remember why *Casualty* is a "national treasure", as Tranter puts it. Telling the story of the pandemic through flashbacks, it emotively centred on the moments that defined the pandemic in hospitals: the invisible tidal wave rolling in from Italy, the exhaustion, the TikTok dances, the lack of PPE, the painful decisions about patients' lives.

Says Kilkelly: "They quite rightly decided that they had to tell the story of how the emergency department had coped with coronavirus, and it was fantastic for the show to win a Bafta in its 35th year.

"It was such an emotional episode because it featured the death of Noel, who was a fan favourite, and that shows how bold *Casualty* can be sometimes – it was an example of where the show didn't hold back.

"There's a brilliant line from Connie where she said, 'The NHS was on its knees already, then we get hit with a pandemic and they expect us to perform miracles'. While the political element is toned down now, it is a good move when they bring in those

real-life elements to it, and you see it as part of the wider world."

The UK's TV industry has also benefitted from the talent that has staggered or been wheeled through *Holby City* Hospital's emergency department doors, not least because it is filmed well away from London, in Cardiff (one of the reasons it has held its space in the schedules while *Holby City*, filmed in Elstree, is set to wind down next year). "The roll call for *Casualty* is quite nice," notes Tranter.

Aside from herself, there is acting talent such as Academy award-winner Brenda Fricker and Robson Green. It also provided early breaks for the likes of Kate Winslet, Orlando Bloom and Daisy Ridley, as well as programme-making talent that includes Antonia Bird, Tony McHale, Catherine Morshead, Bill Gallagher, Daisy Coulam and casting director Catherine Willis, among many others.

The acclaim continues to roll in and, with its 35th anniversary special reinvigorating its fans while once again stretch-testing the formula, *Casualty*'s vitals are good – and it may well have the strength to take on *Coronation Street*, which recently marked its 60th anniversary, for longevity.

"*Casualty* is an emergency room that responds to the extraordinary needs of the citizens of this country – that's never going to stop changing, or being entertaining or heart-warming," says Sathe. "So why not give *Corrie* a run for its money? I'd like to try." ■



Ofcom

Steve Clarke profiles the regulator's CEO, **Melanie Dawes**, who is also a trustee of youth charity the Patchwork Foundation

Ofcom's diversity champion

All eyes will be on Melanie Dawes when she speaks at the RTS Cambridge Convention in mid-September. The CEO of Ofcom for the past tumultuous 18 months was preceded by the charismatic Sharon White – a star attraction at the conference whenever she spoke.

"Melanie Dawes is the most experienced and impressive Chief Executive that Ofcom has had," opines an industry insider. And this will be the first opportunity most of her audience has had to hear her in person, thanks to the pandemic.

From a broadcasting perspective, Dame Melanie's Cambridge appearance could not be more timely. Her in-tray is bulging. A media white paper is due later this autumn and will follow Ofcom's 70-page report on public service broadcasting published in July.

The document called for greater flexibility and heralded "the biggest shake-up in PSB for 20 years," according to Dawes, a civil service veteran of more than three decades. "Our plan of action sets out how the industry, government and Ofcom can together build a stronger system of public service media that can thrive in the digital age," she promised.

Some, however, bridled at that expression "public service media". They wondered if the definition could ultimately lead to greater pressure on the existing PSBs – perhaps resulting in more top slicing of the BBC licence fee.

Colin Browne, Chair of the Voice of the Listener & Viewer, says: "Ofcom's PSB recommendations were good on prominence, but otherwise were open-ended and allow the Government a lot of leeway to do whatever it wants."

"We're concerned about what the criteria are for measuring public service delivery and that other players can have PSB benefits as part of the reinvention of PSB as public service media."

There is little doubt that Dawes's tenure at Ofcom comes at a particularly sensitive juncture both for Ofcom, as it is still without a chair, and the sectors it is responsible for regulating.

"It must be a very nervous time for Dame Melanie – although all her life she has had to find a way to deal with mad politicians of all parties, which

gives you a particular mindset," says a senior broadcaster.

He continues: "She is quite adroit at delivering what her masters or mistresses want and finding her way through the political thicket. There's a downside to that – because, sometimes at Ofcom, you have to stand up for stuff that matters."

Some believe that Ofcom's arm's length relationship with government is threatened after reports that the Prime Minister wanted ex-*Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre as the regulator's new Chair, and the Government refused to renew two Channel 4 board appointments in the spring, despite Ofcom's approval.

Stewart Purvis, a former Ofcom head of content and CEO of ITN, says: "There is concern that Melanie Dawes, who doesn't have any experience of the sector Ofcom regulates, still lacks a permanent Chair to help steer her through what are incredibly complex issues.

"Sharon White had Lord Burns and, before that, Patricia Hodgson. Both brought a lot of broadcasting expertise to Ofcom's decision-making.

"It is vital that someone suitably qualified is appointed chair so Ofcom can demonstrate unequivocally that it is independent of the Government, while taking account of its views but standing up to the Government where it feels it is necessary."

Interviewed by Times Radio in July, Dawes insisted that Ofcom was "scrupulously independent", adding: "I would be really surprised if any new Chair arriving in Ofcom didn't feel that sense of independence."

Aside from broadcasting, there is the crucial question of online regulation. The watchdog is engaged in hiring between 250 and 300 new staff (it currently employs around 1,000 people) to undertake the challenging task of regulating social media.

"I certainly think we need to grow new skills, we know that; and particularly to get into regulating the social media platforms, we've got to recruit more people who have direct experience of emerging and online technologies," acknowledged Dame Melanie in her interview.

She was fiercely vocal in her criticism of the racist social media abuse of England's footballers Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka after

each missed penalties in the shoot-out against Italy in the Euros final. Tellingly, she said that companies such as Twitter had acted too slowly in removing abuse.

Dawes, who is married to the ex-*Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* political editor Benedict Brogan, is steeped in navigating Whitehall's corridors of power. She joined the Civil Service as an economic assistant in 1989, having been educated at Malvern Girls' College and New College, Oxford,

be representative of them. And there is no doubt that mono-cultures can develop if everyone comes from the same background. That's not healthy for any organisation."

Ofcom's apparent inability to crack the whip in relation to broadcasters' unwillingness to radically move the dial on diversity was the subject of an article by Marcus Ryder in these pages just over a year ago.

But it looks as if Dame Melanie is determined to see real change across the UK broadcasting landscape. Appearing before the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee in December 2020, she said that, to rebuild trust, broadcasters should bring back into the industry the ethnic-minority people who had left it – "the generation of people out there who might have come through but were not able to". Expect her to be on the BBC's case when it comes to having a more diverse management team.

Questioned about the appointment of "yet another" white, middle-class male to the BBC Director-General role, Dawes criticised the lack of representation in the corporation's upper ranks: "The BBC structure is not representative on most measures and that is a real issue."

Veteran diversity campaigner Simon Albury, Chair of the Campaign for Broadcasting Equality, is impressed. He is not alone in discovering her eagerness to win over people in the TV sector. "She is relaxed and charming and open to hearing what you have to say," he says. "Dame Melanie has the kind of confidence that puts you at ease."

How her people skills – she once said that kindness was an underrated leadership quality – play out in Ofcom's relationship with the BBC remains to be seen. However, there are signs that Tim Davie's relationship with the regulator has got off to a good start. Any initial resentment the BBC had over being regulated by Ofcom has, it seems, largely evaporated.

"The BBC hated having an outside regulator," says a rival broadcaster. "It had been marking its own homework for almost 100 years and disliked having an outside regulator with opinions on things such as regional investment and diversity. But Tim Davie is much more pragmatic and will want to make the relationship work." ■

'MONO-CULTURES [ARE] NOT HEALTHY FOR ANY ORGANISATION'

before doing postgraduate economics at Birkbeck College, London.

Two years ago, on the 30th anniversary of her becoming a civil servant, she tweeted: "Five departments and seven elections later, I can honestly say it's never been boring. Above all, I've been lucky to work with amazing people inside and outside the #BrilliantCivilService."

The most prominent female civil servant in the UK, Dawes's gilded Whitehall career included 15 years at the Treasury, three and a half at the Cabinet Office and, in 2015, she became Permanent Secretary at what is now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Her non-executive roles have included the consumer body Which? and she is a trustee of the Patchwork Foundation, which helps under-represented young people get involved in democracy.

We know little about what Dame Melanie enjoys on TV other than that she is a devoted fan of *Strictly*: in 2019, she tweeted to congratulate the show on Motsi Mabuse replacing Darcey Bussell – a "fab new judge", she opined.

Her commitment to improving workplace diversity is well known. In 2015, she wrote: "I strongly believe that diversity is not just a nice-to-have – if we want to work effectively on behalf of the communities we serve, we must

Why true crime pays

The country is in the grip of an escalating crime wave, yet the public can't get enough of it. Viewers used to get their vicarious thrills from fictional detective drama – now we are becoming fixated on real-life serial killers and violent psychopaths.

This autumn, True Crime on Channel 4 is set to join the Channel 4 family – and go up against two existing bespoke true-crime channels, A+E Networks UK's Crime + Investigation and Sky Crime.

The new streaming service promises fresh home-grown series, programmes from the All 4 catalogue and acquisitions, including *Surviving Jeffrey Epstein* and *I, Sniper: The Washington Killers* (see box on page 19).

Channel 4 head of factual Danny Horan says that, "year on year, the quality [of programmes] rises, as does the appetite for more stories, particularly with younger audiences".

One new commission, *Bling Ring*, recounts how a wave of burglaries hit the homes of LA celebs such as Paris Hilton and Orlando Bloom. It is squarely aimed at younger viewers, who lap up true-crime TV and podcasts.

Channel 4 commissioning editor Jonah Weston says: "This is a classic

Matthew Bell weighs the evidence for why this documentary genre is more popular than ever in the UK

'only in Hollywood' tale, and I think audiences will love the mix of celebrity and social media."

On its launch in October 2019, Sky Crime promised a roster of US and UK series that would take the viewer from "savage serial killers, unexplained disappearances and love stories gone sour [to] some of the most harrowing, chilling and heartbreakng crimes".

For viewers who prefer their true crime dramatised, ITV continues to make outstanding factual dramas. In just two years, it has offered a Hammer House of Horror: *Des*, featuring David Tennant's chilling portrayal of serial killer Dennis Nilsen; *The Pembrokeshire Murders*; *White House Farm*, about convicted murderer Jeremy Bamber; and *A Confession*, starring Martin Freeman as DS Steve Fulcher on the trail of Christopher Halliwell.

This autumn, *Manhunt* returns to ITV, with Martin Clunes as real-life cop DCI Colin Sutton pursuing a serial rapist of

elderly women. The broadcaster is also offering *Stephen*, a sequel to Paul Greengrass's 1999 drama *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence*, starring Sharlene Whyte and Hugh Quarshie as Doreen and Neville Lawrence, and Steve Coogan as DCI Clive Driscoll.

Jeff Pope, who wrote *A Confession* and is an executive producer of BBC One's upcoming Jimmy Savile factual drama, explained the pull of true crime on him at an RTS event: "If drama is about conflict, which it is, you're looking for the extremes of conflict. Those areas are love, hate and, I would argue, crime. I am not a depressive person or ghoulish but it's the old journalist in me – there's a good story in it."

But what attracts audiences? Whether in newspapers, books or detective series, crime has long been the Brits' staple fiction. George Orwell, in *Decline of the English Murder*, noted the public's insatiable thirst for voyeuristic murder reports in the tabloids. Agatha Christie is reckoned to have sold 2 billion copies of her works, and many of TV's most-watched dramas, from *Z Cars* to *Line of Duty*, pit cops against robbers.

Now we find ourselves in the golden age of the TV crime documentary. "The appetite for true crime is stratospheric," says Dan Korn, VP of programming at A+E Networks UK,

whose channels include Crime + Investigation, which turned 15 in July. The popularity of TV detective drama feeds into true crime, says Korn, who highlights the “immediacy and accessibility of crime – every day, it is in the news”.

True crime may be attracting more younger viewers, but on Crime + Investigation and elsewhere, women – in particular, “women in their forties”, he says – are its core audience. “A lot of the victims are women... and there is this identification and affinity with the perils that women experience in society.”

He adds: “For some women, and this is not to trivialise it, crime stories have a bit of a soap-opera quality to them. Some of the titles, *Nightmare Next Door* or *Women Who Kill*, have a tabloidesque or soap-opera aspect.”

The big streamers, particularly Netflix with its Emmy award-winning *Making a Murderer* focused on US killer Steven Avery, have revolutionised true crime. “They’re so well made and glossy, I think people almost think they are drama rather than real life,” says Korn.

Arrow Pictures creative director John Smithson argues that “audiences want detail and, if something draws them in, the ability to binge view”. With his track record – he produced Bafta-winning docu-drama *Touching the Void*, as well as many crime docs – few people are as well qualified in the field as Smithson. “We’re in a race to the top, [striving for] originality and quality, and with the money to do it. There are now equal levels of ambition and creativity, whether it’s scripted or non-scripted.”

Of course, the genre can sometimes plumb the depths of taste. “Particularly with American content, one has to be careful that it’s not just lurid, salacious, tabloid stuff,” says Korn.

He argues that the sustainability of the true-crime boom “depends on everybody being respectful and careful, and doing it for the right reasons – not dwelling on the salacious but looking at what you can bring journalistically that is new”.

Staleness, too, is a risk: “It’s incumbent on everyone in the space to be saying something different and to cover [different] crimes.... Levi Bellfield [the serial killer] is a classic case in point – he’s been covered and covered.

“I don’t want to be over-pious but, as long as everyone is in it for the right reasons, doing the right kind of content, I see no reason why true crime shouldn’t sustain for some time to come.” ■



The Chevy Caprice used in *I, Sniper...*

Channel 4

Inside the mind of a mass murderer

Over three weeks in October 2002, former US soldier John Muhammad and young Jamaican Lee Malvo, the so-called ‘DC Snipers’, carried out a series of attacks in and around Washington DC. This was the culmination of an indiscriminate shooting spree that began months earlier and, in total, took the lives of 17 people. Muhammad was executed, while Malvo is serving multiple life sentences.

A new six-part documentary from UK factual indie Arrow Pictures, *I, Sniper: The Washington Killers*, is the centrepiece of the launch of True Crime on Channel 4. The series, which features remarkable access to Malvo in prison, was 15 years in gestation and took four years make.

New York-based British producer Mary-Jane Mitchell had made a documentary for Channel 4, *Hunting the Washington Sniper*, in the wake of the shootings and remained in contact with Malvo. ‘She built up trust and ultimately was able to go on his phone list,’ explains Arrow Pictures creative director John Smithson.

‘Five years ago, Mary-Jane and I talked about trying to tell the story of this iconic crime. We weren’t seeking to exonerate [Malvo] – there’s no question of his guilt – but we were seeking

to understand him. We felt this was a unique opportunity to use his voice from all the audio accumulated over years of calls [to the prison].’

Smithson says Malvo is ‘intelligent and lucid’, and able to offer ‘a real insight’ into the shootings. ‘We look at his background as a kid in Jamaica, trying to understand how a 16- to 17-year-old fell under the influence of this older man, the ex-Gulf War veteran John Muhammad.’

Until recently, *I, Sniper* would have been, at most, a full-length doc, assembled from archive and interviews with police and the victims’ families. But true crime – in the wake of landmark series such as *Making a Murderer* and HBO’s *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst* – is increasingly made at multi-episodic drama length.

‘The bar has gone higher and higher and higher. You can now do just one crime story over six hours,’ says Smithson. ‘People were prepared to pay proper money, and that enabled us to do the research, accumulate material and find the key people – and gave us the time to shoot and edit it with classy directors and editors....’

‘*I, Sniper* was an incredibly complex and challenging production but, ultimately, it has been very rewarding as a creative exercise.’



Caroline Frost talks to **Kevin Mayer**, the Disney veteran who oversaw the launch of Disney+ and who aims to turn DAZN into the Netflix of sport

At the beginning of August, Reese Witherspoon sold her company, Hello Sunshine. Even in a world where film-stars-turned-brands have become 10 a penny, the Oscar winner made international headlines thanks to the jaw-dropping sale price – reportedly \$900m. Witherspoon said she was “thrilled to be working with Blackstone, Kevin, and Tom to grow a next-generation media company”.

That Kevin was Kevin Mayer and, if this latest venture brought him more

attention than he has had throughout his 25-year career, including his roles at Disney, TikTok and now DAZN, it is also the natural evolution for a man who has made magic out of identifying the next sweet spot where technology and entertainment meet.

This prophetic skill was first in evidence way back in the early 1990s, when Mayer took his first job at Disney. He recalls realising the potential for the online delivery of entertainment: “We were a bit ahead of our time. We traded a venture with some telephone companies. We were going

to deliver this on-demand streaming content over the internet in the late 1990s – but the internet wasn’t ready for it, it wasn’t capable.”

By the time Mayer returned to Disney, in 2005, this time as executive vice-president for corporate strategy and development, technology was catching up with his vision. Disney boss Bob Iger commissioned him to position the company so that it could deliver content to people’s devices. Most eye-catchingly in the decade that followed, that meant embarking on an unprecedented spending spree.

Mayer explains why acquisitions were always going to be as important as any technological innovation: “We wanted to future-proof the company. We could see that technology was going to enable consumers to have more and more control over what they consumed and where. We didn’t know what that meant for our business models and how we got revenues and profits.

“We wanted to make sure we had the right assets in place [and] we had the right content and brands that mattered most to consumers – so that, no matter what happened to technology, no matter how it impacted the delivery of content, our content would be needed.

“Buy the brands because, in a world of infinite choice, brands really matter, and high-quality content would be better in the long run. We thought that doing fewer things better would be super important in the future, and that led to our acquisitions.

“We couldn’t do all of that on our own. Sometimes, you have to go buy some things – and, in hindsight, we made some very judicious acquisitions.

“It’s hard to imagine Disney without Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars, Hulu. What would Disney be without those? A much, much smaller company, probably part of another company. We’d have been bought by now.”

Mayer’s achievements during his 15-year tenure no doubt helped the meteoric rise of Disney’s share price during the period.

Appropriately for a man who studied electrical engineering at college and wanted to be a naval aviator when he was in high school, it is a technological disruption that is Mayer’s own proudest memory: “I loved the acquisitions, seeing them flower and bloom, but my own personal favourite is launching Disney+ and ESPN+. I took them from the

beginning, bought the technical infrastructure to launch them and assembled the team. I love leading teams.”

Last year saw some huge changes for Mayer. He resigned from Disney to become COO of the Chinese company ByteDance, which made him the boss of social media app TikTok at a time of

public and then the Spac is gone. I’m still on the board at Beachbody [one of the company’s first acquisitions]. I thought the Spac was relatively fast moving, I’d never done it before, and it was a lot of fun.”

What made October 2020 the ideal time for such a move? “There’s a time

Reese Witherspoon



extraordinary growth and engagement beyond the initial youth market. Unfortunately, this also coincided with some serious arm-twisting by the Trump White House to force ByteDance to sever its US operations.

While this move was halted, Mayer left after only a few months, but has only positive things to say. He reflects: “It was testing. One thing I realised is that geopolitical matters can have a huge impact. From a product perspective, it was incredible. The team were all high-quality people, good and solid. TikTok is an exceptionally high-quality product; the unique characteristics of the AI [plus] the ability to parse and get short-form videos to the audience in real time, at scale, are remarkable.

“I use it all the time and it will be a permanent part of the future of entertainment. It was unfortunate that the geopolitical factors got in the way of what I think I could have accomplished there.”

Mayer didn’t exactly go and lick his wounds, nor rest on his laurels. Instead, last October, the corporate veteran went on his own down a path that he makes sound deceptively simple. He raised \$300m of capital and founded a Spac (special purpose acquisition company) called Forest Road Acquisition Group, with former Disney colleague Tom Staggs.

Mayer explains: “Spacs are ephemeral. You buy a company, you take it

for everything.” Mayer replies. “I’d been in corporate jobs for a long time. They were great but being out of my comfort zone is being more entrepreneurial. I had the platform, some notoriety, I was able to marshal some forces together and I thought, what the hell?”

While Reese Witherspoon’s profile is headline-grabbing, for Mayer it is her business acumen and the values he shares with her team that made the

“When we sat down with Hello Sunshine for the very first meeting, I gave my little spiel – the intersection of technology, content and commerce – and they opened their deck and the first page read ‘Content, commerce and community’. We had the exact same viewpoint for the future, and it’s a match made in heaven.”

Somehow, Mayer has also found the time since February to become Chair of the DAZN Group, the sports streaming company he wants to make “the Netflix of sports”. How? He barely takes a breath before replying: “By delivering what people want at a time and place that people want it.

“It expands the opportunity to see your favourite sports content wherever you may be, but it also allows you to deliver incremental values, such as different camera angles, opportunities for betting – most betting is done in-game – and the ability to have commerce opportunities, be it jerseys or NFTs [non-fungible tokens, or unique digital content]. It expands the opportunity for fans to get what they want out of sports.”

With other board roles, either non-exec or advisory, to fill in any spare hours of the day, I wonder if there is an overall mission statement for Mayer’s future roles. “A unified field theory?” he asks, still the science enthusiast. “I love operating at the intersection of



acquisition of Hello Sunshine such an easy decision.

“I have a vision for entertainment that includes traditional long-form content, and the sale of that to streaming channels, but I am also a firm believer than you can extend those properties to social media and connect with influencers and followers for incredible monetisation opportunities.

technology and entertainment. I think it’s an incredible universe of opportunity, challenge, change and dynamism. That’s where I am going to spend the rest of my career. You’ll see that theme running across everything else I do.” ■

Kevin Mayer is an international keynote speaker at the RTS Cambridge Convention 2021.



Stay public – or go private?

Few broadcasting controversies generate as much heat as the vexed topic of selling off Channel 4 – and so it proved at an engaging RTS debate held late last month, “Levelling up: How much could privatisation change Channel 4’s remit?”.

The remit has evolved over time. Since the 2003 Communications Act, the broadcaster’s remit has been largely voluntary. David Elstein, the former Thames, Sky and Channel 5 executive, provocatively claimed that the remit is nowadays “mostly mythical”.

He alone among the RTS panellists supported the Government’s proposal to privatise the television company. He told the RTS that, currently, Channel 4’s only obligations were to air four hours of news in peak time each week, plus four hours of current affairs, not necessarily all in peak time.

A high-powered RTS panel draws the battle lines in the debate over Channel 4’s future

“Everything else is voluntarily,” said Elstein. “There is no requirement for Channel 4 to broadcast any new programmes at all other than news. It’s a 70% repeats channel.” He added: “Privatisation is the last opportunity the Government has to impose a tougher remit on Channel 4 and to require that from new owners.”

Unsurprisingly, this characterisation of a network commonly seen as edgy, mischievous and original – and whose recent shows, such as *The Lateish Show with Mo Gilligan* and the coverage of the Tokyo Paralympics, encapsulate the

spirit of the channel’s original remit – proved contentious.

Two of the other three panellists were quick to come to Channel 4’s defence. Melanie Leach, a successful independent producer of 25 years’ standing, predicted that the UK’s world-beating indie sector would collapse were it not for state-owned, non-profit-making Channel 4. It, of course, commissions all its programmes from third parties.

She recounted how her own career, which benefited from working for Plymouth-based Twofour Productions, then a young independent, would have been very different without Channel 4.

“If Channel 4 hadn’t supported small start-ups, I would have thought twice about whether I wanted to take that leap and entrepreneurial risk,” she added, referring to her own new company, South Shore Productions. She argued that selling off Channel 4

would halt job creation in the UK production sector in its tracks and prevent independents building their businesses by using the so-called terms of trade to retain their intellectual property.

Leach maintained that Twofour's successful *Educating...* strand on Channel 4 would never have been made were the station privately owned. Nor would *Joe Lycett's Got Your Back*, which had brought young audiences to consumer journalism.

"Channel 4 serves more young audiences than any other PSB in the UK, and that audience is part of the remit," stressed Leach. "Their digital numbers speak for themselves."

Alan Clements, ex-STV executive and now the boss of independent Two Rivers Media, warned that privatising Channel 4 would spell disaster for UK indies and their hard-won terms of trade. It was these that made "quite a difficult business" workable.

"For me, privatisation is a solution seeking a question," he said. "Channel 4 works perfectly well supporting a vibrant creative sector." He traced the Government's enthusiasm for selling the broadcaster to August 2019, when former Channel 4 news and current affairs chief Dorothy Byrne gave her MacTaggart lecture, in the course of which she labelled Boris Johnson "a liar". His Government's urge to change the status quo was simply "vindictive", Clements suggested.

While the remit today forces few obligations on Channel 4, the broadcaster still possesses a unique culture, he said: "As producers, when we're in development, we know when somebody has come up with an idea that's right for Channel 4, because it's mischievous or diverse. It goes beyond what's written down in legislation."

The fourth panellist, Marcus Ryder, the ex-head of current affairs at BBC Scotland who is now head of external consultancies at the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, stressed the importance of separating Channel 4's remit from its ownership model.

He reminded the RTS that, before the 2003 Communications Act, Channel 4 was required to broadcast seven hours of education programmes a week plus three hours of multicultural content and an hour of religion.

Ryder wanted the debate over Channel 4's future to broaden its scope to include the "vital" matter of how it is regulated by Ofcom and how it fits into the overall UK broadcasting system.

"We need to make sure that we have a channel that is radical and represents diverse views," he stressed.

In today's world of "peak TV", what did Channel 4 broadcast that could not be found elsewhere? Elstein didn't mention any specific programmes, but described the current remit as much "fluffier" than what had gone before, when regulators enforced PSB across a range of genres.



Channel 4

The Lateish Show with Mo Gilligan

"The latest mantra from the Channel 4 Chief Executive is that its job is to 'Change the world through entertainment,'" scoffed the ex-ITV boss. He claimed that the average UK adult got "one minute per day of public service content from Channel 4".

Ryder sounded nostalgic as he recalled some of the station's early multicultural shows, such as the black sitcom *Desmond's* and black current-affairs show *The Bandung File*, and the backing given to the Black Film Collective in the 1980s.

He castigated Channel 4 for its insensitivity in failing to remove *Bo' Selecta* from All 4 until last year's Black Lives Matters protests drew attention to how it used blackface to depict black entertainers. "Channel 4 has apologised for what it now acknowledges was highly offensive," noted Ryder.

Regarding potential buyers for the station, the "very obvious ones", according to Elstein, were Discovery, Viacom and Comcast. There was room for a lot of efficiencies. He recalled that, when running Channel 5, he proposed merging 4 with 5, which could have saved £130m a year in backroom costs.

"Massive savings" could be generated were Viacom, owner of Channel 5, to buy Channel 4. The money could then be reinvested in content. "There

is a lot of opportunity for outside buyers," Elstein insisted.

He said the broadcaster's wage bill was "the highest of any in UK media", as its 912 staff earned an average of £100,000 a year. "If I owned Channel 4, I would cut that very large wage bill," he promised.

Elstein had no doubt that buyers would emerge, although the terms of any sale were key: "This is an opportunity for the Government to impose tougher rules on a privatised Channel 4 than it is able to impose on a publicly owned one. This is paradoxical but true."

Ryder agreed that the regulation of private companies could be tougher than that of public sector organisations, citing the phenomenon of "regulatory capture", whereby regulators could be found working "hand in glove with the people they were regulating".

While acknowledging the importance of Channel 4's distinct culture, much related to Ofcom's role. "Channel 4's culture is a legacy of the old tough remit that was imposed by regulators," opined Ryder, referring to Ofcom's predecessor, the Independent Television Commission. "Channel 4 needs tough and rigorous regulation."

Clements was sceptical that a Channel 4 owned by a US media company would do anything to protect British independent producers: "Companies such as Viacom couldn't care less about the UK indie sector, and the idea that any savings would be automatically reinvested in programming is fanciful."

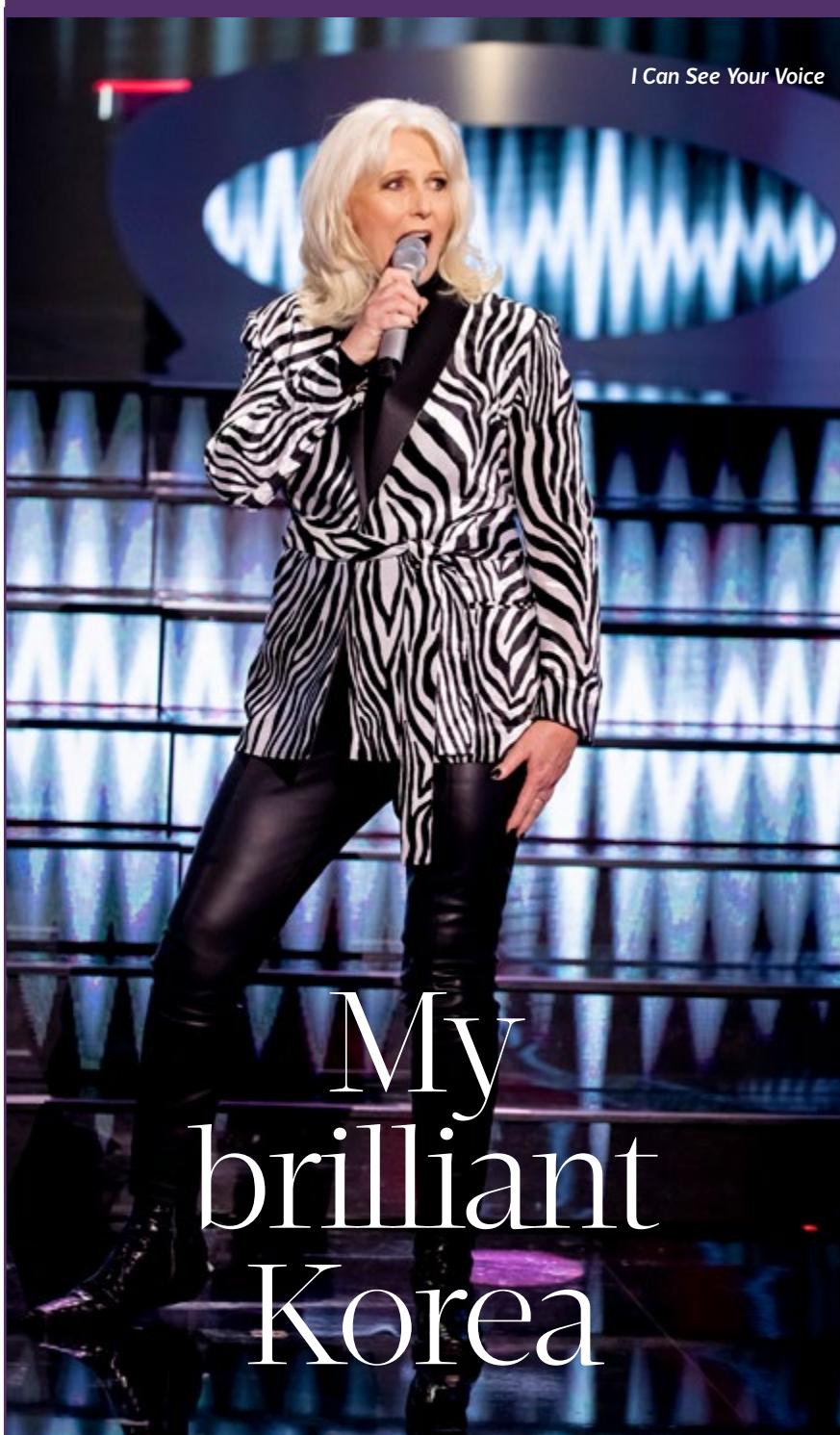
He praised Channel 4's new out-of-London strategy, which he said was "irreversible" as real money was finally being spent by the broadcaster in the nations and regions.

"This year, Channel 4 will spend 50% of its original content budget in the nations and regions," chipped in Leach. "And it hit that quota two years ahead of target."

Ryder reminded the panel that it was Ofcom that pressured Channel 4 into becoming a devolved broadcaster.

Not to be outdone, Elstein recalled how the Channel 4 board had "almost resigned" when faced with the prospect of having to give up the station's London HQ. ■

Report by Steve Clarke. *'Levelling up: How much could privatisation change Channel 4's remit?' was held on 19 August. The chair was Ciaran Jenkins, Scotland correspondent at Channel 4 News, and the producers were Lisa Campbell and Balihar Khalsa.*



BBC

My brilliant Korea

An RTS panel hears why weird and wonderful shows such as *The Masked Singer* and *I Can See Your Voice* are transforming TV entertainment

Brash, brazen and bonkers, Korean formats such as ITV's *The Masked Singer* and BBC One's *I Can See Your Voice* (*ICSYV*) have swept into British homes in Saturday-night primetime, grabbing audiences and plaudits alike.

In slots previously occupied by long-running shows such as *The X Factor* and *Strictly Come Dancing*, these South Korean formats encapsulate the joy of the new and original.

The Masked Singer melds elements of a guessing game, singing competition, comedy panel show, celebrity and an

audience vote. All wrapped up with outrageous costumes, disguised voices and a big reveal every show.

ICSYV sees a guest artist and a team of two contestants presented with a group of six "mystery singers" — some are good singers while others are atrocious.

The contestants must attempt to eliminate bad singers from the group by guessing who they are without hearing them sing. Over the course of four rounds, they receive clues and help from the show's celebrity panelists. The winning mystery singer is revealed as good or bad via a duet with one of the guest artists. The contestants win a cash prize if they get it right.

Korean TV powerhouse CJ ENM format sales executive Albert Park joined the RTS panel discussion from Seoul. The creator of *ICSYV*, he said that much of these shows' success stems from a TV landscape in South Korea where producers are unafraid to try new things.

"I think originality and uniqueness is something that shapes our culture," he explained. Park stressed that Korean audiences were very trend driven, and keen to share their opinions on both scripted and unscripted shows.

"It gives South Korea's creative industry a unique atmosphere. All the creatives and directors know they have to listen to the voice of the audience, and those audiences are not afraid to speak out."

The shows are ideal for digital audience consumption, with bite-sized, shareable footage perfect for posting on social media and so attracting younger audiences.

"We want to adapt to this digital age, change the environment and setting but always keep the original storytelling in our formats," Park said.

Most Korean entertainment shows are created in-house. "What's unique about Korea is that we have several producers that are assigned to bring in new ideas and formulate new developments. We also contract a lot of outside writers to bring in new ideas and then make junior pilots to test fresh ideas," he explained.

In the UK, *The Masked Singer* is produced by Scottish indie Bandicoot (part of Argonon Group), co-founded by Derek McLean and Daniel Nettleton. McLean, executive producer of *The Masked Singer* and spin-off series *The Masked Dancer*, told the RTS that South Korean TV's willingness to take risks appealed to him.

"It was such a fun, bonkers, different, silly way to do a singing show," said McLean. A former creative director of BBC entertainment for BBC Studios, he knows a thing or two about prime-time, shiny-floor shows. "The first thing we saw and loved was that it was a guessing game. It felt like a hybrid of two genres."

McLean noted that the other interesting thing about optioning a format from South Korea, and Asia generally, compared with European formats, was that Korean TV is happy for local partners to interpret the format in any way they think right for their audience.

"I believe that's why you're seeing such a massive success with all these formats, because the Korean format holders are very open to us changing the format to make it right for us," he said.

Some European format holders are much more rigid and protective when it comes to adapting their shows.

"We knew we had to interpret *The Masked Singer* in the right way to make it feel authentically British," he added. "They've given us the leeway to do that. I hope they feel that is the right thing to do."

ICSYV has been a Saturday-night ratings hit for the BBC, averaging 3.8 million viewers per episode. Rachel Ashdown, BBC entertainment commissioning editor, said the first thing that struck her about the show was the number of reveals it had. "You see a lot of formats where everything happens at the very end of the show but, with *ICSYV*, you're getting a reveal hit every 10 minutes," she noted. "The show has that moment where you'd stay on the sofa and say, 'I'll just wait to see what happens to that one' and, before you know it, it's the end of the show."

Amelia Brown, Managing Director of Thames (a Fremantle label) and executive producer of *ICSYV*, agreed. "The contestants can actually win some money for being terrible at something. It's that easy," she grinned.

Ashdown and Brown have been working on a Christmas special and the second UK season of *ICSYV* planned for 2022. They have noticed a big uptick in the number of bad singers auditioning for the show.

Ashdown said that, while any new peak-time Saturday-night show was not devoid of risk, as a public service broadcaster the BBC was allowed to take punts to find the next hit. "There was a lot of work put into it and a lot of thought. We can afford to take those risks because we are not beholden to

shareholders," she stressed. Ashdown and her colleague, BBC Entertainment controller Kate Phillips, always look for shows that possess heart, humour and scale for BBC One's Saturday-night slots. Ashdown and Brown revealed

drop of know-how from CJ ENM in mounting the UK version.

So how are these shows likely to evolve? The panellists agreed that formats featuring music competitions would continue to occupy key slots in



The Masked Singer

ITV

they watch the audition tapes blind so they can play along with the guessing game.

Brown, who has been making shiny-floor shows for 20 years, including *Britain's Got Talent* and *The X Factor*, said one of the key elements contributing to *ICSYV*'s success is having the contestants walk out on stage amid the mystery of whether they can sing or perform. Even that's part of the guessing game, whether it's an *X Factor* contestant or someone from Basingstoke telling the audience she is going to be Cher on *Stars in their Eyes* before emerging on to the stage after her transformation to gasps and applause from the audience.

The will they, won't they keeps the audience on the edge of their sofas as they contemplate whether the contestant will be a good or bad singer for *ICSYV*.

"The Koreans took that very simple idea and 'gamified' it," said Brown. "It was simple, but brilliant." She said she and her team had squeezed every last

the schedules, Korean or otherwise.

Park said CJ ENM was developing a host of shows that had musical guessing games. The guessing-game element was not a passing fad and was here to stay for the next few years at least.

Had working with Korean formats changed the way UK executives approached making entertainment shows, asked panel host Toby Earle.

"It's quite easy, especially in development, to get stuck and think of variation, especially when you've been known for making a certain type of show," replied Brown. "When you are in a working relationship with people who are risk-takers, who think of big ideas or genre-busting, it helps push you that way." ■

Report by Stuart Kemp. TV critic and broadcaster Toby Earle chaired the RTS session, 'I can see your next smash hit: Korea's Saturday night success story', held on 27 July. The producer was Lucy Hynes.

Watching the detectives



There's a firm logic in the recent push to serve up more original drama by the likes of Channel 5 (*Boleyn*, *The Drowning*) and BritBox (*The Beast Must Die*, *Crime*). For viewers, a gripping drama is a calling card that helps define a channel in an increasingly crowded market.

Within the industry, it is a stake in the ground, a display of creativity and clout. So, it is fascinating to see that the pay-TV crime channel Alibi, owned by UKTV, has thrown its towel in the ring, and shown its full commitment with a succession of new shows in the second half of 2021.

After the summer launch of *Annika*, starring Nicola Walker, December will see the debut of *Ragdoll*, the next detective show from Sid Gentle Films following its runaway success, *Killing Eve*. Later, we'll see *The Diplomat*, set in the British Consulate in Barcelona, digging deep into organised crime in Britain and Spain against the backdrop

Shilpa Ganatra
investigates a new era
for crime drama at
the UKTV-owned pay
channel Alibi

of a modern workplace, and all the friction that entails.

"We've had a couple of launches and some good acquisitions, but this year is the starting gun for the channel, as we have a persistent drum beat of good pieces launching," says Alibi channel director Emma Ayech via Zoom, as drama commissioning editor Philippa Collie Cousins nods in agreement in the adjacent box. "It was meant to be last year, of course, but it got delayed by the pandemic."

After hiring Collie Cousins (formerly head of development at Fresh Pictures and head of drama and comedy development at Hartswood West) in 2018 to steer their drama commissions, the

first result aired the following year. *Traces*, which centred on an all-female forensic team, was a calculated first step. The subject matter was safe territory for the channel and was necessary to establish its move into original commissioning.

That allowed Alibi to take a little more risk with its second commissioned programme, the psychological thriller *We Hunt Together*.

Both paid dividends. *Traces*, produced by Red Production Company and distributed internationally by BBC Studios (owner of UKTV), was later shown on BBC One and boosted its profile no end. "Around 1 million people watched it on Alibi, and 6 million people watched it on the BBC," recalls Ayech. "The second series, which will come out later this year or early next year, will have a much bigger audience – hopefully, this will make Alibi better known with fans of crime drama."

We Hunt Together was the channel's highest-rated show in 2020. It netted 602,000 viewers and was shown by

Showtime in the US. It has been commissioned for a second series, too. The commissions complement a strong acquisition strategy that has brought the likes of *Smother*, *Briarpatch* and *Hudson & Rex* to Alibi.

The channel adopted its current name and remit of crime in 2008, when UKTV rebranded it from UKTV Drama. While Alibi's move into original drama is not a brand refresh, it is the next stage of its evolution.

"If we're going to grow with the times, then having a drama offering is really important," says Ayech. "The commercial reality is that Alibi's a pay channel, and drama has been getting better and better, and having more money spent on it."

"Without that handful of bold, British pieces, we weren't going to be worth paying for. That was the bottom line. So we had to raise our game."

Annika, which made its debut in August, is the most recent original. Based on the successful Radio 4 drama, it sees Bafta-nominated Nicola Walker (*Spooks*, *Unforgotten*), reprise her role as a detective in Scotland's Marine Homicide Unit, which investigates unexplained deaths off the coast of Scotland.

"We were really happy that Nicola Walker was up for it," says Ayech. "It's a nice one to hopefully get new viewers in and satisfy everyone that already likes the channel. A unique element is that she breaks the fourth wall, so you get a real insight into her inner world. You always want to make things feel a little bit different because there are so many crime drama programmes."

While the market is certainly crowded, there's still space for a relatively new player such as Alibi, says Collie Cousins. "All of the UK terrestrial broadcasters have been going quite a long time. Their philosophy of what works for them is fairly stuck, or resolved. Whereas, I think that there is a space between BBC One, ITV and a Netflix show that we can occupy."

What makes a crime drama right for Alibi? Ayech suggests that, even before it began commissioning but especially now, "we want to give our viewers a gripping mystery that's always got humour and heart. That can apply to the soft story of the week or the more escapist crime stories that some people enjoy, right up to *Ragdoll*, which definitely has a darker humour and a more gruesome feel to it."

Ragdoll, the next release on Alibi's



UKTV

agenda, focuses on a murderer who stitches together the body parts of his victims, and exemplifies the daring tone the commissioners are aiming for. Collie Cousins explains: "Sally Woodward Gentle [the producer of *Killing Eve*] came to me this time last year and showed me a project that was perfectly fine, but I asked her if she had a script that was a bit more high-concept, because we wanted something a bit riskier. That's when they sent me *Ragdoll*, which was exactly what I wanted to do."

Of course, premium scripts require premium budgets, and "we always make sure projects are properly financed. There are BBC One/ITV-type of budgets for *We Hunt Together*, *Traces* and *Annika*. And then, for *Ragdoll*, it's a lot more, it's around a streaming budget," says Collie Cousins.

Ragdoll was a partnership with AMC in the US, but Alibi also works with Masterpiece and Showtime, which help fund its flagship shows. "I've worked on dramas where you were asked to explain the cultural differences, but it's been a joy to work with these partners because they don't ask you to change anything – they want the sensibility that comes out of the UK," notes Collie Cousins.

Both Ayech and Collie Cousins agree that they're particularly interested in breaking new writing talent, not only to bring fresh thinking to their channel but also to ensure that there are modern, diverse voices.

For example, *Traces* and *We Hunt Together* were the first original series to

come out of the traps for writers Amelia Bullmore and Gaby Hull, respectively.

"Someone said to me about *We Hunt Together* that it was extraordinary that we had two black male leads. You just think, 'Oh, for God's sake, just make room for some new ideas please,'" says Collie Cousins.

The channel is part of Project Diamond to ensure diversity on and off screen – which, inevitably, involves providing spaces where new talent can be nurtured. "Television certainly isn't as diverse as it should be, and that's partly because of the evaporation of entry-level roles," says Collie Cousins. "For drama, you do have to have a certain amount of experience, but we would like diversity in front and behind the camera, so we're looking into what that might look like."

"I was a director and I feel quite strongly that I don't want Alibi to offer a short here and there – I want proper stranding. We should be able to offer something where people can hone their craft." She'll continue considering the shape it will take as their original drama strategy matures.

UKTV has a long-term view of its plans and the pair understand that, while they're off to a promising start, they're still at a formative stage.

"We're trying to build something where we'll look back and see a body of work that is British, well-crafted, the audience loves it and it includes legacy dramas," says Collie Cousins. "The idea is that it's stuff that we'll be watching in 10 years' time." ■



Broadcast Britain

September 15–16

CHAIRED BY:

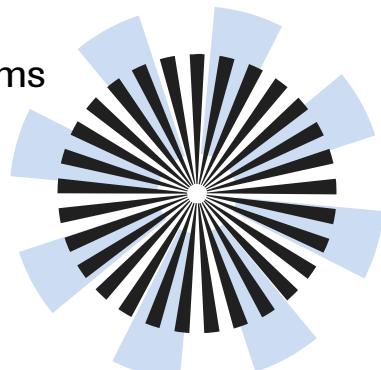
Ben McOwen Wilson, Managing Director, YouTube UK and Ireland

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Clare Balding OBE
Professor Dame Mary Beard DBE
Casey Bloys
Sinéad Burke
Hillary Rodham Clinton
Chelsea Clinton
Professor Sir John Curtice
Dharshini David
Tim Davie
Dame Melanie Dawes DCB
Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Stephanie Flanders
Lorraine Heggessey
Gillian Joseph
Robert Kyncl
Maria Kyriacou
Ralph Lee
Alex Mahon
Kevin Mayer
Dame Carolyn McCall DBE
Naga Munchetty



Clive Myrie
Fraser Nelson
Matthew Price
David Proud
Brandon Riegg
Beth Rigby
Lutz Schüler
Richard Sharp
Sanjay Singhal
Gareth Southgate OBE
Marianna Spring
Dana Strong
Rhodri Talfan Davies
Mark Thompson
Deborah Turness
Jane Turton
Sander van der Linden
Kirsty Wark
John Whiston
Briony May Williams



RESHAPING BRITISHNESS ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

RTS CAMBRIDGE CONVENTION 2021

King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST

OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH

The Majestic in Leeds city centre has quite the history. Its story begins 100 years ago, when it was built as a cinema. The 1920s were a boom time for the movie business and the archives show that the Majestic truly lived up to its name.

The Yorkshire Evening News described “decorations and appointments... of a most sumptuous character”. Over the years, thousands bathed in the light of its silver screen.

But times change and, in 1969, the projector was turned off after one last showing of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. For the next 27 years, the Majestic was a bingo hall.

Since I moved to Yorkshire, it was its next incarnation that I've heard most about, however – as the nightclub said to be the inspiration for the Kaiser Chiefs' earworm, *I Predict a Riot*. From the stories I've heard, that sounds like an accurate enough summation.

The sticky carpets and lingering smell of booze are long gone, though. A fire gutted the Grade II building in 2014 but it has been lovingly restored to splendour. In a few weeks' time, it will officially open as Channel 4's new national HQ.

It is the final piece of our “4 All the UK” jigsaw – an ambitious plan to break out of London. This involves establishing significant new bases in Glasgow and Bristol, as well as making this iconic Leeds building home

Sinéad Rocks
celebrates the
beginning of a
majestic new era in
the Channel 4 story



Channel 4

to more than 200 staff from across the business.

The reason? To ensure that we are at the top of our game when it comes to representing diversity of thought and opinion from all parts of the UK.

All this was, of course, planned in what feels like another lifetime, an era when working from home was an occasional novelty and video conferencing was – at best – a bit of an inconvenience (“Can't we just get everyone in the same room at the same time...”).

Oh, how things have changed. We are all now adept at switching from Zoom to Teams to Skype. Late last year, many independent producers were telling me that, in some ways,

the pandemic was helping their relationships with commissioners.

For indies based outside London, being able to pitch ideas from your kitchen table and avoid a long (and expensive) train or plane journey to London was undoubtedly a game changer.

But, as the pandemic dragged on, the feedback started to change. Yes, there was still a sense of video technology helping to level the playing field, but producers said they were missing the face-to-face chats that help a good idea evolve into a great one. This was something that our nations and regions commissioners had started to focus on pre-lockdown.

As we prepare to cut the ribbon on the Majestic, we are also thinking about how we can ensure that what worked well over the past 18 months can continue, and the things that made us tick before Covid don't get forgotten.

It would be a massive understatement to say that it has been – and continues to be – anything other than incredibly tough for many in our sector. We owe it to ourselves to come out of this better, not just as we were before.

I'm looking forward to opening our new doors – to Channel 4 staff, to our partners, our suppliers and our friends, who all play such a vital role in keeping us on air. ■

Sinéad Rocks is Managing Director for the nations and regions at Channel 4.



King of the crescent

The first series of mould-breaking sitcom *King Gary* subverted masculine stereotypes. An RTS panel reveals the ambitions for series 2

It's been a year since we saw "geezer diva" Gary King (played by co-creator and co-writer Tom Davis) attempt to take over his father's building business and stay a doting father and loving partner, all the while appointing himself as the central figure of Butter-churn Crescent.

Centred on an alpha male who lacks the alpha-ness the role requires, the layered sitcom spoke volumes about modern-day masculinity, the working class, new money and family dynamics.

It garnered a solid 5 million views on iPlayer, which led to the green light for both the Christmas special of 2020, and a second series for 2021 that key members of the cast and crew introduced at a recent RTS event.

This time around, and spurred on by

the warm reception to the first series, "the big thing was to be a little bit braver and more ambitious," said Davis. "The response to that first season was, like, incredible, but me and James [De Frond, the co-creator, co-writer and director] are always analytical, and we looked at it and thought, 'We could have done this better and that better'. It was always about pushing the script but also pushing the people in it [so] there was that little bit more drama."

Picking up where the first series left off, this run has seen Gary and Terri (played by Laura Checkley, also in *Detectorists* and *Action Team*) planning their wedding. But, of course, there are arguments, hiccups and trials along the way – and not only on-screen.

"The original idea was for a wedding in Spain but, because of Covid, we had

to completely rewrite episodes 5 and 6 at the last minute," explained De Frond. "Weirdly, the rewrite actually strengthened it – it made us concentrate more on the characters' relationships and the complexities of it all."

The second series also finds new characters added to the motley crew, such as Terri's friend Alison (Lily Brazier of *People Just Do Nothing*), whom Terri wants to set up with the newly single neighbour Stuart (comedian-turned-actor Romesh Ranganathan).

"Lily is incredible. She wrote on this series with me and James, and she knew this world intuitively," said Davis of his co-star. "The thing that breaks my heart is that she's in four series of a Bafta-winning show and literally nothing else. That's because she's not in a clique, she's not a member of this or

that, and it shows you an almost snobbery in our industry. She should be in so much more. She blew me away every day she was on set."

Elsewhere in the crescent, there is disruption when Gary and his frenemy Stuart unite against new resident Aaron (Morgan Watkins). When this happens, Stuart realises "Gary's a bit of a knobhead if he's going to be your enemy, but he's actually unbearable if he's trying to be your friend," said Davis.

"We had the idea of a bad neighbour as a plotline, but we wanted to work on a Gary and Stuart bromance, so the new neighbour was something we orchestrated to bring them together," said De Frond. "The smart thing with that was making him a younger guy, meaning that Gary wanted to be firm with him, but wanted to impress him, and he was all over the shop."

In keeping with the sentimentality of the season, the Christmas special touched the heartstrings as much as the funny bone.

Having seen the impact of that, the tone of the second series was altered accordingly, so *King Gary*'s comedy is set against higher drama. "The great thing about this show is you can do big funny, but then you can pull the rug and get the emotion going. That's down to these guys being fantastic actors as well as comics," said De Frond.

We see this in episode 3, when a camping trip provides bonding time for Gary and Stuart. It leads to some of the most emotive scenes performed by Ranganathan, a long-standing friend of Davis (they also present the *Wolf and Owl* podcast together). It transpired that, to raise his game, he took acting lessons after the first series.

"Stand-up and panel shows give you timing, but I've learned to go into these scenes with a better appreciation of what Stuart is going through as he knocks on Gary's door, or walks into the wedding," said Ranganathan. "It adds something else, and it's something these guys do so naturally, but I've had to work at it."

There's also plenty of comic drama in the squabbles between Gary's mum, Denise (Camille Coduri), and Terri.

"It's that typical mother-in-law and wife-to-be confrontation, it's natural," said Checkley. "Terri's not to be messed with and Denise sticks her nose in that bit too far."

Coduri suggested that there's some of Denise in Terri, and Checkley agreed – "that's why they clash, for sure".

The series airs a memorable face-off restaurant scene between the pair "which allowed us to channel our *Goodfellas* or *Carmela Soprano*," said Checkley. "Usually, you see a couple of fellas doing a scene like that – it's great to see women do this."

"The women are hilarious, and

James were conscious of showing the anxiety and the pressures of modern masculinity," said Davis. "He's in a real hard place because he wants everyone to be happy, he wants it to be the best wedding that anyone's ever been to, and he wants to be the centre of everything. And you just can't be – that's just never possible."

"Across the whole thing, there's the expectation placed upon him by his



King Gary

BBC

James and Tom have allowed that to be shown," added Coduri. "That doesn't happen very often, here [in the UK] anyway – in the US, it's different."

While there are plenty of new and improved elements, some things just aren't going to change in Gary's world. He's still wearing figure-hugging fashion – "that comes from Terri, telling him he's beautiful and buying his clothes for him one size too small," said Davis.

And his sensitive character is just as endearing, not least because it paints him as a man in today's world, with all the expectations and difficulties that come with it. This series sees him suffer from an anxiety attack. The aim was less to draw sympathy from the audience than it was to display vulnerability on screen.

"When we were writing this, me and

dad, and being the crescent warden. And, at 42, you realise age is a thing, so the new neighbour coming out with youth and a better car than him..."

The heart of the show remains the affectionate relationship between Gary and Terri.

While their bond is tested with the stress of the wedding planning, Ranganathan isn't wrong when he says that "they're so ferociously in love with each other – many people would die to be as close as they are".

And, as long as that's a constant in Butterchurn Crescent, we can rest easy through all the other melodrama. ■

Report by Shilpa Ganatra. The RTS event 'King Gary preview and Q&A' was held on 26 July. It was chaired by journalist Boyd Hilton. The event was an RTS/Multitude Media production.



Bangers and Cash

UKTV

How to nurture talent

Anne Dawson profiles *Bangers and Cash* producer Air TV, which is committed to long-term contracts and extensive training for its new recruits

Awartime aircraft hangar at Leeds East Airport is an unlikely setting for the next generation of out-of-London TV talent to start their careers, but that's exactly what's happening at Air TV.

The company – run by ex-BBC execs Matt Richards, Andy Joynson and Ian Cundall – is passionate about attracting, training and retaining young talent to work on their fast-growing slate of factual shows.

In offices where the RAF once trained Spitfire pilots for the Battle of Britain, at the embryonic Yorkshire Studios, Air is preparing its recruits for some of the most demanding roles in modern TV.

Series such as *Bangers and Cash* – the most-watched programme on UKTV's Yesterday channel – Really's *Helicopter ER*, W's *999 Rescue Squad*, HGTV's *Derelict Rescue* and Yesterday's *Warbird Workshop* demand the kind of multi-skilling

that few companies are brave enough to attempt.

"It means we expect a lot from our staff, especially those working on blue-light shows," says Richards. "In return, we reward them with long contracts and extensive training that goes well beyond TV skills."

Some of the team are trained helicopter technical crew members, qualified to help operate air ambulances; some are even trained to safely use breathing apparatus in smoke or to scale tower cranes alongside specialist paramedics. All have advanced first-aid qualifications.

It's not unusual for a shooting producer-director to scramble by air to a major accident in the morning, film it and then edit the footage in the afternoon. Air also takes pride in encouraging its staff to work across the firm's entire output, from a classic car show to a new fly-on-the-wall series based in North Yorkshire still to be announced

by the commissioning broadcaster.

Having acquired such a range of marketable skills, you might expect a fair number of their team to set their sights on new horizons, but their staff turnover is glacial. With a workforce of 40, only three people have ever left the company since it was formed. Many have permanent, rather than freelance, roles.

"We built our business on bulk series – 10 episodes is a short run for us – and that allows us to commit long-term to people who commit to us," explains Cundall. "We're also keen to take talent via less orthodox routes. I'm not a graduate and I don't see why you need a degree to make great TV."

Air was set up by Joynson and Cundall in 2015. Its first commission was *Emergency Rescue Down Under* for BBC Daytime. Richards joined a year later as series producer; since April 2021, he has been the managing director. The three met while working at BBC Yorkshire.

Joynson began his broadcasting

career as the Lone Groover on a Thursday-night rock show for BFBS Radio in Cyprus but has spent most of his working life in Yorkshire. Cundall started out as a reporter on *The Northern Echo* and worked on-screen for ITV prior to a BBC career as an editor for

you have a passion for the subject you are filming, it comes across in the programmes you make, and that makes for better TV."

Well, it's not rocket science (excuse the pun), but the desire to recruit people with passion for the work they will

talents lie. "We don't always get it right," says Joynson. "We're not perfect. But we do try to support our staff even if, for one reason or another, they don't end up staying."

So how is Air able to maintain this "old school" approach to its employment practices while others see short-term recruitment as the only option? There is probably a critical threshold of work necessary to sustain the number of core staff employed by Air. The economics of a Yorkshire base also help.

According to Ofcom's 2020 diversity and equal opportunities report, "TV production in the nations and regions plays a crucial role in helping to maintain a healthy UK production sector, driving economic growth and thousands of job opportunities throughout the UK and benefiting viewers by delivering a diverse range of programmes and editorial perspectives."

Part of the legacy of the pandemic is a growing recognition of the opportunities for remote working. This may strengthen the case for independents to consider the location of their staff, if not their company.

Our RTS bursary scholars are located across the UK, and all come from lower-income backgrounds. For them, this approach to staffing presents a real opportunity. Surviving in the short-term-contract and freelance world is not an easy option, nor is it a happy place to grow their talent and provide opportunities to try things out.

Juggling contracts and locations is a real challenge when you don't have financial resources behind you. Despite the not inconsiderable challenges they set their staff, the independent spirit of companies such as Air TV is a much more creative and forgiving environment for people starting their careers than the precarious world of short-term contracts. If this is old school, long may it continue. ■

Anne Dawson is the RTS bursaries manager.

■ **Bursary scholar Jake Smith's video can be seen at: <https://bit.ly/Jake-Smith>.**

■ **The RTS bursaries are open to applicants until 30 September 2021. For more information or to apply go to: rts.org.uk/education-and-training-pages/bursaries.**



Helicopter ER

Discovery

network television in the English regions and is a former deputy head of BBC North. Richards joined Air in 2016, following a stint on *The One Show* and several daytime series.

Maybe there is something about Air's distance from London that breeds an independent outlook and a sceptical approach to the latest trends coming from the capital. As winners of the Yorkshire RTS Independent Spirit Award for two years running, it is clear that Air TV's directors are not ones to sheepishly follow a trend.

Air currently has 110 hours in production, including 30 episodes of *Bangers and Cash*, 30 *Helicopter ERs* plus 10 *Derelict Rescues* and two further, as-yet unannounced, new series.

They seem to love what they do. Richards explains that his passion is for renovating buildings, while Joynson's is for cars; unsurprisingly, as a qualified pilot, Cundall's is for aircraft. "We are having fun," says Richards. "If

do for the firm is high on Air's agenda.

Recently named as one of *Broadcast's* "Best places to work", Air's new recruits include RTS bursary scholar Jake Smith. Air was keen to offer him an opportunity after Joynson saw Smith's RTS end-of-year video. "I loved it," he recalls. "Jake had clearly thought about it, but what he produced was not over-embellished. It had a very genuine feel to it – it was authentic and gave us a very clear idea of who Jake was and his interest in cameras and visual style."

Smith's video is also drily humorous, and gently pokes fun at a slightly less than fluent start – "subtitling the word 'erm' was a masterstroke!", notes Joynson.

Air puts a high value on nurturing its staff and giving them the space to develop their abilities and discover where they could fit in the company. Junior staff are encouraged to spend time in different parts of the business. That way, they can see where their

RTS NEWS

Television has never had it so good in Bristol, with indies and talent flocking to the city to meet the demands of soaring production.

According to new research from the University of the West of England, *Go West!*, there are 197 creative companies in the city region, supporting 2,500 permanent jobs and thousands more freelancers. Sky, Netflix and All3-Media have all invested in the city's indies, and Channel 4 has opened one of its two Creative Hubs in Bristol.

Speaking at an RTS West of England event, Tatjana Humphries from inward investment agency Invest Bristol and Bath identified some key reasons for the production bonanza. She pointed to the city's growing reputation: "Global content that's being produced in the city region is certainly helping to attract businesses.... The recent investment from Netflix, Channel 4 and others is [also] helping."

Bristol Film Office's Natalie Moore said that Bristol had long been a favoured filming location, but "on the back of Covid, the boom we've experienced in the past 12 to 15 months has been incomparable". Since early 2021, the number of location filming permits issued by the office had jumped 250%: "Normally, in the late winter and spring months, we'd have maybe four TV dramas working on location – we had 13 active in the city in the first four months of this year."

Partly, this shooting surge is a catch-up exercise, a consequence of the backlog from the first coronavirus lockdown in spring 2020, but Moore said there was no sign that production was "going to slow down hugely".

"There's so much work



Boom time in Bristol

West of England

TV production is in rude health in and around the city – but can the good times last? **Matthew Bell** reports

available," said editor Stuart Davies, who helps to run the Bristol Editors Network.

The epidemic has brought behind-the-camera talent, keen to escape London, to Bristol, reckoned Rachel Drummond-Hay, MD of factual indie Drummer TV. She added that the city's production base had widened: "It's not just animation and natural history."

The *Go West!* research shows that Bristol now has many factual indies, post-production and facilities houses, and a growing branded/corporate production sector. And many dramas are shot at the city's Bottle Yard Studios, on location and in nearby Cardiff, which is also enjoying a boom.

The result, said Drummond-Hay, was that there was a skills shortage in the West Country: "It makes freelancers king at the moment."

The panel agreed that a

sustainable future for production in and around Bristol required a reliable talent pipeline. Mel Rodrigues, founder of Gritty Talent, a Bristol media-tech company that connects creatives with the TV industry, is working to unearth new talent. "In Bristol you can now progress your career," she said, arguing that moving to London was no longer a necessary step to getting on in television. She added: "Widening and nurturing that [talent] pipeline will be critical to continuing the boom."

"We have to take more risks on giving people chances in genres they haven't worked in [and] find opportunities that are maybe not obvious but would help them grow their skills in this region. We will only keep booming if we have diversity of thought and experience."

Career progression, continued Rodrigues, was also important. "We need to

move [people] up so [new] people can come in."

The Bottle Yard Studios are in south Bristol, where there are "pockets of massive social deprivation", explained Bristol Film Office's Moore. "We want to take even more of the employment opportunities that are coming into the studio and directly target people in south Bristol."

Rodrigues added: "There are [many groups of] people who are under-represented in TV... If you look at Bristol's Somali community and British-African diaspora, they may be large in volume but the numbers of people coming into TV and wider creative jobs are not there." ■

'Booming Bristol: How do we build on the success of our world-class content-makers?' was an RTS West of England event on 21 July, chaired by Lynn Barlow and held in partnership with Invest Bristol and Bath.

A new BBC Two series from Leeds-based Wise Owl Films takes viewers inside a modern fire service, offering a revealing picture of the men and women keeping their communities safe during the coronavirus pandemic.

Series producer James Knight explained how the four-part *Yorkshire Firefighters* was developed and filmed at the latest RTS Yorkshire Talks, shortly before it began its run on BBC Two in late July.

The origins of the series lie in the first Covid-19 lockdown of 2020. "Last spring and summer, we were in a massive development frenzy because a lot of existing commissions had been parked," recalled Knight, who was in conversation with RTS Yorkshire Chair Fiona Thompson.

A blue-light series, a "perennial favourite", was the front runner. "Firefighter strands hadn't been as prevalent of late," explained Knight, who had also read about diversity campaigns in the fire service: "We thought that was a really interesting angle to come from in a traditionally white, male profession."



crews on shift, and filming with a Sony FX9 camera, rig cameras at the station, GoPros in engines and helmet cams on firefighters.

Covid-19 filming restrictions, said Knight, meant the series was made with "crews out on location, a bit of production management in the office and edits done remotely.... It's been a bit strange, but satisfying and rewarding as well."

Thanks to safety campaigns and smoke alarms, modern firefighters deal with fewer fires, so the series shows them assisting ambulances and making "safe and well visits" to vulnerable people, as well as relaxing at the station as they await the next emergency call.

"It's a more authentic and intimate portrayal of a job that perhaps the public don't fully understand," said Knight. But it also includes up-close footage of a tyre dump fire in Bradford, which involved some 100 firefighters: "It was a huge story and we were right at the heart of it."

The interview can be seen at: <https://bit.ly/RTS-fire>
Matthew Bell

Wise Owl flies close to the fire

Wise Owl approached West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, which was keen on the indie's angle of focusing on female and black and ethnic-minority firefighters.

Aisling O'Connor, head of TV commissioning at BBC England, greenlit the series, and the indie developed it with Leeds-based BBC commissioning editor Tony Parker.

Blue-light series are at the tricky end of the obs doc spectrum, requiring access to

dangerous places and raising many compliance issues.

As a consequence, Wise Owl set out to recruit an experienced production team: series director Ben Sheldon had worked on BBC One's *Life and Birth* and *Ambulance*, while producer-director Hannah Blackwell had shot BBC Two's *Hospital* during the pandemic.

Filming began last November, with streamlined production teams joining fire



Keith Lloyd, who has died aged 89, was an active member of RTS Southern, even flying from retirement in Spain to attend committee meetings in Southampton.

For many years, Keith put

Keith Lloyd 1932–2021

on an annual technical event jointly with RTS Thames Valley. He also served on the RTS's Devon and Cornwall committee.

Keith was born in Andover and started his career in TV audio, in the late 1950s, at the Croydon transmitter.

He went on to spend much of his professional life in the West Country, working for ITV stations Westward TV and Television South West, as a sound supervisor and head

of sound, respectively. At Westward, his catchphrase was, "There is no substitute for rehearsal...", which he would yell from his booth every time something happened in a live programme that had not been planned and checked several times in advance.

One of his early memories was of ITV mogul Sir Lew Grade turning up with bottles of Champagne to thank the crew he was part of for replacing a burning

transmitter, enabling ITV's flagship entertainment show, *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, to stay on air.

Keith also worked for Middle East Broadcasting, running its studio in Battersea, south London, and for Sky.

He is survived by his wife, Janet, who said: "Television was his whole life and if he had his time again he would do things exactly the same way."

Stephanie Farmer



Times Newspapers

1948 Olympics brought to life

RTS London As an appetiser for the Tokyo Olympics, RTS London premiered a film in mid-July looking back at the BBC's groundbreaking coverage of the London 1948 Olympics.

During a wide-ranging talk on the pioneering early years of BBC outside broadcasts, former ITV head of technology and RTS Fellow Norman Green showed what is thought to be the only surviving footage of the London 1948 television broadcasts.

To cover the games, "the BBC built the first broadcasting centre for radio and television", said Green. Based in the Palace of Arts at Wembley, it housed 16 studios, two TV control rooms, 350 engineers, 200 reporters and 200 support staff.

Green shared film of the legendary Dutch athlete Fanny Blankers-Koen winning gold in the 80 metres hurdles and 200 metres finals, and part of the opening ceremony coverage, long thought lost. This

included the arrival in the stadium of the Olympic torch, with commentary from Richard Dimbleby.

The 1948 "Austerity Olympics" – the first since the notorious Berlin games of 1936, which were the first Olympics to be televised – used existing venues, including Wembley's stadium and pool, and Herne Hill Velodrome.

The BBC had bought the rights to cover the London 1948 Olympics for just £1,000

and the 100,000 households that owned television sets were able to watch almost 70 hours of live coverage.

Seventy years later, the BBC paid around £110m for the current Olympics rights, a deal that lasts until the 2024 Paris games. This summer, it was due to broadcast more than 350 hours of coverage from Tokyo.

The RTS London film, produced by Philip Barnes, is at: <https://bit.ly/RTS-Olympic>

Matthew Bell



Hui lands technology award

RTS Awards Timeline TV graduate technical engineer Simon Hui has been named RTS Young Technologist of the Year by a panel of industry judges.

Hui has worked at the broadcast technology and services company for almost two years and been involved in the development of remote production solutions. These

new systems are being widely used by teams working on series that include the BBC's *Springwatch* and Channel 4's *Sunday Brunch*. "From an impressive range of applications and an excellent set of finalists, Simon stood out for his admirable grasp of technology, given his short time in the industry," said awards jury chair Terry Marsh.

Dock10 broadcast technician Gabriella Watkins won the runner-up prize, receiving the Coffey Award for Excellence in Technology.

The Young Technologist of the Year Award was established by the RTS with funds from the family of the distinguished engineer AM Beresford-Cooke.

Matthew Bell

At their best when the news isn't good

So much for the silly season. The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan dominated the news in August.

Thanks to the bravery of TV reporters, camera operators, their fixers and producers – people such as Dominique van Heerden, who works alongside Stuart Ramsay at Sky News – we've been able to watch this humanitarian crisis unfold on our screens.

ITV News reports from John Irvine and Secunder Kermani's work for the BBC

have been outstanding, too. As has been the reporting of CNN's Clarissa Ward. Once again, the value of trusted TV news has been all too obvious.

Let's also not forget the important role that local Afghan news service Tolo has played in supplying pictures to western broadcasters.

We'll need another shelf for the awards

Staying with news, all good things must come to an end, and so it is with Ben de Pear. He is due to leave the editorship of *Channel 4 News* in December.

Ben is ITN's most award-laden editor ever, with a haul that includes no fewer than four RTS News Programme of the Year prizes.

We wish him well as he devotes the next stage of his

career to documentary – remember, he was Oscar-nominated for executive producing *For Sama*.

and programme PR teams plus the corporate brand and events teams.

Have podcast, will not need to travel

Also at Channel 4, the UpSide welcomes Sao Bui-Van, recently appointed its communications director.

Some readers might recall when Sao for the BBC's media team. Latterly, he was director of communications for King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, where he led the trust's communications response to the pandemic.

He has also worked for the British Council, Viacom and English National Opera.

Sao will not only be heading Channel 4's corporate PR, he will be leading its content

For those of us who haven't been able to enjoy a foreign holiday these past 18 months and are in need of some vicarious Mediterranean sun, don't miss Richard E Grant's *Write Around the World* on BBC iPlayer.

This three-parter features an eclectic selection of literary lights in southern Italy, Andalucía and the Côte D'Azur, and is almost as good as sipping a glass of rosé in the shade on a sun-kissed beach.

Grant is a natural presenter – enthusiastic and spontaneous. Series 2 must surely be on the cards.

Do you need £4,000 for a history of television project?

Grants will be given to assist in the completion of new or unfinished projects, work or literature specific to the objectives of the Trust. 'Literature' is defined as including audio-visual media such as DVDs and websites. It is essential that applicants read all the conditions and criteria, which can be found online at the address below.

George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a

long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is now in its 21st year.

Application procedure

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by **31 October 2021** on the official application form.

[www.rts.org.uk/
shiers-trust-award](http://www.rts.org.uk/shiers-trust-award)



Apply now for the 2021 Shiers Trust Award

The Trust can make a grant of up to £4,000 towards publishing work on any aspect of TV history



RTS PATRONS

RTS Principal Patrons	BBC	Channel 4	ITV	Sky
RTS International Patrons	A+E Networks International Apple TV+ Discovery Networks Facebook Kinetic Content Liberty Global		NBCUniversal International Netflix The Walt Disney Company Viacom International Media Networks WarnerMedia YouTube	
RTS Major Patrons	Accenture All3Media Amazon Video Audio Network Avid Banijay UK Boston Consulting Group BT Channel 5	Deloitte Enders Analysis Entertainment One Finecast Freeview Fremantle GB News Gravity Media IBM IMG Studios	ITN Korn Ferry KPMG netgem.tv NTT Data OC&C Pinewood TV Studios S4C Sargent-Disc	STV Group The Journalists' Charity The Trade Desk UKTV Vice Virgin Media YouView
RTS Patrons	Autocue Digital Television Group	Grass Valley Isle of Media	Lumina Search Mission Bay	PricewaterhouseCoopers Raidió Teilifís Éireann
Who's who at the RTS	<p>Patron HRH The Prince of Wales</p> <p>Vice-Presidents David Abraham Dawn Airey Sir David Attenborough OM CH CVO CBE FRS Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE Mike Darcey Gary Davey Greg Dyke Lord Hall of Birkenhead Lorraine Heggessey Armando Iannucci OBE Ian Jones Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE David Lynn Sir Trevor McDonald OBE Ken MacQuarrie Gavin Patterson Trevor Phillips OBE Stewart Purvis CBE Sir Howard Stringer</p>	<p>Chair of RTS Trustees Jane Turton</p> <p>Honorary Secretary David Lowen</p> <p>Honorary Treasurer Mike Green</p> <p>BOARD OF TRUSTEES Lynn Barlow Julian Bellamy Mike Green Yasmina Hadded David Lowen Jane Millichip Simon Pitts Sinéad Rocks Sarah Rose Jane Turton Rob Woodward</p> <p>EXECUTIVE Chief Executive Theresa Wise</p> <p>Bursaries Manager Anne Dawson</p>	<p>CENTRES COUNCIL Lynn Barlow Phil Barnes Fiona Campbell Tony Campbell Agnes Cogan Stephanie Farmer Rick Horne Kully Khaila Tim Marshall Will Nicholson Stephen O'Donnell Jon Quayle Edward Russell Fiona Thompson</p> <p>SPECIALIST GROUP CHAIRS Archives Dale Grayson</p> <p>Diversity Angela Ferreira</p> <p>Early Evening Events Heather Jones</p>	<p>Education Graeme Thompson</p> <p>RTS Futures Alex Wootten</p> <p>RTS Technology Bursaries Simon Pitts</p> <p>AWARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS Awards & Fellowship Policy David Lowen</p> <p>Craft & Design Awards Ade Rawcliffe</p> <p>Programme Awards Kenton Allen</p> <p>Student Television Awards Sinéad Rocks</p> <p>Television Journalism Awards Simon Bucks</p>