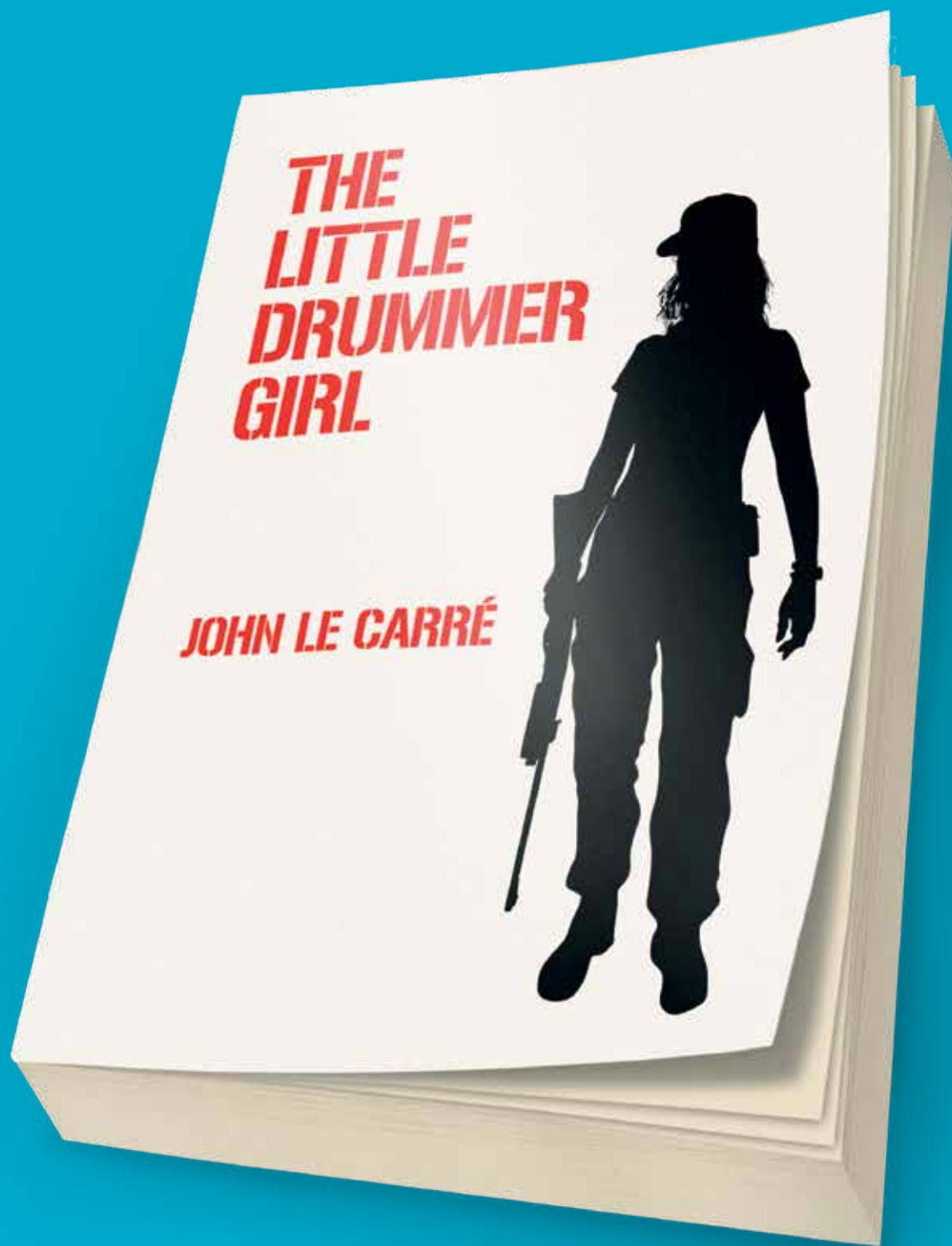


Television

September 2018



Literary cravings



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From the CEO



Several of the articles in this bumper issue of *Television* embrace literary themes. Centre stage is Andrew Billen's brilliant interview with Simon Cornwell,

whose company, The Ink Factory, was the driving force behind the seminal series *The Night Manager*. Simon's latest John le Carré adaptation is *The Little Drummer Girl* – a show that I am greatly looking forward to watching.

Staying with our literary theme, don't miss Simon Shaps's perceptive analysis of why so many of today's TV dramas are based on books, how drama is raiding the bookshelves for adaptation ideas – and why the process of getting from page to screen is sometimes so painful. This provides a

valuable insight into what is a very dynamic part of the content sector.

The third piece with a literary theme is Mark Lawson's profile of Mike Bartlett, who is equally at home writing for TV and stage. He is, of course, the screenwriter behind *Doctor Foster* and the RTS-nominated *King Charles III*. His latest show, *Press*, is a workplace drama set in the world of journalism. The series is bound to be one of the highlights of BBC One's autumn schedule.

Without gifted writers such as Mike, we wouldn't have the rich content diet that we enjoy daily here in the UK and in other dynamic television markets. But writers need commissioners. We have one of the first interviews with Channel 4's head of comedy, Fiona McDermott. Fiona made

such an impact earlier this year with the hilarious *Derry Girls*.

The highlight of the busy RTS autumn programme is our London Conference, "Is bigger better?". I hope that many of you can join us: we have assembled an extraordinary line-up of international speakers. Bob Bakish, Chief Executive and President of the global content business Viacom, will deliver the international keynote. Don't miss the interview in this issue of *Television* in which Bob assesses the state of our industry.

Theresa

Theresa Wise

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Cover: Gordon Jamieson

Editor
Steve Clarke
smclarke_333@hotmail.com
News editor and writer
Matthew Bell
bell127@btinternet.com

Production, design, advertising
Gordon Jamieson
gordon.jamieson.01@gmail.com
Sub-editor
Sarah Bancroft
smbancroft@me.com

Royal Television Society
3 Dorset Rise
London EC4Y 8EN
T: 020 7822 2810
E: info@rts.org.uk
W: www.rts.org.uk

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National events

RTS CONFERENCE

Tuesday 18 September

RTS London Conference 2018: Is bigger better? Will 'the consolidation game' help tip the scales against the tech giants?

Sponsored by Viacom.

Co-chaired by David Lynn, President Viacom International Media Networks (VIMN), and James Currell, President, VIMN, UK, Northern and Eastern Europe. Confirmed speakers include: David Abraham, CEO, Wonderhood Studios; Bob Bakish, CEO and President, Viacom; Zai Bennett, director of programmes, Sky Entertainment UK and Ireland; Karen Blackett OBE, UK country manager, WPP and Chair, MediaCom UK; Georgia Brown, director, European originals, Amazon Studios; Kate Bulkley, media commentator and journalist; Damian Collins MP; Tony Hall, Director-General, BBC; Tim Hincks, Co-CEO, Expectation Entertainment; Ian Katz, director of programmes, Channel 4; Carolyn McCall, CEO, ITV; Mark McLane, global head of diversity and inclusion, Barclays; Alex Mahon, CEO, Channel 4; Anne Nguyen, partner and managing director, London, Boston Consulting Group; Trevor Phillips OBE, Founder, Webber Phillips; Matthew Postgate, chief technology and product officer, BBC; Beth Rigby, political correspondent, Sky News; Kate Russell, technology reporter, BBC Click; Darren Throop, President and CEO, Entertainment One; Jane Turton, CEO, All3Media; Stephen van Rooyen, CEO, Sky UK & ROI; Kirsty Wark, writer and broadcaster; Sharon White, CEO, Ofcom; Deborah Williams, executive director, Creative Diversity Network.

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

STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2018

Thursday 11 October

Charlotte Moore, Director of Content, BBC.

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

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

RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Wednesday 24 October

Who's watching? The challenge of digital TV measurement

Speakers: Rich Astley, chief product officer, Finecast; Matt Hill, research and planning director, Thinkbox; John Litster, MD, Sky Media; Sarah Rose, director of consumer insight, Channel 4; and Justin Sampson, CEO, Barb. Chair: Kate Bulkley, journalist. 6:30pm for 6:45pm

Venue: The Hospital Club, 24 Endell Street, London WC2H 9HQ

RTS MASTERCLASSES

Tuesday 13 November

RTS Student Programme Masterclasses

and

Wednesday 14 November

RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses

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

RTS AWARDS

Monday 26 November

RTS Craft & Design Awards 2018

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

RTS FUTURES

Wednesday 30 January, 2019

Careers Fair 2019

Venue: Business Design Centre,
52 Upper Street, London N1 0QH

Local events

DEVON AND CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson

■ RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

EAST

Thursday 20 September

TV quiz night

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

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

■ Nikki O'Donnell

■ nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk

LONDON

■ Daniel Cherowbrier

■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Tuesday 16 October

RTS Midlands careers fair

10:00am-5:00pm. Tickets: £10, with 300 early-bird tickets at £6. Group bookings available via RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

Venue: Edgbaston Stadium, Edgbaston Road, Birmingham B5 7QU

Tuesday 20 November

RTS Midlands Awards 2018

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

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

■ Jill Graham

■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

Saturday 10 November

RTS North West Awards 2018

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

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ RPinkney@rts.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Thursday 15 November

RTS NI Programme Awards

Venue: TBC

■ John Mitchell

■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ byrnecc@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

■ Jane Muirhead

■ scotlandchair@rts.org.uk

SOUTHERN

Wednesday 17 October

IBC 2018 review

Panel discussion with Q&A. Joint event with RTS Thames Valley. 7:00pm for 7:30pm

Venue: QMC Television Studio, Cliddesden Road, Basingstoke RG21 3HF

■ Stephanie Farmer

■ SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

THAMES VALLEY

Wednesday 17 October

IBC 2018 review

Panel discussion with Q&A. Joint event with RTS Southern. 7:00pm for 7:30pm

Venue: QMC Television Studio, Cliddesden Road, Basingstoke RG21 3HF

Friday 23 November

2018 Winter Ball

7:00pm till late

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

■ Tony Orme

■ RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

WALES

Wednesday 5 September

Is CGI the next big win for drones?

Michael Surcombe, founder, Leaping Wing. 6:30pm

Venue: BBC Wales Club, Llantrisant Road, Llandaff, Cardiff CF5 2YQ

■ Hywel Wiliam 07980 007841

■ hywel@aim.uk.com

WEST OF ENGLAND

■ Belinda Biggam

■ belindabiggam@hotmail.com

YORKSHIRE

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280

■ lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk

RTS Masterclasses

13–14 November

- RTS Student Programme
Masterclasses: 13 November
- RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses:
14 November

Venue: IET London WC2R 0BL

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TV diary

Dorothy Byrne meets Britain's oldest transgender woman and praises the new generation of men who work in TV



TV current affairs and documentaries are obsessed with the new. That means we can ignore problems which continue over decades. My month begins with watching Channel 5's *Raped: My Story* for a panel I'm on.

It's a really daring programme precisely because there is nothing new in it; it is a devastating document of the way rape ruins lives and survivors are denied justice. And that's a story we need to tell again and again.

At the same time, we are finalising a *Dispatches*, *The UN Sex Abuse Scandal*, another programme that could have been broadcast at any time over the past several decades. As it happens, the first film I ever produced and directed when I worked on *World in Action* was about marital rape.

One of my male colleagues at the time commented, "That's not a story." "You're right," I replied. "It's not a story, it's a national scandal."

■ **Big news at BBC News.** I don't refer to the Cliff Richard case, which has worrying potential implications for all of us – there are times when it is vital to name police suspects. No, the news that catches my eye is that there's a restructure and several new job titles have been created.

I see one person has been appointed

editorial director. I assume at first that he is in charge of everything, but it turns out there are other people even more in charge than he is. **Hard for an outsider to comprehend. But what we do all know is that the more people there are in charge of making programmes, the better they are.**

■ Sometimes, a job like mine means that you have to give up on exciting experiences. I'm due to go to an event in Parliament where I would listen to lots of MPs talking at length. But, sadly, I am too busy to attend. I bear it bravely.

■ **An event I am able to turn up to is an auction to raise funds for the wonderful Hospice Biographers, set up by my old Granada colleague Barbara Altounyan.** The idea is that trained volunteers (who might be journalists or anyone with a professional 'listening' background record the life stories of people in their last days.

One can just picture how much those stories would mean in future to, for example, the children of a young woman who died. The auctioneer is Britain's oldest transgender woman, who changed sex at the age of 81.

Apparently, it was having a knee replacement that gave her the idea that she could dare to become the woman she had always felt herself to be. I have had a knee replacement. I

regret that it didn't inspire me to do anything at all.

■ Meanwhile, comments are pouring in about Kate Quilton's film *Breast-feeding Uncovered*, which showed how uncomfortable young women can be made to feel feeding their children in public.

So many women felt she spoke for them. It demonstrates that, for journalism to have an effect, it doesn't always have to be a long-term investigation.

■ **And finally, a conversation in the office about men.** It's clear to me that if you are a decent man, you must feel somewhat under siege when you open the papers every day and turn on the news to see your gender exposed yet again.

I have to say that the young men I work with now behave so much better than some of the men I worked with in television in the past.

I realise that I am older and in a senior position – and I did attend a Bafta event some time ago in which young women told some horror stories. But I genuinely think men have improved.

At the very least, they keep their trousers zipped up in the office, which is a definite improvement.

Dorothy Byrne is Channel 4's head of news and current affairs.

The golden age of adaptation

“You have to remember what a partisan of the novel I am... and that it had long been one of my ambitions to have my novels defeat all attempts to put them on screen”

Interview with Jonathan Franzen,
New York Times, 26 June 2018

The best-selling American novelist Jonathan Franzen is, as it turns out, no enemy of television. In 2001, having initially criticised Oprah Winfrey and her hugely influential TV book club – claiming that she had no literary taste – Franzen accepted her selection of his novel *The Corrections* for the book club. The Winfrey endorsement was helpful. *The Corrections* went on to sell more than 1.5 million copies.

And, like many other authors who had previously turned their noses up at TV, Franzen began to wake up to the strengths of drama series in the era of “peak TV”, championing programmes such as *Friday Night Lights*, *The Killing*, *Orphan Black* and *Breaking Bad*. (I have not met a writer, particularly a male writer, who isn’t a fan of *Breaking Bad*.)

But then came Franzen’s moment of truth. What would television do with his novels, other than simply endorse them, so that people could read them for themselves?

The answer seems to be that his “ambition”, revealed in his *New York Times* interview a couple of months ago, has been fulfilled. To date, his novels have, indeed, defeated all attempts to put them on screen.

An HBO adaptation of *The Corrections* got to a pilot, but then wasn’t picked up. More recently, TV development of his fifth novel, *Purity*, set up at Showtime, seems to have stalled, despite

Drama

From *Patrick Melrose* to *Vanity Fair*, TV series based on books are driving the drama boom. **Simon Shaps** investigates

many scripts, the involvement of the normally unstoppable Scott Rudin, and the attachment of Daniel Craig as lead.

Franzen’s experiences with television are by no means unique. For every John le Carré – with successful BBC adaptations of many of his books in the 1970s and, more recently, of *The Night Manager* – there are many, many more authors who try and fail to get their books developed for TV. Or, perhaps worse, fail at the end of a long and tortuous development process.

And yet we are not merely witnessing a golden age of television drama, we are witnessing a golden age of adaptation. For all the failures, the stalled or seemingly interminable development work, the polite rejections from broadcasters (perhaps citing a policy decision the pitch has unwittingly breached – “too much period”, “too many Russians”, “no more dystopia for the time being”), adaptations are delivering.

From *Big Little Lies* to *Patrick Melrose*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* to *American Gods*, more and more of the most critically acclaimed, talked-about TV is based on books. Novels dominate, but there is a growing appetite for non-fiction titles.

A recent example is John Preston’s *A Very English Scandal*, the source material for BBC One’s destined-for-awards dramatisation of the Jeremy Thorpe scandal. There are countless other “based on a true story” productions, many with a strong bias towards crime, as well as large doses of epic history.

And we can add new and powerful adaptations of the classics: *Howard’s End*, *Vanity Fair* (a judgement based at the time of writing purely on the weight of promos in prized slots during ITV’s World Cup coverage), *The Woman in White* and *Parade’s End*. And then, as it draws to a close, there is the mighty, all-conquering *Game of Thrones*.

Statistics on this phenomenon are hard to come by, but research conducted by K7 Media, the international media consultancy for television, tells a fascinating story. K7 analysed more than 300 new drama series launching in the UK and US between Jan 2016 and June 2018.

In that period, almost one in three of the shows launched, 31%, were based on books.

Dig a little deeper, and significant trends emerge. In 2016, 26% of new series in the UK and US were based on books; in the first half of 2018, that



Vanity Fair

number had risen to 36%, with 42% of new US series based on books.

One more number to note: last year, more than half, 52%, of new SVoD scripted series were based on books. Moreover, those figures do not include the many series based on articles, particularly long-form journalism, that often form the basis of a book the author is in the process of writing.

The K7 numbers, of course, represent a rising percentage of a larger pie: the number of drama series launching each year has been growing across all platforms in both US and UK markets.

Small wonder, then, that the demand for “hot” new titles among producers is greater than ever. Last year, UK television experienced a bidding war for the rights to Naomi Alderman’s *The Power*, a

dystopian work dedicated to Margaret Atwood. Eleven UK production companies bid for the book, with the rights won by Jane Featherstone’s Sister Pictures.

While television has some way to go to match the \$5m paid recently for the film rights to David Grann’s *Killers of the Flower Moon*, sums paid by television companies for options are rising: £50,000 to £60,000 for an 18-month option is not unknown.

Given that the average published author earns less than the minimum wage, these sums matter to them. They also open up the prospect of really life-changing sums if the book makes it to screen, particularly if it becomes a long-running series.

There is a simple explanation for the

rising number of adaptations. Books are a treasure house of material for a TV writer: they supply plot and character, tone of voice and world, and, usefully, dialogue.

A writer once told me that, having been hired to adapt a book only to be replaced by another writer, the few words of dialogue to make it to screen from his version of the script were lifted verbatim from the novel. He was still paid handsomely for his efforts.

Given a choice between a blank page or a book to build on, the book often wins out.

So, the doyen of adaptations, Andrew Davies, can move at what feels like lightning speed, particularly for a man in his eighties, from *War and Peace* to John Updike’s *Rabbit* novels, taking a ▶



Amazon Prime

American Gods

► quick detour to adapt Jane Austen's unfinished *Sanditon*.

Critically, these are authors and titles that broadcasters can sell to audiences. With the almost infinite viewing choices that audiences now have, these are titles that – to use the vogue phrase – “cut through”.

To service this demand, increasing numbers of UK producers now employ specialist book scouts, many with experience of working in publishing, to try and identify suitable titles, often pre-publication.

Among the platforms, Netflix has gone one step further, employing the respected literary scouting agency, Maria B Campbell Associates, to buy books direct, rather than wait for producers to knock on their door with a stack of acquired titles under their arms.

And yet, despite all of this, as Jonathan Franzen suggests, adaptation can

LAST YEAR, MORE THAN HALF OF NEW SVOD SCRIPTED SERIES WERE BASED ON BOOKS

be a tricky business. Novels, not just literary fiction, are brilliant at capturing the interior life of characters, with plot sometimes secondary to that mission – but TV consumes story. Sky's *Patrick Melrose* may be the most extreme example in many years of a TV series that succeeded, despite the novels' limited plot and the notorious difficulty of making addictive behaviour and mental collapse watchable.

For that, Benedict Cumberbatch deserves enormous credit.

There are no reliable figures on the ratio between books optioned – which generally give a producer at least 18 months' exclusivity to develop the material for television – and series produced.

My guess is that authors stand no better than a one in 10 chance of their work ending up on screen, once it has been optioned.

So there is something in Franzen's caution, and his desire to protect the magic of the written word.

It just happens to be the case that we are now living in an era of insatiable demand for material, for the stories gifted authors tell. ■

Simon Shaps is the founder of Simon Shaps Ltd. He also works as a TV and film consultant for the literary agency Georgina Capel Associates.



Ben Chaplin and Charlotte Riley in *Press*

BBC

Press to play

Theatre playwrights and TV screenwriters tend to be different animals who spend most of their time in one cage. Sir David Hare occasionally takes a break between National Theatre commissions to write a TV series, such as BBC Two's recent *Collateral*, and Dennis Potter did a single theatre play, *Sufficient Carbohydrate*, but these were recognisably excursions from their main creative space.

One of the striking things about Mike Bartlett is that the 37-year-old writer moves smoothly and frequently between the ancient and

Screenwriting

Mark Lawson talks to TV and stage writer **Mike Bartlett** as his latest drama, *Press*, hits the screen

modern entertainments. Over the past decade, two major plays at the National Theatre (*Earthquakes in London* and *13*) and a couple at the Almeida (*King Charles III* and *Albion*) have alternated with four original series for TV: *The Town*, *Doctor Foster*, *Trauma* and, from the first week of September, *Press*, a six-part BBC One series about newspaper journalists in a time when their industry is struggling to find money and trust.

Confirming the success of Bartlett's multiskilling, *King Charles III*, a mock-Shakespearean fantasy about the coronation of the current Prince of Wales, secured an Olivier award ➤

▶ and a Tony nomination in its theatre version and an RTS nomination for its TV adaptation.

“The more I do, I come to realise how different TV and theatre are,” says Bartlett. “Far beyond the obvious things, such as the visual being more significant on screen. You don’t get rehearsals in television, really. So, if, from theatre, you’re used to finding and honing the script through five weeks in a rehearsal room, you really have to adjust.

“The other thing I really notice is the different rhythm of it. In TV, if you’re involved as an executive producer, a show can be a full-time job for two years. Whereas, in theatre, you have the moment of writing it and then the moment of it going on, but [you] do all this other stuff in between those two bursts of energy.”

The largest adjustment, though, is in the definition of a script. It would be normal for a theatre director and writer to discuss the style, tone or length of their next piece – but in TV these calculations are often preordained by slot or genre.

Rupert Goold, who directed *King Charles III* on both screen and stage, as well as several other Bartlett stage plays, thinks that the dramatist had to learn how to negotiate the expectations of commissioners and viewers. “I think he felt with *The Town*, which was not a ratings success, that – for various reasons – it hadn’t quite worked out as he hoped,” says Goold. “So he was wary of TV at that point.

“But he watches everything on TV and he learns how to make it work for him. I think he’s fallen in love with TV: with its reach and its ability to communicate.”

Goold suggests that Bartlett’s drive to get things right is central to his success in both forms. In the theatre rehearsal room, dramatists are king, whereas, on a TV production, they are more likely to have the rank of the Duke of Bognor.

There are stories of theatre writers being shocked by the number of hands on a TV script, but Goold says that would never be a problem for Bartlett: “He works and works and works, and hits deadlines. So many theatre writers, the first blast is everything – and it’s quite hard to get them to do the second, third, fourth, fifth drafts.

“But Mike doesn’t have any trouble with that.”

The theatre director also has a striking insight into the writer’s unusual attitude to form: “Mike used to be a



Doctor Foster

drummer in a band and he has often said to me that he tends to think of writing in eight- to 12-line sections, rather than a single line, scene or act. He hears the music of a script.”

While Bartlett’s compositions for TV, so far, look very different superficially, one unifying factor is that, regardless of what direction the shows go in or the

‘I THINK HE HAS FALLEN IN LOVE WITH TV’

ideas they deal with, there tends to be a particular job at the heart of the action: medic (*Doctor Foster*, *Trauma*), heir to the throne (*King Charles III*) and, now, journalist (*Press*).

This list wins a thoughtful pause from Bartlett: “I’d never really thought about that. But I’ve always loved TV dramas where what characters do for a living is crucial to it. I’m thinking of *The West Wing*, *The Good Wife* and even *Breaking Bad*, where the point is that he moves from one occupation to another. Also, if you’re telling a long-form story, you pretty soon have to ask: well, what does this character do in the world?”

He remembers originally pitching *Press*, long before *Doctor Foster*, to various broadcasters, as “a ‘story of the week’ show, in which a gang of journalists would deal with a politics story one week, then a sports or showbiz one the next. It would be a bit *West Wing*-ish.

“But I was told that viewers weren’t interested in media stories. Then, with phone-hacking and the Leveson report, everyone got much more interested in journalism again. And, at the same time, the industry – post-digital – was going through, if not a collapse, then at least a revolution. And then the whole ‘fake news’ debate started.

“So, the show became more about those issues, although using the framework of a workplace drama in which you, hopefully, fall in love with the characters.”

Press moves between the *Herald*, a liberal newspaper with a high mind and a low circulation, and the *Post*, a tabloid where the equation is reversed. Ben Chaplin plays the editor of the *Post* and Charlotte Riley, a key performer for Bartlett – having been in *The Town* and played the Duchess of Cambridge in *King Charles III* – is the news editor of the *Herald*. (“Mike has always written particularly well for women,” says Goold.)



King Charles III

All pictures: BBC

Both Riley and Chaplin's characters, though, are given sympathetic and unsympathetic elements. And, while red-top tactics are dramatised – such as the “death knock”, seeking an interview with grievously bereaved parents – the upmarket publication is also indicted for hypocrisies, including, for example, putting salacious images online under the pretext of “debating the morality” of them.

“Yes. That was always important,” says Bartlett. “The series presents the two approaches to the news – in shorthand, broadsheet-serious and tabloid-populist – but, on any given day, one style may get closer to the truth than the other. And it's really important to present those approaches without pre-existing prejudices. It's on the BBC, written by a playwright who has previously shown leftist tendencies, but I don't want to appeal only to people who read the *Guardian*. And I hope it doesn't.”

Commendably, Bartlett even suggests that there may be messages in *Press* for the broadcaster that is screening it. He thinks that “a really good example” of the current media crisis of credibility “is the BBC thing with Cliff Richard. The BBC's ability to stand up for the freedom of the press – which is an

important cause – is hugely undermined by the fact that it flew a helicopter over his house.

“If you want to stand up for principle, you have to have principles in your daily work.

“But I'd also like the viewers to think about their own professions: when you go to work, how principled are you,

‘HE HEARS THE MUSIC OF A SCRIPT’

and, if you're not, what are the consequences for your industry?”

Rupert Goold confirms the writer's careful open-mindedness: “I think his greatest gift is that he writes with enormous compassion towards all sides. He's a very political man, and a moralist. But, in *King Charles III*, he wanted to present the monarchist voice, and, in our stage play *Albion*, the Brexiteer voice, even though those aren't his own positions.”

So, with *Press*, did Bartlett study previous fictions about journalists, such as the movie *The Front Page* or David Hare and Howard Brenton's stage play *Pravda*?

“No,” he says. “But I think the form that *Press* plays with is the TV workplace drama: *The West Wing*, *Ally McBeal*, *The Good Wife*. It plays with that, but also subverts it. It looks like a ‘story of the week’ show, but I want viewers to be uncertain which of the stories will complete that week or play out over the whole series. Which reflects what it's like working on a newspaper but also gives a different form to the show.”

One of my grandfathers was a County Durham coal miner, and I mention to Bartlett that *Press* made me reflect on the irony that his grandson had ended up in a profession, journalism, that now feels terminally threatened, as coal mining was in the 1980s.

“Yes,” he responds. “But what I'd say – and *Press* explores – is that we could do without coal, but we can't do without energy. To take that analogy to journalism, we might – *might* – be able to manage without newspapers, but we can't manage without news or facts. If we base everything on opinion, civilisation would collapse quite quickly. We have to find a way of verifying objective truth.”

Rupert Goold expects much more TV work from Bartlett: “I tease him that, when we did *King Charles III* on stage, he wrote it and left the production up to me. But, when we did it on screen, every single costume he had a view on. So, I think he does have that American-style ‘showrunner’ in him. He likes to be over it all.”

Bartlett seems to confirm that view: “In *Press*, in the *Post*'s office, in the corner, there's a cartoonist and they designed an office decorated with cartoons from across his whole career. And I was devastated that I hadn't written any of that into the show. I could have done a whole episode about the cartoonist!”

Press has the potential to run to more series, but that will depend on ratings and, appropriately, press. BBC One and its viewers might also like a third series of *Doctor Foster*, with Suranne Jones as the media-friendly GP.

But Bartlett says: “There's nothing happening at the moment. Suranne is super-busy. And I've got other things coming up.

“I think, in all our minds, there's no hurry: there has to be the right time and the right storyline.

“The second series took two years. We've never wanted to make it for the sake of making it. So we'll have to wait and see.” ■

In a media world hit by both consolidation and fragmentation, flagship brands are daily demonstrating their value. And they are central to the strategy of Bob Bakish, CEO and President of global entertainment powerhouse Viacom, who has occupied the hot seat since December 2016.

Names such as Comedy Central, MTV and Nickelodeon are more crucial than ever to Viacom's US and global success in a crowded and fluid media market.

This applies to content that cuts through using the right distribution channels and platforms, but also to live events and movies (Viacom owns Paramount), where profile fuels popularity and revenues.

"It's certainly an interesting time to be in the media," Bakish reflects in a phone call from the group's Manhattan HQ. "You can look at it as glass half empty or glass half full. I tend to look at the whole world as half full, because there is opportunity in change."

The former Booz Allen & Hamilton executive joined Viacom in 1997, rising through various positions, such as business development and advertising sales. From 2007, he ran Viacom International Media Networks and its predecessor, MTV Networks International. During this period, he more than doubled the division's revenues.

In autumn 2016, the comparatively low-key Bakish was appointed Viacom's acting CEO and President. He had impressed Shari Redstone,



Viacom
Steve Clarke
interviews Viacom
CEO and President
Bob Bakish
ahead of his RTS
conference keynote

Viacom

Viacom's transformati

non-executive Vice-Chair of the Viacom board and the daughter of the legendary Sumner Redstone. One of the giants of the US entertainment business, Redstone bought Viacom in the late 1980s in a hostile takeover.

Today, Bakish heads a complex company that reaches a cumulative 4.3 billion TV subscribers. In the UK, Argentina and India, Viacom is the owner or co-owner of high-profile TV networks – Channel 5, Telefe and Colors, respectively.

On being appointed to the top job, Bakish, straight talking and bullish, immediately began devising a transformation plan. Today, it is reshaping Viacom into a leaner, more focused company capable of punching its full weight against traditional competitors and the digital behemoths.

"One of the first things I did when I took over as Viacom CEO in 2016 was very quickly work on a plan and then roll it out publicly. People, including our employees, needed to know what

we were trying to achieve," he says.

Step two was to have the right team in place. "We made extensive changes to the Viacom management team," he explains. "The most extreme case was Paramount, where I changed the entire senior team."

The final – and perhaps hardest – step is the task of executing the plan. "I am happy to say, sitting here a year and a half in, that we've consistently moved the ball forward," says Bakish. "We're not the same company that we

were two years ago. We're in much healthier shape.

"We have a ways to go. I encourage you, for example, to watch what happens at Paramount during the next year, because you'll see it once again be one of the pre-eminent studios in the world."

He adds: "I think it's a great time to be doing it. There's actually a lot of noise out there. A lot of big companies are in a state of chaos because of M&A or potential M&A, [whereas] we're just playing through, building share, improving sequentially."

Consistent with the policy of focusing on maximising the power of Viacom's flagship brands, under Bakish's leadership the Paramount brand today encompasses a range of activities – in other words, Paramount Pictures, the world's oldest film studio, represents only part of what Paramount does.

Production has been ramped up at Paramount Television, as Bakish explains: "Our Paramount television production business didn't exist four years ago. This year, the division will generate more than \$400m in revenue. It is profitable and it is producing hits." These include *13 Reasons Why*, made for Netflix, and *The Alienist*, made for TNT in the US.

On 4 July, Paramount Network, a free-to-air service featuring drama, comedy and movies, was launched in the UK, following its US debut in January. The move was described as "a critical milestone" by

Viacom's brands to have what he calls "true, multi-platform expression", and that the likes of Nickelodeon and MTV are leveraged in more than one space.

"We know that there is tons of consumption in digital," he says. "Historically, we've looked at that as cannibalistic but, with fragmentation, it's an opportunity to reach people you might not otherwise reach."

Six months ago, the company launched Viacom Digital Studios. Here, the strategy involves reimagining its brands for younger audiences, with content destined for such platforms as YouTube and Facebook Watch. Titles announced to date include *Cooking in the Crib with Snooki*, a new take on MTV's *Cribs* franchise, and animated shorts *The JoJo & BowBow Show* for YouTube, featuring Nickelodeon's JoJo Siwa.

"This content is only starting to hit the screen, and we'll be building on this," notes Bakish. "I am tremendously excited about what's going ▶

Pinky Malinky



Bob Bakish ... on the streamers

"Sure, they're frenemies, but we do business with all of them. We've just announced a deal for a new animated series that will be shown by Netflix, *Pinky Malinky*, produced by Nickelodeon.

"I was with a very large European distributor two weeks ago. The conversation was about: 'We have channels on this platform. We have on-demand on this platform.' They're looking to have more original content as they focus on having a cornerstone position in their country.

"To them, Netflix is a frenemy, too. On the one hand, they get some revenue, on the other, they don't want people just going to [the streamer]. That, in turn, led to a conversation about partnering on more original content that they could have, in this case, for an exclusive first window.

"Yeah, the world is a complicated place where, historically, customers are competitors, and people who weren't in the business are now in the business.

"But, as I watch other companies vertically integrate... AT&T, Time Warner, and we'll see what happens with Fox... there's actually an incredible opportunity for Viacom to do what it does best, which is to create great content and partner with others. That is exactly what we're focused on. I think that is a good hand to play."



Nickelodeon
star JoJo Siwa

Nickelodeon

Netflix

on man

London-based Jill Offman, executive vice-president of Comedy Central and Paramount Network International.

With Viacom operating 20-plus TV network brands in the US, Bakish highlights the importance of focusing on the flagship brands. "In the US, they are Nickelodeon, MTV, Comedy Central, BET and Paramount," he says. "We were too fragmented in the US... we needed to concentrate our resources on a subset of those brands."

He believes that it is essential for

on there.” Last month, Viacom confirmed that it had bought Awesomeness TV, further evidence of the firm’s determination to position itself as a leading digital publisher for younger audiences, competing with the likes of Vice and BuzzFeed.

However, reinventing even a world-conquering brand such as MTV in today’s choice-saturated environment presents challenges. The CEO acknowledges that, in the past, mistakes were made regarding MTV’s US strategy.

“In the US, MTV went down a scripted path and saw ratings degradation and some real loss of uniqueness. You’ve got to focus on what the brand represents and what your position is.

“Outside the US, when I was running International – and still today – we were committed to a unique brand position that combined music with heavy reality, unscripted shows. We grew share under that strategy.”

A shift in policy in America with MTV returning to reality shows is paying off. “We’re now in the fifth straight quarter of ratings growth,” says Bakish. “We’re doing a lot of work, day in and day out, with MTV in the digital native space.”

He cites the example of reviving the *Total Request Live* (TRL) franchise and introducing a segment entitled *TRLevator*, in which the Backstreet Boys get into a lift alongside MTV staff and proceed to sing to the amazed workers *Carpool Karaoke*-style. The clip has been a massive hit on YouTube.

“When we brought back TRL, we quickly found that consumption was far stronger online than on TV,” says Bakish, adding: “That way, we’re able to attract, retain and, ultimately, monetise today’s youth, who like to consume content that way.”

This is all well and good, he suggests, but “in this digitally interconnected world, there is no substitute for the real thing. That’s where our events franchises come in.” As the music business learnt the hard way, live performances long ago surpassed record sales in terms of their ability to generate revenue. Historically, Nickelodeon and MTV have been big players in live events.

Nickelodeon’s *SlimeFest* made its debut in the US in June, having previously staged sell-out shows in South Africa, Australia, Italy, the UK and Spain. *SlimeFest UK*, a partnership with Live Nation, will take place in the Arena at Blackpool Pleasure Beach in October.

MTV’s international events have helped reinforce the brand for many



The Alienist

years. Nowadays, their popularity is driven by social media. The biggest MTV events are the MTV Video Music Awards, held last month in New York, and the MTV Europe Awards, to be staged in Bilbao this November.

Says Bakish: “Those are top-of-the-pyramid events. They showcase what MTV is all about in music and pop culture. They’re supported by teams, research and investment. Strictly speaking, it’s not about doing it in the same old way but it’s always about being true to the brand and the fan.”

He adds: “Year-to-year attendance at Viacom events is doubling to about 2 million people.”

Ultimately, though, Viacom remains a content company at heart. Famously, it was Sumner Redstone who coined the phrase, subsequently adopted as an entertainment business mantra, “Content is king”.

In this context, Viacom’s signing of Tyler Perry, the African-American writer, director, producer, playwright and actor, in July last year may turn out to represent a landmark for the Bakish

era. Perry is producing 90 episodes of drama and comedy series per year for BET and other Viacom networks. The company also secured exclusive distribution rights to Perry’s short-form video content and Paramount Pictures gained first-look rights to his feature-film ideas.

“The deal with Tyler Perry came out of a conversation that led to me getting on a plane, flying down and meeting him. That, ultimately, led to Tyler signing to join Viacom instead of Lionsgate,” Bakish recalls.

This aside, competition is unlikely to ease up, especially as Apple joins Netflix and Amazon in the high-end content space.

Does Viacom have anything to learn from these companies? “I think the most important thing you can do in life is to continue to learn,” says Bakish. “You can learn from all over the place. If you look at what happened with TV Everywhere, it was a significantly missed opportunity.

“An inferior product was created because the partners in the ecosystem



WE CONTINUE TO BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ACQUISITIONS IN THE UK

Netflix

– the distributors and the programmers – basically fought each other to get the best economic outcome for themselves. This allowed a new entrant to come in on an OTT basis and create the product we should have had. It attracted triple-digit millions of subscribers and created a market cap that dwarfs the traditional guys.

“The lesson there is that, [while] I don’t think you can do everything, you’ve got to see how to work with people and you’ve got to do it pretty quickly and unlock opportunities.

“If you don’t, someone else will show up. I don’t know if that’s purely a lesson from the digital guys. The digital guys are able to exploit that a lot because of their capital structures.

“At the moment, they have immense resources that they can throw at something if they choose to.

“That teaches you to be focused and not to hang around.... Watching them, seeing what they are able to create and how they use data, targeting and measurability, you have to replicate some of that. So, there are lessons.” ■



Channel 5

Bob Bakish... on the UK’s Channel 5

“Channel 5 is a fundamental part of our international strategy. Actually, when we acquired it almost four years ago, we saw a tremendous opportunity in combining our pay-network position in the UK with a general entertainment, free-to-air position in the UK.

“From a commercial standpoint, we believed there would be synergies – in advertising sales, content creation, cross promotion – and so drive larger audiences for the combined company.

“We believed, frankly, that it would create opportunity for our employees. And all that together would drive growth. That’s exactly what happened. We continue to be very pleased with Channel 5, even though one thing that we didn’t predict when we bought it was Brexit.

“We can’t control the fact that Brexit

happened. All we have to do is play through. The good news is that it is not going to affect Viacom’s commitment to the UK and London. We have a tremendous team there and they’re doing great work.

“We have valuable media assets in London. That is not going to change.

“In the short term, and we’ve seen this to date and, unfortunately, we will continue to see this for a little while, Brexit is affecting our commercial abilities and monetisation [in the UK].

“Brexit has not been a positive for the UK ad market. That costs us some money. I am not happy about that. But we’re in it for the long haul. Through this period, we have chosen to increase our investment, even though revenue hasn’t been what we had hoped.”

...on potential UK acquisitions

“We’re always looking for something interesting that fits in and is likely to accelerate our strategy. [Such deals] are hard to find and hard to get done. Unfortunately, most deals don’t get done.

“We continue to be on the lookout for acquisitions in the UK. I can’t tell you for sure if there’s going to be anything in the UK, because we look broadly.”

...on the drama boom

“Viacom is, at core, a content company, so it’s a good thing. Excluding *13 Reasons Why*, *The Alienist* and *Tom Clancy’s Jack Ryan* for Amazon, we have 22 other scripted shows set up with networks.

“There’s no doubt that some of those will convert to orders. Why is that happening? It’s because there has

never been more access to content. Companies – whether... their core [activity is entertainment], or they are new entrants looking to drive their businesses using entertainment... to pull people into the funnel – are buying product. I think that’s going to last for a while.”

Video streaming

Kate Bulkley explains why Netflix and other streaming services want to park their tanks on the lawns of national TV networks

The old saying “Think global, act local” is the new mantra for the Netflix-led, global tech platforms as they push for ever greater numbers of subscribers. In recent months, Netflix, Apple and Amazon have all started to open offices, staffed largely by locally grown TV commissioners, in the UK and other non-US markets. Simultaneously, the tech platforms are ramping up local marketing efforts.

Amazon has also jumped into local sports markets, purchasing major live sports rights for the UK, including a Premier League football package and US Open tennis rights.

In June, YouTube launched its subscription video service, YouTube Premium, in the UK and staffed up a local commissioning office.

The message is clear: the tech giants are taking the next steps in what some characterise as Silicon Valley’s assault on broadcasters and local creative industries around the world. Indeed, BBC Director-General Tony Hall has called the onslaught of the big SVoD services a “fight for the future” for PSB and commercial broadcasters alike.

Traditionally, the BBC and similar networks have presented their ability to commission and screen local content as a core strength. Who else can reflect Britain back to itself better than the BBC or ITV?

The reasons for the shift to local were underlined by Netflix’s recent quarterly results. Significantly, the company missed its own, rather conservative, subscription targets by a telling 1 million – and its share price dropped 14% in a single day.

“Domestic growth for Netflix has slumped in the US, where it already has high penetration,” says Richard Broughton of Ampere Analysis. “The new growth needs to come from

A global shift to home-grown



international markets if Netflix is to continue on its fairly relentless growth trajectory. To support that, it can sell US content into those markets; but, to reach maximum potential, Netflix needs content that appeals to local preferences.”

Netflix is expected to pour \$8bn into original content this year, much of it directed towards the UK, Germany and Spain. Two years ago, its portion of original programming coming from outside the US was just 23%, but this year it is on track to be nearly double, at 45%, according to Ampere Analysis.

Half of the non-US originals will hail from Europe, particularly the dynamic UK market. This is because Europe has the most potential for new subscription growth. There is good broadband availability, coupled with willingness and ability to pay for content.

Indeed, in its recent results, Netflix’s chief content officer, Ted Sarandos,

emphasised the importance of commissioning shows that “are incredibly relevant in their home territories – and the nice windfall is they get viewed all over the world”.

He highlighted such localised shows as the Danish series *The Rain* and German drama *Dark*, plus the forthcoming new season of Spain’s *Las Chicas del Cable* and *Ghoul* from India; Netflix sees the last as a key growth market.

“It’s really, I think, accelerating the brand perception of Netflix as not just an out-of-towner, but someone who’s producing content that you care about in every part of the world,” explained Sarandos.

And it is not just Netflix that is boosting local content and moving beyond a focus on commissioning scripted, episodic drama. Amazon is heading in the same strategic direction, raising non-US original programming



Netflix commissions from Denmark, Spain, India and Germany

from 3% of the total in 2016 to a predicted 11% this year, according to Ampere Analysis.

In the UK, Amazon hired former BBC and FremantleMedia commissioning and acquisitions executive Georgia Brown last year to lead commissioning for Europe. The UK is, of course, a crucial strategic growth market for Amazon, given its recent investments in premium football and tennis rights.

Other Faang (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google) companies also have highly experienced local commissioners in their game plans – Apple hired former Channel 4 chief creative officer Jay Hunt as creative director for Europe, based in the UK, late last year as part of its original development push.

At Netflix, ex-Canal+ documentary boss Diego Buñuel is overseeing documentaries from a central London

office. And, in July, Netflix announced that

it had chosen Madrid as the site for its first European production hub.

For YouTube and Facebook, the strategy is a bit different. Their current monetisation models are not geared to producing the high-end, premium programmes that broadcasters and Netflix covet. But that looks to be changing, particularly with the launch of YouTube Premium and Facebook's push into video via Facebook Watch.

So how should the legacy broadcasters react? When Ofcom CEO Sharon White says that she would “love to have a British Netflix”, it seems the timing might be right for a unified fightback from the BBC, ITV, Channel 5 and Channel 4. Similar moves are underway to create joint broadcaster-led SVoD services in France and Germany.

Creating this kind of SVoD platform is not without its challenges, particularly given the value of catch-up and

box-set rights to broadcasters. Indeed, the recent row between Virgin Media and UKTV, which led to all 10 of its channels disappearing for three weeks during vexed negotiations over box-set rights, was telling. Both Virgin and UKTV's joint owner, the BBC, need no reminding of the escalating value of certain on-demand rights.

The commercial and branding issues may not be easy to sort out, either, but White's statement that the rise of SVoD has “profound implications for UK television” speaks volumes for what is at stake.

In July, she urged broadcasters to “work together to reach people who are turning away from TV” in order to compete in the digital age.

The recent talk about reviving what is being described as “Kangaroo 2” is clearly underpinned by a regulatory green light. This is ironic, because it was competition regulators who shot down Project Kangaroo nine years ago. That would have seen the major British broadcasters form an SVoD alliance.

Carolyn McCall, ITV's new Chief Executive, unveiled a “strategy refresh” at the broadcaster's half-year financial update in July, including plans for a new subscription streaming service focused on distinctive British content.

ITV already operates the BritBox streaming service in a joint venture with the BBC and AMC in North America.

For the UK service, McCall said she is talking to a number of potential partners. “Ninety-two out of 100 top programmes [viewed by UK consumers] are British programmes,” she said. “There is a bit of a gap and a bit of a window. We have a strategic intention to do something more in this area.”

A big part of that fightback is about distinctive, local content. Media analyst Paolo Pescatore says: “We shouldn't underestimate the value of local content and regional differences. With this in mind, it is paramount that the leading global OTT providers invest in locally produced content” to continue to grow their services.

Pescatore believes that broadcasters should not be fighting against the Netflixes and Amazons. “As the Faangs spend more on local programming, then there is no reason why they shouldn't partner with broadcasters whose strength is in local content.

“It's a great match for both traditional providers and the Faangs. Embrace change by partnering rather than fighting the new world.” ■

The secret agent's son

In the treacherous world of espionage there may no trickier riddle, wrapped in no greater mystery, inside no more elusive enigma than the following question: will there be a *Night Manager II*? Some doubt there can be a follow-up to the 2016 BBC One thriller because John le Carré did not write a sequel on which it could be based. Others, just as cogently, argue that the BBC and The Ink Factory, the production company which made it to such acclaim and ratings, will not be able to resist.

"Actually, not being cute, I really don't know," says Simon Cornwell, The Ink Factory's Co-Chief Executive and son of le Carré. "We don't have scripts for it yet, and we would only think about making a second series of *The Night Manager* if it was going to be really good.

"And I'm sure that Hugh [Laurie] and Tom [Hiddleston] and Olivia [Colman], who are not exactly underemployed actors, won't want to come back unless it's excellent, frankly. And, you know, we have all of le Carré's body of work to pick from."

We are sitting, mid-heatwave, in The Ink Factory office in Covent Garden, not far from the Circus, the fictional intelligence HQ in le Carré's *Smiley* novels. Cornwell, 61, a tall, well-built man, is wearing – unbuttoned – a long, oat-coloured waistcoat.

I have a sensitive question. How is it that le Carré's screen rights have fallen into the laps of Simon and his writer brother Stephen (the company's other Co-CEO, who works from LA)? Was it a gift? Their inheritance? If so, what about the novelist's two other sons?

Did he have to negotiate the deal, I ask. "Yes, furiously."

It wasn't just done over a brandy one night? "I wish it had been done over a brandy one night. For all kinds of appropriate reasons to do with fairness within the family and, actually, to do with the law of the land, it needed to be a bona fide, arm's length deal. And so it is."

Whatever the future of *The Night Manager II*, the Cornwells do have two BBC le Carrés in gestation. The first, emerging this winter, and now in post-production, is *The Little Drummer Girl*, starring Florence Pugh and Alexander Skarsgård, and directed by Park Chan-wook.

It is the story of how Pugh's character, an actress, is recruited on a Greek beach by Mossad to bring down a terrorist ring. The similarity to the premise of *The Night Manager*, in which

British spooks employ a civilian, has not gone unnoticed by Cornwell.

Otherwise, he assures me, it will be very different: "From an early view of the results it is, in a good way, unlike anything I've ever seen on television. It's stunningly, beautifully, amazingly shot, hugely cinematic."

Drummer Girl will be followed, with filming starting "next year", by *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, based on le Carré's first great novel. It was published in 1963 and swiftly made into a film starring Richard Burton. I suggest that the movie's greatness carries its own problems.

"It was, absolutely, a perfect film," he agrees. "I mean, to drop names for a moment, we made a movie a couple of years ago with Ang Lee and Ang would cite *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* as, in his view, a formally perfect film in lots of ways, and I think that's right.

"I guess the beauty of revisiting it is that we have a completely fresh approach to it. Last year, my father published *A Legacy of Spies* and a big section of that is essentially a prequel to [*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*]. It fills a several-year hole in Smiley's life between the end of what is actually his first novel, *Call for the Dead*, and the start of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*."

But what of Smiley? Can anyone fill Alec Guinness's BBC costume department brogues? "*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* was a long time ago and the Smiley in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* is much younger. He's in his late thirties, early forties, I guess."

Does that mean casting an actor who will continue to play him in subsequent Smiley adaptations? "I hope we cast a Smiley who stays with us. Obviously, it's a big ask of any actor to stay with us over multiple stories, multiple years and, of course, Smiley himself grows quite a lot older over the sequence – but I think that it's certainly fun to try."

Both of the new serials have been secured by the BBC. Cornwell fears, however, for public service broadcasters' ability to afford such series in the future. *The Night Manager* cost £3.5m per episode. Thanks largely to the demand for drama from Netflix and Amazon, costs have since risen by 40%.

The solution for The Ink Factory has been co-productions with AMC in the US and its own fundraising, recouped through foreign sales. As things stand, Cornwell estimates that the BBC's tariff for *Drummer Girl* would finance just one and a half episodes.



The Ink Factory

The Billen profile

Andrew Billen meets **Simon Cornwell**, whose production company, The Ink Factory, is best known for adapting the novels of his father, John le Carré



The Little Drummer Girl

All pictures: BBC

Cornwell loved the national obsession that *The Night Manager* became on the BBC and knows his series would not have made an equivalent impact had it been dumped on Netflix as a box set.

"It's a wonderful thing and it's lovely. On the other hand," he reflects, "we might have made more money. So, it is a trade-off."

"It is a real challenge for the public service broadcasters because so much of the conversation in any given year is probably around half a dozen really good TV shows and, you know, we want to have one of those shows and the BBC needs at least half of them."

I ask if, after years in finance, he enjoys making deals. "I do enjoy it but, at the end of the day, it is all about the quality of what we do. No volume of smart deals ever turned a bad show into a good one."

Things are not always as they appear on a spreadsheet, or, for that matter, on a CV. On paper, Simon's childhood looks a disaster. He is the son of an adulterous ex-spy who got famous and whose strained marriage ended in divorce in 1971 when Simon was barely in his teens.

What he recalls, however, is a happy start in life, travelling around Europe and settling for a while in a town in Crete where his father pursued the writing dream à la Lawrence Durrell.

By the time his parents' marriage broke down he was boarding at a rural prep school, whose name he cannot for the moment recall. After that came Westminster School, which he loved.

"It's a very public-school kind of thing to say but, if your parents have split up, then, from the age of eight or whatever it is, you're basically looking out for yourself," he suggests. "You probably spend more time at school than you do with either parent."

Did it damage him? "Well, you'd have to ask other people that. Rather annoyingly, I probably thrived on it, to be honest. And it was good fun."

"I think that we were one of those strange families – I know this is disappointing to journalists – that was superficially utterly dysfunctional but, in reality, highly functional."

After Oxford, where he switched from physics to modern languages, he went to the Thai-Laos-Cambodia border to work for the International Rescue Committee as it dealt with the horrors of Pol Pot. For the UNHCR, he helped build Khao-i-dang, a temporary refugee camp that became the second largest Cambodian city in the world, at its peak sheltering almost 500,000.

"We had 5,000 unaccompanied children, and that number grew over time to 12,000 or 14,000. So we set up a programme to try to track down the ➤



The Night Manager



Relief organisation feeding station north east of Phnom Penh in January 1975

PA/Tea Kim Heang

TWO WAY TV WAS WAY AHEAD OF ITS TIME... IN THE DOTCOM CRASH OF 2001, CORNWELL JOINED THE '10% CLUB'

Cornwell's career

Simon Anthony Vivian Cornwell, joint CEO, The Ink Factory

Born 7 March 1957, Somerset, oldest of three brothers

Brought up In Crete and Essex

Father David Cornwell, spy and, as John le Carré, novelist

Mother Alison Ann Veronica Sharp

Married To Mimi, two sons

Education Frilsham Prep, Berkshire; Westminster School; Wadham College, Oxford; Yale School of Management

1978-81 Works on a tracing programme for Cambodian refugees

1985 Boston Consulting Group

1989 MD of interactive TV, Granada Group

1989 Founders Two Way TV

2001 Joins Amadeus Capital

2011 Founders The Ink Factory with brother Stephen

Hits *The Night Manager* (BBC One), *A Most Wanted Man* (Philip Seymour Hoffman's last film), *Message from the King* (a Netflix top movie mainly because it features *Black Panther* star Chadwick Boseman)

Misses *Our Kind of Traitor*

Watching Norwegian thriller *Monster*

Not watching 'I've been intrigued by *Love Island* but not intrigued to the point where I've actually watched an episode'

Reading Andrew Michael Hurley's *The Loney* and *Devil's Day*

► families of those kids. Some of their parents, obviously, had been slaughtered in the killing fields but, actually, a lot of them hadn't been."

In the end, more than 4,000 children were reunited with their parents. A senior member of Cornwell's team was a Thai woman working for the UN called Mimi. They fell in love, married and have two sons. He left for Yale to study management with the intention of bringing his skills back to refugee relief, "but, like many of the best intentions, it got waylaid – actually by the need to pay off my debts".

Cornwell got a job at Boston Consulting. By the end of the 1980s, he believed he had spotted that interactivity was the future of television. For nine years, he battled away with his company, Two Way TV, trying to tempt customers to buy additional boxes so that they could combine games with live television.

It was pre-digital, and way ahead of its time. In the dotcom crash of 2001 Cornwell joined the "10% club", a club whose only membership requirement was to wake up one morning and find your company worth a tenth of what it had been the night before.

So he went to bed as a millionaire, and woke up as...? "Someone with a very large mortgage."

He crossed the negotiating table and became a venture capitalist at Amadeus Capital but, in 2011, he and his brother set up The Ink Factory; Stephen worked more closely with screenwriters and Simon more closely with investors. Its aim was not

just to make TV and feature films but to spin off computer games and virtual-reality products from them.

The problem, they discovered, is that "good is no longer good enough". In a crowded and pricey market, only excellence gets noticed and makes money. Having nursed a few failures – including a big-screen adaptation of his father's *Our Kind of Traitor* – film, he judges, is even more hits-driven than television.

"I think that more than half of all films released lose money but a relatively small proportion then make enough money to pay for the mistakes."

Has Ink Factory made one of the latter? "Actually, *A Most Wanted Man*, which we did in 2014, is a small movie, but a commercially very successful movie – as well as, I think, quite a good movie. Hopefully, the two things correlate. But we haven't yet had a big, breakout-hit film."

He says he is obsessive about his work, which, he believes you have to be in his business. Yet, as I have discovered, there is another side to Simon Cornwell, a side, I suggest, that could be spotted in *The Night Manager*'s moral fury at Hugh Laurie's arms trader Richard Roper.

"I suppose at one level it is kind of important to me, and important generally, to care about people," he says cautiously, for he is not at all pompous, "but my work is also enormous fun and very exciting."

Simon Cornwell could, I realise, just as easily be talking about his father's work as his own. ■

OUR FRIEND ON THE ISLE OF MAN

Until the beginning of the year, the Isle of Man was shorthand for “I’m almost home...”. On my many flights home to Belfast or Dublin, when the pilot said we were flying over the Isle of Man, I knew landing was only a matter of minutes away. Over the years, based in Ireland but regularly in London, I must have flown over the island more than 800 times – never once did I give it a second thought.

That changed in January, when I became the CEO of Isle of Media, the public-private partnership that aims to make the island a media hub.

I like a professional challenge and thought this would be at the top end of the scale. Why would any media company uproot from their established base and set up on a rock?

While I’m still getting to know the island, as far as I can see there is no Greggs or Nando’s, and no Pret. There is a Costa and a Starbucks. There is not one kilometre of motorway on the whole 48km-long island, which is, in its entirety, a Unesco Biosphere.

Well, actually, all the reasons above are good ones. Many businesses, especially their owners, want to move to a place where the customer knows the barista’s name and they know yours without writing it on a paper cup. The restaurants are varied. Often they are owned by the chef and cook with locally sourced ingredients.

With miles of beach, glen and tramway, and with steam trains to commute on – and no speed limit on open roads – it’s a place for family and maverick alike. The island even has its own fairies, apparently.

Michael Wilson is fast discovering there is more to the island than TT races and stunning scenery



I’ve made it half way through the column without mentioning the tax rate: 0% corporation tax, 0% capital gains tax and a maximum personal taxation rate of 20%. While the BBC’s *Panorama* painted a different picture, the Isle of Man is officially “white listed” by the OECD for good practice and transparency.

So, how do we create a media cluster out of nothing? Well, that’s another misunderstanding. There is already a serious media presence on the island.

At one point, the Isle of Man was one of the British Isles’ busiest locations. More than 100 feature films and TV shows have been filmed here. We are now transitioning to a production, digital media and technology hub, having inherited a large creative talent base.

Greenlight Television is based here. It makes motorsport for international audiences, including the TT races for ITV4 and road racing for the BBC.

Mark Rowland’s latest venture, Formatzone, specialising in unscripted, has an outpost on the island as well as in Birmingham. Its production *Laurence of Suburbia* is distributed by Sky Vision and is beginning its international roll-out. The series is on air in New Zealand, Poland and South Africa.

The pan-European digital channel Motorsport.tv has just invested in the Isle of Man-based Duke Media. The deal will bring the Duke archive to a global audience.

It’s not only production.

SES Satellite Leasing has recently built a teleport, while Mediatech Advertising works internationally, and Manx Telecom supports an IP-based news service.

A major facilities business is about to announce its arrival to cater for the growing media opportunities and will import post-production projects.

In the pipeline is an amazing media tech business, plus a number of animation projects.

We are looking to become a major eSports base, which will complement the existing gaming businesses that flourish on the island.

We even have incentives to deliver businesses to the Isle of Man. These include multimillion-pound government grants and funds, and media-savvy angel investors.

Just like me, you may never have thought about the Isle of Man per se, let alone in a media business context, but we can all be wrong. ■

Michael Wilson is CEO, Isle of Media.

UK broadcasters are against pooling TV ad sales, but there are other ways to co-operate, explains **Gideon Spanier**

The case for collaboration

Broadcasters need to be “more aggressive” in pitching the value of TV to advertisers, and they should produce joint research to prove it, argues Ruth Cartwright, head of audio-visual media for Amplifi, part of agency group Dentsu Aegis Network.

“The challenge for broadcasters is that, despite all the evidence that we know to be true – that TV maximises campaign reach, increases awareness and delivers a competitive return on investment – advertisers and, frequently, media planners undervalue TV,” she explains.

A huge, heated marquee at a holiday campsite in Hampshire might seem like an unlikely venue to champion the future of TV advertising. But, back in February, that was where ITV, Channel 4 and Sky came together for the inaugural Big TV Festival, an event aimed at wooing 150 young marketers and media planners over two days.

Ros King, director of marketing communications at Lloyds Banking Group, described to the audience how Halifax’s TV ads featuring cartoon characters from *Top Cat* had been so effective. The bank kept bringing them back, running them in seven bursts over two years.

Chaka Sobhani, chief creative officer of ad agency Leo Burnett, and Rosie Arnold, head of art at fellow agency AMV BBDO, showed their favourite TV ads, such as the Guinness surfers and Yeo Valley’s rapping farmers. And Rory Sutherland, Vice-Chair of Ogilvy and a *Spectator* columnist, warned about the perils of online advertising in a barn-

storming speech that celebrated the importance of making brands famous.

The Big TV Festival was such a significant event for the UK ad industry because the three leading commercial broadcasters showed that they were willing to unite at a time when online platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, are growing fast.

“The world is getting more competitive from a global perspective,” Jonathan Allan, Channel 4’s chief commercial officer, told the gathering. He explained why he and his counterparts at ITV and Sky felt it was important to “speak more with one voice” and to “get more visible, together externally selling TV”.

Broadcasters have not faced the same structural declines that newspaper and magazine publishers have suffered, as advertisers’ money has migrated to the internet giants. “Emotional” ads by brands such as John Lewis have shown that TV still has unrivalled mass, simultaneous reach and an ability to “connect” with consumers in a way that tech platforms cannot match.

What’s more, targeted TV advertising services such as Sky AdSmart, offer growth opportunities for video on demand (VoD).

Annual TV ad revenue in Britain has risen from £4bn during the nadir of the financial crisis in 2009 to a peak of £5.2bn in 2016. Following a slight dip after the Brexit vote, it is forecast to be up marginally, at just over £5bn, in 2018, according to GroupM, the media-buying agency arm of WPP.

By contrast, national newspaper ad revenue has nearly halved from £1.3bn



The classic Guinness surfers advert

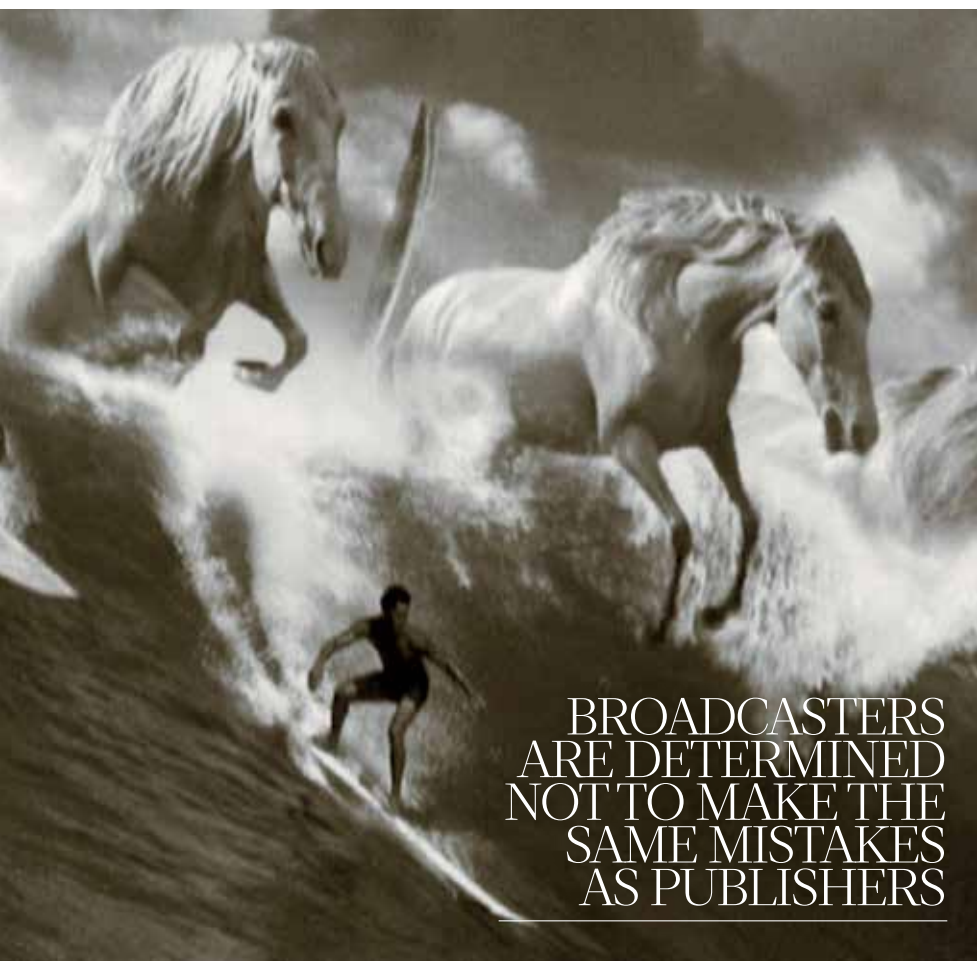
to £750m over the same period. It took until 2016 for newspapers to put aside their rivalries and look at pooling print and digital ad sales to make it easier for advertisers to buy from them.

The initial talks, called Project Juno, collapsed but News UK, publisher of the *Sun* and the *Times*, Telegraph Media Group and Guardian Media Group agreed on a more modest proposal this summer to set up a joint venture, the Ozone Project. It will pool their digital display ad inventory and audience data.

Agencies welcomed the initiative as a small step in the right direction, but industry watchers think publishers should have acted sooner. Enders Analysis warns that the situation is akin to climate change, in that “a meaningful response” could come “too late”.

Broadcasters are determined not to make the same mistakes as publishers when it comes to collaboration. However, for several reasons, pooling TV ad sales is not on the agenda.

First, the TV market is governed by the contract rights renewal (CRR) legislation introduced after the merger of Carlton and Granada in 2003. These



BROADCASTERS ARE DETERMINED NOT TO MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES AS PUBLISHERS

Guinness

rules protect advertisers from ITV abusing its position as the dominant player in TV ad sales.

Enders Analysis has warned that CRR is anachronistic, because it encourages trading by share of ad spend on TV, rather than volume, in a world where advertisers have lots of video options beyond TV. However, Carolyn McCall, ITV's new Chief Executive, has ruled out a challenge to CRR because she fears a "regulatory mire".

The second reason not to pool TV ad sales is that the market works reasonably well and efficiently. In 2003, there were 10 TV sales houses. They have since merged into three main players: ITV's share is about 45%, while Channel 4 (which also handles sales for UKTV and BT) and Sky (which looks after Viacom, Discovery, Fox and others) each have about 27%. That contrasts with newspapers, where there are still seven national sales teams.

Tess Alps, Chair of Thinkbox, the marketing body for commercial TV, says: "TV sales is now consolidated to quite a great extent and the market seems to be happy with that."

There are other ways to collaborate,

particularly around VoD, audience data, technology and content. Setting up the equivalent of the Ozone Project as a joint venture for VoD advertising (leaving aside regulatory hurdles) could have merit.

While there is no great demand for change in traditional TV ad sales, "the world of data-driven, VoD TV, where you have to invest an awful lot of money in technology and know-how, is where you start to have very interesting conversations about how you can work together", according to Jakob Nielsen, Chief Executive of Finecast, Group M's VoD ad-buying platform.

Ruth Cartwright adds that advertisers would like a high-quality alternative to Google and Facebook that has no ad fraud, is brand-safe and has scale. "I do think that any route to creating easily accessible premium content on a joint [advertising] platform would be a good proposition," she says.

Sky's AdSmart platform is already used by brands and agencies to target viewers by demographic and location on that broadcaster's channels and online; its revenues rose 29% last year, albeit from a low base.

ITV and Channel 4 have each held on-off talks with Sky for years about joining AdSmart, but have been unable to agree commercial terms.

Even if the broadcasters won't pool ad sales, they could share audience data. Sources say that ITV and Channel 4 are looking at how they could create a shared VoD data platform.

Agencies are also pushing broadcasters and video platforms to adopt technology that makes it easier to serve ads in a standardised way, instead of having lots of different software.

Finecast, which launched last year, allows advertisers to serve VoD ads on 15 different types of device. These include Sky and Virgin Media set-top boxes, Roku and Chromecast streaming devices, Samsung connected TVs and Xbox gaming consoles. "I can't explain how difficult and how complicated it has been and how long it has taken us to do that," Nielsen says.

The explosion in the number of devices has been good for TV because it means there are more opportunities to view content and advertising. But broadcasters are also having to grapple with immense structural change, as consumers have more power to skip ads and are willing to pay for premium, ad-free, global services such as Netflix.

Suddenly, UK public service broadcasters look small by comparison with international rivals, raising questions about whether the British creative industries could be at risk. This has prompted the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 to discuss plans for a joint, online streaming platform for British content. They have been given encouragement by Ofcom – a nine years after regulators blocked a similar idea, Project Kangaroo, on competition grounds.

The imminent sale of Sky to Comcast or Disney shows that broadcasters can no longer just think local as they battle the tech giants. In a small, but symbolic, move, Channel 4 has set up a joint digital sales venture, the European Broadcaster Exchange, with Germany's ProSiebenSat, France's TF1 and Mediaset in Italy and Spain, to attract international advertisers – a growing issue when Google and Facebook offer global ad sales.

If the golden rule with advertising is to follow the money, then there should be no doubt that the future is greater collaboration. ■

Gideon Spanier is global head of media at Campaign.



Channel 4

Doing comedy differently

Comedy

Fiona McDermott, C4's head of comedy, tells Pippa Shawley that she is determined to build on the success of *Derry Girls*

‘There are times when you sit back and go, “Oh, this is one of the best jobs in the world – how did I get it?” enthuses Fiona McDermott, Channel 4's head of comedy. During her 18 months in the job, the channel has undergone dramatic changes, with the departure of David Abraham and Jay Hunt and the arrival of Alex Mahon and Ian Katz.

Katz landed at the channel the same week that *Derry Girls* launched to become Channel 4's biggest comedy opening since 2004, and the most-watched TV series in Northern Ireland since records began.

It's a rare thing for a sitcom to become an overnight sensation.

“It's not for everyone to work in a genre like this,” says McDermott, who spent six years at the channel in comedy commissioning before being promoted to her current post. “Comedy takes a really long time and it's such a team effort.”

Shows can take years to develop from an idea into a full series. Jamie Demetriou's recent *Stath Lets Flats* took more than three. Even then, the work isn't over. “It's much quoted here, but *The Inbetweeners*' three-series model was extraordinary,” the comedy boss explains. “Series 1 was fine, series 2 went up a bit and then series 3 was an

explosion.” *The Inbetweeners Movie* went on to break box-office records when it was released in 2011, becoming the UK's most successful comedy film of all time.

“The biggest part of this job is having the strength to back things that you believe in,” admits McDermott.

Unlike her colleagues working in news and factual programmes, success means redefining what makes a hit: “Overnights matter, of course, they do. Critical response matters. Public response matters. But I think that, in comedy, you can take a broader view on it sometimes, and your heart has to lead you on a bit.”

Confidence in the whole team is essential, she continues. “From start to finish, you have to back your judgement, you have to back your

producers... good writers... and have the stamina to see it through, even when they might not do amazingly in the overnights.”

The comedy chief is on the hunt for shows that will become part of a cultural legacy. Growing up watching Channel 4 comedies that included *Da Ali G Show*, *Green Wing* and *Black Books*, McDermott is aware of the enduring influence of comedy, and how it can grow over time.

As Channel 4's new director of programmes, Katz vowed to put comedy back at the network's heart. In May, he announced a £10m investment in scripted comedy and comedy entertainment, aimed at making Channel 4 “the unequivocal home of youthful, original, British comedy”.

McDermott says the financial “shot in the arm” will help the channel to reach younger audiences at a time when they are spoilt for choice.

“Channel 4 was just where you went for that slightly alternative take, and you found voices you hadn't heard anywhere else,” she recalls of the channel's comedy heyday. “When you were that age – late teens or whatever – it was bloody cool to watch Channel 4 comedy.”

While the increasing number of rivals on the scene means that more people have been able to get their big

break, it also means greater competition for talent. The challenge for Channel 4's comedy team is to find and support new writers and performers.

"We have to [support] new talent because that's how we're going to bring out new stars who will, hopefully, feel kindred and local to the channel," says McDermott. "We also have our eye on those bigger names that will draw in a bit more of the commercial stuff, maybe by allowing slightly bigger names to do what they wouldn't normally do."

She points to Sacha Baron Cohen, whose Channel 4 series *Da Ali G Show* propelled him to international fame in 2000. Eighteen years on, Baron Cohen has been back on the channel this summer with *Who Is America?*

"There's no one who does what he does," says McDermott. "The balls on that man are off the scale. It was a real reminder [that] Channel 4 is a supporter of that, and that's fantastic."

McDermott says it's "gorgeous" to work with established talent such as Simon Blackwell on *Back*, Stephen Mangan on *Hang Ups* and Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney on *Catastrophe*.

"Sharon and Rob writing *Catastrophe*

is maybe one of the most beautiful bits of chemistry I've ever witnessed," she believes. "It continually dazzles me that they get freshness out of that relationship, and that is because the characters are so finely honed."

She advises writers that she is "always looking for a character that I've not seen before". That doesn't mean pitching outlandish scenarios that no one will identify with. "It's just about that dial being turned up just a little bit." Comedies need to be brave and to take risks, even if that means telling stories that initially might seem shocking.

"The best comedies feel comfortable after a time... but you can't be too comfortable from the out, otherwise it's soft and it's mild and you feel like you've seen it before."

Lisa McGee's idea for *Derry Girls* was one such story that turned up the dial of a school-based sitcom, set against the backdrop of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. From the stern school headmistress Sister Michael, to whimsical cousin Orla, the characters in the series are recognisable to most

viewers, albeit perhaps not in a context of police checkpoints, bomb scares and peace murals.

The show's success in Northern Ireland is a huge source of pride for the comedy boss. But it also served as a wake-up call, demonstrating the kind of programmes that public service broadcasters should be making: "It resonated with the community in Northern Ireland and you realise, 'God, they were so underserved!'" The second series of the 1990s-based comedy begins filming later this year.

Other shows in the pipeline include: Matt Berry's *Year of the Rabbit* (imagine *The Sweeney* set in Victorian England); *Happy AF* (still just a working title) written and starring Aisling Bea (with Sharon Horgan playing her sister); and Rufus Jones's *Home*, which follows the experiences of Sami, a Syrian refugee who enters Britain illegally to claim asylum.

While it's hard to predict the next *Peep Show*-level hit, McDermott believes that there are series in the schedule with the potential to have a lasting place on the cultural landscape.

"We'll only be making more comedy," she says of future plans. "We'll only be taking more risks and breaking more new talent in the coming years and, hopefully, finding a young audience with it, who'll grow up in the same way I did... with comedy that makes you feel part of something." ■



Derry Girls

Channel 4

Local shows for local people

HBO Europe enjoyed a hit in the Czech Republic with the award-winning drama series *Burning Bush*

HBO Europe

As competition bites, HBO Europe is ramping up original production across the continent, reports
Stuart Kemp

P*atria*, a drama series about families ripped apart by ETA, the Basque separatist group that killed around 830 people during its 50-year campaign for independence from Spain, provides the storyline for HBO Europe's foray into a new territory.

It is adapted from Fernando Aramburu's novel of the same name by San Sebastián-born screenwriter Aitor Gabilondo, and is the first project to be developed by HBO España, HBO Europe's newest commissioning hub.

The company plans to make "two, maybe three, shows a year out of Spain", says Antony Root, head of original production for HBO Europe.

"There is an appetite for scripted drama of the highest level among the [Spanish] audience that I have not seen in my career before. And I am an old geezer," says Root, 64, with a smile.

HBO Europe offers programming to subscribers through three services covering 17 countries. HBO España is available to subscribers as an SVoD service and via an exclusive partnership with Vodafone Spain – customers access the streaming service via Vodafone TV or on their computers, smart-

phones or tablets. *Patria* will provide a litmus test for the company's belief in the power of local shows for local people. It is central to HBO's strategy to win eyeballs in the face of formidable global competition from local, free-to-air broadcasters, pay-TV giants and Netflix and Amazon's deep-pocketed streaming services.

Spain is shaping up as ground zero for this battle. Netflix recently announced that its first production base outside North America will be in Madrid. The streamer is investing heavily in Spanish-language content, and is producing 20 originals in Spain this year. They include Isabel Coixet's

Elisa y Marcela, and season 3 of popular local TV series *Las Chicas del Cable*, made by Madrid's Bambú Producciones.

Erik Barmack, vice-president of international originals at Netflix, says the move "will create new opportunities for Spain's incredible creative talent, as well as demonstrating our commitment to the production of original content throughout Europe".

UK producers are looking on with interest. They wonder who will make the next move and where the opportunities lie for them.

"It is great that you can now make an ambitious piece of television in two or three languages and versions if you want to," says Kevin Loader of Free Range Films, whose credits include *The Lost Honour of Christopher Jefferies*.

HBO Europe was created in 1991. It started out with adaptations of existing international formats,

most notably the Hebrew-language Israeli series *BeTipul*,

which HBO America remade in English as *In Treatment*, starring Gabriel Byrne. Rather than buy the US version from HBO, Linda Jensen, then head of HBO Central Europe, decided to begin making versions for individual European territories.

HBO Europe has created iterations of *BeTipul* in Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania. In Hungary and the Czech Republic, it has made local versions of romcom *When Shall We Kiss?*.

Root arrived in 2011 and, in his second year, HBO Europe enjoyed a local-language hit in the Czech Republic with *Burning Bush*, directed by world-renowned Polish film-maker

Agnieszka Holland. Based on real events and characters, *Burning Bush* focuses on student Jan Palach, who set himself on fire in 1969 to protest at the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. The show went on to win awards and emboldened HBO Europe's local-content strategy.

It built its own internal writing teams within the central European countries. The game plan involved growing a generation of writers by working on adaptations and then grooming them to do original work. It would later repeat this in the Nordic region and, subsequently, in Spain.

It strove to work with film-makers and talent at the top of their game. It was a canny move that Netflix is seeking to emulate.

"Of course, you can buy original series from America but original local programming has a big marketing impact with very high viewing figures," says media and telecoms analyst François Godard at Enders Analysis. "It is successful in popular culture because people talk about it. Original programming gives you relevance in the marketplace for a relatively modest investment."

As an example, he points to Spanish pay-TV company Telefónica, which creates 12 TV series for around €100m – compared with paying €1bn a year for football rights.

HBO Europe now comprises several constituent parts: in Scandinavia, HBO Nordic has established itself with its "The home of series" strand, offering a premium SVoD service directly to consumers and via operator partners in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark.

In Central Europe, HBO is available to subscribers in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Content for both regions is being fed by HBO Europe's own talent pools. And in an effort to unearth talent in the Adria region of the former Yugoslavia, the company recently launched a scriptwriting competition.

The winner was Marjan Alčevski's *Success*, about four strangers bound together by one violent event. The series is the first original series from the region. Filming took place in the Croatian capital of Zagreb earlier this year. It was directed by Bosnian Danis ▶

YOU CAN BUY
ORIGINAL
SERIES FROM
AMERICA BUT
ORIGINAL LOCAL
PROGRAMMING
HAS... IMPACT



► Tanović, the first foray into TV for the Oscar-winning writer and director of *No Man's Land*.

The company is reaping the rewards of having operated across Central and Eastern Europe for more than 20 years. "It takes years to build up the human resources, the people who know how to write for TV, shoot for TV, people who know the rhythms and needs," says Godard.

HBO Nordic has green-lit *Beforeigners* from *Lilyhammer* creators Anne Bjørnstad and Eilif Skodvin. Directed by Norwegian film-maker Jens Lien, the near-future science fiction series is a smart satire on attitudes towards immigration and western society. It is the division's second original production, and follows acclaimed Swedish director Lukas Moodysson's comedy series *Gösta*, which recently wrapped.

HBO Europe's first international co-production, *Hackerville*, is a six-part series conceived by *Deutschland 83* co-creator Joerg Winger and Ralph Martin. Produced by Romanian film-maker Cristian Mungiu and producer Tudor Reu via their Bucharest-based Mobra Films, the Romanian-German thriller about a network of hackers is co-produced with TNT Serie and filmed in Germany and Romania. It will air later this year.

The hope is that such ambitious output will also travel across borders. A local story well told should have universal appeal, runs the theory. All the new original language shows will be available across all 17 countries in which HBO Europe operates.

In the US, they will play on HBO Go, HBO Now, and HBO On Demand, the company's VoD platforms. In the UK, HBO Europe-created content has aired on Channel 4's *Walter Presents*. The shows include *Burning Bush* and *The Border*, and content is sold into the market on a case-by-case basis. Sky Atlantic and Sky's on-demand service Now TV play host to HBO's English-language output via its deal with Sky.

"We wouldn't be creating original programming if we didn't think it was commercial," says Root. "When you offer programming you have a different relationship with your audience than if you simply acquire programming."

"A lot of what we do in our business at HBO is defined by the people you get to work with. We aim for an extra dimension, whatever that HBO magic dust is, we want to apply it to these local shows." ■

China

Marcus Ryder offers some advice to British producers worried by the complexities of appealing to Chinese audiences

What Chinese viewers want

A few months ago, the trade association Pact organised a group of television producers, directors and industry insiders to visit China. One of the producers on that trip was an old friend. We were able to catch up over dinner when I took her to a street-food spot that most tourists miss.

The British producer had been in meetings with top Chinese media executives. She said there had been a number of really positive conversations. But there had been one question she had been dying to ask her Chinese counterparts but had put off for fear of offending them. Over some Yunnanese specialities, she asked me in a whisper, "Is China's TV audience racist?"

Putting my personal politics to one side, I think that this is not only a fair question to ask but an incredibly important one. If British television producers are to succeed in selling their programmes in what is, measured by revenue, the third-largest TV market in the world, they need to know what Chinese audiences like and dislike.

This can influence who you cast in a lead or even the types of stories you tell. After all, diversity might be great to talk about but not so great if it prevents an entire market from buying your programme.

This question of whether China's film and TV audiences are racist was

brought into sharp focus earlier this year with the release of the movie *Black Panther*. Around the world, the movie was heralded as a breakthrough for diversity. It had an almost exclusively black cast and was predominantly set in Africa. Crucially, it broke box-office records.

But, in China, the international media focused on how badly it did compared with its popularity in the US and Europe. Significantly, the commentators assigned a large part of that to a racist audience.

If I was a UK media exec keen to break into the Chinese market, my one takeaway from the *Black Panther* headlines would be: do not cast black people in leading roles.

However, on closer examination of the *Black Panther* numbers, the Chinese audience appears far from racist. First of all, the movie took \$21m on its opening day, the second-highest debut for a Marvel movie in China. It is true that, after an amazing opening weekend, ticket sales dropped dramatically. Cue the predictable headlines that this was evidence of China's racism.

But if the newspapers had returned to the story not long after, they would have found that it went on to make \$100m in just two weeks. This was ahead of established superhero franchise episodes, such as *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Spider-Man: Homecoming*.

And if you start to look at other



Black Panther

Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

foreign movie successes, China seems positively to embrace non-Chinese, non-white actors. China is consuming Bollywood films as never before.

The Hindi-language film *Dangal* was a huge hit in 2017, earning \$190m. It wasn't a one-off. Its success has been followed by other Indian films, such as *Secret Superstar*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and *Hindi Medium*.

I mention these details because I think it is important for British TV producers to know what Chinese

audiences think of non-white, non-Chinese actors in films. They should not be scared of making casting decisions that accurately reflect the globalised, multicultural world we live in.

"So, are you telling me that Chinese people are not racist?" asked my British producer friend. I almost choked on my pineapple rice (a wonderful Yunnanese speciality, by the way) when she asked me that one. In China, I have experienced levels of racial ignorance that I have never

experienced elsewhere. I've seen adverts for personal English tutors specifically ask for "whites only". It is not uncommon for black people to be photographed at tourist attractions almost as much as the attraction itself.

However, based on my experience of living in China for almost three years, this racial ignorance does not translate into Chinese people rejecting black characters on screen.

But, anecdotally, there does seem to be a strong reaction against political correctness. In speaking to Chinese friends and colleagues, if viewers perceive any political correctness in the casting or the story being told, they will often reject elements of the show out of hand.

I have received different explanations for this. Some suggest that it is a reaction to western ideology and values, which some viewers see as propaganda.

Other people have proposed almost the opposite, that it is a reaction to a history of Chinese state propaganda, where people have been told what to think, and so they balk at any hint of "thought-police".

In 2014, the UK and Chinese governments signed a memorandum of understanding to increase film co-productions between the two countries. At the same time, Pact brokered a deal with the Chinese state broadcaster aimed at increasing programme commissions, co-productions and acquisitions.

An early win for the UK was Silvergate Media getting two children's series on screen later that year. But other successes have been slow to come. BBC Studios has a representative in Beijing examining co-production and licensing opportunities.

As you would expect with a population of 1.4 billion people, the Chinese television audience is a complex one. It defies easy categorisation. But trying to understand that complexity is key to British companies succeeding in the Chinese market. Simple stereotypes about the Chinese audience will not help; understanding the nuances of what makes the audience tick will.

And, as I told my producer friend from Pact, if you are lucky enough to cast Idris Elba or Thandie Newton as the lead of your next six-part series, please do not lie awake at night worrying that China won't buy your show. ■

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

Cardiff engineer takes tech prize

BBC Wales technology support engineer Gareth Reid is the winner of the RTS/Atos Young Technologist Award 2018.

Reid, who graduated from the BBC Broadcast Engineering Scheme after joining as an apprentice in 2013, receives an all-expenses paid trip to the broadcasting trade show IBC in Amsterdam this September.

The young engineer was chosen to receive the award, which is sponsored by digital technology giant Atos, by a panel of industry judges, chaired by digital media consultant Terry Marsh.

"It was a very strong field this year. However, Gareth stood out immediately," said Marsh.

Reid is based in Cardiff, and works in both TV and radio facilities. He has been heavily

involved in the development of new systems for BBC Wales when it moves to new headquarters next year.

BBC Wales technology support manager Kevin Murphy said: "Gareth has played a key role in supporting all our broadcast technologies.

"The ambition and drive that he has shown, coupled with an eagerness to both mentor and disseminate his knowledge to his colleagues, make him a valuable asset to us here in BBC Wales."

The runner up and recipient of the Coffey Award for Excellence in Technology 2018 is Alex Snell from BCi Digital.

The RTS set up the Young Technologist Award with funding from the family of broadcasting engineer AM Beresford-Cooke, who is best remembered for his work on VHF and UHF transmission



Gareth Reid

BBC

towers and masts. The aim of the award is to advance education in the science, practice, technology and art of television.

Matthew Bell

Previous RTS Young Technologist Award winners

<https://bit.ly/2Lltmnu>

Blue Room showcases BBC technology

Midlands Centre It was a meeting of techie minds when RTS Midlands teamed up with the BBC Blue Room to offer a glimpse into the future of television.

The BBC Blue Room in Birmingham is an interactive exhibition showcasing the best in the corporation's innovative technologies. At the July event, "The future is now", TV producers had the opportunity to put their geekiest questions to Blue Room expert Colin Warhurst – and discovered much that astounded them.

Ultra-high definition (UHD)

television uses pictures that are 3,840 pixels by 2,160 (four times the resolution of HDTV images). More dots means more detail, which sounds great in theory. But, in reality, the human eye is not up to the job. As the amount of detail in an image increases, viewers have to get closer to the screen to notice the difference.

Because UHD does not make enough difference in picture quality without forcing audiences to sit almost on top of their television sets, the industry is making changes to the pixels

themselves, not just the number of them.

The latest features include: high dynamic range; an increase in the available light range, which offers incredible contrast; wider colour gamut, which, simply put, means a move from millions to billions of colours; and high frame rates, which offer more pictures per second. Over the next few years, the last could revolutionise sports coverage.

■ The week before, in early July, Women in Film & Television UK and Film Birmingham joined RTS Midlands for

its latest networking evening. Seventy guests joined the RTS centre and a mix of producers, writers, musicians, composers and those hoping to break into the TV industry at the Colmore Club in Birmingham.

Dorothy Hobson, Vice-Chair of the RTS centre, said: "It was another very successful evening, when the room was buzzing with chat, the exchange of ideas and new contacts being made."

RTS Midlands is planning more networking events for the coming year.

Jenny Wilkes

Channel 4 drama *Ackley Bridge* enjoyed a triumphant night at the RTS Yorkshire Programme Awards in July.

The popular secondary school-set series, which is made by the Forge, scooped four top prizes, including the prestigious Drama award.

Poppy Lee Friar, who plays feisty Missy Booth, scooped the Actor prize; Penny Woolcock took home the Director Fiction prize; and Tim Phillips won the Music award.

More than 350 guests attended the ceremony at the Queens Hotel in Leeds, which was hosted by Ellie and Izzi Warner, two of the stars of Channel 4 show *Gogglebox*.

True Vision Yorkshire's *Catching a Killer: The Search for Natalie Hemming* (Channel 4) took home two prizes: the Documentary Series and Professional Excellence: Factual Production awards.

"The family of Natalie Hemming, the victim of the murder covered in the series, attended and spoke very movingly about their loss and how important they thought the documentary had been in raising awareness about domestic violence and coercive relationships," said RTS Yorkshire secretary Lisa Holdsworth.

Regional news programme *Look North* also enjoyed success at the ceremony. The BBC's East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire service secured two awards: News or Current Affairs Reporter for Phillip Norton and Presenter for Peter Levy.

BBC Yorkshire's *Look North* was equally successful, taking the News or Current Affairs Story award for "House prices" and the News Programme award for *Manchester Arena Bomb*.

The RTS Yorkshire 2018



Poppy Lee Friar (centre) in *Ackley Bridge*

Channel 4

School drama tops class

Outstanding Achievement award was made to Screen Yorkshire Chief Executive Sally Joynson for her contribution to TV in Yorkshire.

The Single Documentary award was won by the BBC Four film *Handmade in Hull*.

In the Factual Entertainment and Features category, Shiver took home the award for ITV's *Elton John: The Nation's Favourite Song*, and the Low-cost Factual prize went to Air Television for UKTV's *999 Rescue Squad*.

York-based indie Air Television's work was also recognised at the ceremony with the Independent Spirit award. A total of 23 awards were presented in this, the 14th year of the awards.
Matthew Bell

RTS Yorkshire winners

Outstanding Achievement

Sally Joynson, Screen Yorkshire

Drama (sponsored by York St John University) - *Ackley Bridge* - The Forge for Channel 4

Actor - Poppy Lee Friar, *Ackley Bridge* - The Forge for Channel 4

Director Fiction - Penny Woolcock, *Ackley Bridge* - The Forge for Channel 4

Writer - Charlie Swinbourne, *Deaf Funny* - Juggle Productions/British Sign Language Broadcasting Trust (BSLBT) for the Community Channel/BSLBT

Music - Tim Phillips, *Ackley Bridge* - The Forge for Channel 4

Single Documentary - *Handmade in Hull* - BBC Studios for BBC Four

Documentary Series - *Catching a Killer: The Search for Natalie Hemming* - True Vision Yorkshire for Channel 4

Factual Entertainment and Features

Elton John: The Nation's Favourite Song - Shiver for ITV

News or Current Affairs Reporter - Phillip Norton, *Look North* - BBC East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

News or Current Affairs Story - 'House Prices', *Look North* - BBC Yorkshire

News Programme - *Manchester Arena Bomb*, *Look North* - BBC Yorkshire

Presenter - Peter Levy, *Look North* - BBC East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

One to Watch - Kerry Maule - Made in Leeds

Animation - *Troy Story* - Fettle Animation for the Open University

Independent Spirit (Sponsored by Channel 4 Nations & Regions) - Air Television

Low-cost Factual - *999 Rescue Squad* - Air Television for UKTV

Promotion or Commercial Production

Larry and Paul: The Newsreader Nightmare - BBC and online

Second Screen - *My Glasto Lineup* - Joi Polloi/BBC Creative for the BBC

Professional Excellence - Drama and Comedy Production - *Slung Low* production team, *Flood: To the Sea* - Slung Low for BBC Two

Professional Excellence - Drama and Comedy Post-production - James Ridgway and Gareth Bull, dubbing mixers, *Victoria 2* - Mammoth Screen for ITV

Professional Excellence - Factual Production - *Catching a Killer: The Search for Natalie Hemming* - True Vision Yorkshire for Channel 4

Professional Excellence - Factual Post-production - *The Yorkshire Vet* post-production team - Daisybeck Studios for Channel 5

ONLINE at the RTS

■ After weeks of designing, building and tweaking, RTS TV launched this summer. The new section of the RTS website is a hub for all our video content, from red-carpet interviews to a behind-the-scenes look at some of Britain's best-loved shows. You can also find videos of all RTS early-evening events. Videos are now fully integrated on the website, so you will see more relevant content popping up alongside them. You can check out RTS TV at: www.rts.org.uk/rts-tv.

■ Earlier in the summer, RTS digital intern Louisa Cavell met the cast and crew of *To Provide All People*, a BBC Wales production about the work of the National Health Service as it turns 70. The live-action poem was written by Owen Sheers and features an all-star cast, including Eve Myles, Celia Imrie and Michael Sheen.

Myles, who grew up reading Sheers's poetry, told the RTS that she felt a strong affinity with the NHS and its staff due to the difficult birth of her first child: 'I'll never, ever forget what they did for me, and the hours they put in and just how it was normal to them to be so caring and professional and clever and loving.' You can read more at: www.rts.org.uk/ToProvideAllPeople.

■ The digital team is pleased to be working with Accenture once again to provide an app for this month's RTS London Conference.

The app, which can be downloaded from the App Store or the Google Play Store (please search for 'Royal Television Society') will offer information on the conference speakers, programme and more.

Pippa Shawley



Age Before Beauty

BBC

Drama scrubs up well

North West
Centre

RTS North West offered an early peek at Debbie Horsfield's new drama, *Age Before Beauty*, at a sold-out event in late July.

The drama, which is made by Mainstreet Pictures and stars Polly Walker, Robson Green, Sue Johnston and Lisa Riley, has been broadcast on BBC One over the summer.

RTS North West hosted the preview of the six-part series at Salford's Lowry Theatre with many of the cast in attendance, followed by a Q&A with Horsfield, who was interviewed by BBC Radio 5 Live's Anna Foster.

Age Before Beauty is set in a struggling, family-run beauty salon in Manchester's fashionable Northern Quarter.

Horsfield, whose many successful dramas include *Poldark* and *Cutting It*, revealed that family dynamics are at the heart of *Age Before Beauty*, whose characters are

constantly feuding. "I like to write about secrets and the hidden subterfuges in families," she said.

Setting the drama in a family business added another dimension to the drama: "The way families act in workplace settings presents a melting pot of ideas. It's a great source of drama, end of."

She continued: "I started by looking at how people do or don't act their own age and who decides what is appropriate for particular age groups."

"What we see as *Age Before Beauty* continues is that none of the characters fall into their stereotype."

Horsfield discussed her thinking behind the explosive opening of the drama in which the central character, Bel (Walker), discovers a secret on her husband's phone that has the potential to wreak havoc in the family.

"I wanted a grabbing opening to introduce the big cast and show how they all fit in," she explained. "We think we know all about the characters but it's much more complicated, so the [non-linear] structure is about going back and showing how we got to that place."

The first episode offers a glimpse into the complicated personalities of the drama's characters. "Getting old is not an option," says one of the many strong female characters, Leanne, who epitomises 21st-century glamour.

Kelly Harrison, who plays Leanne, said: "These characters are so layered and distinctive." And, it's not just their personalities that are multilayered, she added: "We spent so much time on the make-up truck every morning."

Laura FitzPatrick



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WILL 'THE CONSOLIDATION GAME'
HELP TV TIP THE SCALES AGAINST
THE TECH GIANTS?



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GLOBAL HEAD OF DIVERSITY, BARCLAYS

DEBORAH WILLIAMS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CDN

KINGS PLACE
90 YORK WAY
LONDON N1 9AG

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