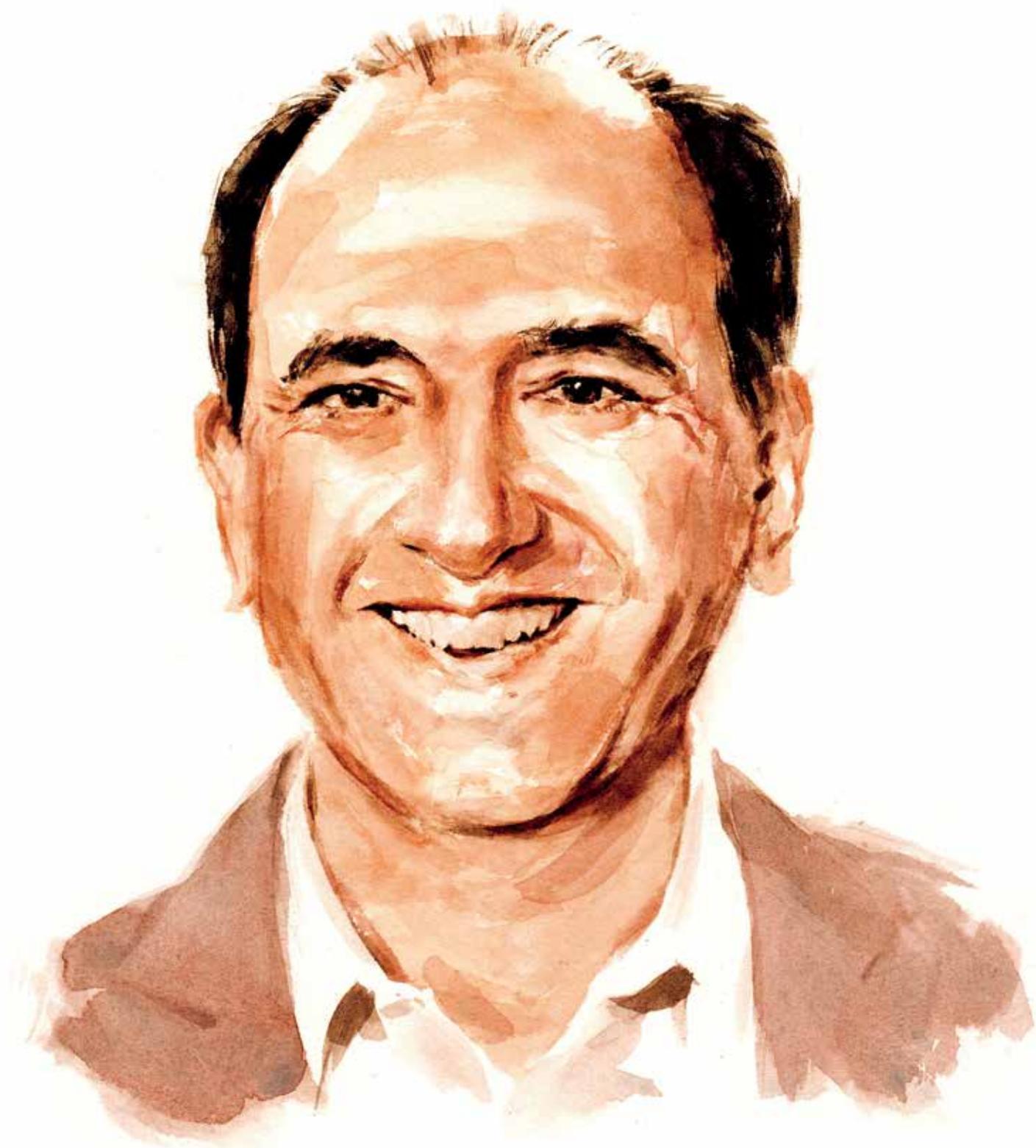


April 2015

Television



**Armando Iannucci:
A life in comedy**

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From the CEO



The Society's most glamorous and starry evening, the RTS Programme Awards, was a huge success. I'd like to thank every-

one involved in what was a glittering event at Grosvenor House on Park Lane. Congratulations to all the winners and nominees.

Thanks, too, to the evening's brilliant host, John Sergeant, who kept proceedings running super smoothly.

Earlier in March, I was fortunate enough to attend the RTS West of England Awards at the Bristol Old Vic: another memorable evening, and a great night for the BBC's Natural History Unit, proud winner of six awards.

Later in the month I had the honour of attending a memorial lunch arranged by RTS Midlands for Tony Pilgrim, the Society's former Chairman who died earlier this year, aged 91. More than 50 years ago, Tony helped to set up our Midlands Centre.

George Pagan made a very touching speech, reminding us of the man and his achievements.

Comedy is perhaps the hardest of all the TV genres to get right. At the end of March, we were privileged to hear from one of its most successful practitioners, Armando Iannucci, at a sold-out early-evening event in the magnificent surroundings of Westminster's Telford Theatre. He is, rightly, our cover star this month.

Interviewed by Sky's Head of Comedy, Lucy Lumsden, Armando spoke about his extraordinary career and his success on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the course of a wonderfully entertaining evening, he recalled what it was like to work for BBC Radio in the pre-digital era, and the contrasting approaches to making *The Thick of It* in the UK and US.

He also recounted his first encounter with Julia Louis-Dreyfus, the star of his hit HBO series, *Veep*.

Theresa Wise

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National events

RTS FUTURES

Monday 27 April

I made it in... digital

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

■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS FUTURES

Monday 11 May

First dates

A formatting event

Venue: *Hallam Conference Centre, 44 Hallam St, London W1W 6JJ*

■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS LEGENDS

Tuesday 19 May

General election 2015: Did TV come to the aid of the party?

Jeremy Paxman and Alastair Stewart OBE in conversation.

Just days after the conclusion of the election, two of television's leading interviewers will share

their insiders' views of exactly what happened. Tickets are

£69.60 inc VAT (£58+£11.60 VAT) per person and are inclusive of

service but exclusive of alcoholic beverages. 12.30pm for 1.00pm

Venue: *London Hilton on Park Lane, London W1K 1BE*

■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS AWARDS

Friday 5 June

RTS Student Television Awards 2014

Venue: *BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT*

■ Jamie O'Neill 020 7822 2821

■ jamie@rts.org.uk

RTS CONVENTION

16-18 September

RTS Cambridge Convention 2015

Venue: *West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge CB3 9DP and King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST*

■ Events 020 7822 2820

■ events@rts.org.uk

Local events

BRISTOL

14-15 April

New directions in film and television production studies

Two-day academic conference

Venue: *Watershed, 1 Canon's Road, Bristol BS1 5TX*

Wednesday 15 April

The Bristol Distinguished Address Series: Sir Peter Bazalgette

Chaired by Lynn Barlow. 6:00pm

for 6:30pm

Venue: *Arnolfini, 6 Narrow Quay, Bristol BS1 4QA*

May – date TBC

RTS Futures event

Venue: *Bath Spa University*

■ Belinda Biggam

■ belindabiggam@hotmail.com

DEVON & CORNWALL

■ Contact TBC

EAST ANGLIA

■ Contact TBC

LONDON

Wednesday 15 April

Future technologies for immersive and personal broadcasting

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: *BBC Research & Development, Centre House, 56 Wood Lane, London W12 7SB*

Wednesday 29 April

Suspects: an unusual drama

The backstory of Channel 5's first original drama commission

in eight years. *Suspects* is un-

scripted, with the cast devising their own dialogue based on a

detailed plot description.

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: *Riverside Bar, ITV Studios, Upper Ground, London SE1 9LT*

Wednesday 13 May

Freeview Play, the natural next step

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: *Riverside Bar, ITV Studios, Upper Ground, London SE1 9LT*

■ Daniel Cherowbrier

■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

April to May

Education workshops in secondary schools

These will give students in years 8 and 9 an insight into jobs in the TV industry.

■ **16 April** *Blue Coat Academy, Walsall*

■ **21 April** *Baxter College, Kidderminster*

■ **23 April** *King Charles I School, Kidderminster*

■ **30 April** *Charlton School, Wellington*

■ **17 May** *SCA Academy, Walsall*

Educators' seminars

■ **28 April** *Worcester University*

RTS industry update roadshows

■ **22 April** *Birmingham, venue TBC*

■ **26 April** *Worcester University*

■ **21 May** *BBC Nottingham*

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ jayne@ijmmedia.co.uk

NORTH EAST & THE BORDER

19-20 May

Young People's Video Festival

Venue: *University of Sunderland*

■ Jill Graham

■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

Monday 27 April

Great Big Telly Quiz

Venue: *Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ*

Thursday 14 May

Screening: *The Day They Dropped the Bomb*

Followed by Q&A with Producer/Director Leslie Woodhead. 6:30pm

Venue: *Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ*

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk

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NORTHERN IRELAND

■ John Mitchell

■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Date – TBC

iPhone and iPad workshop

Presentation by Noel Hayes of CompuB. 8:00pm

Venue: *Studio 4, Audience Reception, RTÉ, Dublin 4*

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ byrnecc@iol.ie

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SCOTLAND

Wednesday 20 May

Annual Awards

6:30pm. Tickets are free if you join the RTS by direct debit during April, otherwise: members,

£24 inc VAT plus booking fee; non-members, £48 plus booking

fee. Online booking at Eventbrite

Venue: *Oran Mor, Glasgow G12 8QX*

■ James Wilson 07899 761167

■ james.wilson@cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk

TV diary

Muriel Gray goes on the trail of some prized restoration architecture – and ends up scooping a jackpot at the RTS Programme Awards



I've been travelling the country with the heavenly task of looking at restoration architecture, in connection with our daunting project at Glasgow School of Art (GSA) to rebuild the iconic Charles Rennie Mackintosh building, damaged by fire last May.

Miraculously, most of the building was saved by the incredible quick thinking, bravery and professionalism of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Tragically, though, we lost one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, the Mackintosh Library. We are, of course, going to rebuild it.

■ Examining parallel, albeit smaller, heritage projects has been a delight. For instance, 78 Derngate, a ridiculously tiny, Mackintosh-designed, terraced house in Northampton, has been exquisitely recreated, with a contemporary wing added to enhance the visiting experience. A joy to walk around.

Our taxi driver, who'd brought us from the station, had ejected us half a mile away, assuring us we were "nearly there".

So as not to be fooled on the return journey, we call one to the door.

The driver turns out to be a Mackintosh expert, except that everything he tells us with the grave authority of a local is spectacularly wrong.

We smile and nod, and make noises of feigned interest in the back of our throats, mindful of the possibility of another half-mile walk with non-wheeled cases.

One of my travelling companions, Professor Tom Inns, Director of GSA, demonstrates the greatest restraint by not only allowing our scholarly conductor to talk nonsense, but also tipping this man who insists that nobody in Northampton cares about Mackintosh anyway. We have a natural-born leader here at GSA.

■ The trek takes us north to Liverpool and a tour around the spectacular, refurbished St George's Hall. The janitor, Mike, unlocking things as we go, is passionate about the building. We end up listening to him as much as to our guide.

However, even Mike cannot explain why civic buildings, regardless of their breathtaking grandeur, all end up smelling of boiled cabbage.

■ Having chaired a fascinating and inspiring RTS Programme Awards Arts Jury, I am rewarded, together with my fellow judges, by attending the ceremony at the Grosvenor House Hotel, with its carpeted staircase eternally spangled by dropped sequins.

Our table is the best of fun. I start a sweepstake, with everyone marking on the programme who they think will win each category and the person with most wins taking the pot.

On discovering that my hero Tom Hollander is sitting at the next table, I abuse my evening's companion, fellow juror and provider of my London overnight accommodation, Alexei Sayle, by pretending to take his photo while secretly snapping my real target, Mr Hollander. Shameful fan-girl behaviour. Alexei rolls his eyes.

Of course, I tweet this picture, feeling safe. How will he ever know that someone at the next table has behaved so childish? Fifteen minutes later, I bump into this acting god outside the toilets. He does know.

Turns out Twitter isn't a private thing. I ask a passing Floella Benjamin to take a photo with me actually beside Mr Hollander this time. She does. Because she is smashing.

Later, it occurs to me that I was probably quite rude to Baroness Benjamin, who would have been nicer in the picture anyway, as she was looking gorgeous in a stunning red dress and I was wearing stupid shiny pants. I think I may have to give up this tweeting thing. I'm rubbish at it.

■ Melvyn Bragg rounds off a terrific evening with a properly stirring speech in defence of the arts and the BBC, as he collects his Lifetime Achievement Award. We should clone him while we can.

■ I win the sweepstake, through sheer luck and guesswork rather than any broadcasting insight, and probably by being last to fill in the programme – thereby putting my initials against programmes nobody else had picked. I'm a little embarrassed. It smacks of corruption.

■ We all go home proud of our jury's decision, *Grayson Perry: Who Are You?* The arts are back in broadcasting with a vengeance. Happy days.

Muriel Gray is an author, broadcaster, producer and journalist.

Funny ideas

about how to do satire

Comedy

Armando Iannucci looks back on more than two decades of TV laughter and reveals his love for *Morecambe and Wise*.
Steve Clarke takes a front row seat

By many people's reckoning, Armando Iannucci is one of our greatest and funniest TV satirists. The political classes and the grammar and conceits of television have proved fertile ground for Iannucci's wit and his team of gifted collaborators, notably Steve Coogan, Rebecca Front and Chris Morris.

Iannucci's remorseless, and occasionally scabrous, humour has sustained a wide-ranging and lengthy career across radio, TV and film. He learned his craft as a radio producer back in the late 1980s. Since then, he's worked as a writer, performer and director, principally for the BBC, but also for Channel 4 and, latterly, for HBO.

The US subscription service, feted for high-end fare such as *Game of Thrones*, commissioned Iannucci to make *Veep*, for which Julia Louis-Dreyfus has thrice won an Emmy as a gaffe-prone Washington politician.

Veep is further proof that British humour can work on the other side of the Atlantic and thrive in the world's most competitive TV market.

At a sold-out RTS early-evening event, Iannucci looked back on his life in comedy.

He began by highlighting his comic roots with clips from *Morecambe and Wise* and Spike Milligan before explaining how he'd helped to sire two of TV's most perfectly realised comic monsters. Step forward, foul-mouthed, New

Labour spin doctor Malcolm Tucker, played to manic perfection by Peter Capaldi in *The Thick of It*, and the hapless, gormless Alan Partridge, an enduring creation that refuses to die.

Iannucci told interviewer Lucy Lumsden, Sky's Head of Comedy, how, as a child, he'd been brought up in Glasgow on a diet of mainstream TV, supplemented by a side order of radio comedy.

The family "was a big Saturday night, BBC One, *Morecambe and Wise*, *Generation*

I LOVE COMEDY THAT HAS SURPRISES AND HAS IDEAS BEHIND IT

Game, *Mike Yarwood*-watching" household. As a comedian in the making, he failed at first to appreciate *Monty Python*, preferring instead the eccentricities of *The Goodies*.

Lumsden asked if he considered himself a satirist. "I've never really seen myself as being political," replied Iannucci. "I've always been fascinated by politics and drawn towards it because I think politics is important..

"I really love slapstick... visual humour... hopefully aligned with verbally dexterous stuff, as well.

"I love comedy that has surprises and has ideas behind it."

One of the things he loved about Eric and Ernie was the double act's ability "to take a normal thing and

change one element". To demonstrate his point, Iannucci showed the audience a *Morecambe and Wise* sketch in which the former struggles hilariously and in vain with a gigantic ventriloquist's dummy.

This love of the surreal was evident also in a clip of Spike Milligan. In the sketch, the comedian does the voice-over for a dalek invading a suburban dining room as the table is being laid.

"You could sort of call it satire, but it's not really," explained Iannucci in remarkably genial tones for someone who is obviously drawn to the darker side of human nature. "It's funny, completely distinctive. Spike Milligan has his own voice and yet takes bits that are familiar cultural iconography...

"The people I really enjoyed were the quirky ones: Ivor Cutler and Spike Milligan, Marty Feldman and *The Goodies*."

It was after Oxford (where he did a bit of writing and stand-up) and landing a job in the comedy hothouse that was BBC Radio that Iannucci began to find his own voice.

"They talk about corridor culture. It literally was a corridor, with lots of writers coming in and out," said Iannucci. "You'd befriend writers over a cup of tea and suddenly think of an idea."

Having other wordsmiths around allowed Iannucci to raise his game.

"Writing is a displacement activity," he said. "If I sit down on my own to write, I do a 101 things; but if you're in



Paul Hampartsoumian

Iannucci on...

Why US does more TV satire

'We forget that the US audience is much, much bigger. *The Daily Show* only gets a tiny percentage of the big American audience but it's enough to keep it going and give it the advertising that it needs.

'We have a smaller population to play to. I'd say the UK equivalent of *The Daily Show* is the stuff that Charlie Brooker does.

'It's very difficult here to find the resources to justify something that will play to a niche audience.

'With a bigger market, they can make something work without the obligation to go mass market.'

The birth of Alan Partridge

'I said to Steve [Coogan]: "Have you got a voice that sounds like a sports reporter? But it's not an impression. It's not David Coleman or John Motson."

'Steve just went [slips into Alan Partridge]: "What, a voice like this?" Instantly, everyone in the room went: "That's him."

'Within seconds, somebody said: "He's called Partridge." And someone else went: "He's an Alan." It's almost like he emerged fully formed.'



Steve Coogan as Alan Partridge

PA

a room with people who're all funny, you're egging each other on.

"Or you push ideas to levels that you wouldn't really do on your own – or you'd take three times the amount of time to get there... There's something about sparking off each other.

"When we write all the *Partridge* stuff... either Peter [Baynham] or myself will be at the keyboard with Steve wandering around as Alan."

A pivotal moment at BBC Radio was meeting Chris Morris, whom Iannucci had heard parodying DJs on his Saturday morning Greater London Radio show.

At the time, Iannucci was producing programmes such as *Just a Minute* and *Week Ending*. The latter was an influential sketch series lampooning politicians and their peccadillos that served as a training ground for comedy writers.

"Chris and I immediately hit it off. We discovered we were both very similar in age, had both gone to Jesuit schools and had had the same teachers despite being educated in different parts of the country," recalled Iannucci. "He had a very, very battered old car

that he was trying to park outside Broadcasting House.

"He couldn't find anywhere to park so I just got in. He drove me around Broadcasting House about 200 times and so we had our meeting."

The pair assembled what became the team for the news satire *On the Hour*. It included the writers Stewart Lee and Richard Herring, and a line-up of acting talent headed by Steve Coogan and Rebecca Front.

As Lumsden noted, unlike a lot of BBC comedy talent, the *On the Hour* troop was not an Oxbridge clique.

Iannucci explained: "It was a disparate group of people who gelled... We wanted to do a comedy show that didn't sound like any other comedy show.

"The humour had to be different. It had to have a surreal quality and characters, but feel weird and not too scripted, so we encouraged people to improvise. But good gags.

"We made it like a magazine, with lots of different items."

It was here that Alan Partridge was invented – initially, as a gauche sports reporter (see box, right). >



Paul Hampartsoumian

Iannucci on...

The Thick of It in the US

'I was flown out to Los Angeles and stayed in this nice hotel.

'Nothing happened for two weeks. I was getting a little restless, so they allowed me to attend a meeting.

'It had 30 people in it. It was to discuss the colour of the ties and jackets the cast were going to wear. It was at that point I said, "Take me home."

'*The Thick of It* depends on its poisonous, vitriolic freneticism. But the US version was shot very conventionally.

'There was no swearing, Ollie was a girl, and I think there was an upbeat, happy ending.

'It wasn't bad, it was boring.'

Being an outsider

'[In Scotland], there is that thing of being neither in nor out. If you go to a very Scottish occasion, such as a ceilidh, you think it's a bit strange. But if you go to an Italian wedding or your first communion, it's also a bit strange.

'You don't know quite where to fit. You're an Italian in Scotland and a Scot in England. There are these layers of feeling slightly at one remove.'

› *On the Hour's* success gave Iannucci the confidence to go freelance and enter the very different and more demanding world of television.

The result was BBC Two's *The Day Today*, another news spoof, and the comedian's first experience of working in television.

"BBC Television approached us," Iannucci recalled. "But it was very traditional then. They said: 'You're radio producers. You can't deliver it, so we'll give it to someone else.'

"I said, 'No, you can't have it.' This was bizarre because, at the time, a lot of radio comedy was going to TV."

Several independent producers, including comedy specialist Hat Trick, wanted to make the show.

Iannucci and Morris decided to accept TalkbackThames's offer, which turned out to be a smart move.

"Peter Fincham [*The Day Today's* Executive Producer] said: 'I'm here just to let you get on with it.' That's exactly what he did.

"He was a fantastic mentor because he understood it and knew the best thing to do was to leave us alone. If ever the BBC got in the way, he would reassure them," said Iannucci.

Was it intimidating being in telly, probed Lumsden.

"It was an enormous learning curve," Iannucci confessed, "because we were not just making our own TV show..."

"It was a show about television, so we were learning television in order to undo it.

"The BBC was very good. BBC News even arranged for Chris and me to attend a training course in order to learn how to make TV news – so that, basically, we could give it the finger."

In the same year that Iannucci worked on *The Day Today*, he was also involved in assembling Alan Partridge's first dedicated show, *Knowing Me, Knowing You*, originally for Radio 4 but later to move to TV.

Meanwhile, BBC Two gave Iannucci his own programmes, including *Friday Night Armistice* and, later, *Time Trumpet*.

On the eve of Tony Blair's 1997 landslide victory, Iannucci hosted an election-night special, *Election Night Armistice*, which ran for more than three hours.

The Thick of It began life as a reinvention of *Yes, Minister* but ended up breaking new ground – partly because it was made on a shoestring. BBC Four Controller Roly Keating told Iannucci he had £100,000.

Iannucci said he thought: "What can you do with that? I worked out that you could probably do three episodes if we went to one building."

As it turned out, *The Thick of It* was filmed in three different unused office buildings. Each episode was shot in three days.

"I wanted to make it fast and furious... with a documentary feel," Iannucci revealed. "I didn't want it to look staged. I wanted a bit of improvisation. It was as if we were eavesdropping on reality."

The constraints helped to enhance the show's intensity. "It gave everyone a little bit of a frenetic look in their eyes as they tried to learn the lines they'd just been given," Iannucci continued.

"Fundamentally, it's a sitcom. It's a farce... What struck me, reading behind the inner workings of the Blair, Mandelson, Campbell thing, [was that] the funny thing was, they kept worrying about stuff.

"If they hadn't worried [so much] about stuff, it would have gone away. But it was the attempts to manage [the news]... to try and haul in a news editor and stop him from doing [something]... It was that, magnified..."

"If you actually analyse Malcolm Tucker's record in every episode, it's terrible. He comes in and shouts at people. They're really scared of him.

"He tells them what to do. They do it. And it's a disaster. But he sort of gets away with it because, by then, he's left the building..."

"I wanted it to be unsettling, which is why the language is the way it was."

In *The Thick of It* the actors lead and the cameras follow. Lumsden wanted to know if the same was true of *Veep*.

"Yes, we didn't put any marks down and there were radio mikes. I said: 'Even if you're not in this shoot, if you speak, we'll hear you. So don't feel you're off.'

"I remember the cast saying that it was exhausting. You can't save all your performance for the close-up: it might not come. It's every take. The camera can suddenly swing around.

"I was always saying to the camera team: 'Don't go to them before they speak. Let them speak and then go and find them, as if you were a documentary team.'"

A key moment in getting *Veep* off the ground was Iannucci's first encounter with Julia Louis-Dreyfus.

Iannucci said he "was fully expecting an entourage of people and a very polite 20-minute conversation. She just turned up and we chatted over a



THE THICK OF IT DEPENDS ON ITS POISONOUS, VITRIOLIC FRENETICISM. BUT THE US VERSION WAS SHOT VERY CONVENTIONALLY



pot of tea for about three and a half hours, making each other laugh...

"At the end of the meeting, I got on the phone and said, 'Right, we're away.' It was like meeting Chris Morris, driving around Broadcasting House."

Working for HBO reminded him of the BBC a decade or so earlier. The lines of command were flat and he was allowed to get on with making the show.

All the writers, directors and editors on *Veep* are British. The show is written in the UK, shot in Baltimore and edited in London.

Iannucci said he finds it irritating that a lot of people who work in British

TV are in awe of their counterparts in the US. He reminded the RTS audience that the editors and writers working on *Veep* have won awards in the US.

"It's a source of great pride," he said. "We shouldn't feel embarrassed to be there [in America]... I think the British television industry is world class and the best people in British television can compete with anyone."

'Armando Iannucci in conversation with Lucy Lumsden' was held at the Telford Theatre in central London on 25 March. The producers were Sally Doganis and Terry Marsh.

Iannucci on...

Improvising with actors

"Working with a really good actor is like working with a musical instrument..."

"I know that if I give Rebecca Front a scenario, she is going to be absolutely amazing..."

"The cast of *Veep* forces you as a writer, as well as a director, to think of new things and play to their strengths."

"I always love it when a performer gives you something you weren't expecting... In the first episode of *The Thick of It*, the minister says: "Why don't we fire David at Transport?" And Malcolm says, "Fine", and the minister says: "It's only fucking transport."

"At that point, Malcolm looks at him, the charm suddenly disappears from his face and the eyes start to burn with hate."

"That wasn't in the script. It's just Peter thinking. He didn't say anything for a very long 10 seconds."

"I was watching on the monitors. That's when I thought we're on to something here."

"That's what I like about the collaborative thing... There are people who want to take risks."

"That's why I want to make another film. I love working with great actors."

"They don't have to be famous actors or big names. They just have to be good."

What he's watching

"I've been so stuck in the edit for the past four years that I feel a bit behind."

"I like *Uncle* (BBC Three)."

"*Mrs Brown's Boys* occasionally makes me laugh. I am not anti-*Mrs Brown's Boys*; I don't watch it regularly."

"I like *House of Fools* and *Toast of London*."

"They're all silly and written by quite seasoned writers."



Jed Mercurio (right) with actor Catherine Walker (centre) on the set of *Critical*, episode 2

John Rogers/Sky

The drama doctor

Jed Mercurio doesn't make it easy for himself. His current show, Sky 1's *Critical*, is a 13-part drama set in a state-of-the-art trauma centre. Every week, it focuses on a different and gruesome medical emergency while also telling the intertwined personal stories of its large cast. Oh, and it's told in real time, too.

"I always think that everything is achievable," he says, when I ask if he deliberately set the challenge of making this series as hard as possible for himself.

"My instinct was that those limitations would intensify the viewing experience." It palpably has, pushing back the boundaries of medical drama, and not just by showing us such grim sights as a woman with a spike through her face in unflinching style.

As we speak, in a central London café, Mercurio is on a break from supervising the editing of a later episode of *Critical*.

Scriptwriting

Boyd Hilton interviews Jed Mercurio, whose edgy approach to his craft has transformed storytelling on TV

To all intents and purposes, he is the showrunner but Mercurio doesn't necessarily embrace the term.

"I'm very fortunate to be in the position of having a voice in every aspect of the production, especially the technical side, but I don't get hung up giving it a title. I just kind of do it."

He is also at pains to point out that the whole process is still a huge collaboration. Mercurio has his say in every element of *Critical* but, of course, it wasn't always thus.

His was an extraordinary route into TV drama. Twenty-two years ago, he was working as a doctor when he stumbled across an ad in the *British Medical Journal* placed by Tony Garnett's Island World Productions (which went on to make *This Life* and *The Cops*).

The company was interested in developing a new TV medical drama and Mercurio, without any prior professional writing experience, submitted some "weak material I'd written for a medical review".

He was invited to an interview and spent an hour describing what it was like being a junior hospital doctor. A couple of weeks later, he was asked to write a synopsis of how a series might work depicting what it was really like working in the NHS in the early 1990s. So *Cardiac Arrest* was born.

He credits veteran producer Margaret Matheson for encouraging and enabling his move into TV drama, as well as Garnett himself. "They took an enormous leap of faith," he says. "I

reckon they managed to get it on air at the BBC mainly because it was so cheap and the BBC thought, 'Why not?'"

Key to the success of *Cardiac Arrest* and his later medical drama *Bodies* – the latter was shown, rather incongruously, on BBC Three – was their no-holds-barred, insider's portrayal of the hectic, gruelling, understaffed world of the NHS.

"I definitely had a voice and a view that was highly contradictory of what medical drama was doing at that time," recalls Mercurio. "There were certain conventions within the genre that were repeatedly observed and felt so out of date to me.

"My approach to it was to just try and tell a version of what the reality was. I was naive enough to think that I could represent the reality of the hospital precinct and how that world worked."

He was also naive about how involved in the production he would be allowed to be. It soon became clear on *Cardiac Arrest* that "a lot of decisions were being made by people who had no experience of what was being depicted in the script. I was very much held at arm's length and I felt marginalised."

When the series was recommissioned, Mercurio played it differently. "I wanted to be involved in casting but I was excluded from that. And I didn't think the reasons for my exclusion made any sense.

"There was just a desire by some of the people involved in the series to have as much control as they could. And they would get that by excluding the writer. It's also possible that they didn't like having me around."

So, to guarantee that he had to be around, Mercurio made sure he became the series's medical advisor. He was always on hand to communicate with the cast and director concerning every moment of medical procedure. And it worked.

The whole experience gave Mercurio the confidence to lobby for more influence on the shows that he wrote, from *Bodies* to the massive critical and popular hit *Line of Duty*.

When asked about the thorny topic of accuracy in TV drama (as we meet, Chris Chibnall has just gone into print to defend series two of *Broadchurch* from accusations of inaccuracy in its depiction of the finer points of the

criminal justice system), Mercurio draws a deep breath and lets rip.

First, he explains, high levels of technical accuracy and story credibility are very different matters: "There are things that happen in the real world that aren't credible in a TV drama."

Then, there are the so-called experts who complain about factual inaccuracies in his own shows. He says: "I am shocked about



IF YOU HAVE A SCENE THAT ISN'T ADVANCING THE STORY, WHY IS IT THERE?

some of the stupid things doctors have said about medical dramas and it worries me that they are clinically weak.

"My favourite idiotic remark was by a guy who said he thought the clamshell use in *Critical* was woefully inaccurate because he'd seen one in 1980. And they didn't do it that way.

"I mean, these are the kind of idiots who go on Twitter and make comments – you can always find some idiot who thinks he knows best."

Mercurio goes on to explain how important the police advisors were on *Line of Duty* but, even then, he emphasises that writers and producers have to find the right ones – who really know what they're talking about.

The conversation shifts from the accuracy issue to Mercurio's writing technique, which seems to have got more focused as his career has developed, with ever-tighter plots and leaner, more powerful narratives.

Sometimes, he says, he maps out the whole story, while at other times there's a basic outline and he trusts himself to

knit together the plot details as he goes along.

He maintains, however, that he is ruthless at getting rid of stuff he knows isn't working: "I'm interested in very direct forms of storytelling. If you have a scene that isn't advancing the story, why is it there?"

Indeed, it's nigh-on impossible to find a scene in either series of *Line of Duty* that doesn't advance the story.

Every now and then, Mercurio

reminds himself of theories of character and structure and storytelling. But, using one of many sporting analogies during our conversation, he explains: "My relationship with those things is like the relationship a professional sportsman has with his coach. You can look at small details but, fundamentally, my swing works."

If that sounds arrogant, he doesn't mean it that way, and has a wry smile when he says it. He just knows his own worth and his own method.

"I have a reel running in my head of what a scene should look like, so, when I see it being filmed or at assembly, I can compare that to what I have in my head," he says. "The same goes for the way I deal directly with the cast about what I was going for when I wrote their characters."

When he has finished with this series of *Critical*, Mercurio will move on almost immediately to the filming of series three of *Line of Duty*.

And there's also the unusual prospect of a Mercurio classic period piece: a one-off, feature-length BBC version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* on the way, which he adapted and directed.

He's directed a few episodes of shows before, but admits it's not his usual preference. "Since I've been doing these longer-running precinct dramas, it's been hard to step out of the role I do. Being the director takes you out of the loop on a whole load of other decisions.

"It's like a manager running on to the field and deciding he's going to play an anchoring midfield role. You lose sight of the game." Mercurio pauses. "Actually, I wouldn't play an anchoring midfield role. I'm much more of an attacking midfielder. A creative player." Yet another sporting analogy. But a very apt one.

Profile

Lucinda Hicks, COO of newly merged Endemol Shine UK, has never made a programme in her life. But that hasn't stopped her rapid rise, says **Tara Conlan**

The world of television production can, to quote Digital UK Chief Executive Jonathan Thompson, "sometimes be somewhat sniffy about strategy folk".

With this in mind, he says Lucinda Hicks' success in becoming Endemol Shine UK's Chief Operating Officer is doubly impressive.

He hired Hicks to work with his team at Channel 4 in 2008, when he was its Strategy Director.

But there was a surprise when she turned up for her first day – Thompson told her he was leaving. He says Hicks took it "on board in such a calm, professional and pleasant way that it made me begin to wish I could stick around a little longer to have the opportunity to work with her".

What was it about Hicks that made him hire her and has seen her rise to the top echelons of the UK wing of the newly merged mega-producer?

Thompson reckons she is "that rare and wonderful combination of a person who has great intelligence, ambition and determination to get things done, but always with warmth, humour and a strong sense of teamwork".

Speak to those who have worked with Hicks and the talk is of a "brilliant colleague" who is "collaborative", and who people have enjoyed working with.

One says: "She is really good at detail, efficient, smart and pleasant to work with. I've watched with interest her rise in the indie sector. It's good to see a young, female executive get to those kinds of positions."

Mark Raphael, who was Joint Managing Director with her at Dragonfly, says of Hicks: "Lucinda is almost annoying. She manages to be creative,



Endemol Shine

A strategy for success

wonderfully calm and fair-minded, while ensuring everyone is enjoying their work and having fun. You could say our professional time together has been very much one of ying and yang."

Hicks, who is 35, has a sharp business brain, having read economics and management at New College, Oxford. She was brought up in north-west London, not far from where she now lives with

her husband, whom she married last year.

She started her career at Booz Allen, one of the oldest management consultancies in the world. Two years later, she joined the BBC as Business Strategist and remained there for a year before becoming a Strategy and Commercial Development Executive at Fremantle.

SHE MANAGES TO BE CREATIVE, WONDERFULLY CALM AND FAIR-MINDED, WHILE ENSURING EVERYONE IS ENJOYING THEIR WORK AND HAVING FUN

In 2006, she returned to consultancy, and spent two years at leadership advisers Panthea Leadership before Thompson recruited her as part of his strategy team at Channel 4.

Since then, she has not looked back. In 2010, she was hired by *MasterChef* maker Shine Group to launch a new global business development division as its vice-president – later adding operations to her responsibilities.

In 2013, Hicks was appointed COO of *One Born Every Minute* producer (and Shine company) Dragonfly, before being promoted to Joint Managing Director alongside Raphael.

Thompson thinks her greatest achievement has been to “make the transition from a strategy background into senior management in an operational role, which many, many strategists fail to do successfully.”

Hicks acknowledges it has not been easy. “Coming up through the strategic and commercial route has given me a great context but is perhaps an advantage and a disadvantage,” she says.

“Being joint MD of Dragonfly, having never made a programme myself, gave me a different lens through which to challenge and question things – sometimes those questions may have been basic but, largely, I think I was able to bring a different perspective.”

Her background was not in media. Her father worked in the City and her mother was a secretary in a special needs school – although her sister has joined her in the creative industries, in publishing.

Hicks says that the main driving force for her move into television was simply that she loved watching it: “From *Spooks* to *EastEnders*, from *Faking It* to *The Fast Show*, I grew up loving TV and I still watch as much as I can.

“When I was travelling a lot around

the Shine companies, I watched a lot of our international content as well, including a Shine Germany pilot show that had me in floods of tears on a train one day with my husband. I don’t speak German and it wasn’t subtitled but I got enough of the gist.”

She explains that when she left management consultancy she “was determined to work in an industry where I cared about the output”.

“The vast majority of people watch TV to some degree and, love it or hate it, they all have an opinion on what they watch,” she adds. “At its best, television has the power to move people, to open people’s minds and to provoke debate and discussion. Who wouldn’t want to be a part of that?”

Her job is clearly all-encompassing but, when she can spare the time, Hicks likes “getting outside at the weekends – I am a mad-keen skier, play a bit of tennis and try to escape to Devon for the odd weekend (where my mother now lives) for long walks and even some fair weather surfing”.

Elisabeth Murdoch and Alex Mahon, who were her bosses at Shine when she joined, were both big inspirations for her. She credits them for giving her “the self-confidence and opportunities to really stretch myself”.

Despite her rapid rise, Hicks has kept a fairly low profile, getting on with the day job and not seeking the limelight. She was picked as one of four Next Generation Leaders to speak at the 2013 RTS Cambridge Convention.

The collaborative way of working that her former and current colleagues talk about is reflected when she says: “To me, great leadership is not just about real talent but about having the ability to inspire those around you and enable them to thrive. That is what drives loyalty and respect.”

So that is presumably what the UK division of Endemol Shine – cheekily dubbed Shendemol by RTS President Peter Bazalgette – can expect when she takes up the new job this month.

Gluing together the separate entities following a merger is rarely easy.

Apart from the production company heads, she will be the most senior person from the Shine side of the business in the UK division, where she will work with CEO Richard Johnston (the former Endemol UK COO) and another Endemol, Chairman Lucas Church.

The companies in the division include Artists Studio, Brown Eyed Boy, Dragonfly, DSP, Fifty Fathoms, House of Tomorrow, Initial, Kudos, Lovely Day, Princess Productions, Remarkable Television, Shine North, Shine Soho, Shine TV, Tiger Aspect, Tigress and Zeppotron. Their hits range from *Broadchurch* to *Big Brother* and *The Fall* to *Pointless*.

With her feet not yet under the table, it is too soon for Hicks to have much of an idea about what the future holds, but she says that the new group “has some incredible talent, both in the UK and internationally, and it has a formidable leadership team in the form of Sophie [Turner Laing] and Tim [Hincks]. I feel really excited about being a part of it.”

She adds: “There is obviously a lot happening, at least in the UK, in 2015 with the public service broadcasting review, a lot of the consolidation from late 2014 shaking out – and, inevitably, more to come.

“It’s a fascinating and dynamic time to be part of one of the greatest creative markets in the world. But, as producers, above all else, we need to remain focused on doing what we do best: making world-class content.”

Spoken like a programme-maker, not a strategist.

On a rescue mission

BBC

As **Tony Hall** prepares for an epic Charter battle, **Anne McElvoy** detects an upbeat mood at Broadcasting House. Can he win over the BBC's critics?



BBC

For an insight into the day job of the BBC Director-General two years into his role, I pop into Tony Hall's plate-glass eyrie at New Broadcasting House.

I arrive in the aftermath of one of the regular encyclicals that DGs dispense.

He's sung the praises of the BBC's place in a "thriving, free and competitive market", an alternative to what a colleague terms the "Joni Mitchell" school of heartstring-tugging about the Beeb's innate brilliance.

The most powerful figure in British broadcasting has lulled the non-specialists into catatonia with a description of the end of "managed competition" – the BBC's cherished in-house commissioning quotas.

He is replacing it with something

called BBC Studios, a producer big enough to vie with the new mega-independents. This leaves BBC staff able to sell their wares to other networks – "free to stand on their own two feet", concludes Lord Hall, in what is a masterful alchemy of threat and promise.

A year into the job, it still felt as if the mild-mannered son of Birkenhead was sweeping up the shards from the horrors of Savile to the debris from the evanescent tenure of George Entwistle.

The end of year two feels more like it embodies his BBC. "The place had blown in a Shakespearean sense when he arrived," says an ally.

A largely defensive posture has been replaced by an upbeat one. In a building where few senior executives regularly stroll the corridors glad-handing staff, the DG frequently strides out,

often with strategy chief James Purnell in tow, nodding and smiling to startled members of the workforce.

He reels off visits to Belfast, Salford – and, yes, even other parts of the BBC's still-neglected north – as a sign that he has reconnected to what the corporation does day to day. When he wants to go incognito, he dons an old-fashioned pair of sunglasses, reminiscent of a 1950s package tourist.

I ask the head of a major arts organisation if he reckons that Hall's key achievement is a return of stability, and am pointed to the fact that there "hasn't been a real crisis on Tony's watch and he makes sure there isn't one".

With the inevitability of Greek fate, we all wake up the next day to find that Jeremy Clarkson has allegedly thumped his producer, putting the future of *Top*

Gear, one of the corporation's most beloved, loathed and internationally profitable brands, in jeopardy.

A petition of 1 million people subsequently demanded the presenter's reinstatement, while Clarkson less than helpfully added that he thought the nation's biggest broadcaster had "fucked up" his show. Crisis, what crisis?

The incident showed how precarious the BBC's balancing act can be. Hall's early response was typically judicial. He wanted "to get to the facts".

But the facts mask a vicious culture war, between those who think that Clarkson's rebellious streak is a tonic in a broadcast realm in hock to safely calibrated beliefs and multiple diversity targets, and those who see the presenter as a menace, best left to roar off to a commercial competitor.

In the end, Clarkson was let go, but the affair pointed to the central BBC contradiction: is it, at heart, a big, popular broadcaster or a lightning rod for preferred values?

Hall has taken on similarly fraught challenges before, though, at the Royal Opera House. There, he calmed fractious unions and ended managerial off-stage strife.

Antonio Pappano, its Music Director and a close friend, says he appreciated Hall's "eternal calm in many storms", and his capacity for combining commercial savvy with good (and strategically useful) works.

Sensitive to the Opera House's reputation as an elite institution, he expanded its work on education and participation, attending the meetings in person.

As a member of its Learning and Participation Committee, I have had an insight into Lord Hall the operator. He would balance out instincts and aversions cannily, encouraging challenges as well as applause, while sounding sympathetic to almost everyone.

The only difficulty – which persists in the new role – is knowing which proposals one could take as likely to result in action and which not. Much is described in Hall-world as "fantastic". Anything less than outright enthusiasm means disapproval.

That brings us to the thorny part. Does the DG's intention of creating a BBC that is open to all talents, less clique-ridden (by implication) and less over-stuffed with managers, stand up to scrutiny?

He admits that the corporation is still somewhat devolved in the wrong places, despite a drive to excise at least some management layers. Yet unions

and freelancers share a view (often for opposing reasons) that roles are somehow parcelled out on an inside track, and that, creatively, the BBC is more like *Gormenghast* than open mic night.

Add to that: shifting targets for a higher on-air profile that tend to lurch from women one year to older women the next to ethnic diversity this last year. Quite what the Beeb considers meritocracy can be a bit muddy.

Hall's team has come under scrutiny. He appointed prominent outsiders – the former Labour minister Purnell as strategy boss and ex-*Times* Editor James Harding as Director of News and Current Affairs – as well as bringing the former *Guardian* Deputy Editor Ian Katz in to edit *Newsnight*. The logic was clear: a fresh start at the top, employing talented voices with experience of politics and the media outside the BBC bubble.

But the impression of a clique remains. "Tony has not met a 40-something, privately educated, matey male with a short name he doesn't like," sighs an executive outside the inner circle.

He has appointed and promoted women: Anne Bulford, Hall's feared Managing Director of BBC Finance and Operations; Fran Unsworth, head of the World Service; and Fiona Campbell, an outspoken new current affairs chief.

Still, a senior (female) editor wonders if Hall "has the courtliness of his generation [he's 64] and deems women a bit less naturally ambitious than men".

That would surprise his wife, Cynthia, until recently a ferociously strong head of the elite Wycombe Abbey girls' school turned headhunter.

If Hall might have to plead guilty to the charge of cliquishness, he has diplomatic talents to seduce the outside world. And few outright enemies.

He arrived at the corporation via Birkenhead grammar and PPE at Oxford and has the kind of CV the BBC relishes – namely, a long and well-padded internal one: Editor of *BBC Nine O'Clock News*; Director of News and Current Affairs; and the man behind the launch of Radio 5 Live, BBC News 24 and BBC News Online.

He was not, however, an inevitable victor in the 1999 race for the top job: he was passed over in favour of Greg Dyke, and decamped to the Royal Opera House and the Channel 4 board.

Even after that, the BBC was never far from his thoughts. Giving me advice on how to pitch programmes to Channel 4, he recommended ▶

MUCH IS DESCRIBED IN HALL-WORLD AS 'FANTASTIC'. ANYTHING LESS THAN OUTRIGHT ENTHUSIASM MEANS DISAPPROVAL

IF HALL MIGHT HAVE TO PLEAD GUILTY TO THE CHARGE OF CLIQUISHNESS, HE HAS THE DIPLOMATIC TALENTS TO SEDUCE THE OUTSIDE WORLD

› “thinking of what you do for the BBC and suggesting the exact opposite”.

He has said that he “cannot imagine a world without the BBC”. These days, however, the fragmentation of the corporation, if not its annihilation, is quite easy to imagine.

Disaggregation, I suggest, is a force so powerful that it is likely – later, if not sooner – to subvert a licence-fee-funded broadcaster that relies on a one-size-fits-all funding model.

Hall replies (rather hotly) that he firmly believes that there are “things everybody should have” – things that hold the national fabric together, whether it is a notable performance of *The Duchess of Malfi* on television, *The Voice* or *Strictly Come Dancing*. All DGs have to profess a love for shiny floor shows.

He is convinced that universality is what people crave in a more segmented media landscape (though we don’t really know what people crave until they get a say in it).

In truth, he does not much relish “what if” conversations about whether the BBC might one day run a partial subscription model – a subject on which he is unusually testy. But then, “no politician argues for coalition,” explains a senior ally of his in the licence-fee renewal talks. “We have to pitch for an overall majority.”

The immediate objective is to secure a return of the licence fee in the 10-year Charter renewal to be negotiated by 2017 (almost no one is counting on a real-terms rise). Perhaps the licence fee is like Matthew Arnold’s “long, withdrawing roar” – but it has proved resilient.

Few fear that Hall will fail outright to deliver its renewal, whoever is in No 10. His headache is how to make it fund his ambition to keep the BBC up to date with digital innovation, while serving a wide audience, to prove its relevance, and keeping enough in the kitty to adequately fund factual programmes on TV and radio.

Mind-stretching programmes can wither on the vine of a cash-strapped broadcaster; it is much harder to grow them back.

An emotive case for the BBC is easy to make, but one made for its cost-effectiveness might sound less and less convincing as audiences increasingly segment themselves.

Hence his announcement of “compete or compare”, opening the BBC to competition and benchmarking its

performance in back-office areas and production.

If old-timers sniff the approach of further squeezes on staffing, they’re probably not wrong. The strategy is clear: “I will not make a case about the future level of the licence fee until I am confident... that we have done everything to make the BBC as efficient as possible,” says Hall. It is body-armour for future negotiations.

The definition of what is subject to competition and what is not does tend to wander a bit.

Television drama production is a case in point. It is being floated off into BBC Studios, a complex pseudo-company that will create scale and a platform for the best to sell their shows elsewhere. But BBC drama cannot necessarily compete at the market rate and neither can it be sold off. “Playing at shops,” snorts an American producer.

At the same time, current affairs – the part of factual output that could profit most from more eclecticism in commissioning and ideas – remains a semi-autonomous republic of news. And thus not open to competition.

Hall thinks that tough calls, such as a difficult *Panorama*, need a short chain of management. This might be true, but it is hardly an answer to whether commissioning is bold or curious enough overall.

He has taken much of the heat out of allegations of political bias. Some think he errs on the safe side and that the near-saturation coverage of *Wolf Hall* was the sign of a safety-first approach to the dramas that help define a network.

His greatest personal enthusiasm is reserved for the arts, albeit with less focus on challenging those who produce the shows than on reassuring us that arts will be covered. Edginess may not prove a Hall speciality.

Hall’s message to the purse-string holder in No 10 after May will be a recasting of sturdy BBC principles: tooth-and-nail impartiality and the argument that, in a bewildering world, the Beeb is better than most broadcasters at separating the signal from the noise.

And, beneath the geniality, watch out for a touch of steel as the haggling gets under way.

Anne McElvoy is Policy Editor of The Economist and presents programmes for BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4.

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OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH

Here in the North East, it doesn't take long to detect a growing appetite for culture and the creative industries. After years of eye-watering investment in regeneration, manufacturing and infrastructure, civic leaders are prioritising design, content production and interactive digital media.

And young people are queuing up in their thousands to gain the skills and qualifications to pursue creative careers.

This is the North East of China and I'm in the city of Shenyang – a sprawling metropolis of 8 million people. I'm meeting university leaders keen to adopt UK-style industry-focused design and media degrees.

At the Shenyang Aerospace University, there's been extraordinary spend over the past five years in arts, design and media. Here among the fine-art studios and design labs, they already produce animation for broadcasters, including Disney.

Next door, fellow students are hard at work in a vast hangar testing and developing solar-powered drones and light aircraft.

This reminder of the Chinese pre-occupation with science, engineering and business continues alongside their new enthusiasm for creativity.

The university's Vice-President outlines his strategy: he wants his staff and students to learn from the best in the world. And, in his book, when it comes to the creative industries, there's nowhere better than the UK.

It's no secret here that the UK's creative industries are growing three times faster than any other sector of the economy and account for many of the globe's biggest brands.

But, while China is enthusiastically promoting careers in art, design and production, it feels like a different story back home. Jonathan Miller

Graeme Thompson
shows how studying
media in North East
England trumps
North East China



Paul Hampartsoumian

compares media degrees to having a qualification in stationery. Politicians openly question the value of young people opting to study arts and creative degrees at our universities.

In North East England, we're attempting to change those perceptions. The five universities in the region are making the case that economic regeneration needs its artists, designers and producers just as much as its planners, accountants and scientists.

Games and software activity in North East England is booming. Television, less so. According to the latest research from *Broadcast* magazine, independent production across the North of England has been decimated since 2011 by a lack of commissions and increased industry consolidation around London.

Thankfully, ITV and the BBC continue to do their bit for the North East creative economy. Production of BBC children's drama continues to employ large numbers of local performers

and crew, with shows that include *Wolfblood* and *The Dumping Ground*.

Filming starts soon in Northumberland on the next instalment of the Brenda Blethyn ITV hit *Vera*.

Shooting is under way at a quarry in Weardale for ITV's 13-part retelling of the *Beowulf* legend. Starring Hollywood actor William Hurt, the series mixes action, adventure and fantasy. It is already being compared to *Game of Thrones*.

More importantly – at least in my book – the efforts by drama producer Will Nicholson to get the show made in the North East, ahead of other rugged landscapes, has resulted in jobs for at least two of Sunderland University's media production graduates.

Which brings me nicely back to the students and academics I've met in China. I show them my film of life on the Sunderland coastal campus with its lingering shots of post-production suites, design labs and expensively equipped radio and television studios.

A young man is quick to assure me that no one in China under the age of 30 watches television: "We get everything here"; he holds up a large-screen smartphone of indeterminate make.

"TV is for grandparents," concurs his friend.

I'm beginning to wonder if I've blown it by mentioning television.

I should have stuck with music, apps and game design. But, then, another student looks up at the dust cloud and fumes filtering the light and makes my day: "I come to Sunderland to study animation and production and to breathe the clean sea air and see the sun."

I haven't made the case for television, but I might have found a new recruitment slogan.

Graeme Thompson is Chair of the RTS Education Committee and Dean of Arts, Design and Media at the University of Sunderland.



Why diversity pays dividends

The economic arguments for diversity came under the microscope at a lively joint RTS/BBC session held at New Broadcasting House last month. The panellists agreed that, following years of inaction, broadcasters are finally making an effort to boost black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) representation in television.

BBC Radio 4 *Saturday Live* presenter and ITV *Tonight* reporter Aasmah Mir chaired “Making diversity pay”, part of the corporation’s “Reflect and Represent” week. This included a session on BBC Two transgender sitcom *Boy Meets Girl* and an interview with Sally Wainwright, creator of *Last Tango in Halifax* and *Happy Valley*.

Charlie Hanson, who produced the successful Channel 4 sitcoms *No Problem!* and *Desmond’s* in the 1980s and 1990s, told a packed house that he “owed his career to diversity”.

Hanson, who is in fact white, had been working for the Black Theatre Co-operative (which he co-founded)

Diversity

Reflecting the whole nation makes business sense for broadcasters.

But will the BBC’s lack of a commercial imperative derail its diversity targets?

Matthew Bell reports

when it was asked to make *No Problem!* “Both those shows were commercial successes,” he said. “[The broadcaster] knew it had growing black audiences, and, even then, the advertisers were putting on pressure to have shows that they could watch.”

The sketch show *The Real McCoy*, devised by Hanson for the BBC and featuring black and Asian comics, had its first outing in 1991. “They were doing

it out of embarrassment – they’d been left behind,” he said. “The BBC has never really seen its debt to people paying the licence fee as something it had to take seriously – perhaps now it is.”

Hanson went on to produce the Ricky Gervais comedies *Extras* and *Derek*. He now runs Tantrum Films with director Amma Asante, who recently enjoyed critical and commercial success with *Belle*, a film based on the life of an 18th-century woman of mixed race.

“[Amma] and a lot of her contemporaries are working in America, mostly because they never get asked to do anything in this country. We have a talent drain as a result of the lack of investment in diverse voices, be they writers, directors or producers,” he claimed.

Hanson told the audience that he had been on similar panels discussing TV’s lack of diversity 10 and 20 years ago: “I’ve avoided doing it again because I didn’t see anything happening, particularly with the BBC.”

However, he added, Lenny Henry’s highly effective initiative to increase



From left: Diane Kemp, Jane Millichip, Aasmah Mir, Charlie Hanson and Barbara Emile

All pictures: Paul Hampartsoumian

edition of BBC Radio 4's *Today*, where he also drew attention to the issue.

Act for Change was launched in early 2014 in the wake of an ITV winter drama trailer lacking any BAME actors.

The campaign, backed by leading members of the artistic community, demands that the live and recorded arts reflect the diversity of UK society.

"It does seem to me that Sky, Channel 4 and ITV are moving in the right direction. The BBC is still introducing the training and mentoring schemes that it did 30 years ago, that it does every 10 years and that still haven't worked," said the TV veteran.

"Perhaps [it is] because the BBC does not have the commercial imperative [to make programmes for BAME people that] it is lagging behind," he added.

Nevertheless, despite his harsh words for the BBC, Hanson said: "We're at a turning point because people do seem to be listening. I hope this will be the last time I have to come on a panel like this."

Diane Kemp, Professor of Broadcast Journalism at Birmingham City University, argued that the economic case for diversity is proven. Turning the question on its head, she asked: "What is the cost if you don't have diversity at the heart of what you do?"

Without diversity, Kemp said, "you're going to lose stories; in terms of news, you're going to lose experts and fresh angles on life; and, particularly for public service broadcasting, where you have a licence fee that everybody pays, you're going to lose that legitimacy unless people can see themselves, their lives and their point of view reflected."

"My feeling is that this is an idea whose time has come," she added.

Like Hanson, Kemp also pointed out that she had been on panels discussing diversity in the past and yet little had changed.

Former *EastEnders* and *Holby City* Series Producer Barbara Emile, now Executive Producer at the new Lenny Henry indie, Douglas Road Productions, agreed with Hanson and Kemp that there was a growing momentum for change. "We do have to acknowledge that every broadcaster is making an effort," she said.

Emile backed ring-fencing money "as the fastest, most efficient way" to boost diversity in front of and behind the camera, and to ensure lasting change. "It's fine to develop one drama. For one small company, it takes about three or four years; after that, if >

Broadcasters' diversity targets

Last August, Sky set itself a target that 20% of the stars and writers of its home-grown UK output would come from a BAME background by the end of 2015.

This surpassed the BBC's target of 15% on-screen portrayal (up from today's 10.4%) over three years, announced by Director-General Tony Hall in June.

Other broadcasters followed Sky's lead. Last November, ITV introduced



Jane Millichip

a 'social partnership' between its commissioners and producers in a bid to make its programmes and workforce more inclusive.

"ITV's commissioning team will take responsibility for, and ownership of, our aim to better reflect the diversity of modern Britain on screen," said ITV's Director of Television, Peter Fincham.

The broadcaster also set itself an on-screen target exceeding the 14% proportion of the country made up of BAME people.

In January, Channel 4 launched its '360° Diversity Charter', which includes a series of targets.

The broadcaster said it would increase the percentage of BAME staff from 15% to 20%, staff with disabilities from 1.9% to 6% and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender staff from 2.4% to 6% – all by 2020.

The new charter is backed by the power to withhold executive bonuses if targets are missed.

BAME representation in the television industry and the launch of the Act for Change project had given the campaign for greater diversity a shot in the arm.

In the past year, Henry has called for funds to be set aside to boost the presence of BAME people in the broadcasting industry. The comic and actor has made a number of high-profile speeches emphasising the lack of diversity in TV, appeared before the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee and guest-edited an

YOU ARE GOING TO LOSE LEGITIMACY UNLESS PEOPLE CAN SEE THEMSELVES, THEIR LIVES AND THEIR POINT OF VIEW REFLECTED

Are quotas the way ahead?

Jane Millichip, Managing Director of Sky Vision, told the audience gathered at New Broadcasting House that the impact of Sky's 20% quota in her international sales division would be 'positive'.

She added: 'Proper diversity on screen is good for international sales – putting it crudely, in business terms.'

Questioned by event chair Aasmah Mir, Millichip denied the quota was 'tokenistic', adding: 'It's about on-screen and off-screen talent and it's from grass-roots level upwards.'

'Yes, we've imposed a quota on ourselves to hit but behind that is a genuine, positive desire to make a difference. It's a voluntary quota – it's not something somebody forced on us.'

'It's something that we've adopted ourselves to redress an imbalance.'

From the audience at New Broadcasting House, former RTS Chief Executive Simon Albury, who chairs the Campaign for Broadcasting Equality, said the BBC had a 'minuscule, derisory, ring-fenced fund' for on-screen representation.

'It's hardly surprising that the BBC should have an event that is called "Reflect and Represent" rather than an event that is called "Reflect and Represent and Employ",' he added.

Albury argued for the adoption of the 'Lenny Henry plan to drive off-screen employment, where the power lies. The editorial decision-making is off-screen.' This plan would see funds ring-fenced to increase BAME representation in the same way that budgets are reserved for regional programmes.

Millichip, however, said that 'a quota system is only half of the story. Ultimately, this is a television business. Yes, there is creative endeavour here but, unless we make good business out of it, then I'm afraid it does become tokenistic.'

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE NEWS BEING READ, IT'S ABOUT WHO SELECTS THE STORIES IN THE FIRST PLACE



› you do not have another commission, you cease to exist.

"Ring-fenced money will ensure sustainability and demand. Supply is not a problem: there is amazing, [diverse] talent in this country, across the board."

Emile argued that emerging markets around the world and the growth of online programming offered huge opportunities to British TV. "If we limit ourselves and do not consider diversity, as producers, we are at a disadvantage. When I say diversity, I mean across the board. We've got to get real if we're going to sell programmes."

Diversity is more than just a question of race, said Kemp, raising the lack of social diversity in areas such as news. "You need to make sure that the people in newsrooms making decisions are from across the [social] board – it's not just about the news being read, it's about who selects the stories in the first place," she said.

Does diversity help or hinder the sale of British programmes? Jane Millichip, Managing Director of distributor Sky Vision, argued that the degree of "universality of the themes in programmes" was central to driving international sales.

"When we're assessing a show, what we're looking for is the essence of great storytelling, whether it's a documentary, factual entertainment show or a drama. That's love, loss and laughter; it's less about the diversity in and of itself," said Millichip.

"In international, the diversity of programming tends to fall into two camps: those shows where the diversity is incidental and those where the story is the diversity itself. Both can sell well – it just depends how the story is told," she added.

Millichip pointed to two current Warwick Davis shows to illustrate her point. A programme for BBC Two documentary strand *Modern Times – Warwick Davis' Big Night*, about a theatre company for actors, like himself, of reduced height – was "doing quite well". ITV1's *Weekend Escapes*, featuring Davis and his family touring the country, was selling less well, she reported, "not because of Warwick but because it's about British seaside resorts."

"I dare anyone here to try and sell a series like that to a French or Italian buyer – the British Riviera is not something they find in any way appealing."

"For us, it's sometimes the Britishness of a show that is a barrier to sales, not the ethnicity or diversity within it," Millichip concluded. "The incidental diversity of programming, which is increasing, has to be a good thing because it's a more natural reflection of the world we live in."

'Making diversity pay' was a joint RTS/BBC event, held at New Broadcasting House in London on 3 March. The producer was Marcus Ryder, who is Head of Current Affairs at BBC Scotland and Chair of the RTS Diversity Committee.

Paul Hampartsoumian

FROM THE DIGITAL EDITOR

What you need to know to break into TV news. And comedy. And animation. **Tim Dickens** highlights new RTS online features



RTS



RTS

Behind the Scenes at Channel 4 News

There's been a lot of interest in the latest in our *Behind the Scenes* series. The 10-minute film takes a look at all the work that goes into bringing the daily news show to our screens.

It provides valuable insights for aspiring broadcast journalists, and also examines some of the important craft skills involved, such as editing, vision mixing and directing.

▶ j.mp/BTSChannel4

Video: Armando Iannucci on how to break into comedy writing

Not content with simply filming our sell-out evening with comedy great Armando Iannucci, we sat him down for an exclusive interview about *Partridge*, procrastination and producing great TV on both sides of the Atlantic. A must watch.

▶ j.mp/RTSArmando

British television is a pioneer for accessibility services

It turns out the UK has a proactive attitude when it comes to making television more accessible to those

with disabilities. Online reporter Pippa Shawley found out why when she spoke to campaigners, charities and Ofcom. She discovered some rather smart tech solutions for deaf or visually impaired audiences.

▶ j.mp/accessTV

The rise and rise of British animation

It's a good time to be making animated telly, it seems, so reporter Rebecca Stewart has been talking to animators and producers to ask "Where next for cartoons?" With BBC Three preparing to go online, it looks like increased opportunities for short-form content could help animation reach even greater heights.

▶ j.mp/RTSanimate

In the pipeline

Our next *Behind the Scenes* takes us to Leeds for *Emmerdale*. The video team will dissect what it takes to put together the hugely popular soap. We've got *Tips in 60 Seconds* from Armando Iannucci. We'll also take an in-depth look at *The Great British Bake Off* format in an online feature.

Springtime at RTS HQ and from our window St Paul's looks glorious in the April sunshine.

Last month saw our social media following swell to a remarkable new level. The RTS Programme Awards, like the RTS Television Journalism Awards before them, meant that many eyes were glued to our live blogs, Twitter feed and Facebook to get the latest news and gossip from the blue carpet.

In case you missed them at the time, our four-strong team bagged interviews with stars including Grayson Perry, Bear Grylls, Russell Tovey and Sheridan Smith. Our videos – uploaded straight to YouTube – attracted thousands of views.

Twitter was vital to the success. We generated 1.2 million views of tweets written furiously from laptops as the winners were being announced.

By the time the glitter was being swept up at the Grosvenor House Hotel, we had some 500 new followers at @RTS_Media.

As an educational charity, one of the Society's big priorities is to reach out to young people who want to get ahead in television. We'll be promoting our bursary schemes across the digital sphere, as well as the RTS Young Technologist of the Year Award 2015 – for which entries have just opened.

The team will also be playing with an exciting new platform from Creative Skillset, called Hiive. This could provide a valuable network and resource for anyone trying to climb the TV ladder.

Tim Dickens is RTS Digital Editor.

▶ Do you have a news or feature idea for the RTS website? Let Tim know on 020 7822 2836 or tdickens@rts.org.uk.

Sackings, secrecy and sex

Book review

A new history of the BBC during the Thatcher era by its official historian has it all. But **Maggie Brown** wonders if the approach lacks genuine focus



Writers of contemporary media history need to be brave. They also, of course, want to be read. Professor Jean Seaton, the official BBC historian, has a crisp style, a fine grasp of the period 1974–87 and has authored an absorbing book, with the power to annoy and stimulate debate.

As the title, *Pinkoes and Traitors* (taken from the Dear Bill letters of *Private Eye*), announces, the prose is leavened by light touches.

She describes the BBC alighting on the diplomatic Ian Trethowan as a potential director-general (he served 1977–82) this way: “Treating him like a queen bee grub, the BBC began to feed him royal jelly”, consciously expanding his experience.

All of this is a far cry from Lord (Asa) Briggs, whom Seaton follows. He wrote voluminous doorstopper histories.

She compresses her account of what were seriously dark years into 384 pages: 13 chapters, with conclusions, from “Mrs Thatcher and the BBC: the Con-

servative Athene” to “Endgame”, about the dispatch of Alasdair Milne.

Milne’s son Seumas has attacked her for writing journo history. But this account is the distillation of scores of interviews, access to the fabled closed oral BBC archive (which tapes leading figures on departure) and state papers. All history bears personal imprints.

The question is: do you trust her overarching framework? This is that the BBC, corporately, floundered repeatedly during the 1970s and 1980s and failed to address the big issues of the day, dominated as they were by the rise of Thatcherite market forces.

First, it tried and failed to establish decent licence-fee settlements with the Callaghan Government, which secretly toyed with ending the licence fee, and then imposed three short-term settlements during the period 1977–79 (the so-called “noose”), which forced the corporation into debt.

In a decade of social turmoil that included the 1970 Equal Pay Act, Seaton details a hilarious 1973 “Limitations” document to the BBC’s Board of Management that gave reasons not to promote women. Just 81 of the 1,434

managers were female in 1973. Not until Monica Sims’ 1984 report was the BBC’s disregard for women confronted. The first ethnic-minority graduate trainee was employed in 1979.

The 1980s brought a near-disastrous clash with Margaret Thatcher and the more hawkish members of her Cabinet. “[The BBC] was like a rabbit caught in the eye of a ferret,” writes Seaton.

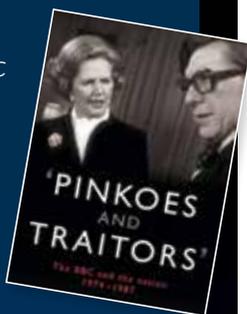
This was a period of sectarian war in Northern Ireland, spilling into terrorism in England, rising unemployment, and the Falklands war, which cemented Thatcher’s power.

The Prime Minister then moved on to question the licence fee, via the Peacock Committee in 1985, but was thwarted on sound economic grounds.

Seaton credits economists Andrew Ehrenberg and Paddy Barwise of the London Business School and their sophisticated independent research for saving the BBC’s funding model.

There are problems with Seaton’s approach. It is a bit scattergun. There is an extensive chapter on the ambitious 13-part *Life on Earth* project, which enabled the Bristol-based Natural History Unit to come into its own.

Pinkoes and Traitors: The BBC and the Nation 1974-1987 by Jean Seaton is published by Profile Books, priced £30. ISBN: 978-1846684746



Life at the top

BBC Director-Generals

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| Charles Curran | 1969-77 |
| Ian Trethowan | 1977-82 |
| Alasdair Milne | 1982-87 |
| Michael Checkland | 1987-92 |

BBC Chairmen

| | |
|------------------|---------|
| Michael Swann | 1973-80 |
| George Howard | 1980-83 |
| Stuart Young | 1983-86 |
| Marmaduke Hussey | 1986-96 |

Another chapter dissects the wedding of the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer, noting that “the age of deferential royal coverage [was] on the wane”, and declaring the media as on the “cusp of a febrile royal news story”.

But there is scant account of sport, or the nations and regions. Drama experienced a golden period – Milne is credited with encouraging Dennis Potter’s *Pennies from Heaven* after refusing to screen his *Brimstone and Treacle* (the Devil rapes a disabled girl, which made him feel sick) – but radical figures such as Tony Garnett are not interviewed.

Sexual abuse and Jimmy Savile are dealt with briefly: Seaton found no trace in the BBC’s files of anxiety about him, nor referrals upwards. Uncouthness acted as a cloak.

There is some detail about men groping women and an unnamed executive prone to spanking younger females. This led to comfy exile in a BBC America post. BBC Chairman Lord Howard (1980-83) is exposed as a “dirty old man”.

For me, the final chapter, about the sacking of Milne, which was a seismic event, is disappointingly succinct.

Seaton’s view that Milne was the wrong person for the DG post rings absolutely true. In 1986, I witnessed him being told that the BBC had a new chairman (following the death of Stuart Young) as he sat on a public platform at the BFI. He fled, saying he’d never heard of Marmaduke Hussey.

And there is an important discovery: Thatcher consulted Rupert Murdoch over the appointment of Hussey.

Seaton points to the failure of Milne’s BBC to keep communications open with the Thatcher Government. It had allies, she writes, but barely mustered them.

Following the 1979 election, then-Home Secretary Willie Whitelaw gave the corporation amazing security in the form of a 15-year Charter.

Another Conservative Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, and senior civil servants subsequently battled in different ways to protect the BBC.

Crucial to this history is the decision by the powerful Patricia Hodgson, former BBC Secretary and now Chair of Ofcom, to be interviewed as the key witness in the plot to remove Milne.

She reveals her annual dinners with Thatcher, which began in 1976, when Thatcher was Leader of the Opposition. When Milne became Director-General in 1982, he stopped these dinners.

Central to his fall is the issue of whether the 1984 *Panorama* programme *Maggie’s Militant Tendency* was flawed. It examined the allegedly extremist views of three right-wing Conservative MPs (Harvey Proctor, Neil Hamilton and Gerald Howarth).

Hodgson’s view was that Milne and his Assistant Director-General, Alan Protheroe, were consciously misdirecting the governors, “trying to price the MPs out of the market” so that they would be forced to drop their libel case.

At the heart of the programme was an allegation of anti-Semitism in the Conservative Party. Young, the first Jewish BBC chairman, “was convinced that the general argument was correct but did not appreciate problems with how the story was told”, writes Seaton.

Protheroe and Milne assured him that the BBC’s evidence was watertight.

When wealthy backers got the MPs’ case to court, the governors decided to settle. Seaton says they had already decided that Milne should go when Young was appointed, but they were forced to delay action because of the massive row over Paul Hamann’s 1985 *Real Lives* programme.

In 1986, Hodgson gave Hussey, the new Chairman, “the smoking gun from 1984”. Just before Christmas 1986, Milne told his Management Board that he would be remaining as Director-General until 1990.

“Tragic,” comments Seaton. The brutal sacking went ahead a month later. There was no attempt to prepare Milne. But, as Seaton observes, he did not fight it.

More positive examples of the way in which key figures shaped the BBC are threaded into her story. Seaton rescues Director-General Michael Checkland, “one of the quiet heroes”, from near obscurity.

He backed the BBC Micro computer project and defeated a vanity building on the Langham site. He also prepared for and won a pivotal industrial dispute with scenic services workers in 1984, seen as the BBC’s Wapping.

Checkland “simply refused to be involved” in the Government’s abortive satellite broadcasting plans – the open sesame for Murdoch’s expansion.

Another Seaton hero is Bill Cotton, who rose from Head of Light Entertainment to Managing Director of BBC Television. His brilliant handling of talent is counterbalanced by holding on to *The Black & White Minstrel Show* too long.

By the early 1980s, with the BBC facing a “brutal crisis” as mass audiences slipped away, Cotton recruited Michael Grade to run BBC One. The launch of *EastEnders* in 1985 “reconnected the BBC with its mass audience. In a way, it saved the BBC,” comments Seaton.

Unexpected insights include the central role of engineers: outside broadcast units “thought of themselves as the ‘SAS of broadcasting’... practical, physical, expeditionary... focused”.

We also learn that chief engineers had a security clearance above that of the Director-General: they could paralyse the emergency communications network. The BBC used the term “formalities cleared”, stamped on the back of personnel files, as code for such clearance.

This is a sincere effort. The BBC, subjected as it was to some unreasonable political pressure, did have to change. In 2015, it has to defend universal public service broadcasting in an age of infinite choice.

I conclude with a final, helpful Seatonism: “The BBC thinks its way forward by poring over the runes of past car crashes”.

To the internet and beyond



As broadcasters meet at the NAB technology show, **Adrian Pennington** highlights four trends that could transform TV

NDS

1 Why your TV should talk to your toaster: connected-TV and the 'internet of things'

One of the big draws at television technology shows such as NAB in Las Vegas is the “living room of the future”, with its wall-filling, multi-image, interactive TV screen. Such “wallpaper displays” are still, largely, mock-ups, not demonstrations of real services.

But the “internet of things” (IoT) – the multiplication of connected devices, body-worn sensors and Cloud data services – could soon make such TVs a reality.

Analyst IDC optimistically reckons the global IoT market could be worth \$7tr in five years’ time.

Consumer gadget vendors such as Apple and the online information giants Google, Facebook and Amazon are keen to connect the personal data they already Hoover up to your electronic devices in the home, car or outdoor environment.

But pay-TV and telco operators could be poised to steal a slice of that IoT pie, if they can capitalise on their long experience of in-home customer service.

They already possess a “home gateway” in the set-top box and existing billing relationships.

“Advanced services, such as home security, home safety, home automation and energy management... usually require an installer to come on site and handle ‘the last mile’ of the service,” points out Simon Trudelle, Senior Product Marketing Director at broadcast technology company Nagra. Broadband and pay-TV suppliers, such as BT, Sky and Virgin “are very well positioned”, he adds.

Customer relationships, security and trust are part of the equation but so, too, is the interface that will have to seamlessly and efficiently handle both entertainment and “in-picture” IoT services on the big screen.

2 Ultra-high-definition TV needs agreed standards for better colour and contrast

Broadcasters have been telling consumer electronics manufacturers for some time that simply cramming more pixels into a picture does not make Ultra-HDTV a compelling proposition for viewers.

However, pictures with a wider colour range and greater brightness levels – collectively called High Dynamic Range (HDR) – might sway consumers.

Recognising the need for HDR is one thing, agreeing a standard for it is another. Every major manufacturer has been marketing its own technique for raising brightness in TVs.

“Manufacturers would like to increment Ultra-HD technology every year in order to sell new TVs. But pay-TV broadcasters want Ultra-HD to be a significant step change in quality so that they can charge more money for it,” says Simon Gauntlett, CTO of the Digital TV Group. “In the middle is Netflix, which likes the idea that it can move a bit quicker than broadcasters to implement any new technologies as they develop.”

Even if an HDR standard is agreed, its implementation is far from solved. Broadcasters want an HDR-augmented broadcast stream to work without compromise on the majority of existing HDTV screens, as well as on new Ultra-HD sets.

While the incorporation of HDR into the current Ultra-HD 4K television specifications is being considered, there are calls for HDR and Ultra-HD to be

separated entirely. The reason for this is that when HDR is applied to a 2,000-pixel-wide HDTV picture, to some eyes it looks far superior to a basic 4,000-pixel-wide 4K image.

Which rather calls into question the whole Ultra-HD project.

3 Unburdened by the hype carried by 3DTV, virtual reality is taking stealthy strides

No one expects immersive virtual reality (VR) programming to supplant conventional viewing any time soon. It will prosper as a second-screen adjunct to cinema and TV programming until someone comes up with a killer entertainment app.

There's no need to buy a new TV set – anyone with a smartphone can watch VR content on it if they pay around £10 for it to be temporarily converted into a headset, using Google Cardboard or Samsung Gear VR.

Broadcasters have taken a scattergun approach to trials: Sky has shot dozens of VR shorts, including scenes from *Fortitude* and *Critical*.

The related technologies of panoramic image capture (especially of live events) and “mixed reality” (which still requires the viewer to don head-gear) are also attracting interest from video content creators.

4 Mobile TV may finally take off thanks to the arrival of LTE Broadcast

Excitement is building around an emerging technology, LTE Broadcast, which the mobile phone companies' Global Suppliers Association hails as a “game changer”.

LTE Broadcast supercharges existing 4G networks by delivering the same content – such as video or music or software updates, or even severe weather warnings – to multiple users, rather than delivering each user their own individual stream.

The system could come into its own at sports venues, where there is often heavy demand for the same live video stream from crowds of fans. The application could easily be extended to other live events and catch-up TV.

LTE Broadcast even promises to end the war between the mobile industry and Europe's free-to-air broadcasters over scarce spectrum.



Netflix

Six of the best

Gavin Mann, Global Broadcast Lead at Accenture, selects the six solutions most urgently sought after by broadcasters and online video providers.

1 Monetising live events

Despite the fragmentation of viewership, live events – especially sports – give broadcasters access to valuable mass audiences. The India vs Pakistan World Cup cricket match in February was seen by about 1 billion people worldwide.

The cost of rights to such events is rocketing, as broadcasters chase the top-tier live events that will give them the edge over their new, digital competitors. This is boosting interest in technologies that integrate social media, online video and tools for monetising the live experience.

2 DIY bundling

Consumers want a ‘post-bundle’ world, where they can choose content quickly and easily. So look out for pay-TV and internet video providers working more closely to create joined-up interfaces that cut back on the profusion of devices, remotes and subscription plans that users currently have to cope with.

3 Flexible streaming platforms

This is a new battleground. Local internet video service providers are having to fight back against global online video distributors, such as Netflix and Amazon. At NAB, a lot of interest is focusing on new, flexible streaming

platforms that can be adapted to the needs of local service providers.

4 Cloud services for broadcasters

The Cloud offers a faster time to market for new services, the ability to scale service costs according to demand and greater access to customer analytics. The Cloud is fundamental for service providers such as Amazon, but increasingly important to broadcasters, as well.

5 Understanding the audience

Audience analytics have become essential for broadcasters and advertisers seeking to understand consumer behaviour, trends and dynamics over a wide range of devices.

NAB features many new tools for collecting and analysing statistics in real time to guide ad-servers and content recommendation engines.

This relentless focus on consumer optimisation will have an impact on all aspects of broadcasting: from decisions about content to implementing new services for viewers and advertisers.

6 Future-proofing with Ultra-HDTV

Relentless, global competition is driving broadcasters and video service providers to stand out from the crowd. Ultra-HDTV in its 4K incarnation provides the next logical step.

But providers are looking for technologies that will allow them to offer 4K content without the need for massively increased broadband capacity.

The Awards were presented at the Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane, on 17 March, and hosted by **John Sergeant**

RTS Programme Awards 2013–2014



Scripted Comedy: *Harry and Paul's Story of the Twos*



Lifetime Achievement Award: Melvyn Bragg

Pictures: Paul Hampartsoumian/BBC

Lifetime Achievement *Melvyn Bragg*

'Tonight's recipient enjoys multiple careers – novelist, writer of non-fiction, radio broadcaster, member of the House of Lords, campaigner and educator – but first and foremost, he's a man of television, a great broadcaster and programme-maker.

'But even that doesn't adequately describe the role he has come to occupy in national life – because in Britain, no one is more synonymous with the arts than Melvyn Bragg.'

Actor – Female

Sarah Lancashire – *Happy Valley*
Red Production Company for BBC One
"The brilliance of [Lancashire's] performance elevated this powerful piece to another level."

Nominees:

Georgina Campbell – *Murdered By My Boyfriend*, BBC Productions for BBC Three
Sheridan Smith – *Cilla*, ITV Studios/GroupM Entertainment for ITV

Actor – Male

Tom Hollander – *A Poet in New York*
Modern Television for BBC Cymru Wales and BBC Two
"[Hollander] immersed himself completely in the role, delivering a deeply moving piece of work."

Nominees:

Adeel Akhtar – *Utopia – Series 2*, Kudos Production for Channel 4
Toby Jones – *Marvellous*, Fifty Fathoms Productions and Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Two

Arts

Grayson Perry: Who Are You?

Swan Films for Channel 4
"Two words sum this up – original and outstanding."

Nominees:

Messiah at the Foundling Hospital, Reef Television for BBC Two
Our Gay Wedding: The Musical, Wingspan Productions for Channel 4

Actor – Male: Tom Hollander
– *A Poet in New York*



Actor – Female: Sarah Lancashire, *Happy Valley*



Arts: Grayson Perry: *Who Are You?*

Children’s Fiction

4 O’Clock Club – Christmas

CBBC Productions for CBBC
“Fresh, unpredictable and with a cracking pace.”

Nominees:

Hank Zipzer, Kindle Entertainment/DHX Media/Walker Productions supported by Screen Yorkshire’s Yorkshire Content Fund for CBBC

Katie Morag and the Tiresome Ted, Move On Up for CBeebies

Children’s Programme

The Big Performance 3: Finale

Twenty Twenty Productions for CBBC
“Fantastic production values made this a truly satisfying watch.”

Nominees:

Marrying Mum and Dad, CBBC Productions for CBBC

Swashbuckle ‘Pirate Pampering’, CBeebies for CBeebies



Host: John Sergeant



Children’s Programme: *The Big Performance 3: Finale*

Comedy Performance

Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith – *Inside No 9*

BBC Comedy Production London for BBC Two

“Witty, clever and brilliantly inventive.”

Nominees:

Harry Enfield – *Harry and Paul’s Story of the Twos*, Balloon Entertainment for BBC Two

Sarah Hadland – *The Job Lot – Series 2*, Big Talk Productions for ITV2

Daytime Programme

Couples Come Dine with Me

ITV Studios for Channel 4
“Funny, cheeky and clever ...”

Nominees:

This Morning, ITV Studios for ITV

Superstar Dogs, Tuesday’s Child Television for Channel 4



Comedy Performance: Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith – *Inside No 9*



Children’s Fiction: *4 O’Clock Club – Christmas*

Documentary Series

Life & Death Row

BBC Documentaries Production for BBC Three

“A brilliantly crafted new take on a familiar topic, offering fresh insight through superb film-making.”

Nominees:

Bedlam, The Garden Productions for Channel 4

Protecting our Parents, BBC Documentaries Production for BBC Two ▶



Daytime Programme: *Couples Come Dine with Me*

Pictures: Paul Hamparsumian/Richard Kendal/BBC/Channel 4

Drama Serial

The Honourable Woman

Drama Republic and Eight Rooks for BBC Two

“Remarkable in its ambition, production values, writing and the way it handled a complex subject.”

Nominees:

Prey, Red Production Company for ITV

The Driver, Red Production Company/Highfield Pictures for BBC One

Drama Series

Line of Duty – Series 2

World Productions for BBC Two

“Spell-bindingly good, with an intensity of performance.”

Nominees:

Happy Valley, Red Production Company for BBC One

Peaky Blinders II, Caryn Mandabach Productions/Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Two

Entertainment

The Graham Norton Show

So Television for BBC One

“Effortlessly slick, brilliantly cast and continually fresh.”

Nominees:

A League of Their Own – Series 8, CPL Productions for Sky 1HD

Ant and Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway, ITV Studios/Mitre Television for ITV

Entertainment Performance

Claudia Winkleman – Strictly Come Dancing

BBC Productions for BBC One

“It was a stand-out year for the winner – a genuinely individual performer and... a consummate professional.”

Nominees:

Graham Norton – The Graham Norton Show, So Television for BBC One

Keith Lemon – Celebrity Juice, Talkback for ITV2

History

Our World War

BBC Documentaries Production for BBC Three

“A fresh way of approaching history, giving a visceral sense of what being there was really like.”

Nominees:

The First Georgians: The German Kings Who Made Britain, BBC Arts Production Bristol in partnership with Royal Collection Trust for BBC Four

The World’s War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire, BBC History Production for BBC Two



Drama Series: *Line of Duty – Series 2*



Presenter: Billy Connolly – *Billy Connolly’s Big Send Off*



Drama Serial: *The Honourable Woman*



Entertainment Performance:
Claudia Winkleman – *Strictly Come Dancing*

Documentary Series: *Life & Death Row*



Live Event: *D-Day: The Heroes Return*



International: *Fargo*



History: *Our World War*



Popular, Factual and Features: *The Island with Bear Grylls*

Pictures: Richard Kendal/BBC

International

Fargo

MGM/FX Productions for Channel 4

“A stylised mini-series perfectly capturing the darkly comedic tone of the source material.”

Nominees:

The Big Bang Theory – Series 7, Chuck Lorre Productions Inc in association with Warner Bros Television for E4

True Detective, HBO Entertainment in association with Neon Black/Anonymous Content/Parliament of Owls/Passenger, acquired by Sky Atlantic

Live Event

D-Day: The Heroes Return

BBC Event Productions for BBC One

“Hugely ambitious, this programme was beautifully produced, with live coverage on a massive scale.”

Nominees:

The Grand National, IMG Productions for Channel 4

WWI Remembered – From the Battlefield and From Westminster Abbey, BBC Event Productions for BBC Two

Popular, Factual and Features

The Island with Bear Grylls

Shine TV/Bear Grylls Ventures

Co-Production for Channel 4

“A brave and inspired approach to casting, injecting a level of authenticity and jeopardy that distinguished it from its predecessors.”

Nominees:

50 Ways To Kill Your Mammy, Burning Bright Productions/Brown Bread Films for Sky 1HD

The Great British Bake Off, Love West for BBC One

Presenter

Billy Connolly – Billy Connolly’s Big Send Off

Burning Bright Productions for ITV

“Raw, funny, brave and a great communicator – open and spellbinding.”

Nominees:

Dr Lucy Worsley – The First Georgians:

The German Kings Who Made Britain, BBC Arts Production Bristol in partnership with Royal Collection Trust for BBC Four

Grayson Perry – Grayson Perry: Who Are You? Swan Films for Channel 4 ▶

Science and Natural History

Live from Space: Lap of the Planet

Arrow Media for Channel 4

“Probably one of the most ambitious live programmes ever made.”

Nominees:

Life Story, BBC Natural History Production/Open University/BBC Worldwide/Discovery/France TV for BBC One

The Girl Who Talked To Dolphins, BBC Scotland Science Productions for BBC Four

Scripted Comedy

Harry and Paul's Story of the Twos

Balloon Entertainment for BBC Two
“A masterpiece... incredibly funny and bold.”

Nominees:

Him and Her: The Wedding, Big Talk Productions for BBC Three

Moone Boy – Series 2, Baby Cow Productions/Hot Cod Productions/Sprout Pictures/Grand Pictures for Sky 1HD

Single Documentary

The Paedophile Hunter

Amos Pictures for Channel 4

“An astonishing film with incredible access – a brave commission and a brave programme to make.”

Nominees:

Baby P: The Untold Story, Sandpaper Films for BBC One

This World: Terror at the Mall, Amos Pictures for BBC Two

Single Drama

Murdered by My Boyfriend

BBC Productions for BBC Three

“This work felt important and utterly compelling, with inventive direction and writing – a bold and original approach to difficult subject matter.”

Nominees:

Common, LA Productions for BBC One

Marvellous, Fifty Fathoms Productions and Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Two

Soap and Continuing Drama

Casualty

BBC Drama Production Wales for BBC One

“A show that had regained exceptional form. A strong sense of the community within the show never detracted from the individual journeys the characters went on... an excellent drama.”

Nominees:

Coronation Street, ITV Studios for ITV

EastEnders, BBC Drama Production London for BBC One

Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit

Gary Neville

Sky Sports

“[Neville] has a genuine insight, strategic knowledge and a mission to explain.”

Nominees:

Gary Lineker, BBC Sport for BBC One

Hazel Irvine, BBC Sport

Sports Programme

The 2014 Ryder Cup

Sky Sports/European Tour Productions for Sky Sports

“With an approach that took the audience to the heart of the event and with a commentary team of unrivalled expertise, this was a production that was perfectly placed to showcase great sporting drama.”

Nominees:

British Grand Prix, BBC Sport for BBC Two

World Cup: Germany vs Brazil, BBC Sport for BBC One

Writer – Comedy

Harry Enfield, Paul Whitehouse and Charlie Higson – Harry and Paul's Story of the Twos

Balloon Entertainment for BBC Two

“Funny, clever writing with amazing attention to detail.”

Nominees:

Jessica Knappett – Drifters – Series 2, Bwark for E4

Sam Leifer and Tom Basden – Plebs – Series 2, Rise Films for ITV2

Writer – Drama

Peter Bowker – Marvellous

Fifty Fathoms Productions and Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Two

“Extraordinary writing – joyful, life-enhancing but in no way sentimental.”

Nominees:

Jimmy McGovern – Common, LA Productions for BBC One

Sally Wainwright – Happy Valley, Red Production Company for BBC One

Judges' Award

Ben Stephenson

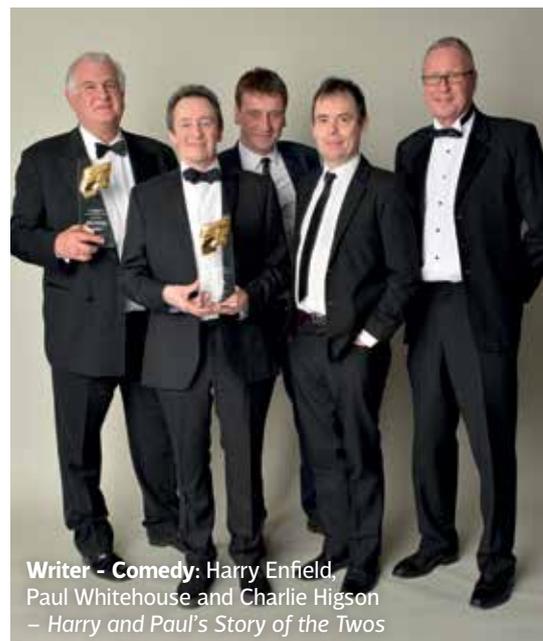
Controller, Drama Commissioning, BBC Television

Lifetime Achievement Award

Melvyn Bragg



Single Drama: *Murdered by My Boyfriend*



Writer - Comedy: Harry Enfield, Paul Whitehouse and Charlie Higson – *Harry and Paul's Story of the Twos*



Single Documentary: *The Paedophile Hunter*



Writer – Drama: Peter Bowker – *Marvellous*



Soap and Continuing Drama: *Casualty*



Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit Gary Neville



Sports Programme: *The 2014 Ryder Cup*

Pictures: Richard Kendal/BBC/Channel 4/BskyB



Science and Natural History: *Live from Space: Lap of the Planet*



Judges' Award Ben Stephenson

'We are living through an extraordinarily rich period of television drama in the US and Europe, and this year's RTS Judges' Award acknowledges the contribution one executive has made to what many are calling a new golden age.'

'He was responsible for seven out of the top 10 most-watched dramas of the year and seven out of 10 of the most appreciated.'

'He has built BBC Two drama into a formidable creative force with titles such as *Peaky Blinders*, *The Fall*, *Line of Duty* and *The Honourable Woman*. And he has successfully introduced a new slate of returning series to BBC One with *Sherlock*, *Call the Midwife*, *Death in Paradise*, *Last Tango in Halifax*, *The Musketeers* and *Shetland* all playing last year.'

'Also in 2014, he introduced *Happy Valley* and *The Missing* – two of the most talked-about series of the year, greeted with huge critical and audience acclaim.'

'Add to all that single films such as Jimmy McGovern's *Common* and Peter Bowker's *Marvellous*, not to mention a rejuvenated *EastEnders*, and it would be hard to disagree that our winner has had an extraordinary year.'

Southern talent in the news

More than 200 people attended the Southern Centre Awards dinner at Winchester's Guildhall in early March. Hosted by the region's star presenters, ITV's Fred Dinenage and the BBC's Sally Taylor, the ceremony celebrated the work of 10 local independents and four broadcast centres.

Best Newcomer was Harry Hitchens for his easy-going, natural style presenting Channel 4's *Gay Sex, Apps and Me*.

There were 22 entries for Best Regional Journalist, once again won by BBC South East's Colin Campbell for his tireless investigative reporting. The Best Video Journalist award went to ITV Meridian's Christine Alsford.

The coveted Best Regional News Programme award went to *ITV Meridian East* for its timely edition reacting to the Eastbourne Pier fire. Retiring BBC South News



Awards winners

All pictures: Howard Lucas

Editor Lee Desty was honoured by his colleagues for his services to *BBC South Today*.

Lambent Productions won Best Single Documentary for BBC Three's *Dead Behind Bars* and Ricochet took the Best Factual award with C4 series *Mr Drew's School for Boys*.

There was an excellent range of student work on offer from five universities in the region. The Animation and Drama awards went to University for the Creative Arts in Farnham; the Factual and Open prizes were won by Bournemouth University; and the Entertainment category was taken by Arts University Bournemouth.

The event received in-kind support from BBC South and ITV Meridian, as well as sponsorship from Arqiva, Bournemouth University, Southampton Solent University and the Arts University Bournemouth.

Gordon Cooper

BBC offers clear signals

RTS Yorkshire addressed the future of the BBC's news services in terms of changing technologies and editorial content, as a contribution to Leeds Trinity University's annual Journalism Week. The two sessions in early March were organised jointly with the Yorkshire Branch of The Radio Academy.

An audience of 50, including many students, heard Helen Thomas, Head of BBC Regions for Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, discuss the corporation's "Future of News" report. Thomas was one of a team of senior man-

agers who wrote the report, published earlier this year.

Interviewed by Yorkshire Centre Chair Mike Best, Thomas pointed out that the report was just the starting point for a wider debate. "We are opening our doors to find out how we can continue to be a part of people's lives in the next 10 years," she said.

Looking forward to Charter renewal in 2017, Thomas added: "What I want to make sure of in the future is that the BBC remains as relevant as it has always been."

Thomas also highlighted the need to distinguish

between "news" and "noise" on the internet. She said that, more than ever, the BBC is needed as the trusted institution that "makes that news clear".

The second session featured BBC Radio 5 Live reporter Nick Garnett, who has pioneered the use of mobile journalism at the corporation. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January, Garnett filmed several hours of footage and made more than 50 live reports using just his iPhone.



Helen Thomas

Garnett told the audience "news is changing and the iPhone has certainly changed broadcasting for ever. But, no matter what the technology, at the end of the day, it's still all about telling a story."



Michaela Strachan (left) and Patrick Aryee

region's RTS Student Television Awards – were welcomed on stage by RTS CEO Theresa Wise, who encouraged them to take a bow before the 300-strong audience and wished them luck in the national awards later in the year.

The Sir Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award for an outstanding contribution to television in the RTS Bristol area went to Gina Fucci of Films at 59, a post-production facility that has been supporting the production community for the past 25 years.

Sproxton presented the award to Fucci who said: "We are proud to have been a part of some of this city's most extraordinary creative work for so long and look forward to being involved for a long time to come."

BBC One's *Inside Out West* took the News Coverage category and Robert Murphy from *ITV News West Country* was named Best Reporter.

Bristol Centre is very grateful to the main sponsor of the awards, Evolutions Bristol. The company's Blair Wallace won the Best Grading Award for the BBC Two documentary *Frankenstein and the Vampyre: A Dark and Stormy Night*.

Matthew Bell



Aardman's David Sproxton (left) and John Woolley

Factual rises in the West

BBC Natural History Unit programmes scooped six awards at the RTS West of England Awards, which were hosted by adventurer and TV presenter Steve Backshall at the Bristol Old Vic in early March.

Springwatch and *Autumnwatch* (both BBC Two) presenter Michaela Strachan was named Best On-screen Talent, while Patrick Aryee (BBC Two's *Super Senses*) took the award for New On-screen Talent.

"I am absolutely delighted – it's a great award to get at this stage of my career," said Aryee. "Thank you to everyone who has helped and supported me along the way."

Simon Bell was named Best Director for BBC One series *Hidden Kingdoms*, which also won the Best Cinematography and Sound awards (the latter went to Wounded Buffalo Sound Studios). Nitin Sawhney won the Best Composer category for BBC Two's *Wonders of the Monsoon*.

The BBC took more awards for: Best Daytime Series (BBC One's *Glorious Gardens from Above*); "Flying Futures" Talent Award (Erika Jones of *See Hear*, BBC Two's magazine show for the deaf community); and Editing (Glenn Rainton, for BBC Two's *MR James, Ghost Writer*).

From the independent sector, Testimony Films took the Factual award for BBC Four's *Photographing Africa* with Harry Hook, and Icon Films' *Africa's Giant Killers* for BBC Two was named Best Natural History Series.

Dragonfly's *One Born Every Minute* for Channel 4, filmed at Bristol's Southmead Hospital, won the Documentary category and Love West's BBC One show *The Great British Bake Off* triumphed in Factual Entertainment. Drummer TV took the Children's category for CBBC's *My Life: Born Lucky*.

Bristol-based indie BDH notched up three wins, securing the Animation category for BBC Two's *The Somme* in

Seven Poems, Best Short for *The Kismet Bureau* and (with Subvertical) Best Graphics and Visual Effects for BBC Two's full-length documentary feature *War of Words: Soldier-Poets of the Somme*.

Aardman Animations won two awards: for Digital Creativity (for online learning resource *Shaun's Game Academy*); and Titles, Promos and Branding for the short film *Flight of the Stories*, which publicised the opening of the Imperial War Museum's First World War Galleries.

The Bristol-based company was also presented with a special award for *Shaun the Sheep, the Movie*. The "voice" of Shaun (and CBBC presenter) Justin Fletcher gave the award to Aardman co-founder David Sproxton and Series Producer John Woolley.

The next generation of talent – winners of the

OFF MESSAGE

As the general election campaign grinds on, it is a shame that there will be no more TV leaders' debates featuring all the political jungle's big beasts. One thing is abundantly clear from the two that we did get: in an age of social media, television remains uniquely powerful.

ITV should be congratulated for its deft handling of the seven-way, two-hour marathon, broadcast live on 2 April with only one commercial break. Host Julie Etchingham did an exemplary job in keeping all those egos in check.

With more than 7 million people watching (a 33% audience share), the programme proved to be every bit as popular as another Salford-based show – *Coronation Street*.

■ As for the other leaders' debate, it was good to see Jeremy Paxman back on form as he made light work of both David Cameron and Ed Miliband for Channel 4.

The old bruiser looked seriously engaged – unlike on his latter-day *Newsnight* appearances, where, all too frequently, he seemed bored by the whole process.

Paxman is clearly enjoying his new berth at Horseferry Road and is, once again, a ubiquitous media presence. On the first Saturday in April, Paxo was the *FT's* diarist – and still found time to file a lengthy op-ed piece, published in *The Times* the same day.

His subject? A guide to grilling politicians, of course.

■ By now, everyone knows that TV types have a passion for hot food. But what is it about film studios and canned tucker?

Speaking recently to the RTS, Armando Iannucci revealed how he was inundated by tins of food when his movie, *In the Loop*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

"Baskets of fruit would arrive in my hotel room from various American indies and they also sent lots of tinned food. What use is that?" he wondered.

What, indeed. One can only think what Jeremy Clarkson might have done, had he been on the receiving end of such an odd gift.

■ Staying with Iannucci, it is intriguing to note that he is adapting a BBC Films-backed version of *David Copperfield*, regarded by some Dickens scholars as the novelist's very greatest work.

This is something of a departure for the humourist, although not a complete one since he has made documentaries on literary subjects before. These include a programme about Dickens.

In case you are worried that the co-creator of *Alan Partridge* is turning his back on humour, fear not.

Another upcoming project is a black comedy looking at one of the 20th Century's most sinister characters, Joseph Stalin.

So who might play the lead? Not exactly a part for Steve Coogan.

■ One of the highlights of Off Message's March was seeing Lenny Henry

collect the Harvey Lee Outstanding Contribution to Broadcasting Award from the Broadcasting Press Guild.

The actor, comedian and diversity campaigner took a break from rehearsals at the London Palladium for Comic Relief to attend the BPG lunch, held less than a mile away at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

Collecting his award, Henry described recent initiatives announced by the broadcasters to improve black, Asian and minority ethnic representation in TV as "diversity poker".

Let's hope none of those involved throw in their hand before meeting their declared targets.

■ Congratulations to outgoing BBC Controller of Drama Commissioning Ben Stephenson on his new job.

Stephenson is crossing the Atlantic to work for film-maker JJ Abrams' Bad Robot Productions as Head of Television.

Stephenson has overseen an astonishingly rich period for BBC TV drama. This was reflected at last month's RTS Programme Awards, where he deservedly received the Judges' Award.

Coincidentally, his predecessor, Jane Tranter, is reported to be returning soon from the US, where she runs BBC Worldwide Productions.

A job in the UK independent sector appears likely.

With two such talented drama executives quitting the BBC at roughly the same time, the corporation will have its work cut out to ensure there is no dip in the quality of television drama.



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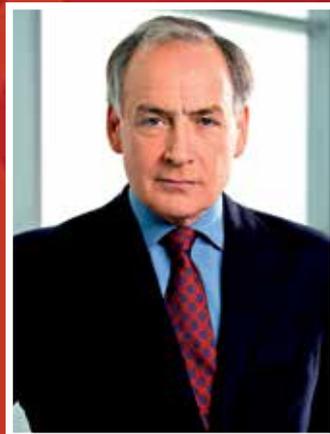
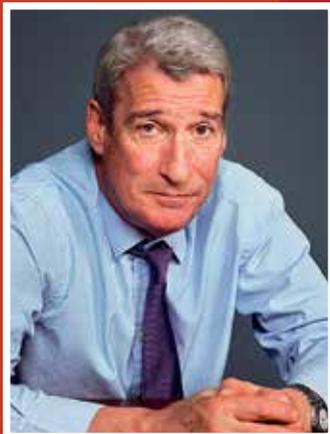
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RTS LEGENDS LUNCH

Did television come to the aid of the party?

Jeremy Paxman and
Alastair Stewart OBE
in conversation



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